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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

June 6, 2018

Ha'aretz

Macron to Netanyahu: Jerusalem Embassy Move Led to People Dying, Didn't Promote Peace

French President Emmanuel Macron said Tuesday that the relocation of the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem led to “people dying” and did not advance peace. At a joint press conference, Macron and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that they discussed Iran’s growing influence in the region and the 2015 nuclear deal. Macron said France shared Israel’s concerns about Iran. He stressed the importance of the Iran deal but said it should be complemented with an agreement that would target Tehran’s ballistic-missile program and activities in the region. Macron added that the two leaders agreed to set up joint working groups to coordinate efforts. Netanyahu said he did not ask Macron to withdraw from the nuclear deal “because I think it will be dissolved by weight of economic forces.”

Times of Israel

Netanyahu Says Iran’s New Uranium Enrichment Drive is Aimed at Destroying Israel

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tuesday that a newly announced plan by Iran to increase its nuclear enrichment capacity was aimed at producing nuclear weapons to be used against Israel. “Two days ago, Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader, stated his intention to destroy the State of Israel,” Netanyahu said in a video posted on social media. “Yesterday he explained how he would do it — by unlimited enrichment of uranium to create an arsenal of nuclear bombs.” Netanyahu added, “we’re not surprised. we won’t let Iran obtain nuclear weapons.”

Times of Israel/AFP

EU: Iran Enrichment Plan Not in Breach of Nuclear Deal

The European Union said Tuesday that a “first assessment” indicated that Iran’s announcement that it has launched a plan to boost uranium enrichment capacity did not breach its commitments under the beleaguered 2015 nuclear deal. Iran has notified the International Atomic Energy Agency that it plans to open a center for producing new centrifuges, drawing an angry response from Israel. The EU, which is working to save the 2015 agreement with Iran after the US pulled out, warned the Iranian announcement would not help build confidence in the Iranian program. A European source said the Iranian enrichment announcement is being interpreted as a bid to step up the pressure on Brussels to deliver on these promises. The EU is trying to come up with ways to persuade Iran to stick with the deal by protecting the economic benefits it gained when tough sanctions were lifted in return for it halting the weapons-capable aspects of its nuclear program.

New Proposals May Resolve Israel/Lebanon Oil and Gas Dispute

New ideas proposed in US back-channel mediation of an Israeli-Lebanese maritime dispute over oil and gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean raise the prospect of a partial deal this year, Israel's energy minister said. Israel kicked off a gas bonanza in the eastern Mediterranean almost a decade ago with the discovery of two huge gas fields. Others were found in Egypt and Cyprus, and companies are now exploring Lebanese waters as well. One of the Lebanese blocks being explored, Block 9, borders Israel's maritime zone and contains waters claimed by both countries. The disputed border also touches two other not-yet-licensed Lebanese blocks. This has led to years of brinkmanship with officials on both sides promising to protect their resources and warning about encroachment. David Satterfield, the acting US assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, has shuttled between the countries in recent months as a mediator.

Jerusalem Post

IDF Says No Direct Fire Was Aimed at Gazan Nurse Killed Friday

A preliminary investigation into the death of a Gazan paramedic has found that 21 year-old Razan Ashraf al-Najjar was not targeted by IDF fire, the IDF announced on Tuesday. The Gaza Ministry of Health said 21-year-old al-Najjar, was shot in the stomach while providing first aid to wounded demonstrators near the fence on Friday evening. According to witness reports, she had approached the area of the fence with her hands in the air and that she was wearing clothing which clearly identified her as a medical worker. Initially the IDF said Palestinian terrorists had attacked troops with gunfire and a grenade and the army had returned fire in accordance to the open-fire regulations; it later opened an investigation into her death. Najjar's death was condemned by human rights groups and the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nikolay Mladenov who tweeted that "Medical workers are #NotATarget!" and that "Israel needs to calibrate its use of force and Hamas need to prevent incidents at the fence."

YnetNews / Associated Press

UN Releases First Education Guide on Fighting Anti-Semitism

The United Nations has released its first ever guidelines on fighting anti-Semitism in education. UNESCO, the UN's cultural body, launched the publication on Monday in Paris in collaboration with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the OSCE. The guide, aimed to be used by young people, the teaching world, as well as political leaders, was presented by Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO's first Jewish director general. "Many Jewish communities across the world are facing increasing threats. (Jews) have become targets for terror attacks in Paris, Brussels, and Copenhagen," Azoulay said. "Fear of anti-Semitism, harassment, and even physical assault has grown particularly near Jewish culture centers, religious sites including synagogue, museums, and schools," she added. "This is a warning call for those who survived the Holocaust. Europe's Jewish communities sense a renewed danger of anti-Semitic attacks," UNESCO's first Jewish director general warned. "Anti-Semitism is neither the problems of the Jewish communities, nor it requires the communities to deal with it. Anti-Semitism exists in religions and diverse political groups ranging across the entire political spectrum. It is a symptom of a wider social or political problem that indicates tendencies of (social) regression which dangerously harms the social fabric," she added.

