



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, November 29

Headlines:

- **Chad Reportedly Conditioning Israel Ties on Arms Sales**
- **Ultra-Orthodox Clash with Police over Military Draft**
- **Defense Official Slams IDF Over Settler Violence**
- **Sen Rand Paul Voices Support for Israel Aid Limits**
- **Airbnb Faces U.S. Legal Action Over West Bank Policy**
- **Irish Senate Advances Bill to Boycott West Bank Goods**
- **Before Resigning, Lieberman Tried to Seize Sensitive Unit**
- **Will Palestinian Art Museum in Israel Break Ground?**

Commentary:

- **Ha'aretz: "It's Not So Simple for Israel to Just 'End the Occupation'"**
 - By Peter Lerner, Former IDF Spokesperson
- **Ynet: "Trump's Statements on Israel will Boomerang"**
 - By Ron Ben Yishai, Senior Columnist

News Excerpts

November 29, 2018

Times of Israel

Chad Reportedly Conditioning Israel Ties on Arms Sales

The president of Chad has presented Israel with a laundry list of demands, including significant arms sales, as a condition for renewing ties, according to a report Wednesday. Idriss Déby's visit to Israel this week was hailed as a historic opening, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu planning a reciprocal trip in the near future. But senior Foreign Ministry officials said the breadth of the demands led to a dispute between the National Security Adviser and the Foreign Ministry, who lobbied for the visit to be conditioned on immediate resumption of ties.

Times of Israel

Ultra-Orthodox Clash with Police over Military Draft

Police in Jerusalem clashed with hundreds of ultra-Orthodox demonstrators Wednesday in protest of the arrest of an army draft-dodger from a religious seminary. Many in the community shun the mandatory military service that applies to most Israelis, and the community has historically enjoyed exemptions from the army in favor of religious studies. The government on Tuesday asked the Court of Justice to further extend the deadline the court set to pass a new law regulating the enlistment of ultra-Orthodox men in the military.

Times of Israel

Defense Official Slams IDF Over Settler Violence

A Defense Ministry official recently slammed the military for what she deemed to be its weak approach in dealing with violence carried out by residents of the Yitzhar settlement and the surrounding outposts in the northern West Bank, according to a report Wednesday. In a letter to Civil Administration head Achvat Ben Hour in September, senior Civil Administration officer Idit Zargarian said the army should not continue to treat the hardline settlement "with a double standard: promoting civilian issues... alongside the continued violation of the rule of law."

JTA

Sen Rand Paul Voices Support for Israel Aid Limits

U.S. Sen. Rand Paul acknowledged that he had placed a hold on major funding legislation for Israel, saying "if we are going to send aid to Israel it should be limited in time and scope so we aren't doing it forever, and it should be paid for by cutting the aid to people who hate Israel and America." Paul said he planned to introduce an amendment to the legislation, the United States-Israel Security Assistance Authorization Act of 2018, in coming days. The bill codifies into law the \$38 billion defense aid package for Israel over 10 years negotiated in 2016.

Jerusalem Post

Airbnb Faces U.S. Legal Action Over West Bank Policy

Airbnb is facing at least three legal cases in the United States over its decision to drop settlement listings in the West Bank. On Monday, an Israeli company Bibliotechnical Blue & White Ltd. located in the Gush Etzion region of the West Bank filed a complaint against Airbnb for discrimination with the American Arbitration Association in New York. Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan asked four states in the US to take action against Airbnb for its decision to remove West Bank settlement listings from its global website advertising vacation rental properties.

Ha'aretz

Irish Senate Advances Bill to Boycott West Bank Goods

The Irish Senate approved on Wednesday another stage in the legislation to boycott the sale of products from Israeli settlements. The bill prohibits the export and selling of products and services which come from "illegal settlements in occupied territories." The vote was postponed earlier this year in an attempt to reach a compromise with the government, which sought to soften it after Israel broached the subject.

Ha'aretz

Before Resigning, Lieberman Tried to Seize Sensitive Unit

One of Avigdor Lieberman's last actions before resigning as defense minister was an abortive attempt to place the ministry's own security department under his direct authority. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is also the defense minister, is reviewing the affair. The Defense Ministry's security department is among the state's most highly classified units; little has been disclosed about it over the years. The department is responsible for the security of the ministry itself and its facilities, Israel's arms industry, the nuclear research center in the Negev and other security bodies.

