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Qatar to keep funding Gaza through the end of 2021

Doha pushing for monetary aid to go to infrastructure projects such as a gas pipeline to operate the enclave's only power station while the Gaza rulers push for more money to be delivered to families in need in the run-up to internal elections scheduled for early 2021
Elior Levy| Published: 10.21.20 , 19:52

Qatar announced Wednesday that it will keep its funding of the Gaza Strip through 2021. It is yet unknown how much monetary aid will be given how it will be used.

Mohammad al-Emadi, Qatar's envoy to Gaza, has regularly visited the Strip in recent years with Israeli approval, bringing funds dedicated for the purchase of fuel, civil servants salaries and cash to help Gazan families in need.

This funding has been critical to maintaining calm along the border.

The decision was made while intensive efforts were underway by Israel, Hamas and international mediators, held in Israel and in Doha, to negotiate a ceasefire that would be in effect for at least one year.

Qatar and the Gaza-based terror group remain at odds over how the funds were to be used with Doha officials insisting on investments in significant infrastructure projects include building a gas pipeline to supply the only power station in Gaza still operating on coal.

The very costly plan is still in the planning stages with construction expected to last 2-3 years.

The project includes the supply of gas from Nobel Energy - which oversees and operates the Leviathan gas rig off the coast of Israel selling the gas to Israeli Delek company, which in turn would sell it to Qatar, which will deliver it to the private company operating the enclave's power station.

Whether Hamas and Qatar reach an agreement on the project or not, final approval must be given by the Israeli government.

It is yet unclear whether the project will be conditioned on the release of the Israeli captives and MIAs held by Hamas in the besieged enclave.

Sources within the group's leadership say they would like the monetary aid be given to families in need, rather than to infrastructure projects that could take years to get off the ground.

Hamas would like to see either more money given to families that have been receiving monthly payments of \$100 in cash or alternatively an increase to the number of families eligible to receive the Qatari assistance .

That position may be directly linked to internal Hamas elections scheduled to take place in early 2021, and an effort by members of the organization to gain public support.

Despite Qatari efforts to bring about an understanding between Israel and Hamas that could ensure calm along the border, the Islamic Jihad faction, that opposes Doha's involvement, and is believed to be responsible for the recent rocket fire launched from the Strip on Israeli communities in the south, could disrupt any agreement and bring about a further escalation of hostilities.

10.21.20

MK speaker halts button vote for naval vessels purchase, insisting on roll call vote

10.21.20

Uprou as Knesset speaker overturns vote for probe into submarine deals

Backed by Joint List deputy speaker, Levin justifies cancellation on grounds of confusion over format of voting; second vote, boycotted by opposition lawmakers, wins no support as 44 oppose; Meretz bill sponsor demands full review

Moran Azulay | Published: 10.21.20 , 17:06

A massive row erupted in the Knesset on Wednesday as Knesset Speaker Yariv Levin overturned a vote on legislation to form a committee of inquiry into the controversial purchase of submarines from Germany.

Lawmakers voted 25 to 23 to create a parliamentary commission into the so-called submarine affair, which allegedly saw Israeli officials advocating for the purchase of naval vessels from German shipbuilder Thyssenkrupp in return for kickbacks. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was cleared of suspicion in the affair, known as Case 3000.

Opposition lawmakers erupted in parliament when Levin, a Netanyahu ally from Likud, announced that he would hold a repeat vote on the issue. The speaker said he overturned the vote after several coalition MKs said they either did not have enough time to cast their vote or that they believed it would be a roll call vote with their names being called in turn. Instead the vote was held electronically, with MKs being instructed to push a button to indicate their vote.

Opposition lawmakers stormed out of the plenum when Levin made his announcement, with some yelling "shame" at him.

"As I was present, I do not have to learn what happened here from a second hand account," said Levin, insisting that the voting procedure had been unclear.

