



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Wednesday, September 6

Headlines:

- **Report: Billionaire Questioned on Suspicion of Bribing Netanyahu**
- **AG Urges Court not to Turn PM into Suspect in Submarine Affair**
- **Haley Lays Out Case for US to Leave Iran Deal**
- **Trump to Meet Netanyahu and Abbas on Sidelines of UN**
- **Israel Evicts Palestinian Family From East Jerusalem Home**
- **More Israelis Like the EU than Dislike it, Poll Finds**
- **As Netanyahu Probe Deepens Sa'ar Emerges as Possible Successor**
- **State: Public Transportation on Sabbath Not an Essential Need**

Commentary:

- **Jerusalem Post: "CONFRONTING HEZBOLLAH IN LEBANON"**
 - By Nikky Haley, US Ambassador to the UN
- **Ha'aretz: "Israeli Army Can Defeat Hezbollah in Massive Drill, but Reality Is More Complicated"**
 - By Amos Harel, columnist at Ha'aretz

News Excerpts

September 6, 2017

i24 News

Report: Billionaire Questioned on Suspicion of Bribing PM

Billionaire businessman Arnon Milchan was questioned by investigators last week in London regarding suspicion that he paid bribes to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli media outlets reported on Tuesday. He was questioned at least three times at the Israeli Embassy in London, according to Israel's *Mako* news site. Milchan previously told investigators that cigars, champagne and other luxury items he gave to the Netanyahu and his wife Sara started as occasional gifts, but turned into a steady supply at the couple's demand, according to reports. The PM and his wife would make specific demands, and even send him reminders to send supplies, a report by Israel's *Channel 2* quoted Milchan as saying. See also, ["Arnon Milchan becomes suspect in PM bribery probe" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Ynet News

AG Urges Court not to Turn PM into Suspect in Submarine Affair

Israel's Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit has asked the High Court of Justice to throw out a recently submitted petition asking it to instruct the state prosecutor to investigate Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a suspect in the [submarine affair](#). While police have carried out a [wave of arrests](#) of suspects closely associated with Netanyahu in the affair, the prime minister himself is not considered a suspect in the corruption-riddled purchase of military vessels for the IDF. Mandelblit urged the court to categorically reject the notion of turning Netanyahu into a suspect, arguing that the investigation was still in full swing and that judicial intervention would be entirely inappropriate. See also, ["Attorney general says he won't reveal details of submarine probe, grill PM" \(TOI\)](#)

CNN

Haley Lays Out Case for US to Leave Iran Deal

US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley laid out a case for President Trump to step back from the Iran nuclear deal Tuesday, arguing that Iran's technical compliance alone isn't enough for the US to stick with the pact. In a carefully read 20-minute address, Haley argued that the nuclear deal can't be considered in isolation. Instead, Iran's history, its hostility toward the US and its behavior in the Middle East have to figure into Trump's calculus when he decides in October whether to certify if Iran is abiding by the deal, she said. And, Haley argued, both UN resolutions and US law should be considered as well. "What I am saying is should he decide to decertify, he has grounds to stand on," Haley said, "But there's so much more to the story that we need to be looking at," she added. See also, ["U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley suggests Iran may be cheating on nuclear deal" \(LA Times\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Trump to Meet Netanyahu and Abbas on Sidelines of UN

U.S. President Trump is expected to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in two weeks, to discuss his planned peace initiative, senior Israeli and Palestinian officials told Haaretz. These would be Trump's first meetings with Netanyahu and Abbas since his visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority in May. See also, ["Trump reportedly to meet with Abbas, Netanyahu on sidelines of UN gathering" \(i24 news\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Israel Evicts Palestinian Family From East Jerusalem Home

After eight years without any evictions in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, the Shamesneh family on early Tuesday morning was forced out of the house where it had lived for more than 50 years. It belonged to a Jewish family until the War of Independence, when Jordanian authorities occupied the area. Police entered the Shamasneh house around 7 a.m. accompanied by three right-wing activists who were sent to assume ownership. The family received an injunction earlier this week saying there was at least another week until the eviction, but were later told it was annulled overnight by the Bailiff's Office during a hearing the family was not told about until Tuesday morning. See also, ["Israel Evicts Palestinian Family From East Jerusalem Home to Make Way for Pre-'48 Jewish Owners" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Times of Israel

