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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, May 2

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News Excerpts

May 2, 2019

Ynet News

Holocaust Remembrance Day Commences

President Rivlin and PM Netanyahu delivered speeches at the central event for Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day at Yad Vashem Wednesday evening. The ceremony began with the lowering of the national flag to half-mast. During the ceremony, six Holocaust survivors — Bela Eisenman, Shaul Lobovich, Fani Ben Ami, Menachem Haberman, Sara Shapiro and Yehuda Maimon — lit a flame in memory of the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators in World War II. A film about the survivors life stories was shown during the event as well. The ceremony included the reading of psalms by Chief Rabbi Dovid Lau; the Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef will say the Kaddish prayer. See also, [*“Israel Marks Holocaust Remembrance Day Amid Rising Wave of Anti-Semitism Worldwide” \(TIME\)*](#)

I24 News

Palestinians Prevented from Attending Joint Memorial Ceremony

Israeli authorities will not allow Palestinians travel from the West Bank to Tel Aviv to attend a joint Israeli-Palestinian ceremony on the eve of Memorial Day, Israeli media reported on Wednesday evening. 181 Palestinians were planning on attending the ceremony organized by the Israeli-Palestinians Bereaved Families for Peace and Combatants for Peace on May 7th. The decision was apparently taken directly with the approval of the defense ministry, according to sources. The portfolio is currently overseen by incumbent PM Netanyahu - although no official confirmation had been mad. See also, [*“Netanyahu Bars All Palestinian Participants From Attending Joint Memorial Day Ceremony” \(Ha’aretz\)*](#)

Times of Israel

2 Rockets Fired into Israel from Gaza After IAF Strikes Hamas Targets

Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip launched at least two rockets into southern Israel early Thursday, the military said. The projectiles fell in an open area, and no injuries were reported. The rocket fire came hours after Israeli aircraft bombed a Hamas base in the northern Gaza Strip around 3:30 a.m. Thursday in retaliation for a wave of balloon-borne incendiary devices that were launched into Israel from the Strip the day before, which sparked at least two fires. “Earlier today, explosive and arson balloons were launched from the Gaza Strip,” the army said. “In response, overnight, an IDF fighter jet and an IDF aircraft struck a number of terror targets in a Hamas military compound in the northern Gaza Strip.” See also, [*“Rockets Fired at Southern Israel; Military Strikes Hamas Targets in Gaza” \(Ha’aretz\)*](#)

Times of Israel

US Envoy Slams Rabbis for ‘vile’ Remarks Supporting Nazi Views

US Envoy to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt on Wednesday slammed rabbis from a West Bank religious academy for making “vile” comments denigrating Arabs, defending Adolf Hitler’s worldview, and openly promoting Jewish supremacy. In a series of undated recordings published by Channel 13 news on Monday, Rabbi Eliezer Kashtiel, the head of the Bnei David pre-military academy in the settlement of Eli, can be heard calling for the enslavement of the “stupid and violent” non-Jews due to their genetic inferiority. In another clip from the Bnei David Yeshiva, Rabbi Giora Redler can be heard praising Hitler’s ideology during a lesson about the Holocaust. See also, [*“Rabbis say ‘Hitler was right, pluralism the true Holocaust’” \(Jerusalem Post\)*](#)

Jerusalem Post

New Legislation in Congress Criticizes Military Assistance to Israel

New legislation in Congress is seeking to “promote human rights for Palestinian children living under Israeli military occupation,” and require that “United States funds do not support military detention, interrogation, abuse or ill-treatment of Palestinian children and for other purposes.” Congresswoman Betty McCollum, a Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party Representative (DFL) of Minnesota, sponsored the legislation. In a press release, she said that “Israel’s system of military juvenile detention is state-sponsored child abuse designed to intimidate and terrorize Palestinian children and their families.” Rep. McCollum cited the NGO B’Tselem in her press release, saying that the organization “repeatedly documented that children are subject to abuse and, in some cases, torture.” See also, [“Anti-Israel legislation submitted to US Congress” \(Arutz 7\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

UNSC to Informally Meet on WB Settlements Ahead of Trump Plan

The United Nations Security Council is set to hold an informal meeting on West Bank settlements on May 9, in advance of the anticipated rollout of US President Donald Trump’s peace plan, possibly as early as June. The UNSC last held such a meeting in 2016, under a mechanism known as the Arria-Formula, that allows for a gathering of the council upon the request of a member state. No formal action can be taken at such a meeting. Indonesian Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani, whose country has taken over the UNSC presidency for the month of May announced the meeting a press conference in New York late Wednesday. “We are thinking of having an Arria-Formula on the issue for Palestine, particularly focusing on the issue of settlements. That will happen on May 9,” Djani said.

