



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
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Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

September 2, 2020

Al-Monitor

UAE Agreement Stabilizes Israel's Unity Government

For Blue & White ministers, the normalization agreement with the UAE is justification for continuing their complicated partnership with Prime Minister Netanyahu. It looks like the next few weeks will help Blue & White publicly and politically. Both Israel and the UAE have been highlighting the economic and civil potential of the agreement to advance a thriving economy in the region, and this means that quite a few Blue & White ministers with portfolios relevant to collaborative ventures will become more active. Potential candidates include Minister of Culture, Tourism Minister and even Labor Minister of Economy. Current assessments, supported by recent reports, indicate that [embassies](#) in Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv will open in a matter of months, and that Israelis will soon be able to fly freely to the UAE and vice versa. High-ranking delegations from these ministries are already preparing to visit Abu Dhabi, while Israel is preparing to receive the first UAE delegation.

Ynet News

Israel, UAE Agree on Financial Cooperation

The joint Israeli/U.S. delegation's historic 24-hour trip to finalize a pact marking open relations between Israel and the UAE. The team took off for Israel flying once again through Saudi Arabia's airspace. Netanyahu said in a statement that representatives from both countries signed the understanding. Focus would be on "cooperation in the field of financial services and removing financial barriers for making investments between the countries, as well as promoting joint investments in the capital markets, added Netanyahu. "UAE's media office later confirmed the deal via Twitter. "Abu Dhabi Investment Office and Invest in Israel set out plans for bilateral investment cooperation, during a landmark first meeting when both parties explored mutually beneficial areas of partnership with a strong focus on innovation and technology," said the statement. [See also "Beyond Secret Cyber Deals, Israel and UAE Ties May Be a Boon for AI" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Reuters

UAE Pursuit of Stealth Jets Rumbles

Jared Kushner met UAE military officials at the Al Dhafra air base, where the U.S. keeps some of its F-35 advanced warplanes, highlighting the UAE's years-long drive to obtain the aircraft. Israel, which has the F-35, has balked at any other Middle East powers obtaining the plane, citing U.S. laws that it should maintain a military advantage in the region. UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar said normalization should remove "any hurdle" for the US to sell the F-35 to the UAE. The US has sold the F-35 to allies including Turkey, South Korea, Japan and Israel. [See also "Erekat: The UAE-Israel Deal Has Created Arab Zionists" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

UAE: We Have 'Assurances' Annexation Won't Happen

A senior official at the Emirates' Foreign Ministry said that the UAE has received assurances from Jerusalem and Washington that Israel will not go through with its plan to annex West Bank settlements and the strategic Jordan Valley. Director of Policy Planning Department at the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs Jamal Al Musharakh initially said Israeli annexation would not lead to the collapse of the nascent normalization agreement between the two countries, despite the condition being an integral part of the agreement when it was announced on August 13. A later statement from the Emirati Foreign Ministry clarified, however, that the bilateral agreement is indeed contingent upon Israel halting its annexation plan. He reiterated the Gulf Kingdom's support of the Saudi-sponsored 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which promised Israel full ties with Arab states if a peace settlement is reached with the Palestinians. [See also "Emirati Remarks on West Bank Annexation 'Encouraging,' Says Likud MK" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain Tell Kushner Ties Will Have to Wait

The leaders of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain appeared to express hesitation about joining a US push for normalization with Israel in talks with senior adviser Jared Kushner. Kushner flew to Bahrain and then Saudi Arabia with high hopes for a shift in Gulf attitudes toward Israel, a day after leading a US-Israeli delegation to Abu Dhabi to mark the start of talks toward full open diplomatic ties. Saudi Arabia has said it will not normalize relations until Israel agrees on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, in keeping with the decades-old stance of most Arab nations. Kushner later met Saudi Crown Prince MBS in the Neom region, the home of a massive high-tech hub being built by the oil giant and reportedly the site of the first open business deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel. The pair discussed "the need to resume negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to achieve a just and lasting peace," according to the Saudi government news agency SPA. [See also "Palestinian Report: US Aiming for September 13 Israel-UAE Signing Ceremony" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Hamas: We'll Give Israel 2 Months to Implement Ceasefire

