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Israel and the Middle East News Update

Tuesday, August 8

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News Excerpts

August 8, 2017

Ynet News

AG to Announce Indictment Against Sara Netanyahu

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit is expected to inform the wife of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Sara Netanyahu, that he has decided to prosecute her, and that she will be subject to a hearing on the suspicion of misusing state funds under aggravated circumstances. Mandelblit is expected to announce his decision soon, following the completion of a police investigation into Mrs. Netanyahu's alleged misuse state funds, which reinforced the original recommendation of the Jerusalem District Attorney and the State Prosecutor to indict her. See also, "[AG to indict Sara Netanyahu](#)" ([Jerusalem Post](#))

Kan- Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation

Netanyahu: I won't be Toppled, I have Nothing to Fear

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected criminal suspicions leveled against him in recent days, amid speculation that his tenure will end soon. According to a report on Kan, the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, Netanyahu lashed out – in private conversations with Knesset members – at the press, the opposition and members of his own party, whom he accused of conspiring to unseat him. "They are trying to get me and attempting to topple the Right," Netanyahu told senior officials in his coalition. "This is not new. They have been trying for many years. I don't see us going to elections now." The PM mocked reports about his former chief of staff, Ari Harow, who has turned state's witness against him. See also, "[All the Scandals Involving Netanyahu, and Where They Stand](#)" ([Ha'aretz](#))

Ha'aretz

Court Rules PM Must Divulge Phone Records With Adelson

Israel's top court ruled Monday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu must divulge information on his meeting with Sheldon Adelson and the editors of the Israel Hayom (Israel Today) daily, published by Adelson and considered supportive of Netanyahu. The Supreme Court accepted the appeal submitted by investigative reporter Raviv Drucker, deciding that Netanyahu must release call logs detailing the times of his discussions with top Israel Hayom representatives, including Adelson and the former editor-in-chief Amos Regev. This decision overturned last year's district court ruling regarding Drucker's freedom of information request. See also, "[COURT ORDERS PM TO REVEAL CONTACTS WITH 'ISRAEL HAYOM'](#)" ([Jerusalem Post](#))

Jerusalem Post

Abdullah and Abbas Forge Front against Al Aksa Challenges

King Abdullah of Jordan and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas agreed Monday to intensify coordination against possible future Israeli "challenges" to al-Aksa Mosque, said PA Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki. Maliki, at the close of the king's first visit to Ramallah in five years, said a joint working group was being formed to focus on issues related to protecting the mosque, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa. The two sides also discussed the need to advance stalled Middle East peace efforts, according to Jordan's official Petra news agency. See also, "[Jordan's King Abdullah II makes rare visit to West Bank after Jerusalem shrine crisis](#)" ([LA Times](#))

White House: Cutting PA funding Can't harm peace efforts

The White House offered some support for a bill that would slash Palestinian Authority funding over terrorist salaries Monday, but said the administration would work with Congress to ensure the legislation does not interfere with attempts to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. On Thursday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed the Taylor Force Act after marking up the bill to guarantee funding for security cooperation with Israel and humanitarian aid would not be touched, attempting to calm worries that the effort could harm ties with Ramallah. "President Trump has made it clear that he believes the Palestinian program that provides financial support to Palestinians convicted of acts of terror or their families incentivizes terrorism and must end," a White House official told The TOI." See also, ["Taylor Force Act Passes Senate Committee With Bipartisan Support" \(ha'aretz\)](#)

Ha'aretz

IDF Helicopter Crashes; One Pilot Dead, Another Injured

An Apache helicopter crashed near the Ramon Air Force base in the south of Israel on Monday with two crew members inside. One of the two was killed in the incident and the other was seriously injured. The Israel Defense Forces identified the deceased pilot on Tuesday morning as Maj. David Zohar, a 43-year-old veteran pilot with the rank of a major serving in reserve duty. The pilots were on their way back to the base after a training flight when a technical malfunction was reported around 9 P.M. According to the Israeli army's spokesman, the helicopter crashed near the landing pad at the base. See also, ["Israeli military pilot killed in Apache helicopter crash" \(i24 News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Court Rules to Revoke Citizenship of Convicted Terrorist

