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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Wednesday, June 13*

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# News Excerpts

June 13, 2018

Axios

## **Kushner to Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia for Peace Plan Talks**

President Trump's Middle East peace team, senior adviser Jared Kushner and special envoy Jason Greenblatt, will travel to Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia next week to discuss the next stages of the peace effort and the crisis in Gaza. The official said Kushner and Greenblatt want to discuss lingering questions they have as they finish drafting the peace plan, including the optimal time for launching it. The U.S. official added the trip may include other stops as well, but does not include a meeting with Palestinian officials.

Ha'aretz

## **Palestinians Push for UN Vote on Israeli Use of Force**

The Palestinians and their supporters are asking an emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly on Wednesday to adopt a resolution deploring what it calls Israel's "excessive use of force," particularly in Gaza. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley has urged countries to condemn Hamas instead of voting for the resolution, which she called "fundamentally imbalanced." Arab and Islamic nations decided to go to the UNGA, where there are no vetoes, after the US vetoed virtually the same resolution in the Security Council on June 1.

Times of Israel

## **Liberman Conditions Gaza Aid on Visits to Captive Israelis**

Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman on Tuesday conditioned stepped-up humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip on Hamas granting the Red Cross access to two captive Israelis. "We're asking for the most obvious, humane humanitarian gesture — at least letting the Red Cross see our captives and fallen soldiers," Liberman said. "After that it will be much easier, not necessarily to reach a long-term 'hudna' (ceasefire) but to give humanitarian aid to the residents of Gaza." Two Israeli men — Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed — and the remains of two fallen soldiers — Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin — are believed to be held captive by the terrorist group in the Gaza Strip.

Times of Israel

## **In Standoff Before Razing Outpost, Protest Turns Violent**

The court-ordered clearing of 15 homes in the illegal West Bank outpost of Netiv Ha'avot for demolition took a violent turn on Tuesday afternoon, with at least eight police officers injured while attempting to empty the final building, where hundreds of teenage settlers had gathered to obstruct the razing. Fourteen of the 15 buildings were cleared for demolition relatively peacefully throughout the afternoon, where police met only with passive resistance by demonstrators. The demolition of the homes will take place on Thursday.

Jerusalem Post

## **PM Questioned in Submarine Affair for First Time**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu completed his ninth round of questioning by police on Tuesday – for the first time – about the Case 3000 Submarines Affair, in which he is a witness. According to Channel 2 News, this was as much as a surprise to the prime minister as it was to the media, both of which had been expecting the questioning to be about Case 4000. The questioning lasted for some five hours. Case 3000 is an investigation into Israel's purchase of German-made naval vessels. Miki Ganor, ThyssenKrupp's sales representative in Israel, as well as other top defense officials and top aides to Netanyahu are accused of committing fraud and skimming off the top in a deal for Israel to buy nuclear submarines from the German company.

Times of Israel

## **Settlers, Palestinians, Soldiers Clash in West Bank**

Clashes broke out between residents of the Yitzhar settlement in the northern West Bank and Palestinians from a nearby village overnight, the army said Tuesday. Soldiers from the Samaria Regional Brigade were called to the scene. "A number of Palestinians began throwing rocks at the troops who responded with riot dispersal means and with warning shots in the air. The gathering dispersed," the army said. The clashes came in a period of heightened tensions, ahead of the demolition of Netiv Ha'avot and during the Sunni Muslim Laylat al-Qadr holy day.

Jerusalem Post

## **COGAT to Limit Helium Supply to Gaza**

Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), Maj-Gen. Kamil Abu Rokun, ordered the restriction of the entry of Helium gas into the Gaza Strip for medical purposes, due to the "use of gas by terrorist elements to fire Molotov cocktails from the Gaza Strip into Israel," according to COGAT statement released on Tuesday. Abu Rokun stressed that if the use of helium gas by the terrorist elements in the Gaza Strip continues, its supply would stop, "and it would be [seen as the responsibility of the terrorist organization Hamas."

Reuters

## **Syrian Army 'Boosts Air Defenses Near Israeli Border'**

The Syrian army has reinforced its anti-aircraft defenses near the frontier with the Golan Heights, a commander in the regional alliance that backs President Bashar Assad said on Tuesday. Additional defenses are set to be deployed in the coming days. The stationing of the Russian-made Pantsir S1 weapon aims "to renew the air defense system against Israel in the first degree," added the commander, a non-Syrian who spoke on condition of anonymity. The Israeli military targeted an advanced Iranian air-defense system at the T4 base in Syria last month.

