

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

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### A. Israel and the Palestinians

- **The peace process has not resumed, but ministerial-level contacts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority have** - Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) spoke with outgoing President Rivlin, with incoming President Herzog (twice), with Defense Minister Gantz and with Public Security Minister Bar-Lev. Region Cooperation Minister Frej linked up Israeli ministers with their Palestinian counterparts. Health Minister Horowitz and Environmental Protection Minister Zandberg met in Jerusalem with their PA counterparts. Gantz met with the European Union's Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Koopmans
- **Dealing with a consumer boycott on the settlements** - Ice cream maker Ben & Jerry's announced that it would not allow its products to be marketed in the Occupied Palestinian territories under a new licensee, generating attacks on the company in Israel where it was described as economic terrorism, a BDS initiative and even anti-Semitism. Prime Minister Bennett discussed the decision with the CEO of Unilever, which owns the Ben & Jerry brand, Foreign Minister Lapid and the Foreign Ministry said they would pursue legal measures against the company in US states that have legislated bans on anti-Israel boycotts, and President Herzog joined the condemnations. The government formed an inter-ministerial team led by the Foreign Ministry with the participation of the Economic and Justice Ministries to deal with the boycott, and instructed Israeli embassies worldwide to lobby against it. The Dutch Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the government to encourage the divestment of Dutch pension funds from companies linked to the settlements. Norway's largest pension fund (KLP) announced that it would suspend investments in 16 companies over their links to Israel's occupation of the West Bank.
- **Struggle continues over Jerusalem sovereignty** - PM Bennett praised the Israel Police Commissioner for protecting Jewish freedom of worship on the Temple Mount by allowing Jewish worshipers and right-wing Knesset members to pray at the site on Tisha B'Av. Following criticism of his comments, and at the request of the US, Bennett amended his statement to emphasize that Israel was committed to the status quo at the

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site and explain that he was referring only to the freedom to visit the holy site. Jordan condemned the visit of Jewish worshipers and issued a demarche. The Foreign Ministry asked the US to delay the re-opening of its consulate on Jerusalem's Agron Street until after the summer in order to save the new government additional difficulties. Israel's top planning authorities continued to advance plans for construction in the E1 area and issued invitations for public comments. Ir Amim director Oppenheimer attended a UN Security Council debate at the invitation of France, the current Council President, on the possible eviction of Arab families from their homes in East Jerusalem. Foreign Minister Lapid thanked his Slovak counterpart for announcing the opening of a Slovakian cultural and economic institute in Jerusalem in September

- **Attempt to establish in Gaza permanent mechanism vis-à-vis Hamas** - Efforts continued to establish a mechanism with the involvement of the UN and the US for the transfer of Qatari funds to needy Gaza families to ensure the money does not fall into the hands of Hamas. To that end, US diplomat Amr visited Israel and Ramallah, and the Qatari envoy al-Emadi visited Israel and Gaza. Israel asked to combine negotiations on Gaza's rehabilitation with the return of soldiers' bodies and Israeli prisoners, but the talks reached a dead end. Israel expanded the Gaza fishing zone by three miles and the list of goods permitted to enter and leave Gaza, but in response to the firing of incendiary balloons, the IDF attacked targets in Gaza and the fishing zone was once again confined from 12 to 6 miles.
- **Israeli government seeks ways to bolster PA economy, even as it implements military occupation mechanisms** - Regional Cooperation Minister Frej and Housing Minister Elkin advanced a government resolution approving an additional 15,000 work permits for Palestinian laborers in Israel. The State Department's Amr asked Israel to promote measures bolstering the PA government in Ramallah. The diplomatic-security cabinet authorized the freeze of some 600NIS million in tax revenues owed to the PA in response to its support for the families of terrorists and prisoners. The IDF evicted a community of herdsmen in the Jordan Valley and South Hebron Hills, destroyed facilities and water reservoirs and confiscated property. Knesset member Mara'ana urged the chair of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Ben-Barak to convene the panel to discuss the killing of Palestinians in IDF shootings in the territories.

