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09.12.20

Bahrain & UAE say Israel deal helps Palestinians; other Arabs are choosing sides

09.12.20

Bahrain says Israel deal helps Palestinians; PA recalls Manama envoy

Bahraini FM says 'agreement is best way to ensure rights of Palestinians' but Ramallah slams move as 'betrayal of Jerusalem and of the Palestinian issue'; Egypt's Sisi praises announcement as 'important step' to reaching 'just and permanent settlement' of Palestinian issue'

Daniel Salami, Ilana Ushomirsky, News Agencies | Published: 09.12.20 , 00:24

Shortly after announcing an agreement for normalized ties with Israel, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa on Friday evening stressed the importance of reaching a comprehensive peace agreement with the Palestinians.

It was a message repeated by Bahrain's foreign minister and advisor to the king, Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa.

"The agreement is the best way to ensure the rights of the Palestinians," Al Khalifa said. "The agreement conveys a message to the people of Israel that comprehensive peace with the Palestinians is the best way and a real interest for their future."

The Palestinian Authority, however took a different view of the announcement, issuing a statement slamming the decision by Bahrain.

The agreement is a setback for Palestinian leaders, who have urged Arab nations to withhold recognition until they have secured an independent state.

The principle of normalized ties with the Arab world in return for full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War is a mainstay of the 2002 Saudi-led Mideast peace initiative, which was again endorsed at the Arab League meeting in Cairo this week.

"We condemn the statement and see it as a betrayal of Jerusalem and of the Palestinian issue," the PA said in a statement, echoing language it used to condemn a similar agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates last month.

"The Palestinian Authority sees the move as a very dangerous one, as it thwarts the Arab peace initiative and contradicts international legitimacy. The PA calls on Bahrain to withdraw from its declaration, and emphasizes it is unwilling for any Arab country to act on its behalf."

Bahrain will sign a declaration with Israel along with the UAE in a ceremony at the White House on September 15.

Like the UAE agreement, the Bahrain-Israel deal will normalize diplomatic, commercial, security and other relations between the two countries.

Bahrain, along with Saudi Arabia, had already dropped a prohibition on Israeli flights using its airspace. Saudi acquiescence to the agreements has been considered key to the deals.

The PA also said Friday night it has recalled its ambassador to Bahrain for consultations. The Palestinians have seen a steady erosion in once-unified Arab support -- one of the few cards they still held as leverage against Israel -- since Trump began pursuing an unabashedly pro-Israel agenda.

"This is another stab in the back of the Palestinian cause, the Palestinian people and their rights," said Wasel Abu Yousef, a senior Palestinian official.

"It is a betrayal of Jerusalem and the Palestinians... We see absolutely no justification for this free normalization with Israel," he said.

The Hamas terror group, which has long been a rival faction to the Fatah movement that dominates the PA, also expressed dissatisfaction with Bahrain's announcement.

"The normalization agreement means that Bahrain is becoming a partner in the 'deal of the century', which constitutes an attack on the Palestinian people," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said, referring to U.S. President Donald Trump's Mideast peace plan unveiled in January.

A senior official in the Islamic Jihad terrorist organization blasted Bahrain's rulers for "following American orders."

The announcement, made jointly by the Bahraini king, Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, drew a mixed response from other Middle Eastern states. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, whose country was the first Arab state to sign a peace agreement with Israel in 1979, said Friday night he appreciates the "important step" of Israel and Bahrain establishing diplomatic relations.

The agreement would help establish "stability and peace in the Middle East, in a way that achieves a just and permanent settlement of the Palestinian issue," Sisi said on Twitter.

The United Arab Emirates also welcomed the decision, saying it hoped the step would have a positive effect on the climate for peace and cooperation in the region and around the world.

"The move represents a significant step towards an era of security and prosperity ... [and] would expand the scope of economic, cultural, scientific, and diplomatic avenues of cooperation," the UAE foreign ministry said in a statement.

But the foreign minister of Jordan, which signed its own peace agreement with Israel in 1994, said in a statement Friday, that the necessary steps to achieve a fair and comprehensive peace in the region should now come from Israel.

Ayman Safadi said that after the announcement of normalized ties between Israel and Bahrain, Israel should stop all its procedures to undermine the two-state solution, and end the illegal occupation of the Palestinian lands.

The announcement was also greeted coolly in Tehran, with Hossein Amirabdollahian, a special adviser to Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, calling it a great betrayal to the Islamic cause and Palestinians.

"The imprudent leaders in UAE, #Bahrain must not pave the way for the Zionist schemes," he wrote on Twitter.

Bahrain is acutely aware of threats posed by Iran, an anxiety that comes from Bahrain's majority Shiite population, despite being ruled since 1783 by the Sunni Al Khalifa family.

