

Ynet News July 31

Israel approves plan to build 700 Palestinian homes in West Bank

Israel approves plan to build 700 Palestinian homes in Area C

For the first time in years, Israeli government approves construction for Palestinians living in West Bank's area under full Israeli civil and security control as part of a broader plan which includes 6,000 housing units for Israeli settlers

Itamar Eichner|Published: 07.30.19 , 22:36

The security cabinet on Tuesday unanimously approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plan to build 700 housing units for Palestinians living in the West Bank's Area C, which is under full Israeli civil and security control.

The move represents a shift in the policy of Israeli government which over the past four years did not approve any construction for Palestinians in the area.

The proposed construction is part of a broader plan which also envisions some 6,000 housing units for Israelis living in Area C.

All cabinet ministers voted in favor of the proposal, including Transportation Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Education Minister Rafi Peretz, who are known for their right-wing nationalistic views.

"The construction - meant solely for native Arab residents of Area C - will be conducted in a way that benefits Israel's security and strategic interests," said Smotrich after the vote.

Senior Israeli officials told Ynet the plan was approved after a careful consideration in order to make sure it wouldn't harm the state security and the interests of neither Israeli military nor the Jewish settlers. One official added the decision to approve the plan is a strategic one due to Israel being the one announcing plans for construction in the area and not the Palestinian Authority.

Sources also said Netanyahu's insistence to include hundreds of housing units for Palestinian residents of Area C appears to have stemmed from the pressure being applied on his government by the U.S. President Donald Trump's administration.

Senior Trump adviser Jared Kushner and Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt are expected to arrive in Israel in the coming days as part of their regional tour meant to promote the long-delayed U.S. Mideast peace plan.

Trump to launch peace conference with Arab leaders in Camp David

Kushner sets off to for Mideast visit to persuade leaders to attend the conference, set to take place before the Israeli September 17 elections; Netanyahu involved in the designing of peace plan Trump will present, but will not attend the conference

Nahum Barnea | Published: 07.31.19, 08:53

Senior White House advisor Jared Kushner is set to invite Arab Mideast leaders to a peace conference in the U.S. during his visit to the region, launched on Wednesday.

The peace conference is to take place in Camp David, the U.S. President's country retreat, and U.S. President Donald Trump is set to present his Mideast Peace Plan during the conference.

According to an unnamed source in Washington, the conference is set to take place before the September 17 elections in Israel; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Ron Dremer were involved in the designing the plan.

However, the source believes Netanyahu will not take place in the conference, since his presence will make it difficult for Kushner to convince Arab leaders to attend it.

The peace conference serves both Trump and Netanyahu's election campaigns; it portrays Netanyahu as a global leader and could affect Blue and White and the Labor parties' refusal to join his coalition after the elections.

On Tuesday, the security cabinet unanimously approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plan to build 700 housing units for Palestinians living in the West Bank's Area C, which is under full Israeli civil and security control.

The decision, that outraged rightist circles, was set to assist Kushner in convincing Arab leaders in taking part in the planned peace conference.

Kushner is set to travel to Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to hold talks during his current visit.

Trump is expected to present the peace plan in Camp David without going into details and conditions; yes to a Palestinian entity, but not necessarily a Palestinian state, yes to Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, but not necessarily as a capital.

PA leader Mahmoud Abbas is likely to rule the plan out, while other Arab leaders will legitimate the move simply by attending the conference. Netanyahu, on his hand, is likely to praise the move and say he has many reservations without specifying.

Last week, Jordanian King Abdullah II met with Abbas in Amman. After the meeting, the two published an announcement supporting a Palestinian state with a capital in East Jerusalem — both demands that Kushner aspires to get off the table.

"Both sides believe it is important to reach a steady peace between Israelis and Palestinians and stress that they will continue to back Palestinians in getting their legal rights and establishing a state based on the 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital," said the mutual statement.

