



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, June 7, 2018

Headlines:

- **UK Foreign Minister Urges Netanyahu to Open Independent Probe of Gaza Deaths**
- **After Argentina Cancellation, Netanyahu Warns of BDS Pressure to Nix Other Event**
- **Iran Won't Cooperate Fully with Nuke Inspectors Until Deal Impasse Resolved**
- **Senior Delegation of Russian Officials in Israel to Address Syrian Conflict**
- **Knesset Nixes Bill Forcing Completion of West Bank Security Barrier**
- **IDF Shot Dead Palestinian Teen During Violent West Bank Riots**
- **Former NSC Head: Netanyahu Negotiated on Golan Heights**
- **Netanyahu Wants Abbas to Pay for Gaza Kite Arson**

Commentary:

- **Haaretz: "Israel Should Stop Playing Into BDS' Hands or Argentina Soccer Fiasco Will Only Be the Beginning"**
 - By Chemi Shalev, Haaretz correspondent in US
- **Al-Monitor: "Likud Minister Takes Gamble in Bid for Jerusalem Mayor"**
 - By Mazal Mualem, columnist for Al-Monitor's Israel Pulse

News Excerpts

June 7, 2018

Times of Israel

UK Foreign Minister Urges Netanyahu to Open Independent Probe of Gaza Deaths

Britain's Foreign Minister Boris Johnson urged Prime Minister Netanyahu Wednesday to open an independent investigation into the dozens of Palestinians killed by Israeli troops during violent protests on the Gaza border over the past several months. Meeting Netanyahu during the Israeli premier's visit to London, Johnson condemned "incitement and rocket fire against Israel," but said that the UK was worried about the worsening situation for Palestinians in Gaza. Earlier this month, the UK abstained from a U.N. Security Council resolution which called for an inquiry into the deaths. Before meeting Johnson, Netanyahu told UK Prime Minister Theresa May that the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip stems from the Hamas terrorist group's desire to destroy Israel, adding that Israel was doing everything it could to minimize casualties.

Haaretz

After Argentina Cancellation, Netanyahu Warns of BDS Pressure to Nix Other Event

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned on Wednesday that following Argentina's decision to cancel an exhibition match against the Israeli national soccer team, "there is the possibility that there will be pressure to cancel other events in various areas and we will do as we see fit." While Netanyahu did not specifically mention the Eurovision Song Contest, his remarks came soon after a senior Israeli sports and culture official said that the 2019 event might not take place in Jerusalem, despite Israel winning the completion this year. "Eurovision in Jerusalem? It isn't at all a given," Yossi Sharabi, director-general of the Culture and Sport Ministry, said. Argentina's decision was the result of terrorists' death threats against star player Lionel Messi and his family, Culture Minister Miri Regev said Wednesday. Regev blamed the Palestinians for the game's cancellation, accusing them of terrorism, and even evoking the massacre of Israeli Olympians at Munich in 1972 as a comparison. "Israel needs to calibrate its use of force and Hamas need to prevent incidents at the fence."

See also: ["PA in Show of Support for Argentina: 'From Palestine, Thank You Messi'"](#) (YnetNews)

Times of Israel

Iran Won't Cooperate Fully with Nuke Inspectors Until Deal Impasse Resolved

Iran on Wednesday upped the ante in its standoff with the United States and European powers over the 2015 nuclear deal from which the Trump administration withdrew last month, with its United Nations envoy warning it would not cooperate fully with nuclear inspectors until the future of the deal was resolved. Reza Najafi also gave the European parties to the nuclear deal several weeks to salvage the accord. The Iranian envoy signaled that international inspectors from the IAEA would not

receive expanded access to its facilities while the deal remained precarious, adding “no one should expect Iran to go to implement more voluntary measures.” “But I should emphasize that it does not mean that right now Iran will restart any activities contrary to the (deal),” Najafi added. “These are only preparatory works.” On Tuesday, Iran informed the UN nuclear watchdog that it would increase its nuclear enrichment capacity, yet stay within the provisions of the accord. And on Wednesday, Iran’s nuclear chief inaugurated the Islamic Republic’s new nuclear enrichment facility at Natanz, which is geared toward producing centrifuges that will operate within the limits of the nuclear deal.

