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Iranian Navy increases activity near key oil choke point, prompts warning from Pentagon

Tom Vanden Brook, USA TODAY Published 5:20 p.m. ET Aug. 1, 2018

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani threatens President Trump and the U.S. Buzz60

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WASHINGTON – Iranian naval forces have increased activity near key oil shipping choke points in the Middle East, U.S. military officials said Wednesday.

Iran recently threatened to block the [Strait of Hormuz](#), a key passage for oil tankers from the Persian Gulf, a move the Pentagon said would be countered.

"We are aware of the increase in Iranian naval operations within the Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman," Navy Capt. Bill Urban, a spokesman for Central Command, said in a statement. "We are monitoring it closely, and will continue to work with our partners to ensure freedom of navigation and free flow of commerce in international waterways."

Last week, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis warned Iran that shutting down the Strait of Hormuz, which narrows to 34 miles, would be considered an attack on international shipping.

"Iran has threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz," [Mattis told reporters](#). "They've done that previously in years past. They saw the international community put – dozens of nations of the international community put their naval forces in for exercises to clear the straits."

"Clearly, this would be an attack on international shipping, and – and it would have, obviously, an international response to reopen the shipping lanes with whatever that took, because of the world's economy depends on that energy, those energy supplies flowing out of there."

In May, [President Trump withdrew the United States](#) from a multi-national deal on Iran's nuclear that eased economic sanctions on Iran in return for it giving up the means to make nuclear weapons. [Trump](#) called the deal one-sided in favor of Iran.

On Monday, [Trump said that he would be willing to meet Iran's leaders](#) to discuss how to improve relations.

More: [Donald Trump says he's willing to meet with Iran on new nuclear agreement](#)

Newsletter Wednesday December 19, 2012

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US blocks UN condemnation of Jerusalem construction

Washington nevertheless issues sharp rebuke, expressing "deep disappointment" with Israeli plans to build hundreds of new homes in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria • Planning committee rejects plan for hundreds of new housing units in Givat Hamatos neighborhood of Jerusalem.

Yori Yalon, Shlomo Cesana, Daniel Siryoti, Gideon Allon and News Agencies

Givat Hamatos neighborhood in Jerusalem. | Photo: AP

The U.S. administration on Wednesday torpedoed a United Nations Security Council condemnation against Israel over recently approved plans to build hundreds of new housing units in contested areas of Jerusalem, Israel Radio reported.

The Palestinians, who said Tuesday that all of the Security Council members, except the United States, would condemn Israel's recent construction announcements, sought to convince the Security Council to issue a presidential statement against Israel's actions. A presidential statement is often issued when the Security Council cannot reach a consensus, or when a resolution cannot be passed due to a permanent member's veto, or threat thereof.

The Palestinian initiative was blocked by Washington, after State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said on Tuesday that the U.S. would not support a proposal for a Security Council resolution.

"I don't think we think that is a helpful step at this point," Nuland said.

The U.S. expressed "deep disappointment," however, with Israel's intention to press ahead with a plan to build 6,000 homes for settlers on land claimed by the Palestinians, defying criticism from Western powers who fear the move will damage already faint hopes for a peace agreement.

"We are deeply disappointed that Israel insists on continuing this pattern of provocative action. These repeated announcements and plans of new construction run counter to the cause of peace," Nuland told reporters.

"Israel's leaders continually say they support a path toward a two-state solution, yet these actions only put that goal further at risk. So, we again call on Israel and the Palestinians to cease any kinds of counterproductive, unilateral action and take concrete steps to return to direct negotiations," Nuland added.

Israel says the future Palestine's border should be set in direct negotiations, from which Abbas withdrew two years ago in protest against the settlements.

Nuland repeated the long-standing U.S. position that direct negotiations are the only way to achieve an enduring two-state solution to the conflict.

Meanwhile, Palestinian envoy Riyad Mansour said Tuesday that the 14 other council members would tell reporters after the council's monthly Middle East meeting on Wednesday that continuing settlement activity is illegal and must be stopped.

He said there was near global unanimity against Israel's actions, pointing to the 169-6 vote in the General Assembly Tuesday on a non-binding resolution condemning settlement activities by Israel and demanding their immediate cessation.

"Unfortunately, one powerful country with veto power does not want the Security Council to act accordingly," Mansour said. "Therefore, the 14 other countries in the Security Council, in their own creative way, will make their position clear, collectively or separately, to the media outside the chamber on Wednesday."

He said the four West European council members — Germany, France, Britain and Portugal — would issue a statement of condemnation, followed by India speaking on behalf of the Nonaligned Movement of mainly developing countries, and other council members likely including South Africa, Russia and China.

