



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Tuesday, September 5*

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- **Russia Threatened to Veto anti-Hezbollah UN Move Led by Israel**
- **Netanyahu Boasts Israel's Success, Mocks Barak**
- **Ex-minister Arrested in Submarine Affair, Minister Likely to be Quizzed**
- **Rivlin Heads to Munich to Unveil Monument to Athletes**
- **IDF to Simulate War with Hezbollah in Largest Drill in Decades**
- **Palestinian activist Arrested for Calling on Abbas to Resign**
- **Churches Protest 'Attempt to Weaken Our Presence in Jerusalem**
- **Israel to Give \$1 Million in aid to Houston's Jewish Community**

### Commentary:

- **Ma'ariv: "Netanyahu and *Israel Hayom*: Dangerous Mutation"**
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# News Excerpts

September 5, 2017

## Ha'aretz

### **Russia Threatened to Veto anti-Hezbollah UN Move Led by Israel**

Russia worked behind the scenes to protect Hezbollah during last week's discussions in the UN Security Council on a resolution to renew the mandate of the UN peacekeeping forces (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon, talks with Israeli officials indicated. In last week's decision to renew UNIFIL's mandate several paragraphs were added. However, during the negotiations over the wording of the resolution, significant portions endorsed sought by the United States and Israel were removed, chiefly the direct reference to Hezbollah as conducting prohibited military activity in southern Lebanon that is in violation of Resolution 1701. It was Russia that ensured all mention of Hezbollah was omitted. See also, "[Russia behind softening of language on Hezbollah in UN resolution: report](#)" (i24 News)

## Ynet News

### **Netanyahu Boasts Israel's Success, Mocks Barak**

PM Netanyahu published a video on Monday, in which he spoke about his impressions of yesterday's visit to South Tel Aviv, about political meetings held Monday and about Israel's achievements in the world, but it is precisely the final chord of the video, in which he ridiculed former PM Ehud Barak, that is getting all the attention. "You will not hear about it much or at all in the media, but this is your chance to know," said Netanyahu in the video, whose first half was dedicated to the illegal immigrant situation in southern Tel Aviv. "Israel is a country that is courted. They admire us, value us, you need to hear how we are talked about. They want to be close to us, and this goes on from country to country and continent to continent." See also, "[Netanyahu sheds statesmanlike persona as scandals mount](#)" (TOI)

## i24 News

### **Ex-minister Arrested in Submarine Affair, Minister to be Quizzed**

A former government minister, a former senior member of the National Security Council, and the political adviser to a serving minister were questioned by Israeli police on Monday in connection with the "submarine affair," which centers on allegations that PM Netanyahu's personal lawyer pushed for multi-billion shekel deals in favor of German conglomerate ThyssenKrupp, which is his client in Israel. Eliezer "Moodi" Sandberg, who served as a science and infrastructure minister in the mid-2000s was questioned by fraud investigators, and formally placed under arrest. It was also reported that the serving minister for energy, Yuval Steinitz, is likely to be quizzed by detectives during the course of the investigation. See also, "[Ex-minister Eliezer Sandberg named as suspect in widening submarines probe](#)" (TOI)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Rivlin Heads to Munich to Unveil Monument to Athletes**

President Reuven Rivlin is due to leave for Munich on Tuesday evening for the inauguration of the long overdue monument in memory of the Israeli athletes who were brutally murdered and cruelly dismembered during the 1972 Munich Olympics by terrorist organization Black September. Rivlin's departure coincides with the 45th anniversary of the September 5 attack on the Israeli section of the Olympic Village. Rivlin will unveil the monument together with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. See also, "[Rivlin and Merkel to meet in Berlin amid submarine scandal](#)" (Ynet News)

## **IDF to Simulate War w. Hezbollah in Largest Drill in Decades**

Israel's army will be commencing its largest drill in 20 years in the north of the country on Tuesday, one that will encompass all forces: ground, air, sea and intelligence. The drill, which will be overseen by Israel Defense Forces' Northern Command, is expected to last about 10 days. It will include a scenario of instant escalation, in which the army has to defend Israel against multiple terrorist infiltrations in the north. For instance, one scenario has "terrorists" entering moshav Shavei Tzion, 15 kilometers from the Lebanese border, from the sea, while "Hezbollah" forces stage an attack in the Golan Heights (and a famous prehistoric archaeological site). The army will also be practicing an attack on Lebanon and the evacuation of Israeli towns by the border in preparation for the eventuality of heavy missile attacks. See also, ["Israel army to hold drill simulating war with Hizbollah" \(The Ntional\)](#)

