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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Tuesday, July 3*

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- **Ultra-Orthodox leader: We'll Topple Government if Bill Passes**
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- **West Holds De-Facto Boycott of UNHRC's Anti-Israel Debate**
- **US Debating Terrorist Label for Iranian Revolutionary Guards**
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# News Excerpts

July 3, 2018

## Ha'aretz

### **Bill to Draft ultra-Orthodox Into IDF Passes First Knesset Vote**

The Knesset passed a bill Monday night that would draft ultra-Orthodox men into the Israeli army. 63 members of Knesset voted for the bill with 39 opposing. The bill passed its first reading Monday night. It needs to pass two more readings (three in total) in order to become law. At the request of chief opposition whip MK Yoel Hasson, who is a member of the opposition movement, the vote was defined as a no-confidence vote in the Knesset. Most members of the ultra-Orthodox parties waited outside the Knesset chamber before coming in to vote against the bill once they confirmed that there were enough votes for it to pass. See also, ["IDF draft bill passes first hurdle in the Knesset" \(Ynet News\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **Ultra-Orthodox leader: We'll Topple Government if Bill Passes**

The leader of an ultra-Orthodox party threatened Monday to bring down the coalition if a bill regulating mandatory military service for members of the religious community becomes law. "If the enlistment law passes three readings, we will quit the coalition," Deputy Health Minister Yaakov Litzman, who heads the United Torah Judaism party, said at the Knesset. His threat came as lawmakers were set to vote on the legislation later Monday, in the first of three readings it must pass before becoming law. Earlier Monday, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman said he would not support any changes to the current proposal. See also, ["Draft bill advanced in Knesset despite threats made by Litzman" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **Law Passed to Deduct Terrorists' Salaries from PA Tax Money**

A bill proposal was passed into law on Monday evening to deduct terrorists' salaries from roughly \$130 million in monthly tax revenues Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. In a bipartisan vote, 87 MKs supported the legislation, while 15 opposed it. Under the new law, which was sponsored by MKs Elazar Stern (Yesh Atid) and Avi Dichter (Likud), money that would otherwise go to pay stipends to roughly 35,000 families of Palestinian terrorists and their families will be automatically frozen in accordance with the Paris Protocol—without the need for a special approval from the Cabinet. See also, ["Israeli parliament passes law slashing funds to PA over 'terror payments' \(i24 News\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **West Holds De-Facto Boycott of UNHRC's Anti-Israel Debate**

Western nations held a defacto boycott of the Agenda Item 7 debate against Israel at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Monday. Only 22%, 43 nations out of the 193 UN countries who could have taken the floor, stood up to condemn Israel. France, which had initially signed up to speak, changed its mind at the last moment and was not present in the room when its name was called. The silence marked a slim sign of continued success for the Israeli and US campaign to abolish the UNHRC mandate that requires a debate on Israeli actions against the Palestinians at every council session under Agenda Item 7. All other alleged human rights abuses around the globe are dealt with under Agenda Item 4, save for Israel, which is the only country with a permanent dedicated agenda item. See also, ["The US withdrawal from the UNHRC is perfect for Xi Jinping and China" \(The Guardian\)](#)

## **US Debating Terrorist Label for Iranian Revolutionary Guards**

The United States is weighing whether to label Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist group, as part of an effort to increase the pressure on Tehran, CNN reported Monday night. Senior current and former officials familiar with the matter say the White House has been debating the issue for months but has yet to reach a consensus. According to the officials, the debate has senior cabinet officials squaring off on both sides. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is in favor of the designation, sources familiar with his thinking say, while Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats has cautioned the administration that designating the IRGC could pose dangers to US forces. See also, ["Exclusive: Trump administration debating 'terrorist' label for arm of Iran's military" \(CNN\)](#)

## **Trump Administration Aims to Drop Iran's Oil Revenue to Nothing**

The Trump administration vowed to stick with its pressure campaign against Iran on Monday, affirming its strategy to change Tehran's behavior by gutting its oil revenue and isolating the country globally. "Our goal is to increase pressure on the Iranian regime by reducing to zero its revenue on crude-oil sales," said Brian Hook, the State Department's director of policy planning, at a briefing with reporters. He also suggested, however, that there would be some leeway with other countries that import Iranian oil from avoiding immediate sanctions, once they are set to be re-imposed come November 4. "We are prepared to work with countries that are reducing their imports on a case-by-case basis, but as with our other sanctions, we are not looking to grant waivers or licenses," Hook said.