"Therefore one can say 14 versus 1 is the reality of the Security Council in condemning Israel settlement activity — although the one is also condemning," Mansour said.

In Israel, meanwhile, the Housing Ministry is poised to issue tenders in the coming days for the construction of thousands of new housing units in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria. Among the designated areas for new construction are the settlements of Givat Ze'ev, Efrat and Karnei Shomron.

But the Jerusalem District Planning and Building Committee decided on Tuesday to reject a plan for 800 new homes in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Givat Hamatos, located beyond the Green Line. Following a heated debate, however, the committee members approved the construction of 700 new homes in the Beit Safafa neighborhood in southern Jerusalem, designated for use by the city's Arab population.

Jerusalem Council member Meir Turjeman, who also serves on the Planning and Building Committee, said Tuesday that, "it is a shame and a disgrace that no one is looking out for our young [Jewish] couples in Jerusalem."

The planning committee was set to reconvene on Wednesday to discuss plans to build 900 homes in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at an event in Acre on Tuesday that, "Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel, and we will continue to build there."

Newsletter Tuesday May 17, 2016

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French president postpones Paris peace conference

French President Francois Hollande says international conference aimed at reviving Israeli-Palestinian peace process is being delayed to allow U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to attend • Hollande: We are going to create parameters for negotiations.

French President Francois Hollande listens to a question during a radio interview, Tuesday | Photo: Reuters

French President Francois Hollande said on Tuesday that an international conference due in late May in Paris aimed at reviving the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was being delayed but would take place this summer.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault had proposed May 30 for the conference, but U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was not available on that date, Hollande told Europe 1 radio.

"John Kerry cannot come on May 30," Hollande said. "It's postponed, it will take place, it will take place in the course of the summer."

The conference is set to include representatives of the Middle East Quartet (the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations), the Arab League, the U.N. Security Council and about 20 countries, without Israeli or Palestinian participation.

"We are going to create, with all actors and neighboring countries, the parameters which will allow Israelis and Palestinians to return to the negotiating table," Hollande said. The French president also voiced regret about a resolution passed by UNESCO last month that ignored Jewish ties to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

"There was an unfortunate amendment put forward by the Jordanians ... which blurred this text," Hollande said. "I promise to be extremely vigilant when the next resolution is put forward in October. I will look at it personally."

Meanwhile, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said on Monday that he hoped countries participating in the upcoming Paris conference would succeed in renewing the peace process.

"We hope that the (participating) countries will follow their obligation and work towards the goal that the conference was called for, which is pushing the Palestinian cause forward," Abbas told reporters in Jericho, where he inaugurated a new security facility.

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah also expressed support on Monday for the French diplomatic initiative. Hamdallah said over two decades of talks between Israel and the Palestinians have not produced any results.

"We have been talking with the Israelis for 22 years and nothing has been achieved," Hamdallah said. "So now we really support the idea of international peace conference all countries can participate in."

Hamdallah cited the international community's nuclear agreement with Iran as a possible precedent. "When the international community came together, a peaceful settlement was found for the Iranian issue. Why not for Palestine?" he said.

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated Israel's opposition to the French initiative and expressed concern that the Paris conference would try to dictate terms for a peace deal.

At the start of Sunday's cabinet meeting, Netanyahu said the only way to advance genuine peace between Israel and the Palestinians was through direct negotiations between the two sides without any preconditions.

Newsletter Tuesday July 12, 2016 Newsletters from:



'African infiltrators countrywide will be transferred to tent city'

Interior Minister Eli Yishai: 100,000 infiltrators will be moved to a tent city under construction in the south • Population and Immigration Authority calls on South Sudanese infiltrators to leave voluntarily or face deportation.

Opinions



Dore Gold | Why the Six-Day War still matters

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Lawsuit says Facebook "knowingly provided material support and resources to Hamas" • "Facebook must be held accountable for its role in promoting the terrorist activities of Hamas," Shurat Hadin Director Nitsana Darschan-Leitner says.



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Al Arabiya: PM Benjamin Netanyahu tells Egyptian FM he would participate in Cairo summit with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi and PA President Mahmoud Abbas • Summit would be part of

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Report: 'Palestine' represented as state at UN assembly
At international assembly of countries who are parties to Law of the Sea treaty, Palestinian U.N. observer Riyad Mansour represents 'Palestine' for first time • Nonaligned Movement to urge U.N. to visit Palestinian territories.



52% of Israeli Jews agree with Regev: African migrants a 'cancer'
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"Purpose of this law is to prevent an absurd situation in which foreign countries interfere in Israel's internal affairs by funding NGOs without the Israeli public being aware of this," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says.



