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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

May 10, 2019

Reuters

U.S. Crafting Surrender Plan, Not Peace Deal: Pal' Foreign Minister

The United States seems to be crafting a plan for a Palestinian surrender to Israel instead of a peace deal, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki told a meeting at the United Nations attended by U.S. Middle East peace negotiator Jason Greenblatt. Greenblatt and senior White House adviser Jared Kushner have spent two years developing a peace proposal that they hope will provide a framework for renewed talks between the Israelis and Palestinians. The plan is expected to be unveiled in June. "We cannot afford not to engage with any peace efforts, but the U.S. administration efforts cannot be characterized, nor can qualify, as peace efforts, unfortunately," al-Maliki told the informal meeting of members of the U.N. Security Council on Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory. See also, ["GREENBLATT: BIASED UNSC IGNORES HAMAS ROCKETS, BLASTS ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS" \(JPost\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Jason Greenblatt says No Peace Plan Leak, All Speculations

The White House has denied earlier reports by Israel's leading newspaper that the "deal of the century" has been leaked. In a tweet, which referenced a translation and report by The Jerusalem Post about the leak, US Special Envoy Jason Greenblatt wrote, "FYI: our plan hasn't leaked. Reports like this are inaccurate & just speculation. The article itself even says it may be a hoax. Once again, speculation & bad sources don't do anything to advance peace. If you haven't heard it from our team don't trust it." See also, ["Greenblatt reiterates rejection of reports on US peace plan" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

Times of Israel

Israel to Reopen Gaza Fishing Zone as Calm Returns to Border

Israel was set to begin easing restrictions on the Gaza Strip Friday, a week after deadly clashes broke out in the border region, pumping up fears of all-out war. Israel is set to reopen a 12 nautical mile fishing zone off the coast of the Strip, after it was closed of amid heavy fighting over the weekend, authorities said. Israel also opened crossings into and out of the Strip at midnight Thursday, after they had been closed for the Memorial Day and Independence Day holiday, as is standard. COGAT, the Defense Ministry body that liaises with the Palestinians, said in a statement late Thursday that the fishing zone expansion is "part of the civilian policy for prevention of deterioration in humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip and is consistent with the policy of distinguishing between terrorists and the unimplicated population." See also, ["Region braces for Friday escalation in Gaza" \(j24 News\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Egyptian Delegation in Gaza for Talks in Effort to Maintain Calm

An Egyptian security delegation arrived Thursday in the Gaza for a round of meetings with Hamas officials and representatives of other Palestinian factions, amid ongoing efforts to ensure a calm between Israel and the Strip after a violent escalation that ended late Sunday with a cease-fire agreement. The Egyptian officials, led by head of the Egyptian intelligence's Palestine desk Gen. Ahmed Abdel Khalek, are scheduled to meet later on Thursday with Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar, as well as other senior Hamas and Islamic Jihad officials. See also, ["Egyptian security officials arrive in Gaza to preserve ceasefire" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Thousands of Arab Israelis March to Commemorate Nakba

Thousands of Arab citizens of Israel marked Nakba Day Thursday in a march on the empty Palestinian village of Khubbayza in northern Israel. This is the 22nd time a "march of return" has taken place. Although the official Nakba Day is on May 15, the march is held annually on Israel's Independence Day, each time on a different Palestinian village demolished in 1948. "Nakba," the Arabic word for disaster, is the Palestinian term used to describe Israel's founding and used to describe the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians leading up to and following the 1948 War of Independence. One of the event's organizers, Muhammad Kial, said at the march that one of the challenges facing the Palestinian people is the attempts to undermine the national Palestinian issue, including the right of return. See also, ["In Israel, members of Arab minority embrace Palestinian identity" \(Ynet News\)](#)

i24 News

15,000 Israelis Gather at WB Army Base to Celebrate Independence

The West Bank was closed to Palestinian traffic on Thursday, during Independence Day celebrations, as is normally the case during Israeli holidays. But many Israelis took to the roads to cross into the territory in order to celebrate, with as many as 15,000 attending a special ceremony on the Samaria army base. The event, which is in its 9th year, was the largest single show put on by the Israel Defense Force, according to news outlet Arutz 7. Kids and adults alike enjoyed some good old patriotic fun - and more modern activities, with the celebrations featuring a virtual reality complex. "There are celebrators from all over the country - religious, secular and haredi - the settlement is the IDF and the IDF is the settlement," Yossi Dagan, head of Samaria Regional Council, told Arutz 7.

