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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Tuesday, October 9

Headlines:

- **Report: Russia Gives S-300 to Syria for Free**
- **PM: World Must Recognize Israel's Sovereignty Over Golan Heights**
- **Greenblatt: Peace Plan to Focus Heavily on 'Israeli Security Needs'**
- **Massive West Bank Manhunt for Barkan Terrorist Enters Third Day**
- **Jerusalem Mayor's Plan to Expel UNRWA May Face Legal Issues**
- **Israeli Intel Firm Offered Trump Campaign to Smear Rivals in 2016**
- **Labor Leader Gabbay Meets with Jordan's King Abdullah**
- **Hebrew University Joins Appeal of U.S. Student Detained by Israel**

Commentary:

- **Foreign Policy: "Jared Kushner's Peace Plan Would Turn Jordan Upside Down"**
 - By Khalil E. Jahshan, executive director of Arab Center in Washington DC
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "The Sara Netanyahu Trial is Another Fake Drama"**
 - By Nahum Barnea columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

News Excerpts

October 9, 2018

Ynet News

Report: Russia Gives S-300 to Syria for Free

Russia has given Syria three S-300 anti-aircraft battalion sets—with eight launchers and more than 100 surface-to-air guided missiles each—for free, according to a report in the Russian news site TASS on Monday. According to a Russian military diplomatic source, the systems delivered to Syria were previously deployed at a Russian air force battalion that now uses the more advanced S-400 systems. "The S-300 systems underwent capital repairs at Russian defense enterprises, are in good condition and are capable of performing combat tasks," the source told TASS. According to Russia's Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, Russia has supplied Syria with 49 pieces of equipment for the S-300 system, including radars, control vehicles, and four launchers. See also, ["Russia says it provided Syria with 24 advanced S-300 launchers for free" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

I24 News

PM: World Must Recognize Israel's Sovereignty Over Golan

Prime Minister Netanyahu on Monday called on the international community to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights and that he would bring this up with Russia's President Vladimir Putin in their upcoming meeting. Netanyahu made the remarks at the dedication of a synagogue at the Ein Keshatot archaeological site on the Golan Heights on Monday, warning that without Israeli control of the area, Hezbollah and Iran would be on the "shores of the Kinneret (sea of Galilee)." "Today we see what is happening over the border – Iran's attempts to establish a military presence and the aggression of terrorist fanatics. We will continue to stand strong and determined against all of these. Israel on the Golan Heights is a guarantee for stability in the surrounding area," the prime minister said.

I24 News

Greenblatt: Peace Plan to Focus on 'Israeli Security Needs'

US Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt dismissed the idea of a three-way confederation between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians as part the long awaited Middle East peace plan, Times of Israel (TOI) reported on Monday. "We're not looking at a confederation model," Greenblatt told TOI in an interview. The idea of bringing Jordan into a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been raised numerous times since the 1967 war, most recently by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas who told Greenblatt and US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior aide Jared Kushner that he wants a three-way confederation with Jordan and Israel .See also, ["U.S. Envoy Greenblatt Denies Trump's Peace Plan Includes Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Times of Israel

Massive WB Manhunt for Barkan Terrorist Enters Third Day

Seven Palestinians were arrested in the West Bank early Tuesday as the manhunt for the suspected shooter in the deadly Barkan Industrial Park terror attack entered its third day. IDF, Shin Bet and Border Police forces continued operations in the village of Shuweika, near Tulkarem, the home of Ashraf Na'alowa, 23, who on Sunday killed coworkers Kim Levengrond Yehezkel, 28, and Ziv Hajbi, 35, and wounded Sara Vaturi, 54, using a locally produced Carlo-style submachine gun. See also, ["Fatah official 'understands' circumstances of Barkan attack" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Jerusalem Mayor's Plan to Expel UNRWA May Face Legal Issues

The office of Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat has announced plans to terminate the services of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), tasked with tending to Palestinian refugees and their descendants. The news, however, is being received with a significant degree of apprehension, as some analysts doubt the plan has any teeth. The mayor's idea is in line with the policies of US President Donald Trump, including his decision to de-fund UNRWA. Yael Ronen, a legal expert, conveyed to The Media Line that "the presence of UNRWA is not a municipal issue," and expressed skepticism that the proposal could be implemented. Still others believe the mayor's proposed initiative is a political stunt that aims to bolster his bid to run for parliament after he exits office following elections later this month. See also, "[Top UNRWA official says he champions both Israel and Palestinian refugees](#)" (TOI)

