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Israel and Middle East News Update

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Headlines:

- **Netanyahu Seeking to Amend Indictment in Corruption Case**
- **Benny Gantz Calls Upon Mahmoud Abbas to Resume Talks**
- **Abbas Aide: Palestinian Leadership Ready to Resume Talks**
- **Israel, Lebanon Resume Talks on Disputed Maritime Border**
- **IAEA: Iran Continues to Stockpile, Enrich Uranium**
- **Poll: Israel, Rather Than Iran, Is Region's Biggest Threat**
- **Pompeo to Announce Process to Label Groups Anti-Semitic**
- **Erdogan Says Turkey, Russia to Monitor Karabakh Ceasefire**

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Save Your Worries"**
- By Alex Fishman
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "The Accordion Policy"**
- By Amihai Attali

News Excerpts

November 12, 2020

Ynet News

Netanyahu Seeking to Amend Indictment in Corruption Case

[Prime Minister Netanyahu](#) said he was seeking to amend the charges against him, claiming some of the charges attributed to him were committed by his wife and son. PM's legal team filed the request with the Jerusalem District Court where the premier is set to resume his trial next month, citing what they called "serious deficiencies," they said. They also claimed the indictment does not specify when, from whom, and for whom, alleged illicit gifts were received that could indicate bribery while multiple witnesses have testified the prime minister was unaware of his wife and son's direct communications with witnesses in the case. The 40-page filing, which is an indication of the defense team's strategy, includes a request for an amendment to the charges calling the indictment "superficial and full of deficiencies," that were deliberate. [See also "Danny Danon Calls for Primaries in Likud" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Al-Monitor

Benny Gantz Calls Upon Mahmoud Abbas to Resume Talks

Defense Minister Benny Gantz called on the [Palestinian leadership](#) to return to the negotiating table. Gantz said that the Abraham Accords changed past paradigms, where the Palestinians blocked Israel's path to the Arab world. Gantz addressed the Palestinian leadership and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas directly. "The Abraham Accords can expand to additional countries in the region, but it is just as important that they trickle to our close neighbors — the Palestinians. Unfortunately, the Palestinian leadership has not understood that it is time to put away the excuses, return to the negotiating table and work together to find a solution. I call on Abbas and the Palestinian leadership — if not for yourselves, do it for your children. They, the future generation, deserve a future of peace and well-being." [See also "With Election in Offing, Gantz to Authorize 1,700 Illegal Settler Homes" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Ynet News

Abbas Aide: Palestinian Leadership Ready to Resume Talks

Senior Palestinian Authority official and aide to President Abbas said that the PA was ready to resume negotiations with Israel at the point at which they stopped in 2014. The comments came after Defense Gantz urged the PA leadership to return to the negotiating table. The last round of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian leadership took place in 2013 and 2014 with US mediation overseen by then-Secretary of State Kerry. Then Prime Minister Netanyahu authorized then-Justice Minister Tzipi Livni to conduct talks with the Palestinians, who were represented by Saeb Erekat. Negotiations ceased in April 2014, after Israel delayed the fourth phase of a staged release of Palestinian prisoners and the PA decided to join UN institutions, a step it pledged to avoid during negotiations. [See also "Iron Dome Batteries and New Airline Vectors: Israel Prepares for Violence From Gaza" \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

Reuters

Israel, Lebanon Resume Talks on Disputed Maritime Border

Israel and Lebanon resumed US-mediated talks on a dispute about their Mediterranean Sea border that has held up hydrocarbon exploration in the potentially gas-rich area, the Israeli energy minister and Lebanon's state news agency said. The longtime foes held three rounds of talks last month hosted by the UN at a peacekeeper base in southern Lebanon which the world body and the US have described as "productive". But sources had said that gaps between the sides remain large after they each presented contrasting maps outlining proposed borders that actually increased the size of the disputed area. The next round of talks will be held in December, a joint statement from the US and the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon said, as did Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz in a separate communique. They did not provide further details about Wednesday's discussions. [See also "American Sanctions Target Major Hezbollah Ally in Lebanon" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

