



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Friday, December 29*

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# News Excerpts

December 29, 2017

## Times of Israel

### **US, Israel Sign Secret Pact to Tackle Iran Nuclear Threat**

Israel and the United States have secretly signed a far-reaching joint memorandum of understanding providing for full cooperation to deal with Iran's nuclear drive, its missile programs and its other threatening activities, an Israeli TV report said. The document was signed on December 12 at the White House, culminating intensive talks between representatives of the major Israeli and American intelligence and defense hierarchies, headed by the US and Israeli national security advisers, H. R. McMaster and Meir Ben-Shabbat, respectively, the Channel 10 report said Thursday. See also, ["REPORT: US AND ISRAEL FORMULATE A PLAN TO STOP IRAN – TOGETHER"](#) (*Jerusalem Post*)

## i24 News

### **Lebanese FM Blasted for Accepting Israel's 'Right to Exist'**

Lebanon's Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil came under heavy rebuke on Thursday from fellow politicians and social for his remarks in a television interview that "we do not reject the existence of Israel or its right to security." The statement came in response to a question on whether normalization began between the Arab countries and Israel during a long interview with the local television channel *al-Mayadin* on Tuesday. Bassil's office responded to the attacks by stating that *al-Mayadin* had distorted his comments. Lebanon and Israel have no diplomatic relations, suggests why the top diplomat's comments were so controversial, a former minister even calling on Bassil to resign. See also, ["Lebanon's Top Diplomat Under Fire for Saying Israel Has Right to 'Live in Security'"](#) (*Ha'aretz*)

## Jerusalem post

### **Police Delay Recommendation to Indict PM in Gift Probe**

The police will delay their recommendations to indict Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Case 1000, which was said to be announced in the coming weeks. Senior officials, according to a Channel 2 News report, said the recommendations will only be announced in a month to a month and a half. They explained that it is because the police did not complete their investigations yet and that Netanyahu might be summoned for another round of questioning. The prime minister is suspected of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in two cases – 1000, the "Gifts Affair," and 2000, the "Yediot *Aharonot* Affair." In Case 1000, which is considered to be a stronger case against the prime minister, police are investigating whether Netanyahu returned favors to various businessmen who gave him expensive gifts. See also, ["Did the Police Recommendations Law protect Netanyahu?"](#) (*Jerusalem Post*)

## Ynet News

### **Netanyahu Hails Arab World's 'Changing Opinion' on Israel**

Prime Minister Netanyahu said Thursday that the general outlook on Israel was undergoing positive changes in the Arab world, citing opinion polls which indicate a significant growth in the number of people who place importance on forging diplomatic relations with Israel. "It is already happening between the governments, but the thing that stirs the most hope for me is that, and this may surprise you, it is also taking place among wide sections of public opinion in the Arab world," Netanyahu said during a speech at a ceremony in northern Israel.

## Justice Hayut Touts Arab to Fill Supreme Court Vacancy

Supreme Court Chief Justice Esther Hayut has included an Arab on a list of candidates to fill two vacancies on Israel's top judiciary—a suggestion that is expected to be struck down by right-wing politicians. The draft list, which was sent to Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked and obtained by Yedioth Ahronoth at the beginning of the week, features the Jaffa-born Muslim, Khaled Kabub. Also appearing on the list are Ofer Grosskopf, Yigal Mersel, Moshe Sobel, Ron Sokol, Ruth Ronen and Shaul Shohat. Hayut, 64, who was [sworn in](#) as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in October, replacing Miriam Naor, rushed to mollify bitter disappointment expressed by a number of judges who say they feel sidelined for not appearing on the list of candidates to fill the two empty seats. See also, [“Report: Muslim Set to Be Recommended for High Court Seat” \(Hamodia\)](#)

### Jerusalem Post

## US Envoy: Pal' Reaction to Trump Announcement 'Ugly'

Some of the Palestinian rhetoric in response to President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem has been “ugly, needlessly provocative and antisemitic,” US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman told *The Jerusalem Post* this week. Friedman, a leading force behind Trump's decision three weeks ago to recognize Jerusalem and move the US embassy there from Tel Aviv, characterized the Palestinian reaction as “largely emotional,” saying they “unfortunately overreacted” because Trump made clear that the US was “not taking a position on any final-status issues, including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem.” In light of the Palestinians now rejecting any US role in the process, Friedman said there will be no process without Washington's involvement. See also, [“US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman Reportedly Asks State Department to Drop 'Occupied' Term” \(Algemeiner\)](#)

