



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

Friday, September 4

Headlines:

- Lockdowns on 30 Cities Hard Hit by Coronavirus
- AG: Netanyahu Won't Have to Step Down During Trial
- Israel Charts Potential of Ties with 3 More Gulf States
- Bahrain to Allow UAE-Israel Flights to Cross Airspace
- Rival Palestinian Factions Hold Rare Joint Meeting
- Report: PA Interested in Renewing Security Ties with Israel
- Washington's ME Allies Could Have Little Choice with 5G
- Greece, Turkey to Hold 'Deconfliction' Talks at NATO

Commentary:

- **Ma'ariv: "The Netanyahu Method"**
 - By Ben Caspit
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Headed Towards 1,000 Deaths"**
 - By Nahum Barnea

News Excerpts

September 4, 2020

Ynet News

Lockdowns on 30 Cities Hard Hit by Coronavirus

The coronavirus cabinet, which leads Israel's response to the pandemic, decided to impose lockdowns on 30 localities with high COVID-19 infection rates. Under these new measures, residents will be prohibited from venturing more than 500 meters away from home except for the supply of food, medicine, and other essential house maintenance needs; all "non-essential" businesses will be shuttered; educational institutions will be closed except for kindergartens and special education; and travel to, within, and from the cities, and even certain neighborhoods will be restricted. The restrictions are set to come into effect on Monday and ministers are expected to finalize the list of localities that will be placed under lockdown by Sunday. Restrictions will be in effect for a week and might be extended upon reassessment.

See also ["Gamzu Says 'Israel Is at War', Tough Decisions Afoot as Virus Spreads" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Times of Israel

AG: Netanyahu Won't Have to Step Down During Trial

Attorney General Mandelblit said that Netanyahu won't have to step down when his trial on corruption charges revs up in January. Mandelblit stressed that while Netanyahu can continue to serve as prime minister, he must avoid any conflicts of interest whereby he could be seen to be attempting to use his political status to influence the criminal proceedings against him. Netanyahu, who has long accused Mandelblit of weakly submitting to a plot by state prosecutors, police investigators, the media and the political left to frame him for corruption and thus force him out of office, has recently also been clashing with Mandelblit over whether he should be involved in appointing senior law enforcement officials. Netanyahu's critics have argued that he will not be able to keep his total focus on the job when his trial picks up in January, with multiple hearings scheduled each week for witnesses to testify against him.

Times of Israel

Israel Charts Potential of Ties with 3 More Gulf States

The Intelligence Ministry has analyzed the potential of future ties with 3 additional states in the region and found fertile ground for robust cooperation, especially in the fields of [security](#) and trade. "The emerging agreement with the UAE may open the door for the advancement of ties with additional Arab Gulf states, primarily Oman, Bahrain and [Saudi Arabia](#)," according to a ministry report. The ministry determined that Riyadh's security concerns closely align with Jerusalem's, paving the way for cooperation. The potential Israel-Saudi cooperation would focus on "Israeli technologies that could strengthen Saudi economy and its ability to cope with regional security threats," the report went on. See also ["Netanyahu Condoned Sale of F-35s to UAE, Despite Public Denial – Report" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Bahrain to Allow UAE-Israel Flights to Cross Airspace

Bahrain announced that the UAE would be permitted to fly over the island kingdom, following Saudi Arabia's lead a day earlier. Although Bahrain still has no diplomatic relations with Israel, like Saudi Arabia, the decision suggests increasing normalization between Israel and other Persian Gulf states after the US- brokered deal between the UAE and the Jewish state. Some experts speculate that the next country to normalize relations with Israel will be Bahrain, a Shi'ite majority country ruled by a Sunni Arab family that has accused Tehran of inciting unrest in the country. Important details of the deal remain uncertain, most notably the freezing of Israel's annexation plan of West Bank settlements and a tentative sale of F-35 stealth fighters to the UAE. [See also "Abbas Urges Arabs Not to Normalize Ties with Israel" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Reuters

Rival Palestinian Factions Hold Rare Joint Meeting

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas held a rare meeting with rival factions as they sought to present a united front over Israel and the UAE's deal to normalize ties. The meeting was held through video-conference between Ramallah in the West Bank and Beirut, where Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh and Islamic Jihad Secretary General Ziyad al-Nakhalah attended. It is rare for Islamist Hamas and Abbas's secular Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization to have such high-level contacts after years of in-fighting. Abbas has refused to deal with Trump's administration for more than 2 years, accusing it of pro-Israel bias, and rejected Trump's Mideast plan. "Our meeting comes at a very dangerous stage, in which our national cause faces various plots and dangers," Abbas said. "In order to stand together in the trench of confrontation and peaceful popular resistance to the occupation, I invite you here to agree on the formation of a national leadership." [See also "Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad Leaders Meet in Beirut: Report" \(I24 News\)](#)

