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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Monday, January 7

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Times of Israel

After Rockets, Israel Said to Block Qatari Cash for Gaza

Israel will block the third installment of \$15 million from Qatar to Hamas in the Gaza Strip next week, several Palestinian outlets report. The Israeli Air Force struck several targets in the Gaza Strip before dawn on Monday, after terrorists in the Gaza Strip fired a rocket into Israel, which was intercepted by the Iron Dome system. Qatari ambassador Mahmad Al-Amadi has notified Hamas officials that he will delay his trip to Gaza that had been set for next week, until quiet is restored on the border with Israel. Israel had previously agreed for \$90 million to be distributed in installments, primarily to cover salaries of officials working for Hamas.

Times of Israel

PA Announces Closure of Rafah Crossing with Egypt

The Palestinian Authority announced on Sunday that it has decided to pull out all its employees from the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. The decision, effective Monday morning, will result in the closure of the terminal weeks after the Egyptians agreed to keep it open on a daily basis. The move came after Hamas reportedly arrested dozens of Fatah activists in the Gaza Strip in the past few days.

Ha'aretz

Former Supreme Court Justice Slams PM Attacks on Police

A former vice president of Israel's Supreme Court attacked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Sunday for attempting to push until after the April 9 Knesset election the decision to charge him in three criminal cases. "I cannot recall any time in my entire career such statements against law enforcement by anyone other than heads of crime organizations," the former justice, Eliyahu Matza, told Israel Radio. Matza, served on the Supreme Court from 1992 to 2005.

Jerusalem Post

US Ambassador: Trump Peace Plan Delayed Several Months

Ambassador to Israel David Friedman said Sunday that the Trump administration's Israeli-Palestinian peace plan will be presented "within the next several months." Trump's plan has been delayed time after time. On one hand, Trump's peace team says it cannot be responsible for embarrassing the country, the president or the administration by publishing a plan that falls flat on its face out of the gate. Yet it also refuses to give up, insisting that circumstances will serendipitously change just enough for the world to take the plan seriously.

Times of Israel

Abbas: 'I Will Not End My Life as a Traitor'

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Friday night said all agreements with Israel were in jeopardy, including the Oslo Accords and security coordination, due to the moribund state of the peace process. He added that he did not intend to negotiate on President Trump's expected peace plan due to America's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. "We are dealing with three issues that we can not accept: the situation with the US, the situation with Israel and the situation with Hamas," Abbas told reporters during a visit to the Egyptian capital of Cairo.

The New York Times

Israeli Teenagers Suspected in Death of Palestinian Woman

Several Jewish teenagers have been arrested in connection with the fatal stoning of a Palestinian woman in the West Bank, Israel's Shin Bet security agency said on Sunday. The suspects were under investigation for "grave terrorism offenses, including murder." The Palestinian woman, Aisha Rabi, was struck in the head by a stone as she rode in a car with her husband and two daughters near the settlement of Rehelim on Oct. 12.

Times of Israel

Iraqi Delegations Said to Make Historic Israel Visits

In an unprecedented series of visits, three delegations of local leaders from Iraq have reportedly made trips to Israel in recent months, and held meetings with Israeli officials. The delegations, totaling 15 Iraqis, held meetings with Israeli academics, visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, and, most significantly, met with Israeli government officials, Hadashot TV news reported on Sunday night. Iraq is at war with Israel and is a firm supporter of the Arab League boycott of Israel. The groups made the trips, which were firmly designated as unofficial visits, under conditions of great secrecy, in part in order to avoid antagonizing Iran.

Ha'aretz

New Congress Looks to Reintroduce Israel Legislation

Republican Senator Marco Rubio reintroduced Israel-related legislation that did not get passed in the last Congress. Among the items is the US-Israel Security Assistance Authorization Act, which would codify the 2016 deal between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government that guarantees Israel \$38 billion in security assistance over 10 years. Also included in the Rubio bill is a version of a bill that would establish federal legal protections for states passing laws divesting pension funds from groups that boycott Israel.

