



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

ISSUE 55
NOVEMBER 2021

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in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

The International Community Discusses the Peace Process

Representatives of the Middle East Quartet met on the sidelines of the donor states' meeting in Oslo, welcomed the fiscal help measures Israel had announced for the Palestinian Authority (PA), and underscored the need to keep working for a two-state solution and avoid unilateral steps. Following a conversation between Chinese President Xi Jinping with President Herzog, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang called Deputy Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Amr, offering to help in advancing the peace process and expressed support for the two state solution. On the occasion of Palestinian Solidarity Day, Moroccan King Hassan VI informed the UN of his country's commitment to advancing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, its support for the Palestinians' demands and the two-state solution, and the advancement of internal Palestinian reconciliation. UAE Crown Prince Bin Zayed referred to the reasons that led to the Abraham Accords and underscored his country's commitment to the Palestinian issue and the Emirati aspiration for peace.

Criticism of Human Rights Violations in the Territories

Despite opposition and calls for the minister of defense to revoke his decision designating six Palestinian human rights groups operating in Jerusalem as terrorist organizations, the head of the Central Command Fuchs signed an order outlawing the organizations in the West Bank too. Foreign Minister Lapid and Defense Minister Gantz presented the conviction of a foreign citizen on charges of aiding the Popular Front in support of the decision to designate these groups as terrorist organizations. However, a military court subsequently conceded the two cases were unrelated. More than a hundred Hollywood celebrities signed a letter criticizing the labeling of the Palestinian groups as terror organizations. The cell phones of activists in these organizations were reportedly found to contain the Pegasus spyware program of the Israeli company NSO. The Palestinian Foreign Ministry also reported that the spyware was found in the phones of senior ministry officials tasked with Palestinian appeals to the International Court in The Hague. Foreign media reported that the IDF was conducting technological monitoring and supervision using facial recognition software for surveillance of Palestinians in the West Bank.

Economic and Civilian Relations with the PA

The donor states met in Norway with the participation of Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh and Finance Minister Bishara, Jordanian Foreign Minister a-Safadi, Qatari State Minister al-Mouriki, US envoy Amr and additional representatives. Israel was represented by Regional Cooperation Minister Frej. Prior to the conference, Defense Minister Gantz urged the US to pressure European and Arab states to increase their funding aid to the PA. The incoming head of the Shin Bet security agency Bar held his first meeting with Abu Mazen in Ramallah. The Israeli government decided to promote the employment of 500 Palestinian high-tech workers in Israel over the next three years. The coordinator of government activities in the territories Alian is advancing an official seal of approval by the Israel Standards Authority for Palestinian factories, with the first pilot of five plants to begin in December 2021.



Continued Struggle Over Sovereignty in Jerusalem

Prime Minister Bennett and Foreign Minister Lapid expressed their opposition to the re-opening of the US Consulate in East Jerusalem to serve the Palestinians, stressing Israel's sovereignty over Jerusalem. Senior Palestinian officials condemned their comments and expressed hope that the US administration would re-open the consulate. Interior Minister Shaked called on US Jewish organizations to publicly assail the Biden Administration's intention to re-open the consulate. The residents' committee of Sheikh Jarrah rejected the Supreme Court's compromise proposal on eviction of the Palestinian residents from their homes in the neighborhood. A Jewish-American company subsequently demanded the eviction of ten families from property over which it has claimed. Colombia opened an office of entrepreneurship and innovation agency in Jerusalem. Following a petition to block the construction of a neighborhood on Givat Hamatos, citing discrimination, the state announced for the first time that Palestinians from East Jerusalem would be eligible to participate in the lottery for subsidized housing. Religious Affairs Minister Kahana said in an interview that he supports allowing Jews to pray on the Temple Mount, prompting the Jordanian Foreign Ministry to condemn his statement.

