



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Thursday, June 6*

### Headlines:

- Israel Said Trying to Block Bipartisan Senate Two-State Resolution
- Greenblatt Rejects Shayyeh's Warning of Collapsing PA
- Iran Urges Gulf Rivals not to Back US Peace Plan
- U.S. Lawmakers Push Bipartisan Bill for \$50 Million in Palestinian Aid
- Republican, Democrat Senators Seek to Block Trump Saudi Arms Deal
- Israek Gets First Gay Minister: Ohana Appointed Justice Minister
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- First Lady Nechama Rivlin Laid to Rest with Prayers and Song

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- **New York Times: "New Palestinian Premier Warns of a 'Very Hot Summer'"**
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# News Excerpts

June 6, 2019

## Times of Israel

### **Israel Said Trying to Block Bipartisan Senate Two-State Resolution**

Israeli diplomats in Washington have been working to prevent the Senate from passing a bipartisan resolution that would endorse a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to a report published Wednesday. The resolution, which is expected to be tabled soon, was drafted by Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham and Democratic Sen. Chris Van Hollen and is seen as a means of putting pressure on the White House ahead of the release of its peace plan, according to the report on Israel's Channel 13. "Sen. Van Hollen and Graham are long-time supporters of a two-state solution and work on the best way to advance that commitment in Congress," Van Hollen told Axios.

## Jerusalem Post

### **Greenblatt Rejects Shayyeh's Warning of Collapsing PA**

Jason Greenblatt, Special Representative for International Negotiations, rejected on Wednesday the warning of Palestinian Prime Minister, Muhammad Shtayyeh, who told the New York Times in an interview that the Palestinian Authority is on dire straits. "Shtayyeh is wrong," Greenblatt tweeted. "The Palestinian Authority isn't 'in a collapsing situation,' the PA caused the situation. Time for the PA to step-up and take responsibility for their people and the economy. The PA can't continue to blame the United States and everyone else for a situation they caused." Shtayyeh addressed the new Israeli anti terrorism law that allows Israel to withhold part of the Palestinian revenue. Since Israel started to withhold the monthly stipend for Palestinians who attacked Israelis the Palestinian Authority refused to receive any payment from Israel. See also, ["New Palestinian Premier Warns of a 'Very Hot Summer' "\(NYT\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **Iran Urges Gulf Rivals not to Back US Peace Plan**

U.S. allies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are set to attend the Bahrain conference. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday warned regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Bahrain not to support the U.S. Middle East peace plan, slamming the forthcoming deal as a "great betrayal of the Islamic world." Washington is preparing to roll out the economic aspects of its long-awaited plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at a conference in Bahrain later this month. "The aim of this conference is to realize America's traitorous, dastardly plan on Palestine which they have named the 'deal of the century,'" Khamenei said in a live address during prayers marking the Eid al-Fiter. See also, ["Iran accuses Israel's Mossad of 'fabricating' intel on Tehran's role in Gulf tanker attacks" \(Ynet News\)](#)

## Ha'aretz

### **U.S. Lawmakers Push Bipartisan Bill for \$50 Million in Pal' Aid**

With the Trump administration's Middle East peace plan hitting a major roadblock after the announcement of new elections in Israel, Congress is taking its own initiative. Senators and representatives from both parties reintroduced a bill Wednesday that would allocate \$50 million to investments in the Palestinian economy, as well as to programs that promote peaceful relations between Israelis and Palestinians. The bill to create a "Partnership Fund for Peace" between Israelis and Palestinians was first introduced last October, in the very last days of the previous Congress. See also, ["Will Ehud Barak form a new party?" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Rep., Dem. Senators Seek to Block Trump Saudi Arms Deal**

Republican and Democratic U.S. senators said on Wednesday they would introduce legislation to block President Donald Trump's plan for \$8 billion in military sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates without congressional review. Backers said the introduction of the 22 "resolutions of disapproval," one for each of the 22 arms deals cleared by the Trump administration, was intended to "protect and reaffirm Congress' role of approving arms sales to foreign governments." The announcement followed furious rejection in Congress late last month of the administration's declaration that a growing threat from Iran was an emergency that forced it to sidestep lawmakers' review of major arms deals and approve precision-guided munitions, aircraft engines, mortars and other equipment for Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan. See also, ["Senate could vote 22 times to disapprove of Trump's Saudi arms sale" \(Washington Examiner\)](#)