Haaretz

Senior Delegation of Russian Defense and Intel Officials in Israel to Address Syrian Conflict

Russia and Israel have in recent weeks discussed Israel's demand to push Iranian forces and Shiite militias funded by Tehran out of southern Syria. A delegation of senior Russians defense and intelligence officials visited Israel on Wednesday and met with senior officials from Israel's defense ministry and army. The two sides discussed the situation in Russia and terror in the Middle East. Last week, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman traveled to Russia and met with his counterpart. During Lieberman's meeting, he raised the possibility that Israel would tacitly accept a return by the Syrian regime to the area.

Jerusalem Post

Knesset Nixes Bill Forcing Completion of West Bank Security Barrier

The Knesset on Wednesday voted down a bill that would have forced the government to finish the West Bank security barrier within 18 months of the legislation’s passage into law. “What happens if we cannot stop the next terrorist?” Zionist Union Chairman Avi Gabbay told asked prior to the preliminary vote on the bill, which was opposed by 42 parliamentarians and supported by only 23. MK Omar Bar Lev (Zionist Union), who authored the legislation, told the plenum that politics had trumped security when it comes to finishing the barrier. His party estimates that 16 years after work first began on the structure designed to halt suicide bombings, only 60% of the barrier’s 790-kilometer route has been completed. It’s a number that is also backed up by the United Nations. “Let me remind you that one-third of the terror attacks within the state of Israel have been carried out by terrorists who infiltrated through the gap (in the barrier) in Gush Etzion,” Bar Lev said.

Jerusalem Post

IDF Shot Dead Palestinian Teen During Violent West Bank Riots

An IDF soldier fatally shot Izz ad-Din Tamimi, 21, during a violent clash in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh on Wednesday. Soldiers had entered the village to arrest a suspect, according to the IDF. A group of more than 10 Palestinians threw stones at them and the army responded with riot dispersal methods. According to the army, Tamimi threw a stone that hit a soldier in the head. That soldier responded by firing at Tamimi, who was then treated medically at the scene before being declared dead. The village is also home to many members of the Tamimi clan, the most famous of whom is Ahd Tamimi, 17, who was arrested last year after she slapped a soldier who was standing outside her home and barring people from entering.

Former NSC Head: Netanyahu Negotiated on Golan Heights

Former National Security Council head Uzi Arad said Wednesday that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu had previously negotiated with Assad over Israeli presence on the Golan Heights. Arad attended the "World with the Golan" conference held by the Yesh Atid Party in the Knesset, calling on world leaders to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. "It's an indisputable fact that four Israeli prime ministers, two from the Labor Party, two from my background, negotiated a withdrawal from the Golan Heights," Arad said. "We may forget that, but Assad's palace has all the documents, some of them American. Netanyahu also in 2010-2011 conducted serious indirect negotiations with Assad the son, the psychopath, about coming down from the Golan Heights," he claimed.

Al-Monitor

Netanyahu Wants Abbas to Pay for Gaza Kite Arson

Alongside mass demonstrations near the Gaza-Israel border fence, Palestinian activists have been lighting paper kites on fire and launching them into the air. The kites, swept by the warm wind, cross the border fence from above and set fire to Israeli fields and crops. Several hours before setting off for Europe on June 4, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on social media that he had instructed his national security adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat to start proceedings against the Palestinian Authority (PA) for damages caused by the fire kites from Gaza. Specifically, Israel would deduct the damages from tax revenues it collects for the PA and use the money to compensate Israeli farmers whose fields have been burned in the recent wave of airborne arson attacks. Some 5,000 dunams (1,236 acres) of crops have gone up in flames on the Israeli border with Gaza in blazes ignited by these incendiary kites, causing damages estimated at millions of shekels.

