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## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Wednesday, October 13*

### Headlines:

- Sa'ar Ready to Cooperate with Likud If Netanyahu Defeated
- Bennett Traveling Next Week for Meeting with Putin
- Lapid Tells US to Formulate Plan B to Iran Nuke Talks
- FIFA President Raises Idea of Israel-UAE 2030 World Cup Bid
- Abraham Accords Not a Substitute for Two-State Solution
- Israel Signs Deal to Double Water Supply to Jordan
- Iran Kicks off Air Defense Drill amid Regional Tensions
- US, Taliban Had 'Productive' Talks on Humanitarian Aid

### Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "1948: An Unfinished Story"**  
- By Michael Milshtein
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Little Gaza"**  
- By Elior Levy

# News Excerpts

October 13, 2021

## Jerusalem Post

### **Sa'ar Ready to Cooperate with Likud If Netanyahu Defeated**

In his first reaction to MK Yuli Edelstein's challenge to opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, Justice Minister Gideon Sa'ar said that his New Hope Party could work together with a new Likud leader. Edelstein said that he will run for the Likud leadership and urged for a primary to be held soon. "If Likud will bring another candidate, it will be natural to cooperate, not only for New Hope but for other parties," Sa'ar said. A Channel 12 poll found that Likud voters prefer Netanyahu over Edelstein, 86% to 6%, and that the Likud under Edelstein's leadership would win 14 fewer mandates than under Netanyahu if Knesset elections were held now. Most Likud figures declined to comment about Edelstein's run, but MK Shlomo Karhi accused him of undermining Netanyahu and warned that he was on the way to join New Hope. [Dig Deeper "Sa'ar, Bennett Oppose US Consulate in Jerusalem for Palestinians" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## I24 News

### **Bennett Traveling Next Week for Meeting with Putin**

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin next week at the Black Sea resort city of Sochi, where they are expected to discuss the Iranian nuclear program, according to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office. The talks taking place on October 22 are going to be the first face-to-face encounter since Bennett was sworn in at the Knesset this past June. Bennett and Putin spoke by phone when the Bennett congratulated Putin on the occasion of his 69th birthday. The two leaders had agreed to a face-to-face meeting during their first phone call in July, shortly after Bennett took office. Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid last month was in Moscow for a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The two diplomats discussed Iran and Syria.

## Ha'aretz

### **Lapid Tells US to Formulate Plan B to Iran Nuke Talks**

Foreign Minister Lapid stressed the necessity of the US forging a fallback plan in case negotiations with Iran reached a dead end in his visit to Washington, the first time an Israeli foreign minister has made the trip since President Joe Biden's inauguration. In his meeting with National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Lapid expressed Israel's concern over Iran "becoming a nuclear threshold state." Lapid also met with Vice President Kamala Harris, who opened their discussion by reiterating the US "unwavering" support for Israel. The meeting with Sullivan also covered the reconstruction of the Gaza and Lapid's 'Economy for Security' plan for the Strip, according to Israeli sources. Sullivan, meanwhile, emphasized "the importance of practical steps to improve the lives of the Palestinians" in the sit-down." Lapid also met with senators from both major parties, as well as House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#). [Dig Deeper "Blinken Will Be 'Candid' with Lapid Regarding Risks to Cooperating with China" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## **FIFA President Raises Idea of Israel-UAE 2030 World Cup Bid**

FIFA President Gianni Infantino raised the idea of Israel participating in a regional bid led by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to host the 2030 World Cup. Infantino made the remarks during a visit with Prime Minister Bennett at his office in Jerusalem, according to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office. Bennett congratulated the head of soccer's international governing body on his first visit to Israel. FIFA organizes the World Cup — the biggest sports tournament globally — every four years. The next World Cup in 2022 will be hosted by Qatar, followed by 2026 by the United States, Canada and Mexico. Infantino raised the possibility that Israel would host matches along with other Arab countries. Israel last year signed the [Abraham Accords](#) that normalized relations with the UAE and Bahrain, with the later additions of Morocco and Sudan. [Dig Deeper “Frustrated with US, but Reluctant to Fight, PA Envoy Looks Elsewhere for Help” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

### Arutz Sheva

## **Abraham Accords Not a Substitute for Two-State Solution**

The United States is working to expand the normalization agreements between Israel and Arab nations, known as the Abraham Accords, and hopes restoring such ties can be leveraged to advance progress on the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, senior State Department officials said. In a briefing with reporters previewing Secretary of State Antony Blinken's meetings today with his Israeli and Emirati counterparts, officials stressed that the Abraham Accords were not a substitute for the two-state solution between Israelis and the Palestinians. "We continue to welcome the economic cooperation between Israel and all countries in the region. We hope that normalization can be leveraged to advance progress on the Israeli-Palestinian tracks," said one senior State Department official. The officials did not say precisely how Washington aimed to use the normalization agreements as a tool to make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. [Dig Deeper “US Hopes Abraham Accords Will Help Israeli-Palestinian Issue – Officials” \(Reuters\)](#)