## Ha'aretz

### **Israek Gets First Gay Minister: Ohana Appointed Justice Minister**

Amir Ohana will be the country's first gay minister ever after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to appoint him interim justice minister. The move comes ahead of Thursday's gay pride parade in Jerusalem. The official Prime Minister's Office statement announcing the appointment emphasized Ohana's professional qualifications as "a lawyer who is very familiar with the legal system," and his apprenticeship in the State's Attorney's Office Tel Aviv district. Netanyahu's spokesman Yonatan Urich singled out only the history Netanyahu was making in the appointment: "For the first time ever, a member of the LGBT community will be a senior member of the Israeli government." See also, ["Netanyahu Appoints Justice Minister Who Supports Immunity From Indictment for Prime Minister" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **Ahead of Jlm' Pride, Police Say Recruiting Transgender Officers**

More than 2,500 police will be deployed Thursday in Jerusalem as the city hosts its 18th annual Gay Pride Parade, vowing to "act decisively" against anyone who tried to disrupt the event or harm participants. And in a clear show of support for the LGBT community, police revealed that in recent months the force has recruited several transgender trainees and that one of them has already completed her course and is working her beat, Channel 12 reported. The move, together with the preemptive arrest of a right-wing activist, marks a shift for the police force, which has been widely criticized for failing to protect previous marches and for still not solving a mass shooting at a Tel Aviv gay youth center a decade ago. See also, ["Police on alert as Pride parade comes to Jerusalem" \(JPost\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **First Lady Nechama Rivlin Laid to Rest with Prayers and Song**

Israel bade farewell Wednesday to its late First Lady Nechama Rivlin, on what would have been her 74th birthday, a day after she lost her long battle against lung disease. Mrs. Rivlin's coffin was laid in state at the Jerusalem Theater on Wednesday afternoon, allowing the public to pay their final respects to one of the country's most admired public figures before her funeral at the capital's Mount Herzl cemetery. Mrs. Rivlin passed away on Tuesday at the Beilinson Hospital near Tel Aviv, from complications that occurred following a lung transplantation which she had undergone in March. Her friends and admirers as well as many of the Israeli public who have met her over the years paid their condolences, recalling her bravery and her love for both people and nature.

## **New Palestinian Premier Warns of a ‘Very Hot Summer’**

By David M. Halbfinger, Jerusalem bureau chief of The New York Times

- **Pressured by the Trump administration, confronted with Israeli talk of annexing the West Bank, increasingly isolated in the Arab world and running out of money, the beleaguered Palestinian Authority is staring at what its new prime minister acknowledges could be its own demise. “We are in a collapsing situation,” the premier, Muhammad Shtayyeh, said in an interview.**
- **A new Israeli antiterrorism law that withholds some Palestinian revenue has precipitated a financial crisis that could bankrupt the authority by July or August, he said. If that happens, the authority would have to furlough its police officers, he said — a not-so-veiled threat to Israel, which depends on Palestinian security forces to police the West Bank. “It’s a very hot summer. At every level,” Mr. Shtayyeh warned. “I hope we will not reach that point.”**
- **In one of his first interviews with a major Western news organization, Mr. Shtayyeh also attacked as “blackmail” the Trump administration’s pressure tactics in pushing for a peace plan, beginning with a conference this month on economic development on the West Bank.**
- **Mr. Shtayyeh, 61, was a top economic-development official and an occasional participant in peace talks with the Israelis before being appointed to the No. 2 job in the Palestinian Authority in March. His boss, President Mahmoud Abbas, is in his 80s and in poor health. Since then Mr. Shtayyeh has set about trying to increase public confidence in the authority, while also showing a common touch, as if he hoped to be a candidate to succeed Mr. Abbas. But he starts his job facing an immediate financial crisis.**
- **In February, under a 2018 law modeled on the American Taylor Force Act, Israel began deducting about \$138 million in what it calls “pay-to-slay money” from the roughly \$2.5 billion a year in taxes and tariffs that it collects for and transfers to the Palestinians. The deduction is equal to Israel’s tally of the financial support that the authority provided last year to Palestinians in Israeli prisons for attacking Israelis, to their families, and to the families of those “martyred” or killed long ago in uprisings against Israel, including suicide bombers.**
- **Israel and Western countries see those payments, which began in the 1960s, as incentivizing terrorism. But the Palestinians see them as a vital form of welfare that rewards the sacrifices made by freedom fighters and their families, and say that many prisoners had no part in violence and did not receive fair trials. Unilateral deductions by Israel, they say, violate the agreements under which Israel collects revenue for the Palestinians.**
- **Mr. Abbas responded by refusing to accept any revenue transferred from Israel, effectively giving up more than half the authority’s income and setting it on a kamikaze course if Israel does not repeal or suspend its new law. The authority has already slashed its payroll, with tens of thousands of West Bank civil servants and police officers receiving only 50 percent of their salaries. Palestinian banks, stretching to lend the authority money while struggling to collect on consumer loans, are exhausting their liquidity, Mr. Shtayyeh said. But accepting the reduced monetary transfer from Israel, he said, would be tantamount to acknowledging that the payments support terrorism, a premise he rejects. If the Palestinian Authority runs out of cash, Mr. Shtayyeh said, it will furlough its police officers, which Israel and the Palestinians consider crucial. If the Palestinian Authority runs out of cash, Mr. Shtayyeh said, it will furlough its police**

