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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, January 12

Correction:

In yesterday's News Update, the JTA article "Don't Destroy the Two-State Solution" was written by Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt, and not US Envoy Jason Greenblatt.

Headlines:

- Israeli Committee Approves 1,122 New WB Housing Units
- PM Orders Illegal Outpost Hooked Up to Power Grid
- Israel Planning to Increase Work Permits for Palestinians
- Palestinians: US encouraging Israel to approve settlements
- Two Palestinians Killed in Clashes with Israeli Troops
- Netanyahu to Meet Trump, Putin in Coming Weeks
- State Prosecutor: PM Investigations Finished in Weeks
- Israeli Leader Netanyahu Stumps Acclaimed Mentalist

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Something is Rotten in the Prime Minister's Residence"**
– By Sima Kadmon, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth
- **Ha'aretz: "Why I'm Not a Zionist - and Why You're Not, Either"**
– By Anshel Pfeffer, columnist at Ha'aretz

News Excerpts

January 12, 2018

JTA

Israeli Committee Approves 1,122 New WB Housing Units

An Israeli planning committee approved over 1,000 new West Bank housing units. The Civil Administration, the military body that enforces Israeli policy on citizens in the West Bank, on Wednesday approved the 1,122 new housing units in 20 settlements and outposts in the West Bank, according to Peace Now. On Wednesday tenders for 651 housing units were published. The tenders were for housing in Emanuel, Ariel, Adam and Maale Adumim. Israel's Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman had announced on Tuesday that the Civil Administration's Higher Planning Committee would meet the following day to approve the new housing units. He also said it would advance planning for 2,500 others. See also, "[Israel approves over 1000 new West Bank settlement homes](#)" (*i24 News*)

Times of Israel

PM Orders Illegal Outpost Hooked Up to Power Grid

Prime Minister Netanyahu instructed the Defense Ministry on Thursday to officially hook up Havat Gilad to the electricity grid, two days after a father-of-six who lived at the illegal outpost was slain by Palestinian terrorists in a drive-by shooting. The outpost southeast of Nablus currently receives electricity through a makeshift connection to the power grid. Regulating the service would allow for the installment of proper infrastructure linking the hilltop community to the national power network. The move could be seen as a step toward legalizing the hilltop community, which was founded in 2002 in memory of Gilad Zar, security coordinator of the Shomron Regional Council, who was shot dead in an attack a year earlier. See also, "[Netanyahu: connect Havat Gilad to grid](#)" (*Ynet News*)

Jerusalem Post

Israel Planning to Increase Work Permits for Palestinians

The government is likely to approve 7,500 additional permits for Palestinians to work in Israel, a top general said on Thursday. Some 100,000-110,000 Palestinians currently work in Israel, including 30,000-40,000 laborers without permits, while 30,000 work in West Bank settlements. "There will probably be an approval of a government [measure] next week, which... would increase the number of work permits by 7,500," according to Maj.-Gen. Yoav Mordechai, who heads the branch of the Defense Ministry that is responsible for liaising with Palestinians. A security official said the permits would only be granted to Palestinians in the West Bank.

Times of Israel

Palestinians: US encouraging Israel to approve settlements

A Palestinian top official, Saeb Erekat, charged Thursday that the American decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December has encouraged the Jewish state to "speed up" settlement construction in the West Bank. "The Israeli government continues with its plan to bury all the chances of a political settlement by announcing the approval of 1,122 new illegal settlement units in 22 illegal colonial-settlements in Occupied Palestine," Erekat said in a statement, employing a number reported by Peace Now. See also, "[EREKAT: US TALK OF PEACE DEALS 'UNACCEPTABLE' AS LONG AS TRUMP JERUSALEM DECISION STANDS](#)" (*Jerusalem Post*)

Reuters

Two Palestinians Killed in Clashes with Israeli Troops

Two Palestinian youths were shot dead by Israeli troops during clashes on Thursday in the Gaza Strip and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Palestinian medical sources and witnesses said. Israeli-Palestinian tensions have risen following U.S. President Donald Trump's Dec. 6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a move that has sparked violent Palestinian protests along the Gaza border and in the West Bank. A 16-year-old youth was killed and two others wounded in a clash near the Gaza-Israel border fence in which Palestinians threw stones at Israeli troops, one of the wounded youths, medics and witnesses said. See also, ["Manhunt for Havat Gilad attacker continues, Nablus area under closure" \(i24 News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Netanyahu to Meet Trump, Putin in Coming Weeks

