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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

September 28, 2017

Times of Israel

Netanyahu to US Envoy: PA Harming Chances for Peace

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met Wednesday with US special peace envoy Jason Greenblatt, and told him that the actions of the Palestinian leadership in the past few days seriously harmed any chance for reaching a peace deal. Netanyahu told Greenblatt, and US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman who also attended the meeting in Jerusalem, that the refusal of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to condemn Tuesday's terror attack in Har Adar, in which three Israelis were killed and a fourth injured, gravely undermined the prospects of achieving an accord.

Ha'aretz

Netanyahu at Settlement Ceremony: No More Uprooting

Israel will not remove any more towns, be they Arab or Jewish, Netanyahu announced to applause Wednesday night at an event celebrating 50 years of Israeli control over the West Bank and Golan Heights. "There will be no more uprooting of towns in the Land of Israel," Netanyahu said at the event in Gush Etzion, titled "50 Years of Settlement in Judea and Samaria." Even before it began, the event stirred debate following the Supreme Court's decision not to send a representative to the ceremony, explaining that the commemoration was too politically controversial. Cabinet ministers criticized the Supreme Court's position, claiming it proves the court is biased against settlers and the settlement enterprise.

See also, [*"Bennett: The time to apply sovereignty in Judea and Samaria is now"* \(Arutz Sheva\)](#)

Times of Israel

PM: US Told Israel Not to be a Pig on Settlement Building

Netanyahu told settler leaders on Wednesday that US officials told his chief of staff to not be a "pig" on new settlement construction and that the Trump administration is prepared to tolerate limited settlement building, a senior settler present at the meeting said. During the closed-door meeting, Netanyahu said he successfully convinced the Trump administration to drop its distinction between settlement blocs and so-called isolated settlements.

See also, [*"Trump's Ambassador Told Netanyahu: Don't Go Overboard With Settlements"* \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Times of Israel

US Lawmaker: We Won't Honor Palestinian Interpol Notices

A top US lawmaker said that Washington won't honor Palestinian warrants issued through Interpol, though a Palestinian official claimed Ramallah had no plans to use the international policing body to seek the arrest of Israelis, but rather would pursue Palestinian criminals, including a top rival of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Palestinian Neighbors Deplore Attack in Settlement

Har Adar leaders have maintained friendly relations with the heads of local Palestinian clans. Some of these friendships persist until today. But after the attack on Tuesday, Israel ordered the immediate enforcement of closure orders on the West Bank that are always imposed during Jewish holidays, and the defense establishment has banned Palestinians from entering Har Adar for the next few days.

Ha'aretz

UN Warns 150 Companies for Doing Business in Settlements

The UN's Human Rights Commissioner began sending letters two weeks ago to 150 companies in Israel and around the world, warning them that they are about to be added to a database of companies doing business in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, senior Israeli officials and Western diplomats involved in the matter told Haaretz. Senior Israeli officials said the Israeli fear of divestment or scaled-down business due to the blacklist is already becoming a reality.

Ha'aretz

Palestinian Man Shot by Israel to Receive Compensation

The National Insurance Institute has recognized an Arab resident of East Jerusalem as the victim of “hostile actions” for the first time, and he is now entitled to a monthly disability allowance – after being hit in the eye by a foam-tipped bullet fired by the police. Such recognition is usually reserved for the victims of terrorist attacks.

Jerusalem Post

Israeli Intel Helps Thwart Dozens of Global Terror Attacks

Israel's intelligence community has helped thwart dozens of terrorist attacks around the globe planned by Islamic State and al-Qaida by sharing intelligence with other countries. The defense establishment marks the November 2015 ISIS attacks in Paris, which killed 130 people, as the day the intelligence community changed its perspective to a more global one and tightened its coordination with international bodies. With shared threats in the Middle East, cooperation between the intelligence communities of Israel and Western countries such as the United States has always been close and intensified since the early 2000s, despite Israel not being a part of the “Five Eyes.”

