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Israeli delegates' plane will fly over Saudi Arabia to UAE, source says

This would be the first publicly acknowledged entry of Saudi airspace by an official Israeli plane, which will carry officials from Washington and Jerusalem to Abu Dhabi for the first stage of the normalization talks

Agencies| Updated: 08.30.20 , 19:47

An airliner carrying Israeli and U.S. delegations to the UAE on Monday will fly over Saudi Arabia, according to a source familiar with the itinerary, in what would be the first publicly acknowledged entry of an Israeli plane into Saudi air space.

El Al flight LY971, a number that includes the UAE international dialing code, will depart from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi on Monday. Flight LY972, which includes the Israeli international dialing code, will make the return journey on Tuesday.

The plane will bring aides to U.S. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu - along with traveling journalists - to Abu Dhabi for talks meant to put final touches on a pact establishing open relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

Asked if the plane would fly over Saudi Arabia in order to manage its planned three hour and 20 minute flight time, the source, who declined to be identified by name or nationality pending an official announcement of the route, said: "Yes." The four countries and El Al have declined to comment on the route.

The U.S.-brokered deal between the UAE and Israel has raised speculation that other U.S.-backed Gulf Arab countries might follow. A senior member of the Saudi royal family said this month that Riyadh would only normalize ties with Israel after the creation of a Palestinian state.

In 2018, Netanyahu made a surprise visit to Oman on a tight schedule that suggested his plane would have had to fly over Saudi Arabia. He and his aides refused to provide any details on that route.

White House adviser Jared Kushner on Sunday trumpeted the agreement by Israel and the United Arab Emirates as a historic breakthrough and said "the stage is now set" for other Arab states to follow suit, but he gave no indication that any new deals were imminent. Kushner appeared alongside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the U.S. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien a day before he is to join a senior Israeli delegation on the flight to Abu Dhabi.

"Today obviously we celebrate a historic breakthrough for peace," Kushner said, adding that the deal will create "previously unthinkable" economic, security and religious cooperation.

"While this peace agreement was thought by many to be impossible, the stage is now set for even more," he said, claiming he has heard optimism throughout the region since the deal was announced.

"We must seize that optimism and we must continue to push to make this region achieve the potential that it truly has," said Kushner, President Donald Trump's son-in-law and chief Mideast adviser.

08.30.20

UAE Crown Prince Zayed is expected to sign the accord in the coming weeks

08.30.20

Palestinians no longer have veto on peace, Netanyahu warns

'If we have to wait for the Palestinians, we'd have to wait forever,' prime minister says at joint Jerusalem press conference with U.S. officials Jared Kushner and Robert O'Brien, a day before first ever direct flight from Israel to UAE

Ynet, i24NEWS | Published: 08.30.20 , 16:43

The Palestinians no longer have veto power over peace efforts between Israel and the Arab world, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Sunday at a joint press conference in Jerusalem with White House aide Jared Kushner and U.S. National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien.

"I think for too long the Palestinians have had a veto on peace, not only between Israel and the Palestinians but between Israel and the Arab world," the prime minister said.

"If we had to wait for the Palestinians, we'd have to wait forever [but] no longer," he said.

"The day will come, and it won't be far away, when we will ask: how could it have been any other way?" Netanyahu said.

"Because today's breakthroughs will become tomorrow's norms. It will pave the way for other countries to normalize their ties with Israel."

Kushner and O'Brien will on Monday be passengers on the first direct commercial flight between Israel and the UAE, which comes just weeks after the two countries announced an agreement for normalized ties.

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Netanyahu on Sunday also heaped effusive praise on U.S. President Donald Trump for his Middle East peace efforts, calling the administration's so-called "deal of the century" the first realistic plan for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

The prime minister said he was willing to negotiate peace on the basis of the Trump plan, adding that "as more Arab and Muslim countries join the circle of peace," the

Palestinians would be "hard pressed to remain outside the community of peace."

Kushner, who later met with President Reuven Rivlin praised United Arab Emirates Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed as a "courageous visionary," saying his decision to normalize ties with Israel will be "an inspiration for the Middle East."

"We worked to defy the odds and achieve something few thought was possible," Kushner said, referring to the breakthrough accord expected to be signed in the coming weeks.

