



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

July 2, 2018

Ynet

Qatari Official: Israel, Hamas in Indirect Talks on Gaza Crisis

The Qatari Ambassador to Gaza, Mohammed Al-Emadi, confirmed on Sunday evening for the first time that Israel is holding indirect discussions with Hamas in an effort to formulate a solution to the humanitarian crisis. Al-Emadi said that the US is involved in the talks, but "there still is no agreement between the two sides, only contacts." Al-Emadi noted a number of recommendations made by the White House for rehabilitating Gaza through infrastructural projects that would help its water supply, alleviate its paucity of electricity and create work for the residents.

Times of Israel

Hamas Said Refusing to Return Israelis for Aid Package

Hamas has refused to return Israeli citizens and the bodies of IDF soldiers it holds as part of an agreement to provide humanitarian help to the Gaza Strip, an Arabic daily reported Saturday, and is conditioning any release on Israel freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Hamas is reportedly weighing three proposals, two of which would require releasing the Israelis and agree to a truce in exchange for opening border crossings to all goods. Hamas, however, is only willing to return the Israelis as part of an exchange for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel on security offenses.

Ha'aretz

Arab States to US: Peace Plan Would Inflame Region

Arab nations have asked the White House to refrain from revealing its Mideast peace plan, senior Palestinian officials told Haaretz. "Egypt isn't short on internal issues, along with fighting terror in Sinai; Jordan is dealing with many difficulties on the home front and repercussions from the Syrian war don't simplify things and the Saudis with the challenges in Yemen and the struggle against Iran," a Palestinian official told Haaretz. "If the administration presents a plan without Jerusalem and without the refugees it will be an earthquake whose repercussion will undermine stability in the entire region and not one is ready for that."

Jerusalem Post

IDF Prepares for Khan al-Ahmar Village Demolition

Israel Civil Administration staff entered the Palestinian Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar to begin preparations for its pending demolition, the NGO B'Tselem reported. The High Court of Justice last month ruled that the village, which is home to 52 families, could be razed along with the nearby school. The village is located on the edge of Route 1, right outside of the Kfar Adumim settlement. The European Union and the United Nations have publicly called on Israel not to carry out the demolitions.

Majority of Israelis Say Trump Won't Release Peace Plan

A quarter of Israelis fear Trump will exact a price from Israel in the peace plan the White House plans to reveal, a poll revealed on Sunday. Taken by Smith Consulting on behalf of the Middle East Forum and the Israel Victory Project, the poll revealed that only 21% of Jewish Israelis are concerned with the possibility that Trump will recognize a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and 62% do not believe that it will happen at all. The survey found that 59% of Jewish Israelis consider Trump to be the most pro-Israeli president ever, compared to just 25% who were concerned that he might “set a price” for his support of Israel.

PM Says He Wants to Push ‘Jewish State’ Bill

At a meeting of coalition heads Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly announced his intention to push the controversial “Jewish state” bill forward to become law before the end of the current Knesset session, with the final vote possibly to be held as early as next week. A controversial provision instructs the justice system to prefer Israel’s Jewish character to its democratic one in cases where the two are at odds. Kulanu leaders had reportedly demanded that the clause be excised, and that the Jewish and democratic values of the state share equal stature.

The Tiny Gulf State Winning Race for Ties with Israel

An Israeli delegation last week visited an Arab country that officially doesn’t have diplomatic relations with Israel. The Israeli diplomats were in the Gulf island of Bahrain for an international conference organized by UNESCO. Though symbolic, their participation marks a shift in the kingdom’s ties to Jerusalem – which traditionally receives the cold shoulder from such Arab states. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain’s neighbor and strategic ally, recently refused to allow an Israeli team to enter when it hosted an important international chess tournament last December. Bahrain chose a different policy. Its decision to allow the Israeli delegation in to attend the UNESCO conference serves the tiny kingdom’s international interests, but it could also signal a shift with regard to its treatment of the Jewish state.