The terrorist convicted of a 2015 car-ramming and stabbing attack that seriously wounded four Jews at Kibbutz Gan Shmuel near Hadera in the North, had his citizenship revoked by a Haifa District Court judge Sunday. The controversial ruling adheres to the recommendation of Interior Minister Arye Deri, filed last year, after it was approved by Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit. Judge Abraham Elyakim, who presided over Sunday's ruling, deemed the revocation of Ziad's citizenship "a proper and proportionate step." "Every citizen has duties alongside his or her rights, which they must fulfill," Elyakim stated. "One significant and meaningful duty is loyalty to the state, which includes the duty not to carry out terrorist activities that harm its safety and that of its residents." See also, ["Setting Precedent, Israeli Court Approves Revoking Citizenship of Convicted Terrorist" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Reuters

Israel Moves to Shut Down Local Operations of Al Jazeera

Israel plans to revoke the media credentials of Al Jazeera TV journalists, close its Jerusalem bureau and pull the Qatar-based station's broadcasts from local cable and satellite providers, Communications Minister Ayoub Kara said on Sunday. The closure did not appear imminent, however, and an Israeli official said a legal process was still required to implement most of the proposed steps. The Israeli move adds further pressure on Qatar, which has been involved in a dispute with four of its Arab neighbours. Kara said the measures were intended to bolster Israel's security. See also, ["Al Jazeera Under Fire in Israel, Calls Closure Attempt 'Undemocratic'" \(Variety\)](#)

Israel's Alleged 'Right-Wing' Prime Minister

Netanyahu's associates are accusing the State Attorney's Office, the legal system and the Israel Police of 'joining forces to bring down the right-wing government.' But in the 10 years Netanyahu has been in power, there has hardly been any implementation of a right-wing policy.

By Amihai Attali, Knesset Correspondent for Yediot Ahronot

- **The prime minister of the Right? Now's your time. You have at least a few more months in office. Let's see you implement a right-wing policy: revoke the citizenship of terrorists with an Israeli identity card, stop the construction freeze in Jerusalem, allow Jews to visit the Temple Mount in masses, push for the appointment of conservative judges. Show us what you've got.**
- **There is definitely a tough competition going on these days between the prime minister's associates over who will produce the lousiest argument. We've already gotten used to the herd of Netanyahu sycophants (blaming the media for everything that's wrong in the world. But the voices we heard in the past weekend, which claimed that the State Attorney's Office, the legal system and—most importantly—the Israel Police have all joined forces to bring down the Netanyahu government, are sad evidence of how much they really care about what the admired supreme leader will leave behind after he's gone.**
- **Public trust in the bodies that are supposed to enforce order and justice here is critical. Netanyahu's loyalists aren't interested in that. They don't care about the scorched earth we'll all be walking on after he's gone. After all, the two religious officials—Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit and Police Commissioner Roni Alsheikh—are extreme leftists who are willing to crush every normal procedure to get rid of the person who appointed them.**
- **These accusations have been joined in the past few days by the following statement: "They have all joined forces to bring down the right-wing government." Unfortunately, though, in the 10 years Netanyahu has been in power there has hardly been any implementation of a right-wing policy.**
- **The man is definitely brilliant in managing an economic policy, and recently in foreign affairs too, but he's not the prime minister of the Right. Netanyahu is the man who signed the Hebron agreement, shook hands with Yasser Arafat, initially voted in favor of the disengagement from Gaza, released more than 1,000 terrorists in the Shalit and, only a few days ago, folded in the metal detector affair.**
- **So now's the time to make the following suggestion to Benjamin Netanyahu: come on, come and be the Right's prime minister. So far, you've specialized in categorizing bodies and people—those who are in favor of the Netanyahu family and those who are against us—and tried to sell it to us as a distinction between rightists and leftists.**

- **Mr. Netanyahu, why don't you stop whining about the jurists' rule and lead the appointment of judges who will reflect our political side. Give up your habit of checking if they'll rule in favor of you and your wife, and bring us judges who will reasonably challenge the standing.**
- **Deal with the terrorists among Israel's Arabs in a serious manner. Revoke the citizenship of terrorists from Umm al-Fahm, impose real sanctions on relatives who praise them, use a firm hand against 10,000 Israeli citizens who attended the hate-filled funeral of terrorists who murdered policemen at the Temple Mount. Stop talking to us about the death penalty for the terrorist who murdered the Salomon family members in Neve Tzuf. First, present a bill requiring a death penalty, and then launch the spins around it.**
- **Let's see you stop the construction freeze. We're not dreaming of Yitzhar and Itamar. Let's start from Jerusalem. Givat Hamatos and Har Homa will be good place to start. Give Jews free access to the Temple Mount. The newspaper archives are bursting with your quotes about our historical right to Jerusalem, but in practice, only some of Abraham's sons can't visit the place where the sacrifice of Isaac took place.**
- **Start doing some things in that direction. Why even in the event of an indictment, you have at least a few more months as prime minister. The prime minister of the Right, allegedly.**

