



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Wednesday, July 11*

### Headlines:

- **Likud May Remove Measure Allowing Jewish-Only Areas**
- **Israel Did Not Notify US of Kerem Shalom Closing**
- **'Closure of Gaza Crossing Is Like Shooting a Dying Man'**
- **IDF Intercepts Another Gaza Blockade-Running Boat**
- **Tensions High as Khan al-Ahmar Awaits Court Decision**
- **PM to Meet Putin Amid Friction Over Iran in Syria**
- **PM Claims He Never Received Favored Coverage From Walla**
- **Young Evangelicals Feel Complexity Of Conflict in Israel**

### Commentary:

- **Times of Israel: "Closing Border Shows Israel Has No Vision for Gaza"**
  - By Avi Issacharoff, Analyst, Times of Israel
- **AI Monitor: "Israeli Right Dreams of Third Temple in Jerusalem"**
  - By Shlomi Eldar, Analyst, AI Monitor

# News Excerpts

July 9, 2018

Times of Israel

## **Likud May Remove Measure Allowing Jewish-Only Areas**

The ruling Likud party is reportedly discussing removing a controversial clause in the nation-state bill that is seen as opening the door to the establishment of Jewish-only communities in Israel. Politicians, legal advisers and others have warned that the clause in the bill is discriminatory and could cast a dark shadow over Israel in the international arena. The clause would allow the state to “authorize a community composed of people having the same faith and nationality to maintain the exclusive character of that community.” Earlier on Tuesday, President Reuven Rivlin said the legislation “could harm the Jewish people worldwide and in Israel.”

Jerusalem Post

## **Israel Did Not Notify US of Kerem Shalom Closing**

The Israeli government did not provide the Trump administration with advance notice of its plans to close Kerem Shalom, the main commercial crossing into the Gaza Strip, a US official said. The IDF said it would pause exports and the marketing of goods from the Gaza Strip through the crossing with the exception of humanitarian supplies, such as food and medicine. Those items will have to be approved on an individual basis by the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT).

Ha'aretz

## **'Closure of Gaza Crossing Is Like Shooting a Dying Man'**

The Palestinian business community in Gaza is calling the Israeli decision to close Kerem Shalom the final nail in the coffin of Gaza's industry and trade. The results, traders said Tuesday, will be devastating to the civilian population. On Monday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel will close Kerem Shalom over the airborne firebombs launched at Israel and the weekly protests along the border. "Israel seems to think that businesspeople have power to influence the Hamas political or military leadership, an idea that is nothing more than an illusion without a basis in reality," a number of Gaza traders told Haaretz.

Times of Israel

## **IDF Intercepts Another Gaza Blockade-Running Boat**

The Israeli Navy stopped and seized a fishing boat that attempted to break through the naval blockade around the Gaza Strip, arresting the eight Palestinians on board, some of them people injured in recent border clashes with Israeli troops, the military said. The vessel's purported destination was Cyprus, however the boat lacked the equipment necessary to safely reach the island nation, making it more likely that this was a symbolic act of protest. “The vessel was seized without incident,” the IDF said in a statement.

## **Tensions High as Khan al-Ahmar Awaits Court Decision**

Tensions are high as the residents of the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar await two High Court of Justice rulings regarding their forced evacuation and the demolition of their homes. Police and the Civil Administration officials spent the last three days constructing an access road to the hillside squatters' village located just off of Route 1, near Kfar Adumim in Area C of the West Bank. Fifty-two families, including 92 children, dwell there in tents and shacks. The residents, members of the Jahalin tribe, have made two last ditch appeals to the court, which ruled in May that the village could be relocated. The IDF wants to move the families to permanent homes in the nearby West Bank city of Abu Dis. Residents of Khan al-Ahmar want to remain at their present location. Alternatively, some wish to return to their ancestral land near Beersheba from which the IDF deported them to the Jordanian-controlled West Bank in the early 1950s.

## **PM to Meet Putin Amid Friction Over Iran in Syria**

Netanyahu is set to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin Wednesday, in the latest in a series of frequent summits between the two amid persistent tensions over the presence of Iran-backed fighters in Syria. The meeting between the two comes days after Israel was blamed for an airstrike on a Syrian airbase near Homs thought to be used by Iranian militiamen and other Shiite fighters. Jerusalem has also focused in recent days on keeping Syrian fighters out of a demilitarized zone on the Golan border as forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad and backed by Russian air power look to take over the last pockets of rebel resistance in southern Syria.