More Israelis Like the EU than Dislike it, Poll Finds

Nearly half of Israelis have a positive opinion of the European Union, despite Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top politicians continually castigating it for being overly critical of Israel. According to a survey released Tuesday by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a German pro-EU think tank, 46 percent of Israelis have either a "somewhat favorable" or a "very favorable" view of the 28-member states alliance, while 43% look at the European Union unfavorably. Eleven percent have no opinion of the matter. Furthermore, 56% of respondents said they would be in favor of Israel joining the EU, with only 34% opposed to such a move. (Fifty-four percent said they'd like Israel to join NATO). See also, ["ISRAEL'S VIEW OF EUROPE-ISRAELI RELATIONS" \(Konrad Adenauer Foundation\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

As Netanyahu Probe Deepens Sa'ar Emerges as Successor

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's former No. 2 in Likud, Gideon Sa'ar, is expected to display his political muscles on Wednesday night at a pre-Rosh Hashana toast at the Hermitage Hall in Or Yehuda. The toast will be the largest event hosted by Sa'ar since a September 2014 holiday toast in which he shocked a crowd of more than 500 Likud activists at Ramat Gan's Kfar Hamaccabiah Hotel by announcing that he was taking a break from politics. Sa'ar announced his comeback to politics on April 3 in Acre, which is north of Haifa. Wednesday's toast is his first major event in the center of the country. A source close to Sa'ar said 700 to 800 people would attend the event, including mayors from across the country. Buses will take Likud activists from Beersheba and Haifa to Or Yehuda.

Ha'aretz

State: Public Trans' on Sabbath Not an Essential Need

Public transportation on Shabbat is not an essential need for Israelis, the state told the High Court of Justice on Tuesday, responding to a petition seeking much more public transportation on the Sabbath. Current law sharply curtails public transportation on the Sabbath and holidays, and the government must interpret a provision "to the extent possible" based on Jewish tradition. The state said a Sabbath license for public transportation was therefore "exceptional and should be interpreted in a restricted manner." The law, however, does allow licenses for Sabbath transportation serving hospitals, remote areas, towns and villages whose residents are not Jewish, and anything considered essential to public safety. See also, ["PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ON SHABBAT NOT ESSENTIAL, STATE TELLS SUPREME COURT" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

CONFRONTING HEZBOLLAH IN LEBANON

By Nikky Haley, US Ambassador to the UN

- It's not every day that there's good news to report from the United Nations. Last week, we got some good news, as the UN Security Council voted to significantly strengthen its efforts to stop the Hezbollah terrorists in southern Lebanon.
- The clouds of war have been gathering right under the nose of a UN peacekeeping force. At the direction of its Iranian patron, Hezbollah has amassed an arsenal of weapons and battle hardened fighters in southern Lebanon. The situation is dangerous, but an agreement reached in the Security Council last week might prove to be a turning point.
- Hezbollah has become so brazen that it conducted a media tour of its illegal fighters and weapons – reportedly inviting over 100 journalists to see its fighters show off weapons in a part of Lebanon where Hezbollah is not supposed to have any.
- In flagrant violation of UNSC resolutions, Hezbollah fighters posed with their guns and other weapons for the visiting journalists. One photographer said it looked like “Madame Tussaud’s with Hezbollah fighters.” But the UN force, known as UNIFIL, saw none of the weapons that the world’s media managed to photograph.
- UNIFIL is called an “interim” force, but it has been in Lebanon for 40 years. A key part of its mandate is to help the Lebanese government ensure there are no weapons outside of the government’s control in the area near Israel. It is a difficult task, but for too long, the peacekeeping force has been utterly failing at achieving this fundamental part of its mandate. Some of its leaders do not even acknowledge that there’s a problem.
- While UNIFIL has averted its eyes, Hezbollah has been preparing for war. By its own admission, Hezbollah is committed to the destruction of Israel. In recent times, it has doubled down on this commitment, massively increasing its supply of rockets, missiles and fighters.
- Hezbollah has become so brazen that it conducted a media tour of its illegal fighters and weapons – reportedly inviting over 100 journalists to see its fighters show off weapons in a part of Lebanon where Hezbollah is not supposed to have any. In flagrant violation of UNSC resolutions, Hezbollah fighters posed with their guns and other weapons for the visiting journalists. One photographer said it looked like “Madame Tussaud’s with Hezbollah fighters.” But the UN force, known as UNIFIL, saw none of the weapons that the world’s media managed to photograph.
- UNIFIL is called an “interim” force, but it has been in Lebanon for 40 years. A key part of its mandate is to help the Lebanese government ensure there are no weapons outside of the government’s control in the area near Israel. It is a difficult task, but for too long, the peacekeeping force has been utterly failing at achieving this fundamental part of its mandate. Some of its leaders do not even acknowledge that there’s a problem.

