



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

September 10, 2020

Reuters

Netanyahu Demands Probe of Investigators in His Trial

Prime Minister Netanyahu called for an inquiry into the investigators who brought corruption charges against him, in a move that critics said was an attempt to distract from his handling of the [pandemic](#). Amid a surge in coronavirus cases, attorney general has accused Netanyahu of trying to discredit the country's criminal justice system while he is on trial for bribery, fraud and breach of trust. Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party and allies voiced anger after Channel 12 reported that police and prosecutors had failed to disclose alleged conflicts of interest by an investigator who the report said was involved in the cases against him. A spokesman for Israel's State Attorney Office declined to comment on the remarks. [See also "Netanyahu Bashes AG as Justice Officials Said Weighing If PM Must Step Down" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

Arab League Refuses to Condemn Israel-UAE Deal

The Arab League failed to pass a resolution proposed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) which would have condemned the normalization deal between Israel and the UAE. Senior Arab League official Hussam Zaki said: "Discussion around this point was serious and comprehensive. But it did not lead to agreement over the resolution proposed by the Palestinians." While preliminary reports had indicated that Palestinian diplomats intended to soften their stance on the UAE going into the meeting to avoid diplomatic failure, PA Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki demanded a full-throated stance rejecting the normalization deal in a speech opening the session. UAE officials, such as Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash, have emphasized that their decision to normalize with Israel was a "sovereign" decision made in accordance with the UAE's strategic interests. [See also "Arab League Rejects Palestinian Demand to Condemn UAE Deal" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Arutz Sheva

Saudi to Permit All Israeli Flights to Fly Over Its Airspace

White House adviser Jared Kushner announced that Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have agreed to open their airspaces to all flights from Israel. The move means that Israeli airlines will be able to fly from Israel to Asia and significantly shorten flight times. "That will save people a lot of time and knock down a barrier that's been up for 72 years," said Kushner, adding, "Countries starting to let go of old conflicts and move in the direction of peace." Saudi Arabia so far has poured cold water on the idea of an agreement with Israel. King Salman bin Abdulaziz told President Trump there would be no normalization with Israel without Palestinian statehood. [See also "Kushner: Our Plan Is Bid to Save 2-State Solution; Israel Was Eating up the Land" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Saudi Supports Comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Saudi Arabia told an Arab League meeting it supports all efforts to reach a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. But a statement released by the Saudi foreign ministry on remarks made by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud included no direct mention of a normalization deal between Israel and the UAE. The prince said Riyadh supported the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the borders before the 1967 Six-Day War, with East Jerusalem as its capital, according to the statement. During that war, Israel captured territory including the West Bank and Gaza Strip. [See also “Palestinians Win Saudi Support but No Arab Condemnation of UAE-Israel Deal” \(Reuters\)](#)

Gaza Factions Say Hamas Cut Them Out of Deal with Israel

On Aug. 31, Hamas abruptly announced that it had reached understandings with Israel to contain the escalation in the Gaza Strip. The two parties had conducted rounds of indirect negotiations, first through Egyptian mediation and then with Qatari help. The office of Hamas' leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar stated, “After rounds of talks and calls, the last of which was carried out by Qatar’s Ambassador Mohammed al-Emadi, an understanding was reached to contain the escalation and stop the Zionist aggression against our people.” The Islamic Jihad movement made no official comment on Hamas' announcement. Members of the Islamic Jihad had been launching incendiary balloons toward Israel throughout August, as a pressure tool. Al-Monitor learned from sources within Islamic Jihad that the movement is not pleased with the agreement, claiming that it does not fulfill the resistance's basic demand of lifting the 14-year siege of the Gaza Strip. It seems that Hamas negotiated on its own without involving the rest of the factions in the Gaza Strip. [See also “Israel Punishes Hamas, but Also Advances Gaza Development Programs” \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