Israel Should Stop Playing Into BDS' Hands or Argentina Soccer Fiasco Will Only Be the Beginning

Israeli sports minister's intervention and agitation has handed the movement a moral victory that could spur South Africa-style sports boycott

By Chemi Shalev, Haaretz correspondent in US

In December 1945, Dynamo Moscow became the first Russian soccer club to play in Great Britain. Its four matches against English and Scottish teams shocked British soccer players and fans alike: Dynamo Moscow employed innovative tactics and methods that were unknown to conservative British sides, and proved an equal to revered teams such as Chelsea and Arsenal. Dynamo's success spurred the international soccer federation, FIFA, to invite the Soviet Union to join its ranks.

George Orwell, however, was more impressed with the rowdy behavior of the British fans and the wave of unbridled nationalism that engulfed them. He penned one of his rare articles on sport, "The Sporting Spirit," which included a sentence that would henceforth be quoted in any discussion of the link between sports and politics. Serious sport, he wrote, "is war minus the shooting."

The decision of Argentina's national soccer team to cancel its friendly against Israel on Saturday gives the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement a dramatic victory in its own war against Israel.

The cancellation garnered unusually large international attention because of its proximity to the opening of the World Cup in Russia next week, and as a direct consequence of the irresponsible intervention of Israel's flamboyant culture and sports minister, Miri Regev.

The game itself was of no importance, and Israeli fans of Lionel Messi will soon get over their disappointment and outrage. But the danger of the Argentine cancellation lies in the precedent it sets: It bestows legitimacy on other foreign clubs and national teams to follow in Argentina's footsteps. The BDS movement's moral victory could spur it to concentrate on a sports boycott against Israel, and to try to emulate the successful tactics adopted by the Anti-Apartheid Movement from the 1950s onward.

The South African precedent should trouble all Israelis – including those who reject any analogy between the Israeli occupation and the repressive and racist white government that ruled South Africa until the early '90s. The sports boycott began in 1956, with the decision of the International Table Tennis Federation to expel the all-white South African team, and expanded throughout the next two decades to include cricket, rugby, soccer and the Olympic Games.

The sports boycott paved the way for the cultural, academic and economic sanctions that followed. And while it may have had no tangible effect on the apartheid regime, it accentuated Pretoria's growing international isolation and demoralized sports-crazy white South Africans.

The Anti-Apartheid Movement focused at first on the exclusion of black players from segregated South Africa's national teams, but soon turned it into an expression of protest against the apartheid regime as a whole.

The sports world provided a convenient battleground for boycott supporters. Clubs and national teams proved more mindful to public opinion than governments and business conglomerates. National and international sports federations were mostly independent, able to make their own decisions. Their strict hierarchy enabled them to impose the boycott on reluctant teams. In the '70s, South Africa began handing out large sums of money to makeshift teams to play on its soil. However, participants risked personal boycotts and expulsion from their sports.

The South African government's reaction poured more fuel on the smoldering fire. Pretoria retaliated by expelling foreign proponents of the boycott who came to visit, and by arresting and incarcerating local activists. The harsh reaction attracted the attention of the foreign press and empowered the boycott movement still further. It was perceived as confirmation of the apartheid regime's repressive nature.

A half-century may have elapsed, but the current Israeli government hasn't learned the lesson: Protest movements thrive on confrontation and publicity. Small wonder that the Israeli war against BDS activists – including the wholesale refusal to allow them to enter the country – has similarly provided vital lifelines to an often-fading movement.

To his credit, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu showed on Tuesday that he is well aware of the risks of amplifying the Argentina incident.

“Let's move on,” he said, signaling his ministers and parliamentarians to stop depicting the cancellation of a friendly soccer match as an act of terror, if not the destruction of the Third Temple. After all, hardly anyone was aware that, only last month, Argentina also canceled a friendly match against Nicaragua, scheduled for May 29, citing “security concerns” after riots left 40 dead in Managua and other cities. In Israel, however, the BDS movement is constantly being boosted by right-wing firebrands eager to impress their base.