Iran under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had pushed to take over the island after the British left, though Bahrainis in 1970 overwhelmingly supported becoming an independent nation and the UN Security Council unanimously backed that.

Since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, Bahrain's rulers have blamed Iran for arming militants on the island. Iran denies the accusations, though weapons experts suggest explosives found there bear similarities to others linked to Iran. Israel and Iran view each other as top regional enemies.

09.11.20

Syria reports Israeli airstrike near northern city of Aleppo Friday

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Syria reports Israeli airstrike near northern city of Aleppo

State-run media says Syrian air defenses shot down most missiles before they hit their targets in area of northern city; Israel accused of multiple recent strikes on Iran-backed militias

Associated Press| Published: 09.11.20 , 11:07

Israeli warplanes fired missiles on suburbs of the northern city of Aleppo early Friday, Syrian state media said, amid increased airstrikes on Syria in recent weeks. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Israel rarely comments on such reports, but is believed to have carried out scores of raids targeting Iran's military presence in Syria.

In the past three months alone, Syria has accused Israel of carrying out at least nine air raids on its territory.

State news agency SANA gave few details about Friday's strike but said the country's air defenses shot down most of the missiles before they hit their targets.

Iran has been a key ally of the Syrian government in the nearly decade-long civil war sending thousands of Iran-backed fighters to fight on President Bashar Assad's side.

Israel views Iran as a regional menace and has vowed to prevent any permanent Iranian military buildup in Syria, particularly near the frontier.

In recent months, Israeli officials have also expressed concern that Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group that operates in Syria, is trying to establish facilities to produce precision-guided missiles. Tensions have also risen along the Israel-Lebanon border.

09.11.20

Full two-week lockdown imposed on entire country before Jewish New Year

09.11.20

Ministers opt for two week nationwide lockdown pending government approval

After hours of deliberation the ministerial committee on the coronavirus agreed on lockdown to come into effect before the Jewish New Year, Full Cabinet to approve decision on Sunday

Moran Azulay, Adir Yanko | Updated: 09.11.20, 00:08

The Ministerial Committee on the Coronavirus Pandemic decided on Thursday evening to present for the approval of the full cabinet a proposal for a three phase plan beginning with a full two-week lockdown to be imposed on the entire country beginning next week before the Jewish New Year.

The decision was reached after long hours of deliberation though there was no agreement yet on when the lockdown should come into effect.

During the two-week lockdown all non-essential work and commerce would not be allowed, including restaurants, leisure and entertainment centers, shopping malls, domestic tourism sites and commercial centers. Food shops and pharmacies would remain open.

Schools would be closed down although children from fifth grade and up would continue to distance learn online.

People will be restricted to no further than 500 meters from their home except for the purchase of vital supplies.

Prayers and other gatherings would be permitted under the restrictions imposed on red zones, with a limit of no more than 10 people congregating indoors and no more than 20 outside.

After the initial lockdown, and in the second stage of the proposal, less stringent measures would come into effect with more businesses allowed to open and people no longer restricted to the vicinity of their homes but barred from traveling outside their municipal borders. Schools would remain shut and the restrictions on congregations would remain in place.

After two weeks, the third phase would begin with the government approved Traffic Light plan presented by coronavirus czar Ronni Gamzu, in which activity would be allowed according designation of localities as green, yellow, orange or red based on the amount of morbidity and infection rates.

Though the proposal was supported by eight ministers, four others objected including United Torah Judaism leader Minister Yaakov Litzman who was heard accusing Gamzu of attempting to bring down the government saying, "I know the man. He is lying."

Israel saw 4,013 new coronavirus infections on Thursday - a daily record high for the country with the death toll from COVID-19 reaching 1,075. A report released Thursday by Coronavirus National Information and Knowledge Center also calls for a full lockdown on the grounds that this is the only way to bring down morbidity in a reasonable time frame.

The report by the center, which operates under the auspices of the Health Ministry and run by Military Intelligence, says that closure has shown itself to be an effective way of lowering morbidity.

"As a way of reducing the rate of infection, closure is a proven tool - when it lasts for long enough and the conditions for its implementation are met (the ability of the people to cope under restrictions of movement and distance and their willingness to abide by them)," the report said.

"In most cases worldwide, morbidity has dropped to desired levels after a few weeks. However, this length of time, with restrictions on movement, also exacts a high price on the local society and economy," it said.

The report also stressed that the sooner such measures are implemented, the lower the death toll and the quicker morbidity levels can be lowered.

09.10.20

Due to pandemic, Western Wall raffles off 2,500 tickets for High Holy days

09.10.20

Due to pandemic, Western Wall raffles off tickets for High Holy days
Site's foundation opts to raffle off 2,500 tickets in order to keep crowding to a minimum during the coronavirus pandemic, worshippers will be divided by small walled-off capsules

The Media Line | Published: 09.10.20, 18:22

Among many customs associated with this festive period are Selichot, penitential prayers that are recited at the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site.