## B. Israel and the Middle East

- **A new page in relations with Jordan** - Following a freeze of several years in high-level ties under Netanyahu, Bennett met secretly with King Abdullah at his palace in Amman. The two sides agreed to turn the page in bilateral relations and increase the quota of water Israel sells Jordan. Slight tensions emerged after word of the meeting was leaked to the media. In a CNN interview, the King himself reported on his meeting with Bennett and also mentioned his meeting with Defense Minister Gantz at which agreement was reached on expanded security cooperation. The King said he was encouraged by the talks. Abdullah called to congratulate Herzog on his inauguration as President and remarked on the resumption of proper relations. Foreign Minister Lapid met with his Jordanian counterpart Safadi on the Jordanian side of the Allenby Bridge. The two signed an agreement reached during the term of Lapid's predecessor Gaby Ashkenazi to increase the water quota and bilateral trade, as well as expand Jordanian exports to the PA. Opposition Chair Netanyahu attacked the government over its measures vis-a-vis Jordan.

- **Advancing diplomatic relations with the UAE** - Lapid appointed Israel Hotel Association President Hayek as Israel's first ambassador to the Emirates. The UAE Embassy in Israel was inaugurated in the presence of President Herzog. For the first time since taking office, Bennett spoke with UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin-Zayed. The Emirati Minister of Food and Water Security Al-mheiri visited Israel and signed the environmental chapter of the Abraham Accords with Minister of Environmental Protection Zandberg. The Ministry of Environmental Protection rejected the environmental impact report on the risks of pumping Gulf oil from Eilat to Ashdod, and the deal was effectively suspended pending a governmental decision on the matter. Bennett and Lapid decided to set up an inter-agency team to re-examine the agreement. The Sheba Medical Center signed a cooperation agreement with Dubai-based Al Tadawi Healthcare Group. The Emirati investment firm DidsruptAD invested in the Israel cultivated meat firm Aleph Farms. Under cooperation agreements following the Abraham Accords, a meeting was held in Israel between representatives of the Mitvim Institute and the Emirati TRENDS Institute.
- **Developing and expanding relationship with Morocco** - Foreign Ministry Director Ushpiz conducted an official visit to Morocco, meeting with his Moroccan counterpart Yazur and handing him an invitation for Foreign Minister Bourita to visit Israel. Foreign Minister Lapid spoke with Bourita and agreed to visit Morocco. Moroccan Defense Minister Abdellatif Loudiyi signed a cyber security cooperation agreement with Unna, the director of the Israeli cyber directorate – the first security agreement between the states. Israeli carriers Israil and El-Al launched direct flights to Morocco, and Arkia is also expected to do so in August. A Moroccan Air Force plane landed at an Israel Air Force base ahead of an international US-led military exercise.
- **Advancing normalization with additional Arab states?** - Foreign Minister Lapid spoke with his Omani counterpart al-Busaidi who insisted that his country would only normalize relations with Israel once progress was made on a two-state peace agreement with the Palestinians. An aircraft that took off from Israel and made a stop in Amman was seen heading for Kuwait. Algerian and Sudanese judokas refrained from competing against Israelis at the Tokyo Olympics, while the Saudi Olympic Committee allowed judoka Alqahtani to fight Israel's Hershko.
- **Efforts to formulate updated strategy to counter Iran's nuclear program and regional activities** - Israel continued its dialogue with the US in an attempt to affect negotiations on a return to the Iran nuclear agreement and shape a different agreement, and discussed US security support for Israel. A team led by Bennett, Lapid and Gantz launched a re-examination of Israeli policy on US-Iran relations. Israel warned the US that Iran was on the verge of becoming a nuclear threshold state. An Iranian government spokesman accused Israel of damaging a centrifuge production plant. Israel accused Iran of attacking an oil tanker owned by an Israeli businessman near Iran and killing a Romanian and a British crew member, launching a campaign to generate unequivocal international condemnation of Iran, to hold an international inquiry into the incident and schedule a UN Security Council debate. Israel reportedly mounted several attacks on Iranian targets in Syria. Russia reported that its anti-aircraft system had intercepted most Israeli missiles fired at targets in Syria, thereby expressing its discontent with Israeli operations in the region.

