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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Wednesday, May 16*

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# News Excerpts

May 16, 2018

The New York Times

## **Violence Ebbs But Tensions Do Not in Gaza**

Protest turned to mourning across Gaza on Tuesday after Israeli soldiers on Monday killed 60 protesters and wounded many hundreds more. Doctors struggled to treat the wounded in hospitals overflowing with young men suffering from gunshots. Funeral processions surged through the otherwise deserted streets. Tensions lingered that the crisis could escalate into military clashes between Hamas and Israel. Arab countries and other critics, including the United Nations human rights body, accused Israel of employing excessive force against unarmed protesters. South Africa and Turkey recalled their ambassadors to Israel. Among Western countries only French President Emmanuel Macron of France directly assailed Israel's actions.

Washington Post

## **No Consensus at UN Gaza Meeting**

The U.N.'s Middle East envoy said there was no justifying the killings in Gaza, and several Security Council members called for an independent investigation, but the council had no unified message Tuesday. U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley laid blame on Hamas for inciting people to lob flaming objects toward the Israeli side of the border fence. Haley asked: "Who among us would accept this type of activity on your border?" Still, Kuwait's envoy said he planned to propose a council resolution on protecting Palestinian civilians.

Ha'aretz

## **Nakba Day Draws Only 2,000 Demonstrators in West Bank**

Nearly 2,000 people participated Tuesday in demonstrations in the West Bank and within the Green Line to mark Nakba Day and to protest the mounting death toll in Gaza. The Health Ministry in Ramallah noted that 27 people were injured in the West Bank, and one is in grave condition. However, the Israeli military stated that despite Palestinian reports of live fire used by the army in Hebron, the IDF used rubber-tipped bullets. Two border police officers were injured during the protest. In Israel, some 200 people, among them Joint List MKs, demonstrated at the entrance to the city of Umm al-Fahm.

Jerusalem Post

## **PLO Ambassador to US Summoned Back to West Bank**

PLO Ambassador to the US Husam Zomlot was summoned to the West Bank on Tuesday at the direction of PA President Mahmoud Abbas. The PA Foreign Ministry said that Zomlot will arrive in the West Bank on Wednesday. At a meeting in Ramallah on Monday, Abbas called the new embassy "a settlement outpost."

## **Israelis Reflect on Gaza Deaths with Defiance and Shame**

From the agricultural hamlets with their backs up against Gaza to the busy sidewalks of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and all the way to Israel's northern borderlands, Israelis grappled in different ways with the staggering casualty reports from the Gaza. The fundamental imbalance — heavily armed soldiers firing on mostly unarmed demonstrators, or rioters and terrorists, as the military termed them — elicited responses of defiance or defensiveness in some, shame in others, and a healthy dose of served-them-right in some corners. Others only wanted to celebrate the new American Embassy.

Times of Israel

## **After Minor Operation, Abbas Calls for Two-States**

Dismissing rumors of his deteriorating health, Abbas said on Tuesday night that a “minor surgery” he underwent earlier in the day was successful and that he was in good physical condition. Abbas, 83, who had surgery at a hospital near Ramallah in the West Bank, said he had suffered from a problem with one of his ears but now felt better. He was released from the hospital a few hours after the operation. Abbas stressed his commitment to the peace process and the “the two-state solution and an agreement that will bring about the establishment of a Palestinian state next to the State of Israel.”

Associated Press

## **Gulf States Rebuke Israel But Alliances Still Inch Closer**

Behind the scenes fears over Iran have divided Arab leaders, with some willing to quietly reach out to Israel. Saudi Arabia, which has used its control of holy sites in Mecca and Medina to brand itself the protector of Islam around the world, offered a brief statement of condemnation and reaffirmed its support for “the Palestinian brotherly people” and their “legitimate rights.” Among Arab Gulf states, Qatar's statement was the most fiercely-worded.

Ynet

## **Guatemala Inaugurates Embassy in Jerusalem**

Guatemala's President Jimmy Morales inaugurated his country's embassy in Jerusalem on Wednesday, following in the footsteps of the United States, which opened its own embassy in the capital earlier this week. On Tuesday night, the walls of Jerusalem's Old City were illuminated with the flags of Guatemala, Israel, and the US and a message thanking President Jimmy Morales for the embassy opening. Morales first announced his plans to move his country's embassy to Israel's capital in December.

