



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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January 29, 2019

Ynet News

Rivlin Predicts Iran will 'Worsen its Attacks on Israel's North'

President Reuven Rivlin said Monday that he believes Iran will step up its attacks on the north of Israel in retaliation for IAF air strikes on Iranian facilities in Syria. Speaking at a conference held by the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, Rivlin said the Israel's future strategic situation can be described in two words: "deterioration and complexity," and gave the case of the Iranian presence in Syria as an example. "It appeared as though Iran would be restrained by our understandings with Russia and its defeats on the northern front," Rivlin said referring to recurring IDF airstrikes on Iranian facilities in Syria, "but in recent months the trend is changing." See also, ["Rivlin warns Iran may step up retaliation over Israeli strikes in Syria" \(TOI\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Iran: We Won't Negotiate over Our Missile Program

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi stressed on Monday that the country would never negotiate over its missile program, saying that the country will continue to boost its deterrence power "to protect national security." "Our policy on missiles is clear and the issue as part of our country's defense sector cannot be negotiated," he was quoted as saying by Iran's Tasnim news agency. The missile program is in line with efforts to protect the country's security, Qassemi said, adding that Iran does not want to have difficulties acquiring weapons if needed. Qassemi also denied holding secret talks with France over Iran's controversial ballistic missile program after French FM Jean-Yves Le Drian said it was ready to impose more sanctions if there was no progress in talks over the program.

Reuters

Netanyahu to Eject Foreign Observers in Flashpoint Hebron

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday he would eject a foreign force set up to help safeguard Palestinians in a flashpoint city in the occupied West Bank, accusing the observers of anti-Israel activity. "We will not allow the continued presence of an international force that acts against us," Netanyahu said in a statement announcing that the Temporary International Presence in Hebron's (TIPH) mandate would not be renewed. The statement did not elaborate on the alleged misconduct of TIPH, which draws staff from Norway, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. A force spokesman declined comment. Palestinians denounced the move. See also, ["Israel to Expel International Monitoring Force in Hebron After 20-year Presence" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Times of Israel

UN Chief: World Must Rise Up against Worsening Anti-Semitism

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned Monday that hatred of Jews is growing, calling for a concerted fight "against rising anti-Semitism." "Not only is anti-Semitism still strong – it is getting worse," Guterres told the UN's annual commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. "We must rise up against rising anti-Semitism." Guterres cited figures that showed anti-Semitic incidents in the United States increased 57 percent in 2017, according to the Anti-Defamation League and noted that the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency reported last year that 28 percent of Jews experienced some form of harassment just for being Jewish.

Israel to Host Summit for Europe's Emerging Nationalist Bloc

A year and a half after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu participated in the summit meeting of the Visegrad nations – Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia – in Budapest, Israel will host the next meeting of the group on February 18 and 19 in Jerusalem. The meeting was revealed Monday in an official Foreign Ministry document listing planned official visits. Israel was scheduled to host the summit in July 2018, but it was postponed a number of times. The leaders attending the meeting are expected to visit the Western Wall and the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial center in Jerusalem. See also, [“Yesh Atid: As PM, Lapid would demand Orban apology for ‘anti-Semitic campaign’ “ \(TOI\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Anti-BDS Bill Advanced by Senate, US-Israel Sec' Ties Boosted

The U.S. Senate took a step closer toward passing a bill that will tackle the anti-BDS movement in America, boost security cooperation with Israel and Jordan as well as increase sanctions on Syria. The Republican-introduced legislation had been on standstill amid a government sanction. On Monday, a major procedural hurdle was passed, allowing the bill to move forward. With the vote of 74-19, the bill is likely to pass in the Senate when the actual vote takes place later in January. Senators who voted against the motion included Kirsten Gillibrand, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren. This is the fourth vote since Republican Senator Marco Rubio introduced the bill at the beginning of the new congress. See also, [“ Senate advances bill that allows states to penalize companies boycotting Israel “ \(Washington Times\)](#)

