



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Thursday, January 11*

### Headlines:

- **Netanyahu Praises US Envoy for Blaming Palestinians**
- **Report: Abbas Looking to Replace US with EU Support**
- **Settlers Throw Stones at Palestinians After Terror Attack**
- **EU, Norway to Convene Emergency Meeting of PA Donors**
- **Arab Foreign Ministers to Meet on Trump's Jerusalem Move**
- **US Jewish Clergy Urge PM Not to Demolish Susya**
- **Obama Officials: PM Asked for Palestinian Land in Sinai**
- **Tapes Show How Right-Wing Group Tried to Buy in E. J'lem**

### Commentary:

- **JTA: "Don't Destroy the Two-State Solution"**
  - By Jonathan Greenblatt, Anti-Defamation League CEO
- **Ma'ariv: "Palestinians: Trump is Acting Insanely"**
  - By Ben Caspit

# News Excerpts

January 11, 2018

Times of Israel

## **Netanyahu Praises US Envoy for Blaming Palestinians**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday praised the American envoy to Israel for having blamed the Palestinians' alleged support of terrorism for the lack of peace in the Middle East. Earlier on Wednesday, Friedman had taken to Twitter to condemn the deadly drive-by shooting of Rabbi Raziel Shevach the night before near his West Bank home. The Palestinian Foreign Ministry reacted angrily to Friedman's comments, saying they reflect his "prejudiced and selective attitude toward the occupation, settlement construction, and the Palestinian just and legitimate national rights."

*See also, ["Netanyahu: I Will Meet With Trump in D.C. in March, Possibly Before"](#) (Ha'aretz)*

Times of Israel

## **Report: Abbas Looking to Replace US with EU Support**

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas will visit the headquarters of the European Union in Brussels later in January, where he will present a "package of demands" that will set a new course to achieve Palestinian statehood, according to a report Thursday. The Palestinian leader will demand the recognition of the state of Palestine along 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, said the report in the London-based Pan-Arab daily al-Hayat.

Ynet

## **Settlers Throw Stones at Palestinians After Terror Attack**

A video surfaced Wednesday showing skirmishes between Palestinians and a group of settlers, in which the latter can be seen throwing stones at Palestinian homes in the West Bank following Tuesday's terror attack. According to the Palestinians, the settlers in the video, some of whom were masked, shattered windows of houses of the local residents in the town of Jit in Qalqilya near Kedumim.

*See also, ["Soldiers search for rabbi's killers near Nablus, keep roadblocks in place"](#) (Times of Israel)*

Ha'aretz

## **EU, Norway to Convene Emergency Meeting of PA Donors**

The European Union and Norway will convene an emergency meeting of donor groups that provide funding for the Palestinians on January 31. It will be held against the backdrop of the crisis in peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, the American threat to cut financial assistance to the Palestinians and the stalled reconciliation process between Fatah and Hamas. The gathering will also examine the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

AFP

## **Arab Foreign Ministers to Meet on Trump's Jerusalem Move**

Arab foreign ministers will meet early next month to discuss steps against US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the Arab League said Wednesday. The meeting of the League's Council will be held on February 1 in Cairo. Jordan said on Saturday that the League would seek international recognition of the Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital following the US move.

JTA

## **US Jewish Clergy Urge PM Not to Demolish Susya**

More than 300 US Jewish clergy have written to Netanyahu urging him not to carry out a planned demolition of nearly half of the buildings in a Palestinian village that Israel has deemed unauthorized. The 315 signatories covered the gamut of religious streams, including Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist clergy, according to J Street, the liberal Middle East policy group that initiated the letter. Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman last year said Israel plans to demolish a chunk of Susya, a small village near Hebron, parallel to plans to demolish unauthorized West Bank Jewish settlements. The letter says that Israeli officials recently informed the courts that the destruction of 40 percent of Susiya is imminent.

