

## The Diplomatic Report: A Monthly Review of Israel's Regional Foreign Policies

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### A. Israel and the Palestinians

- **Stagnation in the Peace Process** - Minister of Defense Gantz [called](#) the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table. In an [interview with Asharq Al-Awsat](#), he added that there is no prospect for peace in the Middle East without solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority met in Cairo and called Israel to resume the peace process based on the two-state solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and UN resolution 2334. [The US Congress enacted](#) historic funding of 250 million USD, over five years, to civil society projects promoting Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding and Palestinian economic development.
- **Creeping Annexation** - Israel continued to [advance](#) a new housing plan Atarot, and the Jerusalem District Planning and Building Commission determined that the plan met the necessary conditions. The Knesset approved a preliminary reading of a bill to regulate illegal settlements. Following Pompeo's declaration, the US Customs and Borders Protection [revoked its regulation](#) differentiating between Israeli products made in Israel and those made in the West Bank. The Israeli government approved a special grant to Jewish local authorities in the West Bank for 2020, worth 40 million NIS, in addition to 10 million NIS for construction of Jewish boarding schools and documentation of settlement projects.
- **Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination and Economic Ties** - Following the resumption of security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Israel allowed Palestinian security forces to enter Palestinian neighborhoods on the outskirts of Jerusalem, to disperse weddings that violated social distancing restrictions. The Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories said that Palestinians working in Israel will have to be tested for Covid-19. A reform regarding working permits, issued by the Civil Administration, came into force reducing construction workers' dependence on employers. The chairman of the Palestinian Authority's Prisoners Affairs Commission, Abu Bakr, said that Israel will vaccinate Palestinian prisoners in Israel. Sources in the Palestinian Authority said they did not ask for Israel's help in receiving vaccines, rather they will work with international bodies to receive them.
- **International Humanitarian Aid to Gaza Continues** - Reports said that Israel offered Hamas, via the Egyptians, a prisoner swap which includes medical aid to fight the covid-19

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pandemic. The outgoing chair of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee publicly opposed this offer. Hamas [accepted to receive medical equipment](#) from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), despite Dahlan's involvement and the UAE's normalization with Israel. A medical delegation of Physicians for Human Rights as well as twelve other doctors from the West Bank, were [allowed to enter Gaza](#) to assist in fighting the pandemic and treat other patients. The American hospital was opened in Gaza, operating for now as a day clinic with foreign doctors. A delegation from the EU [entered Gaza](#) to examine the humanitarian situation considering the pandemic. In the meantime, violent incidents between Israel and Hamas, continued.

- **Diplomatic Struggle on the International Stage** - As on every anniversary of the UN's partition plan, the UN General Assembly [adopted resolutions](#) calling for peace, and opposing Israeli occupation in the West Bank and its sovereignty in the Golan Heights. Member states voting patterns did not change. The US, Australia and a small number of island-states voted with Israel against the resolutions, while the UK and Brazil occasionally join them. Foreign Minister [Ashkenazi congratulated](#) Wennesland on his appointment as the new UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Wennesland replaced Mladenov, who in his [farewell letter](#) thanked Netanyahu and Abbas for their cooperation, and emphasized the importance of the two-state solution. There are [concerns in Israel](#) that Wennesland will adopt a different position than his predecessor, less favoring Israel. The Ministry for Strategic Affairs highlighted, in an English publication, Israeli physicians' activities in Gaza, but the Director of Physicians for Human Rights called out the hypocrisy of the Ministry, which criticizes the organization's activities in its Hebrew publications.

## B. Israel and the Middle East

- **Resumption of Diplomatic Relations with Morocco** - [Morocco announced](#) that it will normalize ties with Israel after the US recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, and [agreed](#) to sell advanced weapons to Morocco and to promote trade treaties with it. An Israeli-American delegation flew from Israel to Morocco to participate in the signing ceremony at the royal palace in Rabat. The agreements between Israel and Morocco include direct flights, visa exemptions for diplomats and memoranda of understanding in civil aviation, water resources, finances, and investments. Netanyahu spoke on the phone with the Moroccan King and invited him to Israel. The Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry and the Moroccan Foreign Minister announced that diplomatic missions will open quickly, and a delegation from Morocco visited Israel to examine the procedures. The joint declaration by the US, Israel and Morocco, mentioned Morocco's unchanged support of the Palestinians and Jerusalem's importance to the Abrahamic religions. The King of Morocco reiterated this position during a phone call with Abbas and in a letter later sent to him. The Moroccan Foreign Minister gave an interview to the Israeli media, sharing his hopes that normalization will promote a two-state solution. Israelis of Moroccan descent in the southern Israeli town of Yeruham took to the streets to celebrate the agreement. Israeli and Moroccan flags have been projected on Jerusalem's old city walls, and the Moroccan Minister of Justice met with leaders of the Jewish community in Casablanca. Oman's Foreign Ministry also welcomed the normalization between Israel and Morocco.
- **Formal Diplomatic Ties with the UAE** - Netanyahu wished the citizens of the UAE a joyous national day. The Israeli National Security Council [issued a travel warning](#) to the UAE and Bahrain after the assassination of an Iranian nuclear scientist. Out of fear of diplomatic implications, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) prevented the UAE's designation

