

Posted:

Israel to enlist countries to build 1,200-mile pipeline through Cyprus, Greece and Italy

Newsletter Friday March 8, 2019

Opinions

Yossi Beilin | This week: A look back

Despite dire warnings from Coalition Chairman MK David Amsalem, millions did not take to the streets to protest the attorney general's decision to indict the prime minister.

Melanie Phillips | Unleashing anti-Semitism in the West

Those with power or money can never be good; those without power or money can never be bad. Therefore, Jews, who have money and power, are bad.

Jonathan S. Tobin | Democrats failing on anti-Semitism

The sad lesson of the Ilhan Omar controversy is that most American Jews are unprepared to choose between their interests as Democrats and defending the Jewish community.

Newsletter Friday March 8, 2019

Lebanon warns against using Israeli pipeline in disputed waters

Planned EastMed gas pipeline from Israel to Europe must not violate Lebanon's maritime borders, "especially when it comes to any eventual attempt from Israel to encroach" on Lebanon's jurisdiction," Lebanese FM tells U.N., EU, Cyprus, Italy and Greece.

Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 08/03/2019

Lebanon's Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil | Photo: Reuters

Lebanon on Thursday warned its Mediterranean neighbors that a planned EastMed gas pipeline from Israel to the European Union must not be allowed to violate its maritime borders.

Beirut has an unresolved maritime border dispute with Israel – which it regards as an enemy country – over a sea area of about 860 square kilometers (330 square miles) extending along the edge of three of Lebanon's southern energy blocks.

Israel is hoping to enlist several European countries in the construction of a 2,000-kilometer (1,200-mile) pipeline linking vast eastern Mediterranean gas resources to Europe through Cyprus, Greece and Italy at a cost of \$7 billion.

Lebanon's foreign minister, Gebran Bassil, said he had written to U.N. Secretary General António Guterres, EU foreign policy head Federica Mogherini and the foreign ministers of Cyprus, Greece and Italy to request that the pipeline does not infringe on Lebanon's rights within what it claims as its exclusive economic zone.

In a copy of the letter sent to Greece's foreign ministry seen by Reuters, Bassil said Lebanon would not allow its sovereignty to be breached, "especially when it comes to any eventual attempt from Israel to encroach on Lebanon's sovereign rights and jurisdiction over its EEZ."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday said that U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will visit Israel within the next few days to help with its plan to export natural gas to Europe.

"In a few days, the leaders of Cyprus and Greece will come here, together with ... Pompeo, to advance a gas pipeline from Israel to Europe via these countries," Netanyahu said.

Pompeo on Monday said his visit to the region will also include a stop in Beirut and Kuwait.

Lebanon last year licensed a consortium of Italy's Eni, France's Total and Russia's Novatek to carry out the country's first offshore energy exploration in two blocks. One of the blocks, Block 9, contains waters disputed with Israel.

Lebanese leaders have repeatedly warned Israel not to encroach on its offshore oil and gas reserves.

A number of big gas fields have been discovered in the eastern Mediterranean Levant Basin since 2009. However, the region lacks significant oil and gas infrastructure and political relations between the countries – including Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon and Syria – are strained on a number of fronts.

In January, eastern Mediterranean countries, including Israel, agreed in Cairo to set up a forum to create a regional gas market, cut infrastructure costs and offer competitive prices. Lebanon and Turkey did not participate in the meeting, nor did war-torn Syria.

Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz, who attended the forum, said at the time that Israel will begin exporting natural gas to Egypt in a few months' time.

Steinitz said Israeli exports to Egypt were expected to reach 7 billion cubic meters annually over 10 years. About half the exports were expected to be used for Egypt's domestic market and half to be liquefied for re-export, he said.

Posted:

PA warns: 'Without terrorist salaries we will nix Paris Protocol

Newsletter Thursday March 7, 2019

Opinions

Tirael Cohen | Visionaries, not whiners

The residents of communities adjacent to the Gaza Strip, the northern border, and the Jordan Valley deserve to be listened to, not dismissed.

Alan M. Dershowitz | Yoffie's ad hominem attack, my response

Rabbi Eric Yoffie wrote a screed against me for criticizing the proposed indictment of Netanyahu. Shame on Yoffie for hiding his long-term biases against me; shame on Haaretz for refusing to print my response.

