



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

Tuesday, October 26

Headlines:

- **Left-Wing Parties Demand Recognition of Massacre**
- **Lapid Criticizes New Settler Homes amid Coalition Tensions**
- **Palestinians Renew Threat to Nix Agreements with Israel**
- **Israel Holds Largest-Ever Air Force Drill with UAE Visit**
- **Syrian Government Alleges Israeli Attack on South**
- **US Envoy Says Iran Nuclear Deal Effort Is at 'Critical Phase'**
- **Egypt Lifts State of Emergency in Force since 2017**
- **Sudanese Diplomat: Coup Won't Impact Normalization**

Commentary:

- **Ma'ariv: "The Red Line"**
- By Itzhak Levanon
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "This is Going to End in Murder"**
- By Ben-Dror Yemini

News Excerpts

October 26, 2021

Arutz Sheva

Left-Wing Parties Demand Recognition of Massacre

With just weeks to go before the state budget must pass if the government is to survive, yet another threat to the stability of the coalition has emerged from its left-wing parties, furious at the decision to go ahead with the reestablishment of the Samaritan town of Evyatar (settlement in the West Bank). Kan reports another bombshell thrown into the government ranks – MK Aida Touma Suleiman of the United Arab List (UAL) is about to introduce legislation that would make learning about the massacre that allegedly took place in Kafr Qassam in 1956 part of the regular school curriculum. The UAL and Meretz coalition parties have indicated that they will promote this bill with all the parliamentary influence they can muster. Meanwhile, both Yamina and New Hope may be expected to oppose the legislation, and they could also be joined by Benny Gantz’s Blue & White party. [Dig Deeper “Coalition Increasingly Split on Left-Right Lines as Budget Deadline Looms” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

Lapid Criticizes New Settler Homes amid Coalition Tensions

Amid growing signs of [coalition infighting](#), Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said that government ministers were successfully dealing with issues that had been neglected “for ten years,” but indirectly criticized Prime Minister Naftali Bennett over the decision to build 1,300 new homes in West Bank settlements. The approval of the new housing units came after Hebrew media reported that over 3,000 settlement homes will be advanced this week alongside some 1,300 Palestinian homes in the West Bank’s Area C. Lapid insisted the divisions in the narrow coalition — which is made up of right-wing, centrist and left-wing parties, and an Islamist faction — would not derail the budget, which must be approved by November 14 or the Knesset will automatically dissolve, triggering new elections. [Dig Deeper “EU, France Condemn Israel over Plans to Build 1,300 New Settlement Homes” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Palestinians Renew Threat to Nix Agreements with Israel

Palestinian leaders have renewed their threats to rescind all signed agreements with Israel, especially the Oslo Accords, saying they are also disappointed with the US administration’s “lack of interest” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinian Authority (PA) officials have stepped up their rhetorical attacks on the Israeli government, a move that is threatening to end an apparent thaw in relations between the PA and Israel. In recent weeks, a number of Israeli ministers and officials, including Defense Minister Benny Gantz, visited Ramallah, where they met with PA President Mahmoud Abbas and other Palestinian representatives. Abbas chaired an emergency meeting of PLO and Fatah officials in Ramallah to discuss the latest developments surrounding the Palestinian issue and the Palestinians’ relations with Israel and the US. [Dig Deeper “Palestinian NGO Ban Lays Bare Divisions in Coalition” \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Israel Holds Largest-Ever Air Force Drill with UAE Visit

Israel is holding its largest-ever air force exercise this week, joined by several Western countries and India, with the United Arab Emirates's (UAE) air force chief set to inspect the drills. Ibrahim Nasser Muhammed al-Alawi's visit is the first by an Emirati military official to the Jewish state since both countries signed the US-brokered normalization agreements last year. Amir Lazar, chief of Israeli air force operations, told reporters the drills "don't focus on Iran", but army officials have said the Islamic republic remains Israel's top strategic threat and at the center of much of its military planning. Israel has held the so-called "Blue Flag" exercises every two years since 2013 in the Negev desert. Other nations taking part this year include France, the US and Germany, and Britain. With more than 70 fighter jets -- including Mirage 2000s, Rafales and F-16s -- and some 1,500 personnel participating, the drills are the largest-ever held in Israel. [Dig Deeper "IAF to Start Training for Strike on Iran Nuke Program in Coming Months" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Israel Hayom

