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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Friday, October 5*

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- **Merkel: Khan Al Ahmar Demolition is an Israeli Decision**
- **Police to Grill Netanyahu for 12th Time in Graft Probes**
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# News Excerpts

October 2, 2018

## Ha'aretz

### **PM to Merkel: Hamas Attacks Because Abbas Suffocates Gaza**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told German Chancellor Angela Merkel during a joint press conference in Jerusalem on Thursday that Israel's response to an attack by Hamas would be "very harsh." "In the last year Abu Mazen [Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas] has made the situation in Gaza more difficult by choking off the flow of funds from the Palestinian Authority to Gaza," Netanyahu said. "As a result of this chokehold, pressures have been created there and as a result of the pressures, from time to time Hamas attacks Israel at a relatively low intensity but the chokehold is tightening," Netanyahu continued. See also, ["Netanyahu to Abbas: 'stop strangling Gaza'" \(Ynet News\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **IDF to Send Reinforcements to Gaza Border Amid High Tensions**

IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot decided Thursday to send reinforcements to the Southern Command amid the high tensions on the Gaza border. As the security situation on the Gaza border continues to deteriorate, Eisenkot held a situation assessment with the IDF's top generals as well as senior Shin Bet officials, at the end of which it was decided on a wide-scale deployment of additional troops in the south over the next few days. The IDF said in a statement that the decision was made "to continue the determined policy to thwart terror attacks and prevent infiltrations into Israel in the border fence area of the Gaza Strip. The IDF is prepared and ready for a variety of scenarios and considers the Hamas terror organization responsible for everything that happens in and from the Gaza Strip."

## Reuters

### **U.S. General Slams Russia's Deployment of S-300 Missiles**

A senior U.S. general on Thursday sharply criticized Russia's deployment of the S-300 surface-to-air missile system in Syria, saying it was a needless escalation and a knee-jerk response to last month's downing of a Russian military aircraft there. Army General Joseph Votel, who oversees U.S. forces in the Middle East, said the deployment also appeared to be an effort by Moscow to help shield "nefarious activities" by Iranian and Syrian forces in the country. U.S. President Donald Trump has ordered bombing of Syria two times since taking office last year in response to what he says was Syria's use of chemical weapons in that country's civil war. See also, ["Top US general: Russia's S-300 deployment in Syria a 'needless escalation'" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Merkel: Khan Al Ahmar Demolition is an Israeli Decision**

German Chancellor Angela Merkel refrained from publicly criticizing Israel over its pending demolition of the illegal West Bank Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, during her two-day trip to Israel that ended Thursday. "This is an Israeli decision," she said at a morning event at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, during which the University of Haifa conferred upon her an honorary doctorate. She also held a question and answer period with Haifa University students, during which one of them pressed her on an Army Radio report that she had threatened to cancel her trip if Israel razed the encampment of tents and shacks before her arrival. See also, ["Khan al-Ahmar's residents appeal to Merkel to halt expulsion" \(Ynet News\)](#)

## **Police To Grill Netanyahu for 12th Time in Graft Probes**

Police investigators were set to question Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the 12th time on Friday in a series of burgeoning corruption investigations. Netanyahu will be questioned at his official residence in an interview likely to touch on recordings and information provided by his former adviser Nir Hefetz, who has been recruited as a state witness. The questioning is set to focus on two separate graft cases the prime minister is suspected in, known as cases 1000 and 2000, according to Hebrew media reports, in which he is suspected of receiving illicit gifts and engaging in illegal quid pro quos. It's not clear if police will also ask Netanyahu about a third affair known as Case 4000, in which police suspect he may have traded favors for favorable media coverage. See also, "[Police to Interrogate Netanyahu in Corruption Probes on Friday](#)" ([Ha'aretz](#))