Stephen M. Flatow | Looking for Jews to kill

Regardless of the evidence that an attack was perpetrated by terrorists, major Western news outlets look for ways to minimize Palestinian culpability.

Newsletter Thursday March 7, 2019

Iran says no chance of negotiations, compromise with US

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani tells supporters the differences between Iran and the U.S. are so wide, they are "neither negotiable nor can there be a compromise • "We should push the enemy back," he says on American sanctions.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 07/03/2019

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani gestures to the crowd in northern city of Lahijan, Iran, Wednesday | Photo: AP

Iran's president said on Wednesday that there was no chance of negotiations or compromise with the United States, allegedly because Washington is seeking to topple the government in Tehran.

In a televised speech, Hassan Rouhani said "the United States says Iran should change" back to the way the country was before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when it was ruled by a U.S.-supported monarchy.

"We say we won't go back," Rouhani said at a gathering in the northern city of Lahijan.

He said the differences between Iran and the U.S. are so wide, they are "neither negotiable nor can there be a compromise."

The Trump administration has taken a hard line on Iran but insists the U.S. is not trying to overthrow the government.

However, tensions between the two countries have been heightened after Washington withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal last year and re-imposed sanctions on Iran, which have particularly hurt Iran's vital oil industry.

Rouhani said his country is in an economic war because of these U.S. sanctions, and that giving in to U.S. demands means "losing all historical achievements" including freedom, independence and democracy. "We should push the enemy back," he said.

The U.S. says it wants Iran to radically change its policy and stop supporting regional terrorist groups, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Hamas, as well as halt its development of long-range ballistic missiles.

Newsletter Thursday March 7, 2019

PA warns: 'Without terrorist salaries we will nix Paris Protocol'

Israel has one week to reinstate funds it has deducted from the taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, otherwise, the PA will seek to reopen the Paris Protocol, the office of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas warns.

Daniel Siryoti and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 07/03/2019

Palestinian security prisoners at Nitzan Prison in central Israel | Illustration: AFP

Israel has one week to reinstate funds it has deducted from the taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, otherwise, the PA will seek to reopen the Paris Protocol, the office of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas warned in a statement Wednesday.

The Paris Protocol was an amendment to the Oslo II Accord of 1995.

As a reminder, last month the Israeli cabinet authorized a deduction of some 500 million shekels from the PA due to its longstanding policy of paying monthly stipends to convicted terrorists and their families.

The PA's finance minister wrote in a letter to Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon, among other things, that "the cuts to the PA taxes that Israel collects for the [PA] are intolerable and contravene the Oslo Accords and the economic amendments signed in Paris."

It should be noted that according to the PA, Israel also deducted funds earmarked for various other services for which the Palestinians rely on Israel, such as electricity, water and other infrastructure.

PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki, meanwhile, has asked international bodies to pressure Israel to return the deducted funds, which puts considerable strain on the PA's monthly budget.

The taxes Israel collects on the PA's behalf amount to 60% of its overall budget.

The PA expressed outrage over the Israeli decision and a senior official in Abbas' office threatened to "dismantle the PA."

The official added: "The Israeli cabinet's decision is a gross and unilateral violation of the Paris Protocol. We will take the appropriate steps, and even consider dismantling the PA and returning economic responsibility [for Palestinian affairs] to Israel."

Despite the cabinet's measure, the PA's transition government, following the resignation of former PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, still transferred the stipends to Palestinian security prisoners and the families of "shahids" (martyrs).

"Israel is grossly violating the agreements and the consequences will be severe," Abbas said. "This is another blockade on the Palestinian people, who are buckling under the crimes of the occupation – and all of these measures against us began with [U.S. President Donald] Trump's plan. We will not allow it."

Newsletter Thursday March 7, 2019

IAF attacks Hamas targets in Gaza following repeated provocations

Palestinians say Israeli fire kills Gaza teen after a day of violence in which Gazans targeted Israeli troops with firebombs and laser lights • Incendiary devices, rocket fired toward Israeli communities but no injuries were reported.

Nikki Guttman, Lilach Shoval, Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 07/03/2019

Palestinian protesters on the Gaza Strip border | Photo: AFP

Israeli aircraft attacked Hamas targets overnight Wednesday after a day of violent protests against Israeli troops.