Netanyahu is Playing with Fire

By Ben-Dror Yemini, Senior Columnist

- This isn't criticism of the justice system, which is legitimate. It's not about the struggle of one man, junior or senior, for his innocence; this struggle is legitimate as well. This is another kind of struggle, a dangerous one, which is all about playing with fire. Because Benjamin Netanyahu is fighting against the legitimacy of the justice system. "I am the state," said Louis XIV of France. "I am the law, the justice and the state," said Netanyahu. Follow Ynetnews on Facebook and Twitter In a campaign propaganda video posted on Saturday, Netanyahu compares the decision on an indictment to the amputation of an arm. "Can anyone give him back his arm? Can anyone give you back the elections?" This is an idiotic comparison. Sixty-four percent of the citizens of Israel want the attorney general to make a decision about Netanyahu's pending corruption cases before the elections. It has nothing to do with support or opposition to Netanyahu. It has something to do with one fact only: The public wants and has the right to know.
- Netanyahu's video points to one thing: he already knows there is going to be an indictment against him. If Netanyahu thought for even a moment that the attorney general's decision would be different, he would've thrown his full support behind it. The thing is, Netanyahu's threats join those of coalition head David Amsalem, who said millions will oppose the decision to file an indictment against the prime minister. There are no millions; there were no millions, and there will be no millions. But the danger remains. The threats and the efforts at delegitimization could cause a few thousand, or perhaps only hundreds, to hold support rallies for Netanyahu. And of them, one or two might do something about it.
- Netanyahu went on to claim that, "there haven't been so many people running amok in the history of Israeli justice, and even perhaps in the history of democratic nations" in order to file an indictment against him. This is a farfetched claim indeed. After all, the investigations have been going on for years under the supervision of the attorney general. Furthermore, Netanyahu knows the "Buzaglo test" (the obligation to enforce the law against a public official in the same way that it is applied to the "average Joe") doesn't apply to him, because throughout the investigations, he received endless leeway. He knows the attorney general is not a member of some leftist elite trying to overthrow him; he was once Netanyahu's cabinet secretary. Despite that, his reckless claims mark another low point in his delegitimization campaign against law enforcement authorities.
- It's unclear whether Netanyahu will end his political career with a criminal conviction. I hope not. But it's clear he is leading a dangerous campaign with reckless abandon and public corruption. This is sad, because there are two Netanyahus. There's the statesman, who only a few days ago returned from a successful visit to Brazil. And there is Bibi, who is trying to drag Israel into quicksand—we mustn't allow him to succeed.

American Jews and Israeli Jews Headed for Messy Breakup

By Jonathan Weisman, Deputy Washington Editor

- The events of the past year brought American and Israeli Jews ever closer to a breaking point. President Trump, beloved in Israel and decidedly unloved by a majority of American Jews, moved the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May, with the fiery evangelical pastors John Hagee and Robert Jeffress consecrating the ceremony. In October, after the murder of 11 Jews at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, President Trump went to that city to pay his respects. Members of the Jewish community there, in near silent mourning, came out to protest Mr. Trump's arrival, declaring that he was not welcome until he gave a national address to renounce the rise of white nationalism and its attendant bigotry. The only public official to greet the president at the Tree of Life was Israel's ambassador to the United States, Ron Dermer. At a Hanukkah celebration at the White House last month, the president raised eyebrows and age-old insinuations of dual loyalties when he told American Jews at the gathering that his vice president had great affection for "your country," Israel.
- Yossi Klein Halevi, the American-born Israeli author, has framed this moment starkly: Israeli Jews believe deeply that President Trump recognizes their existential threats. In scuttling the Obama-era Iran nuclear deal, which many Israelis saw as imperiling their security, in moving the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in basically doing whatever the government of Benjamin Netanyahu asks, they see a president of the United States acting to save their lives. American Jews, in contrast, see President Trump as their existential threat, a leader who they believe has stoked nationalist bigotry, stirred anti-Semitism and, time and time again, failed to renounce the violent hatred swirling around his political movement. The F.B.I. reports that hate crimes in the United States jumped 17 percent in 2017, with a 37 percent spike in crimes against Jews and Jewish institutions.
- When neither side sees the other as caring for its basic well-being, "that is a gulf that cannot be bridged," Michael Siegel, the head rabbi at Chicago's Conservative Anshe Emet Synagogue, told me recently. He is an ardent Zionist. To be sure, a vocal minority of Jews in Israel remain queasy about the American president, just as a vocal minority of Jews in the United States strongly support him. But more than 75 percent of American Jews voted for the Democrats in the midterm elections; 69 percent of Israelis have a positive view of the United States under Mr. Trump, up from 49 percent in 2015, according to the Pew Research Center. Israel is one of the few developed countries where opinion about the United States has improved since Mr. Trump took office.
- Part of the distance between Jews in the United States and Israeli Jews may come from the stance that Israel's leader is taking on the world stage. Mr. Netanyahu has embraced the increasingly authoritarian Hungarian leader Victor Orban, who ran a blatantly anti-Semitic re-election campaign. He has aligned himself with ultranationalists like Rodrigo Duterte in the

Philippines, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and a Polish government that passed a law making it a crime to suggest the Poles had any responsibility for the Holocaust.