## **General: Israel Prevents Clouds from Releasing Rain over Iran**

An Iranian general on Monday accused Israel of manipulating weather to prevent rain over the Islamic republic, alleging his country was facing cloud "theft", before being contradicted by the nation's weather chief. "The changing climate in Iran is suspect," Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali, head of Iran's Civil Defense Organization told a press conference, semi-official ISNA news agency reported. "Foreign interference is suspected to have played a role in climate change," Jalali was quoted as saying, insisting results from an Iranian scientific study "confirm" the claim. "Israel and another country in the region have joint teams which work to ensure clouds entering Iranian skies are unable to release rain," he said. "On top of that, we are facing the issue of cloud and snow theft", Jalali added, citing a survey showing that above 2,200 meters all mountainous areas between Afghanistan and the Mediterranean are covered in snow, except Iran."

## **Israel Fears Iran May Target Senior Officials Abroad**

Israel's security officials are concerned that Iran might try to target senior Israeli officials while they are abroad. On Monday, Israel News Company reported that the director of the Shin Bet security services, Nadav Argaman, met last week with former Prime Minister Ehud Barak to discuss his personal security. Barak frequently holds meetings abroad, and is sometimes protected only by his personal handgun. Barak and the Shin Bet did not respond to the report. In recent months, a series of attacks targeting Iranian targets in Syria were attributed to Israel, and security officials are preparing for possible Iranian revenge. See also, ["Report: Israeli security fears Iranian attack on ex-PM Ehud Barak \(i24 News\)](#)

# The Palestinian Paradox: 70 years of Perpetuating Refugeeism

By Ben Dror Yemini, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- “The Palestinian side won by a knockout,” said Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, the IDF’s international spokesperson. Well, of course. That’s the result of the “wait and see” policy. Hamas knows it won’t defeat Israel in the battlefield. But it knew in advance that it would defeat Israel in the global public opinion. [Hamas](#) wasn’t the only one that knew that. Any sensible person knew that.
- Israel should have made the Palestinians in Gaza, including Hamas, an offer they couldn’t refuse a long time ago. I have repeated this claim, I must say, like Cato the Elder. Now, Hamas is proposing a hudna. The proposal’s precondition, senior Israeli officials responded, doesn’t meet Israel’s demands. Such foolishness. Not only is Israel failing to initiate anything, it is also rejecting a Hamas proposal. When Hamas propose something, Israel should first of all say yes, and add that the hudna must be based on the international community’s terms. Does Israel have anything to lose? No.
- But Israel, once again, is winning on the Gaza border and suffering a defeat in the global media. That’s what Hamas wanted. That’s what Hamas got. And the admission of senior Hamas official Salah Bardawil, that 50 of the Palestinians killed on May 14 were Hamas members, doesn’t help Israel in any way. We have lost this conflict—not because of Hamas, but because of Israeli foolishness.

## The only ones perpetuated as refugees

- The details of US President Donald Trump’s new peace initiative don’t matter. We already know what the Palestinian reaction will be in advance. Those who rejected Bill Clinton’s proposal, who rejected Ehud Olmert’s proposal and who turned down Barack Obama and John Kerry’s proposal will turn down Trump’s new proposal as well. The thing is there is no need to give up. In order to do some good to the Middle East, and in order to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a need to drain the conflict’s biggest swamp—the refugee problem.
- For 70 years now, the international community has been helping the Palestinians, mainly those who are called—for some reason—refugees. Tens of millions of people became refugees following the dissolution of empires, wars, conflicts and the establishment of nation states. The United Nations created the International Refugee Organization (IRO) in 1947 to deal with the refugees of World War II.
- Two years later, in late 1949, the organization’s name was changed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to deal with all of the world’s refugees. Well, not exactly all of them. Because five days after the UNHCR’s establishment, another body was created to deal with the refugees of Palestine—the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Only with them.
- Why was there a need for another body? Because the UNHCR was supposed to deal with the integration and rehabilitation of refugees. The Arab states objected. They wanted a body which

wouldn't deal with integration or rehabilitation. They wanted a body that would work to perpetuate the problem. The definition of a refugee was different and broader, the budgets were much bigger, etc. And most importantly, the UNHCR dealt with 50 million refugees—and they aren't refugees. UNRWA, on the other hand, started off with 711,000, and today the number of registered refugees is 5.3 million. Everything has been reversed.

- Since its establishment until today, from 1950 to 1918, the international community has allotted huge sums to UNRWA, which are worth today \$40-45 billion. Considering the number of refugees and the size of the families (seven births per woman) when the problem was created, we are talking about \$500,000 per family. Even if it were much less, only \$250,000, it's a huge sum.
- Considering the purchasing power in the region's countries, had the international community invested this huge capital in buying an apartment and a car and a farm for each family, a huge sum would have been left for investments in infrastructure, in industry, in welfare and in education. But 70 years of refugeeism are 70 years of perpetuating refugeeism.
- For the sake of comparison, the UNHCR, which was created five days before UNRWA, dealt with 50 million refugees, none of whom are refugees today. UNRWA, on the other hand, hit the road with 711,000 refugees and says it is dealing with 5.3 million today.
- To understand the paradox, I must add that in late 1950 the UN decided to create another body, the United Nations Korean reconstruction Agency (UNKRA), to handle the reconstruction of Korea, and mainly the refugees—1 to 3 million people who were penniless. This body operated until 1958. Its budget was \$148 million (worth about \$1.4 billion today). The money donations stopped and the "refugee problem," like all the refugee problems from the previous decades, disappeared. The transit camps in Israel, which were mainly used to take in the refugees of the Jewish Nakba, operated for several years too, and most of them were emptied out by the late 1950s. The Palestinians are the only ones perpetuated as refugees.