Egyptian, Jordanian leaders meet ahead of Kushner's visit

Jordan's King Abdullah II and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi strive for a united position on Trump's peace conference; Jordanian official: this is an attempt to form a united stance that rejects the 'Deal of the Century'

The Media Line | Published: 07.31.19, 09:33

Jordan's King Abdullah II met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to arrive at a united position on the Trump Administration's proposed plan to bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Just days before an American team is set to visit the Middle East, the two leaders met in Cairo to discuss "relations between the two countries and ways to promote levels of joint cooperation," according to a statement from the Jordanian government.

Bassam al-Manaseer, former head of the Jordanian Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, said that the meeting was an attempt to form a united stance that rejects the "Deal of the Century," which has become a somewhat disparaging reference to US President Donald Trump's peace proposal.

Noting Jordan's dire economic situation, al-Manaseer said, "(Amman) is under huge pressure by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the (United Arab Emirates) to accept the American project." But noting that the Palestinians have rejected the deal and that the Jordanian public opposes it, he added that "basically (Abdullah) is trying to (coordinate his) position with (that of) another Arab (nation) that refuses the accord."

Ayman Abd Al Majeed, an Egyptian writer and head of the political section at the Rose al-Yusuf daily newspaper in Cairo, said that during Abdullah's visit several other Middle East issues were discussed. Nevertheless, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict topped the agenda.

"The Palestinian cause is a mutual interest for Amman and Cairo, with both countries supporting it since 1948," Al Majeed said, adding that they both support the Palestinian right to establish a state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"Egypt won't accept anything less than that," he stressed. "What the Palestinian people refuse, Cairo refuses."

President Trump's senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner will head the American delegation's upcoming visit, whose aim is to promote the economic part of the peace plan that calls for a \$50 billion investment in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and regional states including Egypt and Jordan.

Accompanying Kushner will be lead US negotiator Jason Greenblatt. The American team is expected to visit Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Nabil Shaath, a senior Palestinian Authority official, told The Media Line that the Jordan is “very supportive of the Palestinian people and (its) leadership. Amman is very important as it (is) in the heart of the Palestinian cause.”

Shaath said that not only Jordan opposes the American plan, but Kuwait, Iraq and other Arab states do as well. “King Abdullah isn’t alone and the passion is significant,” he said.

Although Jordan sent representatives to the summit in Bahrain for the unveiling of the US economic plan, King Abdullah said that was only because of “the importance of attending any conference regarding the Palestinian(s).”

The PA has rejected the American initiative, since it first focuses on urging Arab countries to support investments in the West Bank and Gaza before addressing the thorny issues at the center of the conflict with Israel.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas has characterized the “Deal of the Century” as a “shameful bargain” that “will go to hell.” He said any peace proposal must begin with core political elements such as the delineation of borders and the future status of Jerusalem.

Article written by Dima Abumaria
Reprinted with permission

Party leaders race to win the Russian vote

Just a few kilometers apart, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman both met with Russian speaking voters in an effort to seal support from the immigrant community

Moran Azoulay|Published: 07.31.19, 12:53

Avigdor Liberman presented his list of Knesset candidates to a packed hall Tuesday repeating his demands from the new government when it is formed and mocking Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for remembering the immigrant communities from the Russian speaking countries just 60 days before the election.

Liberman reiterated his party will recommend the leader of the largest party to be tasked with building a coalition, to the president.

Lieberman told the crowd he will demand new ministries for his Yisrael Beiteinu party after the elections including portfolios today held by ultra-Orthodox ministers.

Lieberman mentioned the ministry of Interior held by the Shas party leader Aryeh Deri which is deemed crucial to preventing the closure of businesses on the Shabat, a point of concern for the predominantly non-religious and often non-Jewish immigrant communities.

The second is the ministry of health, which Lieberman says has been taking care of sectorial groups (alluding to the ultra-Orthodox community) ahead of the general public.

His candidate for minister will be Dr. Leonid Eidelman, former head of the Israel Medical Association and an immigrant himself, who will be a professional minister rather than a member of Knesset.

