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Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

November 19, 2020

Jerusalem Post

Gantz Reportedly Decides to Probe Submarine Affair

In a move that could signal the end of the government, Defense Minister Gantz has decided to establish a formal commission of inquiry to investigate Prime Minister Netanyahu and his role in the purchasing of submarines and other naval missiles, Channel 12 reported. The report said the commission would be enabled to force Netanyahu and his closest associates to testify. It would be headed by a retired judge and include former IDF officers. In the past, Gantz has said there was no point in forming the commission because Attorney-General Mandelblit said it was not needed and that he did not want to act as the opposition within the government. The Likud responded that “the only thing that has changed since then is Blue & White sinking in the polls and looking to gain votes by targeting the prime minister with worthless maneuvers.” [See also “Blue & White Boycotts Vote on Anti-Bibi Bill” \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Times of Israel

Netanyahu to Ask US for Okay to Advance Building Plans

Prime Minister [Netanyahu](#) will reportedly ask the Trump administration for a green light to advance construction plans in an area of E. Jerusalem. According to KAN, Netanyahu told associates he intended to raise the matter with Sec. of State Pompeo, who arrived in Jerusalem for a two-day visit. Unnamed sources told KAN that the premier wants to establish facts on the ground before President-elect Biden takes office in January. In February, Israel began advancing [plans](#) to build a major Jewish neighborhood with 9,000 housing units at the Atarot Airport site, which has been inoperative since the eruption of the Second Intifada in 2000. The new neighborhood in Atarot would break a long stretch of Palestinian urban areas extending from the E. Jerusalem neighborhoods of Beit Hanina and Shuafat north to Kfar Aqab, Qalandiya and Ramallah on the other side of the security barrier. [See also “Israel Entrenching a ‘One-State Reality,’ Germany Tells UNSC” \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Ynet News

Palestinians Sending Ambassadors Back to UAE & Bahrain

[The Palestinians](#) are sending ambassadors back to the UAE and Bahrain after recalling them in protest at the US-brokered deals establishing ties with Israel, a Palestinian official said. In August, the Palestinian Authority recalled their envoy in Abu Dhabi, after the UAE announced it will establish formal ties with Israel. A month after, the PA recalled its representatives to Bahrain, after Manama also announced it will establish diplomatic, calling it a “betrayal of Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinian issue.” This development came shortly after the PA announced it will renew its security coordination with Israel, which was severed six months ago. [See also “Gantz Welcomes Renewed Palestinian Security Ties, Calls for Peace Talks” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Saudi FM: Saudi to Seek Nuclear Weapons if Iran Gets Them

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said that the kingdom will seek nuclear weapons if Iran was to obtain nuclear strike capabilities, DPA reported. He urged taking a harsher international line against Tehran. "We believe that the Iranians only respond to pressure," he said, noting that Riyadh "will have to see" what President-elect Biden's policies will be with regard to Iran. Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran have sparred through proxies in other countries, especially Yemen, in recent years. Saudi Arabia views itself as the leader of Sunni states in the Middle East and is allied with countries including the UAE and Bahrain, which have recently normalized their relations with Israel. Biden has said his administration would explore re-entering the 2015 nuclear deal. Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said that Tehran was willing to return to the nuclear deal if Biden lifts the [crippling sanctions](#) imposed on Iran. [See also "Saudi Arabia Takes Aim at Muslim Brotherhood Before Democrats Take DC" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Senators Introduce Resolutions to Stop UAE Arms Sales

Three Senators announced that they would introduce four resolutions aiming to halt arms sales to the UAE. The Trump administration formally notified Congress earlier this month of its intention to sell over \$23b worth of F-35 joint strike fighter jets and other advanced systems. Senators Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Ranking Member of the [Senate Foreign Relations Committee](#), Rand Paul (R-KY), and Chris Murphy (D-CT) announced they are introducing four separate Joint Resolutions of Disapproval, "rejecting the Trump administration's effort to provide the UAE with a precedent-setting aircraft and myriad other weapons systems." Senator Murphy said that he supports the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE, "but nothing in that agreement requires us to flood the region with more weapons and facilitate a dangerous arms race." [See also "Republican Senators Urge Trump to Label Settlement Goods as 'Made in Israel'" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Greece, UAE Sign Political, Defense Agreements