## **PM Claims He Never Received Favored Coverage From Walla**

Netanyahu said in a police testimony during a Tuesday interrogation in the Bezeq-Walla Affair involving alleged illicit quid pro quo deals, that his family did not receive favorable coverage from Bezeq, as the corruption investigation, also known as Case 4000, alleges. Netanyahu was well prepared for the interrogation and arrived carrying various documents, which included articles from Walla! News and financial statements from his time as communications minister. Netanyahu also denied he had approved the merger of Bezeq and satellite television provider Yes.

## **Young Evangelicals Feel Complexity Of Conflict in Israel**

Nearly 5,000 young Christians have visited Israel over the past three years on a trip called "Passages," their version of Birthright Israel, created to connect youth to their faith by exposing them to the country. The trip acknowledges the complexities posed by Israel's control of Palestinian territory, but in general, it tells a positive story about the Jewish state. Evangelical activists and donors say they are concerned about a September 2017 survey which showed that more than 40% of evangelicals 18 to 34 years old had "no strong views about the State of Israel."

## Closing Border Shows Israel Has No Vision for Gaza

By Avi Issacharoff, Analyst, Times of Israel

- Immediately after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Israel was closing the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza on Monday, Palestinian terror groups in the Gaza Strip issued a host of furious and threatening warnings. Hamas accused Israel of “crimes against humanity,” while Islamic Jihad went further and claimed that the new sanctions were “a declaration of war” against the Palestinians. The Palestinian factions even announced an “emergency meeting” in Gaza Tuesday to coordinate their positions regarding the closure of the crossing. Netanyahu made the move in response to the wave of incendiary kites and balloons sent over from Gaza, which have scorched thousands of acres of farmland and nature reserves. And yet, at least now, it seems it is not time for war.
- Firstly, it is important to clarify that the Kerem Shalom crossing, which is the main route for bringing goods into the coastal enclave, is not closed completely. Food, medicines, and other humanitarian aid will continue to go through the crossing. What won’t be let through are items defined as luxuries — for example, furniture, electronic equipment, and building materials. Secondly, it is unlikely the immediate implications of this decision will be dramatic or critical for the people of Gaza. While Netanyahu and Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman received applause from Israeli ministers for the move, Palestinian merchants in the coastal enclave say the impact of the decision will hardly be noticed.
- Basically, they say the situation in the Strip is so harsh that there is very little business in Gaza anyway, other than buying food. “Who has money to buy electronic goods or new furniture in Gaza? Nobody even buys building materials, but if they do they get it from Egypt where it is cheaper. So what are we talking about? It’s bullshit,” a Gaza merchant explained. “Your government had no strategy for Gaza and it seems as though it won’t have one in the future, and we will pay the price,” he said. The despair in Gaza is so great, this man said, that any initiatives presented nowadays by the Egyptians, the Qataris, the United Nations, or anyone else, are met with a wall of skepticism and cynicism. “On Wednesday Fatah and Hamas representatives will meet in Cairo to discuss reconciliation,” he said. “Do you understand? How many times have we heard that sentence? Everyone is laughing at us to our faces, but also at you. Your government doesn’t know what to do and doesn’t even know what it wants with Gaza.” Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas “promised many weeks ago that he would begin paying full salaries again to PA employees — his people, Fatah people — but it hasn’t happened. Who should we trust?” he told this reporter.
- He and others in Gaza are also negative towards Hamas, though the criticism is less scathing, perhaps out of fear for their lives. Their main complaint is the fact that Hamas is funding its military wing at the expense of civilian infrastructure. Furthermore, the main reason for the status quo which currently holds between Israel and Gaza is the clear lack of desire by either

side for war. Israel and Hamas do not want to see the collapse of the other: Hamas needs Israel to preserve its rule in Gaza, and Israel needs Hamas to keep the quiet. The big question is: Will the dire economic situation in Gaza endanger Hamas's control over the Strip in a way that will cause an end to the quiet?

