



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Wednesday, May 8*

### Headlines:

- Israel Remembers its Fallen Soldiers, Terror Victims
- Islamic Jihad Leader Expects War with Israel Next Summer
- PA 'Surprised' by Qatari Pledge to Give \$480 Million in Aid
- Thousands of Israelis, Palestinians mark Memorial Day in Joint Ceremony
- Iran Informs World It Is Partially Withdrawing from Nuclear Deal
- UN Ambassadors Survey Damage to Southern Israel After Violence
- Israel Slams Putin Adviser's Comment about Ukraine and Jews
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- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Latest Israel-Hamas Flare-Up Made Palestinian State a Possibility"**
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- **Ha'aretz: "What if Israel Let Gaza Have an Airport, Gas Field and Desalination Plant?"**
  - By Raviv Drucker, political commentator, channel 13 news

# News Excerpts

May 8, 2019

## Ynet News

### **Israel Remembers its Fallen Soldiers, Terror Victims**

The central gathering ushering in national Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terror began at the Western Wall in Jerusalem Tuesday evening at 8:01 pm, following a minute-long siren and moment of silence. President Reuven Rivlin, IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi and police Commissioner Motti Cohen were in attendance. President Rivlin spoke about the return of the body of Zechariah Baumel, missing in battle for 37 years, last month, as an example of Israel fulfilling its pledge to Israeli mothers and fathers, who send their children into battle, that Israel will not rest until each and every soldier returns home. "This is an obligation that we continue to uphold to the families of those missing in action and those whose burial place is unknown," Rivlin said. See also, ["Israelis pause to honour fallen on Remembrance Day" \(France 24\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Islamic Jihad Leader Expects War with Israel Next Summer**

A leader of the Islamic Jihad said in a televised interview that he expects a war with Israel to break out by next summer. Speaking to Al Mayadeen, a Lebanese news channel, on Tuesday night, secretary general of the Islamic Jihad Ziad al-Nahala described the most recent escalation against Israel as "just preparation for the greater battle". "The resistance in Gaza is fully prepared for any war," Nahala said, adding that when the ceasefire was reached they were about to shoot rockets at Tel Aviv. The Islamic Jihad leader further said that the weekly protests at the border with Israel will continue. See also, ["Islamic Jihad warns of upcoming war, calls last flareup 'live fire drill'" \(TOI\)](#)

## Ha'aretz

### **PA 'Surprised' by Qatari Pledge to Give \$480 Million in Aid**

Palestinian Authority officials said Tuesday they were taken by surprise by Qatar's pledge to give \$480 million to the Palestinians. Officials in Ramallah noted that the decision to appeal to Qatar for financial support marks a change in approach from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whose ties with Saudi Arabia are tighter. The Qatari funds to the PA and Gaza are slated for education, health and humanitarian support. A senior Palestinian official told Haaretz that aid of this scope, which has political ramifications, could not have come to fruition without getting the green light from the White House. See also, ["QATAR WILL ALLOCATE \\$480 MILLION TO THE WEST BANK, GAZA" \(JPost\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **Thousands of Israelis, Palestinians mark Memorial Day in Joint Ceremony**

Some 9,000 Israelis and dozens of Palestinians marked Memorial Day in a joint service in Tel Aviv on Tuesday in an event which was criticized by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this week. Sitting in long, orderly rows of plastic chairs in a grass field in Hayarkon Park, attendees listened to Israelis and Palestinians commemorate loved ones killed on both sides of the conflict and heard activists speak about their hopes for peace in the region. Israeli Arab actress Samira Saraya opened the ceremony, called "Sharing Sorrow, Bringing Hope," saying that Israelis and Palestinians needed to take action to put an end to the conflict. See also, ["Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Event Disturbed by Protesters; Ceremony Streamed in Gaza" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## **Iran Informs World It Is Partially Withdrawing from Nuclear Deal**

Iranian state television says letters outlining the Islamic Republic's partial withdrawal from its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers have been delivered to ambassadors. A letter from President Hassan Rohani was delivered to the envoys of countries that are still committed to the deal despite the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the accord last year. In the letter, Rouhani said that after 60 days, Iran will scale back more compliance with the deal, and will increase their uranium enrichment. He also warned of a "firm response" if the nuclear case is once again referred to the UN Security Council, and that Tehran is ready for nuclear negotiations. The five world leaders were also told that Tehran will no longer sell its enriched uranium and heavy water to other countries. See also, ["What happens if Iran pulls out of the nuclear deal?" \(CNN\)](#)