- **Egypt continues Israel-Hamas mediation attempts** - Foreign Minister Lapid and his Egyptian counterpart Shoukri met in Brussels and discussed the Palestinian issue, Gaza and regional security. A delegation of Israeli security officials including National Security Council representative Raz and the coordinator of Israel's MIA and POW return Blum took part in talks with Egypt on a long-term ceasefire with Gaza. Lapid gave an interview to the Egyptian Sada el-Balad network. In response to public discourse in Egypt, Israel's Embassy in Cairo stressed that Israel maintains a neutral stand, avoids intervening in the Ethiopian Nile Dam issue, and is willing to place its technological expertise at the disposal of the sides to ease Egypt's water shortage.

## C. Israel and Europe

- **Improving diplomatic ties with the European Union** - Foreign Minister Lapid participated in a formal meeting of European foreign ministers in Brussels. In his speech to the group, Lapid emphasized his support for the two-state solution. He also met with the EU's foreign minister Borrell and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg. Lapid and Culture Minister Tropper agreed to advance Israel's membership in Creative Europe, the European arts and culture program that includes a geographical exclusion of the settlements. Former Bulgarian Foreign Minister Dimitar Tsanchev, who served as his country's ambassador in Israel, was appointed to replace Giaufret as the EU's ambassador to Israel. EU Ambassador Giaufret met with Regional Cooperation Minister Frej and with the chair of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Ben-Barak. The EU delegation in Israel supported the initiative of the Ashdod municipality to clear pollution from the beaches.
- **Bolstering bilateral ties with European states** - Foreign Minister Lapid met with German Foreign Minister Maas and preparations were made for a visit to Israel by Chancellor Merkel in August. President Herzog sent a condolence message to German President Steinmeier following the fatal floods in his country. Deputy Foreign Minister Roll met with the German ambassador and visiting German Bundestag members. Lapid spoke with his French counterpart Le Drian and met with him on his visit to Brussels, as well as with Czech Foreign Minister Kulhanek. Lapid spoke with Croatian Foreign Minister Grlic-Radman who accepted his invitation to visit Israel. Regional Cooperation Minister Frej met with Italian Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Sereni to discuss Europe's role in advancing Israeli-Palestinian cooperation.

## D. Israel and the Mediterranean

- **Positive signals from Turkey** - Turkish President Erdogan called to congratulate incoming President Herzog and conducted a lengthy conversation with him, inter alia regarding possible cooperation in advancing the Palestinian issue. Turkey appointed a culture attache to its embassy in Israel. The Turkish-Israeli Civil Society Forum launched a new initiative aimed at cultivating a network of young Turkish and Israeli leaders who will work to strengthen ties between the two countries.
- **Reassuring Greece** - Foreign Minister Dendias congratulated Foreign Minister Lapid on taking office, and subsequently visited Israel and met with him. Following his talk with Erdogan, Herzog conveyed a message to the President of Greece reassuring him that improved ties with Turkey would not come at the expense of relations with Greece.

- **Solidarity with Cyprus** - In light of Erdogan's unilateral declaration on the status of the northern Cypriot town of Varosha, Israel conveyed a clear message of support for the Cypriot position. Cypriot Foreign Minister Christodoulides visited Israel, met with Lapid who expressed Israel's support for Cyprus on the northern Cyprus issue, and thanked his hosts in Hebrew. At Cyprus's request, Israel sent firefighting planes to the island to help douse raging wildfires. Cypriot President Anastasiades congratulated incoming President Herzog.
- **Continued consolidation of regional gas forum** - Energy Minister Elharrar represented Israel at the fifth ministerial-level meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, during which the forum launched its official site. The ministers voted to accept the EU as a permanent observer in the forum.

