

Ynet-News, June 10, 2020 – Wednesday

06.10.20 – We - - - News Placed in June 10 spot – Thursday

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Germany assumes EU presidency in July, meets Netanyahu & Gantz on annexation

06.10.20

German Foreign Minister meets Netanyahu, relays concerns over annexation

Netanyahu tells the visiting minister Israel must ensure its 'vital interests', such as maintaining 'full security control' over the West Bank and Jordan Valley according to a statement by the PM's Office

Reuters, Ynet| Updated: 06.10.20 , 21:58

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a brief visit to Israel Wednesday, one month before Berlin assumes the European Union presidency, a role which gives it great influence in guiding EU policy.

Netanyahu told the visiting minister that any realistic plan to end the Israeli Palestinian conflict, "must recognize the reality of Israeli settlement in the territory and not foster the

illusion of uprooting people from their homes”, according to a statement from Netanyahu’s office.

The statement made no direct mention of annexation. But it said Netanyahu spoke of ensuring Israel’s “vital interests”, such as maintaining “full security control” over the West Bank

Maas, speaking in a press conference in Jerusalem, expressed serious concern to Israel about its plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, but he stopped short of threatening sanctions.

Israel’s new unity government next month intends to begin discussing extending sovereignty to its settlements in territory that Palestinians claim for an envisaged independent state.

The plan has been criticized by Arab and European powers as likely to finish off long-moribund efforts to make peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel says annexation would be in keeping with a unilateral plan announced by U.S. President Donald Trump in January.

“I repeated here today the German position as well as our serious concerns as a special friend of Israel of the possible consequences of such a step,” Maas told reporters alongside his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi.

Maas also met with Defense Minister Benny Gantz who said Germany has a vital role in peace efforts in the Middle East and thanked the visiting dignitary for his involvement in his government's decision to outlaw the Lebanese based Hezbollah terror group

From Israel, the minister was to travel to Amman, Jordan.

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Jihad militants erected one tent in Bethlehem & fired shots in air to show presence

06.10.20

Islamic Jihad puts on show of force in West Bank

Fearing public criticism, a weakened Palestinian Authority refrains from shutting down public demonstrations by the terror group, allowing the Iranian-backed organization to put on memorials honoring its former leader

Elior Levy | Published: 06.10.20 , 21:27

The Islamic Jihad terror organization is increasing its visibility in the West Bank, so far unimpeded by the Palestinian Authority.

The PA has long been in conflict with both the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad despite reconciliation efforts including a 2017 agreement to end hostilities, signed with the mediation of Egypt.

The change in the group's behavior coincides with the PA's financial woes compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and its suspension of security cooperation in Israel due to Jerusalem's announced intention to annex parts of the West Bank. The recent death of a former Islamic Jihad leader, Ramadan Shalah last week, was the opportunity for members of the organization to make public statements and demonstrate a presence in their strongholds in Bethlehem and Jenin.

Palestinian sources told Ynet that in one mourner's tent erected in Bethlehem to honor the late leader, armed Islamic Jihad militants fired shots into the air in a ceremonial act to commemorate the dead and then quickly left the scene though no security forces appeared to be in pursuit.

On Wednesday, at the same mourner's tent, a public memorial ceremony included Islamic Jihad flags and speeches by the terror group members, a scene that would have been unimaginable weeks earlier with both Israeli forces and the Palestinian Authority blocking any attempt at a public show of force by the group.

On Monday, Jihad activists led a large car convoy through the village of N'ima near Ramallah waving flags and calling out slogans hailing the organization, using loudspeakers while swearing their allegiance to the groups' current leader Ziad Nahala.

A source blamed the lack of security cooperation with Israel on the PA's security forces' failure to react to the Jihad's demonstration, claiming if Israeli forces could have been called in, these public events would have been stopped.

The source explains that the PA could not afford to be seen breaking up the Islamic Jihad's events without public criticism.

06.10.20 – We - - -

PM plans annex of three West Bank settlements completed by the mapping teams

06.10.20

Report: PM plans immediate annexation of settlements blocs but not Jordan Valley

An official source claimed the move would be acceptable to both the Blue & White and to settler leaders concerned the Trump plan could lead to a Palestinian state  
i24 NEWS | Updated: 06.10.20 , 21:14

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will likely announce the annexation of three large settlement blocs located in the West Bank shortly after July 1 but set aside the Jordan Valley area for a later date, three senior Israeli government officials told The Times of Israel on Wednesday.

