



Israel and the Middle East News Update

Monday, June 4

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News Excerpts

June 4, 2018

Times of Israel

Merkel Backs Israel's Demand That Iranian Troops be Removed From Syria

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Monday told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that she agrees with Israel's demand that Iranian troops be removed from Syria, especially the area close to the Israeli border. "Iran's regional influence is worrying," she said, adding that her government would use "diplomatic" means to counter it. Announcing at a joint press conference in Berlin that she and other government representatives planned to visit Israel in early October, Merkel said that "one has to discuss" Tehran's presence in Syria. She also condemned the Islamic Republic's heavily anti-Israel tweets.

Ha'aretz

Netanyahu: Israel Examining Ways to Prevent Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

Weekly mass protests by Palestinians at the Gaza border are the result of the dire economic situation in the Strip caused by Hamas, and Israel is examining ways to prevent a humanitarian crisis there, Prime Minister Netanyahu said Monday as he briefed Israeli reporters following a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. "I raised the issue of Gaza and gave her a very brief description of how this crisis was created by Hamas's investment in tunnels," Netanyahu said. "What they built underground in Gaza is like six office towers ... a huge investment ... They're suffocating economically, and therefore, they decided to crash into the fence ... We're examining various possibilities for preventing a humanitarian crisis there. Israel is the one doing the most, and perhaps the only one taking action on this issue. I spoke with Merkel about a plan to improve the [border] crossings."

See also: ["Israel Braces for Renewed Protests Along Gaza Border"](#) (Ha'aretz)

Times of Israel

Shin Bet Thwarted Plot to Assassinate Prime Minister, Jerusalem Mayor

Israeli forces arrested an East Jerusalem man suspected of planning to assassinate Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat earlier this year, on orders from a Syria-based terrorist group, the Shin Bet security service revealed on Tuesday. The main suspect, 30-year-old Arab Israeli Muhammad Jamal Rashdeh, was arrested on April 24. Two more suspects were arrested in the following weeks, the Shin Bet said. The security service refused to identify the two suspected accomplices. "Working on orders from terrorist operatives abroad, Muhammad planned to carry out a number of significant terror attacks against a variety of targets," the security service said. The targets included Netanyahu and Barkat, as well as buildings belonging to the US consulate in Jerusalem (which has since been converted into an embassy) and a delegation of Canadian security

officials who were in Jerusalem to train Palestinian Authority security forces in the West Bank, the Shin Bet said.

The New York Times

Jordan's Prime Minister Quits as Protesters Demand an End to Austerity

Escalating economic pressures on Jordan threatened to turn into a political crisis on Monday, as the Prime Minister Hani Mulki resigned amid nationwide protests against proposed tax and price increases in a country that has suffered through years of declining living standards. There was no sign that his departure would mollify the protesters. The replacement of a prime minister is a tactic frequently used by King Abdullah II, Jordan's ruler, in an attempt to placate the populace when discontent threatens the stability of the kingdom. But behind the recent protests is a collision of international factors that are far less easy to manage. Western lenders are demanding painful measures to balance the budget and liberalize the economy even though Jordan's standard of living has been declining for years. And at the end of 2017, the petroleum-rich Persian Gulf monarchies cut off \$1 billion a year in aid that had covered many of Jordan's big expenses for the previous five years. Recent signs of distance between King Abdullah and some important Persian Gulf rulers have raised questions about whether they are holding back aid solely because the falling price of oil has squeezed their own budgets, or also partly because of political differences.

Times of Israel

Khamenei: Israel a 'Cancerous Tumor' that 'Must be Eradicated'

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sunday lashed out at Israel, calling the Jewish state the "cancerous tumor" of the region that must be "removed and eradicated." In a series of tweets Sunday, Khamenei leveled harsh criticism at Israel for its handling of the violent Hamas-orchestrated "March of Return" protests along the Gaza border. A day earlier, the supreme leader took to Twitter to warn "traitorous countries" that refused to confront Israel militarily in order to appease the US, saying that "resistance is the only way to save Palestine from oppression." Khamenei has previously branded Israel as "barbaric," "infanticidal," and the "sinister, unclean rabid dog of the region." More recently, he blamed "Zionists" for the anti-government demonstrations held across Iran earlier this year.

