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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

January 8, 2018

Times of Israel

Netanyahu Wants UNRWA Gradually Shut Down

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has urged the United States to gradually reduce its support for the UN's aid agency for the Palestinians by transferring that aid money to the UN's other refugee agency, UNHCR, which supports all other refugee groups. Ultimately, he said, UNRWA should be shut down altogether. Instead of cutting UNRWA off at once, a move opposed by the IDF and other Israeli security and diplomatic agencies, he urged a more gradual approach.

See also, [*"U.S. Cuts to UNRWA to Endanger Thousands of Teachers' Jobs" \(Times of Israel\)*](#)

Reuters

Arab League to Lobby for E. J'lem as Palestinian Capital

Arab states will soon embark on a diplomatic drive to persuade the United Nations to recognize a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital on territory captured by Israel in the 1967 war, Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said. Six Arab foreign ministers met in Amman on Saturday to follow up on earlier decisions taken by the Arab League to counter Trump's move in December.

The New York Times

Tapes Reveal Egypt's Tacit Acceptance of Jerusalem Move

After Trump's Jerusalem move, an Egyptian intelligence officer quietly placed phone calls to the hosts of several influential talk shows in Egypt. "Like all our Arab brothers," Egypt would denounce the decision in public, the officer, Capt. Ashraf al-Kholi, told the hosts. But strife with Israel was not in Egypt's national interest, Captain Kholi said. He told the hosts that instead of condemning the decision, they should persuade their viewers to accept it. Palestinians, he suggested, should content themselves with the dreary West Bank town that currently houses the Palestinian Authority, Ramallah.

Washington Post

Israel Turns the Power Back on in Gaza

There was some small respite for residents of the Gaza Strip on Sunday as Israel restored the electricity it supplies to the Palestinian enclave after a nine-month-long hiatus. However, even with the boost, homes will receive only about six hours of power a day. Gaza residents have been caught in the middle of a political rift between Fatah, which controls the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and the rival Hamas leadership in the strip. Israel cut off 50 megawatts of electricity to Gaza last year after the Palestinian Authority said it would no longer pick up the bill for power supplied to Hamas territory while the group was running a shadow government in the strip.

Associated Press

Israel Lists 20 Groups to be Denied Entry over Boycott Calls

Israel on Sunday identified 20 activist groups from around the world whose members will be banned from entering the country over their calls to boycott the Jewish state, stepping up its fight against a movement it views as a serious threat. Israel last year enacted a law that would ban any activist who “knowingly issues a public call for boycotting Israel.” The list made public Sunday, which includes a Nobel Peace Prize winning organization, follows up on that legislation.

Jerusalem Post

Trump Team Confident Peace Plan Appeals to Palestinians

In the aftermath of Trump's decision to declare Jerusalem as Israel's capital— as Palestinian leaders began dismissing his administration as a serious arbiter of peace— top officials in the West Wing and nearby Executive Office Building made a decision: They would proceed with a flurry of scheduled inter-agency meetings on their plan for Middle East peace as if nothing had changed. Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt believe they can insulate their peace initiative from a diplomatic crisis with the PA— and that the plan, once presented, will appeal on its face to the Palestinians and the wider Arab world, effectively nullifying their angry response to the Jerusalem decision.

Times of Israel

Police Said to Walk Back Plan to Quickly Conclude PM Probe

Police have revised their plan to submit recommendations in the two corruption cases against Netanyahu in the first weeks of the year, with the investigation now set to continue for several more months, Hadashot TV news reported Friday, citing a police source. The current estimate for concluding the case is now Passover, at the end of March, the report said. At the end of December, the same TV channel, also citing a police source, reported that barring any unexpected developments, the two probes were nearing completion and their results would be handed over to prosecutors soon.

See also, [*“Thousands Join Anti-corruption Protests in Tel Aviv for Sixth Week in a Row” \(Ha’aretz\)*](#)

Ynet

Netanyahu, Bennett Lock Horns over Stalled Legislation

Netanyahu and Education Minister Naftali Bennett clashed Sunday over the Likud's refusal to support legislation seeking to incorporate Israeli West Bank academic institutions into the Council for Higher Education. Earlier in the day, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked decided to stop discussions at the Ministerial Committee for Legislation over Likud MK Yoav Kisch's refusal to support what is dubbed as the "Ariel University bill," which is sponsored by Shaked and Bennett's fellow Bayit Yehudi party member Shuli Mualem-Refaeli.