Fleeing Airstrikes, Syrians Say Israeli Border is Safest

As Syrian President Assad’s forces advance on southern Syria, the stream of refugees fleeing toward Israel has increased. Thousands of them, crowded into trucks jolting along the roads toward the border fence on the Golan, perceived as being the safest area, which Russia and the Assad regime would hesitate to bombard. According to United Nations figures published early last week, some 11,000 civilians have fled to this area. But aid groups and local residents say the number has ballooned following bombardments of population centers in the southern part of Daraa province.

Will the West Cede the Golan Heights to a Psychopath?

By Yair Lapid, leader of the Yesh Atid party; and Moshe Ya'alon, former Defense Minister

- We live in a world full of complex diplomatic dilemmas, but for once here is a simple one: Would you take an area that is flourishing in a western democratic state, where fifty thousand people of different religions and ethnicities live in harmony, and hand it over to a violent dictatorship ruled by the worst mass murderer of our time so that he can destroy the area and murder most of the residents? If your answer is “no” then you support recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. In 1981 Israel applied its law to the Golan Heights. The Syrians insisted it be returned to them. Most countries, including the United States, have avoided taking a clear position. We believe it's time to get off the fence.
- The Golan Heights is a unique story in the Israeli-Arab conflict. It's a mountainous region of around 695 square miles (around the size of a medium-sized ranch in Texas), in the north of Israel. It's worth noting, of course, that it is entirely unrelated to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. Not a single Palestinian lives in the Golan Heights. “[Syria] is a dark regime led by a psychopath supported by the most malevolent forces on earth today.”
- Historically, the Golan is known as the biblical land of Bashan from the book of Deuteronomy. Just recently a major renovation of a 4th century Jewish synagogue was completed and in archaeological excavations a coin from 67 CE was discovered with an inscription which read, “For the redemption of Jerusalem the Holy.” It is an area with a long and deep Jewish connection. The Syrians, on the other hand, ruled over the Golan Heights for only 21 years; between the years 1946 and 1967. During those years they turned the Golan into a military base, rained rocket fire on the Israeli communities which are under the Golan Heights and tried to divert Israel's critical water sources to dry the country out.
- In 1967, during the Six Day War, the Golan Heights was liberated by Israel. In the 51 years since then Israel developed the Golan Heights and turned it into an impressive center of nature reserves and tourism, with high-tech agriculture, award winning wines, a flourishing food-tech industry and in-demand boutique hotels. The Druze population of the Golan Heights, who make up about half the population, were granted all the same rights as any other citizen in Israel, as would be done in any genuine democracy. On the other side of the border, life went in the other direction; in the past seven years President Assad has massacred over a half a million of his own people and his actions led to the displacement of 11 million more. He let the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah, the largest terror organizations in the world, into Syria. He encouraged Shia militias from Iraq and elsewhere to flood into Syria. It is a dark regime led by a psychopath supported by the most malevolent forces on earth today.
- The man who didn't hesitate to use chemical weapons against women and children, continued to demand the Golan Heights in the name of “international law.” The fact that anyone in the

Western world still takes that argument seriously is worse than naivete – it is insanity. Does his monstrous behavior have no cost? Do we live in the world without any sense of reward and punishment? The fact that the Golan Heights is under Israeli rule is the only thing that saved it from the Syrian valley of death, which is collapsing under the weight of violence and destruction. The international community, led by the United States, needs to do the simple thing: To announce that they see the world as it is. We call on the American administration and both parties – Republicans and Democrats – to lead an international process of recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. It is historically just, it is strategically smart and it will allow the United States to extract a price from Assad for his despicable behavior without putting boots on the ground in Syria.