Israeli and US officials are working on a date for a meeting between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Donald Trump when Netanyahu travels to Washington in early March to attend AIPAC's annual policy conference, an Israeli diplomatic official said on Thursday. Netanyahu made reference to the upcoming meeting during a speech at the Globes Business Conference in Jerusalem, saying he will meet Trump in Washington in March, "if not before then." This would be their first meeting since September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York. Diplomatic officials said there was a possibility that the two leaders would meet at the Davos Economic Summit later this month, which they are both scheduled to attend. Nothing final, however, has yet been set up. See also, ["Netanyahu expects to meet with Putin in coming weeks" \(TASS\)](#)

Ynet News

State Prosecutor: PM Investigations Finished in Weeks

State Prosecutor Shai Nitzan on Thursday evening addressed the ongoing criminal cases against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, rejecting allegations of deliberate delays in the investigations as "baseless" and "false." "My hope is that the police will submit their recommendations in the coming weeks," he said at the Globes Israel Business Conference at the International Convention Center in Jerusalem. According to Nitzan, "the investigation will end once all the state's needs have been exhausted." "I read a piece by some journalist who said we had enough information. Apparently he has wonderful sources. I want to tell him, and in general, that if you imagine that the investigation of the prime minister is easy, then it is just that: your imagination," he said. See also, ["State attorney hints at police recommendations on Netanyahu within weeks" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

AP

Israeli Leader Netanyahu Stumps Acclaimed Mentalist

Acclaimed mentalist Lior Suchard appears to have met his match: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Suchard, who has wowed audiences around the world by guessing their secret bank PIN numbers or the names of their childhood crushes, went head to head with Netanyahu in front of a group of journalists, only to come up empty in an awkward duel with the seemingly inscrutable Israeli leader. In one of his famous routines, Suchard asks his guest to scribble a picture on a piece of paper, while Suchard stands across the stage and draws an identical image. But when he tried the game with Netanyahu on Wednesday night, Suchard was unable to match Netanyahu's doodle.

Something is Rotten in the Prime Minister's Residence

The things Yair Netanyahu said to his friends as they were being driven from one strip club to another on a Friday night represent exactly who he is: A 26-year-old jobless man who lives at the state's expense and drags an entire security detail wherever he goes 24/7, costing the Israeli public millions

By Sima Kadmon, political columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- Isn't it ironic that while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was fighting to pass the [supermarkets bill](#), which vows to protect the sanctity of Shabbat, Channel 2 News aired a [recording](#) of his son's adventures on a Friday night which had nothing to do with sanctity whatsoever? The recording includes a conversation—more like drunk talk—between Yair Netanyahu and his friends, as they are driven from one strip club to another in a government car with a driver and bodyguard.
- Their journey begins on Tel Aviv's HaMasger Street and ends in the apartment of billionaire James Packer, another friend of Netanyahu Jr., who even gave Yair's friend, Roman Abramov—who is with him in the car—a cushy job.
- If this wasn't the prime minister's son, the Netanyahus may have had a point when they slammed the report as cheap and vicious gossip. But this young man, who sat in a car funded by all of us, with a driver and a security guard funded by all of us, who spoke about prostitutes in gutter language and even offered to set up intimate meetings between his friends and his ex-girlfriend—this young man isn't everyone's child. And thank God for that. I believe there isn't a single parent in Israel who wouldn't die of embarrassment if his or her son were exposed in a conversation like the one that took place in that car.
- It's not that we didn't know who we're dealing with here. Netanyahu Jr. has given us quite a few reasons to understand what has been growing in the garden bed at the Prime Minister's Residence, from the story about how he gave a neighbor the finger when she asked him to pick up his dog's waste to the story about how he cursed and walked out of an arbitration meeting with representatives of the left-wing Molad organization. Not to mention the false Facebook post in which he trashed former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's children.
- It's not that we have no clue about the young generation. We all have children. No one is being naïve. A conversation between young people, especially if they're intoxicated, is never a Shakespearean experience. But what was revealed in the recording was not a regular conversation between young people. It goes beyond the vulgar, obscene discourse. For example, the disparagement and contempt towards women, and the realization of what that group had done several minutes earlier in strip clubs and the amount of money they had spent there and on what (“the 400 shekels were for the hooker,” as the prime minister's son was heard saying).
- Yair Netanyahu's surprisingly quick apology, in which he claimed that the things he said don't represent who he is or the values he was raised on, won't help either. I think we are aware of the values he was raised on: Netanyahu Jr. picks rich friends too. Like his mother and father, he expects them to pay for his leisure activities. His language isn't very different from his mother's

language when she abuses her workers. And like his parents, he also feels he deserves everything, no matter how much it costs and who's paying.

