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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

October 7, 2020

Al-Monitor

Israeli, Emirati Diplomats Meet in Germany

Israeli and Emirati diplomats met in Germany for their first meeting since normalizing ties. Germany's top diplomat, Heiko Maas said the historic agreement between the two countries has the potential to advance stalled peace efforts. Maas hosted FM Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and FM Gabi Ashkenazi in Berlin. Nahyan and Ashkenazi referred to each other as "friend" in a news conference following a closed meeting. They also visited a Holocaust memorial in Berlin. Nahyan wrote "Never again" in the visitor book at the memorial, [Reuters](#) reported. Germany is a close ally of Israel, in part due to the legacy of the Holocaust. The European power is also not afraid to voice its disagreements with Israel, however. In July, Germany warned Israel against its plans to annex parts of the West Bank. Israel agreed to suspend plans in exchange for normalization with the UAE. [See also "Litmus Test for Israeli-Arab Normalization Comes as Early as Next Week" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Palestinian Officials to Pressure EU to Reverse NGO Funding

Palestinian Foreign Ministry officials have convened with representatives of Palestinian factions, civilian organizations, and prisoners organizations to discuss ways to remove terror organizations from the EU's lists of restrictive measures. The listing is significant as the EU cannot pay out funds to NGOs who have ties to the terror groups on the lists, or who refuse to sign. According to a statement on the official news-site of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the meeting, chaired by Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the PLO, Saeb Erekat, focused on the need to preserve a relationship with the EU while at the same time rejecting the terrorist label attached to the factions and the need to comply with that designation to access the funding. The attendants also unanimously agreed to reject conditional funding.

Ha'aretz

Pro-Israel Groups Audition Dems Seeking Top Policy Seat

The 3 House of Representatives Dems seeking the influential chairmanship of the Foreign Affairs Committee are meeting with donors and staff of pro-Israel groups and asking them to lobby the party leadership. Reps. Brad Sherman, Gregory Meeks, and Joaquin Castro have or will soon have Zoom meetings with the Democratic Majority for Israel and J Street. Whoever replaces outgoing Rep. Engel will face growing calls from the party's left-wing to put more pressure on Israel when it comes to reaching a two-state agreement with the Palestinians. Meeks and Sherman clarified what appeared to be their earlier endorsement of a proposal, popular among the left, that Congress should ban assistance to Israel from being used to annex parts of the West Bank.

Chevron Completes to Operate Israel's Natural Gas Reserves

Energy giant Chevron has completed the acquisition of Noble Energy, the company which holds most of the natural gas reserves off Israel's coastline, Israel Hayom reported. In addition to involvement in the natural gas industry, Chevron would also take part in Israel's high-tech industry in topics such as cyber-gas, energy efficiency, power storage and more, [Israel Hayom](#) reported. In July, Chevron -- the second largest energy company in the world -- announced its intention to acquire Noble Energy, and three weeks ago the Oil Council in the Ministry of Energy recommended to approve the merger of Noble Energy into a subsidiary of Chevron. According to a NASDAQ report, the deal is worth around \$13 billion. In compliance with the deal, state revenues are expected to reach hundreds of billions of shekels.

Reuters

After Signs of Rapprochement, Turkey-EU Ties Sour Again

Turkey's relations with the EU appeared to take a turn for the worse as Ankara voiced dissatisfaction with the result of last week's EU summit and the bloc said the country's bid for membership was [evaporating](#). Tensions between the EU and Ankara had eased in recent weeks as Turkey and EU member Greece agreed to hold exploratory talks to solve several longstanding disputes, including a standoff over maritime claims in the eastern Mediterranean. EU leaders assuaged concerns raised by Cyprus, which had been pushing for sanctions on Ankara, by assuring it that the bloc would punish Turkey if it continues oil and gas drilling in disputed areas of the eastern Mediterranean. But President Erdogan told German Chancellor Merkel that the outcome of the EU summit was not sufficient to overcome the problems in Turkey-EU ties. Erdogan accused the EU of stalling Turkey's membership bid for years and said the same had occurred during the summit. [See also "Turkey to Test Russian S-400 Air Defense System Amid Tensions in NATO" \(AI-Monitor\)](#)

