



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Wednesday, January 30

Headlines:

- **Gantz: Political Divisiveness is Tearing Israel Apart**
- **Allying with Gantz, Ya'alon Rejects Two-State Solution**
- **Rival Parties Attack Gantz**
- **PA Security Aid to End, Envoys Seek Workaround**
- **Abbas Asks Palestinian Government to Stay for Transition**
- **Norway: Israeli Removal of Hebron Monitors 'Worrying'**
- **Abbas Suspends New Social Security Law**
- **Engel Rejects Tlaib Congressional West Bank Trip**

Commentary:

- **Times of Israel: "Gantz Offers 'Hope' to a Crowd Calling for 'Change'"**
 - By Raoul Wootliff, Senior Columnist
- **Fathom: "An Interview with former Mossad Director Shabtai Shavit"**
 - By Raphael Cohen-Almagor, Editor

News Excerpts

January 30, 2019

Ynet

Gantz: Political Divisiveness is Tearing Israel Apart

Former IDF chief of staff Benny Gantz broke his silence with the campaign debut of his Israel Resilience Party in Tel Aviv Tuesday evening. Gantz announced, “For me, Israel comes before everything... But I am here tonight because I fear for Israel. The nation is strong, the country is amazing, but an ill wind is blowing. Gantz accused the Netanyahu government of encouraging incitement and divisiveness. “No Israeli leader is king; the state is us all. I stand here today... and ask for your trust so that I can lead the State of Israel.”

Times of Israel

Allying with Gantz, Ya’alon Rejects Two-State Solution

Former defense minister Moshe Ya’alon ruled out supporting a two-solution to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, moments after his new political partner Gantz said Tuesday he would push for peace if elected prime minister. Asked if he would support a two-state peace deal, Ya’alon replied “of course not.” Ya’alon, a former member of the right-wing Likud party, has long held hawkish views toward the Palestinians and in 2014, criticized US secretary of state John Kerry as “obsessive” and “messianic,” for his efforts to broker peace.

Jerusalem Post

Rival Parties Attack Gantz

Rival political parties attacked Gantz on Tuesday night, with Science Minister Ofir Akunis saying Gantz spoke a lot, but said nothing. Opposition leader Shelly Yachimovich said Gantz “kept open his option to become a minister in Netanyahu’s government. ” The New Right party mocked the Gantz-Yaalon alliance, saying the last time the two “were together, it ended in 30 terror tunnels in the south.”

Reuters

PA Security Aid to End, Envoys Seek Workaround

US security aid for the Palestinian Authority was set to dry up on Thursday after it declined the money over concerns it could increase its exposure to US anti-terrorism lawsuits. The loss of \$60 million in annual funding potentially undermines security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank. Diplomatic sources said Palestinian, US and Israeli officials were seeking a way to keep the money flowing as of a January 31 deadline set by Congress’ Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act (ATCA) of 2018. One Palestinian official said such a solution may include alternative funds within the CIA budget or amending US legislation.

Abbas Asks Palestinian Government to Stay for Transition

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas accepted the resignation of his prime minister Tuesday, but asked the government to stay on until a new one is formed. Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and his government tendered their resignations earlier Tuesday, marking the end of a failed unity bid with rival Hamas. Abbas accepted the resignations but assigned Hamdallah and his fellow ministers the task of maintaining the PA government's operations until the formation of a new one. The government's decision to resign came two days after the Fatah Central Committee recommended the formation of a government made up of representatives of factions in the Palestine Liberation Organization and independent personalities, leaving out Hamas, a terror group that is the de facto ruler of the Gaza Strip.

Reuters

Norway: Israeli Removal of Hebron Monitors 'Worrying'

Palestinians in Hebron accused Israel on Tuesday of trying to rid the flashpoint city of witnesses to its actions in the West Bank by ejecting a foreign observer force that helps safeguard residents. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that he will not renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), accusing the observers of unspecified anti-Israel activity. Norway, which has headed the multi-country observer mission for the past 22 years, called the situation "worrying" and "unstable."

Ha'aretz

Abbas Suspends New Social Security Law

Abbas backtracked on implementation of a new social security law Monday, one day before a planned general strike called by West Bank organizations opposing the controversial legislation. The decision was a victory for the coalition that has taken shape in the past six months, which said the demonstration planned for Ramallah on Tuesday would instead become a celebration. The growing movement has publicly expressed distrust of the Palestinian Authority government and its ability to safeguard the social insurance funds at its disposal without diverting them for other purposes. Changes to the law have not satisfied its opponents.