An Israeli-Palestinian Confederation Can Work

By Dahlia Scheindlin, Policy Fellow, Mitvim, The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies

- Between mayhem at the Gaza border and U.S.-Israeli triumphalism, it is becoming impossible to imagine a serious peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, let alone an agreement anytime soon. But none of this will distract Palestinians from their quest for liberation. And for Israelis, that means the conflict will never truly be over. Many commentators have declared the two-state solution dead, while others cling to the concept stubbornly. From Israel's side, the possibility looks beyond remote. Israel's long-serving leader Benjamin Netanyahu has steadfastly thwarted a two-state solution for years. Nearly a decade ago, he gave one speech expressing hypothetical, circumscribed support for the concept. Since then, he has presided over halfhearted, failed negotiations. He has insisted that Jerusalem won't be divided and that there will be no Palestinian state on his watch. One of his current coalition partners, the Jewish Home party, is dead-set against the idea.
- Nor will the Israeli public lead the charge. In a December 2017 joint Israeli-Palestinian survey I conducted with the Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki, just over half of Israelis — 52 percent — supported the broad notion of a two-state solution, a steady decline from more than 70 percent in 2010. That figure includes Arab Israeli respondents who support two states by 83 percent; among Israeli Jews, just 46 percent supports this solution. If you show respondents the details of the traditional two-state plan developed in the 2000s, support sinks to a minority on both sides.
- When it comes to the land where a Palestinian state might be located, the picture becomes even more complicated. Israel directly controls 60 percent of the West Bank, including a thick perimeter connected by a series of lines that dissect the middle. This is Area C, where the Israeli military is responsible for both the security and civil affairs of the approximately 400,000 Israeli settlers (not including East Jerusalem) and between 200,000 and 400,000 Palestinians, according to combined data from the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, United Nations agencies, and Palestinian sources. The latter are ruled under martial law; the remaining areas A and B are governed by the Palestinian Authority, but the Israeli army has ultimate sovereignty over the entire West Bank.
- The idea of annexing the West Bank once would have been considered extremist and impractical. Today, incremental annexation starting with Area C is rapidly being legitimized in Israel. Naftali Bennett, the head of the Jewish Home party, is calling for the complete annexation of Area C. In 2017, the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, passed a law to legalize settlements on land expropriated from private Palestinian owners. Netanyahu's Likud party passed a nonbinding but influential party resolution calling to annex settlement areas of the West Bank. And, in late May, a prominent member of Israel's erstwhile dovish Labor Party published a controversial article arguing for the annexation of mostly the same territory.

- If Area C becomes part of Israel, only the hollowed-out patches in between would be left over for a future Palestine. The prospect of living in state under these terms is losing support among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, too: Like Israeli Jews, just 46 percent of those Palestinians supported the two-state concept in the same December survey. Finally, two-state experts now say that, at a minimum, more than 160,000 Jewish settlers (there is no genuine consensus on the number) would have to move for a future Palestine to have basic territorial contiguity. Israel moved just 8,500 people from Gaza in 2005; from then on, the Israeli right has devoted itself to preventing another so-called expulsion.
- Activists, scholars, and pundits — especially those who have observed the territorial realities closely — have been seeking a new vision from both sides of the political divide for some years. They have mapped out paths, like alternate routes on a GPS to a destination just over the horizon, whose contours are not yet visible. In the quest for alternatives to the traditional two-state solution, many terms are being thrown around, generating mostly confusion. “One state” means little until one knows if it is a democratic state, with de jure equality of all citizens, or an apartheid state, in which one group is disenfranchised or lives under different laws. “Parallel states,” described in an intriguing 2014 book, actually means stacked-pancake states. The terms “confederation” and “federation” are used interchangeably, inaccurately, or both; they may refer to Israel and Palestine or to Israel and Jordan. To clarify the options, it’s essential to examine the core principles guiding the Israeli right and left in the name of peace.
- The shared goal of the right is Jewish Israeli control, for the sake of cultural dominance and religious fulfillment. There was once another reason, too. In 2003, then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated that “it is not in our interest to govern” the Palestinians and that “the disengagement plan is a security measure.” Today’s right has instead concluded the opposite: that Israel’s continued control is necessary for physical security as well. By contrast, the primary shared goal of the left — including Jews and Palestinians — is ending the half-century military occupation through political independence for Palestinians. Whether this happens through one state or two is a point of internal disagreement; so is the question of Palestinian refugee claims going back to 1948. But all agree on the need to end military occupation and achieve political rights. With these distinctions in mind, it becomes easier to characterize the different plans proposing alternatives to two states.
- A federation or confederation between Israel and Jordan implies Israeli control of all territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River; it is a right-wing vision for Jewish Israeli control of the land Palestinians claim as their state. The same is true of the one-state model for Israel and the West Bank, in which Palestinians would be unequal to Israelis. Plans or statements supporting annexation while denying Palestinians full citizenship and civil rights have been proposed in detail by a radical right-wing parliamentarian from the Jewish Home party, Bezalel Smotrich, who is also a deputy speaker of the Knesset. The Likud lawmaker Miki Zohar proposed similar ideas in a television interview. Even Labor’s Eitan Cabel, who advocated annexing the settlement blocs in May, proposed in an interview that Palestinians