Times of Israel

Israeli Rescuers Aid Slow Search Through Brazilian Mud

Brazilian firefighters and Israeli rescue workers poked sticks into treacherous mud Monday looking for bodies as pressure mounted on the mining company responsible for a dam that burst and spilled a flood of iron ore waste. By late in the day, the death toll rose to 65, with 279 people still missing, said Lt. Col. Flavio Godinho of the civil defense department in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais. In a sign of the risks posed by the deep mud, Col. Alexandre Ferreira, a doctor with the military police of Minas Gerais, advised rescue crews, volunteers and journalists to take antibiotics to prevent cholera, the bacterial infection leptospirosis and other diseases. See also, [“Israeli rescue delegation lands in Brazil after dam collapse leaves hundreds missing” \(i24 News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

A Cure for Cancer? Israeli Scientists Say They Might Found One

A small team of Israeli scientists think they might have found the first complete cure for cancer. “We believe we will offer in a year’s time a complete cure for cancer,” said Dan Aridor, of a new treatment being developed by his company, Accelerated Evolution Biotechnologies Ltd. (AEBi), which was founded in 2000 in the ITEK incubator in the Weizmann Science Park. AEBi developed the SoAP platform, which provides functional leads to very difficult targets. “Our cancer cure will be effective from day one, will last a duration of a few weeks and will have no or minimal side-effects at a much lower cost than most other treatments on the market,” Aridor said. “Our solution will be both generic and personal.” It sounds fantastical, especially considering that an estimated 18.1 million new cancer cases are diagnosed worldwide each year, according to reports by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Further, every sixth death in the world is due to cancer.

All the Prime Minister's Men

Netanyahu keeps pushing publically to delay any legal moves on his three graft probes until after the April 9 elections, but behind the scenes his camp understands that this is not happening, and they are preparing hard to fight back against possible indictment decision in the coming weeks.

By Eli Senior, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- **With the bolstering of Benjamin Netanyahu's legal defense team and his many declarations in the media, on billboards and in videos, it seems that it has finally sunk in over at the prime minister's residence that there is no more dodging or weaving. Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit's decision regarding the corruption investigations into the prime minister will apparently be published in the coming weeks, and not after the elections as Netanyahu so desperately wanted. To this end, Netanyahu's inner circle is hunkering down to prepare for a hearing, and are planning for a last ditch effort to diminish the power of the indictment, if it is brought.**
- **Netanyahu's aides, legal advisors and associates are out in full force to replace the image of a corrupt leader dogged by police investigations with a picture of an innocent man brought low by his scheming political rivals. One of the main arguments made by Netanyahu's defense attorneys concerns the purity of the investigation. Sources close to the prime minister claim that police officers did not have the tools to conduct a proper investigation for the a number of reasons. Firstly, they argue that during questioning by the Police Internal Investigations Department, Maj. Gen. Roni Ritman, the former head of the Lahav 433 anti-fraud unit who quit over sexual harassment claims, claimed that he suspected the female officer who made the complaint about him was sent by Netanyahu's associates. And thus, the prime minister's legal team asserted, Ritman "had a conflict of interest and did not want to really dig for the truth."**
- **Netanyahu's lawyers also plan to bring up former police commissioner Roni Alsheich at the hearing, to brand him as someone who could not be objective because "he claimed in interviews that someone put private investigators" onto the police officers working the prime minister's cases, which "has not been proven." Moreover, Netanyahu cronies claim, Alsheich admitted that details of the investigations had leaked – which raised questions about its reliability.**
- **Speaking Sunday at a conference held by the Institute for National Security Studies, Alsheich referred to the criticism that has been leveled against him for the duration of the investigations into Netanyahu. "I think that we (law enforcement officials) have all seen the evidence," he said, and rejected any allegations that the police had trumped up the charges against the prime minister. Alsheich said he had never questioned Netanyahu himself, but did insist that he "read every word of the testimonies of the interviewees." He also flatly rejected any allegations that police officers had leaked details of the case. "Journalists know that the police do not leak, period," he said. "I know where the leaks came from."**
- **Regarding Case 4000, the main argument of Netanyahu's camp is that sympathetic coverage is not considered a bribe. The prime minister is suspected of taking bribes and acting in a conflict of interest by promoting regulations worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the Bezeq telecommunications company and its then-majority shareholder Shaul Elovitch. In return, the prime minister allegedly received favorable coverage on Elovitch's Walla! website.**

