



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
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Israel and Middle East News Update

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Headlines:

- **Battle Over Budget Risks Election, More Economic Gloom**
- **Bennett: Support for LGBT Doesn't Mean He'll Back Laws**
- **IDF Says Pinpointed Terrorist Tunnel From Gaza Into Israel**
- **Israel-Qatar Ties Warming Amid Efforts to Ensure Gaza Calm**
- **Sudanese Strains Surface as Pressure Triggers Israel Debate**
- **Syrian Report: IDF Attacked Hezbollah Post Near Quneitra**
- **Iran's Massive Air Defense Drill to Cover 'Half the Country'**
- **Israeli Firm Signs Deal to Pipe UAE Oil to Europe**

Commentary:

- **Ma'ariv: "A New Peace"**
 - By Alon Ushpiz, Israeli Foreign Ministry Director General
- **Makor Rishon: "The Solution to the Conflict: A United Palestinian Emirates"**
 - By Dr. Mordechai Keidar

News Excerpts

October 21, 2020

Reuters

Battle Over Budget Risks Election, More Economic Gloom

A festering crisis over passage of a national budget could push Israel into its fourth election, further straining an economy hard hit by the pandemic. Crunch time is approaching: Netanyahu's bickering coalition, patched together in May, has by law until Dec. 23 to pass the 2020 budget. Failure to do so by the deadline would automatically trigger an election that both Netanyahu and his governing partner, Blue & White chief Benny Gantz, insist they do not want. Gantz wants a 2021 budget passed in tandem, saying it would speed up economic recovery and is demanding real progress be made soon. It's a game of thrones, political and economic commentators said, with a budget crisis a potential means for Netanyahu to hold a new election and scupper a "rotation" pact under which he would hand over the premiership to Gantz in Nov. 2021. [See also "Alliance with Ultra-Orthodox Could Bring Netanyahu Down" \(AI-Monitor\)](#)

Times of Israel

Bennett: Support for LGBT Doesn't Mean He'll Back Laws

[Naftali Bennett](#), leader of the right-wing religious Yamina party, scaled back his remarks in favor of equal rights for LGBT people, after criticism from his political partner Bezael Smotrich. Yamina is an alliance of 2 parties: Bennett's New Right and Smotrich's National Union. While New Right has sought to distance itself from a religious image, National Union is a standard-bearer of the national-religious camp. Questioned on the matter during an interview, Smotrich made clear his faction would not vote in favor of legislation enshrining such rights. Bennett has sought to portray himself as the level-headed, responsible adult in the room in the face of the coalition's internal bickering. And he has done his best to establish Yamina as a party with nationalist, traditional roots but a forward-facing agenda. [See also "Bennett in Dilemma Over His Growing Popularity" \(AI-Monitor\)](#)

I24 News

IDF Says Pinpointed Terrorist Tunnel From Gaza Into Israel

The IDF located a terrorist tunnel connecting the Gaza Strip with Israel. The tunnel in southern Gaza, which originated in Khan Yunis and crossed a few dozen meters into Israeli territory, failed to breach the underground security barrier, the IDF said. The tunnel, dug several dozen meters beneath the ground, did not represent a threat to the local Israeli communities. In a tweet, the army lambasted the structure as "a violation of Israeli sovereignty, an attempt to terrorize our civilians" and a misappropriation of international humanitarian aid. While it is unclear which of the Gaza factions built the tunnel, the army said it held Hamas accountable for anything happening in the restive enclave. The IDF closed off roads and agricultural lands in the areas around Gaza, citing an unspecified "engineering operation" underway in the area. [See also "IDF Strikes Hamas Targets After Gaza Rocket Interception" \(I24 News\)](#)

Israel-Qatar Ties Warming Amid Efforts to Ensure Gaza Calm

Israeli officials believe relations with Qatar are warming, a report said, after a deal was reportedly made to increase aid to the Gaza Strip. An Israeli delegation visited the Gulf sheikhdom in recent days and managed to guarantee \$60m will be given to Gaza by Doha before the end of 2020 to assist the Palestinian enclave, Channel 13 news reported. The report said Israel believed Qatar views its positive contacts with Jerusalem as a way of getting back in the good graces of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The channel said officials even floated the notion of Qatar moving to normalize ties with Israel in the not-too-distant future. Qatar's envoy to Hamas-controlled Gaza, has regularly visited the Strip with Israeli approval, bringing funds to the Strip for purchasing fuel, paying civil servants and helping Gaza's poor. The funds are seen as crucial to maintaining calm along the border. [See also "With Coordination Still Suspended, Israel Hands Three Power Stations to PA" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

