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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

September 13, 2017

Times of Israel

Claiming Public Support, PM Vows to Lead Israel for Years

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday said he wants to continue to lead Israel for years to come, rebuffing reports claiming he plans to quit political life in the near future or seek snap elections. The next elections are scheduled for November 5, 2019, but unnamed Likud sources “close to Netanyahu” claimed on Tuesday that Netanyahu plans on announcing the end of his political career. The prime minister is currently the subject of two separate corruption investigations, known as Cases 1000 and 2000.

See also, [“Israeli leader in Argentina, lauds effort to solve 1994 Jewish center bombing” \(Reuters\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

UN Tourism Organization Nixes Palestinian Membership Bid

The United Nations' World Tourism Organization has announced that it will postpone until its next session, in two years, a decision on allowing the Palestinian Authority to join its ranks. The Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Tourism applied for membership for “Palestine” into the organization last year. Had the bid been successful, the UNWTO would have been the second UN organization, after UNESCO, to which the Palestinians gained full membership.

See also, [“Palestinian Authority Backtracks on Attempt to Gain Membership in UN Tourism Body” \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

AI Monitor

Senate Could Reverse Billions of Dollars of Cuts to Israel

The Senate could vote this week on a provision that would undo a key aspect of the military agreement with Israel negotiated last year under former President Barack Obama. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., has filed an amendment to the annual defense bill that would allow Israel to continue to spend more than a quarter of US military assistance to buy equipment from domestic, rather than US, firms. The amendment would represent a payday of more than \$8.5 billion for the Israeli defense sector, but some critics say it would put the entire 10-year, \$38 billion agreement in jeopardy.

Ha'aretz

Israeli Party Approves Plan to Coerce Palestinian Departure

The conference of the National Union faction, which has MKs in the Habayit Hayehudi Knesset party, approved a plan Tuesday for essentially annexing the territories while either facilitating the exit of Palestinian residents or allowing them to remain but without voting rights. The plan was unanimously approved by the delegates present, who included Habayit Hayehudi MKs Smotrich, Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel, and MK Moti Yogev. Party chairman Naftali Bennett,

however, did not attend the conference, nor did he send a recorded message, although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did.

See also, [*"The First Step Towards the Elimination of the Oslo Accords" \(Arutz Sheva\)*](#)

Jerusalem Post

Shaked: Replace Migrant Workers with Palestinians

Employers who lose African migrant workers should replace them with Palestinians, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked said on Monday. Referring to government efforts to get more African migrants to leave the country, Shaked told an audience at IDC Herzliya's International Institute on Counter-terrorism Conference that Palestinians with "work permits do not perpetrate attacks. Israel is trying to send Eritreans and Sudanese out of its borders and those who can replace them are the Palestinians. Do not be afraid. If they take your Eritrean and Sudanese workers – switch them with Palestinians!" Shaked also addressed the threat posed by the Iranian-Syrian nexus. She said that Syria's President Hafez Assad must "keep Iran out if he wants to survive."

Ynet

12 Years After Gaza Pull Out: 'No Life, High Unemployment'

Marking the 12th anniversary of Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip, Hamas announced that resistance against Israel remains the best plan and shortest path for the Palestinian people to "freedom and a better life." Since Hamas took control of the enclave, the Palestinians living there have been forced to contend with daily hardships brought on partially by the terror organization's apparent refusal to dedicate resources to building economic infrastructure, instead diverting them toward sinister projects designed to wage its so-called wars of resistance against Israel.

See also, [*"Gaza Official: Most of the Strip Receiving Four Hours of Electricity" \(Jerusalem Post\)*](#)

Ma'an

Israel Delivers Demolition Warrants to East Jerusalem

Inspectors from Israel's Jerusalem municipality delivered demolition warrants to Palestinian families in the occupied East Jerusalem neighborhood of Issawiya on Tuesday, while a homeowner near the Old City has managed to delay an imminent demolition order by a few more days. The warrants were mainly delivered to buildings near the entrance to Issawiya and in the center of the neighborhood.

Times of Israel

Liberman Warns Hezbollah War Will End with Israeli Victory

Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman issued a stern warning to Hezbollah on Tuesday that a future conflict would "end with a decisive victory for the IDF and the State of Israel." The minister made his remarks during a visit to observe a large, ongoing IDF exercise simulating a

war with the terrorist group and came a day after he made a separate threat aimed at Syria. The defense minister added that the drill — the military's largest in nearly 20 years — “is a reminder to anyone who is plotting to harm the security of Israel's citizens.”

See also, [“Hezbollah won't be able to seize Israeli territory in next war” \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

