



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, June 14

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News Excerpts

June 14, 2018

Reuters

UN Condemns Excessive Israeli Force Against Palestinians

The U.N. General Assembly condemned Israel on Wednesday for excessive use of force against Palestinian civilians and asked U.N. chief Antonio Guterres to recommend an “international protection mechanism” for occupied Palestinian territory. The General Assembly adopted a resolution with 120 votes in favor, eight against and 45 abstentions. It was put forward in the General Assembly by Algeria, Turkey and the Palestinians after the United States vetoed a similar resolution in the 15-member U.N. Security Council earlier this month. The General Assembly text condemned the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israeli civilian areas, but did not mention Hamas, the Islamist group that controls Gaza. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding but carry political weight. See also, [“UN: 120 countries condemn Israel over Gaza deaths, dismiss US bid blaming Hamas” \(i24 News\)](#)

Ynet News

Haley Scolds UN General Assembly for Anti-Israel Resolution

The U.S. UN Ambassador Nikki Haley reprimanded members of the General Assembly on Wednesday as the body convened to vote on a resolution condemning Israel for violence that has gripped the Gaza border in recent week. “This resolution blames everything on Israel,” Haley said in her remarks, adding that “it does not even mention Hamas.” Kuwait tried to pass earlier this month a similar resolution at the UN Security Council, which condemned Israel for using “excessive force” against the Palestinians and called for a UN protection force to defend Gazans. However, it was vetoed by the United States. See also, [“NETANYAHU PRAISES NIKKI HALEY FOR STRONG DEFENSE OF ISRAEL AT U.N.” \(Jpost\)](#)

Ha’aretz

U.S. Officials: Trump’s Peace Plan Will Be Basis for Talks

The Trump administration’s plan for peace in the Middle East won’t be a “take it or leave it” proposal, but rather a basis for direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, administration officials told Haaretz this week. They said the plan will be revealed soon, and that the White House hopes to share it not only with the leaders in the region, but also with the general public. The officials said previous reports that the plan would be released immediately at the end of the Muslim month of Ramadan were incorrect. “We hope to release it in the near future, but not immediately after Ramadan,” one official explained. See also, [“US official says Trump peace proposal won’t be the ‘Bibi plan’” \(TOI\)](#)

Ha’aretz

Pal’: No 'Deal of the Century' if Jerusalem Not Addressed

Palestinian President Abbas will not meet with U.S. President Donald Trump's adviser and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, expected in Israel next week, officials from the Palestinian Authority said Wednesday, continuing a freeze in diplomatic ties between Ramallah and Washington following the U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem. Ahead of Kushner's visit, Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said that any talks about the “the deal of the century” would not lead to any if the proposal skip over the issues of Jerusalem and the Palestinian refugees. According to Abu Rudeineh, if the U.S. continues its policy of “changing the rules of the game” then the current diplomatic stagnation will become permanent.

U.N. Envoy: Another Gaza War Could Spark Regional Conflict

Another Gaza war could spark a regional conflict, UN Special Coordinator to the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov told Army Radio in an interview published on Wednesday. “What unites everyone both here in the region and internationally is that no one wants to see another war in Gaza,” Mladenov said during the interview, which took place this week. “It would be much more devastating than 2014, it would engage the region. We can still do what we need to do to prevent that from happening,” he said. Mladenov explained that the UN has had a critical role in reducing the possibility of such an outbreak. “If we stop the humanitarian aid. If we stop running the schools and running the hospitals or providing fuel, you will have a war in a couple of days.” See also, [“UN envoy: Without us in Gaza there will be war ‘in a couple of days’” \(WIN\)](#)

Ynet News

As Turkish Elections Loom, Israel-Bashing Takes Center Stage

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s main political rival has attacked him for signing “secret deal with Israel,” in an apparent attempt to score points as the country prepares to go to the polls in the presidential elections later this month. Muharrem Ince, who heads the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) has gained 30% of the country’s support according to a Bloomberg poll, leaving him trailing behind the incumbent president who is leading with 50.8% of the nation’s backing. In an apparent bid to rally the country behind him by stinging Erdoğan on the populist issue of Israel, Ince scolded the president for his dealings with the Jewish state. “Did you sign a secret deal with Israel? Yes, you did,” Ince said during an electoral rally held in the port city of Ordu on the Black Sea coast of Turkey, while challenging the president to participate in a televised debate. See also, [“ERDOGAN WAS ACCUSED OF COLLUSION WITH ISRAEL” \(The Silver Telegraph\)](#)