Syrian Government Alleges Israeli Attack on South

The [Syrian government](#) said Israel carried out an attack in southern Syria on Monday, state media reported, in a frontier zone where Israel has long been concerned about the presence of Iran-backed groups. The [Israeli military](#) declined to comment. A Syrian foreign ministry source said Israel had committed "a new aggression in the southern region", the Syrian state news agency SANA reported. It did not say what was hit or whether there were any casualties. Syria was discussed last week at a meeting in Sochi between Israeli Prime Minister Bennett and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Assad's most powerful ally. Bennett told his cabinet the two secured 'stable and good' understandings over Syria – an allusion to deconfliction efforts with Russian forces amid continued Israeli air strikes on suspected Iranian assets. They also discussed Iran's nuclear program, according to Bennett's office. [Dig Deeper "Syria Vows to Oppose Israel in New Relations with Jordan" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Reuters

US Envoy Says Iran Nuclear Deal Effort Is at 'Critical Phase'

Efforts to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal are at a "critical phase" and Tehran's reasons for avoiding talks are wearing thin, a US official said while raising the possibility of further diplomacy even if the deal cannot be resuscitated. US Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley told reporters Washington was increasingly worried Tehran would keep delaying a return to talks, but said it had other tools to keep Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and would use them if need be. While saying that the window for both the US and [Iran](#) to resume compliance with the agreement would eventually close, Malley said the US would still be willing to engage in diplomacy with Iran even as it weighed other options to prevent Tehran from getting the bomb. Iran has said for more than a month that it would "soon" return to indirect talks in Vienna with the US on resuming compliance with the accord, but has yet to set a date. [Dig Deeper "Iran's Enrichment to High Levels at Natanz Plant Is Expanding, IAEA Says" \(Reuters\)](#)

Egypt Lifts State of Emergency in Force since 2017

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced the lifting of the state of emergency in place since deadly jihadist attacks on Coptic Christian churches more than four years ago. The North African country has been under a state of emergency since April 2017 bombings of two Coptic churches by an Islamic State group affiliate that killed more than 40 people. Coptic Christians account for around 10% of Egypt's population. Under a state of emergency, police powers such as arresting and holding citizens are extended and constitutional rights such as freedom of speech and assembly are curtailed. Egypt has for years been battling an Islamist insurgency. The attacks have been largely concentrated in the northern Sinai Peninsula, but occasionally struck elsewhere in the country. Since February 2018, the authorities have been conducting a nationwide operation against Islamist militants, mainly focused on North Sinai and the country's Western Desert, towards the border with Libya. Rights groups say the state of emergency coupled with the government's effective protest ban since 2013 has helped it in crushing dissent. [Dig Deeper "Egypt's President Sisi Ends State of Emergency for the First Time in Years" \(Reuters\)](#)

Times of Israel

Sudanese Diplomat: Coup Won't Impact Normalization

A senior Sudanese diplomat was quoted by Israel's public broadcaster Kan as saying that the [military's takeover](#) of the country was not expected to dramatically affect the normalization process with the Jewish state. The report said this was because the military leaders, many of whom support the normalization efforts, have strengthened their position after dissolving the government and declaring a state of emergency. The outlet quoted the unnamed diplomat as saying Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who was arrested early Monday, had intended to soon travel to Washington to formally sign the normalization deal. The diplomat warned, however, that in the long term, the identification of the military with the normalization efforts could backfire. Israeli officials have yet to comment publicly on the coup in Sudan, though the broadcaster said several meetings were held on the matter. Citing unnamed sources familiar with the deliberations, the report said the belief in Israel was that the takeover could delay Sudan's official accession to the [Abraham Accords](#), the US-backed normalization agreements reached last year between Israel and several Arab states. [Dig Deeper "China, Israel Refrains from Signing UN Statement on Uighurs" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

