



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, August 10

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News Excerpts

August 10, 2017

Ynet News

Netanyahu Slams Left-Wing and the Media in Support Rally

Surrounded by supporters in a rally organized by his close confidant MK David Bitan, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu slammed the media and left-wing Wednesday evening, accusing them of trying to "overthrow" him. Netanyahu, plagued by 2 criminal investigations against him and others against his wife and close associates, was warmly welcomed by some 2,000 Likud supporters, including many of the party's ministers and MKs who attended following threats by Bitan that he would "settle the score with them in the primaries." "Both the Left and the media know Israel's situation hasn't been better, so they come together for an obsessive hunt against me and my family in an attempt to stage a coup, to exert intense and incessant pressure for an indictment to be filed," he charged.

See also, ["FULL TEXT: Netanyahu's Speech to Thousands of Supporters at Tel Aviv Rally" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

See also, ["Barak: Netanyahu Support Rally Was 'Pathetic Performance of Whining'" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Palestinians Skeptical Fall of Netanyahu Would Benefit Them

To some Palestinians, the prospect of Benjamin Netanyahu going to jail for graft can be likened to the busting of Al Capone, the notorious American gangster of the prohibition era, for tax evasion. On Saturday, al-Quds, the most popular Palestinian newspaper, ran a caricature suggesting that Netanyahu was being investigated for the wrong crime. Surrounded by files labeled – among other things as "war crimes," "forced removals" and "terrorism" – a morose-looking Netanyahu held up a piece of paper that said "bribes." "Once Netanyahu is out, Israel will go in one of two ways," Abu Sada says. "Either someone from Likud will be prime minister or there will be early elections. The trend is that the Right will receive the most votes and continue to keep political power in their own hands. What happens is not up to our hopes or to our imagination. Public opinion polls in Israel show that Likud, Yisrael Beytenu and Jewish Home will continue to have solid support. So even if Likud loses some voters they will go to other right-wing parties." "Unfortunately, the Left and center-left in Israel are weak and the status quo is convenient for the Israelis: no intifada, no major violence and the continuation of settlement expansion," he added.

BICOM

Elor Azaria Begins Prison Term

Former IDF soldier Elor Azaria entered prison yesterday to begin his 18-month sentence for manslaughter. Azaria arrived at Tzrifin military base to dozens of supporters outside, a day after the IDF Military Courts of Appeal denied his request to delay the beginning of his sentence until Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot had decided whether to commute his sentence. On July 30, Azaria's conviction and sentence were upheld and military sources subsequently indicated that Chief of Staff Eisenkot wouldn't consider a clemency request unless Azaria actually entered prison and expressed remorse for his actions.

See also, ["Hebron Shooter Elor Azaria Begins Serving Prison Sentence for Manslaughter" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Ma'ariv

Gaza Wall, Most Technical Endeavor, to Be Done in 24 Months

An international brigade has been building the barrier on the Israel-Gaza border over the last several months. Sealant material from Europe, drilling machines from Germany, workers from Moldova, and engineers and equipment operators from Spain and Italy. That is the impression gained from a tour of the Gaza border, along which has been building the concrete wall. The civilian-military NIS 3 billion project is one of Israel's largest and most technologically challenging and involves operational, technological, and engineering components that are unprecedented, even by international standards. Upon its completion, in 18 to 24 months, Gaza will be surrounded by an underground cement wall and by a fence on top of it, which will make it difficult for Hamas to dig tunnels into Israeli territory.

See also, [*"Revealing Details of Gaza Tunnel-Thwarting Barrier, IDF Says It Could Spark War"* \(Times of Israel\)](#)

See also, [*"Israel Warns Hamas Not to Try to Foil Its Anti-Tunnel Gaza Wall"* \(Reuters\)](#)

Times of Israel

Over 200 US Rabbis Want Israel to Lift BDS Travel Ban

More than 200 rabbis from the liberal movements of American Judaism signed a letter opposing Israel's travel ban on leaders of the boycott movement against Israel. The rabbis signing Wednesday's letter were responding to an incident last month in which Rabbi Alissa Wise of Jewish Voice for Peace, which supports the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, was prevented from boarding an Israel-bound airplane leaving Dulles Airport in Washington DC.