## Israeli Tactics Trump Strategy for Gaza

By Zvi Bar'el, Analyst, Ha'aretz

- The idea that humanitarian aid will bring an end to terrorism amounts to “illusions and delusions,” said Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, explaining his opposition to easing the blockade of Gaza. Lieberman is right. Relief measures are inadequate compensation, and not enough to convince an occupied population to end its national struggle for liberation. Such measures are like loosening the rope around the neck of a man who is being hanged. At most they are likely to stop him from twitching. Because more than they will serve the population, they will give Israel the image of a humanitarian occupier, one that gives its subjects a little more food and medicine, and even some building materials with which to rebuild their demolished homes.
- Gaza does not need relief measures, but genuine economic development. The discussion in the Israeli security cabinet, which took place this week in the hideout of an underground bunker, made it clear that the debate among the decision makers is about tactical questions, such as compensation in bodies and captives that Israel must demand, rather than strategic solutions to the so-called “Gaza problem.” Lieberman, with his nonsensical reasons for opposing aid measures, is ignoring the fact that the brutal siege of Gaza, which has lasted for 11 years, didn't bring an end to terrorism, neither did the highly touted Operation Protective Edge, which produced a long period of relative quiet which turned out to amount to little more than “illusions and delusions.”
- If we accept Lieberman's opinion, that economics is not a relevant component in the war against terror, and leniency is only a price to be paid for bodies and captives, why did the economic equation prove relative efficacy in the West Bank? Is it because as opposed to the Gazans, the residents of the West Bank have stopped believing in violence as a solution because they earn more, study more, and enjoy greater freedom of movement? If the reply to this question is in the affirmative, then that completely contradicts Lieberman's distorted idea. And perhaps the difference stems from the Israeli perception of the two distinct sets of leaders of the two parts of Palestine?
- A flourishing economy, in the West Bank or Gaza, is not a substitute for national liberation, but it can dull the violent symptoms of conflict. A healthy economy does strengthen the status of the Palestinian leadership. But since the death of the diplomatic process the question of the strength of leadership, is not significant in Israel's opinion - as far as Israel's concerned, Hamas and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas are one and the same. Neither are interlocutors, both, in Israel's opinion, are terrorists who want to destroy the State of Israel.
- In other words, the ideological gap between the two sets of leaders makes little difference as far as Israel is concerned. The main distinction as far as Israel is concerned is that in the West

Bank the population's profit and loss calculations are bringing quiet, while in Gaza the residents have no basis for comparison. In Gaza they have nothing more to lose, and a dignified death on the fence is considered better than their otherwise miserable and hopeless lives. We can assume that if Israel should decide to impose harsh economic sanctions against the West Bank, at least part of the Palestinian public, perhaps the majority, would pressure its leadership to do something about it. In Gaza Israel has no such civilian partner or leverage. This is a population that has been weakened by bombings, mass killings, terrible economic distress, and a lack of any economic horizon that would encourage the people in Gaza to put any pressure on their leadership.

- In Israel's eyes, taking any steps toward improving economic development in Gaza would be a prize for terrorism, and strengthen Hamas' status, hence amounting to making a concession without receiving any tangible results. But this perception contradicts an Israeli aspiration to achieve responsible leadership in Gaza, who could control the other organizations, prevent the storming of the fence and maintain the cease fire.
- For that purpose it needs genuine economic leverage, not relief or donations. But so long as Israel remains trapped in the sort of archaic thinking whose origins can be traced to the second intifada or 2006, and the strategic calendar Nakba Day (the anniversary of Israel's independence) and Nachsa Day (the anniversary of the Six-Day War) are regarded as ultimate threats to the country, no leaders, either military or political, will take a chance on any long-range thinking.

