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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

August 10, 2018

Ynet News

Report: Ceasefire Reached Between Israel and Hamas

Israel and Hamas have reportedly reached a ceasefire under Egyptian mediation, which went into effect at 10:45pm Thursday, according to Al Jazeera. A source in Gaza confirmed the ceasefire to Ynet, while two Israeli officials denied a truce had been reached, in line with Israel's policy of ambiguity. An Israeli official said Hamas has been asking for a ceasefire since Thursday morning, but the IDF continued attacking significant targets. Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV channel reported late Thursday that a ceasefire has taken hold "on the basis of mutual calm." It said the deal was mediated by Egypt and other regional players. A senior Hamas official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media, said the deal would formally go into effect at midnight. See also, "[Israel, Hamas agree truce to end Gaza flare-up: Palestinian officials](#)" (Reuters)

Times of Israel

Security Restrictions Eased in South as Tense Calm Sets In

Most Israelis in the south of the country were shifting back to their daily routines on Friday as violence from the Gaza Strip subsided and a tense calm set in, following a two-day bout of fighting that saw the heaviest rocket fire and retaliatory Israeli strikes since the 2014 Gaza war. The Israeli army lifted some security restrictions on Friday, with the Home Front Command announcing that all previously ordered precautions in the town of Netivot and communities in the central Negev region had been lifted. The military also said that the train service between Ashkelon and the Gaza border town of Sderot would resume. See also, "[Gaza, Israel calm but tense as truce keeps lid on violence](#)" (i24 News)

Ha'aretz

U.S. Condemns Hamas, 'Supports Israel's Right to Self-Defense'

The Trump administration announced on Thursday that it backs Israel's right to defend itself against rocket launches from Gaza, and that Hamas is to blame for the security escalation in the region. "We strongly condemn the launching of missile attacks into Israel and call for an end to this destructive violence," a State Department official said. The same official added that "we fully support Israel's right to self-defense and to take action to prevent such provocations." IDF said Thursday that it struck 150 targets in Gaza in retaliation to a massive barrage of rockets that was fired at Israel since Wednesday evening. See also, "[US condemns Hamas rocket attacks, supports Israel's right to defend itself](#)" (Times of Israel)

Jerusalem Post

Israeli Minister Regev Calls to Assassinate Hamas Leaders

Israel should assassinate Hamas leaders, Culture and Sport Minister Miri Regev said Thursday, in response to a day of recurrent rocket launches from Gaza. "The equation should be very simple: If our children live in fear, then the leadership of Hamas should live in fear," Regev said. "We must go back to the policy of targeted assassinations of leaders of this murderous terrorist group." Regev spoke with mayors of towns in the South, and commended them for their strength. "They told me about the inconceivable reality of children who cannot enjoy camp and social activities like the rest of the children in Israel," she said. "This is not what their summer vacation should look like."

Liberman Demanded a Gaza Operation, but Remained Isolated

A charged security cabinet meeting was held yesterday in Tel Aviv, after Binyamin Netanyahu postponed it by two hours in the hope that the Egyptians would succeed in producing something that would serve to end the current round. Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman found himself in a distinct minority in the meeting: He was the only one who demanded to launch a large-scale operation in the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu was opposed. The IDF also didn't recommend it. The chief of staff and other officials presented the range of options and costs, and it could be understood from this presentation that even a large-scale round would not significantly improve Israel's situation, given the working assumption that there is no organization to replace Hamas at this stage. Most of the ministers joined Netanyahu's position. Liberman found himself isolated and it was decided to shelve the large-scale operation at this stage and to continue to pound Hamas according to the scale of responses presented by the IDF, which will gradually escalate as Hamas responds. See also, "[Liberman: 'We will do whatever is necessary' to stop Gaza rocket barrages](#)" (TOI)

Ynet News

Israel: Colombia Recognizing 'Palestine', Is a 'Slap in the Face'

Israel has slammed what it describes as "a slap in the face by a friendly nation" after Colombia's outgoing President Juan Manuel Santos announced on Wednesday a previously-taken decision to recognize "the State of Palestine." Santos's successor, President Ivan Duque, took office on Tuesday and was informed a few days ago of the decision, which was detailed in an August 3 letter to the Palestinian representative in Colombia, the foreign ministry said. "This is a slap in the face by a friendly country, which goes against the close and quality relationship, especially between the states and the leaders," said a statement released by the Israeli Embassy in Colombia. See also, "[Israel 'surprised' by reports of Columbia recognition of Palestinian state](#)" (i24 News)