I24 News

Report: PA Interested in Renewing Security Ties with Israel

The Palestinian Authority is interested in gradually renewing security coordination with Israel after abruptly cutting off defense ties with the Jewish state, an Israeli official told local media outlets. Ramallah ended relations with Israel after Prime Minister Netanyahu announced his intention to annex parts of the West Bank earlier this year. Last month, Israel agreed to put the move on hold as part of its normalization deal with the UAE. A security source told broadcaster Kan that senior Palestinian Authority officials had expressed a desire to renew the coordination through various messages, although no further details were provided. The Israeli security establishment has long touted its coordination with the Palestinian Authority, crediting Ramallah for preventing numerous planned attacks on Israelis by Hamas and other terrorist actors in the West Bank. Defense officials have warned that the breakdown in relations could lead to a rise in violence, with more clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinians. [See also "Top Trump Official Says U.S. 'Wants to See Palestinians in Their Own State" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Washington's ME Allies Could Have Little Choice with 5G

The US is pressing its allies in the Middle East to join about 30 other nations in foregoing the Chinese version of 5G, the newest technology for cellular networks, claiming that a law in China can compromise their data and security. These states will thus find themselves having to choose between Beijing, a major investor in the region, and Washington, their security guarantor, which believes its own security could be breached via allies using a Chinese system. "It's every country's own decision," US Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment Keith Krach told [The Media Line](#), adding, however: "We want to warn them against using Chinese 5G for their own national security." When asked how serious the US was in saying that it could sever ties with allies that disagree, Krach replied: "It's very serious." One of those allies is Israel. Washington has made its concerns known to the Gulf states as well, but perhaps not so publicly.

Greece, Turkey to Hold 'Deconfliction' Talks at NATO

Greece and Turkey are to hold talks at NATO aimed at preventing accidental clashes in the eastern Mediterranean, where they are at odds over maritime borders and gas exploration rights. Tensions are running high over Turkey's drilling activities, which Greece and Cyprus say violate their sovereignty, and both sides have deployed warships in a show of force, raising fears of conflict erupting by accident. The two NATO allies have now agreed to get together to discuss ways to avoid this, alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg said. With the talks set to be of a technical military nature, they are unlikely to bring a complete solution to the complex, long-running rivalry between Greece and Turkey. But observers will hope they will at least offer an opening for further dialogue. The talks come after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged the two sides to reduce tensions and open diplomatic channels to ease the crisis. [See also "Greece, Turkey Agree to Talks Over Eastern Mediterranean, NATO Says" \(Reuters\)](#)

The Netanyahu Method

By Ben Caspit

- **The State of Israel is now paying the price for the fact that it is an unmanaged country. The Health Ministry is not managed, the Finance Ministry is falling apart, there is no Prime Minister's Office. There simply isn't. A complete and utter vacuum. A place where senior economists sat, people with a managerial record, people with personality, stature, experience, education, an impressive resume—now looks like the Gobi Desert at the peak of summer. The bleached skeletons of previous directors general are scattered all around; not a sound is heard. This week, Israel signed an economic protocol with the United Arab Emirates. The governor of the bank signed on behalf of the UAE. Someone named Ronen Peretz signed on behalf of Israel. The acting director general of the Prime Minister's Office.**
- **A person lacking any skills, significant experience, professional background. A person who knows nothing about economics, macro-economics, monetary issues, banking, economic plans. He has not managed anything or anybody in his lifetime. He was accepted to the post of second deputy of the cabinet secretary, a very junior post, and he was boosted to the post of the “director general of the country” for obvious reasons: the fact that he is a Likud wheeler-dealer who is ready and willing to fulfill every whim of the Lady on Balfour Street. The funniest thing is that the person who brought him to the bureau was Avichai Mandelblit, and the main task he performed was recording construction in the settlements.**
- **The volatile story of the endless whims and insane, ceaseless demands from Balfour Street caused the downfall of every director general of the Prime Minister's Office who preceded Peretz. Without exception. So, they brought Peretz, to sign off on everything. So, he also signs the economic agreement with the United Arab Emirates. A slap in the face for the governor of the Bank of Israel, the director of the National Economic Council (Professor Avi Simhon), the figurehead finance minister and those who still remain in the Finance Ministry leadership of the. That is the Netanyahu method. Staff? The staff isn't important, or as Netanyahu says to his interlocutors in English, “who cares about staff?” Only the outcome matters.**
- **He wants all the credit for himself. With this method, which has taken root over the years, a situation has arisen in which the prime minister of Israel is surrounded by garden gnomes devoid of any independent existence. “He only brings people who have nothing to look for outside, nothing to do outside, so they are completely dependent upon him,” someone who was there said to me this week, “the problem is that there's also a country to run here.” So, Netanyahu is surrounded by characters like Peretz, Hanni Bleiweiss, Effi Azulai (the caretaker whom the GSS disqualified but the Netanyahu family approved), Tal Gilboa (the adviser for animal affairs), and a few others of their ilk.**
- **“Every time Netanyahu is called upon [to implement] a process, he fails,” relates a person who worked with him closely for a long time, “he simply isn't capable of**