Jerusalem Post

UN Stuck on the Fence Between Israel and Hezbollah

A vote is set to take place at the UN Security Council on August 31 to renew the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon (UNIFIL), which was formed in 1978 in order to "restore international peace and security" to the volatile border region between Israel and Lebanon. In advance, US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley called for action to "enhance [UNIFIL's] efforts to prevent the spread of illegal arms...which are almost entirely in the hands of Hezbollah terrorists...[and] threaten the security and stability of the region." Her statements came after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres—who will soon visit the Middle East—confirmed his intention to beef up UNIFIL's efforts to combat "the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure inside its area of operations."

See also, [*"Haley to Discuss Iran with IAEA Officials"* \(Arutz Sheva\)](#)

Times of Israel

Former Top Security Officials Urge Trump to Stick to Iran Deal

A bipartisan array of former top national security officials urged US President Donald Trump to stick to the Iran nuclear deal, saying that war with Iran is "more imaginable" today than it has been in five years. The statement was published Tuesday on the website of the magazine of The National Interest, a conservative think tank. It was responding to reports that Trump may refuse to certify Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which trades sanctions relief for a rollback of Iran's nuclear program, when the next assessment period comes around in October.

See also, [*"Trump's Anti-Nuclear Playbook Looks a Lot Like Obama's"* \(Bloomberg\)](#)

See also, [*"Iranian Drone Buzzes U.S. Fighter Jet Over Persian Gulf"* \(New York Times\)](#)

Divisive Speech

By Ben Caspit

- [The following is an excerpt from a longer column from Ma'ariv's upcoming weekend edition]. "Netanyahu's roar" yesterday delivered the goods. A speech of pure incitement, brimming with threats and lies, which had just one purpose: to incite and to divide the world into "us" against "them," with utter disregard for the facts and while spitting in the face of the humiliated truth.
- The prime minister of Israel yesterday faced a large crowd and found himself hard put to utter even a single word of truth. He repeated time and again his invention, which bears absolutely no resemblance to reality. According to that invention, there is "them," and there is "us." "They" are the conspirators who want to topple him. The left, the media, the anti-Semites as such, that same miserable and devious group of post-Zionist well-poisoners who, on their way to selling out the homeland to the Arabs, have decided to topple Netanyahu.
- The prime minister doesn't care that he is setting a fire inside the house, he doesn't really care that there isn't a shred of truth to any of his accusations. The only thing that he cares about is to continue to rule. All means to achieving that end are kosher.
- So, for the sake of historic accuracy, here are several indisputable facts: the left has no connection to the criminal investigations that are gaining momentum against Binyamin Netanyahu. The media is also playing third violin in this story. The people running the investigations are public officials whom Netanyahu himself appointed. Not a single one of them is suspected of the worst crime possible in the Likud Central Committee's list of crimes—namely, of being a leftist. Netanyahu personally pushed for the current attorney general to be appointed, after having groomed him as cabinet secretary. Netanyahu appointed the police commissioner, who hails from the national-religious camp. The same applies to all the others.
- The thing that is toppling Netanyahu is his behavior throughout the years. The ones who are toppling Netanyahu are the people who had the courage to tell the truth, most of whom are his close friends, advisers and people who were there and saw the events unfold. None of them are leftists, none of them work for the New Israel Fund or the Palestinian Authority.
- One of the peak moments of Netanyahu's inciting speech was when he suggested that the police investigate Kaya, the royal dog. Lucky for him, Kaya can't talk. Lucky for us, others can. The walls of silence, silencing, concealment and blurring are beginning to collapse one after the other around Netanyahu. That is what has made him afraid, and that is what has made him incite and deflect. It's my impression that that won't be of any avail to him. The prime minister's fate is neither in the hands of the media (which he has tried to wipe off the face of the earth in the past few years) nor in the hands of the left (which barely exists anymore). His fate is in the hands of the law enforcement agencies and they, so it would appear, have begun to do their job of late.

Ben Caspit is a senior columnist for Ma'ariv and other Israeli newspapers.

