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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Thursday, February 1*

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# News Excerpts

February 1, 2018

Associated Press

## **Israel Vows to Retain West Bank Control in Any Peace Deal**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday said Israel will retain security control over the Palestinians as part of any future peace deal, deepening Palestinian fears that Israel and the Trump administration are colluding on a proposal that will fall far short of their dreams of independence. In an awkward exchange, German foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel said his country is “very much in favor” of the two-state solution. “I was very thankful to hear that of course also the government of Israel wants to have two states, but (with secure) borders,” he said. Netanyahu broke in with a clarification, adding Israel’s “first condition,” would be to control security west of the Jordan River, the heartland of the Palestinians’ hoped-for state. “Whether or not it is defined as a state when we have the military control is another matter,” he said. That suggests Israel would prefer something most observers would more likely define as autonomy than independence — an arrangement that would have few if any equivalents in the world.

Ha’aretz

## **Israel Presents Plan for Palestinians, Demanding PA in Gaza**

Representatives of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the US participated in an emergency conference in Brussels on Wednesday of countries and organizations that provide financial support for Palestinians. Israel presented humanitarian assistance plans for the Gaza Strip, estimated to cost one billion dollars, which Israel asked the international community to fund. Israeli Regional Cooperation Minister Tzachi Hanegbi noted that implementation of the plan would require the PA to take responsibility for civilian life in Gaza. US Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt said that the US remains committed to advancing the peace process. The European Union foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, announced a \$53 million assistance package for the Palestinians, and said she would soon invite representatives of the Arab League to meet with her on the peace process under the leadership of Jordan and Egypt.

See also, [\*“Israel to allow generators into Gaza to ease power crisis” \(Times of Israel\)\*](#)

The New York Times

## **UN Examines 206 Companies Over Links to Settlements**

The United Nations rattled Israel on Wednesday by disclosing that it was examining more than 200 companies doing business with Israeli settlements but deferred naming them until it had completed a review of their activities. Of those identified, 143 were based in Israel and 22 were in the US, the UN said. It observed that “businesses play a central role in furthering the establishment, maintenance and expansion of Israeli settlements” and said that they should consider whether it was possible to operate in such an environment in a manner that met their obligation to respect human rights.

Jerusalem Post

## **US Classifies Hamas Chief Haniyeh as Global Terrorist**

The US has designated Hamas Politburo Chief Ismail Haniyeh as a specially designated global terrorist, becoming the first country outside of Israel to do so. Following Trump's recognition of Jerusalem, Haniyeh called for a violent uprising that he vowed would continue until "Jerusalem's liberation." The US Coordinator for Counterterrorism said the consequences of the new designation which aims to impede terrorist funding, would be "significant."

Associated Press

## **Netanyahu Corruption Probe in 'Final Stretch'**

Israel's attorney general says an investigation looking into two corruption allegations against Netanyahu is in its "final stretch." Avichai Mandelblit says dozens of witnesses have been questioned in various countries as part of the probe, and authorities will "not be afraid to take difficult decisions" if needed. Netanyahu has denied wrongdoing and has dismissed the accusations as a witch hunt orchestrated by a hostile media.

Times of Israel

## **Cabinet to Vote on Steps to Authorize Illegal Outpost**

The Israeli cabinet will vote on Sunday on a proposal that would begin the process of legalizing the Havat Gilad outpost, less than a month after the murder of resident Raziel Shevach, the Defense Ministry announced Wednesday. If adopted by the cabinet, the proposal would authorize the defense minister to instruct relevant government bodies to examine the legal aspects of recognizing Havat Gilad as an official settlement.

Jerusalem Post

## **'Multicultural' Bill Responds to Jewish State Proposal**

A new bill titled "Basic Law: Israel – A democratic, multicultural and egalitarian state," was proposed by Joint List MK Yousef Jabareen this week to serve as his response to the Jewish nation-state bill. "Instead of dark ideas promoting... ethnic superiority for Jews, I propose enlightened ideas of equal citizenship," Jabareen argued. Opponents to the Jewish state bill have raised concerns about certain elements, such as one saying the Supreme Court should consider Jewish tradition if there is a case with no legal precedent.

AFP

## **Israel Sends 14-Year-Old Palestinian Girl to Gaza**

A Palestinian teenager from the West Bank arrested by Israel was sent to the Gaza Strip despite never having been there in her life, an NGO said Wednesday. Israeli rights group HaMoked said the 14-year-old girl, named only as Ghada, was arrested in Jerusalem on January 13 without a permit while visiting the city. A spokesman for the Israel Prison Service said they were examining the case.

