



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Tuesday, January 2

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News Excerpts

January 2, 2018

Ha'aretz

Tougher Conditions for Separating Neighborhoods in JLM

The Knesset approved the updated text of a bill early Tuesday morning that originally discussed the possibility of allowing the division of Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods into an independent municipal authority. The updated text makes it harder for splits to be made without the Knesset's approval. The bill passed with 64 MK's in favor of the bill and 52 against. Those who wrote the law toughened the wording surrounding the main clauses in response to political pressure. The updated text states that, contrary to the original law, the prime minister must win the support of Knesset before he can approve any changes to the municipality. See also, ["In late-night vote, Knesset passes law to hinder East Jerusalem withdrawal" \(Time of Israel\)](#)

i24 News

IDF Strike Hamas Facility in Response for Rocket Fire

Israeli fighter jets early on Tuesday bombed a Hamas facility in the Gaza Strip in retaliation for a rocket fired at Israel from the coastal enclave hours earlier. "In response to the rocket fired towards Israel earlier this evening, an IAF aircraft targeted a military compound belonging to the terrorist organization Hamas in southern Gaza," the military spokesperson said in a statement, adding that Israel "holds Hamas accountable for events in Gaza." A rocket fired from the Gaza Strip exploded in an open area in Southern Israel on Monday, no damage and no casualties were reported according to the police. The projectile fell in within the territory of one of Eshkol's regional communities, in the Western Negev. See also, ["Israel Strikes Hamas Compound in Gaza in Response to Earlier Rocket Fire" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Ynet News

PM Wishes Success to Iran Protesters, Denies Involvement

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised Iranian anti-government protesters on Monday, while denying as "laughable" Tehran's apparent accusations that Israel was behind the demonstrations. Five days of protests in Iran have posed the boldest challenge to its clerical leadership since pro-reform unrest in 2009. At least 12 people have been reported killed as some confrontations with police turned violent. "I wish the Iranian people success in their noble quest for freedom," Netanyahu said in a video posted on his Facebook page. Netanyahu also said Rouhani's suggestion that Israel was involved was "not only false—it's laughable". See also, ["Ex-Mossad chief Halevy: Don't stir cauldron in Tehran" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Lapid, Livni,: Decision by Likud Body a 'Gift' to BDS

Netanyahu's Likud party aided efforts to boycott, divest, and sanction Israel around the world when it passed a resolution calling for sovereignty in Judea and Samaria, Yesh Atid chairman Yair Lapid and Hatnua leader Tzipi Livni said Monday. The non-binding resolution calls upon the elected officials of the Likud to work towards free construction and application of Israeli law and sovereignty in all liberated areas of settlement in Judea and Samaria. It does not contain the word annexation, nor was that word mentioned in the two-hour event.

Reuters

Israel Indicts Palestinian Teenage Girl Tamimi

Israel indicted a 16-year-old Palestinian girl on Monday on charges including assault for punching an Israeli soldier in the face two weeks ago, an incident which made her into a hero for Palestinians and was seen as humiliating by right-wing Israelis. Israel has held Ahed Tamimi since arresting her three days after she was filmed punching the soldier at the entrance to her family home in a village in the occupied West Bank. The confrontation took place after what Israel says was a stone-throwing assault on its troops. The case has made her into such a potent symbol for Palestinians that a commentator in Israeli left-wing newspaper Haaretz said Israel risked turning her into the “Palestinian Joan of Arc”. Right-wing Israelis, meanwhile, have debated whether the soldier had appeared weak by opting not to strike back. The Israeli army said he “acted professionally” by showing restraint. See also, [“Palestinian woman who slapped IDF soldiers charged with assault” \(JTA\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

MK’s Wife’s Death Becomes Political

The death of Likud MK Yehudah Glick’s wife Yaffa turned into the center of a political debate Monday, as Glick’s absence exacerbated an already tight vote count. Late Monday, Shas and UTJ decided to postpone the vote on the “mini-markets bill” – meant to curb further store openings on Shabbat – until next week, in light of Glick’s absence and that of Religious Affairs Minister David Azoulay, who was hospitalized and whose doctor did not permit him to attend the vote. The coalition planned to put several controversial bills to a vote Monday night: The “primaries bill,” funding incumbent MKs’ campaigns; the “Jerusalem bill,” requiring an 80 MK-minimum vote to concede parts of the capital; and the “mini-markets bill.” The opposition submitted many objections to each bill on the agenda, adding up to a plenum meeting that was expected to last from Monday afternoon until Tuesday, only a week after a two-day filibuster. See also, [“Supermarkets Bill vote postponed to next week” \(Ynet News\)](#)

Times of Israel

White House Denies Pence’s Trip to Israel Canceled

US Vice President Mike Pence’s office on Monday denied reports that a planned trip to Israel had been delayed indefinitely beyond January. Responding to a tweet from The Associated Press saying, “Pence visit to Israel postponed again,” the vice president’s press secretary Alyssa Farah wrote, “This report is false. The VP is still going to Israel as planned.” In addition, Pence’s deputy chief of staff Jarrod Agen tweeted, “As we’ve said, @VP Pence is traveling to Israel & Egypt later this month. Reports otherwise are wrong. There’s a false story circulating of a delay. It’s not true.”

