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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

January 3, 2018

Ha'aretz

Trump Threatens to Cut Palestinian Aid

US President Donald Trump said the United States may withhold future payments to the Palestinians because they are "no longer willing to talk peace" with Israel, and that Israel would have "had to pay more" in return for his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December. Trump's tweet implied that he intended to extract possible future concessions from Israel for his speech recognizing Jerusalem as the Jewish state's capital. Trump's comments came hours after US Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, said that the Trump administration would cut funding to UNRWA, the UN's agency for aiding Palestinian refugees, unless the Palestinian Authority went back to the negotiating table.

See also, ["How Much Funding Does the U.S. Give Palestinians" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Times of Israel

PA: Israel Law on Dividing Jerusalem is 'Declaration of War'

The PA accused Israel of "declaring war" on the Palestinian people Tuesday, hours after Knesset lawmakers passed a bill making it harder to relinquish parts of East Jerusalem. Early Tuesday morning, the Knesset voted 64-51 to pass the law, which requires a special two-thirds majority majority of lawmakers — 80 of the Knesset's 120 — to give up any part of Jerusalem, potentially complicating peace efforts with Palestinians who see the eastern part of the city as their future capital.

The New York Times

Netanyahu Allies Rethink Remapping of Jerusalem

Before the Jerusalem vote, the Israeli government coalition stripped from the bill a provision that would have allowed the municipal map of Jerusalem to be redrawn without a parliamentary vote on the new boundaries. That, in turn, would have smoothed the way for a proposal to exclude from the city several densely populated Palestinian neighborhoods that are outside the security barrier Israel erected to prevent terrorist attacks. The decision was tactical, not philosophical, but left-wing activists hoped it would give them a chance to fight another day.

Ha'aretz

State Dept Denies Shift on 'Occupied' West Bank

The State Department on Tuesday reiterated that it has "not changed" its position regarding the status of the West Bank as occupied territory, following a report published last week saying that US Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, has pressured the department to stop using that term. The Department's spokeswoman said that "our position hasn't changed."

Ha'aretz

Army: Islamic Jihad Fired Iran-Made Mortar Shells

After investigating the circumstances, Israeli army officials now think it was Islamic Jihad that fired mortar shells from the Gaza Strip toward Israel on Friday. Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman had said on Saturday evening that the attack was the work of small Islamist Salafi groups, an opinion the army's conclusion now contradicts. The investigation found that the mortar shells, which were made in Iran, were identical to those Islamic Jihad had shot at an Israeli army position near the northern Gaza Strip on November 30.

See also, [*"Israel exposes alleged Iranian intelligence operation in West Bank" \(Times of Israel\)*](#)

Jerusalem Post

US Ambassador to Pay Shiva Call Over Green Line

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman intends to pay a condolence call to MK Yehuda Glick at his Otniel home beyond the Green Line in the Southern Hebron Hills, a US embassy official confirmed on Tuesday night. The embassy official, however, said this was not an official public visit, but rather a personal visit without any political significance.

Ha'aretz

Egypt: Israeli Restraint Vital to Palestinian Reconciliation

Egypt is concerned at the possible ramifications the escalation in Gaza could have on reconciliation talks between warring Palestinian factions. Israeli officials received worried messages emphasizing the importance of all sides exercising maximal care and patience in response to rocket fire - including Israel. Messages worded in a similar tone were sent to the Hamas leadership, calling on them to make every effort to prevent rocket fire by extremist factions.

Ynet

INSS Report Details Threat of Two-Pronged Northern War

President Reuven Rivlin received Monday the 2018 Strategic Assessment for Israel produced by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). The institute's Executive Director, Major-General (res.) Amos Yadlin said that neither Israel nor Hezbollah are interested in another war. However, Israeli activities aimed at crippling Iran's entrenchment in Syria, alongside Hezbollah freeing itself of the task to save Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, may deteriorate the situation towards the "First Northern War," which will not necessarily be limited to Lebanon.

