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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

December 4, 2017

Times of Israel

Kushner: Peace Needed for Wider Middle East Stability

In rare public remarks, US President Donald Trump's senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner said on Sunday that solving the Israeli-Palestinian was crucial to achieving wider Middle East stability. "I think that if we're going to try to create more stability in the region as a whole, then you have to solve this issue," he told I Haim Saban, a longtime Democratic donor and supporter of Hillary Clinton, Trump's 2016 rival. Kushner also said that Trump has not yet made his mind on moving the US embassy to Jerusalem or recognizing the city as Israel's capital. "The president is going to make his decision." See also, ["Jared Kushner on Stage: Hearing His Voice, at Last, if Little Else" \(New York Times\)](#)

CNN

McMaster: 'Not Sure' if Trump will Move Embassy in Israel

White House national security adviser HR McMaster said Sunday morning that he doesn't know whether President Donald Trump will decide to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. "I'm not sure what decision he'll make. We've given him options," McMaster said. When asked by "Fox News Sunday" host Chris Wallace about Trump's decision-making process, McMaster said the President's advisers have discussed a number of options, and that each of these options will allow the United States to take action concerning Jerusalem in a manner that would "gain momentum toward a peace agreement and solution that works both for Israelis and for Palestinians." See also, ["McMaster: Trump not giving up on Mideast peace amid video backlash" \(The Hill\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Pal' Call for Emergency Meeting of Arab League over Jim'

Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki on Sunday asked the heads of the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation to host emergency meetings over US President Donald Trump possibly recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Over the weekend, a number of US media outlets reported that Trump is going to deliver a speech on Wednesday in which he will recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. "Maliki called for holding meetings of the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation on the level of permanent representatives to discuss the imminent dangers facing Jerusalem and the holy sites," the official PA news site Wafa reported. See also, ["Top PLO Official: Trump Will Sow an Ethnic Conflict if He Declares Jerusalem to Be Israel's Capital" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

i24 News

After Protest, PM Seeks Change to Police Bill

Netanyahu called Sunday for changes to controversial legislation his opponents say was designed to help him survive ongoing police probes after tens of thousands protested at the weekend. The controversial bill would prevent police from recommending criminal charges to state prosecutors or from publicizing charges in certain cases, but would be revised to explicitly exclude active police investigations into his affairs. On Saturday night tens of thousands of people poured onto Tel Aviv's streets in an unprecedented demonstration of dissent against the legislation and wider government corruption. See also, ["Netanyahu: 'I asked for the recommendations bill to not apply to me'" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Arab League Warns Trump Against Recognizing Jerusalem

The Arab League chief said on Sunday a decision by US President Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital would boost fanaticism and violence, and not serve the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Trump's son-in-law and Middle East peace envoy Jared Kushner told the Saban Forum on Sunday the president is close to a decision on whether to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. "It is unfortunate that some are insisting on carrying out this step without any regard to the dangers it carries to the stability of the Middle East and the whole world," Ahmed Abul Gheit, head of the Arab League, told reporters in Cairo on Sunday. "Nothing justifies this act... it will not serve peace or stability, instead it will nourish fanaticism and violence," Abul Gheit said. See also, ["Trump recognition of Jerusalem as Israeli capital would fuel violence: Arab League" \(Reuters\)](#)

Ynet News

Coalition Chief Bitan Questioned on Suspicion of Bribery

Police announced Sunday morning that 17 local and national government officials were arrested and detained for questioning on possible underworld ties. Among the suspects are senior Rishon Lezion municipality officials very close to coalition chairman MK David Bitan (Likud) and the head of a criminal organization. Bitan himself was questioned on his involvement at the police's Lahav 433 unit. A person very close to Bitan was also questioned under caution, while a senior Rishon Lezion municipality official, interrogated since Sunday morning, will be remanded at the Rishon Lezion Magistrates' Court. The head of the Israel Police's Investigations and Intelligence Department Maj.-Gen. Meni Itzhaki spoke with Knesset Speaker Yuli-Yoel Edelstein early Sunday to notify him Bitan will be called in for questioning Sunday. Bitan is suspected of working on behalf a senior criminal figure in return for assistance in paying off his debts to loan sharks. See also, ["Police question coalition chair Bitan in mass arrest of senior officials" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Ha'aretz

UN Refugee Chief to IL: Don't Forget Your Own Painful History

The head of the UN's refugee agency says Israel is choosing to forget its own painful past and should treat its African asylum seekers more compassionately. "The Israeli government's decision to expel 40,000 African asylum seekers is of great concern," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi told Haaretz at a conference in Rome over the weekend. "Israel has a painful history of migration and exile," he added. "New generations must not forget that refugees do not flee out of choice, but because they don't have any other choice." He continued: "This situation makes me think of a saying by Italian political thinker Antonio Gramsci: 'History teaches, but it has no students.'"

i24 News

Record Number of Women Signing up for Israeli Army

Israel's army said on Sunday that the number of women serving in its combat units had reached a record level this year as it seeks to further boost such participation. Some 2,700 women enrolled in combat units this year, a military official said, citing numbers released after November's recruitment period. Total figures for the previous year were not given, but last year the military projected that some 9.5 percent of enlisted women would serve in combat units in 2017. That compared with three percent four years earlier.