"Even I, sitting in my [speaker's] chair, did not vote. I did not vote for two reasons: one, because this was a roll call vote and two, because the announcement that this was an electronic was not made or was inaudible," Levin said.

"In light of the clear request for a roll call vote, I hereby cancel the outcome of the vote and announce a roll call vote."

After the opposition lawmakers departed in order to boycott the second vote, more members of the ruling Likud party arrived in the plenum and the bill failed by 44 votes against and none in favor. The bill had not been expected to pass in any event due to a lack of support from coalition lawmakers.

"What happened here was very simple," said the coalition chairman, Likud MK Miki Zohar, after the second vote.

"They will probably check the cameras and the truth will come out. First of all, for those who do not know, my vote was not recorded. Do you know why the coalition members did not vote? Because I requested a roll call vote and people did not vote because they were waiting to be called by name. The moment I requested a roll call vote, they should have called the names of MKs and they should have voted. Electronic voting was activated even though I asked for a roll call vote."

Deputy Knesset Speaker Mansour Abbas of the Joint List, who was in charge of the vote, issued a joint statement with Levin supporting the decision to cancel the first vote, the Israeli media reported.

According to the joint statement, Abbas failed to hear Zohar requesting a roll call vote, adding that, "It was the correct decision to cancel the results of the vote and redo it." Bill sponsor Tamar Zandberg of Meretz demanded after the vote that the video of the events was inspected from all angles, arguing any request for a roll call vote was only made once electronic voting was already underway.

Meretz leader Nitzan Horowitz added: "This is a disgrace in the Knesset. There was a majority for the proposal to set up a parliamentary committee of inquiry into the submarine affair, now Speaker Levin committed an unprecedented act by canceling the vote, only to hold another after more coalition MKs entered the plenum."

10.21.20

Regional Minister tells Army Radio - another normalization deal before US election

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Minister sees another normalization deal before U.S. election

Regional Cooperation Minister Ofir Akunis tells Army Radio announcement about another normalization agreement is set to come sometime before the November 3 U.S. vote

Reuters| Published: 10.21.20 , 14:17

An Israeli minister predicted on Wednesday that the United States would announce another deal establishing ties between Israel and an Arab or Muslim country before the U.S. election.

"I have a reasonable basis to believe that the announcement will come before Nov. 3 - that, if you'll permit me, is what I understand from my sources," Regional Cooperation Minister Ofir Akunis told Army Radio.

In a foreign-policy flourish ahead of his reelection bid, top aides to President Donald Trump this week escorted Israeli delegates to Bahrain and UAE delegates to Israel, cementing Israel's new, U.S.-brokered relations with the Gulf states.

Trump signaled on Monday that Washington would remove Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, stirring speculation that it could be the next Arab country to move closer to Israel.

Akunis said several countries were candidates to normalize relations with Israel. He did not name these, saying that it was "customary" to let the first official word come from Washington.

"I will be very happy if the announcement will happen - and before the elections in the United States," he said.

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Britain Observatory reported a missile attack on Syrian base for pro-Iran militias

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Report: Several dead in alleged Israeli strike in southern Syria

Syrian state TV reports the strike hit a school located in a village in Quneitra's northern countryside; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, however, says the attack targeted a base for pro-Iran militias

AFP, Ynet| Updated: 10.21.20 , 11:20

An Israeli strike hit a school in the province of Quneitra in southern Syria, the country's state media reported on Wednesday. A war monitoring group said a number of people were killed in the attack.

The school, which apparently was hit by a missile, is located in a village in Quneitra's northern countryside, the official SANA news agency said, without providing additional detail.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported a missile attack on the area, saying Israel was "likely" responsible. The war monitor said the attack hit a base for pro-Iran militias and a number of people had died as a result.

The last time Syria accused Israel of carrying out attacks on its territory was in September. SANA then reported a number of missiles had been fired at targets near the city of Aleppo, but most were downed by Syrian defense systems.

