



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, June 7

Headlines:

- **AG Rejects PM's Request to Postpone Pre-indictment Hearing**
- **IDF: Radars Detect Anti-Aircraft Missile Launch from Syria**
- **Abbas Calls Rivlin to Offer Condolences on wife's Passing**
- **Dem' Senators Push Resolution Decrying WB Annexation Plans**
- **AIPAC, J Street Support Resorting Israel-Palestinian Peace Dialogue Funding**
- **Jerusalem's Gay Pride Parade Kicks-Off Amid At Least 49 Arrests**
- **Israeli Diplomats Call to Stop PM's Appointment of Cairo Envoy**
- **Investigators Blame 'State Actor' for Attacks on Oil Tankers near UAE**

Commentary:

- **New York Times: "Amir Ohana Is Gay and Right-Wing. How Far Can He Go in Israel?"**
 - By Matti Friedman, contributing opinion writer at NYT
- **Ha'aretz: "What Israel Can Learn from its June Wars"**
 - By Giora Eiland, former head of Israel National Security Council

News Excerpts

June 7, 2019

Ha'aretz

AG Rejects PM's Request to Postpone Pre-indictment Hearing

Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit rejected on Thursday Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's request to postpone his pre-indictment hearing until after the new election, which is slated to be held on September 17. Mendelblit has rejected the request on the grounds that the hearing only involves the premier's lawyer and not Netanyahu himself, and therefore shouldn't interfere with the campaign. At most, he is expected to agree to a very short postponement of a week or two. Mendelblit's aide, Gil Limon, released a statement saying that "The dissolution of the Knesset and new election cannot justify the postponement the prime minister's pre-indictment hearing." See also, ["Israel AG rejects Netanyahu request to push back pre-indictment hearing" \(FOX News\)](#)

Ynet News

IDF: Radars Detect Anti-Aircraft Missile Launch from Syria

Several anti-aircraft missiles were fired from Syria toward the Golan Heights, Israeli military said Thursday. The incident comes after two rockets, targeting Israel's only ski resort on Mount Hermon, were fired from Syrian territory late last Saturday. "Our radar systems detected a number of anti-aircraft missiles fired from Syria," said the IDF Spokesperson's Unit in a statement. The launch appears to have failed as the missiles didn't reach Israeli territory and there were no reports of injuries or damage. Israel attacked Syrian military positions in response to Saturday's rocket fire, killing at least 10 people - including three soldiers and seven foreign nationals - as well as wounding seven others. PM Netanyahu said he "instructed the IDF to take strong action" in response to any rocket fire.

Times of Israel

Abbas Calls Rivlin to Offer Condolences on wife's Passing

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas called his Israeli counterpart Reuven Rivlin on Thursday to offer condolences on the passing of First Lady Nechama Rivlin, drawing fire from his rivals. Rivlin died on Tuesday at the age of 73 after suffering complications from a lung transplant. "His excellency offered his condolences to President Rivlin during the call and asked God to provide him and his family with comfort and patience," the official PA news site Wafa reported. Jonathan Cummings, a spokesperson for Reuven, confirmed that the two presidents spoke on the phone. See also, [" Hamas livid after Abbas phones Rivlin" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

Times of Israel

Dem' Senators Push Resolution Decrying WB Annexation Plans

Five Democratic senators, including the party's deputy leader in the chamber and two leading presidential candidates, Senators Sanders and Warren on Thursday introduced a resolution decrying any Israeli plan to annex West Bank territory, an apparent shot across the bow at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has recently spoken in support of extending Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank. "Unilateral annexation of portions of the West Bank would jeopardize prospects for a two-state solution, harm Israel's relationship with its Arab neighbors, threaten Israel's Jewish and democratic identity, and undermine Israel's security," said the non-binding resolution. See also, ["DEMS INTRODUCE RESOLUTION REAFFIRMING U.S. COMMITMENT TO TWO-STATE SOLUTION" \(Jpost\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

