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Israel and Middle East News Update

Thursday, December 2

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News Excerpts

December 2, 2021

I24 News

Israelis Attacked, Car Set on Fire After Entering Ramallah

After entering downtown Ramallah, two Israelis were attacked, and their car was set on fire by a crowd of Palestinians. The Israelis stated they entered Ramallah by accident while attempting to drive to the West Bank settlement of Hashmonaim. In videos, a crowd can be seen surrounding the car, before setting it on fire. The Israelis reportedly did not suffer any major injuries. "Two Israeli civilians entered Ramallah. The civilians were escorted out of the city by Palestinian security forces through the Focus Crossing, and transferred to IDF authorities," the Israeli military said. According to one witness via [Ha'aretz](#), it "wasn't difficult to see that they were Jews, and their car stood out. It looked like the ones belonging to religious people who drive around with loudspeakers playing religious music." Israelis are banned by an Israeli military order from entering Palestinian Authority (PA) areas. [Dig Deeper "Palestinian Police Rescue Israelis From Mob in West Bank" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Associated Press

UN Envoy Warns of Risk of New Israel-Palestinian Violence

The United Nations (UN) Mideast envoy Tor Wennesland warned that without quick and decisive action to address the key drivers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the region risks plunging into "another deadly escalation of violence." Wennesland told the UN Security Council it's essential that the parties "calm things on the ground," reduce violence across the Palestinian territories, avoid unilateral steps including new Israeli settlement building, and solidify the May cease-fire that ended an 11-day conflict between Israel and Hamas. He also called for urgent action to tackle the severe fiscal and economic crisis threatening the stability of Palestinian institutions in the West Bank. But he warned: "Even a full and immediate financial package may not be sufficient or come quickly enough – if at all – to help buffer the consequences of the current situation." [Dig Deeper "Israel, Palestinians 'Locked in Spiral of Distrust,' Warns UN Envoy \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

Ynet News

US Resumes Financial Aid to Palestinian Authority

The United States has resumed its financial aid to the PA since suspending it in 2017, according to a general budget report. According to data released by the Palestinian Finance Ministry, Washington has transferred \$10m to fund hospitals in East Jerusalem. The PA is suffering from a sharp decline in external grants, both from Arab sources and from European Union countries. According to a source in Ramallah, it is now in need of \$600m in emergency aid to ensure the payment of salaries to its employees and suppliers. In 2021, there was a sharp decline in foreign aid to the PA budget, receiving \$49m compared to \$321m over the same period the previous year. However, financial reports released by the PA show that its 2021 revenues were the highest in its history. According to the PA's financial report, its net income for the first 10 months of 2021 totaled \$3.6b, reflecting a rise of \$570m in comparison to 2019, and over \$950m in comparison to 2020.

Times of Israel

Bennett Declares Israel's National Counterterrorism Force

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett declared the Israel Police's Special Police Unit the national counterterrorism unit, an official designation that comes with both additional responsibilities and funding. "The unit will be allocated \$3.17m from the Prime Minister's Office for 2022 to strengthen the unit, expand the network of troops, enlarge its manpower and upgrade its operational fitness, with an emphasis on weaponry and training facilities," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement about the decision. With this designation, the Special Police Unit, often referred by its Hebrew acronym Yamam, will be made officially responsible for Israel's counterterrorism operations, for the purpose of hostage situations, dangerous arrest raids and more. Even before this designation, the 47-year-old police unit had already been taking the lead on such efforts in Israel and the West Bank. [Dig Deeper "Amid Spate of Attacks in South, Ministers Say Throwing Rocks at Vehicles is 'Terror'" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Ha'aretz

US Officials: Iran Nuclear Talks Will End Thursday or Friday

The current round of nuclear talks in Vienna between Iran and major world powers will wrap up on Thursday or Friday, Biden administration officials said. The exact timing will depend on developments in the talks, the sources explained. However, Iran's Tasnim News Agency reported that the Europeans who are parties to the talks, wish to put a halt to them. The agency cited a source involved in managing the negotiations, who reportedly confirmed this, and another official with ties to the Iranian negotiating team who said that Iran wishes to continue negotiating provisions of the nuclear accord to whatever extent required. Senior Israeli officials have approached the countries engaged in the talks and asked that the negotiations be limited and subject to a deadline. This is based on an [Israeli assessment](#) that Tehran is seeking to drag the negotiations out to the extent possible as it clandestinely advances its nuclear program. [Dig Deeper "Iran Begins Enriching Uranium with Advanced Centrifuges During Nuclear Talks" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

129 Nations Ignore Jewish Ties to Temple Mount

The UN's General Assembly approved a resolution 129-11, that disavowed Jewish ties to the Temple Mount and called it solely by its Muslim name of al-Haram al-Sharif. The text, referred to as the "Jerusalem resolution," is part of a push by the Palestinian Authority and the Arab states across the UN system to rebrand Judaism's most holy site and as an exclusively Islamic one. The US, which opposed the text, said that the omission of inclusive terminology for the site sacred to three faiths was of "real and serious concern." The US has not been the only country to voice concern over the lack of inclusive language. In an attempt to ensure support for the resolution, its authors had made some small amendments since the UNGA last approved the resolution in 2018 by 148-11. That text referenced al-Haram al-Sharif twice, one in the action portion of the resolution and once in the introduction. This time, the phrase al-Haram al-Sharif was mentioned only once in the introduction.