### i24 News

## NBA Says Sorry for Referring to 'Occupied Palestine' on Site

America's National Basketball Association removed a reference to "Palestine — occupied territory" from its official website following an angry missive from Israel's culture minister, the *Times of Israel* reported. Minister Miri Regev lashed out at the designation in an official letter to NBA Commissioner Adam Silver, charging that the website referred to "a country everyone knows doesn't exist" which "distort[s] historical facts and reality." “I view the inclusion of ‘occupied Palestine’ in the list of countries appearing on your official website as legitimizing the division of the State of Israel and as gross and blatant interference, in contrast to the official position of the American administration and the declarations of President Donald Trump, who has just recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel,” she wrote in the letter to Silver. “I would like to express my disapproval and am asking you to immediately remove the 'Palestine - occupied territory' from the list,” Regev urged. According to the *TOI*, Silver responded and said that the listing was placed by a third party. It has since been removed. “We apologize for the errant listing. We do not produce the country listings for NBA.com and as soon as we became aware of it, the site was updated,” an NBA spokesperson said.

## **Lorde's Canceled Israel Concert Reveals the Hypocrisy of BDS**

By Emily Shire, contributor to Forward

- Lorde began racking up praise and awards for her debut album, *Pure Heroine*, before she'd even hit her 18th birthday. Listening to her poetic yet sharp-tongued lyrics, combined with her soulful voice, one reflexively assumed she had spent decades meticulously reflecting on her own passing youth; in fact, she was barely old enough to buy a pack of cigarettes. No wonder she was regularly described as offering “age-defying wisdom” in her songs and seeming “wise beyond her years.”
- But when the now 21-year-old New Zealand singer announced last weekend that she was canceling her concert in Tel Aviv, she seemed no different from a run-of-the-mill university student buying into the simplistic, unfounded narratives around Israel, ones that are so often embraced in an attempt to seem “woke.”
- Lorde reneged on her scheduled June performance in Tel Aviv after receiving a smattering of social media pressure provoked by a public letter written by New Zealanders Nadia Abu-Shanab and Justine Sachs. The letter is steeped in unsupported clichés of Israel as an oppressor, colonizer, and land stealer, without any links to articles or experts to support their numbers or claims. (In a related side note, Sachs co-founded Dayenu: New Zealand Jews Against Occupation, which vocally supported the Chicago Dyke March's decision earlier this year to forcibly expel Jewish women carrying flags with Stars of David.)
- But rather than an aberration, the letter is part and parcel of what we've come to expect from the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) movement. The movement is focused on dismantling Israel with little to no ink spilled on ways to create a viable state to advance the Palestinian people or combat poverty or abuse — especially towards women, with the persistence of “honor killings” — within Gaza and the West Bank. The BDS movement has yet to officially acknowledge any Jewish right to self-determination. The official BDS website makes no mention of support for a two-state solution. Instead, it refers to Israel's “violent establishment” in 1948 and makes no mention of what would happen to the country or the Jewish people if all its demands were to be met.
- And yet, Lorde, a woman praised for her creativity and independence, fell for BDS — and rather fast. For an artist who has found success in criticizing the superficiality of her peers in songs like “Royals,” it was galling how light on substance her cancellation statement was. Alluding to having done “a lot of reading and sought a lot of opinions” without any specifics about where she was actually getting information, Lorde said “i'm not too proud to admit i didn't make the right call” on scheduling a concert in Tel Aviv.” She ended her cancellation statement with a frustratingly phony, cotton-candy-sweet sentiment that sounded eerily like a Miss USA contestant stumbling through a question about world peace: “i hope one day we can all dance.”
- The irony, of course, is that if Lorde actually wanted us to “all dance,” she could easily make that happen by performing, using music — her music — as a bridge to bring people together. Artists have great power to transcend barriers, to push people out of their comfort zones, and

to challenge and provoke through their work and their performances. But the BDS movement to which Lorde has bowed stands against that rich history.