- While UNIFIL has averted its eyes, Hezbollah has been preparing for war. By its own admission, Hezbollah is committed to the destruction of Israel. In recent times, it has doubled down on this commitment, massively increasing its supply of rockets, missiles and fighters.
- Our changes will make UNIFIL step up its patrols and inspections which will help disrupt Hezbollah's illegal activity. UNIFIL will now enhance its visible presence on the ground and its ability to detect and deter incoming fighters and weapons.
- Most importantly, our changes require UNIFIL to report when it is prevented from seeing something it wants to inspect. From now on, when the peacekeepers encounter a Hezbollah roadblock, they have to tell us the details of where, when and why they got stopped. This transparency will put an end to the ignorance about what's really going on in southern Lebanon. When UNIFIL is prevented from doing its job, the Security Council will know about it. And if the UN refuses to act on this information, the world will know about it.
- For the United States, this is a time for strength, resolve and accountability at the United Nations. That's what our effort at strengthening UNIFIL was all about. This is an important step, but there is much more to do. As the proxy for the outlaw Iranian regime, Hezbollah will not give up its terrorist goals. But just as Hezbollah is stepping up its efforts, the United States, and now the United Nations, are stepping up our efforts against them.

SUMMARY: UNIFIL is called an "interim" force, but it has been in Lebanon for 40 years. A key part of its mandate is to help the Lebanese government ensure there are no weapons outside of the government's control in the area near Israel. It is a difficult task, but for too long, the peacekeeping force has been utterly failing at achieving this fundamental part of its mandate. Some of its leaders do not even acknowledge that there's a problem. While UNIFIL has averted its eyes, Hezbollah has been preparing for war. By its own admission, Hezbollah is committed to the destruction of Israel. In recent times, it has doubled down on this commitment, massively increasing its supply of rockets, missiles and fighters. Our changes will make UNIFIL step up its patrols and inspections which will help disrupt Hezbollah's illegal activity. UNIFIL will now enhance its visible presence on the ground and its ability to detect and deter incoming fighters and weapons.

Israeli Army Can Defeat Hezbollah in Massive Drill, but Reality Is More Complicated