Qatar and Egypt Advance Aid Blueprint for Gaza

An agreement has been reached between Qatar and Egypt for the latter to receive money from Qatar and in return allow fuel and construction material to be transferred to Hamas as a source of funding for the salaries of Hamas employees. Qatari mediator al-Amedi entered the Gaza Strip through the Erez Crossing to advance the mechanism. Israel and Egypt coordinated on the deployment of an Egyptian military presence in Rafah. Over 95,000 families in Gaza received a Qatari grant of \$100 each.

Creeping Annexation, Construction Promotion in the Territories

The Jerusalem municipality promoted the construction of 9,000 housing units in Atarot but the government informed the US that it would not move ahead with the Atarot construction plan. The plan was removed from the agenda of the district planning council, but restored a few days later. As an alternative to this construction plan, Regional Cooperation Minister Frej proposed restoring the abandoned Atarot airfield for joint use by Israel and the PA. Construction and Housing Minister Elkin declared his intention to promote the construction of 1,500 apartments in the Jordan Valley in the next few years, generating criticism by his coalition's left-wing members. The Housing Ministry launched marketing of 1,300 housing units in a new neighborhood of Ariel. The local Kiryat Arba council decided to build 372 additional housing units subject to the Defense Ministry's approval. President Herzog chose to light the first Hanukkah candle at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Palestinian leaders and clerics, as well as the Saudi, Kuwaiti and Qatari foreign ministries condemned Herzog's move. Ministers Lapid and Gantz met with US Ambassador to the UN Thomas-Greenfield, who conducted her first ever visit to Israel and expressed her concern over settler violence in the territories and continual construction in the settlements.

ISRAEL AND SURROUNDING REGIONS **THE MIDDLE EAST**

Enhancing Relations with the UAE

Israeli Ambassador Hayek presented his credentials to UAE leader Bin Rashid and officially took up his post. A first round of talks took place within the framework of Israel-UAE negotiations on a free trade agreement. Leaders of Israel's five religions took part in a conference on religious tolerance organized by the Foreign Ministry in the Israeli pavilion at the Dubai Expo. The Economy Ministry and UAE Embassy in Israel led a business conference in Israel with the participation of Emirati Foreign Trade Minister al-Zeyoudi, Minister for Entrepreneurship and Medium and Small Business al-Falasi and Israeli Minister for Regional Cooperation Frej, with Israeli and Emirati business people. Israel took part in the International Defense Expo in Dubai. Elbit opened up a division in the UAE to advance long-term cooperation. The Israeli Aircraft Industries signed an agreement with the Emirates Group to reconfigure passenger planes into cargo planes. The advisory-level Petroleum Council recommended that the Energy Ministry approve the transfer of ownership of the Tamar and Dalit gas fields from Delek Drilling to two subsidiaries of the Emirati Mubadala Petroleum Company. Ex-Defense Minister and IDF Chief Moshe Yaalon will reportedly head a UAE-based Israeli-owned venture capital fund.



Plans to Revoke Emirati Oil Deal with the Trans-Israel Pipeline

The director of the Ministry of Environmental Protection informed Trans-Israel Pipeline CEO that the ministry would withhold approval of expanded oil tanker activity in the Gulf of Eilat. Disapproval among government ministries over the economic deal of shipping oil from the UAE to Eilat was reflected in a special discussion convened by the director of the Prime Minister's Office. While the finance and foreign ministries approved maintaining the deal with the UAE, the Energy Ministry noted that the agreement does not strengthen Israel's energy security, and the Environmental Protection Ministry also expressed its opposition. Foreign Minister Lapid subsequently said that the deal might be scrapped, and Energy Minister Elharrar called to revoke it. Two large oil tanks arrived in Eilat in accordance with the agreement between the Israeli and Emirati companies.

