

Newsletter Monday August 27, 2018

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Israeli officials hail US move to cut aid to Palestinian refugees

U.S. move to cut UNRWA funding and end Palestinian demand for right of return is an "important and historic step" in exposing the Palestinian refugee lie, Israeli minister says

• Defense figures say U.S. move could ignite regional violence, draw backlash.

Mati Tuchfeld

A woman outside UNRWA headquarters in Gaza City | Photo: AP

Israeli officials welcomed reports Sunday indicating that U.S. President Donald Trump plans to act to **end the Palestinian demand for a right of return and to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees**, a move they say is in line with Israeli policy.

A diplomatic official dismissed the criticism of a defense official who had been quoted as saying the U.S. decision "could set the area, which is already on the verge of a conflict, on fire."

"The tendency of certain officials in the defense establishment to fear everything, and sometimes align themselves with pro-Arab organizations that act against Israel, is alarming," the diplomatic official said. "The defense establishment's job is not to replace the diplomatic echelon, but rather to ensure the safety of the citizens of the State of Israel using our own resources. They needn't go looking for sub-contractors that engage in incessant anti-Israel propaganda."

Jerusalem Affairs Minister Zeev Elkin welcomed the U.S. administration's "justified decision," saying it "finally speaks the truth to the Arab lie that has been marketed all over the world for decades."

"The solutions for the challenges facing those currently living in various Arab countries can be found in those countries. There is no reason for them to dream of returning [here]," Elkin said.

"The State of Israel was, is and will always be the national homeland of the Jewish people, on the grounds of 2,000 years of history as well as its official status since the days of the Balfour Declaration.

"For many years, **the UNRWA organization artificially perpetuated the Arab problem** to use it as a tool to batter the State of Israel, and it should have long since passed from the world.

"This example [of the U.S. cutting aid] proves that when Israel believes in its path, and when the Israeli public unites behind our national interests, ultimately, the world concedes the truth and comes around to our position. That is happening now with the [Palestinian] right of return, it happened with the decision to relocate the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, and it will happen in other areas if we show enough determination."

Science and Technology Minister Ofir Akunis also lauded the Trump administration for "finally putting an end to the Arab lie."

"International aid funds do not help the Arabs of Judea and Samaria, but rather the corrupt leadership there. It aids the families of terrorists," he said. "Exposing the administration's plan to revoke the demand for the right of return is an important and historic phase in exposing the lie that has been prevalent for decades."

Deputy Defense Minister Eli Ben-Dahan said, "The funds, which are undoubtedly going to fund the Hamas terror regime in Gaza instead of going toward rehabilitating the [Gaza] Strip, are used to produce rockets, dig terror tunnels and build up [Hamas'] terror forces that act against Israel and its citizens. The aid must be cut."

Likud MK Sharren Haskel, who chairs the Knesset's Lobby for Reform With UNRWA, accused the organization of "raising generations of refugees and straying from its original role of resolving the refugee

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[Iranian defense minister arrives in Syria amid clashes](#)

"We hope to have a productive role in the reconstruction of Syria," says Amir Hatami as Iran-backed Hezbollah forces clash with troops loyal to Assad • Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif: America is waging a "psychological war against Iran."

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Iranian Defense Minister Amir Khatami | Photo: AFP

Iranian Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Amir Hatami arrived in Syria on Sunday for meetings with senior defense and military officials as part of a two-day visit according to Iran's Tasnim news agency.

"We hope to have a productive role in the reconstruction of Syria," Hatami said on arrival in Syria, according to Fars News.

The backdrop for this visit is the support provided by Iran to Syrian President Bashar Assad in a civil war currently raging in his country. Last week, however, clashes erupted

between Syrian forces loyal to Assad and Hezbollah – the Iranian-backed Lebanese militia, over control of commercial passageways.

The Sky network in Arabic reported Saturday that clashes broke out in the eastern Deir ez-Zor district in Syria, with one Hezbollah fighter killed. According to the report, the clashes were prompted by conflicting bids for control over a commercial passageway along the Euphrates River and the income it generates.