- The Israeli prime minister was one of the very few world leaders who reportedly ran interference for the Trump administration after the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and urged President Trump to maintain his alliance with the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. Mr. Netanyahu's son Yair was temporarily kicked off Facebook for writing that he would "prefer" that "all the Muslims leave the land of Israel." Last month, with multiple corruption investigations closing in on him and his conservative coalition fracturing, Mr. Netanyahu called for a snap election in April, hoping to fortify his political standing.
- If past is prologue, his election campaign will again challenge American Jewry's values. As his 2015 campaign came to a close, Mr. Netanyahu darkly warned his supporters that "the right-wing government is in danger — Arab voters are heading to the polling stations in droves," adding with a Trumpian flourish that left-wing organizations "are bringing them in buses." Israeli politicians — and citizens — are increasingly dismissive of the views of American Jews anyway. Evangelical Christians, ardently pro-Israel, give Jerusalem a power base in Washington that is larger and stronger than the American Jewish population. And with Orthodox American Jews aligned with evangelicals, that coalition has at least an interfaith veneer — even without Conservative and Reform Jews, the bulk of American Jewry.
- The divide between American Jews and Israeli Jews goes beyond politics. A recent law tried to reinstate the Chief Rabbinate as the only authority that can legally convert non-Orthodox Jews in Israel. Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, after the slaughter in Pittsburgh, refused to refer to the Conservative Tree of Life as a synagogue at all, calling it "a place with a profound Jewish flavor." Already only Orthodox Jewish weddings are legal in Israel. Reform Jews have been roughed up when praying at the Western Wall. Promises to Jewish women that the Israeli rabbinate would become more inclusive have largely led to disappointment. Last summer, the group Women of the Wall was warned that if it did not remain confined to the small, barricaded area within the "women's section," its members would be barred from praying there altogether. And the stalemate over Palestinian rights and autonomy has become nearly impossible to dismiss as some temporary roadblock, awaiting perhaps a new government in Jerusalem or a new leadership of the Palestinian Authority.
- The two-state solution is increasingly feeling like a cruel joke. American Jews' rabbis and lay leaders counsel them to be vigilant against any other solution, such as granting Palestinians full rights in a greater Israel, because those solutions would dilute or destroy Israel's identity as a Jewish state. Be patient, American Jews are told. Peace talks are coming. The Palestinians will have their state. In the meantime, the movement to boycott, divest from and sanction Israel grows stronger on American campuses, and new voices are emerging in the Democratic Party, such as Representatives Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, who are willing to speak openly about Palestinian rights and autonomy where other lawmakers have declined to do so.

- Of course, American Jews, like Israeli Jews, are not a monolith. Within the American Jewish population, there is a significant generational split on Israel that goes beyond ideology. Older American Jews, more viscerally aware of the Holocaust and connected to the living history of the Jewish state, are generally willing to look past Israeli government actions that challenge their values. Or they embrace those actions. Younger American Jews do not typically remember Israel as the David against regional Goliaths. They see a bully, armed and indifferent, 45 years past the Yom Kippur War, the last conflict that threatened Israel's existence. American Jewry has been going its own way for 150 years, a drift that has created something of a new religion, or at least a new branch of one of the world's most ancient faiths.
- In a historical stroke with resonance today, American Jewish leaders gathered in Pittsburgh in 1885 to produce what is known as the Pittsburgh Platform, a new theology for an American Judaism, less focused on a Messianic return to the land of Israel and more on fixing a broken world, the concept of Tikkun Olam. Jews, the rabbi behind the platform urged, must achieve God's purpose by "living and working in and with the world." For a faith that for thousands of years was insular and self-contained, its people often in mandated ghettos, praying for the Messiah to return them to the Promised Land, this was a radical notion. But for most American Jews, it is now accepted as a tenet of their religion: building a better, more equal, more tolerant world now, where they live. Last summer, when a Conservative rabbi in Haifa was hauled in for questioning by the Israeli police after he officiated at a non-Orthodox wedding, it was too much for Rabbi Steven Wernick, chief executive of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the umbrella organization of the Conservative movement in North America.
- "I do not believe we can talk about a 'gap' between Israel and the Diaspora," Rabbi Wernick wrote in a letter to the Israeli government. "It is now a 'canyon.'" My rabbi in Washington, Daniel Zemel, quoted the Israeli Yaniv Sagee during Kol Nidre, the Yom Kippur evening service, this fall: "For the first time in my life, I feel a genuine threat to my life in Israel. This is not an external threat. It is an internal threat from nationalists and racists." Rabbi Zemel implored his congregation to act before it is too late, to save Israel from itself. But Israelis want nothing of the sort. American Jews don't serve in the Israeli military, don't pay Israeli taxes and don't live under the threat of Hamas rocket bombardments. And many American Jews would not heed Rabbi Zemel's call. Zionism divided American Jewry for much of the latter 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Those divisions remained in the early decades of the Jewish state, fading only with the triumph of the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and the peril of the Yom Kippur War. Now many American Jews, especially young American Jews, would say, Israel is Israel's problem. We have our own. There are roughly 6.5 million Jews in Israel. There are roughly 5.7 million Jews in America. Increasingly, they see the world in starkly different ways. The Great Schism is upon us.