officers, which Israel and the Palestinians consider crucial. CreditErin Trieb for The New York Times. “Politically, we cannot take it that our kids in jail are terrorists,” he said, and legally, it could expose the authority and Palestinian banks alike to lawsuits in Israeli and American courts.

- If the Israelis want the authority to collapse, “let them push it to collapse,” he said. “We will not dissolve the authority. But they can push it to collapse.” If it does, he added, “The P.L.O. will run the show” — effectively rolling back the clock to before the Oslo peace process began. Even Palestinian recognition of Israel could be called into question if that happened, he said. When the authority can no longer pay its bills, he said, “we will start by sending our security people home.”
- That threat has a specific meaning in Israel, whose security forces work closely with their Palestinian counterparts to root out terrorist cells, prevent attacks on Israelis or pursue the perpetrators, and deconflict Israeli military raids in areas of the West Bank under Palestinian security control. But Israel generally treats such threats with great skepticism, because its security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority is largely aimed at preventing Hamas, the militant group that controls Gaza, from entrenching itself on the West Bank. The Fatah officials who dominate the authority may have even more to fear from their rivals in a resurgent Hamas than from Israel.
- Mr. Shtayyeh said he had expected that Israel would seek a resolution of the impasse after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu formed a new government following his re-election in April. But Mr. Netanyahu’s failure to do so, and the prospect of another election in September, makes it less likely that the standoff will end quickly, he said. “Our backs are really tight to the wall,” he said. “We are now in control of the situation. I don’t know for how long.”
- A stalwart of Fatah, the secular nationalist party that dominates both the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Shtayyeh took over a largely technocratic post that executes policies set by Mr. Abbas. A Nablus native, he came of age leading Fatah demonstrations against Israel as a student and then as a teacher at Birzeit University. He said he was arrested and badly beaten by Israeli soldiers twice, in 1977 and 1978. Since he started the job, he has fostered a popular image unlike that of his predecessors. He was photographed walking to work, dispensed with his predecessor’s long motorcade, quit his other posts and banned first-class travel for ministers. He attended a Ramadan iftar, or break-the-fast meal, at a refugee camp. And he demanded that his underlings show tangible improvements in services within 100 days.
- In the interview in his Ramallah office, he did not deviate from the party line in attacking the Trump administration’s plan for an “economic workshop” this month in Bahrain, where it hopes to gather donor nations to convince Palestinian business executives of the financial windfalls they can expect if they embrace the administration’s eventual peace plan. “We know the political agenda,” Mr. Shtayyeh said, citing moves by the Trump administration that favored Israel, including moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem. Ivanka Trump and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin attended the dedication of the new embassy in 2018.
- The Bahrain event has put Palestinian leaders on the defensive politically, pressuring West Bank business leaders to boycott the event while lamenting that other Arab leaders are likely to participate. Mr. Shtayyeh said it was rich for the Trump administration to talk of improving the Palestinian economy after it had eliminated hundreds of millions of dollars in United States aid

to projects in the West Bank and Gaza, to the main United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, and to hospitals in East Jerusalem. “These same people are the ones who have been working on the drying up of the financial resources of the Palestinian Authority,” he said.

