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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, February 2

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News Excerpts

February 2, 2018

Times of Israel

Israel Strikes Hamas Position After Rocket fired from Gaza

Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a Hamas position in the northern Gaza Strip early Friday morning in response to a rocket attack several hours earlier, the army said. "The IDF sees the Hamas terror group as the sole party responsible for what takes place in the Gaza Strip and for what emanates from it," an IDF spokesperson said. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage in the strike. It wasn't clear whether the rocket fired from the Gaza Strip toward Israel Thursday night had landed in Israeli territory, the army said earlier. No rocket sirens were triggered, indicating the projectile was not headed for a populated area in Israel. See also, ["Israeli jet strikes Hamas position in retaliation for rocket fire" \(i24 News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

E.U. To U.S.: 'You Can't Solve the IL-Pal' Conflict Alone'

The United States cannot be the sole broker for a peace deal between the Israelis and Palestinians, the European Union warned on Wednesday when high level representatives from the EU and the US met in Brussels. "If I can put it in the headline: Nothing without the United States, nothing with the United States alone," EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said. "Any framework for negotiations must be multilateral and must involve all players," she continued, adding that "a process without one or the other would simply not work, would simply not be realistic." See also, ["EU urges US not to go it alone with Israel-Palestine peace efforts" \(The National\)](#)

Ynet News

Polish PM: Poland Will Never Limit Holocaust Debate

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said on Thursday that Poland would never limit the freedom to debate the Holocaust and that Warsaw understood Israel's emotions about the issue. "We will never curb the freedom of the Holocaust debate. We owe that to all those who experienced it," Morawiecki said on the Polish state television TVP. "We understand the emotions of Israel. We need a lot of work to make our common, often complicated, history possible to tell together." Morawiecki's remarks came in the wake of Polish lawmakers' overwhelming approval of draft legislation penalizing suggestions of any complicity by Poland in the Nazi Holocaust on its soil during World War Two, defying criticism by Israel and the US. See also, ["Polish PM cites shared Nazi horrors to ease speech law anger" \(Washington Post\)](#)

AP

Lebanon Blasts Israel over Oil Exploration Near Border

Lebanon's energy minister vowed Thursday that Beirut will go ahead with oil and gas exploration near its maritime border with Israel, despite Israeli claims to the field that provoked wide condemnation in the tiny Arab country. Cesar Abi Khalil's comments to The Associated Press came a day after Israel's defense minister described as "very provocative" Lebanon's offshore oil and gas exploration on the countries' maritime border and suggested that Lebanon had sought bids from international companies for a gas field "which is by all accounts ours." The Israeli official's comments drew sharp condemnation from the militant Hezbollah group and Lebanese officials, including Prime Minister Saad Hariri, a Western ally, who described Lieberman's comments as a "provocation that Lebanon rejects."

Qatari FM: 'We're Building Good Relations' w. Jewish Communities

Qatar's foreign minister reacted publicly on Thursday to the recent wave of visits by leaders of U.S. Jewish organizations to his country at the invitation of the ruling Emir. In reply to a question from Haaretz on the subject, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani confirmed the visits and said his country does not discriminate on the basis of religion or ethnicity. "All of them are welcome and we are building good relations with them," he added. Al-Thani spoke at an event hosted by the American Enterprise Institute focused on the crisis in the Gulf and the partial blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia on his country. He is visiting Washington this week as part of a senior Qatari delegation holding strategic talks with the Trump administration. See also, ["Why Did ZOA's Morton Klein Go to Qatar? 'I Talked With the Emir About Hamas and Al Jazeera'" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Milchan's Aide: Sara Netanyahu Asked Gifts Be Inconspicuous

Hadas Klein, the personal assistant of Arnon Milchan, testified this week in the Case 100 investigation concerning alleged illicit gifts received by the Netanyahu family. Channel 2 reported Thursday evening that Klein and other aides of Milchan were asked by Sara Netanyahu to place the gifts in dark, sealed bags so they cannot be seen. According to the report, Klein testified that Sara Netanyahu was very nervous and behaved in a very systematic fashion during the gift transfers. She asked that the bags be completely sealed. Owing to her connections with businessmen Arnon Milchan and James Packer, Hadas Klein developed a relationship with the Netanyahu's and her testimony is central to the case. Her testimony is considered reliable and is not suspected of any wrongdoing, as she only handled the practical matters related to the gifts.

