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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Monday, November 13*

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# News Excerpts

November 13, 2017

The New York Times

## **Trump Team Begins Drafting Middle East Peace Plan**

President Trump and his advisers have begun developing their own concrete blueprint to end the decades-old conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, a plan intended to go beyond previous frameworks offered by the American government in pursuit of what the president calls “the ultimate deal.” After 10 months of educating themselves on the complexities of the world’s most intractable dispute, White House officials said, Mr. Trump’s team of relative newcomers to Middle East peacemaking has moved into a new phase of its venture in hopes of transforming what it has learned into tangible steps to end a stalemate that has frustrated even presidents with more experience in the region.

See also, [\*“Saudis told Abbas to accept Trump peace plan or resign” \(Times of Israel\)\*](#)

Ha’aretz

## **Saudis Back Abbas on Reconciliation Dispute with Hamas**

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has received full backing from Saudi Arabia regarding his position on the reconciliation with Hamas, particularly in regard to the issue of putting all weapons under a single authority, a senior Palestinian official told Haaretz. A disagreement over the issue of day-to-day security and the operation of the Palestinian security services is at the heart of the conflict, particularly as they pertain to the border crossings and the operation of the government in Gaza City.

Times of Israel

## **Abbas: PA Could to One-State Solution if Two States Fail**

If the two-state solution fails, Palestinians will back a one-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with full rights for all citizens, Abbas said Saturday. In a pre-recorded speech broadcast on large screens in Gaza City as tens of thousands gathered to mark the death of PLO leader Yasser Arafat, Abbas, who has not visited Gaza since his allies were thrown out by Hamas in 2007, hailed his predecessor’s legacy.

Ha’aretz

## **Islamic Jihad to Israel: Your Threats Are a Declaration of War**

Israel’s warnings that Islamic Jihad is “playing with fire” amid talks of retaliation against this month’s tunnel strike amount to a declaration of war, Islamic Jihad said on Sunday. The Israeli army warned the commanders of Islamic Jihad in a video over the weekend that any attempt to attack Israel in retaliation to Israel’s destruction last month of a tunnel the militant organization dug from the Gaza Strip to Israel would be met with great force.

See also, [\*“Amid war of words, IDF nabs top Islamic Jihad official in West Bank” \(Times of Israel\)\*](#)

Jerusalem Post

## **US: Nine Anti-Israel Drafts Harm Peace Efforts**

Next month, the UN General Assembly is expected to affirm east Jerusalem's status as "occupied territory," call for international companies to boycott Israel and condemn Israel's presence on the Golan Heights. Nine drafted texts, of what will likely be a slate of 20 anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian resolutions, were overwhelmingly affirmed Friday in New York at a meeting of the Fourth Committee – also known as the Special Political and Decolonization Committee – which is made up of the 193 UN member states. "The US continues to oppose the annual submission of a disproportionate number of unfair UN GA resolutions biased against Israel," a United States representative told the committee, explaining that it is planning to oppose the texts.

Ha'aretz

## **Report: Police Have Evidence to Charge Netanyahu**

Sources in the Israel Police believe there is sufficient evidence to charge Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with bribery for accepting hundreds of thousands of shekels' worth of gifts from wealthy businessmen, Israel Channel 10 News reported on Friday. According to Channel 10, prosecutors have not yet decided on an indictment in the case. The Israel TV News Company — the shared news division of Keshet 12 and Reshet 13, the former Channel 2 — reported on Friday that the police and the State Prosecutor's Office disagree over charges in the case.

The New York Times

## **In Saudi Arabia, Lebanon's Leader Claims He's Free to Go**

Lebanon's prime minister, Saad Hariri, whose mysterious sojourn in Saudi Arabia has shaken the Middle East, said in a television interview on Sunday night that he was able to move freely, that he had left Lebanon in order to protect himself and that he would return home "within days." But the remarks — his first in public since he unexpectedly flew to Saudi Arabia on Nov. 3 and announced his resignation from there a day later — seemed unlikely to clear up the confusion and tension over whether he had acted freely, whether he was in effect a hostage of the Saudis, and whether they had pressured him to resign as part of a broader strategy to increase pressure on their regional rival, Iran.

