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Netanyahu, Gantz meet on unity government as clock ticks for latest coalition-building bid

Talks between heads of two largest parties comes amid report that senior Blue and White officials Lapid and Ya'alon refuse to join Netanyahu-led government; Rivlin repeats support for unity government, as country cannot face third round of elections within 12-month period

Moran Azulay, Yuval Karni |

Updated: 11.20.19, 00:00

With a little over 24 hours left to form a coalition, Blue and White leader Benny Gantz met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem on Tuesday night in a fresh attempt to close the gaps on a unity government, with the two sharing a rotating premiership.

The two met for about an hour and did not issue a joint statement to the media after the meeting.

The talks between the Blue and White and Likud leaders came amid reports that senior Blue and White officials MKs Yair Lapid and Moshe Ya'alon had refused to join a Netanyahu-led government.

Blue and White officials later said that MK Gabi Ashkenazi also refuses to join a government headed by Netanyahu.

Gantz was tasked with forming a coalition after Netanyahu returned the mandate to Rivlin last month, saying he was unable to muster the 61 Knesset members needed for a majority government in the wake of the September 17 elections, the second national ballot in six months.

On Tuesday evening, President Reuven Rivlin issued a public reprimand of Netanyahu for implying that Israel's Arab community posed an existential threat to the country. Netanyahu has in recent days lashed out at Gantz for what he said were efforts to form a minority government with external support from the predominantly Arab Joint List faction. Such a move, Netanyahu said, would be a gift to Israel's enemies Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas.

But Rivlin made clear that he found such comments unacceptable.

"The characterization of all Arab elected officials as a 'threat' to the existence of the State of Israel and as a 'fifth column' must be emphatically denounced," he said in a statement released following a meeting with the prime minister at the president's official residence in Jerusalem.

"We who live as sovereigns in our country, the Jewish and democratic State of Israel, must ensure equality of rights and respectful and meaningful discourse with all Israelis." Rivlin also repeated during the meeting his support for a national unity government comprising the two biggest parties. The president has fervently advocated for a unity government, insisting that the country cannot go through a third round of elections in a 12-month period.

Netanyahu held an ad hoc Monday meeting with members of his right-wing bloc, telling them that there was still controversy over the rotation question and that he and Gantz would discuss the matter Tuesday night.

He also told them he was trying to persuade Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Lieberman to agree to maintain the status quo over the separation of religion and civil affairs.

Blue and White have made it clear that they are still standing by the demand that Netanyahu give up his bloc of 55 MKs from the right-wing and religious parties, and negotiate only on behalf of the Likud.

One of the other points of contention between the two parties is the clause in an outline for a unity government drawn up by President Reuven Rivlin, which determines what would happen should Netanyahu be indicted in one or more of three corruption cases against him.

Under the clause, the premiership would operate on a rotational basis between Netanyahu and Gantz, with Netanyahu serving as prime minister for the first two years, followed by Gantz for a similar time period.

If Netanyahu is indicted, he will resign and pass the premiership directly to Gantz.

Blue and White officials said that they were "making every possible effort to prevent elections for the third time" in a year.

By law, if Gantz officially announces that he was able to form a government with Netanyahu, Knesset Speaker Edelstein has a week to set a date for a plenary session in which a vote of confidence in the new government is held.

11.19.19

Pompeo symbolically announced Israeli settlements do not violate international law.

11.19.19

Netanyahu celebrates U.S. settlement decision in tour of West Bank

Visiting Alon Shvut, PM tells settlers that reversal of decades-long policy is 'huge achievement' that 'fixed a historic wrong'; Arab League chief says Trump administration step will lead to 'more violence and cruelty' against the Palestinians, undermines peace prospects

Associated Press|Published: 11.19.19, 17:40

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to the West Bank on Tuesday to celebrate the U.S. announcement that it does not consider Israeli settlements to violate international law.

Netanyahu called the Trump administration's declaration, which stepped back from four decades of U.S. policy and reversed the policies of President Barack Obama, a "huge achievement" that "fixed a historic wrong."

"I think it is a great day for the state of Israel and an achievement that will remain for decades," he said.

Netanyahu spoke Tuesday at a gathering of ecstatic supporters and settler leaders in Alon Shvut, a settlement outside of Jerusalem.

