



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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Headlines:

- **Likud Seeks to Convince Gantz to Bolt Government**
- **Israel Plans to Tax Disposable Plastic in Bid to Reduce Use**
- **Ben & Jerry's Announces Ending Sales in the West Bank**
- **Discreet Jewish Prayer Continues on Temple Mount**
- **Gantz Speaks With PA Leader, In 1st Call From in 4 Years**
- **Khan Al-Amar's Residents' Condition for Evacuating**
- **President Joe Biden Welcomes King Abdullah to the WH**
- **Ethiopia Says Second Filling of Nile Dam Complete**

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "This Isn't a Boycott"**
- By Afif Abu Much
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Victory for the Hate Campaign"**
- By Ben-Dror Yemini

News Excerpts

July 20, 2021

Times of Israel

Likud Seeks to Convince Gantz to Bolt Government

Opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party renewed its public efforts to persuade Blue and White's Benny Gantz to leave the government and form an alternate coalition with right-wing parties. "If Benny Gantz wants to be prime minister, he can be prime minister — right now," Likud MK Miki Zohar told the Knesset channel in an interview, referring to an offer for the defense minister to become premier as part of a rotation deal that would see Netanyahu returned to power in two years' time. Gantz, who previously joined a power-sharing government with Likud, did not immediately respond. Asked about the offer at the Yesh Atid faction meeting in the Knesset, Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid laughed off the suggestion that the Likud would succeed in enticing Gantz.

Associated Press

Israel Plans to Tax Disposable Plastic in Bid to Reduce Use

The Israeli government put forward a plan to double taxes on single-use plastics in a bid to reduce the proliferation of the environmentally harmful products. The Finance and Environmental Protection Ministries said in a joint statement that raising taxes on disposable plastic goods is projected to cut consumption by 40%. It said Israelis use an average of 16.5 pounds of single-use plastics per person each year, five times the amount in the European Union. Single-use plastic waste does not biodegrade, clogs landfills and significantly contributes to coastal and marine pollution. The United Nations Environment Program has called on governments to take action to curb plastics. The Finance and Environmental Protection Ministries will advance the proposal for approval by the Knesset's finance committee. If approved, the new plastic tax will take effect in 2022. [Dig Deeper "PM Vows Action on Climate Change as Minister Urges Declaring 'Strategic Threat'" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

I24 News

Ben & Jerry's Announces Ending Sales in the West Bank

Vermont-based ice cream manufacturer Ben & Jerry's announced it will end sales of its products in the West Bank. It is inconsistent with its values for its ice cream to be sold in "occupied Palestinian territory" the company announced. Ben & Jerry's is also ending its partnership with its local distributor, possibly as the Israeli company was unwilling to take part in a future distribution agreement that differentiated between Israel's 1948 borders and settlements in the West Bank. The brand is widely popular in Israel, and the company's announcement has triggered many reactions, including from members of the government who branded it "antisemitic." Foreign Minister Yair [Lapid](#) called the manufacturer's decision "a disgraceful capitulation to antisemitism, to BDS, to all that is evil in the anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish discourse." A member of the left-wing Meretz party, MK Michal Rozin, countered this by tweeting, "Ben & Jerry's is not boycotting Israel, but rather the settlements. You may not like it, but this is the price of settlement expansion, land grabs."

Discreet Jewish Prayer Continues on Temple Mount

Discreet Jewish prayer continued on the Temple Mount, following a day of mutual recriminations over the holy site. Several dozen Jewish visitors ascended to the Temple Mount in the morning hours designated for non-Muslims, including two engaged couples who were set to get married later in the day, as well as a three-year-old with his family ahead of his ritual first haircut, according to Asaf Fried, a spokesman for an association of Temple Mount activist groups. About 1,600 visitors ascended to the site on Sunday, including some who participated in prayer services and others who sang "Hatikva," leading to protests from the Egyptian and Jordanian foreign ministries, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Ra'am (United Arab List) Party, a coalition partner. [Dig Deeper "PA Accuses Bennett of Inciting Religious War Over Temple Mount" \(Arutz Sheva\)](#)

