



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

Friday, September 11

Headlines:

- **Nationwide Lockdown Gets Green Light Ahead of Final Vote**
- **Coronavirus Rages, but Netanyahu Goes to Washington**
- **Trump Says Another Country Could Join Israel-UAE Accord**
- **Bill Would Declare PA a 'Foreign Political Entity'**
- **Syrian State Media Reports Israeli Airstrikes Near Aleppo**
- **Lebanese Army Says Downed Israeli Drone, IDF Confirm**
- **Pompeo to Visit Cyprus in Bid to Defuse Mediterranean Row**
- **EU Stops UAE Ship on Suspicion of Breaking Arms Embargo**

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: “The Next War”**
- By Sarit Rosenblum
- **Jerusalem Post: “Netanyahu Opposing UAE-US Arms Deal Normalizes Lying”**
- By Ehud Olmert, the 12th prime minister of Israel

News Excerpts

September 11, 2020

Israel Hayom

Nationwide Lockdown Gets Green Light Ahead of Final Vote

The special ministerial forum on the COVID-19 approved virus czar Ronny Gamzu's proposal to reimpose a nationwide lockdown for about a month. The decision now moves to the cabinet and then to the Knesset for final approval. Gamzu and officials in the Health Ministry presented the lockdown option as the best means of tackling the second wave of the pandemic, which has begun to spiral out of control with case records being broken almost daily. Under the emerging decision, which was favored by Gamzu despite being potentially harmful to [the economy](#), the shutdown of the businesses and other public venues will be along the lines of the measures imposed several months ago. [See also "Coronavirus Restrictions Complicate Coverage of UAE-Israel Peace Event" \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

Al-Monitor

Coronavirus Rages, but Netanyahu Goes to Washington

The Social media, morning news and talk shows focused on the question of whether it is appropriate for Netanyahu to [fly](#) to Washington for the White House signing of Israel's normalization deal with the UAE while the pandemic rages uncontrollably throughout Israel. Netanyahu's planned absence has been generating criticism over the timing of the trip and the decision to leave rather than devoting himself to curb the spread of the disease. The debate grew more heated following the latest [Health Ministry report](#) that indicated another record of daily infections had been broken. This comes at the peak of a historic diplomatic process Netanyahu has labored over in recent years and that is now bearing fruit. Netanyahu aspired to attend the event as a winner, exactly 27 years after the signing of Oslo on the same White House lawn. In those days, he headed the opposition and led the bitter struggle against the deal with the Palestinians. [See also "Netanyahu Needs to Be in DC for Signing Ceremony – Analysis" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Reuters

Trump Says Another Country Could Join Israel-UAE Accord

President Trump said it was possible another country could join a diplomatic accord between Israel and the UAE. Trump, who is seeking re-election on Nov. 3, did not disclose the name of the country that might be the next to join, but predicted that Saudi Arabia would eventually do so. The Saudi Embassy in Washington did not respond to a query on whether the Saudi ambassador or another Saudi representative would attend the signing ceremony at the White House. Trump said he believed the Palestinians, who have denounced Trump's Middle East peace initiative as too favorable to Israel, would ultimately "get back into the fold" and open a dialogue. [See also "Palestinians: 'Our Arab Brothers Have Abandoned Us'" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Bill Would Declare PA a 'Foreign Political Entity'

A bill submitted by MK Avi Dichter (Likud) and MK Matan Kahana (Yamina) will define the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a 'foreign political entity' and thus place it under the 'Prohibition of Contact with a Foreign Agent' law on the accompanying penalties for violating the law. The proposal was submitted following an initiative by the 'Ad Kan' organization in response to the Ezra Nawi affair, in which Israeli left-wing activist Ezra Nawi was recorded bragging about helping the PA identify Palestinians who had sold property to Jews, a capital offense under PA law. The PA is neither a terrorist organization nor a foreign state under Israeli law, so in the current situation it is not possible to prosecute an Israeli citizen with ties to it or someone providing information to PA security forces. The amendment proposes replacing the term 'foreign state' with a broader concept - 'foreign political entity,' which will also include gray areas such as the PA. [See also "Implications of PA's Collapse May Not Be as Dramatic as Assumed" \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