Right-wing leaders welcomed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement.

Although it is largely symbolic, it fueled calls from settler supporters for increased construction or even the annexation of parts of the West Bank.

The Palestinians, who claim the West Bank as part of a future state, condemned the decision. They and other countries said the move undercuts any chances of a broader peace deal.

Over 400,000 settlers now live in the West Bank, in addition to more than 200,000 settlers in East Jerusalem, the Palestinian's hoped-for capital.

The Palestinians and the international community say that settlements are illegal and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. Israel says the fate of the settlements should be determined in negotiations.

The head of the Arab League joined the large number of critics, condemning the Trump administration's latest decision "in the strongest terms."

The league's secretary-general, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, said the decision would result in "more violence and cruelty" against the Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli settlers and "undermines any possibility" of achieving peace.

The White House says it has developed a Mideast peace plan, which Trump has branded "the deal of the century," but it has not yet unveiled it. The Palestinians already have rejected the plan, accusing the U.S. of unfair bias in favor of Israel.

The Trump administration has made a number of moves in favor of Israel, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the embassy there from Tel Aviv, recognizing Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights and shuttering the Palestinian diplomatic offices in Washington.

11.19.19

UN opposes Pompeo declaration that US supports settlements, built on occupied land

11.19.19

UN rights office says Israeli settlements remain unlawful

Human rights groups opposing Israeli settlements in the West Bank and areas of Jerusalem remain defiant in face of U.S. decision to back communities build on what is considered 'occupied territory'; 'Settlements are a war crime,' says Human Rights Watch Reuters|Published: 11.19.19, 15:12

The U.N. human rights office said on Tuesday that Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory remain in breach of international law, rejecting the Trump administration's position that it now backed them.

The United States on Monday abandoned its four-decade-old position that the settlements, built on land Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East War, were inconsistent with international law.

"We continue to follow the long-standing position of the UN that Israeli settlements are in breach of international law," UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville told a news briefing.

"A change in the policy position of one state does not modify existing international law nor its interpretation by the International Court of Justice and the Security Council," he said.

The International Court of Justice, in an advisory opinion issued in 2004, said that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, were established in breach of international law.

The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 - which both the United States and Israel have ratified - lays down that an occupying power shall not transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, he said.

Non-governmental activist groups also rejected the Trump administration's new stance, announced by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

"This changes nothing. President Trump can't wipe away decades of established international law that settlements are a war crime," Andrea Prasow, acting Washington director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

Philippe Nassif of Amnesty International said the construction and maintenance of the settlements breached international law and amounted to war crimes.

"Today, the United States government announced to the rest of the world that it believes the U.S. and Israel are above the law; that Israel can continue to violate international law and Palestinians human rights and the U.S. will firmly support it in doing so," he said in a statement.

11.18.19

Israel welcomes U.S. reversal on settlements as Palestinians fume

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Netanyahu thanks White House for saying settlements not illegal, urges Palestinians to hold final status talks, but PA says Trump administration has ruled itself out of any future role in peace process

Published: 11.18.19 , 23:51

Israel on Monday welcomed the U.S. decision to no longer view its settlements in areas captured in 1967 as illegal, but said that it would remain ready to negotiate a final status agreement with Israel

Netanyahu also maintained that the settlements were a matter to be decided by the Israeli courts.

“Israel’s legal system, which has proven itself fully capable of addressing legal questions related to the settlements, is the appropriate place for these matters to be adjudicated - not biased international forums that pay no attention to history or facts,” he wrote.

-@IsraeliPM

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Israel remains ready and willing to conduct peace negotiations with the Palestinians regarding all final status issues in an effort to achieve a durable peace but will continue to reject all arguments regarding the illegality of the settlements.

The comments came shortly after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on Monday that the U.S. is softening its position on Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, the latest in a series of Trump administration moves that weaken Palestinian claims to statehood.

Pompeo said the U.S. repudiates a 1978 State Department legal opinion that held that civilian settlements in the occupied territories are “inconsistent with international law.”

The move angered Palestinians and was likely to put the U.S. at odds with other nations working to end the conflict.

Palestinian Authority spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeinah condemned the U.S. move as “unacceptable,” the Israeli media reported.

Abu Rudeineh said Pompeo's announcement "totally contradicts international law and resolutions that reject settlements."