- For Lorde in particular there's an extra thick layer of hypocrisy over her decision to cancel on Israel: she is still scheduled to perform in Russia — not once but twice. Thus far, Lorde has shown absolutely zero qualms about performing in Russia, a country known for terrible and anti-democratic measures.
- Unlike her decision to boycott Israel, Lorde is not boycotting Russia, meaning Lorde apparently feels she made “the right call” on her decision to perform in a country where journalists and politicians are jailed or suffer “mysterious” deaths for uttering any criticism of Russian premiere Vladimir Putin. While Lorde cowered to pressures from BDS supporters who claim to care about Palestinian sovereignty (though, notably, the BDS movement has not officially supported a two-state solution), she seems to care little about Ukraine's sovereignty, and is happily planning to sing and dance for a country that defied all notions of respect for a neighboring people by annexing a huge chunk of their land.
- Some have pointed to President Trump's recent decision to move the United States embassy to Jerusalem as fodder for Lorde's cancellation, since the letter calling on her decision to cancel her performance briefly cited it. Aside from the fact that the BDS movement has been threatening artists for over a decade, well before Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, one would think BDS proponents would actually hold Russia's feet to the fire a bit more, considering the evidence that suggests Russia took some pains to give Trump an edge in the election (which, of course, Russia has consistently denied).
- The piece de resistance in Lorde's double standard for selecting which countries are and aren't worthy of her performances is that she has yet to give public pause about performing in a country teeming with anti-LGBTQ hate crimes. She has yet to voice any discomfort about making oodles of money from a country where the government actively punishes citizens found to be promoting “homosexual behavior among minors” — aka offering any sort of support for LGBTQ youth. For a woman who has so commendably lent her fame to raise money and attention for LGBTQ causes around the globe, Lorde's silence on Russia speaks volumes to how either hypocritical or ill-informed (or both) she is.
- But Lorde's willingness to perform in Russia speaks to the hypocrisy at the core of the BDS movement. The original letter calling on Lorde to cancel her concert in Israel cited her work as an “empathetic artist who is committed to the empowerment of women, the LGBTIQ community and people of colour [sic].” What makes the BDS movement so hard to take seriously is that their supporters claim they are acting in the name of empowering LGBTQ people, women, people of color — and yet, unless there is some faint, tangential tie to Israel, they do not care about these communities or their suffering anywhere else in the world.
- BDS is about putting up walls, fencing off artists, and shaming and berating people until they refuse to engage with Israel, its art, or its citizens at all. Furthermore, BDS penalizes artists, performers, and scholars who are Israeli by pressuring countries and institutions throughout the world to refuse to host them or discuss their work. Make no mistake: BDS at its foundation is discrimination based on birth, a combination of xenophobia and cultural totalitarianism.
- And yet, Lorde, a woman who seemed implausibly musically mature beyond her scant two decades, has caved. Where even Justin Bieber had enough sense not to bow, Lorde crumbled.

Lorde's singular decision to cancel her concert in Israel suggests she is holding the one Jewish country to a different standard than the rest of the world, or that she caved to the slightest tap of social media pressure without actually doing any independent research. Neither one is a good look for a woman who is trying to fashion herself as an artist of substance and separate herself from a pack of cookie-cutter pop stars.

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## **I Am Proud of Our Diplomacy**