#### The return fantasy

- The amazing paradox is that the more the international community invested in the refugees of Palestine—and it invested in them more than it invested in any other refugee in the world—the bigger the problem became. The Arab world stubbornly refused to rehabilitate the refugees (as detailed in Einat Wilf and Adi Schwartz's book "The War for the Right of Return," which was published this week). The stubbornness was only and exclusively about the perpetuation of refugeeism.
- The Center for Near East Policy Research keeps exposing what is taking place behind the walls of UNRWA schools, and especially the brainwashing concerning the "right of return." There is no such right. Tens of millions of people became refugees those years. None of them received a "right of return." There were occasionally claims from expelled and uprooted people in Europe, who demanded the restitution of property and a return.
- The European Court of Human Rights discussed the most important claim in this area. Refugees from the Turkish side of Greece, following the Turkish invasion in 1974, demanded a restitution of property. The situation has changed, the court ruled, and dismissed the claim.
- There were other claims. Jews claimed property that was expropriated from them in Egypt. In practice, no one received compensation. But the refugees from Palestine, who were Arabs at the time and later became Palestinians, keep fostering just one fantasy: A return.

## **Dissolving UNRWA**

- **To somehow solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a need for a different route based on the following principle: No more perpetuation of refugeeism, but rather a rehabilitation of refugees. There is no need to terminate UNRWA right away. And anyway, most of those registered by UNRWA are no longer in refugee camps or don't even exist (only 177,000 of the 450,000 people registered in Lebanon are actually in Lebanon). Many others are Jordanian citizens or residents of the Palestinian Authority, and others have moved to Europe with hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria. The remaining ones should be handled by the UNHCR.**
- **Trump's peace plan will fail just like all previous plans, but the American administration can change direction regarding the refugees. This is a historic opportunity, because some Arab states have changed their stance. And dissolving UNRWA, which was impossible in the past, is becoming more possible today. It's good for the Palestinians, to wean them off their fantasies, it's good for the Middle East, it's good for Israel and it will only raise the chances of peace.**

**SUMMARY: To somehow solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a need for a different route based on the following principle: No more perpetuation of refugeeism, but rather a rehabilitation of refugees. There is no need to terminate UNRWA right away. And anyway, most of those registered by UNRWA are no longer in refugee camps or don't even exist (only 177,000 of the 450,000 people registered in Lebanon are actually in Lebanon). Many others are Jordanian citizens or residents of the Palestinian Authority, and others have moved to Europe with hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria. The remaining ones should be handled by the UNHCR.**

## **Abbas Is Key Obstacle to Gaza Rehabilitation, in Eyes of Israeli Security Establishment**

By Amos Harel, columnist at Ha'aretz

- The Israeli security establishment sees opposition from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as the main obstacle to taking steps toward improving the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Despite the tough rhetoric by Israeli leaders, the past few weeks have seen a greater readiness among them to advance projects that would rehabilitate Gaza's infrastructure.
- But Abbas' vehement opposition, due to the ongoing tension between the PA and Hamas, is making it difficult to move anything forward. Qatar, meanwhile, disclosed on Sunday that there have been indirect contacts between Israel and Hamas aimed at preventing an escalation of violence in the Strip and facilitating reconstruction.
- In their official statements, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman continue to demand the return of the two Israeli civilians and the remains of the two soldiers being held in Gaza before they will approve extensive humanitarian measures. In practice, however, the two have been giving the professional echelon more discretion to advance projects that could help ease tensions with Hamas along the border. Among other things, progress has been reported in contacts with Cyprus for the construction of a harbor that could receive and forward goods to the Gaza Strip.
- Since Hamas began the demonstrations along the border fence with Gaza on March 30, more than 130 Palestinians have been killed by Israel Defense Forces fire, hundreds of rockets and mortars have been fired into Israel, and over the past two months Israeli fields and forests near the Gaza border have been set ablaze by incendiary kites and balloons launched from the Strip.
- The international community and the Trump administration, which sees Gaza's reconstruction as part of the peace initiative it plans to present, also support moves to upgrade Gaza's infrastructure. But the major stumbling block is the difficulties raised by the PA. Israel needs the PA's cooperation to make various improvements to Gaza's infrastructure, such as operating an additional electrical power line, yet it must also maintain coordination with the PA in other areas, primarily maintaining security in the West Bank. The energy problem in Gaza is now described as the most urgent issue.
- The international community also needs the PA to send money to the Gaza Strip. The rigid financial rules imposed by the United States, even more so under the Trump administration, make it virtually impossible to work with banks directly or indirectly connected to the Hamas regime. Therefore, aid money has to go through banks in the Palestinian territories (only recently the Arab Bank was required to pay more than \$1 billion in a compromise agreement following a U.S. court case in which it was charged with handling terrorist funds).
- Abbas was released last month from a Ramallah hospital after a series of hospitalizations. Despite official PA denials, it appears the health of the 83-year-old Palestinian leader is starting to deteriorate. He has been working fewer hours now and his relations with some of the senior officials in his circle have become quite tense. Those close to Abbas get the impression he is

