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Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

September 2, 2021

Arutz Sheva

Gantz: Bennett Approved My Meeting with Abbas

Defense Minister Benny Gantz reiterated the Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was aware of his meeting with Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Mahmoud Abbas and stated that he and the prime minister agreed on the policy that the PA should be strengthened to prevent its collapse. "It was an important meeting," Gantz told Channel 12. "Those who think that this formula is simple to manage are wrong. It is complex. Bennett also thinks that Abu Mazen should be strengthened." On the criticisms against him after the meeting, including from a coalition source who claimed that the Gantz was running a "government within the government," Gantz said: "I suggest we look at Israel's security relations from a more significant height than a Twitter headline. It is possible to reach an agreement at the moment, Abu Mazen also knows it. The meeting was important and I hope that its good results will be seen in the coming days." [Dig Deeper "A government with 2 heads: Bennett and Gantz lead coordinated, opposing policies" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Lapid: Palestinian Consulate in Jerusalem Jeopardizes Gov't

US plans to reopen its Jerusalem Consulate General – which directly worked with the PA – would jeopardize Israel's government, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid warned, adding that this viewpoint has been conveyed to Washington. "We have an interesting yet delicate structure of our government, and we think this might destabilize this government, and I don't think the American administration wants this to happen," Lapid said. The former Trump administration closed the Consulate General in 2019, folding its services into that of the US Embassy, which the US had relocated to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv the previous year. The US first opened a consulate in Jerusalem's Old City in 1844, moving it to a nearby location outside the city walls in 1912. After the 1993 Oslo I Accord, the consulate acted as a de facto embassy to the PA. [Dig Deeper "Israel Announces 'Civil Steps' to Alleviate Conditions in Gaza" \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

Associated Press

Palestinians Mourn Man Found Shot, Blame Israel

Hundreds of people mourned the death of a man Palestinian health officials said was killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank. Raed Jadallah, 39, a resident of Beit Ur al-Tahta near Ramallah. According to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, Jadallah was a gardener and was shot at the western entrance of his village while returning from work in [Israel](#). The circumstances of the death were unclear, as there were no conflicts in the area when the shooting happened. The Palestinian foreign ministry described the killing as a "heinous crime" and blamed the Israeli army for Jadallah's death. The Israeli military has not commented on the circumstances of the incident. [Dig Deeper "Palestinian Mourners Accuse Israel of Killing Father of Five" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

PA-Egypt-Jordan Summit to Discuss Peace Talks with Israel

PA President Mahmoud Abbas arrived in Cairo, where he is scheduled to meet with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah to discuss ways to internationalize talks toward a two-state resolution. The Abbas-Sisi-Abdullah summit, which is expected to take place today, will discuss common issues and ways of unifying the Palestinian-Egyptian-Jordanian position in order to follow up on the political activities at the international level and seek to revive the peace process with Israel, senior Palestinian official Azzam al-Ahmed said. The renewed push to review the peace process comes as Prime Minister [Bennett](#) has clarified that he has no intention of meeting with Abbas or engaging in peace talks. Abbas wants an internationalized peace process in which the US is not the main broker. Ahmed indicated that the PA was seeking the backing of Egypt and Jordan for relaunching the peace process with Israel under the umbrella of the UN with the participation of the Quartet members – the US, UN, Russia, and the EU. [Dig Deeper “Egypt and Jordan Mulled Inviting PM to Summit with PA’s Abbas” \(Ynet News\)](#)

Bennett and Egypt’s Sissi to Meet Publicly in Sinai Soon

Prime Minister Bennett will travel to the Sinai Peninsula to meet with Egyptian President el-Sissi in the near future, a Kan reported. Contrary to many of the previous meetings Israeli leaders have held with their Arab counterparts, which were covert and only divulged after the fact, the Bennett-Sissi sit-down will be public, Kan added without citing a source for the information. The visit will take place in the Sinai resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh. It said the meeting would take place “soon,” without offering a timeframe. No details of the planned meeting have been released since Bennett announced last month that he had accepted an invitation to meet Sissi. Hours later, the counter-terror bureau under his aegis announced it was easing a travel warning for the southern Sinai Peninsula, offering a possible clue to its location. Bennett’s upcoming visit will be the first public visit by an Israeli premier since 2011, when former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh. Netanyahu also reportedly paid a secret, unofficial visit in 2018.