Tens of thousands of Jews – young and old, men and women, secular and religious – come from all over the country and from abroad, packing the plaza during the weeks leading up to Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

But with the coronavirus pandemic, this year is unlike any in recent memory.

To keep crowding to a minimum and prevent unnecessary disappointment, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation has opted to raffle off 2,500 tickets for the main holiday event: Selichot prayers taking place from 11:00 pm to 1:30 am.

Only worshipers whose names are drawn in the lottery and who have special tickets on hand will be allowed to attend. Police will also be deployed throughout the Old City to ensure that health directives are met.

“We were concerned with how we can manage the week before Rosh Hashanah and the week before Yom Kippur to handle the mass of people coming,” Yohanna Bisraor of the Western Wall Heritage Foundation told The Media Line. “Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the climax of the Jewish calendar here at the Western Wall.”

Due to Health Ministry restrictions, at the moment only 2,500 people are allowed into the plaza to pray at any given time. The space itself has been divided into small walled-off capsules that can only hold a limited number of worshipers; social distancing markers have also been placed on the ground at regular intervals.

“We managed to think of creative ways to allow as many people as we can be here for these important holidays for the Jewish people,” Bisraor said.

In previous years, some 100,000 people would attend midnight prayers at the peak of the holiday period. Selichot, prayers for forgiveness, are recited by observant Jews who believe that during this period God judges the world and determines how the upcoming year will unfold.

“People pray from around midnight until dawn,” Daniel Yom Tov, an event coordinator at the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, explained to The Media Line. “This is the time where the skies are the most open to prayer.

“Because of this, during normal periods this entire plaza would be full of people,” he continued. “I’m not exaggerating; tens of thousands of people came each night last year.” While registration is required for the main Selichot events, worshipers who are unable to get a ticket will still be able to visit the Western Wall during the rest of the hours of the day. If the plaza is full, however, they will be required to wait outside until more space becomes available. Additionally, those watching from the comfort of home can via special broadcasts on the Western Wall Heritage Foundation website.

“People come because they feel that the beginning of the year can give them something fresh and new,” Bisraor related. “We know the Western Wall is sometimes called the Wailing Wall. People come to pray, to cry and to ask for forgiveness and for a better year.”

There are still no tourists in Israel as its skies remain closed to foreign nationals, but in recent months life has slowly begun to trickle back to the holy site.

In fact, dozens of Israeli families arrive each day to celebrate.

“There was a period of four months where there were no bar mitzvahs here,” Yom Tov noted. “After the first wave of the coronavirus, we reopened to bar mitzvahs and they ... slowly went back up to a peak of 50 or 60 bar mitzvahs each day.”

Before the pandemic, he added, there were often up to 120 bar mitzvahs taking place on any given day. “Obviously this is not the Western Wall as we’ve seen it in the past,” he affirmed. “But, praised be God, after the period where the wall was closed off – some

color and festivities have returned. There are now bar mitzvahs and joyous family events taking place here.”

09.10.20

Kushner: US Mideast peace plan aimed at saving two-state solution

09.10.20

Kushner: U.S. Mideast peace plan aimed at saving two-state solution

White House advisor says concept of Israeli, Palestinian states existing side by side is still viable and on the table; president's son-in-law says without American plan, 'ultimately, Israel would have eaten up all the land in the West Bank'

Ynet| Published: 09.10.20 , 09:58

The peace plan unveiled by U.S. President Donald Trump earlier this year was meant to save the two-state solution, White House advisor Jared Kushner told reporters late Wednesday, adding the solution was indeed still on the table.

"We were trying to save the two-state solution," Kushner told reporters Wednesday, according to media reports. "If we kept going with the status quo... ultimately, Israel would have eaten up all the land in the West Bank," he said.

Israel last year announced plans to effectively annex swathes of the West Bank, a move that drew international condemnation and warnings of potential sanctions. The United Arab Emirates has repeatedly said the normalization deal it signed with Israel last month was geared at ending the annexation plan, which Jerusalem has now suspended.

Kushner also said that in the wake of the agreement with between Israel and the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have decided to open their skies to every flight heading in or out of Israel, not just those bound for the Emirates.

Flights to and from Israel have often seen hours added to the flight time due to restrictions on airspace imposed by other countries in the Middle East. According to Kushner, the move not only save hours for passengers but also signifies a significant shift in regional politics. The White House aide said that the accord between Israel and the UAE created a new sense of positivity in the region.

The Kushner call came hours after Arab League foreign ministers meeting in Cairo decided to withhold any condemnation of the Israel-UAE deal, despite a request by the Palestinian Authority.

According to a Palestinian diplomatic source, both the Palestinians and Arab countries agreed to exclude a clear condemnation of the deal.