### Jerusalem Post

## **UN Ambassadors Survey Damage to Southern Israel After Violence**

A delegation of UN Ambassadors visiting Israel arrived in Ashkelon on Tuesday to survey the damage caused by the recent rocket attacks against Southern Israel. The group of ambassadors, which was led by Israel's Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon, made visits to several sites, including the home of Moshe Agadi, who was killed by a rocket that directly hit his home, and later visited the Arlosoroff School that was also hit by a rocket. Danon said "We arrived in Ashkelon to offer strength to the residents of the south and to show the world what Hamas aggression looks like. The time has come for the Security Council to designate Hamas as a terrorist organization, one that commits double war crimes and exploits the people of Gaza as human shields. This will be the next measure we bring to the UN." See also, ["UN envoys tour rocket-hit Ashkelon" \(TOI\)](#)

### Times of Israel

## **Israel Slams Putin Adviser's Comment about Ukraine and Jews**

Israel on Tuesday criticized an article authored by a close adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin, which claimed that Ukraine's president may want to move Israeli Jews into parts of his country, as "conspiratorial and anti-Semitic." Jerusalem was "puzzled" by Sergey Glazyev's article, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Emmanuel Nahshon told The Times of Israel. "The conspiratorial and anti-Semitic style of his words is inappropriate and does not reflect the positive nature of Russia's relations with Israel," Nahshon added. In the lengthy article posted on the nationalist blog Zavtra (Tomorrow) and on his personal website, Glazyev describes new Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who is Jewish, as a puppet of the US administration, which is doing the bidding of the Israeli right.

### Calcalist

## **Israel Doubles Down on Beresheet 2.0 Lunar Spacecraft**

Israel is doubling its support for the next Beresheet project, pledging NIS 20 million for the cause, the Israeli Minister of Science, Technology, and Space Ofir Akunis announced Sunday. The first Beresheet spacecraft, funded by a private donation of nearly \$100 million, received government support to the tune of NIS 9.5 million (approximately \$2.66 million). Beresheet's entire budget stood at \$100 million. Beresheet got its start as a private attempt by Israeli nonprofit organization SpacEL to win Google's 10-year space race competition Lunar X Prize. The spacecraft was developed in partnership with Israeli state-owned defense contractor Israel Aerospace Industries Ltd. (IAI). The project continued after the competition's deadline passed with no winner.

## **Latest Israel-Hamas Flare-Up Made Palestinian State a Possibility**

By Sever Plocker, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- **Since the first Gaza war in 2008 (known as Operation Cast Lead), every single cross-border flare-up between Israel and Hamas has ended in losses for both sides. The latest round of violence that began four days ago, was no different. People were killed, lives were destroyed and traumas became even worse, and it was all for nothing, because we're back to square one. There is no sense of victory in either Jerusalem or Gaza, only the feeling of mutual loss. It's reasonable to assume what happened over the weekend was the last major round of cross-border fighting between Israel and the militants in Gaza. Let's not kid ourselves, there will not be anymore attempts to "restore the deterrence" because it simply can no longer be restored.**
- **Gaza's economical situation will not significantly improve even if Israel allows for another \$200 million of Qatari aid to enter the Hamas-ruled enclave. In order to change the disastrous economic situation in the Strip, billions need to be invested, and it will never happen as long as Hamas - and not the Palestinian Authority - is at the helm. Thus, the day of the intra-Palestinian reconciliation - between Hamas and Fatah - is edging closer than ever. In fact, the reconciliation might well be part of US President Donald Trump's long-delayed Mideast peace proposal under the chapter "The New Palestine."**
- **Among other aspects the peace plane might include are: demilitarization of Hamas; annexation of Israeli settlement blocs (as well as isolated settlements) from the West Bank; maintaining the status-quo at the holy sites of Jerusalem and Israeli municipal control of the city (which would also be a ceremonial capital of "The New Palestine"), and an exclusive Israeli security control of the Jordan Valley.**
- **Some sources say The New Palestine would acquire national security services from Israel and conduct democratic elections, but will not be able to buy real estate in Israel (and vice versa), the Palestinian refugee question will most likely remain unanswered.**
- **The economic aspects of the long delayed proposal include: leasing parts of the Sinai Peninsula to The New Palestine - where Gaza port would be established; construction of highways and bridges between Gaza and the West Bank; opening of all border crossings between Israel and Palestine to allow movement of people and goods (financed largely by the Gulf states), and anyone who would oppose the plan, will not receive a single dollar in aid from the White House.**
- **Whether these leaks have a truth to them or are designed to undermine Trump, one thing is clear, the reconciliation between Gaza and Ramallah - under the Palestinian Authority's leadership - is the only acceptable alternative to constant military confrontations. It seems that Hamas is also now more than ever willing to form a unity government with Fatah and to place its military forces under the command of the Palestinian Authority. This is the development that Israel must begin preparing for, because the era of cross-border flare-ups is over**

