



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Friday, September 29*

### Headlines:

- **US Ambassador: Settlements Are Part of Israel Proper**
- **Washington Rebuffs Own Envoy for Saying ‘Settlements are Part of Israel’**
- **U.S. Legislators, AIPAC Push anti-BDS Bill After UN Letter**
- **PM Warns of Retaliation for Palestinian Diplomatic Warfare**
- **Abbas Condemns Palestinian Attack that Killed 3 Israelis**
- **Hamas Reportedly Agrees to Egypt’s Plan for Prisoner Swap With Israel**
- **Abbas demands Qatar play no role in Gaza as condition for reconciliation**
- **Israel to Close Off West Bank, Gaza for Yom Kippur**

### Commentary:

- **Foreign Policy: “Palestine Just Joined Interpol. Is That Bad for Israel?”**
  - By Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, assistant editor at Foreign Policy.
- **Yediot Ahronot: “What Do You Say to Yourself, Mr. Prime Minister, When You Engage in Soul-Searching?”**
  - By Sima Kadmon, columnist at Yediot Ahronot

# News Excerpts

September 29, 2017

## Ynet News

### **US Ambassador: Settlements Are Part of Israel Proper**

The US ambassador to Israel raised eyebrows on Thursday by saying that Israel occupies just two percent of the West Bank and that settlements there are part of the Jewish state proper. The comments angered the Palestinians and are at odds with decades of US policy in the Mideast. "I think the settlements are part of Israel," American Ambassador David Friedman said in an interview with an Israeli news site. He refrained from answering when asked if settlements would be removed in a peace agreement with the Palestinians. "They are only occupying 2 percent of the West Bank," he said. See also, ["U.S. ambassador to Israel appears to break with American policy on West Bank" \(LA Times\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **DC Rebuffs Own Envoy for 'Settlements are Part of Israel'**

For the second time since David Friedman assumed his post as US ambassador to Israel, the US State Department has publicly rejected remarks he made pertaining to Israel's presence in the West Bank as not reflecting the administration's stance. On Thursday afternoon, spokesperson Heather Nauert told reporters that Friedman's comments in an interview he considers West Bank "settlements are part of Israel" should "not be read as a shift in US policy." "I just want to be clear that our policy has not changed," she added, with emphasis. "I want to be crystal clear." See also, ["State Department says Friedman settlements comments do not reflect US policy" \(i24 News\)](#)

## Ha'aretz

### **U.S. Legislators, AIPAC Push anti-BDS Bill After UN Letter**

Legislators in the U.S. Congress and pro-Israeli organizations said on Thursday that the letter sent by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to companies doing business in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, underscores the importance of passing the "Israel Anti-Boycott Act," a proposed piece of legislation that would make it illegal for U.S. Companies to participate in boycotts against Israel organized by international bodies, such as the United Nations. The letter was sent by the UN's Human Rights Commissioner to 150 companies in Israel, 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. See also, ["Senate anti-BDS bill to be reviewed amid criticism" \(JTA\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **PM Warns of Retaliation for Palestinian Diplomatic Warfare**

Jerusalem will not let continuous Palestinian diplomatic steps against Israel go without a response, Prime Minister Netanyahu said on Thursday evening in reaction to Interpol's decision earlier in the week to admit the Palestinians as a member state. Netanyahu's comment came at a meeting in his office with US envoy Jason Greenblatt, US Ambassador David Friedman and Israel's Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer. The Prime Minister's Office did not indicate what that response would be. See also, ["Interpol OKs 'State of Palestine' as new member, irking Israel" \(Japan Times\)](#)

## **Abbas Condemns Palestinian Attack that Killed 3 Israelis**

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has condemned a deadly Palestinian shooting attack that killed three Israelis, two days after it took place. Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rdeneh published a statement condemning the attack late Thursday on the Palestinian government-run Wafa news agency site. A Palestinian killed three Israelis and seriously wounded another before he was shot dead at a West Bank settlement near Jerusalem. Abbas has long been a critic of violence, but has remained quiet in the past when attacks against Israelis took place in the West Bank. He had been under heavy pressure to condemn Tuesday's shootings. Abbas' condemnation came as President Donald Trump's Mideast envoy is in the region attempting to breathe life into peace talks.