## AP

## **Palestinian Activist Arrested for Calling on Abbas to Resign**

Palestinian security forces have detained a prominent activist after he called for President Mahmoud Abbas to resign. A lawyer representing Issa Amro, a human rights activist from the West Bank city of Hebron, says his client was arrested Monday after posting his comments on Facebook. Ayman Qawasmi, a Palestinian reporter, was arrested on Sunday after writing that Abbas should resign for "failing to protect the Palestinian people." Qawasmi's radio station was closed last week by the Israeli military for alleged incitement to violence. The arrests are the latest in recent crackdown on journalists by the Palestinian Authority. See also, ["Mahmoud Abbas cracking down on media?" \(PressTV\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

## **Churches Protest 'Attempt to Weaken Our Presence in JLM'**

Heads of churches in Jerusalem on Monday criticized what they see as a breach of the status quo in the capital, claiming there is a "systematic attempt to undermine the integrity of the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and to weaken the Christian presence." The church leaders are referring to two contentious issues that surfaced in recent months. The first is a Jerusalem District Court ruling from last month saying that the purchase of three major compounds adjacent to Jaffa Gate in the Old City were carried out legally, and as a result, were transferred from the Greek-Orthodox church to the rightwing NGO Ateret Kohanim Yeshiva, according to a *Maariv* report. The second issue is a bill proposed by the Kulanu MK Rachel Azaria that seeks to nationalize lands owned by churches in west Jerusalem and sold to private entrepreneurs. See also, ["APPEAL OF THE PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM" \(Jerusalem-patriarchate\)](#)

## Ynet News

## **Israel to Give \$1 Million in aid to Houston's J. Community**

Israel will reportedly donate \$1 million in emergency aid to Houston's Jewish community to aid in post-Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts. Diaspora Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett says in a statement that the funds will be earmarked to help the 60,000-strong community repair and rebuild schools, synagogues and a community center damaged in the storm and floods. "The city of Houston was hurt badly last week, and the Jewish community, 70 percent of which lived in the flooded neighborhoods, was hit hard," said Bennett.

## **Netanyahu and *Israel Hayom*: Dangerous Mutation**

By Ben Capit, Columnist at Ma'ariv

- There has never been a phenomenon like *Israel Hayom* in any modern democracy since the invention of the free newspaper. It is a sophisticated, planned, financed and dangerous Israeli invention. It celebrated its tenth birthday in Israel last July—but it is only now, at a grave and disastrous delay, that the gatekeepers are beginning to understand what they overlooked all these years and what huge damage this caused. The writing was smeared on the wall (and on these pages) from day one, but those who were supposed to read it preferred to look the other way. Fear gripped their hearts and no one wanted to run afoul of the emperor on Balfour Street or with the hit team he arranged for himself on Hashlosha Street in Tel Aviv. No one dared raise a hand against the royal plaything.
- Let's make order: There is nothing wrong with a free newspaper. There is also nothing illegal about a party newspaper or an ideological newspaper. The problem arises when you connect both the former and the latter and create a false display. That is exactly what was done with *Israel Hayom*. Its ideology is simple: The wellbeing and prosperity of the royal family on Balfour Street. Contrary to free newspapers, which are based on a slim editorial staff, minimal expenses and a format that does not purport to contain real journalism, *Israel Hayom* masqueraded as a real newspaper: a long and expensive line of leading talents, impressive supplements, a large editorial board, headlines, stories, color photos and everything a self-respecting newspaper is supposed to offer readers. The problem is that *Israel Hayom* was a real newspaper about the same way that Pinocchio was a real boy. In the absence of a journalistic genetic code, no battery of talents can persuade the public that it is a newspaper. Sheldon Adelson started to understand this only recently, when even Netanyahu himself was heard bemoaning the fact that despite the huge investment, "*Israel Hayom* has no influence." Now Adelson is trying to change direction, but I think it is a bit too late.
- Every time the leading executive of this newspaper boasted of its impressive circulation, I laughed. Although it is not at all funny. *Israel Hayom*'s circulation is dependent only on one factor: The budget that the Adelson family allocates to printing and distribution. When something is distributed to Israelis free of charge, they take it. Circulation is as high as the number of copies pushed into the hands of the public on the streets. There is no attempt to win the reader's heart, no challenge, no competition. *Israel Hayom* was intended to spread the ideology of Balfour Street on a daily basis and to crush the competitors who thought differently. Crush them how? Firstly, through circulation. Secondly, through advertising. An investigative report published by the Seventh Eye shows how *Israel Hayom* lowered advertising prices deliberately. It didn't make much of a difference to Adelson's deep pockets at the time. But for *Ma'ariv*, *Ha'aretz* and mainly for *Yedioth Ahronoth*, it was a catastrophe. Netanyahu was not satisfied to have an effective private propaganda mouthpiece, he also wanted to bring its great rivals to their knees, perhaps even to crush them. He nearly succeeded.
- For years, *Israel Hayom* thrived within the newspaper clique too, relying on the hatred that had built up against *Yedioth Ahronoth*. It is important to stress: *Yedioth Ahronoth* earned this hatred honestly. Until the appearance of the Adelsons, *Yedioth Ahronoth* was the local monster. It ruled

