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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Wednesday, November 8

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News Excerpts

November 8, 2017

Ynet

Egypt's al-Sisi Says Israelis 'Can Be Convinced of Peace'

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi says he believes a solution can be reached to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and that the Israeli public can be persuaded into signing a peace agreement, according to an interview published Tuesday in the Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper. Asked whether the Hamas terror movement has changed following the reconciliation agreement recently signed with the Palestinian Authority, al-Sisi extolled the virtues of agreement.

See also, ["Sisi reiterates commitment to Israeli-Palestinian peace during Abbas visit" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Times of Israel

Kerry Said Israeli Government Doesn't Want Peace

Former US secretary of state John Kerry blamed the Israeli government's resistance to the establishment of a Palestinian state for harming the prospects of a peace deal, while warning Israel could face a future violent Palestinian uprising if there was no progress in peace talks. In recordings published Tuesday by Channel 10, America's former top diplomat can be heard praising the Palestinian Authority's commitment to nonviolence following a wave of terror attacks beginning in the fall of 2015, which he said has been ignored by Israelis due to right-wing configuration of the current government.

Ha'aretz

PM: Israel Allying With Arab States That Fight Extremism

Israel is strengthening its ties with moderate Middle East actors and hopes the Palestinians will follow suit, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a special Knesset session marking the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration on Tuesday. "I can only hope that, in the end, the Palestinians will also adopt this approach and turn toward peace... This is the root of the conflict: the refusal to recognize Zionism and the Jewish home, and to recognize the modern state of Israel in any borders."

Times of Israel

Poll: 67% of Arab Israelis Reject Israel as Jewish State

Two-thirds of Arab Israelis believe Israel has "no right" to define itself as the Jewish nation state, while a majority of Jewish Israelis (58 percent) say those who reject that definition of Israel should have their citizenship revoked, according to a new poll underlining deep divisions between the two communities. Some 67% of Arab respondents "answered that the State of Israel had no right to be defined as the national home of the Jewish people," the Israel Democracy Institute survey, released Tuesday, found.

Ha'aretz

PA Pushing for Security Control of Gaza Strip

A week after the Palestinian Authority assumed control of the border crossings in the Gaza Strip, Hamas and Fatah on Tuesday found themselves fighting over control of the Strip. Hamas expressed anger at Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah's comments that the PA couldn't guarantee the crossings' orderly operation without assuming full security control over Gaza. Hamdallah's words were met with anger by Hamas, that said that any delay in the opening of the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, which was run only by Hamas and has been only partially operational since they took control of the Strip, was unacceptable and would severely harm Gazans.

Ynet

Children of Settlers Killed by Terror Ask PM for Protection

The children of families affected by deadly terror attacks in the West Bank have joined their parents in fighting for better security along the roads and settlements in which they live, by personally writing Netanyahu to approve more security measures in the region. This is the second week in which settlers are protesting outside the Prime Minister's Residence for better security measures in the West Bank.

Ha'aretz

Police Questioned Ambassador Dermer in Corruption Probe

Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Ron Dermer was summoned to testify to the police regarding an alleged attempt to procure a U.S. visa for Israeli Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan through Kerry, Israel's Channel 2 News reported on Monday. According to the report, Dermer, considered close to Netanyahu, acted on the prime minister's behest to advance Milchan's interests. The allegations are being examined as part of a wider investigation into possible wrongdoing on Netanyahu's part. Dermer was reportedly questioned under caution.

Times of Israel

Israel Tells Envoys to Back Saudis Against Hezbollah, Iran

The Foreign Ministry has instructed Israeli ambassadors around the world to begin in earnest a diplomatic campaign against Iran and Hezbollah that includes backing Saudi Arabian claims that the two Shiite allies were behind a missile attack on Riyadh International Airport over the weekend. Channel 10 reported Wednesday that the ministry sent a classified memo to Israel's envoys around the world urging them to contact government officials and plead the case for reining in Iran and its Lebanese proxy.