Ynet News

Iran: We’ll Begin Uranium Enrichment if Nuclear Deal Unravels

Iran will begin uranium enrichment at its Fordow plant and will install new nuclear equipment at its Natanz facility if it withdraws from a nuclear deal with major powers, said the spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). The fate of the 2015 nuclear deal is unclear after the United States withdrew from it. The other signatory nations—Russia, China, Germany, Britain and France—are trying to salvage the accord, which imposed curbs on Iran’s nuclear program in return for a lifting of some economic sanctions. Iran has two vast enrichment sites, at Natanz and Fordow. Much of Natanz is deep underground and Fordow is buried inside a mountain, believed to protect them from aerial bombardment. See also, [“Iran says will begin uranium enrichment at Fordow if nuclear deal unravels” \(Reuters\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

PM Announces Second Trip to S. America in 14 Months

It took a sitting Israeli prime minister 69 years to visit Latin America, but now it appears that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu can’t get enough, announcing on Wednesday he will travel to Guatemala in November. In a sign of warming ties with Latin America, and an apparent gesture of thanks to Guatemala for moving its embassy to Jerusalem last month, Netanyahu said the purpose of the trip will be a meeting with regional leaders. This would be his second visit to Latin America in some 14 months, having made a groundbreaking visit last September to Argentina, Colombia and Mexico.

Why Israel Should Help Solve Jordan's Economic Problems

By Shaul Shay, Former head of the Israel National Security Council

- **Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated across Jordan recently in protest of the grave economic situation and price hikes in the Kingdom, demanding the replacement of the government led by Hani al-Mulki. The protest was led by the trade unions and members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. For the first time, it also included the loyalist Bedouin tribes. These are the biggest demonstrations since 2011.**
- **King Abdullah cut short a visit abroad and returned to Jordan in light of the unrest in the Kingdom, issuing an order to suspend the government decision to raise gas and electricity prices in the country. The move didn't put an end to the protests.**
- **Last week, Prime Minister al-Mulki was forced to step down. The next day, King Abdullah appointed Minister of Education Omar Razzaz as prime minister. The king demanded that he launch a dialogue on the tax law which stirred up the masses and reexamine the entire tax system.**
- **Jordan has been in a serious state of distress since Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates failed to renew their aid package to the Kingdom—\$3.6 billion for five years, which ended in 2017. The distress has been aggravated by the economic burden created by some 1 million Syrian refugees residing in the Kingdom, bureaucratic failures and an inflated and inefficient governmental system.**
- **Jordan is also suffering from a serious water crisis as a result of global climate changes, which are reflected in the Mediterranean Basin in a drop in the amount of precipitation and a rise in temperatures, which lead to higher vaporization and dryness of the ground. At the end of the day, this causes a negative water balance.**
- **Jordan's foreign debt reached \$35 billion this year. The budget deficit this year is expected to be more than \$1 billion, and the average unemployment rate is nearing 18 percent, according to official data. In light of these economic figures, the World Bank has demanded that Jordan carry out painful economic reforms in return for economic aid.**
- **A general strike was declared in Jordan on May 30, 2018, to pressure the government to withdraw the draft of the new tax law which it had submitted to the parliament's approval, and the trade unions have threatened to launch another strike.**
- **The Hashemite royal family, like the rest of the monarchies in the Arab world, survived the Arab Spring in 2011 and successfully handled a wave of public protests in the beginning of the year over the bread subsidy cuts. But in light of the country's serious economic situation, it seems to be facing a particularly serious challenge, which could threaten the Kingdom's stability.**
- **At the moment, King Abdullah is still very popular in his Kingdom, and the criticism is directed at the elite associated with him—ministers, advisors, family members and financiers. They are perceived by most of the Jordanian public as corrupt and detached from the people. The king is**

therefore working to calm things down by restraining the government, but it won't solve the Jordanian economy's basic problems.

- Jordan serves as a strategic security space for Israel against the Iranian threat, Palestinian terror organizations and radical Islamist terror organizations like the Islamic State. It also serves as an important component in the Saudi-led Arab-Sunni coalition against the Iranian expansion threats in the region and is an important ally of the United States.
- There are also significant reciprocal relations between Jordan's large Palestinian population and the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. The situation in Jordan will affect the options of reaching an agreement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
- A chaotic situation in Jordan—and even more so, a collapse of the Hashemite regime—could have serious ramifications on Israel's security and on the geo-strategic balance of power in the Middle East. The State of Israel should therefore do everything in its power to help restore stability in Jordan.
- At this stage, stability can be restored in the kingdom by offering immediate economic aid and building a plan for comprehensive and long-term economic reconstruction. Israel should work behind the scenes to advance such a move through the US, European countries and the moderate Arab axis states, which all share a strategic interest to maintain Jordan's stability. Past experience shows that direct external involvement in countries' affairs fails to contribute to the problems' solution, and often even makes them worse. The Hashemite regime had the experience and abilities to deal with the current crisis, as long as it is offered the required economic resources, and this is something Jordan's friends should do before it's too late.