### Ynet News

## **Israel Signs Deal to Double Water Supply to Jordan**

Israel formally agreed to double the amount of freshwater it provides to neighbor [Jordan](#), one of the world's most water-deficient countries. The agreement is proof that "we want good neighborly relations," said Infrastructure, Energy and Water Resources Minister Karine Elharrar. Elharrar traveled to Jordan for a signing ceremony between representatives to the Joint Water Committee that manages bilateral water relations. This capped an arrangement first announced in July. The two countries agreed then that Israel would sell 50 million cubic meters of water a year to Jordan, doubling what it already supplies. "This represents the largest water sale in the history of the two countries," said Gidon Bromberg, Israel director of the regional environmental group EcoPeace Middle East. Jordan's cooperation with Israel on water predates their 1994 peace treaty. Israel is also a hot, dry country, but desalination technology has opened opportunities for selling freshwater. [Dig Deeper “Jordanian King Vows to Supply Lebanon with Electricity in Meeting with PM” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## **Iran Kicks off Air Defense Drill amid Regional Tensions**

Iran kicked off a massive, two-day air defense drill in the country's sprawling central desert, state TV reported, the latest show of force by the Islamic Republic. The report said both the army and the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard were taking part in the annual maneuvers dubbed "Velayat." It said elite air force and air defense units as well as the Guard's airspace division would participate. Iran regularly holds such drills and says they assess the troops' combat readiness and demonstrate the nation's military capabilities. Earlier in October, Iran held a drill near its border with Azerbaijan, putting on a display of military capabilities near a neighbor it is increasingly skeptical of for its ties to the West and Israel. Azerbaijan and Israel have strengthened their military alliance in recent months, with Israeli-supplied high-tech drones helping Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh last year. The region remains on edge over Iran's escalating nuclear program. Talks in Vienna to revive Tehran's now-tattered 2015 accord with world powers have stalled since June, with no date set for their resumption. [Dig Deeper " Hamas Is Increasing Its Activity in Lebanon and Angering Hezbollah" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## **US, Taliban Had 'Productive' Talks on Humanitarian Aid**

The state Department spokesperson Ned Price said that "productive discussions" with the Taliban over humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan took place in Doha, Qatar. "There has been progress on a number of fronts," Price remarked at a press briefing. US officials participated in two days of meetings with Taliban representatives in the Qatari capital about providing humanitarian aid following the American military withdrawal at the end of August and subsequent takeover by the Deobandi Islamic fundamentalist movement. Price described the talks as "largely positive," adding that a separate meeting with European officials also took place. The European Union announced a \$1.2b aid package for Afghanistan at a virtual summit hosted by Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi. Counter-terrorism was also a key topic of discussion at the Taliban meetings in Qatar and also at the virtual summit, according to Price. The first high-level talks with the Taliban since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan included Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Tom West, CIA Deputy Director David Cohen and the US Agency for International Development (USAID)'s top humanitarian official Sarah Charles. [Dig Deeper "Qatar Diplomat Emphasizes Engagement with Taliban at Forum" \(Associated Press\)](#)

## **1948: An Unfinished Story**

By Michael Milshtein

- **The year 1948 has refused to disappear from Israeli discourse, and it is good that that is the case. A heated debate recently ensued in the wake of calls that by Israeli journalists and intellectuals to teach the Palestinian Nakba in schools attended by Jewish Israeli children, a debate that began in close proximity to the riots this past May that illustrated just how much 1948 is not an historical event that is over and done with. Rather, it remains an open story whose narratives continue to inspire passions in both societies. However, it is hard to shake the feeling that the discussion currently underway is fundamentally dichotomous, and is rendered exclusively in shades of black and white. One side routinely acts as history's plaintiff, the perennial victim with justice on its side, with no interest in either a [national] reckoning or engaging in self-criticism. Conversely, there is another side that is routinely seated in the defendant's dock, is demanded to recognize the injustice that it committed by dint of its very existence, and is expected to apologize.**
- **That is the attitude adopted by the plurality of Palestinians: those who live in the diaspora, in PA-administered territories, in the Gaza Strip and the Arab citizens of Israel. The incessant effort to prove an absolute injustice and to oblige the other side to admit guilt and to apologize is not a recipe for reconciliation; rather, it can only serve to elicit a lack of interest and empathy among Jews for the Palestinians' past and their fate. 1948 was a complex event, and as long as it continues to be described as a premeditated crime that was committed by one society against the other, it will only produce a pugnacious and sterile debate. Yes, it is essential for the Jewish public to recognize the Nakba in order to grasp the depth of the Palestinians' collective memory and consciousness—especially of Arab citizens of Israel—and to think critically about the country's past. The Palestinians, for their part, would do well to cultivating their own school of "New Historians" that might take a critical view of the past and address Palestinian historic mistakes,: rejection of the 1947 partition plan, premeditated attacks on the Jewish Yishuv [pre-state of Israel] and their responsibility for the massacres that were committed against Jews, particularly in communities that surrendered.**
- **While it is true that some Palestinian historians have engaged in critical discourse about 1948, those discussions have focused on the reasons that precipitated the Nakba, including the failure of the Palestinian leadership, the absence of internal cohesion and betrayal by their Arab brethren. Historian Mustafa Kabha argues that whereas Israel is ripe for self-criticism, the Palestinians remain under circumstances that oblige them to fall into line on behalf of advancing their national aspirations and, as such, have been hard pressed to develop a self-critical approach to their own past. Therefore, the Palestinians must recognize that the Nakba didn't "befall" them out of a clear blue sky, but rather that it was part of a multi-dimensional historic event in which they played an active role.**