Lieberman's declared his objective is keeping ultra-Orthodox parties out of the next coalition which he thinks should be a unity government of both Likud and Blue and White.

Before the April ballot, Lieberman was tethering around the minimum threshold and seen as the leader of a sectorial party, but since his refusal to enter into Netanyahu's coalition, polling shows he has almost tripled his support and is seen by the public as a representative of the general public, especially those opposing religious legislations

While this event was taking place, just a few kilometers away, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a gathering of his own with Russian speaking immigrants.

Netanyahu's main message to the crowd was that Lieberman has turned left and away from the immigrants he proports to represent, he said, and will back Blue and White leader Benny Gantz as the next prime minister.

Netanyahu promised he will see to the needs of the Russian-speaking community by keeping the ministry of Imigration and Integration in the hands of Likud.

The prime minister has been trying to attract Russian speaking voters away from Lieberman since the latter announced he will not join the prime minister's coalition after the April 2019 elections.

He enlisted the help of former Lieberman crony Robert Ilatov, who was dropped by Lieberman from the party's list before the April elections, to help him get his message out to the community.

The Blue and White party also met with Russian speaking voters Tuesday promising they will form a cabinet with no extortion and no extremism.

PA: Camp David summit is ploy to boost Netanyahu before elections

Palestinian Foreign Ministry dismisses conference, at which Trump expected to unveil his peace plan, move as way of setting up normalized Arab-Israeli ties while shunting aside Arab world's own peace bid

Elior Levy|Published: 07.31.19 , 17:56

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday condemned a planned U.S. summit of Arab leaders at Camp David to unveil President Donald Trump's so-called "deal of the century" for Middle East peace.

The plan to hold the summit was first revealed in Ynet's sister publication Yedioth Ahronoth on Wednesday morning.

The summit, according to the Palestinian Authority, is aimed at strengthening Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of the September elections, establishing normalized Israeli-Arab relations and pushing aside the Arab League-endorsed Saudi peace initiative of 2002.

Furthermore, the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said, holding the conference is a sign that the U.S. does not view the Palestinian leadership as a partner for peace - and that Washington wants to reach an agreement without the Palestinians, thereby also eliminating the concept of a two-state solution.

The Palestinians have warned against the U.S. coming to the aid of Netanyahu, whom they say is trying to implement Israeli law in the West Bank and beyond.

Also Wednesday, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh dismissed Jerusalem's approval for 700 housing units for Palestinians in Area C of the West Bank, which is under full Israeli civilian military rule.

"Dividing the territories into A, B and C no longer exists as Israel has violated the Oslo Accords (which set out the division)" Shtayyeh said. "We need not permission from an occupying power to build homes on our own land."

The Palestinian prime minister said that the move was intended to sway international public opinion and legitimize Israel's West Bank settlements, which will receive an additional 6,000 housing units as part of the same plan.

The summit was reportedly planned together with Netanyahu and his ambassador to the U.S., Ron Dermer.

The head of the U.S. team for Mideast peace and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner was meeting Wednesday with the Jordan's King Abdullah II in Amman and later in the day with Netanyahu in Jerusalem. His entourage will then holds talks in Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

A Washington official who has been following the preparations for Kushner's trip estimated that the current intention is that Netanyahu will not attend a conference that will convene at Camp David, since his participation will make it difficult for the Arab invitees.

Trump is expected to present the deal without going into binding detail. For example, he will agree to a Palestinian entity, but not necessarily a state, he is likely to say yes to a Palestinian presence in East Jerusalem but not necessarily as the capital of a Palestinian state, and so on.

Abbas is expected to reject the plan outright, while Netanyahu is likely to praise the move, but say he has many reservations, without elaborating. The Arab rulers will lend the process legitimacy by attending the Camp David conference.