Bill to Ban Circumcision Introduced in Iceland's Parliament

Lawmakers from four political parties in Iceland introduced a bill in parliament that would ban the nonmedical circumcision of boys younger than 18 and impose imprisonment of up to six years on offenders. Members of the ruling Left Green Movement, the Progressive Party, People's Party and the Pirate Party submitted the bill to the Albingi on Tuesday, the RUV news site reported. Together, the parties account for 46 percent of the parliament's 63 seats. The measure cites the prohibition of female genital mutilation in 2005, arguing a similar prohibition is necessary for males. The report did not say when the bill would come to a vote. See also, ["Iceland MPs propose ban on circumcision of boys" \(Independent\)](#)

Haim Gouri, 'Nation's Contemporary Poet,' Laid to Rest

Haim Gouri, poet, novelist, journalist and Israel Prize laureate, was buried on Thursday in Jerusalem's Har Hamenuhot cemetery, in a plot reserved for the city's honorary citizens. Earlier in the day his body lay in state in the Jerusalem Theater, where hundreds of people came to pay their respects. President Reuven Rivlin eulogized Gouri at a ceremony in the theater plaza at midday, saying Gouri was "the nation's contemporary national poet." "Here lie our bodies, our faces have changed, we're not breathing," lamented Rivlin, quoting from one of Gouri's best known poems, "Here Lie Our Bodies." Gouri had dedicated it to the "Lamed Hei," the convoy of 35 Haganah soldiers ambushed and killed during an attempt to supply the kibbutzim of the Etzion Bloc in 1948, and helped immortalize the story in the annals of Israeli history.

A Dangerous Course Israel Should Avoid

By Danny Yatom, former director general of the Mossad and Amnon Reshef, former IDF major general

- When Vice President Mike Pence spoke to the Knesset on Jan. 22, legislators who oppose a two-state solution sent a clear signal that they have taken President Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital as a green light to proceed with initiatives to annex portions of the West Bank. The signal came in two parts: As Mr. Pence reiterated America’s commitment to Israeli-Palestinian peace, every member of the governing right-wing coalition stayed silent while opposition legislators rose to applaud. More stunningly, the Knesset’s speaker, Yuli Edelstein, declared that Israel will “develop the whole of the country, including Judea and Samaria,” referring to the biblical names for the entire West Bank.
- But none of the legislative initiatives toward that goal addresses the implications for Israel’s security that would come with them. That is a potentially fatal lapse, because what now seems to be under serious consideration would have disastrous consequences for Israel’s security and would undermine American interests throughout the Middle East.
- It is no accident that none of the proposals suggests annexing the entire West Bank. Even the most zealous legislators realize that absorbing all of the West Bank’s 2.7 million Palestinians would threaten Israel’s existence as a Jewish and democratic state. Consequently, those seeking to block prospects for separation from the Palestinians into two states look for a “luxurious annexation”: absorb as much of the land, with as little of the population, as possible.
- Competing proposals put forward by the end of January included annexing all Jewish settlements in the West Bank without touching areas populated by Palestinians. Another would annex the Gush Etzion and Ariel settlement blocs plus the Jordan Valley. Yet another would create a region called “Greater Jerusalem.”
- The most popular among annexationists was perhaps the most extreme: Education Minister Naftali Bennett’s proposal calling for the annexation of “only” the 60 percent of West Bank land designated Area C (Israel’s major settlement blocs now occupy about 7 percent of Area C). The area surrounds 169 “islands” of Palestinian towns (called Area A) and villages (Area B). Spread throughout Area C and in isolation from one another, these disconnected 169 communities, which constitute the remaining 40 percent of West Bank land, would not be annexed.
- That’s the plan. But how would it work? What would be the fate of the 300,000 Palestinians now living in Area C? Logic dictates that Israel would have to offer them citizenship or a permanent residence status equal to that of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. Either status would have to bring free movement throughout Israel.
- Even though movement from the West Bank is restricted by a security barrier, a few terrorists even now manage to enter Israel. With Area C annexed, identifying the few bad guys seeking to kill Israelis among the 300,000 new Palestinian Israelis from Area C (who would have unfettered access to Israel) would be difficult and costly.
- The physical barriers required to prevent residents of Areas A and B from filtering into Area C en route to Israel would be a security nightmare. The perimeter of each of the 169 Palestinian islands would have to be treated as an international border. To separate the annexed land from

the islands they encircle, 1,200 miles of new barriers would be required, along with hundreds of security gates that would allow controlled Palestinian movement from one enclave to another or from their enclaves to land of theirs in Area C (where 75 percent of the land is owned by Palestinians). The cost of building such a barrier system would be about \$10 billion, and constructing the gates, along with associated security measures, would cost far more.

