



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Tuesday, October 3

Headlines:

- **For the First Time in 3 Years: PA Cabinet Meeting in Gaza**
- **Abbas: PA Must Control Everything in Gaza including Security**
- **Greenblatt Calls on Palestinians to 'Recognize Israel'**
- **Mossad: Iran 'Closer than Ever Before' to Israel's Borders**
- **MK Petitions Court to Permit MK Visits to Temple Mount**
- **Lieberman: IDF Yet to Face Difficult Tests**
- **Norway will Grant Entrance to Israeli Nuclear Whistleblower**

Commentary:

- **AI Monitor: "Is Netanyahu's Party Ready to Divide Jerusalem?"**
 - By Ben Caspit
- **Yediot Ahronot: "When Israel's Government Celebrates Controversy"**
 - By Ami Ayalon, Gilead Sher and Orni Petruschka, founders of the political movement *Blue White Future*

News Excerpts

October 3, 2017

Israel Ahyom

For the First Time in 3 Years: PA Cabinet Meeting in Gaza

For the first time in the past three years, a Palestinian Authority cabinet meeting will be held today in Gaza, as part of the internal Palestinian reconciliation understandings between Hamas and Fatah. Palestinian media outlets reported that PA Chairman Abu Mazen and Hamas Political Bureau Director Ismail Haniya had spoken on the phone on Sunday evening, and emphasized the need to reach reconciliation and Palestinian unity. For the purpose of holding the Palestinian cabinet meeting, Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah came to the Gaza Strip from Ramallah, accompanied by the Palestinian cabinet ministers and dozens of PA officials from the West Bank, who are supposed to carry out the transfer of civilian power in the Gaza Strip from Hamas to the Palestinian Authority. See also, ["Will Hamas Really Give Up Its Armed 'Resistance'?" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Abbas: PA Must Control Everything in Gaza including Security

PA President Abbas on Monday said he would not accept a scenario in the Gaza Strip, in which Hamas's armed wing would be able to hold onto its weapons. Abbas's comments came several hours after PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and Hamas Politburo Chairman Ismail Haniyeh met in Gaza in a bid to start work on ending the decade-long territorial division between the West Bank and Gaza. Hamas has controlled Gaza since 2007 when it ousted the Fatah-dominated PA. "Everything needs to be in the hands of the Palestinian Authority," Abbas told Egypt's CBC, a popular Arabic television station, in an interview. "I'll be even more clear—I will not accept reproducing the Hezbollah experience in Lebanon...We are one state, one system, one law and one weapon." See also, ["Palestinian Factions, Fatah and Hamas, Move Toward Reconciliation in Gaza" \(New York Times\)](#)

Ynet News

Greenblatt Calls on Palestinians to 'Recognize Israel'

US President Donald Trump's special envoy to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt publicly called on Palestinians Monday to recognize the State of Israel and commit to nonviolence in what was a rare layout of the White House's preconditions to kick-start peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Uploaded on his Twitter page, Greenblatt, who has paid several visits to the region in a bid to inject energy into the moribund peace talks, said "The United States stresses that any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognition of the State of Israel, acceptance of previous agreements and obligations between the parties, and peaceful negotiations." In addition, Greenblatt praised Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and his Fatah delegation for visiting the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip to undertake the most ambitious attempt to reconcile the rival political factions since the Islamic militant group seized control of the enclave over a decade ago. See also, ["Palestinian leader launches reconciliation push in Gaza" \(AP\)](#)

Mossad: Iran 'Closer than Ever Before' to Israel's Borders

The head of the Mossad intelligence service warned on Monday that Iran, through its proxies, is operating closer “than ever before” to Israel’s borders with Lebanon and Syria, though he also said Israel was operating deep in enemy territory. Spy chief Yossi Cohen said that in addition to arming the terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas, the Islamic Republic was working to develop its own nuclear capabilities with the goal of weaponizing them. Cohen made his remarks at a ceremony in which six teams from the espionage service received a special commendation from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Due to the sensitivity of the operations, the details of the teams’ activities were kept secret. See also, [“Hezbollah says Israel pushing region to war” \(Reuters\)](#)