JTA

Birtheright Co-Founder: Don't Use a Free Trip to Criticize Israel

Charles Bronfman, Birtheright Israel co-founder and billionaire philanthropist said that young Jews are free to criticize Israel — but not while enjoying a free trip. "If people want to call Israel names and say bad things about the country, they certainly have the right to free speech. But they don't have the right to do it on our nickel," he said in an interview published yesterday. His comments come after at least two groups of American Jews visiting Israel on the 10-day trip walked off the tour to join left-wing groups on visits to Palestinians. The walk-offs reportedly were encouraged by IfNotNow, a left-wing American-Jewish group. The young Jews who walked off the trip and some others who remain on them are critical of what they say is Birtheright's failure to deal with Israel's occupation of the West Bank. Some have complained that maps handed out to participants do not draw a proper distinction between Israel and the West Bank. Bronfman said in his interview with Haaretz that participants on Birtheright can extend their trip and join any kind of group they want or travel on their own to Palestinian areas. "If they want to go to the West Bank or Gaza, they are certainly free to go," he told Haaretz. "What is not fair is making a big tzimmes while the trip is on. Frankly, I just don't think that is fair to their fellow participants." See also, "[Birtheright Co-founder Says Walk-out Protesters Don't Have Right to Criticize Israel 'On Our Nickel'](#)" (Ha'aretz)

US Game Plan on Iran Written in Tel Aviv, Claim Israeli Insiders

By Ben Caspit columnist at AI Monitor

- An anonymous high-level Israel intel source was quoted in the Israeli media Aug. 7 as saying that the renewed US sanctions imposed this week on Iran “will bring Iran to its knees.” The source also argued that chances are good that the country will be forced to return to the negotiating table with the six world powers that cut the nuclear agreement and agree to a modification and to limitations on its continued expansion in the Middle East.
- These words are overly optimistic and exaggerate the accepted opinion that prevails in the Israeli security system. But the quote does reflect the high-to-euphoric spirits in Israel following the US administration’s policy changes toward Iran, a country Israel views as a true existential threat. Words that were once uttered behind closed doors or spoken hesitantly have become accepted facts in today’s Israel. In a radio interview Aug. 7, Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan verified this assessment and the Israeli hope that the ayatollah regime will indeed fall in the near future.
- According to close associates of the prime minister, everything that is happening now on the American-Iranian-Israeli front was planned in Israel, “marketed” to President Donald Trump by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and is now being implemented to “fix it or nix it,” the slogan coined by Netanyahu regarding the nuclear agreement. According to Israeli diplomatic sources, Trump is following Netanyahu’s plan meticulously.
- “First of all, he abandoned the agreement,” a high-level political source told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity. “Afterward he imposed the sanctions in two stages, so that the pressures on Tehran would continue to increase. Then he announced that there’s a possibility for negotiations and agreed to maintaining contacts with Iran in order to change the agreement. And that is exactly what Netanyahu wanted to happen.”
- When he emerged from his last meeting with Trump, Netanyahu said, “We have made important achievements for Israeli security.” This referred to Trump’s intention to walk away from the nuclear agreement with Iran and impose sanctions that would continue to worsen until “Iran falls to its knees,” as senior Israeli intelligence figures said this week. Trump’s performance in this area could surpass Netanyahu’s wildest dreams.
- The first signal to Tel Aviv that Washington was going to align itself fully with Israeli policy was Trump’s decision to change senior Cabinet members and other top officials. He exchanged those with the more pragmatic, restrained opinions for a new, tougher faction. When John Bolton became national security adviser and Mike Pompeo received the State Department, Israel knew that Trump was going to carry out his promise to Netanyahu. Communications between the two capitals became tighter than ever. The transfer of the Iranian nuclear archives from Tehran to Tel Aviv in a brilliant Mossad operation was the diamond in the crown and helped encourage Trump to make his final decision to abandon the nuclear agreement.
- There were those in Israel who compared the nuclear archive theft to the intelligence that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon conveyed in 2002 to President George Bush proving that PLO Chairman

Yasser Arafat was behind the second intifada and rearmament efforts of Palestinian terror groups. That document, which was delivered to the Americans by the Israel Defense Forces intel attaché in Washington, caused Bush to overhaul his policy entirely. Arafat was discredited in Washington and became a “bad guy” until his death.