The three blocs of settlements include Maale Adumim, Gush Etzion, and Ariel, home to large settler populations, the Times reported.

But Foreign Minister, Gabi Ashkenazi, said on Wednesday that Jerusalem has not yet decided whether to extend Israel's laws to parts of the West Bank during a press conference with his German counterpart Heiko Maas.

During Israel's year-long political crisis, culminating in a unity government in March, Netanyahu repeatedly promised to extend Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank and the Jordan Valley.

But according to American and Israeli officials, there is still "a lot of work" that needs to be completed by the mapping teams, in charge of delineating borders across the region.

Netanyahu is reportedly confident that Israel can immediately annex the three large settlement blocs as they are "relatively well-defined areas" and require little if any additional planning.

Israeli officials say there is a wide consensus, domestically and in Washington which unveiled the Trump peace plan last January, around Jerusalem holding onto the three areas and that the move would not cause friction with Jordan.

But Amman has repeatedly warned that any annexation moves by Israel "would not go unanswered."

The same officials say the move would not be opposed by the Blue & White coalition partners or by leaders of the settlement movement that have come out against the Trump peace plan because it could leave open the possibility of an establishment of an independent Palestinians state in 70% of the West Bank.

But the defense minister warned Tuesday of possible "hostile reaction" from the international community if Israel were to advance on its plans for a one-sided move.

06.10.20 – We - - -

German EU should wait until Israeli annex July 1 before making any response

06.10.20

FM to German counterpart: Don't act on annexation before Israeli decision

Ashkenazi says plan 'will be implemented responsibly, while maintaining regional stability'; in first official trip outside Europe since onset of pandemic, Maas urges Jerusalem to avoid any unilateral moves, return to two-state solution

Associated Press, Gilad Cohen, Itamar Eichner | Updated: 06.10.20, 14:58

Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi on Wednesday told his German counterpart Heiko Maas that Berlin should wait until Israel takes concrete steps on annexing parts of the West Bank before making any response.

Maas made his first trip outside of Europe since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic to convey Europe's stiff opposition to Israeli plans to begin annexing parts of the West Bank on July 1, in line with the U.S. Middle East peace plan.

Ashkenazi said after the meeting that he "hopes that Germany will first wait for an Israeli decision before taking any steps against Israel, if at all."

He stressed that Germany is a friend of Israel, noting that "the plan will be implemented responsibly, while maintaining regional stability."

The annexation plan has come under harsh criticism from some of Israel's closest allies, including Germany, who say that unilaterally redrawing the regional map would destroy any lingering hopes for establishing a Palestinian state and reaching a two-state peace agreement.

"Many people in Israel - and also in the European Union - are preoccupied with the current developments in the Middle East peace process and the possible annexation plans," Maas said prior to his departure.

"Germany remains committed to the goal of a negotiated two-state solution. We will also talk about this and I will underline that we are ready to support all initiatives to revive talks between Israelis and Palestinians."

Germany, already a key European power broker, will be taking over the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union and assuming the presidency of the United Nations Security Council next month.

Maas was also scheduled to consult with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Benny Gantz.

Later in the day, he was to travel to neighboring Jordan to meet his counterpart there and hold a conference call with Palestinian leaders.

The Israeli media reported this week that the government scuppered Maas' plan to meet with the Palestinian leadership by warning that he would have to enter two-week quarantine upon his return to Israel from the West Bank.

The U.S. plan envisions leaving about one-third of the West Bank, which Israel captured in the 1967 Six-Day War, under permanent Israeli control, while granting the Palestinians expanded autonomy in the remainder of the territory.

The Palestinians, who seek all of the West Bank as part of an independent state, have rejected the plan, saying it overwhelmingly favors Israel.

In response, they have cut off key security ties with Israel and say they are no longer bound to agreements signed. The moves have raised concerns of a return to violence if annexation is carried out.

Gantz has urged the military to hasten preparations for what could be fierce Palestinian protests against the move.