Rothschild Boulevard protest: The Second Generation

The shift of the anti-corruption protest from a small Petah Tikva square to one of Tel Aviv's main streets reflects much more than a change of location on the map. What began as a protest of two people is turning into a mass protest before our eyes against government corruption.

By Nahum Barnea, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- They headed to Tel Aviv in droves on Saturday evening. Not on buses, but rather by foot. Not on behalf of left-wing NGOs, but on their own behalf. They moved up Rothschild Boulevard, in a line that grew thicker and thicker before spilling over into Allenby Street and blocking it.
- I don't know how many people were there, but there are two things I can testify to: First, it was very crowded at the heart of the protest, just like in the right-wing protests in Jerusalem's Zion Square; second, quite a few rallies have been held over the years outside the historical Tel Aviv Museum building, including the outburst of joy after David Ben-Gurion announced the establishment of the State of Israel there. That was, most probably, one of the biggest, if not the biggest rally of all.
- The move from Petah Tikva's Goren Square to Tel Aviv's Rothchild Boulevard reflected much more than a change of location on the map. What began as a protest of two people, Meni Naftali and Eldad Yaniv, is turning into a mass protest before our eyes. It has yet to reach the dimensions of the 2011 social protest that began on Rothschild Boulevard, but the 2011 protest didn't draw hundreds of thousands of people at its inception either.
- Saturday evening's protestors were the sons of veteran, organized Israel, people from the middle and upper class. There were hardly any representatives of other sectors—periphery residents, religious Jews, Arabs, poor Israelis. A similar crowd can be seen at the annual Rabin memorial rallies at Rabin Square, with one difference: At the Rabin rallies there are mostly elderly people and teenagers, members of youth movements. Saturday evening's protest was also attended by the middle generation.
- The slogans were taken from the Saturday protests at Petah Tikva and from the tent protest of the summer of 2011. Then, the people demanded social justice; now, they're demanding legal justice. "It's our state, not Netanyahu's," the protestors chanted. "We'll prosecute you because the people don't believe you"; "The government versus the people—the people versus the government"; "Sovereignty belongs to the people."
- I don't think the people—in other words, the majority of Israel's citizens—are demanding legal justice. Not just yet. Protest movements, however, never waited for orders from the people. They went forward, hoping to be joined by the masses later on. All protest movements falsely spoke on behalf of the people when they began.
- Nevertheless, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a problem. At this stage he has no good convincing answer to the "Mushchatim Nimastem" (we're sick of the corrupt) claim. He knows that the sense of disgust doesn't stop at Rothschild Boulevard. The steps he is taking to thwart his investigations are causing discomfort among his own supporters too.

- **“Neither left, nor right, but straight!”** one of the protestors wrote on a poster he prepared at home. **“Ethics,”** the protestors chanted in rhythm. These are chants that cannot be easily eliminated by arguing that this is just a dark left-wing scheme. They’re not a manipulation; they’re a fact.
- **Corruption wasn’t invented by Netanyahu.** There was corruption in Israel before he took office, and there will be corruption even after he leaves office. He isn’t the first prime minister with a mountain of suspicions piling up around him, but he’s the first prime minister who’s trying to change the democratic rules of the game, the first one who’s saying: I’m going to stop playing by the rules. His abuse of power is much worse than the offenses he is being interrogated over.
- **On Monday, the Knesset was expected to convene for one of the most shameful days in its history, but that was abruptly delayed by MK David Bitan (Likud).** When that vote does take place, it is expected to approve the bill to silence investigations. Coalition members will vote against their conscience, against the state’s best interest, against the values they preach. The people who protested Saturday evening said: This isn’t according to our norms. They managed to somewhat reduce the extent of the disgrace.