## The Road to an Israeli-Palestinian Deal is Vanishing

By David Ignatius, Columnist, Washington Post

- Vered Ben-Saadon says she and her husband felt a sense of biblical mission to cultivate “part of the land of Israel” when they founded their winery here at a settlement about 30 miles north of Jerusalem. And she appears to have no intention of leaving, regardless of what peace negotiators may say. “The two-state solution is not relevant anymore,” she says, answering questions as she offers visitors glasses of the gewurztraminer and cabernet sauvignon she and her husband have produced at their Tura Winery here. She hopes President Trump will come visit their settlement one day.
- The Ben-Saadon family has built a thriving business, with wine production growing from 1,200 bottles a year in 2003 to 100,000 bottles last year. The Tura website says their presence fulfills a prophecy from the Book of Jeremiah: “Yet again shall you plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria.” Here in these rocky hills, you sense the collision between competing narratives about the Israeli-Palestinian problem: The Ben-Saadons believe this is Israel; the Arabs in the village just to the east surely think it’s Palestine. You come away with a conviction that the “ultimate deal,” as Trump calls his still-fuzzy vision of a peace agreement, isn’t going to happen. It’s too late, the parties are too dug into their positions, and there simply may not be enough land available for a viable Palestinian state. The visit with the Ben-Saadons on Monday was the most visceral moment in a tour of the West Bank organized by the Institute for National Security Studies, a think tank holding its annual conference in Tel Aviv this week.
- Our guide was Danny Tirza, a retired army colonel who for years was the chief mapmaker for Israeli negotiators, and who plotted the path of the separation wall that divides Israeli and Palestinian areas around Jerusalem. The eight-hour tour offered a brief dose of ground truth about problems that have gone unresolved since Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 war. I’d love to be wrong about the prospects for negotiations. Many Israeli speakers at the INSS conference argued that Israel’s survival as a Jewish democratic state requires a two-state solution. But the momentum is moving in the other direction, and the Trump administration’s gauzy talk of a deal has been undermined by its own actions.
- The space for compromise seems to be vanishing: After Trump’s decision in December to shelve long-standing U.S. policy and move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat warned: “The two-state solution is over.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud Party in December endorsed a nonbinding resolution urging annexation of parts of the West Bank and unlimited construction of settlements. Settlements may be the hardest problem on negotiators’ agendas, because the issue arouses such intense passions. According to a Haaretz investigation last year, more than 380,000 settlers now live in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem), over 40 percent of them outside major blocs. Even a

two-state advocate such as Avi Gabbay, the leader of the opposition Labor Party, told me that “evacuation [of settlers] back to Israel is something that Israeli society cannot bear.”

- Our tour stopped at Ariel, one of the larger settlements. It has the look of a well-scrubbed suburban town, perched atop a hillside. The settlement boasts a brand new “Mega Or” shopping mall and 45 factories in an adjacent industrial park. There’s even an Ariel University, drawing about 15,000 students. Mayor Eli Shaviro told us that the permanent population of Ariel is now about 25,000, but he hopes it will grow to 100,000 within the next five to 10 years. “We don’t foresee a negotiated settlement with the Arabs. That’s just the way it is,” he says. His goal for now is “coexistence,” which he says is improved by 3,000 Palestinians working at the industrial park, at wages four to five times what they could make in Palestinian areas.
- Earlier, just north of Jerusalem, we had gazed toward the Shuafat Palestinian refugee camp, bounded below by the separation wall. It’s called a “camp,” but it’s actually a cluster of grim-looking apartment buildings whose residents are descendants of Palestinians who fled Israel after the 1948 war. I visited Shuafat in 1982, and I recall it even then as a sad, sullen place whose residents dreamed of homes to which they would never return. A checkpoint for Palestinians to enter such areas was marked with a forbidding sign installed by the army: “The entrance for Israeli citizens is forbidden. Dangerous to your lives.” I fear the route to peace is obstructed, too.

