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Israel and Middle East News Update

Thursday, June 5

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Times of Israel

Shas said planning to back Knesset dissolution over stymied draft-exemption bill

The Sephardic ultra-Orthodox Shas party will support the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party's efforts to introduce a bill to dissolve the Knesset over the coalition's failure to pass a law exempting yeshiva students from military service, according to multiple Hebrew media reports Wednesday. Speaking with the Haaretz daily following a faction meeting held to discuss whether or not to support the UTJ-led move, a Shas source said that the party will push to dissolve the Knesset, a move that would strip the coalition of its majority and trigger new elections.

Times of Israel

Mediators optimistic Hamas will soon submit softened hostage deal proposal

Mediators are optimistic that Hamas will soon submit an updated hostage deal proposal that will be closer to what US special envoy Steve Witkoff presented last week, three sources familiar with the matter told The Times of Israel on Wednesday. Hamas submitted an earlier response to Witkoff's proposal on Saturday, which the US envoy blasted as unacceptable. Since then, Egyptian and Qatari mediators — along with Witkoff's representative in Doha, Palestinian-American businessman and political activist Bishara Bahbah — have been working with Hamas officials to soften or remove some of the changes it made to the US proposal, an Arab official and a second source familiar with the matter said.

Times of Israel

GHF says Gaza aid sites won't reopen Thursday morning as planned, after one-day shutdown

The Israel-backed body leading aid distribution in the Gaza Strip said Wednesday its distribution sites would not be opening Thursday morning, due to maintenance and repair work. The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation indicated the sites would resume operations later in the day, but did not say when. The GHF post said the organization would share information on opening times as soon as the work is complete.

Jerusalem Post

Freedom flotilla will not be allowed to dock in Gaza, sources confirm to the 'Post'

The IDF decided that the "Madleen," which is sailing to Gaza and carrying 12 pro-Palestinian activists, including climate activist Greta Thunberg, will not be allowed to approach or dock in the Gaza Strip, KAN reported on Wednesday. A senior Israeli defense source confirmed the matter to The Jerusalem Post, adding that Defense Minister Israel Katz is expected to make more decisions on Thursday. The ship is expected to arrive within a week.

Times of Israel

US vetoes UN Security Council resolution calling for Gaza ceasefire

The United States on Wednesday vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for an "immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire" between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the release of all the hostages and unhindered aid access across the enclave. "The United States has been clear we would not support any

measure that fails to condemn Hamas and does not call for Hamas to disarm and leave Gaza,” Acting US Ambassador to the UN Dorothy Shea told the council before the vote.

Al-Monitor

Trump travel ban bars entry from Iran, Libya, Sudan, Yemen

US President Donald Trump issued a proclamation on Wednesday evening prohibiting nationals of 12 countries, including several in the Middle East and North Africa, from entering the United States. The White House said the proclamation “fully restricts and limits the entry of nationals” from Iran, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Burma, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, and Haiti.

Reuters

Iran's Khamenei dismisses US nuclear proposal, vows to keep enriching uranium

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that abandoning uranium enrichment was “100%” against the country's interests, rejecting a central U.S. demand in talks to resolve a decades-long dispute over Tehran's nuclear ambitions. The U.S. proposal for a new nuclear deal was presented to Iran on Saturday by Oman, which has mediated talks between Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff.