Times of Israel

Syrian State Media Reports Israeli Airstrikes Near Aleppo

The Israeli military launched a number of missiles at targets near the Syrian city of Aleppo, Syrian state media said. The Syrian state news agency SANA claimed that Syrian air defenses had downed the Israeli missiles before they hit their targets. There were no immediate reports of casualties. Most Syrian war analysts dismiss the military's regular claims of interceptions as empty boasts. Aleppo is a major city in northern Syria, near its border with Turkey, and is not a common site for reported Israeli airstrikes. Israel has launched hundreds of strikes in Syria since the start of the civil war in 2011. It has targeted government troops, allied Iranian forces, and fighters from the Lebanese Shiite terror group, Hezbollah. It rarely confirms details of its operations in Syria but says Iran's presence in support of President Bashar Assad and Hezbollah is a threat and that it will continue its strikes. [See also "Syrian Air Defenses Thwart Israeli Attack on Aleppo City: Syrian State TV" \(Reuters\)](#)

I24 News

Lebanese Army Says Downed Israeli Drone, IDF Confirm

An IDF drone landed in Lebanese territory during an operation in the northern region of the Israel-Lebanon border. According to the Lebanon army, its forces identified the aircraft while flying over the village of Ayta ash Shab in the southern part of the country. The military personnel managed to down it some 656 feet away from the Blue Line within Lebanon, the army stated. The IDF spokesperson confirmed the report, noting that "no concern of intelligence breach" arose from the incident. Around three weeks ago a similar incident had occurred, when an IDF unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) landed in Lebanese territory near the border. Hezbollah-affiliated television station Al-Manar reported that the Shiite terrorist organization downed the UAV, similarly above the airspace of Ayta ash Shab. In July, another drone was downed in southern Lebanon. [See also "US Envoy: Israel-Lebanon Maritime Talks Held up by 'Absurd' Sticking Point" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Pompeo to Visit Cyprus in Bid to Defuse Mediterranean Row

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will visit Cyprus in a bid to seek a peaceful resolution to mounting Mediterranean tensions between several EU states and Turkey. According to Pompeo's statement, he will meet with officials in Cyprus on Saturday after a trip to Doha where he will take part in the [inauguration ceremony](#) for talks between Afghanistan's government and the Taliban. State Secretary said his own diplomatic efforts will be backed by President Trump's phone calls with his Turkish counterpart Recep Erdogan and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The dispute "has to be resolved in a way that's diplomatic and peaceful," Pompeo told reporters on his plane, as cited by AFP. Pompeo credited Germany with seeking to lower tensions. France has also been active on the maritime rift and has staunchly backed Greece and Cyprus. Turkey, which is hunting for gas and oil reserves in waters claimed by fellow NATO member Greece, last month deployed an exploration vessel backed by military frigates. Greece responded with naval exercises as a warning.

Reuters

EU Stops UAE Ship on Suspicion of Breaking Arms Embargo

A European Union naval vessel stopped a ship that was carrying jet fuel from the UAE to Libya on suspicion it was violating a United Nations arms embargo, EU officials said. The EU military mission, named Irini, is operating in the Mediterranean to stop arms from reach warring factions in Libya. The ship had sailed from the port of Sharjah in the UAE and was heading to Benghazi in Libya, the statement said, adding that its cargo of fuel was "likely to be used for military purposes". Libya has been split since 2014 between areas controlled by the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli and territory held by commander Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), based in Benghazi. The UAE, Egypt and Russia back Haftar, who has suffered a string of military reverses this year. The U.N. Security Council has imposed an embargo on arms to stop the military confrontation and facilitate the peace process in the country. The EU is enforcing the embargo through its Irini operation.