Greece and the UAE signed a foreign policy and defense agreement as their mutual tensions with Turkey in the Mediterranean Sea continue. Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis visited Abu Dhabi and signed a "strategic partnership" and an "agreement on joint foreign policy and defense cooperation," he said in a tweet. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed met with Mitsotakis. Nahyan said on Twitter that the UAE and Greece established a partnership on political, economic and cultural cooperation. Neither countries' Foreign Ministry has released details on what exactly was in the agreement. The two leaders discussed terrorism and Turkey's actions in the region at the meeting, according to Greek Reporter. Greece is an important European ally for the UAE. Lately, their interests have converged on the issue of Turkey's foreign policy in the region. In Libya, the UAE backs the Libyan National Army against Turkey's ally, the Government of National Accord. In the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey is currently conducting energy drilling in what Greece and Cyprus say are their territorial waters.

Pompeo Announces US Action Against Bds Movement

The US Government Will Take Action Against the Anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) Movement and Groups that Support It, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Said. We will regard the global anti-Israel BDS campaign as anti-Semitic,' Pompeo said, adding that the designation will come along with concrete steps against it. "We will immediately take steps to identify the organizations that engage in hateful BDS conduct and withdraw US government support from such groups," he announced. Pompeo minced no words, comparing the BDS movement with "cancer," and reinstated the "ironclad" US commitment to Israel's security: "During the President Trump's administration, America stands with Israel like never before." [See also "Pompeo, on Visit to Israel, Says He Will Go to Golan Heights" \(Reuters\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Joint Egyptian Military Drills with Jordan, UAE, Bahrain

Joint training taking place in Egypt between 15-17 November with Jordan, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egyptian armed forces are a major leap forward for the joint role these countries play in regional security and stability. Together, these four countries, with support from Saudi Arabia and links to Greece and Cyprus, increasingly look like a bloc of countries that share views and are a kind of alliance. Joint military training is key to maintaining that. According to reports, the training is called Saif al-Arab, the sword of the Arabs. According to the Saudi Gazette Sudan is also participating and Riyadh is observing. Training takes place at the Mohamad Naguib base in northern Egypt. Arab News also reported that Egyptian and Sudanese aircraft conducted a joint air exercise called Nile Eagles 1 at Sudan's Marwa base near Khartoum. This is an important drill and will continue until November 26. Considering the security challenges in the region and Sudan's current transitional government, this training helps Khartoum and Cairo to work more closely. Turkey, an ally of Qatar, is harshly opposed to Egypt, and the UAE and has threatened Greece, Cyprus and Israel, including hosting Hamas this year.