Ha'aretz

## **Obama Officials: PM Asked for Palestinian Land in Sinai**

Netanyahu asked the Obama administration in late 2014 to consider a plan in which Israel would annex large parts of the West Bank, and the Palestinians would in return receive land from Egypt in the northern part of Sinai, according to four former senior U.S. officials. The Prime Minister's Office denied the account, stating that "this story is not true." The officials said that Netanyahu said that in his view, it was possible to convince Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi to accept the idea. The Obama administration heard directly from Egypt, however, that it wouldn't accept such an idea, and came to a conclusion that neither would the Palestinians. Netanyahu's idea, according to the officials, was to create a Palestinian state in some parts of the West Bank and "compensate" the Palestinians for massive Israeli annexation in and around the settlements by attaching lands in northern Sinai to Gaza.

Ha'aretz

## **Tapes Show How Right-Wing Group Tried to Buy in E. J'lem**

"You want a girl? One, two, how many do you want ... how old do you want?" The speaker is Matityahu Dan, chairman of the Ateret Cohanim organization and a driving force behind Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem. He is offering a girl, plus Viagra if needed, to the Palestinian owner of a property his organization seeks to acquire. The above conversation took place about two decades ago. Since then, Ateret Cohanim has acquired many properties. This and other recordings obtained by Haaretz offer a glimpse into how Jewish groups acquire Palestinian property in East Jerusalem.

## **Don't Destroy the Two-State Solution**

By Jonathan Greenblatt, Anti-Defamation League CEO

- Several recent political measures in Israel — including announcements by Israel's parliament, attorney general and ruling party — have significantly begun to undermine the possibility of achieving a two-state solution. Let me be clear: When discussing why the peace process has been stalled for so many years, one has to begin with the Palestinians. There is little evidence to suggest that the Palestinians have yet made the necessary qualitative leaps to accept the legitimacy of the Jewish state, to negotiate in good faith on the outstanding issues or to stop inciting its people to violence and instead prepare them for peace. In past decades there were several occasions – the 1993 Oslo Agreement, the 2000 Camp David summit, and the 2007-08 Annapolis process – when it looked as though Palestinian leaders could be on the verge of accepting Israel in a serious and responsible way. Unfortunately, that hope foundered as former Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat and then Mahmoud Abbas refused to make serious, specific responses to significant Israeli peace proposals.
- In sum, principal responsibility for the absence of peace rests with the Palestinian side, even while they do have some legitimate grievances and aspirations. We at the Anti-Defamation League have long held that the two-state solution is important for the safety and survival of the Jewish people. And Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself has stated Israel's commitment to such a solution. However, the central committee of Prime Minister Netanyahu's ruling party voted on Jan. 2 to demand "free construction and application of Israeli law and sovereignty in all liberated areas of settlement." Doing so could make any potential Palestinian state unviable by annexing far-flung settlements to Israel that separate Palestinian population centers from each other.
- This is something Israel, under both right- and left-wing governments for 50 years, has refrained from doing, in part for international legal reasons. Instead, Israel has maintained judiciously that the difficult situation on the West Bank is only a temporary one, albeit long-lasting, because of the absence of peace. But that distinction was also blurred by a Dec. 31 directive from Israel's attorney general, who under pressure from the country's justice minister instructed government agencies to apply new civilian laws when possible to cover the West Bank as well as Israel proper. Finally, Israel's parliament voted on Jan. 2 to make it well-nigh impossible for Israel to give up any part of Jerusalem in peace negotiations. It raised the bar for Knesset approval of any peace agreement that would include ceding part of Jerusalem to a foreign entity from a majority to a supermajority of 80 of the body's 120 votes.
- The law itself might be reversed by a simple majority vote at a later date, but it also sends worrying signals about Israel's long-term intentions. This was further exacerbated that same day by President Donald Trump's ill-advised tweet stating "we have taken Jerusalem, the toughest part of the negotiation, off the table." That telegraphs the wrong message to Israelis and

Palestinians, and it stands in direct contradiction to the president's own historic speech on the matter. On Dec. 6, Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and specified that "we are not taking a position on any final status issues, including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem." He similarly confirmed that Jerusalem would remain "one of the most sensitive issues in those talks." ADL welcomed the president's speech because Jerusalem has been the capital of Israel since its founding and the spiritual home of the Jewish people for millennia. But we also called on the parties to redouble their efforts to foster conditions necessary for an eventual two-state solution and to resume negotiations immediately.

