



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, November 10

Headlines:

- **Netanyahu Interrogated for Over 4 Hours in Graft Probes**
- **PM: I helped Milchan due to his contribution to Israel's Security**
- **Israel Katz: Israel Planning UN Action Against Iran**
- **Minister: Parts of Cabinet Can't live with Trump's Peace Demand**
- **Likud MK: Cut Police Chief's Salary, Give Netanyahu Raise**
- **Social Reconciliation Moves Forward in Gaza**
- **Top Officials: Saudis Holding Lebanon's Outgoing PM Hariri**
- **Israel Hosts its Largest Aerial Exercise in History**

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Let's Stop Lying to Ourselves About a Palestinian State"**
– By Yoaz Hendel, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth
- **Jerusalem Post: "Is the Patel Scandal Really About the British Government, or Israel?"**
– By Tova Lazaroff, columnist at Jerusalem Post

News Excerpts

November 10, 2017

Times of Israel

Netanyahu Interrogated for Over 4 Hours in Graft Probes

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was grilled by police on Thursday for over four hours in a pair of criminal investigations involving suspicions he received illegal gifts and favors from businessman for advancing their business interests. “We confirm that the prime minister was interrogated for several hours at his residence in Jerusalem, as part of the investigation conducted by the Lahav 433” anti-corruption unit, police said in a statement. See also, [“Israeli anti-corruption police question Netanyahu for fifth time” \(Guardian\)](#)

Ynet News

PM: I helped Milchan due to his contribution to Israel

During the investigation, Netanyahu was confronted with Harow’s testimony, as well as with the suspicions raised in billionaire Arnon Milchan’s recent testimony in the illicit gifts affair (also known as “Case 1,000”), which is looking into billionaire Arnon Milchan’s gifts to Netanyahu and his wife, Sara. Among other allegations, it is said that Netanyahu had pushed for Milchan to receive a US visa by contacting then-US state secretary John Kerry three times on the matter and protecting Milchan’s investment in the Channel 10 franchise. Netanyahu’s version is that he only helped Milchan because of his contribution to Israel’s security, just like he helped former Mossad Director Meir Dagan, when he was fighting cancer and had to undergo a liver transplant in Belarus. Milchan, however, told the investigators that he was forced to recruit other donors to share the burden of funding Netanyahu’s gifts. See also, [“ISRAELI AMBASSADOR RON DERMER QUESTIONED IN NETANYAHU PROBE” \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

AP

Israel Katz: Israel Planning UN Action Against Iran

Following the surprising resignation of Lebanon’s prime minister, Israel is planning a diplomatic offensive to step up pressure on Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah at the United Nations, a senior Israeli government minister said Thursday. Intelligence Minister Israel Katz told The Associated Press that he believes conditions are ripe to take a stand against Iranian actions in the region, including its support for the Lebanese Shiite militant group. In particular, he said that Israel wants the world, after years of inaction, to tightly enforce a 2006 cease-fire agreement that called on Hezbollah to disarm and stay away from Israel’s border. See also, [“Israel planning UN action against Iran, says intelligence minister” \(TOI\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Minister: Parts of Cabinet Can’t live with Trump’s Demand

Many cabinet members will vote against an American peace initiative based on a two-state solution, Science, Technology and Space Minister Ofir Akunis warned ahead of his trip to the US next week. Akunis said he expects US President Donald Trump’s administration to present a diplomatic plan for Israel and the Palestinians in the coming months that will push for the establishment of a Palestinian state. “With all of my appreciation for the Trump administration, which I don’t hide,” Akunis said, “I can’t live with a document that talks about two states, and I will vote against it. I have a clear ideological stance... Many ministers agree.”

Likud MK: Cut Police Chief's Salary, Give Netanyahu Raise

Likud MK David Amsalem on Wednesday proposed raising the salary of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to surpass the earnings of top police officials, in a suggestion subsequently rejected by Israel's premier. Speaking to the Hadashot TV news outlet (formerly Channel 2), Amsalem noted the discrepancy between the prime minister's monthly wages and those of Police Commissioner Roni Alsheich. "The police commissioner receives NIS 97,400 [per month] and a [entry level] police officer receives NIS 6,000," said Amsalem. "So if he [Alsheich] would receive NIS 40,000 and he [the police officer] receives NIS 10,000, that isn't better? That doesn't sound more fair?" See also, ["Bill blocking police from recommending charges advances" \(TOI\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Social Reconciliation Moves Forward in Gaza