living in those areas would not have citizenship; he later retracted that statement when his party kicked up a storm. But the incident shows how this once extreme approach is creeping into the mainstream.

- The idea of one state in which certain residents lack civil rights has troubled some mainstream Israeli political and security leaders such as former Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the late Meir Dagan, the former head of the Mossad intelligence agency, both of whom characterized steps in this direction as “apartheid.” Even some figures on the right have warned of the A-word in those scenarios, such as Moti Ohana, the lone Likud member who voted against his party’s resolution promoting annexation. President Reuven Rivlin, from Netanyahu’s Likud party, worried that Israel would look like an apartheid state if the new law to recognize settlements were applied. (The law is currently being challenged in the Supreme Court.)
- However, other than the little-read plans published by Bennett and his party member Smotrich, the right has been somewhat reticent about formal annexation programs, focusing more on political slogans. “Sovereignty!” is a popular poster seen all around West Bank settlements. For four years, an annual conference devoted to Israeli sovereignty led by settlers has attracted a range of right-wingers, including government ministers. A common theme in these circles is the assertion that “Jordan is the Palestinian state,” which is brandished as a justification for denying Palestinians national rights in the West Bank and Gaza. On my recent visit to the Jewish community of Hebron, two settlers displayed mild disagreement about whether Palestinians should have the right to vote if Israel became sovereign in the area: One preferred that they not have the right to vote, while another felt confident allowing it — convinced that most Palestinians would not exercise the right.
- It’s not even clear if Netanyahu has a vision, as he has stayed mostly silent about what should happen with the Palestinians. Yet his policies have led to the creeping de facto annexation of Area C and the deepening fragmentation of Palestinian territory and society. His occasional references to a “state-minus” hint at his approach; it is not one that can ever satisfy Palestinians. The left’s plans, motivated by the goal of Palestinian independence, include one equal state, parallel states, and a federation or confederation between Israel and the Palestinians. These ideas all acknowledge a complex reality in which developments on the ground have suffocated Palestinians’ physical space and fragmented their society but which have also created geographic and economic interdependence. Like puzzle pieces jutting into one another, the lines exist, but the pieces must come together for a coherent picture to emerge.
- Jerusalem, the proverbial microcosm, makes this clear. By the municipality’s own assessment, up to half of the Palestinian workforce of East Jerusalem works in West Jerusalem, in settlements in the east, or in other parts of Israel. Dividing the city would be a massive economic blow. Palestinians in East Jerusalem have traditionally boycotted municipal elections since 1967 as a rejection of Israel’s authority there. But the Palestinian political stigma against voting in Jerusalem is fading among younger generations. Many younger Palestinians in

Jerusalem like to hang out in the west's bars and art spaces; some send their children to bilingual schools and Hebrew University; and as many as three Palestinians have announced that they will form lists to run in October's municipal elections — whether they stay the course through the elections, or possibly merge, remains to be seen. Few on either side want to divide the city. Only around 25 percent of the public on both sides accepts the division of Jerusalem, as recorded in the December survey.

