

**JERUSALEM RESPONDS TO LATEST ATTACK; MEANWHILE,  
HEBREW MEDIA INCRIMINATES BIBI OVER SCANDALS**

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Isranet Daily Briefing, July 17, 2017

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/jerusalem-responds-latest-attack-meanwhile-hebrew-media-incriminates-bibi-over-scandals/>

[Temple Mount Turmoil: Preventing an Explosion of Mounting Tensions: Editorial, \*Jerusalem Post\*, July 17, 2017](#)— Last week, The Atlantic rendered a great service to those of us who contend that America is in the midst of a civil war between the right and the left.

[The Media Closes in on Netanyahu: Adiv Sterman, \*Times of Israel\*, July 14, 2017](#)— Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alleged involvement in a string of scandals is the number one topic for Israel's major Hebrew-language papers Friday.

[What the Labor Party Primary Says About Israel's Consensus: Evelyn Gordon, \*Commentary\*, July 14, 2017](#)— Following Monday's leadership primary for Israel's main moderate-left party, much has been written about the outcome and its implications for the party.

[The Harm in Trying: Elliott Abrams, \*Weekly Standard\*, July 3, 2017](#)— Among Israelis and Palestinians, there's little optimism about renewed American efforts to negotiate a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

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[Israel to Reopen Jerusalem Holy Site After Terror Attack: \*New York Post\*, July 16, 2017](#)

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**TEMPLE MOUNT TURMOIL:**

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**PREVENTING AN EXPLOSION OF MOUNTING TENSIONS**

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*Editorial*

*[Jerusalem Post](#), July 17, 2017*

Referring to the area in and around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem as “potentially explosive” would be an understatement. All the elements for a major explosion of violence exist: A plenitude of righteous Muslim anger at Israel’s security restrictions; an abundance of Arab-language media outlets well versed in fanning anti-Israel incitement; a desire on the part of Arab leaders and media outlets to shift attention away from internal Arab conflicts in Syria, Iraq or with Qatar to the “Zionist entity”; even the exceedingly hot weather in the region is conducive to bringing nerves to a breaking point.

Further exacerbating the situation is a general unwillingness by members of the United Arab List to denounce the attack, which was perpetrated by three Israeli citizens from Umm el-Fahm. The best they could do was iterate a general position against the use of violence in the struggle for Palestinian independence while blaming the “occupation” as the main cause for Palestinian violence. Lastly, were the calls by some Israelis on the Right for the state to use the attack to solidify its control over the holy site and to, for example, permit Jewish prayer there in response.

The government’s decision to swiftly close the Mount on Friday and declare publicly that it will not change the status quo appears to have worked for the time being. Further violence, as of Sunday evening, seems to have been avoided. Nevertheless, Arab and Muslim leaders need to be more responsible. While Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas denounced the attack in a rare telephone conversation with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on Friday, he did not do so in Arabic before the Palestinian people.

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**Arabs with Israeli citizenship smuggled guns into a holy site and desecrated a place designated for prayers and supplication to God by shedding the blood of two innocent human beings. Yet, instead of denouncing this, Palestinians and the broader Arab and Muslim world has focused on the security measures taken by Israel in response to the attack.**

**Jordan's King Abdullah publicly criticized Israel's decision shortly after the attack on Friday morning to block access to the Temple Mount. The king was motivated by the need to demonstrate to Jordanians, most of whom are of Palestinian origin, that he is taking a tough position against Israel. Still, out of deference to his alliance with Israel, Jordan's leader could have delayed his criticism of what was a supremely rational move by Israel, one aimed at preventing rioting and hot tempered reactions if Muslims were allowed into the compound for prayers.**

**Just as Netanyahu was right to decide - after consulting with security officials - to close the Temple Mount in the wake of the terrorist attack, he was acting responsibly when he moved to gradually reopen the site, this time with a new security arrangement: metal detectors. Unfortunately, this modest attempt to prevent a repeat of Friday's bloodshed was met with characteristic Palestinian and Arab intransigence as an attempt by Israel to change the status quo. In a classic "blame the victim" argument, MK Taleb Abu Arar (Joint List) told *The Jerusalem Post* that introducing the metal detectors would bring more bloodshed.**