Expanding Cooperation with Egypt

Members of the joint Israeli-Egyptian military committee met in Sharm al-Sheikh and agreed on enlargement of Egyptian forces in the Rafah region. In an interview with Israeli media, Egypt's director of intelligence Kamel said Egypt was working to include the issue of Israeli prisoners in talks on a ceasefire with Hamas. An additional security team led by National Security Advisor Hulata and Shin Bet Chief Bar met in Cairo with Kamel to discuss regional issues and the situation in Gaza, including a prisoner exchange deal. Energy Minister Elharrar and her Egyptian counterpart Moula signed a MoU on a possible increase of Israeli gas exports to Egypt.

Enhancing ties with Jordan

The chair of Israel's Islamic movement Abbas met in Amman with King Abdullah. The visit was conducted in coordination with Prime Minister Bennett, and in summing up, the King emphasized the importance of striving for peace with the Palestinians based on the two-state solution. Following political criticism in Israel of Abbas's alleged diplomatic dealings with Jordan, the Jordanians emphasized that the two did not conduct a diplomatic dialogue. Economy Minister Barbiwai met in Jordan with her counterpart al-Shamali and signed an agreement enabling Jordan to increase trade with the PA. Energy Minister Elharrar signed a MoU in Dubai with Jordanian Water Minister al-Najar in the presence of US climate envoy Kerry and Emirati climate envoy al-Jaber on advancing a joint Israeli-Jordanian-Emirati project for Jordan to supply Israel with solar energy in return for desalinated water, with Emirati funding. The signing prompted a public outcry in Jordan, with students demonstrating against the project. Furthermore, government representatives were downplaying its importance and presented it as an Emirati initiative. The Saudi government reportedly pressured the UAE to scrap the project, saying that it had not been informed about it in advance thereby undermining its standing. A senior IDF officer conducted a visit to Amman.

Advancing Relations with Bahrain

National Security Advisor Hulata participated in the Manama Security Dialogue and met with Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister of Bahrain, with Foreign Minister Al Zayani and with his Bahraini counterpart. An unusual meeting was documented at the conference between Israel's envoy to Bahrain Tagner and Indonesian Defense Minister Subianto. Israel's first ambassador to Bahrain Eitan Na'eh took up his post.

Enhancing Ties with Morocco

Defense Minister Gantz visited Morocco, met with his counterpart Loudiyi, other top defense officials and Foreign Minister Bourita, signing a MoU on security cooperation between the two states. Gantz was accompanied by Knesset members Wasserman-Lande and Margi, and military officers. Algerian President Tebboune and Parliament Speaker Goudjil condemned the visit and the agreement, as did the PLO and Hamas. Moroccan authorities prevented demonstration against normalization with Israel during the Gantz visit. Dr. David Govrin was confirmed as Israeli ambassador to Morocco. The Israeli government ratified the cooperation agreement with Morocco on culture, sports and youth, tasking Lapid with implementing it. Foreign Ministry Director General Ushpiz congratulated Morocco on its independence day. A Moroccan delegation visited Israel, with its leader condemning the terror attack that occurred during his visit to Jerusalem. Young Israeli judokas, both Arabs and Jews, participated in a training camp in Morocco with local clubs.



Opposition to Return to the Iranian Nuclear Deal

American special Iran envoy Malley arrived in Israel following meetings in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. He met with the ministers of defense and foreign affairs Gantz and Lapid, the Mossad director, the National Security Advisor, and others. PM Bennett avoided meeting him in order to signal his displeasure with the US position on the issue. Officials in the foreign and defense ministries argued that Bennett's decision was misguided. Many senior Israeli officials came out against a return to the agreement, warning the powers that Iran was playing for time in order to progress with its nuclear program. On the other hand, Transportation Minister and member of the Diplomacy-Security Cabinet Michaeli argued that the most important element in dealing with Iran's nuclear program was the discrete cooperation with the US. Israel reportedly passed on information to the US and the European powers in accordance to which Iran was preparing to enrich Uranium to a military grade of 90% degree. In his meeting with French President Macron, Lapid said a credible military threat must be presented to Iran for it to abandon the nuclear program.

