



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Friday, May 11*

### Headlines:

- **UN Chief Asks for Halt to ‘All Hostile Acts’ in Middle East**
- **US Makes Good on Threat, Sanctions Iranian Quds Force**
- **France Slams ‘Unacceptable’ New US Sanctions on Iran**
- **Rohani: We Don’t want "New Tensions" in the Middle East**
- **Intel Chiefs: This Round Is Over, Long-term Strife Will Continue**
- **Germany, Russia Decline Invitation to U.S. Embassy Event**
- **Poll: 97% of East J'lem Residents Oppose Israeli Control**
- **Five Top ISIS Officials Captured in U.S.-Iraqi Sting**

### Commentary:

- **New York Times: “Trump’s Most Foolish Decision Yet”**  
– By Susan E. Rice, national security adviser to President Barack Obama
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: “Few Comments at the Margins of the Situation”**  
– By Nahum Barnea, Columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

# News Excerpts

May 11, 2018

AP

## **UN Chief Asks for Halt to ‘All Hostile Acts’ in Middle East**

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is urging an immediate halt to “all hostile acts” to avoid “a new conflagration” in the Middle East after Israeli forces bombed Iranian targets inside Syria. Israel says the strikes were retaliation for an Iranian rocket barrage on its positions in the Golan Heights and has called on the U.N. Security Council and secretary-general to immediately condemn Iran’s attack. The Security Council, deeply divided over Syria, is highly unlikely to issue a statement and as of Friday morning no council member has asked for a meeting. Israel and Iran have long fought each other through proxies, and with the new exchange each seemed to be sending a warning that a direct clash between them could swiftly escalate. See also, [“Israel DEMANDS UNSC CONDEMN ‘IRANIAN AGGRESSION’ FOLLOWING GOLAN ATTACK” \(JPost\)](#)

Ynet News

## **US Makes Good on Threat, Sanctions Iranian Quds Force**

The US Treasury imposed sanctions on Thursday against six individuals and three companies it said had funneled millions of dollars to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force, just days after President Donald Trump withdrew from the landmark 2015 Iran nuclear deal. The Treasury Department said it was acting with the United Arab Emirates to disrupt the network and accused Iran's central bank of actively helping the group to access US dollars held in foreign bank. "The Iranian regime and its Central Bank have abused access to entities in the UAE to acquire US dollars to fund the IRGC-QF's malign activities, including to fund and arm its regional proxy groups, by concealing the purpose for which the US dollars were acquired," Mnuchin said in a statement.

Times of Israel

## **France Slams ‘Unacceptable’ New US Sanctions on Iran**

France’s foreign minister on Thursday condemned the United States for reimposing sanctions against foreign companies trading with Iran, labeling the move “unacceptable” in comments that expose the deepening rift between Washington and its European allies on the issue. Washington has given European firms doing business in Iran up to six months to wind up investments or risk US sanctions and they are also forbidden from signing any new contracts with Iran. See also, [“Reality Check: Europe Won't Roll Over on Iran” \(Bloomberg\)](#)

HuffPost

## **Rohani: We Don’t want "New Tensions" in the Middle East**

Iran does not want "new tensions" in the Middle East , Iranian President Hassan Rohani said Thursday in a telephone interview with German Chancellor Angela Merkel , not to mention the Israeli strikes in Syria. Israel conducted dozens of deadly airstrikes against Iranian targets in Syria earlier that day, claiming to respond to Iranian rocket fire against the part of the Syrian Golan Heights under its control. Asked by AFP, the Iranian Foreign Ministry has not reacted to this information. "Iran has always sought to bring down tensions in the region, trying to strengthen security and stability," Rohani said, in the Iranian presidency’s website. See also, [“Rouhani says Iran doesn’t want ‘new tensions’ in Middle East” \(Ha’aretz\)](#)

Ha'aretz

## **Intel Chiefs: This Round Is Over, Long-term Strife Will Continue**

Another clash with Iran in Syria is unlikely, intelligence officials told ministers on Thursday, after the intensity of the air force strikes on Iranian targets the night before. However, the high alert in the north is expected to continue for several days. At the same time, Israel is beefing up security around Israeli embassies abroad for fear of an Iranian attack. Military sources said Wednesday night's attack damaged Iran's deployment in Syria, also taking out a significant part of Syria's aerial defenses that had already been hit in February. However, IDF officers believe it's too early to determine whether Iran will reconsider its plan to establish a military base in Syria. It is possible, they said, that Iran will refrain from immediate retaliation due to its recent failures and Israel's intelligence advantage, as shown Wednesday night. See also, ["Ignore the tough talk. War would be 'suicide' for Iran" \(Arab News\)](#)