### Ynet News

## **Jerusalem To Remove UNRWA from City**

Jerusalem's mayor Nir Barkat said Thursday he plans to remove a UN agency for Palestinian refugees from the city, accusing the body of operating illegally and promoting incitement against Israel. Barkat said schools, clinics and sports centers, among other services operated by UNRWA in east Jerusalem, will be transferred to Israeli authorities. The municipality did not provide an exact timeline but it said schools serving 1,800 students would be closed by the end of the current school year. "The US decision has created a rare opportunity to replace UNRWA's services with services of the Jerusalem Municipality. We are putting an end to the lie of the 'Palestinian refugee problem' " Barkat said in a statement, claiming the schools and clinics were illegal and operate without an Israeli license. See also, "[Outgoing Jerusalem mayor lays out plan to oust UNRWA from city](#)" ([TOI](#))

### Jerusalem Post

## **Israeli Official 'Invites' UK Jews to Make Aliyah if Corbyn Elected**

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Office MK Michael Oren (Kulanu) has called for Israel to prepare "the warmest invitation" for British Jews to make aliyah, including various state-backed incentives, should UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn win a general election and become prime minister. Oren described Corbyn as being extremely hostile to Israel, and said that his election would create an even worse atmosphere in the UK for Britain's 270,000 Jews. Should Corbyn be elected, said Oren, Israel should reach out to the UK Jewish community and make aliyah to the Jewish state as easy as possible, while drawing up a detailed plan to prepare for any mass immigration from Britain. A poll conducted for the UK's Jewish Chronicle last month showed that 40 percent of British Jews would consider emigrating should Corbyn become prime minister.

### Ha'aretz

## **American Visa-holding Student to Be Deported for Backing BDS**

The Tel Aviv administrative appeals court rejected Thursday the appeal of 22-year-old Lara Alqasem, who received a student visa for her master's degree at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, but was denied entry to Ben-Gurion Airport on suspicion of "boycott activity." Alqasem has received a "stay of execution," and will appeal the ruling again on Friday. The judge, Dotan Bergman, who delayed the deportation yesterday and demanded that the Ministry of Strategic Affairs explain its request, ruled that the state's decision is "reasonable" and "could not justify intervention."."

## **What Is Netanyahu Hiding in the Archive From 1948?**

By Ofer Aderet, columnist at Ha'aretz

- **What is it that's frightened the defense establishment so badly that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has decided to extend the period of confidentiality for archival materials from 1948 for another 20 years? What happened then, during the War of Independence, that still needs to be concealed from the public and to prevent its release, even after 70 years? Will it really cause irreparable harm to national security and Israel's foreign relations if the public is able to examine documents about the massacre at Deir Yassin, for example? Or maybe it's actually the opposite? Is a strong and stable democracy such as Israel incapable of handling the publication of a few yellowing documents, even at the price of the embarrassment it will cause to some institution or person who is almost certainly not among the living?**
- **The decision to extend the period of confidentiality on the materials held in the archives of the Israel Defense Forces, Shin Bet security service, Mossad and the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, nuclear research centers and the Israel Institute for Biological Research raises numerous questions. While it is possible to understand why the government wants to protect the details concerning its nuclear programs, for example, it is much harder to explain why documents about battles, incidents, operations and the events of 1948 – those involving members of the pre-state undergrounds Haganah, Palmach, Etzel and Lehi, groups that have not existed for decades – might possibly endanger anyone.**
- **The claims of the defense establishment, in which the release of the material could well expose sources of intelligence information and the methods used by these organizations to this day, just doesn't hold water. Even if these claims are true, that in a small part of these materials there is information which for various reasons is still classified as sensitive even in the 21st century, this is no reason to prevent the release of all documents created in 1948.**
- **The default should be the opposite: To release and publish as much as possible, and to censor and erase as little as possible. Or in other words, only those sections in specific documents that are problematic to release for now. For example, a document concerning the Shin Bet's operations in the temporary transit camps around the time of the founding of the state – a real issue that is still being hidden from the broader public – can have the names of Shin Bet officers or their sources redacted, but the rest of the document must be permitted to be published. Even if exceptional security information is hiding in the minutes of the trial conducted for the Border Police officers who carried out the Kafr Qasem massacre in 1956, it is possible to remove this line so as to allow the release of the rest of the document – and so on and so forth.**
- **Still, it is important to note in this context, as anyone can clearly see, that Israel is a special case. The archival material involved deals partly with the ongoing conflict whose end is nowhere on the horizon. For this reason, the rules about the documents concerning these matters is different from those documenting World War II, which are held in archives in Germany, Britain and Russia and for which no justification exists to prevent their publication.**
- **Nonetheless, even given the present situation, some form of balance is necessary between the public's right to know and protecting the country's critical interests. It is important to note here too that it is unacceptable to hide superfluous interests under this terminology: political,**