Ha’aretz

Netanyahus Appear on IRS List of Israelis With U.S. Assets

Prime Minister Netanyahu and his wife Sara had financial assets in the United States until 2015 at least, according to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service’s list of Israeli citizens with active bank accounts for 2014 and 2015. The list was given to the Israel Tax Authority last year as part of an agreement between the two countries to share tax-related data in their war against tax evasion and the black market. The fact that the couple appear on the list doesn’t signal that they are suspected of evading taxes, but Israeli authorities are expected to use the list to check whether Israelis have been correctly reporting on their foreign holdings.

The Work of the Wicked

By Ben Dror Yemini, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- **Minister Gilad Erdan called on the members of the Likud Central Committee to attend a special meeting that was held last night 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 the Jewish residents who live there can at long last enjoy Israeli law.” I listened to his statements and rubbed my ears. Is that Erdan?**
- **Erdan is the strategic affairs minister. The fight against anti-Israel propaganda is under his purview. He knows that one of the primary arguments made by those propagandists is that Israel is an apartheid regime that applies two separate sets of laws to different populations. Albeit in practice, Israeli law is applied in any event in the settlements and on the settlers. But there is a difference between laws that are applied in keeping with orders issued by the military governor as a temporary measure, and primary legislation by the Knesset. When the demand to apply Israeli law is coupled with a demand to allow “free construction in all of Judea and Samaria,” who needs the BDS movement anymore? The work of the wicked is being done by top members of the Likud.**
- **Oddly enough, there is only one person, or nearly only one person, who has faced off against that march of folly, and he too, most certainly, has a hard time understanding the efforts to shackle him. His name is Binyamin Netanyahu. It isn’t that the prime minister has turned into a leftist, but he knows exactly what the all countries that are friendly to Israel think. He knows that the US administration also views the settlements as a vexing problem that needs to be stopped.**
- **Spokespersons from the right wing as a whole and from the Likud in particular tend to describe the current US administration as being enthusiastically supportive of every Israeli whim. Trump’s declaration about Jerusalem has whetted their appetite. Except when the issue in question is settlements, they are being utterly disingenuous. Trump personally said that the continued expansion of the Israeli settlement enterprise is damaging to the peace process, and an official statement that was issued by the US administration described the construction of new settlements and the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders as unhelpful. That was putting things diplomatically. In practice, the current administration is opposed to the expansion of settlements just like the previous administrations.**
- **The thing is that there’s no need for either the US administration or the peace process, which has disappeared without a trace, to know what is good for Israel. International experience clearly teaches us that mixing hostile populations is a sure recipe for a bloody conflict. The right is leading us into precisely that kind of disaster. The result will be one large state that will be neither Jewish nor democratic, but which will be riven by conflict and soaked in blood. It will be that kind of country regardless of whether full rights are given to the Palestinians—as the extreme left wing and some of the members of the right want—or without full rights to the Palestinians, as some on the right want.**
- **Nine hundred members of the Likud Central Committee signed the petition to hold the special meeting in order to approve a resolution calling for Israeli law to be applied and to allow unfettered construction. Top Likud officials are convinced that there is no choice but to veer to**

the right since that is the direction that is supported by the registered Likud members and figures in the Likud institutions, even if not by the Likud voters. Which means that the Likud needs to approve resolutions that contradict the prime minister's position and, more importantly, which contradict Israel's national interest, in order to satisfy the raging appetite of some Likud Central Committee members and to approve an ever-increasing list of nationalist resolutions, even if they run contrary to the national interest.

- There are moments when leadership is required. Gilad Erdan could have been the person to say something about Israel's real national interests, precisely because of his job and his responsibility for fighting the anti-Israel propaganda. He didn't have to adopt the left wing's positions, but should have made a clear statement against this latest initiative. A few days ago Erdan received tens of millions of shekels more to finance the fight against the effort to boycott Israel. But with one decision that is pure folly, the Likud decided to give the BDS movement a gift that is worth far more.

