



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, September 8

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News Excerpts

September 8, 2017

Ynet News

Sara Netanyahu to be Indicted by Attorney General Mandelblit

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit is set to inform Prime Minister Netanyahu's wife, Sara, that she is to be indicted in the dormitory affair on Friday. Mrs. Netanyahu will be charged with the offense of fraudulently receiving goods under aggravated circumstances. Mandelblit announced his decision following the completion of a police investigation that strengthened the original recommendation of the Jerusalem District Attorney and the State Attorney to indict Mrs. Netanyahu. Both the prime minister and his wife have called Attorney Yossi Cohen in for an emergency meeting regarding Friday's indictment. See also, ["Attorney General expected to indict Sara Netanyahu Friday morning" \(Jpost\)](#)

Times of Israel

Trump Expresses 'Reluctance' on Chances for ME Peace

US President Donald Trump expressed reservations Thursday about reaching a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians but said he had not given up on his efforts to bring the two sides together. Speaking alongside the Emir of Kuwait Al Sabah at a White House press conference Thursday, Trump said: "I think there is a chance that there could peace, but again I say that a little bit reluctantly." See also, ["Trump deems there is a 'chance' of peace in Israeli-Palestinian conflict" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Taylor Force Act Now to Start in 2018, Cutting Funds to PA

The Taylor Force Act was attached to the 2018 Foreign Operations budget in the Senate on Thursday, meaning the legislation is almost certainly assured of being enforced in the United States from next year. The legislation is intended to cut U.S. funding for the Palestinian Authority while it continues to financially support convicted terrorists and their families. The amendment approved by the committee makes a clear distinction between American funding that benefits the PA directly, which will be suspended, and funding that goes to civilian institutions such as hospitals in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which will continue to receive support. See also, ["Taylor Force Act Targeting Palestinian Authority Terror Payments Receives Procedural Boost in Senate" \(The Algemeiner\)](#)

Ynet News

Following Airstrike, Syria Files UN Complaint against Israel

Following the airstrike on Syria's Scientific Studies and Research Center (CERS), which is responsible for research and development of nuclear, biological, chemical and missile technology and weapons for the state, the Syrian Foreign Ministry sent a letter of complaint Thursday to UN Director-General Antonio Guterres and to the president of the UN Security Council, about Israel's "unabated aggression" against it and its support of terrorism. "The Israeli attacks have become systematic behavior to protect the terrorists from al-Nusra Front," the letter read. "It is inconceivable that the Security Council has so far taken no action to put an end to these blatant attacks." See also, ["Syria: UN probe documents use of chemical weapons and other crimes against civilians" \(UN News Center\)](#)

Red Cross chief: Settlements are ‘Key Humanitarian Challenge’

The president of the International Committee of the Red Cross on Thursday issued a scathing condemnation of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, describing them as a key reason for Palestinian suffering. Peter Maurer, wrapping up a three-day visit to the region, also noted that Hamas’s refusal to provide information about and access to Israelis held in Gaza violates international law, though he added his organization was in no position to negotiate a deal between Hamas and Israel to secure their freedom. See also, [“Red Cross chief spurned in attempt to visit captive Israelis” \(Washington Post\)](#)

Ha’aretz

Right-wing Party Wants to Pay Palestinians to Leave Israel

A right-wing Israeli party will launch a new campaign promoting a plan to pay Palestinians to leave the West Bank and move to an Arab country. The National Union-Tkuma party, which has run for the Knesset on the Habayit Hayehudi slate, will be funding the internet campaign to promote a diplomatic plan proposed by Bezalel Smotrich, a lawmaker from that faction, that includes compensation paid to Palestinians who agree to move. Smotrich, who has worked on the plan for a considerable time, said it does not involve the forced transfer of Palestinians. “Even now, 20,000 Palestinians a year are leaving Judea and Samaria [the West Bank], and surveys that they themselves conduct show that 30 percent hope to emigrate abroad. I will help them, fairly and with full monetary compensation and not by force. It will be cheaper than the wars and military operations every few years,” Smotrich explained. See also, [“MK: Israel should sponsor Arab emigration” \(Arutz 7\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Security is Main Issue During Rivlin’s Meeting with Merkel