## **What if Israel Let Gaza Have an Airport, Gas Field and Desalination Plant?**

By Raviv Drucker, political commentator, channel 13 news

- **What if we had done the reverse? Let's say Israel had allowed the construction of a deepwater port for Gaza, the rebuilding of the Strip's airport and even the building of a desalination plant so Gazans could have a reliable supply of drinking water.**
- **Let's say, just for the sake of argument, that Israel had allowed the development of the natural-gas field offshore Gaza. In 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak transferred the rights to these reserves to the Palestinian Authority. The second intifada broke out afterward.**
- **Barak's successor, Ariel Sharon, opposed all development of the Palestinian gas. He claimed the revenue would be used for terror and it would be better to import gas from Egypt. British Gas, which held the rights to develop the Palestinian gas reserves, gave up; the exploration license expired. Ever since, a treasure has lain off the Gaza coast that could transform the territory, supplying all its electricity needs and raising living standards. But no one even talks about this. After all, it's inconceivable for Israel to allow Palestinian gas development.**
- **Even today, despite all the disappointments, states and companies could presumably be found to take on such ambitious projects, with the potential to transform the Strip. Projects this size would employ tens of thousands, lowering Gaza's horrific unemployment rate. They would offer hope to 1.5 million desperate people and reduce Gaza's direct dependence on Israel and Egypt.**
- **But the defense establishment is opposed, and there's no way Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would go against its recommendations (except in the case of purchasing submarines). Of course, the entire defense establishment doesn't object, but the heads of the defense agencies always have an interest in opposing such moves: If the moves succeed, they won't get credit; if they fail, there'll be a commission of inquiry.**
- **Besides, it's indecent, leftist and naive to view economic development as having a mitigating effect on a declining security situation. Who would be crazy enough to suggest such a thing? Those same generals who brought us to the current awful situation would immediately explain that a port would be used to smuggle in game-changing weapons, and the planes would be crashed into our homes, and the gas revenue would go toward strengthening Hamas.**
- **How long did it take Israel to paralyze the Palestinian airport at Dahaniyeh at the beginning of the second intifada? A minute and a half? What harm could come from trying to rebuild it? In any case it would take years. Perhaps some good would come of it, perhaps there could be a change in direction. Hamas won't change its spots, but even it has no interest in confronting a population that sees some kind of positive horizon.**
- **What's more, such projects would be an excellent way to inject the Palestinian Authority back into the Gaza Strip in some form. One assumes that Israel would condition any such construction on Hamas not operating it. Obviously, nothing happens in the Gaza Strip without Hamas, and Hamas would be involved, but so would the Palestinian Authority.**

- The outlines of the Israeli debate about Gaza are depressing. Benny Gantz is attacking from the right over a lack of deterrence, while the right they are attacking Netanyahu over a lack of decisiveness. The prime minister is seemingly maintaining the most moderate, conciliatory position because he has repeatedly avoided a full confrontation.
- But at the same time, Netanyahu hasn't done anything for a decade to change the awful strategic balance that has emerged between us and Gaza. His room to maneuver ranged from increasing the amount of goods entering through Kerem Shalom on the good days to reducing the fishing zone on bad days. There's no new thinking, zero creativity, only the hope that the Egyptians will succeed in buying us a little more quiet and if not, we'll launch Operation Protective Edge II or Operation Cast Lead III, or anything — lest we not be portrayed as naifs who believe that carrots might also be important.

**SUMMARY:** Even today, despite all the disappointments, states and companies could presumably be found to take on such ambitious projects, with the potential to transform the Strip. Projects this size would employ tens of thousands, lowering Gaza's horrific unemployment rate. They would offer hope to 1.5 million desperate people and reduce Gaza's direct dependence on Israel and Egypt. But the defense establishment is opposed, and there's no way Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would go against its recommendations (except in the case of purchasing submarines). Of course, the entire defense establishment doesn't object, but the heads of the defense agencies always have an interest in opposing such moves: If the moves succeed, they won't get credit; if they fail, there'll be a commission of inquiry.