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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Monday, August 7

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News Excerpts

August 7, 2017

Ha'aretz

PA: Peace Talks Nonstarter as Bibi Under Criminal Investigation

Officials in the Palestinian Authority who are closely following reports about the suspicions against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are coming to the conclusion that the possibility he might be prosecuted in the coming months makes any effort to resume peace talks irrelevant. Associates of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas recalled the atmosphere that prevailed when Ehud Olmert had to resign as premier, and the messages conveyed at the time by senior Israeli and American officials were that no progress could be made with a prime minister who was suspected of crimes. Moreover, they note that as opposed to Olmert, Netanyahu doesn't have much to offer on the diplomatic front.

See also, ["Netanyahu's Top Aide Turning State's Witness Leaves Little Doubt: PM Will Be Indicted"](#) (Ha'aretz)

Jerusalem Post

Poll: Likud Better Off without Netanyahu

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's departure from politics due to criminal investigations against him could end up helping his Likud Party, a Statnet poll taken for *Channel 10* found Sunday. Two-thirds of respondents said if an indictment is issued, Netanyahu should quit. 21% said he should not, and 13% said they did not know. The poll found if elections were held now and Netanyahu remained, his party would win 27 seats under his leadership, Zionist Union 22, Yesh Atid 18, Joint List 11, Bayit Yehudi 9, Yisrael Beytenu 8, Kulanu and United Torah Judaism 7 each, Shas 6, and Meretz 5. But if the Likud was led by one of its other leaders, the poll predicted it would win 4 additional seats and end up with 31, one more than Netanyahu won at the helm of the party two years ago.

See also, ["After Criticism from Netanyahu, Likud Ministers Rush to Defend Him"](#) (Ynet News)

See also, ["MKs Lock Horns Over Netanyahu Corruption Scandals"](#) (Ynet News)

Times of Israel

In First, Court Revokes Citizenship of Arab-Israeli Terrorist

The Haifa Magistrate's Court on Sunday revoked the citizenship of an Arab Israeli man convicted of carrying out a combined stabbing and car-ramming attack that seriously injured an IDF soldier as well as 3 others last year. The ruling marked the first time Israel stripped an Arab Israeli of citizenship over terror charges. The court was responding to a request from Interior Minister Aryeh Deri.

Israel Radio News

King Abdullah Heads to Ramallah for First Time in 5 Years

King Abdullah of Jordan will visit Ramallah today for the first time in five years and he will meet with PA Chairman Abu Mazen. The king called upon the administration in Washington to ramp up its efforts to move the peace process forward and said that no breakthrough will be achieved without an American commitment to the Palestinian cause. He added that were it not for the Hashemite Kingdom's attention and the steadfast stance of the residents of Jerusalem, Islamic holy sites would have been lost years ago.

See also, ["Jordanian King Begins Rare West Bank Trip Seen as Message to Israel"](#) (Times of Israel)

Hamas Said to Accept Plan for Pal. Unity, Fatah Holding Out

Hamas has agreed to a reconciliation deal with the Palestinian Authority's ruling Fatah party brokered by Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, Arab media reported on Sunday. However, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah party has yet to agree to the terms and has sent in a counter-offer. Sissi reportedly presented Abbas with the deal when the two met early in July in Cairo amid spiraling tensions between Hamas and Fatah. The proposed deal includes Hamas dissolving a committee it formed to administer tasks historically carried out by the PA, as well as a commitment by Abbas to end harsh measures he has leveled against Gaza since April, including reductions in support payments for electricity, medical aid, and governmental salaries for residents of the Strip.

See also, [*"Trapped Between Israel and Hamas, Gaza's Wasted Generation Goes Nowhere"* \(Washington Post\)](#)

Israel-Jordan Ties Continue to Sour Following Embassy Incident

Jordan is considering "diplomatic options" in dealing with the Israeli embassy incident in Amman, according to Jordanian government officials. The kingdom's decision is reportedly based on Israel's commitment to handle the matter through legal channels. Israel has already begun to make good on this commitment, with the State Attorney's Office asking police on Friday to open an investigation into the shooting at the behest of Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit.

PA Defends Payments Deemed Incentive to Kill by US Senators

Monthly payments to families of those imprisoned for attacking Israelis contribute to stability in Palestinian society rather than encourage terrorism, the senior Palestinian official in charge of disbursing them said Sunday. "This assistance has never encouraged terrorism, the opposite is true," said Issa Qaraqe, head of the commission for detainees and ex-detainees, who holds the rank of minister in the Palestinian Authority. "This social and humanitarian assistance creates a kind of stability in the Palestinian society. Cutting the assistance is what will lead to extremism." Qaraqe's defense of the stipends to families of prisoners and "martyrs" came three days after the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 17-4 to cut off some \$300 million in annual aid to the Palestinian Authority unless what lawmakers describe as payments rewarding terrorism are halted.