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US Threatens Iran with 'Swift, Decisive' Action as Tensions Escalate

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday threatened a "swift and decisive" US response to any attack by Iran, in the latest of a series of escalating statements and actions. "The regime in Tehran should understand that any attacks by them or their proxies of any identity against US interests or citizens will be answered with a swift and decisive US response," Pompeo said in a statement. "Our restraint to this point should not be mistaken by Iran for a lack of resolve," he said. The United States has already announced the deployment of an aircraft carrier strike group and nuclear-capable bombers to the region, saying it had information of plans for Iranian-backed attacks. The moves have frightened some European allies as well as President Trump's Democratic rivals, who fear the administration is pushing for war. See also, ["Pompeo: 'We do not seek war' with Iran but U.S. will defend itself" \(UPI\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

EU Rejects Any Ultimatums After Iran's Move on Nuclear Deal

European countries said on Thursday they wanted to preserve Iran's nuclear deal and rejected "ultimatums" from Tehran, after Iran scaled back curbs on its nuclear program and threatened moves that might breach the pact. Iran announced steps on Wednesday to ease curbs on its nuclear program, in response to new U.S. sanctions imposed after Washington abandoned the deal a year ago. Tehran's initial moves do not appear to violate the accord yet, but President Hassan Rouhani said that unless world powers protect Iran's economy from U.S. sanctions within 60 days, Iran would start enriching uranium beyond permitted limits. "We reject any ultimatums and we will assess Iran's compliance on the basis performance," read a statement issued by the European Union.

Ilhan Omar's Ignorance and Bigotry on Gaza Rockets

By Alan Dershowitz, Harvard law professor

- All decent people should be outraged at the terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip that fired 698 rockets at Israeli civilians – killing four, injuring 234 and traumatizing thousands of innocent children. Imagine what other countries, including the United States, would do if lethal rockets targeted their civilians.
- Yet, Israel has responded with restraint. To be sure, 30 Palestinians were killed and 154 injured by Israeli efforts to stop the rocket rampage. Many of these were terrorists, but some were civilians who were put in harm's way by the terrorists.
- These deaths and injuries were caused by the tactic employed by Hamas and Islamic in Jihad: they deliberately place their rocket launchers in densely populated areas – near schools, hospitals and mosques – in a deliberate effort to maximize Arab civilian casualties. This has been called “the dead baby” or “CNN” strategy. The goal is to have CNN and other media show the children and other civilians that Israeli counter-measures have inadvertently killed, while trying to stop the terrorist rockets from killing Israeli children and other civilians.
- Tragically, this strategy works, because with the media, “if it bleeds, it leads.” The visual media love to show dead and injured children, without explaining that they are actually encouraging such casualties by playing into terrorist's hands. So, too, is US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar encouraging the firing of rockets by Hamas and Islamic Jihad by blaming the Israeli victims for what she calls the “cycle of violence,” instead of blaming those groups for initiating terrorist violence against innocent Israeli civilians.
- In a tweet following the rocket barrage, Omar justifies the double war crimes committed by terrorists who target Israeli civilians while using Palestinian civilians as human shields. She asks rhetorically, how many “rockets must be fired, and little kids must be killed until the endless cycle of violence ends?” This implies that these war crimes are justified by what she calls the “occupation and humanitarian crisis in Gaza.”
- Does Omar not realize that Israel ended its occupation of Gaza in 2005 when it removed every soldier and settler from that area? Gaza could have become the Singapore of the Mediterranean, with its port and location. The Israelis left behind greenhouses and other facilities. Europe and Qatar poured money into the Gaza Strip.
- But Hamas – which forcefully took over the area from the Palestinian Authority – decided to turn it instead into a large scale rocket launcher. Instead of using its newly acquired resources to provide humanitarian benefits to its residents, it used them to build terrorist rockets and tunnels that targeted Israeli civilians. This forced Israelis to take counter-measures to protect its citizens. To use the “occupation” – there is no longer any occupation – as a justification for why “rockets must be fired” is to show both ignorance and bigotry.
- Nor is Omar alone in blaming Israel for the rocket attacks on its civilians. The ADC (American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee) issued a statement condemning Israel for “targeting and killing Palestinian civilians, including children and infants.” Irresponsibly, it never once mentioned the firing of 698 rockets by the rulers of Gaza that target Israeli civilians, nor did it