Taliban, Iranian Forces Exchange Fire at Border

Clashes between Iranian forces and Afghanistan's Taliban fighters have ended, Iranian state news outlets reported, blaming a "border misunderstanding" for the incident. Iranian news outlet also denied reports that the Taliban fighters had captured an Iranian border camp near the Nimroz province. Iran shares a 560-mile border with Afghanistan and hosts some 3.6m Afghan refugees. Since the Taliban's takeover in August, hundreds of thousands of Afghan civilians have escaped into neighboring Iran using informal border crossings. The Shiite Islamic Republic has pledged to work with Afghanistan's new Sunni extremist leaders despite their historically rocky relationship. Iran's hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi has described the United States' "military defeat" in Afghanistan as an opportunity for peace. [Dig Deeper "US Delegation Met with Afghan Taliban Representatives in Qatar" \(Reuters\)](#)

Reuters

Hamdok Would Quit if Post-coup Deal Not Implemented

Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok will quit if a political agreement he signed with the military last week is not implemented or fails to receive backing from political factions, a source close to him said. Hamdok was released from house arrest and restored to his job under the deal reached on Nov. 21, four weeks after he was removed in a military takeover. The takeover ended a 2019 power-sharing agreement between the military and political groups involved in toppling former leader Omar al-Bashir. Those groups have rejected the agreement, as have resistance committees that have organized a campaign of protests. The latest of those protests, drew tens of thousands of people to central Khartoum under the slogan "No partnership, no negotiation, no compromise". Further protests are planned for December on key anniversaries from the 2018 start of protests against Bashir. Opponents say the post-coup agreement favors the military by leaving the army chief in charge of a body, the Sovereign Council, that was meant to pass to civilian control. [Dig Deeper "Tens of Thousands Protest in Anti-military Marches in Sudan" \(Associated Press\)](#)

His Wife

By Sima Kadmon

- **There is no other way to say it: the Bennett family’s decision to leave for a Hanukkah vacation overseas was surreal, infuriating, not to say dumb to the point that it raises concerns. If this was an independent decision that was made by Gilat Bennett, and if the prime minister was unable to dissuade her from taking their children on vacation—after recommending to Israel’s residents that they refrain from doing so—then this shows questionable judgment on the part of the prime minister’s wife. It was no wonder that some people rushed last night to dub Gilat Bennett as “Missus Two,” referring to the whims of the former prime minister’s wife. If the prime minister is unable to influence his wife and children, many Israeli citizens asked themselves, how can he expect to influence the Israeli public?**
- **After all, after announcing an emergency situation and after recommending that the public not travel overseas right now, many people rushed to cancel their vacations. But even if it is premature, or certainly excessive, to judge Gilat Bennett as a version of her predecessor, it’s still hard to go about business as usual knowing this. The picture of Bennett that was released, showed him sitting by himself on the couch in the Prime Minister’s Residence on Balfour Street, highlighted the abnormality of this family’s behavior. Almost six months after being elected prime minister, they still haven’t moved to the official residence in Jerusalem and have continued to live in their Raanana home. According to reports, Bennett went there to see the situation of the house on Balfour Street, which needs to undergo massive renovation. It could be that the timing of the release of the picture of Bennett on Balfour Street, a few hours before his wife’s flight, was deliberate. On the one hand, that flight was upsetting and infuriating. But, on the other, on another matter that upsets the public—the family’s living situation—progress has been made.**
- **The problem is that at the rate that the work is progressing, the prime minister who will move into the renovated home will be Yair Lapid. None of Bennett’s excuses will do any good. The trip cannot be justified. No one can say that Gilat Bennett is an independent entity. It is also hard to see Bennett recycle the whiny responses of his predecessor when it comes to his wife (“leave my wife and children alone”). But one thing is clear—he can’t go with his son, David, on Sunday to get him vaccinated in front of the cameras and then say goodbye to his wife and children going overseas. That simply can’t work. An event on the national scale is underway, and any deviation from the rules could affect the outcome. The degree of seriousness with which Israel’s citizens treat the coronavirus depends, first and foremost, on the personal example set by its leaders. That was the case when the pandemic first erupted, when President Rivlin, Prime Minister Netanyahu and other ministers demanded that we celebrate the Passover Seder without our families, while they spent the holiday with their families. That has neither been forgiven nor forgotten, and neither will Gilat Bennett’s trip be, most likely. If you, Ms. Bennett, do not take your husband seriously, don’t expect us to either.**

