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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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January 10, 2018

Associated Press

Israel Clamps Down on West Bank After Israeli Man Killed

The Israeli military set up roadblocks, cordoned off Palestinian villages and deployed reinforcements to the West Bank on Wednesday, a day after an Israeli settler was killed in a drive-by shooting by suspected Palestinian gunmen. Israeli troops have combed villages around the city of Nablus searching for the suspects in Tuesday's attack near the Havat Gilad settlement. In the attack, Raziel Shevah, 35, was shot multiple times from a passing vehicle and was hospitalized in critical condition. He later died of his wounds. The isolated community of a few hundred Israelis is located deep inside the West Bank. Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman called for the unauthorized outpost to be retroactively recognized in response to the attack.

Times of Israel

US Ambassador Accuses Palestinians of Preventing Peace

The US ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, launched a rare scathing attack against the Palestinians Wednesday, blaming them squarely for the lack of peace with Israel. "An Israeli father of six was killed last night in cold blood by Palestinian terrorists. Hamas praises the killers and PA laws will provide them financial rewards," Friedman said in a statement posted to Twitter. "Look no further to why there is no peace. Praying for the bereaved Shevach family."

Times of Israel

Erekat: No Talks Until US Revokes Jerusalem Recognition

Top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat on Tuesday said the Palestinians would reject all United States-sponsored peace talks until Washington rescinded its December 6 recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. "The continued American talk about deals to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or calling for negotiations or talks is unacceptable to the Palestinian leadership, as long as Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is not revoked," Erekat said.

Ynet

Kahlon: It's Time to Annex West Bank Settlement Blocs

Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon surprised fellow government ministers on Sunday by proposing to annex the main Israeli settlement blocs in the West Bank in light of the freeze in the peace process. The government did not, however, discuss Kahlon's proposal as it was not on the meeting's agenda. The finance minister apparently views the move as a way to push for the resumption of peace talks by presenting a moderate position compared to a resolution recently adopted by the Likud Central Committee's resolution urging the government to fully annex the West Bank and the Jordan Valley. While Kahlon seeks to apply Israeli law to settlement blocs, he stressed he is not entirely against conceding land as part of a peace agreement.

Ha'aretz

Israel to Approve Hundreds of Settler Homes in West Bank

The Israeli Civil Administration's top planning council is expected Wednesday to approve the construction of hundreds of settler homes across the West Bank. The council is slated to give final approval for the construction of over 300 housing units in settlements including Susya, Petzael, Ariel, Alfei Menashe and Oranit. Also on tap are 44 new homes in Ma'aleh Adumim and a handful in Ariel and Beit Aryeh. In addition, the Civil Administration is expected to promote the planning of hundreds more units.

Times of Israel

Def. Min. Endorses PA Funding Cuts over 'Martyr' Stipends

The Defense Ministry on Tuesday publicized a draft bill that would deduct welfare payments paid out by the Palestinian Authority to Palestinian prisoners and their families from the tax revenues Israel transfers annually to the PA. The bill, which targets cash payments by the PA to jailed or injured terrorists and their relatives, will also apply to Palestinians who committed other crimes for which they are being compensated by the PA. The Palestine Liberation Organization gives monthly payments to all Palestinian prisoners jailed in Israel, no matter the reason for their incarceration, and also to families of so-called "martyrs" — a term used by the PLO to refer to anyone killed by an Israeli, whether the person was killed attacking Israelis or an innocent bystander.

Times of Israel

Isaac Herzog Tells Arab Media He Hopes for a Regional Deal

Opposition Leader Isaac Herzog, in an interview published Tuesday, spoke of the changes happening in the region, his plans for peace with the Palestinians, and how he forfeited his political position in an attempt to reach a comprehensive agreement with Israel's neighbors. The interview was published in Elaph, a London-based independent Arabic news site, one of the most popular news sites in the Arab world. When asked whether he believes a peace deal with the Palestinians was truly possible, Herzog said that one had to take the long-term view, and create the right conditions.

Ha'aretz

Israel Sets Up Secret Anti-Delegitimization Firm

The Strategic Affairs Ministry has set up a public-benefit corporation to engage in what it calls "mass awareness activities" as part of "the struggle against the delegitimization campaign" against Israel internationally. The shareholders and directors include former ministry director general Yossi Kuperwasser; former UN ambassador Dore Gold, who is also a former adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; former UN ambassador Ron Prosor, and Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin, who heads the Institute for National Security Studies.

