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## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Thursday, October 8*

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# News Excerpts

October 8, 2020

## Israel Hayom

### **Poll Shows Yamina Breathing Down Likud's Neck**

A new poll that aired on Channel 12 projected a close race between Yamina and Likud, giving. The poll found, Likud would win 26 Knesset seats and Yamina would secure 23 seats. Yamina has been growing steadily stronger in the polls, and it seems the national-religious faction comprising the New Right and National Union parties will pose a significant challenge for Likud. The survey, conducted by the Midgam polling institute projected that Yesh Atid would win 18 seats, followed by the Joint Arab List (15), Blue & White (9), ultra-Orthodox Sephardi party Shas (9), Yisrael Beytenu (8), Ashkenazi Haredi party United Torah Judaism (7), and Meretz, with 5 seats. The poll shows that the right-wing and ultra-Orthodox bloc continues will grow slightly stronger, winning 65 seats, while the left-wing and Arab bloc, together with the Yisrael Beytenu, would have win only 55 seats. [See also "Shaked: We Need Elections After 2nd Virus Wave, Bennett Would Be 'Excellent' PM" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Israel, UAE Shake Hands at the UN in Geneva**

In a latest advancement of Israel-UAE normalization, the countries' ambassadors to the UN on met in Geneva, one of the more diplomatically contentious sites for Israel, because it is the seat of the UN Human Rights Council. The two ambassadors touched on the thornier issues such as the UNHRC, that annually passes more resolutions against Israel than any other country. The body is mandated to debate alleged Israeli international human rights abuses at every session, under what is known as Agenda Item 7. Israel has worked to highlight that bias and to eliminate that agenda item and has argued that criticism regarding human rights should be dealt with under Agenda Item 4, alongside allegations against other countries. Separately, Israel's Minister for Regional Cooperation held a Zoom meeting with his UAE counterpart. They discussed cooperation in water, agriculture, technology, cyber security and tourism.

## Reuters

### **Qatar Makes Formal Request for F-35 Jets**

Qatar has submitted a formal request to the US to buy stealthy F-35 fighter jets, three people familiar with the deal said, in a deal that if pursued could strain U.S. ties with Saudi Arabia and Israel. The request for the Lockheed Martin Co jets was submitted by Qatar in recent weeks, the people said. Keen to counter Iran in the region, the U.S. helps to arm allies including Qatar, host to the largest U.S. military facility in the Middle East, and home to 8,000 service members. Israel has signaled stiff opposition to a UAE sale and would likely be just as resistant to one with Qatar, fearing it could undercut its military advantage. A fourth person familiar with the matter said concern about Qatar's links to Hamas have frequently surfaced over arms sales to the Gulf state. But in the case of an advanced warplane like the F-35, it could be a deal breaker.

Reuters

## **Elbit Systems Signs \$50 Million Contract with US Military**

Israel's Elbit Systems said its U.S. subsidiary won a contract worth up to \$50 million to produce spare parts for the aviators' night vision imaging system head-up display system of the U.S. Army. The contract, to be carried out over 5 years, was awarded on behalf of the U.S. Army by the Defense Logistics Agency. An initial order for \$17.9 million was placed under this contract, to be supplied until 2023. The day and night display system connects to the helmets of army helicopter pilots, allowing their heads to remain upright and looking out of the aircraft, with all applicable information presented in front of their eyes, instead of looking down or inside the cockpit to view information.