This was not the first time that Hezbollah fighters clashed with local forces, despite fighting shoulder to shoulder against rebel forces in the civil war. Last week, Hezbollah forces confronted a different Syrian militia loyal to Assad in the village of Abu Kamal over similarly disputed profits.

Also last week, during a visit to Israel, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton said Iran should remove its forces from Syria.

Bolton said the United States, Israel and Russia share the common goals of removing Iranian and Iranian-backed forces from Syria and ending Iran's support for Hezbollah.

According to Bolton, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the July summit in Helsinki with U.S. President Donald Trump that he did not think Russia has the same interests in Syria as Iran "and that he'd like to talk about ways to get" Iran out of the country.

However, a U.S. administration official familiar with the meeting said the Russian leadership believes securing Iran's withdrawal from Syria would be difficult.

Senior Iranian officials have said their military presence in Syria is at the invitation of the Assad government and they have no immediate plans to withdraw.

More than 1,000 Iranians, including senior members of the elite Revolutionary Guards, have been killed in Syria since 2012.

Meanwhile Sunday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said America is waging a psychological war against Iran and its business partners.

"[America's] focus is on a psychological war against Iran and its business partners," Zarif said.

Trump pulled the United States out of the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers in May and is reimposing sanctions on Tehran. Other parties to the accord are trying to find ways to save the agreement.

The decision to withdraw from the nuclear accord has hurt the United States, Zarif said, according to the Iranian Students' News Agency.

"From the time that Trump announced the withdrawal from the nuclear deal, America has not been able to reach its goals," Zarif said.

Washington aims to force Tehran to end its nuclear program and its support of terrorist groups and proxy militias in the Middle East.

Zarif added that the nuclear deal has led to political conflict within Iran.

"There are some in the country who, instead of laying the groundwork for using the opportunities presented by the nuclear deal, chose a political fight," Zarif said, according to the Iranian Students News Agency. "And this political fight led to despair and disappointment."

Hard-line critics of the deal have lashed out at Iranian President Hassan Rouhani after America's withdrawal, claiming the agreement was a form of capitulation.

Newsletter Sunday August 26, 2018

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US official says \$21 million in EU aid for Iran sends 'wrong message'

"Foreign aid from EU taxpayers perpetuates the regime's ability to neglect the needs of its people and stifle meaningful policy changes," says Brian Hook, U.S. special representative for Iran, slamming Iranian government corruption, investment in terror.

In November, U.S. sanctions will target Iran's banking sector and oil exports | Illustration: AFP

The top U.S. envoy on Iran criticized a European Union decision to give \$21 million in aid to Tehran on Friday, saying it sent "the wrong message at the wrong time."

He also urged Brussels to help Washington end the Iranian threat to global stability.

"Foreign aid from European taxpayers perpetuates the regime's ability to neglect the needs of its people and stifles meaningful policy changes," Brian Hook, the U.S. special representative for Iran, said in a statement.

"The Iranian people face very real economic pressures caused by their government's corruption, mismanagement, and deep investment in terrorism and foreign conflicts," he added. "The United States and the European Union should be working together instead to find lasting solutions that truly support Iran's people and end the regime's threats to regional and global stability."

The EU decision on Thursday to provide €18 million (\$21 million) in aid to Iran was aimed at offsetting the impact of U.S. sanctions as European countries try to salvage a 2015 agreement that aimed to curb Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

U.S. President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the **nuclear deal** in May and has begun reimposing sanctions on Tehran, even as other parties to the accord are trying to find ways to save the agreement.

The EU funding is part of a wider package of €50 million (\$58 million) earmarked in the EU budget for Iran, which has threatened to stop complying with the nuclear accord if it fails to see the economic benefit of relief from sanctions.

The United States is pressing other countries to comply with American sanctions and isolate Iran.

"More money in the hands of the ayatollah means more money to conduct assassinations in those very European countries," Hook said in his statement.

U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton told Reuters during a visit to Israel last week that the restoration of U.S. sanctions was already having a strong effect on Iran's economy and popular opinion.

The first round of U.S. sanctions, instated earlier this month, target Iran's car industry, trade in gold and other precious metals, and purchases of U.S. dollars crucial to international financing and investment and trade relations. Farther-reaching sanctions are scheduled for November and are poised to target Iran's banking sector and oil exports.