- The things he said in that conversation in the car represent exactly who he is: A 26-year-old young man who has no job and lives at the state's expense. A person who drags an entire security detail wherever he goes 24/7, costing the Israeli public millions. A person who is overwhelmingly involved in the state's affairs, participates in state events, poses for photographs with world leaders—yet isn't aware of the price this entails and acts like a spoiled and rotten child.
- So even if what he told Nir Maimon, the son of Kobi Maimon, one of the owners of the Tamar gas field ("My father set you up with \$20 billion, and you can't even hook me up with a show for NIS 400?"), should be taken with a grain of salt and probably don't call for an immediate investigation—there is clearly something very rotten in the Prime Minister's Residence. And in his debaucherous behavior on a Friday night, Yair Netanyahu further exposed us to this rot.
- The question whether Avner Netanyahu needs an entire security detail to escort him on his after-army trip to Australia—and whether Yair Netanyahu needs a car, a driver and a bodyguard to take him out to clubs on Friday nights—should now be discussed more intensely. There is something unreasonable here, and like in the other Netanyahu affairs, we are all keeping quiet.
- It's hard to say how all this will affect Netanyahu's position. Chances are it would make way for other things within a day or two. The question is how much more will we be willing to take, and what else has to happen before we say enough is enough.

SUMMARY: The things Yair Netanyahu said in that conversation in the car represent exactly who he is: A 26-year-old young man who has no job and lives at the state's expense. A person who drags an entire security detail wherever he goes 24/7, costing the Israeli public millions. A person who is overwhelmingly involved in the state's affairs, participates in state events, poses for photographs with world leaders—yet isn't aware of the price this entails and acts like a spoiled and rotten child.

Why I'm Not a Zionist - and Why You're Not, Either

By Anshel Pfeffer, columnist at Ha'aretz

- **Zionism was born this week, 135 years ago, in a provincial town in Romania. On January 11, 1882, delegates from across the land arrived in Focșani for the first conference of activists promoting Jewish resettlement of the historical land of Israel.**
- **Few have heard of the Focșani Conference, which was one of the launching points for Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion). That's mainly because Theodor Herzl, as a successful journalist, was so much better at public relations, and it was his congress, 15 years later in Basel, that would go down in history as "The First Zionist Congress."**
- **I was reading about the Focșani Conference this week, when it struck me that the State of Israel, now in its 70th year, has by now been around longer than Zionism, which existed for 66 years, between 1882 and the declaration of Israel's independence in 1948. On that Friday afternoon, when the British Mandate ended and David Ben Gurion announced in the old Tel Aviv Museum the founding of Israel, Zionism ended, having fulfilled its purpose of establishing a Jewish nation-state. As I was reading, one of the periodical flurries of indignation was taking place in the wake of another ridiculous statement from the government. This time it was the the Ministry for Strategic Affairs's publication of a blacklist of 20 boycott-supporting organizations whose members may be barred from entering Israel.**
- **I'm not going to dwell here on the dual ironies of the government claiming Israel is a functioning democracy while denying entry to its critics, and the wailing from those who want to boycott an entire country and visit it at the same time. I've scant expectations of either side making any logical or moral sense. But the by-now-standard reaction from the opponents of every latest wheeze by the government still mystifies me.**
- **Every new statement or law or policy from a government minister nowadays results in another wave of tweets, Facebook statuses, blog-posts and op-eds in serious newspapers pronouncing the "death of Zionism" and offering laborious explanations why the writer is "no longer a Zionist." It's mystifying because very few of the writers are over 70 and therefore could never have been Zionists to begin with.**
- **I've had a few conversations in recent months with some of the "ex-Zionists", and in every case, their problem isn't with a movement that was born 135 years ago. Their problem is with the latest racist law going through the Knesset, deportation of African asylum-seekers, discrimination against non-Jewish citizens and non-Orthodox Jews, the killing or arrest of a Palestinian teenager in the West Bank, the ongoing iniquities of the occupation and the gradual erosion of Israeli democracy.**
- **"I no longer believe in Zionism" seems to have become just another way of saying "I'm thoroughly pissed-off by the policies of successive Israeli governments and have lost any hope of it changing in the foreseeable future." I get it. "The death of Zionism" is fashionable in some circles. It fits in a handy tweet and "Why I stopped being a Zionist" as a headline is clickbait. But it's meaningless. Despite the -ism in its name, Zionism was never an ideology, it was a program. For the 66 years of its existence there were heated debates over Zionism's**

justification, objectives and the best means for achieving them. They ended on May 14, 1948, when an independent Jewish state was established on part of the ancient homeland.