Jerusalem Post

Will Palestinian Art Museum in Israel Break Ground?

Said Abu Shakra has a vision: To build the first museum dedicated to contemporary Palestinian art in Israel. To this end, he recently began working with architects with a view to breaking ground on the project in the near future. Establishing a permanent home for Arab-Israeli and Palestinian art has been a lifelong goal for Abu Shakra, who comes from a family of well-established artists in Umm al-Fahm, an Arab city in northern Israel located hundreds of meters from the West Bank border. For several years, Abu Shakra has worked tirelessly to secure millions of dollars in funding in order to build his museum, although he has encountered several obstacles along the way.

It's Not So Simple for Israel to Just 'End the Occupation'

Peter Lerner, Former IDF Spokesperson

- "End the occupation!" a middle-aged man shouted at me at one of my recent speaking events. "It's that simple, just end it!" We are in an impatient era, an era of instant tweets, of news at our fingertips, Peace Now and Breaking the Silence now. If only it were that simple. As we continue to brace ourselves for President Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century," we need to keep a few things in mind. I'm not talking about the debate about historical and religious rights, Abraham buying the Machpela Cave in Hebron, and everything that defines us as a Jewish nation.
- Those rights are widely quoted by many politicians, and are a source of inspiration for many Israelis and Jews. But they are not the realpolitik factors for a final settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. While those issues are important, they bring us no closer to understanding the challenges we face today amid the looming demand by international and national organizations that we "end the occupation." The peace camp, as they like to call themselves, are no closer to bringing peace - and this is due to their failure to grasp the very real challenges Israel faces. Here's why Israel can't just walk out of the West Bank. The challenges in 2018 are threefold. Leadership, geography and trust.
- First, let's address leadership, or lack of leadership. The Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas is 82 years old, has been hospitalized several times this year and suffers from failing health. Since 2007, he has empowered his security forces to coordinate so closely with Israel we could almost call them relations of intimacy. The Palestinian security forces work with Jerusalem not out of love for Israel, but out of fear of Hamas taking over the West Bank. But as Abbas threatens time and time again to cancel this security coordination, it leaves Israel in a constant state of national security limbo. Abbas has no clear successor, and if the lessons of the Middle East can teach us anything, a power struggle will most surely happen within his own camp once he leaves the stage. Hamas, too, is watching like a panther preparing to pounce in order to challenge the Palestinian Authority's West Bank leadership.
- On the Israeli side, Benjamin Netanyahu has toned down his 2009 Bar Ilan endorsement of two states. He now says different people understand different things when discussing a negotiated agreement. He has refrained from repeating the 10-month settlement construction freeze he imposed in 2009 in an attempt to appease then-U.S. President Barak Obama and entice Abbas back to the negotiating table. Neither benefits accrued, and his actions came with a huge political price. None of the Israeli contenders for the country's leadership have any other viable plan, from Naftali Bennett's autonomy and citizenship, to Lapid's hyperbolic economic peace, high walls and no splitting of Jerusalem. This leaves very little chance for change in the future.
- Secondly, topography and geography remain the only static factor in the strategic debate about peace with the Palestinians. Judea and Samaria - the West Bank of the Jordan river - are a

mountain ridge. Those mountains create a strategic depth that Israel requires in order to safeguard its civilians. In the shadows of the West Bank's hills, between Haifa and Ashkelon, lies 70 percent of Israel's population and 80 percent of Israel's industry, including power stations, offshore gas rigs, and Ben-Gurion International Airport. Anybody who controls that mountainous area controls everything beneath it. With all the regional turmoil, with Iranian leaders calling Israel a cancerous tumor in the region and eyeing Jordan as its next playground for Middle East upheaval, can any Israeli leadership relinquish security control over such a strategic asset?