Newsletter Friday August 24, 2018

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Study finds surprising reason behind most terrorist attacks

While many Palestinians support terrorist attacks against Israel, mental health issues or personal distress are the main motivators prompting lone wolf attackers to act and seek a martyr's death, a study by Israel's Public Security Ministry has found.

Nadav Shragai

Attackers are motivated by psychological, ideological or personal reasons and are "triggered" to act by events, the study has found | Photo: AP

Last Friday, Ahmed Mohammed Hamid from Umm al-Fahm joined the long list of "mentally unstable" Palestinian terrorists killed or arrested while committing or trying to commit attacks.

Hamid was a patient at the Sha'ar Menashe Mental Health Center in Haifa, and had been hospitalized in a psychiatric institution, his relatives revealed. On Friday, he left the Temple Mount compound in Jerusalem via the Majlis (Council) Gate carrying a knife. He pounced on the first Israeli police officer on the way to the gate and tried to stab him. Other police officers standing nearby shot and killed him. Relatives said he was not devout and were surprised that he had visited Al-Aqsa mosque.

Like many other attackers suffering personal distress, some of whom were psychotic or were part of the troubled fringes of Palestinian society, Hamid will soon be getting a status upgrade. He will be moved from the "distressed" group, at the rejected end of the Palestinian spectrum, and given a place of honor in the pantheon of Palestinian ethno-religious martyrs. His wild, incitement-filled funeral in Umm al-Fahm on Tuesday was just the first sign that the process has begun.

Many others have already taken the same path. Fuad Tamimi, who, in the spring of 2016 opened fire on Israeli police officers stationed at the Flowers Gate and was killed by security forces, was a thief and a drug addict.

Jamil Tamimi, who murdered British tourist Hannah Bladon 15 months ago, had been convicted of molesting his daughter and had tried to cut his own throat with a razor.

Amani Sabatin, a mother of four from the village of Husan near Bethlehem, who had been fighting with her husband and was seriously troubled, was shot and killed after she tried to run down soldiers at Gush Etzion junction in March 2016.

That same month, Ahmed Youssef Amar from the village of Mas-ha tried to stab soldiers at the A-Zawaya checkpoint south of the Elkana settlement and was fatally shot. He left a suicide note in which he asked his parents' forgiveness and revealed that he was tens of thousands of shekels in debt to three people.

Mona Fadwa Abu Tir, a mother of five, tried to stab Jews in the Old City of Jerusalem and was fatally shot. According to the Shin Bet security agency, she suffered from long-term depression and apparently wanted to end her life.

Abdullah Takata from Beit Fajjar – who had been reported by the Israeli military as deranged – tried to commit suicide by running toward a group of soldiers with a knife. It worked. He was shot and killed.

Amar Ahmed Lutfi Khalil committed a number of terrorist shootings together with his fiancée. Khalil pulled out a gun to resist arrest, and was shot and killed. Their motivation was their families' refusal to accept their relationship, the Shin Bet said.

Wissam Tawabte, also from Beit Fajjar, was receiving regular treatment at a mental hospital in Bethlehem when she stabbed border policewoman Hadar Buchris to death at the Gush Etzion intersection in November 2015.

And for 13-year-old Roqaya Abu Eid from Anata, it was a fight with her sisters that sent her basically running to her death when she tried to stab a security guard at the Anatot checkpoint in northern Jerusalem in January 2016.

These are only a sample of the findings in an ongoing Public Security Ministry study and were presented at the International Homeland Security Forum convened by Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan three months ago in Jerusalem. The figures show the growing prevalence of terrorist attacks committed by Palestinians driven by personal distress.

The key number is surprising: 67% of attackers had a history of mental health problems.

The study was led by Professor Ariel Merari, a psychologist who served as scientific director of research on Palestinian suicide terrorists in the National Security Council from 2002 to 2009, and Professor Boaz Ganor, the founding president of the International Academic Counter-Terrorism Community and executive director of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya. They and their team of Public Security Ministry officials, researchers, psychologists and sociologists worked to investigate and analyze the growing problem of lone wolf terrorists.

Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya

Professor Ariel Merari: Why do these individuals, and not the hundreds of thousands who hate Israel, commit attacks?

They addressed the wave of terrorist attacks that took place between October 2015 and December 2017, and their database includes 700 terrorists who participated in some 560 attacks, alone or with others, but without belonging to or assistance from any terrorist group.

They asked 45 imprisoned lone wolf terrorists to fill out questionnaires and take part in face-to-face interviews. The findings indicate that about two-thirds of the attackers suffered from mental health issues, psychosis, or suicidal tendencies. More than half of those with suicidal tendencies, 54%, said their preferred method of suicide was to die while carrying out an attack.

The Public Security Ministry is stressing that a combination of factors motivated the attackers: psychological, ideological and personal, with the "triggers" that prompted them to act being "geopolitical events, traumatic events, and sometimes, just an urge to imitate other terrorists."

All these factors were "strengthened by calculated incitement," the study found.

"The ideological (and nationalist and religious) motive was found to affect the decision to murder Jews in 60% of the youths in the sample, 28% of the men, and 11% of the women.

Family problems were an especially common motive among the female attackers, but not restricted to them."

Merari, who has decades' worth of articles and studies devoted to the psychology of terrorism to his credit, told Israel Hayom that among Palestinians in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, there is a great deal of support for terrorist attacks against Israel.

"Public opinion polls conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, headed by Dr. Khalil Shikaki, have indicated that during the Second Intifada, public support for terrorist attacks within the Green Line was as high as 70%, and support for terrorist attacks against Israel beyond the Green Line was nearly 90%," Merari said.

"Shikaki's polls during the period of lone wolf terrorism that started in October 2015 indicated about a 50% rate of support for those attacks, which is also very high. We're talking about hundreds of thousands of supporters of terrorism, although the attacks were actually carried out by a few hundred individuals.

"Our research focused on the question, why them? Or why do so few out of a population of hundreds of thousands who hate Israel actually commit terrorist attacks? What causes one particular Palestinian and not 1,000 others to get up one morning and decide that this is the day he'll stab or run over a Jew? What characterizes that attacker? These are the basic questions of our study."

Q: What did you learn from interviewing the terrorists?

"Among other things, we found that 67% of the attackers we looked at had indicators of psychopathology, including suicidal tendencies, and in some cases serious personality disorders that were close to psychosis. In a number of cases, there was a background of psychosis both before the attack and while it was being committed. That's a very high rate of mental disorders."

Q: Is that unique to terrorism in Israel?

"No. The quality studies conducted in Europe and the U.S. into the backgrounds of lone wolf terrorists – although they didn't interview any attackers – found that over a third had mental health issues, and in a significant number of cases, criminal backgrounds."

Merari said the sample revealed that family troubles were much more likely to motivate women to commit a terrorist attack than to motivate men. Security officials recount stories of women who took to terrorism because they were being forced to marry against their will, or because their husbands were divorcing them and trying to take their children, and even one case of a female attacker who approached a security guard at a West Bank checkpoint and asked him to shoot her.

"I don't want to hurt you," she reportedly told him, "but please kill me." The astonished guard stepped back and did not fire. But when she approached him in a threatening manner with a knife in hand, he fired and wounded her.

Q: Jews with troubles like these don't go out and stab Arabs. They get treatment or jump off a roof. Why is that sometimes different with the Palestinians?

"There are two reasons. One is very simple: Muslims, like Jews or Catholics, are not allowed to commit suicide. A Muslim who commits suicide is destined to eternal hell. Dying while carrying out a terrorist attack, on the other hand, is not only not forbidden, it is recommended by many. For someone who wants to die, this is a religiously legitimate way," Merari said.

"Second, there is no doubt synergy with the public and social atmosphere. This is where the hard-core incitement comes in, and we need to add the copycat element and the 'contagion' of many of the attackers. One imitates another. When a woman with difficult family problems wants to die, for totally personal reasons, the first thing that occurs to her is, 'I'll go kill an Israeli soldier, and then I'll have social legitimacy. Society will see me positively.' The daily reporting of these incidents in the Palestinian media and the legitimacy they are given there guides a potential suicide terrorist to choose this manner of death."