The Red Line

By Itzhak Levanon

- **The criterion for opening a consulate in another country is set out in detail by the Vienna Convention from 1963. According to the convention, any country that wishes to open a consulate needs to receive the consent of the host country in writing. That applies to Israel and to the US. It is important to remember three things in this regard. First, consulates are generally opened in cities other than the capital, either to serve a specific population group or to expand relations between the two countries. Second, if the host country does not agree, the consulate is simply not opened.**
- **In other words, opening it unilaterally means creating a major diplomatic crisis and is a violation of the convention. Third, the tasks and the activities of the consulate are decided by mutual consent between the host country and the country wishing to open it. That is what the convention states. This is not, as some commentators say, a case of the US deciding on its own to make use of its property as it sees fit in the pursuit of its best interests. When the pertinent institutions in the US—to wit, the administration, the Senate and House of Representatives—officially changed the status of Jerusalem and recognized it as the united capital of Israel and relocated its embassy there, the previous status of Jerusalem was automatically canceled, and the Vienna Convention applies to any new American request. The US cannot forcibly open a consulate in East Jerusalem unless it means to twist Israel's arm, which would lead to a crisis. On the face of things, Washington's request to open a consulate in Jerusalem is motivated more by political considerations than by consular considerations.**
- **The US must decide whether it really and truly wants to look out for a specific population that it wishes to serve, or if it wants to use the request to open the consulate as a political card with consequences for Jerusalem's future status. If this is a purely consular matter, solutions can be found, such as opening a consular section in the American embassy in Jerusalem the capital. Such a department could have an office anywhere in the city. Israel has a consular section in its embassy in Paris. Another option is to open the consulate in Abu Dis, outside Jerusalem's municipal boundaries and close enough to be accessible to the population that it wishes to serve. The US must disconnect the political aspect of its request and abide by the Vienna Convention. The US' demand to locate a consulate in East Jerusalem effectively states from the outset what the political future solution of the city will be when we hold talks with the Palestinians. Regardless of whether the matter remains political or shifts onto consular tracks, the decision remains Israel's prerogative, and Israel is a sovereign country that can either accede to the US' request or deny it. The special relationship between the two countries obliges the sides not to cross any lines that are liable to damage it. The US must leave the issue of Jerusalem for talks with the Palestinians, as agreed by both sides. Israel must show any generosity on the issue of the consulate it can, up to the point that it does not undermine its own sovereignty or the special relationship with Washington.**

This is Going to end in Murder

By Ben-Dror Yemini

- We are accustomed to self-examination after a failure, a fiasco, a murder. The euphoria of the years after the Six-Day War led to the Yom Kippur War failure. The Mt. Meron disaster is now resulting in self-reflection. In the months after Rabin's assassination, there was self-introspection in Israel. The camp that had been accused of incitement did not hesitate to reflect on its actions. That was the right and courageous thing to do. The years passed, and what has been happening in recent years is much worse. The rhetoric is violent, inciting and divisive. In the course of the two years of repeated elections, Itamar Ben Gvir was the person who was most heard and seen, or at least, one of the top five. Why? Because no one needed social media to find violent language.
- The mainstream media provided it, with Ben Gvir on one side and a media figure who hails from the anti-Zionist left pitted against him on the other side, who became the representative of the left wing in innumerable discussions. Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked said that she and Minister Gideon Saar have been forced to move about with bodyguards. That is a nuisance, but there is no choice but to provide them with permanent security because the incitement has since escalated. Words like "crook," "post-Zionist government" or "Palestinian government" have been said so often that some people have become persuaded [that they are true]. That screaming is also heard in the Israeli Knesset. A former minister, Miri Regev, called MK Ram Ben Barak an "Israel hater." MK Miki Zohar was called "the new Ruvi Rivlin" only because he said that the style of discourse should be changed to become more dignified and moderate.
- It's not just the right wing. The campaign that was mounted against Netanyahu in the last few years saw a large number of violent statements and actions. When Sadi Ben Shitrit compared Netanyahu to Hitler—while he admittedly did not receive any support for making that comparison—he continued to receive an embrace from the spokespersons of the [anti-Netanyahu] protestors. In a normal country, the distribution of political opinions takes the form of a bell curve, with fewer on the extremes and many more in the center. When the center grows weaker and the graph begins to look more like two camel humps—that is a sign of a sick society.
- That is exactly what happened to American society. It lost the backbone of the center in the last decade. In Israel, the distribution is still normal. But in the media, not just social media, we are two humps. A conversation of the extremes. The danger currently emanates primarily from right-wing rhetoric. The right has not been engaged in critiquing the government—it has been engaged in incitement, an attempt to delegitimize the government. All the incitement against Yitzhak Rabin in the months preceding his murder pale in comparison to the incitement of last few months. This is happening here and now, and it is dangerous. Because one person is liable to take action. That has happened before. It is liable to happen again. I call on my friends in the right wing, the ones willing to listen.

- **You are getting carried away with yourselves; you are becoming more extreme; you are going too far. The current government is not exempt from criticism, but what you are engaged in is not criticism, it is incitement. You shouldn't wait for someone to do something before you engage in self-reflection. You should do that now. Because if you don't, this is going to end in murder.**