By Amos Harel, columnist at Ha'aretz

- On September 6, 2007, this week a decade ago, there was a mysterious attack in eastern Syria. Then-U.S. President George W. Bush, a series of senior officials in his administration and many media outlets – essentially, all possible sources except the Israeli media, which is prohibited from going into detail about the matter – later reported that Israel Air Force jets had attacked and destroyed a nuclear facility that North Korea had built for the Assad regime.
- The large-scale Israel Defense Forces drill being conducted by Northern Command for a week and a half, starting Tuesday, reflects some of the changes that have occurred on Israel's northern border in the 10 years since. The bombing in Syria may have taken place a year after the Israeli army's disappointing performance against Hezbollah during the Second Lebanon War, but at the time Israel still saw Syria as a serious enemy.
- The strategic reality in 2017 is totally different. The Syrian army has been almost totally eroded by six-and-a-half years of civil war; Hezbollah is the primary enemy and Lebanon is the most worrisome battleground for Israel. Syria is now considered a secondary arena, one that might be part of a future war with Hezbollah under certain circumstances (like enhanced Iranian activity along the border with Israel on the Golan Heights), or that could expedite its breaking out.
- This corps exercise is the first of its kind in 19 years. On the eve of the 1982 Lebanon War, the general staff dissolved the corps command, believing it to be an archaic, unnecessary headquarters, only to restore it hastily immediately after the war. Taking part in this exercise will be tens of thousands of regular and reserve soldiers, but what's important about it is the drilling of dozens of brigades and especially the training of the commanders, from the company commanders on up.
- The objective set for this exercise for the commander of the Northern Corps, Maj. Gen. Tamir Heyman, is to defeat Hezbollah. This time the talk is not of inflicting significant harm to Hezbollah, to deter it, or to quash its desire to fight until the next round of violence. This is a positive development; it's good that the Israeli military is speaking clearly both within and without. But one must take all this with the proper caution. It's much easier to declare victory in an exercise than in a war, whereas the direction in which things develop at the moment of truth is to a large extent dependent on the dialogue between the general staff and the political echelon.
- The cabinet and the security cabinet, as was made very clear during the recent conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza, aren't eager to set detailed or ambitious goals for the military. In many cases the general staff has been forced to derive the objectives of a campaign through the creative interpretation of the overly general guidelines it received from above. That's one of the reasons behind the decision two years ago by IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot to publish a document on the military's strategy that for the first time addressed these issues publicly. This

time, it seems, at least most of the ministers in the security cabinet will make an effort to watch parts of the exercise, after most were absent from the general staff exercise last year.

- Hezbollah is aware of the Israeli military's preparations for the exercise and is expected to do its utmost to analyze Israel's plans and assess its capabilities. Despite the soothing messages emerging from Israel, which stress that this is no more than a drill (with the Lower Galilee serving as "south Lebanon"), one can assume that regional anxieties will rise over the coming 10 days. Israel will seek to utilize the exercise to deliver a deterrent message: Despite Hezbollah's improved capabilities over the past 11 years, the increase in the Israeli army's aerial, intelligence, technological and ground maneuvering abilities is significantly greater. If Hezbollah makes the mistake of thinking that its achievements in the Syrian war have prepared it for success against the Israeli army, it will pay a heavy price.
- The background for the exercise is the dramatic change in the regional picture. The war in Syria is far from over, but President Bashar Assad's regime has been saved from defeat by Russian and Iranian intervention and by massive Hezbollah assistance, which blocked the rebels' progress and in recent months even restored some key territories to Assad's hands.
- The Israeli intelligence community is still having a hard time assessing how Russia will act in the event of a war with Hezbollah. In Syria, Moscow and Hezbollah are in the same camp supporting the Assad regime, but the Russians are maintaining an open and friendly line of communication with Israel. If there were a war, Russia might try to deter Israel from pummeling Hezbollah, but it could also be that the Russians (in a situation in which America's influence and regional involvement is waning) could be the ones to supply a diplomatic path out of the crisis.
- In recent weeks there have once again been reports, which first surfaced in March, regarding efforts by Iran and Hezbollah to build factories in Lebanon to produce precision missiles. The idea that the producer of these dangerous weapons would be in close proximity to their end-users is of concern to Israel, but it seems as if there was some exaggeration about the immediacy of this threat. Israeli warnings have deterred Iran. Israel will apparently need to continue combining public declarations, diplomatic pressure and "below the radar" deterrent operations to keep this threat from ever coming to fruition.

SUMMARY: Hezbollah is aware of the Israeli military's preparations for the exercise and is expected to do its utmost to analyze Israel's plans and assess its capabilities. Despite the soothing messages emerging from Israel, which stress that this is no more than a drill (with the Lower Galilee serving as "south Lebanon"), one can assume that regional anxieties will rise over the coming 10 days. Israel will seek to utilize the exercise to deliver a deterrent message: Despite Hezbollah's improved capabilities over the past 11 years, the increase in the Israeli army's aerial, intelligence, technological and ground maneuvering abilities is significantly greater. If Hezbollah makes the mistake of thinking that its achievements in the Syrian war have prepared it for success against the Israeli army, it will pay a heavy price.