the market without limitations, it trampled everyone else, it paid no attention to anyone else. But despite all that—and despite the fact that I spent most of my career in a persistent battle against the *Yedioth* monopoly—it cannot be said that the Mozes family’s tabloid was not a newspaper. Yes, there was talk about various lists, and about the wind that blows from the top echelons, but the bottom line is that *Yedioth Ahronoth* had and will continue to have a journalistic soul. Paradoxically enough, that was even revealed in the Mozes-Netanyahu conversations, when Mozes himself explained to the prime minister that he had no control over his senior journalists. *Yedioth Ahronoth* would not dream of completely ignoring the indictment or conviction of the editorial board’s darling, Ehud Olmert. The editing might be tendentious, items might be hidden or highlighted according to various preferences, but no one would dare to blatantly manipulate the reality or the facts.

- The best example is *Yedioth Ahronoth*’s behavior after the exposure of the Bibi-Mozes talks, which was laudable, versus the way that *Israel Hayom* chose to report yesterday on the exposure of the dates of the conversations that Netanyahu held with Adelson and Amos Regev: In the most remote section of the gossip column. They were apparently amused by this.
- Yesterday it was also claimed that all senior politicians talk to senior journalists, mainly before elections. This claim is completely irrelevant in this case. A professional journalist strives to engage politicians, to get them talking, to hear them, to cross-reference what he was told, to compare to other sources and in the end to reach a proper professional product, more or less. In *Israel Hayom* this process does not exist. The exposure of the conversations led by Drucker proves everything we have known from the first moment: This is a mouthpiece and nothing more. Netanyahu dictates, Regev takes notes and publishes. All this under the guise of journalism.
- Here is another comparison that will help people understand the matter: Amos Regev did not begin his career in *Israel Hayom*. On the contrary, he ended it there, and I am convinced that he regrets every moment. Amos Regev was chief of the news division in *Ma’ariv*. Then too, he was an admirer and an associate of Binyamin Netanyahu. But then he was part of a real newspaper, and he himself was a real journalist. During his days in *Ma’ariv*, Regev spearheaded more than a few tough stories about the Netanyahus. This was Bibi’s first term as prime minister and the festivities were in full gear. Regev had no fear or bias. He kept his personal and political preferences to himself. Then too, he would not have refused to take a phone call from the prime minister at 11:45 PM. But then he would not have accepted what was dictated to him as sacred writ. He would have checked, he would have cross-referenced, he would have subjected it to professional journalistic criteria. In *Israel Hayom* there are no such criteria. That would run contrary to the very existence of the enterprise.
- *Israel Hayom* brought the Israeli printed press to its knees. Under the auspices of the incompetence of the gatekeepers, the willful ignorance of the state comptrollers over the generations, the indifference of the attorneys general, the feigned innocence of the Central Elections Committees and the *schadenfreude* towards the Mozes family, a monster sprouted that is unparalleled in any other democratic place around the world. This was forbidden party funding, a distorted election benefit, a personality cult that cost billions and relied on foreign money that had one goal: To frighten the public away from anything that was not Netanyahu, to label and wipe out anyone who threatens Netanyahu, to intimidate anyone weighing the

possibility of rebelling against Netanyahu. That is the truth. Everyone knows it. Now people are also starting to understand its ramifications.