See also: [Israel Responds with 'Mean Girls' GIF after Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei's Nuclear Threats](#) (Newsweek)

Ha'aretz

Iran to Inform UN It's Starting Process to Increase Uranium Enrichment

Iran will inform the UN nuclear watchdog in Vienna on Tuesday over its start of a process to increase the country's uranium enrichment capacity. "In a letter that will be handed over to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) ... Iran will announce that the process of increasing the capacity to produce ... UF₆ (uranium hexafluoride) ... will start on Tuesday," Iran's Atomic Energy Organization spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi said. The UF₆ is a feedstock for centrifuges. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said he had ordered preparations to increase uranium enrichment capacity if a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers falls apart after the U.S. withdrawal from it last month. The

deal allows Iran to continue 3.67 percent uranium enrichment, far below the roughly 90 percent threshold of weapons-grade. Before the deal, Tehran enriched uranium to up to 20 percent purity.

Jerusalem Post

Friedman: If Reporters Can't Get Gaza Story Right, Keep Mouths Shut

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman attacked the media on Monday, claiming that journalists had an obligation to work harder before reporting criticism of Israel. The example he gave was recent coverage of the ongoing conflict along Israel's border with the Gaza Strip. If journalists can't list alternatives that Israel can use to better counter the threats from Gaza, he said, "keep your mouths shut." He added: "With all the criticism Israel has gotten, nobody has identified the less lethal means by which Israel could have defended itself over the last 4 weeks... If what happened isn't right – what is right? It seems to me that in this journalistic environment nine out of 10 articles that are written about the Gaza conflict are critical of Israel." Friedman said that criticism of Israel could be legitimate but that journalists were not fairly reporting on the reality along the border with Gaza.

Times of Israel

From Other End of World, Group Races to Preserve Middle East's Jewish Heritage

Even at the time of the early Muslim empires in the 7th century, Jews had already been established in Arab lands for hundreds of years. Vibrant communities flourished throughout the Middle East, with synagogues dotting the skylines of major cities from Algiers to Aleppo. Over time, the Jews built up an extensive cultural legacy. Around the time of Israel's establishment in 1948, however, things took a turn for the worse as Jews were forced to flee the Muslim-majority countries. Now, as climate change, human development and terrorism threaten to obliterate what remains, one nonprofit organization is racing to safeguard this legacy before it's too late. Since 2010, Boston-based Diarna ("our home" in Judeo-Arabic) has used the latest in 3-D digital mapping technology alongside traditional scholarship and oral interviews to document more than 2,500 Jewish sites in the Middle East and North Africa. "When I talk about Jewish fortresses in Saudi Arabia, I get blank stares. But this highlights a forgotten history and also the sensitive nature of the work we're doing," said Jason Guberman, Diarna's co-founder and coordinator.

The Arab World Needs to Move On From the Liberation of Palestine

Israel is going nowhere, and we in the Arab world have to deal with it. That means offering Israelis prosperity, security and friendship; all Israel needs to do is overcome their prejudices and give Palestinians their rights

By Khalaf Al Habtoor, chairman of the Al Habtoor Group

For the people caught in the enduring Israeli-Palestinian conflict, their own leaders and Western intermediaries have failed.

Summits, conferences, accords and a roadmap going nowhere have been a waste of time and effort. Earlier attempts at finding solutions brokered by U.S. presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton were genuine - but were stymied. Those that followed were either fig leaves or half-hearted.

Today, there is not only "nothing on the table," there is no table. When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced there would never be a Palestinian state on his watch – a statement he later retracted for international consumption – he meant every word. Just days ago, his government announced it would consider approving the construction of 2,000 more settler homes on the West Bank.

And, quite frankly, I am beginning to think President Donald Trump's blueprint for peace is a figment of his imagination.

There is plenty of blame to apportion. But regurgitating past errors of judgment has been done over and over again. It is beyond time for a new page to be opened in this unending book of horrors. How long must we go on rehashing and repeating more than 50 years' worth of mistakes?

Presidents, prime ministers, Middle East envoys and UN Secretary Generals, however well-meaning, have achieved precisely nothing. Relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority are on the rocks. Rockets and missiles fly both ways over Gaza.

I am convinced that peace will not come from the top down, but rather requires grassroots movements - on the lines of Peace Now, established by Israeli reservists in 1978 to advocate for a two-state solution. Once popular and commanding a huge Israeli following, it is now on the fringe; its activists subjected to death threats.

The climate has worsened since the movement's heyday, currently dominated by fear, hatred and a thirst for revenge. Those destructive emotions need to change. Trust between the two peoples needs to be built brick by brick; they should learn to see each other as fellow human beings with the same hopes and dreams. Peace Now's philosophy must be revived in the hearts of minds of not only Israelis but also Palestinians.