- He said the workshop was doomed to go the way of other attempts to promote an “economic peace” or improve Palestinians’ quality of life, from the Reagan era to the Obama administration. “Nothing has materialized,” he said. “And now this Bahrain conference. It will be born dead. Nothing will come out of it.” So far, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to attend, and Qatar reportedly plans to as well. Mr. Shtayyeh suggested that others who agree to participate might do so only because of American coercion. “We hope that Arabs don’t go,” Mr. Shtayyeh said. “Now, we know also that there are countries who are under serious pressure. Some can afford the pressure, and some cannot afford the pressure.”
- Asked why Palestinians did not defy expectations and attend the Bahrain conference, if only to disprove Israeli and American critics who call them rejectionist, Mr. Shtayyeh said the authority was not invited, but argued that to participate in any part of the Trump process would be to fall into a trap. He cited a litany of moves by the Trump administration that favored Israel, including moves to strip millions of Palestinians of their refugee status, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and abandoning the pursuit of a two-state solution based on the June 1967 armistice lines. “We know the political agenda,” he said. “They are saying no to refugees. They are saying no to Jerusalem. They are saying no to two states. They are not respecting ’67 borders. And if this economic track is part of the overall package, what are we accepting? If we are there, people will use our presence there to capitalize on that.”
- Broadly speaking, Mr. Shtayyeh described the Trump administration’s moves as recklessly tampering with the status quo, and the Palestinian response as utterly rational. “The United States is doing a very dangerous thing,” he said. “We and the Israelis have agreed that Jerusalem is a negotiation issue. Now the United States is taking it off the table.” The same for refugees and Jewish settlements on the West Bank, he said: “The Americans didn’t even make one single statement against these settlements, and they are saying they are there to stay.” “We are not rejectionist,” he said. “Our problem is that we know. There are so many people who are blind, but we know — we know where they are taking us. I will tell you, this American design of this blackmail strategy, it will never yield. There are people who think, in Washington, unfortunately, that Palestinians have to be defeated, so they surrender, so they accept.”

**Summary:** He said the workshop was doomed to go the way of other attempts to promote an “economic peace” or improve Palestinians’ quality of life, from the Reagan era to the Obama administration. “Nothing has materialized,” he said. “And now this Bahrain conference. It will be born dead. Nothing will come out of it.” So far, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to attend, and Qatar reportedly plans to as well. Mr. Shtayyeh suggested that others who agree to participate might do so only because of American coercion. “We hope that Arabs don’t go,” Mr. Shtayyeh said. “Now, we know also that there are countries who are under serious pressure. Some can afford the pressure, and some cannot afford the pressure.”

## **Does Israel's Blue and White Party Need to Change Leaders?**

By Ben Caspit, contributor to Al Monitor

- On the outside, it's "business as usual" for the leadership of the Blue and White party. The party announced on June 2 that despite various rumors and statements, the rotation agreement between Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid will be upheld because "agreements must be honored." According to this agreement, if the party wins the elections, Gantz will serve as prime minister until the beginning of 2022, to be replaced later by Lapid. The party's announcement did not include statements like "this is the right thing to do," and none of the party's top brass really believe that a continuation of the rotation between the two will improve the party's electoral outcome — except for Lapid, of course. The decision to continue the rotation — which is probably not final — nonetheless illustrates Lapid's political power. He is the only senior member of the party who is backed up by an experienced political body with logistical systems and an army of devoted volunteers and activists throughout the country.
- The question is what will happen on the ups and downs leading to election day on Sept. 17. "We've received a second chance," Lapid said after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was unable to assemble a government and the Knesset dissolved itself on May 30. Lapid was right. The problem is that at this stage the opportunity does not include new instruments or tie-breaking tools that would enable Blue and White to succeed in the very same place it failed last April: to beat Netanyahu. Perhaps even the contrary is true. It is altogether possible that the next Labor party chairman (primaries will be held this July) will be stronger and more effective than Avi Gabbay was and will succeed in returning some of the voters it had lost to Blue and White. And this is even before expressly mentioning the name Ehud Barak, the former Labor chair and former prime minister, who is seriously considering returning to the party and running for chairman. Blue and White would then be operating in a more complicated and dangerous arena than they had faced in April — and without any improvement in the means it has at its disposal. As aforesaid, things might even be worse this time around.
- At the moment, early public opinion polls show that Blue and White retains its strength, more or less, while the Likud party continues to strengthen. However, Blue and White is lucky in that chances are low that the popular former Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked will be able to transfer from her New Right party to the Likud. This is due to the categorical opposition of the first lady, the prime minister's wife, Sara Netanyahu. Shaked's popularity crosses parties and sectors and was supposed to create new woes for Blue and White. But even without her, the situation is not encouraging.
- As aforementioned, Blue and White officials are outwardly trying to project business as usual and the image of a fraternity of military warriors, which they developed in the course of the last campaign. On the other hand, no one tries anymore to pretend that the party is a united one. The party's elites have decided to stop wasting efforts on hushing up internal disagreements, but have instead adopted the opposite tactic: Yes, we have a variety of opinions and don't always agree on everything, but we'll all walk the path together to the very end. And that's what is important.