- Finally, trust. The failures of the Oslo process, the ongoing settlement activities, the repeated wars with Gaza and the political animosity leave both Israelis and Palestinians in a deep state of mistrust. This constantly deepens the current stagnation. The U.S. cutbacks to USAID's staff and funding - which may lead to the agency's complete collapse, according to recent reports - will undermine stability even further. For the Jewish state to have a real future, and to prevent a slide into a one-state future, these challenges must be addressed - and sooner rather than later.
- Trust must be built with the help of international partners - NGOs like USAID, state actors like Egypt and Jordan - and maybe that's where Saudi Arabia fits into the puzzle. Alliances must be built. Confidence in a process to be rekindled and for Israel to extend that hand of peace and good neighborliness towards the common good of the region that its Declaration of Independence first offered. Technology and safety measures must be devised to safeguard the strategic depth that a two state solution would require for Israel's security. The next generation of pragmatic leadership on both sides must be cultivated – on both sides.
- We must look at the issues with open but realistic and practical eyes. We have to explore a path for Israel that recognizes our Jewish heritage here – but also admits that insisting on a "Jerusalem eternally united" under sole Israeli sovereignty, and maintaining the Jewish settlement in the heart of Hebron, may well mean we end up a minority in a one-state Holy Land. And we know what happens to minorities in the Middle East. All of these are long processes and they must be accepted as such. There's much work to do both for Israelis and Palestinians. There are no instant solutions at hand, and easy, self-righteous slogans won't help. So stop shouting, "End the occupation!"

Trump's Statements on Israel will Boomerang

By Ron Ben Yishai, Senior Columnist

- The common practice of US President Donald Trump to "bend" facts and adapt them to the media narrative he wants is nothing new, and should primarily be of concern to the citizens of his country. But recently, the US president has adopted a posture of "fake news" which should concern us as well. A prominent example was last week in Trump's conversation with journalists about Thanksgiving, in which he tried to explain why the United States should not punish Saudi Arabia and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS) for the murder of Jamal Kashoggi. Despite the fact that the CIA determined that it was very likely that MBS was responsible for the horrific murder of the journalist, a critic of the regime. Trump claimed that the conclusions of his country's intelligence agency were not absolute, and then he also drew the Israel card from up his sleeve.
- "Without Saudi Arabia, Israel will be in great trouble," Trump said, hinting that he, the president of the United States, might have considered cooling relations with MBS and Saudi Arabia over the murder at the Saudi embassy in Turkey, but his commitment to Israel's security had his hands tied. This is because Israel's security is a higher priority than the traditional American commitment to respect international law, human morality and human rights. Ostensibly, the Israeli government and its citizens are entitled to be satisfied and feel more secure after the protective statements by President Trump. However, a closer examination of the facts and the significance of the declaration should give us the opposite feeling. First, because Saudi Arabia does not significantly contribute to the national security of the State of Israel apart from one issue: Iran is the common enemy of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, while the United States is the patron of Saudi Arabia and the moderate Sunni Arab states, just as it is Israel's patron. Therefore, Saudi pressure on the United States to weaken Iran and stop its attempts to attain nuclear weapons, long-range missiles and regional hegemony indirectly serves Israel as well.
- Saudi Arabia is also trying to advance Trump's peace proposal for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and thus, in the opinion of many Israelis, they serve our strategic interests. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not so sure of this and the proof is that he is constantly trying to delay the presentation of the proposal, which would require painful concessions from him that his right-wing base will not like. In any event, Mahmoud Abbas has already rejected the Saudi prince's attempt to convince him to agree to the Trump plan. MBS and the Saudis also failed in their attempt to impose a more west-friendly regime in Lebanon and weaken Hezbollah; the war in Yemen against the Houthis is also no success story: Iran's allies continue to threaten Red Sea shipping and block the Straits of Bab al-Mandab. In short, Saudi Arabia's alliance with the United States and the Saudi dependency on Uncle Sam only indirectly serve the security interests of the State of Israel. Taking note of these facts, which demonstrate just how little Saudi Arabia's contribution and value to the security of the State of

Israel is, there are those in the Israeli and global media who raise the possibility that if Israel decides in the future to attack and destroy Iranian nuclear facilities and ballistic missiles, Saudi Arabia will allow the Air Force jets to pass through its air space making it easier to perform the task.