Jerusalem Post

## **EU Won't Give PA Aid as it Refuses Collected Tax Funds**

The EU turned down requests from Ramallah for **additional aid**, as long as the Palestinians refuse to accept their own money because it is collected by Israel. The PA will, however, continue to get the aid it usually receives from the EU. All imports to the PA go through Israeli checkpoints, and Israel collects VAT and tariffs for the PA. Those funds are the largest source of income for the PA. Israel also collects income tax and health insurance funds for Palestinians who work for Israelis. In May, PA President Abbas announced that he is stopping cooperation with Israel, in anticipation of Israel applying sovereignty to parts of the West Bank. Those plans were officially suspended in August, but the PA still has not accepted its own tax money from Israel. Israel has since amassed over \$700 million that the PA refuses to take. The EU, Germany, the UK and Norway told Palestinian to take the tax money Israel collected, in light of the fact that Israel stopped its plan to apply its laws in the West Bank. The Palestinians said they would only renew cooperation if there is a written commitment from Israel not to annex territory, Walla reported. [See also "Palestinian Village Installs Cameras, Accusing Settlers of Attacks" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

## **Saudi Arabia Must Focus on Own Interests-Prince Bandar**

Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief and envoy to the US, Prince Bandar bin Abdulaziz, said the kingdom must focus on its own interests and security while supporting the Palestinian cause. In the final episode of a three-part interview with Saudi-owned Al Arabiya, Bandar once again criticized Palestinian leaders. In the interview, he criticized the Palestinian leadership for their "transgression" and "reprehensible discourse," in opposing the decision of some Gulf states to normalize ties with Israel. Palestinians fear the moves will weaken a long-standing pan-Arab position - known as the Arab Peace Initiative - that calls for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory and acceptance of Palestinian statehood in return for normal relations with Arab states. The deals are seen as a strategic realignment of Middle East countries against Iran. Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, has not directly commented on the normalization deals, but has said it remains committed to peace on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative.

## Turkey's Erdogan Holds Talks with Qatar's Ruler

Turkish President Erdogan made a one-day visit to Doha on for a meeting with Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. Erdogan had a closed-door meeting with the Qatari emir at his sea palace in the capital, reported the Turkish state-run Anadolu Agency. Turkey has remained one of Qatar's closest allies in the region since the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt imposed an economic and diplomatic blockade on Qatar in June 2017. The three countries accuse Qatar of supporting terrorism, which Doha denies. Thousands of Turkish troops are stationed at Ankara's military base in Qatar. The so-called "anti-terror quartet" has demanded its closure as a condition for lifting their blockade. Turkey and Qatar are also on the same side of the Libya conflict, with both supporting the UN-backed government in Tripoli. The eastern-based army led by Khalifa Hifter has the support of Egypt, the UAE and Russia. With Turkish air support, the Government of National Accord (GNA) was able to recapture Tripoli from Hifter's forces in June. [See also "North Cyprus Reopens Part of Resort Abandoned in 1974 Conflict" \(Reuters\)](#)

### 124 News

## 4,129 New Coronavirus Infections, Death Toll Hits 1,846

Israel added 4,129 new COVID-19 coronavirus infections, the Health Ministry reported. According to the update, 49,068 tests were taken over the past 24 hours, the positive test ratio stood at 8.9%. This was the first time that the ratio stood below the 10% mark in weeks, with the Israeli government earlier voicing cautious optimism regarding the effect of the ongoing lockdown on new infections. The metric is seen as one of the key statistics for assessing the severity of the outbreak as it accounts for the disparities in the total number of tests being conducted on workdays and weekends. Israel's death toll in the outbreak reached 1,846. The latest figures put Israel's total infections since the start of the pandemic at 283,531, with 61,639 active cases. Some 1,632 patients are currently in hospitals, the Health Ministry reports, including 878 patients in a serious state and 240 in need of artificial lung ventilation. [See also "Long way to herd immunity: only 5.5% of Israelis have virus antibodies" \(Ynet News\)](#)