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True Message Behind Jordan's King Abdullah's West Bank Visit

Jordan's beloved king is facing a level of public anger that he hasn't encountered in his 17-year rule. His visit sends a message to two audiences: Israel and his fuming constituency.

By Daoud Kuttab

- Jordanian national outrage over last month's embassy killings was never mentioned as the motivation behind King Abdullah's brief visit to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. While the public goal of his visit was to check on Abbas and show support for Palestinians and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the real message of the short helicopter trip was aimed at the Jordanian people and Israel.
- Thousands of Jordanians heard Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's congratulatory phone call to the embassy security guard who killed two Jordanians moments after he left the country amid a 24-hour diplomatic crisis. They read the Arabic-language transcript of the officially released conversation, in which the Israeli prime minister tells him to enjoy his date that night with his girlfriend. The recording and translation spread like wildfire on WhatsApp, angering Jordanians who felt that their government betrayed the blood of two Jordanian citizens for political gain.
- The humiliation continued later that night, when broadcasts showed Netanyahu hugging the killer of the Jordanians and congratulating him "for keeping his cool."
- Israel not only humiliated Jordanians but appeared to be stabbing King Abdullah and the Jordanian government in the back by not following up on the Vienna Protocol, which requires Israel to pursue criminal investigation when a person with diplomatic immunity commits a crime in a foreign country.
- While Jordan is a monarchy, the king only governs through his government. In this instance, most Jordanians believe the government was strongly encouraged to act. The pressures from Israel and the White House's Jared Kushner to quickly release the Israeli security guard – despite his alleged criminal actions – have become public knowledge in the kingdom, leaving Abdullah vulnerable in the eyes of his people.
- Jordanians who remember the 2014 King Hussein [Allenby] Bridge incident, in which an Israeli guard killed Jordanian judge Raed Zeiter, note that a supposed joint committee is still investigating that incident. Callers on popular talk radio shows in Amman were quick to say that justice has yet to be served in the case of the slain judge, adding they need more proof that the king intends to pursue justice in this new case.
- The beloved King Abdullah is currently facing a level of public anger he has never encountered in his 17-year rule. The king was on vacation during the embassy incident, and, amid Israeli and U.S. pressure, cut short his vacation and returned home. He went directly to the slain Jordanians' homes upon arrival. In a moving meeting with the father of the slain 17-year-old furniture store worker, Abdullah said he will seek justice for the man's son as if it was his own son.

- After meeting with the Jordanian foreign minister and convening his National Policies Council, the king had some sharp words for Netanyahu in his initial remarks. “The Israeli prime minister is obliged to commit to his responsibilities and to take the necessary legal actions, which include putting the killer on trial to attain justice, instead of dealing with this crime as a political display with the intent of achieving personal political gains. This sort of antagonistic behavior is rejected on all fronts, and it infuriates all of us.”
- Upon arriving in Ramallah for his meeting with Abbas, Abdullah focused on supporting the Palestinian president, who has confined himself to the West Bank rather than beg for security clearance to travel abroad. Since cutting short his official trip to China, Abbas met with his top officials, who decided unanimously to halt cooperation and security coordination with Israel.
- To Jordanians, the king wanted to show full support for Palestinians in their struggle against Israeli attempts to change the status quo at Al-Aqsa. Native Jordanians as well as Jordanians of Palestinian origin spoke in a unified voice on this matter. The king wanted to be on their side.
- As for Israelis, the king wanted them to know that Jordan supports the Palestinians and that the rapprochement with Israel that has made Israeli-Jordanian peace a warm one is in real danger – not only because of Al-Aqsa, but also because of the way the embassy issue was handled, and due to continued Israeli obstacles to the two-state solution.
- Abdullah’s visit to Ramallah is his fifth since becoming king and his first in five years. The helicopter of an Arab leader doesn’t usually visit Ramallah or any other location in the occupied Palestinian territories. The entire visit to Ramallah didn’t last more than two hours, but the impact of the visit and the messages it conveyed will echo for a long time.

Daoud Kuttab is a Palestinian journalist and columnist for Al Monitor, and former Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton University.

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