Ma'ariv

MK Petitions Court to Permit MK Visits to Temple Mount

MK Yehuda Glick (Likud) yesterday petitioned the High Court of Justice requesting that it issue an interim injunction instructing Prime Minister Netanyahu, to allow Jewish MKs to visit the Temple Mount during the upcoming Sukkot holiday. MK Glick argued in his petition, “nobody disputes that all relevant security agencies are prepared for MKs to visit the Temple Mount at this time.” He also noted the one-day pilot on August 23 in which he took part, when the political echelon and the police let Jewish MKs visit the Temple Mount on that one day. He said, “in a private meeting with the prime minister, he promised me personally that if the pilot worked, the Temple Mount would open to MKs. I feel cheated and insulted since it turns out that the pilot was only a bone that was thrown, as if the MKs were dogs. See also, [“Glick to Supreme Court: “Tossing a bone” is not enough” \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Ynet News

Lieberman: IDF Yet to Face Difficult Tests

Israel’s next military confrontation with its enemies will be of an “entirely different character,” Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said Monday during a ceremony for IDF officers and non-commissioned officers. According to Lieberman, the IDF will be forced to wage a different kind of campaign “when our enemies try to harm our civilian concentrations and civilian infrastructures.” The Yisrael Beytenu leader went on to say that in the next round of hostilities, Israel will not have “the luxury of conducting a long war,” which he characterized as “a step forward and a step back.” See also, [“Lieberman: ‘In the next confrontation, the enemy will pay a heavy price’” \(Arutz 7\)](#)

i24 News

Norway will Grant Entrance to Israeli Nuclear Whistleblower

Norway will allow Israeli nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu to immigrate to the country in order to be reunited with his wife, who is a Norwegian citizen. It was not clear, however, when or if Vanunu would be allowed to relocate. Vanunu spent 18 years in an Israeli prison for disclosing information and photographs he had collected during his employment at Israel's Dimona nuclear facility to Britain's Sunday Times newspaper in 1986. He was released from prison in 2004 and married Norwegian theology professor Kristin Joachimsen in May 2015. See also, [“Nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu invited to immigrate to Norway” \(Jewish News\)](#)

Is Netanyahu's Party Ready to Divide Jerusalem?

By Ben Caspit

- Likud Knesset member Anat Berko arrived at the Prime Minister's Office on Sept. 24 with a group of experts with whom she about a year ago developed a plan to change the face of Jerusalem. They held an extended meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the course of which Berko showed him a plan for redesigning and partitioning Israel's capital. Such a program, developed by a strong right-winger like Berko, who was personally appointed to Likud's Knesset list by Netanyahu, is no less than a political and diplomatic powder keg.
- This was not the first tete-a-tete between Netanyahu and Berko on the volatile subject of Jerusalem. They had sat together several months earlier, when MK Berko showed the prime minister the general principles behind her program to separate from Jerusalem as many Arab-Palestinian neighborhoods as possible. The proclaimed goal is to increase the Jewish majority in the city, reduce the economic burden on the state treasury and improve security. Netanyahu did not authorize the principles or express agreement, but he did encourage Berko to continue to work on the program and present it to him later as a consolidated working paper. That is what transpired on Sept. 24.
- Berko, a lieutenant colonel in the reserves, previously published an extensive academic paper on suicide bombers and their handlers. Over a 15-year period, she met with numerous Hamas terrorists and other prisoners in Israeli prisons. These included Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who served as Hamas' spiritual leader until he was assassinated by Israel after his release. Berko's husband, Reuven Berko, is an expert on Middle Eastern affairs. He served in the past as an adviser on Arab affairs to the mayor of Jerusalem.
- In the September meeting, Anat Berko presented detailed maps to Netanyahu in which the city was divided into geographic and political regions, differentiated with colors. Digital simulations were also included. According to her plan, almost all the Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem would be transferred to Palestinian control. In the first stage, they would be under Palestinian civil rule with Israeli security control, like area B of the West Bank. In the final stage, they would have area A status, that is full Palestinian control. This would decrease Jerusalem's population by 300,000 Palestinians, leaving some 30,000 Palestinians alongside the more than half a million Jewish residents of the city. The Jewish demographic majority in Jerusalem would grow from the current less than 70% to more than 95%. Israel would be spared the billions of shekels it now pays in National Social Insurance payments and various stipends to the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, who have permanent residency status in Israel.
- Berko, speaking to Al-Monitor, refused to provide details on Netanyahu's reaction to the program. "[The program] is on our table," she said, "and I plan to continue to promote it." The plan and the meeting with the prime minister were revealed Sept. 30. A storm erupted at the Likud ministers' first weekly gathering following the meeting, with members asking Netanyahu

whether the news of it was true and whether he supports the plan for partitioning Jerusalem. Netanyahu hurriedly backtracked from the plan. He confirmed that Berko had, indeed, submitted “some papers” to him, but claimed that he does not support the plan and that it goes against the principles of the Likud.

