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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, December 1

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December 1, 2017

Ha'aretz

Trump to Delay Embassy Move, but Recognize Jerusalem

U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to sign a presidential waiver delaying the move of the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, breaking his campaign promise on the matter for the second time since entering the White House. However, multiple press reports in the U.S. say he will declare recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in concert. Trump's decision, which would be in line with long-standing American policy, breaks an election promise he made to move the embassy to Jerusalem, the second president to break such a promise after George W. Bush.

Times of Israel

Kushner to Discuss Peace Push at DC Confab

Trump's senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner will make a rare public appearance on Sunday, when he partakes in a keynote conversation at the Brookings Institution's annual Saban Forum in Washington, D.C. Kushner, 36, has been tasked by his father-in-law to lead the White House's efforts toward forging an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord. The Kushner keynote discussion will take place Sunday at 1 p.m. EST.

Ha'aretz

Soldier Stabbed to Death in Suspected Terror Attack

Israeli soldier Ron Isaac Kokia, age 19 from Tel Aviv, was stabbed to death in the southern Israeli town of Arad on Thursday evening in a suspected terror attack. The soldier was waiting at a bus station adjacent to a local mall at the time of the incident. Police are currently searching for suspects who are thought to have fled the scene. Get all updates on Israel and the Middle East - subscribe to Haaretz The soldier, found unconscious at a bus stop by attending paramedics, was in his twenties. Attempts to revive him were unsuccessful.

Ha'aretz

IDF: IJ Fired Mortars in Retaliation for Tunnel Strike

The Israeli military said Islamic Jihad fired 10 to 12 mortar shells at Israeli forces near the northern Gaza Strip on Thursday in retaliation for an Israeli strike in October on an attack tunnel reaching from Gaza into Israeli territory. None of the Israeli forces, who were working near the border at the time of the strike, were wounded. In response to the mortar fire, the Israeli military struck two Hamas positions and two Islamic Jihad positions, with tanks and aircrafts, in northern Gaza. Two Palestinians were lightly wounded in the strikes, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Later, the Israeli air force struck a further two military compounds in central Gaza.

Ynet

Israeli Kills Palestinian Who Threw Stones at Children

An Israeli man shot dead a Palestinian on Thursday who was among a group of Palestinian rioters throwing rocks at a group of Israeli children visiting the Samaria region of the West Bank near the village of Qusra. Follow Ynetnews on Facebook and Twitter According to the settlers, one of whom opened fire on the Palestinians, the violence erupted after the Israeli group came under attack in what was described by the Samaria Regional Council as an "attempted lynch."

Ha'aretz

Israel Raids Villages Where Hundreds to be Expelled

In the early hours of Wednesday morning Israeli soldiers raided three West Bank communities that the government has earmarked for forced relocation: Palestinian shepherding communities Ein al-Hilweh and Umm Jamal in the north of the Jordan Valley, and the Bedouin community Khan al-Ahmar. Army jeeps with some 50 soldiers deployed among the tents and huts at Ein al-Hilweh and Umm Jamal, collecting identification cards of the residents and holding two of the residents for questioning.

Reuters

Jordan: Prosecute Guard Before Opening Israeli Embassy

Jordan will not allow Israel to reopen its embassy in Amman until it has launched legal proceedings against an Israeli security guard who shot dead two Jordanian citizens in July, a Jordanian diplomatic source said on Thursday. Israel must also be able to assure its Arab neighbor that "justice has been served" in the case, the senior source said, asking not to be named. The embassy was closed shortly after Israel hastily repatriated the guard under diplomatic immunity to prevent Jordanian authorities from interrogating him and taking any legal action against him. The Israeli ambassador and embassy staff were pulled out.

Associated Press

Intelligence Minister Says He Plans to Succeed Netanyahu

Israel's intelligence minister said Thursday he plans to succeed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who is embroiled in corruption scandals and a police investigation. But Israel Katz said in an interview with The Associated Press he hopes Netanyahu will be able to continue as prime minister, and "that the clouds that are hanging over his head now will pass." Israeli police have questioned Netanyahu six times over a pair of corruption scandals and one of his closest former aides has become a witness against him. Netanyahu has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and called the accusations a witch hunt orchestrated by a hostile media. Police say they suspect Netanyahu of being involved in bribery, fraud and breach of trust. The scandals have yet to threaten his rule but have chipped away at his public approval ratings.

What Initiative Are Kushner And The Saudis Cooking Up?