Netanyahu's belated enlightenment, however, does not absolve him of his overall responsibility for the fiasco. It was he who appointed Regev as culture minister; he who allowed her to run wild to her heart's content; he who kept silent as she turned the Independence Day torch-lighting ceremony, the Eurovision Song Contest, the “Salute to Israel” at Times Square and the friendly match against Argentina into unadorned presentations of nationalism, arrogance and personal aggrandizement.

In exchange for her shameless kowtowing to Netanyahu and his wife Sara, Regev was given a blank check to carry out unprecedented politicization of the culture and sports spheres she oversees.

Regev's insistence on investing millions of shekels into moving the venue of the Israel-Argentina match from Haifa to Jerusalem loaded the friendly with political connotations, which – wonder of wonders – somehow managed to reach Buenos Aires as well.

Right-wing agitators quickly adopted the ridiculous thesis that Haifa is somehow unworthy, and that friendly matches between nations are always played in capitals – as if Brazil only hosts foreign national teams in Brasilia rather than Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo.

As is their wont, Regev's supporters immediately transformed support or opposition to the Jerusalem venue into another vile litmus test for patriotism and love of country. The hoarding of tickets by Regev and her confidants – to be handed out to lackeys, supporters and other Likud dignitaries – contributed to the transformation of the game's image from a sporting contest for the pleasure of soccer fans into a government-sponsored showcase for Netanyahu, Likud and, first and foremost, Regev herself.

The government, its supporters and the heads of Israeli soccer would do well to downplay the enormity of the Argentine transgression, despite the storm that has admittedly engulfed Israeli public opinion. The more they rail and rage against the cancellation, the more they increase the chances of it launching a dangerous trend. But for that, they would need to change their spots and stop using nationalistic agitation as their political weapon of choice.

In any case, it's a pipe dream as long as Regev remains at her post. Her next provocation, which will inevitably sully Israel's reputation, is surely waiting in the wings. As in war, it's hard to win when your own side insists on kneecapping your own team and players.

Al-Monitor – June 5, 2018

Likud Minister Takes Gamble in Bid for Jerusalem Mayor

Minister Ze'ev Elkin showed political courage when he decided to run for mayor of Jerusalem, even though Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ignored him.

By Mazal Mualem, columnist for Al-Monitor's Israel Pulse

Israel is scheduled to hold municipal elections Oct. 30. Jerusalem's Mayor Nir Barkat has announced that he will not run again for the position but will instead try for a spot on the Likud Knesset list in the next general elections. And so the Jerusalem mayoral race has taken up a new dimension. The Likud Party has yet to announce who will be its candidate.

Minister Ze'ev Elkin, after concluding that he was not going to be receiving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's blessings, at least not at this early stage, announced May 31 that he had decided to run for mayor of Jerusalem anyway. The senior Likud official explained his decision by saying that he believes the position presents a challenge on a nationwide scale and that he is, therefore "willing to give up his position as a senior minister and Cabinet member for it."

Elkin, who serves as minister of Jerusalem affairs and minister of environmental protection, tried to get the official support of Netanyahu for weeks. He had hoped that Netanyahu would declare him the Likud's candidate in the municipal elections, but the prime minister took his time on it. Netanyahu's decision to ignore, or perhaps even abuse, Elkin was the result of a testy relationship between the two men, based on the growing sense in the prime minister's household that Elkin is not completely loyal to him. Meanwhile, Netanyahu and Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman started to reach an understanding that they would both support the candidacy of Moshe Leon, a confidante of the Yisrael Beitenu chairman, who ran in the last election in 2013 and was defeated. Now he has decided to run again. Leon, who served as director general of the Prime Minister's Office during Netanyahu's first term (1997-1999), was considered a leading candidate for the job until Elkin threw his hat into the ring.