- The question is what will happen in the coming weeks as the election date nears and their fate will be decided. In this campaign, Netanyahu's fate will be decided not only in the political realm but also on the legal-criminal level. In these elections, Israel will decide which way to turn: toward a "state of Jewish-religious law" in the style of King David-King Solomon — according to Knesset member Bezalel Smotrich from the United Right? Or for the old, democratic, liberal Jewish state that the country's founders had dreamed of and the right-wing is now trying to undermine?
- What will happen to Blue and White if the polls, which had been so favorable to them in the previous campaign, will now give the party the cold shoulder? What will happen if Netanyahu opens a gap and the neighboring parties, mainly Labor, gnaw a larger portion of its electorate than last time (35 mandates)? Under such circumstances, the chiefs of staff — Blue and White seniors Benny Gantz, Moshe Ya'alon and Gabi Ashkenazi — together with Lapid will face truly painful decisions. It won't be a walk in the park. Army higher-ups like Gantz, Ya'alon and Ashkenazi are used to giving orders and heading a giant military pyramid in which everyone else is subordinate to them. Lapid became accustomed to the same kind of system in Yesh Atid with its quasi-military atmosphere in which everyone obeyed him. Now they need to shake up the system and try to decide what is the best thing to do in order to secure victory. This time, they don't have all of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) behind them.
- The first thing to return to the party's agenda would be the rotation deal. If the polls prove that rotation is bad for Blue and White, then Lapid will find himself under siege. Lapid is a stubborn and determined person. These characteristics were mentioned before on the backdrop of the prevailing assessment at the time that he would not give up the first spot in order to merge with Gantz's Israel Resilience Party. Not ever. Still, the fact is that he did agree to the rotation deal placing him as No. 2 on the Blue and White list. On the legal level, canceling the rotation deal does not require the party to change its election list. It would be enough to announce as such two days before elections, as did Zionist Camp leaders Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni in March 2015. So what will Lapid do at the moment of truth if he faces an ultimatum posed by his party partners?
- There is another, even more sensitive question: What will these gentlemen do if, in a few weeks, it emerges in the polls that Ashkenazi heading the Blue and White list would draw significantly more votes than would Gantz? Ashkenazi has one prominent advantage over Gantz: He knows how to talk to Likud supporters. Ashkenazi, the IDF's 19th chief of staff, is viewed as the sole high-placed Blue and White member capable of bringing in voters from the other side of the political spectrum — the right wing — without harming the traditional center-left electoral base that is ready to donate their kidneys to get rid of Netanyahu. Ashkenazi is equipped with a bit more charisma than Gantz, who has a pleasant, relaxed personality but doesn't create electricity around him or carry people away with his rhetoric. In addition to all of this, Ashkenazi isn't really happy about his relatively low position — No. 4 — on the high list. Ashkenazi committed himself to do what was needed to unite Lapid, Gantz and Ya'alon, and is viewed as the main matchmaker of this Blue and White union. He also said he won't insist on a place among the higher-ups and is ready to do the work but waive the glory. But that's all history; the campaign of the 21st Knesset is behind us, and now we face a new campaign. Is Ashkenazi's commitment still valid today?

- All of these questions will erupt into the agenda in the coming weeks on the assumption that Blue and White will receive lukewarm ratings in the polls or, conversely, Netanyahu takes off. But if Blue and White leads, then peace and quiet will reign. The odds of this happening are somewhat lower.

**Summary:** There is another, even more sensitive question: What will these gentlemen do if, in a few weeks, it emerges in the polls that Ashkenazi heading the Blue and White list would draw significantly more votes than would Gantz? Ashkenazi has one prominent advantage over Gantz: He knows how to talk to Likud supporters. Ashkenazi, the IDF's 19th chief of staff, is viewed as the sole high-placed Blue and White member capable of bringing in voters from the other side of the political spectrum — the right wing — without harming the traditional center-left electoral base that is ready to donate their kidneys to get rid of Netanyahu. Ashkenazi is equipped with a bit more charisma than Gantz, who has a pleasant, relaxed personality but doesn't create electricity around him or carry people away with his rhetoric. In addition to all of this, Ashkenazi isn't really happy about his relatively low position — No. 4 — on the high list. Ashkenazi committed himself to do what was needed to unite Lapid, Gantz and Ya'alon, and is viewed as the main matchmaker of this Blue and White union. He also said he won't insist on a place among the higher-ups and is ready to do the work but waive the glory. But that's all history; the campaign of the 21st Knesset is behind us, and now we face a new campaign. Is Ashkenazi's commitment still valid today?