Ha’aretz

Former Israeli Reveals, I Guarded Israel's First Nuclear Device

A former Israeli is claiming that during the Six Day War, he commanded a secret base in the center of the country where a nuclear core was stored that could have been used in a nuclear weapon. In an interview appearing on the website of the Woodrow Wilson Center, Elie Geisler, who was a trained radiation inspector, tells Prof. Avner Cohen that he had been assigned to guard the device for the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission. He also told Cohen that he feared there could be armed internal Israeli conflict over control of nuclear power. Geisler, who is now a behavioral sciences professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology, served in a secret unit whose soldiers were assigned to the Nuclear Research Center in Dimona. He was a nuclear radiation inspector, a job he continued to fill as a civilian. See also, [“THE ISRAELI NUCLEAR DRAMA OF MAY 1967: A PERSONAL TESTIMONY” \(Wilson Center\)](#)

Ha’aretz

Amazon Is Coming to Israel, and Upending the Local Market

The long-awaited arrival of Amazon in Israel appeared to have come on Tuesday as the e-commerce giant invited Israeli vendors to sell products directly to local shoppers through the site. The move by itself wasn’t dramatic but it caps months of signals from Amazon that it plans to establish a local presence in Israel. While some retail executives and stock market analysts discounted the significance of the move, others said it was the first step in a wider rollout in Israel, which would include a local logistics center and warehouse. In a Hebrew-language email, Amazon invited its Israeli vendors to become part of a local delivery program in Israel, including a Hebrew-language site.

Are Trump, Netanyahu Planning to 'Buy Off' the Palestinians?

By Ben Caspit, columnist at AI Monitor

- **After many years of crying wolf — so much so that it has become a ritual — the wolf may, indeed, arrive. Warnings of the imminent collapse of the Palestinian Authority (PA) go back to the beginning of the PA's existence in 1993. The threats have gone up and down over the years, but they have always emerged as futile. Every time Israel freezes the PA's monies, or fines the PA in a one-sided gesture, or tries to economically strangle the PA, the senior PA members emphatically announce that they will simply return the keys and close down the business. In the past, this was avoided at the very last minute. In recent years, even the natural tension that once accompanied these crises has disappeared. No one really took the threats of the elderly PA leader, President Mahmoud Abbas, seriously. But now, for the first time, the threats seem genuine.**
- **A host of mitigating factors has disappeared; checks and balances have collapsed. Both sides cry "help me," but there is no one to come to the rescue. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is trapped in the most right-wing coalition that has ever existed, and is thus held hostage by the extremists. President Abbas is dispirited, sick, at the twilight of his tenure and striving for a dramatic way to leave his mark. The world leaders who usually know how to push the two sides into each other's arms at the right moment are tired of the game. Special circumstances will be needed to avert a free fall.**
- **Once upon a time, Netanyahu operated on behalf of Israeli strategic interests that viewed the survival and functioning of the PA as an important security need. Today, this interest plays second fiddle to Netanyahu's even more existential need: his own political and personal survival, which depends on his hard-line right-wing partners. These partners hold the keys that will enable him to evade trial (an earlier AI-Monitor article addressed this issue at length). Netanyahu needs his partners to propose some sort of law that would offer him immunity. Bezalel Smotrich, a dominant Knesset member from the United Right party, feels that Israel would benefit from the downfall of the PA and from the chaos that would follow.**
- **Netanyahu is thus dancing to the tune of the most dangerous of the right-wing hawks. And only these hawks can satisfy his strategic needs: the option to remain in his post despite an indictment, or receive parliamentary immunity from an indictment, or both. Until now, Netanyahu was the "responsible adult" who pulled the wagon from the mud at the moment of truth, via machinations in the Cabinet. Netanyahu would make lots of noise, freezing the tax monies that Israel collects for the PA, then would release those funds at the right moment. The freeze would make front-page news, while the thaw would appear in small letters in the back pages. Netanyahu excelled at eating his cake and having it, too.**
- **But the current situation is different. It is not about freezing funds but about Israel's one-sided offsetting of the funds that the PA pays the families of terrorists and murderers. This is based on a law that the Knesset passed in July 2018 by a large majority. The right-wing coalition passed it with much fanfare but also had the support of many opposition members. There is no doubt that this law is justified and that Israel should not have to accept the transfer of PA funds to those who murder Israelis, including civilians, women and children. The problem is, justice**