SUMMARY: So now's the time to make the following suggestion to Benjamin Netanyahu: come on, come and be the Right's prime minister. So far, you've specialized in categorizing bodies and people—those who are in favor of the Netanyahu family and those who are against us—and tried to sell it to us as a distinction between rightists and leftists. Mr. Netanyahu, why don't you stop whining about the jurists' rule and lead the appointment of judges who will reflect our political side. Give up your habit of checking if they'll rule in favor of you and your wife, and bring us judges who will reasonably challenge the standing. Deal with the terrorists among Israel's Arabs in a serious manner. Revoke the citizenship of terrorists from Umm al-Fahm, impose real sanctions on relatives who praise them, use a firm hand against 10,000 Israeli citizens who attended the hate-filled funeral of terrorists who murdered policemen at the Temple Mount. Stop talking to us about the death penalty for the terrorist who murdered the Salomon family members in Neve Tzuf. First, present a bill requiring a death penalty, and then launch the spins around it.

As Prime Minister, Netanyahu Cannot Hide Behind a 'Presumption of Innocence'

Right wing politicians who devote their careers to undermining the judicial system are suddenly anointing judges as supreme arbiters of what's ethical and proper

By Chemi Shalev, US editor and correspondent for Haaretz

- The Israeli right has a new mantra: The presumption of innocence. Cabinet ministers and other leaders of the coalition who have agreed to come out in Benjamin Netanyahu's defense repeat the claim like parrots. Netanyahu is innocent unless and until he's proven guilty. Therefore, all the demands that he resign or be removed from power, according to his would-be two-bit attorneys, are an affront to democracy, a plot against the will of the voter, an attempt to carry out a putsch and other such wild exaggerations.
- The problem is that they're all talking nonsense. They are mixing up between Netanyahu the citizen and Netanyahu the prime minister, between a court of law and the court of public opinion. Citizen Netanyahu certainly enjoys a presumption of innocence. He is considered innocent until proven guilty and his guilt has to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Prime Minister Netanyahu, on the other hand, has no presumption of innocence. His guilt does not have to be established in a court of law, certainly not beyond a reasonable doubt. In order to convict him before the benches of democracy - the Knesset, the coalition, public opinion and history - it is enough to harbor reasonable suspicions or to rely on circumstantial evidence or to simply feel disgust and revulsion in your gut. That is sufficient to decide his fate and to deem him unworthy of holding his office.
- It is tempting to ascribe this muddle of the legal and public arenas, this mix-up between the unlawful and the unworthy to an honest mistake or even regrettable dimness, but this is not the case. Many of those who are now brandishing Netanyahu's supposed presumption of innocence know that they are pulling the wool over a gullible public's eyes. They are manufacturing an alibi first and foremost for themselves, one that can excuse the fact that they are not demanding that Netanyahu accept responsibility at least that he bother to explain the allegations against him. They are elevating the threshold for public condemnation to that of legal conviction, and thus exempting Netanyahu from responsibility for his actions.
- Some are even going further by asserting that Netanyahu won't have to resign even if he is indicted. This is where the juxtaposition of the prime minister with a private citizen becomes grotesque. A citizen does not decide on matters of war and peace, life and death, poverty or prosperity and the like, so the question of how he will handle his responsibilities while devoting himself to defending himself in court is irrelevant. A private citizen does not represent the state, so dragging him to court as a common suspect does not demean the rest of us. A private citizen did not appoint the attorney general or the chief of police and isn't their superior, so an intolerably complex situation is not created when they decide he has committed a crime and should be prosecuted. But when duly appointed legal officers, including the attorney general who is a judge by standing, reach the conclusion the person who stands at the top of their own pyramid is a criminal, that is conviction enough, to all political intents and purposes. Such a

prime minister cannot stay in office even for a day, unless one wants to turn government into a circus.

