



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Friday, June 29*

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- **50,000 Syrians Flee Assad Bombs to Jordan Border**
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- **House of Representatives Advances Israel Anti-Boycott Bill**
- **Israel Boosting Defense of Reactors Fearing Iranian Missiles**
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# News Excerpts

June 29, 2018

AFP

## **Russian Airstrikes in Syria Kill 22 Civilians, Monitor Says**

A barrage of Russian airstrikes on rebel-held areas of southern Syria killed 22 civilians on Thursday, a monitoring group said, most of them in a single battered town. "At least 35 Russian airstrikes hit the town of Al-Mseifra," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. "One of them hit a basement where people were taking shelter, killing 17 civilians, including five children," the Britain-based monitor said. The Observatory says it determines who carried out particular strikes based on the type of aircraft and munitions used, the locations and the flight patterns. See also, "[Assad Preparing to Retake Southwest Syria and Israel Will Have to Decide Whether to Intervene](#)" (*Ha'aretz*)

Ha'aretz

## **50,000 Syrians Flee Assad Bombs to Jordan Border**

As the Syrian regime makes headway in its attempt to recapture the southwest part of the country, Israel's defense establishment is increasingly preparing for the possibility of fighting spilling onto the border region on the Golan Heights. Israel has clarified to all the parties involved that it would not accept violations of its sovereignty or spillage into Israel. Thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing bombardments by the Bashar Assad regime in southern Syria are heading in the direction of the Jordanian border and Israeli borders. A United Nations report put the number of those heading towards Jordan at 50,000. The Jordanian government issued a statement it would block entry to all Syrian refugees coming from Daraa to the Syria-Jordan border. See also, "[Will Israel accept waves of incoming Syrian refugees?](#)" (*Arutz 7*)

Times of Israel

## **IDF Chief in Washington to Meet Senior US Defense Officials**

IDF chief Gadi Eisenkot landed in the United States for a work visit in the American capital on Thursday night, the army said. During his stay, Eisenkot will meet with US military and defense officials to discuss "military cooperation in the face of significant defense challenges in the different regions of the Middle East," the army said in a statement. During Eisenkot's stay in Washington, DC, he will be the guest of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford. The talks are expected to focus on the renewed fighting in southwest Syria, where Syrian dictator Bashar Assad's forces, aided by Russia, have begun a massive offensive against the rebel groups in the Daraa province.

I24 News

## **House of Representatives Advances Israel Anti-Boycott Bill**

A bipartisan bill intended to combat the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel advanced in the House of Representatives on Thursday. The House Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously approved the Israel Anti-Boycott Act, which would shield Israel and Israeli businesses by criminally penalizing US citizens seeking to participate in international boycotts against them. The legislation is now cleared for a full vote on the House floor. The bill is the most significant federal effort to legislate against the BDS movement, following on a model adopted by several US states including Texas, California and Florida – to prohibit discrimination on the basis of national origin.

## **Israel Boosting Defense of Reactors Fearing Iranian Missiles**

The Israel Atomic Energy Commission has been taking numerous steps to protect the nuclear reactors in Dimona and Nahal Sorek in light of assessments that Iran and Hezbollah see the reactors as preferred targets for missile attacks. Commission members have said that such a scenario is the greatest danger related to the reactors today. Recently the IAEC held a large training exercise that simulated a missile attack on one of the reactors, and included the evacuation of employees and actions to prevent a leak of radioactive materials. A missile strike that hits a nuclear reactor would be a major propaganda achievement for Iran or Hezbollah, say commission members. But it would not endanger Israelis. See also, ["Where the Immediate Threat to Israel Actually Lies" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## **20 Fires Break Out in South Due to Incendiary Balloons**

Around 20 fires broke out on Thursday in various areas in south Israel along the Gaza border due to incendiary balloons being flown from the strip, with the largest conflagration erupting in Kibbutz Be'eri and Kibbutz Alumim. Fires also broke out throughout the course of the day in the Regional Councils of Eshkol, Sedot Negev and Sha'ar HaNegev, as well as in several nature reserves, costing the lives of many animals. Residents of the Gaza border communities are demanding that the IDF and the defense establishment put a stop to the phenomenon of incendiary kites and balloons, which has been wreaking havoc in the area for the last three months and which has burned more than 30,000 acres of land. See also, ["Is IDF letting Hamas dictate rules of game? \(AI Monitor\)](#)

