



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Tuesday, June 12

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News Excerpts

June 12, 2018

Yedioth Ahronoth

Netiv Haavot Outpost to be Removed Today

The security forces this morning are scheduled to evict the 15 families that live in the Netiv Haavot outpost in the Etzion Bloc. The assessment is that the eviction will not be met with violence and large-scale protests, as was the case in recent evictions in Amona and Ofra, thanks to agreements that were reached between the residents and military representatives. The residents who are slated to be evicted are to be relocated on a plot of land that was legalized on their behalf—plot 91—several hundred meters south of the settlement outpost. They will live on that site for roughly three years, in hope that in the interim the status of the land that Netiv Haavot sits on is legalized. See also, [“Teens clash with police ahead of Netiv Ha’avot evacuation” \(Ynet News\)](#)

Ma’ariv

Austrian Chancellor: Too Many People Helped Kill Jews

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu met yesterday with Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. Netanyahu said to his guest: “You’re a true friend of Israel and the Jewish people. I think you demonstrated that today when you went to the Kotel, to the Western Wall, and I hope that other leaders in Europe will follow in your important example.” Netanyahu also praised the young Austrian chancellor (31) for his stance on anti-Semitism, saying: “You clearly opposed anti-Semitism and you spoke about Jewish life in Austria. You said, and I want to quote this: Austria was not only a victim but also a perpetrator. These are courageous and bold words. And I think that they chart the course of your leading Austria and our relationship, one that I support very very much. See also, [“Kurz: It took Austria too long to be honest about its part in Holocaust” \(Ynet News\)](#)

Times of Israel

PM to Face Police Interrogation Today over Bezeq Graft Probe

Police will question Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Monday in high-profile the Bezeq graft probe, having acquired new evidence from a key state’s witness reportedly implicating the premier in an illicit quid pro quo deal. The probe, known as Case 4000, involves suspicions that Netanyahu, who has also served as communications minister for several years over his past two terms, advanced regulatory decisions benefiting Bezeq controlling shareholder Shaul Elovitch in exchange for flattering coverage of the Netanyahus from the Elovitch-owned Walla news site.

Ha’aretz

Trump's Pressure on Iran Working Better Than Expected

The decision by U.S. President Donald Trump to pull his country out of the Iran nuclear deal has already wreaked widespread economic damage to Iranians. According to intelligence assessments presented to Israeli leaders, the chain reaction of the American decision last month has been more severe than originally forecast. Trump announced his decision last month, threatening at the same time to reinstate harsh sanctions against the Iranian oil industry and foreign firms that trade with it. These steps are supposed to go into full effect at the beginning of November. See also, [“Trump: Iran is not the same since I left the deal” \(Arutz 7\)](#)

Expert: Palestine Fails International Law Test for Statehood

Experts need to continue to press back on the International Criminal Court's recognition of Palestine as a state, because "there is still time and room to counter this," international law scholar Andrew Tucker told The Jerusalem Post. Tucker and Matthijs De Blois of The Hague Initiative for International Cooperation held a press conference along with NGO Monitor and its legal expert, Anne Herzberg, on Thursday night to discuss their book *Israel on Trial: The Role of the UN and the EU in Lawfare and the Delegitimization of Israel*, which advocates for Israeli positions on a range of international law issues, including dropping the ICC war crimes probe of Israelis. See also, [*"Trump Mideast Envoy: The Palestinians Deserve So Much More Than Saeb Erekat"* \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Ha'aretz

PM, WH Working to Drive Wedge Between Pal' and Gulf States

The Trump administration is working with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to create a rift between the Gulf states and the Palestinians, according to a wide-ranging report on Trump's Middle East policy that was published on Monday in The New Yorker. The report says that the Trump administration's peace plan, which will likely be much closer to the Israeli government's positions than previous U.S. peace plans, could be used by Netanyahu to divide the Gulf monarchies and the Palestinians. Netanyahu, according to the report, expects the Palestinians to reject Trump's plan, thus creating an opening for the Gulf states to support it and distance themselves from the Palestinian leadership while inching closer towards Israel, with whom they share a common view of Iran as the main threat in the region.