The Palestinian provocations included the launching of a rocket toward Israeli communities and the flying of incendiary devices across the border using balloons.

Israeli tanks also took part in the response, with Palestinians reporting shelling of a Hamas outpost in the southern Gaza Strip.

Gaza's Health Ministry says a 15-year-old Palestinian has died from Israeli gunfire on Wednesday when protesters clashed with Israeli troops along Gaza-Israel border fence.

Saif Abu Zaied was wounded in the head Wednesday and died at a hospital, the ministry said early Thursday.

The protests on Wednesday saw dozens of youths engaged in violent protests involving firebombs and laser lights directed at Israeli forces along the border fence.

The night skirmishes are complementary to the weekly daytime protests that Gaza's Hamas rulers have staged for a year.

Posted:

Pope: Vatican March 2020 to open archives on wartime Pius XII

Newsletter Wednesday March 6, 2019

Opinions

Ruthie Blum | Nothing new in Ramallah

The Palestinians have been busy for the past week demonstrating in word and deed that U.S. President Donald Trump's "deal of the century" will be dead on arrival.

Clifford D. May | Things we know that aren't so

The conventional wisdom, according to which peace through compromise is preferable to a prolonged conflict that ends with one side victorious and one side defeated, is far from universally accepted.

Raphael G. Bouchnik-Chen | Don't politicize intelligence

Any political leadership must interact with its intelligence community to make strategic decisions. The intelligence input must be professional, independent, courageous and apolitical.

Newsletter Wednesday March 6, 2019

Israeli spacecraft snaps ultimate selfie on way to moon

Picture shows the spacecraft Beresheet, Hebrew for Genesis, orbiting some 23,400 miles (37,600 kilometers) away, with the entire Earth as the stunning Apollo-style backdrop • Spacecraft, launched last month, shooting for a moon landing April 11.

Ilan Gattegno, Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 06/03/2019

The Beresheet spacecraft with Earth in the background | Photo: AP

The Israeli spacecraft Beresheet has taken the ultimate selfie on its roundabout journey to the moon, some two weeks after blasting off from Earth.

Organizers for the privately funded mission released the photo Tuesday showing Beresheet, Hebrew for Genesis, orbiting some 23,400 miles (37,600 kilometers) away, with the entire Earth as the stunning Apollo-style backdrop. A plaque bearing the Israeli national flag reads, in English, "Small Country, Big Dreams," and, in Hebrew, "Am Israel hai" (the people of Israel lives).

Australia easily stands out in the photo.

The spacecraft is shooting for a moon landing April 11. It rocketed from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Feb. 21 and has been circling Earth in ever bigger loops.

Despite some early problems, Beresheet should be close enough to enter lunar orbit in early April. A touchdown would make Israel the fourth country to pull off a moon landing.

The Beresheet mission originally was part of the Google Lunar XPrize competition and even made the final cut before the contest ended last year without a winner.

The organizers decided to press ahead on their own, and the project was financed largely by Dr. Miriam and Sheldon Adelson together with SpaceIL president and billionaire high-tech developer Morris Kahn, as well as other donors from around the world.

The idea of having the phrase "the people of Israel lives" displayed by the spacecraft originated with Dr. Adelson, who wanted to ensure that the spacecraft would carry a symbolic message that represents modern-day Israel, Zionism and the history of the Jewish people.

The Adelson family owns the company that is the primary shareholder in Israel Hayom. Dr. Miriam Adelson is the publisher of Israel Hayom.

Newsletter Wednesday March 6, 2019

Islamic council rejects Israeli court closure at holy site

Waqf Council chairman says Gate of Mercy shrine to remain open for Muslims to pray despite Israeli ultimatum to close site by next Monday • Chairman demands Israel permit waqf to renovate building, allow waqf officials, guards, worshippers to enter site.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 06/03/2019

Muslims enter the Gate of Mercy in the Golden Gate area of the Temple Mount, Feb. 22 | Photo: Reuters

The Islamic authority that oversees Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem has rejected an Israeli court order to close a religious hall that has ignited tension between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli police in recent weeks.

Sheikh Abdelazeem Salhab, chairman of the Waqf Council appointed by neighboring Jordan, said Tuesday that the structure, called the Gate of Mercy shrine, would "remain open for Muslims to pray," despite Israel's ultimatum to close the site by next Monday.