### Ynet News

## **Report: Hamas Agrees to Prisoner Swap With Israel**

The leader of Hamas in Gaza said on Thursday that the organization has agreed to a framework for prisoner exchanges between Hamas and Israel proposed by Egypt two weeks ago. The proposal was submitted to the Hamas delegation, led by Ismail Haniyya, during its recent visit to Cairo and was conveyed to the Israeli side through an Israeli negotiator, Lior Lotan, but Israel rejected the proposal. "Hamas and the Egyptians have agreed to the proposal. The ball is now in Israel's court," Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar said. According to a report by the Ma'an news agency, Yahya made the statements during a meeting with Palestinian youths in Gaza. Sites affiliated with Hamas have not confirmed the report. See also, ["Hamas: We approved prisoner exchange deal" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

### i24 News

## **Abbas: Qatar Out of Gaza as Condition for Reconciliation**

As Mahmoud Abbas inches towards resolving a decades-long dispute with his Gaza-based rivals Hamas, the Palestinian Authority president has reportedly set forth three new conditions for reconciliation including that Qatar have no involvement in the affairs of the Gaza Strip under the new unity government there. According to a report by the London-based *Al-Hayat* newspaper, Abbas told senior Palestinian officials that he would not agree to Qatar or any other nation playing any role in managing the affairs of the Gaza Strip. Abbas also demanded that all economic aid bound for the Gaza Strip pass first through the consensus government and not through Hamas-run channels, the report said. See also, ["Quartet welcomes PA's return to Gaza as part of reconciliation with Hamas" \(TOI\)](#)

### Times of Israel

## **Israel to Close Off West Bank, Gaza for Yom Kippur**

The IDF announced on Thursday that it will put in place a closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, ahead of the holiday of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, which starts Friday evening. The closure is expected to last until midnight on Saturday, "depending on a situational assessment," the army said. In a less common move, the military also announced that Palestinian workers would be barred from entering Jewish settlements in the West Bank — a measure that is not normally taken during closures. The army said special permission may be granted in some cases. See also, ["Israeli army locks down West Bank for Jewish holy day" \(i24 News\)](#)

## **Palestine Just Joined Interpol. Is That Bad for Israel?**

By Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, assistant editor at Foreign Policy

- **Interpol, the international police organization, has voted to accept Palestine as a member country — which will heighten fears in Israel that Palestine could use Interpol to target Israeli officials. Interpol membership will bring several benefits to Palestinian police. They'll get access to information that other police agencies around the world have shared about criminal activity and will be able to issue red notices, which function as international nonbinding warrants requesting the extradition of criminal fugitives.**
- **And that's what makes Israel nervous. Israel is strongly opposed to Palestine's membership in Interpol (Israel opposes Palestine's entry into any international organization, insisting that it is not an independent state) and blocked its attempt last year to achieve Interpol membership, warning that Palestine might issue red notices against Israeli government officials. In the end, 75 countries supported Palestine's bid for membership, 34 abstained, and 24 opposed it.**
- **Interpol's constitution forbids the use of red notices for political purposes. But some countries have been known to abuse Interpol, particularly its red notice system, for political purposes. Russia, China, Venezuela, and Turkey have issued red notices for dissidents and activists, in addition to the actual criminals for which the system is intended. (Interpol functions primarily as a liaison between police agencies around the world and does not itself have agents with policing powers.)**
- **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."**
- **But Palestine's membership in Interpol shouldn't actually pose a new concern for Israel, he said: Pretty much the whole world is already in the police organization. "Almost every country in the world is a member of Interpol, with the notable exception of North Korea," Min said, including the Arab League, whose members view Israel with hostility. "Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Syria, Yemen, Iran — these are all member countries I'm assuming for Israel would be not particularly friendly countries." That means that Iran, for example, already has access to the same kinds of data that Palestine will now have. That didn't keep Iran from joining Interpol, nor has it prevented virtually any other country. "Interpol has a very, very broad membership," said Min, noting that some members have good human rights records, while others abuse the justice system.**

- A Chinese national, Meng Hongwei, currently serves as Interpol's president, fueling accusations that China is using Interpol as a political tool. Interpol does not recognize Taiwan, whose statehood China vehemently rejects, as a member, and rejected the self-governing island's request to join the general assembly as an observer last year.
- Palestine is having more luck getting international recognition. More than 130 countries recognize Palestine as a state. Since 2012, when its status in the United Nations was upgraded to "non-member state," Palestine has joined dozens of international organizations. It submitted its application to join Interpol in August 2015.