Commentary:

Israel Hayom

Hamas Also Knows This Time It's Up Against the Wall

By Danny Zaken

- More than anything else, Hamas's announcement earlier this week that it was immediately prepared to resume negotiations to end the war highlights the Islamic terrorist organization's urgent need to stop the Israeli offensive and try to prevent its own complete collapse.
- This is a shift, admittedly not a 180-degree one, from the position it presented in response to US Envoy Steve Witkoff's latest proposal, which it essentially rejected.
- Hamas now finds itself at its lowest point since its founding, and in real danger of ceasing to be an influential actor. Fear has ceased to be a barrier for Gazans, primarily thanks to the American aid centers that operate under Israeli auspices. Hamas understands this, and is making desperate effort to stop this aid route, including by instigating shooting incidents such the one on Sunday on the road to an aid distribution center, which cost dozens of Gazans their lives.
- Even the mobilization in support of Hamas by many global media outlets, which unquestionably accepted the narrative it sold them as if Israel had fired on civilians, has not changed the situation on the ground. Witkoff's harsh and critical reaction to Hamas's response surprised the terrorist organization's leadership, which responded with an insult of sorts.
- The Americans who, to Israel's dismay, received Hamas's rejection after they had conducted a direct channel of negotiation with the group, are truly angry.
- That is why Hamas is now making efforts to bring Egypt back into the picture, as well as Qatar, which has so far helped Hamas in the negotiations. In its statement, Hamas praised the two countries for their assistance in the talks.
- The Americans are still somewhat uncertain about whether to renew the negotiations, since their previous message to Hamas was, "This is the proposal. Take it or leave it," meaning stick to the proposal outlining the principles, add certain details, but leave the main points of contention for future talks. Agreeing now to talks would reopen the discussions about the terms of the ceasefire agreement.
- Israel has persevered with its strategy of holding negotiations under fire. The ongoing military pressure has had substantial impact. The aid distribution centers are operating excellently, and more are planned.
- These centers' success is important both for their direct role in distributing aid and, equally important, for breaking Gazans' dependence

on Hamas, which had previously commandeered the aid that entered Gaza mainly via UN agencies.

- This is illustrated in last night's statement from a senior Israeli official, who said, "Israel is committed to the proposal presented by envoy Witkoff. The proposal was approved and then rejected by Hamas. We will continue all diplomatic and military efforts to secure the release of the hostages and to ensure Hamas no longer poses a threat to the State of Israel." In other words: a ceasefire only on condition of the immediate release of half the hostages, and with no commitment either to withdraw or other Hamas demands, such as a long-term truce.
- Officials in Jerusalem expect that Hamas's dire situation on the ground means that, at some point, it will have to accept the ceasefire terms, perhaps with minor adjustments. Until then, the ground operation in Gaza will continue to be expanded in a measured way—one street at a time, one neighborhood at a time. With caution and determination.
- When will Hamas decide enough is enough? Once it genuinely believes that it cannot force America to budge from its support for the Israeli military ground operation. And credit is due to the Trump administration: Despite all the talk about a need for a deal, this support has continued—in both military and diplomatic terms.

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Yediot Ahronot

Diplomatic Flood

By Itamar Eichner

- The Canadian police's decision to reveal that it has been conducting an undercover investigation for more than a year into Jewish and Israeli soldiers who fought in Gaza for alleged crimes against humanity, coupled with the decision made by the Spanish Defense Ministry to suspend the production permit of Rafael-made anti-tank missiles in Spain—a decision that effectively cancelled a USD 310 million contract —should not come as a surprise to anyone.
- These developments occurred after a joint announcement was issued by France, the UK and Canada threatening sanctions. They come on the heels of fierce criticism that was aired by the German chancellor, who criticized Israel's attacks on Gaza, saying they no longer made sense and he could not understand them, and after his foreign minister refused to rule out a future arms embargo.