- Accordingly, the newer left-leaning peace ideas still seek the right dosage of separation, in deference to national identities. But recognizing the economic and social dangers, or the impossibility, of ripping the sides apart, they are also testing dosages of togetherness. Some plans foster physical and political integration, while others retain a structure of separation. Federation is a plan for integration. The United States and Germany are federations: unitary states with a central government, the only body that enters into foreign relations. An Israeli-Palestinian federation could have two national regions — like the bizonal/bicommunal federation concept in Cyprus — but the two peoples would sit in one legislature and share power in an executive. That's hard to imagine for two nations that have been in a bitter struggle for 70 years. Indeed, the only government shared by Greek and Turkish Cypriots lasted just three years before it collapsed in 1963. Negotiations in Cyprus that began in 1968 have failed for 50 years. The inability to agree on a new formula for sharing power in a single government has stymied any resolution.
- The idea of “parallel states” — proposed in Mathias Mossberg and Mark LeVine's 2014 book, *One Land, Two States* — allows for complete geographic integration. Anyone could live anywhere, but an Israeli and a Palestinian living one floor apart in the same building would be subject to separate laws; “stacked states” seems more appropriate than “parallel,” implying two lines that never touch. This approach raises considerable legal, ethical, and practical problems, but beyond those, neither side truly wishes to blend people and cultures in a common physical space.
- An Israeli-Palestinian confederation, by contrast, would start with the building blocks of two separate and territorially defined independent states. Promoted largely by the civil society group A Land for All, among others, the idea is that there would be two governments, two heads of state, and a border on or near the pre-1967 division, known as the Green Line. Each state would be sovereign and free to define its national character. But a confederation would diverge from the traditional two-state model by creating an agreement to share certain aspects of their sovereignty. The border would be porous, designed to facilitate rather than limit crossings. Freedom of movement — to tour, work, or study — would be the default, restricted only for individuals who pose a specific security threat.
- Today, the reverse is the norm. All people are restricted from crossing boundaries; everyone theoretically needs a permit to go somewhere. In practice, Palestinians are severely constrained in their daily life. West Bank residents need a permit to travel anywhere inside Israel, including the settlements and Jerusalem, or between Gaza and the West Bank; an airport permit is

almost unobtainable. The permit allowances are byzantine by design and are commonly denied, and checkpoints and the security wall make short distances into lengthy, tortuous trips for all Palestinians. Gazans are almost entirely trapped inside Gaza. Porous borders would release Palestinians from this suffocating constraint on their physical movement.