managing a process. The coronavirus is the best example. Bibi knows how to give speeches against the coronavirus, but the virus isn't impressed by the charisma, the makeup or the vocabulary. This virus has to be managed. Closing the skies or imposing a lockdown is easy. What is difficult to do is building mechanisms for breaking the chain of infection, creating a system of testing that will be strong, flexible and efficient, making clear-cut decisions and implementing them, and telling the public the truth. After the lockdown the government was given six months to organize. To set up mechanisms. To prepare. What did they do? They had fun. "This week a tender was finally issued for quick coronavirus tests at the airport. That is unbelievable. And look what is happening with the Haredim. He isn't capable of telling them the truth. He brings a project manager, doesn't give him powers, then he humiliates him by proxy, all to keep from losing a few halves of seats of Breslau hasids or Litzmans of various kinds. Netanyahu is surrounded by either fools or people who are being fooled. No one else can survive there for any length of time.

- Actually, he has tried to lead a few processes, I countered, for example, the normalization with the UAE. "You must be kidding," said my interlocutor, "the process he tried to lead was annexation. Historic sovereignty over the land of our forefathers. He tried to manage it. He held a press conference before the first round of elections and almost announced the annexation of the Jordan Valley. Afterwards he traveled to Washington, received the 'deal of the century' and annexation, and held a celebration filled with many participants and champagne in the White House with President Donald Trump. He clipped coupons and sewed suits [in anticipation of a festive event] and announced and gave speeches, and ended up with nothing.
- In the first second that someone would violate a guideline in the coronavirus crisis, he would pound on the table and send him to the blazes. A director general of the same stature as Sheves, Locker, Horowitz, Liberman, Groner and the like. Ronen Peretz needs navigation software to find the table and a ladder to climb up to it. It is no wonder that the Haredim are celebrating, the Breslau hasids are dancing, the Arab sector is neglected, and the economy is on the ropes. There is the old cliché that you can lie to some of the people some of the time, but you can't lie to all the people all the time. Well, Netanyahu has an advanced version of that. He lies to some of the people all the time. They swallow the lie happily, are convinced its candy and enjoy every moment. So, what, in fact, is Netanyahu's plan? One of his associates raised yesterday the following spectacular option: It's simple. He hopes that by November 2021 the situation will be so severe, so chaotic, so hopeless, that Benny Gantz will tell him: You know what, Bibi? It's a shame to trade places now. You go ahead, I will catch up later.

Headed Towards 1,000 Deaths

By Nahum Barnea

- In the never-ending discussion about the coronavirus, there are a few facts that everyone knows. One, the Israeli authorities have lost control of the rate of infection; two, it is not the virus that is to blame for the spike in the numbers, but rather people; three, we know precisely when and where this terrible crash occurred. It took place at the encounter between the dearth of leadership on top and the dearth of public trust down below. A dearth of leadership is a virus super-spreader. COVID-19 is one of them.
- Israel set a record yesterday: it became first in the world in the number of daily infected per million. Netanyahu, who was quick to attribute to himself Israel's modest achievement in the first wave, is piling the current failure on others. That's what politicians do. The problem was not created now, but rather during the days of euphoria, the days of the first wave. What Netanyahu should have done, as prime minister, was to keep the political establishment away from the decision-making process. That was hard to do but had to be done. Instead, he turned himself, temporarily, into Mr. Coronavirus.
- Why? Because politicians—at least those serving in the government today—are incapable of withstanding sectorial pressure. The Haredi ministers are willing to support a general lockdown but are fiercely opposed to closing Haredi cities. Their voters view this as discrimination. Netanyahu capitulates to the threats of the Breslau Hasids. We won't vote for you, they say. They don't vote for him in any case, but he fears that he will lose his grip on the Haredi street and enable Haredi politicians to release themselves from the grip of the right-wing bloc. His political interests overcame his common sense, and that is just one example among many. The general public sees what the government is doing, and it loses faith. That's why he needs a project manager, someone with authority, someone for whom the government works. In practice, the government appointed a project manager to work for the government, to be its scapegoat. This does not lower morbidity.
- We will cross the threshold of 1,000 deaths in the next few days. The number should not horrify us: it is only a signpost. The question that should worry us is the hospitals' ability to treat the seriously ill properly. Some say this number is 600; some insist that it is 800. I cannot understand why, in the six months that have elapsed since the coronavirus entered our lives, no serious effort was made to increase the number of beds, to train more medical staff, to install more equipment.
- The second question that should trouble us is the economy. These are the questions on the agenda. The Haredim complain that the government wants to close the synagogues on the High Holidays. With all due sorrow, the synagogue can wait. The performing artists complain that the halls are closed. We can live without entertainment for one summer; the problem is the workers who have lost their livelihood, not the audience. The same is true for restaurants, cafes, weddings. It is the workers who matter, not the guests. The virus is devious, says Health Minister Yuli Edelstein. The problem is not the

virus's cunning, but rather the failure of the people called on to curb it. On the same matter: the attorney general again said yesterday that in his opinion, the prime minister can continue to serve even while his trial is being conducted. He can do two things at once. If Netanyahu's handling of the coronavirus is any indication, I'm not certain that he's right.