## **Palestinian Authority Steps Up Activities in East Jerusalem**

The Palestinian Authority and various Palestinian factions have stepped up their activities in east Jerusalem, while Israeli security authorities have intensified their operations to torpedo those efforts. "The Jerusalem Police have been playing a cat-and-mouse game with the Palestinian Authority and other Palestinian political factions trying to operate in the city in violation of the law," a Palestinian lawyer from east Jerusalem told The Jerusalem Post this week. "This has been going on for the past two decades. But in recent months, especially after [US President Donald] Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to the city, we have witnessed an escalation in this conflict." See also, ["Jordan, Saudis and Palestinians Warn Israel: Erdogan Operating in East Jerusalem Under Your Nose" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## **In First, Four Women Complete IDF Tank Commanders' Pilot**

Four female combat soldiers participated for the first time ever on Thursday in a graduation ceremony for a tank commanders' course at Yad LaShiryon Memorial Site and Museum at Latrun after completing their training as tank crewwomen. The female soldiers were part of a pilot training course aiming to integrate women into the border defense system. Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot will reach a final decision on how to integrate the female soldiers as tank commanders after the Armored Corps and the border defense establishment present their recommendations on the matter. The four new tank commanders who made history are Noga Shina from Binyamina, Shiran Tetroashvili, from Gan Yavne, Charlotte Feld-Davidovici, who moved to Tel Aviv from Londo and Osnat Levi, from Jerusalem.

## **New State Solution: The Shift Both Peoples Need**

By Major-General (IDF Ret.) Gershon Hacoheh

- **Since the creation of British Mandatory Palestine in the early 20th century, and the drafting of borders over territory encompassing the western Land of Israel, the concept of two states for two peoples has been adopted as the sole paradigm for a solution to competing Jewish and Arab territorial claims.**
- **Such was the framework that undergirded key efforts to resolve the conflict—from the 1937 Peel Commission to the 1993 Oslo Accords. An underlying fundamental assumption, presumed to enjoy clear consensus, has rested on the premise that the Arab peoples within the apportioned territory would be organized into a single Palestinian state—and not multiple Palestinian states.**
- **In the summer of 2005, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon withdrew Israel from the Gaza Strip. We will never know his strategic vision for what would follow the withdrawal, but since that moment a new reality has emerged.**
- **Following the failure of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to establish itself as an effective governing body in Gaza, and the subsequent assertion of Hamas rule in its place, the Gaza Strip has become a de-facto state—both in conduct and in function. The disconnect between the PA in Ramallah and the Hamas government in Gaza has created an ever-widening fissure in the two-state paradigm. The Palestinians themselves have split into two entities, each clearly identified.**
- **Israel's Gaza withdrawal was not the cause of that rift, but it catalyzed a pre-existing division between Gazan Palestinians who reside on the coast and the Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") Palestinians, who reside in the mountains. Beyond considerable, internal differences between the Palestinians of Gaza and Judea and Samaria, one also witnesses different modes of interaction with Israelis between these two groups.**
- **In the Gaza Strip, from which the State of Israel carried out a complete withdrawal, total spatial separation was created with a defined border surrounded by a rigid security infrastructure.**
- **In Judea and Samaria, by contrast, a unique interaction has come into being, characterized by only a partial separation between Palestinians and Israelis, and clear areas of integration and cooperation. There, the Israeli and Palestinian territory is not subject to an absolute divide. There is an interweaving of land and people. Despite efforts on the part of some Palestinians to avoid Israelis, and vice-versa, in this model, contact between the two groups continues. At times there is friction, but there are also instances of coexistence. Far beyond security cooperation between Israel and the PA, on the civil level, many roadways are shared, and there is substantial interaction in the realm of commerce. More than 100,000 Palestinian workers regularly enter Israeli communities for work, with the impact of that employment improving their standard of living, and that of their families and wider communities.**

### **A Flawed Perception Based Upon An Outmoded Paradigm**

- **From inception, the center of the PA's institutions of government was in Ramallah and its administration prioritized the population of Judea and Samaria, relegating the Gaza Strip to a peripheral district and consideration. Despite the widening disconnect between Ramallah and**

Gaza however, the international community has continued to see the PA government as the address for both entities.

- Due to unyielding attachment to that paradigm, two fundamental assumptions have been preserved. The first is that the solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict lies in the division of the land into two states, drawn within the lines of the former British Mandate. The second assumption is that there exists only one Palestinian entity. Yet the time has come to acknowledge that a significant change in circumstances has pried open the door to a discussion of a new paradigm.