- A high-level intelligence source spoke to AI-Monitor several days ago and confirmed on condition of anonymity that there is a basis for cautious Israeli optimism: “Truly crazy things are going on now in Iran; the effects of the American sanctions are far more sweeping and rapid than we first predicted. This is causing real hardship to the Iranians, and they have started to cut back on their funding for terror.” The source confirmed reports that Iran significantly cut back on its assistance to Hezbollah in recent weeks in light of the worsening situation of the Iranian economy. The sanctions are being imposed gradually, all according to plan. There are currently sanctions in specific spheres of commerce, but in November the sanctions will hit the exportation of petroleum products and natural gas. “By November,” another senior intelligence source told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity, “the Iranians will understand the depth of the pit into which they have fallen. There is a chance that they will change their policy but if not, the regime is likely to start to wobble.
- The only thing that sours Israel’s premature celebrations is Trump’s startling but not atypical announcement that he will speak with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting next month in New York. “If Trump meets with him, that could slow down or ruin the implementation of the plan,” a senior security source told AI-Monitor, also on condition of anonymity.
- Tel Aviv has also convinced the Americans of the theory, backed up by intelligence, that a battle is going on in Iran between the pragmatic bloc led by Rouhani and the extremist one in which Quds Force commander Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani influences Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The pragmatic bloc wants to stop investing in terror and exporting the revolution and concentrate on saving the Iranian economy. The extremists want to continue spreading terror throughout the Middle East and keep up its struggle against Israel.
- “It could be that Trump is aware of this internal struggle and is trying to enlarge the abyss that separates Rouhani from Khamenei,” a senior Israeli political source told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity. “It could be that at the meeting, he’ll make all kinds of far-reaching promises to Rouhani in order to encourage and strengthen him in his difficult battle with the Revolutionary Guard.” One way or the other, Tel Aviv believes salvation is coming in November.

SUMMARY: A high-level intelligence source spoke to AI-Monitor several days ago and confirmed on condition of anonymity that there is a basis for cautious Israeli optimism: “Truly crazy things are going on now in Iran; the effects of the American sanctions are far more sweeping and rapid than we first predicted. This is causing real hardship to the Iranians, and they have started to cut back on their funding for terror.” The source confirmed reports that Iran significantly cut back on its assistance to Hezbollah in recent weeks in light of the worsening situation of the Iranian economy. The sanctions are being imposed gradually, all according to plan. There are currently sanctions in specific spheres of commerce, but in November the sanctions will hit the exportation of petroleum products and natural gas.

Tzipi Livni to Ha'aretz: Next Israeli Election Will Be Referendum on the Declaration of Independence

By Judy Maltz, columnist at Ha'aretz

- Tzipi Livni couldn't have picked a more divisive moment in Israeli history to step into her new role as leader of the opposition. As the tens of thousands of protesters who took to the streets of Tel Aviv last Saturday attested, rarely has an issue driven such a deep wedge in Israeli society as the new Jewish nation-state law.
- But Livni plans to use the situation to her advantage. In one of her first moves as opposition leader, she gathered together representatives of 40 civil society organizations active in a wide range of causes and invited them to join her new "emergency coalition," as she terms it, to fight this law, which she believes jeopardizes Israel's democratic character. "These are organizations that disagree on many things," she told Haaretz this week. "But when it comes to the nature of the State of Israel, what I discovered is that they are able to rise above their differences and unite. These are organizations that don't usually work together, but on this issue they are willing to cooperate."
- At the meeting, Livni indicated that a new era had begun for her as well. From now on, she said, she would no longer use the term "centrist" to describe the Zionist Union – the Knesset list she co-heads. In other words, as opposition leader she would not accept further attempts by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his cohorts to besmirch and delegitimize the left.
- Livni, who turned 60 last month, is arguably the most prominent woman in Israeli politics. In 2009, she came very close to becoming the country's second female prime minister (after Golda Meir), when the party she headed won a plurality of seats in the Knesset. She failed to form a government, though, leaving the field open to Likud and its leader Netanyahu, who has served as prime minister ever since.
- An outspoken advocate of the two-state solution, Livni has led numerous rounds of negotiations with the Palestinians on behalf of the Israeli government. Her cabinet posts have included stints as foreign minister, housing minister, immigrant absorption minister and, twice, justice minister. And in more than two decades of government service, she has moved increasingly toward the left.
- The daughter of prominent right-wing Zionists (her parents were leaders of the pre-state Irgun underground organization, and her father later served as a Knesset member for the right-wing Herut party), she initially found a natural home in Likud – where, ironically, Netanyahu was one of her early mentors. In his first spell as prime minister, from 1996 to 1999, he put Livni in charge of the government privatization program.
- Livni broke with Likud in 2005 and, together with then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and future Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, helped found the centrist Kadima party. After Kadima disintegrated, she started a new party, Hatnuah, which focused on promoting peace. It joined with the Labor Party before the 2015 national election to form the Zionist Union alliance. After Isaac Herzog left the Knesset earlier this month to assume his new position as chairman of the Jewish Agency, Livni was appointed opposition leader by Avi Gabbay, Labor's new chairman. (Although he