## **Israeli Minister Offers Creative Approach to Gaza**

By Mazal Mualem, Analyst, AI Monitor

- On the morning of June 10, just hours before the Security Cabinet — the Israeli government's top forum on security issues — was set to debate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Transportation and Intelligence Affairs Minister Yisrael Katz struck from the agenda his proposal to build an artificial island off the Gaza coast. Katz, a member of the Security Cabinet, has been trying in recent years to promote this ambitious and creative plan to ease the pressure of the blockade on Gaza and provide the Palestinians their economic independence without endangering Israel's security. The plan, which Katz calls a "separation island," a play on words in Hebrew, has been the focus of international attention, but the Security Cabinet, especially Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman, has turned its backs on the idea.
- Ahead of the Security Cabinet session, Katz and the director of the Intelligence Ministry, Chagai Tzuriel, went over their slick presentation and prepared topics for discussion, including the legal aspects of the proposal. On the morning of the meeting, however, Katz realized that the strategic debate, scheduled weeks in advance, would instead become a tactical discussion given the series of violent clashes along the Gaza border in recent weeks and the wave of incendiary kite attacks that Israelis have dubbed "kite terrorism." Katz consulted with others and then announced that he would withdraw his plan from the agenda.
- The official reason for his decision was Liberman's sweeping opposition to the approach. Katz has known for a while that the defense minister is not enamored of the plan, especially after Liberman said in February that investing billions for the benefit of the Hamas rulers of Gaza was "total madness." Katz, however, assumed that within the framework of a strategic debate and having the support of defense officials he would finally get to lay out his much-touted plan in an organized presentation, and that given the escalation surrounding Gaza, the Security Cabinet would give it due consideration. After making his decision to hold off, and before the start of the meeting, Katz issued a statement critical of Liberman. "The State of Israel has been caught in an unreasonable situation in Gaza," Katz said. "On the one hand, we are dealing with proposals for civilian aid in the short run due to the humanitarian crisis instead of exerting significant practical pressure to return the bodies of IDF soldiers and the captives, and on the other hand, we are avoiding decisions on proper strategic solutions for the long run."
- After the three-hour meeting, Katz understood he had made the right decision. According to ministers at the session, the discussion was conducted along general lines, nothing new was said, improvised solutions were suggested and no vote was taken. Once again, it transpired that the Israeli government continues to lack a strategic solution for Gaza. During the course of the meeting — an exchange of views, the airing of slogans and letting off of steam — the ministers expressed their views on kite attacks, whereas IDF chief of staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot continued to warn against the severe repercussions for Israel's security from the economic crisis

in Gaza. Liberman, on the other hand, reiterated his insistence that absent progress on the return of the bodies of two Israeli soldiers and two Israeli civilians held in Gaza, Israel would not grant significant humanitarian concessions. According to sources at the meeting, Liberman rejected some of the measures proposed by the military to ease the pressure on Gaza. So did Education Minister Naftali Bennett, chair of the right-wing HaBayit HaYehudi, who also linked humanitarian aid to the issue of the soldiers' remains and missing Israelis, saying he would only support an equation of "humanitarian in return for humanitarian." Bennett and Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan also urged the army to direct live fire against kite dispatchers.

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not put any decisions to a vote or suggest any concrete solutions, although on June 4 he had told reporters while on a trip to Europe that Israel was examining various options to prevent a "humanitarian collapse" in Gaza. Following the meeting, Katz lashed out at Liberman, accusing him of being pleased with the situation in Gaza. In a June 11 interview on Army Radio, he remarked, "[Liberman] thinks the current situation should be preserved. I disagree completely." Speaking to Al-Monitor, Katz insisted that he has no intention of backing down. He said he would continue promoting his blueprint and would present it at the next Security Cabinet session, where security officials would get a chance to express their opinions frankly. "There are two options for Gaza," Katz said. "Either the defense minister comes up with a plan to destroy Hamas in Gaza with all the known costs that entails, and he has yet to present such a plan, or we go for a disengagement, a separation from Gaza, as I propose, freeing us of humanitarian responsibility. I propose a good disengagement instead of a bad one."
- Katz's plan is interesting in every respect, including in itself and because Katz, a top Likud figure and member of the right-wing camp, suggests thinking outside the box, dismissing populist militant slogans about Gaza and trying to come up with practical, long-range terms. Katz proposes mobilizing international funding for the 3-square-mile island, which will be linked to the coast by an almost 3-mile-long bridge. The project's cost is estimated at \$5 billion. The island would be built in international waters, include a seaport (and perhaps an airport), and a security checkpoint would be built on the bridge. "This will allow economic independence for the Palestinians [and] provide Gaza with a controlled humanitarian and commercial outlet without endangering Israel's security," he said. Katz has presented his plan to senior international officials, among them US presidential envoy Jason Greenblatt, and to foreign media. He also, as mentioned, enjoys the backing of the defense establishment.
- Katz, who intends to run for the leadership of Likud after the Netanyahu era, is adopting a pragmatic, creative and courageous approach reflecting a humane approach from the political right. On the one hand, he favors tough, military measures to counter terrorism from Gaza, but on the other hand, he does not bury his head in the sand and believe that economic prosperity in Gaza will enable Israel to disengage from the enclave and will be effective in security terms. Unfortunately, political disagreements and clashing egos are preventing serious consideration of the plan, at least by the country's top security ministerial forum.