## **The Moral Challenge of Gaza**

By Donniel Hartman, President, Shalom Hartman Institute

- “Abba, what are you writing about Gaza?” Before her call, I hadn’t intended to write. Gaza paralyzes me into silence. When I read reports or hear discourse about Israeli Army use of lethal force against demonstrators, I cringe. To call what is happening at the Gaza border a demonstration, is a perversion of reality as I know it. The inhabitants of Gaza have every right and reason to demonstrate against the tragedy which is their life. Not only do they live under unforgiveable and deplorable conditions, no one is taking responsibility either for their predicament or for the path to rectify it.
- What is happening on the Gaza border is not a protest against the reality of life in Gaza, but an attack against the sovereignty of Israel and its right to exist. Palestinians have every right to view and experience the formation of Israel as their Nakba (catastrophe). They have every right to view the Six Day War and Israel’s reunification of Jerusalem as a deepening of this Nakba. When tens of thousands of people, civilians interspersed with thousands of Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists, march on our border with the intent to destroy it, and penetrate into Israel, and allow the terrorists to murder Israelis, it is not only not a peace demonstration, it is not a demonstration at all. It is a battlefield, where anyone who approaches the fence is a combatant. While Palestinians have every right to their narrative of Nakba, my people have every right to celebrate our independence and our victory in 1967, and to express joy at being home in our country, whose capital is Jerusalem. And we have every right to defend our rights.
- The challenge is that when it comes to Gaza, for Israelis our moral conscience is by and large, silent. We argue that our unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, including its setting of the precedent of dismantling Jewish settlements, should have inspired Gazans to embrace or at the very least explore, the possibility of peace, instead of the path of war. It should have inspired the trade of goods and the fostering of economic ties, and instead it led to missile fire and the resulting partial blockade. We hold the Gaza population personally responsible for the choices they have made. We hold the leadership that they have chosen, a leadership that regularly declares its desire for my destruction and acts on it, as responsible both for the tragedy of Gaza and its rectification. And as a result, most Israelis believe that from this moment henceforth, our moral responsibilities are limited to our efforts at self-defense. The plight of Gazans is taken out of the equation of our moral discourse.
- Gaza paralyzes me into silence, for I am like most Israelis. I am not only saddened by the choices they have made and by the paths that they have chosen not to take, I am angry. I am a devout two-statist, who believes in the right of the Palestinian people to sovereignty in their own state, living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security for both of us. I am angry, because I believe that the hatred and violence spewing out of Gaza has possibly buried Israelis’ belief in the viability of the two-state solution in our lifetime. Any discourse about a Palestinian state in

Judea and Samaria is immediately rejected under the counter-argument: "It will just become another Gaza." And this Gaza will be able to shut down all of Israel with mere mortar fire.

- But as my daughter's phone call reminded me, we cannot allow ourselves to be paralyzed, and to create a moral black hole in our society. I do not believe that Israel is principally responsible for the reality which is Gaza, but it does bear some responsibility. I do not believe that our soldiers on the border of Gaza are firing on demonstrators, but are engaged in a war. I do not believe that the Hamas-inspired action on the border poses an existential threat to the State of Israel. It does, however, pose a life-and-death danger for many Israelis. At the same time, 60 human beings were killed and thousands were injured in one day. While 60 human beings lost their lives, and Israeli soldiers were engaged in the horrific challenge of protecting our border, tens of thousands of Israelis converged on Rabin Square in Tel Aviv to sing and rejoice with Netta Barzilai on her and our victory in the Eurovision contest.
- When the Egyptians – a greater power and enemy than the Palestinians – were drowning in the Red Sea, our tradition recounts that the angels in heaven began to sing a song of praise to God. God silenced them with the words, "My creation is drowning in the sea, and you want to sing a song of praise?" The Book of Esther recounts a particularly chilling moment. After Ahasuerus and Haman sent forth the pronouncement decreeing the murder and destruction of all Jews throughout the kingdom in one day, it states, "And the King and Haman sat down to drink and the city of Shushan was in chaos." We do not need to take moral responsibility for the reality which is Gaza, but at the same time we cannot allow our humanity and moral conscience to be so inert as to sit down and drink, not to speak of dancing in our city squares, when we are causing, justifiably or not, death and chaos.
- We can believe that the events in Gaza are a war against Israel, support our soldiers, and still desire a public debate over the means necessary to win this war. I don't value Monday morning moral philosophers, nor expressions of "concern" for loss of life. I do value serious moral reflection on how to ensure that we live up to our military moral code, which demands that even when force is used in self-defense, we only use the amount of force necessary and in proportion to the danger that we face, and that we do everything in our power to avoid civilian casualties. I do desire an Israeli society which welcomes and engages in this discourse. I do not believe that our soldiers are violating international law, yet I am interested in a public discourse about what our soldiers on the front lines in Gaza are experiencing. I am interested in defending our soldiers from being placed in situations where their orders are not clear, and thus placing our soldiers in morally compromised situations.
- Gaza paralyzes me, because human beings are dying at my hands, and I do not know how to prevent it. Gaza frightens me, because it is so easy to forget it and sing, regardless of what is happening there. Gaza challenges us, for it is in Gaza that our commitment to the value of human life is and will be tested. We may not be principally responsible for the reality which is Gaza, but like all moral human beings, we must constantly ask ourselves whether and how we

can be part of the solution. As Jews, we are commanded to walk in the way of God, a God who declares, "My creation is drowning, and what are you doing about it?"