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Israeli Opposition's Internal Battles Play into Netanyahu's Hands

By Mazal Mualem, columnist at AI Monitor

- When Avi Gabbay was elected in July 2017 to head the Labor Party, Yesh Atid chairman Yair Lapid was among his many well-wishers. Lapid noted that Israeli politics needs good people like him.
- Less than a year later, the possibility of creating a meaningful center-left bloc to stand up to the right and lead to a change in government has been shattered. The two leaders of the significant opposition parties failed to effectively cooperate in the Knesset to replace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as they were too busy slinging mud at each other.
- Netanyahu is reaping the benefits. He doesn't have to spend energy and resources countering an opposition that is trying to bring down his government, and he is simply watching as the two people who wish to replace him fight each other. In the political history of the State of Israel, the opposition has never been in such a grave state that its leaders pray for the next election to be postponed as far as possible.
- Channel 10's latest poll tells the opposition's sad story. Roughly three years since the 2015 election, the Likud headed by Netanyahu has grown to 31 mandates. The party of Lapid, who up to a year ago was considered a realistic candidate to defeat Netanyahu, has only 18 mandates and Labor, though Gabbay soared in the polls after his election and talked seriously about the prime minister's office, has collapsed to 13 mandates.
- The center-left camp doesn't have a realistic candidate to run against Netanyahu for prime minister. When Lapid was doing well in the polls and challenged the Likud, he could have been perceived as prime minister material. As long he continues to weaken, many of his constituents seem to be waiting on the fence. Gabbay, after failing to reel in right-wing voters, has gone back to scavenging for votes in the center-left camp, and Yesh Atid has become his main target.
- This week it became clear that Gabbay is focusing all his efforts on a battle against Lapid. On June 11, it was revealed that Gabbay is behind the online mudslinging campaign against Lapid — not Netanyahu, as Lapid initially claimed. According to the report, Gabbay is operating a company called Spotlight Political Research, whose main client is the Labor Party. Facebook pages like “No suckers” and “Enough Yair” that attack Lapid's soft underbelly — his lack of security experience — seem to be the work of Spotlight.
- One of the “Enough Yair” posts read, “Imagine this. The middle of the night. The head of the Mossad is on the phone, saying that they have proof of the existence of a nuclear reactor. On the phone is prime minister ... Yair Lapid. What would Yair do? Smear on some more hair gel? Look at the teleprompter and see there's nothing there to read? That's the man who would decide if we go to war, if we confront the threats or not? Scary ...”
- Gabbay hasn't denied the accusation and continues to viciously attack Lapid. Labor criticized, among other things, “Lapid's crybaby campaign” and said Lapid “should figure out whether he chose the right profession.” Yesh Atid responded, “The Zionist Camp's mode of conduct and the pressure exerted by Netanyahu's office stem from the fact that the public understands that

the next election will be a race between Netanyahu and Lapid. It's sad that the Zionist Camp wastes its time and public funds instead of leading change for the good of the country.”

- Lapid and Gabbay are now spiraling downward within their own parties. While Lapid is Yesh Atid's almighty ruler and has no opposition in his political house, Gabbay faces rivals at home who claim that he has led the party to a low point. Former Labor chair and Defense Minister Amir Peretz is doing so openly. On June 12, Channel 10 broadcast recordings from a closed meeting in which Gabbay and Peretz exchanged accusations. The fighting isn't helping the Labor win over the public.
- The sense is that Gabbay and Lapid, separately and together, have not succeeded in creating an ideological alternative to Netanyahu — not in the diplomatic arena, nor in security. Too many times in recent months they have had to praise Netanyahu for his successes: moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem and US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran, both of which Netanyahu's associates claim stem from his excellent relationship with President Donald Trump. Lapid and Gabby, scrambling to find support on security in the form of former chiefs of staff, are not seen as players of equal weight with Mr. Security, who has also succeeded in responsibly navigating between the northern front (Syria) and the southern (Gaza).
- The opposition is despairing at Netanyahu's continuing political stability despite the criminal investigations of his affairs. Netanyahu has not only not lost support from his camp, he has grown stronger. In the end, their attempts to draw Likud voters have hurt them among the center-left, which has not liked their kowtowing to the right, especially in Gabbay's case.

The opposition doesn't have a leader, and that's the reason for its collapse.

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