White House aide denies peace summit planned for Camp David

Official says Kushner, who is currently meeting regional leaders in Mideast, will upon returning 'discuss the many potential next steps to expand upon the success of the Bahrain workshop'

Published: 07.31.19, 21:43

A senior White House official denied Wednesday that President Donald Trump is planning a summit of Arab leaders at Camp David to unveil his self-styled "deal of the century" for Middle East peace.

The plan to hold the summit was first revealed in Ynet's sister publication Yedioth Ahronoth on Wednesday morning.

According to the American official, "no summit has currently been planned."

He said that the U.S. team on the Middle East, which is headed by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and is at present in the region, "will report back to the president, the vice

president, the secretary of state and the National Security Council upon returning to discuss the many potential next steps to expand upon the success of the Bahrain workshop.”

The official was referring to the June conference in Bahrain, which focused on advancing the peace process via economic benefits for the Palestinians but whose leaders were not invited to attend.

Kushner was meeting Wednesday with the Jordan's King Abdullah II in Amman and later in the day with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem. He and his entourage will then holds talks in Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

A Washington official who has been following the preparations for Kushner's trip said that the current intention is that Netanyahu will not attend the Camp David conference, as his participation would make it difficult for Arab invitees to accept.

The summit was reportedly planned together with Netanyahu and his ambassador to the U.S., Ron Dermer.

Trump is expected to present the deal without going into binding detail. For example, he will agree to a Palestinian entity, but not necessarily a state, he is likely to say yes to a Palestinian presence in East Jerusalem but not necessarily as the capital of a Palestinian state, and so on.

The American denial came hours after the Palestinian Foreign Ministry condemned the planned U.S. summit.

The summit, according to the Palestinian Authority, is aimed at strengthening Netanyahu ahead of the September elections, establishing normalized Israeli-Arab relations and pushing aside the Arab League-endorsed Saudi peace initiative of 2002.

Furthermore, the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said, holding the conference is a sign that the U.S. does not view the Palestinian leadership as a partner for peace - and that Washington wants to reach an agreement without the Palestinians, thereby also eliminating the concept of a two-state solution.

The Palestinians have warned the U.S. against coming to the aid of Netanyahu, whom they say is trying to implement Israeli law in the West Bank and beyond.

Abbas is expected to reject the plan outright, while Netanyahu is likely to praise the move, but say he has many reservations, without elaborating. The Arab rulers will lend the process legitimacy by attending the Camp David conference.

UAE 7-member delegation held talks with Iranian border and coastguard commanders Iran and UAE hold talks on maritime security

An official said the meetings focused on issues related to border security and navigation in shared waters, describing the talks as “nothing new” and unrelated to current tensions. The official said there were periodic meetings scheduled between technical teams
Associated Press|Published: 07.31.19, 16:12

Officials from the United Arab Emirates and Iran met to discuss maritime security for the first time in six years amid a spike in tensions in the Persian Gulf, both countries confirmed on Wednesday.

The meeting is significant because the UAE and Iran are regional rivals. The UAE downgraded ties with Iran in 2016 and has long pushed for more hawkish U.S. policies toward Tehran, including supporting tough American sanctions.

The UAE and its close ally, Saudi Arabia, have also been at war against Iran-aligned rebels in Yemen since 2015. In recent weeks, though, the UAE has pulled out thousands of its troops from Yemen as it boosts security at home.

Recent confrontations in the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial oil shipping corridor, and fears of a wider conflict have prompted the UAE to call for de-escalation and diplomacy with Iran.

Four oil tankers were sabotaged off the UAE coast in May.

The UAE has declined to join Washington in blaming Iran for the attacks, which Tehran denies. Earlier this month, Iran seized a British-flagged oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz in what some Iranian officials have suggested was retaliation for the seizure of an Iranian tanker by British authorities in Gibraltar.

An Emirati official said the meetings focused on issues related to border security and navigation in shared waters, describing the talks as “nothing new” and unrelated to current tensions. The official said there were periodic meetings scheduled between technical teams in both countries and this was the sixth one to take place.