Gantz Speaks With PA Leader, In 1st Call From in 4 Years

Defense Minister Benny Gantz spoke on the phone with PA President Mahmoud Abbas to wish him a happy Eid al-Adha, in the first conversation between a high-ranking Israeli minister and the PA leader in four years. "The two spoke with a positive atmosphere and discussed the need to advance [confidence-building measures](#) between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which will assist the security and economy of the entire region," Gantz's office said. The last senior government official to speak with Abbas was then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2017. President Isaac Herzog also spoke with Abbas and conveyed his blessings for the Muslim festival which began Monday, Herzog's office said. The phone calls came in a relatively tense time, with the Palestinians angry at the entry of 1,700 Jews to Jerusalem's Temple Mount for Tisha B'Av, as well as at recent footage of Jews praying in the flashpoint compound in apparent violation of a long-standing status quo. It also came amid widespread Palestinian protests in the West Bank against Abbas's continued rule over the death of a journalist critical of Ramallah at the hands of PA police. [Dig Deeper "Israel Considering Financial Relief to the PA Following US Envoy's Visit" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Khan Al-Amar's Residents' Condition for Evacuating

Residents of the illegal Arab village of Khan al-Ahmar have signed a document in which they pledge to evacuate the village located near Kfar Adumim, in exchange for an Israeli passport, Channel 12 reported. The residents agreed to their voluntary evacuation and a quiet move to a new area in Israel. The outline was formulated in secret negotiations over the past two years will soon be brought to the approval of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. Foreign Minister Lapid announced his intention to examine the consequences of the evacuation of the village and wrote in a letter to the Prime Minister that the evacuation could harm Israel's foreign relations. Lapid said that he intends to "examine the conditions necessary for the evacuation of the outpost and conduct a meaningful and in-depth examination of all the legal consequences." Last November, the Court set a final deadline of July 2021 for the encampment's demolition, after then-Prime Minister Netanyahu pushed off the eviction. [Dig Deeper "PM Reviewing Deal to Relocate Khan Al-Ahmar Residents to Israel" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

President Joe Biden Welcomes King Abdullah to the WH

President Joe Biden welcomed Jordan's King Abdullah to the White House. It is the first of three face-to-face meetings with leaders from the Middle East expected this summer. Abdullah, who faced down a challenge to his authority in April from his half-brother, Prince Hamzah, held his first Oval Office talks with Biden since he took power in January. He will also have a working breakfast with Vice President Kamala Harris at the Vice President's Residence, followed by a meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the State Department. Abdullah is the first Middle East leader to visit the Biden White House, and will be followed on July 26 by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi. US and Israeli officials are currently working on scheduling a meeting between Biden and Prime Minister Bennett. A senior Biden administration official said the president's talks with the king are expected to include the way forward for Israel and the Palestinians, with Bennett having recently replaced Netanyahu as Israeli prime minister. Tensions remain high in the wake of the 11-day war in May between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Abdullah's standing in Jordan may come up in the talks. Jordan's image as an island of stability in the turbulent Middle East was called into question after Prince Hamzah was accused of a plot to destabilize the country in April. [Dig Deeper "As Leaders Meet, Jordan Finds Itself Vital to US Plans in the Region" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Ethiopia Says Second Filling of Nile Dam Complete