- Whatever one's views on the particulars of any future peace agreement, however remote it may seem today, three priorities for Israel should be respected by all: Israel's fundamental right to security; its need to maintain a substantial Jewish majority; and the need to protect and strengthen Israel's democratic values and institutions. At the same time, it is essential that a final resolution also address the concerns of the Palestinian people and allow them to control their own destiny through some form of statehood. And we continue to believe that such a mutually beneficial outcome, one that delivers on the needs of all people, will be determined only through direct negotiations between the two parties as both sides make the tough choices that are required to achieve peace. A two-state solution still offers the only hope to achieve all these goals. Security is possible with the right terms. A Jewish majority can be assured by separating from the Palestinians. And Israel's democratic character and respect for civil rights depends upon its continued pursuit of the two-state solution. It is complicated and challenging, but it still must be the ultimate goal.

## Palestinians: Trump is Acting Insanely

By Ben Caspit

- “Trump’s Jerusalem declaration was the excuse that we used to stop the peace process. After we received information about it, we understood that the peace plan that was being formulated by President Trump isn’t good for the Palestinians,” said senior Palestinian Authority officials to two Israeli lawmakers in a meeting they held in Ramallah this week. In the course of the meeting, which was organized by the Geneva Initiative and which was attended by several senior Geneva Initiative representatives, the Palestinians announced: “We will no longer agree to the United States’ being the sole mediator in negotiations. When the president acts insanely, the mechanism needs to be changed. The era in which the United States mediated between us and you is over.”
- The Palestinians proposed a new mechanism: “Just as the negotiations over the nuclear agreement with Iran were conducted between a joint team of the superpowers (P5+1), the same needs to be done in our case,” said the senior Palestinian officials. “There is no reason for the international community not to join the negotiations.” The Palestinians cited Russia as a country that they would be pleased to see on the international negotiating team. “After all, your relations with the Russians are at an all-time peak,” they told the Israelis. “The Russians have entered the region and their influence over the Middle East is greater than the Americans’. The United States has become weaker, and there’s no reason for it to have exclusivity in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Russians, the Chinese, the Europeans—all of them are parties that need to join the effort.”
- The Palestinians adopted particularly blunt language when the issue was President Trump himself. The words that they used were blunt and “acting insanely,” is only one example. The senior Palestinian officials, who are very close to Abu Mazen, said that they had received information about the peace plan that Trump’s team was formulating from the Egyptians and the Saudis. According to information that was received in Ramallah, the Trump peace plan would not result in the establishment of a sovereign and independent state for the Palestinians, is not based on the 1967 lines and makes no mention of the refugee issue.
- “In that state of affairs,” said the Palestinian officials, “Trump’s declaration about Jerusalem gave us an opening. We too understand that the declaration itself is not truly important and that it has no impact on the turn of events on the ground, but we used it to deliver a preemptive blow and to torpedo the negotiations before the Americans concluded drafting their peace plan so that we wouldn’t subsequently have to reject it publicly.” “On the issue of Jerusalem there is virtually a total consensus in the world,” said the Palestinians. “No one took us to task when we shut things down in the wake of the president’s declaration.” In the course of their conversation with the Palestinian officials, the Israeli lawmakers came to understand that Ramallah views the Egyptian involvement in a positive light, although the same cannot be said about the Saudi

involvement. “They barely mentioned the Saudis,” one person who attended the meeting told Ma’ariv. “They are obviously very suspicious of the special close [relationship] between the Saudis and Israel.”

- “Trump helped us with the tweet he fired off after his speech on Jerusalem, when he announced that Jerusalem was being removed from the agenda. After a tweet like that the entire world understands why we can’t remain in a process in which only the Americans are in the room,” said the Palestinians. Palestinian officials said they were disappointed with the Arab world and with the fact that not a single important Arab country had come to their aid under the current state of affairs. “The Arabs are weak,” one person said in the conversation. “Some of the countries prefer close relations with Trump to helping us,” they lamented.