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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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Headlines:

- **Abbas: Trump Offered Me a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation**
- **Greenblatt: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Not the Core Regional Problem**
- **Colombian President: Recognition of Palestinian State 'Irreversible'**
- **UNRWA Head Signals US Defunding Won't Shut Down Agency**
- **Assad to Iranian FM: 'West has Failed'**
- **Israel Signals it Could Attack Iranian Weaponry in Iraq**
- **AG Decries Attacks on Media, in Veiled Criticism of Netanyahu**
- **Israeli Officials Pressured EU Chief to Nix Meeting with Arab-Israeli Lawmaker**

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "A Jordan-Palestinian Confederation—Why Not?"**
 - By Ben-Dror Yemini, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth
- **Ha'aretz: "Netanyahu's Education Policy: A Speech and a Brochure"**
 - By Raviv Drucker, political commentator at Channel 10

News Excerpts

September 4, 2018

Ha'aretz

Abbas: Trump Offered Me a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said Sunday that U.S. President Donald Trump's peace team offered him a political plan based on forming a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation. According to Abbas, he told the administration that he would only agree to such a plan if Israel is part of the suggested confederation. Abbas spoke in Ramallah at a meeting with Israeli left-wing movement Peace Now and Israeli lawmakers. "I was asked if I believe in a federation with Jordan," Abbas said about a talk he held with Trump's aide, Jared Kushner, and his Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt. "I answered: Yes, I want a confederation with Jordan and Israel. I have asked the Israelis if they would agree to such an offer." See also, ["Jordan rejects alleged US proposal for confederation with Palestinians" \(TOI\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Greenblatt: Israeli-Pal' Conflict Not the Core Regional Problem

Jason Greenblatt, US President Donald Trump's chief envoy to the Middle East peace process, disseminated sharp words in three different languages concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that it "is not, as many have claimed, the core conflict of the region." Greenblatt elaborated on the many threats in the Middle East: "solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not solve other conflicts in the region, including the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, terrorists in the Sinai Desert in Egypt, a tragic, continuing civil war in Syria, war in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, instability in Libya, and an Iranian regime that oppresses its own people and foments terrorism around the world." See also, ["Greenblatt: Trump wants a year of peace" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

I24 News

Colombian President: Recognition of Pal' State 'Irreversible'

Colombia's President Ivan Duque does not intend to reverse his predecessors decision to recognize a Palestinian state, he said on Monday. "This decision is irreversible. first of all because the president of the republic is the person designated by the constitution to manage foreign relations," Duque said in a radio interview. The Colombian president said he would be willing to discuss the matter in the Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee, but that the decision made by his predecessor should be honored. "Since the Oslo Accords, I always believed the solution for the Middle East is the two-state solution. This would help a lot. But obviously, the discussion has become more difficult every time" he said. See also, ["Colombian President Says Recognition of Palestine 'Irreversible'" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Times of Israel

UNRWA Head Signals US Defunding Won't Shut Down Agency

The head of the UN's Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), on Monday said he believes funding from other countries will make up a shortfall of some \$200 million after the United States withdrew its financial support for the organization. Speaking to The Washington Post, UNRWA commissioner-general Pierre Krahenbuhl said that since the US announced in January that it would be cutting its contributions to the agency, he was not given a "consolidated position on the reasons for it." See also, ["Trump's anti-Palestinian agenda will ultimately hurt Israel" \(Washington Post\)](#)

Assad to Iranian FM: 'West has Failed'

Syria's President Bashar Assad and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met on Monday to discuss recent developments in Syria and the region, and prepare for the upcoming summit with Russia, Iran and Turkey. According to a statement made by the Syrian Presidential Palace, the two leaders agreed that "the fact that the West has resorted to threats and pressure on Tehran and Damascus attests to its failure to implement the plans it has proposed." "the pressures exerted by some Western countries will not deter both countries from continuing to maintain their principles and securing the region," the statement read. During the meeting, the two leaders discussed recent developments in Syria and the region.

Reuters

Israel Signals it Could Attack Iranian Weaponry in Iraq

Israel signaled on Monday that it could attack suspected Iranian military assets in Iraq, as it has done with scores of air strikes in war-torn Syria. Citing Iranian, Iraqi and Western sources, Reuters reported last week that Iran had transferred short-range ballistic missiles to Shi'ite allies in Iraq in recent months. Tehran and Baghdad formally denied that report. Israel sees in Iran's regional expansion an attempt to open up new fronts against it. Israel has repeatedly launched attacks in Syria to prevent any entrenchment of Iranian forces helping Damascus in the war. "We are certainly monitoring everything that is happening in Syria and, regarding Iranian threats, we are not limiting ourselves just to Syrian territory. This also needs to be clear," said Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman. See also, ["DM: 'Israel will deal with Iranian threats everywhere' \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

