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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Jerusalem Post

Court Bars Razing of Settler Outpost on Palestinian Land

In a historic first for the settlement movement, the Jerusalem District Court barred the IDF from evacuating the outpost of Mitzpe Kramim, even though it was built on private Palestinian property. The ruling stated that the presence of the small community on the outskirts of the Kochav Hashahar settlement was legal, contrary to High Court of Justice ruling in such cases, which have consistently upheld the principle that illegal settler building on private Palestinian property must be removed. The ruling falls in line with the legal understanding on which the Knesset approved the Settlement Regulation Law, which allows for the retroactive legalization of 4,000 settler homes on private Palestinian property and offers the Palestinian landowners monetary compensation.

Ha'aretz

Right-wing Lauds Court for Endorsing Legalized Outposts

Knesset members and ministers on the Israeli right applauded the Jerusalem court ruling on Tuesday. Knesset speaker Yuli Edelstein said, "I welcome this just, requisite ruling from the District Court in Jerusalem. We will continue to strengthen settlement in Israel!" Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked said "Anybody who settled with the permission of the state and in good faith shall not be evicted. The wrong done with the evacuation of Amona and Netiv Ha'avot shall not recur."

Times of Israel

Abbas Voices Support for Demilitarized Palestinian State

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday said he believed a future Palestinian state should be demilitarized, offering rare backing for a key Israeli demand. Abbas told a group of visiting Israeli academics, "I support a state along the 1967 borders without an army.... Instead of warplanes and tanks, I prefer to build schools and hospitals and allocate funds and resources to social institutions." Opposition leader Tzipi Livni confirmed that Abbas had voiced support for these elements during peace negotiations she held with him from 2013-2014.

Reuters

US Envoy Haley Questions Palestinian Refugee Numbers

US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley on Tuesday appeared to question the world body's count of Palestinian refugees. "We will be a donor if it (the UN Relief and Works Agency) reforms what it does ... if they actually change the number of refugees to an accurate account, we will look back at partnering them," Haley said. UNWRA says it provides services to about 5 million Palestinian refugees. Most are descendants from individuals who fled Palestine in the 1948 war that led to the creation of the state of Israel.

Palestinian Aid Critics Wary of Trump Cuts

After slashing economic and humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, the Trump administration is now reportedly considering narrowing the definition of who qualifies as a Palestinian refugee. The US hard line is sparking worries of a backlash even among some of Israel's staunchest supporters. "UNRWA needs to be reformed," said Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., who serves on the Senate foreign aid panel. "Cutting off aid is also not the solution." "We have to be a little careful," said Foreign Relations Committee Chair Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., who sits on both the Foreign Relations Committee and foreign aid spending panel, said the cuts "will lead to more desperation on the part of those people who live in Gaza and have the potential to produce further violence."

Plan for E. J'lem Schools is 'Israelization,' Critics Say

After 50 years of neglect, the Israeli government and the Jerusalem municipality are promising a revolution for East Jerusalem's schools via a five-year plan that starts this year. But East Jerusalem Palestinians are convinced the program's only goal is to rapidly replace the Palestinian curriculum with the Israeli one. They also say the plan doesn't address the main problem – a lack of classrooms. Ever since 1967, the East Jerusalem school system has suffered deep neglect. The state itself admitted to the High Court of Justice that there's a shortage of 2,000 classrooms, so residential apartments serve as improvised classrooms for thousands of students. Moreover, 20,000 school-aged children aren't registered with any school, and nobody knows if they're actually studying or not.

Women Arrested for Aiding Hamas in Hebron

Israel has arrested seven women who took part in a scheme to promote and aid the Hamas terror group in the West Bank city of Hebron, the Shin Bet security service said Tuesday. The women and two men also involved in the network were arrested over the last several weeks and have been accused of working in coordination with Hamas officials in Gaza as well as abroad in order to promote terror activity, the security service said in a statement. The network was allegedly used to transmit messages, transfer funds for terror activities, and coordinate operations.

Kahlon and Mnuchin Form Joint Sanctions Team

Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin agreed to set up a joint team for the enforcement of economic sanctions against Iran during their meeting in Washington on Tuesday. Kahlon said that "the sanctions on Iran contribute to removing a threat to Israel's security and to the security of the entire free world." In May, the US pulled out of the nuclear deal with Iran and sanctions were reimposed.