is relative in the Middle East and “doing the right thing” is not always the wise course of action. Deducting monies from the PA may well cause the PA’s downfall and ruin, leading the Israelis to miss the good old days as they frantically try to return the genie to the bottle.

- **Members of Israel’s security apparatus view this process with great worry. The heads of the various security branches are well aware of the high level and quality of the security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians; this decisively contributes to the relative security quiet that exists in Israel and the West Bank. In the current political atmosphere, after another strong victory of the right in the elections, high-level personages in the Israel Defense Forces, the army intelligence branch, the Shin Bet and Mossad are conspicuously silent. There is nothing they can do; they know that no Palestinian leader or any future Palestinian leader could ever change the national Palestinian narrative that views past, present and future Palestinian assailants as martyrs who struggle for their nation’s freedom. Over the years, and even though this totally negates all existing humanitarian principles and values, Israel has learned to tacitly accept the situation — until now. No more. Two trains are on a collision course and no one knows how to stop it. As this article is being written, a European emergency forum is convening in Brussels in an attempt to square the circle and reformulate the PA support of convicted prisoners in order to mollify Israel. Its chances of success are modest.**
- **According to some Israeli sources, however, there is a certain amount of hope, even in the current environment of palpable strategic hazards. There was a rather pathetic unilateral Israeli attempt to deposit hundreds of millions of shekels last month (after deduction), in the PA’s account, but the PA returned the money! However, there is another glimpse of hope in President Donald Trump’s long-awaited “deal of the century.” By then, the PA may well be on the verge of collapse. The standard of living is deteriorating, unemployment is expected to jump and unrest on the streets will grow.**
- **President Abbas is serious about waiving all the tax monies — which constitute a significant portion of the PA’s budget — should Israel continue to deduct from them the monies he pays to the terrorists. At this dramatic moment, when everything is falling apart, the American program will be unfurled. It is believed by Israeli and American officials that the program will include an especially generous international Marshall Plan to rehabilitate the PA’s territories with enormous investments and massive economic assistance. According to this theory, the timing will be perfect. One moment before bankruptcy and chaos, a new option will be presented to the Palestinians that can transform Ramallah and other Palestinian cities into the Middle East version of Singapore.**
- **Is this the way that Trump, Netanyahu and Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman are planning to “buy off” the Palestinian people? Is the deal really an “economy in exchange for a state”? Billions as compensation for full sovereignty? Stop trying to wear us out about your “right of return” and grab this opportunity for the good life, improved standard of living and hope? Forget about East Jerusalem and settle for a Western economy!**
- **Perhaps. The problem is that anyone who is really familiar with the people involved knows that the chances of success are very low, at least in the current generation. Will Crown Prince Salman really wave \$10 billion in Abbas’ face, or will the bills remain in his pocket? It is doubtful whether, at this stage, it will be possible to buy off Palestinian honor with big bucks.**

SUMMARY: President Abbas is serious about waiving all the tax monies — which constitute a significant portion of the PA's budget — should Israel continue to deduct from them the monies he pays to the terrorists. At this dramatic moment, when everything is falling apart, the American program will be unfurled. It is believed by Israeli and American officials that the program will include an especially generous international Marshall Plan to rehabilitate the PA's territories with enormous investments and massive economic assistance. According to this theory, the timing will be perfect. One moment before bankruptcy and chaos, a new option will be presented to the Palestinians that can transform Ramallah and other Palestinian cities into the Middle East version of Singapore.