personal or public relations interests in one form or another. Critical interests mean exactly that: those whose publication could endanger national security here and now or critically damage relations with other countries. The vast majority of the archival documents contain no information that remotely meets this definition.

- It is not a matter of left and right. A government headed by Likud should also be able to respect this liberal stance. In fact, this was the formula used by none other than the last chief archivist, Dr. Yaacov Lozowick, whom no one can suspect of being anxious to expose documents that could jeopardize the security of the state. “A democratic society must allow free discussion of its wars,” he has said in the past in this context. “There are no general secrets. The State of Israel is strong, Israeli society is strong and there is no reason not to allow its citizens to freely research the documentation of its distant wars.”
- In the last few years there have been a number of incidents that made headlines in which more than once the State Archive (either independently or at the instruction of higher-ups) made prohibited, ridiculous or superfluous use of the claim of “state security” in order to continue to censor decades-old documents. There is no shortage of examples. For example, the state officially still censors the Riftin report of 1948, which documents the executions by Haganah members of foreign citizens and Arabs. In fact, most of the report has already been published in books, on the internet and, most recently, in an article in Haaretz. Planet earth continued to revolve on its axis afterwards, too.
- Another document from 1967, censored by the State Archives until recently, dealt with an incident in which the IDF shot in the direction of Syrian farmers and shepherds who were crossing the border fence. Last year the document was exposed to the public. Did anything change in Israeli-Syrian relations in the wake of the publication of the document?
- In another incident the State Archive censored a security-related discussion that took place on June 2, 1967, in which the commander of the air force, Mordechai Hod, said that the IDF had “the exact numbers” of the deployment of the Egyptian air force. Did someone in the archives think that even after 50 years this information would endanger state security? In fact, in this case it was finally none other than the Israel Defense Forces and Defense Establishment Archives that publicized the information that the State Archive censored – and, in doing so, proved that there was no reason to censor that item. The bottom line: The decision to extend the period of censorship on many archive documents is regrettable and will undermine historic and journalistic research, for the most part, for no good reason.

**SUMMARY:** The decision to extend the period of confidentiality on the materials held in the archives of the Israel Defense Forces, Shin Bet security service, Mossad and the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, nuclear research centers and the Israel Institute for Biological Research raises numerous questions. While it is possible to understand why the government wants to protect the details concerning its nuclear programs, for example, it is much harder to explain why documents about battles, incidents, operations and the events of 1948 – those involving members of the pre-state undergrounds Haganah, Palmach, Etzel and Lehi, groups that have not existed for decades – might possibly endanger anyone.

## **Absent Terror, a Gazan Sea Port Would Open the Strip for Business**

By Rear Admiral (ret.) Oded Gur-Lavie, former commander of Israel's submarine flotilla