## E. The Israeli Foreign Service

- **Changes in the Foreign Service, appointments and working conditions** - The Israeli government shut down the Ministry for Strategic Affairs and transferred its responsibilities and budget to the Foreign Ministry. The Nativ liaison office that operated out of the Prime Minister's Office was placed under the purview of Finance Minister Liberman. Dr. Eyal Hulata was appointed head of the National Security Council, replacing Ben-Shabbat. Roni Alon was named director general of the Regional Cooperation Ministry. Tziona Koenig-Yair was appointed director of the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs. The Foreign Ministry's senior appointments committee made 27 new appointments. In order to increase gender equality, the Ministry formed a special team to encourage women to apply for positions of heads of diplomatic missions abroad. Lapid named a political appointee, former Knesset member Hoffman, ambassador to Canada. The 37th Foreign Ministry cadet course got underway with 25 men and women participants. Knesset member Mara'ana was named a member of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, becoming the first Arab woman lawmaker named to the panel (male Arab lawmakers have served on the committee in the past). The Foreign Ministry decided that professional meetings would end at 3pm twice a week to encourage a balance between parenting and career advancement.
- **Expose about use of Israeli spyware challenges country's democratic image** - An international investigative expose revealing that various regimes used software developed by an Israeli company, NSO, to spy on politicians, journalists and dissidents around the world prompted criticism of Israel and of the attack spyware developer. The government formed a special team to handle the crisis. Defense Minister Gantz flew to Paris for talks with his counterpart Parly on the Lebanon crisis and the nuclear agreement with Iran. In light of reports that NSO software was used to eavesdrop on President Macron, Gantz assured his counterpart that NSO was not responsible for break-ins into the cell phones of French politicians. The US State Department downgraded Israel's ranking on the list of countries fighting human trafficking.
- **Campaign against anti-Semitism and racism** - Foreign Minister Lapid addressed the 7th Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism sponsored by the Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, writing an opinion piece in Israeli media arguing that anti-Semitism was a specific and radical form of racism and that Israel must therefore fight any kind of racism. The idea deviates from the popular Israeli narrative that portrays the Holocaust and anti-Semitism as categories of their own. Lapid blasted the new Polish

law on property restitution, warning that it would undermine relations with Poland. The leader of the Polish governing party Kaczyński attacked Lapid's statement. After President Rivlin sent a pro forma message to Belarus President Lukashenko on his country's Independence Day, despite the boycott by many countries of Belarus, Lukashenko included anti-Semitic comments in his speech. The Foreign Ministry summoned the acting Belarus ambassador to discuss the matter. Lapid thanked Canadian Foreign Minister Garnau with whom he met in Israel for adopting the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. The club of Arab FC Barcelona fans in Israel and Knesset member Shehadeh brought about the cancellation of a friendly preseason match between Beitar Jerusalem and the Catalan team citing the racist anti-Arab views of the Jerusalem club's fans.

- **Climate-based foreign policy** - The Israeli government decided to shift to a low-carbon economy and set milestones for government action to implement them. Environmental Protection Minister Zandberg spoke with Special US Climate Envoy Kerry and noted Israel's commitment to the international effort to deal with the climate crisis. A team of international scientists departed from Eilat to study Red Sea corals under Swiss sponsorship, which enables cooperation with other states bordering the sea such as Sudan and Saudi Arabia. The International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds approved damages for the oil spill pollution on Israel's coast in January 2021.
- **Israel's international integration** - The Foreign Ministry has begun examining Israel's possible return to UNESCO from which it withdrew in 2019. Israel joined the OECD resolution on minimum taxation of digital economy multinationals. Israel joined the African Union as an observer. Deputy Foreign Minister Roll represented Israel at the International Forum for the Advancement of LGBT Rights.
- **Corona diplomacy** - Israel provided South Korea with 700,000 vaccine doses in return for a future shipment of Pfizer vaccines that South Korea has ordered. Israel sent medical equipment and respirators to Nepal.
- **Expressions of solidarity** - Defense Minister Gantz noted that Israel was willing to help Lebanon and was encouraging other countries to help it overcome the crisis in which it is mired. The Foreign Ministry expressed solidarity with the Iraqi people on Arabic-language social networks over the heavy heat wave and power outages they are experiencing, and took the opportunity to attack Iran's intervention in Iraq. Israel expressed regret at the fire that broke out at a hospital south of Baghdad. The Tel Aviv Municipality building was lit up in the colors of the German flag in a show of solidarity with the disastrous floods that swept in the country.
- **Days of grace and caution in relations between the new government and the Democratic administration** - Israel delayed razing the home of a terrorist with American citizenship in response to a US request to avoid the move, but eventually went through with it. Prime Minister Bennett and Foreign Minister Lapid met with members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, with Bennett underlining his opposition to a return to the Iran nuclear deal and Lapid underscoring the importance for Israel of bipartisan American support.