Iranian Fuel Exported to Lebanon without Gov't Permission

The Lebanese government has received no request for fuel to be imported from Iran, the caretaker energy minister said, appearing to confirm that the Shi'ite group [Hezbollah](#) has bypassed the state with a move to import Iranian fuel. Hezbollah, a heavily armed group founded by Iran's Revolutionary Guards in 1982, announced that shipment of Iranian fuel oil was on its way to help ease crippling shortages. The group is by far the most powerful faction in Lebanon, where it has been part of the ruling system for years. The fuel crisis, caused by a broader meltdown of Lebanon's economy and plunge in the value of its currency, has forced even essential services to shut down or scale back operations. The first shipment has yet to arrive, and Hezbollah has not announced details of where it will dock. [Dig Deeper “US Senators Warn against Iranian Fuel Shipments to Lebanon” \(Associated Press\)](#)

Biden Reaffirms Pact Not to Push Israel on Its Alleged Nukes

President Joe Biden reportedly signed a letter reaffirming the US commitment to decades-old strategic understandings with Israel over its alleged nuclear arsenal, according to a report. The move came during a visit by Prime Minister Bennett to Washington last week, during which he discussed several bilateral issues with Biden, according to an unnamed Israeli official speaking to Walla news. The White House and Prime Minister's Office declined to comment on the report. The focus of Bennett's meetings with Biden and other top US officials was thwarting Iran's nuclear ambitions. Bennett said the US had reaffirmed its commitment to preventing Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Israel has never confirmed foreign reports regarding the existence of its own nuclear arsenal, instead maintaining a policy of official ambiguity on the issue. The understandings reportedly endorsed by Biden grew out of a 1969 agreement between President Richard Nixon and Prime Minister Golda Meir that Washington would not push Israel to join the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and Israel would not declare, test or threaten use of its nuclear weapons. [Dig Deeper "To Take on Iran, Lapid Sketches Out Vision for a Regional 'Alliance of Life' \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Israel to Increase Oversight of NSO Technology Sales

Israel played down criticism of the country's regulation of the cyberespionage firm NSO Group but vowed to step up efforts to ensure the company's controversial spyware doesn't fall into the wrong hands. Foreign Minister Lapid said the government has only limited control over how defense exports are used by customers. Yet he said that Israel is committed to enforcing and strengthening safeguards to prevent abuse of all types of weapons. NSO has come under widespread criticism over reports that its flagship spyware product, Pegasus, has been misused by governments to spy on dissidents, journalists, human rights workers and possibly even heads of state. Pegasus is able to stealthily infiltrate a target's mobile phone, giving users access to data, email, contacts and even their cameras and microphones. NSO has denied wrongdoing. It says it sells Pegasus only to governments and only for the purpose of catching criminals and terrorists. Israel's Defense Ministry regulates all arms exports, including cyber products. In late July, the ministry said it had sent a team to meet with NSO representatives after France said it was looking into suspicions that President Emmanuel Macron may have been targeted by Moroccan security agents using Pegasus spyware. [Dig Deeper "Israeli Leader Surprised Biden Hardly Raised China during Visit" \(Axios\)](#)

Renewed Strategic Understandings

By Barak Ravid

- In the course of their meeting in the White House last Friday, President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Bennett renewed their commitment to the strategic understandings between the two countries that, according to previous reports, pertain to the Israeli nuclear program, said a high-ranking Israeli official to Walla News. The Prime Minister's Bureau and the White House refused to comment on the matter. The strategic understandings between the United States and Israel have been renewed by every American president since Richard Nixon. It is a recurring "ceremony" that plays out in every first meeting between an American president and an Israeli prime minister. According to foreign reports, those understandings include an American pledge not to pressure Israel into signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which forbids countries from developing atomic bombs.
- Israel, for its part, undertakes to maintain "nuclear ambiguity." Israel and other Western countries believe that Israel has had since the late 1960s an arsenal of nuclear bombs that it is capable of deploying as warheads on long-range Jericho missiles. Israel has never admitted to possessing nuclear weapons and in public says that it will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East. The strategic understandings between Israel and the US were first presented in 1969 in a meeting between the president at the time, Richard Nixon and Prime Minister Golda Meir. The understandings, which were oral, were necessary because of the American assessment that Israel already had nuclear weapons. Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush Sr. and Clinton all ratified the understandings in their first meetings with Israeli prime ministers. In 1998, as part of the negotiations over the Wye River Memorandum, Prime Minister Netanyahu asked President Clinton to put the oral understandings into writing.
- Clinton agreed and signed a letter stating that the United States would allow Israel to retain "strategic deterrence," and pledged that any control and disarmament initiatives would not affect Israel. Clinton signed the letter a second time in 1999, when Ehud Barak replaced Netanyahu as prime minister. President George W. Bush also signed the letter when he worked with Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert as Israel's prime ministers. When Barack Obama assumed office in 2009, Israel was afraid that he might pressure it on the nuclear issue. However, Obama also signed the letter ahead of his first meeting with Netanyahu in May 2009. The Washington Times was the first to report that, half a year after the meeting.
- Netanyahu intimated in an interview to Channel Two in September 2009 that Obama had signed the letter, in response to a question as to whether he was worried about American pressure on the nuclear issue. "In my first meeting with President Obama in Washington I received from him, and I asked to receive from him, an itemized list of the strategic understandings that have existed for many years between Israel and the United States on that issue. It wasn't for nothing that I made that request and it wasn't for nothing that I received it," said Netanyahu in that interview.