busy trying to fashion his historical legacy (as someone who did not yield on Palestinian national principles) in preparation for the end of his tenure. At the same time, he is looking for ways to protect his family members, some of whom have gotten rich during his time in power and are liable to face public criticism after he retires.

- In conversations over the past few weeks, Abbas is said to have expressed little interest in the Gaza Strip's distress. He remains very hostile to Hamas, which he accuses of sabotaging the internal Palestinian reconciliation process and of the assassination attempt on PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah during a visit to Gaza in March. As a result, the PA chairman has not responded to the feelers that have been put out by Israel, the United States and Nickolay Mladenov, the UN secretary-general's envoy to the Middle East, about advancing the rehabilitation of the Strip.
- The PA leadership in Ramallah is concerned, however, about one possibility: West Bank residents identifying with the situation in Gaza, encouraged by Hamas. At the end of June, PA policemen in Ramallah dispersed a demonstration of solidarity with Gazans. However, Ramallah officials believe that if the crisis in the Gaza Strip continues, it could ultimately undermine the West Bank's relative stability.
- Muhammad Amadi, the Qatari special envoy to Gaza who has been working in recent years as an unofficial mediator between Hamas, the PA and Israel, confirmed Sunday in an interview with the Chinese Xinhua news agency that there are indirect contacts between Israel and Hamas about the Gaza situation. Amadi said Israel and Hamas are conducting indirect negotiations, with the knowledge of the United States, to come to an arrangement in Gaza, and that the talks are dealing with infrastructure projects that will improve the electricity, water and sewerage in the Strip and provide jobs. He said the talks have yet to result in any agreements.
- Amadi's remarks support the assessment that alongside the exchange of aggressive messages between Israel and Hamas, their attempts to reach an indirect political settlement continue. Although Hamas has intensified its responses to the air strikes in the Gaza Strip, firing barrages of rockets and mortars at the Gaza border communities, it has thus far refrained from longer-range fire, at Ashdod or Be'er Sheva, for example. This behavior may also reflect a certain restraint being imposed by Egypt.
- Hamas has won some relief from the siege on Gaza following Egypt's decision to open the Rafah crossing to both people and goods since Ramadan. So far, more than 1,400 trucks from Egypt have passed through Rafah. Because the security control over the crossing is limited, Israel doesn't know for sure whether Hamas was smuggling weapons in those trucks, as it has in the past.
- Abbas, meanwhile, has reportedly met with former PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for the first time after a long break in relations. The Al-Sharq Al-Awsat newspaper reported Monday that the two discussed the possibility of establishing a Palestinian unity government, in agreement with Hamas, to be headed by Fayyad.
- Abbas would need Fayyad's experience and status if the international community decides to send additional funds to the territories. The meeting appears to be an attempt by Abbas to deal with the American peace initiative. The PA is very suspicious of the Trump administration's intentions and is boycotting its emissaries to the region, maintaining that the administration is totally biased in Israel's favor.

**SUMMARY:** In conversations over the past few weeks, Abbas is said to have expressed little interest in the Gaza Strip's distress. He remains very hostile to Hamas, which he accuses of sabotaging the internal Palestinian reconciliation process and of the assassination attempt on PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah during a visit to Gaza in March. As a result, the PA chairman has not responded to the feelers that have been put out by Israel, the United States and Nickolay Mladenov, the UN secretary-general's envoy to the Middle East, about advancing the rehabilitation of the Strip. The PA leadership in Ramallah is concerned, however, about one possibility: West Bank residents identifying with the situation in Gaza, encouraged by Hamas. At the end of June, PA policemen in Ramallah dispersed a demonstration of solidarity with Gazans. However, Ramallah officials believe that if the crisis in the Gaza Strip continues, it could ultimately undermine the West Bank's relative stability.