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Gantz views plan for Palestine capital in Abu Dis, a small town near Jerusalem

12.17.20

Gantz: There will be a place for Palestinian capital in united Jerusalem

Defense minister tells Asharq al-Awsat newspaper Jerusalem is a 'spacious city full of sites sacred for all,' but stresses Israel will not return to its pre-1967 borders; calls on Palestinians to return to negotiating table

i24NEWS, Ynet| Published: 12.17.20 , 11:20

Benny Gantz believes Jerusalem is "spacious" enough for a Palestinian capital whilst still remaining united, according to an interview in a Saudi newspaper published Thursday.

Gantz who serves as defense minister and alternate prime minister told the Arabic language newspaper Asharq al-Awsat that Jerusalem is a "spacious city that is full of sites which are sacred for all".

"They want and need an entity in which they will live independently. A state or a kingdom, they can call it whatever they like," Gantz said. "It is in their right to have independence and a capital which will be a solution to all deadlocked issues."

The Blue & White chair, however, stressed the city, which is also **the official capital of Israel, must remain undivided.**

Gantz added that he does not see peace in the Middle East without a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and called on the Palestinian Authority and its leader, President Mahmoud Abbas, to come back to the negotiating table.

"I want Palestinians to be part of the peace process. The push for normalization within the Arab world is a great and tangible opportunity," he said.

The centrist leader also said that Israel **will not** return to its pre-1967 borders, which means **withdrawing from all territories captured from Jordan** during the **Six-Day War** that the Palestinians seek for a future state, but the **sides can reach a compromise.**

The former IDF chief also revealed that he had **already visited** a majority of **Arab states** with clandestine visits as part of his military service and said **he would love to go on an official tour.**

He warned against what he called the "Iranian axis" in the region, saying it posed a threat to both Israel and Arab states, pointing to countries like Syria and Lebanon as examples of its corrupt influence.

While Israel views Jerusalem as its official and undivided capital, while the Palestinians want its eastern part as their own capital under a two-state solution.

A **peace plan unveiled** by U.S. President Donald Trump earlier this year **placed the Palestinian capital in Abu Dis, a small town near Jerusalem.**

12.16.20

Lieberman, Lapid, Sa'ar & Bennett form liberal party with anti-Netanyahu agenda

12.16.20

Lieberman calls for union with Lapid, Sa'ar and Bennett to challenge Netanyahu

Yisrael **Beytenu** head's proposal includes imposing term limits for the premiership, full civil marriages, a constitution and mandatory military or national service for all Israelis; acknowledges difference, but says an **anti-Netanyahu** camp is 'the order of the hour'

Moran Azuly | Updated: **12.16.20**, 09:46

Yisrael Beiteinu leader MK Avigdor **Lieberman** called on fellow **opposition** lawmakers to join forces and challenge Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu** and his ultra-Orthodox allies in the upcoming elections.

In a letter to Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid, Yamina chief Naftali Bennet and Gideon Sa'ar - who **last week broke off from Likud to form his New Hope party** - Lieberman wrote that "the establishment of a **liberal, Zionist coalition** is the order of the day, especially in light

of the **growing cooperation between Netanyahu and representatives of the Islamic movement**," alluding to PM's ties with Ra'am leader Mansour Abbas.

"Such a bloc would be a true **alternative to Netanyahu**, and can **ensure his replacement**, which so many citizens want. Such an upheaval would allow Israel to achieve what the most successful countries in the world are achieving."

Lieberman acknowledged that there are differences between the parties, but said they should announce a united front, agree on several core principles and then hash out disagreements later.

The guiding principles the Yisrael Beytenu chief proposed, which he described as basic, include **legislation for limiting prime ministers to 2 five-year terms** only and holding Knesset and municipal elections on the same day in order to reduce costs, **installing a constitution** and the **requirement for** parties to position at least **three women among their top ten candidates**.