Kushner, who is married to the president's daughter, has played a key role in Trump administration efforts to advance Middle East peace, including the agreement between Israel and the UAE.

He was a member of the American and Israeli delegation on board the El Al plane that last week made history by becoming the first-ever direct commercial flight from Israel to the UAE.

The **delegation** flew into Abu Dhabi last Monday and returned to Tel Aviv on Tuesday after **two days of talks**.

09.09.20

Palestine requested rejection summit; surprised at the lack of Arab consensus

09.09.20

Saudi Arabia supports comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace solution

Kingdom's FM says Riyadh backs establishment of Palestinian state along 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital; **Palestinian** official **urges Arab rejection** of accord between J'lem, Abu Dhabi

Reuters| Published: **09.09.20** , 19:37

Saudi Arabia told an Arab League meeting on Wednesday it supports all efforts to reach a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

But a statement released by the Saudi foreign ministry on remarks made by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud included no direct mention of a normalization deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

The prince said Riyadh supported the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the borders before the 1967 Six-Day War, with East Jerusalem as its capital, according to the statement. During that war, Israel captured territory including the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Announced on Aug. 13, **the UAE-Israel accord** was the first such accommodation **between an Arab country and Israel in more than 20 years** and was forged largely through shared fears of Iran.

In comments about the UAE at the Arab League meeting in Cairo, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki referred to the accord as a “surprise”, “a normalization” and an “earthquake” that hit Arab consensus.

But he avoided strong words such as “**betrayal**” that were **used by Palestinian** leaders in the immediate aftermath of the announcement.

Maliki used tougher language against Israel, referring to “colonial and racist occupation”, and accused the United States of blackmail, pressure and assault against Palestinians and some Arab states.

Maliki voiced **dismay at the lack of Arab consensus** that **prevented** an emergency Arab summit being held at the Palestinians’ request following the Aug. 13, announcement. He **called for immediate rejection** of the accord before the signing ceremony planned at the White House next week.

09.08.20

Report by Channel 12 TV slams police for conspiracy to topple Netanyahu

09.08.20

Netanyahu slams police for 'corrupt conspiracy' to topple him

At event ostensibly focused on battle against coronavirus, prime minister claims former state **prosecutor did not pursue probe into alleged police misconduct** in 2017 killing of Yakub Abu Alkian **for fear it would harm criminal cases** against the PM

Associated Press, Ynet| Published: **09.08.20** , 23:30

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lashed out at the country's law enforcement system on Tuesday, continuing a crusade to discredit those who have pressed corruption cases against him ahead of the resumption of his trial early next year.

Netanyahu's latest tirade came in response to a **report by Channel 12 TV** alleging that police covered up a **conflict of interest** involving **one of its senior investigators** who was looking into alleged crimes committed by Netanyahu and his wife Sara.

Speaking at an event meant to be focused on Israel's struggling battle against the coronavirus, Netanyahu was asked about the report and devoted a chunk of his time accusing the police of conspiring to oust him.

"The entire chain of command is involved: senior investigators, the chief of police, the state attorney, and everything is sanctioned and authorized by the attorney general," Netanyahu said.

"This was **not an investigation**. This is a **corrupt political conspiracy** to topple a prime minister."

To highlight his point about police wrongdoing, Netanyahu addressed another media report claiming the former state prosecutor did not pursue an investigation into a case of alleged police misconduct.

The case surrounded the fatal shooting of Yakub Abu Alkian in 2017, out of fears it would tarnish the image of law enforcement amid its investigations into Netanyahu. **Police shot** the man, **claiming he had intentionally rammed his car into police** who were **carrying out a demolition in his Bedouin village**. **His family disputes the police claims**.

On Tuesday, Netanyahu apologized for the killing and for the man being wrongly labeled a terrorist, which he said is what he was told by police at the time.

"I first of all want to apologize on my behalf to the Alkian family for the killing of the father of the family," said Netanyahu.

"They [the police] told me he was a terrorist, on Monday it turned out he was not, in fact, a terrorist. On Monday it became abundantly clear that senior prosecutors and the police had turned him into a terrorist in order to protect themselves and harm me. I said many times there are many failures in the police's work, but this is worse."

Since he was indicted on charges of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes, Netanyahu has repeatedly sought to disparage the police and prosecutors, accusing them of being biased against him and seeking to force him out of office.

Legal officials and experts say Netanyahu's attacks on an independent and reputable system have done lasting damage to Israel's democracy.

The charges revolve around a series of scandals that accuse Netanyahu of trading favors with wealthy associates in exchange for gifts and palatable media coverage of himself and his family.

Netanyahu's trial is set to resume in January, with evidentiary hearings to take place three times a week and sure to keep Netanyahu's alleged crimes firmly in the public conversation at a time when he faces widespread discontent over his handling of the coronavirus crisis.