Bennettgate

By Ben Caspit

- It could very well be that Amir Peretz's appointment as chairman of the Israel Aerospace Industries is merited. It could very well be that the decision to disqualify him was not. But the only thing that we are going to remember from this affair is the fact that an official committee that was tasked with reviewing senior appointments disqualified Peretz's appointment, and that the cabinet nevertheless approved it. The decision was legal and permissible. The cabinet has the authority to overrule the committee's recommendations, provided the appointment is subsequently approved by the Knesset plenum. That is precisely what happened. But it still doesn't look good. It doesn't smell good. This government was established to correct that kind of behavior.
- This government was established to restore the lost dignity of the public servants, the "bureaucrats," the regulators and the gatekeepers. It needs to be meticulous. It needs to set a personal example. It could very well be that Yair Lapid's sister-in-law who was appointed to the JNF's board of directors is a good, talented woman who was perfectly suited for the job. I am inclined to believe that that is the case. Yes, the job she took is in a voluntary capacity, and she wasn't even eligible for reimbursement of her transportation costs. But you don't appoint your sister-in-law to a senior position. You just don't do that. It doesn't look good, it doesn't smell good and it doesn't set a good personal example. The trip abroad by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's wife and children isn't illegal either. It isn't corrupt. To the contrary, it's allowed.
- The Bennetts aren't violating any ordinance at all (as opposed to the former prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, the former president, Reuven Rivlin, the former cabinet minister, Yoav Galant, and several others during the first coronavirus lockdown). Nevertheless, it doesn't look good, it doesn't smell good and it doesn't set a good personal example. Just two days earlier it was Bennett himself who advised Israelis not to travel overseas at the current juncture in time. What was he thinking? Doesn't he know that he is in the spotlight? What is the public going to think of the prime minister's recommendations moving ahead? What are we going to think of the Health Ministry's recommendations? It may be legal, but it reeks. There are times when semblance is more important than substance.
- The public is looking at you, members of the Bennett family. The public is paying attention. There are three possibilities: either none of Bennett's advisers recognized the potential damage inherent in that needless and silly decision; they did recognize that, but Bennett failed to recognize it himself; or he did recognize it, but failed to persuade his wife. In any event, it's troubling. There's an expression in English: "it isn't done." Bennett has excellent English. He's familiar with that expression. It is immaterial whether the act in question was done by him, his staff or his family—the damage has since been done. If you know that your family is planning a vacation, why would you issue a public recommendation not to travel abroad just two days before? And once you made that recommendation, why would you "go along" with the planned family vacation?

- After having said all that, some proportion is in place. Up until now the Bennett-Lapid government has successfully completed most of its major tasks. In many cases, it succeeded above and beyond all expectations. The budget was approved, reforms are getting underway, the economy is bouncing back, the security situation (touch wood) is decent and the salaries paid to conscripted soldiers have been raised (awfully belatedly). Nearly every day we learn about more important accomplishments that have been chalked up by this government. The decision that was made by Bennett (a former commando with Sayeret Matkal) and Omer Bar-Lev (the former commander of Sayeret Matkal) to declare the Yamam [also known as the Special Unit for Counter- Terror Warfare] as Israel's official national counter-terrorism unit is an excellent decision. The Yamam needs to be increased in terms of its size and the means at its disposal. This government is working assiduously. It has been able to set aside differences of opinion, and it is making the hopes that people placed in it come true. Precisely on account of all that, the "mistakes" cited above are all the more annoying.
- Yes, the onslaught that was mounted against the Bennett family brims with a decent share of populism. Gilat Bennett is not her husband's property. She is entitled to make her own mistakes. She, at the very least, doesn't meddle in state affairs, doesn't make decisions, and professional appointments don't need to be approved by her. But after having said all that, it would be better if the Bennett family were to set a positive personal example for the public while the pandemic is raging. The same applies to Foreign Minister Lapid. And the same ought to apply also to Defense Minister Benny Gantz, who insisted on Peretz's appointment. Guys, you're offside. Your game on the pitch has been good, you've been scoring goals, the outcome hasn't been bad—but at the end of the day you'll be brought down by the little things. They don't look good, they don't smell good and, most importantly, they're entirely gratuitous. If you keep making mistakes of that kind, you'll stop being the "government of change" and find yourselves the Bennetgate government.