Why European Recognition of Palestine Is Fast Approaching

By David Makovsky

- In Israel, there's a clear tendency to caricature Europeans and their governments as innately hostile - legitimating the idea Israel can afford to take little notice of them. There is indeed a growing chasm between Israel and Europe over the Palestinian issue. But foreign policy approaches in Europe and Israel actually converge in other key Mideast conflicts. European officials believe that Israeli officials are perfectly aware of this convergence, but choose not to publicly emphasize this common ground in order to marginalize European views on the Palestinian issue. Having just visited four European capitals - London, Paris, Berlin, and Brussels - where I met with senior officials dealing with the Mideast issues, it is safe to say that Israel has reason to be concerned about brewing European attitudes towards it. But in every meeting, it was clear there were areas of high strategic importance to Israel where its interests clearly converge with those of Europe.
- Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has always been proud of his powers of persuasion with foreign leaders. He correctly says that his job is to represent the national interest of Israel, as he interprets it, and not to win international plaudits; however, he also wants persuade his interlocutors to come round to his position. However, the Europeans are fixed on their policies, and the arguments of the past that might have persuaded are no longer effective. European leaders don't see Israel's current government having any of the flexibility on the Palestinian issue that even previous Netanyahu governments (2009-2013 and 2013-2015) exhibited.
- They hear about new laws passing in the Knesset, and they wonder if those laws make a two-state outcome even possible. When Israel complains about Palestinian incitement, and validly, Europe isn't really listening, because those complaints are being made during a total impasse (in which they see Netanyahu deeply invested) in terms of a negotiated way out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some Europeans were hoping that Netanyahu would come to a meeting with leaders of 28 European countries in Brussels last month with a magnanimous move on the Palestinians, fresh from President Trump's declaration on Jerusalem. But those officials were disappointed. Others – such as EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini – who had flagged Netanyahu's visit by twice assailing the Jerusalem decision – would have been less surprised. Those European officials might have had optimistic expectations, but it's also possible to make the argument that European abstentions on key votes at UNESCO and the UN general assembly that omitted the Jewish historic connection to Jerusalem may have contributed to the atmosphere around the Trump decision – and Netanyahu's clear choice to discount any European criticism of it.
- Some in Israel will say: So what if the Europeans are not happy about Trump's move? Yet, European countries feel strongly they still have a role to play in Mideast peacemaking. Many officials speculate that if the Europeans feel spurned and marginalized, then mainstream

European countries, not just the Swedes, will say the time has come to recognize Palestine. I heard this throughout my trip. European countries are likely to move in this direction as individual states, and not collectively as a political union. EU decisions require a consensus of all 28 member states. This limits them, not only on major policy decisions such as recognizing Palestine, but also on other decisions, such as adopting an approach that differentiates between settlements likely to be part of Israel in any final accord and those that, in most estimations, would be under Palestinian sovereignty.

- Privately, all officials acknowledge that some of the settlements will become part of Israel in a land-swap agreed in final status agreements that are public knowledge and discussed over more than a decade. Yet, as a collective, the EU cannot veer from its own policy by an iota. European Union policy is to oppose settlement activity anywhere in the West Bank and that includes Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem as well. It may explain why Europe has not been able to write new policy guidance on anything relating to Israelis and Palestinians for two years. While differences exist on the Palestinian issue, on some key issues, Europe and Israel are actually in sync. On Syria, Israel and Europe both fear the destabilization to which an American military withdrawal would lead. Europeans feel confident that U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis will keep 2,000 U.S. special forces troops in the eastern part of the country even after the defeat of ISIS. European forces have been involved in the war against ISIS, and apparently, the signal for the U.S. to stay is also a signal for them to stay. Without the US, this would not have been tenable.
- For Israel, a U.S. exit would have created a vacuum that would mean more Shia militias in eastern Syria, and thereby increase the probability of military escalation between Israel and Iranian proxies. Europe would have felt the destabilizing effects of an American exit at their own borders, as it would lead to more emigration from Syria. They also see the Iran's Shia proxies as destabilizing. Despite Russian leader Vladimir Putin's insistence that the war in Syria is essentially over, and Europe should pour billions of reconstruction aid into Syria, the European officials with whom I spoke stated there was no appetite to do so until they see a clearly demonstrated intention and process of political transition in Syria. Europeans recognize Putin and Assad controlling less than 50% of the country, so they do not see the war as being over.
- The question remains whether the Europeans will withhold that aid funding until the Iranian Shia proxies leave Syria. Will Europe actually use its economic leverage to distance those forces, which also threaten Israel? Iran is trickier. On the one hand, the European low-key response to widespread Iranian protests certainly differs from that offered by the U.S. and Netanyahu. Obviously, as a signatory, the EU is emphatic about retaining the nuclear deal and actually are confident the U.S. – despite the White House rhetoric - will not scrap it either. Despite fears in the fall in the wake of Trump's October speech announcing the decertification of the JCPOA, Americans and Europeans have continually held quiet talks about retaining the Iranian nuclear deal. But this should not obscure a growing convergence that both Europeans - belatedly and quietly - and Israel - very publicly - see as a key vulnerability of the agreement, namely the

critical "sunset" clause in the Iranian nuclear deal that enables Iran to highly enrich uranium beyond the deal's 10-15 year period.

- Europe and Israel don't differ on whom to root for in Saudi Arabia either. For all his personal challenges, all the Europeans I met are unambiguously backing Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman to modernize Saudi Arabia. They believe over time, if successful, reform will weaken support for Saudi clerical radicalism abroad, which impacts them both domestically and abroad. For Israel, MBS has made clear that he does not see Israel as a threat, but a potential ally. The bottom line is that it is not correct to say Israel is from Venus and the Europeans are from Mars. They share some important common assumptions about the region, as well as some key differences, namely the Palestinian issue, in which the chasm seems only to be widening. Still, it is clearly better for Europeans and Israelis alike not to view the other as a caricature, which has been an unfortunate tendency for many years now, and to exploit common ground for agreement for both their benefits.

