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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Tuesday, November 27*

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- **US Ambassador Denies White House is Holding Up Release of Peace Plan**
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# News Excerpts

November 27, 2018

## Jerusalem Post

### **Czech President Voices Hope Embassy Will Move to Jerusalem**

Israel's self-proclaimed "best friend," Czech President Milos Zeman, gave a "message of solidarity with Israel and the Jewish People" in his speech to the Knesset on Monday. "Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu said the Czech Republic is Israel's best friend in Europe. I wonder, why only Europe?" Zeman quipped in English. "Anyway, I am the best friend of Israel in my whole country." Zeman cited historic Czech support for Israel and the Jewish People, and called the European Parliament's "support for Palestinian terrorists" shameful. "If we betray Israel, we betray ourselves," he said, to applause from MKs. See also, ["Czech president vows to move embassy to Jerusalem in speech to Knesset" \(j24 News\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **US Ambassador Denies WH is Holding Up Release of Peace Plan**

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman denied on Monday that the administration is considering postponing the publication of its much-awaited peace proposal, saying that the plan will be released whenever it has the best chance of success. "I would like to reaffirm that the United States remains committed to sharing its vision for peace with Israel, the Palestinians and other regional and international stakeholders at the appropriate time," he said in a rare written statement posted to the website of the US Embassy. See also, ["Ambassador Friedman's Statement on Recent Meetings in Washington on the Peace Plan" \(US Embassy in Israel\)](#)

## Ha'aretz

### **PA Seeks Arab League Session Over Israel's Warming Ties**

Palestinian Authority officials are seeking emergency sessions of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation over Israel's increasingly close ties with some Arab countries and what is seen as the normalization of relations with Israel. The developments include this week's visit to Israel by the president of Chad; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit last month to the Gulf state of Oman; and reports that Israel is working to establish diplomatic ties with Sudan and Bahrain. Former Palestinian Foreign Minister Nabil Sha'ath told Haaretz that the Palestinian leadership is monitoring Israel's development of diplomatic ties. The closer relations that Arab countries have developed with Israel run counter to declarations adopted by the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation summits. See also, ["Sudan denies it will follow Chad in establishing ties with Israel" \(JPost\)](#)

## Reuters

### **Israeli Minister Says He's Invited to 2019 Conference in Bahrain**

An Israeli cabinet minister said on Monday he had been invited to attend a conference next year in Bahrain, in what he described as part of Israel's emerging relations with Arab and Muslim countries that do not formally recognize it. Israel's diplomatic push in the Gulf, where it sees Arab states as its natural allies against regional powerhouse Iran, has become increasingly public after years of covert contacts. Shared worries about Iran or needs in terms of security, agriculture and water have thawed hostility toward Israel among some Arab governments. After a surprise trip to Oman last month, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on Sunday hosted a first visit by Chadian President Idriss Deby.

## **Israel Works to Release Arab Detained for Selling Lands to Jews**

Israel has increased its pressure on the Palestinian Authority (PA) in an effort to secure the release of Issam Akel, an east Jerusalem resident with American citizenship, who was detained by the PA's General Intelligence Service (GIS) six weeks ago on suspicion of selling lands to Jews. On Sunday, the Israel Police arrested Adnan Rit, the Governor of the Jerusalem District of the Palestinian Authority, on suspicion he was behind Akel's detention. Rit had been arrested at his home in east Jerusalem's Silwan neighborhood, and his remand was extended until Thursday. This move was one of a series of unusual steps Israel has taken against senior officials in the PA as part of the attempts to free Akel. See also, ["PA wages campaign against Palestinians selling lands to Jews in east Jerusalem" \(Ynet News\)](#)

### Jerusalem Post

## **Cabinet Source: Coalition Won't Survive Haredi Enlistment Law**

The coalition is at an impasse over haredi enlistment and is unlikely to pass a law on the matter despite asking the Supreme Court to extend its time limit beyond the December 2 deadline to do so, a senior cabinet source said Monday. "The extension is just a way to kill time," the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The coalition has not been able to find a way to move past haredi parties' conditions for the law, and at this point it seems likely that Agudat Yisrael, the hassidic bloc in United Torah Judaism, would not only vote against the bill but would leave the coalition if the law passes, the source added. Their departure would likely trigger an election. At the same time, PM Netanyahu does not want to significantly change the bill, which is based on the IDF's needs and recommendations. See also, ["COALITION REQUESTS NEW EXTENSION ON HAREDI ENLISTMENT BILL" \(JPost\)](#)

### Times of Israel

## **Furious Regev Bashes Ministers for Blocking her Loyalty Bill**

Culture Minister Miri Regev launched a scathing attack Monday against fellow cabinet member Moshe Kahlon and Yisrael Beytenu head Avigdor Liberman, after they effectively blocked the passage of a bill granting her the power to withhold arts funding based on political criteria. During a tense press conference that saw journalists verbally assailed by her supporters, Regev said that Kahlon, the finance minister, and Liberman have "given a gift to terrorists" by refusing to back her bill, "shirked their responsibility" to the public and proved that they "work for the New Israel Fund," the left-wing NGO that has become a bogeyman for right-wing lawmakers.