ever mention the sad reality that Hamas and Islamic Jihad deliberately use “Palestinian civilians, including children and infants” as human shields in order to increase the number of inadvertent Palestinian casualties.

- The conflict in Gaza will only get worse if terrorism is encouraged by the lies of commission and omission told by Omar, ACD and other supporters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. All decent people must try to discourage the targeting of civilians by terrorist rockets and tunnels. A good beginning would be to tell the truth.
- I write these words from Israel, which is now commemorating the many soldiers who have fallen over its years of fighting against those who would destroy the nation state of the Jewish people. It is also celebrating its 71st year of independence. No nation has contributed so much to humankind in so short a period of time. No nation faced with threats compared to those faced by Israel has ever had a better record of human rights, compliance with the rule of law or concern with avoiding civilian casualties.
- The world should join Israeli in celebrating its 71st year of statehood. The world should also recognize that if Israel’s enemies stopped attacking its citizens, there would be peace – but if Israel stopped defending its citizens, there would be genocide.

SUMMARY: In a tweet following the rocket barrage, Omar justifies the double war crimes committed by terrorists who target Israeli civilians while using Palestinian civilians as human shields. She asks rhetorically, how many “rockets must be fired, and little kids must be killed until the endless cycle of violence ends?” This implies that these war crimes are justified by what she calls the “occupation and humanitarian crisis in Gaza.” Does Omar not realize that Israel ended its occupation of Gaza in 2005 when it removed every soldier and settler from that area? Gaza could have become the Singapore of the Mediterranean, with its port and location. The Israelis left behind greenhouses and other facilities. Europe and Qatar poured money into the Gaza Strip. But Hamas – which forcefully took over the area from the Palestinian Authority – decided to turn it instead into a large scale rocket launcher. Instead of using its newly acquired resources to provide humanitarian benefits to its residents, it used them to build terrorist rockets and tunnels that targeted Israeli civilians. This forced Israelis to take counter-measures to protect its citizens. To use the “occupation” – there is no longer any occupation – as a justification for why “rockets must be fired” is to show both ignorance and bigotry.