The official was not authorized to discuss the talks with media and so spoke on condition of anonymity.

The state-run IRAN daily reported that a seven-member delegation from Abu Dhabi met with Iranian border and coastguard commanders in Tehran on Tuesday in the first such meeting since 2013.

Another daily, Etemad, described the meeting as an effort to boost maritime security cooperation between the two countries. It reported that the Emirati delegation met Iran’s police border guard commander, Gen. Ghasem Rezaei.

Despite pursuing rival policies in the region, the UAE and Iran have maintained links. The UAE has kept its embassy in Iran open and Dubai remains a popular destination for Iranian tourists. Emirati citizens with Iranian heritage also maintain links with Iran, which operates a hospital, cultural club and school in Dubai.

Tensions in the region have soared since the Trump administration withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers last year and imposed crippling sanctions on the country. In recent months, the U.S. has boosted its military presence in the Persian Gulf while Iran has begun openly exceeding limits on its nuclear activities, saying it can no longer fully abide by the 2015 deal unless European signatories to the agreement provide some kind of economic relief.

On **Wednesday, Iran dismissed** Secretary of State Mike **Pompeo's offer to visit** and address the Iranian people as a "hypocritical gesture."

"You don't need to come to Iran," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on the sidelines of a Cabinet meeting in remarks directed at Pompeo. **He suggested Pompeo instead grant visas for Iranian reporters to travel to the U.S.** and interview him, accusing him of having rejected their requests.

On **Monday, Pompeo had tweeted**: "We aren't afraid of (Zarif) coming to America where he enjoys the right to speak freely."

"Are the facts of the (Khamenei) regime so bad he cannot let me do the same thing in Tehran?" Pompeo said, referring to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "What if his people heard the truth, unfiltered, unabridged?"

The Trump administration has said its policies are aimed at changing Iran's behavior in the region, not its government.

Zarif, a relative moderate within Iran's clerically-overseen political system, was an architect of the nuclear agreement.

The U.S. and Iran cut off all diplomatic relations after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but the U.S. allows Iranian officials to visit the United Nations headquarters in New York.

U.S. renews Iran sanctions waivers

The Washington Post reports the Treasury Department asked for more time to consider the effects of possible sanctions on Russian, Chinese and European companies

Reuters|Published: 07.31.19 , 12:13

The United States is set to announce this week it will renew sanctions waivers for five Iran nuclear programs that allow Russia, China and European countries to continue civilian nuclear cooperation with Iran, the Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

President Donald Trump, in an Oval Office meeting last week, sided with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin who argued for renewing the waivers over objections by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton, the Post said.

Mnuchin “argued to Trump that if the sanctions were not again waived as required by law by Aug. 1, the United States would have to sanction Russian, Chinese and European firms that are involved in projects inside Iran that were established as part of the 2015 nuclear deal,” the Post said, citing six unnamed officials.

A State Department spokesman declined to comment to Reuters.

Pompeo in May extended five of seven sanctions waivers for 90 days. The waivers allow work at Iran’s Bushehr nuclear plant, the Fordow enrichment facility, the Arak nuclear complex and the Tehran Research Reactor.

Trump abandoned the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran and six world powers last year, arguing that he wanted a bigger deal that not only limited Iran’s atomic work but also reined in its support for proxies in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon, and curbed its ballistic missile program. Trump tightened sanctions on Iran in May to try to choke off its oil exports.

The Post said the Treasury Department asked for more time to consider the effects of possible sanctions on Russian, Chinese and European companies, and quoted a senior administration official as saying the goal of ending the waivers remained.

“These waivers can be revoked at any time, as developments with Iran warrant. But because of the Treasury Department’s legitimate concerns, we’ve decided to extend them for now,” the official said, according to the Post.

Fears of a direct U.S.- Iranian conflict have risen since May with several attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf, Iran’s downing of a U.S. surveillance drone, and a plan for U.S. air strikes on Iran last month that Trump called off at the last minute.