See also, [“Israeli Intelligence Helped Thwart Dozens of Terror Attacks Worldwide” \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Israel Unsure About 'Day After' Abbas, and Even 'Day Before'

By Ben Caspit

- In recent years, the working assumption of the Israeli security establishment has been that there is not enough negative energy among Palestinians in the territories that could lead to an eruption of grass-roots violence along the lines of the first and second intifadas. The moderating agents that operate against this kind of violence have been stable: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' rule, which from the start opposed the use of violence; the growing strength of the Palestinian security apparatuses, which enforce law and order throughout the West Bank; and primarily the Tanzim, the largest armed Palestinian organization, remaining outside the circle of violence and under the control and restraint of Abbas. Recent months, however, have seen a fundamental shift in this assumption.
- The intelligence branch of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and its head, Maj. Gen. Herzl Halevy, presented a strategic warning to the Cabinet a few months ago about the possibility of all-out violence erupting on the Palestinian front. The warning reappeared Sept. 25 in the yearly intelligence assessment report distributed to military correspondents. After years in which the heads of the Israeli security and intelligence branches repeatedly said that the stabilizing and moderating agents on the Palestinian front are much stronger than the inciting agents, the impression now is that a reversal is taking place in front of our eyes. True, it is happening slowly, and it is still reversible, but it cannot be denied that the prediction of a third intifada or another round of violence between Israel and Gaza is gaining traction in Israel's higher echelons.
- It seems that the main reason for a violent eruption is rooted in Gaza. The deteriorating humanitarian situation there, plus the imminent completion of the enormous underground wall that Israel is constructing — which will almost completely neutralize Hamas' cross-border tunnel threat — light up all the warning lights on the Israeli side. The person primarily responsible for raising the alarm regarding the situation in Gaza has been, and remains, Gen. Yoav Mordechai, coordinator of government activities in the territories.
- In 2017, as opposed to previous years, it is not only Gaza on the warning list, but the West Bank, or Judea and Samaria to the Israelis, is also considered in danger of an eruption. Ironically, now that the so-called individual intifada has been halted, worry on the Israeli side is only intensifying. It is not the terror attack in Har Adar on Sept. 26 that is worrying to Israeli security. That shooting, carried out by a Palestinian who worked for years in the Israeli settlement where he carried out the attack, is viewed as anomalous. The real problem is the forces bubbling under the surface.

- The warning signs all concern Abbas, the eternal Palestinian leader. Abbas is the current elephant in the middle of the Israeli-Palestinian living room. He is 82 years old, in poor health and rather depressed in spirit. His diplomatic horizon is narrow, and his options are decreasing, one by one. Israel — despite all its intelligence agencies, experts and capabilities — does not know what the “day after” will look like. As far as is known, the few discussions on the issue have thus far been paltry and inadequate, without a point. No one in Israel has any idea who will step into Abbas’ shoes when the day comes, whether the Palestinian Authority will fall apart and descend into chaos or who or what will take control of the territory in filling the inevitable vacuum.
- Israel is not only worried about the day after, as even the “day before” — the last leg of the elderly Palestinian leader’s journey, in other words, these very days — raises numerous questions and presents unsolvable conundrums. The more time that passes, according to Israeli assessments, the less Abbas has to fear and the less he has to lose. Thus, he can allow himself to be more daring. All the calculations and considerations of the past are disintegrating. Anything that happens now will be designed to create an “Abbas legacy” for future generations. What might possibly happen, according to Israeli sources? Abbas might lose his discretion, sense of judgment or his cool. He might gather his strength or just lose interest. Any guess is as good as the next.
- Israeli leaders’ main concern is the Tanzim being coopted to join in a round of violence against Israel. Recent years have seen relative peace and quiet in the West Bank (with the exception of the individual terror wave that erupted in September 2015). This quiet is attributed to the work of the Palestinian security apparatuses and the Tanzim being removed from the equation. One order from the leadership in Ramallah, however, could rouse it. This is the most disturbing scenario and cause for concern for Israel in the coming period. The higher-ups in military intelligence and in the Palestinian General Security Services admit that this is not a “reasonable” scenario, but one that is called in Israel an “extreme” scenario. “Extreme” scenarios in the Middle East, however, have a propensity to materialize at the worst possible time.
- To all this, one must add the fact that members of President Donald Trump’s peace team continue to drag their feet in the region and are not supplying the goods that the Palestinians expected to receive. Despite renewed promises by Trump that he is determined to present a program in the near future, it seems that no one in Ramallah is convinced of this. After a short period of euphoria, the Ramallah leadership now understands that Trump will not offer them what former Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton were also unable to provide.
- Meanwhile, Israel faces a dilemma. On the one hand, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not really interested in a renewal of the peace process or any other presidential peace initiative. On the other hand, such an initiative could calm the Palestinian street as well as the Palestinian

leadership, at least temporarily. Since Netanyahu is the best wizard at playing the “time game,” it could be that, ultimately, an initiative will become his preferred option.