- Palestinians would view Israeli annexation as a game-changer, foreclosing the option of a viable Palestinian state. The Palestinian Authority would collapse, and Israel would have to impose martial law and provide basic services to all Palestinians in the West Bank. Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman has estimated the annual cost of social security alone for Palestinians at \$6 billion. The yearly cost of health, education and other government services could be \$5 billion more.
- With the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian-Israeli security coordination would vanish. Many of the Palestinian troops would turn their weapons on Israelis, and the Palestinian street would most likely explode. This would leave Israel's military and its domestic security agency, Shin Bet, to take full security responsibility not just in the newly annexed Area C, but also for the millions of Palestinians in Areas A and B, where Palestinian security agencies now operate in close coordination with the Israel Defense Forces.
- This, in turn, would necessitate an increase in the I.D.F.'s presence throughout the West Bank; the standing army could not do the job alone and a mobilization of reserves would be required. This, too, would tax the Israeli economy and severely diminish military preparedness for other security threats, most directly from Syria, where Iran seeks to establish a presence, and Lebanon, where Hezbollah has become more experienced at combat.
- Arab governments might not be able to ignore potentially violent domestic expressions of outrage at Israel's actions. Accordingly, Israel's diplomatic and security relationships with Egypt and Jordan might not survive, and chances for additional relationships would vanish.
- Israel's relationship with the American Jewish community would also be jeopardized, with annexation attempts further alienating large numbers of American Jews and accelerating the alarming trend of Jewish youth distancing themselves from Israel — a trend that undermines a major pillar of Israel's long-term national security. And not only Israel would suffer. All of this would come back to haunt the Trump administration, by undermining its efforts to forge an American-led regional coalition harnessing the resources of Israel and moderate Arab states to check Iran's hegemonic ambitions — a goal that serves the strategic interests of all.
- We are both former Israeli generals, but we are not alone in these comments. They are based on the findings of a task force composed of members of a network of over 275 retired generals from all of Israel's security services, who retain the view that an eventual two-state solution is essential to Israel's security, as well as to its Jewish and democratic character.
- A two-state solution may not soon be in the cards. But preserving conditions for an eventual separation from the Palestinians must remain a primary Israeli strategic objective. No annexation fantasy can be allowed to undercut it. It is the height of irresponsibility for Israeli politicians to propose annexation and for Americans, if they care at all about Israel, to egg them on.

SUMMARY: Palestinians would view Israeli annexation as a game-changer, foreclosing the option of a viable Palestinian state. The Palestinian Authority would collapse, and Israel would have to impose martial law and provide basic services to all Palestinians in the West Bank. Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman has estimated the annual cost of social security alone for Palestinians at \$6 billion. The yearly cost of health, education and other government services could be \$5 billion more. With the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian-Israeli security coordination would vanish. Many of the Palestinian troops would turn their weapons on Israelis, and the Palestinian street would most likely explode. This would leave Israel's military and its domestic security agency, Shin Bet, to take full security responsibility not just in the newly annexed Area C, but also for the millions of Palestinians in Areas A and B, where Palestinian security agencies now operate in close coordination with the Israel Defense Forces.

Pence Let Netanyahu and Abbas Evade Negotiations

By Major-General (res.) Amiram Levin, former IDF Northern Command chief

- One could not but be impressed with US Vice President Mike Pence's warm embrace during his visit to Israel. Moving the American embassy to Jerusalem and the determination in the battle against the Iranian nuclear program and the terrorism Iran is spreading are important and welcome. Pence and President Donald Trump's appreciation and sympathy towards Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are sincere.
- But between all the hugs and the praise heaped on us, one could not ignore the fact that Pence repeated President Trump's policy, stating that only if both sides agree to advance the two-state solution—the US would help them move forward and reach peace agreements.
- Pence allowed both Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to evade negotiations, so each of them can keep sticking to his refusal and preventing progress.
- In his statement, Pence left Netanyahu with an escape route from the two-state solution and allowed the Israeli government to continue its passive cowardly approach, allowing the Palestinians to dictate our agenda and continue our dependence on Abbas' will, an old and discontented leader who has past his prime. Furthermore, Pence gave the Palestinians and Abbas the power and the keys to decide whether to move forward towards agreements or not.
- It's a shame Pence didn't urge the Knesset and the Israeli government in his speech to take responsibility and work courageously to advance the two-state solution. Something like: "You, the State of Israel and the Israeli society, which have established a state against all odds, which have built a strong society and an exemplary democracy here and overcome all your enemies, you are strong enough—even without the US—to fearlessly initiate and advance agreements to solve the conflict with the Palestinians, all the more so when the US president and the US have committed and are committed to your security at the highest possible level.
- "President Trump and I stand by your side with all our might. It's time to be brave, it's time for an historic act that will strengthen your security, bolster the wonderful democracy you have built here, and most importantly, keep wars and bloodshed away from the two sides, which have suffered enough.
- "President Trump proved his sincerity, determination and courage when he declared Jerusalem as Israel's capital (<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5052940,00.html>), and now he has promised to move the American embassy to Jerusalem before the end of 2019. Gentlemen, it's now your turn to prove your courage through action and move towards tough decisions. Stop being afraid and take responsibility for your people and for the people of the region."
- As long as the Netanyahu government remains fearful or unwilling to move towards agreements, we will likely keep enjoying supportive visits which always end with the Americans returning to America while we stay here for additional rounds of violence and bloodshed.
- We, the IDF, the security forces and the Israeli society are the strongest in the region. As the landlords, we must take responsibility for a solution. Not out of fear and not out of concern for the Palestinians, but in a bid to keep building a better society here and a better state with a solid

Jewish majority. Let's take our fate in our hands and stop blaming the stalemate on one of Abbas' delusional speeches.

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