



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Wednesday, September 20

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News Excerpts

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i24 News

Netanyahu at UN: 'Those Who Threaten Israel Face Mortal Peril'

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu followed what he called a "bold and courageous" speech by US President Donald Trump to world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday with his own address offering a stern warning to its arch-foe Iran. "Iran vows to destroy my country every day," Netanyahu said. "As long as Iran seeks the destruction of Israel, it will not have a worse enemy than Israel." "Those who threaten us with annihilation put themselves in mortal peril. Israel will defend itself with the full force of our arms and the full power of our convictions," he said. See also, ["PM: IRAN RISKS 'MORTAL PERIL' BY THREATENING ISRAEL" \(JPost\)](#)

Ynet News

Netanyahu to UN: Change Iran Deal or Cancel it, Fix it or Nix it

Turning his attention to Iran, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized the nuclear deal signed under former president Barack Obama's leadership, echoing statements he made during last year's General Assembly speech that rather than blocking Iran's path to the bomb, "it paves it." Pledging that he would never allow Iran to gain a military foothold in Syria or Lebanon and position itself to strike at Israel's northern border, the Israeli premier said that he had a message for the Iranian supreme leader, the "Iranian dictator." "The light of Israel will never be extinguished," the prime minister emphatically declared to the sounds of a rapturous applause. Iran, he said, "will be able to make many bombs by keeping the deal." See also, ["Netanyahu Vows to Curb Iran in U.N. Speech" \(WSJ\)](#)

Times of Israel

'Flawed' Iran Nuke Deal Must be Reworked Tillerson Says,

The United States is looking for support from its allies to persuade Iran to re-open talks on the nuclear deal, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Tuesday, pointing to the fact that it will expire as its biggest problem. "The most glaring flaw is the sunset provision," Tillerson told the channel. "We all know this is merely a kick the can down the road agreement." Under the deal, limits on Iran's uranium enrichment will begin to expire in 2025. "most importantly the agreement comes to an end, and so we can almost start the countdown clock as to when they restart their nuclear weapons capability," he said. See also, ["Tillerson says Iran nuclear deal 'really has to be revisited' "\(Fox News\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Israel Shoots Down Iranian-made Drone Over Syria Border

The Israel Defense Forces shot down an Iranian-made drone operated by Hezbollah on Tuesday afternoon after the drone entered the demilitarized zone along the border between Israel and Syria. The Israel Air Force's aerial defense command fired a Patriot missile and destroyed the drone. The interception of the drone took place just hours before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to speak to the United Nations General Assembly in New York. A large part of his speech is expected to be devoted to Israeli claims concerning Iranian military involvement in Syria.

Bahrain King Denounces Arab Boycott of Israel

Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa has denounced the Arab boycott of Israel and said his subjects are free to visit the Jewish state. The statement by the head of the Persian Gulf country, which does not have diplomatic relations with Israel, was revealed at a multi-national event last week in Los Angeles, hosted by the city's Simon Wiesenthal Center. At the event, Rabbis Marvin Hier and Abraham Cooper, who head the Wiesenthal Center, revealed the king's pronouncements made to them during their visit to Manama, Bahrain's capital city, in early 2017. At the conclusion of the ceremony, a reporter asked Cooper whether the evening's upbeat tone and hopeful notes were warranted in the light of the Middle East's apparently endless conflicts. Cooper responded that Bahrain, like Israel, "Lives in a tough neighborhood. But if there is to be any hope for the future, it will have to be realized by voices of religious moderation." See also, ["Police band participates in Bahrain Declaration conference" \(Bahrain News Agency\)](#)

Al-Sisi Urges Palestinians to Unite, Co-Exist with Israel

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Tuesday urged Palestinians to unite and "be ready to co-exist" in peace with Israelis, in his address to the United Nations. Speaking a day after a first meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Sisi said an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal was a "necessary precondition for the entire region" to enjoy stability. Egypt has been leading mediation efforts between Palestinian arch-rivals Fatah and Hamas as part of a push to return to the forefront of Middle East diplomacy. Departing from his prepared remarks to the UN General Assembly, Sisi said he wanted to "tell the Palestinian people, it is important to unite ... to overcome the differences and to be ready to accept co-existence with the other, with Israelis, in safety and security." See also, ["SISI-NETANYAHU MEETING: LIGHTS, CAMERA AND A NEW ERA OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY?" \(JPost\)](#)

