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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Tuesday, October 10*

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# News Excerpts

October 10, 2017

AFP

## **Palestinian Rivals Head to Cairo for Reconciliation Talks**

Palestinian rivals Fatah and Hamas dispatched teams to Egypt on Monday for talks in a renewed push to end their decade-long split after a key breakthrough last week. Senior Fatah figures attending the Cairo talks include intelligence chief Majed Faraj and Fayez Abu Eita, a party leader in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian official news agency Wafa said. Newly appointed Hamas deputy leader Salah al-Aruri and the movement's Gaza chief, Yahya Sinwar, will lead the Hamas delegation.

See also, [\*"Hamas and Fatah to Take Part in Reconciliation Talks" \(Jerusalem Post\)\*](#)

Jerusalem Post

## **Sa'ar: No Peace Until All Know We're Here to Stay**

Former minister Gideon Sa'ar advised US President Donald Trump that an agreement between Israel and its enemies can only be achieved by persuading adversaries of the Jewish state to stop their efforts to destroy it. Sa'ar spoke on Monday to 26 parliamentarians from 15 countries worldwide at the Israel Allies Foundation's annual Jerusalem Chairman's Conference in Jerusalem. Sa'ar joined other Likud politicians who have criticized Trump for saying on Sunday that he wants to try and make peace between Israel and the Palestinians before moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

See also, [\*"Israel is not an occupier" \(Arutz Sheva\)\*](#)

Ha'aretz

## **Netanyahu: Israel Must Cope With Future Security Threats**

Israel must prepare now to cope with future existential threats if it wants to celebrate its 100th birthday in another three decades, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned last week. Speaking during a Bible study session he hosted at the Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem, he noted that the Hasmonean kingdom survived for only about 80 years, and he is working to ensure that modern Israel will surpass that mark and reach its 100th birthday.

Ha'aretz

## **For First Time in 15 Years: Israel Approves Homes in Hebron**

An Israeli panel is set to approve next week construction in West Bank settlements, a significant portion of which are located outside settlement blocs. For the first time in 15 years, Israel is expected to approve construction in the Jewish settlement of Hebron. The number of housing units that will be brought to the top planning council for the West Bank has not been officially published, but a Channel 2 report on Sunday said the panel is expected to approve the construction of a total of 3,829 housing units.

Times of Israel

## **Israel Bemoans Arab Victory in UNESCO Leadership Vote**

Carmel Shama-Hacohen, Israel's ambassador to UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural agency, lamented the results of Monday's first round of voting to elect a new leader for the cultural organization. Former Qatari culture minister Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari received 19 of the 58 votes, with Egyptian diplomat Moushira Khattab coming in third place with 11 votes, behind French former culture minister Audrey Azoulay. Shama-Hacohen said the vote was "bad news for the organization and unfortunately also for Israel."

Times of Israel

## **Saudi Royal, Former Mossad Chief to Talk Two States**

A Saudi prince and a former Israeli spymaster will be talking about the two-state solution in a New York synagogue this month, as a dovish pro-Israel group takes its show on the road to drum up support for the moribund diplomatic vision. The Israel Policy Forum, a liberal advocacy organization dedicated to promoting two states for two peoples, will be holding two conference-like events in New York (October 22) and Los Angeles (October 29), a panel discussion in Washington, D.C. (October 24) and two panel discussions in Chicago (October 25 and 26). The summits will attempt to educate Jewish communities on the core issues relevant to achieving the long-coveted resolution.

Ma'ariv

## **Erdan Files Complaint Against Tibi for Visiting Temple Mount**

Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan (Likud) filed a complaint with the Knesset Ethics Committee against MK Ahmed Tibi (Joint List) after the latter visited the Temple Mount in late July during the metal detector crisis in which security forces clashed with worshippers after the terror attack in which two Border Policemen were killed on the Temple Mount. The police thought that action needed to be taken to deter Tibi, and so Minister Erdan was contacted and it was recommended that he "attend to the matter with the tools at his disposal."

