



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Wednesday, June 12

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News Excerpts

June 12, 2019

Ynet News

Egypt, Jordan, Morocco to Attend U.S.-led Palestinian Conference

Egypt, Jordan and Morocco have informed the Trump administration they plan to attend a U.S.-led conference in Bahrain in late June on proposals for boosting the Palestinian economy as part of a coming U.S. peace plan, a White House official said on Tuesday. Egypt and Jordan's participation is considered especially important since they have historically been key players in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. However, Palestinian leaders have vowed to boycott the June 25-26 conference and lashed out at members of the international community who have agreed to attend the conference. See also, "[Egypt, Morocco and Jordan agree to take part in US-led peace conference](#)" (*Israel Hayom*)

Times of Israel

Palestinians 'Deeply Regret' Egypt, Jordan Attending of Bahrain Meet

The Palestinian Authority on Tuesday said it "deeply regrets" the decision by Egypt and Jordan to participate in the upcoming American-sponsored economic workshop in Bahrain and called on them and other "brotherly" nations to withdraw. Egypt, Jordan and Morocco have informed US President Donald Trump's administration that they will attend the conference, a senior US official told The Times of Israel on Tuesday, ending weeks of uncertainty and paving the way for Israel to be invited as well. The Palestinian government "deeply regrets the declaration of Cairo and Amman about its participating in the workshop and call on them and all brotherly and friendly countries to withdraw from participating in the workshop," said spokesman Ibrahim Melhim. See also, "[Why Is the PA So Opposed to the Bahrain Conference?](#)" (*Algemeiner*)

Reuters

Qatar Says U.S. Needs Palestinians on Board for Middle East Peace Plan

Qatar said on Sunday that there was a disconnect between the Palestinians and the United States over a U.S. blueprint aimed at ending the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, warning that a solution could not be imposed on Palestinians. The U.S. blueprint, driven by Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's son-in-law and White House adviser, is seen by Palestinians, and by some Arab officials and politicians, as a plan to finish off the Palestinian cause. "As far as we see, right now there is a disconnect between the Palestinians and the U.S.," Qatar Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani said told reporters in London. "Our position remains very firm: We are going to support any plan that the Palestinians are willing to accept." See also, "[Jordan's king tells Kushner the Israel-Palestinian conflict requires two-state solution](#)" (*LA Times*)

I24 News

Syria Intercepts Israeli Missiles Fired Overnight: State Media

Syria's missile defense system intercepted a number of missiles fired by Israel at its southern border, according to Syrian state news agency Sana overnight on Tuesday around 2 am local time (1100 GMT). Tel al-Hara, the alleged area targeted by Israel's Defense Forces, is considered a strategic point overlooking the Golan Heights, which sits on Syria's northern border with Israel. There were no casualties, Sana reported. Just last month, IDF responded with retaliatory attacks on its northern neighbor after an anti-aircraft missile was fired at an Israeli fighter jet in Israeli airspace. See also, "[Syria accuses Israel of firing missiles at a border town in its south](#)" (*TOI*)

Labor Leader Gabbay Won't Seek Re-Election in Wake of Results

The leader of Israel's venerable Labor party, Avi Gabbay, announced Tuesday that he won't run in the upcoming primaries for party leader, set to take place ahead of the September 17 general elections. But Gabbay said that he would not leave the party and instead would be claiming the no. 2 reserved spot on the labor list in the upcoming elections. The no. 2 spot was this week evacuated by former IDF general and freshman MK Tal Russo, who said he would not be returning to politics in September. Under Gabbay, the party that founded Israel sunk to an all-time low of just six seats out of the 120 in parliament after the April 9 elections. "The direction was clear on the eve of the last election, but you don't make big decisions during a storm, so I waited for things to be relevant in order to decide and make an announcement," the Haaretz daily quoted Gabbay as saying Tuesday. See also, ["Labor Party Must Learn From Gabbay's Mistakes" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Lieberman: I Have no Commitment to Crown Netanyahu

