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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Friday, November 9*

### Headlines:

- **New Envoys from Cairo, Amman Affirm Peace with Israel**
- **Netanyahu's Suspected Lawyer: PM Was Unaware**
- **High Court Freezes Demolition of Terrorist's Family Home**
- **Lieberman Pushes Death Penalty for Terrorists**
- **Palestinian Said Killed Near Gaza Border Fence**
- **Gaza Vicinity Youth March Reaches Jerusalem**
- **Israeli Olive Tree Sabotage Plagues Palestinian Farmers**
- **Gallant: We're Ready for Peace With Arab States**

### Commentary:

- **Jerusalem Post: "Israeli Elections or a US Peace Plan?"**
  - By Yaakov Katz, Editor, Jerusalem Post
- **Ha'aretz: "Occupation? What Occupation?"**
  - By Zehava Galon, former Leader, Meretz Party

# News Excerpts

November 9, 2018

Times of Israel

## **New Envoys from Cairo, Amman Affirm Peace with Israel**

New ambassadors of Jordan and Egypt on Thursday recommitted to their countries' peace agreements with Israel, while stressing the need to achieve progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In separate meetings with Ghassan Majali of Jordan and Khaled Azmi of Egypt, Rivlin hailed the peace deal with Israel as an anchor of regional stability, but expressed the wish for warmer relations with both peoples. Both envoys lauded the peace agreements and said there was a need for Israel to reach an arrangement with the Palestinians.

Times of Israel

## **Netanyahu's Suspected Lawyer: PM Was Unaware**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's former lawyer David Shimron insisted Thursday that the premier was unaware of illicit activity in the purchase of naval vessels from a German shipbuilder, after police recommended the indictment of a number of Netanyahu's associates, including Shimron. Shimron, who is also Netanyahu's cousin, was one of six high-profile figures who police said should be charged with bribery in the so-called Case 3000, which revolves around Israel's acquisition of submarines manufactured by the German industrial giant ThyssenKrupp at a cost of hundreds of million of dollars.

Jerusalem Post

## **High Court Freezes Demolition of Terrorist's Family Home**

Israel's High Court of Justice temporarily froze the demolition of the home belonging to the Palestinian terrorist who killed two at the Barkan industrial zone. The IDF announced earlier this week that it was going to partially demolish the attacker's family's home. The High Court decision does not mean that the demolition was blocked, only that it wishes to hear the family's arguments against the demolition.

AI Monitor

## **Lieberman Pushes Death Penalty for Terrorists**

Despite objections by Israel's security and defense establishments, Netanyahu has given Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman a green light to advance a bill allowing military courts to more easily sentence terrorists to death. The coalition agreement between his party and the Likud stipulated that the government would promote the change. But given various security agencies' assessment that it could foment Palestinian violence, and opposition by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, Netanyahu did not rush to legislate the law.

Ha'aretz

## **Palestinian Said Killed Near Gaza Border Fence**

A 20-year-old Palestinian male was killed by Israeli military fire on Thursday near the Israeli border in central Gaza, the Palestinian Health Ministry reported. According to Palestinian reports, Israeli forces opened fire at four youths near the border fence. The incident comes one day after the organizing committee for the March of Return in Gaza announced that the marches along the border fence with Israel will continue this weekend, despite the positive diplomatic developments and improved conditions in the Strip in recent days.

Ynet

## **Gaza Vicinity Youth March Reaches Jerusalem**

Thousands of Israeli high-school students from Gaza border communities began the last leg of their protest march Thursday and are expected to reach the Wohl Rose Park park situated opposite the Knesset in Jerusalem. The youth have organized the march in order to raise awareness of the ongoing high tensions on the Gaza border. The students have walked over 90 kilometers for the past five days in order to reach the capital, and they were joined along the way by their peers from other areas of the country. On Thursday morning, the teenagers were joined by the bereaved families, who lost their loved ones during Operation Protective Edge.

Times of Israel

## **Israeli Olive Tree Sabotage Plagues Palestinian Farmers**

Olives are perhaps the most well-known and abundant Palestinian product, with trees lining valleys and terraced hillsides throughout the West Bank. In many places, farmers say they face intimidation and violence from nearby extremist settlers and call in support from foreign and Israeli supporters, including Jewish rabbis, to protect them and their crops. Some of the incidents are seen as attempts at revenge following Palestinian attacks on Israelis, even if the farmers targeted were not involved. In other cases, say rights groups, there is little motivation other than just to destroy Palestinian property. Some rights groups have distributed video footage of such incidents in a bid to pressure Israeli authorities to act.