Sanders: Netanyahu Blocks Equality Among Israeli Jews

Seven Jewish senators, including former Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, have expressed their "deep concern" to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about recent Israeli government decisions that "reject the equality of Judaism's non-Orthodox movements." In a letter sent to Netanyahu on Monday, the senators refer to the government's decision to suspend plans to create a new egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall, and to a new bill that would grant the Orthodox-run Chief Rabbinate a monopoly over conversions in Israel. Under pressure from world Jewish leaders, Netanyahu decided in June to suspend discussion of this controversial conversion bill for six months. The seven Democratic senators are Ron Wyden (Oregon), Ben Cardin (Maryland), Dianne Feinstein (California), Al Franken (Minnesota), Brian Schatz (Hawaii), Richard Blumenthal (Connecticut) and Sanders (Vermont). See also, ["US senators pen letter asking PM to implement Kotel agreement" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Netanyahu at the UN: All Talk

By Nahum Barnea

- **The UN has 193 member states. In one week in September, the leaders of most of these states come to New York and give a speech at the General Assembly. Ostensibly, they are speaking to the world; in fact, they are speaking to their peoples. All the world's a stage, but the entire audience is at home.**
- **We should be interested in two of the speeches that were given yesterday—Trump's speech and Netanyahu's speech. Trump gave one of the most outspoken addresses ever given from the podium of the UN General Assembly. Not as outspoken as the speech in which the ruler of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, took off his shoe on the podium in 1960, but nearly.**
- **Trump spoke first and foremost to his voters. They are the ones he wished to persuade that his isolationist rhetoric from the campaign period still stood. His words can be summed up in five brief slogans:**
 - 1. America first. Every nation, including the United States, looks first and foremost after its own interests. That is the basis of international relations. That is the situation, and that is how it should be. The world, the international organizations, global warming, are pushed back.**
 - 2. Radical Islamic terrorism. Trump continues to identify terrorism with religion, despite the protests of friendly Muslim regimes.**
 - 3. The United States will totally destroy North Korea. Trump has escalated the tone of his threats against the regime in Pyongyang. He added to the text at the last moment a humiliating nickname for Kim Jong-un, ruler of North Korea: "Rocket Man."**
 - 4. The Iran deal is an embarrassment to the United States. This sentence was said to his voters more than to the rulers of Iran. It is important to Trump to reiterate that everything that the Obama administration did was counter to American interests.**
 - 5. Not a word about Russia, China or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Russia is a sensitive issue, because of the investigations; China is a complicated issue, because of North Korea; and the conflict is of no interest.**
- **Teddy Roosevelt bequeathed to world leaders the immortal advice: "Speak softly and carry a big stick." Trump has adopted the opposite guideline—Speak loudly and carry a small stick. His rhetoric, both on domestic issues and on foreign policy, is sharply-worded and threatening. The actions are very small. So far this has worked fairly well. The problem is that at a certain point a decision may be required. The rhetoric will collide with the practice, and the outcome could be disastrous. North Korea is a good example. It is not threats of destruction that are needed now, but rather an international coalition that will disarm the regime.**

- A speech is marked by what it leaves behind. Netanyahu's speech included many correct statements. The delivery was perfect—the UN stage is the place where Netanyahu feels at home. But what remains of it? Not much. Not even a cartoon bomb.
- Levi Eshkol once defined Israel as *Shimshon der nebechdiker* [Samson the pitiful]—boasting of its strength and at the same time weeping about its distress, about its anxieties. Netanyahu's speech combined the two, for the thousandth time: unbridled boasting about the country's strength and his own trips throughout the world, and a call for help against Iran and against the wickedness of the UN institutions. It also had flattery: Netanyahu is very good at flattering Trump.
- Let the Israelis ask themselves how they benefited from this speech. Will the Iranians be deterred from threatening Israel and developing their missile industry? Will they stop dreaming about a nuclear bomb? No. Will they be pushed away from the Golan Heights? No. Will the UN institutions stop condemning Israel? No.
- Netanyahu can say about himself what tourists say at the end of a trip abroad: I was here and there and there, and all I brought back was this lousy T-shirt.