He urged the international community to disregard Pompeo's "illegal" pronouncement, which he said was a threat to international peace and security.

PLO chief Saeb Erekat also slammed the announcement by Pompeo, saying that the Trump administration has "completely lost all credibility and no longer has any role in the peace process," the Jerusalem Post reported.

11.18.19

Ultra-Orthodox signal willingness to compromise with Liberman Monday

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Ultra-Orthodox signal willingness to compromise with Liberman

With the clock to form new government running out, Shas and United Torah Judaism parties say they're ready to make concessions on matters Yisrael Beytenu leader most concerned with in an effort to lure him back into right-wing bloc

Kobi Nachshoni | Published: 11.18.19, 13:59

Senior officials of the ultra-Orthodox parties said Monday they are willing to talk with anti-religious hardliner Avigdor Liberman about a compromise on key issues as efforts continue to end Israel's political limbo.

Blue and White leader Benny Gantz has just three days left to form a coalition before his mandate to form government needs to be returned to President Reuven Rivlin.

The comments came just a day after United Torah Judaism Chairman Yaakov Litzman said the most he is willing to compromise on is "breakfast."

The ultra-Orthodox said that although they haven't yet received a concrete offer from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, they believe Likud is making behind the scenes efforts to lure the Yisrael Beytenu leader back to the right-wing bloc.

The religious and ultra-Orthodox parties are already gearing up for the talks on the yet-to-be revealed offer, asking to separate the "halachic" issues from the "public" ones.

While they believe they can't compromise on halachic matters such as conversion to Judaism and marriage registry, they can make concessions on public issues such as the Western Wall and public transportation on Shabbat, once they've received approval from the Council of the Great Torah Scholars.

The ultra-Orthodox parties believe that they can compromise on the issues Liberman is most concerned about - namely, they would oppose the potential legislation in these areas but would not veto, and allowing the bills to pass the Knesset.

In addition, the issue of public transportation on Shabbat is an initiative of local authorities and therefore does not require any legislation.

"Halacha-related issues should not be compromised on because we have no authority to give up on matters concerning Judaism," said Shas and the United Torah Judaism parties in a statement. "We need to understand what Netanyahu really wants in order to know how we can move forward."

"If they want for the ultra-Orthodox to be flexible, they need to give us something concrete and with that we'll go to the rabbis for approval."

11.18.19

Wind gusts uproot palm tree, injuring 2 children badly as temperatures dropped Sunday

11.18.19

Strong winds batter Israel leaving 2 children badly hurt

A 10-year-old girl is in a serious condition after a tree falls on 2 schoolchildren as gusts rip through most parts of the country in the first winter weather system to hit Israel this season

Raanan Ben Zur|Published: 11.18.19 , 11:22

Howling winds ravaged most parts of the country on Monday, leaving two young girls injured after a palm tree was uprooted by the gusts and collapsed on the children making their way to school in central Israel.

One of the girls, aged 10, initially suffered moderate and was taken to Meir Medical Center in Kfar Saba where her condition deteriorated and is now described as serious.

The other girl, aged 8, was taken to Laniado Hospital in Netanya and her condition is described as light. She suffers from injuries to her head and legs.

"I saw a large palm tree that collapsed and a girl, aged about 9, trapped underneath it," said MDA paramedic Moshe Gafni. "She was fully conscious and suffered from multisystemic injuries. Near her was another girl who suffered injuries to her head and legs."

A palm tree which fell on 2 girls in central Israel

The incident comes after temperatures dropped significantly overnight Sunday and winds tore through most parts of Israel in what appears to be the first winter weather system this season.

Israel's Nature and Parks Authority earlier said they're closing several hiking routes and tourist sites due to what they described as "extreme weather condition."

According to the Meteo-Tech meteorological company, winds in the northeastern Mediterranean Sea will reach speeds of up to 40 kph (25 mph), while the winds on the northern shores will reach the speed of up to 55 kph (34 mph).

In the northern city of Haifa, the temperatures will range from 23 degrees celsius during the day Sunday to just 16 degrees at night. In Tel Aviv, the weather will be similar with a range of 24 degrees during the day and 15 degrees at night. In the southern city of Be'er Sheva, temperatures will range from 23 degrees throughout the day to 13 degrees at night. In Jerusalem, the temperatures will be cooler, reaching 17 degrees celsius during the day and falling to 10 degrees overnight.