By Rex Tillerson, US Secretary of State

- **Over the past year, the United States has faced immense challenges in its dealings with North Korea, China and Russia, and in its efforts to defeat international terrorism. But Americans should be encouraged by the progress the State Department and United States Agency for International Development have made in pushing for global peace and stability.**
- **When President Trump took office, he identified North Korea as the United States' greatest security threat. He abandoned the failed policy of strategic patience. In its place we carried out a policy of pressure through diplomatic and economic sanctions. This year, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted three of the strongest sanctions resolutions in history, including bans on a wide array of North Korean exports such as coal, iron, seafood and textiles.**
- **The United States has asked allies and partners to exert unilateral pressure against North Korea in order to force the regime to change its behavior. Many have responded with positive steps like shutting down trade, severing diplomatic ties and expelling North Korean laborers.**
- **Our peaceful pressure campaign has cut off roughly 90 percent of North Korea's export revenue, much of which is used to fund illegal weapons development. We hope that this international isolation will pressure the regime into serious negotiations on the abandonment of its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. A door to dialogue remains open, but we have made it clear that the regime must earn its way back to the negotiating table. Until denuclearization occurs, the pressure will continue.**
- **A central component of our North Korea strategy is persuading China to exert its decisive economic leverage on Pyongyang. China has applied certain import bans and sanctions, but it could and should do more. We will also continue to pursue American interests in other areas of our relationship, including trade imbalances, intellectual property theft and China's troubling military activities in the South China Sea and elsewhere. China's rise as an economic and military power requires Washington and Beijing to consider carefully how to manage our relationship for the next 50 years.**
- **Defeating terrorism remains one of the president's highest priorities. The administration's aggressive strategy to counter the Islamic State delegates greater authority to American military commanders on the battlefield, giving our forces more freedom and speed to do what they do best, in partnership with indigenous fighting forces. As a result, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS has accelerated operations and has recaptured virtually all of previously held Islamic State territory in Iraq and Syria. While our military was helping clear Iraq and Syria of Islamic State forces, our diplomats were following up with humanitarian aid and assistance, such as clearing land mines, restoring water and power, and getting children back in school.**
- **A commitment to stopping Islamist terrorism and extremism also motivated the administration's decision to adopt a new South Asia strategy, which focuses on Afghanistan. That country cannot become a safe haven for terrorists, as it was in the days before the Sept. 11 attacks. Pakistan must contribute by combating terrorist groups on its own soil. We are prepared to**

partner with Pakistan to defeat terrorist organizations seeking safe havens, but Pakistan must demonstrate its desire to partner with us.

- On Russia, we have no illusions about the regime we are dealing with. The United States today has a poor relationship with a resurgent Russia that has invaded its neighbors Georgia and Ukraine in the last decade and undermined the sovereignty of Western nations by meddling in our election and others'. The appointment of Kurt Volker, a former NATO ambassador, as special representative for Ukraine reflects our commitment to restoring the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Absent a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine situation, which must begin with Russia's adherence to the Minsk agreements, there cannot be business as usual with Russia.
- While we are on guard against Russian aggression, we recognize the need to work with Russia where mutual interests intersect. Nowhere is that more evident than in Syria. Now that President Vladimir Putin has committed to the United Nations-backed Geneva political process for providing a new future for Syria, we expect Russia to follow through. We are confident that the fulfillment of these talks will produce a Syria that is free of Bashar al-Assad and his family.
- Lastly, the flawed Iran nuclear deal is no longer the focal point of our policy toward Iran. We are now confronting the totality of Iranian threats. Part of this strategy entails rebuilding alliances with our partners in the Middle East, and in November we helped re-establish diplomatic ties between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. We will continue to work with our allies and with Congress to explore options for addressing the nuclear deal's many flaws, while building a like-minded effort to punish Iran for its violations of ballistic missile commitments and its destabilizing activities in the region.
- I am proud of what our State Department and Agency for International Development teams around the world have accomplished this year, and our progress will continue in 2018 and beyond. To that end, we have undertaken a redesign of the State Department to strengthen our teams' ability to deliver on our mission.
- Our redesign doesn't involve simply shifting boxes on an organizational chart. Our changes must address root problems that lead to inefficiencies and frustrations. By making changes like streamlining our human resources and information technology systems, better aligning personnel and resources with America's strategic priorities, and reforming duplicative processes, we are giving our people more opportunities to flourish professionally and spend more time confronting the global problems they have dedicated their careers to solving.
- When I wake up each morning, my first thought is, "How can I and my colleagues at the State Department use diplomacy to prevent people around the world from being killed, wounded or deprived of their rights?" In spite of the challenges, I remain optimistic about the power of diplomacy to resolve conflicts and advance American interests. My confidence comes from the knowledge that our efforts are carried out daily by patriotic and dedicated State Department employees who make sacrifices to serve with patience and persistence and who, by advancing democratic values the world over, are protecting our citizens' rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

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