#### **Gaza + Northern Sinai = New State Solution**

- In the 1978 peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat negotiated the return of Sinai but chose to leave the Gaza Strip in the hands of Israel. The internationally imposed border in Rafah, resulted in the division between West Rafah under Egyptian sovereignty, and East Rafah under Israeli sovereignty, rendering the Gaza Strip dependent upon Israel in every aspect, including aspects of population growth and land development.
- The development space of the Gaza Strip was thus locked between Israel from the north and east, and Egypt from the west. Gaza, built over generations as an important station on the ancient "via-maris" trade route between Egypt and Mesopotamia, lost its significance as a trade junction. Like a once thriving train station now on an abandoned railroad track, this demotion was the beginning of Gaza's economic distress, but rebuilding that economic track for Gaza still holds unrealized potential. That rebuilding ought to be undertaken. In order to do so we must move our thinking beyond from the limitations that have brought about the current impasse.
- In the context of this economic, social, and political background, a plan known as the New State Solution has emerged, seeking a paradigmatic shift in focus from Ramallah to Gaza, and beyond—into the Northern Sinai Peninsula. By prioritizing Gaza, where almost half of the Palestinians reside, instead of Judea and Samaria, where past state building efforts have focused and floundered, an intersection of interests and opportunity is coming into visible existence.
- Physically, the open lands between Rafah and Egypt's El-Arish offer the sheer space needed for economic and infrastructure development. And just as Palestinians from Judea and Samaria find employment in Israeli communities and industrial zones, so too Gazans can find work permits to help develop the burgeoning northern Sinai economy, with particular potential for tourism along the area's pristine coastline. This would bring together a massive Gazan work force with a massive New State works project - for the good and the future of the people who would build upon and live in the land.
- To be sure, such a process depends heavily on Egyptian consent. Of course, Egypt will not easily give up Egyptian sovereign territory but, it is possible to find creative ways that do not necessarily require sovereign concession. The potential positive impact of such an arrangement for the Egyptian economy and population would rally international support and investment, and boost Egyptian geopolitical standing.
- Of course, Hamas will not abandon its dreams of a state from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, but if the standard of living for young Gazans improves, the next generation will prove more likely to abandon these fantasies as counterproductive.

- **As is often the case, glaring opportunities sometimes hide in plain sight, in the void. The northern Sinai, as an open, undeveloped space, is a place of potential opportunity that is awaiting a comprehensive initiative; one that will benefit all the peoples of the region. To actualize this we must redraw the borders of our own thinking away from that which has not worked toward a paradigm that will.**

**SUMMARY: In the context of this economic, social, and political background, a plan known as the New State Solution has emerged, seeking a paradigmatic shift in focus from Ramallah to Gaza, and beyond—into the Northern Sinai Peninsula. By prioritizing Gaza, where almost half of the Palestinians reside, instead of Judea and Samaria, where past state building efforts have focused and floundered, an intersection of interests and opportunity is coming into visible existence. Physically, the open lands between Rafah and Egypt's El-Arish offer the sheer space needed for economic and infrastructure development. And just as Palestinians from Judea and Samaria find employment in Israeli communities and industrial zones, so too Gazans can find work permits to help develop the burgeoning northern Sinai economy, with particular potential for tourism along the area's pristine coastline. This would bring together a massive Gazan work force with a massive New State works project - for the good and the future of the people who would build upon and live in the land.**