How the War Between America and Iran Will Start

By Warren Getler, editor-at-large for Bloomberg

- There are growing signs that there could be escalation at the edge – provocative attacks by pro-Iranian Shia forces operating in the Wild West of Iraq. How will America handle this form of escalation with Iran? Will a direct, premeditated attack on U.S. troops by Iranian proxies in Iraq and Syria draw the United States into a conflict at the core: a major, all-out U.S. war against Iran?
- It's becoming more conceivable by the day. Indeed, there's potentially a lot more than just good old-fashioned "gunboat diplomacy" and deterrence-posturing going on when it comes to recent, very loud and very visible moves by the Trump administration, which this week cited intelligence pointing to a threat to U.S. forces from Iranian proxies.
- National Security Advisor John Bolton raised the alarm Sunday and announced the rapid deployment of both a U.S. carrier strike group and a bomber task force to the region. "The United States is not seeking war with the Iranian regime, but we are fully prepared to respond to any attack, whether by proxy, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or regular Iranian forces," he stated. And Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made an unannounced trip to Iraq Tuesday, the day after declaring: "There's escalation that may be taking place, and so we're taking all the appropriate actions, both from a security perspective, as well as [to ensure]...the president has a wide range of options in the event that something should actually take place."
- Here's what behind war drums: The U.S. is muscularly tightening the screws with effective oil sanctions against Tehran, and, if Iran's oil lifeline is all but cut off amid an already atrophying economy, the regime could strike back: with a first strike at scattered U.S. forces on the ground in Iran-dominated Iraq. Were it to transpire, make no mistake, this would be a very big war, one that could rapidly escalate into a conflict that would unfold in a much more violent and costly way than the two Gulf Wars involving the United States and Iraq from previous decades.
- Iran, with a population of some 80 million, has a very large military (including an estimated 550,000 active personnel), a growing armory of increasingly accurate land-based ballistic and cruise missiles, plus a scrappy navy that includes a contingent of hard-to-detect "midget" submarines. Today the nation's geopolitical sphere, indeed, its military reach, extends from Tehran, through Baghdad, into Damascus and terminates in Beirut: a highly strategic corridor all the way to the Mediterranean. This strategic "crescent," or land-bridge, is something that the radical Iranian leadership has coveted for decades and has now achieved, via both boots on the ground and influence-by-other-means: influence that reaches deep into such remote spots as Yemen, Venezuela and North Korea.
- And just this last weekend, Iran's proxy in the Gaza Strip, Islamic Jihad, in coordination with Hamas, unleashed a targeted barrage of more than 600 rockets on Israel, in an effort to keep Israel's military focused on this threat from one direction while more significant preparatory operations to the east, in Syria and Iraq, were underway by Tehran's proxies there.

- Under Putin, Russia has notably shown itself to be interested in reconstituting the geography of the former Soviet Union. In turn, Moscow has condoned the pursuit by the authoritarian Tehran regime of Iran's own "historic" and, indeed, expansive sphere of influence. Russia, to be sure, has played at best an inconsistent role in urging restraint by its allies in Tehran, particularly when it comes to Israel's heightened concerns of an encroaching Iranian missile threat.
- The U.S. Congress, focused on what could well become all-engrossing fact-finding hearings on alleged misdeeds by President Donald Trump post-Mueller Report, must pause and turn its gaze to the real and immediate danger of escalation at the edge. Complacency about "over there," now that the last ISIS enclave has been wiped off the map by U.S.-supported forces, is misplaced. The regional chessboard is now very much U.S. v Iran, and the first major moves in that square-off already are in motion.
- In the past - despite Iranian proxies being responsible for seeding Iraqi battlefields and villages with IEDs that killed hundreds of U.S. military personnel during the Iraq War - the United States has largely avoided any direct "kinetic" conflict with Iran or its operatives in the field. At this critical juncture, America's elected representatives in both chambers will need to soberly consider the nation's carefully worded 1973 War Powers Act.
- A landmark piece of legislation rarely enforced, it strives to balance the power placed in Congress to declare war with the need for the Commander and Chief to have utmost flexibility in meeting the national security exigencies of the United States in confronting any real or imminent military conflict – conflicts that could have long and significant impact on the nation as a whole.
- The War Powers Act, becoming law despite a veto by then-President Richard Nixon, provides that the U.S. president can send American troops into conflict overseas only by declaration of war by Congress, "statutory authorization" or in the event of a "national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces." The recent designation by the Trump administration of the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization theoretically gives the White House some legalistic air-cover to attack those IRGC units in Iraq and Syria without Congressional approval, or a declaration of war in the event of suspected or real hostile activities threatening U.S. or allied forces in the area.
- Here's the current equation, and it would be unsurprising to start seeing media reports of U.S. ground forces being reinforced in Iraq, following recent comments by President Trump about his desire to keep America's eyes on Iran in Iraq: Iran, feeling intense pressure from U.S.-imposed oil and economic sanctions, wants the U.S. out of its way in Iraq and Syria and will use plausible-deniability proxy militias to move history in its direction and to deter further attempts at strangulation-by-sanction; Russia is giving a yellow light to Tehran, or perhaps even a veiled green light, when it comes to Iran's pressing its agenda on the regional battlefield, all the way up to Iran's embedded positions along the Golan border with Israel.
- The U.S. president, with his stark anti-Iran views and policies, is supported by anti-Iran hawks, namely Bolton and Pompeo. Until recently, former Secretary of Defense and highly-decorated Marine General Jim Mattis was a voice of caution on aggressive moves toward Iran, but that voice, following his resignation, is no longer heard in the Trump White House. The same could be said about Trump's former NSC Advisor, H.R. McMaster.

