



THE DIPLOMATIC REPORT: A MONTHLY REVIEW OF ISRAEL'S REGIONAL FOREIGN POLICIES

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ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Still no peace process

UN Special Coordinator Wennesland presented his quarterly report to the UN Security Council, describing violent incidents, expressing concern over further escalation, and calling on the sides to restore calm. Addressing his followers in Gaza, Dahlan declared that given Israeli attempts to bury the two-state solution, he was adopting the one-state solution. The Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel's political left and right sought to highlight the diplomatic nature of the meeting between Defense Minister Gantz and PA Chair Abu Mazen, but nevertheless Gantz himself, Foreign Minister Lapid and Prime Minister Bennett insisted the meeting dealt only with coordination.

Implementing a “conflict minimization” policy

Following reports of a planned meeting between Defense Minister Gantz and PA Chair Abu Mazen, Gantz hosted Abu Mazen at his home in Rosh Ha'ayin. The two agreed on several confidence building measures to support the PA's economy and stability, including the addition of 10,000 names to the Palestinian population registry, an advance of NIS 100 million in tax payments that Israel collects for the PA, more work permits, and Israeli quality standards certification for Palestinian factories. Present at the meeting were Coordinator of Government Activities Alian, the Palestinian official in charge of ties with Israel Hussein al-Sheikh, and Palestinian intelligence chief Majed Faraj. The Shin Bet director warned that the PA was in dire economic straits and called for action to bolster its standing, as did Regional Cooperation Minister Frej and IDF officers. Palestinian police safely extricated two Israelis who mistakenly entered Ramallah. Israel handed over two Palestinians to the PA who threw an IED at Palestinian security forces in Bethlehem and were caught in Israel.

Struggle over Jerusalem sovereignty

US Secretary of State Blinken urged Prime Minister Bennett to avoid unilateral tension-raising moves, including the Atarot construction plan. Despite Blinken's request, the regional planning committee convened to discuss the plan. Foreign Minister Lapid said the Israeli government would determine by itself its policy on the Atarot construction but will avoid turning the issue into a diplomatic clash with the Americans. The committee decided an environmental impact survey was required before the plan could be advanced. The Jerusalem municipality started advancing the construction of an additional neighborhood for Jews across the Green Line, “Givat Shaked”, adjacent to Beit Safafa. This is in addition to other plans being promoted by a Justice Ministry department for construction of Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. Arab diplomats paid a solidarity visit to Sheikh Jarrah and expressed opposition to the eviction of the Salem family. US State Department spokesperson Price stated US opposition to the eviction. The eviction, planned for the end of December, was reportedly delayed to the end of January for technical reasons. Discussions continued on the US intention to re-open its consulate in Jerusalem, with Bennett reiterating his opposition to the move. The PA condemned his stand. Ukraine's ambassador to Israel said he expects his country to open an embassy branch office in Jerusalem within the coming months. Church leaders in Jerusalem launched a harsh campaign against Israel, claiming it planned to uproot them from the city. The Foreign Ministry condemned the reports and highlighted Israeli actions to safeguard freedom of worship for all.



Egypt mediates between Israel and Gaza

The Egyptian Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza reported progress on a second phase that would include six major projects in the northern section of the Strip. An Egyptian engineering delegation visited Gaza to advance the projects. An Egyptian security delegation led by Al Khalek continued to mediate between Israel and Hamas on a host of issues; following meetings with Israeli security officials, it entered into another round of talks in the Strip. Attempts reportedly continued to arrange a prisoner exchange with Hamas. Israel completed construction of the barrier around the Gaza Strip.

Creeping annexation process

Public Security Minister Bar-Lev met with Deputy US Secretary of State Noland to discuss settler violence. The Palestinian Foreign Ministry praised Bar-Lev's recognition of the problem and called on Israel's center and left-wing parties to stand firm against the violence. The Electricity Authority is moving ahead with the formulation of principles for the operation of a gas-fired power station in the West Bank under Israeli license and in accordance with Israeli-applied standards. President Herzog said he would present US National Security Advisor Sullivan with a request by settlers to avoid evacuating the Homesh outpost. The government opposed a bill proposed by Knesset member Amsalem to apply Israeli law in Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria. The government transferred NIS 5.5 million to strengthen a first response station in Judea and Samaria.