In a public square in Gaza City on Thursday, thousands of Gazans participated in a social reconciliation ceremony, advancing understandings between Fatah dissident Mohammad Dahlan and Hamas. In July, Dahlan and Hamas officials agreed in Cairo to take action to promote social reconciliation between families whose members were killed in fighting between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza in 2007 that ended in the political division of the Palestinian territories. Dahlan and the Hamas officials decided to set up a United Arab Emirates-backed fund to make payments of approximately \$50,000 to families that lost their sons in the internecine Palestinian conflict in 2007, in return for publicly renouncing the demand to avenge their deaths. See also, ["Palestinian reconciliation spells cheaper prices for Gaza consumers" \(Reuters\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Top Officials: Saudis Holding Lebanon's Outgoing PM Hariri

Lebanon believes that Saudi Arabia is holding leading Sunni Muslim politician Saad Hariri and plans to work with foreign states to secure his return to the country, a top Lebanese government official told Reuters on Thursday. Hariri resigned as prime minister on Saturday in a shock declaration read from Saudi Arabia, pitching Lebanon into deep political crisis and pushing the country back to the forefront of a regional struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Lebanese President Michel Aoun is seeking help from diplomats to uncover the mystery surrounding Hariri's resignation, al-Manar TV reported on Thursday. See also, ["IS SAUDI ARABIA GOING TO WAR WITH LEBANON? PRIME MINISTER STILL MISSING AS GULF CITIZENS TOLD TO LEAVE IMMEDIATELY" \(Newsweek\)](#)

Ynet News

Israel Hosts its Largest Aerial Exercise in History

The largest seen aerial exercise in Israel began on Thursday and is to continue for the next two weeks. 1,000 highly-trained fighter pilots from eight different countries opened the "Blue Flag" exercise, which includes roughly 100 of fighter jets, helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). It is the most immense military drill to take place so far this year. This is the third-time Israel has hosted the exercise, which takes place once every two years. In addition to Israel, this year it included teams from Greece, India, the US, Germany, Poland, France and Italy. During the drill, Israeli F-15 and F-16 jets will come up against German Eurofighters and French Mirage jets. Most of the jets are kept in the southern Ovda airport, with the soldiers themselves staying in hotels located in the coastal city of Eilat. See also, ["IDF's largest aerial military exercise tests coordination with other countries" \(i24 News\)](#)

Let's Stop Lying to Ourselves About a Palestinian State

In London, Netanyahu finally told the truth about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: There will be no full Palestinian independence, as it's too dangerous. What we are left with is an extended autonomy, a state minus—as long as the security restrictions and political separation are maintained.

By Yoaz Hendel, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- Pressure sometimes gets good things out of people. A year after Donald Trump was elected US president, and in the middle of Benjamin Netanyahu's investigations and his family's legal woes, the prime minister has started talking about his ideological aspirations. Prime ministers discuss ideology in two cases: Either before they rise to power or when they step down. It's one of the best reasons for limiting a prime minister's term, to give him a limited amount of time to implement his beliefs or abandon them (in the event that he lied).
- Last Friday, at the Chatham House independent policy institute in London, Netanyahu was asked about the option of a Palestinian state. He replied that we have seen many Muslim states in the Middle East fail and that the model of modern sovereignty with no boundaries should be reexamined (in other words, we should no longer rely on the 1967 borders).
- To the people sitting in the room it may have seemed like another typical attempt to avoid making any progress towards a Palestinian state, but there was actually a refined moment of truth there. Since the Bar-Ilan speech, which was basically forced on Netanyahu by former US President Barack Obama, Israel has been lying to itself and lying to the world. There is no prime minister who believes in a return to the 1967 lines, including minor border corrections. There will be no such prime minister, if only due to the familiar limitations of Jerusalem, refugees and Israeli settlers. There is no Palestinian leader who would agree to settle for a state that would be established on less than that. That's the only fact the involved parties agree on. From here, the matter is subject to interpretation.
- In the past few years, when Israeli representatives have spoke about an Israeli state, what they meant is an extended autonomy in which the Palestinians have political (and diplomatic) control, but Israel retains permanent security access. They mean supervised crossings. In short, they mean something very similar to what we have today. The only difference between Right and Left in this context is the size of the discussed territory.
- When the Palestinians talk about a Palestinian state, they see Israel in their imagination, and when the international community deals with two states for two people, they see the Green Line. These differences are the source of the dispute with the international community, and sometimes the reason why the State of Israel is misunderstood. Their immediate question is how can we bridge between statements and action: If we want two states for two people, why are we building beyond the 1967 lines?
- About a year ago, when Trump was elected president, there was a unique opportunity to present a different Israeli vision from the Bar-Ilan speech and convince the Americans to accept a different sovereignty model to the one that has been discussed in countless conversations since the Oslo Agreements. Israel chose to mumble something unclear, and in response emissaries popped up, as well as Trump's mysterious peace initiative, which no one really know what it's about. The