Despite the low temperatures, the weather will be dry and partly cloudy. Mist is expected in some parts of the country.

11.17.19

Trump flustered & disappointed with Netanyahu & Israeli politics says anonymous

1.17.19

Sources: Trump 'frustrated' and 'disappointed' with Netanyahu, Israel

White House senior officials, who spoke with their Israeli counterparts, say the president distanced himself from Israel's leader because he 'doesn't like losers'

Itamar Eichner|Published: 11.17.19, 10:53

The U.S. government feels "frustrated" and "disappointed" with Israeli politics in general and with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in particular, according to senior White House officials who spoke with their Israeli counterparts on condition of anonymity.

"Americans are discouraged and frustrated by Israeli politics and the current political crisis, which has prevented the White House from unveiling the political part of the deal of the century," said White House sources, referring to the Trump administration's long-delayed Mideast peace plan.

The sources added that President Donald Trump has in the past admitted to feeling "very disappointed" with Netanyahu and has spoken about him in a negative manner.

According to sources, Trump has decided to distance himself from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after his failure to secure a clear victory in the April 9 elections and form a government, despite the assistance Israel's leader received from the president. "The president doesn't like losers," said a White House source."

Before the April 9 vote, Netanyahu was invited to the White House, where Trump officially recognized the Golan Heights as Israel's sovereign territory and designated Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization.

During the election campaign ahead of the September 17 vote, however, Trump's behavior toward Netanyahu has changed.

He'd written no blank checks for Netanyahu during that campaign and made no loud statements or promises. The only notable thing being a tweet, where Trump vowed to form a security alliance with Israel.

In addition, Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who was fired by Trump a year into the job, said two months ago during an event at Harvard University that Netanyahu "played" Trump on several occasions by providing him with incorrect information.

"In dealing with Bibi, it's always useful to carry a healthy amount of skepticism in your discussions with him," he was quoted as saying. "It bothers me that an ally that's that close and important to us would do that to us."

11.17.19 Tuesday

Venice braces for high tide after flood rains just short of the record set in 1966

11.17.19

Venice braces for another 'tough day'

Venice mayor Luigi Brugnaro, estimated damages from the flooding in the city since Tuesday at around 1 billion euros but expects today's floods to be less severe than those experienced last week

Reuters|Published: 11.17.19 , 14:53

Several Italian cities were on high alert on Sunday after heavy rain overnight, including Venice where residents and tourists were braced for another exceptional high tide.

The city, which suffered its worst flooding in 50 years on Tuesday, will face a high tide at around 160 cm (5.25 feet) at 1200 GMT, the city's centre for forecasting tides said.

Authorities in Florence and Pisa were also closely monitoring the Arno river, whose water levels rose rapidly in the night due to heavy rain.

The mayor of Venice, Luigi Brugnaro, said on Saturday that the city was preparing for another "tough day". However, he said the situation was expected to be less dramatic than Tuesday when the flooding left squares, shops, homes and hotels inundated.

Brugnaro, who has been appointed special commissioner to deal with the emergency, estimated damages from the flooding in the city since Tuesday at around 1 billion euros (\$1.10 billion).

On Tuesday the tide peaked at 187 cm (6.14 ft) at 10.50 p.m. (2150 GMT), just short of the record 194 cm set in 1966. In normal conditions, tides of 80-90 cm are generally seen as high but manageable.

Italy's longest river, the Po, which runs across northern Italy passing through Turin, was also being monitored on Sunday after its level rose by a metre and a half in the last 24 hours due to heavy rain.

11.18.19

Iran's fuel & food rations turn to protest demands that top clerical leaders step down

11.18.19

Iran's Revolutionary Guards warn protesters of 'decisive' action over continued unrest. Protests have spread across Islamic Republic since Friday, turning political with demonstrators demanding that top clerical leaders step down and at least 100 banks and dozens of buildings and cars torched, according to state media. Reuters | Updated: 11.18.19, 14:55

DUBAI - Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards warned anti-government protesters of "decisive" action if unrest over gasoline price hikes do not cease, state media said, in a hint that a harsh security crackdown could be on the cards.