ISRAEL AND SURROUNDING REGIONS

THE MIDDLE EAST

Strengthening ties with the UAE

Prime Minister Bennett paid an official visit to the UAE, the first such visit by an Israeli premier since the signing of the Abraham Accords. Bennett met with the Crown Prince, discussing the Iran issue, the deepening of Israeli-Emirati ties, and granting interviews to local media. The Israeli government ratified a tax treaty with the Emirates designed to avoid double taxation and tax fraud. Tel Aviv's City Hall was lit up with the colors of the UAE flag to honor the Gulf country's national day. The Emirati ambassador to Israel thanked well-wishers in Hebrew. The Emirati under-18 football team took part in an international winter tournament held in Netanya. Israeli swimmer Gorbenko won two gold medals at the World Swimming Championship in Abu Dhabi.

Israeli actors work to block UAE pipeline deal

Opposition to the deal between the UAE and the Trans-Israel Pipeline Company continued. Among the opponents were Knesset members, research institutes, environmental groups, Environmental Protection Minister Zandberg, Regional Cooperation Minister Frej, and Foreign Minister Lapid, who expressed his objection to the deal but said the issue required delicate handling to avoid undermining bilateral relations. The director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Gulf Affairs department Dvir said the potential diplomatic fallout from cancelling the deal was containable. Defense Minister Gantz argued for a freeze of the agreement pending thorough government examination. Responding to a Supreme Court petition, the state claimed there was no need to intervene in the agreement because the Environmental Protection Ministry would limit its implementation in accordance with its regulatory role of preventing ecological damage to the environment.

Expanding cooperation with Egypt

Foreign Minister Lapid paid an official visit to Cairo and met with President A-Sisi, Foreign Minister Shoukry and the head of Egyptian intelligence to discuss the Iran issue, Gaza and the Palestinians, and bilateral relations. In a symbolic goodwill gesture, Lapid handed back stolen archeological artifacts found in Israel. Egyptian media outlets devoted extensive coverage to Lapid's visit. Israel was reported to be cooperating with Egypt on advancing the construction of solar power stations on Egyptian soil. The Egyptian Waqf Minister announced that a Hebrew-language interpretation of the Koran would soon be published. The National Library in Jerusalem launched a digital archive of the veteran Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram.



Challenges in ties with Jordan

In light of growing security tensions in Jerusalem and renewed talk of deploying metal detectors at the entrance to the Temple Mount/Haram a-Sharif, Jordan conveyed messages warning of such a move. A stormy debate was held in the Jordanian parliament over a water and power deal between Israel, Jordan and the UAE, with opponents citing Jordan's commitment to the Palestinians. The chief Israeli negotiator of the peace treaty with Jordan Rubinstein eulogized former Jordanian PM A-Tarawneh.

Celebrating Bahrain's National Day

President Herzog spoke with Bahrain's monarch Hamad bin-Isa Al-Khalifa and congratulated him on his kingdom's national day. Foreign Minister Lapid also congratulated Bahrain, and Tel Aviv's City Hall was lit up with the colors of the Bahraini flag.

Opposition to a return to the Iran nuclear deal

Prime Minister Bennett took advantage of Secretary of State Blinken's request to halt Atarot construction plans in order to ask for an immediate cessation of negotiations and adoption of tougher measures against Iran. Foreign Minister Lapid spoke with Blinken about the same matter. The spokesperson for Iran's foreign minister responded and said the representatives in Vienna would not take orders from Israel. Similar opposition to lifting sanctions against Iran in return for an unsatisfactory agreement was expressed by Mossad Director Barnea, Justice Minister Saar and Ambassador to the UN Erdan. Defense Minister Gantz and Mossad Chief Barnea visited Washington in a bid to convince the Americans to maintain pressure on Iran. Ahead of the resumption of negotiations in Vienna, Lapid granted a series of interviews to global media outlets in an effort to mobilize support for Israel's position. Gantz attacked Iran's activities in the region. The IDF announced that the Israel Air Force would conduct a major exercise in six months simulating an attack in Iran. Lapid participated in a hearing of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee focused mostly on preventing Iran's nuclearization.