Ha'aretz

## **Germany, Russia Decline Invitation to U.S. Embassy Event**

Some 30 out of the total 86 foreign ambassadors serving in Israel have accepted the Foreign Ministry's invitation to the reception marking the U.S. embassy's move to Jerusalem. The event, which will take place on Sunday evening in Jerusalem, a day before the official relocation ceremony, will be attended by U.S. President Donald Trump's daughter and adviser, Ivanka Trump, his son-in-law and adviser, Jared Kushner, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin and other elected U.S. officials. Three of the 30 ambassadors who accepted the invitation represent member states – Hungary, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria – of the European Union, which is leading a policy against the embassy's move.

Jerusalem Post

## **Poll: 97% of East J'lem Residents Oppose Israeli Control**

When it comes to the future of Jerusalem, 97% of the Palestinians living in the city say that they strongly object to the idea that Jerusalem should maintain its current municipal boundaries and be fully annexed to and controlled by Israel, according to a comprehensive survey conducted by the Leonard Davis Institute of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. However, the survey also indicates that 97% of the responders said that they also strongly object the idea that Jerusalem should be divided along the June 1967 armistice boundaries, without allowing the residents of the city access between its parts. The survey was obtained by The Jerusalem Post earlier this week ahead of Jerusalem Day – For the survey, 612 Palestinians from 22 east Jerusalem neighborhoods were interviewed face-to-face.

New York Times

## **Five Top ISIS Officials Captured in U.S.-Iraqi Sting**

Five senior Islamic State officials have been captured, including a top aide to the group's leader, in a complex cross-border sting carried out by Iraqi and American intelligence, two Iraqi officials said Wednesday. The three-month operation, which tracked a group of senior Islamic State leaders who had been hiding in Syria and Turkey, represents a significant intelligence victory for the American-led coalition fighting the extremist group and underscores the strengthening relationship between Washington and Baghdad. Two Iraqi intelligence officials said those captured included four Iraqis and one Syrian whose responsibilities included governing the Islamic State's territory around Deir al-Zour, Syria, directing internal security and running the administrative body that oversees religious rulings. See also, ["Islamic State leaders captured by Iraqi forces in Syria" \(Ynet News\)](#)

## **Trump's Most Foolish Decision Yet**

By Susan E. Rice, national security adviser to President Barack Obama

- **President Trump's reckless decision to withdraw the United States from the Iran nuclear deal will not force Iran back to the negotiating table, nor will it address serious concerns about Iran's behavior in the Middle East. But it will leave Iran's nuclear program unconstrained, and an inconstant America isolated from its allies and far less safe.**
- **The Iran deal has worked as intended. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United States intelligence community, the United Nations Security Council and the president's top advisers, Iran has fully complied with its obligations. As required, Iran relinquished 97 percent of its enriched uranium stockpile, dismantled two-thirds of its centrifuges and its entire plutonium facility, abided by the most intrusive international inspection and monitoring regime in history, and forswore ever producing a nuclear weapon.**
- **This agreement was never about trust. It is about stringent verification — in perpetuity. The deal effectively cut off all potential pathways for Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon. Now President Trump has ceded the moral high ground and freed Iran from all those constraints. Iran will be able to resume its nuclear activities without being blamed for violating the agreement.**
- **Instead, it is the United States that is about to unilaterally violate the very agreement it negotiated by reimposing nuclear-related sanctions while Iran remains in compliance. Mr. Trump disregarded the pleas of our closest European allies, who worked for months to try to address his objections. Instead of reaching agreement with our allies, President Trump told them to get lost and now will penalize European companies for abiding by an agreement that is working. The political and economic consequences for our relationship with Europe will most likely be considerable.**
- **The costs to American global leadership are steep. When the United States unilaterally abrogates an international agreement in the absence of any breach, we undermine international perceptions of our reliability and responsibility. That is precisely what we have already done with the Paris climate agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. But violating the Iran deal is far more dangerous.**
- **Iran could stay in the deal for now if the remaining signatories can provide sufficient trade and investment benefits. Yet this outcome is far from assured and likely unsustainable, given the ability of the United States to impose painful sanctions against foreign entities doing business with Iran. Alternatively, Iran could resume its nuclear activities unfettered — either gradually or rapidly — and even withdraw from the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, making it a far more dangerous actor in a volatile region.**
- **The nuclear deal was never intended, nor was it able, to address Iran's other pernicious behavior: its support for terrorism, malign influence in neighboring countries and ballistic missile program. But the deal always made good sense because Iran's nefarious activities would be far more dangerous if they were backed by a nuclear capability. By withdrawing from the deal, we have weakened our ability to address these other concerns.**