## Israel's PR Attempts to Band-Aid Over Gaza's Mortal Wound

By Noa Landau, Columnist, Ha'aretz

- Alongside the series of funerals expected in Gaza on Tuesday, the official Israeli government policy – as reflected in the responses from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, members of the security cabinet and the talking points put together by the Foreign Ministry for the foreign press – is casting full responsibility for the crisis in the Gaza Strip on the leadership of Hamas, and focusing on explaining Israel's right to defend its borders. But behind the scenes and for a long time, cabinet ministers have been discussing with security forces representatives about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and advancing possible solutions to quell the flames. The positions in these discussions are usually divided between those who think the crisis directly affects Israel's security, so it must take serious action to ease the situation; and those who feel the crisis has still not yet reached the level of a humanitarian disaster and is still not urgent to deal with it. Among those holding the minority opinion, there are some who think Israel has no reason to intervene and prevent the suffering of Gaza residents.
- Traditionally, it is the IDF representatives who represent the position that preventing a humanitarian disaster in Gaza is an Israeli security interest, while representatives of the Shin Bet security service are those who say the situation is not that bad yet – and they even present the ministers with evidence that the standard of living in Gaza is reasonable, showing them pictures of packed cafes and other places, to back this up. Over the past few months, it seems a certain amount of change has occurred in the Shin Bet's position, which now tends to support the IDF's view that the economic crisis is severe and getting worse. Netanyahu and the members of his security cabinet have been presented with repeated warnings about the economic collapse in Gaza, and in particular the collapse of the civil infrastructure, over the past six months. Data reported by Amos Harel in Haaretz shows the Israel's security establishment has warned that about 95 percent of the water in the Gaza Strip is unfit to drinking and hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of sewage flow into the Mediterranean Sea every day – and also reach Israeli shores. The unemployment rate is nearing 60 percent.
- The former coordinator of government activities in the territories, Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, said similar things at the Globes Business Conference in January: "The Gaza Strip is a failed region. 90 percent of the water is unfit for drinking and I can provide many more figures here. The problem is mostly that of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. But Israel is very much influenced by it. This is another factor and layer for the IDF's security viewpoint," said Mordechai. In light of these warnings, most members of the security cabinet conceded in these meetings that Israel must act to promote solutions to the crisis, mostly in the area of infrastructure, but only with international cooperation and funding. For example, in January Israel presented an emergency plan for the humanitarian rehabilitation of Gaza at an emergency conference of donor nations to the Palestinians in Brussels – and asked the international community to enlist to fund it. At the center of the plan was Israeli aid to construct

desalination, electricity and natural gas facilities as well as improving the Erez industrial area, at a total cost estimated at \$1 billion.

- In a very rare exception since the diplomatic breakdown between the Palestinians and the Americans, PA prime minister Rami Hamdallah sat with U.S. special representative to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt and Israeli representatives: Regional Cooperation Minister Tzachi Hanegbi and Mordechai. Hanegbi, Netanyahu's representative at the conference, presented the Israeli plan. It included a proposal to build a desalination plant, a new high voltage electricity connection to Israel to double the amount of electricity received by Gaza, a natural gas pipeline from Israel to Gaza, a sewage plant, waste disposal landfill site, improvements to the Erez industrial area and more. Israel proposed contributing knowledge and technology to the projects and was more flexible concerning allowing the entry of certain "dual-use" materials, which can be used for both civilian and terrorist purposes. In other words, Israel can be more flexible when it wants to.
- Hanegbi told the European Union's representative for foreign affairs Federica Mogherini that Israel hopes the conference succeeds and is acting on many levels to aid the residents of Gaza. In a talk with journalists in January, Netanyahu said he supports easing the economic situation in Gaza. Israel's intensive efforts to deal with situation in the Gaza Strip can also be seen in the ongoing links and tight coordination with the Egyptian security forces and leadership. Netanyahu is personally involved in the relations with Egypt in an attempt to create leverage to calm things down. Israel is also holding talks on the matter with both the Palestinian Authority and Jordan.
- Therefore, the official claims that Israel has supposedly completely left Gaza and Hamas bears complete responsibility for what is happening there, does not exactly correspond in practice to the government and security establishment's intensive efforts on the issue of the fate and economic situation of Gaza residents – especially concerning questions relating to the easing of the tight blockade: How many people and how much goods can enter and leave Gaza – both from Israel and from Egypt. The present focus in public on the messages renouncing any such responsibility out of fear of "PR damage" and "headlines around the world" conceal the fact that the Israeli government has been discussing for a long time the humanitarian time bomb in Gaza. At a time when cabinet ministers are themselves working to find solutions behind the scenes, it is worth remembering that public relations is just another Band-Aid on a mortal wound.