Times of Israel

Defense Ministry Aims For Sanctions on Draft Dodging Yeshivas

With a legislative deadline imposed by ultra-Orthodox parties fast approaching, the Defense Ministry published Monday night its recommendations for reaching "a durable, realistic and relevant arrangement" on a bill to formalize limited ultra-Orthodox conscription. The new proposal sets minimum yearly targets for ultra-Orthodox conscription that if not met, would result in financial sanctions on the seminaries where they study. "The number of recruits from the ultra-Orthodox community has increased 10-fold in the last decade. We should continue the efforts to progressively increase the amount of recruits to the IDF and National Service," the Defense Ministry said in a statement. See also, [*"New ultra-Orthodox Draft Bill Would Fine Yeshivas for Not Meeting Quota"* \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Reuters

UK's Prince William to Meet Netanyahu, Abbas on ME Trip

William, Queen Elizabeth's grandson and second-in-line to the British throne, is the first senior British royal to pay an official visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories. While the trip is at the behest of the British government, the prince's Communications Secretary Jason Knauf said such a visit had been discussed for years. "Now is the appropriate time and the Duke of Cambridge is the right person to make this visit," Knauf told reporters, referring to William by his official title. He said the prince was looking forward to building "a real and enduring relationship with the people of the region". "The non-political nature of his royal highness's role - in common with all royal visits overseas - allows a spotlight to be brought to bear on the people of the region," Knauf said.

The Best Model for a Nuclear Deal with North Korea? Iran

By Antony J. Blinken, Former deputy secretary of state in the Obama administration

- **Visitors to a future Donald J. Trump presidential library may find a whole section dedicated to his demolition of the 2015 Iran nuclear accord: “worst deal ever”; “horrible” and “one-sided”; “major embarrassment”; “defective at its core.”**
- **As Mr. Trump pursues North Korea’s denuclearization at the Singapore summit meeting scheduled for Tuesday, he risks being hoisted on his own hyperbole. By Mr. Trump’s own logic, any deal with the North has to be better, tougher, more comprehensive than the Iran accord. Even if the North’s leader, Kim Jong-un, is operating in good faith — a historically big if — that outcome is highly unlikely. Paradoxically, the best deal Mr. Trump can reach with North Korea more than likely will look like what Barack Obama achieved with Iran.**
- **The Iran deal required Tehran — up front — to eliminate 98 percent of its uranium stockpile, dismantle and put under seal two-thirds of its centrifuges, cap uranium enrichment at levels well below weapons-grade and remove the core of its plutonium reactor. The effect was to push Iran’s “breakout capacity” — the time it would take the regime to produce enough material for a single weapon — from weeks to over one year. A sweeping inspections regime would ensure Iran was making good on its commitments.**
- **Mr. Trump argued the deal was “disastrous” because some of the limitations on Iran’s enrichment and reprocessing capacity expire over 10 to 25 years — even though the prohibition on Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon and the inspections regime are permanent — and because the accord did not directly address Iran’s missile program, its malicious activities throughout the Middle East or its human rights abuses at home. So what would the Trump standard mean if applied to Pyongyang?**
- **Unlike Iran, North Korea already has nuclear weapons, the means to deliver them and the machinery to keep making them. According to published assessments, Pyongyang possesses around 60 nuclear warheads, dozens of ballistic missiles and a widely dispersed infrastructure that churns out enough fissile material for about six bombs every year.**
- **If Mr. Trump were to abide by his own critique of the Iran pact, any deal with North Korea should eliminate the material, warheads and missiles it already has and, just as important, its ability to produce more — forever. That deal should be verified by an indefinite, intrusive inspections regime. And it should contend with Pyongyang’s other egregious activities, like providing weapons and technology to unsavory regimes like Bashar al-Assad’s in Syria and maintaining the world’s worst gulag state.**
- **Mr. Trump himself has already walked back the fantasy that Mr. Kim will hand over the keys to his nuclear kingdom in Singapore. The administration may find merit in an interim agreement that requires North Korea to disclose all of its programs, freeze its enrichment and reprocessing infrastructure under international monitoring and destroy some warheads and missiles in return for limited economic relief. That would buy time to negotiate a more comprehensive deal, including a minutely sequenced road map that will require sustained diplomacy. That’s the approach Mr. Obama took with Iran.**

