



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, May 9

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News Excerpts

May 9, 2019

Ynet News

Israel Celebrates 71 Years of Independence

Celebrations for Israel's 71st Independence Day began at Jerusalem's Mt Herzl with the traditional Torch-Lighting Ceremony. IDF bands and flag bearers marched across the parade grounds forming Israel related symbols in highly choreographed fashion. The ceremony began with the Yizkor prayer recited by Shimon Baumel, brother of Zechariah Baumel whose remains were only recently repatriated to Israel 37 years after disappearing in battle in Lebanon. Speaker of the Knesset Yuli Adelstein addressed the audience: "Independence Day 71 is a good opportunity to open old photo albums and recall who we are, where we came from and what is our story."

Ha'aretz

Gaza Still Waiting on Qatari Money and Warns of Relapse Into Conflict

Three days after the announcement of a truce between Israel and Palestinian factions in Gaza, the coastal enclave is still waiting for measures that could improve the situation, and warn of the risks of continued deadlock. On Wednesday morning, Gazan fishermen reported that the sea was still closed off and that they have not been able to go to work for several days now. There is no official word yet as to when the Qatari money to pay Hamas bureaucrats' salaries and aid needy families will arrive. The Lebanese newspaper Al-Ahbar reported Wednesday that the Qatari envoy could arrive in Gaza this Friday to coordinate the transfer and advance projects to create jobs in Gaza, but the report has not been corroborated by any official source. See also, "[Waiting for Qatar's dollars](#)" (*Globes*)

Times of Israel

Trump Moves to Strangle Iran Economy as Nuclear Deal Withers

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday tightened the screws further on Iran with sanctions on its mining industry after a frustrated Tehran said it would suspend some promises it made under a nuclear deal rejected by Washington. On the anniversary of Trump's withdrawal from the accord he denounced as "horrible," tensions were soaring after the United States deployed an aircraft carrier strike group and nuclear-capable bombers to the region and accused Iran of "imminent" attacks. In an announcement previewed for days, Iran said it would immediately stop implementing some restrictions under the 2015 deal — a move aimed largely at pressing European allies to step up to preserve the agreement. See also, "[Trump administration imposes new sanctions on Iran's industrial metals](#)" (*Reuters*)

Yedioth Ahronoth

Netanyahu: Israel Will Not Allow Iran Nuclear Weapons

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a Memorial Day ceremony, held Wednesday, at Mt. Herzl, said: "This morning, on my way here, I heard that Iran intends to pursue its nuclear program" He added. "We will not allow Iran to achieve nuclear weaponry. We will continue to fight those who would kill us". Netanyahu's comments came after Wednesday announcement by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani that Iran would stop complying with two of its commitments under the Iranian nuclear deal. reiterating a long-held Israeli position after Tehran announced it was scaling back some of its commitments under a 2015 nuclear deal. See also, "[Netanyahu and Jewish Destiny](#)" (*WSJ*)

Jordan: Cabinet Resigns Ahead of King's Government Reshuffle

All government ministers in Jordan handed in their resignations on Wednesday ahead of an expected cabinet reshuffling directed by King Abdullah II. Current Jordanian Prime Minister Omar Razzaz is expected to remain in his post, and a number of ministers who tendered their resignations will be re-nominated in the next round. The mass resignations come after King Abdullah fired a number of top officials in defense and intelligence posts, including the director of Jordan's intelligence agency General Adnan al-Jundi, who once held one of the most sensitive and influential posts in the government. The king said his decision was inspired by complaints of issues with the administration of the intelligence bureau and the discovery that some individuals were using their positions for their own personal gain at the country's expense." See also, ["All Jordanian Ministers Resign" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Rep. Rashida Tlaib Sets Dates for Congressional Visit to West Bank

Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., set the dates for her congressional visit to the West Bank. Tlaib, a Palestinian American, proposed the trip last year after she was elected to Congress for the first time as a counterbalance to Israel trips organized by the American Israel Education Foundation, an affiliate of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. On Wednesday, Jewish Insider posted the flier that Tlaib was distributing to promote the Aug. 17-22 trip. A sponsor appears to be the Humpty Dumpty Institute, a development nonprofit. Reps. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., the majority leader in the U.S. House of Representatives, and Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., the minority leader, are set to lead the AIEF trips for their respective party's freshmen this summer.

