



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, November 23

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News Excerpts

November 23, 2018

Jerusalem Post

Report: Trump Delays Peace Plan until February

The Palestinian daily Al-Quds claimed on Thursday that US President Donald Trump has decided to postpone the publication of his plan for peace in the Middle East until February 2019. The paper's correspondent in Washington quoted an unnamed "informed source" as saying that Trump prefers not to publish his plan at all, certainly not under the current circumstances where the situation in the Middle East is "unclear and volatile." According to the source, Trump has been briefed on the "wide frames" of the US peace plan, but has left the matter in the hands of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, his adviser Jason Greenblatt, and US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, who will revise it and discuss the date for its release. See also, ["ANALYSIS: Why Trump shelved his peace plan for Israel" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Hamas Releases Images of 'Israeli Fighters Involved in Gaza Raid'

Hamas published images on Thursday that allegedly show the Israeli combat soldiers who took part in a botched special operation in the southern Gaza Strip last week. The office of the Israeli military censor issued a rare statement in which it asked not to publish the information distributed by Hamas. "Hamas is currently involved in an attempt to decipher and understand the event that took place deep in Gaza on November 11 and every piece of information, even if it is considered harmless by those publishing it is liable to endanger human lives and cause harm to the country's security," the statement read. See also, ["Hamas publishes photos of raid 'fugitives'; Israeli censor warns media" \(Reuters\)](#)

Reuters

Airbnb Faces Israeli Class-Action Suit for Delisting Settlement

Lawyers launched a class action lawsuit in Israel on Thursday against Airbnb, accusing the company of "outrageous discrimination" and demanding monetary damages after it withdrew listings of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. The San Francisco-based company said this week it was removing listings of around 200 homes in settlements after hearing criticism from people who "believe companies should not profit on lands where people have been displaced". Through her attorneys, Ma'anit Rabinovich from the West Bank settlement of Kida, who offers guest room rentals, said the move "represents especially grave, offensive and outrageous discrimination". See also, ["Class action lawsuit filed against Airbnb by Israeli settlers" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Times of Israel

Trump: Israel Would Be in Big Trouble Without Saudi Arabia

US President Donald Trump on Thursday suggested that Israel would face major regional difficulties in the Middle East if it were not for the stabilizing presence of Saudi Arabia. "Israel would be in big trouble without Saudi Arabia," Trump told reporters after a Thanksgiving Day telephone call with members of the military from his Mar-a-Lago resort home in Florida. The US president was asked to comment on reports that the CIA had concluded that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman ordered the brutal murder of US-based Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October. "Israel would be in big trouble without Saudi Arabia," Trump said.

IDF Wish Lebanon Happy Independence Day ‘Free of Hezbollah’

Israel's military wished Lebanon a happy Independence Day Thursday, using the rare message to urge an end to Iranian influence over the country. In a tweeted message, accompanied by a picture of the Lebanese flag and a hand making a peace sign, the IDF's Spokesperson's Unit wished Lebanon freedom from "Iranian imperialism and #Hezbollah's terrorism in your country." "Happy Independence Day to the people of #Lebanon, our neighbors to the north," read the message. The message was posted to the IDF's English, French and Spanish Twitter pages, but not in Hebrew. See also, ["Israel admits it sank Lebanese refugee boat in 1982 war error, killing 25" \(TOI\)](#)

I24 News

Israel Authorizes Evacuation of 700 Pal' from East Jerusalem

Israel's High Court of Justice rejected the petition filed by residents of the Silwan village on Wednesday, authorizing the right-wing Ateret Cohanim organization to continue evacuating 700 Palestinians from East Jerusalem. The dismissal of the petition came despite the judges admitting that the procedure concerning the Silwan village homes was flawed and raised questions about land transfers to the organization. The rejected petition was filed by 104 residents of the Batin al-Hawa neighborhood in Silwan. The Israeli Justice Ministry's administrator general has been accused by Palestinians and left-wing organizations of unfairly helping settler organizations in East Jerusalem. In Silwan, the office has been supporting Ateret Cohanim organization's acquisition of land where hundreds of Palestinians live. See also, ["Israel to evict 700 Palestinians from Silwan" \(MEM\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Israeli who Sent Thousands of Bomb Threats Jailed for 10 Years