Sudanese Strains Surface as Pressure Triggers Israel Debate

U.S. pressure on [Sudan](#) to normalize ties with former adversary Israel has stirred public debate on a topic that was long taboo, exposing splits that could complicate any swift settlement of a deal. An agreement between Sudan and Israel may have edged closer when President Trump signaled that Washington would remove Khartoum from its list of state sponsors of terrorism. Military figures leading Sudan's political transition have appeared open to normalizing ties, but civilian groups including left-wing and Islamist politicians are more reluctant. A technocratic gov't has so far rebuffed U.S. advances aimed at pushing Sudan to follow the lead of the UAE and Bahrain. Khartoum's caution reflects concerns that such a major foreign policy move at a time of deep economic crisis could upset the delicate balance between military and civilian factions, and even put the gov't at risk, two senior Sudanese sources said. [See also "Top Sudan Cleric: There Is No General Islamic Opposition to Salaam with Israel" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Arutz Sheva

Syrian Report: IDF Attacked Hezbollah Post Near Quneitra

Syrian media reported that the IDF attacked 2 Syrian army positions and a vehicle near Quneitra. The targets were used by the Syrian army and by [Hezbollah](#) to gather intelligence on the IDF. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported a missile attack on the area, saying Israel was "likely" responsible, according to AFP. The group further said that the attack hit a base used by pro-Iran militias. Last month, Syrian media reported that the country's air defense systems were activated over the city of Aleppo following an air strike attributed to [Israel](#). The Syrian army claimed that Israeli aircraft fired missiles at the T4 air base located in the area. The Syrian news agency reported that the country's air defense systems had been activated against hostile targets on the outskirts of Damascus. That attack, also attributed to Israel, reportedly killed 11 people. [See also "Israel Said to Strike Iran-Backed Militia Base in Southern Syria" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Iran's Massive Air Defense Drill to Cover 'Half the Country'

Iran says that it is conducting a massive air defense drill that will cover half of Iran's airspace. This comes in the wake of a joint Israel F-35 drill with the US. It comes in the context of increased focus on air defense in the region after Azerbaijan has used drones successfully against Armenian forces for the last three weeks of fighting. An arms embargo on Iran recently expired and the country is looking to improve its military and defense technology. In the drill, the network-based operation will coordinate air defense units, including using locally-produced missiles and radar. Iran has recently been trying to improve its defenses against drones. This is assumed to be due to Iran believing that its adversaries have stealth drone technology. Iran long ago downed a US Sentinel drone in 2011 so Iran is familiar with some of the kinds of drones that might be conducting surveillance over it. The goal of this drill, Iran says, is to test real-time air defense using the latest technology. It will be designed to stop both drones and enemy bombers. Iran shot down a US Global Hawk drone last year and it has increasingly sought to export air defense to Syria and Yemen. [See also "Berkshire Hathaway to Pay \\$4.14m to Settle Iran Sanctions Violations Claims" \(Reuters\)](#)

Israeli Firm Signs Deal to Pipe UAE Oil to Europe

An oil pipeline running from the Red Sea resort of Eilat to the Mediterranean port city of Ashkelon will be extended to the UAE, providing the country with a bridge to get fossil fuel directly to Europe, an Israeli company said. It is seen as one of the most significant collaborations to have emerged since the countries established diplomatic ties. The memorandum of understanding is between the state-owned Europe-Asia Pipeline Co., formerly the Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline Co., and a company called MED-RED Land Bridge, which is a joint venture between Israelis and Emiratis, according to an announcement. EAPC said in a statement that the collaboration is significant news for the global energy market, since it will offer oil producers and refiners the shortest, most efficient and most cost-effective route to transport oil and related products from the Arabian Gulf to the consumption centers in the West, and provides access for consumers in the Far East to oil produced in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. The deal is worth \$700-\$800m over several years, according to [Reuters](#), which cited an unnamed official with knowledge of the details.

A New Peace

By Alon Ushpiz

- **Diplomats in Israel and around the world have repeatedly used the words “historic,” “dramatic” and “first-ever” in the past 2 months to describe the developments between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain, almost making us grow accustomed to [those kinds of developments]. That is precisely what we need to grow accustomed to—to grow accustomed to, but not to take lightly. To appreciate, to respect and to understand the enormity of these developments and the duty we bear to swiftly implement Israel’s relations with the Gulf states. Yesterday, a first official Emirati delegation landed at Ben Gurion, headed by the finance and economy ministers and accompanied by the American secretary of the treasury. That visit complements a long string of events: the Abraham Accords signing ceremony in Washington; the Israeli delegations, along with our American partners, to Abu Dhabi and Bahrain; and the very special visit that was paid by Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas to the Holocaust Museum in Berlin.**
- **Several agreements were signed in the course of the visit, and many more will be signed moving forward. Those agreements are between people, and they are designed to allow us to live with one another, to visit one another, to do business with one another and to move forward. They are designed to change reality. Today’s great achievements are the fruit of the important work that has been done by Israel’s diplomatic corps. Over the course of more than 2 decades we operated quietly and under a cloak of secrecy in the Gulf countries to lay the groundwork for this day. We established political and economic relations, and we built bridges, including on social media.**
- **An important part of what makes the current turn of events so unique is rooted in those efforts. Long-standing and close familiarity is a recipe for ensuring mutual understanding and readiness. It is a recipe that guarantees that we will quickly agree on our shared priorities and on the ways to act on them, replete with all the opportunities and challenges they present. We smile at the same things and are worried about the same things. Our new partners in the UAE and Bahrain are talented and serious people. Courageous patriots who inspire respect. Israel is a powerful and special country in terms of its capabilities and its character. It is clear to us that our expectations from this peace are high, and we are all deeply committed to achieving them.**
- **The Foreign Ministry will shortly open embassies in the UAE and Bahrain. The new Israeli representative offices in the Gulf, and the Israeli diplomats who have the good fortune to serve in them, will perform one [sic] task: to advance our interests, to secure palpable achievements for Israel, to provide service to the citizens of Israel and to guarantee that this peace is as genuine, warm, palpable and swift. Finally, we cannot and must not downplay the importance of the decisive role that was played and is still being played by President Trump. A strategic alliance, in which the US has invested an array of its capabilities as a superpower to ensure that things are better for Israel and for Israelis.**