Israelis and Palestinians must put a lid on the past, no matter how painful and bloody, else they will suffocate what could be a bright future. Yesterday is just fodder for history books. The only path of any value is forward, a path that takes us away from dark shadows into the light.

What Palestinians have to gain from a peaceful conclusion to this conflict is well known. The tiny spark of hope that gave them the courage to carry on is all but stifled, replaced by desperation, evidenced by recent mass protests in Gaza resulting in dozens of deaths and thousands of injuries.

Their courage is beyond reproach. But other than placing their plight on the international front burner for a brief moment in time, such demonstrations are exercises in futility at a great cost to those who took part.

Yes, Israel's reputation for brutality has been endorsed again. European states and even sectors of the American Jewish community are outraged. Many countries are beginning to consider Israel a pariah state. However, as long as it remains under a White House umbrella, it will never be held accountable.

Appealing to Netanyahu or Trump to come up with solutions in good faith is pointless. They only understand the language of force.

My appeal is directed at the people of Israel, so used to the status quo that they may be unaware that reconciliation with stable, prosperous Arab states on condition Palestinians get their rights will provide them with untold benefits.

Those benefits include inflows of investments from the GCC and other Arab countries to boost Israel's economy. That translates into new business opportunities, improved infrastructure, greater opportunities and prosperity.

They include the ability to travel and be welcomed as tourists throughout most of the Middle East.

They include a reduction in anti-Semitism exacerbated, in part, by the occupation.

They include a potential end to the conscription of young Israelis and mandatory reserve duty.

They include an exchange of talent and technologies. Multilateral cultural and social interactions. The end of aggression and loathing.

And they include security and intelligence cooperation, buffering Iran's belligerence.

I would ask Israelis to set aside their long-held prejudices and dig deep to see what is in their interests. The same goes for Arabs.

Think about your children and grandchildren. Don't indoctrinate them with your fears and hatreds. Don't pollute the minds of future generations. Young people deserve to be carefree, not forced to wear uniforms and carry weapons. Allow them to formulate their own views.

Give them a chance to move forward together, free from the weight of your emotional baggage and bad experiences. Changing attitudes is a crucial prerequisite for Israelis and Arabs to live together with mutual respect on the same soil.

Like it or not, the Israeli state is recognized by the United Nations and the world at large. Israel boasts high-calibre university graduates, ground-breaking inventions and cutting-edge research. Better to deal with it than fruitlessly wishing it away. Israel with its nuclear weapons and military might is going nowhere.

Whereas I have championed a two-state solution throughout most of my life, organizing fundraisers and conferences, I am a realist. The chance of two states happening is gone, other than the creation of another enclave like Gaza, a demilitarized entity with no control over its own borders. I can only

conclude that Israelis and Palestinians must coexist in one state as equal citizens with the same rights.

We all prayed for Palestine to be liberated and for Palestinians to have their own state, but is that achievable now? Or is that simple, wishful thinking within our stubbornly romantic minds? Wishful thinking will not permit the Palestinian people to live in dignity and security without fear.

Let us shift our thinking towards a logical solution that will secure a better future for our nations, for Arab and Israeli youth and especially for those young Palestinians, born in conflict, who deserve the same chances enjoyed by their peers everywhere.

Israelis and Palestinians should revolt against the useless old leadership and outdated playbooks keeping them on different sides of the fence. Tear down those figurative and material walls. People power could be a game changer. The men in suits bent on consolidating power have let you down. Peace engendered by the very people who have the most to gain (and to lose) could work where all else has failed.

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Jerusalem Post – June 3, 2018

Israel and Europe – What Has Gone Wrong?

The current wave of Europhobia in the Israeli government is not really warranted by the facts and the situation.

By Susan Hattis Rolef, PhD in International Relations

The EU is still Israel's largest trading partner, the source of much of the highly valued research funds that pour into the country, and the cultural and intellectual base of large sections of the Israeli population. I dare add that I have no doubt that if it ever gets into a spot, Israel will be able to rely much more on the Europeans than on its new "friends" in Russia, India, Japan, Africa and Saudi Arabia to come to its rescue.

Yet to listen these days to some of the Likud leaders – including Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Internal Security Minister Gilad Erdan and Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz, one gets the impression that the Europeans – or more accurately the members of the EU – are our greatest enemies, who seek our destruction. Well, not all of them – not Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Austria, which participated in the celebrations for the opening of the American Embassy in west Jerusalem at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and two of which are planning to open embassies of their own in our capital in the foreseeable future.