as a Covid-19-related “red country”, contrary to the Ministry of Health’s position. President Rivlin [hosted](#) a delegation from the UAE and Bahrain, and called to deepen the partnership between the countries. The Foreign Ministries of Israel and the UAE signed a temporary agreement to ease procedures for business activities. Netanyahu’s visit to the Gulf, planned for the first week of January, was postponed a second time.

- **Civil and Economic Relations with the UAE** - Israeli airlines began [operating flights](#) between to the UAE, and Bahrain granted them permission to fly over its territory en route to the UAE. The Israeli MFA intervened to [assist Israeli tourists](#) who took the first flights to the UAE and who faced difficulties entering the country. Later in the month, tens of thousands of Israelis visited the UAE, including some who decided to hold weddings there. Many Israeli journalists visited Dubai, some funded by business companies in the UAE. The Israeli Ministry of Tourism held a virtual conference with 500 tourism promoters to encourage tourism between the two countries. Israeli companies already registered to participate in a tourist conference taking place in the UAE in May 2020. Reports revealed that many Israeli tourists exploit Dubai’s prostitution industry and that criminals from both countries collaborate in the industry. About 200 Israeli businessmen, including the chairman of the Israel Export Institute and CEO of Bank Hapoalim, [participated](#) in one of the world’s largest tech conferences in Dubai. The chair of Dubai Multi Commodities Centre and Diamond Exchange visited Israel to open the Emirati office in Israel’s Diamond Exchange, and to meet with Netanyahu’s advisors. The Emirati businessman Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Nahyan purchased nearly 50 percent of Beitar Jerusalem football club. The Israeli artists Idan Raichel and Nasreen Qadri performed in the Dubai Opera, and a Dubai fashion journal dedicated its recent issue to Israeli fashion. The Western Wall Heritage Foundation translated its website to Arabic, expecting an influx of Muslim tourists. Israel’s Chief Rabbi visited Dubai and inaugurated a new Jewish school.
- **Advancing Ties with Bahrain** - The Bahrain Industry, Commerce and Tourism Minister, Alzayani, [visited Israel](#) and met with Netanyahu, Ashkenazi and other Israeli ministers. Alzayani and Ashkenazi [signed](#) several bilateral agreements and Alzayani stated that Bahrain will not differentiate between Israeli products made in Israel and the West Bank. However, the Bahraini Foreign Ministry issued a response, [clarifying](#) that Bahrain remains committed to UN resolution 2334 and it will prohibit the import of Israeli products from the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights. Agriculture Minister Schuster met with a press delegation from Bahrain. Gulf Air [announced](#) it will launch a direct route between Israel and Bahrain. Ashkenazi and other senior Israeli officials participated in the annual security conference in Manama.
- **Signs of Improving Ties with Saudi Arabia** - Saudi Arabia [granted](#) Israeli commercial flights permission to travel through its airspace en route to Dubai. Saudi sources [expressed](#) concern and disappointment that a meeting between Netanyahu and Bin Salman was leaked to the press. They anticipated that the leak will have negative consequences on the relationship. Saudi companies are [exploring](#) possibilities to cooperate with Israeli companies through Bahrain.
- **Normalization with Sudan?** - The President of the Sudanese Sovereign Council [threatened](#) Pompeo that Sudan will freeze its normalization with Israel if Sudan is not removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. Sudan was thereafter removed from the list and the US Congress [passed](#) a bill largely restoring Sudan’s legal immunity against

future lawsuits, excluding standing lawsuits related to 9/11. The bill also includes economic assistance to Sudan worth more than 1 billion USD.