- According to Netanyahu's camp, police investigators again did not really push to find the truth. And the fact of the matter is, Antitrust Commissioner Michal Halperin —one of the most relevant witnesses — was not summoned for questioning. Another claim against the validity of the case is that no attempt was made to assess whether the coverage on the Walla! website was really sympathetic to Netanyahu and his family. The prime minister's inner circle also claim that the facts of the case were embellished and that in reality 91% of Bezeq's shares were publically held, and that Bezeq suffered heavy losses in the wholesale reform of the market.
- As for Case 1000, Netanyahu's associates claim that the police vastly inflated the value of the cigars gifted to the prime minister, to the sum NIS 500,000. According to the alleged gift-giver, Israeli-American producer Arnon Milchan, the cigars were bought in two stores in Herzliya. Furthermore, Netanyahu's associates claim, their own investigation of the cigar supplier showed that during the years in question, the supplier ordered the import of the cigars favored by Netanyahu for just NIS 269,000. Therefore, according to the prime minister's associates, it is inconceivable that all the cigars imported to Israel were purchased by Milchan alone and given solely to Netanyahu.
- Another argument leveled by Netanyahu is that during his stint as minister, Yair Lapid also met with Milchan, accepted cigars from him and even dealt with his request to amend legislation. Therefore, from Netanyahu's point of view, this is selective enforcement that targets him alone. Regarding the state's witnesses, the prime minister's camp claims that agreements reached with them were carried out in contravention of the attorney general's position on other cases and performed in a "wholesale" fashion. Furthermore, Netanyahu's associates claim, key witness Nir Hefetz was brought in by the prosecution even before they reviewed the possible evidence he could provide. Meanwhile, Netanyahu's lawyers on Sunday presented the attorney general with a binder containing 122 leaks allegedly published during the course of the investigations into the prime minister.
- "This is a clear case of quantity becoming quality until, given the continuous flow of leaks, and in light of the contamination of the investigation, one receives the impression that unacceptable norms have become ingrained in these investigations," wrote Netanyahu's attorneys Navot Tel-Zur and Tal Shapira.

SUMMARY: With the bolstering of Benjamin Netanyahu's legal defense team and his many declarations in the media, on billboards and in videos, it seems that it has finally sunk in over at the prime minister's residence that there is no more dodging or weaving. Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit's decision regarding the corruption investigations into the prime minister will apparently be published in the coming weeks, and not after the elections as Netanyahu so desperately wanted. To this end, Netanyahu's inner circle is hunkering down to prepare for a hearing, and are planning for a last ditch effort to diminish the power of the indictment, if it is brought. Netanyahu's aides, legal advisors and associates are out in full force to replace the image of a corrupt leader dogged by police investigations with a picture of an innocent man brought low by his scheming political rivals.

Collusion: How Trump's Peace Plan Helps Netanyahu Win the Election and Avert Prison

By Chemi Shalev, columnist at Ha'aretz

- According to a report in Walla! News last week (full disclosure: it was made via its intrepid reporter and my daughter Tal Shalev), U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman has said in private conversations that Donald Trump's long-awaited peace plan will be submitted in April, after the Israeli election - but before a new coalition is formed. The timing is curious. Logic would seemingly dictate that, having held off the presentation of the plan because of elections, the administration would wait a few more weeks until a new Israel cabinet is formed and its policies are formulated. That, however, would be missing the point: Both decisions – to withhold now and to publish immediately after the election – are meant to assist Benjamin Netanyahu win the election, and, more importantly, help him escape the long arm of the law.
- The administration's saving-Netanyahu strategy is a function of two near certainties regarding the Trump peace plan: Israel's hard right will reject it, no matter how much it is perceived as favorable to Israel, and Netanyahu won't, no matter how much it strays from his core beliefs and current positions. The last thing Netanyahu wants or needs, before or after the election, is a Trump outraged by his Israeli BFF's refusal to play ball.
- In the lead up to election, Trump's peace plan works against Netanyahu. Besides his brazen appeal to voters to help him avoid indictment and prosecution on charges of corruption, Netanyahu's campaign is based on bleeding his right-wing rivals of their potential Knesset seats by outflanking them from the right. Although the size of his Likud party is less critical to staying in power than the overall number of Knesset members who will recommend that the president pick him to form the next government, the famously paranoid Netanyahu is worried that his nemesis Reuven Rivlin will use any possible pretext to choose anyone else but him. The better Likud does in the election, the less wiggle room Rivlin has for his supposed subterfuge – and the more Netanyahu can claim that the public has rejected his potential indictment.
- The presentation of a plan before the April 9 ballot would have stuck Netanyahu between a rock and hard place: Rejecting it would have upset his beautiful friendship with Trump and might have driven whatever is left of Israel's center-right into the arms of Netanyahu's centrist rivals, Yair Lapid and Benny Gantz. Accepting the plan, however, even if Netanyahu pads his acquiescence with untenable reservations and even if his prayers are answered and the Palestinians reject it first, would have been worse. Avid right-wingers, especially Jewish settlers, have never trusted Netanyahu fully: They appreciate his current rejectionism but remember his 1996 endorsement of the Oslo Accords, 1997 embrace of Yasser Arafat, 1998 signature on the Wye River agreement and, most injuriously, his 2009 endorsement of a two-state solution.
- Any hint that Netanyahu might embrace Trump's designs might have sent them flocking to right-wing parties who could curb the prime minister's enthusiasm, in far greater numbers than moderates who might be swayed to support him. Likud would be diminished, along with Netanyahu's claim to a personal mandate from voters.