Ties with Arab States Outside the Normalization Circle

Qatar's plan to establish a diamond trading center was enabled after Israel removed its objections to Qatar's designation as a diamond trading state, and the two states signed a secret agreement enabling Israeli diamond traders to operate in Qatar. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hussein gave an interview in Bahrain to an Israeli media outlet, prompting the foreign ministry to clarify that Iraq rejects normalization with Israel. Saudi judo fighter Nada defeated Israel's Ravid in the world's under 16 championship held in Dubai. Israeli Taekwondo fighter Zrihen who competes in a Portuguese club won a bronze at the open world championship in Saudi Arabia.

Contacts Over Maritime Border with Lebanon

US mediator to the Israel-Lebanon maritime border talks Hochstein conducted his first shuttle diplomacy mission between Lebanon and Israel. In Israel he met with Energy Minister Elharrar and other top officials, and stressed the limited time left to reach agreement before the March 2022 Lebanese elections. He also met with Palestinian officials in Ramallah. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution holding Israel responsible for the oil spill caused by an attack on storage tankers during the Second Lebanon War, and seeking compensation to Lebanon of some \$856 million. Lebanese journalist Maalouf, who is critical of Hezbollah and lives in exile, was interviewed by an Israeli media outlet.

Ties with Sudan in the Shadow of the Coup

A Mossad delegation reportedly visited Sudan and met with Sudanese top general al-Bourhan and with ousted Premier Hamdok. US Ambassador to the UN Thomas-Greenfield visited Israel and asked Defense Minister Gantz to intervene in the Sudan crisis. Businessman al-Bortoum who was appointed to a senior post in the new provisional council established by al-Burhan said the normalization process with Israel should be advanced.

EUROPE

Bolstering Relations with the European Union

Foreign Ministry Director General Ushpiz visited the EU institutions in Brussels and met with the secretary general of the EU foreign service Sannino and with other senior EU and NATO officials. The EU (in partnership with the Peres Institute for Peace) held the second of four meetings within the framework of a regional online initiative to address desertification challenges, with the participation of Israel, Jordan, Egypt, the PA, the UAE, Morocco, Germany and the EU. A delegation of young European leadership visited Israel at the initiative of the Foreign Ministry and the ELNET organization. Deputy Foreign Minister Rol hosted a European Parliament delegation.

Signs of thaw in relations with Poland

The Polish government conveyed messages suggesting it was interested in ending the crisis over the law limiting claims for World War II property restitution and in returning the two countries' ambassadors. The Foreign Ministry decided to send back the diplomat in charge of the Warsaw embassy Ben-Ari, but conditioned an end of the crisis on a Polish Parliament resolution adopting the IHRA principles for combatting anti-Semitism.



Belgium signals that Settlements are not Part of Israel

The government of Belgium decided that any agreement with Israel would include a territorial article excluding the West Bank and East Jerusalem and that the Belgian customs authorities would immediately start labeling settlement-made products. Deputy Foreign Minister Rol, on an official visit to Belgium at the time, cancelled his planned meetings at the Belgian Foreign Ministry and Parliament in response to the decision. The Foreign Ministry condemned the Belgian government decision. Knesset member Raz praised Belgium for its decision distinguishing between Israel and the settlements.

Strategic Partnership with the UK

On the eve of the nuclear talks with Iran in Vienna, Foreign Minister Lapid met in London with Prime Minister Johnson and with Foreign Secretary Truss. Lapid and Truss signed a strategic partnership agreement between the two states and published a joint article in the Israeli and British media warning that time was running out to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. President Herzog conducted an official visit to the UK, meeting with Prince Charles and PM Johnson. Lapid underscored the Foreign Ministry's contribution to the UK's decision designating the political arm of Hamas as a terror organization. Demonstrators protested against the participation of Israeli Ambassador Hotovsky at a student union event in London.