- **Tunisia Rejects Normalization with Israel** - After Morocco re-established diplomatic ties with Israel and in response to rumors that Tunisia could be next, the Tunisian Foreign Ministry stated it has no wishes to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Tunisian Singer Noamane Chaari and Israeli singer Ziv Yehezkel, [performed a song together](#), written by a Yemenite artist to promote religious tolerance between Muslims and Jews. The collaboration was arranged by the Arab Council for Regional Integration. However, the Tunisian artists association summoned an emergency meeting in response, and the Tunisian media attacked Chaari.
- **Ties with Egypt from a Regional Perspective** - President a-Sisi [welcomed](#) the UAE's entry into the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum as an observer. An Egyptian TV program [discussed](#) reports in the Israeli media revealing Israeli tourists' exploitation of Dubai's prostitution industry. Israel examined reopening the land border in Sinai, closed due to Covid-19, while Eilat's mayor expressed his objection to such a move. The Israeli embassy in Cairo streamed a live show of Firqat Alnoor, a band consisting of Jewish and Arab artists, performing to advance coexistence and peace.
- **Attempts to Decrease Tensions with Jordan** - Ashkenazi secretly met his Jordanian counterpart on the Jordanian side of the Allenby Crossing, after many years that such meetings were not carried out or made public. The Jordanian Minister said that Israel must preserve the status quo in the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif and return to negotiations with the Palestinians based on international law. During the security conference in Manama, the Director of the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies argued against the Jordanian Foreign Minister's position, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the root of all the conflicts in the region.
- **Conflict with Iran** - Reports said that an Israeli submarine passing through the Suez Canal was heading to the Gulf to send a message of deterrence to Iran. In response, the spokesperson of the Iranian Parliaments' National Security Committee said that the presence of the submarine is an act of hostility that will justify Iranian retribution. Israeli Ambassador to the US reiterated that it would be a major mistake for the US to return to the Iran Nuclear Deal. The Israeli government's position was passed on to the Biden Administration during General Milley's visit to Israel.

## C. Israel and Europe

- **Europe Remains Committed to the Two-State Solution** - The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, [welcomed](#) Israel and Morocco's re-established diplomatic relations. The EU foreign service [clarified](#) that its position on Western Sahara has not changed and that the EU continues to support UN efforts to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace. Spain's Foreign Minister gave an interview to the Israeli media during her visit to Israel, expressing Spain's willingness to be involved in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and urging regional leaders to leverage the new normalization agreements to find a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict.
- **Strengthening Israeli-European Cooperation** - The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy [agreed](#) to allow third states, like Israel, to join various projects and agreements in the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects. Ashkenazi met his Portuguese

counterpart and expressed his wishes that the Israel-EU Association Council will resume under Portugal's presidency of the Council of the EU. Ashkenazi highlighted how the discourse has shifted from annexation to regional normalization, and restated Israel's position to outlaw Hezbollah. As Germany's presidency of the Council of the EU was coming to an end, Ashkenazi [thanked](#) his German counterpart for the continued improvement of Germany's voting record in the UN in Israeli-related resolutions. A delegation of Israeli physicians arrived in Italy to assist in the fight against Covid-19 in northern Italy.

- **Fighting Anti-Semitism:** Israel welcomed the Council of the EU's [declaration](#) on the necessity to enhance the fight against anti-Semitism across policy areas. Norway decided to [cut 3.4 million USD](#) of its funding to the Palestinian Authority due to the Palestinians' failure to reduce anti-Semitic materials in school curriculum. The European Court of Justice [approved](#) Belgium's Kosher and Halal slaughter ban, despite the Jewish and Muslim communities' appeal.

## D. Israel and the Mediterranean

- **Turkey Signals a Willingness to Improve Ties with Israel, Which Israel Examines -** Reports indicated that Turkey has [appointed](#) Ufuk Ulutaş, who previously studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as its designated ambassador to Israel. It was further reported that Azerbaijan mediated between the countries and sent Israel messages that Erdoğan was interested in improving the relations. In a briefing to the press, Erdoğan [said](#) that Israel and Turkey have continued to cooperate, including in the intelligence field, but despite his willingness to improve the ties, the problem is the identity of the Israeli leaders and Israel's policy towards the Palestinians. An advisor to Erdoğan verified the Turkish President's interest in normalizing ties with Israel, and added that Turkey will take two steps forwards to every step forward taken by Israel. Turkey's Foreign Minister also [expressed](#) willingness to normalize ties with Israel, emphasizing that it is up to the Israelis. The Israeli Charge D'affaires in Turkey, Roey Gilad, [announced](#) that he will be leaving at the end of the year and hinted at a "possible improvement" in the relations between Israel and Turkey. Ashkenazi summoned senior Israeli officials from Israel's foreign service and security establishment to examine Turkey's sincerity and for the time being, decided not to publicly address the issue.
- **Strengthening Relations in the Eastern Mediterranean -** The Director Generals of the Israeli and Greek MFAs, [headed](#) a policy dialogue with officials from both countries to discuss future plans in the fields of health, tourism and security. The Israeli Minister of Environmental Protection has initially opposed the ratification of the charter of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, due to the Palestinian Authority's standing as an equal member, but she has ultimately removed her objection and the government ratified the constitution.