The proposal also faces opposition in Israel, where many fear that annexation is a step that could lead to the creation of a single bi-national state with the Palestinians. Even some hard-line settlers oppose the plan, saying it doesn't go far enough.

But Netanyahu appears eager to press forth before the U.S. election in November, when Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee who has said he opposes annexation, could replace Trump.

Netanyahu has lauded Trump's nearly blanket support for his policies and hailed annexation as a historic opportunity to establish Israel's permanent borders, and retain control of strategic frontiers without having to evacuate a single settler.

Previous peace plans have all included calls for far greater Israeli concessions.  
First published: 14:05 , 06.10.20

06.10.20 – We - - -

Palestine militants have weapons to bridge internal disputes in West Bank

06.10.20

In rare cooperation, militant group helps Palestinians maintain order in West Bank  
Palestinian security forces work in concert with Tanzim after years of hostility;  
cooperation raises concerns PA may allow armed faction to act against Israeli security forces in future

Elior Levy | Published: 06.10.20 , 12:34

After the Palestinian Authority cut security ties with Israel due to the latter's intentions to apply sovereignty over parts of the West Bank, Ynet has learned that the Palestinian government started cooperating with the rival Tanzim militant group to maintain order in Palestinian localities that are under Israeli control.

This seems to bring a relative lull after long years of tensions between the armed offshoot of the ruling-Fatah party and Palestinian authorities. Tanzim militants and Palestinian security forces often used to clash as government soldiers tried to instill order in Tanzim-controlled areas, such as Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank.

Special emergency committees were set up in Palestinian towns, comprised of Tanzim activists, past and present security personnel, and local dignitaries sitting side by side. These committees are meant to bridge internal disputes and conflicts that may arise occasionally between civilians of the same town, or between residents of neighboring towns and villages. These disputes often end in severe violence between the parties and lead to casualties.

Prior to the cessation of security coordination, Israel allowed Palestinian armed forces to enter these areas as disputes spiraled into violence.

However, since security ties were severed, armed Palestinian security personnel are no longer allowed to move freely within Israeli-controlled territories. This led to a spike in the number of casualties in violent conflicts, since Palestinian police forces are no longer allowed to enter these areas and restore order.

Palestinian officials told Ynet that these emergency committees are not officially armed, but each town with Tanzim presence also has weapons that could be used if needed. The officials also said that this unusual cooperation between the Palestinian government and Tanzim could embolden the militant group's members to point their weapons at Israeli security forces in case tensions escalate due to a potential annexation of West Bank territories.

The Israeli security system is also aware of the emerging problem but has no ability to intervene for the time being.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said on Monday that If Israel annexes parts of the West Bank, the Palestinians will unilaterally declare a state based on pre-1967 borders.

Speaking at a foreign press conference in Ramallah on Tuesday, Shtayyeh said that if Israel moves ahead with annexation, which he called an "existential threat" to the Palestinians, it will be a serious violation of agreements with the PA.

06.10.20 – We - - -

United Arab Emirates will launch a mission to orbit Mars in July.

06.10.20

As ties warm, Israel hails UAE space launch bid

Foreign Ministry on Twitter expresses hope that attempt to launch first Arab space probe 'will contribute towards deeper cooperation between all countries in the region'

AFP| Published: 06.10.20 , 11:00

In another sign of warming ties between Israel and Gulf Arab nations, the Jewish state Tuesday congratulated the UAE on its bid to launch the first Arab space probe.

The United Arab Emirates announced last month that it would launch a mission to Mars in July.

The unmanned probe, named Hope, has been billed as "the first interplanetary exploration undertaken" by an Arab state.

"We wish the UAE the best of luck on the launch of this scientific mission, and hope this step will contribute towards deeper cooperation between all countries in the region," the Foreign Ministry's "Israel in the Gulf" Twitter account wrote in Arabic.

Except for Jordan and Egypt, Arab countries have no official relations with Israel.

But Arab states in the Gulf like the UAE have been warming ties with Israel recently amid shared concerns over Iran.

The UAE made its first publicly announced flight to Israel last month when its Etihad Airways sent medical aid for Palestinians to combat the coronavirus pandemic, and on Tuesday a second plane landed at Ben Gurion Airport.