I24 News

IAEA: Iran Continues to Stockpile, Enrich Uranium

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) revealed that Iran is continuing to stockpile and enrich low-grade uranium far beyond the limits set according to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In "a confidential document distributed to member countries that Iran as of November 2 had a stockpile of 5385.7 pounds of low-enriched uranium, up from 4,641.6 pounds reported on August 25," reported [The Republic](#). In the deal, which the US, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany (P5+1) signed, Iran was permitted to keep a stockpile of only 447 pounds. The newly disclosed amount is more than 12 times the agreed limit. In addition, the IAEA also disclosed that "Iran has also been continuing to enrich uranium to a purity of up to 4.5%, higher than the 3.67% allowed under the deal." Under President Trump's administration, the US withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018 and imposed crippling economic sanctions on Tehran, principally for non-compliance of the rules. [See also "UN Watchdog: Iran Storing 12 Times More Enriched Uranium Than Nuke Deal Allows" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

Poll: Israel, Rather Than Iran, Is Region's Biggest Threat

Saudis consider Israel, not Iran, the greatest threat to regional security, according to an opinion poll out of Jerusalem. The poll, which surveyed hundreds of people throughout the Gulf as well as in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Morocco, the US and Germany, also showed recent normalization deals with Israel receiving a chilly reception, underlining gaps between the stances of authoritarian regimes in moderate Sunni states and their populaces. Asked which country threatens the stability of the Middle East the most, 33% of Saudis chose Israel, compared to 25% who chose Iran. The data for the poll was collected via ads placed in cell phone apps in 9 different countries. In some Arab states, such as [Saudi Arabia](#), UAE and Bahrain, public opinion is tightly controlled by the respective regimes, and some pollsters say gauging actual public opinion in many Gulf countries is difficult. [See also "Several Wounded in Blast at Cemetery for Non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia" \(I24 News\)](#)

Pompeo to Announce Process to Label Groups Anti-Semitic

Secretary of State Pompeo is expected to unveil a process for designating groups and organizations as anti-Semitic, [Politico](#) reported. The announcement will not include pointing fingers at any specific entities, the report added, with no specific timing for the possible announcement given. The process is said to be partially based on the working definition of anti-Semitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. According to three sources, the process is in the pipeline, but Pompeo could still change his mind and decide against the announcement. Previously, [Politico](#) reported that the State Secretary was looking to designate a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as anti-Semitic. The NGOs on the targets list were said to include Oxfam, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The designation would have cut them off US government funds, and Washington would have urged other nations to follow suit. The decision on unveiling just the process, without any immediate action taken, comes as a compromise made in the face of the pushback against the initial plan. [See also "What Trump Has in Store for Israel, Middle East During Final 70 Days in Office" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

Erdogan Says Turkey, Russia to Monitor Karabakh Ceasefire

Turkey and Russia signed an agreement to establish a joint center to coordinate efforts for monitoring a ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, President Erdogan said. He said Ankara would also participate in a peacekeeping force, but a senior Turkish security source said it would be sending observers, not peacekeepers. The ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia was announced on Tuesday, ending the worst fighting in the region in decades, and celebrated as a victory in Azerbaijan and its ally Turkey. Deployment of Russian peacekeeping troops locked in Azerbaijan's territorial gains. Speaking to members of his AK Party in parliament, Erdogan said Turkey would participate in the peacekeeping force and that the agreement ended Armenia's 28-year occupation of Azeri lands - an allusion to Nagorno Karabakh, a mountainous enclave within Azerbaijan ruled by ethnic Armenians. However, a senior Turkish security official said only military observers will operate from inside the center, while Russian peacekeeping troops would be on the ground. [See also "Turkey Again Calls for Joint U.S. Study on Russian S-400 Systems" \(Reuters\)](#)