Another **proposal**, which seems to **directly target Netanyahu**, was a proposed legislation to bar any Member of Knesset under indictment from being nominated to form a government or become president.

The proposed **platform** also includes **changes to matters of religion and state**: allowing civil marriages, mandatory non-religious studies in the curriculum of ultra-Orthodox schools, allowing municipal rabbis to oversee conversion to Judaism, public transportation on Shabbat and mandatory military or non-military national service for all Israeli citizens.

Lieberman did not call for the other parties to run under Yisrael Beytenu's leadership, but proposed a "mechanism" for **choosing** the bloc's leader and the **list of candidates** for the Knesset

On Tuesday, Likud MK Yifat Shasha-**Biton** announced on her Twitter page **she** was leaving the party to **join** Gideon Sa'ar's **new breakaway list** as its number two. "I've decided to embark on a journey alongside Gideon Sa'ar for new hope," Shasha-**Biton** said in a video she posted. "My partnership with Gideon stems from our dedication to politics of transparency and unity. Brave politics that echos the voice of the public."

MKs Yoaz Hendel and Zvi Hauser of the center-right Derekh **Eretz faction** announced they will be **joining the new party** in the next election, **bolstering its anti-Netanyahu agenda**. First published: 09:42 , 12.16.20

12.15.20

Renegade left-wing MKs joining new party blocking 20th Knesset & Netanyahu

12.15.20

'Renegade' Likud MK quits to become no. 2 in Sa'ar's rival party

MK Yifat Shasha-Biton, who butted heads with Likud leaders over coronavirus regulations, joins new party of Netanyahu rival; coalition chair, transport minister call for her to be retired from parliament

Moran Azulay | Published: 12.15.20, 20:21

Likud MK Yifat Shasha-Biton on Tuesday announced on her Twitter page she was leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's party to join Gideon Sa'ar's new breakaway party as its number two.

"I've decided to embark on a journey alongside Gideon Sa'ar for new hope," Shasha-Biton said in a video she posted. "My partnership with Gideon stems from our dedication to politics of transparency and unity. Brave politics that echos the voice of the public."

Shasha-Biton's announcement came a week after Sa'ar, a former minister for Likud, announced he was resigning from the party in order to launch a new faction whose aim is to replace Netanyahu as the leader of Israel's right-wing.

Shortly after the announcement, Coalition chairman and Likud MK Miki Zohar appealed to Knesset's House Committee, requesting Shasha-Biton be declared a retiring MK, which may prohibit her from receiving funding from state coffers and prohibit her from running in an existing party in the next election.

Transportation Minister Miri Regev also called on Shasha-Biton to resign from her position as a member of Knesset.

"If you have an iota of integrity left in you, resign from Knesset immediately and return the mandate to the national camp you co-opted for your personal benefit," said Regev. Yamina MK Bezalel Smotrich also slammed Shasha-Biton, blaming the Kulanu Party, from which the renegade lawmaker moved to Likud, for "blocking any amendment to the justice system during the 20th Knesset seat."

Smotrich, who has called repeatedly for sweeping reports in the justice system for what he deems a left-wing bias, also said that Sa'ar and Shasha-Biton's party will act as "gatekeepers" for rogue elements in the system and right-wing voters should not be tempted to vote for them.

MKs Yoaz Hendel and Zvi Hauser of the center-right Derekh Eretz faction announced they will be joining the new party in the next election, bolstering its anti-Netanyahu agenda.

Hendel and Hauser, who serves as chair of Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee - both former Netanyahu aides elected on the Blue & White ticket.

Hauser, who served as Communications Minister, was displaced from the post by Defense Minister and Blue & White leader Benny Gantz after the announcement.

12.15.20

Kushner delegation normalizing Morocco, & hope for one more before Jan 20

12.15.20

Kushner to lead U.S. delegation to Israel, Morocco

U.S. delegation and Israeli team will join together and take a direct flight from Tel Aviv to Rabat as a sign of progress after the Israel-Morocco deal that Kushner helped broker
Reuters| Published: 12.15.20 , 19:21

White House senior adviser Jared Kushner will lead a U.S. delegation to Israel and Morocco next week for discussions on the normalization deal the two Middle East countries reached last week, a senior administration official said on Tuesday.