09.08.20

Trump White House will host Israel-UAE signing ceremony on Sept 15

09.08.20

U.S. to host Israel-UAE deal-signing ceremony on Sept. 15

Senior White House official says Netanyahu and Emirati FM will lead their respective delegations; PM says he is 'proud' to be taking part in the ceremony, calling it the foundation of the treaty between the two countries

Reuters| Published: 09.08.20 , 21:13

U.S. President Donald Trump will hold a Sept. 15 signing ceremony for a groundbreaking Middle East agreement normalizing relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, a senior White House official said on Tuesday.

As part of the deal, announced at the White House on Aug. 13 following what officials said were 18 months of talks, the Gulf state agreed to normal relations with Israel, while Israel agreed to continue with plans to suspend its annexation of the West Bank.

The senior White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, would lead the two delegations to the ceremony.

Netanyahu said Tuesday night that he was "proud" to be taking part in the ceremony, calling it the foundation of the treaty between the two countries.

Trump and other administration officials have said they **expect Saudi Arabia and other countries to follow suit in recognizing Israel.**

Iran has dismissed the agreement, which also served to firm up opposition to Tehran, a regional power seen by the UAE, Israel and the United States as the main threat in the Middle East.

The deal falls short of any grand Middle East **peace plan to resolve decades of conflict** between Israel and the Palestinians despite Trump's pledge to do so with efforts led by his White House aide and son-in-law Jared Kushner.

An Emirati source said Monday that the Gulf nation is planning to make its **first official visit to Israel on Sept. 22** to build up the countries' agreement to normalize relations. The trip, which has yet to be finalized, will come in reciprocation of a groundbreaking trip to Abu Dhabi last week by senior Israeli and U.S. envoys, the source said.

The source said the **UAE** was **expected to finalize** the trip **after** the **date** was **announced for the ceremony** to sign the normalization accord.

09.08.20

Ministers approve week long night curfew on 40+ localities to stop the virus

09.08.20

Ministers approve week long night-time curfew on at least 40 localities

Restrictions on the mostly Arab sector and Ultra-Orthodox communities include a limit of movement to no further than 500 meters from home and school closures

Moran Azulay | Updated: **09.08.20**, 13:48

After multiple delays, ministers on Tuesday approved a **list of 40 cities**, communities and neighborhoods that **will be placed under night-time curfew** due to high coronavirus contagion rates.

The curfew will be in place between 7pm and 5am for a period of one week.

Among the areas hardest hit by the virus are a majority of Arab Sector communities and cities and neighborhoods with a predominately ultra-Orthodox population.

The decision was made despite the objection of Minister of the Interior Aryeh Deri who had advocated a nation wide **lockdown rather than partial** restrictions to be placed on the Haredi communities.

Social media posts circulating among residents of the predominately ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak have been calling for residents to disrupt police efforts to enforce the curfew.

In addition to the curfew which would allow people to venture no more than 500 meters from their homes accept to purchase vital supplies, schools will also remain closed.

In an interview to Ynet earlier Health Ministry # 2 Professor Itamar Grotto said, "We must give the night-time curfew on highly infected cities that is due to be imposed a chance, but It will not be enough on its own to stop the spread of the virus.

09.07.20

Source: UAE planning first official visit to Israel on Sept. 22

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Source: UAE planning first official visit to Israel on Sept. 22

The source says the UAE was expected to finalize the trip after a date is announced for a ceremony where the countries' leaders will sign their normalization accord; senior Israeli and U.S. envoys travelled to Abu Dhabi last week in historic visit

Reuters| Published: 09.07.20 , 15:18

The United Arab Emirates is planning to make its first official visit to Israel on Sept. 22 to build up the countries' agreement to normalize relations, a source familiar with the provisional itinerary said on Monday.

Israeli officials declined to comment and UAE officials did not respond to calls seeking comment.

The two countries announced on Aug. 13 they would normalize diplomatic relations in a U.S.-brokered deal that was hailed as a breakthrough by Washington and Israel but spurned by the Palestinians.

The UAE delegation's trip to Israel, which has yet to be finalised, would come in reciprocation of a groundbreaking trip to Abu Dhabi last week by senior Israeli and U.S. envoys, the source said.

The source said the UAE was expected to finalize the trip after a date is announced for a ceremony, likely in Washington, where the countries' leaders will sign their normalization accord. That ceremony is likely to take place in mid-September, the source added.

The source declined to be identified by name or nationality due to the sensitivity of the evolving contacts.

The trip would be the first publicly acknowledged visit to Israel by an official delegation from the UAE.

Israel exchanged embassies with neighbours Egypt and Jordan under peace deals decades ago. But until the UAE accord, all other Arab states had demanded Israel first cede more land to the Palestinians.

An Israeli minister said on Monday annual trade between Israel and the UAE is expected to reach \$4 billion.