Unlike the first flight last month, the Dreamliner 787 used Tuesday carried the Etihad logo and the United Arab Emirates flag.

Arab countries have called for a settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a condition for normalizing ties with the Jewish state.

But Gulf Arab states have shown signs of a rapprochement with Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Oman in 2018, and Israeli athletes and officials have been increasingly allowed to visit the Gulf states.

UAE's WAM said the Hope probe would be launched on July 15 from Japan's Tanegashima Space Center.

It is set to make a 495-million-kilometer (307-million-mile) journey to reach and orbit Mars.

Last September, Hazza al-Mansouri made history as the first Emirati in space.

06.10.20 – We - - -

PA officers transferred large number of documents from West Bank ahead of violence

06.10.20

Report: Palestinian forces hide sensitive documents ahead of possible violence

PA intelligence officers given order to transfer physical files, last done ahead of Second Intifada, amid fears of conflict following Israeli intention to extend sovereignty over W.Bank lands

i24NEWS| Published: 06.10.20 , 09:15

Palestinian intelligence offices in at least two West Bank cities have been ordered to hide sensitive documents in preparation for possible violence, Channel 12 reported Tuesday.

According to the report, a large number of physical files have been transferred to unspecified locations as Ramallah anticipates an uptick in tensions if Israel goes ahead with its intentions to apply sovereignty over areas within the West Bank.

Previously, such preparations were only made in the run-up to the Second Intifada - a violent uprising that lasted from 2000 until 2005 which saw scores of terror attacks on Israelis and IDF forces.

The report comes as the July 1 deadline for a vote on the move, as outlined in U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan, nears. The plan includes Israel keeping its settlements in the West Bank and the Palestinians establishing a state under stringent conditions.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has set the date to begin advancing his plan to extend sovereignty over Israel's settlements and the Jordan Valley, hoping for a green light from Washington.



The Palestinians have rejected the proposal and voiced outrage against Israel's proposed annexation.

Warning of possible violence and diplomatic repercussions, some European and Arab states, together with the United Nations, have urged Israel not to annex its settlements, regarded by many countries as illegal.

Israel's neighboring Jordan has also been increasingly vocal in its opposition to annexation, warning that the move could jeopardize the peace treaty between the two countries.

06.10.20 – We - - -

UN prioritizing monitoring capabilities for its Lebanese border breach patrols

06.10.20

UN chief calls for a more mobile, reconnaissance-oriented UNIFIL

Secretary General Guterres urges prioritizing monitoring capabilities, maneuverability over high-density deployment for its Lebanese border peacekeeping mission  
i24NEWS,AFP| Published: 06.10.20 , 09:59

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said the international organization's peacekeeping mission to Lebanon must be "more agile and mobile," according to a report on Tuesday.

"Standard armored personnel carriers are not entirely suitable for crowded areas, narrow streets and mountainous terrain," Guterres said, adding that "high-mobility light tactical vehicles and reconnaissance vehicles with improved monitoring capacity" could be a better alternative.

He also called to purchase more technologies that would bolster the mission's monitoring capabilities, including thermographic cameras, advanced binoculars, and drones. Guterres also called for the construction of additional observation posts across southern Lebanon. Such measures would be better suited for the environment, he pointed out, as it "would result in a force sufficiently protected but with a lighter footprint, geared towards better situational awareness."

Currently, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is following a so-called "saturation model," prioritizing high-density deployment of troops.

UNIFIL has up to 10,000 troops deployed in the area at any given time, mainly comprised of reserves from militaries across the world. They are tasked with helping the Lebanese military secure the border and ensuring the peace with neighboring Israel.

The UN established UNIFIL in 1978, but their role expanded in the aftermath of the Second Lebanon War in 2006 after they were tasked with upholding the ceasefire agreement signed by both parties at the end of the campaign.

Israel and the United States have criticized UNIFIL in the past, as the border between Lebanon and Israel has frequently been breached despite UNIFIL patrols.

Most recently on June 2, Israel faced off with the Lebanese army after Lebanese soldiers approached Israeli troops operating near the border.

Back in May, the Iranian-backed terror group Hezbollah, which holds a sizeable representation in Lebanese Parliament, refused U.S. calls to extend UNIFIL's mandate in the area and allow its troops to conduct searches in private properties.