Israeli strategy for the past decade has been to lie, and to maneuver until the dangerous winds have blown over. But the danger is still here and the lie hasn't advanced us anywhere.

- Two years ago, I sat with the leader of one of the opposition parties, who told me about a negative campaign that had been planned against Netanyahu. In one of the polls, they checked whether presenting him as a liar on Israeli-Palestinian issues would help drive voters away. Politics is ugly on all sides. The findings were surprising: The Right believed he was lying for the Land of Israel. The Left believed he was lying and had no intention of making progress in that area. Everyone agreed and no one was surprised.
- What is true for domestic relations is problematic where foreign relations are concerned, which is why the London event is so interesting, because it made Netanyahu say what he has been saying behind closed doors for a long time now: The truth about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We can't reach an absolute solution of Israel-style Palestinian independence. It won't happen because it's too dangerous, no matter how many Bar-Ilan speeches are delivered on the way. What we have is basically an extended autonomy, a state minus, an entity or even a Palestinian empire, if that's what they wish to call it—as long as it's clear that the foundation is the existing Palestinian Authority territories, a political separation from Israel and maintaining the security restrictions. A different kind of sovereignty. We should have said this a long time ago.

SUMMARY: What is true for domestic relations is problematic where foreign relations are concerned, which is why the London event is so interesting, because it made Netanyahu say what he has been saying behind closed doors for a long time now: The truth about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We can't reach an absolute solution of Israel-style Palestinian independence. It won't happen because it's too dangerous, no matter how many Bar-Ilan speeches are delivered on the way. What we have is basically an extended autonomy, a state minus, an entity or even a Palestinian empire, if that's what they wish to call it—as long as it's clear that the foundation is the existing Palestinian Authority territories, a political separation from Israel and maintaining the security restrictions. A different kind of sovereignty. We should have said this a long time ago.

Is the Patel Scandal Really About the British Government, or Israel?

By Tova Lazaroff, columnist at Jerusalem Post

- Given that 22,000 people tracked the path of British politician Priti Patel airplane flight, it would seem that she had to have done more than hold secret meetings with Israeli officials. Patel, the British International Development Secretary, had been in Uganda when the scandal over her secret meetings with Israeli officials hit its boiling point and British Prime Minister Theresa May ordered her to return to London on Wednesday. The BBC repeatedly published maps of her flight path. A hashtag was created, #hasPritilandedyet, with people speculating about whether she would resign or be fired. They almost imagined May standing at the airport or Patel asking the pilot not to land. All in all, some 85,000 people tweeted about her story.
- But was it Israel or the fate of the British government that garnered such a social media frenzy? It is easy to spin the story within the context of the deep and conflicting emotions toward Israel in Great Britain. One has to ask if Patel had secretly met with officials in the Netherlands, would anyone care?
- Historically there has been a love-hate relationship between Israel and the British, whose history with the Jews dates back almost one thousand years. Britain is enshrined in Zionist history because its issuance of the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917 made it the first country to publicly endorse the right of the Jewish people to a state in the land of the Bible.
- But appreciation for that act was replaced with enmity in 1939 Britain, which governed that area, clamped down on Jewish immigration to what was then known as Mandate Palestine, thereby preventing a Jewish escape route from the Nazis in Europe. In modern day parlance, the country is split between what is viewed as a pro-Israel stance of the Prime Minister's Office and the ruling Conservative Party and the perceived pro-Palestinian position of the Foreign Office and the Labour party, which heads the opposition.
- Last Thursday night May gave a rousing endorsement of the Jewish state at a special gala event to celebrate the Balfour Declaration, explaining that anti-Zionism was a modern form of antisemitism. Just six days later, Patel was forced to resign after the media reported that she had held a series of secret meetings with Israeli officials in August while on vacation, including with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Foreign Ministry Director-General Yuval Rotem and Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan.
- At issue was her failure to disclose those meetings to the Foreign Office prior to her arrival and to follow proper protocol in holding those discussions, which should have included British officials in Israel. Further revelations showed that she visited an Israeli field hospital that treats wounded Syrians on the Golan Heights, which Britain considers to be "occupied territory." She also wanted to use British funds to help the IDF treat the wounded from the Syrian conflict.
- In addition, when she apologized to May on Monday and described her activities, she omitted two subsequent meetings with Israelis, one with Rotem in New York and another with Erdan in London.