09.07.20

Saudi King to Trump: Kingdom eager for fair solution to Palestinian issue

09.07.20

Saudi King to Trump: Kingdom eager for fair solution to Palestinian issue

Trump also tells King Salman in a phone call that he welcomed the opening of Saudi airspace to flights between Israel and the UAE, following a historic peace agreement between the two states; U.S. has been trying to get more Arab states to recognize Israel
Reuters| Published: 09.07.20 , 08:26

Saudi Arabia's King Salman told U.S. President Donald Trump in a phone call on Sunday that the kingdom was eager to achieve a fair and permanent solution to the Palestinian issue, which he said was the main starting point of the kingdom's proposed Arab Peace Initiative, the state news agency reported.

The leaders spoke by phone following a historic U.S. brokered accord last month under which the United Arab Emirates agreed to become the third Arab state to normalize ties with Israel after Egypt and Jordan.

King Salman told Trump he appreciated U.S. efforts to support peace and that Saudi Arabia wanted to see a fair and permanent solution to the Palestinian issue based on the Arab Peace Initiative proposed by the kingdom in 2002.

Trump also told King Salman that he welcomed the opening of Saudi airspace to flights between Israel and the UAE and discussed ways to enhance regional security, a White House spokesman said.

Under the proposal, Arab nations have offered Israel normalized ties in return for a statehood deal with the Palestinians and full Israeli withdrawal from territory captured in the 1967 Six-Day-War.

Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and site of its holiest shrines, does not recognize Israel.

However, this month the kingdom said it would allow flights between UAE and Israel, including by Israeli airliners, to use its airspace.

White House adviser and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner has said he hopes another Arab country normalizes ties with within months.

King Salman's son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Kushner discussed the need for the Palestinians and the Israelis to resume negotiations and reach a lasting peace after Kushner visited the UAE last month.

09.06.20

UAE arms deal undermines Israel military superiority promise given in 1973

09.06.20

Israel to demand U.S. compensation over UAE warplanes sale

Jerusalem is set to ask Washington to move up the date of supply of advanced weapons systems by a year, indicating Israel's defense establishment had resigned to the fact the arms deal between U.S. and UAE will go through

Nahum Barnea | Published: 09.06.20 , 10:44

Israel is set to demand compensation from the United States over the sale of advanced warplanes to the United Arab Emirates.

As first revealed by Ynet's publication Yedioth Ahronoth, Washington has struck an arms deal with the Gulf state, which includes the sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets, and unmanned aerial vehicles, as part of UAE's peace agreement with Israel.

Yedioth Ahronoth has learned that Israel's security establishment is now debating which compensation package to demand from Washington. Among the options being examined is moving up by one year the date of supply of advanced weapons systems, as part of American military assistance to Israel.

The proposal to accelerate the American apparently stems from the coronavirus crisis and the subsequent economic fallout, due to which Israel is now struggling to develop and manufacture defense systems domestically.

Israel Aerospace Industries offered to manufacture the weapons systems for the IDF and get paid for the project next year, but the Finance Ministry deemed the plan too expensive.

The demand for compensation indicates that Israeli defense establishment has come to terms with the fact the arms deal between the U.S. and UAE is almost certainly going to happen. The security establishment reportedly opposed the sale of warplanes to the Arab state, which could undermine Israel's military superiority in the region.

Additionally, U.S. President Donald Trump has promised to preserve Israel's qualitative advantage when it comes to American weaponry - a promise which was first given by Washington to Israel during the Yom Kippur War in 1973 - making the demand for compensation a plausible option.

The potential arms deal with the UAE is expected to be discussed in Congress in the near future. The Trump administration hopes for the deal to be approved since the sale appears

to be an integral part of the Israel-UAE normalization agreement, along with the halting of West Bank annexation.

On Friday, the New York Times confirmed the report by Yedioth Ahronoth, according to which, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was aware of the Trump administration's plan to sell arms to the Emirates in return for the peace deal.

Netanyahu himself has repeatedly denied the allegations.

"At no point in the talks between Israel and the United States that led to the historic breakthrough, did Netanyahu give Israel's consent to the sale of advanced weapons to the UAE," said the Prime Minister's Office in a statement.

09.04.20

Kosovo & Serbia to establish ties with Israel, open Jerusalem embassies

09.04.20

PM: Kosovo to establish ties with Israel, open Jerusalem embassy along with Serbia
Kosovo to be first Muslim-majority nation to open embassy in capital; agreements part of normalization deal with U.S.; Netanyahu hails step in rare Shabbat statement, says 'circle of peace and recognition of Israel is expanding, more countries are expected to join'
News Agencies| Published: 09.04.20, 21:14

Israel and Kosovo have agreed to establish diplomatic ties and Kosovo, along with Serbia, will open embassies in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday.