AIPAC, JStreet Support Resorting Israel-Pal' Peace Dialogue Funding

An array of pro-Israel groups are backing a bipartisan bill that would seed investment in the Palestinian areas and restore funding to peace dialogue programming that the Trump administration removed as a punitive measure against the Palestinians. The bill reads in part as a rebuke to the administration for ending funding for dialogue groups last year. It also reinforces backing for a two-state solution at a time when the Trump administration and Israeli PM Netanyahu are playing down the prospect of Palestinian statehood. The bill announced Wednesday has drawn support from groups that are often at odds over peace policy, including AIPAC, which generally aligns with the Israeli government on security issues, and J Street and Americans for Peace Now, which have frequently criticized the Netanyahu government's and Trump administration's approaches to the conflict. See also, ["AIPAC and J Street back restoring funds to Israeli-Palestinian dialogue programs" \(TOI\)](#)

Ynet News

Jerusalem's Gay Pride Parade Kicks-Off Amid At Least 49 Arrests

Some 15,000 people turned out Thursday in the capital as part of the 18th annual Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade. The event got underway under increased security measures implemented by the police, with at least 2,600 police officers deployed to secure the march, nearly 100 more than last year. The police in Jerusalem said at least 49 people had been detained before and during the parade, including a man carrying a knife who was arrested by undercover police officers just hours before the event was due to get underway. Israel's first openly gay minister Amir Ohana from Likud, who was assigned the justice portfolio arrived at the parade and was booed by the crowd assembled at the location, with some shouting 'Shame, Shame' and 'What have you done for our community?' at the new minister. See also, ["Justice Minister Ohana joins Gay Pride Parade in Jerusalem" \(JPost\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Israeli Diplomats Call to Stop PM's Appointment of Cairo Envoy

Foreign Ministry employees have written Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz in recent days, asking him to act against Netanyahu's move to consider Likud lawmaker Ayoub Kara for the position of Israel's envoy to Egypt. The Foreign Ministry representatives are asking Katz to defend a different candidate for the position: Amira Oron, a veteran and esteemed diplomat who was elected for the role by the ministry's appointments committee. Oron is an expert on Middle Eastern affairs and fluent in Arabic. She served as the head of the Foreign Ministry's Egypt department and was in charge of the Israeli Embassy in Turkey. Kara, who serves as communications minister, had caused in the past several embarrassing diplomatic incidents. See also, ["Former ambassadors call on gov't not to appoint Kara as envoy to Egypt" \(Jpost\)](#)

Times of Israel

Investigators Blame 'State Actor' for Attacks on Oil Tankers near UAE

Initial findings of an investigation led by the United Arab Emirates of May 12 attacks on oil tankers point to the likelihood that a state was behind the bombings, but there is no evidence yet that Iran was involved, the UAE said Thursday. The UAE along with Saudi Arabia and Norway presented the preliminary findings during a briefing to the UN Security Council, which will also receive the final results of the probe to consider a possible response. The United States has accused Iran of being behind the attacks on the four oil tankers off the Emirati coast, which came at a time of escalating tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Amir Ohana Is Gay and Right-Wing. How Far Can He Go in Israel?

