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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Thursday, July 12*

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# News Excerpts

July 12, 2018

Jerusalem Post

## **IDF Strikes Three Military Targets in Syrian Golan**

The IDF spokesperson confirmed in a statement early Thursday morning that Israel attacked three military posts in Syria late Wednesday night. The attack was carried out in response to the crossing of a Syrian drone that the IDF intercepted earlier on Wednesday. The attack near Hader village at the border of the Israeli Golan Heights caused only material damage. Israel has been on high alert as Syrian government forces advance on rebels in the vicinity of the Golan, worrying Assad could let his Iranian allies entrench near its lines.

Ha'aretz

## **Report: Russia Working to Remove Iran From Syria Border**

Russia has been working to push Iran away from Israel's border with Syria, Israeli diplomatic sources reported Wednesday evening. His report comes after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin, where he arrived Wednesday for a two-day visit. While Russia is pursuing this effort, Israel has largely avoided intervening as Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime retakes Syria's south. The sources said that while Iranian forces have not completely been ousted from the border, Moscow is currently acting to carry out the process.

Times of Israel

## **House Dems Demand 'Transparency' in US Aid to PA**

Nine Democrats in the House of Representatives demanded greater transparency from the Trump administration on Wednesday, asking for more details on its review process of US aid to the Palestinian Authority and Gaza Strip. In a letter, the entire Democratic membership of the House Foreign Affairs Middle East Subcommittee asked Trump to share with them the "timeline and metrics" of the White House's assessment of American assistance to Palestinians. In January, the administration froze \$65 million from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the main UN agency responsible for providing humanitarian aid and refugee assistance to Palestinians.

Times of Israel

## **IDF Opens Fire Near Gazans Flying Incendiary Balloons**

An Israeli drone fired toward a group of Palestinians flying incendiary balloons into southern Israel from Gaza on Wednesday. No injuries were reported in the airstrike, which was said to have occurred east of the city of Rafah. This was the first such strike by the IDF against Palestinians sending airborne arson devices into Israel in two weeks. Throughout the day on Wednesday, incendiary kites and balloons sparked 19 fires, of varying sizes, in southern Israel, according to local government officials.

Times of Israel

## **Strike at Defense Ministry Could Delay Settlement Approvals**

Settler leaders called on government ministers to act Wednesday to prevent a labor strike by workers of a key Defense Ministry body that threatens to delay construction of thousands of settlement homes in the West Bank. On Monday, employees of the Civil Administration, which runs daily affairs in the West Bank, announced they would be ceasing the vast majority of their activities starting next Sunday in protest of what workers argued was the Finance Ministry's refusal to meet their basic demands for improvements to their employment conditions. The umbrella Yesha Council chairman Hananel Dorani sent an urgent letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to prevent the "practical construction freeze" on settlement homes that had already gained approval at a political level.

Jerusalem Post

## **MKs Advance Bill Limiting Palestinian Access to Court**

The Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee approved legislation Wednesday that would limit Palestinian access to the High Court of Justice with regard to land cases. The legislation has advanced after a first reading, but needs to return to the plenum for a second and third reading before it becomes law. Right-wing politicians have argued that the law reduces the High Court's heavy caseload and helps normalize land issues in Area C of the West Bank by sending them to district courts, which handle such matters within sovereign Israel. Those lower courts would also hear cases regarding travel permits, restraining orders barring individuals from regions of the West Bank and freedom-of-information petitions.

Times of Israel

## **Gaza Businesses Rue Border Crossing Restrictions**

Palestinian merchants and business leaders in the Gaza Strip expressed frustration on Wednesday over Israel's new restrictions at the Kerem Shalom commercial crossing, warning the clampdown on imports and exports could significantly damage their business interests and undermine the economic welfare of other Palestinians in the coastal enclave. On Monday, the IDF announced that only humanitarian aid would be allowed into Gaza in response to airborne incendiary objects that Gazans have launched into the Jewish state, incurring extensive damage to Israeli farmlands.

Ha'aretz

## **Document Reveals Bedouin Eviction Planned Decades Ago**

Forty years ago, Uri Ariel, now agriculture minister, was already planning the eviction of Bedouin living east of Jerusalem. This emerges from a document signed by him titled, "A proposal to plan the Ma'aleh Adumim region and establish the community settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim B." The document outlines a plan to turn some 25,000 to 30,000 acres of Palestinian land into an area of Jewish settlement and develop it as a "Jewish corridor," as he put it, from the coast to the Jordan River. Now the Civil Administration and the police are expediting the demolition of the homes of the Bedouin community in Khan al-Ahmar.