- Patel, a rising star in the Conservative party, herself admitted that she had broken protocol. Israel issued no statement on the matter holding that it was an internal British affair. Diplomatic sources rejected media stories that the Foreign Office had leaked information on Patel because they were upset that the Prime Ministers office was bypassing them on policy issues regarding Israel. But on social media her supporters and opponents fell into pro and anti-Israel camps, with some speculation that Patel's sudden fall was proof that Israel's ties were a toxic topic for British politicians even though May took care to speak of Israel as an important ally in chastising Patel.
- Social media pundits critical of Israel noted that this was the second scandal this year involving Israel. In January an undercover reporter from al-Jazeera tapped a political officer from the British Embassy speaking about ways to discredit British parliamentarians who were anti-Israel. They also questioned Jewish Conservative politician Lord Stuart Polak's involvement in the Patel scandal, noting his close ties to May. Polak was with Patel in many of the meetings.
- Scottish Labour politician George Galloway known for his pro-Palestinian sympathies said on talkRadio that his anger over the Patel scandal had nothing to do with his position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Imagine that Patel had been on vacation in Sochi and not Israel, he said. "She doesn't tell anybody that while she's in Sochi she meets 12 Russian government ministers and meets President Vladimir Putin. Without the British Ambassador from Moscow having a sniff of the fact that that cabinet minister was even in the country." "I tell you bluntly not only would that cabinet minister have been an ex-cabinet minister for at least a week, they'd be an ex-member of parliament and almost certainly be facing criminal charges, if not for treason, than for breaches of the Official Secrets Act," Galloway said.
- Her supporters explained that she held meetings involving humanitarian aid with a close British ally. They noted that she was not the only British politician to have held questionable meetings, pointing to British Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn had in the past met with Syrian President Bashar Assad, members of Hamas, Hizbollah and, prior to 1994, the Irish Republican Army.
- A mock Corbyn Twitter account stated: "Priti Patel met the representatives of a friendly nation in secret. They fired her. I met the representatives of our enemies openly (and praised them). They made me leader." The British group North West Friends of Israel tweeted: "Priti Patel has meetings to discuss giving aid to injured Syrian refugees. Biggest crime of the century. Corbyn meets mass murderers & is seen as the Messiah. Left totally obsessed with Jews & Israel." British Deputy Labour Party leader Tom Watson suggested Downing Street and the Foreign Office had known Patel's activities in real time and that Patel had met with British consulate members while in Israel.
- The Patel scandal, however, is just one of a number of problems rocking May's government and her cabinet ministers. Last week her defense secretary Michael Fallon resigned over allegations of sexual misconduct. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson is also in hot water over comments he made that could endanger British citizen Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe who is in jail in Iran. Patel's story is best seen as part of a sequence of events that have endangered May's government and it has garnered attention accordingly.
- British journalist Piers Morgan wrote in an opinion piece on the Daily Mail's online site: "For God's sake go now, Theresa. Because NOTHING can be any worse for Britain than this embarrassing slow-motion national car-crash."

- May is considered to be one of Israel's closer allies among the European heads of state. So for Israel the Patel scandal is less important than the overall question of whether it is about to lose a "genuine friend" in Downing Street.

SUMMARY: Scottish Labour politician George Galloway known for his pro-Palestinian sympathies said on talkRadio that his anger over the Patel scandal had nothing to do with his position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Imagine that Patel had been on vacation in Sochi and not Israel, he said. "She doesn't tell anybody that while she's in Sochi she meets 12 Russian government ministers and meets President Vladimir Putin. Without the British Ambassador from Moscow having a sniff of the fact that that cabinet minister was even in the country." "I tell you bluntly not only would that cabinet minister have been an ex-cabinet minister for at least a week, they'd be an ex-member of parliament and almost certainly be facing criminal charges, if not for treason, than for breaches of the Official Secrets Act," Galloway said.