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Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

September 1, 2021

Jerusalem Post

Controversial Budget Proposal Submitted to Knesset

The state budget for the next two years and its accompanying arrangements bill were officially submitted to the Knesset for the first time since 2018, the Knesset Secretary-General announced. The arrangements will come to a vote in their first reading on Thursday in a special session of the Knesset plenum. They currently lack a majority due to the opposition of Labor and Meretz to raising the retirement age for women, agricultural reform and other measures. Finance Minister Avigdor Liberman (Yisrael Beytenu) met with coalition party heads in an effort to reach compromises. One possibility is to pass the bills in their first readings and then remove controversial issues from the budget ahead of its final readings. Liberman ruled that out, saying that the budgets for the two years and the arrangements bill are one inseparable package. The budget for 2021 is \$135b and for 2022 is \$141b. [Dig Deeper “Liberman Rolls Out ‘Most Social Budget Ever’; Predicts Swift Passage” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Al-Monitor

Bahraini Ambassador Arrives in Israel

Bahrain's ambassador to Israel Khaled Al-Jalahma, arrived to further the historic relations between the two states. Israel and Bahrain established diplomatic relations as part of the Abraham Accords brokered by the former US administration. Bahrain's decision to normalize relations followed its Gulf ally the [UAE](#) agreeing to establish ties with Israel. The UAE and Bahrain were the first Arab states to open relations with Israel in more than 20 years. Jalahma also met with Israeli Foreign Ministry official Gil Haskel, according to a ministry release. Before Bahrain and the UAE, only Egypt and Jordan officially recognized Israel in the Arab world. The Gulf states have been more open about their relations with Israel than Egypt Jordan, where much of the population is opposed to Israel. [Dig Deeper “First Bahraini Ambassador to Israel Arrives in Country to Take up Post” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

Israel-Jordan Ties Boosted in Interests on Water, Energy

As scientific warnings of dire climate change-induced drought grow, many in Israel and Jordan cast worried eyes at the river running between them and the critical but limited resources they share. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change showed unequivocally that the climate is changing faster than previously feared, heaping pressure on finite water supplies even as demands grow greater than ever before. But experts say that instead of provoking argument, Israel and Jordan could be poised for an unprecedented boom in water cooperation amid technological advancements, climate pressures and stronger ties. Jordan is one of the world's most water-deficient countries, suffering from extreme droughts, and water cooperation with Israel long predates a 1994 peace deal between them.

Israel Lets Building Goods into Gaza, Easing Closure

Israel allowed dozens of truckloads of construction materials into the Gaza Strip, easing a tight blockade it has maintained on the Hamas-ruled territory since an 11-day war last May. The imports came during a tense period in which Hamas activists have launched incendiary balloons into Israel, sparking a number of wildfires across the border, and staged a series of sometimes violent demonstrations along the separation fence with Israel. Despite the tensions, Israeli officials allowed the entry of the badly needed building materials for Gaza's private sector in a step that may help calm the situation. An Israeli security official, speaking on condition of anonymity under policy guidelines, confirmed that building materials had entered Gaza. He had no specific details, but said they came under previously announced government decisions. Israel, with Egyptian help, has maintained a tight blockade over Gaza since Hamas seized control of the territory in 2007. [Dig Deeper "Israel Extends Gaza Fishing Zone, Lets in More Workers despite Border Riots" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

Palestinians Riot along Gaza Border for 4th Night

Hundreds of Palestinians demonstrated on the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel for a fourth straight night of riots. Gazans from so-called "night confusion units" set tires alight and rolled them toward soldiers stationed along the frontier, and lobbed improvised explosives, in a repeat of violence seen along the border the previous three nights. As Israeli troops responded, the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza said that one Palestinian was moderately wounded from Israel Defense Forces (IDF) live fire. There was no immediate comment from the IDF and no reports of injuries on the Israeli side. The "night confusion units" behind the border riots do not officially tie themselves to Hamas, though their activities could not take place without the approval of the militant group that rules the Strip. The groups, which are affiliated with various terror factions, have said that the nightly riots on the border will continue until at least Thursday. [Dig Deeper "Fatah-Hamas Rift Deepens as Abbas Moves Closer to US, Israel" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Israel Hayom