Abbas' Electricity Deal an Olive Branch to Gaza

By Shlomi Eldar

- The Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories on Jan. 7 made the announcement Gaza residents had waited over more than seven months to hear. On the administrative body's Arabic Facebook page, Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai wrote, "Recently the Palestinian Authority turned [to Israel] with the request to turn on the electricity after its supply was constricted in June 2017, and promised to pay the requisite costs. Israel discussed the request and after much indecision and misgivings, it accepted the Authority's appeal only out of humanitarian considerations and in light of the deep suffering of the residents. In the next few days, Israel will increase the currently limited electrical supply to 120 megawatts via the 10 high-power lines that extend from Israel to the Gaza Strip, as had been the case until June 2017."
- Mordechai said the security-diplomatic Cabinet had agreed more than a year ago to add 100 megawatts to the Strip's supply on condition that a humanitarian issue be resolved: the return of the bodies of Israeli soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, held by Hamas since the 2014 Gaza war. The families of the two soldiers expressed their objection to Israel's willingness to restore power to Gaza despite Hamas' refusal to return the bodies of their sons. Perhaps as a show of goodwill to the families, Mordechai also shared a message from Leah Goldin, Goldin's mother, directed at the people of Gaza. "Do not allow yourself to be held hostage by the Hamas terror organization," Leah Goldin wrote. "Humanitarianism and benevolence must go two ways." The PA's request had been taken Israel by surprise. Until recently, the Palestinian reconciliation process had reportedly remained stuck over President Mahmoud Abbas' refusal to remove the sanctions on Gaza, until control over the armed forces in Gaza was resolved. Israel had based all its plans on these reports. High-level Hamas members even complained that despite Hamas' clearly stated willingness to forfeit civil control in the Strip and allow for far-reaching compromises, Abbas stubbornly refused and showed no signs of readiness to put an end to the crisis. All this changed during the past weekend.
- Abbas' agreement to fund Gaza's electrical supply even as the United States threatens to reduce aid to the PA is no small thing. The cost of Gaza's electricity consumption is estimated at about 40 million shekels (\$11.6 million) a month. Some of the money will come from the PA's taxes that Israel will deduct, some from countries around the world and some from international aid foundations. Of course, restoring the power supply does not completely resolve the energy problems of the Strip's residents, but does alleviate them somewhat. When the supply is restored, households in Gaza will receive between two to four additional hours of electricity a day, for a total of about 10 hours of electricity over a 24-hour period. To Gaza residents who have suffered long days of only two hours of electricity, it will be a tremendous improvement.
- "This is, clearly, a first step toward reconciliation," an Israeli defense source told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity. "To residents of the Strip, Abbas' cutbacks in electricity were his most

unpopular acts adopted toward Hamas, and turned him into their number-one enemy.” Signs vilifying Abbas were hung up on the streets. People scrawled graffiti on Gaza’s walls, calling Abbas a “child murderer.” Abbas was held responsible for the deaths of babies and children who were unable to receive medical treatment in Gaza’s hospitals due to electrical outages. Yet in spite of it all, the Palestinian president refused to back down. Abbas was willing to accept the curses of the Strip’s residents, about half of his people, to teach Hamas a lesson. Indeed, the pressure on Hamas bore fruit. If not for Abbas’ steadfastness, it is doubtful whether Hamas would have been willing to hold reconciliation talks with Fatah and discuss power-sharing, including sharing control over the security apparatuses in Gaza. Certainly, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar would not have announced that his movement had made a strategic decision to forfeit civil control in Gaza.

- But what caused Abbas to give in and compromise now? The timing is most likely connected to the Palestinian National Council convening Jan. 14 in Ramallah. All the Palestinian factions are supposed to take part in the council, including Hamas representatives residing in the West Bank. The council is meeting amid a crisis in US-PA relations as well as difficulties in the reconciliation process between Fatah and Hamas. A high-placed source in the Fatah movement told Al-Monitor that the PA is now in its most severe crisis in recent times, and the council meeting will produce important decisions. The Fatah source said on condition of anonymity, “Abbas does not have many options. He is aware of the intricate and thorny situation. In order to restore confidence among the Gaza residents toward the Palestinian president, he must show them that he is not ignoring them but is willing to resume responsibility for their welfare.”
- According to the source, while Abbas’ decision to resume payment for Gaza’s power supply is an important step, there is still a long way to go toward reconciliation. The concession on electricity was not meant to soften Hamas. Instead, it sends a message to Gaza residents that the PA and Abbas have not abandoned them. It is Abbas, not Hamas, who assumes responsibility for their welfare. The Fatah movement cannot discuss the future of the Palestinians at the council in Ramallah and ask them for support and loyalty while Gaza suffers from an electrical shortage at the height of winter, the source concluded. It is up to the residents of Gaza to decide whether to forgive Abbas for his belated kindness.