- **They must recognize that the positions taken by their leaders enjoyed sweeping popular support, and that they had dramatic repercussions on the evolving reality - principally on their massive displacement and destruction of Palestinian towns and villages. The demand for an Israeli apology for the Nakba is, to a great extent, the equivalent of a demand that Japan or Germany might make of the Allies to apologize for the suffering that Japanese and German citizens endured during World War II. The Palestinians were an aggressor that was defeated; they suffered a collective trauma that Jews need to recognize and to partake in the discussion about ways to resolve its long-term repercussions. One can regret the past, but there is no need to apologize for it. Stubbornly clinging to the self-image as an absolute victim—and all the more so a demand to turn back the wheels of history—creates a foundation for mistrust and the conflict's perpetuation, not for reconciliation.**

## **Little Gaza**

By Elior Levy

- **Two weeks ago, when security tensions in the Jenin region were heating up, armed men gathered in the Jenin refugee camp for a demonstration that was intended to sow fear in Israel. It was not merely for show: alongside the armed men, who appeared on an improvised stage on one of the streets in the camp, Palestinians dressed in white robes also appeared with their faces covered and wearing body suits adorned with electric wires. That was a common sight around the West Bank during the second Intifada; since then, however, that spectacle has disappeared from around Judea and Samaria (The West Bank). The men in white robes back in the day were suicide bombers who were planning to set off on their terrorist missions inside Israel. It isn't clear whether the robes we saw two weeks ago were lined with explosives, but regardless it was the message that was important. "We are warning the Zionist enemy not to make any stupid moves by entering the refugee camp. We are ready for them," said the armed, masked men. Terrorist threats have returned to the Jenin refugee camp.**
- **The camp was one of the great symbols of the second Intifada. Twenty-three IDF soldiers died in the camp during Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, including 13 reservists in a single day, when Palestinians alleged that the IDF had massacred locals. The militants' aura has waned over the years, but the sense of pride that the camp instills in the Palestinian public lives on. The chain of events in the Jenin area over the past six months has led to a feeling among the population that the place has reverted to where it was 20 years ago. The Jenin refugee camp was built in 1953 by UNRWA, on land rented from Jordan by the United Nations. It is the second-largest camp in the West Bank, covering 473 dunams (116 acres) and housing 12,000 residents—about 8,500 of whom are under the age of 40. There is 35% unemployment.**
- **At the end of the second Intifada and the rehabilitation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the militants in the refugee camps began to feel marginalized. The Palestinian economy started; the regime that had passed from Arafat to Abu Mazen led to a change in priorities, government institutions were rebuilt and the armed factions, which had previously been the heroes of the Palestinian public, were left forgotten. While some of them joined the Palestinian security forces, the hard core of the militant groups remained in the ghettos of the camps, frustrated and resentful. They began to use the weapons they had accumulated and continued to stockpile began to be used for mainly criminal purposes. The refugee camps remained ex-territorial territory. Every time the PA entered the camp, it was met with resistance and gunfire. Therefore, security coordination with Israel is virtually insignificant in the camp as long as the PA does not rule on the ground. The Jenin refugee camp has returned to the headlines for security reasons, but one must go back to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 to understand what happened.**

- In the early days of the pandemic the PA was unable to enforce lockdowns and other restrictions that were expected to ramp down the infection rate. The PA enlisted the Fatah-linked Tanzim armed group across the West Bank to help with the issue, including in the Jenin refugee camp. The IDF, for its part, reduced its activities arresting wanted men in the West Bank at the same time. These factors made it easy for the armed factions in and around Jenin to raise their heads once again. Later, Abu Mazen surprised everybody by announcing elections for the Palestinian Parliament. Hamas announced in reaction that it would answer the challenge and began building its election list to compete with the Fatah Party. Islamic Jihad made its customary decision not to join the political establishment. Israel didn't want it to appear as if it was helping Fatah, so arrests of Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists were reduced.
- How is all this connected to the Jenin refugee camp? Because the Islamic Jihad is very influential in the area. The Jenin area is the organization's center of power in the West Bank. Reducing arrests there, both because of the coronavirus and because of elections, helped the organization reorganize and expand its activities. For operational reasons Israel decided to reduce the scope of the force that ensured security in the area. That allowed armed groups to ramp up their weapons smuggling operations, the source of which were criminal elements inside Israel. The Jenin region is absolutely swimming in illegal weapons: M-16 and Kalashnikov rifles, improvised Carlo guns, pistols and more. There are laboratories to manufacture IEDs and grenades to throw at troops, and presumably there are also heavy weapons that are ready to be put into use when the day comes.