Trump is Trashing Middle East Peace

By Daniel Kurtzer

- Remember the two-state solution as a means to achieve Middle East peace? It has been a pillar of American foreign policy, certainly since President George W. Bush announced U.S. support in 2002. But in three quick strokes over the past few weeks, the Trump administration has demonstrated it really is not very serious about pursuing a two-state solution.
- The first shoe dropped when a team of presidential emissaries, led by Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt, visited the Middle East to talk to the Israelis and Palestinians. State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert was asked whether the Trump administration supports a two-state solution. Her response was shocking:
- “We are not going to state what the outcome has to be. It has to be workable to both sides. And I think, really, that’s the best view as to not really bias one side over the other, to make sure that they can work through it. It’s been many, many decades, as you well know, that the parties have not been able to come to any kind of good agreement and sustainable solution to this. So we leave it up to them to be able to work that through.”
- Nauert was following the Trump script, as he stated months earlier: “I’m looking at two-state and one-state and I like the one that both parties like. I’m very happy with the one that both parties like.”
- Nauert’s use of the word “bias” is highly misleading. She is hardly calling for a neutral, non-biased approach to the Middle East conflict. In fact, her words indicate that the Trump administration itself is extremely biased — in favor of hardliners in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalition who want the United States and Israel to abandon the two state outcome. These radicals cheered Trump’s comments in February and probably celebrated Nauert’s recent non-answer answer.
- The second shoe, amplifying this farce, dropped when Nauert was asked about a report that Israel had destroyed a girls’ school in Bethlehem. In response to a reporter’s question, Nauert said:
- “So with so many of the incidents like that that you mention, and you’ll bring to me often various cases that are upsetting to folks there, we would say the same thing: We encourage both sides to work together to take appropriate actions to ease tensions and to try to build an environment where both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, can conclude so that they could work together on a mutually agreeable, peaceful solution.”

- How can U.S. policy be taken seriously when that is an official reaction to the reported destruction of a school? Is the United States uninterested in whether this happened?
- The third shoe dropped during an interview in The Jerusalem Post by U.S. Ambassador David Friedman. While noting that his rhetoric has changed but not his personal right-wing views about settlements, Friedman went on to refer to the “alleged occupation” of the territories Israel has in fact occupied since the 1967 war. Friedman’s comment was neither a slip of the tongue nor a casual remark; it echoes the right-wing narrative in Israel that has argued that the territories are “disputed,” not occupied.
- Any observer can read between the lines of the Trump, Nauert and Friedman statements: The administration doesn’t think that a two-state solution is necessarily desirable or feasible and they thus are comfortable with and intend to support Israeli policy in the occupied territories. The fact that a majority of Israelis and Palestinians continue to support the two-state outcome is apparently of little interest to this administration. Under these circumstances, Israelis and Palestinians would be much better off if Trump, his ambassador and his spokespeople took their self-described deal-making elsewhere, lest they continue to cause damage to the already-slim prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

It's Time to Update the American Anti-Boycott Law for Israel

By Jonathan Greenblatt

- Bipartisan legislation is making its way through Congress that would bar Americans from joining in boycotts by international organizations against companies doing business in Israel. The bill, known as the Israel Anti-Boycott Act, has attracted much criticism from free-speech advocates, including the American Civil Liberties Union, which argues that the legislation would violate First Amendment rights.
- These concerns are unfounded. It is important to understand why this legislation is needed and why it would not amount to a violation of free speech.
- In 1977, the Business Roundtable, American Jewish organizations and the Carter administration supported and Congress passed legislation that prohibited American companies from complying with boycotts imposed by foreign governments against nations friendly to the United States. The measure aimed squarely at the Arab League's secondary boycott of Israel and was designed to protect Americans from discriminatory action if they wished to do business with Israel. Over its 40 years of operation, the law helped to break the back of the Arab boycott.
- The Israel Anti-Boycott Act would extend the 1977 law to international organizations, such as the United Nations or even the European Union, that might parallel the Arab League's original "blacklist" of companies doing business with Israel, which was the heart of its boycott.
- It couldn't come at a better time. Already, the U.N. Human Rights Council has passed a resolution last year requesting its high commissioner for human rights to create a database of companies that operate in or have business relationships in the West Bank beyond Israel's 1949 Armistice Lines, which includes all of Jerusalem, Israel's capital.
- If the high commissioner implements this resolution, as he appears determined to do, it will create a new "blacklist" that could subject American individuals and companies to discrimination, yet again, for simply doing business with Israel.
- Moreover, the European Union has instituted a mandatory labeling requirement for agricultural products made in the West Bank and has restricted its substantial research and development funds to Israeli universities and companies to only those with no contacts with territories east of the Armistice Line.
- None of the many U.N. member states that are serial human rights violators are accorded similar treatment. Not Iran. Not Syria. Not North Korea. Only Israel. These kinds of actions do not create the right atmosphere to prompt resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians that the Trump administration is seeking to jump-start.

- In criticizing the pending anti-boycott legislation, the ACLU and other opponents ignore the four-decade track record of the 1977 law. They have not cited a single instance in which “political beliefs” have led to civil or criminal penalties under current law. Courts have repeatedly upheld the 1977 act against constitutional challenges on free-speech grounds as a legitimate restriction on commercial conduct.
- To be clear, criticism of Israel, its treatment of Palestinians and its settlement policies are indeed protected by the First Amendment as free speech. The Israel Anti-Boycott Act does not target the rights of U.S. individuals and companies to criticize Israel, which — like any country — is subject to criticism for its policies.
- What companies and individuals would not be able to do under this legislation, however, is boycott Israel at the behest of international governmental organizations, just as they are now prohibited from doing at the behest of Arab nations. Congress has wide constitutional authority to limit such discriminatory international commercial conduct that lawmakers find contrary to U.S. national interests.
- To the extent any of this is unclear in the current draft of the bill, we would support further efforts to clarify this fact. The authors of the bill in the Senate have already indicated their willingness to consider modifications.
- The Israel Anti-Boycott Act, like its 1977 predecessor, is designed to protect U.S. businesses and individuals from being pressured into a discriminatory economic boycott of Israel or other friendly nations by international governmental organizations. While Congress has a heavy agenda, this bill should be passed promptly, before another “blacklist” of U.S. companies becomes a reality.