By Matti Friedman, contributing opinion writer at NYT

- For Amir Ohana, the shift that led to Israel's current political moment - and indirectly, to his own unlikely rise - can be pinpointed to one incident in the fall of 2000. Mr. Ohana, who was just appointed this country's first openly gay cabinet minister, was then a 24-year-old from a desert backwater making his way in Tel Aviv. The Israeli right, his political camp, was out of power, the public still hoping for peace with the Arab world.
- On Oct. 12, two Israelis in their 30s reporting for their annual stint of reserve duty took a wrong turn in the occupied West Bank and ended up detained in a Palestinian police station in Ramallah. As a crowd cheered outside, Palestinian civilians beat them both to death and dumped one of the bodies out the window.
- Mr. Ohana remembers seeing the footage on TV, particularly one image that became infamous: a jubilant killer raising two bloody hands out a window. That evening, he told me, he felt the national mood shift. "Many Israelis who saw themselves on the left moved to the right at that moment, and stayed there," he said.
- For Israelis the killings came to symbolize the end of many things: of the optimistic 1990s, of the Oslo peace process and of the old Israeli left. The right, its dark predictions vindicated, began its return to dominance.
- In Israel's recent election, in April, Labor barely squeaked into parliament with a humiliating six seats out of 120. The election went, again, to the right-wing Likud - with significant help from Mr. Ohana, now 43 and one of his party's most hard-line, eloquent and anomalous spokesmen. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's failure to form a new coalition since then has triggered the country's descent into a second national election. But Mr. Ohana's role in the last campaign, and in the new one, was recognized Wednesday when, after just one term in parliament, he catapulted through the party ranks to make history by becoming justice minister in Israel's interim government.
- The new Knesset has five openly gay members, a record. But four are on the center-left, where L.G.B.T. rights have long been popular. Mr. Ohana, the first openly gay lawmaker on the right, is in uncharted territory. His unique trajectory is worth watching because it will test the extent of tolerance by the rightist politicians who hold power, and by the electorate.
- Israelis sometimes speak about two Israels: one Western-oriented and left-leaning, with roots in Eastern Europe, and the other working-class, traditional and rooted in the lost Jewish communities of the Islamic world. Although Mr. Ohana grew up in the middle class, in that simplified division his North African last name and family background place him in the second Israel.
- Mr. Ohana's parents were raised in Morocco. Along with many other Arabic-speaking Jews who came to Israel, they landed in rough immigration camps in the southern desert, then fashioned new lives for themselves against steep odds. The Ohanas' social world was conservative, and their dusty city was far from the sexually liberal bubble of Tel Aviv; there weren't many openly

gay people around Beersheba in 1991. Having a gay son wasn't something they'd planned. But when he was 15, Mr. Ohana told his parents the truth. "That was me and there was nothing I could do about it," he told me recently. "I couldn't change and I didn't want to." They took it, he remembered, "very badly."

- When Mr. Ohana was 18 he joined the army, serving as an officer in the military police. He was discharged in 2000, as peace negotiations collapsed and the Second Intifada began. He then joined a Shin Bet intelligence outfit tasked with stopping the Palestinian suicide bombings and other attacks wreaking havoc on Israeli streets. Polls show that Israelis of Mr. Ohana's generation and younger are drawn increasingly to the right. (He says he was always there.) He spent six years in the security service, studying law at night.
- At a Tel Aviv bar called Evita he met a man named Alon, a stockbroker. They've been together for 14 years - without getting married, because the state doesn't recognize gay marriages performed in Israel, and there's no civil marriage at all. They have two children, David and Elah, born in 2015 to a surrogate mother in Klamath Falls, Ore., because surrogacy is not legal for gay men here.
- In the fall of 2011, Mr. Ohana convened 20 friends in his living room. He'd met some of them on Facebook - that was the year that social media helped drive Arab revolutions, social-justice protests in Israel and Occupy Wall Street in the United States. The mood was one of empowerment. (The same wave in Israel would propel two young leaders from the leftist protests into the Labor benches, where they now serve as Mr. Ohana's opponents.)
- All those present at the meeting were openly gay and right-wing. Until then, L.G.B.T. issues had been a sole concern of the left, and Mr. Ohana and his comrades, later known as the Likud Pride group, saw no reason for this to continue. The Israeli right isn't the American right; here right-wing mainly means a tough stance on the conflict with the Arab world, and the rest is flexible. Or, as Mr. Ohana has said before entering the Knesset in 2015, "Being attracted to men doesn't mean you have to believe in creating a Palestinian state."
- The Likud-led coalition included ultra-Orthodox lawmakers who oppose L.G.B.T. rights, and they absented themselves when their new colleague took the podium. Mr. Ohana introduced himself as the son of "Esther and Meir who came from Morocco to build a state," and the "other half" of Alon, who was in the audience with their two infants. "I'm Jewish, Israeli, Mizrahi, gay, a Likudnik, a security hawk, a liberal and a believer in the free market," Mr. Ohana told parliament. ("Mizrahi," or "eastern," refers to Israelis with roots in the Islamic world, about half of the Jewish population.)
- Mr. Ohana quickly positioned himself on the Likud's right flank, an opponent of compromise on all issues of national security and identity. Success as a newcomer depends on Mr. Netanyahu's grace, and Mr. Ohana has appeared frequently on TV to defend the prime minister from corruption charges with the cool skill of a criminal lawyer. Like Mr. Netanyahu, he's willing to see the justice system - for which he just became responsible - not as a moral force but as a competing interest group. He recently criticized its "Sicilian mafia tactics."
- Mr. Netanyahu appointed him to head the committee in charge of passing the controversial nation-state law, which led to one of the biggest political fights in recent years. The law, passed in 2018, enshrined Israel's Jewish character in law for the first time. The center-left opposition denounced it for undermining the status of minorities, downgrading the status of Arabic and