Former Israeli Defense Minister and leader of Yisrael Beytenu party, Avigdor Lieberman, said on Tuesday that he will not commit to recommend Benjamin Netanyahu as the next prime minister in the September 17 elections. "I have no commitment to crown Netanyahu. My first commitment is first of all that the right-wing wins, (and) secondly that a liberal national government be established, not an ultra-Orthodox- Hardali government," Lieberman said. "There are no personal elections. I know it's convenient for Netanyahu to present it as if it is a direct election. Ultimately you don't vote for a person. You vote for a party," he added. Lieberman refused to join the right-wing coalition without a commitment to passing a draft law for ultra-Orthodox students, causing Netanyahu to label Lieberman as part of the "left-wing". See also, ["Lieberman: Ultra-Orthodox MKs just 'say amen and wait for the checks'" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Buttigieg: Netanyahu is 'Turning Away from Peace'

Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana who has emerged as a strong contender for the Democratic presidential nomination, said there are signs that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is "turning away from peace." "Just as an American patriot may oppose the policies of the American president, a supporter of Israel may also oppose the policies of the Israeli right-wing government," Buttigieg said Tuesday. "Especially when we see increasingly disturbing signs that the Netanyahu government is turning away from peace." Buttigieg said "the security of Israel continues to be an essential tenet of U.S. foreign policy" but said he would be willing to use economic leverage to pressure Israel. See also, ["Democrat Buttigieg warns he would cut Israel aid over West Bank annexation" \(TOI\)](#)

Mossad Involved in Anti-BDS Activity, Minister's Diaries Reveal

The datebooks of Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan for 2018 reveal that he cooperated with the Mossad in the fight against the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. The diaries, which were released in response to a Freedom of Information request, show that Erdan met with Mossad head Yossi Cohen about "the struggle against the boycott." The request was made by the Hatzlaha movement, an organization promoting a fair society and economy, to all ministers, deputy ministers and ministry directors-general. Officials in the Strategic Affairs Ministry are proud of their work with the state's security agencies.

Right Wing Starts to Sour on Netanyahu, but Can't Replace Him

By Anshel Pfeffer, Columnist at Ha'aretz

- Benjamin Netanyahu is facing a deluge of criticism in the right-wing media and online, unprecedented at least since his days as finance minister under Ariel Sharon, when he voted four times in favor of disengagement from Gaza. For the first time in over a decade, prominent religious-nationalist pundits are wondering aloud whether they wouldn't be better off without the eternal leader.
- "Is the man bigger than the ideal?" asked Channel 20's senior political analyst Shimon Riklin on Twitter last week. Riklin has been regularly lampooned on the left as "the nodding head" for his uncritical style of interviewing Netanyahu, who he called in the past "God's messenger."
- "Netanyahu has become a burden on the right," wrote Doron Nir-Tzvi, a columnist in Makor Rishon, the weekly owned by no less than Netanyahu's benefactor Sheldon Adelson. (This weekend Makor Rishon, it should be stressed, also published columnists fulsomely praising Netanyahu.) Veteran political commentator Menachem Rahat wrote in the Matzav Ha'Ruach weekly, which is distributed every Shabbat in national-religious synagogues, that even in the Roman, Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, "The subjects realized, sooner or later, that even the emperor can be replaced. Will this also happen here?"
- Under the headline "Does Benjamin Netanyahu really advance the national camp's worldview?" popular columnist Kalman Liebskind wrote, "For Netanyahu, before everything, what's important is to continue sitting in his chair. What he does in that chair? Who remembers anyway."
- Sadly, none of this awakening on the right is due to the impending indictments for bribery and fraud against Netanyahu. The few right-wing figures who have called for replacing Netanyahu due to his personal corruption, like Rabbi Yuval Cherlow and veteran Haaretz columnist Israel Harel, remain lone voices. Netanyahu has become the object of nationalist ire because he failed to form a right-wing government, refused during the aborted coalition negotiations to appoint Bezalel Smotrich justice minister, wouldn't commit to annexing parts of the West Bank, and worst of all, at the last moment, before being forced to dissolve the Knesset, secretly offered Labor key ministries and to relinquish much of his legislative program if they would only join his coalition. Many on the right, especially the religious, are also furious at the way Netanyahu summarily fired Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked last week.
- And they're not actually calling to replace Netanyahu. At least, they don't have anyone specific in mind. Karni Eldad, another journalist at Makor Rishon who wrote last week that "Netanyahu is drunk with power and that's dangerous," admitted further down in her column that "I haven't got an alternative to Netanyahu." In an interview with Haaretz this week, she was at pains to emphasize that she was only representing herself and not Makor Rishon; the right-wing is beginning to allow voices of dissent, but it's still not easy.
- "I'm not saying let's replace Netanyahu," she said. "But I am saying let's limit his power. Let's vote for other right-wing parties and not Likud. So Netanyahu will still be prime minister, as leader of the right, but not all-powerful." The ideological right has long been skeptical in regard to Netanyahu's real sympathies. It wasn't just his signing of the Hebron and Wye River