An Israeli-American hacker who terrorized U.S. Jews with bomb threats was sentenced on Thursday by a Tel Aviv District Court judge to 10 years in prison. The 19-year old was charged with making thousands of bomb threats, including to a United States senator, as well as to airports, schools and Jewish centers in the U.S. in 2016 and early 2017. The hoax threats forced widespread evacuations and stirred fear of resurgence of anti-Semitism. The hacker, whose name was withheld from publication, was arrested in March 2017 with the help of the FBI. An Israeli court convicted him in June of all counts committed when he was no longer a minor, from 2016 onwards. Among other counts, he was convicted of extortion, conspiracy to commit a crime and money laundering. According to the conviction, he made around 2,000 false terrorism threats from 2015 until his arrest in March 2017.

Ynet News

Knesset Rejects Opposition Bill to Treat Violence against Women

The coalition brought down Wednesday an opposition bill proposal to combat violence against women, despite weeks of extensive public protest against the phenomenon. The bill proposal was rejected by 59 Knesset members, while 56 supported it. Among the female coalition MKs who voted against the bill—many of whom promote social issues— were Social Equality Minister Gila Gamliel (Likud), Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked (Bayit Yehudi), Culture and Sports Minister Miri Regev (Likud), Deputy Foreign Affairs minister Tzipi Hotovely (Likud), Kulanu MKs Tali Ploskov, Meirav Ben-Ari, and Likud MKs Nava Boker, Anat Berko, Nurit Koren, and Yifat Shasha-Biton. Welfare and Social Services Minister Haim Katz also voted against the bill, as well as all other coalition members.

Greenlighting East Jerusalem Eviction Attests to Revolution in Israel's Supreme Court

By Nir Hasson, Jerusalem correspondent at Ha'aretz

- The Supreme Court rejected an appeal from Palestinian residents of Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood against their eviction last Thursday, on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired. On Tuesday, the Supreme Court's justices rejected a petition from a woman dispossessed of her property by a rabbinical court because she had committed adultery. That same day, it rejected an appeal by Sheikh Sayekh Abu Madi'am, who was sentenced to 10 months in jail for trespassing because he insisted on returning to the land in the Negev from which he had been forcibly evicted. And on Wednesday, the High Court of Justice rejected a petition by 104 residents of Jerusalem's Silwan neighborhood, allowing the settler organization Ateret Cohanim to resume proceedings to evict some 700 Palestinians from their homes.
- This series of decisions from the past week alone shows that Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked has completed her revolution. The High Court decision in Silwan is at best a rubber stamp for injustice, endowed with legal and moral flexibility; at worst, the court is leading the conservative and reactionary charge, both legally and in Israeli society more generally.
- Wednesday's ruling on the Silwan petition, written by Justice Daphne Barak-Erez, is quite thin. Its 22 pages summarize a legal and historical case that goes back 120 years. The petition challenged a 2002 decision by the Justice Ministry's office of the administrator general to hand land that had been owned by Jews until 1948, but which is today home to 700 Palestinians, over to three members of Ateret Cohanim.
- After first rejecting a request by the settlers and the state to dismiss the petition out of hand, the ruling detailed a series of flaws in the administrator general's conduct. For instance, Barak-Erez wrote, the administrator, formerly known as the Custodian of Absentee Property, released the land to Ateret Cohanim without even bothering to inform the residents who had lived there for decades, some of whom had even purchased their homes. She also confirmed that the administrator never investigated whether the land's legal classification under the laws of the Ottoman Empire – the ruling power at the time Jews purchased it – even allowed the land to be turned over. Only in the final stages of the legal process did the state start looking into this complex question, the justice bemoans, and there's still no definitive answer to it.
- Yet despite all these problems, her bottom line was that the High Court is the wrong place to investigate these factual arguments, and that the problems didn't stem from the way the administrator acted, but rather "lie in the statutory arrangement." Therefore, she rejected the petition. As a result, the dozens of suits Ateret Cohanim has filed to evict the Palestinian residents will be resumed in the coming weeks.
- At the end of the ruling, Barak-Erez paid some lip service, writing, "Evicting people who have lived on this land for decades – some of them without even knowing that the land belongs to others – creates a human problem." She then proposed that the state provide "a solution" for those evicted from their homes, perhaps hinting at the generous "solutions" – in the form of