Security dominated the discussions between President Reuven Rivlin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on Thursday. Rivlin thanked Merkel for Germany’s ongoing commitment to Israel’s security under her administration, and said that he hoped this would continue regardless of who is in power. Merkel is in the final stages of campaigning for a fourth term. Rivlin also thanked Germany for the sale of submarines to Israel, which he said were a vital component in Israel’s security measures, especially in the face of Iran’s support of terrorism from the air, land and sea. Rivlin spoke of the intensified Iranian threat against Israel in light of its presence in Syria and the spread of its influence throughout the Middle East, which he warned could bring the whole region to the brink of war. See also, [“Rivlin tells Merkel that Iran, Hezbollah are forcing Israel to react” \(JNS\)](#)

In Alleged Airstrike, Israel Punctuates Opposition to Syria Ceasefire Pact

By Judah Ari Gross, The Times of Israel's military correspondent

- The timing of the airstrike allegedly carried out by the Israel Air Force against a Syrian advanced weapons development facility early Thursday morning could not have been more apt. The aerial attack came nearly 10 years to the day after Israel allegedly destroyed a Syrian nuclear reactor; a few weeks after Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah visited Damascus; two weeks after a meeting between Russian and Israeli heads of state; a day after a United Nations report formally blamed the Bashar Assad regime for a sarin gas attack earlier this year; and in the midst of the IDF's largest exercise in nearly two decades, in which tens of thousands of soldiers are simulating a war with Hezbollah, a key part of the Syrian-Iranian Shiite axis.
- In addition to whatever tactical value was gained from destroying such a facility, the early Thursday morning bombing run also presented a message to Syria, Iran and Hezbollah, as well as to the United States and Russia, that Israel would continue to act in the war-torn country if necessary — ceasefire between the regime and rebels be damned. The target was a Scientific Studies and Research Center (CERS) facility, which reportedly produces and stores both chemical weapons and precision missiles, located outside the city of Masyaf, in Syria's northwestern Hama region, nearly 300 kilometers away from Israel's northernmost air base.
- "It targeted a Syrian military-scientific center for the development and manufacture of, among other things, precision missiles which will have a significant role in the next round of conflict," wrote Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin, a former head of Israel's Military Intelligence, on Twitter. Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror, a former national security adviser, also noted that the rockets fired by Hezbollah at a Haifa train station during the 2006 Second Lebanon War, which killed eight people, were manufactured at the Masyaf facility. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he told Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly that Israel would act in Syria, during their meeting last month in the Russian city of Sochi.
- "We will act when necessary according to our red lines," Netanyahu told reporters after the meeting. "In the past, we have done this without asking permission, but we have provided an update on what our policy is." But while declaring a policy publicly might send a message to Israel's allies and enemies about its intentions, nothing can state that position more clearly than a missile. Yadlin noted that Russia and the US, which are helping negotiate and maintain a ceasefire in Syria, have been "ignoring the red lines that Israel has established." For instance, last week, the Arabic daily Asharq Al-Awsat reported that the US agreed to let Iran-backed militias take positions within 10 kilometers of Israel's border with the Syrian Golan Heights, a troubling notion for the Jewish state as it would open up yet another potential front for terrorist groups in a future conflict. According to Yadlin, the overnight airstrike also served to show that the presence of Russian troops — and their advanced air defense systems — "do not prevent actions, which are attributed to Israel, in Syria." Israeli airstrikes in Syria, while not quotidian, have been a fairly common occurrence over the course of the country's civil war,

which began in 2011. The Jewish state has long-held a public policy of maintaining “red lines” and taking action if they are violated.

- Yet Thursday’s strike also represented a change in tack for Israel, Amidror said during a phone briefing with reporters organized by the Israel Project. Yadlin wrote that the attack was “not routine.” Indeed, it was the first airstrike apparently conducted by the IAF since the Russian-American brokered ceasefire went into effect earlier this summer. Israel has cast doubts over the agreement, which it says allows Iran to entrench itself near the Golan border in southern Syria.
- According to Amidror, the strike on the CERS base was the first time Israel targeted not a Hezbollah weapons convoy nor a Hezbollah warehouse on a Syrian base, but an Assad regime production facility. The former national security adviser connected the airstrike to Nasrallah’s visit to Damascus last week. He said that during the terrorist leader’s visit to Syria, he likely secured a deal in which Assad would either “transfer the facility to Hezbollah or at least supply weapons to Hezbollah.” Amidror noted he did not have access to intelligence to confirm that estimation, but said the “only logical explanation for this attack” was that weapons from the Masyaf base were going to be given to the terrorist group, in violation of one of Israel’s “red lines.” He added that the target of the strike was likely the missile production facilities on the base, not necessarily the chemical weapons.
- While Hezbollah is believed to have a stockpile of over 100,000 missiles, Amidror said he was unaware of the terrorist group having significant quantities of chemical weapons in its possession. Some aspects of the timing of the strike are more than likely coincidence. The 10-year anniversary of Operation Orchard, as the strike on the Syrian nuclear core is known, and the publication of the UN report accusing Assad of a war crime were likely non-factors in conducting the bombing. According to Amidror, the massive IDF exercise might have served as a certain degree of back-up for the strike, but was probably not a consideration either. But intentional or not, these factors drive home the point that while Thursday night’s airstrike attributed to Israel might have adhered to the established “red lines” policy, but it was not just more of the same.