AG Decries Attacks on Media, in Veiled Criticism of Netanyahu

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit lambasted attacks against the media on Monday, comparing its role to that of law enforcement, which he said was also under threat, amid a series of high-profile investigations of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Speaking at a conference organized by Hadashot TV news, Mandelblit said, "A free press is an essential component of a democratic society and it is of utmost importance to protect and guard it." He added that the role of the media was similar to that of the police and law enforcement. "One can say there is a comparison between the world of media and the world of law enforcement," he said. "With regard to both, it is obvious that independence of the constituent bodies is more important than anything else. See also, ["Mandelblit: Parties trying to undermine legitimacy of PM probes" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Officials Pressured EU Chief to Nix Meeting With Arab Lawmaker

Israeli officials pressured the European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini in recent weeks to cancel her meeting with Joint List chairman Ayman Odeh regarding the nation-state law, according to sources involved in arranging the Mogherini-Joint List meeting. The sources also claimed the Israeli officials tried to convince Mogherini to have a lower-level EU official meet with Odeh in her stead. However, the sources say, Mogherini said she would meet with representatives of the Joint List as she had with other Knesset parties, and hear from them about issues involving Arab citizens in Israel. See also, ["At airport, Jewish Home MK urges Arab colleagues to emigrate from Israel" \(TOI\)](#)

A Jordan-Palestinian Confederation—Why Not?

By Ben-Dror Yemini, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- When the British gained control over Palestine as part of the UN mandate, the area encompassed both sides of the Jordan River and covered some 117,000 square kilometers. However, in 1921 the British government drew a separation by cutting the eastern bank of the Jordan River, which became known as the Emirate of Transjordan or simply as Trans-Jordan. To all intents and purposes, this was a colonialist creation.
- When the Peel Commission was appointed in 1936 in response to the Arab Revolt, it decided on yet another division. A mere 4,800 square kilometers were designated for the Jewish state, while 20,600 square kilometers were added to the Arab state—Trans-Jordan—which already extended over a land mass of around 90,000 kilometers.
- The recommendation was not about the establishment of a “Palestinian state” because at that time there was no Palestinian people or a Palestinian entity. The recommendation was for the establishment of a single Arab state on both sides of the Jordan River. It is worth paying attention to the fact that 96% of the original land of Palestine was reserved for this Arab state, and the remaining 4% was to be given to the Jews. The Arab resistance to the division did not stem from the establishment of an Arab state on both sides of the Jordan River, but from the meager percentage that was set aside for the Jews.
- In the 1947 UN Partition Plan, the Jewish state was granted 15,000 square kilometers, which constituted less than 13% of the land originally known as Palestine. It was a marked improvement on the original 4% set aside for the Jews. Due to the Arab countries' resistance to the new division, and the invasion of Israel by surrounding Arab countries, the Jewish state's land grew to 21,000 square kilometers.
- One thing we can all agree on is that there was never any distinction made between those residing on the west side of the Jordan River and those on the east side of the river. They belonged to the same family, practiced the same religion, spoke the same language and the shared the same culture. After the War of Independence, the Jordanians annexed the West Bank and gave citizenship to those living beforehand under the British mandate.
- They were not Palestinians in those days. They were Arabs. The UN did not decide to establish a Palestinian state. It decided to establish an Arab state. The connection made by Jordan was completely natural. It was not a connection between foreigners, but between brothers.
- After the Six-Day War, the “Jordanian Option” was the preferred option for a peace agreement. After all, the Arab world did not create a separate state in the two decades free from Israeli “occupation.” In 1987, a final attempt was made to implement the Jordanian Option as part of the London Agreement between King Hussein and Shimon Peres. Yitzhak Shamir, then prime minister, imposed a veto. It was an historic mistake.
- If the Middle East behaved rationally, the connection between the people of the same nation would have been natural. After all, they all speak about Arab unity. Indeed, a string of Arab speakers, including Azmi Bishara (former Arab MK who fled the country after being suspected of espionage) for example, admitted that “there is no Palestinian people.”

- It is easy to understand the existence of Egypt, Iraq and Syria, each of which has, to some degree or another, a history and a heritage that gives them a certain uniqueness. But the Jordanians and Palestinians? They have the right to self-rule. But separation, for what and why? What exactly distinguishes them? nothing.
- The global left and Palestinian activists in the West Bank, as well as some members of the Israeli right, speak of "one state." However, one state is established in similar and identical communities, which practice the same religion and share a similar culture, it is not established in two different communities.
- Jordan is Palestine, and Palestine is Jordan. Czechoslovakia split into two entities, and Yugoslavia split into seven entities on the basis of religious and ethnic self-determination. What was true there and considered right by most countries of the world— should also be true for the Middle East. Therefore, assuming that the US administration, as Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas told us Sunday, recommended a peace plan that was based on a confederation with Jordan, it is an appropriate and correct recommendation.
- It is not clear why Abbas is insisting on including Israel in such confederation. Did the Croats invite the Slovenes to join them? It is true that 31 years after the failed London Agreement, it seems that the Jordanian option is no longer considered, but logic demands putting it back on the negotiating table.