New York Times

Israeli Intel Firm Offered Trump Campaign to Smear Rivals in 2016

A top Trump campaign official requested proposals in 2016 from an Israeli company to create fake online identities, to use social media manipulation and to gather intelligence to help defeat Republican primary race opponents and Hillary Clinton, according to interviews and copies of the proposals. The Trump campaign's interest in the work began as Russians were escalating their effort to aid Donald J. Trump. Though the Israeli company's pitches were narrower than Moscow's interference campaign and appear unconnected, the documents show that a senior Trump aide saw the promise of a disruption effort to swing voters in Mr. Trump's favor.

Jerusalem Post

Labor Leader Gabbay Meets with Jordan's King Abdullah

The king of Jordan, Abdullah II, took time on Monday to meet with the leader of the Zionist Union, Avi Gabbay. Abdullah hosted Gabbay despite polls indicating that the Zionist Union would win only 12 seats in the next election – and if former IDF chief Benny Gantz headed a new party, it would only garner 10. A Midgam poll broadcast on Channel 2 found that only four percent of Israelis believe he is the most fit candidate to be prime minister. A press release from the Hashemite Kingdom said that the two men discussed developments in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. "King Abdullah stressed the need to revive the peace process, based on the two-state solution and in accordance with international law and relevant UN resolutions, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative, leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 4 June 1967 lines with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel, in peace and security," the statement said.

Ha'aretz

Hebrew University Joins Appeal of US Student Detained by Israel

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem's senate called on Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan and Interior Minister Arye Dery to allow an American student, 22-year-old Lara Alqasem, into Israel. Alqasem, who was accepted as a graduate student at the Hebrew University, was barred from entering the country and detained at Ben-Gurion Airport on Tuesday because the Israeli authorities claim she supports a boycott of Israel. In an unusual step, the university also asked to join Alqasem's appeal to the district court against the decision to deport her. The appeal is expected to be heard in the coming days. See also, "[After Hours of Waiting, Israeli Lawmakers Allowed to Visit American Student Detained at Airport](#)" (Ha'aretz)

Jared Kushner's Peace Plan Would Turn Jordan Upside Down

By Khalil E. Jahshan, executive director of Arab Center in Washington DC

- **The Trump administration's attempt to pressure Jordan to strip its Palestinian refugees of their status struck a nerve in the kingdom at a time of unprecedented economic and political turbulence. In presenting their ill-conceived plan to Jordanian officials, U.S. peace negotiators Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt have demonstrated a bias and ineptitude that will derail Washington's self-proclaimed peace plan and further undermine U.S. credibility in the Middle East.**
- **Jordan is home to almost 2.2 million registered Palestinian refugees—more than any country in the region. When Palestinians were expelled from their homes in the British Mandate of Palestine during the war that led to Israel's independence, the kingdom welcomed the refugees and granted them citizenship to ease their humanitarian burden, but in a limited capacity so as not to affect Palestinians' national aspirations or their political future. They are still considered "stateless" awaiting repatriation, as provided by Jordan's legal, regional, and international commitments. The popular phrase "Jordan is not Palestine" was and remains a vital national security concern in the kingdom.**
- **For almost seven decades, the poorest refugees in Jordan have been cared for by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA operates 171 schools in Jordan, serving more than 121,000 students. Its 25 primary health centers handle more than 1.5 million visits a year, and 10 recognized refugee camps shelter around 370,000 refugees.**
- **The White House's goal, detailed in internal emails from Jared Kushner to his colleague Jason Greenblatt that were obtained by Foreign Policy, is "to have an honest and sincere effort to disrupt UNRWA" and strip refugee status from all but the few living Palestinians who fled British Mandatory Palestine in 1948—a plan that reveals a profound ignorance of Jordan's current political and economic woes.**
- **Kushner seems convinced that UNRWA "perpetuates a status quo, is corrupt, inefficient and doesn't help peace." President Donald Trump's son-in-law turned senior advisor, who lacks any credible diplomatic experience in Middle East affairs, expressed his view that, "Sometimes you have to strategically risk breaking things in order to get there." What he fails to understand is that his half-baked plan risks undermining the legitimacy and sovereignty of Jordan, Washington's closest ally and partner in the Middle East. In this sense, taking the refugee issue off the negotiating table is, as Trump is fond of saying, tantamount to cutting off your nose to spite your face.**
- **Despite the generous foreign aid Amman receives, with a new infusion on the way from the Gulf States this week, it has been struggling with an economic crisis fueled by domestic and international factors, including the spillover from conflicts next door in Iraq and Syria. Widespread tax evasion has further contributed to ballooning Jordan's debt to 95 percent of GDP.**
- **The lack of funds has triggered runaway inflation at a time when the state struggles to provide food and water for 670,000 poverty-stricken Syrian refugees. Proposed tax reforms and price**