## **Israeli Labor Chief's New Diplomatic Plan**

By Mazal Mualem, Columnist, AI Monitor

- In a breakfast meeting at the Jerusalem King David Hotel between German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, Zionist Camp leader Avi Gabbay and head of the opposition Isaac Herzog on Jan. 31, Gabriel expressed great interest in the new diplomatic plan being formulated in the Labor Party, the main partner within the Zionist Camp. While the Israeli public is currently occupied with the police investigation into the submarine affair involving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the German minister was more interested in the Facebook post Gabbay published Jan. 26, according to which the Labor Party convention will soon vote on a resolution regarding separation from the Palestinians for the sake of having a state with a clear Jewish majority.
- At the meeting Gabbay added details to the resolution being drafted, which is supposed to be authorized by the party's convention in the coming weeks, and Herzog urged Gabriel to put pressure on the Palestinians in order to move them out of the diplomatic deep freeze. What's interesting in this story is how what goes without saying — namely the support of the Labor Party for separation from the Palestinians, had become a headline. Similar decisions were accepted in the past, including in February 2016, under former party Chairman Herzog, when the party's convention accepted a comprehensive resolution on separation from the Palestinians as part of realizing the vision of two states.
- So what happened that only two years later Gabbay's intention to pass a similar resolution is seen as something new? The answer is to be found in Gabbay himself, who, after his election as head of the party seven months ago, let loose hawkish diplomatic declarations such as one in December that the unity of Jerusalem is more important than peace. These caused many who voted for Labor for years to flee the party. Thus, when Gabbay makes a headline identified with the traditional diplomatic left, this is an interesting and rather significant statement. To Gabbay's credit, it should be said that he has grasped that his drop in the polls stems from the insult to the traditional electorate of the Labor Party, which supports the two-state solution as a worldview, and he seeks to bring them back home. Now Gabbay is returning the diplomatic discourse to center stage and establishing an opposition between two worldviews: The suggestion to annex West Bank lands as passed by the Likud Center in December is in sharp contrast with the resolution on separation likely to be accepted by the Labor Party in the next few weeks.
- At a time when it seems that the diplomatic dialogue between left and right has diminished and the center-left has been following the right, Gabbay is raising high the diplomatic flag and creating an argument and difference in anticipation of the next election. A similar move was made on the eve of the 1992 election as Yitzhak Rabin, chairman of Labor, sharpened the diplomatic difference between him and the chairman of the Likud, Yitzhak Shamir. This was

seen in a televised debate between the two senior politicians, when Shamir asked Rabin, “Do you really want a Palestinian state within the land of Israel? With whom do you seek a territorial compromise?” While Israel was then dealing with the strong impression left by the first intifada, which began in 1987, Rabin was not afraid of the explosive question and answered, “I oppose a Palestinian state between us and Jordan. On the other hand, I don’t want 1.7 million Palestinians to be citizens of Israel.” That election was won by Rabin, who led the State of Israel to the Oslo Accord. This was his legacy after he was assassinated in 1995, and this was also the agenda of the Labor Party, which differentiated it from the Likud and the centrist parties that have been established over the years.

- In recent years the shine of this agenda has dimmed, as party leaders such as Shelly Yachimovich and then Gabbay tried to wink to the right in the thought of winning elections with the support of the soft right. This assumption proved to be a big mistake for Yachimovich in the 2013 election. Gabbay, luckily, has discovered this before the election, and he has time to make a round of improvements. The hard core of the Labor Party wants its leader to fly the flag of the two states without apology, or else leave the party, and if hard-core members did leave, Likud members would not be flowing to Labor to replace those who left.
- In the meantime, Gabbay is drafting the resolution he’ll bring to the convention. The date of the convention has not been set yet, since he also intends to bring to it a far-reaching suggestion regarding the structure of the party: opening of the convention to all party members. The significance of this move is that the 60,000 party members would have the status of convention members, and not only the 2,000 current delegates. Senior Labor sources have estimated that Gabbay would easily succeed in passing the diplomatic resolution with an overwhelming majority, but it’s not clear what would happen to the resolution that essentially means taking power from the hands of convention delegates. In any case the draft resolution regarding separation from the Palestinians that would be brought before the convention is a significant political move that signals the launch of a campaign meant to restore Gabbay and Labor as a diplomatic element and to reawaken this sentiment among the public. This in return should stop the collapse in the polls. Gabbay hopes that he will thus once again become a relevant player to lead the center-left camp as opposed to Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid.
- The draft decision under formation is the essence of what he wrote in his Facebook post: “Separation is the Zionist security, and national act we must realize, in order to keep the State of Israel Jewish and democratic within secure borders and with broad international support. ... This resolution not only stands as the basis of the worldview of the Labor Party and the Zionist Camp, but also reflects the position of most citizens of Israel. Our role as leaders is to persuade them that this is possible, that this is, first of all, in Israel's interest and that the alternative to this is the end of the Zionist project.” Gabbay said that although the partner isn’t perfect, Israel's leadership should show responsibility, and that he intends to sharpen the differences between him and the Likud headed by Netanyahu, which has moved to the extreme right arena.

- As previously mentioned, this is not a far-reaching statement. This is not former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's realignment plan on the eve of the 2006 election, which entailed a daring unilateral move. Gabbay expressed the conservative position of the Labor that was also adopted by Netanyahu in his 2009 Bar-Ilan speech: two states for two people. Gabbay isn't talking about a unilateral move but an agreement that would be reached as a result of negotiations. At a time when Yair Lapid is seen as right-lite, there seems to be a place and a real need in the political system for a party with a clear diplomatic agenda, even if it's accused of being "lefty."