- **With Iran unconstrained, Saudi Arabia and others in the region may push to obtain a nuclear capacity. The hard-liners in Iran who never liked the nuclear deal will be strengthened in their bid to destabilize the region, leaving relative moderates like President Hassan Rouhani sidelined. In light of America's abrogation of its commitments, Russia and China's position in the region will be bolstered at our expense. Israel may now rush into conflict with Iran, betting it can draw in the United States. Under any scenario, America will be less safe; and in the worst case, we could face the choice of going to war or acquiescing to a nuclear-armed Iran.**
- **President Trump, disdainful of any success of his predecessor, has long been determined to destroy this agreement, even though it has served American interests and won the grudging support of many of its original critics. The president spiked the Iran deal out of spite and hubris, with no viable alternative. He asserts that, with increased pressure on Iran, he can negotiate a better deal. But only someone who knows nothing about Iran would presume that it will pay more under duress to get the same thing it was promised three years earlier.**
- **If Mr. Trump thinks he is sending a strong message of resolve to North Korea, he is again mistaken. Instead, he is demonstrating to a far more advanced and unpredictable adversary on the eve of negotiations that the United States cannot be trusted. He has provided proximate proof that any deal the United States makes, even a successful one, may be tossed aside on the whim of this or any other president. Our negotiating partners, including Japan, South Korea and China, will doubt our credibility when we most need to demonstrate collective resolve. Why would Kim Jong-un give up his nuclear and missile capability when the United States has just demonstrated that, once he does so, it might well renege on the bargain?**
- **The president has just made the most foolish and consequential national security decision of his tenure. Exactly what comes next is unclear, but we certainly will face a far worse situation than today. When the mess materializes, Mr. Trump, per standard procedure, will blame everyone else: his political opponents, his predecessor, the Europeans and the Iranians. But there will be only one person responsible: President Trump, our wrecking ball in chief.**

**SUMMARY: The nuclear deal was never intended, nor was it able, to address Iran's other pernicious behavior: its support for terrorism, malign influence in neighboring countries and ballistic missile program. But the deal always made good sense because Iran's nefarious activities would be far more dangerous if they were backed by a nuclear capability. By withdrawing from the deal, we have weakened our ability to address these other concerns. With Iran unconstrained, Saudi Arabia and others in the region may push to obtain a nuclear capacity. The hard-liners in Iran who never liked the nuclear deal will be strengthened in their bid to destabilize the region, leaving relative moderates like President Hassan Rouhani sidelined. In light of America's abrogation of its commitments, Russia and China's position in the region will be bolstered at our expense. Israel may now rush into conflict with Iran, betting it can draw in the United States. Under any scenario, America will be less safe; and in the worst case, we could face the choice of going to war or acquiescing to a nuclear-armed Iran.**

