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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Monday, December 3*

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# News Excerpts

December 3, 2018

Ha'aretz

## **Livni: PM Must Resign After Police Recommend Charges**

Israel's opposition leader called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to resign following the police's recommendations to charge him with bribery in the co-called Case 4000. "Netanyahu must go home before he destroys the law enforcement in order to save his own skin," Tzipi Livni wrote on Twitter. "The people of Israel deserve a clean leadership. Elections now!" Israel Police recommended on Sunday indicting Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, as well as media mogul Shaul Elovitch and his wife Iris, for bribery and other corruption charges.

Jerusalem Post

## **Court Ruling on Haredi Draft Deals PM Second Blow**

Netanyahu suffered a second blow Sunday when the Supreme Court rejected his government's request to extend the deadline for passing a the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) enlistment bill by four months and gave him only until January 15. Had the four-month extension been granted, Netanyahu could have gotten away without passing a new bill at all, waiting for the next Knesset recess and keeping the next election on schedule for November 5. The decision made it much more likely that the next election will be held in May.

Associated Press

## **In Sudden U-Turn, Trump Supports Some PA Aid**

For two years, the Trump administration has slashed aid to the Palestinians. Now, amid signs it may finally roll out its peace plan, the administration is scrambling to save what little remaining Palestinian assistance it provides. The striking turnabout is the result of the belated realization that an obscure new law will likely force the US to terminate all aid to the Palestinian Authority, including security assistance supported by Israel, by the end of January. Eliminating such aid, which totaled \$61 million this year even as other assistance was being cut, would deal a blow to Palestinian-Israeli security cooperation that both sides value.

Ha'aretz

## **PM Takes Mossad Chief to Meet Pompeo in Brussels**

Netanyahu briefly visit Brussels, Belgium on Monday where he is slated to meet Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. They will be accompanied by the head of the Mossad, and the head of the National Security Council. The premier and Pompeo were supposed to meet on Wednesday, but it was rescheduled due to changes in light of George H.W. Bush's funeral. Netanyahu and Pompeo are expected to discuss regional developments.

Times of Israel

## **Erekat Says Abbas Willing to Meet Netanyahu**

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is willing to meet Netanyahu anywhere in the world, according to Saeb Erekat, the secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee. "This is a challenge, a declared challenge." Another PLO official, who asked to remain unnamed, said Erekat meant to say Abbas is willing to meet Netanyahu anywhere other than Washington, DC.

Times of Israel

## **Shaked Touts Palestinian Confederation with Jordan**

Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked has proposed a "confederation" between parts of the West Bank, Jordan, and Gaza. "Our plan is to apply Israeli sovereignty on Area C and give the Palestinians living there full citizenship. Areas A and B will be part of a confederation, together with Jordan and Gaza," she told journalists Wednesday. "There's a large Palestinian population in Jordan and the Palestinians already have a state in Gaza. In the distant future, a confederation of these three entities will be the right way forward." Shaked, a member of the nationalist Jewish Home party, endorsed party chair Naftali Bennett's "Stability Plan."

Jerusalem Post

## **At UN, 148 Nations Disavow Jewish Ties to Jerusalem**

The UN General Assembly on Friday approved six anti-Israel resolutions including two that ignored Jewish ties to the Temple Mount. The votes come as Israel is working to shore up international support for its sovereignty in Jerusalem. The United States, Canada and Australia voted against all six resolutions, which are the first batch of some 20 resolutions that the UNGA annually passes against Israel. Speaking on behalf of the EU, the Austrian representative said the EU stresses "the need for language on the holy sites of Jerusalem to reflect the importance and historical significance of the holy sites for the three monotheistic religions."

Times of Israel

## **Israel Green-Lights \$187 Million for Gaza-Area Communities**

Israel on Sunday earmarked \$187 million for an economic plan to "strengthen the civilian resilience" of Gaza-area communities. In his remarks, Netanyahu credited the resilience of the communities with allowing "members of the government and security cabinet to make decisions in the right way at the right time." The decision to provide economic assistance includes the establishment of various factories to southern communities adjacent to the Gaza Strip and the development of industrial zones, as well as assistance in education, health, and social welfare.

## **A Step Closer to a Dramatic Shift in Israeli Politics**

By Lahav Harkov, Senior Columnist

- The recommendation to indict Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on corruption charges over Case 4000, otherwise known as the Bezeq Affair, is not likely to have much of an immediate impact, but it is a step toward what could be the most dramatic development in Israeli politics in a decade. “There will be nothing, because there is nothing,” has been Netanyahu’s mantra all along, and he repeated it again after the police released their statement on Sunday, trying to shrug off the latest development.
- In the short term, Netanyahu may be right not to despair because it seems likely that he will be safe, both politically and legally, for the coming months. The recommendations to indict Netanyahu in Cases 1000 and 2000 didn’t have much of a political effect. The opposition called on the prime minister to resign then, just as they did after the latest development. Likud ministers and MKs rallied around Netanyahu and cast aspersions on the police, just as they did on Sunday. After so many leaks in the media about Netanyahu and these cases, the announcements stopped making much of a dent on the polls. And coalition partners did not leave over the previous cases.
- But the close of this police investigation is more dramatic than the others and will reverberate farther than the others because Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit said he would wait for all the investigations to be completed before deciding whether to indict Netanyahu. Now the hour of decision is at hand. Sources close to Mandelblit have also told reporters that Case 4000 is the most serious of all, and he is strongly considering an indictment. Mandelblit has been known to take his time, but the police recommendations bring us one step closer toward the decision that can make or break Netanyahu, and possibly change Israeli politics as we’ve known it for the past decade. And this police recommendation comes during a time when there is constant election fever.
- This coalition has a one-seat majority, putting it on shaky ground to begin with. Coalition partners seem resigned to Netanyahu not wanting to dissolve the Knesset now, but they still have had trouble promoting much of a legislative agenda in recent weeks. Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon said in recent months that his Kulanu party would not remain in the coalition if Netanyahu is indicted. That factor is stronger now than ever before, and will likely contribute to the division and distrust within the coalition. And there’s the question of whether this recommendation changes Netanyahu’s plans. His attorney, Amit Hadad, favors a plea bargain by which the prime minister would not run for reelection, or resign shortly after being reelected, to avoid the indignity of standing trial. Perhaps Netanyahu thinks an indictment will make him unelectable, so he should try to stretch out his time in the Prime Minister’s Office for as long as possible before Israelis go to the polls. If indicted, could he call a snap election to ensure he remains prime minister for the duration of a possible trial?