Reuters

## **Israel Free to Act in Syria as US, Russia Expand Truce**

Israel signaled on Sunday that it would keep up military strikes across its frontier with Syria to prevent any encroachment by Iranian-allied forces, even as the United States and Russia try to build up a ceasefire in the area. U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday affirmed joint efforts to stabilize Syria as its civil war wanes, including with the expansion of a July 7 truce in the southwestern triangle bordering Israel and Jordan.

## **Rabin's Forgotten Plan for Two-State Solution**

By Uri Savir

- In recent years, the official memorial day for late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has been a day of political controversy between the political left and right — between those who claim to continue the late prime minister's peace legacy and those who rebuke the accusation that the incitement of the right over the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993 led to the assassination of Rabin. This year, Rabin's son Yuval frankly confronted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the memorial service held at Rabin's gravesite, saying that his father did not enact legislation against those who criticized him. "Rabin never passed the buck or whined — even when he was exposed to the terrible expressions of hatred. He was everybody's prime minister," argued Rabin. He was referring to legislation attempts by Netanyahu's associates to protect the prime minister from police investigations.
- There are two debates relating to Rabin's legacy. First, there is a debate concerning the legacy of the Oslo Accord. This debate opposes those who welcome the accords with the PLO, intended to lead to a sharing of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River into two states, and those on the Israeli right who see the accord as a historical mistake abdicating lands that rightfully belong to the Jews. The second debate, not less bitter, is over Yigal Amir, Rabin's assassin, a religious, fanatic youth who studied at Bar Ilan University. Many believe that he was inspired to kill Rabin by right-wing Likud's demagoguery denying Rabin's policies and by the messianic rabbis of the settlement movement. There are others who claim that his act was that of a lone fanatic.
- Naturally, the right camp rejects the accusations by the left, although no one can deny the violent nature of the anti-Rabin demonstrations at the time, such as the March 1994 demonstration where a mock coffin was carried by the crowds with the words Zionism and Rabin painted on it. Opposition leader Binyamin Netanyahu was marching there, at the Ra'anana junction. These passionate and painful debates are unlikely to ever be resolved, as they reflect Israel's deep political divide.
- Dalia Rabin, the daughter of the late prime minister and the head of the Rabin Center, told AI-Monitor, "There was an unprecedented campaign against my father. He was targeted because in the mind of his critics on the right, 'Mr. Security' [Yitzhak Rabin] could actually lead Israel to the goals he set. The environment that was created by this incitement led to the assassination of both him and the hope he had created." Referring to the Oslo process, Rabin said, "Yitzhak Rabin was a pragmatic, responsible and courageous leader, who decided to give peace settlement with the Palestinians a chance, knowing all too well the difficulties and complexities of such a process." His main aim, she concluded, "was to give the young Israeli generation the chance for the life they deserve."