Ripping into the Obama administration's Middle East legacy, he said that the Trump plan showed the world that "Israel is ready to make peace" -- as regional players take note.

Preceding Kushner's address, O'Brien mentioned Iran's "unprecedented" economic crisis due to sanctions imposed by Washington.

"It means it [Tehran] doesn't have a budget to fund its proxy forces," he said, referring to Iran-backed militia groups in Iraq and Syria and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

08.30.20

Hamas prepared for military campaign, insists on Israel lifting all siege forms

08.30.20

Report: Israel, Hamas reach breakthrough amid Gaza tensions

Al Ayyam newspaper reports that Israel is willing to allow fuel into the coastal enclave and transfer \$30 million in financial aid from Qatar if the terror group agrees to halt the incendiary balloon attacks, which cause dozens of fires daily

Eyal Arvid, Matan Tzurij Published: 08.30.20 , 16:01

Palestinian newspaper Al Ayyam reported on Sunday that progress has been made in talks between Israel and Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip in an effort to deescalate the increasing cross-border tensions.

According to sources familiar with the matter, the sides have reached a breakthrough in negotiations after Israel agreed to some of the Palestinian factions' demands, but the talks - mediated by Qatari envoy Muhammad al-Amadi - are still ongoing.

The Palestinian factions, which said on Saturday they are prepared for a long military campaign against Israel, continue to insist on fully lifting Israel's blockade over the coastal enclave as a condition for calm.

According to the report, Israel confirmed its willingness to transfer fuel and \$30 million in financial aid from Qatar as a condition for halting the launches of incendiary balloons into Israeli territory, which start dozens of fires on a daily basis. Israel will also expand Gaza's fishing zone and facilitate the transfer of medical equipment to combat coronavirus.

Meanwhile, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh published a press release Saturday night thanking the Egyptian and Qatari mediators for their efforts in contacts with Israel.

"We're watching closely over the situation in the Strip and the work that the mediators do to lift the blockade," he said. "The leader of the [Hamas] movement in Gaza and the administration are holding talks and continuing their efforts with the aim of fulfilling the will of our people and lifting the siege, especially with the arrival of coronavirus in the Strip."

"The main problem is Israel's stubbornness and refusal to comply with the justified demands of our people. Our decision is to continue down our path until the siege has been lifted in all its forms."

In the meantime, Israeli tanks hit Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, the army said, as Palestinian balloon attacks across the border continued despite international truce efforts.

An early-morning military statement said 25 fires had been started by explosive devices attached to clusters of balloons, launched from Gaza into southern Israel on Saturday.

"In response to the ongoing events, a short while ago... tanks struck military posts belonging to the Hamas terror organization in the southern Gaza Strip," the IDF statement said. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

08.30.20

Israel and UAE officials decided only civil issues will be discussed on Monday

08.30.20

Netanyahu orders all security establishments off UAE flight

PMO says Israel and UAE officials decided only 'civil' issues will be discussed during Israeli delegation's trip to Abu Dhabi on Monday, with defense matters set to be detailed at a later date; among issues on the agenda is the sale of F-35 jets

Itamar Eichner | Published: 08.30.20 , 11:44

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday decided not to include Israel's security establishment in the Israeli team set to travel to the United Arab Emirates to discuss the details of the historic peace deal announced two weeks ago.

Top U.S. President Donald Trump adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner and the other U.S. delegates arrived in Israel on Sunday morning to prepare for the UAE mission. The U.S. delegation will accompany Israeli officials on the trip.

Prime Minister's Office said the delegation, which is set to travel to Abu Dhabi on Monday, will discuss only "civil issues", with matters concerning security set to be detailed at a later date.

The office said the decision was made following talks with UAE officials and full coordination with Defense Minister Benny Gantz.

High-profile Defense Ministry representatives, including the ministry's director general, as well as the heads of the Shin Bet and Mossad intelligence agencies were set to travel to Abu Dhabi as part of the Israeli delegation.

Among the issues which were set to be discussed during the meeting on Monday is the sale of advanced U.S. F-35 warplanes to the Emiratis, which some experts say would undermine Israel's military superiority in the region.