AI Monitor

Engel Rejects Tlaib Congressional West Bank Trip

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Eliot Engel, D-N.Y., said this week that he's against a Congressional delegation to the West Bank as proposed by new Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, a Palestinian-American who has voiced support for the BDS movement against Israel. In order to organize an official congressional delegation, a lawmaker must get approval from the House speaker or the leader of a committee they sit on. Tlaib indicated that she may instead partner with outside advocacy groups to fund the trips.

Gantz Offers ‘Hope’ to a Crowd Calling for ‘Change’

By Raoul Wootliff, Senior Columnist

- As activists, party officials and journalists arrived at the car park of the Tel Aviv Exhibition Grounds Tuesday night on their way to Benny Gantz’s maiden political speech, the election jingle of his Israel Resilience party could be heard pumping out from the hall where the highly anticipated event was about to begin. The repeated chiming of its chorus, “There is no more right or left, just Israel — before all else,” continued to ring in the ears of attendees, only interrupted with Gantz’ address itself, until they got back in their cars some two hours later and closed their doors.
- For those who preferred a more upbeat tempo than the soulful original, a live DJ was performing remixes of the tune during the pre-speech mini-reception. For the deaf and hard of hearing, a sign language interpreter translated every single rendition. The crowd was indeed somewhat of a mixed bunch — shaggy-haired and scruffy-bearded 20-somethings rubbing shoulders with septuagenarians in suits alongside trim ex-general types and businesswomen — all gently moving to the beat of the ambiguously worded ditty.
- There was a palpable excitement in the hall before Gantz arrived, but many of the participants found it hard to articulate exactly what they were excited about. “He’s offering something new,” said a party activist named Iddo wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the same slogan from the song. Asked what, Iddo was stumped. “Well, lots of things. A new vision, a new direction... I think,” he said. Sharon Avrami, who had come to the event from nearby Hod Hasharon, said the ex-chief of staff “will be able to lead the country properly because he has the experience and the know how.” Lead it where? “To a better place,” she said.
- Despite Gantz being considered one of the only possible threats to a fourth straight victory for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in April’s election, little was known— before Tuesday’s speech at least — about his political convictions. The snippets of campaign materials that Israel Resilience have put out and the brief public comments he has made have appeared to be an attempt to place him firmly in the Israeli center, but policy proposals have remained thin, at best. Some in the crowd were sure that Gantz would represent what they believed, even if they didn’t know exactly what his own convictions were.
- “We need a leader that will push for peace,” said 77-year-old Yaakov Ayelet, a former Labor member. “We haven’t heard the word ‘peace’ in years. We need it now. Gantz can bring it.” Simcha Hendler, who said he had previously voted for Likud including under Netanyahu, said that Gantz, “unlike Bibi, will not put up with extremists in his party who attack everything sacred about this country.” The opening speakers of the evening presented similar broad hopes for the new party and its leader. Hila Shai Vazan, a political operative who previously served on the Modiin city council, promised that “things can be different here,” and that “the people of Israel

are ready for a different leadership.” Former Yerucham mayor Michael Biton said, “Benny is obligated to education, welfare, the health system, the periphery... to all of Israeli society.”

- If there was any lingering apprehension in the room, it dissipated instantly when the “no more left or right” music was turned to full volume and Gantz, done away with his khaki fatigues and now donning a well-cut suit, entered from the back of the hall to make his way to the circular stage in the center. Wading through the crowd, the formerly taciturn general became an image of the people’s man, eagerly shaking hands and hugging his new-found supporters and even scaling the low-level bleachers like a real rock star to give a high-five to one.
- When he eventually took to the podium, a few party activists in the room sheepishly started the well-known Israeli political chant (which sounds significantly better in its original rhyming Hebrew), “Ooh ahh, who’s coming? The next prime minister.” The rest of the crowd didn’t instantly join in — after all Gantz hadn’t yet made clear that he even wanted the job — but it slowly rippled throughout the hall, eventually being replaced, even more diffidently, with chants of, “mahapah,” the historical slogan that was used to signify the first Likud victory after three decades of Labor rule which translates as “upheaval,” or simply “change.”
- Breaking his near-silence of many months, Gantz, speaking word-for-word from a teleprompter projecting the carefully curated speech, covered all the bases of Israeli public discourse — security woes and fears, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, the role of the IDF, the welfare system, the Arab and Druze minorities within Israel, the Palestinians (ever so briefly) the right-left divide, public corruption and even, yes, peace.
- In what became a theme throughout, however, Gantz appeared to often offer two options of how he felt on various topics, leaving it perhaps up to the audience to decide which they preferred. “We are one nation. We share one flag, one anthem and one army,” he beamed, before adding, “However, I have come here tonight because I’m also worried about Israel.” “The people are strong. The country is wonderful,” Gantz said. “But in the land a bad wind blows.” “Believe me, I am very proud of our country and will never be ashamed of it,” he vowed. “But lately more and more people, both right and left, myself included, are deeply embarrassed by the way our leadership conducts itself.” The pick-and-choose was also on offer for serious policy proposals. “Under my leadership, the government will strive for peace and will not miss an opportunity to bring about regional change,” Gantz promised. “However, if it turns out that there is no way to reach peace at this time, we will shape a new reality.
- But the ambiguity was done away with when Gantz turned to political corruption in the clearest attack of the night on Netanyahu, and the clearest indication that he does not intend to hold back when it comes to the graft cases in which the prime minister is accused of bribery. “The national government we will establish will show zero tolerance for corruption of any kind. The state’s money belongs to all its citizens and not to a small and privileged minority,” Gantz said, building momentum, to the growing cheers of the crowd. “This is not the personal example that we should provide to the young generation that is watching us. A moral government is an