- The challenges facing the Gaza Strip are multiple and growing, both on land and at sea. They impact upon the wellbeing of its inhabitants. These challenges keep the Hamas-ruled territory isolated and underdeveloped, with chronic overcrowding and a lack of a functioning economy. But the formation of a new Palestinian political entity, which encompasses both Gaza and a part of the adjacent northern Sinai Peninsula, could go a long way to solving these issues.
- From a sea-based perspective, Gaza faces numerous problems. These include constant security friction between Gazan boats and the Israeli Navy in nearby Israeli territorial waters, overcrowded fishing spaces, and the lack of an international sea port. These challenges place Gaza's development and stability in jeopardy. A New State Solution would open the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to the wider world. A shipping port would facilitate large-scale trade, revitalize the Gazan economy, and help bring stability.
- A wider Gaza—Sinai political entity could lead to the construction of a port large enough for a state, with suitable sea access, and a nearby industrial zone to support the port's daily activities. A large new port is under construction in the southern Israeli city of Ashdod at this time, meaning that the precedent for such a large-scale project in the region is already being set. The sea port model being followed by Israelis can be replicated for Gaza.
- The new port could be built along the Sinai coastline, though it would have to be done in such a way that it would avoid causing major ecological damage to the local marine eco-system. The port must not block the natural sand movements that occur underwater in the Mediterranean Sea, from the Nile Delta northwards towards the Israeli coastline. The exact location for the port along the Sinai Peninsula should be to the subject of further research to reduce and avoid potential ecological damage. It would seem that further south-west along the Sinai peninsula would be the best location for it.
- It is clear that if the new Palestinian state is run by a terrorist entity, like Gaza is today, a port, even a distant one, can create and pose serious security threats to Israel. Hence, for such a project—a port—to be truly viable, the new Palestinian entity must be run by a non-terrorist government. Such a government cannot be guided by a fundamentalist anti-Israel ideology. In such a scenario, international investment can begin pouring into Gaza, and a port can create vital access to the outside world.
- The waters off the Sinai Peninsula are not very active at the moment, so there is room to build the new port. Gaza's fishermen could operate off the Sinai coastline as well. This would address another problem that Gaza currently faces - overfishing - which has led to the amount of fish being drastically reduced in the coastal waters off Gaza.
- Gazan fishermen must make a living, but the lack of any limits to their activities, and Israel's need to restrict their movements to a limited area, to avoid security risks, has produced an unhealthy effect on the local marine eco-system. Israel has placed naval restrictions around

Gaza for security reasons. Hamas's doctrine involves organizing terrorist, sea-based attacks (in the form of bomb-laden boats, for example), using civilian fishing vessels as a cover.

- This pattern follows the classic terrorist modus operandi of launching operations from among civilians. The proximity of Gaza to Israel's territorial waters, as well as southern Israeli coastal cities, and offshore Israeli gas drilling rigs, means that a constant friction exists between Gaza and Israel in the Mediterranean Sea.
- All of these problems could be significantly reduced by widening Gaza's sea area southwards, and stretching it out to include the Mediterranean waters off the north Sinai coastline. Such a solution could be part of the New State Solution encompassing Gaza and the designated territory in the northern Sinai.
- The new Palestinian state and Israel could agree to move fishing boats away from the Israeli border. By doing so, both the security risk and the daily friction between Israel and Gaza would decrease substantially by way of the new state. This would also create larger fishing areas, benefiting both Gaza's fishing industry, and the marine eco-system. Gazans could begin setting up fish farms, for example. Israel could end the need to constantly change the fishing zone for Gazans in accordance with the latest security evaluations.
- Additionally, for the Palestinians, the New State Solution opens the door to offshore gas exploration. Although it would take at least two decades for suitable infrastructure to develop, the potential for Gazans to have their own energy source would be highly beneficial for Gaza's economy, and pave the path for heightened regional cooperation between Gaza, Israel, and the wider Arab world, which could cooperate in developing such a project.
- Ultimately, the creation of such a state can lead to a new reality, which is something no one has truly tried to accomplish in the region since the 1979 Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel. With the passage of several decades from that time to this, I believe the time may be ripe for new ideas that are both bold and pragmatic.

**SUMMARY:** A wider Gaza—Sinai political entity could lead to the construction of a port large enough for a state, with suitable sea access, and a nearby industrial zone to support the port's daily activities. A large new port is under construction in the southern Israeli city of Ashdod at this time, meaning that the precedent for such a large-scale project in the region is already being set. The sea port model being followed by Israelis can be replicated for Gaza. The new port could be built along the Sinai coastline, though it would have to be done in such a way that it would avoid causing major ecological damage to the local marine eco-system. The waters off the Sinai Peninsula are not very active at the moment, so there is room to build the new port. Gaza's fishermen could operate off the Sinai coastline as well. This would address another problem that Gaza currently faces - overfishing - which has led to the amount of fish being drastically reduced in the coastal waters off Gaza.