Finally, Ideological Clarity

By Polly Bronstein

- In a historic move that provided moral clarity to the political system, the Likud Central Committee decided to close out 2017 by voting in favor of imposing Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria. Every Israeli that wants to be able to decide between two ideological alternatives should welcome the move because it illustrates how those who vote for the Likud and parties to its right are in favor of annexing Judea and Samaria, with all its implications, and those who vote for the Zionist parties and the parties to their ideological left are in favor of separating from the Palestinians.
- The Likud Central Committee's vote "to act to allow unhindered construction and impose Israeli law and sovereignty over the liberated areas of settlement in Judea and Samaria" was a very important event. It symbolizes the Likud's transformation into a branch of the pro-settlement Habayit Hayehudi party. Moderate Likud voters who vote for Likud in order to preserve the status quo until a separation from the Palestinians becomes feasible, should now understand that the Likud is not an option for them; the pragmatic party of the Right has become a radical right-wing party that prefers the country's territorial integrity to the integrity of the nation and the state.
- Israel's separation from the Palestinians is an acceptable move to the majority of the Israeli public. Numerous polls have shown that over 80% of the Jewish public in Israel supports separation. Despite its inherent risks, the idea of annexation has gained steam as a result of increasing support from members of the ruling party. Those who support annexation are being held hostage to the dream of a Greater Israel. They ignore the fact that imposing Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria would spell the end of the Zionist dream. Everything we fought for and paid for in blood will go up in the smoke left behind by the Messianic annexation that threatens the Jewish and democratic character of Israel by making Israel responsible for 2.5 million Palestinians.
- What has happened to the moderate and pragmatic Right that hopes to create the necessary conditions for a responsible separation from the Palestinians? If the Likud continues to flirt with the radical factions of religious Zionism and neglect the moderate right-wing public, it could find itself in a situation similar to the 2006 elections, when the Netanyahu-led Likud garnered a mere 12 mandates after pushing moderate voters in favor of Israel's disengagement from Gaza toward former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's pragmatic Kadima party.
- The moderate Right needs a responsible party, one that presents a clear vision of a secure Israel protected from surrounding threats. The dangerous policy of annexation should receive support from those on the fringes of the Right and not at those of the heart of the ruling party. Israel requires a clear border to separate us from the Palestinians, not for that border to be

blurred. The vote by the Likud Central Committee serves to demarcate again the border within ourselves, between the Israeli majority that supports separation from the Palestinians and the minority that, in its support for annexation, is willing to risk the future of the entire Zionist enterprise.

In a Foolish Decision, Likud Gave BDS a Valuable Gift

By Ben Dror-Yemini

- Minister Gilad Erdan called on Likud Central Committee members to attend a special meeting Sunday evening to vote “in favor of free construction in all of Judea and Samaria and in favor of applying Israeli law to Judea and Samaria, so that Jewish residents living there will finally be able to enjoy the Israeli law.” I listened to his words and couldn’t believe my ears. Is this Erdan speaking? Erdan is the minister of strategic affairs. He is in charge of the battle on anti-Israel propaganda. He knows that one of the main arguments made by that propaganda is that Israel imposes an apartheid regime, which applies two separate sets of rules on different populations.
- In practice, Israeli law already applies to the settlements and to the settlers. There is a difference, however, between a law that is applied in accordance with the military governor’s orders, temporarily, and Knesset legislation. When a demand to apply Israeli law is attached by senior Likud members to a demand for “free construction in all of Judea and Samaria,” who needs BDS? Oddly enough, there is only one person—or almost only one person—who is standing up against this march of folly, and he is likely having trouble understanding the new rebels too. His name is Benjamin Netanyahu. It’s not that the prime minister has become a leftist, but he knows exactly what all the Israel-friendly countries are thinking. He also knows that the American administration sees the settlements as serious trouble in need of a stop sign.
- Right-wing speakers in general, and Likud speakers in particular, present the current US administration as an ardent supporter of any Israeli whim. President Donald Trump’s Jerusalem announcement has increased their appetite. But when it comes to the settlements, it’s a major deception. Trump himself has made clear that going forward with the settlement enterprise harms the peace process, and an official administration statement said that “the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders may not be helpful.” That was diplomatic language. In practice, the current administration opposes an expansion of settlements just like previous administrations.
- The thing is we don’t need the American administration, or a peace process which we have lost track of, to know what’s good for Israel. International experience makes it clear that mixing hostile populations is a sure recipe for a bloody conflict. The Right is leading us into that exact disaster. The result will be one big state, which be neither Jewish nor democratic, but a bleeding state of conflict. It will be that way even if the Palestinians are given full rights, as the radical left wants and as some right-wing people want, and it will be that way even if the Palestinians have no rights, as others on the Right want. The 900 Likud Central Committee members signed the demand for the special meeting so they could vote in favor of applying Israeli law and unlimited construction. Senior Likud members believe there is no escape from a further radicalization to the Right, because that’s the direction—if not the direction of Likud voters, then definitely the direction of members of the Likud institutions. There is a need for decisions that contradict the

prime minister's stance, and mainly contradict the national interest, to satisfy the raging appetite of some Likud Central Committee members for more nationalistic decisions, even if they're anti-national.

- There are moments which call for leadership. Gilad Erdan, precisely because of his position, precisely because he is in charge of fighting anti-Israel propaganda, could have been the one to say something about the real national interest. There's no need to adopt the Left's views, but there was a need for a clear statement against the new initiative. Only several days ago, Erdan received an addition of tens of millions of shekels for fighting the anti-Israel boycott movement. In a foolish decision, Likud decided to give BDS a much more valuable gift.