**SUMMARY:** Let's make order: There is nothing wrong with a free newspaper. There is also nothing illegal about a party newspaper or an ideological newspaper. The problem arises when you connect both the former and the latter and create a false display. That is exactly what was done with *Israel Hayom*. Its ideology is simple: The wellbeing and prosperity of the royal family on Balfour Street. Contrary to free newspapers, which are based on a slim editorial staff, minimal expenses and a format that does not purport to contain real journalism, *Israel Hayom* masqueraded as a real newspaper: a long and expensive line of leading talents, impressive supplements, a large editorial board, headlines, stories, color photos and everything a self-respecting newspaper is supposed to offer readers. The problem is that *Israel Hayom* was a real newspaper about the same way that Pinocchio was a real boy. In the absence of a journalistic genetic code, no battery of talents can persuade the public that it is a newspaper. Sheldon Adelson started to understand this only recently, when even Netanyahu himself was heard bemoaning the fact that despite the huge investment, "*Israel Hayom* has no influence." Now Adelson is trying to change direction, but I think it is a bit too late.

## **Is Israel's Arab Party about to Split?**

By Shlomi Eldar, columnist at AI Monitor Israel Pulse

- Barely does a day go by that the Balad Party does not in some way challenge the other parties that comprise the Joint List, a unified slate of predominantly Arab parties. The scandals and provocations engineered by the party have often embarrassed other Arab lawmakers and political activists. However, they almost always refrained from reacting in public, adhering to the commitment made when the alliance was established in 2015 to wash their dirty laundry at home and not to give their many detractors any reason to crow over their internal differences. They were especially loathe to give any satisfaction to the head of the Yisrael Beitenu party, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman, whose party had pushed through legislation raising the electoral threshold in order to keep the (small) Arab parties out of the Knesset. At the time, Liberman's initiative pushed four Arab parties to unite into one large Knesset list.
- Since the birth of the Joint List in January 2015 in Nazareth, its members have managed admirably to resolve the problems arising from their innate ideological and social differences behind closed doors.
- When Balad Knesset member Haneen Zoabi was shown on July 28 at Jerusalem's Temple Mount confronting Israeli police, the cops were not the only ones keeping themselves in check to avoid getting dragged into the provocation she tried to engineer. Knesset members from the other Arab parties — which are part of the Joint List — barely concealed their chagrin at her conduct, but held their tongues. When her fellow party lawmaker Basel Ghattas was caught smuggling cellphones to Palestinian prisoners jailed for security-related offenses and sentenced to two year's imprisonment, the most that Israeli reporters were able to elicit from members of the Joint List was that they were surprised.
- In recent months, Arab lawmakers and activists with whom I spoke, most of them Hadash Party members, complained that Balad had dragged the Joint List into places they didn't want to go. One of them (speaking on condition of anonymity) said that they were dragged into "undesirable" territory. Instead of working for the integration of the country's 20% Arab minority into Israeli society, as espoused in the vision of Joint List leader Ayman Odeh, Balad was diverting them further and further away from that goal, they complained.
- On Aug. 30, Balad drove another wedge between Israeli Jews and Arabs, also angering many among the Arab community who do not support the party. At a summer camp run by Balad for Israeli-Arab children and youth, the organizers took the children for "a day of fun" to Dheisheh refugee camp in the West Bank. The children were then taken on a march "to honor the shahids" (Muslim martyrs) in two groups. One was dubbed "Yasser Arafat," named after the late leader of the PLO, and the other "Izz ad-Din al-Qassam," the armed wing of the Islamist Hamas movement. Together, they marched and shouted, "With blood and fire we will redeem you, shahids" and "With blood and fire we will redeem you, Palestine."
- In response, Knesset Committee Chair Yoav Kisch of the Likud fired off a letter to Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit demanding that Balad be investigated for incitement to violence and support of terrorism. "The Balad Party has once again crossed a red line with its camp activity

and its nature, and the severity of this matter should not be tolerated or discounted,” Kisch wrote.