Hezbollah: 3rd Shipment of Iranian Fuel Headed to Lebanon

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has said a third shipment of Iranian fuel will soon arrive in Lebanon to ease crippling shortages in the country. "We have agreed to start loading the third vessel," Nasrallah said in a televised speech. "The coming days will prove those doubtful about the shipments arriving with fuel wrong and our words will be clear when the first vessel reaches Lebanon." Nasrallah said the first vessel carrying Iranian fuel for Lebanon had already departed. Hezbollah's foes in Lebanon have warned of dire consequences from the purchase, saying it risked sanctions being imposed on a country whose economy has been in meltdown for nearly two years. [Dig Deeper "Fuel Dispute Sparks Clashes between Muslims, Christians in Southern Lebanon" \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

Turkey's Erdogan Speaks with UAE Crown Prince

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan by phone in talks regarding regional issues, an unexpected collaboration between two regional rivals. Erdogan's office confirmed that the exchange occurred, stating "relations between the countries and regional issues were discussed in the talks,". The discussion centered on "the prospects of reinforcing the relations between the two nations in a way that serves their common interests and their two peoples," according to the Emirates News Agency. This does not mark the first recent instance of Turkey-UAE diplomatic talks. Two weeks ago, Erdogan also expressed that both nations were engaging in improved relations following his meeting with a UAE official, Reuters reported. The move foreshadows potential UAE investment in Turkey and marks a significant departure from past hostile interactions. During the Arab Spring, Turkey backed Islamist movements, which stoked Gulf leader's fears of domestic instability in their own countries. The incident drove a schism between the regional neighbors. Last year, tensions between the two countries rose, with Turkey condemning the UAE's actions in Libya and Yemen. The UAE fired back with criticism toward the activities of Turkey's armed forces in Syria, northern Iraq and elsewhere. [Dig Deeper "Iraqi Kurdish Leader Helps Ease Turkey-UAE Tensions" \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

Times of Israel

A New Undercover Unit to Tackle Crime in Arab Sector

Israel Police unveiled a new undercover unit tasked with tackling rampant crime and violence in Arab Israeli communities. The Sinai Unit was introduced in a ceremony attended by Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai. It will include 45 undercover officers who will target hotspots and organized crime in Arab communities throughout the country. This will be the first undercover unit tasked with combating crime, rather than terrorism and will be primarily be tasked with acting against Israeli citizens. Shabtai had pushed to enlist the Shin Bet security agency in the effort to combat crime in Arab Israeli communities but received pushback from Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit as well as the Shin Bet itself, which argued that such a task is not within its mandate. Just hours before the unveiling of the Sinai Unit, a 57-year-old man shot dead by unknown gunmen in his home in the northern city of Haifa. The killing marked the 66th killing of an Arab Israeli this year, according to the Abraham Initiatives nonprofit, as Arab cities and towns have seen a surge in violence in recent years, with organized crime seen as the main driver. The year 2020 saw 96 Arab Israelis killed in violence, by far the highest annual toll in recent memory. Arab Israelis blame the police, who they say have failed to crack down on powerful criminal organizations and largely ignore the violence, which includes family feuds, mafia turf wars and violence against women. [Dig Deeper "Police Scramble to Curb Violence after 4 Murders in 48 Hours in Arab Community" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

JNF Jerusalem Land Registration Initiative Meets Obstacles

By Ariel Kahana

- Differences of opinion have riven the JNF's board of directors following an attempt to torpedo a JNF decision to register ownership of properties that were bought by Jews [before 1948] across Jerusalem. JNF officials have been working in the past several months to map out the precise location and size of properties that were bought by the JNF over the years, but which were not registered with the land registry. That preliminary review found several thousands of dunams of land in the Negev and in western and eastern Jerusalem had been bought by JNF subsidiaries over the years, but had not been registered as such with the land registry. A motion was presented to the JNF's board of directors to carry out a thorough review over the course of five years at a cost of \$31 million. At issue are 17,000 properties across Israel that are incompletely registered.
- The purpose of the review is to make sure that the properties in question were legally purchased and then to register them in the JNF's name. The properties in question [presumably referring to properties in East Jerusalem] were administered by Jordan between the establishment of the State of Israel and the Six-Day War. Following the war, the properties came to be administered by the Administrator General's Office. Officials in the Administrator General's Office recently said that they lacked adequate means to administer the properties. That is what prompted the decision to submit the motion to the JNF's board of directors to conduct the comprehensive review. That motion was submitted ahead of the board of directors' last meeting a month ago, but it has now become evident that an attempt is being made to prevent it from being approved.
- The motion is expected to be tabled once again at the next board of directors' meeting, which is scheduled to be held tomorrow. Representatives of Peace Now and [Ir Amim](#) wrote a letter to members of the board in which they argued that registering the properties in question [as JNF-owned properties] would lead to large-scale evictions of Arabs from their homes across East Jerusalem. The two organizations wrote in their letter to the JNF's board of directors: "This is the same legislation that serves as the basis for the eviction suits that now threaten more than 200 families in Palestinian neighborhoods around the Old City of Jerusalem, and place entire communities at risk of expulsion. "The JNF is planning to commence the process of registering [ownership] over 2,500 dunams in Jerusalem alone, and is laying the foundations for thousands of additional potential eviction suits. We cannot overstate the severity and depth of the injustice that that action is liable, with a high degree of probability, to create and its impact on the JNF's public image." Conversely, JNF officials said that the issue at hand was purely a legal, professional and Zionist decision, and that any member of the board of directors who voted against the motion would be breaking the law that obliges him or her to act in the company's best interests.