US Democratic Rep: F-35 Sales to UAE Puts Israel in Danger

Reflecting the Democratic Party’s Jewish campaign strategy ahead of November elections, a leading party member said the US should not sell advanced F-35 fighter jets to the UAE because it puts Israel’s security in danger. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz made the case in an op-ed in the [Miami Herald](#). The sale was announced together with last month’s normalization agreement between Israel and the UAE — a breakthrough because for years it was thought impossible to forge a deal with a Gulf Arab state absent a peace deal with the Palestinians. In targeting Jewish voters, the Republicans have touted an array of policy changes in line with Israel’s right-wing government. Among them is the normalization agreement. Wasserman Schultz wrote that the sale of the jets to the UAE would erode Israel’s qualitative military edge, which the US by law must uphold. The fighter jet has “unique capabilities that should be reserved only for Israel’s use,” the Jewish lawmaker wrote. Congress has the option of keeping the sale from going ahead. [See also “Former Israeli Diplomats on Abraham Accord Signing: What’s the Rush?” \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Iran to Conduct New Military Exercise in Strait of Hormuz

Iranian air and naval forces are set to conduct new military exercises in "a vast area covering millions of square meters" including the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean. According to reports, the Iranian military plans to deploy warships, submarines, along with unmanned aerial vehicle technology to the area. The military exercise will be an opportunity for Tehran to show its "authority" and its "ability to act promptly" along its coasts, explained Iranian admiral Amir-Habibollah Sayari. This development comes against a backdrop of heightened tensions between Tehran and Washington after Iran had built and moved a mock American aircraft carrier in the Strait of Hormuz in July, in view of possible military exercises. The report also comes a few days before the signing of the peace agreement between the UAE and Israel, scheduled for September 15 at the White House, which should formalize the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. On August 16, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani threatened the Emirates, saying they had made a "huge mistake" in concluding this agreement with the Jewish state.

Reuters

Macron Says to Seek Common EU Position on Turkey

A summit of seven European Union member states on the Mediterranean due to take place Thursday will push for a common EU position regarding Turkey, said French President Emmanuel Macron, host of the gathering. Relations between the EU and Turkey are badly strained on a number of issues, including exploration for hydrocarbons in the eastern Mediterranean, where Ankara is at loggerheads with EU member states Cyprus and Greece. Macron also told a press conference that France and Germany were working on a coordinated action to show solidarity with Greece, where thousands of migrants were left without shelter on Wednesday after fires gutted their overcrowded camp on the Greek island of Lesbos.

We Need a New Contract

By Amihai Attali

- I wish an election would be held now and I wish the parties would campaign about the real issues. I wish they would campaign about how the coronavirus crisis is being handled, about how the hammer that was supposed to shatter the chains of infection got turned into a tweezer. I wish they would campaign about whether it makes any sense to try run the country without a budget in the course of the craziest year we've ever experienced, and about whether everyone is okay with having the need for sane economic policy to be made subordinate to one man's need to keep an exit pass to elections in his pocket. And for them then to argue that that is way more important than having a budget. I wish they would campaign about whether it makes sense to shower billions of shekels on the public in its entirety, including multimillionaires, or whether it might not make more sense to do a thorough job and to give more to the people who need it not to give to the people who don't.
- I wish they would say that despite the fact that the Haredim are our brothers and the flesh of our flesh, we can't look at everything exclusively through their prism. I wish our politicians would say that that they're perfectly fine with the Haredim being opposed to lockdowns in the morbidity hotspots so instead we'll only have nighttime curfews, whereas during the day, anyone can go in and out. Maybe there should be a political party that campaigns on the coronavirus only being active at night because that's good for the Haredim. I wish we could have an election without all the jabber about Gantz being left wing and weak only to be followed by those same politicians forming a government with him. I wish we could have an election without all that talk about "anyone but Bibi," only to be followed by a decision to crown him. Without saying that this is an "emergency government for the coronavirus and the economy" when yesterday's morbidity record gets broken today, when no budget is passed, and when time is squandered fighting over every possible paltry political issue imaginable that hasn't anything to do with either the coronavirus or the economy.
- I wish we could have an election without them telling us that they care and are attentive to the public's feelings and then go on to form a government with 34 ministers. I wish they'd tell us to our faces that the thing that is most important to them now is to waste our tax money on a Ministry for Digital Affairs, a Water Ministry and on a Ministry for Community Promotion. By all means, let's have campaigns over the law enforcement system. Is it rotten to the core, as claim the Bibi-ists, who did nothing during their 14 years in power? Or is it pure gold, as claim the Nissenkorns who blindly defend even injustices that cry out to heaven?
- We need a new and real contract between the citizens and the government. We need public servants whose time, attention and energy are focused on working for the public, not for themselves. We don't want to discover every day that another minister partied at a wedding the night before. I wish there were some strong and normal force that would stand up and say: there is a lot that needs to be fixed—and then to fix that.