## **Israel's Nuclear Ambiguity Policy Blocks Diplomatic Process**

By Akiva Eldar, columnist at AI Monitor

- In early May, as the world held its breath in anticipation of the nuclear disarmament discussions between US President Donald Trump and North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un and struggled to digest Trump's decision to pull the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal, an international meeting on the subject was winding up in Geneva. Over several days, representatives of dozens of states discussed preparations for the fifth review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) scheduled to take place in 2020.
- As always, the Egyptian representative attacked Israel for refusing to sign the treaty. The Iranian ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Raza Najafi, took the opportunity to take a dig at the United States for its nuclear cooperation with the “Zionist regime.” The Iranian news agency reported that Najafi stressed his country’s full commitment to the treaty.
- Also as always, Israel observed the scene from the sidelines, just as it did last July when 122 states signed a treaty banning a series of nuclear weapons-related activity such as attempts to develop, test, produce, spread and stockpile such weapons. Obviously, the world’s nine nuclear states did not append their signatures to the document. Israel, which is not a member of this club, was also absent from the list of signatories. Iran signed.
- For over five decades, Israel has been playing both sides. Despite numerous and persistent indications that not all of its nuclear reactors are designed for peaceful use, Israel does not admit to having a bomb. In fact, for years, it has maintained a policy of ambiguity, neither denying nor admitting possession of a nuclear bomb. Last week, The New Yorker reported that shortly after assuming office, Trump agreed to a request by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to sign a letter promising not to press Israel to give up its nuclear weapons. According to the report, three previous residents of the White House had signed similar commitments.
- The presidential commitment has a caveat. According to The New Yorker, there is an unwritten understanding on Israel maintaining its longstanding nuclear policy. In other words, Israel cannot admit to having nuclear weapons. This ambiguity enables the United States to provide Israel with a diplomatic umbrella and to repel pressure on it to join the NPT. It also requires Israel to keep IAEA inspectors away from its reactors. As a result, Israelis know nothing about the condition of the aging nuclear reactor in the southern town of Dimona and the extent of its compliance with international safety standards.
- In order to maintain its policy, Israel’s military censors prohibit Israeli journalists from referring directly to Israel’s nuclear capability. They are obliged to hide behind the absurd phrasing “according to foreign sources” when referring to the matter. Over time, the policy of ambiguity has turned into a policy of deception. In 1976, former defense minister and then-Knesset member Moshe Dayan admitted in an interview with a French TV station that Israel had the capacity to manufacture a nuclear bomb. If the Arabs introduce a nuclear bomb into the Middle East at some point in the future, argued Dayan, it is incumbent on Israel to have a bomb first — but not in order to use it first, of course. In 1996, Prime Minister Shimon Peres said in an

interview with the Israeli Maariv newspaper, “Give me peace and I will give up the nuclear [program].”

- Talking to journalists in 1998, Peres boasted that Israel “built a nuclear option, not in order to have Hiroshima, but an Oslo,” a reference to the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement known as the Oslo Accord. In 2006, incoming US Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the former CIA director under President H. W. George Bush, told a Senate confirmation hearing that Iran was “surrounded by powers with nuclear weapons — Pakistan to their east, the Russians to the north, the Israelis to the west and us in the Persian Gulf.” That is how Israel managed both to create nuclear deterrence and to prevent inspection of all its nuclear facilities.
- Explaining its support for Israel’s nuclear ambiguity in position papers it presented at the recent Geneva conference, the United States said countries in the region were trying to obtain weapons of mass destruction in violation of their NPT commitments. In order to clarify that it was not pointing at Israel, the United States argued that these states refuse “to recognize and engage Israel as a sovereign state ... [and] instead pursue divisive actions to isolate Israel.” More so; since a dig at Trump’s predecessor is always de rigeur, the position papers claim that international discussions on the matter between 2010 and 2015 (during the Barack Obama administration) illustrated the limitations of focusing on nuclear weapons without addressing the underlying political and security issues in the region.
- Indeed, the vision of a denuclearized Middle East cannot be realized without addressing the region’s political and security issues. However, these issues cannot be addressed without dealing with the prolonged Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and breathing life into the long dormant 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which foresees Arab states normalizing ties with Israel in return for its withdrawal from the occupied territories. To avoid background noise that could disrupt the on-again, off-again Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic negotiations over the years, the American partners in what is known as the Middle East Quartet (which also includes Russia, the UN and the European Union) have been ignoring Israel’s refusal to join the NPT. The US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran as well as the relocation of its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, its boycott of UNESCO and its recently launched trade war are all weakening the Trump administration’s leverage in the international diplomatic arena. The bear hug between Israel and Trump might prove the beginning of the end of Israel’s nuclear ambiguity policy and the opening shot of a wild nuclear weapons race in the Middle East.

**SUMMARY:** The vision of a denuclearized Middle East cannot be realized without addressing the region’s political and security issues. However, these issues cannot be addressed without dealing with the prolonged Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and breathing life into the long dormant 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which foresees Arab states normalizing ties with Israel in return for its withdrawal from the occupied territories. To avoid background noise that could disrupt the on-again, off-again Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic negotiations over the years, the American partners in what is known as the Middle East Quartet (which also includes Russia, the UN and the European Union) have been ignoring Israel’s refusal to join the NPT.