### Bloomberg

## **Bank of Israel Surprises with Rate Rise Before Transition**

The Bank of Israel raised its benchmark interest rate to 0.25 percent on Monday, an unexpected move that brought nearly four years of record-low borrowing costs to a close. In tightening policy for the first time since May 2011, the central bank determined that inflation is stabilizing within the government's target range and that the economy was strong enough to handle the change. The bank, in a statement accompanying the rate decision, assessed that borrowing costs would rise in a "gradual and cautious" manner. The shekel gained as much as 0.8 percent against the dollar, extending its daily advance and recouping some of its loss since the last rate announcement on Oct. 8. Monday's decision, presided over by acting Governor Nadine Baudot-Trajtenberg shifted the landscape for incoming Governor Amir Yaron, who is due to take over on Dec. 24. See also, ["By Raising Interest Rates, Central Bank Makes Clear Israel's Economy Is Looking Good" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## **Israelis Should Keep in Mind That Only Yair Lapid Can End Netanyahu's Saga**

By Tzvia Greenfield, contributor to Ha'aretz

- **Luckily, centrist and left-wing voters stopped believing opinions declared by pundits and prominent media personalities in Israel a long time ago. The recent hollow talk by senior Haaretz writers, lauding the many qualities of their newfound hero Benjamin Netanyahu, not only insults the good judgement of many people, who feel that under his leadership the country is going off the rails, but once again imposes chaos on people's basic opinions.**
- **Most voters of the center-left know Habayit Hayehudi is a marginal party that governs affairs here only because Likud pathetically handed over the keys. The main culprits behind the vast majority of revolting laws being passed one by one in the country are the prime minister and his Likud cronies.**
- **The stories now making the rounds about Netanyahu's efforts to select the new Israel Defense Forces chief of staff, and if not him then at least his deputy, show yet again how the organizations that should be overseeing fateful decisions such as the acquisition of submarines take fright at Netanyahu or his representatives, timidly dropping any criticism of their actions.**
- **In spite of the credit due the premier in light of his objection to the nuclear accord with Iran, there is no sane person of conscience in Israel who does not know that Netanyahu is the true source of the venom that has been disrupting our life for the last 20 years – the wellspring from which the poison has seeped into Israeli society.**
- **Telling Israelis now that Netanyahu is actually not that bad, and that he may be preferable to opposition leader Tzipi Livni – not to mention Yair Lapid – constitutes a betrayal of trust. Livni is finding increased favor among center and left-minded voters since she expresses their most profound beliefs in a clear and unambiguous fashion. Instead of abandoning them to the embarrassing choir that's suddenly singing the praises of Netanyahu from the left wing, Livni is confirming the basic values of democracy and of Zionism, values which have always driven centrist-leftist voters. After many years of confusion surrounding the basic values embraced by a public that always supported security and peace, Livni articulately and accurately expresses their deepest and truest convictions. This is why people support her.**
- **The same is true with regard to Lapid. Despite media scorn in response to his ambitions of becoming prime minister, there is no doubt that he expresses authentic and deeply felt public views. The statement "I love Israel" expresses a true value, one that drives most moderate left-wing voters after years of undermining by post-Zionists. It's not surprising that polls are showing that most of these voters continue to support Lapid as the candidate with the highest chances against Netanyahu.**
- **The real facts – not the imagined ones – show that his party Yesh Atid, which was badly bruised in the 2015 elections, is nevertheless the only political party currently capable of standing up to Likud. Apparently, no other party, in the opposition or the coalition, including the Zionist Union – which won 24 seats in 2015, but is currently polling at half that number – can pose a realistic threat to Netanyahu, according to recent surveys.**

- **Maybe former Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, or another miraculous candidate who crops up, will win the next election and beat Netanyahu. For now, however, Gantz, just like Moshe Kahlon before the last elections, has been propelled forward mainly thanks to the media. His chances, in effect, are lower than those of Lapid, who's already out there. Thus Lapid, with important support from Livni, Gantz, Ehud Barak and others, is the only one capable of finally ending the Netanyahu saga.**