## **Thou Shalt Not Intervene**

By Scott Lasensky

- In a world awash with states intervening in the politics of other nations, friend and foe, and less than a month before a consequential American election, it bears reviewing why non-intervention is so critical to the US-Israel alliance and why it has such an outsized impact on American Jewish politics. Most Israeli officials understand, accept and respect non-intervention, especially when it comes to the ultra-sensitive question of elections and internal politics, but not all. “I spoke publicly against Mr. Bernie Sanders,” said former U.N. ambassador Danny Danon, unapologetically, after returning to Israel. Make no mistake, interventions of this kind only worsen already deeply polarized American politics and undermine one of the pillars of American Jewish politics: cultivating and sustaining bipartisan support for Israel.
- Danon’s intervention pales in comparison to Prime Minister Netanyahu’s collaboration with Republican leaders in Congress in 2015, or his dalliances with Mitt Romney in the 2012 election. The 2015 case, a still-charged episode, combined with more recent instances of President Trump using the alliance as a political football, have combined to cause tremendous damage to the decades-long effort by American Jewry—numerically small and decidedly liberal—to build and sustain bipartisan support for Israel. The intention is to insulate American bilateral support for Israel from the inevitable pendulum swings of American politics. Bipartisanship has long defined the strategies of the leading advocacy organizations, like AIPAC, the Jewish federations, the President’s Conference, AJC and ADL, yet it is besieged today. Bipartisanship, as a core interest of American Jewry, is not only limited to Israel advocacy, it also applies to combatting anti-Semitism, advocating for community safety, and leveraging America’s global leadership on behalf of Jewish communities around the world.
- There’s also the consequentialist case. Intervention, in either direction, typically fails, often causing collateral damage. Bill Clinton could not get Shimon Peres (re)elected in 1996, despite his considerable investment, and despite his rationale that intervention was justified to save the Oslo process. Neither could Netanyahu damage Obama in 2012. President Trump’s high wattage display of Israel-Gulf “normalization,” impressive to his base, likely won’t move many American voters, including those who care the most about Israel. Yet each of these instances leave behind bitter tastes and damaged confidence and good will. Israelis have a huge stake in the outcome of US elections, no doubt about it, but Israelis should also be sensitive to non-intervention. Here are three practical benchmarks.
- Avoid commenting on the election – Perhaps it goes without saying, but Israeli officials should not comment publicly on the election. Not on the candidates, not on the platforms (well, there’s only one), certainly not on the remaining debates or the tenor of the campaign, and especially not about the outcome should it be contested or delayed. The curiosity of the Israeli public is understandable, the US alliance carries enormous weight in terms of Israel’s future. But when asked, Israeli leaders should deflect and avoid public

comments that could be interpreted as taking sides. In 1972, then ambassador to the US Yitzhak Rabin was accused of signaling a preference for Nixon, but he acted swiftly to put to rest such impressions. Rabin understood the importance of non-intervention. Just the opposite with Ambassador Danon, his statements during the primaries are precisely what Israeli officials should be avoiding.

- **Low-profile, maintain balance – This is the time when Israeli leaders should lower the profile and seek balance in their interactions with American counterparts, to avoid even the impression of intervention. When Netanyahu visited Washington in September to sign the UAE and Bahrain agreements, he could have placed a call to VP Biden or taken another symbolic measure project bipartisanship. Sometimes Americans inject their own politics, as Secretary of State Pompeo did with his address to the Republican National Convention from Jerusalem, which also fuels partisanship. During the Democratic primaries, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders repeatedly invoked criticisms of Israeli leaders and policies to whip up support at home. Elements of both parties are using Israel for their own narrow, partisan purposes, but Israelis should avoid being drawn in. Former President Bush took a swipe at his Democratic opponent, Barack Obama in his May 2008 speech to the Knesset. But Israeli leaders at the time responded carefully, showed balance, and maintained a low-profile, including in how they received then-Senator Obama when he visited two months later.**
- **Steer clear of the transition – Israel, like any country, must look out for its interests. But if VP Biden wins, and America enters a sensitive period of presidential transition, then Israeli leaders and representatives should avoid contact on any substantive policy matters. Granted, if Israel firmly believes its vital interests are on the line, as Netanyahu argued in December 2016 around the U.N. Security Council debate on settlements, the pursuit of more substantive contacts becomes almost irresistible. But as a rule, such contacts should be avoided. In any democracy, transitions are a sensitive political period and a firewall should be maintained with the incoming president and their team. Not only is there a strong norm of non-intervention in international affairs, particularly in relations between liberal democracies, but it is also deeply embedded in Israel’s relations with American Jewry. David Ben Gurion promised Jewish leaders in 1950 “that nothing should be said or done which could in the slightest degree undermine the sense of security and stability of American Jewry,” admittedly a norm often observed in the breach.**
- **Unlike past eras, Israeli and American politics are becoming more entangled, as the scholar Tamara Wittes has said, so much so that even false accusations of intervention can be mobilized for political gain, as with Israel’s 2015 election and accusations by Likud that the US sought to support Prime Minister Netanyahu’s opponents—a charge disproved by a Congressional investigation. Although the politics of this alliance have never been more complex, the merits of non-intervention remain just as strong today. As we enter the final stretch of this US election, any new intervention would undoubtedly create a self-inflicted wound, hurt Jewish American interests, and drag down this most special of relationships.**