**He also accused Israel of taking advantage of the situation to "impose a complete control over the compound" - as though Israel relishes investing more manpower and energy in securing the Temple Mount area for the predominantly Muslim population that visits there. Entrance to the Western Wall area is possible only after undergoing a security check and passing through a metal detector. In the wake of Friday's attack, it has become clear that a similar arrangement must be put in place at the entrance to the Temple Mount. Legitimate Palestinian concerns about long delays should be addressed by Israel.**

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Perhaps the introduction of new security arrangements should be done gradually—and in dialogue with the Palestinians. Nerves are at breaking point. So far, our prime minister has acted responsibly, ignoring calls by some on the Right to change the status quo, and instead working with Israel’s Arab neighbors to prevent additional violence. That policy should continue. Irrational fears and religious fanaticism cannot be allowed to win.

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**THE MEDIA CLOSES IN ON NETANYAHU**

*Adiv Sterman*

[Times of Israel](#), July 14, 2017

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alleged involvement in a string of scandals is the number one topic for Israel’s major Hebrew-language papers Friday. And although no evidence of actual criminal activity on the part of the Israeli leader has been produced, some papers are covering the cases as though it’s patently obvious he should be behind bars.

*Yedioth Ahronoth* shows little restraint when it comes to attacking Netanyahu, with the paper’s front page determining that the latest developments in the German submarines affair, as well as the alleged violations of transparency rules related to regulating Bezeq, “are what corruption looks like.” The daily, traditionally hostile to the prime minister, plainly believes it knows where the investigations will end up. “Black on white, in an official document handed in by the Israel Securities Authority to the courts, are revealed dramatic suspicions regarding the method by which the Communications Ministry operated under [Bezeq head Shaul] Elovitz and Netanyahu,” the paper states authoritatively.

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***Yedioth* mocks the prime minister for an interview he gave on the conservative Channel 20 late Thursday, in which Netanyahu responded to, and dismissed, the allegations against him. Referring to the right wing news outlet as Netanyahu's "home turf," *Yedioth* features a series of quotes by the prime minister that, when strung together one after another without context, look rather ridiculous, even Trumpesque. *Yedioth* also publishes a leaked version of a document handed out by Netanyahu to ministers in his government, which includes talking points about the various corruption affairs, and accuses the media of illegitimately attempting to topple the Israeli leader. *Yedioth* columnist Nahum Barnea continues with the same line of criticism he had been pushing all week, arguing that while Netanyahu may have individual excuses for each different case, the accumulation of affairs involving the prime minister points to something rotten in the leadership of the state.**

**The daily's veteran analyst Sima Kadmon claims that Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, who was appointed by Netanyahu, understands that the chances are slim for the prime minister to avoid indictment in one or more of the cases. On the other hand Amichai Eteli, another *Yedioth* writer, reminds readers that Netanyahu has so far not been charged — indeed, he is not a suspect in the submarine or Bezeq cases — and implores the citizens of Israel, and perhaps his fellow journalists as well, to allow the wheels of justice to turn uninterrupted before jumping to conclusions.**

***Israel Hayom's* coverage of the investigations into the allegations involving the prime minister is particularly interesting, given the recent reshuffling of the daily's editorial staff and the consequent, under-the-radar break away from the paper's previous unstintingly pro-Netanyahu leaning. The daily's front page is rather reminiscent of *Yedioth*, though more restrained, as it presents the developments in the various affairs as dramatic and serious. The paper does not directly criticize Netanyahu, but now, as opposed to the past, does seem ready to entertain the possibility that the prime minister may have been involved in some shady dealings. In contrast, its columnists Akiva Bigman and Haim Shine write respectively that no real evidence has yet indicated that Netanyahu acted illegally,**

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and that the investigations are still at a very early stage, which renders most speculation on the matters to be premature as well.