The U.S. delegation and an Israeli team will join together and take a direct flight from Tel Aviv to Rabat as a sign of progress after the Israel-Morocco deal that Kushner helped broker, the official told Reuters.

Kushner, Middle East envoy Avi Berkowitz and Adam Boehler, chief executive officer of the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, will arrive in Israel on Monday. While in Jerusalem, Kushner, who is U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, is to hold talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the official said.

El Al is expected to be the airliner for the flight from Tel Aviv to Rabat next Tuesday for the Kushner team and a delegation led by National Security Council Director Meir Ben-Shabbat, the official said.

In a live interview on Army Radio, Transportation Minister Miri Regev was asked about news of the Kushner trip.

"I am so proud that our grandfathers and grandmothers can visit Morocco while still alive. This is peace," said Regev, who is descended from Moroccan Jewish immigrants to Israel.

Morocco is the Muslim country that produced the greatest number of Jewish immigrants to Israel - 250,000.

The Israel-Morocco deal was the fourth the United States helped broker, following similar agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan. As part of the agreement, Trump agreed to recognize Morocco's sovereignty over the Western Sahara, where a decades-old territorial dispute has pitted Morocco against the Algeria-backed Polisario Front, a breakaway movement that seeks to establish an independent state in the territory.

Kushner and his team are still holding talks with other countries from the Arab and Muslim world and hope to seal at least one more agreement before Trump leaves office on Jan. 20 when President-elect Joe Biden is due to enter the White House.

12.15.20

Iron Dome successfully tested to intercept a barrage of precision missile targets

12.15.20

Iron Dome successfully intercepts cruise missile for 1st time

Israel tests its air defense systems against a host of threats from land and sea as a message to Iran; systems utilize elements that will facilitate future use of laser-based defense systems

Yoav Zitun | Published: 12.15.20 , 17:52

Israel has successfully completed an air defense exercise that tested the abilities of the Iron Dome missile defense system to intercept cruise missiles for the first time, the Defense Ministry announced on Tuesday.

The defense establishment ran testing of its four Israeli-made air defense systems against a host of threats from land and sea, including cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. Defense officials assessed that Iranian-backed militias may try to fire cruise missiles into southern Israel.

"The success of this series of trials is an important milestone for Israel's defense capabilities against existing and future threats in the region," a statement read. In the drill, the first of its kind, the different defense systems were required to communicate with one another and intercept several types of targets, including rockets, unmanned aerial vehicles and cruise missiles simultaneously. Experiments also showed that Israel's air defense systems could intercept a barrage of precision missiles. Although the drill did not include the newly developed laser-based air defense system, the systems utilized elements that will facilitate future use.

Along with Israeli defense officials, representatives of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency and Israeli defense industries also took part in the drill.

Earlier this year, the defense establishment provided representatives of the U.S. military with the first of two Iron Dome batteries, intended for American ground forces.

The system, made by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, has completed more than 2,400 operational interceptions in Israel since 2011 and was handed over to the Americans after a series of experiments. The U.S. military has purchased the battery to tackle the threat of cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles.

12.15.20

Dust storm from Sinai Peninsula ahead of heavy rain will likely cause flooding

12.15.20

Dust storm hits Israel ahead of heavy rain, thunder

Poor air quality felt in Negev, Jerusalem, coastal plain and Dan region due to dust blown in from the Sinai Peninsula; haze expected to give way to downpours, with flood warnings issued in multiple areas

Danny Rup, Ilana Curie | Published: 12.15.20 , 15:58

The Environmental Protection Ministry on Tuesday issued a warning of **high to very high air pollution across many parts of Israel due to a dust storm** from the Sinai Peninsula.