**SUMMARY:** Palestine's membership in Interpol shouldn't actually pose a new concern for Israel, he said: Pretty much the whole world is already in the police organization. "Almost every country in the world is a member of Interpol, with the notable exception of North Korea," Min said, including the Arab League, whose members view Israel with hostility. "Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Syria, Yemen, Iran — these are all member countries I'm assuming for Israel would be not particularly friendly countries." That means that Iran, for example, already has access to the same kinds of data that Palestine will now have. That didn't keep Iran from joining Interpol, nor has it prevented virtually any other country. "Interpol has a very, very broad membership," said Min, noting that some members have good human rights records, while others abuse the justice system.

## **What Do You Say to Yourself, Mr. Prime Minister, When You Engage in Soul-Searching?**

By Sima Kadmon, columnist at Yediot Ahronot

- For eight consecutive years he has been serving as prime minister. He has been a key player in the political establishment for over 20 years. His influence over all our areas of life cannot be overstated. He wields immense power. Power to build and power that corrupts. He heads a stable government, holds a coalition that maintains itself and will not enable the country to go to elections, and the polls show that even if we were to go to elections today—Binyamin Netanyahu would be the next prime minister.
- In these days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, is Netanyahu engaging in soul-searching? Is the wall of cynicism and constant focus on survival ever penetrated by other thoughts? Such as regret, admission of guilt, shame, a desire to ask for forgiveness. Recognition that this is not what he had wanted, that this is not how he had hoped things would turn out.
- Does he have thoughts of penitence; not in the religious sense but in the moral sense. Does the prime minister ever wonder what happened to him, to the man he used to be. To that Binyamin Netanyahu, the son of Tzila and Benzion Netanyahu, who grew up in a liberal, democratic, cultured home. People with commitment and respect for history, culture, and universal values. And today he sets people against the justice system, urging them to demonstrate in front of the house of the Supreme Court president. Enables racist, fascist and undemocratic laws to be passed. Backs vulgar statements, fails to condemn fulmination, organizes mass support rallies for himself and gives divisive speeches.
- Does he ask himself how it happened that instead of the people he respects, like Meridor, [Benny] Begin, Michael Eitan—he is surrounded by people like Miri Regev, David Bitan, Miki Zohar. People whom he used to scorn, shun, mock their obsequiousness. Today he praises and exalts them, encourages them to go to the media and speak in his name, to fulminate on behalf of his family, refrains from condemning them when they do things that once would have horrified him.
- What happened to the man of the world, who was raised on the tenets of American democracy? The one who understood the importance of media and the free press, and knew how to use it artfully. How did it happen that such a person threatens media outlets and journalists, cynically appoints Ayoub Kara as communications minister, decides to close a public broadcasting organization [and insists on it] to the point to threatening to hold elections, changes his mind and then reverses his position—and all that as part of his efforts to survive.
- In these days of soul-searching, does the prime minister think about his father? What would his father, the intellectual, the scholar, have said about the people with whom his son

surrounds himself. What would he say about his son, who spends time with world leaders, but deals with the lowliest matters. Motivated by a sense of paranoia and suspicion. His best friends are people who feature in the gossip columns. His relationships with millionaires are relationships of give and take—but mostly take—and mostly revolving around luxury items, cigars, champagne, jewelry, as befits his ostentatious lifestyle. What would Tzila and Benzion, who lived their whole lives in a modest fashion, think about the lifestyle of their son and daughter-in-law. [...]