Argentina's World Cup Warm-up vs. Israel Expected to Be Canceled Over Palestinian Pressure

A soccer exhibition match between Israel and Argentina slated for Saturday in Jerusalem has been canceled, Israel's embassy in Argentina confirmed early Wednesday, citing unspecified 'threats and provocations' against star player Lionel Messi. Argentine media reported that the reason for the cancellation was Palestinian pressure and requests by leading players on the Argentina team, including Messi and Javier Mascherano, not to come to Israel. Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke with Argentine President Mauricio Macri late Tuesday in an attempt to prevent the game's cancellation. Macri informed Netanyahu in a follow-up conversation, however, that he is unable to influence the final decision. Argentine player Gonzalo Higuaín told ESPN that "they've finally done the right thing. Rationale and health come before everything else. We think its best not go to Israel."

See also: ["PA official: We only fought Argentina game because it was moved to Jerusalem"](#) (Times of Israel)

In Memoir, Ex-Obama Aide Bemoans a Manipulative Netanyahu

According to a new memoir released Tuesday by Obama's former deputy national security adviser and one of his closest aides, Ben Rhodes, Netanyahu used an insulting 2011 Oval Office lecture, in front of the cameras, about the history of the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to turn the American Jewish establishment against the American president. The meeting came after Obama had given his speech calling for a return to the 1967 lines with mutually agreed upon land swaps. In the book, titled "The World as It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House," Rhodes argues that Netanyahu assiduously blocked Obama's efforts to resolve the conflict. That was in part due to Netanyahu's continual approval to build settlement projects and his reluctance to embrace Obama's vision of a two-state outcome. But Netanyahu, Rhodes explains, was remarkably shrewd at galvanizing the kind of pressure on Obama that made it politically unfeasible for the president to push forward on his peace plan.

The Israeli Right's campaign against Israel

How can anyone complain about the Palestinian Authority, when Israel is single handedly thwarting the chance for a separation? Creating one state serves Hamas and the BDS movement, not the Zionist vision. That's the problem that is making more and more Jews and friends despair.

By Ben-Dror Yemini, Ynet Columnist

Brazilian singer Gilberto Gil won't come to Israel. French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe decided to postpone—and perhaps cancel—his visit to Israel, which was scheduled to take place this week. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, a sincere friend of Israel, postponed his visit as well.

This all happened, and there is more, on the backdrop of black Monday in Gaza two weeks ago. These are harbingers, and not of spring. They are making us realize that we are losing in the international battlefield. Mainly in Europe, but also in the United States, where the Democratic Party is becoming a European branch concerning Israel. And the Democrats will rise to power again sometime, maybe even in the not-so-distant future.

Our euphoria following US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the nuclear agreement, the massive bombardment of Iranian targets in Syria, this time claiming responsibility for the strikes, the US Embassy move to Jerusalem and Israel's Eurovision win, came to its end sooner than expected. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was a king for two weeks. That's over. Because with all due respect to the wonderful and important alliance with Trump, in the Western world Israel is left almost alone with Trump.

Hamas has made it its mission to harm Israel's international status, to stir up Israel's Arabs, to slightly increase Israel's ostracism—and the goal has been fully accomplished. It would be an illusion, however, to think that this conflict is only with Hamas. The 62 fatalities, who were mostly Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives, were a match that sparked much deeper and more serious criticism. For years, Israel hasn't been doing or initiating anything, and if it actually does something, it's usually to announce the construction of more housing units in the territories.

Just several days ago, Tom Friedman blasted Hamas in the New York Times. He is adopting Israel's justified claims. But what is Israel doing in Judea and Samaria? There is no Hamas there. There, despite everything, there is security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority. But the government is insisting on more construction, on approving more outposts, on another Regulation Law, so that Israel won't only be hated by its haters, who will only settle for a suicide, but by its friends as well.

Israel's ruling party has already decided on an annexation. Granted, this disastrous decision to establish a binational state has no practical meaning, but it has a lethal impact on the global public opinion.

How can anyone complain about the Palestinian Authority, when Israel is single handedly thwarting the chance for a separation? Creating one state serves Hamas and the BDS movement, not the Zionist vision. That's the problem that is making more and more Jews and friends despair.

It's not the only reason: The cancellation of the Western Wall plan and the surrender to the Haredim on the conversion issue are also part of the Israeli Right's campaign against Israel. The US Jewry is a

strategic component of power. But Israel's friends, and they're the majority, want a Jewish and democratic state. They don't want a Haredi and binational state. Neither do most Israelis.