See also, [*"Schumer Backs Taylor Force Act, Virtually Assuring Senate Passage"* \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Iran Ridicules US Push for Inspecting Its Military Sites

Iran has mocked the U.S. push for inspections of the country's military sites, calling it a "ridiculous dream that will never come true." This comes after U.S. officials said last month that the Trump administration is pushing for inspections of suspicious Iranian military sites in a bid to test the strength of the nuclear deal that Tehran struck in 2015 with world powers. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Bahram Ghasemi, told reporters on Monday in Tehran that this request is "possibly something that a satirist wrote up."

The Harow Version

By Itamar Eichner and Eli Senyor

- It appears that over the past few days Ari Harow's official transformation from a close associate of the prime minister into an "enemy of the establishment" has been revealed. The signing of a state's evidence agreement instantly aroused a political and legal drama that has unnerved Netanyahu and jeopardizes his government. Now, for the first time, the story of the man responsible for the explosion is being heard.
- Channel Two reported that over the Tisha B'Av fast, Harow spoke with people in his synagogue and made reference to the latest developments. According to the reports, when he was asked about the decision to turn state's evidence and about the similarity between his case and the case of Shula Zaken and Ehud Olmert, he said: "It is not like Shula Zaken. It is not like I broke the law together with Netanyahu and now I'm looking for a way to place the blame on him in order to avoid punishment. They are accusing me of a crime that is not connected to the prime minister and that I do not believe I committed. The choice is not whether I or he go to prison, rather whether I go to prison for no reason—or not."
- "The definition of someone who turns state's evidence is someone from the inside who turns against his boss. That is incorrect. Case 2000 is not an affair that I initiated. It is something that fell on me against my will when I was there."
- Harow is supposed to take off tonight for a prearranged vacation abroad, but the investigation may occupy him there as well. Sources involved in the matter say that there is a possibility that Harow will return to Israel with material that he took care to stash abroad. The police intend to summon Netanyahu for questioning under caution shortly, and they do not rule out subpoenaing Sara Netanyahu to relate her version of the events Harow testified about. A significant part of Harow's statement touches upon events that took place when he was together with the Netanyahu couple in the course of travel abroad.
- Television stations reported last night that business people close to Netanyahu will be soon be subpoenaed to testify on the cases involving the prime minister, some for the second time. According to Channel Ten, at least one of them will be questioned under caution.
- In view of Harow's statements, it seems that the investigations of Netanyahu will continue for a long time and that the matter is liable also to have ramifications for the person in charge of them. Commander of the Police Investigations and Intelligence Unit Cmdr. Meni Yitzhaki, who was already supposed to have completed his term in this position and whose tenure has been extended, will apparently find himself in the position for a longer period of time than anticipated. Even though his successor, Gadi Siso, was already appointed, his [Yitzhaki's] tenure will be apparently be extended for an additional period of time because the police commissioner and the attorney general are interested in having the investigation led by an individual who has a solid command of the material.

- According to a report on Channel Two, Harow also commented on the nature of the information that he gave the investigators: “At the time I didn’t think that they were criminal offenses and I do not profess to determine that now, either. So the claim that I am ‘opening up about Netanyahu’ is incorrect. That is not my frame of thought at all.”
- Regarding his tenure at the Prime Minister’s Bureau Harow stated: “I served at the Prime Minister’s Bureau twice out of Zionism, because I was called to serve. That is the reason I moved to Israel and why I raise my children here. I am proud of the period in which I served the public under Netanyahu and I have nothing to be ashamed of.”
- According to the report, Harow said about the company that he allegedly continued to run during his time at the bureau: “The allegations against me are baseless. I did not do anything with the company without consulting with an attorney. In other circumstances, I would fight it, but given the current circumstances and in view of the resources that have been invested, there’s no point in doing that. I will apparently receive a few months of community service. Were the evidence against me so compelling, I would go to prison for five years and the State Attorney’s Office would not have agreed to give up on it so easily.”

Itamar Eichner, diplomatic correspondent, and Eli Senyor, contributor, work for Yedioth Ahronoth.