The Next War

By Sarit Rosenblum

- **Today is a sad day. It is sad for the hundreds of thousands of families whose holiday table will be devoid of food. It is sad for the elderly who will have to mark the Jewish new year, perhaps their last, alone. It is sad for the country, whose government and prime minister have abandoned it to its fate. The second lockdown—and if we can prophesy, not its last—that will be imposed on the State of Israel during the pandemic is the outcome of an ongoing and inconceivable failure. Three months ago, on June 20, IDF Intelligence’s coronavirus researchers determined that the second wave was here and required massive preparation and determined and immediate steps to reduce the anticipated health and economic damage.**
- **Despite bitter experience from the first lockdown, and even though since then and until today it was clear that the State of Israel was marching in one direction in the matter of morbidity, nobody lifted a finger to try to avert this crisis. Instead of placing political and other disagreements aside, buckling down and preparing properly for the next upheaval to courageously overturn some of the relief measures that had been generously given without any planning or forethought, to establish tracing and quarantine mechanisms to help curb the spread of the pandemic, to strictly and uncompromisingly enforce the social distancing rules, without which there is no chance of controlling morbidity our elected officials chose to focus on nonsense. Instead of building the dam to block the deluge of sick and dead, they wasted long and precious weeks on sectorial battles and silly wars. During this time, hundreds of people lost their lives, most of whom could have been spared if their country had only bothered to do something for them in time.**
- **Even when it was obvious that the situation was irremediable, that there was no other alternative and that life must again be halted for a period in order to reboot it, nobody took responsibility. Nobody said we erred, let’s think about how to fix this and move on. Instead, they dragged us to the very brink of the abyss, and the political battles, again and again, took precedence over the battle against the coronavirus. The coming lockdown is inevitable. There is no point in opposing or protesting it. Without it, there is no possibility of halting the pandemic. A moment before we once again withdraw into our homes for an unknown length of time, we must begin to think ahead, about the third wave. It is also predictable and foreknown; it is lurking just behind the end of the second lockdown. At this bitter and painful moment of failure, we must look ahead. There is still a chance to atone for past sins, to take action and to fix, so that we do not find ourselves in the same trouble in the winter months.**
- **The mistakes that were made up until now are painful for all of those who lost their loved ones and their livelihood because of them. For their sakes, we must do things differently. We lost this battle big time. We must not lose the war.**

Netanyahu Opposing UAE-US Arms Deal Normalizes Lying

By Ehud Olmert

- The signing of the agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates is an extremely positive step, and it's very likely that it will lead in the near future to a full-out peace agreement, including diplomatic ties, the opening of embassies, flights between the two countries, bilateral tourism, and open business relations. In other words, everything that takes place between countries that have peaceful relations with each other. There's no doubt that Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed's decision required courage and might be the breakthrough that could lead the way for other moderate Muslim Arab countries in the region to follow suit. It's true that there have been ties between Israel and the UAE for over 20 years. This matter, like others, did not begin during Netanyahu's term.
- Granted, Netanyahu's son said that before his father became prime minister, there were only oranges in Israel. But there was a country here before Bibi, with advanced industries, impressive technological innovations, covert relations and sometimes almost overt relations with moderate Arab countries, even though these relations did not morph into overt normalization or peace agreements as we currently have with Jordan and Egypt. We had extensive contact with and had taken numerous visits to the Kingdom of Jordan during the years before the atmosphere in the Middle East became ripe enough for the signing of the Oslo Accords (which, for the sake of transparency, I voted against), and for open, public and official ties.
- The incubation period during which Israel and the UAE have been forging a relationship has been lengthy and stable. This relationship reached full maturity during Netanyahu's term, which then led to the announcement of normalization, and will hopefully also lead to a peace agreement. In the meantime, we have not yet reached a peace agreement. Not peace for peace, but instead normalization for normalization. This is certainly a serious achievement and the prime minister deserves a moment of appreciation for this feat, which I do not hold back from giving him in this column. This moment of appreciation is, however, extremely short-lived. It's quite clear that the normalization agreement obliges the Emirates to demand in return a level of commitment from Israel, so that current UAE leader Zayed can justify and protect himself with regards to other Arab countries that are the UAE's natural allies, neighbors and partners in the hostility towards Iran – the common enemy of many countries – including Israel.
- Therefore, the normalization agreement involved an unequivocal commitment by Israel to relinquish its unilateral annexation of territories in the West Bank, as well as to commit to freezing building in existing settlements and to truly agree to the two-state solution as an opening to solving the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Moreover, the normalization agreement was conditioned upon Israeli agreement to an extensive arm deal between the US and the UAE, in which the latter would purchase F-35 fighter aircraft with advanced capabilities, as well as additional weapons systems. I will say this outright: the US-UAE arms deal is a legitimate, reasonable, logical move that poses no risk to Israel's security. I would add

that in no way does this deal affect Israel's qualitative military advantage. In fact, the contrary is true: Strengthening the Emirates through the normalization of relations with Israel is based on the stable security of moderate countries in the region, and there's no reason Israel should oppose this. Moreover, Israeli government and private companies have been carrying out deals with the UAE for years now involving the supply of components, some of which are highly sensitive and have security implications.