The protests have spread across the Islamic Republic since Friday, turning political with demonstrators demanding that top clerical leaders step down. At least 100 banks and dozens of buildings and cars have been torched, state media reported.

The scale of the unrest triggered by announcements of fuel rationing and price rises of at least 50 percent remains unclear as authorities have curbed Internet access to stop the use of social media to organize rallies and disseminate videos.

But it appears to be the **most serious unrest since late 2017** when 22 people were reported to have killed in dozens of cities and towns in protests over poor living standards, with some calling on top figures in the Shi'ite Muslim elite to resign.

President Hassan Rouhani's government said the **gasoline price rises were intended to raise** around \$2.55 billion a year **for extra subsidies to 18 million families** - or roughly 60 million **Iranians on low incomes**.

But many ordinary **Iranians angry and in despair over reimposed U.S. sanctions** that have helped undermine the government's promises of more jobs and investment, and **authorities are anxious to end the unrest**.

"If necessary we will take decisive and revolutionary action against any continued moves to disturb the people's peace and security," the Revolutionary Guards, Iran's heavily armed main security force, said in a statement carried by state media.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali **Khamenei on Sunday blamed** the turmoil on Iran's opponents and **foreign foes**, denouncing protesters who attacked public property as "thugs" and "hooligans."

Some Iranians managed to post social media videos that showed police **firing tear gas to disperse protesters**. The images could not be verified by Reuters. Authorities said one policeman and a civilian had been killed and **1,000 "rioters" arrested**.

"Rioters used knives and guns...A number of security agents and policemen were killed or taken hostage," government spokesman Ali Rabiei told a televised news conference.

The struggle of ordinary Iranians to make ends meet became even harder last year when President Donald Trump withdrew the **United States** from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers and **reimposed sanctions** that had been lifted under the accord.

Frustration has grown over a **sharp devaluation of Iran's rial currency** as well as spikes in the **prices of bread, rice and other staples** since Washington began to apply "maximum pressure" on Iran to make tougher nuclear and security concessions.

11.19.19

Pompeo's Israeli Settlement Reversal seen as an Election boost for Netanyahu

Nov. 19, 2019

Pompeo's Israeli Settlement Reversal Helps Nobody in the Holy Land, but Might Play Well in Kansas

"It's all for show," says veteran Israeli analyst Amir Oren. **"Trump's America has no foreign policy—only re-election policy."**

Noga Tarnopolsky

Updated **Nov. 19, 2019** 9:30AM ET Published Nov. 19, 2019 8:10AM ET

Reuters / Erin Scott

JERUSALEM—After a long dry spell, President Donald **Trump appeared to come to his old pal Benjamin Netanyahu's aid on Monday**, right at the nadir of Bibi's long fight for his political life.

Netanyahu still clings to power after failing to win enough support to form a government in two national elections this year. His top rival, former army chief Benny Gantz, has 48 hours to try his luck forming a government. Netanyahu has attempted to thwart that by engaging in all-out political war against Israel's Arab citizens, referring to the Arab-majority parties who may support a Gantz coalition as purveyors of terror who endanger the existence of the state.

Making matters worse, Netanyahu is expected to be indicted on corruption and bribery charges within days.

In the final stretch of each of the last elections, in April and in September, Netanyahu has made vague promises about formally annexing parts of the West Bank, land Palestinians claim for their own future state, but which Israel has occupied since 1967 when it was ruled by Jordan.

Netanyahu and Trump have not spoken for months. So any indication the president was back with Bibi—the nickname by which Netanyahu is ubiquitously referred to in Israel—would be welcomed.

And Netanyahu did exult in the moments after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the United States had reversed a decades-old policy holding that Israel's settlements in the West Bank are “inconsistent with international law.”

That view, which reflects the international consensus and the Geneva Convention barring an occupying power from transferring its own civilian population to occupied land, was formalized in 1978 by the Carter administration.

“Pompeo's Monday declaration, made at a rushed press conference, left more questions than answers.”

In a series of tweets, Netanyahu announced he had spoken with the president and thanked Trump for “repairing an historic injustice.”

“I told the president we are not in a foreign land but in our homeland of more than 3,000 years,” Netanyahu said he said. “This has been our homeland for over 3,000 years. The reason we are called Jews is because we are the people of Judea.” The occupied West Bank includes historic Judea and Samaria.