The poor air quality was being felt in the Negev, the Arava, inner lowlands, Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Jordan Valley, the southern coastal plain and the Dan region.

These areas, the ministry warned, would experience high concentrations of breathable particles in the air caused by a deep depression over the eastern Mediterranean that led to strong winds and dust blowing from the Sinai.

The air quality was expected to improve by the evening hours, with the arrival of rain in the north and center of the country and a gradual reduction in the dust haze in the south. The Environmental Protection Ministry, in consultation with the Health Ministry, recommended that sensitive sectors of the population, including those suffering heart and lung problems, the elderly, children and pregnant women, all **avoid strenuous outside physical activity**.

The general population was also advised to reduce strenuous exercise outside and schools were advised to **keep all activities indoors**.

Tel Aviv Municipality acknowledged the bad weather with a Facebook post that included the Eye of Sauron and Mount Doom from Lord of the Rings photoshopped on an image of the city with the caption: "Overall a lovely day in the city."

A significant **drop in temperatures** was **expected and rain** was predicted in the north in the afternoon, which would gradually spread to the center of the country, and even intensify. Tuesday night was to bring the return of heavy rain accompanied by **thunder storms**, and **flood warnings** were issued for the coastal plain and lowlands.

Some 30mm of **rain was expected by midnight** in many areas, including the **Dan region and the Galilee**. Even **heavier rain** was expected **in Haifa**, where meteorologists said 50 and 100 mm would fall and **likely cause flooding**.

12.15.20

From north to south thunderstorms, wintry weather & floods expected to resume

12.15.20

From Tiberias to Eilat: Lighting storms, floods reign across Israel

Israel Meteorological Service says after a few hours of a lull in the rain in the first half of the day, **showers are expected to resume** in the evening hours, **with flood warnings** issued **for coastal and low-lying areas**

Danny Rup, Meir Ohayon | Published: **12.15.20**, 10:07

Israel was bracing on **Tuesday** for a new bout of **wintry weather** after lighting and **thunderstorms** reigned **across Israel** a day earlier, spreading from **north to south**.

Flash flood warnings were issued for coastal and low-lying areas.

On Monday, heavy rainfall caused road closures in the south, including in the Arava region after the Faran River flooded.

Flooding was also reported in the coastal areas in the center of the country and the Sharon plain - the central section of the Coastal Plain of Israel.

The storm system also reached the southernmost city of Eilat that has not seen much rain this season. A wind surfer was rescued in the Gulf of Eilat after high winds pushed him out to sea.

Israel Meteorological Service said that after a few hours of a lull in the rain in the first half of the day, with easterly winds bringing desert dust, rainfall is expected to resume in the evening hours followed by a temperature drop and heavy winds.

Flood warning have been issued for coastal cities as the winter storm that will impact the south and east, as well as the coastal plains, is expected to last at least two days.

Snow fall is also expected on the upper levels of Mount Hermon as of Tuesday evening.

12.15.20

Trump hopes Congress may object to massive voter fraud during Jan 6 session

12.15.20

Democracy prevailed,' Biden says after U.S. Electoral College confirms his win

Biden calls for unity while voicing confidence that the country's democratic institutions had held in the face of Trump's attempts to reverse the election outcome after 306-232 win in the Electoral College

Reuters| Updated: 12.15.20 , 06:34

President-elect Joe Biden delivered a forceful rebuke on Monday to President Donald Trump's attacks on the legitimacy of his victory, hours after winning the state-by-state Electoral College vote that officially determines the U.S. presidency.

"In this battle for the soul of America, democracy prevailed," Biden said in a prime-time speech from his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware. "Now it's time to turn the page, as we've done throughout our history to unite, to heal."

Monday's vote, typically a formality, assumed outsized significance in light of Trump's extraordinary effort to subvert the process due to what he has falsely alleged was widespread voter fraud in the Nov. 3 election.