Divergent Lessons of the Holocaust Widen the Gap Between Israel and American Jews

By Chemi Shalev, columnist at Ha'aretz

- **Historians tend to divide the differing approaches to the Holocaust into two main categories. The particularistic view sees the destruction of European Jewry as a singular historical event, the main lesson from which is the need to maintain a strong Israel that will defend Jews at any cost and in any way possible. The universalistic view regards the Holocaust as the most extreme outgrowth of racism and hate, and its lessons as applicable to the world as a whole. Particularists emphasize the victims of the crime; the universalists its perpetrators, including those who failed to raise their voices in protest.**
- **Israel embraced the particularistic view of the Holocaust from the outset. Under the guidance of successive right-wing governments, from Menachem Begin to Benjamin Netanyahu, it entrenched itself in the Jewish-centered approach. Although survivors' testimonies during the Eichmann trial sparked a dramatic change in attitudes towards them, hitherto viewed as remnants of Jews who went to their destruction like "sheep to the slaughter," the focus on the Holocaust's nationalist and Zionist legacy remained intact. The universalistic approach, condemned as "dangerous" by President Reuven Rivlin two years ago in a Holocaust Remembrance Day speech, has virtually disappeared from Israeli public discourse.**
- **Things developed differently for American Jews, especially during the years preceding the Six Day War. While Israel fretted over being trapped in a Middle Eastern ghetto, surrounded by enemies seeking to finish the job started by the Nazis, America was swept by the storms of the struggle for equal rights. Jewish soldiers returning from the war with seared memories of genocide and concentration camps, along with younger Jews appalled at what they perceived as their parents' silence, viewed the racial segregation in the South and the discrimination against blacks in the North as analogous with Nazi policies towards Jews in the 1930s. Many of them volunteered to serve as the vanguard of the civil rights movement. They identified with it – and were thus identified by others.**
- **The anxious days before the 1967 war evoked fears in both Israel and the U.S. of a new Holocaust; the Israeli army's quick and decisive victory was viewed as the Jews' miraculous response, if not retribution. The phrase "never again," first promoted by New York Rabbi Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League, was adopted by the American Jewish community as a whole, in both its particularistic and universalistic connotations. American Jews embraced Israel and became its strategic ally, but the legacy of their fight alongside African-Americans, despite their mutual falling out, remained seared in their collective consciousness, along with their primal fear of governments that nurture racism and foment hatred against minorities.**
- **The era of Donald Trump has accentuated the gaps in the two differing approaches and brought them to center stage. In Israel, the Jewish majority has grown increasingly suspicious – and, some say in the wake of the nation-state law, increasingly tormenting as well – toward minorities, while American Jews suddenly see themselves as a minority threatened by the white majority that elected Trump. Israeli Jews view Trump as their friend in need and indeed, while**

their Jewish cousins in the U.S. see the president as an inciter, dangerous to America in general and to their own well-being in particular.

- Israelis view the recent attacks on synagogues in Pittsburgh and San Diego as aberrations that draw attention away from the main threat of radical Islam; Jews were slaughtered in their houses of worship, according to the prevailing view, for no other reason than being Jews. Most American Jews believe that Trump released the white supremacist genie from its bottle, including hatred for the Jews' universalistic Weltanschauung and an urge to exact historical revenge for their solidarity with blacks.
- The particularistic part of their worldview means that only a few extremists on the fringes of American Jewry dare associate the Trump administration – or the Netanyahu government – with the Nazi regime. The adherents to the universalistic approach, on the other hand, hold both to deserving targets of protest and resistance, before it's too late. Eighty years after the start of the war that facilitated the Holocaust, it now seems, its divergent lessons is one of the main building blocks of the wall that increasingly separates its survivors.

SUMMARY: The era of Donald Trump has accentuated the gaps in the two differing approaches and brought them to center stage. In Israel, the Jewish majority has grown increasingly suspicious – and, some say in the wake of the nation-state law, increasingly tormenting as well – toward minorities, while American Jews suddenly see themselves as a minority threatened by the white majority that elected Trump. Israeli Jews view Trump as their friend in need and indeed, while their Jewish cousins in the U.S. see the president as an inciter, dangerous to America in general and to their own well-being in particular.