- The president of Chile, Gabriel Boric, accused Israel of committing genocide and ethnic cleansing last week. He announced his decision to recall the two military attaches from Tel Aviv, as well as other measures advancing legislation to bar imports from the occupied territories and to instruct his defense minister to find alternatives to Chile's defense imports and not rely on Israel.
- Neither of these steps has much impact beyond fanning the hatred against us. A bill to ban imports from the occupied territories had been on the table for years. It was not advanced for good reason, since it would only have hurt Chile; the bill would not hurt Israel, and it would not particularly help the Palestinians either.
- Canada, Spain, the UK, France and Chile are not alone. The writing was on the wall. To state the obvious, Israel has lost international legitimacy to continue to prosecute the war in Gaza. Israel does not operate in a vacuum. Without the support of major countries, Israel is liable to find itself isolated, which will impair its ability to defend itself as a result of cancelled arms sales and diplomatic action—and which might reach the point of UN condemnations and operative decisions against Israel, in addition to economic damage and the damage to Israel's public image.
- Israel had a period of grace for two or three weeks after October 7, but Israel has lost that in the time since. The diplomatic failure has been resounding.
- Had Netanyahu presented a plan for the day after and had he enlisted the entire world to support it, Israel would be in a different place today. Not only would Israel be declared the victor in the war, the world would have worked with us on Gaza's reconstruction.
- But the coalition's survival has been more important to Netanyahu than anything else, including the hostages, his considerations have not been germane and we are paying the price. He squandered a rare moment of global support.
- Today, we are left only with Orban, the Hungarian leader, and with Milei, the Argentine leader. The significance is that Trump is about to dictate a solution to Israel. He will not consult with us; he will dictate to us. He has been talking without us with the Saudis, the Iranians, Hamas and the Houthis. He has closed deals and he is also planning Gaza's future without us.
- Netanyahu's primary failure has been in the realm of diplomacy. War creates opportunities for diplomatic progress. The Mossad, the GSS and the IDF have all provided the ultimate military umbrella. The blow that Hizbullah took will be taught in schools for decades to come. The IDF's

performance has been incredible but, in the end, along comes the political leader and screws it all up, chiefly because of his fear that his coalition will fall apart.

- All of us have suffered as a result. Our credit rating has been lowered. Young people are talking about leaving Israel. Countries are starting to punish us. Anyone who thinks that the problem is hasbara [lit. explanation] is wrong. While it may be true that our hasbara has failed, bad policy cannot really be explained, and the world's belief in Israel's explanations is vanishing before our very eyes. After all, no genocide is truly being committed in Gaza, and the statements that have been made by Smotrich and other ministers from the extreme right wing are not binding, because the State of Israel's policy is not to destroy, to kill and to raze.
- But the world has no patience for these images, particularly when the Israelis don't see them because the Israeli media does not think it should broadcast them, lest it be accused of a lack of patriotism.
- Trump has also played a role in producing this situation. It was Trump who tossed into the air the fantasy of relocating Gaza's residents, and deluded the right-wing into thinking that this was a realistic plan. He did not really believe it himself, he just wanted to show the Arabs that America would not write a check and that they should be the ones to open their wallets and help us rebuild Gaza. He has been saying the same thing to the Europeans about rebuilding Ukraine on the day after.
- The American president is also to blame for stopping his public support for Israel and showing the world and our enemies that Israel and the US are in disagreement—regardless of how much they deny it. It is no wonder that our friends around the world have begun to allow themselves to speak out against us. They see which way the wind is blowing in Washington.
- The big question is what are the steps being taken supposed to achieve. Are these steps meant to warn the Netanyahu government: Watch out, what is happening in Gaza is excessive; or are they meant for domestic purposes, to reassure the extreme left and the Islamists, which can be found in both Spain and in Canada.
- The answer is still not all that clear, since all the steps that have been taken are reversible. The contract that the Spanish decided to cancel can be renewed and, by the same token, the Canadians can decide to close the investigations that they began and say they failed to turn up anything.

- **These might merely be yellow cards, a warning to the Israeli government. Ultimately, they enjoy high visibility and can be repeated by the media, but they have little significance.**
- **All this will be true until June 17. Then we will know whether France will recognize a Palestinian state at the international conference that it will hold with Saudi Arabia. If France recognizes a Palestinian state, we might find ourselves in a completely different place. Recognition will be a public and an irreversible course of action. We should therefore look ahead, and not just at what is happening now.**