hikes this spring spurred a general strike by labor unions that brought down Prime Minister Hani al-Mulki. New Prime Minister Omar Razzaz's tenuous popularity hinges on whether he will confront Jordan's core political corrosion.

- Amid this tense political climate, with a single-minded goal to dissolve UNRWA at all costs, Kushner reportedly offered to hand Jordan the millions the United States gives annually to UNRWA in exchange for absorbing full responsibility for Palestinian refugees. King Abdullah rejected the offer out of hand, and Jordan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi said such a move would have had "extremely dangerous humanitarian, political and security implications for refugees and for the whole region."
- Some officials in the Trump administration might naively consider Jordan too weak to resist U.S. pressure to accept White House commands. Jordan is certainly a close U.S. ally that is significantly dependent on U.S. aid. However, having survived many existential challenges since 1946, Jordan's monarchy is not willing to commit national suicide just to please Washington.
- The White House would also do well to consider the risks of destabilizing its ally. Palestinian civic leaders in Jordan embrace UNRWA as a protector of Palestinian funds and a guarantor of their livelihood in the face of entrenched corruption in the Jordanian government.
- A wholesale transfer of UNRWA funds to that government would almost certainly be a money grab by a ravenous bureaucracy, sparking violent protests that could potentially collapse the new government in a storm of anti-authoritarian fervor. A formerly reliable insurer of stability would crumble, paving the way for unimaginable devastation and suffering.
- Trump has accused UNRWA of perpetuating the refugee crisis by providing essential services as refugees wait to be repatriated, rather than working to permanently resettle them elsewhere. But nothing in UNRWA's mandate gives it the authority to resettle anyone, even if it wanted to, and a unilateral attempt to strong-arm Jordan into upending multilateral agreements shows an ignorance of the political realities on the ground.
- At last week's U.N. General Assembly meeting, Trump announced he would unveil his plan for Israeli-Palestinian peace within four months. The White House has closed the PLO office in Washington and relocated its Israeli embassy to Jerusalem, moves that confirm a pro-Israel bias that all but guarantees Palestinian noncooperation. Alienating its longstanding ally Jordan would further cement the growing U.S. rift with Arab countries and undermine prospects for peace.
- If the plan bars more international aid to Palestinians, a humanitarian crisis will envelop the region—including Israel—with violence. And, if Kushner's plan succeeds, ultimately host countries such as Jordan would bear the consequences of UNRWA's demise. This explains the enthusiastic lead taken by King Abdullah and Jordanian diplomats at the General Assembly to raise millions of dollars in funds for UNRWA to replace U.S. funding cuts and avoid the collapse of the refugee agency.
- Jordan has avoided calamity for now. To prevent further insecurity, the United States should reinstate its funding for UNRWA and pursue a just and comprehensive negotiation process that treats the Palestinians as a party equally deserving of sovereignty and security rather than simply pandering to Israel.

SUMMARY: Amid this tense political climate, with a single-minded goal to dissolve UNRWA at all costs, Kushner reportedly offered to hand Jordan the millions the United States gives annually to UNRWA in exchange for absorbing full responsibility for Palestinian refugees. King Abdullah rejected the offer out of hand, and Jordan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi said such a move would have had "extremely dangerous humanitarian, political and security implications for refugees and for the whole region." Some officials in the Trump administration might naively consider Jordan too weak to resist U.S. pressure to accept White House commands. Jordan is certainly a close U.S. ally that is significantly dependent on U.S. aid. However, having survived many existential challenges since 1946, Jordan's monarchy is not willing to commit national suicide just to please Washington.