## **Israeli Right Dreams of Third Temple in Jerusalem**

By Shlomi Eldar, Analyst, AI Monitor

- The ban imposed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on visits by government ministers and Knesset members to Jerusalem's Temple Mount lasted three straight years, barring some experimental interruptions in 2017. Netanyahu's decision at the time was prompted by riots at the site and the so-called individual Palestinian intifada, which broke out in the fall of 2015. The murder of Alexander Levlovich in September 2015 and the murders of Eitam and Naama Henkin in the West Bank in October 2015 signaled the beginning of the intifada. The tension in Jerusalem was intense, and the Palestinians accused Israel of seeking to change the status quo at the Temple Mount complex. Netanyahu feared that the Palestinians would view visits by right-wing ministers and Knesset members as provocations, engendering further violence. And so, he rightly issued the ban. Since then, the political right has applied relentless pressure on Netanyahu to lift it.
- On July 3, Netanyahu addressed a letter to Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, saying that lawmakers could visit the Temple Mount once every three months. The first of the ministers to implement his "right" to visit the site after Netanyahu's decision to lift the ban was Uri Ariel, the minister of agriculture and a member of HaBayit HaYehudi. Ariel has made no secret of his yearnings for a third Jewish temple to replace the two destroyed ones. "We hope and pray for Tisha B'av to be a day of happiness and for the temple to be rebuilt, so that there will be no more fasts and we will be able to bring all the sacrifices that we read about in this week's Torah reading," Ariel said. "God willing, a kohen's [Jewish cleric] blessing will be bestowed on all those ascending the Mount."
- Ariel was citing the prophet Zecharia and referring to the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av, a day of fasting and mourning on which tradition has it the temples were destroyed. Tisha B'Av falls this year on July 22, and Ariel was essentially exhorting believers and temple loyalists to follow his example and thus turn the day of mourning into an occasion for "happiness." Knesset member Sharren Haskel of the ruling Likud Party visited the site shortly after Ariel, and additional lawmakers who advocate the temple's reconstruction, such as Shuli Mualem of HaBayit HaYehudi and Yehuda Glick and Amir Ohana of the Likud, followed suit.
- The timing of the renewed visits is probably not a coincidence. It comes just three weeks after Netanyahu's June 18 meeting in Amman with King Abdullah of Jordan, the site's Muslim custodian, after which his office issued a statement saying the prime minister "reiterated Israel's commitment to maintaining the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem." Did Netanyahu discuss with the monarch his desire to lift the ban and thereby ease the political right's pressure on him? Possibly. The fact is that following the meeting, the Knesset's chief security officer issued a letter on July 5 advising all Knesset members interested in going to the Temple Mount to coordinate with police. According to a recent report by the Yeraeh movement dedicated to

promoting a Jewish presence on the Mount, the number of Jews visiting the site has increased significantly, reaching 22,000 in 2017. The group describes itself as an initiative by volunteers who greet Jewish visitors to the site and report on events there; its report forecasts a further significant rise in the number of visitors in the next few years because of its activities.

- The demand by government ministers and lawmakers to experience for themselves the site of the temple, Judaism's holiest site, appears legitimate. Haskel, for example, explained after her visit that it was wrong to depict the experience as being only religious in nature. "The Temple Mount is at the very heart of millennia of Jewish culture and history. ... One cannot separate the special place from our Israeli-Jewish identity, it is part of us," she said. However, right-wing Knesset members, Temple Mount loyalists, the Yeraeh movement and recently formed youth advocacy groups have an ulterior motive. They not only want to experience the place where the ancient temples stood, they want to reconstruct the temple "speedily, in our times."
- Aviv Tatarsky, a researcher with the anti-occupation Ir Amim nongovernmental organization, told Al-Monitor, "It won't be the Messiah who will resurrect the temple, but rather them, the organizations and right-wing movements [that] dream of rebuilding it with their very own hands." Tatarsky added, "After all, in order to rebuild the Temple Mount, the Dome of the Rock must be destroyed." Still, we should remember that according to some of the Jewish Sages (such as Rashi and in the Zohar), the third temple will descend from Heaven all complete and constructed, involving no humankind preparation, destruction or construction. Be that as it may, Tatarsky said the idea that the temple must be rebuilt is slowly gaining traction, and its advocates believe a growing stream of visitors is the only way to spread the word so that the reconstruction becomes a widespread, popular demand and the right of the Jews to rebuild their destroyed temple can no longer be denied.
- Those ultimately spreading the word are the ministers and Knesset members of the right, such as Uri Ariel. They were the ones who kept up the pressure on Netanyahu throughout the years, and as we know, Netanyahu eventually gave in. And not only the prime minister. Tatarsky said the massive right-wing pressure has changed the conduct of the police, as well. A report he authored last November claimed right-wing activists were disseminating footage showing "public displays of affection" by police toward the temple activists in order to "spur more activists to visit the Mount." The video clips send a clear message that the police are on the activists' side, the NGO argued. In addition, the state itself is funding activities related to site visits. Among the 22,000 visitors of which the Yeraeh movement boasts were high school yeshiva students and students at pre-military academies funded by the Ministry of Education and other government departments. Their ascent encourages those in the movement for the building of the third temple.
- The Temple Mount loyalists make no bones of their goal — to lay the cornerstone for the third temple. In the past, these activists were detained and some were banned from the site and even arrested. This week, Netanyahu, perhaps unwittingly, paved their first road into the hearts of a growing number of adherents. The visitation to the Mount by the right-wing leadership, which

openly claims the erection of the third temple is on the agenda, helps instill in the public mind an idea once considered absurd, nightmarish and dangerous. And if high-ranking ministers of the right ascend the Mount, their supporters will surely follow.