- The implications of Israel's establishment and its historic role as an exclusive haven for Jews need to be addressed. But these are contemporary questions of security, borders, human rights, immigration policy, state and religion, not a debate on the validity of Zionism. That was resolved nearly 70 years ago and has no relevance today.
- We can all have an intense discussion and come to the conclusion that Zionism was a mistake, but that won't wish away Israel's existence or solve any of its problems. There are nearly 200 sovereign states around the world, the majority of them even younger than Israel. Agonizing over the controversial circumstances leading to their formation are fascinating exercises in history, but they won't change the fact that each of these countries now exist in their current state.
- Many of those on the left who are now denying they are Zionists would probably approve wholeheartedly of the intellectuals of Brit Shalom who, in the 1920s, called for a bi-national Jewish-Arab state in Mandatory Palestine and accused the rest of the Zionist establishment of perverting Herzl's vision. The enlightened German-born professors who founded both Brit Shalom and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem claimed to be the "true Zionists."
- In an alternative history, where Brit Shalom had found sufficient support among Arabs and Jews for their aspirations and we were living today in bi-national state, today's ex-Zionists would have been proud to call themselves Zionists. But events worked out differently, and the Zionist program took a different course. Brit Shalom disbanded in 1933, after failing to find either Jewish or Arab interlocutors. I suppose today's "ex-Zionists" could claim that Zionism "died" then. But it still has no relevance to today's issues.
- Like most phenomena on the left, the renunciation of Zionism is mirrored on the far-right. 12 years ago, in the wake of Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the dismantlement of settlements there and in Northern Samaria, there was a wave of "anti-Zionism" among fundamentalist settlers. The Zionist state had uprooted Jews from their land and had to be replaced by a truly God-fearing Jewish kingdom. Similar cries were heard during the pullback from Sinai in 1982 and the early years of the Oslo process.
- People of little faith. All they had to do was wait a few years for the emergence of the current government and the return of "their" kind of Zionism to the land. Which begs the question of leftist ex-Zionists: When the pendulum swings back and, one day, the left regains power in Israel and a solution with the Palestinians is finally reached and the occupation ends, will you become Zionists once again?
- But the fact that the dominant political ideology today in Israel is right-wing nationalism says nothing about Zionism. When Zionism actually existed, they were a minor and often ostracized stream, not much more influential than Brit Shalom. Jabotinsky's Revisionists felt so marginalized by the Zionist mainstream that they left the World Zionist Organization and set up their own New Zionist Organization.
- In 1947, when the United Nations was about to vote on the partition of Palestine to two Jewish and Arab states, it wasn't just the Arabs who were against. The United Zionists-Revisionists of America published a full-page ad in the New York Times, denouncing the UN resolution as "the end of the great Zionist dream." One of those who drafted and signed the ad was "Dr B.

Netanyahu." Those pronouncing today the death of Zionism will be heartened to learn that Bibi's father announced its demise 70 years before them.

- Announcing that you've had it with Zionism, whether from left or right, is infantile virtue-signaling – a substitute to seriously contending with the very immediate problems facing Israel. The only way you can abandon Zionism is if you are at least 85 and were politically active when Zionism was still relevant.
- Of course we can, and probably should, have the discussion of what true Zionism is - the nativist nationalism of Israel's current political leaders or, as Barak Obama put in September 2016 in his eulogy of Shimon Peres: "Justice and hope are at the heart of the Zionist idea." But it's no more than a historical conversation, a distraction from present problems. Sure, a 'World Zionist Organization' still exists, but it's only function since 1948 has been to provide salaries for political cronies. They are about relevant to life in Israel as The Flat Earth Society.
- I'm Jewish and Israeli and believe we can fix Israel's massive problems and injustices, but I'm not a Zionist, in the same way I'm not a Pharisee, a Roundhead or an Abolitionist. I may have been had I lived in the relevant period in history, but I can't belong to, or leave, a movement whose purpose ended long before I was born.

SUMMARY: "I no longer believe in Zionism" seems to have become just another way of saying "I'm thoroughly pissed-off by the policies of successive Israeli governments and have lost any hope of it changing in the foreseeable future." I get it. "The death of Zionism" is fashionable in some circles. It fits in a handy tweet and "Why I stopped being a Zionist" as a headline is clickbait. But it's meaningless. Despite the -ism in its name, Zionism was never an ideology, it was a program. For the 66 years of its existence there were heated debates over Zionism's justification, objectives and the best means for achieving them. They ended on May 14, 1948, when an independent Jewish state was established on part of the ancient homeland.