agreements during his first term as prime minister, his votes in favor of disengagement while serving in Sharon's government and his agreement to freeze settlement building early on in the Obama administration. Netanyahu simply never showed the same kind of fervor for clinging on to every clod of earth in the biblical homelands.

- At the same time, they could never forget that it was the Likud prime ministers who waxed most lyrical over the land – Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon, who ultimately also pulled back from the Sinai and Gaza, uprooting the settlers living there. With Netanyahu there is a pact. He may not be the greatest builder and in 13 years as prime minister has not moved towards annexing Area C, but his uncompromising nationalist policy of not making any concessions to the Palestinians also means he won't contemplate dismantling settlements. So they've stuck by him over the past decade.
- The other reason for the right-wing's sticking with Netanyahu is his record of winning elections. But they are no longer so certain of him lasting in power anyway. Shimon Riklin, the now not-so-enthusiastic fan of Netanyahu, said his Twitter criticism of the prime minister was "due to my disappointment with the offers he made to Labor. I'm now not so certain he will win the next election or if he wins, that he remains in office, because the legal stuff could derail him. But for now I'm still supporting him because we haven't got anyone better. It depends on developments."
- What still keeps the right wing behind Netanyahu is that they can't conceive of a replacement from Likud or any other right-wing party. "I'd love to see someone take his place," says Eldad. "But there really isn't someone vying to take his place, and the right is always loyal to its leaders. But the feelings towards him have changed, and now if he's forced to resign because of the indictments, fewer right-wingers will rush to defend him."
- The right wing is incapable of replacing Netanyahu by itself. They fear for the settlements, are addicted to winning and can't see anyone else doing it at this point. But they are beginning to come around to the idea of being forced to go cold turkey off Netanyahu.

Summary: And they're not actually calling to replace Netanyahu. At least, they don't have anyone specific in mind. Karni Eldad, another journalist at Makor Rishon who wrote last week that "Netanyahu is drunk with power and that's dangerous," admitted further down in her column that "I haven't got an alternative to Netanyahu." In an interview with Haaretz this week, she was at pains to emphasize that she was only representing herself and not Makor Rishon; the right-wing is beginning to allow voices of dissent, but it's still not easy. "I'm not saying let's replace Netanyahu," she said. "But I am saying let's limit his power. Let's vote for other right-wing parties and not Likud. So Netanyahu will still be prime minister, as leader of the right, but not all-powerful." The ideological right has long been skeptical in regard to Netanyahu's real sympathies. It wasn't just his signing of the Hebron and Wye River agreements during his first term as prime minister, his votes in favor of disengagement while serving in Sharon's government and his agreement to freeze settlement building early on in the Obama administration. Netanyahu simply never showed the same kind of fervor for clinging on to every clod of earth in the biblical homelands.