Understanding Anti-Normalization in Palestinian Society

By Rami Elhanan

- At the end of a Parents Circle—Families Forum (PCFF) conference in the town of Beit Jala about a month ago, we marched together with the Combatants for Peace and Standing Together movements to the village of al-Walaja in a show of solidarity with its residents. The village has been suffering for years from home demolitions, arrests, casualties and a siege, which is essentially imposed by Israel through the separation fence.
- We were about 1,000 men and women. When we reached the entrance to the village, we were greeted by a handful of Palestinian “anti-normalization” activists who refused to let us in, even though the visit was coordinated in advance. A major argument broke out between the Palestinians themselves, as the Israeli activists and IDF soldiers stood aside watching them with astonishment. Eventually, it was decided that the situation was too explosive, and we turned back. The event’s unexpected ending stirred up emotions: Some of the Israelis were offended, while others were disappointed. But what happened demonstrates more than anything how much we Israelis lack an understanding and awareness of internal processes within the Palestinian society against what the Palestinians refer to as “tatbia”—normalization with Israel.
- Since the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian society in the territories has been following the multiplying coexistence and dialogue meetings between Palestinians and Israelis with growing reluctance. While representatives of the sides began meeting in cafés in Ramallah and Tel Aviv, travelling to conferences abroad together, hugging, kissing and eating hummus together—at the end of the day, the Palestinians returned to their refugee camps and to the humiliating occupation, and the Israelis returned to their convenient democracy. And so, wide parts of the Palestinian society began feeling that while those people were hugging and kissing, allegedly forgetting the wrongs of the past, the situation on the ground was only getting worse: The number of settlers doubled, the roadblocks, the traffic restrictions, the home demolitions, the land theft and the killing and arrests of anti-occupation protestors increased. All this created an unbearable dissonance.
- The growing discomfort over the unbearable situation was reflected in the growing use of the term “tatbia” (normalization). In the Palestinian political culture, this term basically reflects opposition to any joint Palestinian-Israeli activity that deviates from the framework of a struggle and is perceived as a sort of collaboration with the occupier. As far as many Palestinians are concerned, that public dialogue with Israelis is a false representation of normality—as if both sides share equal strength and as if justice is equally divided between them. So any cooperation and dialogue between the sides are immediately suspected by many as a normalization attempt and encounter strong opposition from those in the Palestinian society who are working to prevent it—even at the cost of boycotting Israeli peace activists who wish to help them.

- Many Israelis are finding it difficult to accept this opposition and don't understand why Palestinians are rejecting a hand extended in peace. Even though we can't judge the occupied side from our superior position as rulers, it's important to continue the efforts for a joint struggle against the occupation and its wrongs. We must not let an incident like the one that took place in Beit Jala cloud the holy reconciliation work or serve as an excuse for some of us to avoid the effort to build immensely important bridges between the people.
- Just like we sometimes face elements in the Israeli public who oppose any type of contact with the Palestinians, our Palestinian partners are forced to face harsh criticism from radical elements opposing any contact with Israelis. We must try to understand each other, honor our Palestinian partners who are courageously standing at the forefront of the battle against their society, and keep deepening the joint activity of those who believe in peaceful cooperation against the occupation.

Settler Delusions of Security

By Mazal Mualem

- When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu walked into the Likud conference room at the Knesset on Nov. 6, he knew that the families of terror victims would be waiting for him there. They were the same families who had been holding a hunger strike outside his Jerusalem residence for the past two weeks. They were demanding hundreds of millions of shekels, which they claim have been promised to them, to fund the paving of roads to bypass Arab villages and to install defensive measures at their settlements. Netanyahu arrived prepared. He brought with him a check for 200 million shekels (\$57 million) to increase security on West Bank roads, having discussed the issue with Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon. The leaders of the protest knew about this in advance, but they still refused to forgo their organized attack on Netanyahu. It was broadcast live on all the media outlets with representatives in the room.
- Both sides — the settler leaders as well as Netanyahu — benefited from the highly publicized event. As far as the settlers were concerned, 200 million shekels is just a drop in the bucket. They want a security package to include the paving of bypass roads, the installation of street lights, security cameras and sophisticated fencing, and upgrades to improve cellphone infrastructure, all of which would cost a minimum of 3 billion shekels (\$850 million). As far as Netanyahu was concerned, the attack on him allowed him to present a budgetary "achievement" that the right favors and perhaps even distract the public from the police investigation of two of his confidantes, attorneys David Shimron and Yitzhak Molcho, in the German submarine scandal.
- Under normal circumstances, Netanyahu makes a point of showing up late to Likud meetings. This time, however, he arrived on time, so he could announce, "I am coming from a meeting with the finance minister, where we decided together to immediately set aside 200 million shekels to pave roads that have been agreed upon already. ... In early January, we will initiate a Cabinet discussion to approve the allocation of another 600 million shekels to complete the roads and lighting."
- Despite this announcement, the families of the terror victims interrupted him. Knowing that this would happen, Netanyahu allowed them to attack him in front of the cameras as much as they wanted. He even silenced Knesset member Nava Boker when she tried to make the point over all the shouting that the protests had achieved their goal. The money had been transferred. She was right about that. Netanyahu displayed empathy as he listened to their claims and with a stern expression listened to Adva Biton, the mother of 2-year-old Adelle, who was wounded in 2013 by a rock thrown on a West Bank highway and died from her injuries in 2015. "I buried my daughter at age four and eight months. What are you waiting for, the next disaster?" the girl's mother cried.