By JJ Goldberg

- Nobody outside the tight-lipped circle of principals knows what's in the Trump administration's planned Israeli-Palestinian "deal of the century." But there are hints and rumors, and a coherent picture seems to be emerging. And based on what's emerging, it looks like it's going to be a letdown. The plan is being drafted primarily by presidential adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner and special negotiator Jason Greenblatt, after extensive discussions with Israeli, Palestinian, Egyptian and Saudi leaders. While still evolving, it reportedly will call for a sharp scaling back of Palestinian demands, leading to a sovereign Palestinian state with interim borders, essentially ruling the territory currently under Palestinian Authority control, less than half the West Bank. Israel would keep troops on the Jordan River. Israel and the Palestinians are supposed to undertake confidence-building measures in the meantime, including Palestinians dialing back anti-Israel incitement and Israel easing conditions on the West Bank.
- Those contours have been described separately in similar but unrelated reports from Israeli and Arab news sources. One, sourced to unnamed Israeli officials, appeared November 18 on Israel's Hadashot 2, formerly Channel 2 Television. The other appeared, according to a September 24 Maariv report, in the London-based Arabic-language Al-Arabi Al-Jadid, citing unnamed diplomatic sources in Cairo. A White House aide called the Hadashot 2 report "misleading" and "speculation."
- Several separate reports in recent months point to a plan for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to open with a ceremonial launch in Washington in March 2018. Participants would include representatives of the international community as well as several Arab states that don't currently recognize Israel, notably Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The launch would be followed by multi-track negotiations, with Israeli-Palestinian talks held alongside separate regional talks involving Israel and the participating Arab states. The multi-track plan would represent a significant concession by the Saudis. Up to now they have stuck to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which offers Israel ties with its Arab neighbors only after an Israeli-Palestinian accord creates a Palestinian state along the pre-1967 borders with a capital in East Jerusalem.
- The plan is reported to have the backing of Egypt's President Abdel Fattah a-Sisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Kushner has met with the crown prince three times in recent months, including a lengthy, overnight meeting October 27. Since becoming crown prince in May, Mohammed has sent shock waves worldwide with his unprecedented departures from traditional Saudi governance. In an indirect but clear hint at Riyadh's departure from its own Arab initiative, Saudi foreign minister Adel el-Jubeir told Egyptian television on November 21, responding to a question about possible Saudi flexibility, that the "Arab terms are clear: two states, one of which is Palestinian with east Jerusalem as its capital. As for other matters, they can be agreed upon between the Israelis and Palestinians."

- Should a Saudi shift in Israel's direction become explicit in a U.S. plan, it would effectively cancel one of the Arab initiative's most important promises, recognition of Israel and declarations of an end to the conflict from all 22 Arab states and 56 of 57 Muslim nations (excluding Iran). A 2016 survey found that the offer of peace with the Arab states would lift Israeli approval of a peace deal with all its painful concessions, including sharing Jerusalem and dismantling settlements, from 46% to 60%.
- That prospect may be moot anyway, given the chaos in Syria, Libya and Yemen. Still, it's not clear whether the impulsive crown prince has considered, or discussed with other Saudi leaders, the likely impact on Saudi relations with the Arab and Muslim world. In any case, there's no indication of Palestinian agreement. Kushner and Greenblatt met in late August with Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas and asked him to avoid disrupting the process with provocative statements or international anti-Israel initiatives while they sort out their plans. Following that meeting Abbas's chief international affairs adviser, Nabil Shaath, told Palestinian radio that any negotiations must address Palestinian statehood along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and an agreement on the refugees.
- A month later, in a September 23 address to the U.N. General Assembly, Abbas urged the International Criminal Court to take up alleged Israeli war crimes. Israel hasn't endorsed the project either. Netanyahu is said to be pleased with the Kushner-Greenblatt team's work, but pro-settler elements in his coalition are furiously opposed to any Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank. Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman, who supports the initiative, has been blocked by the cabinet from undertaking any of the expected confidence-building measures. On November 6, shortly after Kushner's all-night talk with the Saudi crown prince, Abbas was summoned to Riyadh for a meeting at which the prince reportedly told him to either accept the American initiative or resign.
- Since then, however, U.S.-Palestinian relations have undergone a sudden, sharp deterioration — apparently resulting not from any confrontational steps by either Palestinian or American negotiators, but from the chaos and lack of coordination that characterizes the Trump administration so far. On November 16, the State Department informed the Palestine Liberation Organization — which runs the Palestinian Authority and conducts its international negotiations — that its Washington representative office was to be shut down for violating its operating terms. The stated reason was Abbas's September U.N. call for international court action. The agreement opening the office forbids Palestinians initiating international measures against Israel. Palestinians claim Abbas's appeal was not a formal court filing but simply a line in a speech.
- On November 16, the State Department informed the Palestine Liberation Organization — which runs the Palestinian Authority and conducts its international negotiations — that its Washington representative office was to be shut down for violating its operating terms. The stated reason was Abbas's September U.N. call for international court action. The agreement