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The U.S. and Israel Just Admitted the Iran Deal Is Worth Keeping

By Eric Levitz is a political columnist at New York magazine

- Earlier this month, senior U.S. and Israeli officials met at the White House to develop a plan for countering Iranian activity in the Middle East. On Thursday, Axios got a copy of the blueprint they arrived at. The document is mostly a snoozer — it will surprise no one that America and Israel would like to undermine Iran’s ballistic-missile program and limit its influence in Syria and Lebanon. But there is one dollop of hot sauce on this nothing burger: a tacit confirmation that the American and Israeli governments believe the Iran nuclear agreement is worth preserving. Here is one of the four goals contained in the “joint strategic work plan,” according to Axios:
- Covert and diplomatic action to block Iran’s path to nuclear weapons – according to the U.S. official this working group will deal with diplomatic steps that can be taken as part of the Iran nuclear deal to further monitor and verify that Iran is not violating the deal. It also includes diplomatic steps outside of the nuclear deal to put more pressure on Iran. The working group will deal with possible covert steps against the Iranian nuclear program.
- On one level, this is unsurprising. National security adviser H.R. McMaster, Defense Secretary James Mattis, and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have all said that unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA (the technical name of the Iran agreement) is not in America’s national interest. And Israel’s defense establishment has been broadly supportive of the deal. Which makes sense: According to international inspectors, Iran is complying with the JCPOA, and thus, a supposedly “existential” threat to the Jewish state has been neutralized. Further, a unilateral U.S. withdrawal — despite Iranian compliance — would nullify America’s diplomatic credibility, and alienate the U.S. (even further) from its core European allies.
- And yet, President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu have been unrelenting in their criticism of the agreement — with the former painting it as a borderline treasonous giveaway to Iranian terrorists, and the latter as a scam that will provide Tehran with “as many as 100 nuclear bombs” in “a few years’ time.” In this context, the fact that both nations treat the deal as a vital tool in official strategic documents is noteworthy. It would seem to suggest that American and Israeli opposition to JCPOA is just for show.
- But then, of course, Donald Trump is not above making hugely consequential policy decisions — over the objections of his top advisers — just for show (see: climate accord, Paris). And the coming month will test the president’s tolerance for putting strategic wisdom above political posturing. The Iran agreement requires the American president to issue temporary waivers of U.S. sanctions against Iran every 120 days. Meanwhile, the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, passed by Congress in 2015, requires Trump to certify that Iran is meeting its obligations under the agreement every 90 days. Trump will run into deadlines for both these actions in mid-January.
- The waiver and certification requirements could very well prove fatal to the JCPOA. The president’s foreign-policy team kept him from sabotaging the Iran deal for most of 2017. But the indignity of having to formally acknowledge the agreement’s success (which he had spent his

entire campaign denying) — and actively abet sanctions relief for Iran (which he had spent his entire campaign decrying) — was ultimately more than Trump could stand. In October, the president refused to certify the deal, and called on Congress and America’s European allies to amend the agreement’s weaknesses.

- That decision didn’t immediately impact the JCPOA — the agreement doesn’t actually require Trump to certify Iranian compliance every 90 days, only U.S. law does. But Trump warned in October that “[i]n the event we are not able to reach a solution working with Congress and our allies, then the agreement will be terminated.”
- Congressional leaders are currently working to provide Trump with a fig leaf — some purely symbolic legislation that allows him to declare victory and leave the Iran deal in peace. But that effort is looking awfully precarious, as Politico’s Michael Crowley reports:
 - McMaster has met with Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) and the committee’s ranking Democrat, Ben Cardin of Maryland, to discuss potential legislation that might appease Trump. As the year wound down, Cardin and Corker continued discussions about what such legislation could look like.
 - Congressional sources said the goal is to find language that would take a hard line on Iran — but on non-nuclear issues, so as not to violate the deal’s terms, which prohibit the imposition of new conditions on Iran’s nuclear program after the deal was concluded.
 - ... A congressional measure “may convince Trump to somehow say he has changed the conversation and he may not take any precipitous action in the near term,” said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, a nonprofit Washington group that strongly supports the nuclear agreement.
 - ... But Corker and Cardin will have little time after Congress reconvenes to craft language before the certification and sanctions waiver deadlines arrive.
- To review: Every major European nation, the top national security experts in the U.S. and Israeli governments, and the congressional leadership of both of America’s political parties all agree that it would be a disaster for Trump to unilaterally withdraw from the Iran deal — but the president could very well do so anyway, unless Congress passes legislation that makes preserving the deal less injurious to his ego by mid-January.

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