Salhab demanded that Israel permit the waqf to renovate the building and revoke orders banning dozens of waqf officials, guards and worshippers from the sacred compound.

Israel sealed off the structure in 2003, claiming it was home to a group with ties to Islamic terrorists. The waqf has recently challenged the closure, convening and staging prayer protests in the area.

Newsletter Wednesday March 6, 2019

Pope: Vatican next year to open archives on wartime Pius XII

Documents from the time of Pius XII, who has long been criticized for not taking aggressive stance toward Nazis and fascists during his 1939-1958 papacy, to become accessible starting March 2020 • "The church isn't afraid of history," Pope Francis says.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff// published on 06/03/2019

Pope Pius XII | Photo: AP

Declaring that the church "isn't afraid of history," Pope Francis said Monday he has decided to open up the Vatican archives on World War II-era Pope Pius XII, who has been criticized by Jews of staying silent on the Holocaust and not doing enough to save lives.

Describing that criticism as fruit of "some prejudice or exaggeration," Francis told officials and personnel of the Vatican Secret Archives that the documentation would be open to researchers starting March 2, 2020.

The move could speed up Pius' path to possible sainthood, a complex process that in Pius' case bore the weight of questions of what he knew and did about Nazi Germany's systematic killing of Europe's Jews.

Pius was elected pope on March 2, 1939, six months before World War II erupted in Europe. He died on Oct. 9, 1958, at the Vatican summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, near Rome.

The Vatican usually waits 70 years after the end of a pontificate to open up the relevant archives. But the Holy See has been under pressure to make the Pius XII documentation available sooner and while Holocaust survivors are still alive.

"The church isn't afraid of history," Francis told the archive staff.

He said the Pius papacy included "moments of grave difficulties, tormented decisions of human and Christian prudence, that to some could appear as reticence."

Instead, Francis said, they could be seen as attempts "to keep lit, in the darkest and cruelest periods, the flame of humanitarian initiatives, of hidden but active diplomacy" aimed at possibly "opening hearts."

Francis words appeared to echo the long-held Vatican defense of Pius which maintains that the Italian pontiff used behind-the-scenes diplomacy to try to save lives.

Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII, gained diplomatic experience in the period following World War I, serving the Holy See in postings in Munich and Berlin in Germany.

In Jerusalem, the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial commended Francis' decision, expressing the expectation that "researchers will be granted full access to all the documents stored in the archives."

Those hailing the decision to open the archives also saw usefulness in dealing with present challenges of anti-Semitism and religious persecution and not just deepening understanding of the past.

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin called opening the Vatican archives "particularly important in these days of ongoing anti-Semitic attacks, the rewriting of history and attempts to deny the Holocaust."

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, a Holocaust survivor who has led a New York synagogue in New York since 1962 and received a papal knighthood four years ago for his activism promoting religious freedom, said "the archives will reveal what was done and what could have been done in the face of Nazi tyranny, particularly the persecution of the Jews that led to the Holocaust."

The archives "might also be a useful instrument on how to deal with dictators of our day who disregard human life, human rights and inflict suffering on their people," said Schneier, who heads the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, which advocates for religious freedom and human rights.

Vatican archivists had already started preparing the documentation for consultation back in 2006, at the behest of Francis' German-born predecessor, Benedict XVI.

For decades, Jewish advocates had lobbied for access to the documentation to help answer the long-standing question of whether Pius did all he could to save lives during World War II.

In New York, Rabbi David Rosen, the international director for interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, called Francis' decision "enormously important to Catholic-Jewish relations."

He noted in a statement that he had raised the issue with Francis and his predecessors in meetings.

"It is particularly important that experts from the leading Holocaust memorial institutes in Israel and the United States objectively evaluate as best as possible the historical record of that most terrible of times – to acknowledge both the failures as well as the valiant efforts made during the period of the systematic murder of 6 million Jews," Rosen said.

Monsignor Sergio Pagano, in charge of the Vatican Secret Archive referred in comments Monday to the thousands and thousands of files, letters and other material to be made available.