America Can't Save the Two-state Solution

By Daniel Kurtzer

- A two-state solution is, I believe, the only way to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but I fear it is fast becoming an illusion. A de facto one state reality is emerging on the ground, and both Israelis and Palestinians are careening toward that end without giving the consequences much thought. For both, a one state reality – whether formalized or not – carries extremely dangerous risks. The idea of partition of Eretz Israel/Palestine into two states has been around since the mid-1930s, when the British government put forward a formal partition proposal. In 1947, it resurfaced in United Nations Resolution 181, which declared how the British Mandate over Palestine should end: two states – one Arab and one Jewish – and a corpus separatum or international regime over the Jerusalem area.
- The idea receded a bit until resuscitated in the late 1980s when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) finally accepted United Nations Resolution 242, proposed in 1967 after the Six Day War, as the basis for resolving the conflict; at that point, the Palestine National Council agreed to accept a Palestinian state on the territory Israel had occupied in the June 1967 war. Since then, the peace process has aimed at achieving a two-state solution through negotiations. Keep updated: Sign up to our newsletter [Email*Sign up Today](#), however, a negotiated outcome is more remote than ever. Neither Israeli nor Palestinian leaders have shown any interest in working together, let alone supporting the kind of difficult compromises that would be needed to reach an agreement.
- The United States, which for decades claimed the exclusive role of impartial third-party intermediary, recently shot itself in the foot with a series of policy pronouncements that aligned it solely with Israel: the announcement (later reportedly retracted) that the administration wanted to close the PLO office in Washington, D.C.; President Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and to locate the U.S. embassy there, absent any recognition of Palestinian claims to the city; the announcement that the United States is considering cutting funding to UNRWA, the agency that supports Palestinian refugees; and the threat by Trump to cut economic assistance to the Palestinians unless they return to the negotiating table.
- As the prospect of negotiations dwindles, Israeli politics are moving inexorably toward a one state reality. Buoyed by the support that Trump has provided to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the significant tilt of American policy toward Israel, the Likud party recently voted unanimously to annex the West Bank. While this is unlikely to actually take place, other actions point in the direction of Israel's further integrating the West Bank into Israel proper. For example, the Israeli Attorney General has reportedly instructed all Ministries to indicate how new rules and regulations will affect Israeli settlements, making it incumbent on the Ministries to explain why this should not happen on a case by case basis. In the meantime, settlement activity continues.

- The situation on the ground is also tying the knot tighter between Israel and the West Bank in important ways. Today, about 120,000 Palestinian day workers commute to Israel, making this the largest source of Palestinian employment other than the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Palestinian security services continue cooperating with Israel, thus serving the dual mission of providing security in PA-held areas and assisting Israel to protect its own population. The administrative service provided by the PA and UNRWA, funded by international donors, has relieved Israel of the burden of caring for the Palestinian population, a role incumbent on an occupying power. And the Palestinian economy is intimately tied into the Israeli economy, in trade of both goods and services.
- One would think that both Israelis and Palestinians would wake up one morning, see what's happening, and say: "Stop." For Palestinians, the emerging reality promises to kill, or at least defer indefinitely, their achieving sovereignty, national independence and a state of their own. Even if they achieve equal political status in the emerging one state – which is far from certain – they will remain a minority with status as second-class citizens. For Israelis, the prospect of one state calls into question the very cornerstone of the Zionist dream – to enjoy independence and sovereignty in a Jewish-majority state. While population figures for Jews and Arabs living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea are disputed, there is no doubt about the near parity in the size of the two populations. It is quite possible that high birth rates among the Israeli ultra-Orthodox population and reported declining rates among some segments of the Palestinian population will maintain a Jewish majority for some time to come.
- But the presence of a slim majority of Jews and a significant minority of Palestinians in a single state raises the most fundamental choice for Israeli society: whether to grant Palestinians full citizenship and full rights in the unitary state. The choice is stark, and the implications of either option are dramatic. Granting Palestinians full rights, a decision that would be in keeping with Israel's civil democratic nature, would represent a severe complication for Israeli politics. Israeli parties proliferate constantly, and coalitions are always required to form a government. While Palestinian parties in this unitary state might also proliferate, perhaps they will not, and thus the Jewish-majority parties could face a blocking minority in the Knesset. In the last Israeli election, Israel's Arab-majority parties did unify, in the process forming the third largest bloc in the parliament.
- The alternative – not granting full citizenship to Palestinians – is unthinkable, for it would be, in the words of former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, tantamount to creating an apartheid state, with Palestinians as second-class residents without full political rights. It is inconceivable that the majority of Israelis who justifiably are proud of their democratic tradition would sacrifice this. I have been an ardent supporter of the two-state solution for more than 40 years, during my career in the Foreign Service and now as an academic. I remain committed to that goal, but must admit that not only am I in a dwindling minority of believers, but also am facing a reality on the ground that appears to be headed in the opposite direction. The search for an answer to this conundrum lies not in my hands, nor in the hands of the U.S. administration for that matter, but

in the hands of Israelis and Palestinians. They must decide the political future – one state or two states – they will share in a common homeland.