Reuters

Health Funding Gap Means 1,700 in Gaza May Face Amputations: U.N.

A lack of health funding in Gaza means 1,700 people shot by Israeli security forces may have to have amputations in the next two years, Jamie McGoldrick, the U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator for occupied Palestinian territory, told reporters on Wednesday. McGoldrick said 29,000 Palestinians had been wounded in protests in the past year, and 7,000 of them had gunshot wounds, mostly in the lower legs. "You've got 1,700 people who are in need of serious, complicated surgeries for them to be able to walk again," McGoldrick said. "These are people who have been shot during the demonstrations and who are in need of rehabilitation, and very, very serious and complex bone reconstruction surgery over a two year period before they start to rehabilitate themselves." See also, ["The Next Round in Gaza Will Be Deadlier" \(Foreign Policy\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Swedish-Israeli NASA Astronaut Jessica Meir Gets Ready for Space

Jessica Meir has been preparing to go into space since the age of 5, but it took Meir three tries to be chosen for NASA's highly selective astronaut training program, which she started in 2013 and from which she graduated two years later. Last month, NASA announced that Meir will be participating in her first mission. On Sept. 25, Meir will co-pilot a Russian Soyuz spacecraft launching from Kazakhstan with Russian cosmonaut Oleg Skripochka. They will be joined by Hazzaa Ali Almansoori, the first astronaut from the United Arab Emirates. Meir, the daughter of a mother from Sweden and an Iraqi-Israeli father, holds Swedish and American citizenship. She will be the first Swedish woman, the fourth Jewish woman and the 15th Jew overall to be part of a space mission.

Israel Looks to Trump to Halt Iranian Nuke

By Ben Caspit, columnist at AI Monitor

- Surprising reports emerged on the evening of May 7 about the movements of two foreign ministers. According to the first, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo suddenly canceled a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and ordered his plane to change course for Baghdad. At almost the exact same time, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif boarded his own plane for an unscheduled visit to Moscow. The scramble underscores the drama now unfolding around Iran and how it is sending shockwaves not only across the Middle East but throughout the entire world.
- Israeli intelligence sources had raised concerns that Iran would react to growing American pressure by pulling out of the nuclear agreement, or at the very least reducing its commitment to it, including possibly going back to enriching uranium at a limited level. While that activity would not allow for the breakthrough needed to build a nuclear device, it would lay the groundwork for that possibility. On May 8, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani announced that this was exactly what Iran was planning. If no new understandings are reached to implement the nuclear deal, said Rouhani, Iran will resume enriching uranium within two months.
- The big question now is how President Donald Trump will react. Will he respond to the Iranian challenge, or will he blink and lose interest, just as he did when he ran up against North Korea? This especially dramatic incident is not taking place in a vacuum. While the Iranians were releasing their statement, the White House announced it was sending the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf. The United States also announced that it was increasing the number of B-52 bombers deployed to the region. The move came in response to intelligence reports reaching Washington that Iran is planning to attack or instigate terror activities against American targets and interests in the region. “It is hard to imagine that the Iranians would take such a step themselves,” one senior Israeli military official told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity, “but we can certainly imagine them ordering one of their proxies, like Hezbollah, to launch such an attack in low signature.”
- According to Channel 13 News, intelligence about this contingency was provided to Washington by Israel’s Mossad. Other writeups also appeared this week on intelligence websites and blogs. According to one such report, Hezbollah fighters were recently seen on the island of Kish, a tourist destination near the Straits of Hormuz. According to those analyses, the island could serve as a launching pad for anyone trying take action or initiate an attack in the Straits of Hormuz, the gate through which all oil exports from the Persian Gulf states must flow. The possibility of Iran blocking the straits or obstructing the movement of oil tankers in the region was already a concern, and the presence of Hezbollah on Kish Island has only intensified it.
- These developments impact other fronts in the region as well. The most recent round of fighting between Israel and Hamas May 4-5 ended without any IDF ground operation. Sources in the Israeli cabinet had insinuated that there were “covert reasons” the Israeli government decided to stop the IDF and wait for a more convenient opportunity. It is now known that Israel already had intelligence that the Iranians were planning to attack Western targets in the Gulf and change