## **Few Comments at the Margins of the Situation**

By Nahum Barnea, Columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- **The butterfly effect:** The American withdrawal from the nuclear agreement starts with the frustration of the white middle class in the periphery of several key states in the United States. The frustrations led to Trump's election. It is doubtful whether another president, either Republican or Democratic, would have withdrawn from the agreement, certainly not at this timing and in this blatant manner, in open confrontation with the entire world except for three countries—Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
- **The Gordian knot:** The mythology tells us about Midas, son of King Gordias, who tied his father's cart up in a knot that no one could untie. One day Alexander of Macedon came to visit. He drew his sword and cut the rope, ensuring himself the takeover of Asia Minor and winning the title "the Great." We can spend days discussing Trump's ignorance of international relations, the scorn he holds for diplomacy, allies and international agreements, and the danger he poses to world peace. The fact is that as of now the world is falling in line with his wishes; he is successful. On the day after the withdrawal from the nuclear agreement the ruler of North Korea rewarded him with a gesture—the release of three Americans. We may be underestimating the merits of ignorance; it makes it possible to operate outside the box and ignore conventions whose time has passed. We may be underestimating the merits of crudeness; it causes rivals to back down. As the Sages said, be wicked to the wicked.
- **Plan B:** One of the serious arguments of the opponents of withdrawal [from the agreement] is that the Trump administration has no alternative plan. Trump proposed one plan to the Iranians—to begin negotiations on a new agreement, which would entail cancellation of the nuclear project and a pullback from Iran's involvement in the region. If Iran should refuse, Trump threatened, it would bear the consequences. A threat is not a plan, the critics say. What is your plan? Trump has no answer.
- **The Netanyahu effect:** On Tuesday, the president of the United States praised Netanyahu in the White House; on Wednesday the Russian president embraced him in the Red Square. No Israeli leader has enjoyed such a sequence of events, and it is doubtful whether a leader of another country has matched it (perhaps Erdogan; it is not certain). Moreover, Netanyahu has not been asked to pay with concessions for the honor that is being granted to him. This champagne is gratis. In the world of Trump and Putin, Netanyahu is the leader of a strong country, he is experienced, articulate, holds similar values, and is a leader who should be taken into account. There is no doubt; Netanyahu's career as foreign minister is more successful than his career as communications minister. Will he deign to retire at his peak? In Israel no one retires at their peak, certainly not Netanyahu.
- **The globalization effect:** Three European governments—Germany, France and Britain—have invested great efforts over the past weeks in paving roads that will bypass the American sanctions. I will list some of them below. Regrettably for Europe, these efforts have encountered an almost insurmountable barrier—globalization. The global business cycle passes through one city, New York, and engages the American economy in countless ways. The sanctions open the door to prosecution not only against a corporation that does business with Iran, but also against

a corporation that does business with a corporation that does business with Iran. The investors are fleeing; the traders are fleeing; the banks are fleeing. The only way to do business is by deception. The Iranians are good at that; for years they held a bank in Bahrain that laundered billions for them. This bank has been exposed. Others were not exposed; our forces can be expected to have a lot of work on this matter.

- **Partnership union:** The underlying assumption of the Israeli move is that the US will handle the threat to Israel from Tehran, and Russia will curb Iran in Syria. The fact that Putin chose to be photographed with Netanyahu in the midst of the IAF strikes and a day after the American withdrawal is not accidental. Putin wishes to convey a message to the Iranians. He needs quiet throughout the summer. He will not let Iran or Israel spoil the world cup for him.
- **The kite effect:** There is no word in the Israeli vocabulary that has become more worn out than “terrorism.” Kite terrorism, balloon terrorism, diplomatic terrorism, agricultural terrorism, economic terrorism. The fires in the fields and forests of the kibbutzim are regrettable and justify compensation, but the term “terrorism” outweighs them. There is even poetic justice in the fact that the all-powerful IDF, which invested billions in an underground barrier, finds it difficult to cope with kites. Perhaps we should stop the supply of string to Gaza? Crepe paper? Maybe we should change the wind direction? The situation in Gaza is desperate. Israel has four options: To take over Gaza; to attack Gaza and leave; to go with Abu Mazen against Hamas; to accept Hamas’s proposal of a ten-year hudna, a cease-fire. The fourth option is the most practical. The defense minister has rejected it out of hand.
- **The Trump effect:** The changes in the rules of the game have not stopped with international politics: they are seeping into domestic politics in a series of democratic states. Israel is one of them; the parties that compose its coalition are filled with Trumpians. If it works for Trump, they say, why not me. The result is bills that are designed to destroy the delicate fabric that envelopes Israeli democracy. The result is unbridled attacks on the legal system, the state audit system, the army, the media, the cultural institutions. There is no top-down guidance here—only politicians, each of whom is pulling the blanket in their own direction, towards their own whim. Israel will manage with Iran; the question still stands whether it will know how to manage with Trumpism.

**SUMMARY:** The Trump effect: The changes in the rules of the game have not stopped with international politics: they are seeping into domestic politics in a series of democratic states. Israel is one of them; the parties that compose its coalition are filled with Trumpians. If it works for Trump, they say, why not me. The result is bills that are designed to destroy the delicate fabric that envelopes Israeli democracy. The result is unbridled attacks on the legal system, the state audit system, the army, the media, the cultural institutions. There is no top-down guidance here—only politicians, each of whom is pulling the blanket in their own direction, towards their own whim. Israel will manage with Iran; the question still stands whether it will know how to manage with Trumpism.