A senior Hamas figure issued an ultimatum to Israel in which it has two months to implement understandings between the sides, otherwise, the terror group will terminate the ceasefire arrangement reached the day prior. In a statement explaining the motives behind the deal with Jerusalem, Hamas' deputy chief in Gaza Khalil al-Hayya warned that the varying factions in the Gaza Strip are prepared to enter "a confrontational campaign, even if it will lead to the bombing of Tel Aviv," Walla News reported. According to the statement, the ceasefire agreement is a ratification of previous deals, including matters of water, electricity and work permits. "We decided in the beginning of the year to increase the pressure through all means in order to remove the siege, but then the world and us turned to deal with the coronavirus," the official recalled. [See also "Qatari Envoy Says He'll Meet Israeli Gas Company to Discuss Pipeline to Gaza" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

IDF Soldier Filmed Kneeling on Palestinian Protester's Neck

Khairi Hannoun, 65, told the official Palestinian Authority Wafa news agency that he was protesting attempts by Israeli settlers to expropriate land near the Palestinian village of Shufa outside of Tulkarem when he was grabbed by a soldier and knelt on. The Israeli military denied wrongdoing but said the incident would be reviewed in the coming days. In video shot from the scene, Hannoun is seen standing and holding his arms out in front of soldiers when one officer suddenly grabs him and wrestles him to the ground. The soldier eventually pushes Hannoun into a prone position on the ground and is seen placing his knee on Hannoun's neck for a full minute while handcuffing him. The IDF said that the videos were "selective and partial, without reflecting the violation of order and violence with preceded the arrest." A spokesperson said the incident will nonetheless be reviewed by the soldiers' commanders in the coming days. [See also "Soldier, Cop Lightly Injured in Suspected Car-Ramming and Attempted Stabbing" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Jordan Pushes Economic Benefits of Ties with Egypt, Iraq

King Abdullah hosted Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at a one-day trilateral summit at Amman airport Aug. 25, the third of its kind in 17 months, which was seen by analysts in Jordan as a response to shifting regional geopolitical dynamics. The summit was attended by senior officials on the three sides. In an opening statement, carried by the royal court, the king was quoted as saying that the meeting was very important "in light of the current extraordinary conditions in the region and the world." He also stressed the importance of close coordination and joint action to deal with rapid developments in the region and foreign meddling attempts. The king went on to say that the Palestinian cause remains the core issue in the region, and that Jordan continues to call for a two-state solution that ends the Israeli occupation and leads to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 lines. One test of the alliance the three leaders will face is how to respond to White House invitations to attend a high-profile ceremony to mark the signing of the Israel-UAE deal in Washington expected to take place in the first half of September. [See also "Can Netanyahu Trade Halting Annexation for Erasing the '67 Line?" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

A Symptomatic Country

By Amihai Attali

- **Fortune-tellers and professional astrologists in particular could have told us that September 1 was coming at least a week in advance. What made it so hard for the leaders of the State of Israel to meet last Tuesday and decide that schools would not open in cities that had more than a designated level of morbidity? The coronavirus cabinet only announced around midnight the night before that schools would not open in red cities. It's one thing for the thousands of children to go to sleep next to their schoolbags in the knowledge that they would wake up and start first grade in Israel, but they woke up to a longer vacation with no end in sight in the abnormal neighborhood that we have become. They'll get over it. But the coronavirus cabinet's conduct is a distillation of the Israeli government's conduct.**
- **Lately the Likudniks have tended to call the demonstrators at Balfour "anarchists." But unbeknownst to them, and because of their bad conduct, anarchy already reigns here. So subject to the coronavirus cabinet's decision, the schoolyear began yesterday across the country except for red cities. But wait, red cities actually do what they feel like too. Beitar Illit, for example, turned out to be extraterritorial. It was business as usual for kindergartens and schools in this sovereign entity yesterday. When the municipality was required to give answers, it asserted that the decision to send children to schools was up to the parents.**
- **Mayor Meir Rubinstein said yesterday that his city was not supposed to be on the list of red cities based on the number of sick people. He could definitely be correct, but instead of bringing these arguments to Coronavirus Czar Prof. Ronni Gamzu, or to Health Minister Yuli Edelstein, Beitar Illit just opened the schools. Rubinstein is a smart fellow, he caught on quickly that we're living in a state of anarchy. The government's conduct is the source of the anarchy. Netanyahu and his associates are afraid of the electoral strength of the Breslau Hasidim, so instead of preventing them from departing the country, or accepting official responsibility for the request that the Ukrainians deny them entry, they're busy contorting themselves to explain it. At any stage they were afraid to prohibit it, so they announced that they "recommended" not flying to Uman. Aren't there any professionals in this country? If the trip is dangerous, it should be categorically banned. If not, then go ahead and fly. But there's no such thing as making recommendations when running a country facing such a big crisis.**
- **Gamzu practically beseeched the coronavirus cabinet to approve his traffic light plan, and only after three meetings were the members willing to agree. Gamzu was horrified at their intention to let in thousands of yeshiva and other students from abroad, but his opinion didn't count in this case either. So, what is the mayor of Beitar Illit supposed to make of all this? What are the Breslau Hasidim who are longing to go to Uman supposed to make of it? What are we supposed to make of it? It's quite obvious. This is a state of anarchy, and in such a situation, the wisest way is to just act like an anarchist.**