**SUMMARY: The real facts – not the imagined ones – show that his party Yesh Atid, which was badly bruised in the 2015 elections, is nevertheless the only political party currently capable of standing up to Likud. Apparently, no other party, in the opposition or the coalition, including the Zionist Union – which won 24 seats in 2015, but is currently polling at half that number – can pose a realistic threat to Netanyahu, according to recent surveys. Maybe former Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, or another miraculous candidate who crops up, will win the next election and beat Netanyahu. For now, however, Gantz, just like Moshe Kahlon before the last elections, has been propelled forward mainly thanks to the media. His chances, in effect, are lower than those of Lapid, who's already out there. Thus Lapid, with important support from Livni, Gantz, Ehud Barak and others, is the only one capable**

## Israel's Ties with the Arab World Are Nothing to Get Excited Over

By Shimrit Meir, contributor to Ynet News

- One of the most basic qualities in the Israeli DNA is the yearning—at times moving and at times slightly pathetic—for recognition, legitimization, and acceptance in the Muslim and Arab world. For a photo op with a Muslim or Arab leader, left- and right-wing Israeli leaders are ready to pay a heavy price, and sometimes it is really not worth it.
- Israel is a small isolated island in a hostile and violent environment. Therefore, it would be wise for the Jewish State to build bridges where it can, form alliances, and do everything in its power to normalize its ties with the Arab world. Over the past few years, progress had been noted on that front, thanks to the combination of several circumstances: the dissolution of some of the countries in the Middle East, some countries' desire to join forces with the "neighborhood's bully" to create a counterweight to Iran, the Palestinians failing in promoting their agenda, forming an opposition to the Obama administration at the time, and now using Israel to get an "in" with the White House.
- But we have to stay realistic about our new friends. Chadian President Idriss Deby's visit to Israel is "historic" since this is the first time he arrives to the Jewish State. Apart from that, there is not a lot to be impressed by. Full diplomatic relations will not be established for now, and economic relations already exist. Israel will continue selling weapons to Deby—another African ruler with a pretty dubious record of human rights violations—only now he has so kindly agreed to arrive in Jerusalem, visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum, and take a picture with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
- It is safe to assume that the African leader has come to the conclusion that the photo op with the premier would benefit him—he needs international economic aid and any other support he can get from Washington—no less than it would benefit Netanyahu, who wants to display political momentum before the general elections next year.
- Even the Palestinian reacted in rather a feeble manner. The normalization of Israel's relations with far more important Arab countries is what's bothering the Palestinians, but they are quite helpless to stop that as well. The more significant diplomatic ties are with countries such as Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and of course Saudi Arabia. Here, too, Israel appears to be seeking to make these relations public, while it's not at all certain the Arab nations want that.
- The Iron Dome system that Israel gave Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, who is embroiled with the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, helped him a lot, but it caused significant damage to Israel's image, especially in the liberal media.
- What do we get from having the name "Israel" come up in relation to a regime that kills opposition journalists? What in it for us when US President Donald Trump uses Israel's secret ties with Saudi Arabia to legitimize his own tolerant attitude towards Bin Salman's actions, tolerance which stems from completely different considerations? It's unclear.

- **Let's hope that Mohammad Bin Salman remembers what Israel did for him better than Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, for whom Netanyahu also did a lot in Washington, and who after several years of toeing the line with regards to Hamas has gone back to embracing the terror organization, much like former president Hosni Mubarak.**
- **Israel is a strong country, which has a lot to contribute to the world and the countries in the region in the fields of technology, medicine, agriculture, and of course advanced weapons and intelligence systems. The last thing it needs from these countries—most of whom have dubious regimes—is legitimization. In fact, it is difficult to see how photo-ops of an Israeli leader with a controversial ruler could benefit the Jewish State, apart from the political benefits on election night. Because the Israelis, as already mentioned, are yet to overcome their childish desire for an Arab or Muslim embrace.**

**SUMMARY: What do we get from having the name "Israel" come up in relation to a regime that kills opposition journalists? What in it for us when US President Donald Trump uses Israel's secret ties with Saudi Arabia to legitimize his own tolerant attitude towards Bin Salman's actions, tolerance which stems from completely different considerations? It's unclear. Let's hope that Mohammad Bin Salman remembers what Israel did for him better than Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, for whom Netanyahu also did a lot in Washington, and who after several years of toeing the line with regards to Hamas has gone back to embracing the terror organization, much like former president Hosni Mubarak.**