*Haaretz's* take on Netanyahu's numerous possible entanglements is unsurprisingly harsh and unforgiving, and the paper dedicates a significant portion of its front page to a stinging analysis by political commentator Yossi Verter titled "A danger to society." Verter argues that the stench of corruption surrounding the prime minister has become unbearable, and that with the publication of new details on each affair the problematics of the Israeli leadership becomes more and more evident. "Adviser after adviser [to Netanyahu], associate after associate, are exposed in their disgrace, are dragged to interrogation rooms, taken to custody... and only the person who they serves [conveniently] knows nothing," Verter writes cynically. "The notion that after the next elections, whenever they may be, he and the characters surrounding him will return to the Prime Minister's Office and other points of power should be enough to sicken every decent Israeli, regardless of their religion, gender, political leanings, or sectoral affiliation."

The paper's editorial argues that Mandelblit must hasten the investigations into Netanyahu, since the state of doubt surrounding the prime minister is terrible for governance, and weakens the trust of Israel's citizens in the judicial system. "The situation is such that for over eight months Netanyahu and his inner circle are heavily suspected of corruption, but continue to hold the reins of power undisturbed," the editorial protests. "The [protracted] continuation of the investigations raises a concern in the public that the attorney general is not doing enough in order to speed up the process and reach the decision of whether to indict or not."

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**WHAT THE LABOR PARTY PRIMARY SAYS ABOUT ISRAEL'S CONSENSUS**

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*Evelyn Gordon*

*[Commentary](#), July 14, 2017*

Following Monday's leadership primary for Israel's main moderate-left party, much has been written about the outcome and its implications for the party. What I found far more interesting, however, was the campaign itself and what it said about the Israeli consensus. Since the primary electorate consisted solely of Labor Party members, one would have expected the candidates to veer left (and then move back to center in the general election). Instead, both candidates publicly disavowed several ideas popular among left-wing journalists and activists, indicating that those ideas are toxic even on the moderate left.

Ostensibly, winner Avi Gabbay and runner-up Amir Peretz couldn't be more different. Peretz is a veteran hard-left activist, an early leader of the Peace Now movement, who was advocating Palestinian statehood back when most Israelis still considered the idea anathema. Gabbay is a moderate who once supported Benjamin Netanyahu's center-right Likud party and, more recently, co-founded the centrist Kulanu party. Yet they sounded almost indistinguishable when answering five questions posed by *Haaretz* (in Hebrew) before Monday's run-off...

Asked about the idea of unilaterally withdrawing from parts of the West Bank, for instance, both men rejected it. "I don't believe in unilateral withdrawal," Gabbay said bluntly. Peretz was wordier, but still quite clear. "We won't continue to settle the territories, but at the same time, we mustn't forget the lessons of the unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza (and also from other conflict areas around the world)," he said.

What makes this surprising is that several Labor-affiliated former senior-defense-officials-turned-activists have been pushing unilateral withdrawal. Among them are former Military Intelligence chief Amos Yadlin, the man slated to be Labor's defense minister had it won the last election, and former Shin Bet security service

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chief Ami Ayalon, a one-time Labor Knesset member. Thus one might expect the idea to appeal to rank-and-file members.

But Peretz and Gabbay thought otherwise. Israel's unilateral pullout from Gaza in 2005 resulted in three wars and 16,000 rockets on Israel (compared to zero from the Israeli-controlled West Bank), while its unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 enabled Hezbollah to grow from a terrorist nuisance into a major strategic threat. That terrorist organization's arsenal of 150,000 rockets is larger than that of most national armies. The candidates evidently concluded that even left-of-center Israelis no longer believe the activist "experts" who persist in denying that unilateral withdrawal endangers Israel's security.