either financial compensation or alternative housing – that have been given to settlers who took over privately owned Palestinian land in the West Bank and were forced to move.

- Perhaps Barak-Erez doesn't know this, but the Palestinian families evicted from Silwan will be required to pay hundreds of thousands of shekels to the settlers after their eviction, in compensation for the costs of the legal proceedings and in rent for all the years they lived there.
- Every brand-new intern in every court in Jerusalem known that when it comes to land laws, there are two classes of citizens. Palestinians, and only them, can be declared as absentees, whose land can be given to others. And only Jews can regain property that they owned before the 1948 War of Independence. This legal and moral injustice is evident in every case in which a Palestinian family is fighting eviction proceedings by a settler organization.
- Ultimately, the judges, bureaucrats and attorneys will have to ask themselves how they operated within this warped system. Did they grease the wheels, or did they try here and there to put a spoke in them, to ask questions and prevent an injustice? With regard to the current Supreme Court justices, the answer seems clear.

SUMMARY: Every brand-new intern in every court in Jerusalem known that when it comes to land laws, there are two classes of citizens. Palestinians, and only them, can be declared as absentees, whose land can be given to others. And only Jews can regain property that they owned before the 1948 War of Independence. This legal and moral injustice is evident in every case in which a Palestinian family is fighting eviction proceedings by a settler organization. Ultimately, the judges, bureaucrats and attorneys will have to ask themselves how they operated within this warped system. Did they grease the wheels, or did they try here and there to put a spoke in them, to ask questions and prevent an injustice? With regard to the current Supreme Court justices, the answer seems clear.

Former IDF Head Spooks Israel's Entire Political Spectrum

By Mazal Mualem columnist at AI Monitor

- So far, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made a point of not attacking former Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, whether directly or indirectly. He has stuck with it while Gantz began to rise in the polls over the last few months, and even though he is taking a bite out of the bloc of less committed Likud supporters. “He’s good for us,” people close to Netanyahu told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity when asked about Gantz’ rise. They explained, “As long as he runs alone, he just ends up splitting the left. Even if he does win seats from the Likud, it will not change the bigger picture.”
- So far, Netanyahu himself has been behind this policy of ignoring Gantz. But all that finally came to an end this week when a Channel 10 poll showed Gantz winning about 15 seats. Another poll, this one by Hadashot, made matters worse, asking, “Who would you like to see as defense minister?” It gave Gantz a significant edge over Netanyahu (28% to just 7%) on the very day that the prime minister officially took over as defense minister, following Yisrael Beitenu head Avigdor Liberman’s resignation.
- Gantz has not yet officially announced that he will launch a new party. He has remained silent about his plans, leaving the feeling that all options are open to him, including the possibility of joining one of the existing center-left parties. On the other hand, the more flattering the polls are to him, the greater his appetite will become. In other words, the chances of him joining an existing party before the next election are dwindling.
- Netanyahu knows how to read between the lines. He has a deep understanding of trends in the polls, regardless of whether the results are made public or if they are gleaned from privately ordered surveys. He certainly knows that his image as Mr. Security suffered a devastating blow as a result of recent events in Gaza. The trouble came to a climax last week, when Netanyahu came under a barrage of criticism from the leaders of the other right-wing parties. Liberman resigned and while Education Minister Naftali Bennett (HaBayit HaYehudi) may have remained in the government, he thinks that Netanyahu failed.
- As a former IDF chief of staff, Gantz is no less a security expert than Netanyahu. On the other hand, he is not tainted by corruption and is regarded by the public as a suitable candidate. Even when Netanyahu was at his lowest point in the polls, there was no one who could challenge his high levels of public support or question his suitability as prime minister or “Mr. Security.” Gantz can.
- When Gantz broke his long silence, he completed the image that the public was seeing at home that night. His comments on responsible leadership were quoted extensively on the evening news. Among other things, he called on the country’s leaders to “avoid taking advantage of this just and essential war of defense for personal or political gain,” and said, “It is important to engage in a firm and clear-headed policy that bolsters the State of Israel’s strength.” He went on to talk about a cohesive society and a government that serves the people, about equality and