- In these days of awe before Yom Kippur, does the prime minister have time to engage in soul-searching, as a person who has been in power for eight years but has not succeeded in bringing us to a better future. During his period, the Israeli public, or at least a large portion of it, has lost hope. While the Palestinians gain one foothold after another in international institutions, we are advancing in giant steps towards a bi-national state or an apartheid state.
- There will be no more uprooting of settlements, Netanyahu said on Wednesday at the controversial ceremony marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation—or occupation—of the West Bank. This is not the way to make peace, said the peacemaking expert, the man who for eight years has avoided any possibility of making progress in the negotiations. What is the way to make peace, Mr. Netanyahu? You turn your nose up even at a preliminary initiative for a political arrangement, which the man upon whom you have pinned your hopes—the US president—wishes to place before us. You see it as a decree that will be imposed on you.
- In the years that you have sat on this sensitive seat, have you ever thought what could be done, instead of thinking how to avoid refrain from taking action. How to stop every initiative, from an international conference to a return to direct negotiations. And you had opportunities. Windows opened. You were the one who slammed them shut. You could have had the people stand behind you. You would be surprised how many people would be willing to follow you to such an initiative. The evidence is the empty seats, the absence of representatives from the court, the chief of staff, the opposition, the US ambassador and many others from the event in the Etzion Bloc.
- Instead of constantly looking rightward, to Naftali Bennett, and trying to outflank him from the right, you should have opened your eyes and your heart to a huge camp that lies in the center—yes, the center—and led it. This sector of the public also wants security. It too looks at reality soberly. It too is not willing to forsake its country. These are the ordinary people, who serve in the army and pay taxes, for whom the Supreme Court is a supreme value, and all they ask is the country that they dreamed about. A Jewish and democratic state. The State of Israel, and not the State of Judea. But in order to lead this part of the people it takes an act of leadership. A strong backbone. An ability to take criticism. An ability to ignore background noise. A conscientious and moral perspective. Everything you lack.
- What did you think, Netanyahu, when you stood there facing the empty stands, seeing how the stage in these jubilee celebrations belongs to just one side? Did you see this as a symbol of a torn public, a symbol of the rift between right and left, Haredim and secular, Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, a rift that has only deepened on your watch.

- In your soul-searching, Mr. Prime Minister, do you ever tell yourself that you missed an opportunity. You might have been able to go down in history as a prime minister who moved the state forward, and not as a person who was always wary not to shake things up. [A person who was anxious] to feed the appetite of your coalition partners. [...]
- These are days of soul-searching. Personal and national soul-searching. The satisfaction level of the Israeli public is sky-high, as shown by the polls that were published here a week ago. Are there really grounds for satisfaction? Is that what we hoped would be here in the state's 70<sup>th</sup> year—a controversial celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the liberation of Judea and Samaria? Do trips across the globe and fiery speeches at the UN make up for what is happening inside, within your people? The sense of frustration and deep despair of such a large portion of the public. The growing gap between what we hoped our country would be and what it is.
- What do you say to yourself, Mr. Prime Minister, when you engage in soul-searching? Are you aware of the short time you have left? In the best case, a year and a half, and that too is only if you insist on holding onto your seat despite the suspicions and perhaps even under an indictment. Is that the way you want to leave your post, with a black cloud casting a shadow on all the years of your tenure. Is this the way you want to go down in history, as a prime minister who has been led again and again to the courts, who leads security cabinet meetings under heavy suspicions, who clings to his seat at all costs, even at the cost of the good of the people and the country.

This is the time for soul-searching. Personal and national soul-searching. Yours, Mr. Prime Minister. And ours.

**SUMMARY:** In these days of awe before Yom Kippur, does the prime minister have time to engage in soul-searching, as a person who has been in power for eight years but has not succeeded in bringing us to a better future. During his period, the Israeli public, or at least a large portion of it, has lost hope. While the Palestinians gain one foothold after another in international institutions, we are advancing in giant steps towards a bi-national state or an apartheid state. There will be no more uprooting of settlements, Netanyahu said on Wednesday at the controversial ceremony marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation—or occupation—of the West Bank. This is not the way to make peace, said the peacemaking expert, the man who for eight years has avoided any possibility of making progress in the negotiations. What is the way to make peace, Mr. Netanyahu? You turn your nose up even at a preliminary initiative for a political arrangement, which the man upon whom you have pinned your hopes—the US president—wishes to place before us. You see it as a decree that will be imposed on you.