Times of Israel

## **Lieberman: Lebanese Army Under Hezbollah Control**

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman says the Lebanese army has been fully integrated into the Hezbollah terror organization and now operates under its command. "Regarding the Lebanese front we are no longer talking about Hezbollah alone. We are talking about Hezbollah and the Lebanese army; regrettably that is the reality. The Lebanese army has become an integral part of the Hezbollah apparatus under its command," he says at a holiday event at the Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv. He also says that the defense establishment is operating under the assumption that the next conflict will be a two-front war.

## Learn From Begin, Not Golda

By Dan Margalit

- Twice following the Oslo Accord and the flexible arrangements Benjamin Netanyahu made in the Hebron and Wye agreements, Israel tried to advance the negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. At the Camp David Summit in 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak daringly slaughtered a verbal sacred cow when he expressed willingness for a more flexible formula than a united Jerusalem under Israel's sovereignty. But Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas were panic-stricken lest U.S. President Bill Clinton force a permanent-status agreement on them, and they ran away. Later, in an interview with Ehud Yaari, Clinton lambasted the Palestinians' conduct. Only the radical left blamed Barak and his comment that "there is no Palestinian partner." But that comment was true at the time, and it may still be true today.
- The second time was the negotiations between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Abbas. Olmert went quite far in his offers to Abbas. His flexibility even surprised the Americans, as recalled by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in her memoir. But the Palestinians also declined to give Olmert an answer.
- Based on these incidents, and on Abbas' refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state – a formulation based on the UN's resolution of November 1947, to which the Palestinians belatedly clung – Benny Begin concluded that there's no one to talk to, especially given the Palestinians' inflexibility on the refugee issue and the fact that Palestinian schools educate their children on an ethos of taking over the entire Holy Land, including pre-1967 Israel. Begin's arguments are logical, but he doesn't go beyond the confines of this debate. He doesn't ask, like the Biblical general Abner Ben Ner, "Shall the sword devour forever?"
- Yet this question deserves to be asked, at least since the establishment of Netanyahu's current government, which leaves the Palestinians no opening to change their position. The implication of Begin's conclusion is that Israel is like Noah's ark during the flood. But unlike Noah, Netanyahu isn't sending out any doves to keep testing whether "the waters were abated." For the government, the current situation is comfortable. It is gripped by the illusion that the Middle East is like a swamp with stagnant waters, in which nothing can change, so there's no place for questions like "Shall the sword devour forever?" But that's a mistake. Beneath that stagnant surface, the diplomatic arena is boiling. Netanyahu's 2017 is a replica of Prime Minister Golda Meir's 1972.
- Golda refused to accept and implement Defense Minister Moshe Dayan's initiative for a partial withdrawal by agreement from the Suez Canal, even though Egyptian President Anwar Sadat accepted the proposal. She also rejected a proposal by UN envoy Gunnar Jarring for a comprehensive agreement. (Dr. Meir Boimfeld's new Hebrew-language book, "Kfitza Lemayim Karim," discusses this at length.) But even if it's true, as historian Uri Milstein argues, that it

wasn't possible to prevent the 1973 Yom Kippur War because Sadat needed it to restore Egypt's honor, this doesn't change the fact that Golda refused to consider any possibility for an agreement. Just like Netanyahu today.

- Then, too, it was possible to point to the actions of Sadat's predecessor, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who bears responsibility for the 1967 Six-Day War because he unilaterally violated every international agreement, and argue that "there's no one to talk to in Egypt." But Prime Minister Menachem Begin didn't do so. When he received the opportunity Golda had passed up for a deal with Sadat, he employed Dayan and Aharon Barak, ignored his political partners and brought Israel the most important peace agreement of its 70 years of existence.
- Therefore, it's not enough to point (correctly) to Abbas' responsibility for the winds of war; it's also necessary to prepare for the day when the diplomatic climate changes, by not building in the West Bank outside the major settlement blocs. We should return to the Barak and Olmert proposals, with a few improvements. Otherwise, it will be possible to write an Arabic version of Benny Begin's article and make the same accusations against Israel that it makes against the Palestinians.