The White House has not confirmed the call took place and Trump, who has not been seen in public for three days, since his unannounced visit to Walter Reed Medical Center on Saturday, did not respond to Netanyahu's tweeted gratitude.

In a statement, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said “the Trump administration's bias toward Israel's most extreme currents blinds it to the vision of the fundamental principles of international law, now in an attempt to support Netanyahu in the final moments of competition for the post of prime minister.”

But Hanan Ashrawi, a Christian Palestinian and stalwart of the peace process, noted Pompeo's background as a messianic evangelical appealing to like-minded Trump voters. Ashrawi tweeted that the move was "another blow to international law, justice & peace by a biblical absolutist waiting for the 'rapture.'"

"The Secretary of State offered no legal arguments to explain why the U.S. now believes 'the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law.'"

Monday's announcement reflected the latest abrupt Trump administration move to side with Israel against Palestinian claims. Palestinian officials have boycotted the U.S. since Trump announced recognition of Jerusalem's capital in December 2017 and later recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which was captured from Syria in 1967.

Each of the other policy reversals regarding Israel and the Palestinians was announced with pomp and ceremony by Trump, including the Golan declaration, which he made in Washington while a surprised Pompeo was holding meetings in Jerusalem.

Thus Pompeo's Monday declaration, made at a rushed press conference, left more questions than answers.

"The Trump administration is reversing the Obama administration's approach towards Israeli settlements," he began, intentionally misstating the case, since Obama merely upheld decades of American policy.

Pompeo is facing growing pressure, and, according to NBC News, the anger of a mercurial president, as diplomats have testified to the House impeachment inquiry regarding both Trump's and Pompeo's actions in relation to Ukraine.

The secretary of state offered no legal arguments to explain why the United States now believes "the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law" and appeared to offer an immediate hedge against possible anger from the Arab world by adding that the U.S. was "not addressing or prejudging the ultimate status of the West Bank" and expressing "no view on the legal status of any individual settlement."

If anything, Pompeo appeared once again to be isolating the United States from an international consensus while sowing confusion in the region about its real intentions.

In Israel, the statement is likely to have no impact. Pompeo's announcement has no effect on international law and while both he and Netanyahu touted the ability of Israel's legal system to handle any challenges to settlers' rights, Israeli law and even Netanyahu's attorney general have repeatedly defined the West Bank as occupied territory, despite de facto recognition of much of Israel's settlement in the disputed area.

Amir Oren, a veteran political analyst writing for the WallaNews website, said flatly, “It is all for show.”

“The [Israeli] Supreme Court has not ruled out the settlements per se, so Americans are also allowed to say that they are not necessarily illegal. But declarations of American recognition of Israeli sovereignty in West Jerusalem and its annexation of the Golan did not promote peace in the region, as Trump’s America has no foreign policy—only re-election policy.”

In Israel, Pompeo’s statement appeared to have electoral purposes as well. After Netanyahu thanked Trump in English, he tweeted out his real feelings, in Hebrew. “Amazing,” he wrote. “At the same moment the United States recognizes our rights over Eretz Israel, Benny Gantz tries to establish a minority government with those who do not recognize any of our rights in our nation.”

Gantz’s Blue & White party riposted “We will not be schooled by a man who warmly shook Arafat’s hand and transfers tens of millions of dollars as a protection to Hamas every month. Bibi, let the people of Israel see Messi in peace.”

The reference was to soccer superstar Lionel Messi. On Monday night, most of Israel was transfixed by a long-awaited match in Tel Aviv between Uruguay and Argentina, with the main attraction being Messi—or “The Messi-ah,” as he was called by the Times of Israel.

The only real effect appeared to be on U.S. citizens. Immediately after Pompeo’s announcement, the U.S. embassy advised Americans to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness “in light of the current environment” in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

On Tuesday, Russia’s foreign ministry warned the Trump administration’s decision to shift its policy would only “escalate” tensions between Israel and the Palestinians.

Trump came into office touting his ability to weave together an “ultimate” peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians, appointing son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner to the task. But the plan has failed to materialize, and despite Netanyahu’s claims that the move would advance peace “because you cannot build true peace on a foundation of lies,” it’s difficult to see who the dramatic shift would help.