- Never mind the irony of right wing politicians who spend most of their days blasting the courts for being too “activist,” who are suddenly rolling over, playing dead and begging the judges to make up their mind for them. Those who portray the alleged “trialization” of politics and government in Israel as the mother of all evils suddenly deciding that it is the only prism through which Netanyahu’s actions can or should be evaluated and judged. Those who call for bulldozers to run over the Supreme Court, who now concede to judges the right to decide Israel’s future.
- Netanyahu invented this very trick during his first term in office. The so-called Baron-Hebron affair, in which Shas Minister Arye Dery and others allegedly conspired to appoint an attorney general who would clear Dery of criminal charges in exchange for his party’s support for the Hebron agreement that Netanyahu concluded with Yasser Arafat in 1997 was arguably the worst political and legal scandal in Israeli history. The Israeli police investigated it and recommended that Netanyahu be tried for fraud and breach of trust. The state attorney overturned their recommendation, saying there was insufficient evidence to ensure a conviction, but she and the attorney general at the time made no secret of their suspicions that Netanyahu was well aware of the conspiracy and played along with it. Israel’s Supreme Court decided, not unanimously, to accept their decision not to prosecute Netanyahu, though the minority opinion held that there was ample evidence to convict him.
- And Netanyahu? He celebrated his narrow escape from prosecution as if he had just been crowned the most honest man alive. Even though legal authorities found that he had behaved with inexplicable negligence, at best, or had committed criminal offenses with full malice and intent, at worst, Netanyahu claimed he was as clean as a whistle. He savaged the media and other critics for conspiring to topple him from power, even though their claims were fully corroborated. The same story repeated itself in other investigations of Netanyahu throughout the years, most of which centered on petty corruption of this kind or another. Small wonder that he feels that he’ll get off scot free now as well, when he is either a suspect or was involved in at least four separate police investigations.
- But there is no working democracy, at least one with a parliamentary system, in which a prime minister would survive a controversy as the big as the Baron-Hebron affair. It’s doubtful whether there are many countries in which a prime minister would remain at his post after it was revealed that his personal lawyer, who is also a family relative, stood to gain many millions of dollars from arms purchase deals that Netanyahu rammed through, against the recommendation of the professionals. Even if one accepts Netanyahu’s incredible claim that he was completely ignorant of what his close confidante was doing right under his nose, the information that already exists about the so-called submarines affair should suffice to see the prime minister resign. In a country, that is, with politicians who have a minimal spine and who wouldn’t agree to stand before the cameras to mumble something nonsensical about Netanyahu’s “presumption of innocence”, as his allies have in recent days.
- Here’s another big difference between citizen Netanyahu and Prime Minister Netanyahu. The former can maintain his right to silence, can plead the Fifth in U.S. lingo, but the latter has no such right. Quite the opposite, in fact. He has a duty to tell all. Way before the police launched

its protracted investigations, Netanyahu was duty-bound to explain his behavior to the public that elected him. He needs to explain how he accepted gifts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from benefactors, for whom, in some cases, he carried out personal favors; he has to justify his backroom horse-trading with a newspaper publisher that he described in public as the devil incarnate; he has to persuade his voters that his suspect handling of the multi-billion dollar submarine purchase from Germany was completely unrelated to the fact that his lawyer and relative represented one of the parties; he has to persuade the public that there was nothing untoward in the fact that the man he handpicked to lead the Ministry of Communications bent over backwards to bestow benefits and favors on Israel's largest telecommunications company, which just happens to be owned by another of Netanyahu's buddies. And he has elaborate on his assertion that despite the billowing clouds of smoke that are enveloping him, there is no fire whatsoever behind them.

- The presumption of innocence claim is the last gambit of a political leader who has been caught red handed and has no plausible excuse for his behavior. It is a miserable yet successful ploy to use legal clichés to camouflage improper behavior. If Netanyahu wants to keep on asserting his right to remain silent and if his backers wish to claim that he should enjoy a presumption of innocence then by all means, let Netanyahu give up his hold on power and return to being a private citizen, one who enjoys the full protections of the law.

SUMMARY: The Israeli right has a new mantra: The presumption of innocence. Cabinet ministers and other leaders of the coalition who have agreed to come out in Benjamin Netanyahu's defense repeat the claim like parrots. Netanyahu is innocent unless and until he's proven guilty. Therefore, all the demands that he resign or be removed from power, according to his would-be two-bit attorneys, are an affront to democracy, a plot against the will of the voter, an attempt to carry out a putsch and other such wild exaggerations. The problem is that they're all talking nonsense. They are mixing up between Netanyahu the citizen and Netanyahu the prime minister, between a court of law and the court of public opinion. Citizen Netanyahu certainly enjoys a presumption of innocence. He is considered innocent until proven guilty and his guilt has to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Prime Minister Netanyahu, on the other hand, has no presumption of innocence. His guilt does not have to be established in a court of law, certainly not beyond a reasonable doubt. In order to convict him before the benches of democracy - the Knesset, the coalition, public opinion and history - it is enough to harbor reasonable suspicions or to rely on circumstantial evidence or to simply feel disgust and revulsion in your gut. That is sufficient to decide his fate and to deem him unworthy of holding his office.