SUMMARY: Jordan is Palestine, and Palestine is Jordan. Czechoslovakia split into two entities, and Yugoslavia split into seven entities on the basis of religious and ethnic self-determination. What was true there and considered right by most countries of the world— should also be true for the Middle East. Therefore, assuming that the US administration, as Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas told us Sunday, recommended a peace plan that was based on a confederation with Jordan, it is an appropriate and correct recommendation. It is not clear why Abbas is insisting on including Israel in such confederation. Did the Croats invite the Slovenes to join them? It is true that 31 years after the failed London Agreement, it seems that the Jordanian option is no longer considered, but logic demands putting it back on the negotiating table.

Netanyahu's Education Policy: A Speech and a Brochure

By Raviv Drucker, political commentator at Channel 10

- In September 2007 the management consulting firm McKinsey & Company published an interesting study called “how the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top.” It piqued the interest of then-opposition chairman Benjamin Netanyahu. At the time, there was a lively debate in the media over “the education crisis” and “the low grades of Israeli students.” In opinion polls, Israelis cared about education. Netanyahu got the message.
- Four months later, he reheated and served up his meal: a news conference, a color brochure, graphs, snappy slogans: “The best go into teaching. Equal opportunities for every child. The program for a real turning point in education.” The production assistants included office manager Ayelet Shaked and bureau chief Naftali Bennett.
- Netanyahu adopted most of the McKinsey recommendations. What makes a school system good is the quality of its teachers and principals, and the key to good teachers lies not in paying them the highest salaries, but rather in the ability to make teaching a respected profession. “Like psychologists,” Netanyahu wrote, “we shall endeavor to restore the teaching profession in Israel to its high status through more exacting screening of teaching candidates. ... We shall train principals in modern management techniques by establishing a school for principals.”
- Netanyahu set an ambitious, measurable goal: “to return Israel’s children within a decade to the top 10 in international test ranks.” When politicians say “within a decade,” it usually means: You’ll never be able to hold us to this promise. In fact, this is one of the rare cases in which the promise can be assessed. It’s been 10 and a half years since that news conference, and Netanyahu has been prime minister for nine and a half of those. Bennett is the minister of education. The results: The status of Israel’s teachers is worse than ever.
- The average score for prospective education majors on the psychometric exam for college applicants has dropped significantly since 2011, Lior Dattel reported in TheMarker Hebrew edition recently. Around half are admitted to higher education institutes without a psychometric test. In our research on the country’s education studies program, we received a great deal of information about the moonlighting and haphazard project otherwise known as teacher’s colleges — true, not all of them, and not all of the time, but we didn’t carry out a thorough study and in any event it doesn’t seem to be news. It’s pretty clear that almost anyone can be a teacher, right?
- If there is one consensus in the education system, it’s that the principal is the most important variable in determining a school’s quality. Well, there’s recently published data on this, too: a shortage of principals, principals hired without a bidding process, principals who don’t meet minimum requirements. When it comes to the international tests, Israel is very far from being in the top 10 as Netanyahu promised; it’s usually near the bottom of the list. Bennett, demonstrating political wisdom, has avoided insofar as possible measuring his term by the international exams. He learned from the mistake of his (not immediate) predecessor Gideon Saar, who would hold his breath before every such exam.

- Bennett decided for himself on the measurable goals by which his term would be judged: reducing the number of students in each classroom, and increasing the number of high-school students who opt to take the higher-level, five-unit bagrut matriculation exam in math.
- Israeli students' scores on the Program for International Student Assessment and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study exams, known as PISA and TIMSS, respectively, no longer make the headlines despite the lack of improvement since "the great education crisis."
- Shay Piron told me that he met with Netanyahu during his brief time as education minister eight or nine times. Netanyahu also pushed through enormous budgets for education; it's his piss-poor managerial skills that get in his way (as usual). It's not a question of politics or his voter base, simply his inability to choose a goal, plan how to reach it and take action day by day to make sure it actually happens. A formative speech and a four-color brochure simply are not enough.

SUMMARY: Netanyahu set an ambitious, measurable goal: "to return Israel's children within a decade to the top 10 in international test ranks." When politicians say "within a decade," it usually means: You'll never be able to hold us to this promise. In fact, this is one of the rare cases in which the promise can be assessed. It's been 10 and a half years since that news conference, and Netanyahu has been prime minister for nine and a half of those. Bennett is the minister of education. The results: The status of Israel's teachers is worse than ever.