Q: So the suicide terrorist gets social and religious approval, and not only is not seen as a transgressor, but becomes a martyr?

"Exactly."

Gideon Markowicz
Professor Boaz Ganor

Q: Did the terrorists you interviewed cooperate freely?

"Yes. We had almost no refusals. The Prisons Service was immensely helpful. Every prisoner who gave an interview as part of the sample underwent a psychological interview of several hours, much longer than is usual."

Q: What parameters did you check?

"Every prisoner we interviewed was asked to discuss his or her personal and social background in detail, as well as their families and mental health history. Every conversation went into details, so there is a solid basis for our conclusion that about two-thirds of the terrorists in the most recent wave of terrorism had a history of mental health problems."

Dr. Michal Morag, head of the criminal profiling program in the Criminology Department at Ariel University, believes the would-be suicide attackers who survive see too great a benefit from their actions.

"Studies conducted on terrorists who survived [the attacks they perpetrated] show that they say they are totally different than they were before the attack. A large number of them found life partners as a result of their acts; some saw their financial situation improve because of what they did; and they also increased their sense of belonging to their families and in general. When they are interviewed, they say, 'We Palestinians.' They didn't feel part of that 'we' until after their attacks," Morag said.

The Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories has also addressed the issue, with a COGAT paper essentially confirming the findings of the Public Security Ministry and Merari and Ganor's study.

"From October 2015 until today, more and more terrorists have chosen to commit suicide by carrying out attacks because of various [personal] problems," the document states.

Sometimes that decision comes because of "fights and serious violence in the family, or with a spouse or fiancee/fiancee."

But in other instances, the suicidal attack is a response to "social criticism for an immoral act, such as adultery or sullied family honor, or even failing matriculation exams, or a serious mental health state stemming from depression, desperation, and other mental illnesses," the paper says.

"In the absence of an effective solution to these problems, either from the family or the authorities, the young man or woman becomes trapped, and death is the only escape. Because suicide is not normative behavior, the young people opt for a death that will be seen as a martyrs' death. The assumption is that carrying out an attack will allow the young person to escape a bitter fate and even win the glory of a martyr. All their evil deeds and aberrant behavior will be forgiven. Their deaths could even benefit their families financially, whether in the form of payments from the Palestinian Authority or by them no longer being a burden on their families."

Newsletter Friday August 24, 2018

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| US says it plans to cut funding for UN Human Rights Council

U.S. supplies 22% of the U.N.'s budget, which includes agency's funds • U.S. national security adviser: Cut will be earmarked to impact Human Rights Council • Israeli Public Security Minister Erdan lauds decision, says "millions around the world will benefit."

Eldad Beck, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

National Security Adviser John Bolton at the U.S. Mission in Geneva, Thursday | Photo: AFP

The United States will cut funding for the United Nations Human Rights Council and may cut funding to other U.N. agencies too, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton told reporters on Thursday, following a five-hour meeting in Geneva with his Russian counterpart, Nikolai Patrushev.

"We are going to defund the Human Rights Council," Bolton said, and warned that other U.N. agencies could also be up for cuts in U.S. funding.

Bolton rejected statements by some U.N. officials that the council gets its funding through the regular U.N. budget, meaning that its operating expenses cannot be specifically targeted.

The United States pays about 22% of the U.N. budget as part of what's known as an "assessment" based on economic weight and other factors.

"We'll calculate 22% of the Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner's budget, and our remittances to the U.N. for this budget year will be less 22% of those costs – and we'll say specifically that's what we're doing," Bolton said. "We expect that impact to occur on the Human Rights Council."

In Israel, Public Security and Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan welcomed the decision.

"The U.N.'s human rights bodies have undermined their founding values by becoming hotbeds of anti-Israel extremism, hate and boycott campaigns," he said in a statement.

"If Bolton's announcement spurs the U.N. to start investing in exposing the world's worst violators of human rights, rather than in delegitimizing the Middle East's one true democracy, millions around the world will benefit."

In June, the U.S. announced its decision to leave the council, condemning the "hypocrisy" of its members and its "unrelenting bias" against Israel.