Writing in Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano Monday, Pagano said the archives "spoke, speak, and, I hope, will speak to researchers and to historians of an almost

superhuman work of Christian humanism" amid mid-20th century events "that seemed determine to annihilate the very notion of human civilization."

Defenders of Pius' wartime actions have noted that some convents and other religious institutes in Italy helped hide Jews, including during the Nazi occupation of his native Rome.

It was during Benedict's papacy that the Vatican in 2009 formally recognized the "venerable" qualities of Pius, an early step along the possible path to sainthood.

Historians will also be keen on examining documents from Pius XII's papacy in the years after the war ended in 1945.

In 1983, the Vatican dismissed as "absolutely absurd" a claim in a Jewish magazine that the Vatican aided Klaus Barbie and other high-ranking Nazi war criminals in their escape from Europe, along with legitimate refugees, after the war.

Newsletter Wednesday March 6, 2019

UN rights chief laments Israeli 'dismissal' of Gaza report

Michelle Bachelet bemoans Israel's "immediate dismissal" of the report, which alleges possible Israeli war crimes in Gaza, "without addressing any of the serious issues raised"

- U.N. database of companies with business ties to settlements delayed again.

Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 06/03/2019

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet attends a session of the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva, Wednesday | Photo: Reuters

The U.N. human rights chief has expressed disappointment with Israel over its "immediate dismissal" of a report about deadly violence by Israel security forces against protesters in Gaza last year.

The comments from Michelle Bachelet, a former Chilean president, came on Wednesday during her first annual address to the Human Rights Council since becoming the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights in September.

Bachelet lamented that Israel responded to a report published Monday on the Gaza violence "without addressing any of the serious issues raised."

The report commissioned by the council found Israeli soldiers intentionally fired on civilians and could have committed crimes against humanity in crackdowns that killed 189 people and left 6,000 hurt by sniper fire.

Bachelet made "gross inequalities" in the world a major theme in her speech.

Meanwhile, the publication of a U.N. database of companies with business ties to Israeli settlements has been delayed again.

The issue is highly sensitive as companies appearing in such a database could be targeted for boycotts or divestment aimed at stepping up pressure on Israel. Goods produced there include fruit, vegetables and wine.

Israel has assailed the database, whose creation was agreed by the U.N. Human Rights Council in March 2016, as a "blacklist."

Bachelet said on Tuesday that despite progress made since launching the study, further work was needed due to the "novelty of the mandate and its legal, methodological and factual complexity."

Her office aimed to finalize and issue the study "in coming months", she said in a letter to the Human Rights Council.

The World Jewish Congress said its CEO, Robert Singer, had met Bachelet last month and urged the cancellation of the database.

The New York-headquartered group welcomed the delay to publication, saying in a statement the report should be put off for good as it would financially hurt thousands of employees, both Israeli and Palestinian, of targeted companies.

Newsletter Tuesday March 5, 2019

Posted:

Findings: It is Al-Aqsa (Jerusalem Mosque) at the heart of Arab concerns, not Palestine

Opinions

Ariel Bolstein | A change to Oslo-inspired diplomacy

The Netanyahu doctrine – according to which it is a strong Israel standing up for itself, not one that makes unnecessary concessions to its enemies, that wins the respect of the world – is working.

Prof. Oz Almog | A Pavlovian rush to condemn Netanyahu

The champions of rule of law who are rushing to convict the prime minister even before he is officially indicted fail to see that, like everyone else, their judgment is subjective.

Hillel Frisch | Arab support for Al-Aqsa and the Palestinians

Palestinians like to claim that their problem lies at the heart of Arab concerns. But Google search trends from Arab internet users show that it's Al-Aqsa, not the Palestinians, that is of interest.

Newsletter Tuesday March 5, 2019

US deploys THAAD missile defense system to Israel

Prime Minister Netanyahu hails Terminal High Altitude Area Defense as a sign of U.S. commitment to Israeli security • "Together with our defense systems, we are stronger in dealing with threats emanating from all areas of the Middle East," he says.

Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 05/03/2019

The THAAD missile defense system is unloaded in Israel | Photo: U.S. Army Europe

The U.S. military has deployed its most advanced air and missile defense system to Israel for the first time, U.S. and Israeli officials said on Monday.

The deployment, which began in March, was intended to test the U.S. military's ability to rapidly deploy such weapons around the world, said a spokeswoman for U.S. European Command.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the arrival of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system as a sign of the U.S. commitment to Israeli security.