SUMMARY: “We will act when necessary according to our red lines,” Netanyahu told reporters after the meeting. “In the past, we have done this without asking permission, but we have provided an update on what our policy is.” But while declaring a policy publicly might send a message to Israel’s allies and enemies about its intentions, nothing can state that position more clearly than a missile. Yadlin noted that Russia and the US, which are helping negotiate and maintain a ceasefire in Syria, have been “ignoring the red lines that Israel has established.” For instance, last week, the Arabic daily Asharq Al-Awsat reported that the US agreed to let Iran-backed militias take positions within 10 kilometers of Israel’s border with the Syrian Golan Heights, a troubling notion for the Jewish state as it would open up yet another potential front for terrorist groups in a future conflict. According to Yadlin, the overnight airstrike also served to show that the presence of Russian troops — and their advanced air defense systems — “do not prevent actions, which are attributed to Israel, in Syria.”

Shimon Peres, in Memoir, Takes on Israel Past and Future

By Isabel Kershner, correspondent in Jerusalem for The New York Times

- The ousted French prime minister had just signed the letter authorizing the sale of a nuclear reactor to Israel — for peaceful purposes, he had been assured — even though he no longer had the authority to do so. It was the morning after Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury’s government fell in late 1957. To get around the problem, he wrote the previous day’s date at the top of the page as an anxious Shimon Peres, then the ever-resourceful director general of Israel’s Ministry of Defense, looked on. “I asked no questions,” Mr. Peres, who went on to serve as prime minister and president, related six decades after the event. “I said nothing at all. What was there to say?” It was, Mr. Peres said, “the most generous display of friendship I had ever known.” The secret negotiations with the French for the reactor to be built in Dimona were one of the peaks of Mr. Peres’s long career, now distilled in his new memoir, “No Room For Small Dreams: Courage, Imagination and the Making of Modern Israel.”
- The book, to be published posthumously in English on Sept. 12, comes a year after Mr. Peres suffered a severe stroke from which he did not recover. He died just over two weeks later, at 93. These are the final words of the last of the founding generation of Israeli leaders. But indefatigable dreamer that Mr. Peres was, his book also delivers a pointed, if veiled, message from the grave about the apparent dearth of vision in the present, and it looks to the future.
- “We need a generation that sees leadership as a noble cause,” he wrote in his epilogue, “defined not by personal ambition, but by morality and a call to service.” Mr. Peres recounts episodes he considered the milestones of a life “entwined with the birth and construction of Israel,” as he put it. They are described in vivid detail and, in some cases, for the first time in his own words, and amount to a kind of ideological will and testament. “He knew that there is a certain amount of time he was given on earth,” Nehemya Peres, Mr. Peres’s younger son, who is known as Chemi, said in a recent interview at the Peres Center for Peace and Innovation, the nongovernmental organization established by his father in Jaffa, on the Mediterranean shore. Mr. Peres completed work on the book in his final weeks, Chemi Peres said, using it as “his last voice” and as “a call to dream, to dare, to be optimistic, to transition ourselves into a new era.”
- Mr. Peres sat and recorded the memoir in English to reach as wide an audience as possible, in the hope, his son said, of inspiring future leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs. Versions will also be published in Hebrew and French. Mr. Peres played a central role at critical junctures in his country’s history. He helped build defense and weapons stocks and industry, salvaging the economy during the hyperinflation of the 1980s, championing Israel’s high-tech industry, and then turning his efforts to peace. The lessons running through the narrative of his memoir are to reach for the impossible and never give up.