hope. It set off all the alarms in the prime minister's office that a new threat was emerging right before his eyes. Then came the morning after, when Culture Minister Miri Regev gave a television interview. Her offensive and toxic comments about Gantz could hardly be attributed to chance.

- Viewers were dumbfounded when Regev responded to a question about the former chief of staff and how he was soaring in the polls. She accused Gantz of being indirectly responsible for the death of a child in August 2014, during the final days of Operation Protective Edge, when a mortar shell hit his home on Kibbutz Nahal Oz. "We all remember Gantz as chief of staff," she said. "The final chord of his tenure as chief of staff was when he told Israelis 'go out to pick anemones' and Daniel Tragerman was killed. The only ones who can lead the security policy are the Likud Party and Netanyahu," she concluded.
- Regev was referring to Gantz' comments after a cease-fire has been reached with Hamas. In remarks later known as the "Anemone Speech," he called on the residents of the south to return to their homes: "The fields will turn green and the south will be awash in red — in the positive sense of the word — in anemones, flowers and stability, which will be here for many years to come."
- Even if Regev's comments weren't coordinated with Netanyahu word for word, they reflected the new mood coming straight from prime minister's office: As of this week, Gantz is the enemy. That was why Regev refused to take back her remarks, saying instead on Facebook Nov. 21, "To all those with a short memory who try to keep this delicate new fruit all wrapped up in cotton balls, I am here to remind you of what you are trying to forget." There can be no doubt that Regev is the songbird whose chirping announces open warfare against Gantz as long as the polls perceive him as a real threat, the country's best hope or the next "Mr. Security."
- This is only the beginning of Gantz' worries. So far, he has not aligned himself with any existing party. If he continues along this path, he is bound to face many rivals, including from members of his own center-left camp. Furthermore, if Gantz runs as the head of his own party, he would effectively lay waste to Yesh Atid, which would only win some 12 seats (polls now give it 18-20 seats), while the Zionist Camp would drop to just 10 seats. He would also take seats from Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon's Kulanu, which would hover on the electoral threshold with just four seats. Neither Lapid nor Zionist Camp head Avi Gabbay will sit twiddling their thumbs once Gantz announces he plans to run. They will accuse him of tearing the center-left apart and claim that Netanyahu will win the election all because of him. In that sense, Regev's vitriol is just the beginning.
- Over the last year, Lapid invested enormous efforts into courting Gantz to fill the number-two slot on his party's list. He failed. He also has no plans to evacuate his seat and his party's number-one slot for Gantz. Meanwhile, senior members of the Zionist Camp have attempted to go over Gabbay's head and recruit Gantz to replace him as party leader. Their efforts were similarly futile. Gabbay will not surrender his position so easily. So far, all of this seething on the ground is causing Gantz to distance himself from the existing parties and consider running independently.
- When a senior member of Yesh Atid ran into Gantz two weeks ago, he told the former chief of staff that he is making the mistake of his life by not the joining the party as Lapid's number-two man. "Why would I?" Gantz supposedly answered. "I haven't said a word, and I'm still climbing in the polls." He was met with the response, "You'll see soon enough. Once they dig your

Anemone Speech out of the archives and start playing it on a loop, you won't be able to stay quiet much longer." What the Yesh Atid member didn't realize was that it all would happen so soon.

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