At the time, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the U.S. decision, saying, "For years, the UNHRC has proved to be a biased, hostile, anti-Israel organization that has betrayed its mission of protecting human rights."

After Bolton and Patrushev met, they chose to forgo a joint statement due to disagreements over alleged Russian meddling in U.S. elections. Bolton said the Russians would face no new U.S. sanctions if they stop such interference.

Their meeting marked the first top-level meeting in what could become a series between the countries' national security teams and was what Bolton called the only "concrete" result from President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin's summit in Helsinki last month. Such meetings aim toward "opening up channels" and "break through some of the difficulties we've had."

Bolton told reporters after the meeting: "I made it clear that we wouldn't tolerate meddling in 2018, and we were prepared to take necessary steps to prevent it from happening."

Asked if there would be consequences if the Russians did so, Bolton demurred, saying the "focus" was "to make sure that's no repetition of 2016."

But he appeared to offer a bit of an olive branch.

"There won't be any new sanctions if there's no further interference," he said.

But he added, "How we resolve the interference in the past remains to be seen. People who are accused of having violated the sanctions could be indicted." He was alluding to a possible follow-up of the U.S. indictments of 12 Russian officials as part of an investigation by U.S. special counsel Robert Mueller.

In remarks carried by Russian news agencies, Patrushev said after the meeting that he and Bolton did not agree on a joint statement because the U.S. wanted to mention the alleged Russian meddling in the U.S. election.

"The Americans wanted to mention what they see as our meddling in their elections, and we deny that," he said.

He said the meeting was constructive and that Russia would look at the U.S. proposals made during the meeting and would expect the U.S. to consider Russian initiatives.

Patrushev said he invited Bolton to have the next meeting in Russia, but no specific time was set. He added that they had also agreed to resume contacts between their Defense and Foreign ministries.

Bolton said he and Patrushev also discussed nuclear nonproliferation, Iran, North Korea, arms control, and Middle East issues including Syria and Afghanistan.

He said he had expressed the U.S. "priority of getting all Iranian forces out of Syria," and reiterated that Putin had told him in a recent meeting that the Russians too "would like

to see the Iranians go home as well [but] we [the Russians] are just not sure we alone can accomplish it."

Bolton said he and Patrushev had discussed "a number of ideas" about how to do that, without specifying.

"We're not going to solve Syria here," he said.

Iran and Russia are two leading backers of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Bolton is a fervent critic of Iran's leadership, saying it supports terrorism. He has defended the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Newsletter Thursday August 23, 2018

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White House sources: **US to present limited Mideast plan**

U.S. President Donald Trump will only unveil an "agenda for peace" at the U.N. General Assembly **meeting next month**, due to difficulties encountered by his peace team in recent months and the president's current legal troubles, a source tells Israel Hayom.

Ariel Kahana and Israel Hayom Staff

U.S. President Donald Trump | Photo: Reuters

Only the first phase of the Trump administration's Middle East peace plan will be presented at the United Nations General Assembly, a source close to the White House told Israel Hayom on Thursday.

Previous reports claimed U.S. President Donald **Trump would unveil his so-called "deal of the century" during the U.N. General Assembly meeting in New York next month. Trump is set to address the assembly on Sept. 25.**

The source said the president would only present a partial outline of the overall peace initiative the White House has been drafting, describing it more as an "agenda for peace."

The source said the reason for the partial presentation was that the president's peace team has encountered difficulties in recent months, but also noted Trump's current legal battles.

U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton told reporters in Jerusalem on Wednesday that while there's been "a lot of progress," the Trump administration has no timetable for rolling out the much-anticipated peace plan.

Bolton refused to speculate what the plan entailed or when it may be publicized.

Meanwhile, another source with ties to the administration said the Trump peace plan has not been finalized yet and that efforts to iron out its details would be expanded in the coming months.

On Tuesday, Trump said Israel will have to pay "a higher price" in peace talks with the Palestinians as a result of official U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital last year.

Speaking at a rally in Charleston, West Virginia, Trump said it was now the Palestinians' "turn" to "get something very good" in potential peace talks with Israel.