- The settler protests over security gathered momentum last July, after the horrific attack in the settlement of Halamish. In that incident, a Palestinian infiltrated a home and murdered Yosef Salomon, his daughter Chaya and his son Elad, gathered around the table for their Sabbath meal. Salomon's surviving daughter Racheli Menzali, having lost her father and two siblings in the attack, wrote the prime minister a letter stating, "I have a hard time understanding how the leader of the national camp will not let the most basic security needs be provided to the settlements and main roads in Judea and Samaria."
- According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, some 400,000 Jews now live in the West Bank, in major settlement blocs and isolated settlements and outposts. They are exposed to terrorism on a daily basis because of their proximity to the local Palestinian population and the friction that ensues. As far as they are concerned, their demand that the right-wing government act to improve their personal security is only natural and should be taken for granted. Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman estimates that a comprehensive plan to improve security would cost approximately 3.3 billion shekels (\$938,000). He made this assessment in a meeting with the settlers' leaders, based on a plan prepared by his ministry. He then said that there was no budget for it, sending the settlers off to exert political pressure to find the money.
- The settlers' desire to prevent the next attack is little more than a pipe dream, especially as long as the diplomatic circumstances of the occupation persist or the situation intensifies. In other words, as long as the Palestinian aspiration for self-determination is alive and kicking, the West Bank will not be a safe place for Israeli citizens and soldiers. It will remain that way, even if billions of shekels from the state budget are invested in bypass roads, lighting and checkpoints. The facts speak for themselves. A way will always be found to launch the next attack.
- This was the missing angle at a Nov. 1 Likud meeting that included a political discussion about the settlers' protest. Not one major figure on the center-left took advantage of the opportunity to raise a challenge by bringing up this point. It can be assumed that the reason is that the two major parties in that camp, Labor and Yesh Atid, are busy investing considerable resources in recruiting votes on the right. It is worth remembering the harsh years of terrorism in the Gaza Strip, such as along the Philadelphi Route, running along the Gaza-Egypt border. From the start of the first intifada in 1987 until the 2005 disengagement, terrorism made it almost impossible for the people in the Katif settlement bloc to live a normal life. It didn't stop even when vast sums of money were invested in sophisticated defensive measures and enormous numbers of troops deployed there.
- Settler children were driven to school in armored buses under heavy security, but the attacks did not relent. The Palestinians replaced Molotov cocktails with rifles and artillery, so Israeli soldiers were still sitting ducks. One of the reasons provided for the disengagement was security, both in terms of cost and effectiveness. A healthy debate over how to ensure the security of settlements in the West Bank must include the contention that any investment in security, no matter how generous, will not prevent the next wave of casualties from Palestinian terrorism. This does not mean that the settlers should be left to their fate, but that is also far

from the situation today. Studies and research over the past few years have shown that the budget per Israeli Jew is greater than it is per person within the Green Line. There is no transparency in this part of the budget, so it is hard to know what the sums actually cover.

- Nevertheless, one thing is certain. Security is a bottomless pit. There is no end to the defenses, wall and bypass roads to pave. No less important to personal security, however, is knowing the truth. None of these security measures will prevent terrorism.