- The administration may also discover that capturing everything we do not like about the Kim regime in one accord is a quixotic enterprise — prolonging the process, dividing us from partners with different priorities and giving Pyongyang more chits with which to bargain. Just as Mr. Obama did with Iran, Mr. Trump should focus on the most critical threat to our security and that of our allies — Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons and the means to produce them — while making it clear that the United States will continue to punish other actions it abhors, including Pyongyang’s development of missiles that can deliver nuclear weapons.
- There is something else Mr. Trump should borrow from the Iran deal: a monitoring system that blankets the entire nuclear supply chain — the mines, mills, centrifuge factories and assembly lines as well as the enrichment and reprocessing sites themselves. That’s the best way to ensure North Korea does not develop a covert program while pretending to make good on its commitments.
- In the end, there will be a straightforward test for success: Does Mr. Kim still have nuclear weapons or the means to quickly produce them? Does he retain nuclear-capable missiles or the ability to rapidly reacquire them? Promises to denuclearize won’t cut it: North Korea repeatedly has made and broken them before.
- Mr. Trump seemed to acknowledge that test when he said in April that denuclearization “means they get rid of their nukes.” “It would be easy for me to make a simple deal and claim victory,” he said. “I don’t want to do that. I want them to get rid of their nukes.”
- Let’s see if Mr. Trump sticks to that standard. He has boasted so often of his ability to achieve what his predecessors could not that he may have trouble resisting the temptation to declare, prematurely, “Mission accomplished.” That would greenlight China and others to ease up on economic pressure on North Korea, reducing American leverage and adding to the diplomatic bounty Mr. Kim already has accrued in his dealings with Mr. Trump. The very fact of meeting an American president gives Mr. Kim the legitimacy North Korea’s leaders have long sought. Mr. Trump has backed away from exerting “maximum pressure.” And he seems to have acquiesced to Pyongyang’s desire to negotiate a peace treaty before it gives up its nuclear weapons — the opposite of longstanding United States policy.
- As part of the team that produced the Iran agreement, I hear the lesser angels of my nature rooting for failure in Singapore. But the national interest trumps schadenfreude, so I’m hoping for success — as long as it’s not “the worst deal ever.”

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Israel's Battle of the Ex-Generals

By Ben Caspit

- **Israel's political establishment is expecting the next elections to take place between March and June 2019, about half a year before the original date in early November. Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon talks about the earlier election dates, as does Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The most dramatic question of all is whether Netanyahu will still head the Likud list in the next elections. The answer to this question lies mainly with Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit. Netanyahu will do everything possible to act before Mandelblit makes his decision of whether or not to indict him, and rush into the elections. The prime minister believes that he will emerge from early elections stronger than ever. For the moment, Mandelblit is taking his time and the chances are low that in the coming months he will come to a decision in regard to the investigations into the prime minister.**
- **Behind the scenes, a real political battle is being waged: the battle of the generals. On the political stage stand former chiefs of staff, generals, defense ministers and Mossad higher-ups, all of whom want to jump into the political waters. What unites them is their bitter grudges against Netanyahu and their strong desire to bring about his replacement. What separates them is one thing: their egos.**
- **The list includes former Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. (Res.) Benny Gantz; his predecessor, former Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. (Res.) Gabi Ashkenazi; Moshe Ya'alon, a former defense minister who also served as chief of staff; Deputy Director of Mossad Ram Ben-Barak; other former Mossad and Shin Bet personages and several junior has-beens. Even the name of Shaul Mofaz, a former chief of staff and defense minister who took a break from the political system in 2015, is still bandied about in this context.**
- **Each party apart from the Likud dances around this company of generals in the hope that one of them will give the party an edge in the battle for second place (Yesh Atid's Yair Lapid is currently Netanyahu's strongest rival in the polls) or help them publicly challenge Netanyahu's position and status. Netanyahu doesn't seem to be very worried. He has long since fortified his position as "Mr. Security." This time, for a change, he is not dependent on external strengthening. The burden of proof is on the other side now.**
- **To the electorate, the most interesting and attractive figure is Gantz. In recent months, Zionist Camp Chair Avi Gabbay has been pressuring Gantz to join the party. Gabbay's position in the polls appears hopeless; he has completely lost the momentum he had created after conquering the Labor Party. To get back into the fray against Lapid, Gabbay needs Gantz. During advanced negotiations between them, an option was raised that Gantz be floated "above Gabbay's head" and serve as the party's candidate for prime minister while Gabbay retains the role of party chairman. Gabbay also floated this idea in a poll he recently ordered. It turns out that while Gabbay only brings about 15 Knesset seats or less to the party, Gantz would bring 25 to the 120-seat legislature. Party seniors are convinced that Gabbay and Gantz will close this deal soon. Gabbay denies this but does verify that Gantz is "becoming close" to the party.**
- **The next in line, Ashkenazi, is playing hard to get. He has been in civvies for seven years already, enjoying his life, but the scars of the 2010 Harpaz affair have not yet healed. Ashkenazi,**