"The American THAAD system is considered among the most advanced systems in the world, and together with our defense systems, we are stronger in dealing with threats, close or distant, emanating from all areas of the Middle East," he said.

The move comes amid increased tensions between Israel and Iran over Israel's bombing campaign in Syria and comments in which Iran's foreign minister said he could not rule out the possibility of military conflict between the two countries.

The U.S. military said the decision to rapidly move the THAAD system to Israel was intended "as a demonstration of the United States' continued commitment to Israel's regional security."

"THAAD is the most advanced integrated air and missile defense system in the world, and this deployment readiness exercise demonstrates that U.S. forces are agile and can

respond quickly and unpredictably to any threat, anywhere, at any time," U.S. European Command said in a statement.

Lockheed Martin, the biggest U.S. arms maker, builds and integrates the THAAD system, which is designed to shoot down short-, medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. Raytheon, another U.S. firm, builds its advanced radar.

As part of the deployment, U.S. forces will work at various locations in Europe, the United States and in Israel to operate the system in close cooperation with the Israel Defense Forces, it said. U.S. officials declined to say how quickly the system was moved to Israel from its home base at Fort Bliss, Texas.

IDF spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus said the deployment differed from previous simulated U.S.-Israel joint military exercises and involved tactical coordination on the ground.

He said all of the components of the THAAD system were at an air force base in the Negev desert, in southern Israel, and would soon be moved to an undisclosed site in southern Israel.

"The advantage from the Israeli point of view is that we have an opportunity to integrate it into our systems and simulate different scenarios," he said.

The IDF said the deployment was defensive in nature and not related to any specific current event.

Saudi Arabia agreed in November to buy 44 THAAD launchers, missiles and related equipment from the United States in a separate deal valued at \$15 billion.

Newsletter Tuesday March 5, 2019

Hamas leader: Egypt renewing attempts to broker Gaza cease-fire

Ismail Haniyeh accuses Israel of "opting out" of understandings to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, such as an expanded fishing zone and an increased electricity supply • Haniyeh blames botched intel raid last fall for escalation.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff

Ismail Haniyeh | Photo: AFP

The leader of Gaza's ruling Hamas movement says Egypt is launching a new round of mediation to secure a cease-fire between Hamas and Israel.

Speaking to reporters Monday, Ismail Haniyeh accused Israel of "opting out of short and long term understandings" aimed at alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave.

Haniyeh said that last year Israel and Hamas reached understandings for Israel to extend Gaza's fishing zone, increase the territory's electricity supply and allow cash into Gaza for Hamas public servants.

But he said a botched Israeli undercover raid in Gaza last fall had undermined understandings on broader issues "as if they never existed."

Hamas expects Egyptian mediators to arrive this week to restart reconciliation efforts.

Newsletter Tuesday March 5, 2019

Abbas slams US administration during visit to Baghdad

After meeting with Iraqi PM Adel Abdul-Mahdi, PA President Mahmoud Abbas says Trump administration is "encouraging Israel to be a state above the law" • Abdul-Mahdi and Iraqi President Barham Saleh stress Jerusalem's importance to the Palestinian people.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 05/03/2019

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas meets with Iraqi President Barham Saleh at Salam Palace in Baghdad, Monday | Photo: AP

Top Iraqi officials have expressed support for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who blasted the Trump administration during a visit to Baghdad.

On Monday, Abbas held talks with Iraqi President Barham Saleh a day after he met with Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi. Both leaders expressed the importance of Jerusalem to the Palestinian people.

Abbas said after meeting with Abdul-Mahdi that "the current American administration is encouraging Israel to be a state above the law."

Abbas added that the Trump administration "is biased and not suitable to be a sponsor of peace talks."

The Trump administration has cited the reluctance of Palestinian leaders to enter peace negotiations with Israel, as well as the PA's ongoing support for terrorism, as reasons for its decision to slash hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to the Palestinians.

Newsletter Tuesday March 5, 2019

Netanyahu to Likud rival Sa'ar: It's time to work together

Speaking at campaign event, Prime Minister Netanyahu tells party members that victory on April 9 is far from certain: "Only a big Likud can beat the Left" • Voting for the Blue and White list, Netanyahu warns, will result in a "rotation of weakness."