A Front to Save the Country

By Ben Caspit

- **A front to save the country needs to be established. It's that simple. A front that is comprised of everyone who believes that the State of Israel, its institutions, stability and proper order are more important than narrow and ulterior personal and political interests. A front comprised of everyone who believes that the truth is stronger than lies. A front by all of us: right and left, black and white, religious and secular, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, Jewish and Arab. We all live here together. We're all dependent on one another. We're all in the same boat. A country without a legal system, without rule of law, without enforcement agencies, without courts, without a police force, without a State Attorney's Office, without gatekeepers is a country gone bankrupt. Israel in the past few weeks has resembled a person who has been rapidly swept up by a powerful vortex, beside which mere bankruptcy looks like child's play.**
- **The front to save Israel needs to include all patriotic Israelis. Everyone. It has just one goal: to stop the complete destruction of the State of Israel's institutions. That destruction is being carried out in front of our disbelieving eyes at an ever-increasingly rapid pace. It began hesitantly, drop by drop, and has since turned into an insane wave. The prime minister stands in front of the cameras every evening and tells bald-faced lies to the Israeli public, invents an alternative reality and sells it to the masses. We've now learned that Yaqub Abu al-Qian wasn't a terrorist; he was merely yet another pawn in Roni Alsheich and Avichai Mandelblit's efforts to frame Netanyahu.**
- **The front to save Israel needs to draw a red line and to stop the people who are trying to assassinate the country. It's now or never. This is the last bulwark. All the levees have been broken; all the strongholds have fallen. We're not in the ninetieth minute, but in overtime. It's going to be too late very soon. Every person now needs to face their own conscience. Yes, you people in the Likud as well, the quiet MKs. The people who know the truth. The people who know that no one framed the prime minister. The people who remember what this prime minister said when the justice system investigated his predecessor in office and ultimately sent him to prison.**
- **The people who know that Avichai Mandelblit is an honest man and that Roni Alsheich, even though he is probably deeply mistaken with respect to the Abu al-Qian affair, did not hatch a plot along with the New Israel Fund, the Wexner Foundation and Islamic Jihad to force Netanyahu from office. You, who yesterday read the list of Netanyahu's six lies in his speech and know that it is accurate. You, who understand perfectly well what is happening here and what the repercussions of that effective demolition machine that is being operated out of Balfour Street are going to be for all of us as it destroys everything: the police, the State Attorney's Office, the accompanying prosecutor [Liat Ben Ari], the state attorney, the attorney general, the judges, the courts system—and yesterday it became the GSS director's turn. Everyone is being put to the butcher's knife, each one in turn.**

- **Anyone who fails to stop this now will be put to the butcher's knife as well. Israel needs reforms. The law enforcement system needs reforms and corrections that will increase transparency, strengthen oversight and make numerous other improvements. Netanyahu has been in power for eleven consecutive years and could have done all that. He didn't bother. The situation was convenient for him. Now he's dispatched a fleet of bulldozers to destroy the law enforcement system entirely. As if we have a backup system in place. As if Israel will be able to recover from that kind of action. As if the country will be able to function without governmental and state institutions. As if the rule of law were a toy that can be disassembled and reassembled.**
- **All that needs to be stopped. Blue and White needs to make it clear to Netanyahu as of this morning that if he doesn't immediately stop assassinating the country that he leads; they are going to take this dubious government apart. Courageous MKs in the Likud need to stand up and say to that man: enough. This wasn't what you were elected to do. Get your hands off the State of Israel. People who know the truth across the entire political spectrum need to stand up and speak it. Yes, Naftali Bennett too. He knows perfectly well what the truth is. He was there. So do honest and patriotic right-wing journalists and we've been blessed with many such journalists they need to realize that there's a limit and that it has been reached. This isn't a question of right and left. This is far simpler: we have no other country. We have no maneuvering room. We don't have the luxury of making a mistake or an error. It's either now or it's going to be too late.**