- The book by no means offers a full accounting or reckoning. Mr. Peres simply does not relate the more contentious episodes. So Mr. Peres, a protégé of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, describes his exploits procuring weapons for the 1948 war over Israel's creation, and says the distance between their offices was, for a time, "only the width of a thin piece of plywood." But he makes no mention of the Palestinians who became refugees, or of the traumatic chapter of the Altalena, the ship organized by Mr. Ben-Gurion's rivals to bring fighters and weapons to Israel. It was shelled on Mr. Ben-Gurion's orders and sunk just off the coast. Nor does Mr. Peres relate his early support for Jewish settlement in the West Bank or his "Grapes of Wrath" operation in Lebanon when he was prime minister in 1996, when Israeli artillery shells killed more than 100 Lebanese civilians sheltering in a United Nations compound.
- "My father was the greatest optimist on earth," Chemi Peres said. "He believed that the future was the only thing that mattered because the past cannot be changed." The book, he added, was not meant to settle disputes or disagreements. Some of Mr. Peres's most evocative descriptions are of his childhood in a wintry Polish shtetl, where he marveled over his first taste of a Jaffa orange, and of his voyage, at 11, with his mother and brother to what was then the British Mandate for Palestine in 1934. Arriving on a steamship at the port of Jaffa, he recalls his tanned father, who had made the journey two years ahead of them, standing on a small Arab fishing boat in the sparkling waters, coming out to greet them. Growing up in the Zionist socialist youth movement, Mr. Peres found his political voice and began to emerge as a leader, even as he opted for a pioneering life as a shepherd on a spartan kibbutz, or communal farm, in the Galilee, called Alumot. His powers of persuasion and creative thinking were not lost on the leaders of the movement, and he was soon recruited into public service by Mr. Ben-Gurion.
- Mr. Peres describes how, when he was still in his 20s, Mr. Ben-Gurion tasked him with procuring an "extensive shopping list of weapons" when Israel had less than a week's worth of ammunition on the eve of the 1948 war. Faced with a Western arms embargo, Mr. Peres found a supplier in Czechoslovakia. After the war he moved to New York to complete his studies and buy weapons on the black market for Israel's fledgling armed forces. He went to meet dealers in Cuba at midday, only to find they had meant midnight, and bought two decommissioned British destroyers from Colombia, flying in to Cartagena to inspect them in a small plane whose left engine was on fire.
- In the early 1960s, in Washington on a mission to buy weapons from the United States government — this time legally — Mr. Peres was unexpectedly invited to meet President John F. Kennedy, who put him on the spot, inquiring about Israeli intentions regarding nuclear weapons. Mr. Peres formed a spontaneous and cryptic answer: "Mr. President, I can tell you most clearly that we shall not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the region." And that, he relates, was how Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity was born. A powerful deterrent, it laid the foundations for peace with Arab nations, he says. "Believing that Israel had the power to destroy them, he writes, "they one by one abandoned their ambitions to destroy us."

- **Mr. Peres also details the behind-the-scenes discussions that led to the audacious operation in 1976 to free hostages from Entebbe, Uganda. Mr. Peres, who was defense minister at the time, described how he pushed for the military raid in the face of the rest of the government's deep skepticism and opposition. In the final chapter Mr. Peres describes the assassination of Prime Yitzhak Rabin, an old rival who once described Mr. Peres as an "indefatigable schemer" for his political manipulations. When the shots rang out Mr. Peres was just yards from Mr. Rabin who, by the end, had become his close ally in the pursuit of peace with the Palestinians. That mission remained unfulfilled.**

SUMMARY: The book, to be published posthumously in English on Sept. 12, comes a year after Mr. Peres suffered a severe stroke from which he did not recover. He died just over two weeks later, at 93. These are the final words of the last of the founding generation of Israeli leaders. But indefatigable dreamer that Mr. Peres was, his book also delivers a pointed, if veiled, message from the grave about the apparent dearth of vision in the present, and it looks to the future. "We need a generation that sees leadership as a noble cause," he wrote in his epilogue, "defined not by personal ambition, but by morality and a call to service." Mr. Peres recounts episodes he considered the milestones of a life "entwined with the birth and construction of Israel," as he put it. They are described in vivid detail and, in some cases, for the first time in his own words, and amount to a kind of ideological will and testament. "He knew that there is a certain amount of time he was given on earth," Nehemya Peres, Mr. Peres's younger son, who is known as Chemi, said in a recent interview at the Peres Center for Peace and Innovation, the nongovernmental organization established by his father in Jaffa, on the Mediterranean shore. Mr. Peres completed work on the book in his final weeks, Chemi Peres said, using it as "his last voice" and as "a call to dream, to dare, to be optimistic, to transition ourselves into a new era."