SUMMARY: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a problem. At this stage he has no good convincing answer to the **“Mushchatim Nimastem”** (we’re sick of the corrupt) claim. He knows that the sense of disgust doesn’t stop at Rothschild Boulevard. The steps he is taking to thwart his investigations are causing discomfort among his own supporters too. **“Neither left, nor right, but straight!”** one of the protestors wrote on a poster he prepared at home. **“Ethics,”** the protestors chanted in rhythm. These are chants that cannot be easily eliminated by arguing that this is just a dark left-wing scheme. They’re not a manipulation; they’re a fact. **Corruption wasn’t invented by Netanyahu.** There was corruption in Israel before he took office, and there will be corruption even after he leaves office. He isn’t the first prime minister with a mountain of suspicions piling up around him, but he’s the first prime minister who’s trying to change the democratic rules of the game, the first one who’s saying: I’m going to stop playing by the rules. His abuse of power is much worse than the offenses he is being interrogated over.

'Israel Has Become the Most Disunifying Force in the Jewish Community'

By Judy Maltz, columnist at Ha'aretz

- Soon after the Six-Day War in 1967, Avraham Infeld became the first Jewish Agency shaliah (community envoy) to be sent to the United States. Those were great times to be representing the Jewish state, he recalls. “I watched as Israel became the unifying factor in the Jewish world,” says Infeld, a renowned Israeli educator who has devoted his life to advancing the concept of Jewish peoplehood.
- He recently returned to his old stomping grounds for a lecture tour marking the 50th anniversary of the famous Israeli victory but was struck by how much the mood had changed. “I found that Israel had become the most disunifying force in the Jewish community,” he told Haaretz this week. “Friends of mine who are rabbis tell me they can’t talk about Israel anymore, that their congregations don’t want to hear about it.” The strains in Israel’s relationship with American Jewry have been evident for some time. As American Jews remain staunchly progressive, both religiously and politically, Israel has lurched increasingly rightward. As a result, its policies have become ever more difficult for the majority of American Jews to stomach.
- But a red line was crossed five months ago, Infeld says, when the Israeli government decided to renege on the Western Wall agreement, which would have created a new and upgraded space for egalitarian prayer and granted formal recognition to the non-Orthodox movements at this most important Jewish holy site. “That decision was a watershed,” he says. “What people have been telling me since is that it’s obvious to them Israel doesn’t give a damn about them, and all it cares about are Orthodox Jews and evangelical Christians.”
- Over the years, Israel has known ups and downs in its relations with the American-Jewish community, but Infeld insists this crisis is different. “In the past, whenever there were fights about conversion and issues like that, it was always seen as an attack on Reform or Conservative Jews,” he says. “This time, it is being seen as an attack on all of Diaspora Jewry, and that’s what makes it unprecedented.”
- Few in the Jewish world today can speak on the subject of Israel-Diaspora relations with as much authority as Infeld or bring as much perspective to the discussion. He served as president of Hillel International – the largest Jewish campus organization in the world – and was among the founding fathers of Birthright Israel, the organization that brings young Jewish adults to Israel on free, 10-day trips and is considered one of the most successful Jewish world projects. He was also founder and president of the Jerusalem-based Melitz Center for Jewish Zionist Education, director of the Shalom Hartman Institute, president of the Chais Family Foundation and head of the Jewish Agency youth department for English-speaking Europe. Today, in retirement, he serves as mentor for the Reut Institute for Tikkun Olam and Jewish Peoplehood.
- According to Infeld, nothing captures the growing disconnect between Israel and Diaspora Jewry better than Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely’s recent dig at American Jews (in which she said they don’t send their kids to the army, live “convenient lives” and are

using the Western Wall crisis for “political gain”). “To me, this is symptomatic of the fact that Israelis don’t understand what Diaspora Jewry is all about,” he says.