Ethiopia's government said that it had completed the second filling of the reservoir of its controversial Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile River. Egypt's government has vociferously objected to Addis Ababa's \$4b mega-project without there being an international agreement for its operation, fearing the dam could drastically reduce Egypt's downstream share of the Nile's water. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government has bolstered military and intelligence ties with other governments in East Africa and hinted at a possible military operation against Ethiopia. A draft resolution by Tunisia following the UN Security Council session on the GERD on July 8 has made little headway despite Cairo's vocal support. The Biden administration earlier this month signaled it supports a resumption of the African Union-mediated process to end the dispute. Now that Ethiopia's national elections are out of the way, there may be some room for compromise by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government of Ethiopia. Abiy's government has staked its political future on the project, and the dam is set to receive its first turbines with the current filling. US diplomats have urged calm, warning that a second filling would likely raise tensions. Still, the Biden administration is treading carefully to avoid the perception that it is taking sides in the dispute as the previous Donald Trump administration did with Cairo. [Dig Deeper "Saudi-Ethiopian Relations Strained by Nile Dam Dispute" \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

This Isn't a Boycott

By Afif Abu Much

- Like a bolt out of the blue, the American ice cream company, Ben & Jerry's—which was founded by two Jewish men, Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield—announced that it was planning to stop selling its products in the settlements. Or, as they put it in a statement that was posted on the company's website: "Ben & Jerry's will end sales of our ice cream in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," which it described as being "inconsistent with our values." Within hours that decision was being blasted as being anti-Israel. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett took to Twitter to describe it as a boycott of Israel; Foreign Minister Yair Lapid dubbed it a "shameful surrender to antisemitism, to BDS"; thousands of other people also took to social media to lambaste the decision and attacked the company angrily. This is the right place to stress that Ben & Jerry's statement noted that notwithstanding its decision to stop the sale of its product in Occupied Palestinian Territory, it would continue to sell its products inside Israeli territory in a future licensing agreement that it would reach.
- Therefore, the attempts to frame its decision as a boycott of Israel or as being an act that was either anti-Israel or anti-Semitic simply has no bearing on reality. Maybe Ben & Jerry's decision was simply made in order to say that there are some people in the world who aren't prepared to fall in line with the message that some folks here have been trying to push for years about how the settlements are an integral part of Israeli territory? Rather, [they are saying that] the West Bank is under an occupation that is alive and kicking, regardless of the numerous efforts that have been made in recent years by the Israeli governments and by some of the Israel's more radical right-wing citizens to create the impression as if there is no occupation and that that supposedly is Israeli territory. It is important to say that the legal status of the settlements is a matter of controversy within Israeli society and between the State of Israel and all the other countries in the world. The Knesset never voted in favor of annexing the West Bank, and Israel never applied Israeli law there.
- As such, opposition to the settlement enterprise is not necessarily opposition to the State of Israel. The time has come to root out of our minds the assertion that a lot of people have tried to instill for generations as if anyone who is opposed to the settlements is automatically acting against the State of Israel and its interests. Objecting to the settlements is permissible and legitimate; doing so is not a crime, contrary to the impression that some people here have been trying to make. Ben & Jerry's is not the first private company to refuse to accept the reigning situation in the occupied territories. Other companies have relocated their factories from the settlements to within the Green Line. The European Union passed a resolution several years ago to mark products that are manufactured in the settlements. There are no grounds for branding decisions of that kind as being anti-Israel. Ultimately, even the State of Israel itself has never dared annex the West Bank in all the time since it first occupied it in 1967.

- **The time has come to take a sober look at the truth, to look the public in the eye and to hold a serious public debate about whether the settlements have stopped being an “asset” and have become a liability. The State of Israel is frequently attacked by people around the world for its settlement enterprise and the occupation policies it has enacted in the West Bank in the past six decades, and not necessarily because people woke up one morning and decided to be anti-Israel, as some people here would like us to believe. Hasn’t the time come to ask how much the settlement enterprise costs us, the citizens of this country? Wouldn’t it be better to invest that money and those resources inside Green Line Israel and to improve its international reputation? And, lastly, please don’t try to sell us Ben & Jerry’s decision as an anti-Israel decision because Israel and the settlements were never one and the same.**