The Solution to the Conflict: A United Palestinian Emirates

By Dr. Mordechai Keidar

- The Arab states are divided, generally speaking, into two types: failed and successful states. The failed Arab states are Syria, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, Yemen and Sudan, whereas the successful Arab states are Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Morocco. The failed states are internally unstable whereas the successful states are stable. The remaining Arab states are all somewhere on the spectrum between successful and failed states, between stability and instability. The first reason for the dismal condition of the failed states is the fact that those states were founded by politicians who established “progressive” regimes that relied on Western ideologies [and concepts] that dazzled them, such as socialism, [establishing a] republic and democracy. Alternatively, the successful states that established systems of government were built on the basis of the traditional local social norms [and concepts], such as tribalism, a kingdom and an emirate.
- The second reason for the difference between the two kinds of states is that society in each one of the failed states is heterogeneous and is comprised of different groups, tribes, ethnicities, religions or sects, and each such group has continued to cling to its own collective identity in terms of its characteristics, rules, traditions and customs, and has continued to view the other groups as enemies. The idea of fealty to the modern state, its institutions, symbols and law, failed in its attempt to replace fealty to the traditional group. The result has been endless fighting between the groups and the state, which they view as an enemy. The “nation-building” project in those states has been a dismal failure. Alternatively, the citizens of every one of the successful states are members of a single homogenous group, such as the Al-Sabah tribe in Kuwait, the Al-Thani tribe in Qatar, the Al-Nahyan tribe in Abu Dhabi and so on. Since society is homogenous it is permanently stable, that social stability is the basis on which a legitimate and functioning system of government is built.
- The difference is also plainly visible in economic terms as well. The situation in the failed states proves that despite the vast quantities of oil they possess, countries such as Libya and Iraq are nevertheless failed states. Alternatively, successful states characteristically have flourishing economies, even though Dubai has virtually no oil or natural gas. The conclusion is that oil alone is not enough to guarantee economic success, since that success stems from the social and political stability in the successful states, and that is what produces a developed economy—be that based on oil, or be it based on commerce and tourism, as is the case in Dubai.
- The state of the Palestinian Authority is one of total failure from every aspect. The separation between Fatah’s PA and Hamas’s state [in Gaza] since 2007, the corruption that courses through the Palestinian Authority’s veins, the tyranny, the oppression and the failed public conduct—all of those together lead to the obvious conclusion that if a Palestinian state is established it will be, without doubt, yet another failed state that will need an external enemy to unite the population under its non-legitimate regime.

- **So why establish a state of that kind? Conversely, the clan system among the Arab population that lives in Judea and Samaria is alive and well, and has a real presence and influence. In many cases—such as in conflict management and organizing day-to-day life, the role that the clan plays is positive and is broadly accepted. The clans’ sheikhs are far more esteemed and respected by the public than the PA is, and that is what leads us to the correct solution: a solution of clan-based emirates in the Arab cities in Judea and Samaria (West Bank).**
- **The idea is to establish independent emirates in each one of the Arab cities in Judea and Samaria, in addition to the emirate that was established in Gaza in 2007. Israel will remain permanently in the rural expanse. Each one of the emirates in Judea and Samaria will be based on the local clans that live in the specific city, and the sheikhs of those clans will be the source of sovereign authority of each emirate. If the emirates choose to form a federation among themselves, there is no problem with that, as long as they do not have geographical contiguity between them.**
- **The emirates that are to be formed in the cities of Judea and Samaria are: Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm, Kalkilya, Ramallah, Jericho and Arab Hebron, in addition to Gaza. Each emirate will be responsible for administering its own affairs, such as domestic security, economic policy, infrastructure, imports/exports, electricity, water, transportation and so on, and that will be done by means of bilateral agreements that are reached between that emirate and Israel. Israel will apply its sovereignty to the rural expanse outside of the emirates and it will offer Israeli citizenship to the residents of those villages. Anyone who accepts Israeli citizenship will be a full citizen, just like the Arab citizens who live in the Galilee, the Triangle or the Negev. Decisions about the minutia that pertain to administering the various spheres of life in the Palestinian emirates will be made in keeping with the cumulative experience that has been garnered by the UAE through consultations with UAE officials.**