their attitude toward the nuclear deal. This information was transferred to Washington via intelligence and diplomatic channels.

- Islamic Jihad was ultimately responsible for the round of fighting with Israel last week and has exhibited unprecedented independence in its dealings with Hamas. It is therefore possible that the direct relationship between Islamic Jihad and Iran is what caused Israel to hesitate rather than get involved in another round fighting. It may not want to give the Iranians any incentives to set the region on fire. Israel prefers that management of the incident be left to the United States in its dealings with Iran, rather than pushed to the sidelines on the Gaza front. All eyes are now on the emerging duel between Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khamenei, supported by his Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Trump, Pompeo and the USS Abraham Lincoln.
- What happens now? So far, Israel's plan has worked perfectly. Trump was convinced to withdraw from the nuclear agreement, pressure on Iran has been increasing to unbearable levels, the Iranian economy is showing signs of rapid disintegration and Iranian oil exports are collapsing. The recent American decision to declare the IRGC a terrorist organization exacerbates the sense of siege surrounding the Iranian regime. Nevertheless, Tehran is showing no signs of reaching its breaking point. On the contrary, Iran is upping the ante, signaling its intent to use terror and declaring that if it cannot export oil from the Gulf, no one will. And now it's announced its intent to resume uranium enrichment.
- The ball has been sent back to the American court. "Everything now depends on Trump," a senior Israeli official told Al-Monitor recently on condition of anonymity. So far, all signs indicate that Trump understands the problem and knows that he cannot allow Iran to become a second North Korea. Israel and the United States are both worried about the first signs of Saudi efforts to achieve military nuclearization. They know that any sign of weakness by the West in the face of Iranian threats will turn the Middle East into a nuclear powder keg. At the same time, Trump's unstable disposition and tendency to quickly lose interest in matters that were once at the core of his policies raise concerns in Israel and overseas. All eyes are turned to the president of the United States, who was once described as the leader of the free world. So far, he provided everything that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wanted to the letter and in force. But it all could be cast into oblivion if the Americans' determination does not persist over the next few months. Netanyahu has aspired to this point his entire life. Now that he has reached it, someone else is in charge.

SUMMARY: What happens now? So far, Israel's plan has worked perfectly. Trump was convinced to withdraw from the nuclear agreement, pressure on Iran has been increasing to unbearable levels, the Iranian economy is showing signs of rapid disintegration and Iranian oil exports are collapsing. The recent American decision to declare the IRGC a terrorist organization exacerbates the sense of siege surrounding the Iranian regime. Nevertheless, Tehran is showing no signs of reaching its breaking point. On the contrary, Iran is upping the ante, signaling its intent to use terror and declaring that if it cannot export oil from the Gulf, no one will. And now it's announced its intent to resume uranium enrichment.

Israel Independence Day 2019: A Time for Dwindling Hope, a Time for Growing Fears

By Chemi Shalev, columnist at Ha'aretz

- I have very few memories from my early childhood, but a surprising number of them are connected to Independence Days. I remember going with my father at the age of five to what was dubbed “The Exhibition of the Decade” to mark Israel’s tenth anniversary. The main attraction for kids was technological innovations, many of them linked to agriculture, including the amazingly automated machine that milked cows dry.
- Independence Days were wondrous. They towered above all other Jewish festivals combined. With no TV to distract them, Israelis poured into the streets, forming endless circles of hora dancing that today seem like a scene out of Otto Preminger’s Exodus. Even little children were allowed to roam free and stay out all night: On Independence Day, normal rules did not apply.