example to us – and to our children.” Presenting himself in contrast to Netanyahu, Gantz continued, “All my life, I have spoken the truth. I have always kept my hands clean. I owe nothing to anyone but my people. And I will neither support, nor will I close my eyes in the face of any violation of moral standards.” To drive this home he added, “The very thought that a prime minister can serve in Israel with an indictment is ridiculous to me. This cannot happen.”

- Truly riled up now the crowd went back to its chant of “mahapah” this time with a genuine passion and unity. And as the ex-general listed the principles his government would be based on — “the unique Israeli combination of tradition and modernity, Judaism and democracy” — the audience, as if freed from hesitation, kept returning to the one-word mantra. Concluding his address, Gantz articulated what some in the crowd had expressed before the speech and had many heard throughout. “Most of all,” he said, “I believe – like you – in hope.” “Together, I will make Israel a strong and united country of hope,” he said, as party activists silently filed onto the stage behind before the national anthem was played. And finally, just before the streamers were released and maybe only briefly, the incessant “no more right or left” was replaced by the Hatikva, known in English as “The hope.” And then the jingle started again.

An Interview with former Mossad Director Shabtai Shavit

By Raphael Cohen-Almagor, Editor

- Raphael Cohen-Almagor: Can the Arab Peace Initiative (API) serve as a basis for talks?
- Shabtai Shavit: I think the API needs to be the main component of the peace process. Why? Because the API originated from Saudi Arabia, the wealthiest, strongest and most influential country among the moderate Arab states. Saudi Arabia wrote it and passed it to the Arab League whose 22 Arab states subsequently adopted it. I decided to take the initiative seriously the first time I read it. Why? Because it's very short. Every line is black and white – there's no type of sophistry with commas, brackets or legal terminology. It's simple. We demand such and such from you, and we will give you such and such in return. And there will be peace inshallah. Not only peace, but peace with the entire Arab world, and an additional 30 Muslim countries. I'm trying to imagine – and it's difficult – what diplomatic relations such as these would mean. But the initiative promises that the entire Muslim world will recognise the State of Israel and establish full diplomatic relations with us. Just think about the economic significance of such a thing; what it would give to the state.
- When I speak to Israelis and reach this point, I say, 'If such were to happen, imagine Israel being economically ahead of states like Holland, Switzerland and all the Scandinavian countries.' But for Israelis, the most important challenge is always security and terror. Security, security, security. Since 2002, the Saudis have periodically reminded us – including those Israelis who argue that the offer was a dictate, a 'take it or leave it' ultimatum – that the offer still stands. And they explicitly say it's negotiable.
- There have actually been improvements and 'upgrades' to what was originally written in the original API. For example, it now recognises the principle of a demilitarised state, and land swaps, and the initial language on refugees was harsher than it is now. The API still uses legalistic language which states that it's impossible to force Arab states currently hosting refugees to absorb them. And that remains a core problem. But when we speak practically about refugees, we speak about the understanding that the State of Israel will be prepared to absorb a symbolic number of refugees and that the main solution needs to be financial, via the international community.
- RC-A: How can peace be achieved?
- SS: You want peace. Let me explain to you how peace can be reached. The chapter of Middle East history which began with the Arab Spring uprisings, then went through the rise of ISIS, and now lies in the post-ISIS world, has created a window of opportunity to resolve our conflict with the Palestinians.