- In simpler terms, Netanyahu's announcement that he opposes the arms deal with the Emirates, has no political logic, no military justification, and could cause UAE leaders to reconsider their decision. Why would the strengthening of the UAE's security be a security risk for Israel? If this country has a few F-35s and other defense systems that could be quite effective in the event of friction with Iran, would our security be compromised? If it's so simple, why is the prime minister lying about this, too? Why is he declaring that he's opposed to the arms deal, when it's clear and obvious that the deal preceded the declaration of normalization and to a large extent, was perhaps a precondition for it? Why is it that when the prime minister finally does something right or even helpful (which have been few and far between in recent years) he has to lie about it, make up stories and try to deceive us?
- Because Netanyahu is weak and spineless. He is constantly succumbing to Deri, Gafni, Litzman and Porush who force him to renege on his commitments, submit to their demands and do the opposite of what he promised to do just the day before. For some time now he's become a captive of his delusions, which have become his hallmark – he's being called a magician. But what kind of magician is he in his own eyes, or in the eyes of his admirers, if he's willing to sign a peace agreement in exchange for giving up the idea of a Greater Israel, or freezing building settlements and reconciling with the idea of two states? After all, any left-winger could have consented to such an agreement. Just some guy who's willing to betray his country, like me for example, or perhaps even someone like Benny Gantz or Yair Lapid. Bibi, in his own eyes, couldn't be just anyone like Begin or Rabin.
- Bibi doesn't have any desire to be a sane, normal leader who sees what's actually happening in life and understands that in the real world, there's give and take in negotiations, that there are times for achievements, but also times when it's best to give in. Finding the balance between these two poles, reaping the benefits and offering the inevitable concessions is a recipe for sane and responsible statesmanship that can be appreciated and praised. What indicates Bibi's madness and mental instability is the fact that he is incapable of doing anything honest that can also be seen as honest.
- After all, if he were to state the obvious – that the normalization agreement requires mutual exchanges and mutual concessions – this would have been acceptable, and he would have been deemed trustworthy. Moreover, in my opinion a significant number of Israelis would have consented. But Netanyahu is captive to this delusional self-image he created with the help of his crazy wife and son. He used to be a normal person, but he's been taken captive by this crazy image. In his own eyes he's no longer a regular political leader. He's told everyone around him that he has one of the highest IQs in the world,

that he's a magician who's capable of doing things no one who came before him has ever done. He's convinced that he's such a courageous and daring person that nothing can deter him from trying to achieve his goals. He'll eliminate Hamas, destroy Iran, annihilate Hezbollah, defeat COVID-19, and world leaders will set out on a pilgrimage to visit him in order to learn how to do these magic tricks.

- It is clear that this self-image is based on a mental imbalance and an incredibly high level of anxiety that undermines his ability to function and make decisions. His need to preserve this image necessitates him to constantly be making up new lies, stories, urban legends and invented tales that have no connection with reality. And we haven't forgotten the story of the British soldiers he saw in Jerusalem before he was born or the tank, he spent time inside of with Barak and Arik Sharon during the Yom Kippur War. Bibi doesn't need to stay connected with reality so long as he is surrounded by his gang of flatterers who make sounds of admiration for the lies and hallucinations, he's spreading around him.
- How much simpler, more dignified and worthy for the State of Israel (and perhaps also for Netanyahu himself, if he were capable of behaving in a normal manner) if we had said from the beginning that the normalization agreement with the Emirates justifies the concessions we have made. Peace in exchange for refraining from annexation, freezing settlement construction and accepting the two-state solution. An arms deal in exchange for normalization. All these I support and it all would have been received with applause, including by all the people protesting on Balfour Street. But Bibi must lie. If he didn't lie about everything he does, everything would look and sound completely different.