The potential sale is said to be a secret clause in the UAE-Israel agreement, brokered by the Americans. Although all sides denied having a secret clause, Trump recently told reporters at a White House news conference the Emiratis had expressed interest in buying "quite a few" of the stealth fighter jets.

He said such a sale was "under review" given the new dynamic between Israel and the UAE since the two nations agreed to normalize relations.

08.30.20

Egyptian delegates broker Gaza blockade to end Hamas explosive balloons

08.30.20

Israeli tanks hit Hamas targets amid continued balloon attacks

The army says the attacks were in response to 25 fires started by incendiary balloons sent into Israel by Gaza militants; over 400 fires broke out in southern Israel since Hamas renewed the practice a few weeks ago

AFP, Ynet | Published: 08.30.20 , 08:51

Israeli tanks hit Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, the army said, as Palestinian balloon attacks across the border continued despite international truce efforts.

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"In response to the ongoing events, a short while ago... tanks struck military posts belonging to the Hamas terror organization in the southern Gaza Strip," the IDF statement said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Israel has bombed Gaza almost daily since August 6, in response to the airborne incendiary devices launched across the border. On Friday, however, the army refrained from attacking the Hamas-controlled enclave despite dozens of fires, which broke out in southern Israel as a result of incendiary balloons.

Advertisement

The fire bombs - crude devices fitted to balloons, inflated condoms or plastic bags - have triggered more than 400 blazes in southern Israel, according to the fire services, since the terror group renewed the practice a few weeks ago.

An Egyptian delegation has been shuttling between the two sides to try to broker a renewal of an informal truce under which Israel committed to ease its 13-year-old blockade of Gaza in return for calm on the border.

It was joined this week by Qatar's Gaza envoy Mohammed el-Emadi who delivered the latest tranche of \$30 million in aid to the territory on Tuesday before holding talks with Israeli officials in Tel Aviv.

Sources close to the Qatari delegation said the Israelis had told Emadi they were willing to end a punitive ban on fuel deliveries for Gaza's power plant and ease their blockade if there was an end to the fire balloons.

Financial aid for the impoverished territory from gas-rich Qatar had been a major component of the truce, first agreed in November 2018 and renewed several times since.

But Israel had also said it would take other measures to alleviate unemployment of more than 50 percent in the territory of some two million people.

Disagreements over their implementation have fuelled repeated flare-ups on the border.

These escalated into major conflicts in 2008, 2012 and 2014, and mediators have been striving to prevent a new war.

08.30.20

Lebanon envoy to Germany has French, Sunni, Iran Shi'ite & Christian support for PM

08.30.20

Lebanese ambassador Adib emerges as front-runner to be PM

If designation goes without last-minute complications, country's envoy to Germany will be nominated before visit by French President Macron on Monday, who is leading efforts to press Lebanese leaders to reform

Reuters| Published: 08.30.20 , 20:43

Lebanon's ambassador to Germany Mustapha Adib looks set to be designated prime minister at formal consultations on Monday after winning political backing from the main Sunni Muslim party, the Future Movement.

Lebanon's prime minister must be a Sunni according to the country's sectarian system. The government led by Hassan Diab quit earlier this month following the catastrophic explosion at Beirut port that killed some 190 people.

Lebanon is grappling with a financial meltdown that has devastated the economy and is seen as the biggest threat to its stability since the 1975-90 civil war.

If the designation goes ahead without last-minute complications, Adib will be nominated before a visit to Beirut on Monday by French President Emmanuel Macron, who is leading efforts to press Lebanese leaders to reform.

The Future Movement, led by former premier Saad al-Hariri, announced its support for Adib after a meeting of its parliamentary bloc on Sunday.

The Iran-backed Shi'ite party Hezbollah and its Shi'ite ally the Amal Movement will also nominate Adib in the consultations, a senior Shi'ite source told Reuters.

Also Lebanon's largest Christian bloc, the Free Patriotic Movement, also announced their support for the nomination of Adib for the premiership.

President Michel Aoun, a Maronite Christian allied with Hezbollah, is required to designate the candidate with the greatest level of support among MPs at Monday's consultations.