- Berko was not alarmed. As opposed to all the other parliamentarians and ministers in the Likud, her fate does not hinge on the support of party members or the results of the party’s primaries for its Knesset list. As noted, she was added to the list as a personal appointment of the prime minister. Berko is not a professional politician and is not afraid to voice her true opinions. She says out loud what quite a few Likud higher-ups whisper in conversations that cannot be quoted.
- Senior Likud ministers recognize that most of the Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem were not part of the city's municipal jurisdiction until June 1967. They also know that there is no reason to keep an inflated municipal Jerusalem of monstrous proportions by insisting on retaining those neighborhoods within it. To them, places such as Kafr Akeb, Azaria, the Shuafat refugee camp, Jabel Mukaber and many additional quarters in which only Palestinians live and which are technically part of the Jerusalem municipal jurisdiction do nothing to add to Jerusalem’s financial stability or to its Jewish character. The opposite is true: They are a millstone on the neck of Jerusalem. Many high-placed Likud officials state as much in private but would never dare express such an opinion in public. “Now and Forever, a United Jerusalem” is the most sacred slogan of the Likud, Israel’s ruling party. Woe to anyone who dares to challenge this mythic statement.
- In this context, Berko is like the small child who shouted “The emperor has no clothes!” For decades, the unity of Jerusalem has been the Likud’s ultimate battle cry. Netanyahu rose to power in 1996, having defeated Shimon Peres in elections thanks to the mantra “Peres will divide Jerusalem.” To this day, practically the only issue that has united Likud officials throughout the ages, and even heads of other parties, including Yesh Atid’s Yair Lapid and Kulanu’s Moshe Kahlon, is declarations like “Jerusalem is Israel's united, eternal capital forever.”
- Berko is now holding up a mirror to this mantra and demonstrating how hollow it is. Her program does not differ much from other plans, such as that presented last year by Haim Rimon, former senior member of the Labor Party and deputy to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The Berko plan is unique in that it sprung from the depths of the right, from the very hub of the ruling party. Also, Berko does not view the plan as leverage for the two-state solution. To the contrary. She emphasizes that she does not trust the Palestinians. Even if and when an arrangement is made with them, she feels, “[They] will continue to challenge us.” Instead, she says that implementing her program will save Jerusalem from continuing to wallow in the present condition, which is not only bad for Israel’s left-wingers, but also bad for its right-wingers too.
- This constitutes a fascinating trial balloon, somewhat like the pistol placed on the table in the first act of a play. Netanyahu’s stance in the context of Berko’s plan is typical, no different from his approach to all the futile negotiations he has conducted with the Palestinians over the

years. Netanyahu will always find something to hide behind. He will always act to protect himself, one way or another, from far-reaching diplomatic proposals. It could be US envoy Dennis Ross backing him up, categorizing a peace proposal as an “American working paper” or declaring negotiations “academic.”

- This time, it is the plan of Knesset member Berko, whom Netanyahu placed on the Likud list with his own hands. She tells the truth in his name too, but he renounces it.

SUMMARY: In the September meeting, MK Anat Berko presented detailed maps to Netanyahu in which the city was divided into geographic and political regions, differentiated with colors. Digital simulations were also included. According to her plan, almost all the Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem would be transferred to Palestinian control. In the first stage, they would be under Palestinian civil rule with Israeli security control, like area B of the West Bank. In the final stage, they would have area A status, that is full Palestinian control. This would decrease Jerusalem's population by 300,000 Palestinians, leaving some 30,000 Palestinians alongside the more than half a million Jewish residents of the city. The Jewish demographic majority in Jerusalem would grow from the current less than 70% to more than 95%. Israel would be spared the billions of shekels it now pays in National Social Insurance payments and various stipends to the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, who have permanent residency status in Israel.

When Israel's Government Celebrates Controversy

It is in our hands to decide whether to create a reality in which a state ceremony in Gush Etzion is a unifying event marching Israel towards a future that realizes the Zionist vision, or a divisive event marching Israel towards its end as the Jewish people's democratic state.