This government, thanks to its leader as well, has an impressive list of achievements, including tightening relations with previously hostile regimes, a stable economy, a growing recognition of Jerusalem and stopping the surrender to the ayatollah regime. But these important achievements could go down the drain in light of the hostility being fostered by Israel, both because of the deliberate settlement deep within the Palestinian area and because of zero initiative vis-à-vis the Palestinians, in the West Bank and in Gaza.

I am writing this column from Europe, where I participated several days ago in a meeting with senior European Union officials. I presented blatant arguments against the aid provided by EU and European countries to NGOs that are part of the demonization campaign. And then two statements arrive—one from Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman about the construction of thousands of housing units in Judea and Samaria, and another from Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz that “Europe can go to a thousand, thousand hells.”

We have excellent claims against the global hypocrisy, the double standards, the campaign of lies. But the Right, in its actions and declarations, is reinforcing the anti-Israel campaign.

Ha'aretz – June 6, 2018

How Hamas Acts as Israel's De Facto Partner in Gaza

The distinction Israel has made in recent years between Hamas and other organizations creates a hierarchy that places Hamas as the only party with which Israel is willing to do business

By Zvi Bar'el, Middle Eastern affairs analyst for Haaretz

When Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman threatens to topple Hamas, the walls should shake, and not with laughter. The last thing we need is for this threat to become real and for it really to be possible with a few targeted assassinations to kill off the organization's leaders. Because doing so would have two terrifying consequences.

First, Israel would have to reoccupy Gaza and manage the world's largest and most densely crowded refugee camp, supply water, electricity, medical and educational services to the two million civilians there, allocate billions from its budget and bear direct responsibility for any civil activity. Second, the Israel Defense Forces would find itself facing an array of local terrorist militias that operate without coordination and without a united leadership, unlike the current leadership that is still ready to take responsibility for security, even if it at times falls short.

This would be the type of occupation from which the United States fled in Iraq and Afghanistan, and from which Israel extricated itself after 18 years in Lebanon. Fortunately for Israel, it could still occupy Gaza the way it occupies the West Bank – an occupation that is done in part via an emissary. In the West Bank this is the Palestinian Authority and in Gaza it's Hamas. In both cases, Israel is exempt from direct management, from paying huge sums at the Israeli taxpayer's expense for the sake of the occupied residents, and in Gaza it is also free from legal responsibility.

In Gaza and the West Bank, Israel enjoys a deluxe occupation. But unlike with the West Bank, where the theoretical threat of a “peace process” still hovers, Hamas also frees Israel from having to deal with this nuisance. Hamas does not recognize Israel, it has no interest in diplomatic negotiations with it, its demand that Israel withdraw from all territories does not come with any promises of a diplomatic or military gain, and so this demand serves no purpose.

Because of its diplomatic and economic weakness, Hamas is forced to accede to the dictates of Egypt, which maintains a brutal blockade of Gaza on a par with Israel’s. Paradoxically, because of the close ties between Egypt and Israel, Hamas finds itself trapped in a security coordination with Israel, just like the Palestinian Authority. This can be seen in the occasional assessments that high-ranking IDF officers provide the government and the media, saying that Hamas is or is not interested in turning up the heat at the moment. The Israeli consideration of Hamas’ rational interests and the coordination of the Israeli response to the organization’s purported interests amounts to a dialogue between partner-rivals, with each side intimately familiar with the other’s thought processes and responding accordingly.

The distinction Israel has made in recent years between Hamas and other organizations like Islamic Jihad and the Salafi groups, and the policy of holding Hamas solely accountable creates a governmental hierarchy that places Hamas in the position of a recognized government, the only party with which Israel is willing to do business. And there is plenty of business to be done: Negotiations for the return of the missing men and the bodies of the soldiers held in Gaza; cease-fire agreements, border openings and closings (on the Israel and Egyptian sides), granting transit permits to Egypt and Israel, overseeing the transfer of construction materials, and Israeli pressure on the PA to transfer designated funds to Gaza, even when they are certain to fall into Hamas’ hands.

The rehabilitation of Gaza will not be accomplished without Hamas’ cooperation, and the easing of conditions that the IDF wants to grant Gazans cannot go ahead without a nod from Hamas. Lieberman is lying to the public when he promises to bring down the Hamas government, because unlike some of his vociferous colleagues, he is well aware of the benefits that Israel reaps from Hamas being in power. Just as Israel recognizes that there is no alternative to Bashar Assad’s regime in Syria, it knows that Hamas is the only option right now for ruling the dangerous prison that is Gaza. Whoever wants to get rid of Hamas should first explain who he would put in its place.