Along with Russia, Israel's nemesis Iran has been a key backer of the Damascus regime in its nine-year-long civil war. Israel has carried out hundreds of air and missile strikes on Syria since the civil war broke out in 2011, targeting Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces as well as government troops. The Israeli army rarely acknowledges individual strikes.

Syria's war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions more since starting in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

10.21.20

Pope & Vatican endorse & support LGBT marriage in new documentary film

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Pope endorses same-sex civil unions in new documentary film

'Homosexual people have the right to be in a family' the Pope said mind-way in a documentary premiering at the Rome Film Festival, adding 'we have to have is a civil union law' sending a strong message to places where the church has opposed such laws Associated Press| Published: 10.21.20 , 18:20

Pope Francis endorsed same-sex civil unions for the first time as pope while being interviewed for the feature-length documentary "Francesco," which premiered Wednesday at the Rome Film Festival.

The papal thumbs-up came midway through the film that delves into issues Francis cares about most, including the environment, poverty, migration, racial and income inequality, and the people most affected by discrimination.

"Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God," Francis said in one of his sit-down interviews for the film. "What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered."

While serving as archbishop of Buenos Aires, Francis endorsed civil unions for gay couples as an alternative to same-sex marriages. However, he had never come out publicly in favor of civil unions as pope.

The Jesuit priest who has been at the forefront in seeking to build bridges with gays in the church, the Rev. James Martin, praised the pope's comments as "a major step forward in the church's support for LGBT people."

"The Pope's speaking positively about civil unions also sends a strong message to places where the church has opposed such laws," Martin said in a statement.

One of the main characters in the documentary is Juan Carlos Cruz, the Chilean survivor of clergy sexual abuse whom Francis initially discredited during a 2018 visit to Chile. Cruz, who is gay, said that during his first meetings with the pope in May 2018, Francis assured him that God made Cruz gay. Cruz tells his own story in snippets throughout the film, chronicling both Francis' evolution on understanding sexual abuse as well as to document the pope's views on gay people.

Director Evgeny Afineevsky had remarkable access to cardinals, the Vatican television archives and the pope himself. He said he negotiated his way in through persistence, and deliveries of Argentine mate tea and Alfajores cookies that he got to the pope via some well-connected Argentines in Rome.

"Listen, when you are in the Vatican, the only way to achieve something is to break the rule and then to say, 'I'm sorry,'" Afineevsky said in an interview ahead of the premiere.

The director worked official and unofficial channels starting in early 2018, and ended up so close to Francis by the end of the project that he showed the pope the movie on his iPad in August. The two recently exchanged Yom Kippur greetings; Afineevsky is a Russian-born Jew who lives in Los Angeles.

But "Francesco" is more than a biopic about the pope.

Wim Wenders did that in the 2018 film "Pope Francis: A Man of His Word," which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival. "Francesco," is more a visual survey of the world's crises and tragedies, with audio from the pope providing possible ways to solve them.

Afineevsky traveled the world to film it: the settings include Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh where Myanmar's Rohingya sought refuge; the U.S.-Mexico border and Francis's native Argentina.

"The film tells the story of the pope by reversing the cameras," said Vatican communications director Paolo Ruffini, who was one of Afineevsky's closest Vatican-based collaborators on the film.

Ruffini said that when Afineevsky first approached him with the idea of a documentary, he tried to tamp down his hopes for interviewing the pope.

"I told him it wasn't going to be easy," he said.

But Ruffini gave him some advice: names of people who had been impacted by the pope, even after just a brief meeting. Afineevsky found them: the refugees Francis met with on some of his foreign trips, prisoners he blessed, and some of the gays to whom he has ministered.

"I told him that many of those encounters had certainly been filmed by the Vatican cameras, and that there he would find a veritable gold mine of stories that told a story," Ruffini said. "He would be able to tell story of the pope through the eyes of all and not just his own."