- The possibility of Netanyahu exiting politics opens endless political questions and possibilities as to who will lead the Likud, whether that person will maintain the party's lead, or whether this is the center-left's opening to win an election for the first time in 13 years. And the possibility of Netanyahu being indicted and staying in politics could be dramatic as well. It is highly likely that there will be a petition at the Supreme Court against his remaining in office while on trial, which means that this is another major decision thrown to the judges. If the Likud is already repeating that leaders should be changed at the ballot booth and not through the police, imagine if a prime minister is removed by the Supreme Court, which the Right has been at odds with for years. Sunday's recommendation doesn't portend much about the political future. But it brings us that much closer to Mandelblit's decision, which could change everything. There may not be drama right now, but it is likely on the way.

## **President Trump's Misguided Approach to UNRWA**

By Eric Schwartz, President, Refugees International; former US Assistant Secretary of State

- In recent days, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has reported that donations from Gulf countries and others have contributed to dramatically reduce the agency's budget deficit for 2018 – a deficit occasioned in large part by US President Donald Trump's decision to cut all US support for UNRWA. This is good news for Palestinian civilians who depend on the critical assistance that UNRWA provides, but it does not alter Trump's wrong-headed decision to deny life-sustaining aid earlier this year. Nor should it end efforts by members of the US Congress to push back on this unfortunate decision. As the former US official in charge of relief to Palestinian refugees, I was dismayed by the president's decision, which was first announced in August. At about \$360 million per year, the United States had been UNRWA's largest country donor.
- Notwithstanding the efforts of other governments to give more in response to the president's action, the abrupt cancellation of US support has impacted UNRWA's effort to provide aid and created considerable uncertainty about the future of assistance that includes food, healthcare, and education. Like all humanitarian aid organizations, UNRWA is imperfect. But it has also proven effective in meeting humanitarian needs over decades. Moreover, it is clear that the US funding cut-off had little to do with UNRWA's effectiveness as an aid organization. In fact, the president has been unambiguous about his rationale: as long as the Palestinian political leadership is not prepared to toe the line on administration policy, Palestinian civilians will suffer the consequences. In a January 2 tweet, the president declared that "with the Palestinians no longer willing to talk peace, why should we make any of these massive future payments to them?" On the same day, when asked explicitly about support to UNRWA, then-ambassador Nikki Haley said that the president would "stop funding" UNRWA's civilian relief programs until the Palestinian leadership met US political demands.
- This linkage flies in the face of decades of responsible US policy on humanitarian aid to civilians around the world. During the Ethiopian famine in 1984, the administration of Ronald Reagan declared that "a hungry child knows no politics." And it was the administration of George W. Bush that signed onto the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles, an international declaration committing governments to humanitarian aid "solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations." These principles are not only morally sound. They have also enabled the United States to exercise enormous influence on international humanitarian issues around the world. In fact, Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have both boasted that the United States leads the world in humanitarian assistance. But those boasts lose their ethical significance if leadership means making life-saving relief to civilians hostage to politics. Indeed, that is exactly what is occurring. According to a report in Foreign Policy magazine, presidential adviser Jared Kushner pressed Jordanian officials to terminate the refugee status of Palestinians living in Jordan, and thereby end UNRWA responsibilities for this population.

- The corresponding White House attack on UNRWA is directly related to this unilateral effort to redefine who is a Palestinian refugee. It reflects an administration determined to dictate the terms of a political settlement, including the disposition of issues relating to the right of return for Palestinians. By terminating its support for UNRWA, the administration is pursuing its political objectives at the expense of the wellbeing and the lives of Palestinian civilians. Supporters of this unfortunate approach have cobbled together additional rationales for the funding cut-off that simply do not withstand scrutiny. Claiming that refugee status cannot be inherited, they have argued that Palestinian descendants of those who became refugees some 70 years ago should not be deemed refugees. However, the protracted refugee cases of Somalis in Kenya, Bhutanese in Nepal, and Afghans in Pakistan – and UN recognition that descendants in those situations were also refugees – demonstrate otherwise.
- They have wrongly contended that the granting of citizenship to Palestinians in Jordan somehow deprives Palestinian refugees of rights to any other durable solution to the forced displacement of their families many decades ago. And they have argued that UNRWA has failed the Palestinians because it has not resolved their political plight, when that objective was never part of the organization's mandate. To be sure, an end to the long term suffering of Palestinian refugees will only come about through a political solution that meets the needs of all parties to the conflict. But in the meantime, the Trump administration must cease measures that make humanitarian relief hostage to its political objectives and it must resume support for UNRWA.