Ynet News

Syria Minister: Turkey Main Terrorism Sponsor in Region

Syria's foreign minister Al-Moallem accused Turkey of being "one of the main sponsors of terror" in Syria and the region, and said it is guilty of "a war crime and a crime against humanity" for cutting water to more than a dozen towns that resisted Turkish occupation. The nine-year Syrian conflict, which initially began as a civil war, later became a regional proxy fight. Turkey, which now controls a zone in [northern Syria](#), has backed opposition fighters against President Bashar Assad, Syrian Kurdish fighters, and the Islamic State extremist group. Al-Moallem also accused Turkey of moving "terrorists and mercenaries - referred to by some as 'moderate opposition' - from "Syria to Libya," violating Iraq's sovereignty, using refugees "as bargaining chips against Europe", and laying claim "by force to energy resources in the Mediterranean." "Its policies and actions, which threaten the security and stability of the whole region, must be stopped." [See also "Report: France's Macron Proposed Israel Sign Long-Term Ceasefire with Hezbollah" \(I24 News\)](#)

Iran Fears War as Fighting Rages Around Nagorno-Karabakh

Iran's president warned that fighting between Azeri and ethnic Armenian forces in the South Caucasus could trigger a regional war as the death toll rose on the 11th day of hostilities. More than 300 have now died in the renewed fighting in and around the mountain enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, which under international law belongs to Azerbaijan but is populated and governed by ethnic Armenians. Azerbaijan says Azeri cities outside the conflict zone have also been attacked in the deadliest fighting in more than 25 years, taking the fighting closer to territory from which pipelines carry Azeri gas and oil to Europe. Iran, which borders both Armenia and Azerbaijan, has been talking to both the former Soviet republics as concern mounts that Turkey, a close ally of Azerbaijan, and Russia, which has a defense pact with Armenia, could be sucked into the conflict. "We must be attentive that the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan does not become a regional war," Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said in televised remarks. In a new call for a ceasefire, Russian President Putin said in a television interview that the events were a tragedy and Moscow was deeply concerned. [See also "Azerbaijan's Calculations as It Contemplates Third Week of War" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Netanyahu, President Putin Talk Iran and Syria

Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Vladimir Putin discussed regional security issues on the phone. The two discussed "Iranian aggression and the situation in Syria," according to a Prime Minister's Office readout. In addition, they talked about cooperation in fighting the coronavirus pandemic. Wednesday is Putin's 68th birthday, and Netanyahu wished him well. Netanyahu and Putin are often in contact, in light of Israel's policy to block Iran from establishing bases close to Israel's northern border and transferring weapons to Hezbollah. Israeli moves to stop these actions are coordinated with Russia, which has a strong presence in Syria. [See also "Iran Says It's Among Top Countries in Military Radar – a Message to Israel" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

The Captains are Drilling Holes in the Ship

By Emily Amrousi

- **We're better than you. The Israeli public is better than the people who hold positions of power and authority over it. The Israeli public is more mature than its leaders are. The public is more intelligent and responsible than its publicly-elected officials are. And we deserve better. After everything we've been through and are still going through—we deserve a better leadership. For the past seven months we've been sifting through news sites in an attempt to understand what the emergency ordinances oblige us to do; we've heeded the guidelines, we've suffered financially and we've paid a painful emotional, familial and social price. But while we've hunkered down in the belly of the ship to help keep the ship from suffering damage—it has nevertheless begun to fill with water. What is going on here? The answer is simple. The people drilling holes in the bottom of the ship are its very captains. The sheer chutzpah and audacity that has been shown by the people who ought to have been setting an example is beyond the pale. How can they demand that the public obey the law when the lawmakers themselves ignore it? In the summer we ascribed the rising tide of infection to the Israelis' lack of self-discipline. This autumn we've seen a royal class that ignores the restrictions. Top government officials urinating on the public's health. Let the puny citizens obey the instructions, not us; we are above them.**
- **I want GSS Director Nadav Argaman to look my little brother and his wife in the eye. They got married in a coronavirus wedding that was attended by exactly ten people, including the rabbi. Their closest friends weren't invited; their nieces and nephews didn't attend, and neither did their grandmothers. I want Minister Gila Gamliel to look my son in the eye. His Bar Mitzvah, which he was looking forward to after spending a year preparing for it, was celebrated only in the presence of his parents and siblings. The first time he put on phylacteries was in our living room, without a prayer quorum. I want MK Mickey Levy to look me in the eye, after I spent Passover eve without my husband because of the lockdown and then spent Sukkot without my husband because of quarantine. My demand from them and the others (the ones who are already on the list and the others who haven't been caught yet—but rest assured, there are more of them) is that they look my grandmother in the eye. She is an energetic 84-year-old widow who has spent the last half-year locked in gazing at the bars on her windows. I want them to look the 1,784 families who have lost loved ones to the coronavirus in the eye. I want them to look the million people who are out of work and the self-employed who are buckling under strain in the eye. I want them to look us all in the eye and to resign their public posts. This isn't about black-flag-waving protestors or black-clad yeshiva students anymore. The people who have violated the guidelines and have trampled solidarity this time are the very people who are supposed to serve as a role model for all of us and to be the most fervently observant orthodoxy in all that pertains to the coronavirus rules. If the people on high have acted that way, what can we say? Go. All of you.**