- Some among Israel’s Arab community agreed that the party had, indeed, gone too far. Some told Al-Monitor that Odeh, who also heads the Hadash Party, cannot keep ignoring such provocations even if it means dismantling the unnatural alliance that they regard as harmful to the cause of Arab-Jewish coexistence.
- The Joint List is, in fact, on the verge of a breakup, but not over Balad’s shenanigans and the discomfort and embarrassment they generate among the other Arab parties under its umbrella. The fate of the alliance will be determined by Sept. 5, at the end of the Eid al-Adha holiday, and it hangs on one Knesset seat. All the tensions, egos and hatreds suppressed for 2½ years are now erupting in a stormy struggle over the Knesset seat vacated by Ghattas when he was sent to prison.
- On the eve of the March 2015 elections, the four parties comprising the Joint List — Hadash, Balad, Ra’am and Ta’al — agreed on a mid-term rotation. Knesset members Osama Saadia of Ta’al and Abdullah Abu Maarouf of Hadash, who currently hold the 12th and 13th spots on the list, were supposed to cede their seats to Joumah Azbarga of Balad, No. 14 on the party’s slate, and to the No. 15, Said al-Harumi of Ra’am. Azbarga went on to join the Knesset, but not because of the rotation arrangement; he moved into the slot vacated by Ghattas. Harumi assumed the Knesset seat vacated for him by Abu Maarouf’s pre-arranged resignation.
- Balad is now demanding an additional Knesset representative in keeping with the rotation agreement, with Niveen Abu Rahmoun next in line for that slot. But Abu Rahmoun is ranked in 19th place on the list of incumbent and potential Joint List Knesset members, and for her to assume a seat, the No. 16 and No. 18 would have to step aside, in addition to Saadia. This convoluted succession arrangement is the focus of a bitter struggle among the four parties, to which the Israeli Arab-language media are devoting intense coverage.
- The anger among the Israeli Arab electorate at the lawmakers of the Arab Joint List crosses party lines. Social media is buzzing with posts asking how the elected representatives who overcame ideological divides and tensions for two years, maintaining the party’s unity, are now risking it all over a Knesset job and its attendant pay and official car. Some Arab media pundits are panning this internal struggle as an “embarrassment,” wondering why lawmakers are willing to sell out the cause of Palestine for the sake of personal benefits.
- So the future of the Joint List will be determined next week. Those who predicted it would fall apart soon after the elections due to its unnatural makeup and forced union were wrong — big time. Its members were able to surmount their substantive divides and resolve issues of principle. But one Knesset slot has become the “be-all and end-all” of the union’s survival, and Israel’s Arab electorate is unlikely to forgive such pettiness.

**SUMMARY:** In recent months, Arab lawmakers and activists with whom I spoke, most of them Hadash Party members, complained that Balad had dragged the Joint List into places they didn't want to go. One of them (speaking on condition of anonymity) said that they were dragged into "undesirable" territory. Instead of working for the integration of the country's 20% Arab minority into Israeli society, as espoused in the vision of Joint List leader Ayman Odeh, Balad was diverting them further and further away from that goal, they complained. On Aug. 30, Balad drove another wedge between Israeli Jews and Arabs, also angering many among the Arab community who do not support the party. At a summer camp run by Balad for Israeli-Arab children and youth, the organizers took the children for "a day of fun" to Dheisheh refugee camp in the West Bank. The children were then taken on a march "to honor the shahids" (Muslim martyrs) in two groups. One was dubbed "Yasser Arafat," named after the late leader of the PLO, and the other "Izz ad-Din al-Qassam," the armed wing of the Islamist Hamas movement. Together, they marched and shouted, "With blood and fire we will redeem you, shahids" and "With blood and fire we will redeem you, Palestine."