## **In Talks, Fatah and Hamas Must Transcend Old Formulas**

By Jack Khoury

- The reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas begin in Cairo on Tuesday under the auspices of Egyptian intelligence, a week after the ceremonial cabinet meeting in Gaza in which both groups took part, again with Egyptian intelligence chiefs on hand. The Hamas and Fatah leaders arrived Monday evening in Cairo. Senior Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri will be heading his side's delegation, with his team including Yahya Sinwar, the head of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Moussa Abu Marzouk, who led the group's representation during reconciliation talks in the past.
- Hamas ensured that the delegation would have one representative from the Strip and one from the diaspora, to show a united front, while Arouri and Sinwar are also part of the security apparatus. Hamas continues to maintain that the group seeks a true reconciliation, not a return to the decades-old divisions. The Fatah delegation includes central committee member Azzam al-Ahmad, who is responsible for the movement's reconciliation portfolio, as well as the minister for civilian affairs, Hussein al-Sheikh. Also on board are other members of the central committee, in addition to Majid Faraj, head of Palestinian security and a close associate of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The Palestinians stress that the presence of Faraj and Sinwar is very important for advancing the talks and implementing the decisions in the field.
- As Haaretz reported last week, the negotiations aren't starting from scratch but will be based on the 2011 Cairo agreement. Both organizations agree that the changes in the region since then mean that amendments and new agreements are needed, but not a reopening of all the agreement's clauses.
- Fatah spokesman Osama Qawasmeh told the Voice of Palestine radio that three days have been allotted to the talks but the timetable is flexible and will depend on the progress. The main objective of the first stage is to focus on the full functioning of the Palestinian government in Gaza, both from the civilian and administrative perspective, as well as security issues including the border crossings. Senior Fatah official Jibril Rajoub told Haaretz that both sides seek a true partnership both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, one based on the Palestine Liberation Organization and various international resolutions and decisions including the Arab Peace Initiative. "The aim is to reach agreements on everything, including how to resist the occupation and implementing this resistance," Rajoub said. "From our perspective, we will work toward implementing a model of nonviolent, popular struggle against the occupation."

- As an Egyptian official close to the intelligence community told Haaretz, “During the first stage the parties won’t deal with strategic issues like Hamas’ military arm or the diplomatic process, but will focus on civilian issues and managing Gaza’s issues so as to stabilize the situation there and then go into the tougher issues.” According to that source, the Egyptians won’t let the process fail at such an early and critical stage because of the implications for the region. Also, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sissi is personally involved in the process.
- Sissi, who met Sunday with his National Security Council, including his intelligence chiefs, reportedly said: “The Egyptian effort toward domestic Palestinian reconciliation constitutes a first step that prepares the ground for peace between the Palestinians and Israel.” In Egypt, some observers are taking things one step further, stressing that Sissi’s words are linked to the overall “regional deal” that U.S. President Donald Trump has been talking about.
- Still, despite the optimism and the pressure from both the people and the Egyptians to make progress on a reconciliation deal, the Palestinians realize that at some point they have to move beyond the administrative and security issues and present a strategy for where the Palestinians want to go. Both Fatah and Hamas have adopted opposing approaches of the past quarter-century, neither of which has led to independence and self-determination for the Palestinian people. Fatah, with Oslo and direct talks with Israel, isn’t getting any closer to its declared goals despite ostensible international support. The United States’ gamble on being a sponsor has failed and the international community isn’t hurrying to adopt the Palestinian narrative.
- Hamas, with its strategy of armed struggle, hasn’t even managed to ease the blockade on Gaza, get a seaport or airport, or gain a foothold in the West Bank. The group also realizes that the era of an agenda that squares with winning the support of the Muslim Brotherhood and its patrons has been an utter failure. Yet addressing domestic power struggles and day-to-day issues will at some point have to yield a clear answer to the people who are seeking freedom and self-determination.