Jerusalem Post

## **Gallant: We're Ready for Peace With Arab States**

Israel is ready to make peace with every Arab country, Construction Minister and former OC Southern Command Yoav Gallant said in an exclusive interview. Gallant, who is also a member of the security cabinet, said, "If you look at the picture, there is no real reason for Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states to fight with Israel. We have shared interests, a shared enemy called Iran, which threatens Saudi Arabia from close with all that it has. And therefore there is no reason we should not be in the process to have peace in the region," he said. "Israel always stretches its hand out for peace with its neighbors... as it did after the Yom Kippur War with the Egyptians."

## **Israeli Elections or a US Peace Plan?**

By Yaakov Katz, Editor, Jerusalem Post

- Two clocks are ticking, one in Jerusalem and one in Washington. The problem is that for the time being, they are not synchronized. With the midterm elections over in the US, President Donald Trump now has the bandwidth and time to shift his focus back to foreign policy issues, including the so-called “deal of the century” that he longs to broker between Israel and the Palestinians. The finishing touches are being put on the plan, and it could be rolled out as early as next month or in January.
- The problem is that the US schedule doesn’t seem to match up with Israel’s schedule, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is apparently toying with the idea of moving up the elections, scheduled now for November 2019. No one in the coalition believes the government will last until then, and almost everyone thinks something – either the haredi draft bill or Netanyahu’s criminal investigations – will prompt the prime minister to dissolve the government in the coming months. This is important because if the government is dissolved in December, there would be no point in rolling out a peace deal that Israel will not be able to embrace. While Netanyahu is expected, according to polls, to remain prime minister after the elections, the Americans remember the sharp turn he made to the far Right during the 2015 campaign, when he said that under his watch there would never be a Palestinian state.
- Did Netanyahu really mean what he said, or was it a last-ditch effort – which succeeded – to pull right-wing votes away from Bayit Yehudi and his nemesis Naftali Bennett? Either way, since being reelected in 2015, he hasn’t engaged in peace talks with the Palestinian Authority. This scenario could easily repeat itself if the Americans roll out a peace plan as Israel heads to elections. If the plan calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state, Bennett could use that to his favor and attack Netanyahu, who would be caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, he would be expected to embrace the plan that had been forged by an administration that he claims is the most pro-Israel in American history. But if he does embrace it, he gives ammunition to his political adversaries. If, however, Netanyahu distances himself from the plan, this could also have far-reaching implications and create an unprecedented rift between him and Trump.
- Since Trump’s election, Netanyahu has worked hard to forge close ties with the president and his administration. Part of this was an effort by the prime minister to show the Israeli public that after clashing with two democratic presidents – Bill Clinton and Barack Obama – he knew not only how to get along with a president, but also how to derive strategic assets from that relationship. If he says no to the plan because of political calculations during elections, he could be undermining that very relationship, a move that could also have political consequences. It seems the Americans know this and are therefore going to wait a bit longer to see what is decided with the Israeli elections. If, for example, Israel seems to be heading to elections sooner

rather than later, Trump will wait. If, however, elections appear to remain on schedule for the end of next year, the peace plan will be rolled out in the coming months.