Yehuda Shlezinger

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: "Only a big Likud can defeat the Left" | Photo: KOKO

"It's time to join hands and work together for a Likud victory," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told one of his major party rivals, former minister Gideon Sa'ar at a Likud campaign event Monday evening.

Netanyahu has accused Sa'ar of trying to encourage President Reuven Rivlin to entrust the formation of the next government, should the Likud win the election, to him rather than Netanyahu.

"Our strength comes from the people and it comes from you, the best team in the state of Israel. Well done, Likud team. You are not some team chosen randomly by a few PR people in an ad office – you're a great team of talented, experienced people who were democratically chosen by tens of thousands of party voters in the most democratic party in Israel," Netanyahu said at Monday's event.

The prime minister had harsh words for the center-left bloc and particularly co-leaders of the Blue and White list, Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid.

"The Left is recommending a path of weakness, of concessions, of defeat – but we have taken a completely different path, one of honor and strength and national pride, a path of great spirit. What isolation? There are days when I meet with one national leader in the morning and another one in the afternoon and a third one later in the day – I'm not exaggerating, that really happens," Netanyahu said.

"I was with six Arab foreign ministers at the Warsaw conference, talking, and not hiding – everything was out in the open. When I meet with my friend President Trump, when I meet with my friend President Putin, when I met with world leaders in Beijing, Tokyo,

Chad, and elsewhere, I am filled with pride that I represent you and all the other citizens of Israel."

Netanyahu went on to criticize the media and its coverage of the various corruption cases involving him: "They'll say, how dare we say the media is biased? But they know that given our immense achievements, they can't beat us. They are playing unfairly. They are crossing a red line. First of all, they are trying to take me off out of the game so the Likud will lose power. You saw that there was nothing new in the accusations against me. The house of cards is starting to collapse and when I have the chance to respond, it will come down. But that will happen only after the election, and in the meantime, I wouldn't dismiss the real danger that some of our supporters will stay home [on election day] or not vote for the Likud."

"Anyone who stays home or votes for Lapid and Gantz needs to know that he will be putting the Left in power – we can't let that happen, because only a big Likud can beat the Left," he said.

"No pressure like this has ever been put on any Israeli prime minister. Lapid and Gantz would have cracked in 15 minutes under pressure like this. With me, that won't happen! We won't uproot settlements! That is the stance of the Likud and that is my iron-clad commitment as head of the Likud. If we're tearing off masks, Lapid and Gantz supported the dangerous [2015] nuclear deal with Iran – I wholeheartedly opposed it. Gantz said the Iranians wouldn't build nuclear bombs because they were rational. ... Gantz thinks that the ayatollah regime, which calls for our destruction, is a rational regime," Netanyahu said.

"Woe betide us if these two wind up being prime minister. ... Will they stand up to international pressure? They can't stop Iran."

Netanyahu said Gantz and Lapid also opposed the nation-state law. "What was the first thing Gantz did? The first thing out of his mouth was that he opposes the law and he wants to change it. But I'm proud that we in the Likud ... led this historic law. After 70 years, we finally declared in law that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, and theirs only," he said.

"Lapid and Gantz want to lead the country? Can you imagine what would happen? A rotation of weakness. You voted for Gantz – you'd get Lapid. The Lapid-Gantz party wants to leave the [natural] gas in the seabed. It should be bringing billions into the state coffers. We will continue to encourage a free economy, lower taxes, cut down on bureaucracy, and we don't just make promises – we do things. What we've done in the past 10 years is to make Israel into a world power."

"If Lapid and Gantz manage to blur the differences between us, the Left will take power. Just like what happened in the past when generals from the Left were 'crowned.' You know what happened – the Oslo Accords. A year after Operation Protective Edge Benny Gantz took part in a memorial service for the Israeli and Palestinian victims of the

operation, who included 1,000 Hamas terrorists. I would never consider attending a ceremony like that. But Benny Gantz sat there, in the front row. And that says that we are Right and Lapid and Gantz are Left – that's the truth. We are in the middle of a tough election and now is the time for everyone to join in with all their strength. There is only one way we can continue the Israeli miracle. To prevent the rise of the Left, we need a big Likud," Netanyahu said.