Days of Repentance

By Yossi Cohen

- **The American withdrawal from Afghanistan, which was completed two nights ago when the final American soldier boarded a plane that took off from Kabul, should make us stop and think, and to worry about the palpable dangers that go hand-in-hand with a possible a second American withdrawal—from Iraq. A rushed and uncontrolled pullout from Iraq—one that is inadequately prepared—could lead to the total collapse of Iraq [as a coherent political state] into a collection of ethnic groups. That could bolster Iran’s militant, military, political and terrorist presence in Iraq. An ongoing Iranian offensive effort in the northern part of the Middle East, in light of the horrific images emanating from Afghanistan and its too-rapid fall to the Taliban, obliges [Israel] to prepare for the possibility that a similar move by the Americans in Iraq could lead to the collapse of important swaths of the Middle East, which is so fragile to begin with. Even as these lines are being written Iran is using terrorism around the world.**
- **Its goal is to strike at Western forces, both in the Middle East and farther afield. Iran has not stopped its efforts to shore up its military capabilities in the region for a single moment. In Lebanon it has been bolstering Hizbullah. In Syria it maintains an active presence of the Revolutionary Guards and helps bring weapons into the country in addition to manufacturing them locally. In Iraq Iran’s presence is palpable and worrying. It depends on two groups: One, al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Units), a grass-roots organization working to undermine Iraq’s [existence as a unified political entity] alongside an impressive presence of Revolutionary Guards and the Quds Force. US President Joe Biden’s decision to pull out of Afghanistan and that country’s fall to the Taliban happened in tandem with another process that is no less dramatic: The world powers’ attempts to forge a new nuclear agreement with Iran. Between the United States’ unwavering desire to communicate with Iran on a nuclear deal and the withdrawal from Afghanistan, Israel finds itself at a critical crossroads.**
- **These two dramatic events influence Israel’s interactions with regional powers in the Middle East, Russia, Europe and mainly in the United States. The main questions Israel must ask its partners around the world in order to formulate a national strategy stem mainly from the process of drawing in-depth conclusions that we must undertake. We must learn from these developments and formulate new policies. As for the nuclear deal: it is known and accepted by all the world powers that Iran will continue to pursue and develop advanced nuclear production capabilities. [It will do this] via the use of underground enrichment facilities, especially the two we know about at Fordo and Natanz, and also via the use of advanced technologies that are relevant to the fuel and enrichment circuit, chief among them the development of the most advanced type of centrifuges. The Spend organization, based in Tehran, is continuing the process of developing scientific capabilities that could serve the nuclear weapons project. In light of President Biden’s announcement following his successful meeting with Prime Minister Bennett that Iran will never be allowed to achieve military nuclear capability, we must challenge the existing agreement.**

- **It gives Iran the ability to proceed [down the nuclear path] virtually without restriction with the consent of the world power, and only restricts parts of the Iranian plans for a limited period, until the agreement expires. Therefore, Israel and its leaders need to formulate a strategy and set clear goals for an updated Israeli policy. We must demand a stable Middle East that neutralizes, as far as possible, Iran's presence around the region and which does not allow Iran to become a nuclear threshold state. Precisely because of the improved relationship between Jerusalem and Washington, [and particularly between] Prime Minister Bennett and President Biden, US policy makers may now be open to considering these views.**