- Israel is increasingly on edge as Iran becomes entrenched in Syria with advanced missile capability, and this on the heels of Tehran's decade-long policy of supplying Hezbollah forces in Lebanon with tens of thousands of missiles aimed at Israel. The hardline Netanyahu government, recently re-elected, has made it explicit: it will not countenance Iran's military presence in Syria. Rocket bombardment from Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip - meant to terrorize those Israelis living within range - seriously heightens the Israel v. Iran cross-border tensions.
- The question then becomes: Will America, preoccupied with pregnant questions surrounding both Russian interference in the 2016 election, and possible obstruction of justice by President Trump, be tested by opportunistic moves by Iranian proxies in Iraq and Syria in the near future? There's a good possibility of that coming to pass. At the least, the current security environment in the region has become, as analysts at the Center for Strategic and International Studies here in Washington note, "increasingly fragile and dangerous."
- The United States, traditionally slow to anger, must prepare for a potentially dire "trip wire" event, one aimed at American troops in Iraq and Syria, and at the hands of Shia militias controlled by Tehran. If that were to happen, at time when America has become exceedingly inwardly focused, the stakes will be very high. A more dramatic move by Tehran, such as blocking the strategic Straits of Hormuz to oil traffic, could also transpire...and then all bets are off.
- With a president under siege at home (not unlike Nixon during Watergate and Vietnam) will Congress have the calm wisdom and unencumbered focus to deal with escalation at the edge? Will it duly exercise the checks-and-balances powers enshrined in the Constitution? Recent votes on the National Emergency border wall and the Yemen conflagration reveal that a number of Republicans in the Senate are willing to stand up with a loud "No." When it comes to a major confrontation with Iran and its proxies, the stakes will be far higher. As a nation, Americans collectively pull together at vital moments when American lives and treasure are at stake. No foreign adversary should doubt American resolve in responding to threats abroad, even during times of domestic uncertainty.

SUMMARY: The U.S. president, with his stark anti-Iran views and policies, is supported by anti-Iran hawks, namely Bolton and Pompeo. Until recently, former Secretary of Defense and highly-decorated Marine General Jim Mattis was a voice of caution on aggressive moves toward Iran, but that voice, following his resignation, is no longer heard in the Trump White House. The same could be said about Trump's former NSC Advisor, H.R. McMaster. Israel is increasingly on edge as Iran becomes entrenched in Syria with advanced missile capability, and this on the heels of Tehran's decade-long policy of supplying Hezbollah forces in Lebanon with tens of thousands of missiles aimed at Israel. The hardline Netanyahu government, recently re-elected, has made it explicit: it will not countenance Iran's military presence in Syria. Rocket bombardment from Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip - meant to terrorize those Israelis living within range - seriously heightens the Israel v. Iran cross-border tensions. The question then becomes: Will America, preoccupied with pregnant questions surrounding both Russian interference in the 2016 election, and possible obstruction of justice by President Trump, be tested by opportunistic moves by Iranian proxies in Iraq and Syria in the near future?