Once designated, the process of forming a new government will get underway. Until a new administration is agreed, the Diab government continues in a caretaker capacity.

08.24.20

Arab Gas Pipeline explosion northwest of Damascus leads to blackout in Syria

08.24.20

Explosion at gas pipeline leads to blackout in Syria, says energy minister

TV channel shows footage of a large fire following the explosion which occurred northwest of the capital of Damascus; minister says possible terror attack

Reuters| Updated: 08.24.20 , 09:15

An explosion on the Arab Gas Pipeline has caused a power blackout in Syria and initial indications point to an attack, the energy minister told state-run television on Monday.

The Ikhbariya TV channel showed footage of a large fire following the explosion, which officials told state media occurred between the Syrian towns of Ad Dumayr and Adra, northwest of the capital of Damascus.

“Initial indications are this was a terrorist attack,” Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Ali Ghanem told Ikhbariya, adding that the pipeline feeds power stations in the south. He said technical teams were already on the ground.

The electricity minister was later quoted by state news agency SANA as saying that power had gradually started being restored to the country’s provinces.

In 2013, much of Syria was hit by a power cut after rebel shelling hit a gas pipeline during the country’s civil war. The Arab Gas Pipeline system extends from Egypt into Jordan and Syria.

First published: 09:08 , 08.24.20

08.30.20

Extremists try to enter German parliament waving the flag of the Reich

08.30.20

German leaders condemn far-right attempt to storm Reichstag

Hundreds of people breached a security barrier outside the Reichstag Saturday but intercepted by police and forcibly removed some arrested in protest of government imposed coronavirus restrictions

Associated Press| Published: 08.30.20 , 22:58

Senior German officials on Sunday condemned attempts by far-right protesters and others to storm the parliament building following a protest against the country’s pandemic restrictions.

Hundreds of people, some waving the flag of the German Reich of 1871-1918 and other far-right banners, breached a security barrier outside the Reichstag late Saturday but were intercepted by police and forcibly removed.

“Reich flags and right-wing extremist provocations in front of the German Bundestag are an unbearable attack on the heart of our democracy,” Germany’s president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said Sunday. “We will never accept this.”

Steinmeier said people had the right to express their anger about the coronavirus restrictions and to question them publicly, including with demonstrations. “My sympathy ends where protesters allow themselves to be used by enemies of democracy and political agitators,” he added. Police used pepper spray to drive back the protesters, who earlier in the day had participated in a large rally through the capital.

About 300 people were arrested in front of the Reichstag and following an incident at the Russian embassy, according to police.

Berlin’s top security official, Andreas Geisel, praised three officers who had stood alone against the protesters outside the Reichstag until reinforcements arrived. Opposition parties criticized the police’s failure to station sufficient officers around Parliament despite public warnings from far-right extremists that they planned to try to enter the building.

Robert Habeck, the co-leader of Germany’s Green party, called for a thorough investigation into the incident.

“The fact that Nazis with imperial war flags try to storm the Bundestag recalls the darkest period in German history,” he told the Funke media group.

“An incident like on Saturday evening must not be allowed to happen again,” Habeck said. “I expect (federal) Interior Minister Horst Seehofer to decisively combat right-wing extremism at all levels.”

The head of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s center-right party, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, expressed anger at the incident. “That the Reich flag should fly again at the German Bundestag is intolerable,” she said.

The co-leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany party, Alice Weidel, described the protesters who tried to storm the building as “a few vandals” whose behavior was unacceptable. Members of her party had taken part in the rally against the pandemic restrictions earlier in the day.

Germany’s Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who is seeking to succeed Merkel in next year’s election, said he was confident security forces would closely analyze what had happened Saturday and ensure it couldn’t occur again.

But he insisted that the incident shouldn’t distract from the fact that “the overwhelming, very big majority of citizens in this country are clever and sensible, and they agree with all of the decisions that we took to protect people’s health and for the benefit of the economy and social cohesion.”

Opinion polls show only one in 10 Germans reject the country's current prevention measures, such as the requirement to wear masks on public transport, in stores and in some public buildings such as libraries and schools.

Police on Sunday ordered an anti-mask gathering of about 2,000 people at the Victory Column to disband, saying people weren't respecting distancing rules. Several people were detained.