

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

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A. Israel and the Palestinians

- **Still No Peace Process, Washington returns to Two-State Solution Discourse** - The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the occupation and the peace process were non-issues during Israel's elections. Israeli President Rivlin [met with](#) UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Wennesland. US State Department Spokesperson Price [clarified](#) the Biden administration's position on the conflict, backing the two-state solution and the US' commitment to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. The Administration further [stressed](#) that it views Israel's presence in the West Bank as an occupation. President Abbas's Spokesperson Abu Rudeineh [said](#) that the Palestinian Authority's relationship with the Biden administration is developing slowly and that their preferred international apparatus is the Middle East Peace Quartet. The representatives of the Quartet (US, UN, EU and Russia) [discussed](#) ways to resume meaningful Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The head of Israel's security service Argaman [met](#) with Abbas in Ramallah and warned him against running on a joint list with Hamas or creating a power-sharing government with Hamas after the elections. The Palestinians claimed that Argaman asked Abbas to cancel the election, a request Abbas rejected.
- **Israel Works Against the International Criminal Court's Decision** - The International Criminal Court in the Hague (the ICC) [announced](#) it will open an investigation into crimes committed by Israel and Hamas from 2014 onwards. The Palestinian Authority [welcomed](#) the decision and said it will collaborate with the investigation. Conversely, Israeli leaders including President [Rivlin](#), Defense Minister [Gantz](#), Foreign Minister [Ashkenazi](#), Ambassador to the US and UN [Erdan](#) and Labor leader [Michaeli](#) have all condemned the ICC's decision, while Prime Minister [Netanyahu](#) called the decision antisemitic. On the other side, the leader of the [Meretz](#) Party Horowitz and members of the [Arab Joint List](#) said the ICC's decision is the consequence of the ongoing Israeli occupation. U.S. Secretary of State Blinken [stated](#) in a press conference that the US stands with Israel and that the ICC lacks jurisdiction to investigate Israel. Vice President Harris also [expressed](#) opposition to the ICC's decision in a conversation with Netanyahu. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov additionally voiced his [opposition](#) to the decision, and to the ICC in general, in a meeting with Ashkenazi in Moscow. Israel [warned](#) the Palestinian Authority that there will be consequences for the latter's collaboration with the ICC. Israel [revoked](#) the Palestinian Foreign Minister's special transit permit after he returned from the Hague. After Israel's National Security Council (NSC) convened to discuss ways to

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respond to the ICC's decision, it [recommended](#) curbing settlement building, refraining from evicting Khan al-Ahmar and indicating that there is a possibility to resume peace negotiations. The UN Human Rights Council [passed](#) its annual motion against Israel for violation of human rights in the occupied territories, despite Israel's efforts to persuade countries to oppose the motion, highlighting the body's bias against Israel.

- **The Struggle for Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital Continues** - Kosovo officially [opened](#) its Embassy in Jerusalem, after Kosovo and Israel [established](#) diplomatic relations last month. The Czech Republic [opened](#) an embassy office in Jerusalem, in the presence of the Czech Prime Minister. Both moves were condemned by the [Palestinian Authority](#) and [Turkey](#). An International Women's Day event in East Jerusalem was [broken up](#) by the police, at the order of Public Security Minister Ohana, who argued the event was tied to the Palestinian Authority.
- **Maintaining International Humanitarian Aid to Gaza** - In his periodic report to the UN Security Council, Wennesland expressed his concern about the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and called Israel to remove its naval blockade. Israel endorses an international plan to vaccinate 7,000 Gaza traders in the Erez Crossing, given by foreign doctors and funded by Qatar.
- **Health coordination with the Palestinian Authority** - After delays and international pressure, Israel began [vaccinating](#) Palestinian workers with permits to stay in Israel. The Palestinian Authority [received](#) a further 60,000 doses from the World Health Organization, as part of its COVAX worldwide program for underdeveloped areas.