- Israeli Jews face few movement restrictions today. Theoretically, they need a permit to visit the small, Palestinian-run Area A, where most Jews have little desire to be. In fact, there is no real barrier other than a warning sign — and they can glide through settler-designated checkpoints on the return. But full freedom of movement offers Israeli Jews, especially religious ones, something they may not have in a traditional two-state plan: access to the many holy sites inside the West Bank, such as the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, Rachel’s Tomb near Bethlehem, and Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus — the last is almost inaccessible to Jews today. In a traditional two-state solution, these sites would be well inside Palestine, and the latter could close its border; this is one of numerous reasons Israelis, especially if they are religious, have little interest in reaching such a solution. The confederation model is predicated on open access.
- Instead of carving up Jerusalem, the city would remain united under shared sovereignty as the capital of two states. Holy places would be governed by a special regime, possibly with international support, just like in earlier two-state plans. But the delicate urban fabric of Jerusalem would remain intact, with an added Palestinian capital in the east. The border between the two states could run widely around the city, rather than through it. An umbrella municipality of Israelis and Palestinians could run east and west boroughs. Free movement and a united Jerusalem would require advanced security measures. Such measures could be grounded in the principle of strong security cooperation, based on the system set up by the Oslo Accords still in place today. At present, Israeli security figures commonly cite the ongoing cooperation with Palestinian Authority forces as the main reason there has not been more violence over the last decade. Living under occupation, Palestinians today deeply resent what they consider collaboration, or the “outsourcing” of Israel’s rule to their own security forces. But if Palestine were free under its own civilian government, coordinated security would protect the arrangement itself, serving people rather than controlling them.
- The centerpiece of the confederation approach is allowing citizens of one side to live as permanent residents on the other while voting in national elections only in their country of citizenship. Israeli settlers who absolutely must live on holy ground could stay so long as they are law-abiding residents under Palestinian sovereignty; they could participate in local elections but would only vote for national representation in Israel. This will alienate settlers who insist on Jewish sovereignty — but it extends a hand to more moderate settlers who have long resented the left-wing expectation that they must all automatically uproot their homes.
- The same provision is a creative concession to Palestinians, since it allows some refugees from 1948 back into Israel under the same terms: permanent residency, provided they are law-abiding and perhaps after Israeli security vetting. The numbers could be determined through

mutual agreement. Those residents would vote in national elections only in Palestine and, like settlers, could vote in local Israeli elections. This concept responds to one of the most intractable problems in the conflict: Palestinians insist on recognition of their right to ancestral lands, while Israelis live in mortal fear of returning Palestinians demographically destroying the Jewish state by voting the Jewish government out of office. In previous rounds of negotiations, the refugee issue has been among the greatest points of contention and remains so in public opinion surveys. Under the confederation proposal, neither side can dominate the national politics of the other, since they may only vote in the state of their national identity.

- Other forms of infrastructural cooperation are less emotional but highly pragmatic. Today, the two sides already use the same currency and buy each other's goods: In 2012, the Bank of Israel found that 81 percent of Palestinian exported goods were sold to Israel while the country sold about \$4.5 billion worth of goods to the Palestinian Authority. These numbers have only grown since. Israeli tech companies have begun hiring Palestinian programmers, quietly but successfully, providing an opportunity for Palestinians who are well-educated but unemployed. Deepening these ties through easier physical mobility and professional associations can only benefit both economies. All this can continue — again, minus Israel's Oslo-era controls over Palestinian economic life through tax collection and controls over imports and exports. A professional economic council could help manage the difficulties of integrating a weaker economy with a much stronger one. This is a serious challenge. But the alternative of a separated Palestinian state with a hard border, and little access and mobility to Israel, could also lead to economic isolation — which could exacerbate rather than de-escalate the conflict.
- Similarly, it hardly seems possible to manage natural resources and infrastructure separately; already, Gaza's waste floats onto Israel's nearby beaches, pollutes aquifers, and has forced desalination plants to shut down at times — all while Israel is now reviving its water-saving campaigns due to shortages. The traditional two-state solution would require coordination on essential environmental issues too, but the confederation model favors it in spirit and structure, facilitating both civil society and government coordination instead of making such cooperation the exception. The liaison is ultimately voluntary. In a federation, secession can lead to war. A confederation approach allows each side the legal right to leave. Legal secession can be peaceful, such as the referendum-based separation of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006 or Brexit (if it is ever implemented).
- The attempt to combine policies from the two-state solution, while drawing on one-state ideas both for pragmatic and symbolic needs, makes this approach appealing for a small but eclectic group from Israel's left and right, as well as some Palestinians and Arab citizens of Israel. Yossi Beilin, a former stalwart supporter and negotiator for a two-state solution, openly favors it, and President Rivlin has endorsed the idea, albeit without elaborating just what he means. Only the future will tell whether Israelis and Palestinians choose to live closer together or further apart. But they are unlikely to reach a peace agreement that is only one or the other.