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Subject: Fw: UNSCO Daily Press Brief, Thursday, 26 May, 2011
Date: Thu, 26 May 2011 08:35:15 +0000

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Sent: Thu May 26 03:42:46 2011
Subject: UNSCO Daily Press Brief, Thursday, 26 May, 2011

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Diplomacy:

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday dismissed Benjamin Netanyahu's outline of a peace deal as a non-starter and said he is now setting his sights on UN recognition of a Palestinian state in the fall. (AP)

Speaking at the opening of a meeting for the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah, Abbas said Netanyahu "has shown us, in addition to the many mistakes and distortions that he moved very far from the peace process. There was nothing that we could build positively on. We look at his speech negatively." (Maan News)

US President Barack Obama said on Wednesday that the Palestinians should negotiate with the Israelis and not appeal to the UN for statehood. "The UN can achieve a lot of important work, what it is not going to be able to do is deliver a Palestinian state. The only way to see a Palestinian state is if Palestinians and Israelis agree on a just peace," Obama said in a joint press conference with British Prime Minister David Cameron in London. (Reuters)

EU foreign policy Chief Catherine Ashton reiterated that the 27 EU states had been united since 2009 in wanting a two-state solution based on the 1967 lines with land swaps. "Now more than ever is the time to reach a solution to actually see coming together in a real dialogue," she said. (AFP)

In response to Netanyahu's speech, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said Wednesday that Hamas will continue to take steps to bolster the reconciliation with Fatah. "We will insist on reconciliation, bolster steadfastness, and face occupation with unity." (Maan News)

Former Mossad director Meir Dagan has come out against Israel's intention to block the international recognition of a Palestinian state. In a speech given on Tuesday in a closed forum, he said that in the end, recognition of the state was inevitable, and Israel's attempt to stop the move would force Israel to accept it, but under the conditions posed by the Palestinians and not under Israel's conditions. Dagan said that Israeli acceptance of the move could actually minimize the damage. (Maariv)

Columnist [Ari Shavit](#) writes in Haaretz that "Netanyahu missed the last chance that history will give him. In another few months, reality will come knocking. Israel will find itself in nonsplendid isolation at the UN...At the same time, a new Palestinian uprising will begin. The liberated masses of the Arab world will support it."

Columnist Thomas Friedman writes in the New York Times: "I can tell [the Palestinians] that having the UN

General Assembly pass a resolution recognizing an independent Palestinian state will only rally Israelis around Netanyahu, giving him another excuse not to talk. May I suggest a Tahrir Square alternative? Announce that every Friday will be "Peace Day," and have thousands of West Bank Palestinians march nonviolently to Jerusalem, carrying two things, an olive branch in one hand and a sign in Hebrew and Arabic in the other. The sign should say: Two states for two peoples."

Friedman continues: "Israel today still has enormous leverage. It is vastly superior militarily and economically to the Palestinians, and it has the US on its side. If Netanyahu actually put a credible, specific two-state peace map on the table — not just the same old vague promises about "painful compromises" — he could get the Americans and Europeans to toss in anything Israel wanted, including the newest weapons, NATO membership, maybe even EU membership. It could be a security windfall for Israel. Does Bibi have any surprise in him or do the Palestinians have him right: a big faker, hiding a nationalist-religious agenda under a cloak of security?"

Gaza:

Egypt announced that the Rafah crossing will be open permanently starting Saturday, allowing Palestinians with passports to cross into Egypt every day from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. except for Fridays and holidays. (MENA, Egypt)

Israeli Homeland Security Minister Matan Vilna'i warned on Thursday that the opening of the Rafah crossing will be very problematic for Israel, but added that Egypt did not break any agreements with Israel. (Israel Radio)

Israeli authorities opened Gaza's sole remaining commercial crossing terminal on Wednesday, for the limited import of building materials designated to international development projects. (Maan News)

Jerusalem:

One day after Netanyahu declared that Jerusalem will not be divided, the speaker of the Knesset and several other government ministers attended a dedication ceremony for the new Jewish settlement of Ma'aleh Zeitim, in East Jerusalem's Ras al-Amud neighborhood. (Haaretz)

Israeli Affairs:

The Pentagon is planning to help Israel buy four more Iron Dome short-range anti-rocket batteries, the head of the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency said on Wednesday. (Reuters)

Syria:

Britain, France, Germany and Portugal circulated a draft UN resolution Wednesday that would condemn Syria for its killing and torture of peaceful protesters and demand an immediate end to the violence. Experts from council nations were scheduled to meet Thursday morning to discuss the draft, UN diplomats said. (AP)

The draft resolution demands that Syria take immediate steps "to address the legitimate aspirations of the population," allow genuine political participation, release all prisoners of conscience and detainees, "and cease any intimidation, persecution, torture and arbitrary arrests." (AP)

A group of Arab organizations on Thursday urged the UN Security Council to condemn Syria's use of heavy military weapons to crackdown on protesters. The New York-based advocacy group Crisis Action, which organized the 220 civil society organizations, sent a petition to the Council members, asking them to break their silence over Syria's killing of protesters. "We are making this appeal because our friends in Syria have been silenced by the regime," said Ziad Abdel Tawab, of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. (DPA)

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah stood firmly behind Syria on Wednesday in his first comments on the country's uprising. "Overthrowing the regime in Syria is in the American and Israeli interest," he said in a speech marking the withdrawal of the Israeli army from southern Lebanon in 2000. "They want to overthrow the regime

and replace it with a moderate regime." (AP)

Defying a state-imposed media blackout, Syria's citizen journalists are keeping protest coverage alive. "With the efficiency of the networks that were developed over the past few weeks, through which we can now see into every town and village in Syria, there is no way the regime can stop information or footage, videos, and images from coming out," said a Syrian activist. (AFP)

Lebanon:

Nasrallah blasted Obama's Middle East vision and comments on the Lebanese group, urging the Arab League to withdraw its peace initiative. "What has Obama and Netanyahu left for the Palestinian people, Palestinian Authority and Palestinians factions? What are the options left to Palestinians? The Palestinians have only resistance to achieve liberation," he said. (Daily Star, Lebanon)

Egypt:

Facebook groups called for a massive demonstration in Cairo's Tahrir Square on Friday in what they dubbed the "second revolution". They complained about the slow political and economic reforms and delays by the military council and the interim government in bringing to justice former officials charged with abuse of power and graft. (Reuters)

The Muslim Brotherhood announced in a statement that it will not participate in the Friday protests. (Al-Ahram, Egypt)

Egypt's Prime Minister Essam Sharaf promoted his interim government's achievements on Wednesday. He appealed to Egyptians to give his government time to meet their demands. (Egyptian TV)

Egypt will review its diplomatic relations with Iran in the new parliament after the September election, Foreign Minister Nabil el-Arabi said Wednesday after a meeting with his Iranian counterpart in Indonesia. (MENA, Egypt)

Regional:

Leaders of the G8 meeting Thursday will discuss the tumult in the Arab world. President Barack Obama and the other leaders of the G8 will seek to marshal their combined economic might behind the grass-roots democracy movements that have swept the Arab world. The leaders of Egypt, Tunisia and the Arab League will join the summit discussions. Several African leaders will also join for a special meeting Friday. (AP)

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