B. Israel and the Middle East

- **The Crisis with Jordan Deepens Again** - Ashkenazi [met](#) his Jordanian counterpart for the third time since the former entered office and the two discussed bilateral cooperation. The Jordanian crown prince's planned trip to the al-Aqsa Mosque was [cancelled](#) at the last minute over security disagreements with Israel. Thereafter, the Jordanians [delayed](#) their approval for Netanyahu to fly over Jordanian airspace for a formal visit in the UAE, a visit that was ultimately cancelled. In response, Netanyahu [ordered](#) the closure of Israeli airspace for flights to Jordan, without authority nor any consultation with the relevant officials and in violation of the countries' peace treaty. In the end, the order was not executed, and Minister [Gantz accused](#) Netanyahu of damaging Israel's security and deteriorating its relationship with Jordan. Furthermore, Netanyahu reportedly [delayed](#) Jordan's request for additional water to alleviate its water shortage, yet despite the crisis and following the foreign ministers' meeting, Israel [announced](#) that it will permit 700 Jordanians entry to work in Eilat's tourism industry.
- **Civil and Economic Relations with the UAE** - The Israeli government sought ways to [return](#) hundreds of Israelis that were [left stranded](#) in the UAE after the immediate closure of Ben-Gurion Tel Aviv airport. Israeli companies [participated](#) in a major defense exhibition in the UAE, although Israel [cancelled](#) its formal participation. Beitar Jerusalem football club [cancelled](#) the sale of 50% of the club to Emirati businessman Bin Khalifa after the football association's investigation found significant gaps in the Emirati's wealth statements. The UAE's "Hope" Mars mission lead engineer, Al Awadhi, gave an [interview](#) to the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation. Avram Grant, the former head coach of the Israeli national football team, [participated](#) in Dubai Sports Council's football player

development program. The Mohamed Bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence and the Weizmann Institute of Science [launched](#) a joint program for artificial intelligence research. Gulf-Israel Green Ventures (GIGV) and the UAE's United Stars Group have [signed](#) a first-of-its-kind deal that will bring Israeli green technologies to the UAE and the wider Gulf region, and Emirati technologies to Israel.

- **Formal Diplomatic Ties with the UAE** - Mohammad Al Khajah, The UAE's first ambassador to Israel, [arrived](#) in Israel and presented his credentials to President Rivlin, thereafter he met with PM Netanyahu and FM Ashkenazi. Ashkenazi also [spoke](#) on the phone with his Emirati counterpart about the ambassador's arrival. The following day, Al Khajah [met](#) with the Israeli Minister for Regional Cooperation and then [with](#) the Foreign Ministry's Deputy Director for Public Diplomacy. Israel and the UAE will exchange official permanent police representatives, after the Israeli Police [announced](#) that it will send someone of the rank of Chief Superintendent as representative to the UAE, which is the customary rank for such representatives around the world. Representatives from the Israeli and Emirati Foreign Ministries [discussed](#) establishing a quarantine-free travel corridor between the countries.
- **Resumption of Diplomatic Relations with Morocco** - Israel and Morocco [opened](#) diplomatic liaison offices, with David Govrin heading the Israeli mission and Abd Al Rahim Byoud, who [met](#) with Ashkenazi on his arrival, leading the Moroccan mission. The first inter-ministerial coordination meeting to promote relations between Israel and Morocco [announced](#) that five agreements were signed and five others will be signed at a future time. The Israeli government [approved](#) the aviation agreement between the countries. Israeli Minister of Internal Security Ohana [spoke](#) with Moroccan Interior Minister Abdelouafi Laftit and invited him to Israel. Israel Minister of Education Galant also [spoke](#) with his counterpart Amzazi, where they agreed to promote student exchange programs and educational trips that would emphasize the history of the Moroccan Jewish population. Many Israeli ambassadors around the world have [met](#) with their Moroccan counterparts since the countries decided to resume diplomatic ties. Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita [highlighted](#) the potential cooperation between Israel and Morocco and Morocco's ability to mediate between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in a virtual conference with the Brookings Institute.
- **Israeli Political Interests Create Tensions with the UAE** - Although sources in the UAE [said](#) they are not interested in a Netanyahu visit before the Israeli elections, their position was later changed following [persuasion](#) by the head of the Mossad. After Netanyahu's visit was cancelled it was reported that he [cancelled](#) Ashkenazi's visit to attend the ceremonial opening of the missions in the UAE due to his desire to be the first Israeli official to visit the UAE. After the cancellation, Netanyahu declared in an election rally that Emirati crown prince Bin Zayed [intends](#) to invest 10 billion USD in Israeli projects, but only if Netanyahu wins the elections because Bin Zayed supports Netanyahu's economic policy. The Emiratis were [angry](#) with Netanyahu for distorting Bin Zayed's words and for using them for his election campaign. They emphasized again that the normalization is between the UAE and Israel, not between any politician, and that they refuse to intervene in the Israeli elections. Thereafter, the Emiratis reduced their contact with Israel, postponed their planned signing ceremony in Abu Dhabi between Israel and Sudan and emphasized that their [investments](#) will not be politically motivated. Additionally, there are [concerns](#) in the Gulf that racist remarks towards Arabs by Netanyahu's possible coalition partners will hurt the normalization process.