The focal point of most Independence Days was the military parade. I remember the march on Israel’s tenth anniversary, which, I later learned, included tanks prohibited in the cease-fire agreement, which almost sparked a war with Jordan. Three years later, a low-flying French-built Mirage fighter jet flew over Jerusalem at a ridiculously low attitude right in front of our balcony, in another challenge to Israel’s decreased sovereignty over its capital that thrilled its witnesses.

- I saw the jubilant military parade in Jerusalem in 1968, which celebrated the redemption of the Six-Day War, as well as the one in 1973, which preceded the catastrophe of the Yom Kippur War. The 1973 parade included battalions of captured Russian tanks now in the service of the Israel Defense Forces, an aerial display by over 400 Israel Air Force aircraft and the overriding sense of invincibility and hubris that was to cost the lives of close to 3,000 Israeli soldiers, including many of my best friends.
- The 1973 parade was, understandably, the last one ever held. Yom Ha’atzmaut, some would say, would never be the same again. Nonetheless, for secular Israelis of my generation, it retained its special status: It was a day to be proud of Israel’s undeniably enormous achievements in the past as well as to feel joy at the bright future that lay ahead.
- We paid very little attention to the Palestinian Nakba, even though the abandoned remnants of the Palestinian flight were present and visible all around us, far more than they are today. Most Israelis, with the exception of the willfully ignorant, are aware of the tragedy that befell the Palestinians in 1948, but their knowledge hasn’t marred Independence Day celebrations. Against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians and their designation as irredeemable terrorists, and with the active encouragement of most Israeli governments, Labor or Likud, most Israelis have learned to repress guilt, skip self-examination, ignore the Palestinian plight and clear their conscience by assigning all the blame to the enemy’s side.
- In recent years, I must confess, Independence Days have lost some of their luster. One clear reason is my advancing years: Participation in the collective festivities these days requires a high tolerance for being packed like sardines and for the inhuman decibel level prevalent in the public performances of Israeli singers, most of whom I haven’t heard of anyway. The fireworks

are always a thrill, but after viewing the New Year's extravaganza in Sydney Harbor and the Fourth of July spectacle along the Hudson River, they no longer spark the same amazement as before.

- From an unequivocal occasion for celebration, Independence Day gradually evolved into an ambiguous affair. My classmates at school continue to attend our annual Independence Day barbecue, but the prevailing atmosphere has changed from content and carefree to worried and frustrated. The sense in my milieu is that Israel has gone off the rails and is hurtling towards a dangerous crash and the anxiety is compounded by the fact that it is a minority view, as the April 9 elections amply proved.
- Throughout most of my life, the focus of Independence Day was Israel's deliverance from its Arab enemies. In recent years, as Israel slides away from the principles enshrined in its own Declaration of Independence, one is reminded of Walt Kelly's humorous play on Commodore Perry's famous saying from the War of 1812: "We have met the enemy, and he is us." Iran may be a strategic threat to Israel's physical wellbeing but the greatest risk to its continued existence as a Jewish and democratic state comes from within. It is a far more immediate, clear and present danger to the only Israel that I can support and adhere to.
- The increasing dread about the future is directly related to the growing proportion of Israelis I can no longer identify with. Despite the preponderance of religious zealots in their midst, they have no common denominator other than, at worst, their wish to dismantle Israel as a bastion of admittedly imperfect Western liberalism or, at best, their indifference to and passive collaboration in the demolition of Israeli democracy.
- These enemies, some of who will soon take up important cabinet posts from prime minister on down, are now backed and shielded by a majority of the Knesset. They disdain democracy, detest dissent, malign the media, and recoil from the rule of law. They have already had a chilling effect on public discourse, doing battle with human rights NGOs and delegitimizing criticism of the occupation.
- The recent election campaign revealed the extent of the Newspeak that Benjamin Netanyahu and his colleagues have imposed on Israeli politics. Not only the rare birds who dare express sympathy for the Palestinians, but even those who simply declare their allegiance to a negotiated settlement and a two-state solution are immediately branded as leftists, a moniker that has assumed sinisterly unpatriotic connotations. Benny Gantz, the great white hope of the left, went so far as to boast of the hundreds of Palestinians killed in Operation Protective Edge, under his command.
- Their blatant efforts to subjugate artistic expression to the whims of the regime are an ironic emulation of the Mapai clique they claim to abhor. The 1958 Expo that I visited with my father was rocked by the kind of public scandal that was once seen as a vestige of Israel's authoritarian socialist past but seems to have returned with a vengeance. When David Ben-Gurion expressed dismay at an abstract painting by Israeli artist Yosef Zaricky, his then aide Teddy Kollek had it immediately moved to a secluded corner of Binyanei Ha'Uma.
- Which is a convenient segue to Hannah Arendt's prescient warnings in her famous article "To Save the Jewish Homeland" published on the eve of Israel's independence in 1948. Arendt underestimated Jewish resilience and Arab incompetence in the War of Independence raging around her, leading her to warn of yet another historic Jewish catastrophe, on top of the