In many ways, Elkin was taking a gamble when he decided not to wait for Netanyahu's endorsement. Instead, he staked out his place in the race, putting Netanyahu in a difficult position. Almost all senior members of the Likud, including its senior ministers, declared they would support Elkin and wished him luck. Now it is up to Netanyahu to decide if he will remain on the fence and avoid

supporting a senior Likud minister who also has a good chance of being elected. To Elkin's credit, it should be noted that his decision to act independently showed not only courage but also the ability to make tough decisions in less than ideal circumstances, even if the prime minister is ignoring him. His announcement reshuffled the deck, making the race for mayor all the more intriguing, with the minister of defense and the prime minister both directly involved.

In an interview that Elkin gave to the Haaretz newspaper May 17, he presented an orderly approach to what he considers to be the role of Jerusalem's mayor. Elkin described the city as the "laboratory of the future" for the State of Israel, explaining that one-third of the population is Arab (in East Jerusalem), one-third is ultra-Orthodox and one-third is everyone else (secular). This, he said, will be the demographic composition of the State of Israel as a whole in the next generation. That is why he thinks that for the next few years, Jerusalem will serve as a model for life in Israel with those demographic divisions.

According to recent polls conducted in Jerusalem, Elkin and Leon are the leading candidates for mayor. It is a tight race. They must maneuver between the ultra-Orthodox, religious and secular residents based on the assumption that it is impossible to win with the support of just one of those groups.

The first challenge they faced came June 3 when Deputy Health Minister Yaakov Litzman of Yahadut HaTorah made ultra-Orthodox support for any candidate conditional on a commitment to shut down the entertainment compound in the Mahane Yehuda market. This popular dining area with all sorts of restaurants has come to represent secularism and sanity in the city. Litzman, on the other hand, considers it to be "a place of debauchery and licentiousness." Elkin and Leon, both of whom are affiliated with the religious-national stream, were not intimidated by his remarks. They and the other candidates announced that the compound will remain open even after the election.

Litzman may have lost this battle, but the fact that he took advantage of the election campaign to extort the candidates on behalf of the ultra-Orthodox community should be seen as a sign of what is to come. The ultra-Orthodox are already demanding that entertainment centers in Jerusalem be closed on the Sabbath.

The position of mayor of Jerusalem has always been attractive. In many ways, it is the equivalent of being a senior minister in the government. This is not just because of the enormous budget or the challenges inherent in running such a large and complex city, but also because of the semi-statesmanlike position held by whoever leads the capital of the State of Israel. For the past few years, as Netanyahu and the Likud's ministers — Elkin among them — bandied about the "Jerusalem" brand as a symbol of right-wing patriotism (with the relocation of the US Embassy adding a new level of centrality to it), the role of mayor has become even more attractive. The position gained an aura of government power ever since Ehud Olmert was elected prime minister. His previous position was, of course, mayor of Jerusalem.

While the race to win this coveted position and become mayor of one of the most famous cities in the world gets more interesting and tense by the minute, whoever is elected to lead Jerusalem for the next five years also faces enormous challenges.

Jerusalem is Israel's largest, most densely populated city. It has 900,000 residents, many of them poor. It is ranked first among the major cities for negative migration due to the number of young people abandoning it (as of 2016), and it has a huge deficit. Jerusalem is also a constant source of

security issues and inter-religious conflicts, not to mention squabbling between its ultra-Orthodox and secular residents.

In that sense, Elkin and Leon, both of them identified with the right, have a distinct advantage over the other candidates because of their connections to the government. This should make it easier for them to get budgets for the city, promote major projects and jumpstart the municipal economy.

They are both considered experienced politicians, too. Leon has served as a member of the Jerusalem City Council for the last few years and has gained intimate experience with the local political scene. While Elkin lacks that experience, as minister for Jerusalem affairs, he brings with him a comprehensive, macro view of this complicated city, with all its many problems. In terms of his political abilities, Elkin is one of the most adept and sophisticated legislators in the Likud Party, two traits that will likely help him build the alliances and coalitions he needs even before the election. All that remains to be seen is whether his gamble will turn out to be a brilliant political move.