Trump's Rule-breaking Doctrine is an Optical Illusion

By Zvi Bar'el, Senior Columnist

- Breaking the rules is sometimes desirable, especially when the target is a failed idee fixe. An example of the latter is the Israeli idee fixe that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unsolvable because Israel has a radical right-wing government supported by an Arab-hating public that's inflamed by fear-mongering over the idea of creating a Palestinian state, which will inevitably be a terrorist state. Alternatively, there's the claim that there's no Palestinian partner in any case, so it doesn't matter what Israel's government does; even if it were a traitorous leftist government, the Palestinians would thwart any opportunity for peace, just as they have in the past. This idea has now hooked up with the rule-breaking doctrine hatched in the feverish brain of U.S. President Donald Trump, under which what was in the past is not what will be. Trump is doing a reboot and erasing the past. Jerusalem will become the capital of Israel, the number of Palestinian refugees will shrink to half a million, the United Nation's aid agency for Palestinian refugees will disappear and the settlements won't be an obstacle to peace.
- The problem is that America's effort to change the rules of the game are related solely to the method of resolving the conflict – not to its substance. The Americans seek to reduce the number of core problems from five to three or even two, while ignoring the fact that all these core problems are intertwined with each other. Ostensibly, Israel should be happy that Trump has removed Jerusalem from the agenda and plans to make the refugee problem evaporate. But Israel is actually the one that has built a defensive wall against the diplomatic process, in the form of an increasing number of core issues that need to be resolved. It is also the one that has insisted that there are no partial solutions, and that there will be no accord unless everything is agreed upon.
- Thus, even if mapping the borders and determining the status of the holy sites were the only core issues remaining on the list after the American filtering process – there's no way to solve them without determining, for instance, the status of the settlements. And it's impossible to reach any agreement on the settlements without an agreement on the holy sites, because the settlers and their supporters are the ones who are dictating Israel's national-religious agenda. Therefore, even if one tries, despite the difficulties, to seriously consider Trump's proposal, which relies on breaking the previous rules, it's impossible to see it as giving rise to a new and original idea. It doesn't obligate either Israel or the Palestinians to make substantive concessions; it won't change the composition of Israeli politics or society; and it offers no solution for Palestinian national aspirations, aside from the president's idiotic warning that one day, the prime minister of Israel will be named Mohammed.
- The optical illusion of demolishing two core issues, Jerusalem and the Palestinians, is like the blow Trump dealt Iran by quitting the nuclear deal. In both, destruction is the main result – or to be more accurate, the only one. But along with these acts of destruction, Trump is fomenting

another revolution: He himself has become a partner instead of a mediator, thereby shattering a long-standing axiom of U.S. policy. In so doing, he has freed Israel and the Palestinians of the burden of the diplomatic process, because Trump himself is the process. Both sides of the conflict are now trapped in a waiting game, for the deal of the century or the next damaging blow from the White House. They're exempt from having to make any response, because there aren't even any pieces to pick up. Ultimately, Trump has launched a mighty kick at the air. The refugees won't disappear, Jerusalem will continue to be a core issue, and the settlements will determine the map of the borders. Even those who think the Trump circus has destroyed any chance for peace can calm down. The idea of breaking the rules hasn't replaced the idee fixe of Israeli rejectionism. The latter remains in force.

Let the Palestinians Make Lemonade of Trump's Lemons

By Ron Ben Yishai, Analyst

- Cutting aid to the Palestinians, cutting funding to UNRWA, and the Trump administration's declaration that it does not recognize the Palestinian "right of return," are all welcomed steps, because they will force the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and other factions in the PLO to adopt a more practical view on a permanent resolution to the conflict. Perhaps these moves could even cause the Palestinians to recalculate their own steps and come back to the negotiating table with a paradigm that would be closer to something Israel would consider acceptable. But alongside the possibilities in these moves by Washington, we must first recognize the risks. The economic pressure, which is the result of cutting UNRWA's funding, will almost certainly cause a very serious and very real humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and to a lesser degree in Judea and Samaria as well. In addition, the Palestinian leadership's response to Trump's declaration, which pulls the rug out from under the international legitimacy for the Palestinian "right of return" demand, will almost certainly spark violence on Gaza and West Bank streets, mostly on the backdrop of the battle over the PA leadership in the wake of Abbas's departure.
- Therefore, if the US, Israel—and perhaps also the Quartet—want to leverage the funding cuts and the canceling the recognition for the Palestinian "right of return" in order to achieve a groundbreaking positive result, this process must be done gradually and be accompanied by supplementary economic moves. Washington needs to gradually cut the funds the Palestinians receive either directly or through UNRWA over 3-4 years in a way that allows the supplementary economic moves to be implemented on the ground, giving the Palestinians in Gaza and in Judea and Samaria alternative sources of income and employment. Otherwise, cutting the funding will, in short order, bring to a humanitarian crisis in the strip that Israel has a supreme political and security interest in preventing. Such a crisis will lead to security tensions that Hamas would either initiate or be dragged into—and the rest is known. A similar conflict could develop in Judea and Samaria as well. There won't be a humanitarian crisis, but the worsening unemployment situation will serve as another incentive for unrest, which has been bubbling under the surface anyway. It will start with street protests—and the rest is known here as well. It could end with another mini-intifada, or perhaps even a full-blown intifada.
- All of this could be avoided if the Trump administration announces a gradual reduction of funding, which will be done in tandem with a plan for economic investments and projects to establish electricity, water, health and education infrastructures in the strip and in Judea and Samaria, in order to replace the donations the Palestinians receive through UNRWA and other international bodies. Indirectly, such a "Marshall Plan" for Gaza and the West Bank could increase Palestinian motivation to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and create internal processes within Palestinian society to allow this. On such a backdrop, the US withdrawing its recognition of the Palestinian "right of return" won't lead to such serious unrest. The Gaza donor countries convened in Brussels Tuesday. This is an excellent opportunity to establish an

international consortium—including Arab states—that would also supervise and ensure the economic investments are not funneled by Hamas to its military wing and that the Palestinian education system doesn't teach incitement.

- Israel would be an active partner in such a consortium, but not as a regular member, rather a "facilitator." Meaning, the Israeli government won't fund or directly carry out the moves, but will do everything in its power to ensure the implementation of these moves will be done quickly through our ports and the border crossings under our control. Professional, engineering and mostly security consultation to the international consortium is necessary not just for effective implementation, but also to maintain our vital national security interests. We can talk and bargain over everything else after there's a calm in the Gaza Strip (a return to the post-Protective Edge understandings), which will allow this process to begin. Calm currently prevails in the West Bank, where this process can start immediately. Then, when this process is already underway, serious negotiations could start over the captives and the bodies of the soldiers that need to be returned home, as well as all kinds of "arrangements."