Restoring Relations with France Following NSO Affair

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met with French President Macron on the sidelines of the Glasgow Climate Conference and the two agreed to put the Cyber Spy Scandal behind them and turn to enhancing cooperation between the two countries. Following the meeting, France lifted its objections to meetings and contacts between senior officials of the two sides. Science Minister Farkash-Hacohen met with her French counterpart Vidal after their previously scheduled meeting was cancelled due to the crisis. Foreign Minister Lapid met with Macron as the nuclear talks with Iran began in Vienna. Heads of the Israel-France parliamentary friendship group, Knesset members Moati and Kalfon met with French Senate members visiting Israel. Lapid told a delegation of the French Jewish community that the presence of French National Assembly member Habib, who had attacked Bennett in the past, was unwelcome and he would not be received at the Foreign Ministry.

Mutual Ties with European Countries

Foreign Minister Lapid spoke with his Austrian counterpart Linhart and congratulated him on his new position. Lapid spoke with his Croatian counterpart Grlić-Radman and thanked him for the change in his country's voting pattern at international institutions and its support at the UN. Health Minister Horowitz met with his Austrian counterpart Muckstein and shared with him data from Israel's corona booster vaccination campaign. Deputy Foreign Minister Rol signed an agreement with Hungary's Education Minister on academic cooperation and Holocaust commemoration. The Foreign Ministry expressed its condolences to Bulgaria over an horrific bus accident.

Release of Israeli Couple Provides opportunity for Improved relations with Turkey

An Israeli husband and wife were arrested in Istanbul on suspicion of spying. The Foreign Ministry led the contacts with the Turkish government that resulted in the couple's speedy release. Contacts included a call by the head of the Mossad to his Turkish counterpart. President Herzog, Prime Minister Bennett and Foreign Minister Lapid thanked Turkish President Erdogan for his cooperation in the release of the Israeli couple. Erdogan subsequently said a return of the two countries' ambassadors was on the agenda. Within the framework of the economic summit of the Organization of Islamic Countries that convened in Istanbul, Erdogan called on the Muslim states to continue opposing Israeli construction in the settlements and defend Palestinian interests. After the government last month approved the protection order of the Haifa port's unique interests, the leading Emirati group's tender proposal was rejected and a Turkish-American group was given an opportunity to compete in the bidding.



THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

Continued Strengthening of Alliances with Cyprus and Greece

Cypriot Foreign Minister Christodoulides hosted Israeli National Security Advisor Hulata. Environmental Protection Minister Zandberg met on the sidelines of the Glasgow climate summit with Cypriot Agriculture Minister Kadis to discuss cooperation. Kadis invited Zandberg to participate in a Cypriot-led cooperation initiative on climate change in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin. A joint exercise was conducted in Israel by IDF cyber experts and their counterparts from the Cypriot and Greek militaries.

Multilateral Mediterranean Basin Cooperation

An international military drill aimed at improving the defense of natural gas reservoirs was conducted in Cypriot economic waters by Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Egypt, France, the US and UK. Energy Minister Elharrar represented Israel at a meeting of the regional gas forum in Cairo. The forum appointed Egyptian Undersecretary for petroleum and mineral Resources Mobarez as secretary general of the forum. Foreign ministers of the Union for the Mediterranean met in Barcelona on the occasion of the first Mediterranean Day celebration. Minister Frej was prevented from participating due to Coronavirus restrictions and Israel was represented by Israeli Embassy spokeswoman Hakim.

ISRAEL'S FOREIGN SERVICE

Climate-Based Foreign Policy

The Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee discussed the climate crisis as a diplomatic-security issue. The government decided to invest NIS15 million in establishing an international desert-tech center in Beersheba. The IDF decided to form a unit focusing on the impact of climate change on national security. The Foreign Ministry drew up a "green seal of approval" for its missions around the world and became the first government ministry to install solar panels on its roof.