Moreover, both candidates promised to freeze settlement construction, but only outside the major settlement blocs. This is a sharp rejection of the line the Obama Administration spent eight years peddling—that construction anywhere beyond the 1949 armistice lines, even in areas everyone knows will remain Israeli under any agreement, is an obstacle to peace. It turns out even left-of-center Israelis consider it ludicrous for Israel to stop building in the settlement blocs and large Jewish neighborhoods of east Jerusalem. They simply don't buy the idea that construction in these areas, which will clearly remain Israeli, is a legitimate excuse for the Palestinians' ongoing refusal to negotiate.

No less noteworthy was one glaring omission. Though both candidates promised immediate final-status negotiations with the Palestinians and deemed a peace deal essential, their only stated reason for this position was to keep Israel from becoming a binational state. Neither so much as mentioned the fear that Israel could face growing international isolation if it didn't resolve the conflict. That claim has been a staple of left-wing advocacy for years. It was most famously expressed by former Labor chairman (and former prime minister) Ehud Barak who, in 2011, warned that Israel would face a "diplomatic tsunami" if the conflict continued.



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This argument has been getting harder and harder to make in recent years, as Israel's diplomatic reach has steadily expanded. But it would have sounded particularly fatuous coming just days after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Israel, which caused many who had previously parroted Barak's warning to throw in the towel. Typical headlines from center-left commentators included "Where's the diplomatic isolation?" and "Modi visit shows Israel can improve foreign ties even without a peace process." Judging by the fact that neither Peretz nor Gabbay mentioned this argument, they evidently think even Labor Party members will no longer buy it.

As an aside, it's far from clear that diplomatic ties would continue expanding under a Labor government, because center-left governments typically view the Palestinian issue as their top priority, and therefore devote much less time and energy to expanding ties with the rest of the world. In contrast, since Netanyahu's government believes a Palestinian deal is currently unobtainable, it has invested enormous effort in expanding Israel's other diplomatic relationships. And that effort matters. As Kenya's UN ambassador said last week, it's only recently that "the lights have gone on" in Israel and it has started engaging. Previously, he spent years asking Israeli officials, "Why are you not engaged? Where is Israel?" But the possibility that Labor might choose to focus on the Palestinians instead doesn't change the fact that Israel clearly can expand its diplomacy even without a peace process...

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**THE HARM IN TRYING**

*Elliott Abrams*

[Weekly Standard](#), July 3, 2017

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**Among Israelis and Palestinians, there's little optimism about renewed American efforts to negotiate a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. In Ramallah and Jerusalem, officials, journalists, and policy analysts have watched as industrious U.S. activity in the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations come to naught—and they expect the same outcome for the Trump administration.**

**There is a lot more optimism in the Trump White House, and of course it starts at the top. The president said this in a February press conference with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu: “I think a deal will be made. I know that every president would like to. Most of them have not started until late because they never thought it was possible. And it wasn't possible because they didn't do it. But Bibi and I have known each other a long time—a smart man, great negotiator. And I think we're going to make a deal. It might be a bigger and better deal than people in this room even understand.”**

**In April, President Trump added, “There is no reason there's not peace between Israel and the Palestinians—none whatsoever.” And in a May press conference with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas he made his most categorical statement: “We want to create peace between Israel and the Palestinians. We will get it done. . . . It is something that I think is frankly, maybe, not as difficult as people have thought over the years.”**

**The attitude I've detected outside the Oval Office is more realistic about the chances of success. But arguments suggesting that there is little or no chance are met with a standard reply: “Okay, but what's the harm in trying?” This is not a new idea; it was Bill Clinton's. As he put it, “We always need to get caught trying—fewer people will die.” So the Trump administration wishes to get caught trying as well, and operates under the assumption Clinton made: that there is no harm in trying, and that indeed it saves lives. But that conclusion is wrong, as round after round of terrorism should attest. To put it slightly differently, there is harm in failing—and it does not save lives. What's the harm?**

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To begin with, it is always harmful for the United States to fail—and for a president to fail. Influence in the world is hard to measure, but when a president devotes himself—as Bill Clinton, especially, did in the Camp David talks in 2000—to any project and fails to pull it off, his influence and that of the United States are diminished. Yes, he does get credit for trying, but there's no benefit in failing. Opinions may differ as to why this happened: The United States misjudged Yasser Arafat, the White House prepared poorly, the timing was all wrong, the conditions were misunderstood. But getting an A for effort isn't enough when other people's security hangs in the balance.