Without the Two-State Solution We Abandon the Jewish Soul

By Charles Bronfman

- I'm probably known to the Jewish community as a co-founder, along with my dear friend Michael Steinhardt, of Birthright Israel, a remarkable program that has seen 600,000 participants exercise their birthright via an educational visit to Israel. However, since I was 17 I've been involved in the Jewish world. My parents led the way, as my dad was president of Canadian Jewish Congress for over 20 years, including serving as a lobbyist at the San Francisco Conference that established the United Nations in 1945. I've been president of the Montreal Federation; of CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership; the inaugural chair of United Jewish Communities (now Jewish Federations of North America); a board member of Mount Sinai Medical Center, and a member of the Jewish Agency for Israel board. For more than 20 years I spent three summer months in Jerusalem, involved in both business and philanthropy.
- To cap off my career, I'm proud to be associated with the Israel Policy Forum, where the singular goal — the two-state solution — is also mine, for that would end the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and bring peace to that part of the troubled Middle East. To me, as well as a majority of Jewish Americans and Israelis, two states is the only way that Israel will be able to keep both its Jewish and democratic character — vital to both Israel's founding document of May 13, 1948, and to the soul of modern Israel. We generally know what that solution entails: the 1967 borders with agreed-to land swaps, plus other items to be negotiated, such as Jerusalem, trade, etc. There are major sticking points on both sides, but if there are courageous leaders on both sides, the two-state solution will come to fruition, as it must in order to maintain the demographic majority of Jewish citizens; obtain secure, clear borders, and have all the attributes of normal statehood after 70 years.
- There are both practical and moral reasons that the two-state solution must happen. In the first place, failing its adoption would spell the end of Israel as we know it! And why? Because Israel is surrounded by Arab nations, to whom our ancient homeland is considered an appendage. Even though Israel is the only nation on the earth to have pushed back the desert and created a global agricultural miracle, and her peoples' creativity and innovation have created a robust world-class economy, she will be doomed. Or, as my dear friend, the late Shimon Peres, said, "It's impossible for a rich island to survive in a sea of poverty." These so-called moderate Arab nations (other than Egypt and Jordan, which signed treaties with Israel) cannot and will not accept Israel until and unless there is an end to the conflict. We've heard this many times. So many, that I believe it to be true.
- I'm also certain that if the government of Israel asked its citizens whether they would accept a deal that would totally end the conflict, a resounding majority would say "Yes!" The Palestinian public would also agree, perhaps with less enthusiasm. Statehood and the responsibility it

requires would bring dignity to the Palestinian people and the conclusion to these endless hostilities. To be sure, reaching this outcome entails many challenges, but we American Jews must be up to the task and vigorously support a two-state solution to ensure Israel's future as a strong, Jewish and democratic state.

- Yes, there could be one state encompassing the territory of Judea, Samaria and Israel. But what would it be? Over time, it would either no longer be Jewish, since a majority Arab population would control it, or it would no longer be a democracy if a Jewish minority ruled over an Arab majority. It would, in fact, be a prescription for prolonged civil war. Moreover, two states is the only outcome that has any chance of being accepted by both parties. Yet we are realistic: A comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian agreement does not appear to be within reach now. But that cannot be an excuse for inaction. Instead, preserving the conditions for a two-state solution that would allow such an agreement to be attained in the future when conditions are more favorable has to be the objective now.
- I have no ambivalence about my love and pride in the Jewish people. It took our forebears thousands of years, tortured, trampled, murdered, discriminated against always, to reach the longed-for reality of a renewed State of Israel. This is the miraculous state of biblical proportions. But the risk of being wrong and losing our Jewish soul is an existential threat in our time — a greater one than intermarriage. So is Israel's not having the security of clear and recognized borders. Ironclad security is mandatory for Israel, which is why I join the 270 retired generals of Israel's military and intelligence organizations, the Commanders for Israel's Security, in seeing the two-state approach as the only way to secure Israel's future. Therefore I ask every Jew in this country and abroad to join the IPF's crusade to reinvigorate a passionate center, rejecting the extremism of both the right and the left, in order to sustain the Israel that we love and that our people so justly deserve.