By Ami Ayalon, Gilead Sher and Orni Petruschka, founders of the political movement Blue White Future

- **Gush Etzion will be an inseparable part of the State of Israel in any peace agreement reached through negotiations, and according to any outline for a settlement. That is indisputable and has been indisputable in all the rounds of talks on a permanent agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.**
- **The Israeli society, however, is split over the future of the territories. As for the West Bank's legal status according to international law, the Supreme Court ruled that "Judea and Samaria are held by Israel under military occupation or belligerent occupation. A military government, led by a military commander, has been established in the area. The military commander's power and authority are granted by the rules of public international law regarding belligerent occupation." These are likely the reasons why the alleged state ceremony celebrating 50 years since Israel captured the West Bank was boycotted by the Supreme Court chief justice. More importantly, these are the reasons why not a single Israeli government has annexed the Judea and Samaria territories.**
- **The fact that Gush Etzion is located in an area which isn't under Israeli sovereignty—even under Israeli law—presents the ceremony, celebrating 50 years since "the liberation of the territories," in a grotesque light: For 50 years, the Knesset has avoided applying Israeli sovereignty to the area whose "liberation" is being celebrated. Moreover, the Supreme Court has allowed the settlement enterprise to exist by legally leaning on the territories' temporariness. But when the State of Israel celebrates the 50th anniversary of the territories' liberation, it conveys a message to the entire world that Israel's control of the territories is permanent, thereby undermining the ruling allowing the settlement's existence.**
- **The international legal angle is, of course, just a reflection of the public-national question we have been dealing with for generations. The Israeli public is struggling with the issue of the territories' fate, which is part of a complicated decision involving security issues, our relations with our Palestinian neighbors and our international standing. While this is a very difficult decision for the Israeli society, which has been debating the issue for 50 years now, it doesn't bother the current Israeli government, which lives on factionalism and incitement, to celebrate a strongly disputed issue in a "state" ceremony.**
- **The court is indicating to the government and to the Knesset that seeing the settlements as part of the state requires a law annexing the territories, like in the case of the Golan Heights and east Jerusalem. But whoever wants the State of Israel to be the democratic state of the Jewish people must decide: Pursuing two states for two people is the way to maintain the**

State of Israel's character and security in accordance with the Zionist vision, rather than devious PR tricks. Whoever wants to save the settlement enterprise must stick to the main settlement blocs, where the vast majority of settlers are already living today, and even annex them if required, and let go of most of the West Bank, which will never be part of the Jewish-democratic State of Israel.

- From a political and diplomatic aspect, Israel must declare that it has no sovereignty claims east of the security fence and in the Palestinian villages that have been annexed to Jerusalem. As a result, Israel won't work to expand the settlement in those territories and will only build in the areas west of the security fence, in Jerusalem's Jewish neighborhoods or in the existing settlement blocs. It must move from maintaining the existing settlements and taking root everywhere to shaping reality and setting a border, if only temporary, around the main settlement blocs.
- Until the permanent agreement is reached, there will be no change in the IDF's deployment and freedom of action in Judea and Samaria. Thus, Israel will start leading a reliable and sincere diplomatic move, which will move the parties towards a reality allowing a separation into two states ahead of a permanent agreement, while establishing a durable Palestinian state. Gradual and continuous progress towards a reality of two states, through independent and constructive interim steps, will lead to stability and normalization over time, and might make a regional permanent agreement possible.
- The area over which Israel has no sovereignty claim will be the minimum land for the establishment of a Palestinian state—the entire West Bank territories and Gaza, excluding the settlement blocs. The settlers living on these lands (who make up about 20 percent of all settlers beyond the Green Line) will be able to vacate as part of a law for voluntary evacuation and compensation, which will actively reflect the Israeli declaration on the future sovereignty of the territories.
- It is in our hands to decide whether we want to create a reality in which a state ceremony in Gush Etzion is a unifying event marching Israel towards a future that implements the Zionist vision, or a divisive event marching Israel towards its end as the Jewish people's democratic state. A governmental policy based on the aforementioned basic guidelines will make it possible to hold the ceremony in Gush Etzion next year, this time in the presence of the Supreme Court chief justice.

SUMMARY: Until the permanent agreement is reached, there will be no change in the IDF's deployment and freedom of action in Judea and Samaria. Thus, Israel will start leading a reliable and sincere diplomatic move, which will move the parties towards a reality allowing a separation into two states ahead of a permanent agreement, while establishing a durable Palestinian state. Gradual and continuous progress towards a reality of two states, through independent and constructive interim steps, will lead to stability and normalization over time, and might make a regional permanent agreement possible.