Strengthening ties with Morocco

An online event was held to mark the first anniversary of renewed Israel-Morocco relations, with the participation of Minister of Foreign Affairs Lapid, his Moroccan counterpart Bourita and Secretary of State Blinken. Lapid and Bourita addressed each other, Blinken congratulated the sides and Israeli Ambassador to the US Herzog met in Washington with Morocco's ambassador to the US, Princess Joumala. Given the increased spread of the coronavirus, Morocco's national airlines announced a delay in launching direct flights, originally scheduled for this month. Israel's Football Association (IFA) signed a cooperation agreement with the Royal Morocco Football Federation under the auspices of FIFA and the Confederation of African Football. The agreement was signed in Rabat by IFA President Hasson and his Moroccan counterpart Lekjaa (who also serves as the Delegate to the Minister of Economy and Finance, in charge of the budget), and in the presence of Israeli Ambassador to Morocco Govrin. King Mohammed VI sponsored a series of cultural and tourism projects to bolster Morocco's Jewish heritage. Miss Morocco Ben-Halima took part in the Miss Universe pageant held in Eilat, and gave interviews to Israeli media. Interior Minister Shaked hosted Moroccan Ambassador Beyyoudh in her office.

Ties with other Arab states

Secretary of State Blinken visited Indonesia and discussed prospects of advancing normalization with Israel. The IMPACT-se research institute that monitors the advancement of peace and cultural tolerance in schools praised Qatar for the changes it had made in its textbooks, removing anti-Semitic content, while noting that further improvements were needed. Israeli football coach Avram Grant participated in a Doha match between Arab Legends and FIFA World Legends. Several Arab players boycotted the event to protest Grant's participation. A private executive jet flew from Israel to Doha, with a short stop in Jordan. Another plane arrived in Israel from Jeddah, also after a stop in Jordan. A cargo jet on its way from Belgrade to a Saudi Air Force base overflew Israel.



Diplomatic activity against Hezbollah

Israeli Ambassador to the UN Erdan led a visit of UN ambassadors to Israel's northern border and Hezbollah tunnels. Foreign Minister Lapid thanked the Australian government for designating all branches of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

Continued attacks in Syria in coordination with Russia; bolstering Israeli sovereignty over the Golan

Israel continued its raids in Syria, attacking the port of Latakia twice and targets around Damascus and Homs. A planned visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov was postponed. Foreign Minister Lapid spoke with him by phone and the two agreed to meet as soon as possible. The Israeli cabinet held its weekly meeting on the Golan Heights and decided to bolster the settlements there. Syria's Foreign Ministry harshly condemned the move. Syria's Olympics Committee expelled football player al-Khatib for taking part in a friendly match in Doha with the participation of Israeli coach Grant.

EUROPE

Enhancing relations with the European Union

Israel joined the world's biggest research and development program, the EU's Horizon Europe. In keeping with other cooperation agreements between Israel and the EU, Horizon Europe does not apply to Israeli settlements. The EU included the Euro-Asian power line linking Europe to Israel through Cyprus in its list of energy projects.

Strengthening bilateral relations with European states

Prime Minister Bennett and members of his government congratulated their German counterparts on formation of their new government under Chancellor Schultz. The Israeli government ratified an agreement with Albania preventing double taxation and the head of the parliamentary Israel-Albania friendship group, Knesset member Salalha, met with the Albanian Ambassador to Israel. Foreign Minister Lapid spoke with his Albanian counterpart Xhaçka. Deputy Foreign Minister Rol discussed ways to bolster Israel's relations with European states with the director of the European Leadership Network (ELNET). The Foreign Ministry hosted a meeting of the Israel-Ukraine Joint Economic Committee.

Poland exerts pressure on scientists maintaining ties with Israel

The Polish Ministry of Science issued regulations requiring Polish researchers to request permission before reaching out to Israeli counterparts or to Israel's Embassy in Poland.

THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

Continued strengthening of alliance with Greece and Cyprus

Israel hosted the eighth summit meeting with the leaders of Greece and Cyprus and Prime Minister Bennett met with Cypriot President Anastasiadis and Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis in Jerusalem. The leaders announced cooperation on advancing regional stability, fighting terrorism and the coronavirus, energy projects, the climate crisis and emergency response. They underscored their desire to continue strengthening the cooperation between themselves, the UAE and the US. A research and science cooperation memorandum was signed at the summit between the Minister of Innovation, Science and Technology Farkash-Hacohen and her Cypriot counterpart Kokkinos. The US Congress approved additional aid for the Greek military that includes direct reference to advancing the partnership between Israel, Greece and Cyprus and the US (3+1).