General Breakdown

By Ben Caspit

- The State of Israel has gone mad. Only in a disturbed country could there be a candidate who gets shut out of the Knesset after failing to cross the electoral threshold by winning just three seats in 2019, only to rake in 23 seats in polls in 2020. That candidate's name is Naftali Bennett. He has come by those seats on paper, but he hasn't come by them honestly. He has persuaded the public that he is the person who is best-suited to fight the coronavirus and to come up with solutions—and he has achieved that goal with real skill, dizzying speed and accuracy. But if anyone were to have told him last April, while he was still scrambling at the Central Elections Committee's offices in an attempt to cobble together the few [thousand more] votes he needed to cross the electoral threshold, about the Hahadashot poll from last night, he would have doubled over in laughter. The problem is that in this case, the joke is on us.
- The Hahadashot poll results that were reported last night, dramatic as they may be, are primarily reflective of a general breakdown, a population that is at wit's end and huge swaths of the public who are looking for a leader. Netanyahu voters who are disappointed in Netanyahu and are now flocking to Bennett; and Gantz voters who are disappointed in Gantz and, surprisingly enough, are also flocking—partially, at least—to that same Bennett. Bennett's party is the coronavirus party. This damned pandemic may be killing people around the world and in Israel, but it has revived Naftali Bennett and brought him back from the dead. Whereas Netanyahu has been struck by lightning, Bennett has become a lightning rod. Bennett knows as well as everyone else that he isn't going to win 23 seats in the next election. The question is who is going to win those lost seats and how the political map is going to be divided.
- There is no answer just yet to that question, just like no one knows when a new election is going to be called. In the current situation anything, but absolutely anything, is possible. Netanyahu needs to decide whom he would prefer to have serve as his second in command: Benny or Bennett. Netanyahu knows that the submissive and weak Benny is twice and three-times better for him than Bennett. The chances of Netanyahu's capitalizing on his next exit point for early elections (December 23) currently appear to be quite slim. He is assured the premiership through November 2021, so why place himself at the mercy of a dangerous and revenge-bent enemy, such as Bennett? Anyone looking for an explanation for Gantz's unbelievably floundering behavior in the past few weeks can find it in those numbers. Gantz knows that Balfour Street [i.e., the Netanyahu family and the prime minister's inner circle of close aides] is terrified of Bennett.
- Gantz has been trying to convince Netanyahu that he would be better off with the one bird he already has in his hand than the two birds (Bennett and Shaked) in the bush. The problem is that judging by the current state of things, by the time the date arrives for the alternating premiership arrangement to be enacted, the caged bird in Netanyahu's hand will already be dead. De-feathered, its wings broken, bereft of any public support whatsoever, Gantz is going to discover belatedly something that he should have known

from the first moment: Netanyahu only understands force. There is nothing to be gained by groveling to him. Netanyahu needs to be dealt with the same way he deals with everything. Namely, by being willing to get dirty. That is what Yair Lapid is trying to do. His polling numbers as of yesterday (18) aren't bad, but they are also far from being good. Lapid should have been the person to whom the voters who were disappointed in Netanyahu and Likud should have flocked—not Bennett. Lapid has lost to his former brother, Bennett, in the coronavirus war.

- But Lapid is a politician who plays the long game and who hopes to fix slowly and patiently that state of affairs. He intends to introduce next week a constructive no-confidence motion in the prime minister. By law, a government can only be toppled by a no-confidence motion if the motion also cites an alternative coalition and a new prime minister (not an alternative prime minister, which we already have...). Lapid intends to present his potential partners with an enticing offer: in his alternative coalition, Gantz remains defense minister, Ashkenazi remains foreign minister and Nissenkorn remains justice minister. Liberman can be given the finance portfolio. And Bennett? Bennett can be what he wants to be: the coronavirus minister. I don't see them going along that plan. But I do see the people in the Prime Minister's Residence going mad with concern and trying to stamp out the conspirators and the plot before it is carried out. That isn't going to hurt Lapid. He will come away looking like a leader; he will fill out the suit he wears as chairman of the opposition; and he will begin to get the public accustomed to thinking of him as an alternative. Will that be enough? No one knows. Seeing as the political landscape keeps changing on us with every day that passes, everything might be back in its former place in another few months' time, too.