Celebrating 50 Years of Settlements Is Political Theater

By Ehud Barak, former Israeli prime minister

- The ceremony in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc marking the 50th anniversary of our return to every part of the Land of Israel, the cradle of our birth as a nation and as the bearer of a universal mission, is anything but a national ceremony. It's a cheap, crude political attempt by the right to appropriate the achievements of the Six-Day War and love of the land – and to hell with the truth and the facts. A national ceremony would have emphasized what we agree on and what unites us rather than what divides and separates us – not to mention what incites. A national ceremony would have reflected the contributions made by every segment of society to the achievements of settlement in Judea and Samaria, and would even have reflected the legitimate disagreement over both the ends and the means.
- A national ceremony would have noted that the people who built the Israel Defense Forces and led the war to liberate these parts of the land were Yitzhak Rabin, Haim Bar-Lev, Motta Gur and others (who later turned out to be “leftists,” heaven forbid), and that the party that consolidated and led the settlement enterprise for a decade, mainly on the basis of security considerations, was the hated Alignment, the forerunner of the Labor Party. A national ceremony would have included Maj. Gen. (res.) Elad Peled on the dais, a man who liberated Safed at the age of 21, as head of a Palmach unit, and then liberated all of Samaria at age 40, as head of the 36th Division. This wise, modest man of action, who never demanded “applause” and never complained about “zero media coverage” of his achievements, contributed more to the liberation of Judea and Samaria than all the planned speakers and guests put together.
- Interpol carefully vets red notice requests, which must be based on documented evidence of wrongdoing, such as a domestic arrest warrant. But it is notoriously difficult to remove a red notice once it has been issued, despite recent reforms attempting to streamline the appeals process. Bruno Min, a legal and policy officer at Fair Trials, a Europe-based human rights organization with a special focus on Interpol, said that Israel may also be concerned about the sharing of sensitive data. “A lot of Interpol’s work is about being able to share data,” Min told Foreign Policy. “Perhaps they might have concerns that any information that they try to disseminate through Interpol’s channels, Palestine would now have access to.”
- Or Dalia Rabin, daughter of Yitzhak Rabin, the IDF chief of staff who presided over the victory and architected the peace, who was murdered by an evildoer from the extremist, incited right. Or Isaac Herzog, leader of the opposition and son of former Military Intelligence chief and President Chaim Herzog, who dispelled the public’s fears before and during the war in special appearances on television – a brand-new medium at the time – and served as the first governor of united Jerusalem. Or Hila Elazar-Cohen, the eldest daughter of Maj. Gen. David Elazar, who demanded the assault on and conquest of the Golan Heights from the very first day of the war, and led it from the fourth.

- A state ceremony would have lavished praise on the clear-sightedness of the Allon Plan and the internal logic of establishing settlement blocs, building Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and establishing settlements along the length of the Jordan River – the dimensions dictated by a sober security perspective and agreed on by all segments of society – instead of deliberately blurring the critical difference between the settlement blocs that are home to 80 percent of settlers and whose security value we all acknowledge and the isolated settlements that even settler leaders admit don't contribute to security, but exist only to observe the religious commandment "to settle the land."
- But a ceremony like that won't take place, because the goal is to appropriate, divide and deceive by blurring the line that separates what is common to all of us – security first, the belief that the unity of the people takes precedence over the unity of the land, and the values of the Declaration of Independence – from what serves a benighted, nationalist agenda tainted with messianism that threatens all of our futures.
- The wonderful story of our return to Zion and our settlement in the parts of our homeland that are essential to ensuring our future is a continuation of the proud Israeli national story. But in the consciousness of the right's leadership, it has been replaced by a lunatic vision of one state with an ongoing civil war and "Jewish apartheid" – or alternatively, an Arab majority. This is a vision whose focus today is the effort to thwart any chance of an agreement with confidence in the future through isolated settlements, and it's a prescription for disaster that must be halted.
- Therefore, justice lies with those who say as follows: We're proud of our role in returning to every part of the land and in the settlement enterprise that is essential to our security. At the same time, we reject the cheap, embarrassing attempt to politically appropriate ownership of this achievement to one side of the political spectrum, while deliberately blurring the difference between, on one hand, "no choice," moments of marvelous unity and the great Zionist act that came in its wake, and on the other, benighted nationalism that has woken a messianic dream whose fulfillment threatens the entire Zionist enterprise.