- This was the essence of the urgent appeals by Netanyahu and his emissaries to the White House in the immediate aftermath of his surprise December call for early elections. Submission of the plan before the ballot would undermine Netanyahu, Trump's advisers were told. Either he would be elected with a small and unstable majority or, perish the thought, go down to defeat. As his evangelical recruits discreetly told the White House, a Trump move that would harm their golden boy Netanyahu would be nothing less than unforgiveable.
- Election, on the face of it, wouldn't change the dynamics on the right: Parties such as Naftali Bennett's Hayamin Hehadash party would have a hard time joining a coalition led by a Netanyahu who endorses a peace plan that, come what may, advocates Israeli withdrawals in the West Bank and gives the Palestinians a foothold in Jerusalem. Under these circumstances, the presentation of a plan before the forming of a new coalition could block Netanyahu's chances of forming a right-wing government and thus block his way to power.
- But that's true only if Netanyahu intends to replicate the religious-nationalist coalition he now heads. If he's looking to ditch the ideological right and to team up with what is bound to be a sizeable centrist bloc, on the other hand, Trump's plan could pave the way. A tepid Netanyahu endorsement of Trump's plan might alienate the right, but it would also serve as a fig leaf for centrists such as Gantz and Lapid to join his coalition, on the pretext of preserving chances for peace, even if, in reality, they don't exist.
- A more moderate Israeli coalition is essential for Trump and his advisers, on the assumption that: A. They really do have a plan and B. They don't want it to be proclaimed dead on arrival. Trump's Middle East peace team – especially Friedman – may be more ideologically aligned with the nationalistic, ethnocentric and anti-democratic bent of Israel's current coalition, but, in this as in all other matters, Trump's personal prestige reigns supreme. If Gantz and Lapid are what's needed to preserve it, the timing of the presentation of the peace plan can be adjusted accordingly.
- Theoretically, Netanyahu could have set up such a center-right coalition after the previous election as well. Lapid's 11 seats-strong Yesh Atid Knesset faction would have more than compensated for the eight seats held by Bennett's Habayit Hayehudi and Isaac Herzog would have jumped at the chance of adding the Zionist Union's 24 seats, giving Netanyahu a super majority in the Knesset.
- The polarizing circumstances that led Netanyahu to hold elections in 2015 after only two years in power – his perception of a plot by his centrist partners to undermine Sheldon Adelson's adoring Yisrael Hayom newspaper – as well as his divisive and apparently decisive “Arabs going to the polling station in droves” gambit on Election Day, combined to alienate the Likud leader from parties to his left and to set up an ideologically cohesive right-wing coalition that he could trust
- Trump's election, in general, and his peace plan in particular changed the equation dramatically. The same rigid coalition that was seen as a bulwark against the sinister designs of former U.S. President Barack Obama and initially as a boon in fostering good ties with the ostensibly far more favorable Trump, would turn into an irritant, if not an obstacle, to preserving Netanyahu's special relationship with a U.S. president who has put his name on a peace plan.
- Nevertheless, Netanyahu's relationship with Trump, which he touts as one of his major achievements, isn't the premier's main concern now. His ability to form a popular broad-based

coalition, which could ameliorate Israel's escalating internal divisions as well, isn't at the top of his agenda either. Netanyahu is focused on one thing and one thing only: Guaranteeing his political and personal survival, with the former, in his mind, critical to ensuring the latter.