Victory for the Hate Campaign

By Ben-Dror Yemini

- **Shalom to you, Ben & Jerry's chief executives. I don't like boycotts. They are justified only in rare cases. Nor am I a big fan of Israel's occupation of Judea and Samaria (West Bank). We shouldn't boycott you in Israel, because it would be wrong to punish the workers in the Israeli plant. But anyone who opposes racism, lies, incitement, violations of human rights must fight your decision. Even if you had no racist or anti-Semitic intentions—which are one and the same—your boycott is another success story for the racist and anti-Semitic campaign that is opposed to the very existence of just a single state in the world. The Jewish state. You should familiarize yourselves with this campaign, which is being spearheaded by the BDS movement. This is a campaign that is not about peace or about ending the occupation. It is true that there are some naive and honest people who support a peaceful solution, without violence, of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, who also support the BDS campaign. But they have been misled. They don't know the facts.**
- **To know them, you have to listen to what the leaders and founders of the BDS movement say. Omar Barghouti openly declared, "No Palestinian will agree to the Jewish state." The same has been said by Ali Abunimah, who said: "There will be no two-state solution." So does Prof. As'ad AbuKhalil, who wrote in an article: BDS's true goal is the destruction of the State of Israel, and there is no need to hide this. In fact, there is not a single central activist in the BDS campaign who supports a just solution of two states for two peoples. From time to time the campaign leaders talk about a boycott only of the territories. But any boycott serves their campaign, which spreads libel and perpetuates the conflict and the suffering of both peoples. Is that a battle that you wish to support?**
- **Peace must be based on the compromises that have been proposed since the conflict began. A short historical review is therefore required. As early as in 1937, the Peel Commission proposed a solution that would give the Jews only 4% of the original Palestine that was decided on by the League of Nations. The leader of Arab Palestine back then was the Nazi mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini. His answer was no. Ten years later, the UN proposed its partition plan, and the mufti once again led the Palestinian rejectionism. This is the same rejectionism that brought about the Palestinian Nakba, when 715,000 of them became refugees, and to a Jewish Nakba, when 850,000 Jews either were forced to leave or were expelled from Arab states. Other compromise proposals were put forward in the past few decades as well. Bill Clinton proposed to the Palestinians in 2000 a state on 96% of the territories plus land from Israeli territory. They said no again. Some years went by and in 2008 they said no to a similar proposal that was made by the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert. They said no once again in 2014 to John Kerry and Barack Obama's proposal. Conceivably, peace could have been reached. There were a handful of Palestinian leaders who were inclined to compromise here and there. But the leaders of the boycott campaign continued to march down the mufti's path. They were always opposed to any compromise.**

- **All of which forces us to ask you once again: is this the campaign that you wish to support? Israel can be criticized. Sometimes it truly should be criticized. Israel is a thriving democracy. In Israel itself, a majority of over 50% supports an historic compromise to end the conflict. Some of the public, including this writer, has been fiercely critical of the ongoing settlement enterprise. But the settlements are not the obstacle to peace. Israel had settlements in the Gaza Strip, and the Israeli government removed them all. The settlements, even now, are located on a very small percentage of the Palestinian territories.**
- **Anyone who supports a compromise that is based on two states for two peoples knows that the [Israeli] Arabs will continue to live in Israel, that they are 20% of Israel's residents and that only a very small percentage of Jews will be able to continue to live in the Palestinian state. Your decision to boycott, therefore, does not serve to advance human rights, peace, reconciliation or compromise. Your decision serves the purposes of a campaign of incitement against the existence of just one country out of all the countries in the world—the State of Israel. Your decision also runs against the direction in which the wind is blowing today in the majority of the Arab states. They, in fact, know that it is Palestinian rejectionism that is the primary problem, not Israel. A Zogby poll from a few months ago found that a majority of the residents of the Arab states support normalization with Israel. And you? Which side are you on? On the side of Iran, where you continue to sell, or on the side of the people who want peace and normalization? Do you understand that you've chosen the wrong side? Are you capable of reversing your wretched decision?**