- The Sykes-Picot agreements held for 100 years. By the way, in retrospect, these French and British gentlemen deserved a Nobel Prize for successfully drawing borders of nation states in the Middle East that lasted for 100 years. But that period is now over. The new Middle East won't be 'Sykes-Picot' but something else. In other words, we are in a period of an historic one-time opportunity to change borders in the Middle East. Show me one state in the world that is willing to change its borders – no such thing exists! But here, developments that have taken place in recent years have created a situation in which there is a widespread readiness in the international community to create something new, with the first expression of this being new borders. Iraq won't be the same Iraq as under Sykes-Picot. Syria won't be the same Syria. And the Kurds have a decent chance of receiving national independence.
- The area in which I see the potential for a Kurdish state begins in northern Iraq, with their hope that it will expand westwards and constitute a barrier between Turkey and Syria. I'll surprise you even more. What was Sykes and Picot's mistake? That they didn't create a Sunni state in the Middle East. And the Sunnis are the majority, and they don't have national expression anywhere in the region. It's possible that in the 'New Middle East' a Sunni state will be established.
- Where is the most natural place for such a state to be established? In the area between Iraq and Syria, where ISIS were in control. I don't have a patent on this idea. National Security Advisor John Bolton – when he was ambassador at the UN – published an article in the New York Times where he suggested – in very 'Boltonesque' language – something along similar lines; that there wouldn't be Middle East peace without the establishment of a new Sunni state. My working assumption is that this rearranging of the New Middle East will take between five to ten years, most likely closer to ten. Many things have happened which at the end of day will lead to a rearrangement of the states in the Middle East. And this is also the window of time to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- How do we do it? Historically, Israel's negotiation strategy was that we wanted to speak to each Arab state separately: Israel vis-à-vis Jordan, Israel vis-à-vis Syria, etc. But in the current situation in the region, with the forecast I have described, Israel needs a multi-lateral strategy. What type of multilateral strategy? First, the US is key to this whole process. Without the involvement of the US it won't work. There is conflict today between the Sunnis and Shia, between radical and more moderate Islam. But Israel has a peace treaty with Jordan and Egypt (by the way the interests between Israel and Egypt have never been stronger). Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, as well as the US, are the coalition that needs to lead the peace process with the Palestinians.
- Speaking as a former member of the intelligence agency, I believe that the first phase of this process – whose timeframe will need to be determined – needs to be secret. Negotiating in front of the cameras – publishing communiques before the meeting and press releases after – makes it very difficult to make concessions. The basis for negotiations has to be the API. Israel should do its own preparation after which we should sit with the Americans to set expectations, and to reach understandings with them over what issues we agree on, what we're prepared to

negotiate over, and where the gaps are. And on the assumption that vis-à-vis the Trump administration we'll get what we ask for, it's the Americans who need to sell it or to convince the Arab coalition.

- Because everything is secret, the Americans should go to each one separately rather than all together. First, the Americans should call Mohammed Bin Salman, MBS, and say, 'You told me on the record, bring a deal and I'll bring Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas], so here's the deal. Let's discuss it, and if it seems reasonable then bring the Jordanians, and the Gulfies and Egypt. And if you need Washington's help to convince them we'll help you. And when we all agree then we call Abu Mazen and say this is the deal'. I'd like to see Abu Mazen reject something like that. MBS would say to him: 'This is the deal – either you accept it, or all the Arab states will wash their hands of you.'
- RC-A: And these players will force an agreement on the Palestinians?
- SS: Yes, they will force an agreement on the Palestinians. Until this point, the process needs to be kept secret. After certain understandings are reached, the process should become more open, and negotiations will begin. Israel and the Palestinians sitting in a room and negotiating with the US and the others as observers. They only get involved when negotiations are stuck on a particular issue. This model is how we conducted negotiations with Jordan. There were working groups that made progress and every time they got stuck on a particular issue they brought it to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein who would resolve things – either over the phone or in person.
- RC-A: But how do we overcome the three obstacles of Jerusalem, refugees and Hamas?
- SS: Refugees is the easiest problem, in my opinion. The solution is financial. In my book there is a chapter that deals with the issue of refugees. I gained access to the state archives and cabinet discussion protocols following each of the wars – 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 – and I learnt the protocols relating to refugees. I believe we should recommend the Americans transfer all of their financial support that they today give to the UN Refugee and Works Agency (UNRWA) – 25 per cent of the budget and which according to a very rough estimate I calculate comes to \$16 billion since 1948.[3] I'd say to the Americans 'you define Hamas as a terrorist organisation, but today UNRWA is basically Hamas.' I'll give you proof. Out of the 30 members of UNRWA's board in Gaza, 95 per cent of them are identified with Hamas. I'd tell the Americans that there is no justification in the world that a refugee organisation dealing with Palestinians exists that perpetuates the problem rather than resolving it. According to UNRWA definitions, anyone who lived for two and half years in Mandatory Palestine before leaving – them, their children and their grandchildren, even those they adopt – can be classed as refugees.
- Following the War of Independence, there were between 600,000 – 700,000 refugees. But 70 years later they talk about 5 million. Based on what logic? The parallel UN refugee agency, the