displaying dangerous signs of ethnic chauvinism. Whatever the law's effects on our society, as politics it was effective, rallying patriotic sentiment around the right while making the left seem naive or treacherous - the classic Netanyahu maneuver.

- When I asked Mr. Ohana how, as a member of a persecuted minority himself, he could back this law, he replied that it merely states what most Israelis believe: Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people. Others are free to live here with full civil rights, but not the right to alter the state's character as a refuge and home for Jews. "Whoever opposes the law simply isn't a Zionist," he said.
- "I grew up in a culture with great respect for the East - the tunes, the tastes, the culture - and it taught me to respect Arabs and not patronize them," Mr. Ohana said, reminding me that both of his parents grew up speaking Arabic. He believes that respecting the Palestinians includes dropping the pretense that their national movement will ever accept Israel's existence. He believes the Islamic world, which housed and endangered his family for many centuries, poses a threat to Jews and L.G.B.T. people, and that Israel must protect both. The West Bank is both the biblical heartland and a vital security buffer against a return to the years of suicide bombings that shaped him and his generation of Israelis in the early years of the century. Israeli control over the Palestinians there will continue permanently as the "lesser evil."
- But how can a state that defines itself as democratic control a large population of people who aren't its citizens? In Mr. Ohana's thinking, democracy is one of several competing values to be weighed against one another. "Why did our parents come here from Morocco, from Poland, Russia, Iraq and Yemen? Did they come to establish a democracy? I don't think so - there were many democracies in the world. They came to create a state for the Jewish people because there wasn't one, and without one it was a terrible world for us."
- On the left, some see Mr. Ohana as a useful mask for the right. "Ohana speaks in the name of liberal values but he actually promotes the politics of the most extreme religious right - annexing settlements, the nation-state law, breaking the power of the Supreme Court, aligning with open racists," said Rami Hod, director of the Berl Katznelson Educational Center, a venerable left-wing think tank affiliated with the Labor movement. "Not only is Ohana not liberal, he represents the death of the liberal Israeli right and shows how the entire right now conforms to the line set by extremists." However he's defined, the new minister's proximity to power makes him the most influential force for gay rights in parliament, even if what he can actually achieve remains to be seen.
- His first bill after entering politics, an attempt to extend hate-crime legislation to transgender people, was blocked by ultra-Orthodox lawmakers. The same pressure led the government to exclude gay men like him from new surrogacy legislation. Mr. Ohana voted with the opposition after delivering an impassioned plea in a Knesset committee, describing his own experience of being forced to travel to Oregon to become a father. He also joined the opposition in trying, and failing, to extend existing anti-discrimination laws to sexual and gender orientation.
- While religious conservatives haven't changed the way they vote as a result of Mr. Ohana, some do seem to have changed the way they speak. Lawmakers from the Shas party, for example, which is ultra-Orthodox and Mizrahi, have said in the past that gays should be treated like the avian flu and that they were responsible for natural disasters like earthquakes. That rhetoric has become rarer, part of what Mr. Ohana sees as "an evolution, not a revolution," and for which some L.G.B.T. activists give him partial credit. It's harder to speak that way about a political ally.

