



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Tuesday, January 31*

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# News Excerpts

January 31, 2023

Ha'aretz

## **Coalition Promotes Bill to Override Court Decision on Dery**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition in Israel is promoting new legislation that will overcome the Israeli Supreme Court's decision to bar ultra-Orthodox leader Arye Dery from serving as a government minister. The proposed legislation states that the court will have no authority to intervene in ministerial appointments under any circumstances. If it passes, Netanyahu will be able to reappoint Dery to his previous positions as Minister of the Interior and Minister of Health. Ten of the 11 High Court justices ruled against Dery's appointment earlier in January. In her decision, Supreme Court President Esther Hayut stated that "this is a person who has been convicted three times of offenses throughout his life, and he violated his duty to serve the public loyally and lawfully while serving in senior public positions." [Dig Deeper "From a Rogue MK to Haredi Subsidies, 8 Times High Court Struck Down Laws, Decisions"](#) (Times of Israel)

Ynet News

## **Bill to Deport Terror Convicts Passes First Reading**

A bill to revoke the citizenship or residency of a terrorist operative who receives compensation for committing an act of terrorism was approved by an overwhelming majority in the first reading in the Knesset plenum. According to the bill, if a terrorist receives any financial compensation from the Palestinian Authority (PA) for carrying out an attack, the interior minister could ask a court to revoke their Israeli citizenship. The PA has for decades paid stipends to Palestinians who have carried out attacks against Israelis or their families. Israel views the policy as a "pay for slay" scheme and has enacted several punitive measures against the PA for it. After serving sentence in Israeli prison, a Palestinian terrorism convict will be deported from Israel to territories under PA rule or the Gaza Strip.

Axios

## **Blinken Hints Consensus Needed for Judicial Overhaul**

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken hinted that a broad consensus was needed for Israel's planned judicial overhaul when he met with Prime Minister Netanyahu. "Building consensus for new proposals is the most effective way to ensure they are embraced and that they endure," he said. He spoke amid proposals from outside the government that President Isaac Herzog leads a non-partisan process for judicial overhaul so that it is not tied to the political and diplomatic agenda of Netanyahu's new government. Critics of the judicial overhaul plan have warned that it could harm Israeli democracy. The US has been concerned but has been loath to publicly come out against an internal reform process in Israel. [Dig Deeper "Diplomatically but Firmly, Blinken Advises Netanyahu Not to Harm Israeli Democracy"](#) (Times of Israel)

## **Abbas Assures US Security Ties with Israel Partially Cut**

PA President Mahmoud Abbas told CIA director William Burns that parts of a security coordination apparatus with Israel have remained in place, despite announcing a total freeze on cooperation last week following a deadly IDF raid in Jenin. The comments to Burns during a meeting in the West Bank came as the Biden administration has pressed the PA to rethink the move as it attempts to de-escalate tensions. Abbas told Burns that intelligence sharing with Israel — a key component of the sensitive security ties — has continued, according to an official familiar with the details of their meeting who confirmed a Channel 12 report. Israel, the US, and PA view the coordination mechanism as a key element helping to tamp down terror activity and promote stability in the West Bank, though Ramallah has repeatedly threatened to suspend cooperation in response to Israeli moves. [Dig Deeper “Former Palestinian Minister: PA Ended Security Cooperation After Israel Ignored Long-Time Request to Stop Incursions” \(The Media Line\)](#)

### Associated Press

## **Palestinians Say Israeli Troops Kill Man in West Bank**

Israeli forces killed a Palestinian man in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. The Ministry said the man, Nassim Abu Fouda, 26, was shot in the head in Hebron, often a center of friction between the Israeli military and Palestinians. The Israeli military said forces asked a car driving suspiciously to pull over, but it then drove into a soldier, prompting soldiers to open fire. It added that the driver was taken away by Palestinian rescue services and that the incident was under review. Israeli-Palestinian violence has spiked in recent days, with an Israeli military raid on a militant stronghold in the city of Jenin killing 10, most of them militants, and a Palestinian shooting attack in an east Jerusalem Jewish settlement outside a synagogue that killed 9 people. A separate east Jerusalem shooting over by a 13-year-old Palestinian wounded two Israelis. [Read More “In Gaza, Palestinian Indifference to Blinken’s Visit to Israel, West Bank” \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

### Ynet News

## **Israel Grapples with Police Shortage Amid Spike in Attacks**

Israel's Border Police recently began a recruitment drive in order to bolster its forces to meet the needs following the escalation of violence. Targeting mainly veterans of military service, the Border Police said it intended to increase the number of active-duty officers from 600 to 1,000. The drive was launched as the Border Police were preparing for violence during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which will begin in less than two months. In recent years, the Muslim holiday saw violent clashes with Palestinian rioters on Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, throughout the city of Jerusalem, and in the West Bank. The Border Police also intend to increase their presence in the mixed Jewish and Arab cities around Israel after violent racial riots broke out there in 2021. [Read More “Israel and Palestinians Risk Deeper Conflict in a Distracted World” \(Ynet News\)](#)