UNHCR, was established around the same time as UNRWA. Since then UNHCR has resolved the cases of millions of refugees around the world. In Syria, the organisation that deals with refugees isn't UNRWA but UNHCR. What justification is there for the continuation of UNRWA? It should be closed – not immediately but we should prepare a plan to do it. We should establish a mechanism that will deal with ending UNRWA in an organised way. All of its budgets should be transferred to the UNHCR within two to three years; those Palestinian refugees who remain refugees according to the actual definition of refugee-ism can be dealt with by the UNHCR, and all the others will have to just cope.

- RC-A: And how do we deal with Hamas and Gaza?
- SS: I'm not going to talk about the tactical level. But the onus should not be solely on the State of Israel. The State of Israel isn't able to fund everything that needs to be done to resolve the economic component of the problem. Firstly, the immediate problems of the civilian population need to be dealt with. And this has to be an international effort, with Israel contributing her share.
- RC-A: Are you talking about contributing economically?
- SS: Yes, but there is also a strategic goal here, which is to create a rift between the civilian population and Hamas. In other words, you aim to create a situation in which they can say to Hamas 'we don't want you anymore'. Today, anyone who thinks that gets killed. How do you break that Gordian knot? You have the civilian population and a gang (Hamas) that rules. So give the population everything it needs in order to fundamentally change the distress in which it lives. And carry out a type of psychological warfare to try and create this rift.
- RC-A: And do you think that is possible?
- SS: I think it's worth trying. Israel's current strategy is one that turns the state – slowly but surely – into a prison. Fences here, fences there, soon there won't be any place without a fence. For example, Israel just finished building a six metre high, 32 km long fence from Eilat northwards along the border. The Ramon airport [in the south near Eilat] has a fence around it that is 26 metres high! In the 1990s I walked around the area of the Caspian Sea to look at the barriers the Soviets built between themselves and Iran (which was then part of the Western world) during the Cold War. I never saw any fence of 26 metres.
- RC-A: Why are they building the fence?
- SS: The ideology is that the airport needs to be protected, although it's still not protected against missiles. It's an ideology that believes that in order to protect the airport from potential threats, we need a fence 26 metres high. So when you look at the State of Israel today what are we doing? Every place there are threats over our border we build fences. On the tunnel threat, Israel is a global leader, and the best minds invest in finding technological solutions to the

threat. But the tunnels are tactical threats rather than strategic, or existential. At the same time, you can't force Israelis whose homes are near Gaza or the border with Lebanon to live under such threats. So we build fences. We spend huge amounts on enormous defensive systems – fences, mines, sensors, command and control systems and we train soldiers to deal with this threat. All of this encloses the State of Israel. But is this how we want to live? Why not try to invest all of this money and to try and reach our neighbours? Why shouldn't it be possible to drive to Damascus and eat Hummus?

- RC-A: And what about Jerusalem?
- SS: On Jerusalem, I'm a hawk. I believe that a people that is willing to give up on the source of its historic sovereignty is not worthy of having its own independent state. Similar things could be said about other places too. It's true that Anatot and Shiloh and Bet El in the West Bank are also part of our Jewish heritage. But Jerusalem is the source, the heart of Judaism – not solely in a religious context but a national one. I don't know any nation that would be willing to concede its core, the heart of its existence. However, what I am willing to say is that one way of solving this is that sovereignty over Jerusalem and the Temple Mount should be ours, but on the ground, Israel should be willing to be as flexible as possible. Super flexible. Whatever they want, we should give them.
- RC-A: And where will be the Palestinian capital?
- SS: Abu Dis. Listen, what happened after the Six-Day War? The victors said, 'Let's take advantage of the situation and expand the municipal borders of Jerusalem'. Even then we saw the demographic threat to Jerusalem. So they took two generals who knew about military matters (I don't know what their understanding was of international affairs) to map out what became the current municipal borders of Jerusalem, which turned Jerusalem into the city it is today. Jerusalem actually has a minority of Zionist residents. So I say 'hold on, those areas that were annexed to Jerusalem after the Six-Day War can't be changed? Why not?'