- **President Donald Trump also signed a similar letter ahead of his meeting with Netanyahu in February 2017. The New Yorker reported that tensions had erupted ahead of Trump's signature between the Israeli ambassador to the US, Ron Dermer, and the president's aides. Top Trump administration officials had been unfamiliar with the letter dating from Obama's term in office since they had never discussed that with Obama's people during the chaotic transition period. They thought that the Israelis were trying to dupe them into signing the letter.**

Don't Make Us Laugh

By Oded Tira

- **Naftali Bennett is a talented fellow; he has the ability to think broadly, his views on the Palestinian issue are spot-on and he speaks fluent English. I have great esteem for him. That said, in my opinion, the media festival over his trip to Washington was odd and created mistrust in journalists, some of whom were perceived as only being interested in not seeing Bibi return. In fact, it seemed that some of the media had failed to its job of criticizing the government, and was actually amplifying the “huge achievements” of the trip. One journalist [Ben Caspit] even went so far as to say that Bennett had returned with a “full basket.” First of all, it is important to understand that overseas trips by leaders are not meant for holding negotiations during one-hour meetings and for produce actual achievements. Trips of that kind do not produce strategic changes in the political and security spheres.**
- **The important thing about meetings of leaders is oftentimes a temporary strategic need. These brief meetings have little content and a lot of fireworks. The commentators seeking scoops, particularly those who want to help the leader, ascribe great and naïve importance to trivialities and empty words. The factor that decides strategy for every state is its interests. Personal relations have no impact on state strategy. The very opposite needs to be the case. Personal relations must have no impact. Ascribing importance to personal relations and to personifying international policy is the foolishness of a ratings-hungry media. There were most likely no negotiations between Bennett and Biden on the core interests of their respective countries. That does not happen in brief personal meetings or in longer meetings.**
- **The real talks are held by the professionals. It is impossible, in a short meeting between leaders, to change fundamental positions. Let us analyze the joint press conference that was held by Biden and Bennett in which Biden said that Iran would never get a nuclear weapon, as well as that other options would be considered if diplomacy did not work. And I ask: how? How will the US prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon? Will the US use military power: will it destroy Iran's missile array that is not included in the nuclear agreement and which has grown significantly? Will the US destroy the advanced centrifuges that continue to enrich uranium? Or will the US perhaps persuade Iran with sweet talk that it should make peace and that all will be well? The Iranian regime realizes that its current political and religious existence depends on obtaining nuclear weapons.**
- **Obviously, it has no motivation to give this up. Just as someone sentenced to death has no motivation to lose weight, since being fat will make it impossible for him to fit into the electric chair. For two decades, the US has been in the process of leaving the Middle East. That is because it no longer needs the oil that is produced here and because the economic weight of the Middle East is much less than that of southeast Asia. The US has removed the bulk of its troops from Iraq, Syria and recently left Afghanistan in disgrace. In my opinion, America has decided to accept a nuclear Iran just as it did with countries like Pakistan, India and North Korea.**

- **If Iran does not develop intercontinental missiles, America will not intervene. America has also decided to accept terrorism in the Middle East and not endanger American soldiers in trying to help countries in the region. The naïve Europe has fallen in love with its status as the orchestra on the bow of the Titanic and with the last of its strength, is grasping onto the sides of the deck, and will therefore accept anything, as long as its residents can live a reasonable life for now. No salvation will come from there on resolving the issue of the Iranian nuclear program. Furthermore, the last few decades have proved that Iran can countenance sanctions and that the US cannot countenance wars. That is why the US will countenance a nuclear Iran. The statement that Iran will not have a nuclear weapon is not worth the microphone on which it was said. A lot of people before Bennett and Biden said the same thing. It was said by President Bush Jr., Obama and Trump. While these dignified presidents were saying this, the centrifuges continued to enrich uranium and the missiles continued to be developed. There is no power that can stop Iran from becoming a nuclear power. The statement, which was the highlight of the Biden-Bennett meeting, that Iran will not have a nuclear weapon—is meaningless. And if you think that smart people like Biden and Bennett don't understand this, you're mistaken.**