China orders Arabic script & Muslim symbols taken down from 11 shops in Beijing
Placed on Monday 29 July (due to space available)

China's capital orders Arabic, Muslim symbols taken down

In the Chinese capital, authorities ordered halal restaurants to remove Arabic script and symbols associated with Islam from their signs; 'they said this is foreign culture and you should use more Chinese culture,' says restaurant manager

Reuters|Published: 07.31.19 , 10:24

Authorities in the Chinese capital have ordered halal restaurants and food stalls to remove Arabic script and symbols associated with Islam from their signs, part of an expanding national effort to "Sinicize" its Muslim population.

Employees at 11 restaurants and shops in Beijing selling halal products and visited by Reuters in recent days said officials had told them to remove images associated with Islam, such as the crescent moon and the word "halal" written in Arabic, from signs.

Government workers from various offices told one manager of a Beijing noodle shop to cover up the "halal" in Arabic on his shop's sign, and then watched him do it.

"They said this is foreign culture and you should use more Chinese culture," said the manager, who, like all restaurant owners and employees who spoke to Reuters, declined to give his name due to the sensitivity of the issue.

The campaign against Arabic script and Islamic images marks a new phase of a drive that has gained momentum since 2016, aimed at ensuring religions conform with mainstream Chinese culture.

The campaign has included the removal of Middle Eastern-style domes on many mosques around the country in favour of Chinese-style pagodas.

China, home to 20 million Muslims, officially guarantees freedom of religion, but the government has campaigned to bring the faithful into line with Communist Party ideology.

It's not just Muslims who have come under scrutiny. Authorities have shut down many underground Christian churches, and torn down crosses of some churches deemed illegal by the government.

But Muslims have come in for particular attention since a riot in 2009 between mostly Muslim Uighur people and majority Han Chinese in the far western region of Xinjiang, home to the Uighur minority.

Spasms of ethnic violence followed, and some Uighurs, chafing at government controls, carried out knife and crude bomb attacks in public areas and against the police and other authorities.

In response, China launched what it described as a crackdown on terrorism in Xinjiang.

Now, it is facing intense criticism from Western nations and rights groups over its policies, in particular mass detentions and surveillance of Uighurs and other Muslims there.

The government says its actions in Xinjiang are necessary to stamp out religious extremism. Officials have warned about creeping Islamisation, and have extended tighter controls over other Muslim minorities.

'New Normal'

Analysts say the ruling Communist Party is concerned that foreign influences can make religious groups difficult to control.

"Arabic is seen as a foreign language and knowledge of it is now seen as something outside of the control of the state," said Darren Byler, an anthropologist at the University of Washington who studies Xinjiang.

"It is also seen as connected to international forms of piety, or in the eyes of state authorities, religious extremism. They want Islam in China to operate primarily through Chinese language," he said.

Kelly Hammond, an assistant professor at the University of Arkansas who studies Muslims of the Hui minority in China, said the measures were part of a "drive to create a new normal".

Beijing is home to at least 1,000 halal shops and restaurants, according to the Meituan Dianping food delivery app, spread across the city's historic Muslim quarter as well as in other neighbourhoods.

It was not clear if every such restaurant in Beijing has been told to cover Arabic script and Muslim symbols. One manager at a restaurant still displaying Arabic said he'd been ordered to remove it but was waiting for his new signs.

Several bigger shops visited by Reuters replaced their signs with the Chinese term for halal - "qing zhen" - while others merely covered up the Arabic and Islamic imagery with tape or stickers.

The Beijing government's Committee on Ethnicity and Religious affairs declined to comment, saying the order regarding halal restaurants was a national directive.

The National Ethnic Affairs Commission did not respond to a faxed request for comment.

While most shopkeepers interviewed by Reuters said they did not mind replacing their signs, some said it confused their customers and an employee at a halal butcher shop accused authorities of "erasing" Muslim culture.

"They are always talking about national unity, they're always talking about China being international. Is this national unity?"