Save Your Worries

By Alex Fishman

- **We [Israelis] have a strange need to look constantly for things to worry about. And if it's about a heightened state of security alert—then we worry all the more so. Now we're worried about a revenge operation that is supposedly about to be carried out against us from the Gaza Strip for the death—a year ago—of the Islamic Jihad commander, Baha Abu al-Ata, and 20 of his men. But there isn't a single day in the Palestinian calendar that isn't the anniversary of the death of some person or of some national catastrophe that has befallen them. This time, the Memorial Day in question has drawn a bit more attention in Israel as a result of the reverberating threats that have been made by Islamic Jihad, mainly on social media. Israel isn't taking any chances.**
- **That is the reason that a state of alert was declared, Iron Dome batteries were deployed, and retaliatory plans were approved. Israel has also informed Hamas that it does not intend to retaliate proportionately, if attacked. To the contrary, it intends to capitalize on the opportunity provided by Islamic Jihad to strike at a list of targets that it has drawn up in advance. Given that state of affairs, it is very likely that Hamas officials are now trying to rein in the recalcitrant members of Islamic Jihad. The Israeli assessment is that Hamas does not have any desire to see a conflagration erupt with Israel at the current juncture in time. Now, in the immediate aftermath of the American elections, officials in Gaza are sitting on the fence, waiting to see how things develop. Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniya don't want to begin a relationship with the new American administration by being perceived as a terror organization that fires on civilians for no reason. Furthermore, up until a few days ago, Rawhi Mushtaha, a Hamas representative, was in Cairo discussing with the Egyptians a possible prisoner exchange deal with Israel. A breakdown in relations now would allow Israel to walk away from talks over an issue that is crucial for Hamas. The Palestinians are about to hold an election, and no one in the Hamas leadership wants to make a mistake that might result in a disproportionate Israeli military retaliation.**
- **Hamas's actions are currently being dictated by the coronavirus and the economic situation—two crises that are only growing worse. There are now 3,052 people in the Gaza Strip who are formally registered as being actively infected with COVID-19, and between 250 and 300 new people join them every day. Sources in the Gaza Strip claim that the real numbers are far higher. Be that as it may, Hamas is losing control over the pandemic. The unemployment rate in Gaza currently stands at around 50%, and mainly affects younger residents and people with university degrees. The crime rate, the drug abuse rate, the divorce rate and the suicide rate have all broken all previously held records. If there's a potential explosion in Gaza that ought to worry Israel, it's an explosion that might be precipitated by those problems. Fears that someone in Islamic Jihad might fire a few rockets at Israel ought to be kept in their proper proportion. It would be best to save our worries for our real security problems.**

The Accordion Policy

By Amihai Attali

- The man who brought us phone calls from world leaders asking to consult with him after his successful handling of the coronavirus, the man who boasts about imposing a second lockdown and who has tried to leverage that as an ingenious success, is now trying to push a nighttime curfew on us. As always, he is focused on the wrong thing and he will never do anything that might affect his political partners, the people who hold him by the throat. He realizes very well that if he does not do as they wish, they will give a little push and he will be sent to pack his bags and to move to Caesarea. That is what he is truly afraid of, and he is willing to do anything to avert that. He is even prepared to keep us all locked in our homes when night falls.
- “Netanyahu, a different league,” is how the prime minister branded himself in one of his recent election campaigns. He sold us stories and tales about his rare managerial abilities. In practice, what we’ve see of him this past year in the coronavirus crisis is a man who advocates blind management, with zero creativity and zero ability to draw a distinction between what needs to be shut down and what absolutely must remain open. This accordion method is devoid of any logic, it does nothing to control the pandemic, so it is only natural that we are soon going to find ourselves once again in the throes of another wave, after which there will be another lockdown, and so on and so forth.
- As if this mass abuse were not enough, the economic significance of two lockdowns means a long and ongoing erosion of the infrastructure of the small businesses. These are businesses that in normal times pay billions in taxes every year, and without them, the stage will come in which the State of Israel will not have enough money to pay its bills. And since the state’s bills are the money that it spends on education, on healthcare and on welfare, each one of us will be forced pay a high price for this sloppy management.
- Netanyahu, whose field of expertise is sales, has gone so far as to boast about his accordion policy. Like a Soviet accordion player, he stands on the speaker’s podium in the Knesset and recounts his own genius and doesn’t realize that with every press on the keys, he is ruining a few hundred more business. A nighttime curfew is a stupid idea because the places that comply with the directives are currently not open at night in any case. The people who comply have no night life. The people who don’t comply—and the Haredim and the Arabs are at the top of that list—brazenly violate the directives. During the day and during the night. But the outstanding manager, Netanyahu, does not dare to do anything about the places that really need to be dealt with. Instead, he prefers to adopt a cruel policy of raining down hammer blows on the entire, despair-ridden general public.
- Many of the current directives make no sense. For example, people are permitted to engage in sporting activities out-of-doors but without instruction from a professional who gets paid—killing an entire industry of fitness instructors. That is only one example

among many of our flawed management. The Haredim, on the other hand, live in their own autonomy: three weeks ago, their schools and yeshivas were reopened after their Sukkot holiday. The fact that all of our children who are in fifth grade and higher have been in school for only two weeks this year is of no interest whatsoever to anybody. But you won't hear from Netanyahu a word about the wholesale Haredi violations of the directives. He has also helped them to prevent fines from being increased, just so that they won't press down on his throat—and so that the movers' truck won't get any closer to Balfour Street, God forbid.