## **Sober Up**

By Ben-Dror Yemini

- **A rebellion is afoot. The Haredi public has declared its divorce from the State of Israel. Not that the relationship had been all that wonderful up until now, but we are now at a stage in which this Haredi rebellion has come to be a national danger. Admittedly, it isn't all of the Haredim. Shas's leaders aren't partners to this rebellion, and Shas's voters don't appear to be either. But the "in your face" behavior by the Haredim will come to haunt them. They aren't hurting only themselves; they are hurting all of us. I hate them, a friend said to me, and immediately took it back. I'm glad that she did. But the sense of disgust has reached new heights. We don't need hatred and we don't need disgust, what we need is for them to wake up and sober up.**
- **It's not that the working Israeli public liked the situation that has existed up until now—the Haredi evasion of army service; the allowances that are designed to create and sustain more and more Haredi freeloaders; the Haredi education system that generally fails to teach pupils core curriculum subjects; and the Haredi tendency to shirk work. But now the damage that they're causing has come to include the health-care system. The relative number of people in Haredi society who have become infected with the coronavirus is five times that of the rest of the public, and seven times that of the Arab public. Not everyone who is infected will have to be hospitalized, but many will. If the health-care system does collapse, that will happen because too many Haredim were disdainful of us, and they need to understand that we are fed up.**
- **This intolerable situation is the outcome of political capitulation. We accustomed them to that. They are a minority to whom the majority routinely capitulates. That has been the case in all that pertains to conversion, the Western Wall and kashrut. Instead of a Jewish and democratic state, we are an extorted state that is becoming increasingly Haredi. Since the damage this has caused has been incremental, we don't cry out every day. We've become used to it. But now things are happening within a very short amount of time. Why the hell did we need to reach a situation in which the health-care system was on the verge of collapsing only because too many Haredim have rebelled against the directives, the rules on social distancing, the state, and sometimes, their own leadership. Admittedly, the same thing is happening in New York as well. As far as they are concerned, just as they are under foreign rule in New York, they are also under foreign rule in Israel.**
- **This is an odd foreign rule, because it can be endlessly extorted. As of a week ago, there were 6,400 Haredim in the coronavirus hotels, versus 1,200 non-Haredim. There is no greater absurdity to illustrate the distorted relationship that has developed between the state and its institutions and the Haredim. The coronavirus crisis is a golden opportunity to change that relationship. The decent Haredi general public, rabbis and scholars must stand up and join the Israeli majority that condemns the extortion and the rebellion of the last few months. Because things can't go on like this anymore. If we had a normal government, it would say: any yeshiva that does what it wants, won't receive a penny**

**from the state. Anyone who became infected after disregarding the directives are invited to be last in line for treatment. There is a lot more that can be done to rescue the state from the Haredi burden, but it has to start somewhere. The time has come.**