- A coalition of fervent right-wing fanatics bent on dismantling the teetering pillars of Israel's liberal democracy would continue to embrace Netanyahu's all-out assault on the rule of law, viewing his personal campaign to avoid criminal charges as a conduit to achieving their greater goals. Netanyahu knows, however, that besides the risk of failure, the steps needed for him to beat Israel's legal apparatus into submission would spark vehement protests, convulse Israeli politics, split society in two and tarnish its name abroad. It's a price he's willing to pay in exchange for a Get Out of Jail Free card, but not if he perceives a better alternative.
- A centrist coalition wouldn't countenance measures such as the sacking of Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit, who seems on course to indict Netanyahu within a few short weeks. certainly wouldn't support the so-called French Law contemplated by Netanyahu and his confidantes, which would prohibit legal proceedings against a serving prime minister and would apply retroactively to Netanyahu himself. If Netanyahu nonetheless views a moderate government as essential to his war of survival, it is a direct outgrowth of his persecution complex and delusional belief in a vast left-wing conspiracy that aims to topple him from power at any price.
- Netanyahu's portrayals of a plot against the prime minister have always been a mix of cynical political populism and genuine, deep-seated paranoia. Coupled with his narcissistic inability to find fault with himself – a trait he shares with Trump – Netanyahu's view of himself as the target of a Deep State, which includes the legal system as well as the leftist media pushing it to indict him, has only entrenched his deep-seated delusions. He is convinced that the same leftist cabal that is pursuing him has exempted politicians who do its bidding – pursuing peace, for example - for crimes equal to or far greater than his; Ariel Sharon is the precedent uppermost in his mind.
- According to the right's version of Israeli history, the same Deep State that is bent on persecuting Netanyahu because he refuses to comply with its defeatist wish to abandon the biblical Land of Israel conspired 15 years ago to bury far more serious charges of corruption against Sharon for the exact opposite reason. According to this view, Sharon's 2005 decision to withdraw from Gaza compelled the leftist powers that be to pressure legal authorities to quash his indictment and to bury unequivocal evidence of his corruption in the so-called Greek Island affair and several other cases in which Sharon was suspected of taking bribes.
- In Netanyahu's view, the disengagement from Gaza was such a powerful incentive that it suppressed not only Sharon's crimes but also decades of leftist hostility towards the brash and hawkish Sharon, despite his image as the "father of Jewish settlements" in the occupied territories. His corroborating evidence is largely based on a random statement made in the months before the Gaza withdrawal by senior Israeli commentator Amnon Abramovich, who is identified with the left, in which he asserted that "Sharon should be protected like an Etrog." Abramovitch was referring to the Hebrew word for the precious citron fruit, which observant Jews protect from harm during the festival of Sukkot as if they were the crown jewels.
- A centrist coalition that is perceived as pursuing peace, or even one that is simply going through the motions, is Netanyahu's magic formula for turning into an etrog himself. Based on the Sharon precedent and his own paranoia, Netanyahu may have reached the conclusion that if his escalating public attacks on the legal system fail to do the trick, his only remaining ticket to freedom lies in emulating Sharon by dangling peace in front of the leftist lions out to devour

him. Netanyahu's road to salvation, therefore, runs through Trump's plan and the timing of its presentation. Which is how he convinced the Trump administration to subordinate its timetable to his needs, in what can only be described, in this day and age, as an act of collusion.

SUMMARY: A centrist coalition that is perceived as pursuing peace, or even one that is simply going through the motions, is Netanyahu's magic formula for turning into an etrog himself. Based on the Sharon precedent and his own paranoia, Netanyahu may have reached the conclusion that if his escalating public attacks on the legal system fail to do the trick, his only remaining ticket to freedom lies in emulating Sharon by dangling peace in front of the leftist lions out to devour him. Netanyahu's road to salvation, therefore, runs through Trump's plan and the timing of its presentation. Which is how he convinced the Trump administration to subordinate its timetable to his needs, in what can only be described, in this day and age, as an act of collusion.