An Invitation to the Next Round

By Alex Fishman

- **No understandings, no agreements and no nothing has been achieved with Gaza. The conclusion of the current round is an invitation to the next round, which is liable to be more violent, since Yahya Sinwar’s line of public credit in Gaza is about to run out. If he were only able to do so, Sinwar would be happy to wipe the memory of the last round from the Palestinians’ minds. Not only doesn’t he have a single economic, political or even military achievement to show the Palestinian public for it, the situation in Gaza has only grown worse. In the course of the three weeks in which Israel closed the sea and ground crossings into Gaza, unemployment there surged by another 10% and thousands of people lost their livelihoods. Sinwar and his men can’t hide those data with bragging. This last round was a colossal failure from his perspective.**
- **In October, Sinwar is expected to announce his candidacy for Hamas’s leadership in elections that will begin in November and end next March. He will be arriving at the starting line with Gaza under complete lockdown as a result of the coronavirus and in the throes of the worst economic crisis it has known since he assumed the leadership. With this latest round of balloon terrorism, Sinwar had hoped to prompt a resumption of negotiations with Israel that would allow him to arrive at October with a clearly visible improvement in the quality of life in Gaza. He succeeded in bringing Israel to the negotiating table via the Egyptians, the Qataris and the UN, where he presented a list of demands that were designed to provide the residents of Gaza with a real flow of oxygen.**
- **He did not make do with his routine demand for an additional electrical powerline for Gaza but demanded that the quantity of Israeli-supplied electricity be increased significantly. He also submitted a list of dual-purpose goods that Israel has prohibited from being allowed into the Gaza Strip; he demanded that the number of Palestinian laborers from Gaza who go to work in Israel under the rubric of “merchants” be increased; and more than anything else: he demanded that the Qataris stop squabbling with him every month and give him an open check for an entire year.**
- **On Monday Sinwar announced that the truce would be restored without having received anything substantively new from Israel—only the same things that he had already had prior to this most recent round. We learned yesterday that the current truce has an expiration date: another two months’ time. That is the amount of time that Hamas has given Israel. The Qataris gave the amount of money they had been planning to give—USD 30 million—without making any commitments about the future. If it were Qatari Envoy to Gaza Mohammed Al- Emadi’s decision to make, this payment would be the last one. It turns out that Sinwar, who came to his meetings with Al-Emadi in the company of the commander of Hamas’s military wing, yelled at him and accused the Qataris of deliberately trying to make him fail so as to improve the prospects of his rival in the elections, Khaled Mashal.**

- **Not only did Sinwar find himself back at square one, the IDF exploited the balloon attacks in August to attack 104 targets from its bank of targets as part of its efforts to destroy Hamas infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. Firefighters and the IDF were prepared to deal with the fires. The IDF and the police also used the opportunity to test the laser system that is supposed to burst balloons and to deal with drones. The results were satisfactory, and the director of the IDF Planning Branch is currently holding meetings to discuss how and when to expand the acquisition and development of the laser cannon. Meanwhile, Hamas has been watching helplessly as the construction of the wall around the Gaza Strip draws near completion—a wall that neutralizes the threat of tunnels.**
- **A week ago, a new wave of the coronavirus struck the Gaza Strip, a development that may have expedited Sinwar’s decision to stop the violence. Considering the fact that there are 120 ventilators in the Gaza Strip, it is on the cusp of catastrophe. The Gaza Strip is currently under complete lockdown—the public is not allowed to travel from one district to another, schools are closed, and the beaches are closed. Cargo that Israel delivered yesterday to the Palestinians was sprayed with disinfectant. There is no way that anyone is going to be allowed to leave the Gaza Strip. Even if Israel were to want to ease the economic constraints on the Gaza Strip [by allowing laborers into Israel to work] in hope of reducing the security tensions, the coronavirus is preventing it from so doing.**