- **Civil and Economic Relations with the UAE** - The Israeli government has [denied](#) environmental organizations' [demand](#), under the freedom of information act, to disclose the details of the memorandum of understanding for transferring oil from the Gulf through Eilat and then to Ashkelon. Israelis and Emiratis come together to [organize](#) the annual global cyber event due to take place in early April in Dubai. Israel and the UAE's national rugby teams [played](#) an international friendly match in Dubai. A delegation from Mashav, Israel's Agency for International Development, [took](#) part in the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference. Ambassador [Al Khaja](#) and the [UAE embassy](#) in Israel have wished happy Passover in Hebrew to the Israeli people.
- **Advancing Ties with Bahrain** - Bahrain [appointed](#) Khaled Yousif Al-Jalahma, former deputy chief of mission to the US, as its first ambassador to Israel. Israel's national water company [signed](#) an agreement with Bahrain to provide consulting services. The countries' postal services [signed](#) an agreement to send and receive packages between them, and Israel's Sheba Medical Center [signed](#) an agreement to cooperate with Salmaniya Medical Complex in Manama.
- **Normalization with other Gulf Countries** - Minister Ashkenazi [spoke](#) with his Omani counterpart, Foreign Minister al-Busaidi, who expressed Oman's commitment to the two-state solution. It was later reported that Ashkenazi [had](#) another conversation with his Qatari counterpart. Sources in Saudi Arabia [said](#) that Israel and Saudi Arabia must coordinate their positions on Iran and be part of any new agreement, but warned the US from returning to the previous nuclear deal. Minister Gantz [said](#) that Israel intends to develop a "special security arrangement" with new Gulf allies to cope with Iran. During the tensions with the UAE, a flight to Dubai carrying the crew of an Israeli reality show was [delayed](#), after Saudis failed to allow them to use its airspace. On the eve of Israeli elections, Saudi officials [reiterated](#) that normalization between the two countries [depends](#) on progress on the Palestinian issue.
- **Strengthening Peace with Egypt** - Israeli Intelligence Minister Cohen [met](#) with the Egyptian Deputy Intelligence Minister to discuss reopening the Sinai Peninsula to Israeli tourists. The meeting was [organized](#) by the National Security Council, and senior officials from the Foreign and Economic ministries were not informed of it. The Israeli embassy in Cairo was told about the meeting from the Egyptians. Energy Minister Steinitz [participated](#) in a meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in Cairo. The Israeli government [approved](#) the Tourism Minister's outline for reopening the Egyptian border. The Egyptian parliament and Education Ministry have [approved](#) a new curriculum that includes studies about Judaism to promote religious tolerance. Israel's embassy [sent](#) its condolences to Egypt following a fatal train accident that cost the lives of 32 Egyptians.
- **The Conflict with Iran** - Israel and the US [held](#) their first round of strategic talks about the Iran nuclear issue. Israel's Environment Protection Minister [accused](#) Iran of environmental terrorism for orchestrating the huge tar spill off the shores of Israel, but senior officials in the ministry and the security apparatus said the accusation was baseless. Israelis [accused](#) Iran of being behind [two](#) attacks against two Israeli-owned cargo ships in the Gulf. Meanwhile, Iran also [claimed](#) that its cargo ship was attacked in the Mediterranean, which comes amidst a US [report](#) that Israel targeted at least a dozen Iranian oil ships bound for Syria since 2019. It was then [reported](#) that Israeli security officials have recommended to ease tensions at sea. Israel continued to [attack](#) Iranian targets in Syria.