Israel Adopts Damage Control in Fallout from Cyber Spyware Trade

The US Commerce Department blacklisted two Israeli companies, NSO and Candiru for engaging in activities contrary to US national interests. The State Department clarified that no steps would be taken against Israel following this decision. The NSO director appealed to the government for help in overturning the US decision. Apple filed a lawsuit against NSO, designating it a state-supported company, and informed clients infected with the Pegasus spyware. The Defense Ministry reduced the number of states to which Israeli cyber firms are permitted to sell technology – from 102 to 37. The updated list excludes Morocco, Mexico, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and will hamper the cyber tech firms in selling products to totalitarian regimes or those suspected of human rights violations.

Foreign Ministry Involvement in Diplomatic Strategic Issues

The Foreign Ministry hosted members of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee for a briefing on the ministry's work and Israel's standing in the international arena. Director General Ushpiz underlined the Ministry's capabilities in dealing with core challenges facing Israel, including the Iranian threat, enhancing the Abraham Accords and the Palestinian issue.

Foreign Service Appointments

The first training course in 26 years for Foreign Service administration cadets went underway with 11 participants chosen from over 1,000 candidates who applied. Foreign Minister Lapid congratulated Yael German on her appointment as Israeli Ambassador to France. Knesset member Dichter was elected to the International Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The government approved the ambassadorial appointments of Amir Maimon to Australia, David Govrin to Morocco, Edwin N. Yabo Glusman to Kazakhstan, Roi Rosenblit as non-resident ambassador to the Pacific States and Gadi Harpaz as Consul General to Chengdu, China.



21st Century Diplomacy

In light of a study pointing to widespread links between Israeli and California high-tech, Deputy Foreign Minister Rol has scheduled a joint investment conference for 2022. The Foreign Ministry issued a call for volunteers to join an initiative for spokespeople in the world media. At a special hearing of the Knesset's Women's Affairs Committee, headed by Knesset member Aida Touma-Suleiman, Foreign Minister Lapid announced that Israel would ask the Council of Europe to join the Istanbul Convention on Prevention of Violence against Women. Israel is expected to express reservations over an article in the convention obliging signatories to grant residency to stateless women who are victims of violence. The Foreign Ministry building was lit up in orange to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Corona Diplomacy

Israel provided Romania with oxygen concentrators to deal with Covid-19, sent a delegation of doctors, and hosted a Romanian medical team. Deputy Foreign Minister Rol participated in an international online meeting led by Secretary of State Blinken on coordinating the fight against the Coronavirus. Health Minister Horowitz met with Japan's Ambassador to Israel Mizushima to discuss the coronavirus crisis.

Enhancing Connections with Asia

Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar said Israel, the UAE, the US and India would continue contacts they have launched and meet in the coming weeks, probably in the UAE. Israel and India signed an agreement on the development of defense and security technology. President Herzog spoke with Chinese President Xi Jinping and raised with him the Iran nuclear issue. Indian Prime Minister Modi greeted Israelis in Hebrew for the Jewish holiday Hanukkah.

Dealing with the Civil War in Ethiopia

The Foreign Ministry discussed concerns that the civil war in Ethiopia would hamper the immigration of those waiting to leave for Israel. It was revealed that dozens of Ethiopians were brought to Israel in a clandestine operation by the previous government, although some did not have any connection to Judaism. Ethiopian Prime Minister Ahmed spoke with Prime Minister Bennett and complained that military officers who had taken part in a massacre had fled to Israel under the guise of the immigration operation. Israel promised to check and send back war criminals should any be found among this group. The Foreign Ministry started evacuating the families of Israeli diplomats in Ethiopia over concerns of an escalation in the civil war.

Maintaining Ties with the US

Israel's new ambassador to the US Herzog took up his post in Washington. A delegation of congressional Democrats visited Israel at the instigation of J Street and met with ministers Lapid, Michaeli, Bar-Lev, Frej and Zandberg. Prime Minister Bennett met with the Democrats but avoided inviting members of the liberal lobbying group to the meeting. Deputy Foreign Minister Rol met in Washington with lawmakers from both parties.

NOTES

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