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Hheads of American and Israeli Reform and Conservative movements send harsh letter to PM Benjamin Netanyahu, criticizing delay of plan to establish mixed-gender prayer space at Western Wall • Current situation "unjust and unsettling," letter says.



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form joint party
with his senior
coalition
partners to
counterweight
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Premier also
says he will not
secure Barak
place on Likud
candidate list.



**US House
committee seeks
tribute to Israelis
slain at '72
Olympics**
House Foreign
Affairs
Committee calls
on International
Olympic
Committee to
hold moment of
silence in this
year's Olympic
opening
ceremony in
memory of
Israeli athletes
killed in 1972
Munich Games.



**Peres heads to
Washington bearing
'made in Israel' gifts**
Peres set to fly
to Washington
D.C. on
Saturday night
to receive the
Presidential
Medal of
Freedom from
Obama, the
highest civilian
honor in the
U.S. • Activists
protest outside
President's
Residence
calling for

convicted spy
Jonathan
Pollard's
release.



Netanyahu takes on new role: tour guide
American
journalist Peter
Greenberg asks
Israel's prime
minister to give
televised tour of
Israel to millions
of viewers •
Netanyahu
agrees to guide
audience to
Masada,
Jerusalem's Old
City and Tel
Aviv and
showcase Israeli
technology at
the Technion.



Economy **HAYOM**



Ebay buys Israeli startup to better understand its users
Online
marketplace
hopes to tap into
Israeli startup's
"advanced
analytics to
predict customer
buying behavior
and sales
conversion" •
Co-founder of
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>> Jewish World **HAYOM**



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**Torah ark burned by
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Holocaust
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Israeli company
Lavi Furniture
Industries to
reconstruct
ornate Torah ark
for Toronto's
Forest Hills
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Lavi CEO
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US House committee seeks tribute to Israelis slain at '72 Olympics

House Foreign Affairs Committee calls on International Olympic Committee to hold moment of silence in this year's Olympic opening ceremony in memory of Israeli athletes killed in 1972 Munich Games.

Peres heads to Washington bearing 'made in Israel' gifts

Peres set to fly to Washington D.C. on Saturday night to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Obama, the highest civilian honor in the U.S. • Activists protest outside President's Residence calling for convicted spy Jonathan Pollard's release.

Netanyahu takes on new role: tour guide

American journalist Peter Greenberg asks Israel's prime minister to give televised tour of Israel to millions of viewers • Netanyahu agrees to guide audience to Masada, Jerusalem's Old City and Tel Aviv and showcase Israeli technology at the Technion.

Ebay buys Israeli startup to better understand its users

Online marketplace hopes to tap into Israeli startup's "advanced analytics to predict customer buying behavior and sales conversion" • Co-founder of Netanya-based company says sale presents "enormous opportunity" because of eBay's "900 million" listings.

With party behind her, Britain's Theresa May to become PM
Conservatives unite behind home secretary after rival drops out of leadership race • PM David Cameron, bruised by EU referendum, to vacate 10 Downing Street Wednesday • May to become UK's second woman prime minister, vows to make Brexit "a success."

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Holocaust survivors from Jaslo, Poland commission Israeli company Lavi Furniture Industries to reconstruct ornate Torah ark for Toronto's Forest Hills Jewish Center • Lavi CEO Oberman: Jaslo ark was one of the most magnificent Torah arks ever built.

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Foreign Ministry Director General Dore Gold | Photo: Dudi Vaaknin

Foreign Ministry Director General Dore Gold sent a scathing letter to the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on Monday, criticizing a draft UNESCO resolution that Gold said ignores the historical bond between the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem.

UNESCO's 21-member World Heritage Committee is set to vote on the resolution, a joint Palestinian-Jordanian initiative, during its annual meeting in Istanbul, which began on Sunday and runs through next week. The resolution calls for a return to the "historic status quo" on the Temple Mount.

In his letter, Gold wrote, "UNESCO is considering the adoption of a completely one-sided draft resolution on the Old City of Jerusalem that deliberately ignores the historical connection between the Jewish people and their ancient capital.

"The resolution also fails to acknowledge Christianity's ties to Jerusalem. It refers to the area of the Temple Mount only as a 'Muslim holy site of worship.'"

Gold went on to say, "Today, it is Israel that defends religious freedom for all of the great faiths -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- against the tide of intolerance sweeping the Middle East region."

Gold further noted the resolution "is full of distortions and is totally disconnected from reality on the ground.

"We urge you to oppose this effort to distort history, which will offend the members of the Jewish and Christian faiths, and undermine the credibility of UNESCO in the future."