Summary:

Channel Two reported that over the Tisha B’Av fast, Harow spoke with people in his synagogue and made reference to the latest developments. According to the reports, when he was asked about the decision to turn state’s evidence and about the similarity between his case and the case of Shula Zaken and Ehud Olmert, he said: “It is not like Shula Zaken. It is not like I broke the law together with Netanyahu and now I’m looking for a way to place the blame on him in order to avoid punishment. They are accusing me of a crime that is not connected to the prime minister and that I do not believe I committed. The choice is not whether I or he go to prison, rather whether I go to prison for no reason—or not.”

Palestinians Warn Abbas Could Dismantle PA in 2018

By Uri Savir

- The Temple Mount crisis and violence has left the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah extremely frustrated. While the goal to restore the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif was achieved and the Israeli government indeed dismantled all security measures July 25 at the entrances to the Temple Mount, the credit for this in the Palestinian public opinion went to the radicals. The Palestinians feel that Hamas and the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, not President Mahmoud Abbas or King Abdullah of Jordan, are the ones who forced Israel to capitulate.
- A senior Palestinian minister, an official with an extensive security background who is close to Abbas, told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity that the Fatah leadership is currently extremely concerned over the nature of the Palestinian struggle in the eyes of the Palestinians and the Arab and Muslim world. The leadership fears that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security measures near Al-Aqsa Mosque added a religious layer to the national conflict.
- The senior Palestinian official said, "The Israelis do not understand the enormous dangers involved in a religious war. It would bring Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran to the forefront of the armed struggle and endanger the pragmatic elements in the Palestinian leadership. If Israel contrives to make Al-Aqsa a cause celebre, it is doomed to confront later on Islamic fundamentalist neighbors that will not shy away from any military, terrorist or popular violence."
- The official warned that turning the Palestinian struggle into a religious one in nature would create an existential threat to the secular majority in the Palestinian leadership. "The day will come that you will miss [PLO leader] Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas — especially if Israel's government continues to be led by messianic settlers," he added. He defined Netanyahu's current policies as pyromania.
- The official noted that given recent events, the diplomatic window of opportunity regarding any possible initiative by US President Donald Trump and his team may close in the months after the UN General Assembly meeting in September. Given the current crises and the painfully slow process led by Trump's envoys, he said, the Palestinian leadership has begun to question its own future.
- According to the official, Abbas has altered his rhetoric in internal leadership deliberations and is threatening, in the case of diplomatic failure and greater violence, to resign at the end of the year and dismantle the Palestinian Authority (PA). Abbas' mood is more militant nowadays. The official recounted that Abbas was disappointed with the lack of Arab support during the Temple Mount crisis, and he found the US intervention through envoys Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt very lacking. Even during this crisis, Abbas was ready to call for the first time in many years on the military wing of Fatah, the Tanzim, to get involved in the protection of Al-Aqsa and its worshippers.

- The official added, “We were closer to an outburst of an intifada than Israel acknowledges.”
- What concerns the Palestinian leadership most is the split between the more religious and fundamentalist forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the more secular ones led by Fatah. Therefore, Abbas has decided to espouse a very nationalistic line, attempting to overshadow the religious one.
- The official claimed that Abbas still objects to violence, as he always has, and that for him the last resort is the dismantling of the PA, placing the onus of the total diplomatic stalemate on Israel and the Arab League. The official said, “Abbas has a clear vision of how this could take place. In his eyes, dismantling the PA would constitute a shock therapy to encourage the international community to act on a two-state solution.”
- If Abbas pursues the idea of dismantling the PA, he could make a series of announcements at the beginning of 2018. These could include the dismantling of the PA, the abolition of the Oslo Accord, the end of any security coordination with Israel, the temporary relocation of the Fatah leadership to Cairo and the distancing of the PLO from the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.
- The official warned about dismissing such a possibility and said that the status quo must change — for better or worse.
- A senior Israeli Foreign Ministry official told Al-Monitor that Israel senses the weakness of Abbas, 82, and that his health might be frail. The Israeli source argued that the security establishment in the PA would not allow Abbas such a move, as it wants to keep the clout of Fatah as strong as possible in its struggle against Hamas. Still, the source acknowledged that given the relative passivity of the international community, including that of the United States, which Israel welcomes, a crisis with the PA is looming. Such a crisis, he said, might occur sooner than Israel expects.

Uri Savir has spent his professional life working on the strategies of peacemaking in Israel. In 1996, he established the Peres Center for Peace and is currently the center's honorary president. In 2011, Savir founded the YaLa Young Leaders online peace movement.

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