- In his new book “A Passion for a People: Lessons from the Life of a Jewish Educator” (YouCaxton Publications), Infeld lays out a plan for mending the growing rift – before it is too late. But before the problem can be solved, he says, it is necessary to understand what he believes to be its root: a fundamental misunderstanding of Judaism and the Jews. “Jews are not a religion and not a nation, but a people,” he says. “That is to say, an extension of a tribe – which in turn is an extension of a family.”
- This definition, he says, is critical to understanding the role of the modern State of Israel. “We were always a people, and that’s the reason we built a state. In other words, it’s not that the Jewish people are here to ensure the future of Israel, as Hotovely may think, but rather, we built a state in order to ensure the future of the Jewish people.” Infeld defies most of the standard labels. Born to a fiercely Zionist but atheist family in South Africa, he embraced Orthodox Judaism in the 1960s after immigrating to Israel, where he studied Jewish history and law.
- Despite the black yarmulke on his head, the 73-year-old great-grandfather remains committed to his roots in Hashomer Hatzair, the left-wing Zionist movement, and is a fierce critic of the Israeli occupation. “As someone who grew up under apartheid, I know what happens when you rule over another people,” he says.
- Infeld believes it would be unfair to blame the current crisis with Diaspora Jewry entirely on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. “He doesn’t deserve that kavod,” he says, using the Hebrew word for honor. “Other governments ignored them as well.”
- Were Israel truly interested in strengthening its ties with Jewish communities abroad, he notes, it would have created what he describes as a “reverse Birthright” program – free trips abroad for young Israelis so they could be exposed to Jewish life in the Diaspora. “Had there been 10,000 Israeli graduates of a program like that, and Hotovely said what she said, I guarantee you there would be people out in the streets here protesting,” Infeld says.
- But Diaspora Jews shouldn’t be let off the hook, either, he adds. As a member of the planning committee that created the blueprint for Birthright 18 years ago, he is deeply concerned that the program’s major achievements may be short-lived because of a lack of institutional follow-up.
- “Birthright’s biggest success has been its ability to give participants this sort of ‘wow’ experience,” observes Infeld. “And whenever I ask these participants what exactly was so ‘wow’ about the trip, they tell me everything they had previously thought it meant to be Jewish was not necessarily so – that being Jewish could be something else entirely.
- “But instead of helping these kids deal with questions left open after the trip, the organization leaves the field open to guys who have money, who can offer freebies, but who have a single answer of what it means to be Jewish and are there to sell that answer.” (A report published in Haaretz this week found that Orthodox organizations account for a disproportionately large share of Birthright recruitment and have been far more successful than others in enrolling trip participants in follow-up programs.) Furthermore, asks Infeld, how can young Jewish Americans be expected to maintain a connection to Israel if their community leaders do not consider it vital to teach them Hebrew? “For most Jewish kids in America today, Hebrew is a language they learn to read for their Bar Mitzvah. They have no idea what they’re mumbling and nobody cares whether they understand it or not,” he laments. “What is this chutzpah to teach Hebrew as a

language that you read and don't understand when half of your people make love in Hebrew, buy Coca-Cola in Hebrew and go to work in Hebrew? How dare they do that to the Hebrew language?"

- Progressive Israelis have been quick to attack Netanyahu in recent weeks for abandoning the vast majority of American Jews and throwing in his lot with the Orthodox. But neither are they entirely blameless for the situation that has developed, according to Infeld. Why, he asks, have they not made any efforts to forge alliances with like-minded Jews abroad? "The ties between Orthodoxy in America and Orthodoxy in Israel are naturally close," he says. "They meet in shul, they have something in common. But the progressive Israeli world has ignored for 70 years progressive secular Jews in the Diaspora. It has hardly done anything to build relationships with them, despite the fact that they have a common enemy."
- Infeld served as president of Hillel International between 2002 and 2006. That was before it published its controversial guidelines that prohibit collaboration with organizations critical of Israel. He had a clear advantage over his predecessors and successors, he admits, in being the only Israeli to ever hold that position.
- "Any American trying to tell me what I could say about Israel, I would tell them, 'Listen, I'm going to go to every J Street conference I want because I'm an Israeli and they're members of my people, just like you're members of my people,'" he says, referring to the pro-Israel, anti-occupation organization. "They could never stop me," he adds, "and they never tried."
- If the current crisis between Israel and American Jewry is unprecedented, so is Infeld's mood these days. "I've never been more pessimistic, but I'm still optimistic," he says. "I guess you could say I'm at the lowest level of optimism I've ever been."

SUMMARY: According to Infeld, nothing captures the growing disconnect between Israel and Diaspora Jewry better than Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely's recent dig at American Jews (in which she said they don't send their kids to the army, live "convenient lives" and are using the Western Wall crisis for "political gain"). "To me, this is symptomatic of the fact that Israelis don't understand what Diaspora Jewry is all about," he says. In his new book "A Passion for a People: Lessons from the Life of a Jewish Educator" (YouCaxton Publications), Infeld lays out a plan for mending the growing rift – before it is too late. But before the problem can be solved, he says, it is necessary to understand what he believes to be its root: a fundamental misunderstanding of Judaism and the Jews. "Jews are not a religion and not a nation, but a people," he says. "That is to say, an extension of a tribe – which in turn is an extension of a family." This definition, he says, is critical to understanding the role of the modern State of Israel. "We were always a people, and that's the reason we built a state. In other words, it's not that the Jewish people are here to ensure the future of Israel, as Hotovely may think, but rather, we built a state in order to ensure the future of the Jewish people." Infeld defies most of the standard labels. Born to a fiercely Zionist but atheist family in South Africa, he embraced Orthodox Judaism in the 1960s after immigrating to Israel, where he studied Jewish history and law.