- While the plan seems to be in its final stages, what remains unclear is how the administration will succeed in getting Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to sit down for negotiations. Abbas's feeling until now has been that the Trump administration is biased against him – it has cut funding to UNRWA, has passed the Taylor Force Act, moved the embassy to Jerusalem, and cozied up with his adversary Netanyahu. It seems Trump's thinking is that by lowering the bar, he could draw Abbas back to the table by offering him a few carrots with the rollout of the deal. It will be interesting to see if that works. But even if it doesn't, there is still something to gain from unveiling a plan, even if predictions that the Palestinians will refuse to negotiate turn out to be right. The first benefit is moving the goalpost. The content of the Trump deal remains a closely-guarded secret. Nevertheless, and based on the administration's actions and public statements by its officials, it will be different from the Clinton parameters or the plan put forth in 2014 by then-secretary of state John Kerry. For far too long, the world has been fixated on a framework for peace that has proven to be unrealistic, mostly because the most Israel could offer never meets the minimum the Palestinians could accept.
- Will that change now? I don't know. But even if the Palestinians refuse to come to the table, the parameters laid down by Trump would serve as a new starting point for any future administration looking to advance a peace deal. The goalpost will have been moved and when peace talks are finally launched – whenever that might be – the starting point will be different than it was before. If Obama and Kerry wanted 1967 lines, Trump's deal might call for something else. And if Clinton wanted Israel out of almost all of the West Bank, the Trump deal might suggest a different idea. The fact that Israel is warming up – in an unprecedented way – to the Gulf states creates conditions that could also help usher in a new deal. If Abbas rejects the deal, but Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates publicly say it has positive elements, the Palestinian leadership will find itself in a tough spot.
- If Netanyahu is headed to elections, the pending peace deal could also play a role in the parties he decides to invite to join his new coalition. If, for example, he brings in Bennett and Bayit Yehudi, he will have inserted into his coalition an automatic opponent to a Palestinian state. If, on the other hand, he tries to establish a coalition with Yair Lapid and Yesh Atid, he might have quiet inside the government, but he will be giving Bennett a platform – in the opposition – from which to attack him daily. As a result, it might be better to keep him inside the tent, even if he will be slightly adversarial. After past deals were proposed by US administrations, Israel usually answered "Yes, but" and the Palestinians usually responded with "No, but." Will that happen this time? Time will tell. The clock to the unveiling of Trump's deal of the century is counting down.

## Occupation? What Occupation?

By Zehava Galon, former Leader, Meretz Party

- On Monday, during the closed-door part of the Likud legislative caucus, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the following: “Nations respect morality up to a known limit and they respect power much more. We reject the understanding of the occupation. If the occupation were the issue, there are a number of states that have occupied other states and no one says a word about them. Big, well-known states. No one said a word about Turkey and Northern Cyprus.” Of course these remarks drowned immediately in the shallows between the latest boorishness of Likud MK Oren Hazan and the sexism of Yesh Atid MK Elazar Stern.
- Just 30 years into his political career, Netanyahu finally told the truth (whispered and behind closed doors, of course): The occupation isn't the issue. Populations under occupation aren't important. Millions of people whose rights are trampled day after day, whose lives are intolerable, are of no interest to Israel's prime minister. He doesn't bother with such things. Power is the only thing that matters. Jewish power. And on that score, Netanyahu is in fact satisfied. “It's important to raise [these issues] because people have spoken of a tsunami, that the Palestinian issue must be solved,” he said at the meeting. “That shouldn't stop us in face of the enormous diplomatic success that we are creating.”
- In last week's local elections, residents of Kiryat Arba voted out Mayor Malachi Levinger, yet once again in Hebron there was no elections no election. In the south Hebron hills, human beings built settlement outposts on stolen land, while the population of Khan al-Ahmar is slated for eviction. Settlers have the right to build in order to accommodate “natural increase,” while the population of the territories is barred from planning construction, “in accordance with instructions from the political level,” as the head of the Civil Administration recently admitted. A “population” is devoid of humanity and can be trampled on or “exchanged,” the way you'd exchange a purchase in a store.
- Something should be said about that power to which Netanyahu aspires like some Hollywood villain. Power is more than the sum of a country's economic and military strengths. Israel's economy and its military strength depend on its alliances and these alliances depend, in part, on its values. The Israel of the Declaration of Independence is a state that acquired sufficient power to enter an alliance with the United States and European states. Netanyahu's Israel crawls after any local tyrant willing to relocate an embassy.
- Strong states are not drawn to aid Hungary's Viktor Orban, whose campaigns drip with anti-Semitism, or Brazil's Jair Bosonaro, who talks about bringing back the military junta in his country. But apparently, the confluence of interests at the basis of such alliances also hides a confluence of values. Prime ministers here once flirted with an alliance of minorities; now we've progressed to an alliance of pariahs. Netanyahu's remarks drew little attention. No one asked

him to clarify and explain how they could be reconciled with the lies he spouted in the Bar-Ilan speech. Maybe because no one expects him to tell the truth.

- Elections in Israel rise and fall on the future of the territories, and the prime minister believes it's legitimate to maintain ambiguity. It's easy to understand this, considering the policy that he supports. It's more difficult to understand why the public submissively accepts this kind of treatment. Netanyahu may have been talking about international relations, but he promotes the same immoral and power-drunk policy on the political level too. If we're not careful, Israel will increasingly come to resemble Netanyahu: a paranoid state that talks about "loyalty" but longs for flattery, a state whose citizens are all potential enemies. We are standing on the edge of the abyss, and reflecting back at us from the bottom is Netanyahu's face.