California, the most-populous U.S. state, put Biden over the 270 votes needed to win the Electoral College when its 55 electors unanimously cast ballots for him and his running

mate, Kamala Harris. Biden and Harris - the first woman, first Black person and first Asian American to become vice president-elect - will be sworn in on Jan. 20.

In a roughly 13-minute speech, Biden, the Democratic former vice president, called for unity while voicing confidence that the country's democratic institutions had held in the face of Trump's attempts to reverse the election outcome.

"The flame of democracy was lit in this nation a long time ago," Biden said. "We now know that not even a pandemic or an abuse of power can extinguish that flame." Biden emphasized that Trump and his allies filed "dozens and dozens" of legal challenges to the vote totals without success, including a Texas lawsuit that asked the U.S. Supreme Court to invalidate four states' results. The court, including three Trump appointees, rejected the bid with no dissents last week.

He also noted that his 306-232 margin in the Electoral College was the same as Trump's 2016 victory, which the Republican described as a "landslide."

Under a complicated system dating back to the 1780s, a candidate becomes U.S. president not by winning the popular vote but through the Electoral College system, which allots electoral votes to the 50 states and the District of Columbia based on congressional representation.

In 2016, Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton despite losing the national popular vote by nearly 3 million ballots. Biden won the popular vote in November by more than 7 million votes.

Electors are typically party loyalists who are unlikely to break ranks, and few observers had expected Monday's vote to alter the election's outcome. With Trump's legal challenges floundering, the president's dim hopes of clinging to power rest in persuading Congress not to certify the Electoral College vote in a special Jan. 6 session - an effort all but certain to fail.

Trump had also pressured Republican lawmakers in battleground states that Biden won, such as Pennsylvania and Michigan, to set aside the vote totals and appoint their own competing slates of electors. But lawmakers largely dismissed the notion.

"I fought hard for President Trump. Nobody wanted him to win more than me," Lee Chatfield, Republican speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, said in a statement. "But I love our republic, too. I can't fathom risking our norms, traditions and institutions to pass a resolution retroactively changing the electors for Trump."

Some Trump supporters had called for protests on social media, and election officials had expressed concern about the potential for violence amid the president's heated rhetoric. But Monday's vote proceeded smoothly, with no major disruptions.

In Arizona, at the beginning of the electors' meeting there, the state's Democratic secretary of state, Katie Hobbs, said Trump's claims of fraud had "led to threats of violence against me, my office and those in this room today," echoing similar reports of threats and intimidation in other states.

"While there will be those who are upset their candidate didn't win, it is patently un-American and unacceptable that today's event should be anything less than an honored tradition held with pride and in celebration," Hobbs said.

In Lansing, Michigan, where Trump supporters on Facebook had urged protesters to gather outside the state Capitol, only a handful showed up. Bob Ray, 66, a retired

construction worker, held a sign that read: "Order a forensic audit," "save America" and "stop communism."

Electors received a police escort to and from the building. One elector, Marseille Allen, told MSNBC she wore a bulletproof vest at the urging of family and friends.

A small group of Republicans who claimed to be electors for their party sought to gain access to the Capitol building as the proceedings were getting under way but were refused entry by police.

They asked for a slate to be delivered to Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer, but the officer at the door told them he would not deliver the paperwork and that they should contact officials independently.

Trump said late last month he would leave the White House if the Electoral College voted for Biden, but he has since shown little interest in conceding. On Monday, he repeated a series of unsupported claims.

"Swing States that have found massive voter fraud, which is all of them, cannot legally certify these votes as complete & correct without committing a severely punishable crime," he wrote on Twitter.

Trump's sole remaining gambit is to convince Congress to reject the results in January. Under federal law, any member of Congress may object to a particular state's electoral count during the Jan. 6 session. Each chamber of Congress must then debate the challenge before voting by simple majority on whether to sustain it.

The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives is sure to reject any such challenge, while senior Republicans in the Senate on Monday dismissed the idea of overturning the result.