- Israeli society is changing for the better, Mr. Ohana said, and so is the Israeli right. A Shas lawmaker, Rabbi Yigal Guetta, came under fire in 2017 for attending his nephew's gay wedding and was ultimately forced to resign - but he went unapologetically to the wedding, a move impossible not long ago. I was with Mr. Ohana in a Knesset corridor when he was greeted by a Shas official with a long beard and a skullcap who congratulated him warmly on his political success. "To the left's credit, it must be said that for years they were the only ones speaking about L.G.B.T. issues," Mr. Ohana said, "but it's an L.G.B.T. interest for these issues not to be left in the hands of a small opposition party." Given the outcome of the recent election, and whatever the results of the next one, there's little doubt he's right.

Summary: On the left, some see Mr. Ohana as a useful mask for the right. "Ohana speaks in the name of liberal values but he actually promotes the politics of the most extreme religious right - annexing settlements, the nation-state law, breaking the power of the Supreme Court, aligning with open racists," said Rami Hod, director of the Berl Katznelson Educational Center, a venerable left-wing think tank affiliated with the Labor movement. "Not only is Ohana not liberal, he represents the death of the liberal Israeli right and shows how the entire right now conforms to the line set by extremists." However he's defined, the new minister's proximity to power makes him the most influential force for gay rights in parliament, even if what he can actually achieve remains to be seen. His first bill after entering politics, an attempt to extend hate-crime legislation to transgender people, was blocked by ultra-Orthodox lawmakers. The same pressure led the government to exclude gay men like him from new surrogacy legislation. Mr. Ohana voted with the opposition after delivering an impassioned plea in a Knesset committee, describing his own experience of being forced to travel to Oregon to become a father. He also joined the opposition in trying, and failing, to extend existing anti-discrimination laws to sexual and gender orientation.

What Israel Can Learn from its June Wars

By Giora Eiland, former head of Israel National Security Council

- June 5 of 52 years ago was the day the Six-Day War broke out. June 6 marks 37 years since the outbreak of the First Lebanon War. Israel started both wars and Israel conquered territory in both wars, and held on to it for many years. But while the differences between the two wars were substantial, both should be a lesson for the future.
- The first difference is one of strategy, which can be either offensive or defensive. An offensive strategy aims to instigate Geopolitical change while a defensive one tries to avoid change or even reverse it. A case in point is the two Iraq wars waged by the United States. In the first, in 1991, American strategy was offensive: Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and the United States interceded to push him out and restore the old order. When that was achieved, the war was over.
- In 2003, however, the American administration deliberately set out to topple Saddam's regime, so an offensive war was launched. The 1967 Six-Day War was strategically defensive: The enemies were to be kept at bay. Even if military offensives were undertaken, their goal was to defend the borders.
- The First Lebanon War of 1982, on the other hand, was strategically offensive to remove the Palestine Liberation Organization from Lebanon and change the political reality on the ground. While the defensive war of 1967 had clear aims, the latter, 15 years later, began with the purpose of creating a new balance of power in Lebanon, and installing a pro-Israel, Christian government, while keeping that fact from the public. "Peace for the Galilee" was the stated goal.
- The second difference between the wars of '67 and '82 is the question of whether there were any way to avoid battle. There was no way to avoid the Six-Day War. The threat to Israel's existence was real and required the government to take action.
- The First Lebanon War, on the other hand, came after a period of relative calm on the northern border. The prime minister at the time, Menachem Begin, spoke publicly about the need sometimes to go to war that was not purely defensive but could achieve national goals. This was a war Israel chose to fight.
- Finally, the balance of power in both wars was very different. In 1967, Israel had no strategic depth. It was David facing the Goliath of the Arab states. 1982 was no such thing. Looking at lessons learned from these two wars in Israel's short history, both of which were began this month 52 and 37 years ago, respectively, it is evident that first of all, Israelis will not tolerate going to war that can be avoided. They are sensitive to the loss of life it entails. Current Israeli government policy on Gaza is a reflection of that.
- Second, the Israeli government must state its expected objectives before taking military action. The policy towards Iran's intrenchment efforts in Syria is an example of that: Israel draws its red lines and acts to enforce them Finally, Israel to date has had a military advantage in all its conflicts, and that can be seen as a double-edged sword. It is challenge of the military to maintain this edge, take tactical risks when necessary and increase preparedness for any eventuality in the spirit of the Six-Day War. These are the lessons that we must learn.