## **To Palestinians, Trump Plan Is End of National Dream**

By Jack Khoury, Analyst, Ha'aretz

- The real estate man in the White House has embedded the term “deal of the century” into the political consciousness of the Middle East in general and Israel in particular. It’s been adopted by everyone, including Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who was quick to use it in his first meetings with Donald Trump in Washington and in Bethlehem. Abbas sought to please Trump then, before realizing it was pointless and severing ties. The term describes a dramatic move — a peace agreement that would end the bloody conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, lead to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and enter the history books.
- But as any intelligent person knows, that isn’t what Trump, much less the Netanyahu government, means. Their true goal is to emasculate the Palestinian leadership by offering a deal that is indeed essentially a real-estate transaction: The Palestinians will receive opportunities to work, to earn a living and to live in reasonable conditions in their current homes, in exchange for abandoning their national dream. They won’t get a state, a capital in Jerusalem or the right of return. To the Palestinians, then, the “deal of the century” means the end of their national dream. It’s become a synonym for an Israeli-U.S. diktat on the Palestinian leadership, coupled with efforts to enlist the Arab world’s support.
- If any proposal deserves the name “deal of the century,” it’s the one that’s been on the table for 18 years. In 2002, at the height of the second intifada, the members of the Arab League passed the Saudi peace initiative. Yasser Arafat was under siege in his presidential compound in Ramallah, but even as isolated as he was, no Arab leader dared challenge the Palestinians’ national principles, as the Arab Peace Initiative proved. Trump and his gang of advisers, Jared Kushner, Jason Greenblatt and David Friedman cannot reinvent the wheel, dictate a new script, especially in light of their lack of diplomatic experience. These are not the sort of people who can lead a difficult, momentous process where far more experienced diplomats have failed.
- Ostensibly, the Palestinian leadership has nothing to worry about. The Palestinian people has overcome harder, crueller situations. After the blow of the 1967 war, which killed the dream of liberating the historic land of Palestine, came the 1970 events of “Black September” in Jordan, which were meant in effect to eradicate the presence of the Palestinian factions there. In interviews, Arafat declared that the plan — which had the support of the CIA — was to eliminate the Palestinian national movement.
- The peace agreement between Israel and Egypt signed in 1979 was another blow, as far as the Palestinians were concerned. The biggest, strongest Arab nation had stepped outside the ring, effectively determining that there would be no more regional conflict, because no Arab country would dare attack Israel without Egypt; and it reached an agreement with Israel that left the

Palestinians outside, with no nation and what looked like an ever more remote chance of realizing their nationalist aspirations. In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in order to eradicate the PLO presence there, with the aid of local Christian militias. That isolated Syria and destroyed the chances of the Palestinian nationalist dream even more.

- At each of these historical junctures, the Palestinians paid in blood, but the dream did not die. The nationalism movement is alive and kicking. Time and again, attempts to dictate agreements to the Palestinians that fail to include any acknowledgement of their nationalist aspirations — especially a state within the 1967 borders — have come to nothing. Even the Israelis and the Americans have grasped — though they keep trying to ignore it — that the Palestinians aren't going to give up on this.
- So why are the Palestinians so worried? Mainly because of their leadership crisis and the persisting internal rift that precludes any possibility of creating a unified Palestinian strategy. So if Abbas, who knows all the deals and all the intrigues, hopes to bequeath something to the next generation, he needs to look out not for his own legacy but for that of his people and do all he can to create an internal Palestinian process that ends the schism, and leads to the election of new leadership that will aim to formulate a national consensus. That is the only possibly way to bury Trump's plan and present the international community with exactly two options, and no more: a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders alongside Israel, or a single state for all its citizens. That really would be the deal of the century.