heads the party, Gabbay does not have a seat in the Knesset and, therefore, cannot serve as opposition leader.)

Rock bottom

- Livni steps into her new role at a time when Israel-Diaspora relations have also hit rock bottom: Progressive Jews – who account for the vast majority outside of Israel – have grown increasingly anxious about the direction the country is taking, both religiously and politically. “I believe that being the nation-state of the Jewish people means representing World Jewry,” she tells Haaretz. “I know that many Jews living abroad today – especially young people – feel very alienated from the State of Israel because of certain trends. What I am setting out to do is to reverse these trends. In that way, I am serving them as well.”
- Asked about the recent detention and interrogation of anti-occupation Jewish activists at Israel’s borders, Livni says: “More than anything else, this is idiotic. In this day and age, does somebody really believe that if you block people from entering the country, you’ll prevent the world from knowing what’s happening here? Besides, I don’t believe we have anything to hide.”
- A lawyer by training, Livni grew up in Tel Aviv in a home she describes as “traditional.” “My parents separated milk and meat, they drove on Shabbat and watched TV on Shabbat, but my mother wouldn’t cook on Shabbat,” she recounts. “That was because she had taken a vow that if my brother came out of the Yom Kippur War alive, she would never cook on Shabbat again.” To indicate the important role religion played in her parents’ lives, she relays that when she first brought home her future husband, Naftali Spitzer, her father had two questions for him. “First, he wanted to know his name, and then he wanted to know if he kept kosher.”
- A pescatarian for many years, Livni says that, in accordance with the rules of kashrut, she does not eat shellfish. She fasts on Yom Kippur and avoids bread on Passover, but does little beyond that in terms of Jewish observance. Although she doesn’t frequent synagogues often, she says, when she does – like on Yom Kippur or whenever tradition mandates that she recite the Yizkor service for her deceased parents – she attends an Orthodox synagogue.

Jewish rebellion

- Livni had her first exposure to non-Orthodox Judaism when the younger of her two sons was in grade school and befriended a child who had just moved to Israel from the United States. “That boy, his name was Jacob, persuaded my son to join Noam – a youth movement run by the Conservative movement,” she recounts. “I had never heard of it before. Suddenly my son would come home all excited about the Jewish holidays and the new songs he had learned, and I remember thinking to myself at the time that this was really nice, and maybe he liked it so much because it wasn’t being forced on him.”
- Now, she says – and probably for the same reason – many of her sons’ friends are choosing to wed outside of the Chief Rabbinate. “It’s their way of rebelling against something they feel is being forced on them,” says Livni. Livni herself officiated at one such ceremony in 2014, in which two men were wed. “If you would have asked me 10 years ago, I couldn’t have imagined doing something like this,” she says. “But now I feel the time has come.” She won’t go so far as to say the institution of the Rabbinate needs to be eradicated, but believes its monopoly over many aspects of Jewish life in Israel must be broken. “We need to start being more open,” she says.