SUMMARY: A speech is marked by what it leaves behind. Netanyahu's speech included many correct statements. The delivery was perfect—the UN stage is the place where Netanyahu feels at home. But what remains of it? Not much. Not even a cartoon bomb. Levi Eshkol once defined Israel as *Shimshon der nebechdiker* [Samson the pitiful]—boasting of its strength and at the same time weeping about its distress, about its anxieties. Netanyahu's speech combined the two, for the thousandth time: unbridled boasting about the country's strength and his own trips throughout the world, and a call for help against Iran and against the wickedness of the UN institutions. It also had flattery: Netanyahu is very good at flattering Trump.

How Trump Could Save Palestinian Statehood

By Jackson Diehl, deputy editorial page editor at the Washington Post

- The annual U.N. General Assembly is underway this week in New York, so we can expect to hear, again, its most hackneyed rhetorical theme — the Israeli-Palestinian “peace process.” Speaker after speaker will declaim the urgency of settling the conflict once and for all; many will assert that the time for doing so has all but expired. Since he will be meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, President Trump may join in the chorus himself. It consequently seems worthwhile to offer a couple of reality checks: No, this is not the time to fashion a Mideast peace deal; and, no, the time for one has not run out.
- Much as it would be desirable to have a peaceful Palestinian state established alongside Israel — and even though many Western leaders regard the terms for it as all but settled — it can’t happen now, for the simple reason that neither Netanyahu nor Abbas is willing or able to agree to it. President Barack Obama, who spent eight years trying to bulldoze or work around them, only ended up proving their resilience and intransigence. When he presented them with a painstakingly fashioned peace framework in 2014, Netanyahu buried it in caveats and conditions, while Abbas simply refused to respond.
- In three years since, both have grown weaker and less able to act. Netanyahu is hemmed in by far-right coalition partners and dogged by corruption investigations. Abbas, at 82, remains in office eight years after his elected term expired, refusing to hold elections and thereby preventing the emergence of a successor. Since January, the two have been toying with the envoys Trump has dispatched to their capitals while ignoring their requests for confidence-building concessions. Abbas has not stopped paying subsidies to the families of militants imprisoned in Israel for acts of violence; Netanyahu has not stopped expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank.
- Trump’s notion of how to break this impasse involves using friendly Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to help bring the parties to the table and induce them to settle. The theory is that Israel’s shared interests with those regimes, above all in opposing Iran, make such collaboration newly possible. But Saudi Arabia’s Mohammed bin Salman, absorbed in trying to consolidate power, will not stick out his neck for the Palestinians. Neither will an Egyptian regime already under assault by Islamist militants.
- In short, whatever Trump might do, a breakthrough in the Middle East is probably years away. Yet the relative good news is that a smarter U.S. strategy could allow Palestinian statehood to survive that delay.
- Obama and his secretary of state, John F. Kerry, were fond of proclaiming that Netanyahu was creating “an irreversible one-state reality” by continuing to build settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The truth, as a former Kerry aide has demonstrated, is considerably more complicated. David Makovsky, now with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, has

overseen a project to document every Israeli settlement with satellite photography, count the people in them and determine how many of them actually stand in the way of an Israeli-Palestinian deal.

- The results, soon to be publicly available on a website, are revelatory. Of the some 600,000 settlers who live outside Israel's internationally recognized borders, just 94,000 are outside the border-like barrier that Israel built through the West Bank a decade ago. Just 20,000 of those moved in since 2009, when Netanyahu returned to office; in a sea of 2.9 million Palestinians, they are hardly overwhelming. Last year, 43 percent of the settler population growth was in just two towns that sit astride the Israeli border — and that Abbas himself has proposed for Israeli annexation.
- If the Palestinians were today to accept the deal they were offered nine years ago by then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, a state on 94.2 percent of the West Bank, only 20 percent of current settlers would find themselves on the wrong side of the border, Makovsky calculates. “You can have a tipping point on sheer numbers, where there are simply too many people on the wrong side of the line,” he told me. For now, though, what the satellite data shows is that it's not too late for two states.
- It follows that a wise U.S. policy would aim at preserving that option until Israeli and Palestinian leaders emerge who can act on it. Makovsky proposes a simple trade-off: Netanyahu stops building in areas beyond the West Bank fence, and Abbas stops paying off militants and their families. Yes, Trump's envoys already pitched that and so far got nowhere. “But the good news,” Makovsky says, “is that neither leader wants to say ‘no’ to Trump.” If the president aims in his New York meetings at pragmatic results, rather than “the ultimate deal,” he might do some real good.

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