Netanyahu is pissed off with the Europeans, who "condition their relations with Israel, which produces technology in every area, on political conditions" (as he said to the leaders of the four Visegrad group members – Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – in July 2017), namely on Israel stopping the development of Jewish settlement in the territories, which poses a threat to the two-state solution that the EU supports. Netanyahu is also frustrated with the

Europeans, who insist on supporting the nuclear agreement with Iran signed in July 2015, even though they admit that it is not an ideal agreement.

Erdan blames the Europeans for providing financing to organizations that, inter alia, support the BDS (well, so do the US, Australia and a few additional non-European states). Steinitz was pissed off with the attempted intervention of the EU in the case of the Arab-Israeli director of the Massawa Center, Jafer Farah, who was apparently beaten up by an Israeli policeman while held in detention, following the violent demonstration in Haifa over the skirmishes along the Israeli-Gazan border on May 21, in which 62 Palestinians were killed. "Let them (the Europeans) go a thousand times to hell" the usually level-headed Steinitz said on May 23.

Yes, I know that Europeans – especially the liberals and social-democrats among them – can be difficult in their approach to Israel. And yes, they expect Israel to act in accordance with international law in general, and the principles of human rights in particular at a time when Israel seems to be moving away from these. They remember that from the beginning of Zionism and until quite recently the Zionists, and later the Israelis, acted to get a hold in Eretz Yisrael through international agreements based on international law, even though religious Jews always believed that the land is ours because God gave it to us.

Today it is the latter argument that the Europeans hear from the likes of Education Minister Naftali Bennett, Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Tzipi Hotovely and Knesset House Committee chairman Miki Zohar, while Israel insists on its own interpretation of international law, which does not quite tally with what the majority believe this law to say.

According to the way the overwhelming majority of states in the world, and in Europe in particular view international law, Israel's presence in the territories that it occupied in June 1967 is an occupation, not a liberation, and all legal means may be used to get it out of these territories on the basis of an agreement that will also provide for Israel's legitimate security concerns. Such legal means can include sanctions on Israel, though the EU insists on sanctions – including a boycott – only against the Jewish settlements in the territories and those who support them economically. No European state speaks of boycotting Israel as a whole or of acting toward its destruction.

With very few exceptions, the Europeans refuse to move their embassies to Jerusalem until the status of Jerusalem is settled by agreement – not by means of unilateral Israeli or American actions, and certainly not on the basis of the argument that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish people, where two Jewish states and Temples were constructed and destroyed within 70 years each time (at the time of King David and King Solomon, and at the time of the Hasmoneans).

ALL ZIONIST Jews believe that we have strong links to this land, and especially to Jerusalem, but not all of us believe that we have a religious right, rather than an internationally recognized right to be here, as long as we do not disregard rights that other might have, and especially those of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine.

Basically people like myself can understand the European positions and even sympathize with most of them. The problem starts when the positions legitimately held by the Europeans are boisterously promoted by antisemites, and/or persons who are ignorant of the basic historical facts.

One cannot deny that there are among the Europeans, and even among a few of their leaders, persons who hold antisemitic views, and wouldn't go into mourning if the Jewish state ceased to exist.

But ignorance is the worst enemy. For example, I wonder what most of the European leaders would say if asked how many persons – Jews and Arabs – have been killed as a result of the ongoing war between the two since 1947. How many know that more Muslims have been killed in Syria since the civil war broke out there in 2011, than have been killed in all the wars, campaigns, terrorist attacks and operations “behind the lines” between Israel and the Arabs (Palestinians and others) since 1947? Also, more people were killed in the former Yugoslavia during the early 1990s when that miserable state fell apart, and its various national components started slaughtering each other.

Or another example. If you ask the European leaders why there is no Palestinian state today, how many will answer that basically it is because in 1947 the Arabs of Palestine and the neighboring Arab states refused to accept the November 1947 UN partition plan and develop a state in part of Palestine – and preferred to start an all-out war to prevent the Jewish State coming into existence? Of course, there are other reasons why a Palestinian state hasn't emerged since the late 1980s, when the PLO adopted a more pragmatic program, and Israel's policy is among them, but it is still the Palestinians who bear most of blame for their plight, today as well.

There are many more examples.

However, after all this has been said, the current wave of Europhobia in the Israeli government is not really warranted by the facts and the situation, and in the longer run – especially after US President Donald Trump no longer resides in the White House, and a more rational and sane balance is returned to American politics – we might find ourselves “in front of a broken trough” (to borrow a Hebrew proverb), just when we need a life-saving drink of water.