- **As an Israeli born to two Jewish parents, she never had her Judaism called into question. So it was only after she assumed her position as immigrant absorption minister 15 years ago that she began to comprehend how powerful the Rabbinate was or the impact it had on the lives of many Israeli citizens – particularly Russian-speaking immigrants not recognized as Jewish in the country. “There’s one story I’ll never forget,” she says. “I had gone to meet with a group of combat soldiers who were going through a conversion course offered by the army. They were all immigrants from the former Soviet Union. I asked one of them why he was doing this. He told me he was converting because he wanted to make sure that if he was killed in battle, he would be buried together with his friends, and that if he survived, he would be able to get married like them. And this really broke my heart. Since then, I’ve felt very strongly that something has to be changed in the system.”**
- **Livni says she understands why Diaspora Jews were so angry and offended by Netanyahu’s decision to call off the Western Wall deal – which was meant to provide Reform and Conservative Jews with full recognition at a new and upgraded prayer plaza at the Jewish holy site. But she doesn’t think most Israeli Jews get it.**
- **“These streams of Judaism are just not as popular in Israel, and that’s why I encourage Diaspora Jews, whenever they get the opportunity, to speak with Israelis, to try to make them aware of why this is important to them,” she says. “I think that most Israelis – not the Orthodox, obviously – would support the idea that Jews should be able to express their faith however they wish.”**
- **Netanyahu has insisted he had no choice but to withdraw from the Western Wall deal, because otherwise the ultra-Orthodox parties would have collapsed his government. Livni doesn’t buy it. “These are all excuses! He could have had a government with the center-left parties and no problems at all in this regard,” she says. “But he chose to fire us and to form a government instead with the ultra-Orthodox. He said they were his natural partners. Well, if they are his natural partners, then his beliefs must be close to theirs.”**

Campaign slogan

- **Moshe Gafni, a veteran ultra-Orthodox lawmaker, dropped a political bombshell about a year ago when he said his party, United Torah Judaism, would be willing to join a left-wing government if that government were willing to break ties with the Reform movement. Would Livni, for the sake of peace, agree to such an ultimatum? “I think this type of demand is unacceptable,” she says. “I don’t understand why somebody would want us to cut our ties with our brothers and sisters who are not living in Israel.” She points out that she lost an opportunity to serve as prime minister because she was unwilling to accept certain demands from the ultra-Orthodox parties.**
- **As far as Livni is concerned, the upcoming elections, whenever they are, will be a referendum on Israel’s Declaration of Independence. Asked if she has come up with a campaign slogan yet, she pulls a scroll of the 1948 declaration from her desk and proceeds to unroll it. “This is the gist of it all,” she says. “Who is for the Declaration of Independence and who is against it? If you’re for it, you’re with us. And I believe that the vast majority of Israelis are for it.”**
- **Not long after he was appointed head of the Labor Party, Gabbay ruled out the possibility of forming a governing coalition with any Arab parties. Livni doesn’t want to rule it out entirely, but under her partnership terms it’s not a likely scenario. “I represent Zionism as I believe it is represented in the Declaration of Independence,” she says. “Israel is the nation-state of the**

Jewish people, but there must be equality for all citizens. Some Arabs in Israel, as well as some of their representatives in parliament, are not willing to accept Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. As leader of the opposition, I will continue to fight for their rights to live as citizens with equal rights, but I cannot identify with their demand to fulfill their national aspirations as Palestinians in Israel.”

- That is why she won't be attending the second demonstration against the nation-state law, scheduled for this Saturday night and organized by the country's Arab leadership (she did attend last Saturday night's in support of the Druze community). “I will stand with them on equality, but I can't stand with them on the issue of national identity,” she says.

SUMMARY: As far as Livni is concerned, the upcoming elections, whenever they are, will be a referendum on Israel's Declaration of Independence. Asked if she has come up with a campaign slogan yet, she pulls a scroll of the 1948 declaration from her desk and proceeds to unroll it. “This is the gist of it all,” she says. “Who is for the Declaration of Independence and who is against it? If you're for it, you're with us. And I believe that the vast majority of Israelis are for it.” Not long after he was appointed head of the Labor Party, Gabbay ruled out the possibility of forming a governing coalition with any Arab parties. Livni doesn't want to rule it out entirely, but under her partnership terms it's not a likely scenario. “I represent Zionism as I believe it is represented in the Declaration of Independence,” she says. “Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, but there must be equality for all citizens. Some Arabs in Israel, as well as some of their representatives in parliament, are not willing to accept Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. As leader of the opposition, I will continue to fight for their rights to live as citizens with equal rights, but I cannot identify with their demand to fulfill their national aspirations as Palestinians in Israel.”