- But if such a scenario materializes, it does not have to fill our hearts with gratitude towards the Saudis. On the contrary, the Saudis and the other Sunni states, trembling under the shadow of the Iranian threat, are the ones who should thank Israel for thwarting the great strategic, mutual, threat posed by Iran. Which means that there is no basis for Trump's claim that without Saudi Arabia, that is, without the close relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia, "Israel will be in great trouble." Recent experience has made it possible to say with certainty that without Israel and its intelligence and operational capabilities, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and the United States would be in great trouble in the face of Iran's domination ambitions for the Middle East and the global energy market. This is not all, but one can only say according to international media reports that the high quality intelligence Israel provides to its allies provides an important contribution to their ability to defend themselves against the Sunni global jihad (al-Qaeda and ISIS), which primarily threatens Arab regimes and rulers. Thus Trump, at best, exaggerated the importance of Saudi Arabia's contribution to Israel's security, if he is even properly familiar with the facts and in the worst case, he is simply lying.
- Trump has a good reason to distort the reality. He needs the Israel excuse to shake off the harassment regarding the US response to Saudi Arabia in the Khashoggi case so that he can proceed with the weapons deal with Saudi Arabia, expected to bring in more than \$100 billion to the American defense industry and the American treasury as well as create thousands of jobs. Trump needs the Israel excuse so that Saudi Arabia continues to flood the world oil market with cheap oil, so that the US sanctions on exporting oil from Iran will not cause a general price increase. Such a price increase, due to the reduction of Iranian oil supplies, would harm the economies of many US allies, which Trump does not want. He needs the support of countries that stand to be harmed by the sanctions on Iran. But Trump apparently considers the Israel excuse a winning card, so on Tuesday he used it again. In an interview with the Washington Post, he was quoted as saying: "Will we leave forces in the Middle East? One reason is Israel." He added that Middle Eastern oil is now a much less important reason than in the past for a US military presence in the Middle East. This is because "the United States now produces more oil than ever."
- Simply put, the United States produces almost all the oil it needs. It also exports oil and gas, and therefore no longer needs the favors of the Arab oil producers. This claim is correct at the core, but not entirely. The United States still needs the good will of the Arab oil producers because they are a major factor in the global oil market and in setting prices. They will remain in this position in the future as well because of the huge oil and gas reserves in their territory. Therefore, the United States still needs to maintain good relations with the Arab oil producers so that they will not drastically reduce oil prices. If they do so, the United States will lose billions. In a situation of low oil prices, it will not be financially worth it for American oil companies to

produce oil in the United States, much of it extracted in relatively expensive processes called fracking. The Saudis have already pulled off such a scenario a few years ago, and Trump must still remember the billions that the oil industry lost under Obama. It is therefore very important for Trump to maintain military forces in Iraq, an important Middle East oil producer, so that its oil does not fall into the hands of Iran.

- The Iraqi Shi'ites took over their country after the Americans overthrew Saddam Hussein and established democracy. The current government in Baghdad is Shiite with a slight inclination towards Iran. If the Americans were to leave, Iraq would become a Shiite protectorate and an important pillar of the Shi'ite crescent and the continental corridor set up by the Iranians, from Tehran to the Mediterranean coast through Baghdad, Damascus and Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. But the most important thing for the Americans is the impact on the decisions Baghdad makes regarding oil. They will be critical not only for world oil prices, but also for the sanctions against Iran. This is just one example of another American interest that has almost nothing to do with Israel, which Trump is trying to hide, behind the argument of preserving Israel's national security. Trump leaves US special forces in Syria not only because it is good for Israel and because Netanyahu has pleaded with him, but mainly because Pentagon officers and National Security Council experts have explained to him that the battle in Syria against ISIS has not ended, and that a presence in Syria is important. This is so that the United States will have military, diplomatic and economic leverage with which to threaten Putin and the Russian presence in Syria, and so that the Iranians in Syria are prevented from destabilizing the pro-Western regime in Jordan and other pro-Western regimes in the region, including Israel.
- The American presence in Syria also prevents Iran from establishing a continental Shiite corridor, and for this Trump responded to an explicit Saudi request. In short, Trump is taking advantage of us, and it would not be so worrisome if only the use of the false claim regarding Israel's security would not come back to bite us. Even those who are not pessimistic by nature should reasonably expect the possibility of American soldiers being harmed or, heaven forbid, killed in Syria or Iraq, or by a Yemeni missile in Saudi Arabia. In this case, and in view of Trump's repeated claim that the American military presence is necessary mainly because of Israel, it is clear that many in the United States will blame Israel for the deaths of American soldiers sacrificed for Israel's security. In the United States, such claims are not forgotten, and even Trump, who invented the false "Israel argument," is likely to turn on us if he gets into trouble in our region.