The Sara Netanyahu Trial is Another Fake Drama

By Nahum Barnea, commentator at Yedioth Ahronoth

- Another day of fake drama in the investigations of the Netanyahu couple ended yesterday in nothing. Sara Netanyahu reported for trial in what is known as the prime minister's residences affair. Attorney Yossi Cohen, her counsel, complained that there was an attempt to "turn this into a drama." Cohen is the last lawyer I would hire as a spokesperson, but this time, he was right. The manner in which the investigations of Netanyahu and his family are being handled is a disgrace for everyone—the State Attorney's Office, the institution of the premiership, the media that covers them, and mainly, the country's law enforcement agencies.
- State Attorney's Office representative Erez Padan asked to hold Netanyahu's trial before a panel of three judges, and not one, as customary. He explained this by citing Ms. Netanyahu's public position. I searched the law books for a clue as to Mrs. Netanyahu's public standing, a psychologist with a part-time job in the Jerusalem municipality. I found none. The defendant in this case is not a civil servant. She was never elected to a public office. To the best of my knowledge, the last job she held in the public service was as a stewardess on El Al when El Al was still a government company. That was a generation ago.
- Unless what the State Attorney's Office is actually worried about is that a single judge will not be able to withstand the pressure when hearing the case. In their speeches at legal conferences, top State Attorney's Office officials praise the professionalism of the judges, but in practice, they have doubts. This says something about the status of the judges; this says something about the State Attorney's Office.
- The charges in the indictment are impressively serious: acquisition through fraudulent means under aggravated circumstances and breach of trust. Ostensibly, someone convicted of such crimes should go to jail for many years. But we know the truth—this is a trivial trial, over principle and money. The principle is that of the Netanyahu family, which hates to pay from its own pocket and hates to admit guilt; the money is ours—this trial is costing the state much more than the fine that any panel of the court will impose on the defendant.
- In the past, legal advisers would end investigations of public figures with a decision to close the case and make do with a public report rife with moral preaching. This missed the objective—the defendant would disregard it and the public was unimpressed. In the case of Mrs. Netanyahu, this might be the right solution—a public report signed by the attorney general that enumerates all the incriminating facts in the case, including those that were omitted from the indictment for reasons relating to her mental health. My conclusion is that this is a case of a psychological problem, not a legal problem, the attorney general will write. The State Attorney's Office has more important, more serious subjects to address. The naval vessels affair, for example. Someone will then petition the High Court of Justice. So let them.
- Last Friday, Netanyahu —the Mister, not the Missus— was questioned for the 12th time in the investigations in which he is a suspect. The questioning session lasted five hours. The commentators had something to say before, during and afterwards—a huge drama. The truth is that there was no drama. Netanyahu, in all his questioning sessions, from the Amedi affair 19 years ago and until this day, tells his interrogators nothing. It's a game. They ask him questions

and he chatters away. Even when he is completely innocent he prefers to take refuge in his amazingly short memory, his shaky memory. He is the first to spot and the last to know. Always.

- The State Attorney's Office asked the police to supplement its investigation, but it knows that Netanyahu's answers won't supplement anything. The goal is to show activity, to delay, to procrastinate. Instead of addressing the facts, they address the status of the subject of the investigation, his political leverage, his popularity in the polls.
- The most serious corruption case connected to the current government is the naval vessels affair. Ostensibly, this relates to hundreds of millions of shekels, to state security, to a long list of close associates and relatives who did what they did under Netanyahu's nose. Something odd happened to this case on its way to an indictment: it froze. The indictments were hijacked and vanished into thin air, like a Saudi journalist.
- And of course, Case 1,000, the work on which has long since concluded, Case 2,000 and Case 4,000. Avichai Mandelblit learned something from Binyamin Netanyahu from the years in which he worked under him as cabinet secretary—he learned the art of not deciding. When he finally does make a decision, nobody will believe him—neither Netanyahu's followers nor his opponents.

SUMMARY: The manner in which the investigations of Netanyahu and his family are being handled is a disgrace for everyone—the State Attorney's Office, the institution of the premiership, the media that covers them, and mainly, the country's law enforcement agencies. State Attorney's Office representative Erez Padan asked to hold Netanyahu's trial before a panel of three judges, and not one, as customary. He explained this by citing Ms. Netanyahu's public position. I searched the law books for a clue as to Mrs. Netanyahu's public standing, a psychologist with a part-time job in the Jerusalem municipality. I found none. The defendant in this case is not a civil servant. She was never elected to a public office. To the best of my knowledge, the last job she held in the public service was as a stewardess on El Al when El Al was still a government company. That was a generation ago.