Kosovo, a predominantly Muslim country, has never before recognized Israel nor has Israel recognized Kosovo.

Netanyahu's statement came shortly after U.S. President Donald Trump made a similar announcement in Washington, where he met with leaders of Serbia and Kosovo as they agreed to normalize economic ties between them.

"Kosovo will be the first country with a Muslim majority to open an embassy in Jerusalem," Netanyahu said in a rare statement issued after the start of Shabbat.

"As I've said in recent days - the circle of peace and recognition of Israel is expanding and more countries are expected to join."

Only two countries - the United States and Guatemala - have already opened embassies in Jerusalem.

The status of Jerusalem is one of the thorniest obstacles to forging a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, who with broad international backing want East Jerusalem, captured by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War, as their capital.

The announcement by Trump came after two days of meetings between U.S. administration officials, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti. The two leaders agreed to cooperate on a range of economic fronts to attract investment and create jobs.

The announcement provided Trump with a diplomatic win ahead of the November presidential election and furthers his administration's push to improve Israel's international standing.

"I'm pleased to announce a truly historic commitment," Trump said in the Oval Office, standing alongside the two leaders, who signed an economic cooperation agreement.

"Serbia and Kosovo have each committed to economic normalization."

Trump said Serbia has committed to open a commercial office in Jerusalem this month and move its embassy there in July.

Belgrade's decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is a nod to both Israel and the United States. The Trump administration recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in late 2017 and moved the U.S. embassy there in May 2018.

The administration has encouraged other countries to do the same but has been widely criticized by the Palestinians and many in Europe because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved.

Kosovo is the second Muslim-majority country to establish diplomatic ties with Israel in weeks.

Israel and the United Arab Emirates last month agreed to normalize diplomatic ties in an accord Trump helped broker.

On Monday, a plane from the fleet of Israeli flag-carrier El Al made the first ever direct commercial flight from Israel to the UAE.

Flight LY971, a nod to the UAE's international dialling code, carried a delegation of Israeli and American dignitaries and businesspeople for talks with Emirati officials.

The flight was given permission to fly through Saudi Arabian airspace, another first for an Israeli plane and a sign of Saudi approval for the normalization agreement.

On the plane's return journey on Tuesday, Flight LY972, which denotes Israel's international dialling code, also flew through Saudi airspace.

09.04.20

NYT: Netanyahu 'privately condoned' U.S. sale of F-35s to UAE

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NYT: Netanyahu 'privately condoned' U.S. sale of F-35s to UAE

Paper quotes American officials as saying PM chose not to oppose deal as it progressed in parallel track to talks between Jerusalem and Abu Dhabi, only voiced opposition following backlash in Israel and was brought back in line by Pompeo last week

Ynet| Published: 09.04.20 , 11:14

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "privately condoned" the American sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets to the UAE despite his public claims to the contrary, the New York Times reported late Thursday.

The sale of such advanced aircraft could end Israel's qualitative military edge in the region, the preservation of which is enshrined in American law.

The paper quoted senior American officials as saying that Netanyahu chose not to oppose the deal as it progressed in a parallel track to talks on the normalization agreement between Israel and the UAE, which was announced by the White House on August 13.

Days after the agreement with the UAE was announced, Ynet reported a clause in the agreement allowed the U.S. to provide the UAE with F-35 fighter jets and advanced drones.

Netanyahu swiftly denied the existence of such a clause, but the American officials told the New York Times that those public denials "were false."

The prime minister branded the Ynet report "completely fake news."

"The peace agreement with the UAE does not include any clause of this kind, and the U.S. has made clear to Israel that it will always ensure that Israel has the qualitative advantage," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement in Hebrew that was tweeted by Netanyahu on August 18.

But citing the U.S. officials, the New York Times said Netanyahu "stopped publicly complaining about the proposed arms sale after a meeting with [U.S.] Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Jerusalem last week that brought the Israeli prime minister back in line."

According to the report, "American officials are careful to insist that the new push to sell the weapons to the Emiratis is not a direct reward for their role in the agreement... [b]ut they do not dispute that after years of American refusals to sell F-35s to the Emiratis, the change in position is linked to the diplomatic initiative."

The UAE said the normalization agreement with Israel was contingent on Jerusalem halting its plan to annex parts of the West Bank.

A delegation of Israeli and American dignitaries on Monday was on board an El Al plane as it made the first-ever direct commercial flight from Israel to the UAE. The delegation held talks with Emirati officials in Abu Dhabi.

The Times also reported that "dozens of Emirati officials" met last week with American officials at the Pentagon and the State Department "to discuss the arms package and their diplomatic initiative with Israel."

According to Hussein Ibish of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, he was informed by officials of all three countries involved that Netanyahu "gave a green light" to the sale of the fighter jets, but later publicly denounced it following the backlash in Israel.