C. Israel and Europe

- **Efforts to Mobilize European Support against Iran and the ICC's Decision** - President Rivlin and the IDF Chief of Staff Kochavi held a 3-day [visit](#) to Germany, France and Austria to lobby against the ICC's decision and to discuss the threats Israel is facing from Iran and its Lebanese proxy [Hezbollah](#). They met with German President [Steinmeier](#), German Foreign Minister [Maas](#) and French President [Macron](#). 442 current and former Members of Parliament and members of the European Parliament across Europe [submitted](#) a letter to European Foreign Ministers and the High Representative of the European Commission for Foreign Affairs Borrell, calling them to denounce de facto Israeli annexation and the one-state reality.
- **Israel Uses the Global Fight Against COVID-19 to Strengthen its Ties with European States** - Netanyahu [held](#) a summit with Austrian Chancellor Kurz and Danish Prime Minister Frederiksen. The leaders discussed resuming tourism, establishing a joint Research & Development Fund and beginning joint efforts for common production of future vaccines. Frederiksen's visit to Israel was [criticized](#) by her coalition partner due to Israel's insufficient transfer of vaccines to the Palestinians and the ongoing occupation. A week later, Netanyahu [held](#) another summit with Czech and Hungarian Prime Ministers in Jerusalem, in which they discussed policies to combat COVID-19. A recent public opinion [poll](#) by the British research company YouGov found that support for Israel in Europe has risen, mainly due to the Abraham Accords and Israel's successful vaccination campaign. Israeli and Ukrainian Interior Ministers [held](#) talks to allow vaccinated Israeli pilgrims to enter Ukraine, amid negotiations on Israeli deliveries of COVID-19 vaccines to Ukraine.

D. Israel and the Mediterranean

- **Israel Strengthens its Hellenic Alliance** - Energy Minister Steinitz [signed](#) a memorandum of understanding with his Cypriot and Greek counterparts to lay an underwater power cable linking their electricity grids. Additionally, Cyprus and Israel have [reached](#) an agreement on the guidelines for future negotiations to solve the disputes surrounding the adjacent Aphrodite and Yishai gas fields. Israel, France, Greece and Cyprus held a naval military [exercise](#). Cyprus and Greece decided to [allow](#) vaccinated Israeli visitors in without quarantine, though it will require a negative test.
- **The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum Hosts First Formal Session** - The gas forum held its first official [meeting](#) since being established as a recognized international organization. The forum [accepted](#) France's request to join as a member and the US as an observer, though the Palestinians, as a founding member, vetoed the UAE's request to also join as an observer. During the meeting, Steinitz [promoted](#) an initiative to restrict the passage of ships powered by polluting fuels throughout the Mediterranean.
- **Complicated Relationship with Turkey** - The Speaker of the Turkish parliament [published](#) the letter he sent to the Speaker of the Knesset, requesting that Israel vaccinate Palestinian prisoners. Officials from the Israeli Foreign Ministry and Turkish President Erdoğan's advisors [participated](#) in the European Jewish Parliament's conference about the Israeli-Turkish relationship. Turkey [protested](#) against Israel, Greece and Cyprus's plan to lay the undersea electric cable, as Turkey claims will pass through its territorial waters.