Avoiding Mistakes

By Giora Eiland

- There are two kinds of mistakes in planning and decision-making processes. The more common kind is bad decisions that are made about issues that are under discussion. Mistakes of that kind can be made as a result of insufficient information, superficial analysis, mental rigidity and even bad luck. But there are also mistakes of a second kind, which stem from a failure to devote attention to an important issue. Israel has made dozens of mistakes of the second kind in dealing with the coronavirus. For example, long before the first person who was infected with the coronavirus arrived in Israel, no one asked the following critical question: how do we effectively monitor everyone arriving at Ben Gurion Airport, which is the only entry point into Israel. That was the first issue that was discussed by Taiwanese officials, and the results have been accordingly.
- Mistakes of the second kind, which are flawed through inattention, also get made on political-security issues. One such mistake is made in Israel's dialogue with the United States. For decades, there have been two primary issues that have come up in discussions between the two countries: the Iranian nuclear program and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of the issues that has been shunted aside has been Lebanon. From Israel's point of view, the problem in Lebanon stems from Hizbullah's military strength, and it is ostensibly purely a military challenge that is bereft of any important political aspects.
- Israel has implicitly accepted the deeply-rooted narrative held by the United States and Europe as if there are "good guys" in Lebanon and there are "bad guys." The "good guys" are the Sunnis, the Christians and the Druze, who want to maintain a liberal and pro-Western country. The "bad guys" are Hizbullah. The implicit conclusion is that it is important to help the supposed "good guys," since helping them is likely to weaken the "bad guys."
- The political reality in Lebanon is starkly different. In practice, the Christian-Sunni elite has reached a power-sharing and a wealth-sharing agreement with Hizbullah. A fresh understanding of that reality, and tapping into the major political-economic crisis that is currently gripping Lebanon, will give the West a rare opportunity to have real influence over developments in that country. Lebanon is in desperate need of immediate economic aid, aid that France alone either cannot or does not want to give.
- This is an opportunity for the new administration in Washington to enter into a dialogue with the Lebanese president, who has been hard pressed to form a stable government, and to propose the following: American economic aid in exchange for a commitment from Hizbullah to stop its efforts to try to build plants for manufacturing precision-guided missiles. Ostensibly, Hizbullah can always refuse. But Hizbullah is first and foremost a political organization that is anxious about maintaining its domestic Lebanese legitimacy.

- **The moment that the Lebanese public, including the members of the Shiite community, realize that there are two options—either Hizbullah insists on rejecting the American offer, which will result in the collapse of the Lebanese state, or it grits its teeth and agrees—Hizbullah may just agree to the proposed arrangement. The chances of that happening will become greater if the American proposal is even tougher: either you accept this offer, or the United States will impose economic sanctions on Lebanon. There are three major advantages for Israel and for the United States in putting a proposal of that kind to Lebanon. First of all, if successful, that will remove the most serious concrete military threat to Israel; if unsuccessful, it will put Hizbullah on a defensive footing in the domestic Lebanese political arena.**
- **Second, any weakening of Hizbullah is a blow to Iran. Iran has been trying to meddle in the affairs of several countries, including Iraq, Syria and Yemen, but the only country in which it has done so with complete success to date is Lebanon. Iran controls Hizbullah, and Hizbullah de facto controls Lebanon. Why confront Iran directly if it can easily be hurt via Lebanon? Third, as opposed to the two other issues—the Iranian nuclear program and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—this is an issue on which no substantive disagreements can be expected between Israel and the United States. Israel needs only to persuade the US to revise its thinking about Lebanon and to take action that is likely to yield a clear diplomatic achievement with little risk.**

A Toxic Puddle

By Ben Caspit

- **First, they tried to say that he was “planted.” Then they tried to say that he “isn’t part” [of the group]. Even he said that he didn’t normally participate in demonstrations, and that he only comes when something on social media upsets him. That man is Ephraim Greif, the man who wished the Farkash family on Tuesday “another one like that”; the man who told the Farkash family that the death of their son, Captain Tom Farkash, an Apache helicopter pilot who was killed in the Second Lebanon War, was actually divine punishment for the family’s leftism. I interviewed him yesterday on Radio 103 FM, and I watched the interviews that he generously gave to the various television stations. He is an Israeli like you and me; just your average guy. He doesn’t have any horns on his head and his hands aren’t drenched in blood. But he is drenched in hatred.**
- **Greif yesterday tried to distance himself from Bibi-ism. The truth is otherwise. He is a member of the most militant, crude and violent WhatsApp groups that are run by the Bibi-ists. Groups in which a river of raw sewage perpetually flows directly from its wellspring on Balfour Street—Yair Netanyahu. Following are a few examples of things that Greif wrote. In the WhatsApp group titled “We’re all Against the High Court, General 1,” in which information was shared about the Black Flags Movement demonstrators and the planned convoy to protest the submarines affair at the weekend, Ephraim Greif wrote: “Let’s hope a terrorist infiltrates them.”**
- **In another group, he had the following to write about a demonstrator: “The very moment she waves a black rag, they need to put a bullet in her head on the spot.” In the “Ran Carmi Buzaglo Discussion” WhatsApp group, following a detailed description of the routes that are going to be taken by the demonstrators against the prime minister, Greif wrote: “The government needs to instruct the IDF to deploy snipers along the route.”**
- **Greif has also been a permanent fixture among the gang that for months has been demonstrating outside the home of the prosecutor, Liat Ben Ari, in Moshav Herut. In one of the video clips from those demonstrations, Greif was documented screaming in a frenzy a long string of curses outside the prosecutor’s home. The leader of that group, Orly Lev, who has a gift for spewing obscenities while being particularly inarticulate, was questioned for making threats against Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit. Lev is no fringe political activist either. She is the most mainstream [imaginable], the closest to Netanyahu, to Amir Ohana, to whomever you want. She has been filmed embraced with and fawning on Netanyahu on numerous occasions. After his trial was begun in Jerusalem, she was even given special quality time with him all on her own. Lev was behind the libel as if Liat Ben Ari’s son had assaulted police officers (a deranged lie), and then she spread the unbelievable tall tale about how Ben Ari supposedly wasn’t sitting Shiva for her sister who had just died, because she had no sister and the story of that sister’s death was all just a fabrication to try to end the demonstrations against her.**