Holocaust. But even if the Jews achieve victory, she said, it would come at the cost of the kind of Euro-centered Jewish homeland that Arendt envisaged, which, in her vision, would be a light onto the nations.

- Arendt's warning seems more pertinent today that it did during the intermittent years since it was written. She writes about the unanimity of opinion among both American and Israeli Jews about the inevitability of a do or die battle for Israel's independence: "A unanimous public opinion tends to eliminate bodily those who differ, for mass unanimity is not the result of agreement, but an expression of fanaticism and hysteria. In contrast to agreement, unanimity does not stop at certain well-defined objects, but spreads like an infection into every related issue." In Israel today, from the media to academia, from the arts to the army, from the Knesset all the way to private conversations, there are symptoms of the spreading infection
- And even if victory is achieved, Arendt notes, "The Palestinian Jews would degenerate into one of those small warrior tribes about whose possibilities and importance history has amply informed us since the days of Sparta. Their relations with world Jewry would become problematical, since their defense interests might clash at any moment with those of other countries where large numbers of Jews lived. Palestine Jewry would eventually separate itself from the larger body of world Jewry and in its isolation develop into an entirely new people.
- "The 'victorious' Jews would live surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population, secluded inside ever-threatened borders, absorbed with physical self-defense to a degree that would submerge all other interests and activities. The growth of a Jewish culture would cease to be the concern of the whole people; social experiments would have to be discarded as impractical luxuries; political thought would center around military strategy; economic development would be determined exclusively by the needs of war."
- Arendt took a particularly dim view of Zeev Jabotinsky's Revisionist disciples, whom she described as "Jewish fascists." The famous letter to the New York Times signed by Arendt, Albert Einstein and a 26 other Jewish intellectuals against Begin's 1948 visit to the U.S said of the Revisionists: "Within the Jewish community they have preached an admixture of ultranationalism, religious mysticism, and racial superiority," a description that seems as apt today as it was back then, even if we thought otherwise in the interim.
- It is the thought that, despite her erroneous assessment of the situation, Arendt may have recognized a core truth about the future of Zionism 75 years ago that now haunts my Independence Days. It underpins an increasing sense of dread and of living on borrowed time, which the April 9 elections may have cut much shorter.

SUMMARY: The recent election campaign revealed the extent of the Newspeak that Benjamin Netanyahu and his colleagues have imposed on Israeli politics. Not only the rare birds who dare express sympathy for the Palestinians, but even those who simply declare their allegiance to a negotiated settlement and a two-state solution are immediately branded as leftists, a moniker that has assumed sinisterly unpatriotic connotations. Benny Gantz, the great white hope of the left, went so far as to boast of the hundreds of Palestinians killed in Operation Protective Edge, under his command.