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- Palestinians reacted furiously to the threatened office closing, announcing a cutoff of contacts with the administration. On November 23 it was reported that Abbas had refused to take a call from Kushner. Then, on November 28, Vice President Mike Pence told a gathering in New York, convened to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the U.N. partition vote, that Trump was actively considering when and how to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. Washington is now rife with rumors that the embassy move will be announced within days.
- Such an action could end the Trump peace initiative before it begins. No country has an embassy in Jerusalem — though a few small ones did in the 1970s and 1980s — and Palestinians insist that the status of the holy city must be a matter of negotiation. Jordan's King Abdullah II warned congressional leaders November 29 that moving the embassy now would threaten peace prospects. But things in Washington take on their own momentum, especially in the Trump era. Trump is required by law to decide in early December on two separate office questions: reauthorizing the PLO office and moving the Israel embassy. It be ironic that the famed real estate mogul's world-shaking "deal of the century" will hang on two minor office properties. But that has been the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for generations: location, location, location.

Good Intentions on the Way to a Binational Hell

By Haim Ramon

- Every now and then, a groundless, captivating and allegedly “creative” idea is tossed into the public discourse: “Why evacuate settlements in Judea and Samaria in a peace agreement with the Palestinians? Just like Arabs live in the State of Israel, Jews will live under Palestinian sovereignty, and the Redeemer shall come to Zion and to Palestine.” Rumor has it that according to the “American initiative” too, not a single settlement would be evacuated. The intentions are good, but they will lead to hell rather than to a heaven of peace and coexistence. The proposal, which appears to sound reasonable, requires a thorough examination. First of all, let’s look at the figures: There are some 400,000 settlers living in Judea and Samaria today, excluding the residents of Jerusalem’s Jewish neighborhoods beyond the Green Line, which clearly won’t be evacuated in any agreement. About 300,000 of them live in the large blocs, which are under a national consensus too. Even Palestinian Authority representatives have agreed that the blocs won’t be evacuated in any agreement, providing land swaps take place.
- We are talking, therefore, about 100,000 to 110,000 settlers living outside the blocs across Judea and Samaria. According to surveys conducted during the Olmert government era, about 70 to 80 percent of them would eventually be evacuated voluntarily or willingly, mainly because they won’t want to live under Palestinian sovereignty. Who would remain? About 20,000—the radical and hard core of the settlers, including Hilltop Youth. Almost all of them will remain, not in a bid to live in peace with their Arab neighbors under Palestinian rule, but in a bid to sabotage the agreement. There would be different kinds of clashes between them and the Palestinians on a daily basis. The IDF would be forced to intervene to protect these Israeli citizens, and that would lead to inevitable clashes with the Palestinian police in the delicate moments of the beginning of the agreement’s implementation. In any event, their stay is clearly a time bomb that will disrupt the agreement sooner rather than later.
- Those who are saying, “Why don’t Jews live in the state of Palestine, like Arabs, live in the State of Israel?” have likely forgotten that Israel’s Arab residents are citizens who are committed to being loyal to the state and to its laws. Are they suggesting that the Jews who remain there will become citizens of the state of Palestine and commit to being loyal to Palestine? Those who are suggesting that the Jews living in Palestine will be permanent residents, like the Arabs in east Jerusalem who are permanent residents but not Israeli citizens, are ignoring reality too: Permanent residents are also committed to being loyal and obey the state they live in.
- This suggestion is an escape from the need to preserve Israel as the Jewish state. There will be a need to evacuate the settlers beyond the blocs. It will certainly be painful, difficult and complicated. After all, these settlers settled beyond the blocs not because they were homeless, but for political and ideological reasons. Yitzhak Rabin saw the isolated settlements as political settlements and saw no security-related or Zionist need for them. Today, the goal of the settlements scattered outside the blocs, according to the settlers, is to thwart the two-state

solution and create—knowingly or unknowingly—a binational apartheid state. So there's no escape from a separation. One can't support a separation through the two-state solution and, at the same time, oppose the evacuation of settlers beyond the settlement blocs. Will we be here (including the blocs) and the settlers "there"? It will be our duty to evacuate the Jews living beyond the

- Some people may ask: Why deal with this now? Many people, after all, believe "there is no partner." But even if that's true, it means we would stick to the status quo as long as there's no partner and let our enemies determine our fate. That's exactly what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Bayit Yehudi leader Naftali Bennett want. In such a situation, it's our duty to do what is best for the Jews and to make a unilateral decision on Israel's borders: The main settlement blocs would be part of the State of Israel; any territory that is not included in them would not be part of it in a final agreement. Once the decision on the borders of separation is made, the settlers outside the blocs would be offered a voluntary evacuation agreement with different alternatives, primarily settling within the boundaries of the blocs. The IDF would naturally remain active across Judea and Samaria just like it is today. This is the only way in the current reality that would save the State of Israel and rescue it from those who are leading it to a binational hell.