Reuters

## **Israel Refills the Sea of Galilee, Supplying Jordan on the Way**

When the floodgates are open, a torrent of water gushes into a dry river bed and races to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, a biblical lake in northern Israel that was being lost to drought and the growing population around it. The water is fresh, high-quality, and expensive. Desalinated from the Mediterranean Sea and transported across the country where it awaits the order to replenish the lake should it start to shrink again. This new network will also let Israel double the amount of water it sells to neighboring Jordan under a broader water-for-energy deal forged through a working, though often fractious, relationship. The Sea of Galilee, whose waters Christians believe Jesus walked upon, is Israel's main reservoir and a big tourist draw. Hotels and campsites line the perimeter encircled by lush hills. It feeds the Jordan River that flows south to the Dead Sea.

AI-Monitor

## **Netanyahu to Meet Macron in Paris Amid Iran Tension**

Prime Minister Netanyahu is set to fly to Paris to meet with French President Emmanuel Macron. The visit is expected to last two days and comes amid a wave of escalation between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as a suspected Israeli drone attack inside Iran. The attack inside Iran targeted a military factory in Isfahan. US officials said that Israel appears to be behind the drone strike. Netanyahu's visit to France will be the first since his return to power in November. The Israeli Prime Minister and Macron spoke following the attacks in Jerusalem. A statement issued by Netanyahu's office said both leaders condemned Iran's participation in harming innocent civilians in Ukraine, clearly referring to Iran's drone supplies to Russia. France has been one of the leading countries in Europe criticizing the Iranian breach of human rights and a broker with the Palestinians. Palestinian President Abbas visited Paris and met Macron last July. [Read More "Russia Sends Veiled Threat to Israel, US Over Iranian Weapons Depot Blast" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## **It's Not the Economy**

By Sever Plocker

- There are numerous reasons for rejecting the new government's plans to change the justice system. There are moral, practical, and state reasons, all of which are based, quite correctly, on the fears that civil rights may be curtailed. But there is one reason that isn't realistic, and it is the reason that has been touted as "economic." This reason is made up of several overlapping arguments. One, which sounds particularly threatening, is that "money will flee." What "money" are the speakers referring to exactly? Israel's foreign currency reserves officially stand at approximately USD 200 billion and are managed by the Bank of Israel. Their accumulation is the result of the large surpluses in the current account of Israel's international balance of payments and the Bank of Israel's intervention to prevent an overly sharp revaluation of the Israeli shekel.
- A revaluation, not a devaluation. And what about the foreign currency in the banks? In any event, Israeli banks keep their foreign currency in other banks across the world. And more generally speaking, is anyone about to move a foreign currency deposit from an Israeli bank to a bank in Switzerland or New York because of the judicial reform? Let's see them try to open an account there. The warnings about money that might flee are more applicable to countries that face a situation such as Lebanon, not Israel, which, as said, has huge surpluses of foreign currency. The second argument has to do with the credit rating agencies, which are liable to lower Israel's rating. In contrast to the impression created, these are not international global institutions like the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. These are for-profit private companies that, in return for payment, provide private assessments on the risk that a country might face in the future in repaying its debts.
- According to this test, Israel's rating should be the highest possible; an Israeli government has never asked to postpone and has never postponed payment on a debt. Israel has a negative external debt: foreigners owe us a lot of money (approximately USD 190 billion), and we owe them nothing. Nonetheless, our rating is not as high as it should be because of the "geopolitical environment." I was surprised, therefore, when our rating did not soar immediately after the Abraham Accords were signed. In short, there is no serious agency in the financial world that cares about Israel's credit rating. The third argument about the economic risks posed by judicial reform takes the form of a warning: because of the reform, foreign investors will leave Israel because they will not be confident that the government would never confiscate their assets and property and that the courts will be able to protect them.
- Really, is that the risk? A violent nationalization of foreign investments in Israel? In a country where massive privatization is a supreme economic and social value? This sounds like complete fantasy. It is not the proposed judicial overhaul that endangers Israel's economy: the current government, in which small nationalist and Haredi fringe parties have outsized practical influence—that is what endangers Israel as a Zionist, democratic, and economically strong country.

- **This was explained by Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg, a senior economist and the executive director of the Institute for National Security Studies, in an interview with Yedioth Ahronoth: “The (economic) risk lies in a change in Israel’s overall image in the eyes of the multi-national business world. When we appear to be a state whose government violates human and civil rights and promotes ideological agendas that are unacceptable to an educated Western person, the pressure on the boards of directors of global tech companies will be ramped up to reduce their presence here. Add to this the intensifying security tension with the Palestinians, and you have cause for anxiety.”**