who is viewed as one of Netanyahu's more stinging critics, will only roll up his sleeves to join a winning platform. He dreams that Lapid and Kahlon unite into one political entity, which he would be willing to join without any preconditions. Ashkenazi told Al-Monitor that such a unification would constitute a real alternative to the rulership that could bring about change and create new hope. Lapid was a predecessor to Kahlon as finance minister, and while they are friendly they lack mutual respect; it is mainly Kahlon who respects Lapid less. Thus, under the current circumstances, the chances are that Ashkenazi will prefer to remain a bystander.

- A tragic figure is that of Ya'alon. After he was ousted from his position in 2016 by Netanyahu for the benefit of Avigdor Liberman, Ya'alon chose to quit the Likud altogether and become Netanyahu's No. 1 nemesis. Ya'alon founded an association and spends his days and nights ploughing through the country and appearing almost every day before different audiences. But he still hasn't seen positive results in the polls. Should Ya'alon's takeoff continue to stall, there is a good chance that he will join one of the other existing forces on the ground, such as Yesh Atid. Lapid lacks a military background and thus is searching for an attractive general figure to retain his party's electoral edge over Gabbay and create a springboard for himself in the battle for the premiership. He dreams about Ashkenazi, prefers Gantz, but will be happy to take Ya'alon with both hands.
- The problem is really psychological in nature. Lt. Gen. (Res.) Ya'alon is the man who headed the commando unit that penetrated the villa of Khalil al-Wazir, also known as Abu Jihad, and eliminated him 30 years ago in Tunis. A military senior of Ya'alon's stature would have a hard time taking orders from someone like Lapid, a former military newspaper correspondent who is about 20 years younger and with far less experience. Nonetheless, Lapid hopes that Ya'alon will get used to the idea.
- In January, Lapid announced that former Mossad senior Ben-Barak was joining Yesh Atid. Ben-Barak had been a candidate for the role of Mossad head in the last round of appointments, but lost the job to Yossi Cohen. Ben-Barak is the legendary Mossad fighter who headed the department responsible for uncovering the intelligence information indicating to Israel that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had built a nuclear reactor in Deir ez-Zor.
- While Ben-Barak's former boss Tamir Pardo went public with harsh criticism of Netanyahu on a recent Channel 12 investigative program, Ben-Barak has been more discreet with regard to respect for the prime minister. Nevertheless, Ben-Barak decided to leave the world of spooks and shadows, join Lapid's list and jump into the muddy waters of Israeli politics. While this constitutes a significant gain for Lapid, it is still not sufficient.
- Netanyahu has managed to use his expertise to transform himself into "Mr. Security" for most Israelis. The fact is that almost all the graduates of the defense apparatus over the generations — including in his first term of office in the 1990s — view Netanyahu as a danger to the future of the State of Israel and its security and hold a strong grudge against him for that. Yet somehow this does not tarnish Netanyahu's public image. The premier has managed to overturn the truism that had prevailed in Israel for generations: that Israel's chief of staff, Mossad chief and security services head will always prevail over the prime minister in public opinion. The current situation is the opposite. However, there will be generals that will try to challenge Netanyahu's absolute control of the arena, and this will constitute a war that even they are not used to winning.

Summary: Netanyahu has managed to use his expertise to transform himself into “Mr. Security” for most Israelis. The fact is that almost all the graduates of the defense apparatus over the generations — including in his first term of office in the 1990s — view Netanyahu as a danger to the future of the State of Israel and its security and hold a strong grudge against him for that. Yet somehow this does not tarnish Netanyahu’s public image. The premier has managed to overturn the truism that had prevailed in Israel for generations: that Israel’s chief of staff, Mossad chief and security services head will always prevail over the prime minister in public opinion. The current situation is the opposite. However, there will be generals that will try to challenge Netanyahu’s absolute control of the arena, and this will constitute a war that even they are not used to winning.