- Even when I reported the pained monologue that was given by the late sister's orphaned son, the Bibi-ists refused to relent. They stuck to their guns, to their truth, to their lies, hatred, incitement, curses, obscene language and megaphone. They, and the legion of "journalists," who enlist to serve them on the private television station [Channel 20 presumably], on radio stations that have been taken over, on every possible sewage pipe imaginable. Earlier this week a major development occurred. Lev announced in an impassioned speech that they were ending their vigil in Moshav Herut and were relocating to Caesarea. They had themselves a new target. The Farkash family. The parents of the late Captain Tom Farkash, who live next door to the prime minister and who have had the gall to host demonstrators against Netanyahu in their home from time to time. Yesterday, in one of the delusional interviews that she gave, I heard Lev say that the Farkash family, "as a bereaved family, can't take a side. They have to be in the middle, objective." Where did she come up with that nonsense? Who told her that drivel? One can only guess. Either way, the incident in Caesarea on Tuesday night had the entire country up in arms, and justly so.
- Let's get a few things straight. Demonstrations that are held outside the home of private citizens do not enjoy the same extensive protection that democracy grants demonstrations that are held outside the homes of publicly- elected officials in general and the prime minister in particular. The Farkash family home in Caesarea is not paid for, either in full or in part, by public funds. The costs of operating the Netanyahu family's villa in Caesarea are paid for—millions of shekels—by the Israeli taxpayer. For the first time in Israeli history, the ruling family has successfully foisted all of the expenses that it incurs in its private home on the public coffers, and it is currently in the midst of extorting from the state a full exemption on tax payments for those outrageous benefits to boot. Despite all of the above, people are permitted to demonstrate against the Farkash family and any other family.
- It was the things that they said that were so upsetting. The audacity, which bordered on depravity, of wishing her to lose another son only because she has dared to support demonstrations against the prime minister. And after all that happened, at the end of the day yesterday, the "Likud Party" issued a weakly-worded apology in the prime minister's name for the deplorable acts of his supporters in Caesarea.
- Netanyahu added, of course, as a reflexive habit, his usual gripes about the demonstrations against him. It always begins and ends with him. He's being threatened, he's being persecuted and he's being cursed. He seems to have forgotten that he is the prime minister, and that that is part of the job. That all of his predecessors went through that (one of whom was even assassinated), but they never for a moment forgot their public responsibility, their humanity and the most basic values that unite us here as a single people. Slowly but surely it has become evident that not only has he forgotten those values, he has also gotten a large segment of society to forget them as well. He is dissolving the glue that still binds us together, turning it into a toxic puddle of hatred, and I doubt whether the damage that he has done can be fixed after he's gone.