## **Turkey, Israel Battle Over Temple Mount**

By Ben Caspit, Analyst, AI Monitor

- Israel and Turkey are again on a collision course. The official reason, at least this time, is not the blockade on Gaza or the diplomatic peace process with the Palestinians, but the Temple Mount. Israel's Security Cabinet is supposed to devote one of its upcoming meetings to the activities and growing influence of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the Temple Mount. Erdogan maintains this influence via a series of nonprofit associations that he funds, headed by the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA). Turkish activity on the Temple Mount worries not only the Shin Bet, the Israel Police and the entire security system, but even the other contenders for the plaza: the Jordanians, the Palestinians, the Egyptians and even the Moroccans who view their king, Mohammed VI, as the keeper of the holy places. According to intelligence material that Israel has been accumulating, Erdogan is trying to snatch the Temple Mount and the title of "Protector of the Mount" in the name of all of Islam from all the other contenders to the throne. The first antagonist that is supposed to foil these schemes is, like always, Israel.
- After the 2016 reconciliation between Israel and Turkey, in which Israel shelled out \$21 million as compensation to the families of the people who were slain on the Mavi Marmara and expressed an apology, the tense relations between the two countries improved somewhat. The ambassadors returned to Ankara and Tel Aviv, and it had seemed that the crisis had passed. But ahead of the June 2018 elections in Turkey, Erdogan began to attack Israel in louder and louder tones. "He needs to divert the agenda of his election system from the crash of the Turkish lira to some external scapegoat. And, of course, he found us," said a senior Israeli Cabinet member to AI-Monitor before the elections, on condition of anonymity. But the elections came and went, and Erdogan continues to grasp the crass anti-Israel ticket with all his strength. "He continues to throw tantrums," a high-placed security source told AI-Monitor this week on condition of anonymity. "His self-confidence has reached an all-time high; he now views himself as a Turkish sultan, ready to renew the Ottoman Empire. Nothing can stop him, and he allows himself everything. But if he tries to tighten the rope too much in Jerusalem," the source added, "he will discover his mistake."
- On July 9, Israel's National Security Council presented an action program formulated against the associations connected to Turkey that contribute to inflaming tension and agitation on the Temple Mount. Most of the focus is on TIKA. Recently, intel on this organization shows that it maintains widespread connections with the radical northern wing of Israel's Islamic Movement as well as with Hamas sources. According to a publication by researcher Pinhas Inbari, a member of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, TIKA is directly linked to the IHH Turkish organization that backed the Marmara flotilla and was labeled by Israel (and others) as a terrorist organization. There's even more. According to Israeli intelligence sources, TIKA pours dozens of millions of shekels, or even hundreds of millions of shekels according to some

versions, to fund Islamic activities on the Temple Mount (a shekel is worth about 27 US cents). “Anyone who visited the Mount in the last year, knows that the place is full of Turkish flags and also Turkish tourists as well,” an Israeli security source well versed in Eastern Jerusalem issues told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity. “These are not mere tourists,” the source continued, “but Islamic activists who flow to the Temple Mount to replace the Mourabitoun and Mourabitat associations that Israel recently made illegal.” These associations have harassed Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount and were banned following accusations of inciting violence.

- The Israelis are convinced that Erdogan is trying to return Ottoman grandeur to the Temple Mount to intensify tension between Jews and Muslims in the holy places and become the top Islamic figure to protect the mosques and Al-Aqsa. “We won’t let this happen, no way,” an Israeli security source said on condition of anonymity. Israel’s Foreign Ministry, which objected to the action plan created against TIKA until recently, is now conforming to the party line and admits that there is no choice but to halt the process before it causes real damage. Israel expends a lot of energy in lowering tensions on the Temple Mount, and officials are acutely aware that a blowup there could quickly put the entire Middle East on fire. It was only on July 3 that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled the sweeping prohibition he had imposed on Knesset members from frequenting the Temple Mount. From now on, all Knesset members are permitted to ascend the Mount (but not pray there) once every three months. The wave of individual Palestinian terror that began more than two years ago, and has since died down, had emerged from the firebrands of Al-Aqsa. And Israel is determined to halt that.
- “We’re not the only ones,” a senior Israeli political figure told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity. “People from Amman and other places share our worry over Turkey’s growing influence on the Temple Mount. No one, except for Hamas, approves of Erdogan making inroads into our region. We have no intentions of making his life easy with regard to these issues.” Israel cannot make TIKA illegal, since it is not listed in Israel. But Israel can require the association to receive prior authorization for every activity it performs in the territories over which Israel rules. “The quantities of money they pour here are huge,” a senior Israeli diplomatic source told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity. “Even the number of Turkish tourists has recently risen significantly. These are the kinds of Islamic tourists who pour into the Temple Mount and on the way try to raise as many riots as they can, complete with curses and swearing and invectives in the old Jerusalem Armenian Quarter.” At the moment, a plan of action that was formulated to counter Erdogan’s increasing influence on the Temple Mount has not been approved for implementation. As aforementioned, the Cabinet is supposed to discuss and authorize it. “We will closely examine Erdogan’s actions in the coming weeks,” a high-placed source in the Israeli Cabinet said on condition of anonymity. “If he signals to us that he wants peace, that’s one thing. But if it turns out that the ‘new,’ post-elections Erdogan wants to stir up trouble, he’ll find a very tough opponent on our side.”
- In the middle of May, Israel expelled the Turkish consul from East Jerusalem and instructed him to return to Ankara for “consultations” for a period of time. This action was taken after the Turkish ambassador in Tel Aviv was returned to Ankara and the Israeli ambassador in Ankara

was expelled. At this point, Israel has no intentions of letting the Turkish consul return. "The Turkish Consulate in East Jerusalem is viewed as a wasp's nest. It inflicts more damage than it helps," a high-level Israeli diplomatic figure told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity. "If Erdogan wants to get his foot in the door again [in Israel], he has to lower his tone and return to the rules of acceptable behavior." But no one in Jerusalem really believes this will happen. It seems that Erdogan wants escalation, not peace.