Results matter. When the United States succeeds, as it did for example in the 1995 Dayton Accords on the Balkans or in the Camp David deal under Jimmy Carter, American prestige and influence grow. But that coin has two sides, and failure is never a good thing. With U.S. influence on the wane in recent years, devoting significant effort to a goal that is unlikely to be attained looks like a misplaced priority.

What's more, the United States has been championing the "peace process" now for about 30 years, if we start with George H. W. Bush and the Madrid Conference of 1991. Palestinians and Israelis have seen negotiators come and go—or in many cases, never go, and instead just age and write memoirs. Round follows round, claims of progress and angry denunciations for blocking progress follow each other, and the "unsustainable occupation" continues. What this produces is cynicism about peace talks and about peace. On the Palestinian side many view the "peace process" as a formula for sustaining the occupation. Many Israelis see it as a shield protecting Palestinian malfeasance and worse: When they demand a stop to official Palestinian glorification of terrorism, they hear, "Don't rock the boat now, negotiations may start."

A further reason to be wary of another big peace effort is the opportunity cost. When each successive American administration works for a comprehensive peace deal, it tends to neglect the many opportunities to make less dramatic but still consequential real-world progress. If the goal were instead to leave things better

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than we found them, every incremental bit of progress would be a victory. That was the “bottom-up” approach taken by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who was fiercely dedicated to Palestinian independence but thought this required building the institutions of a viable state first. That meant concentrating on better financial controls and a reduction in corruption, better courts and police, and a more productive economy. Unfortunately, the incremental approach lacks drama and did not win the international support it deserved—including the Israeli and American support it deserved.

During the George W. Bush administration, those of us on the American side often demanded concessions from Israel to “set the tone for talks” or to “get things moving in the talks.” The steps often gave Abbas symbolic victories but they rarely contributed to state-building. For example, we were more concerned with getting Israel to release some Palestinian prisoners—who may have committed acts of violence—than we were about getting Israel to remove checkpoints or barriers that prevented Palestinian mobility in the West Bank and thereby made both normal life and economic activity harder. How returning convicted criminals to the streets contributed to building a Palestinian state was never explained...

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[Israel to Reopen Jerusalem Holy Site After Terror Attack: \*New York Post\*, July 16, 2017](#)—Israel will gradually reopen a Jerusalem holy site Sunday after taking the rare step of shutting it down following a deadly assault there that sparked concerns of a fresh round of violence.

[Herzog to Remain Opposition Head Under New Labor Leader Gabbay: \*Gil Hoffman, Jerusalem Post\*, July 12, 2017](#)—Former Labor chairman Isaac Herzog will remain the

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head of the opposition, he announced on Wednesday at a ceremony at Labor Party headquarters in Tel Aviv with new party leader Avi Gabbay. At meetings on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning, Gabbay persuaded Herzog to accept the post, which Gabbay could not take for himself because he is not a Knesset member.

**Block Ehud Barak's Comeback:** David M. Weinberg, *Israel Hayom*, July 7, 2017—Desperate for a political messiah who will transform Israel's so-called "peace camp" and pose a viable alternative to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, some on the Left are concocting a campaign to call forth the ghost of former Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

**The Israelis Have Won:** Daniel Pipes, *Arutz Sheva*, July 12, 2017—What does the Jewish Israeli public think about convincing Palestinians that they lost their century-long war with Zionism, that the gig is up? In other words, what do Israelis think about winning? To find out, the Middle East Forum commissioned the Smith Institute to survey 700 adult Israeli Jews. Carried out on June 27-28, the poll has a margin of error of 3.7 percent.