- A pertinent question to be asked nowadays is what Rabin would have done in the current reality, of total deadlock of the peace process. Al-Monitor spoke with several of Rabin's closest associates, who paint a picture of a leader who had evolved politically and security-wise. Rabin was a product of Israel's security establishment, "Mr. Security" as he was often called. The transition from a security hawk toward a leader pushing for peace with the PLO and Syria derived from his conclusion that Israel's security in the long run could be guaranteed only by a political settlement coupled with military deterrence. A new relationship with the Palestinians was a must in order to preserve Israel's democratic and Jewish identity. Rabin believed that the Oslo Accord was a necessary bridge to improve cooperation with the Palestinians, with the goal of reaching a permanent status agreement. It was clear to him that sharing the land with a national Palestinian entity was both possible and necessary.
- His closest former associates told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity that between the years 1993 and 1995, Rabin had developed a vision for a permanent status agreement to be achieved before the year 2000. The first essential element of the plan was sharing of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, with the Palestinian state being demilitarized and the Jordan River serving as Israel's security boundary. Security arrangements would be agreed upon, with Israeli military presence along the Jordan River. The plan also consisted of relocating dispersed settlements into "settlement blocs," mainly in the Jerusalem area. A united Jerusalem would remain under Israel's control, except for the East Jerusalem Palestinian neighborhoods. The plan referred also to the Palestinian refugees, granting no right of return to Israel. Instead, the plan offered right of return to the new Palestinian state and international reparations.
- Rabin's plan favored international and Israeli investment in the Palestinian economy. There was also a Jordanian angle to Rabin's plan, as he held the Jordanian kingdom in very high esteem. The plan proposed a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation that would be decided between the two parties. The last part of the plan consisted of normalizing relations between Arab countries and Israel. At the time, Rabin even favored a peace treaty with Syria and was ready to give up the Golan Heights for the proper security arrangements. Above all, Rabin believed in a strong strategic relationship with the United States, which would have made such an agreement with the Palestinians possible. He definitely had the courage to make the necessary decisions for such a deal. His peace and security legacy is today espoused by the most senior veterans of Israel's security establishment.

## Headed Toward a Clash

By Alex Fishman

- Over the course of the past 48 hours, the last two constraints were breached that have delayed the revenge that Islamic Jihad is planning in response to the destruction of the tunnel and the killing of 12 Palestinian terrorists.
- The first constraint was removed at the end of last week when Islamic Jihad realized that four of its men who were trapped in the tunnel had been killed and that its attempts to reach the bodies or to receive them from Israel would be to no avail. The moment all hope was lost of reaching the bodies, the first constraint on a reprisal was removed. The second constraint, the intra-Palestinian reconciliation, had slowed down to the point of paralysis. This floundering reconciliation, which until a few days ago was still showing signs of life, became caught in the rift between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon and in Yemen.
- The Saudis abruptly summoned Abu Mazen and basically demanded that he stop all the reconciliation steps as long as Hamas was maintaining its flirtation with the Iranians. The Saudis fear the possibility that Hamas's military wing, which moved from Qatar to Beirut, will take over the Palestinian military forces in the refugee camps in Lebanon and move them to the Iranian axis. The Iranians, on the other hand, did not take this lying down and demanded that a Hamas delegation from Qatar make an official visit to the Lebanese president in Beirut. The paralyzed reconciliation process has lowered Hamas's motivation to block Islamic Jihad and to maintain the quiet on the border with Israel at all costs.
- It was for good reason that the coordinator of government activities in the territories issued a direct warning to Islamic Jihad. Israel knows, reports say, that the instructions to carry out a revenge attack have already been issued by Islamic Jihad headquarters in Damascus. It is very reasonable to assume that Israel knows a thing or two about the plans and preparations on the other side; even so, there could always be a surprise that would exact a heavy toll. That's why Israel is even now attempting to use deterrence: by public warnings, by covert messages and by increasing its readiness, and by a visible military presence, including an exercise by the Southern Command in the Gaza Strip.
- The Palestinian media in Gaza is fanning the flames of war, claiming that Israel is trying to heat up the border with descriptions that seem to be taken from reports by lookouts along the border. According to these descriptions, Israel is employing unmanned vehicles, jeeps and Humvees along the border. The reports also say that Israel is using observation balloons in a larger scope than in the past; they are carrying unusually large electronic systems, and an unusually large number of drones. They also say that the IDF is building ramps for tanks, that the work on the border fence has been halted, and that Israeli agricultural activity along the border has also stopped.

- The stage is all set for a clash. Israel is indifferent to the Palestinian reconciliation agreement, and therefore its response to any attempt to attack communities or soldiers—or a terror attack anywhere outside the Gaza Strip—could be of a scope that will be perceived as disproportionate. Islamic Jihad’s motivation for revenge is obvious. Hamas believes that if it sets a fire that is limited in scope, this will lead to American and Egyptian pressure on Israel to stop the fire—and put pressure on the PA to return to the reconciliation talks. And if all the interests in setting a fire converge—a fire will indeed burn.