Ibish told the Times that the prime minister informed the U.S. and UAE "there would not be substantive and categorical opposition" in Israel to the sale.

In the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the United States gave Israel assurances that it would be able to maintain military superiority in the region and that the sale of advanced weapon systems to Middle Eastern countries will be subjected to Israeli discretion. These assurances had been observed ever since, until U.S. President Donald Trump had publicly stated his intention to sell strategic weapons to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, but was blocked by Congress after passing an arms embargo last year.

09.09.20

AstraZeneca vaccine trial paused for inflammatory infections of the spinal cord

09.09.20

AstraZeneca pauses COVID-19 vaccine trial over safety concern

The suspension of trial impacts other clinical trials conducted by other vaccine makers; dims prospects for a potential year-end roll-out by company

Reuters| Updated: 09.09.20, 08:39

AstraZeneca Plc on Tuesday said it has paused global trials, including large late-stage trials, of its experimental coronavirus vaccine because of an unexplained illness in a study participant.

The vaccine, developed with the University of Oxford, has been widely seen as one of the leading global candidates against the coronavirus, and the suspension of the trial dims prospects for a potential year-end roll-out its lead developer had signaled earlier.

AstraZeneca said it voluntarily paused trials to allow review of safety data by an independent committee and was working to expedite the review of the single event to minimize any potential impact on the trial timeline.

"This is a routine action which has to happen whenever there is a potentially unexplained illness in one of the trials," the company said in an emailed statement.

The nature of the illness and when it happened were not detailed, although the participant is expected to recover, according to Stat News, which first reported the suspension due to a "suspected serious adverse reaction".

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration defines an adverse event as one in which evidence suggests a possible relationship to the drug being tested.

According to a New York Times report which cited a person familiar with the situation, a participant based in the United Kingdom was found to have transverse myelitis, an inflammatory syndrome that affects the spinal cord and is often sparked by viral infections.

Whether the illness was directly linked to AstraZeneca's vaccine remains unclear, the report said. AstraZeneca declined to comment on the report.

The suspension of the trial has impacted other AstraZeneca vaccine trials - as well as clinical trials being conducted by other vaccine makers, which are looking for signs of similar reactions, Stat said.

The U.S. National Institutes of Health, which is providing funding for AstraZeneca's trial, declined to comment.

AstraZeneca's statement said that "in large trials, illnesses will happen by chance but must be independently reviewed to check this carefully."

Trials of the vaccine, called AZD1222, are underway at different stages in Britain, the United States, Brazil, South Africa and India. Trials are also planned in Japan and Russia. Shares of AstraZeneca fell more than 8% in after-hours U.S. trading, while shares of rival vaccine developers rose. Moderna Inc was up more than 4% and Pfizer Inc climbed less than 1%.

Moderna said in an emailed statement it was "not aware of any impact" to its ongoing COVID-19 vaccine study at this time.

Nine leading U.S. and European vaccine developers pledged on Tuesday to uphold scientific safety and efficacy standards for their experimental vaccines despite the urgency to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

The companies, including AstraZeneca, Moderna and Pfizer, issued what they called a "historic pledge" after a rise in concern that safety standards might slip in the face of political pressure to rush out a vaccine.

The companies said they would "uphold the integrity of the scientific process as they work towards potential global regulatory filings and approvals of the first COVID-19 vaccines."

The other signatories were Johnson & Johnson, Merck & Co, GlaxoSmithKline, Novavax Inc, Sanofi and BioNTech.

09.09.20

Trump planning to withdraw more troops from Iraq & also looking at Afghanistan

09.09.20

Trump planning to withdraw more U.S. troops from Iraq

Top American general for Mideast says he believes army will keep a smaller but enduring presence in country, with full withdrawal possible in the future

Associated Press | Published: 09.09.20, 10:36

The Trump administration will announce Wednesday that it is withdrawing additional troops from Iraq, as President Donald Trump tries to make good on his campaign promise to disentangle the country from "endless wars."

A senior administration official discussed the draw-down with reporters aboard Air Force One on Tuesday night, on condition of anonymity. The official said the administration is also looking to announce the withdrawal of additional troops from Afghanistan in the coming days.

The planned announcements come as the president has been trying to make the case that he has fulfilled the promises he made four years ago as he tries to secure a second term. There are more than 5,000 American troops in Iraq now. In July, the top U.S. general for the Middle East said he believed the U.S. will keep a smaller but enduring presence in the country.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command, said he believes the Iraqis welcome the U.S. and coalition troops, especially in the ongoing fight to keep IS fighters from taking hold of the country again.

Trump told reporters two weeks ago that “we look forward to the day when we don’t have to be there.” The comments came during an Oval Office meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

However, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo emphasized at that same meeting that a full withdrawal of U.S. troops would only occur once “we can complete the mission.”