## **We Arabs Must Join Israel's anti-Netanyahu Protests Too**

By Anwar Mhajne

- It's clearly noticeable that Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel have been largely absent from the ongoing anti-government demonstrations in Israel. This is despite calls from Arab political leaders such as members of the Knesset Mansour Abbas (head of the Ra'am party) and Ayman Odeh (head of Hadash-Ta'al) for their constituents to join the protests. Why is this the case? After all, the Arab/Palestinian community in Israel is more threatened than the Jewish secular and leftist populations by the Netanyahu coalition's unprecedented proposed legal reforms and severe discrimination against minorities and Arabs. I've heard numerous explanations for why Arab citizens are not joining the protests. Some say that the current government is not fundamentally different from other Israeli governments in its policy toward the Arabs, especially in the core issues related to rights, equality, nation-state law, and the attitude to the Palestinian issue.
- Others describe the demonstrators as hypocritical for protesting for equality and democracy while turning a blind eye to occupation and apartheid. Rather than revolutionary, they seek to maintain an oppressive system – while winning PR kudos for their claim that Israel is "the only democracy in the Middle East." Others view the protests as a purely internal conflict between members of Israel's Jewish community over their democracy. That skepticism and reticence is echoed by Arab leaders in the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee, the community's umbrella representative body.
- In a recent meeting, the Committee concluded that openly joining the protests would effectively tempt Israel's anti-Arab extremists into further demonizing the Arab public and attempts to settle accounts. They also argued that the Arab public has nothing to gain from joining the current struggle other than strengthening ties with parties in the center-left, but they're not fully supportive of the demands of the Arab community anyway. Therefore, Israel's Arab leadership declares we need to stand aside and wish success to both sides.
- Even though all of these claims are true and legitimate, there is clearly a case to be made for Arab participation. These justifications for sitting the conflict out, influenced by limited political opportunities for involvement and the fear of repression, haven't changed our status. On the contrary, sitting on the sidelines or blindly participating in the political process without a clear, practical strategy threatens our community and our already limited engagement space. As well as the expected harm to individual freedoms, the principle of separation of powers, and the independence of the judiciary, the planned reforms will cause severe and direct harm to Palestinian citizens of Israel. It is true that the judiciary has never been a great defender of the rights of Palestinians in Israel. The Supreme Court has even given cover to efforts of legal (for example, the nation-state law and land expropriation cases). However, the Netanyahu government's proposals will exacerbate the situation and limit the judiciary as a venue for challenging and calling racism, discrimination, and persecution.

- **A recent paper by Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority rights in Israel, shows how the coalition agreements will consolidate, institutionalize, and legalize Jewish superiority and racial segregation and adopt them as the main values of the Israeli system by translating them into legally enforceable laws. We've seen this in the passage of seven bills in their preliminary reading in the Knesset threatening to revoke the citizenship of convicted terrorists, even though it goes against international law. Now, far-right members of the government want to extend that revocation, and potentially expulsion too, to an unspecified number of family members.**
- **It is also expected that discrimination against the Arab education system will increase, and control over educational programs' content will be tightened, as will censorship in the field of culture and the arts. Culture Minister Miki Zohar has promised to "deny funding to those who promote our enemy's narrative and harm Israel's good name" and even to force the producers of Two Kids a Day, a documentary about the arrest and prosecution of Palestinian children, to return the state-funded grants they received. Moreover, the coalition is working on a bill making it easier to disqualify and push out Arab parties and MKs from running for the Knesset.**
- **Instead of focusing on what we can't, at least not yet, fix, we should consider building an effective proactive, smart strategy that goes beyond reacting to Israel's political climate and system towards shaping it. These protests could act as an essential force for building and shaping such a strategy. Utilizing the language of full citizenship, equality, democracy, and the rule of law, even if we are well aware of its limitations, could build support for improving the status of our community to audiences inside and outside of Israel. An effective strategy starts where we are, has a clear sense of where we want to go, and gives us a plausible shot of getting there. This requires Arab leadership factions to prioritize small but tangible gains over the rigid and uncompromising pursuit of ideals. And it requires setting aside internal Arab political rivalries in favor of a clear, unified national strategy, setting the well-being of the community at the center of any political act.**
- **We need to consider the political map and identify what existing battles that will help us gain legitimacy with key groups and populations nationally and internationally. What will make a difference in and an improvement to our daily lives? What will undermine the image, authority, and power of those who seek to undermine our rights? We need to foster grassroots leadership-building programs and open paths for new leaders representing the diverse groups in our community. We need to replace the old guard with newer representatives, less tied to their position and status and more invested in the community's welfare. We must outline paths for building alliances with as many political parties, organizations, and individuals inside Israel as possible. Most importantly, we must build and utilize alliances with pro-democratic, anti-occupation Jewish organizations invested in Israeli politics in Europe and the United States. Building alliances with pro-democratic Jewish groups outside of Israel has the potential to be an effective, influential strategy. Alliance building across national and international levels is essential for the viability and capacity of our community to promote social and political change.**

- **Yes, it is true that our citizenship and our participation in Israel's political system have been weaponized nationally and internationally to justify an already oppressive and discriminatory system. No, our political participation won't bring an end to the occupation. But our lack of participation and a lack of a clear smart national action strategy is likely to result in more repression and marginalization of our community. We, Arab citizens, have a crucial stake in democracy and democratic principles. Helping to rescue Israel from illiberalism will help towards our emancipation, too.**