Despite US Pressure, Expect Regional Players to Phone in Manama Meeting

By Shlomi Eldar, columnist at AI Monitor

- Two weeks prior to the opening of the June 25 Bahrain conference, where the US administration plans to unveil economic component of its Israeli-Palestinian “deal of the century,” Israel is uncertain the event will take place. What is the point of a conference showcasing a comprehensive peace plan that neither side wants? President Donald Trump’s administration appears to be the only party interested in the plan, parts of which are to be revealed at the conference in Manama after more than two years of gestation.
- The Palestinians announced on May 23 that they would boycott the event. Egypt and Jordan clearly see no chance of its success, certainly absent the participation of the Palestinians. Israel, too, would rather the Palestinian issue remain sidelined as it carries on with its endless election efforts. No official Israelis will have a bad word to say in public about the plan or the timing. It is easier just to say “we await an invitation” in the hopes that US presidential envoys Jason Greenblatt and Jared Kushner, faced with an event that seems to be sputtering, will delay the meeting at least until the winter months, when the Israeli political picture becomes clearer. Trump’s envoys apparently had no idea what awaited them when they set foot in the morass known as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.
- An Israeli security source told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity that the way things are shaping up, “even if the conference takes place, it will certainly not be a historic event. Anyone looking at the picture in its entirety understands that it is likely to be a minor event and possibly an embarrassing one.” Indeed, Kushner and Greenblatt appear to be facing tremendous organizational hurdles they’re not likely to overcome in the days remaining before the conference. They probably expected a better response, though they probably did realize that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas might refuse to come. So far, only a handful of Palestinian business people have said they would attend in a display of courage, ignoring Abbas and other Palestinian Authority officials’ call to boycott Trump’s scheme.
- Also, Israel and Egypt, both pillars in the implementation of any future peace plan, are clearly unhappy about attending the event. “It is our assessment that even if the conference is held,” said the Israeli source, “the really important states such as Egypt and Jordan and even Saudi Arabia will send minor delegates such as deputy foreign ministers, directors general of economic ministries and even less than that.” Israel will probably send Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, Maj. Gen. Kamil Abu-Rukun.
- Representatives of the business world — from the Gulf and other Arab states, as well as Palestinians — will likely attend, but not out of any sense of responsibility to a cause or a vision of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “They will come because of their egos,” said the Israeli source. “Who rejects an opportunity to join an elite club of leading Middle Eastern business people, to which the United States itself grants an entry ticket? Anything having to do with the US, certainly when it comes to economic dealings, could contribute to their business in the future.”

- **Back in Israel, meanwhile, US Ambassador David Friedman dropped a bombshell. In a New York Times interview on June 8, Friedman said Israel has the right to annex parts of the West Bank. Friedman’s views are well known, as is his support for Israel’s settlement enterprise in the territories. Palestinians dub him “the settler.” However, no one expected that during these critical days of preparations for the Bahrain conference, with all the attendant difficulties and uncertainties, the US ambassador in Jerusalem would put things so bluntly. His remarks gave Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli right a significant tailwind on the controversial annexation issue, but they may chase away those who are still undecided on whether to fly to Bahrain.**
- **On June 10, Egypt announced it would attend the conference. An Egyptian source told the Dar al-Hayat news site that after much deliberation, his country had decided to attend even though “the conference will fail.” The source added that Egypt’s attendance does not indicate its approval of the principles underlying the Trump peace plan. Reading between the lines, Egypt will show up because it has no choice: US aid is its lifeline.**
- **The organizers are now awaiting the response of Jordan’s King Abdullah, who is in a more complex situation. How can the monarchy afford to take part in the conference after an official American emissary publicly said that the annexation of West Bank land has the backing of the president of the United States? “If you ask me,” said the Israeli source, “and this is only based on my personal assessment, the Jordanians will show up for the conference eventually but at a very low level. They, too, like the Egyptians, will say they are not interested in the conference because it doesn’t stand a chance and they do not support the ‘deal of the century,’ but they are coming to listen.”**
- **It will be interesting to see how the Americans market the event on the global stage. The president’s honor is at stake and admitting that his grandiose plan is limping before it has even taken its first step would be highly unpleasant.**

Summary: An Israeli security source told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity that the way things are shaping up, “even if the conference takes place, it will certainly not be a historic event. Anyone looking at the picture in its entirety understands that it is likely to be a minor event and possibly an embarrassing one.” Indeed, Kushner and Greenblatt appear to be facing tremendous organizational hurdles they’re not likely to overcome in the days remaining before the conference. They probably expected a better response, though they probably did realize that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas might refuse to come. So far, only a handful of Palestinian business people have said they would attend in a display of courage, ignoring Abbas and other Palestinian Authority officials’ call to boycott Trump’s scheme.