Erdogan both criticizes and reaches out to Israel

Within the framework of the parliamentary union of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Erdogan highlighted his commitment to the Palestinian cause, attacked Israeli policies on Jerusalem, and expressed support for the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. In a newspaper interview, Erdogan also said that Turkey could restore relations with Israel as it had done with the UAE, stressed that each state needs to recognize the other's sensitivities, and that solutions can be found in this regard. Israel reportedly asked Turkey to shut down the Hamas office in Istanbul. Erdogan met with representatives of the Jewish community in Turkey and told them he was pleased with Turkey's renewed dialogue with President Herzog and Prime Minister Bennett and the deepening of economic and tourism ties, adding that he sees many opportunities to advance normalization between the two states.

ISRAEL'S FOREIGN SERVICE

Corona Diplomacy

Israel donated around one million Astra Zeneca vaccines to Africa through the WHO's Covax vaccine equity mechanism, against the backdrop of the African Union's decision to accept Israel as an observer state. Foreign Minister Lapid and Health Minister Horowitz stressed Israel's commitment to fighting the pandemic. Lapid took part in an international online conference convened by Secretary of State Blinken to discuss the handling of the Omicron variant, along with his counterparts from Japan, Germany, Austria, Mexico, India and others. Given the renewed spread of the pandemic, Israel briefly banned its citizens from traveling to a long list of "red" states. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs flew the top Maccabi Health Services coronavirus expert, Dr. Shahar, to Croatia to share the knowledge accrued in Israel on the coronavirus with a panel of experts. Health Minister Horowitz discussed greater cooperation on combating the coronavirus and medical innovation with Indian Ambassador Singla.

The normative aspect of foreign policy

Polish opposition leader Tusk called for the establishment of a parliamentary commission of inquiry on the use of Israeli Pegasus spyware against opposition activists. Uganda's ruler reportedly used the NSO company's spyware for surveillance of American diplomats. US lawmakers demanded that the Treasury impose sanctions on Israeli spyware companies. Israel started implementing a Supreme Court ruling to grant temporary residence status to 2,445 Sudanese asylum seekers who applied prior to June 2017. Israel pledged funding for a new mental health program for UN peacekeepers.

Modern and inclusive foreign policy

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was lit up in purple to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities and launched a photo exhibit of Israelis with disabilities. The MFA also inaugurated a project for leading Israeli social media influencers to enhance Israel's image around the world. Criticism was voiced at the lack of criteria and transparency in selecting recipients of the MFA's new "Light of Israel" award. The Ministry's legal department encouraged Israeli lawyers to sign up for summer classes at the Academy of International Law in The Hague. The MFA inaugurated a project empowering women staff members to serve as spokespeople. Ministry retirees criticized the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director General for failing to attend their annual conference.

Foreign Service appointments

Ron Prosor was named Ambassador to Germany. The Foreign Ministry's Appointments Committee announced the following ambassadorial appointments: Avi Nir to Norway, Reuven Azar to Romania, Idit Rosenzweig Abu to Brussels, Gali Dagan to Bogota, Tamar Ziv to Kosovo, Yaron Meir to Vietnam and Liron Zaslansky as consul to Dubai. The government also approved the appointment of Ben Burgel as non-resident ambassador to Chad and Yael German as non-resident ambassador to Monaco.



Foreign Service labor dispute

Citing the erosion of their rights, Foreign Service staff continued their demand for a new wage agreement, launching a social media campaign disparaging Foreign Minister Lapid and threatening to stop arranging VIP visits to Israel. The union representing these employees instructed them to stop handling requests after office hours. At the same time, the MFA launched a campaign to recruit new cadets for its 2022 class.

Ongoing dialogue with the US administration

The new US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides presented his credentials to President Herzog and was hosted at the home of Foreign Minister Lapid. Israel took part in an international meeting convened by President Biden to promote democracy around the world. Defense Minister Gantz met with his counterpart Austin and with Secretary of State Blinken in Washington to discuss the Iran issue and regional challenges. Prime Minister Bennett conveyed his condolences to victims of the Kentucky tornado. National Security Advisor Sullivan visited Israel and met with Prime Minister Bennett, Ministers Gantz and Lapid and his Israeli counterpart Hulata, with whom he led an additional meeting of the US-Israel Strategic Consultative Group.

NOTES

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