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Netanyahu heads to Lithuania for first visit by Israeli PM to Baltic nation
Four-day visit to include meetings with PM Netanyahu's Latvian and Estonian counterparts, local officials and heads of the Jewish community • Visit is a "very good chance to built the strategic partnership between the nations," political expert says.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu | Photo: Marc Israel Sellem

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to arrive Thursday in Lithuania for a four-day visit during which he will also meet his Latvian and Estonian counterparts, local officials and the Jewish community.

Netanyahu, making the first visit to Lithuania by an Israeli prime minister, will be met by Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius.

According to the Prime Minister's Office, Netanyahu will attend a summit of the Baltic states and will meet with Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis, Latvian Prime Minister Maris Kucinskis and Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas.

The four leaders will discuss deepening the cooperation between their countries.

Netanyahu will also meet with Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite at the presidential palace.

Lithuania, a member of the European Union, has not followed Washington in recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and supports Iran's nuclear deal despite opposition from the United States and Israel.

"This visit is a very good chance to further build the strategic partnership both countries demonstrated an interest to develop," Marius Laurinavicius, a senior expert at the Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis, said.

"Much remains to be done, but as far as I see it, both countries share a lot of interest to make the bilateral relations more active and productive"

The Baltic nation of nearly 3 million was part of the Russian Empire before declaring its independence in 1918. Lithuania was then independent until 1940, when it was occupied by the Soviet Union. It regained its freedom in 1991 and joined the EU and NATO in 2004.

Netanyahu has roots in Lithuania – his mother's parents lived in the central village of Seduva.

More than 90% of Lithuania's 240,000 Jews were killed during World War II. The role Lithuanian soldiers played in that is sensitive, as the country mainly views itself as a victim of Nazi and Soviet occupations.

During his visit, Netanyahu also will attend a memorial ceremony at the site near Vilnius where up to 100,000 people were killed by Nazi troops and their Lithuanian collaborators and meet relatives of Lithuanians who aided Jews during the war and visit synagogues.

During the service at the Ponary memorial, Netanyahu will award a medal and certificate to Birute Slapikiene, the granddaughter of a family of Righteous among the Nations.

He is also scheduled to visit the Vilna Choral Synagogue, which survived World War II, where he will meet with members of the Lithuanian Jewish community.

Newsletter Thursday August 23, 2018

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Israel advances plans for 1,000 new homes in Judea and Samaria

Nearly half of the new homes will be built in communities in the Samaria Regional Council • Council head: This is not enough for an area that makes up 12% of Israel • Yesha Council disappointed with "scant" number of permits, urges government to do more.

Efrat Forsher, Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff

Heads of the settlement movement criticize government for dragging its feet on building permits | Illustration: AP

The government on Wednesday announced that it was advancing plans to build over 1,000 new homes across Judea and Samaria, pressing ahead with construction as the Trump administration prepares to unveil a long-awaited peace plan.

The Civil Administration, the defense body that oversees civilian affairs in the area, said its planning committee has approved the construction of some 400 homes in Adam, northeast of Jerusalem, and 436 housing units in the communities comprising the Samaria Regional Council. The rest will be built in various settlements across Judea and Samaria.

Peace Now, an anti-settlement watchdog group, criticized the move, saying most of the units were in isolated communities that would likely have to be removed as part of any future Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

Some 600,000 Israelis live in Judea and Samaria, areas that the Palestinians want for a future state.

The majority of the international community sees settlement construction as illegal, claiming it is an impediment to the peace process. Israel says the fate of the settlements must be resolved in peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

Since taking office, U.S. President Donald Trump has broken with his predecessors and has refrained from condemning settlement construction, though he has urged Israel to show restraint.

The U.S. State Department said in a statement that the administration was "firmly committed to pursuing comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The president has made his position on the settlements clear, and we encourage all parties to continue to work towards peace."

There was no immediate Palestinian reaction to the latest settlement announcement.

Also on Wednesday, the government deferred the regulation of two illegal outposts, one in Gush Etzion and the other in the Adumim area, near the illegal Bedouin settlement of Khan al-Ahmar, east of Jerusalem.

Heads of the Settlement Movement criticized the government for failing retroactively legalizing the two settlements, and also slammed the government for dragging its feet with respect to issuing building permits in Judea and Samaria.

Heads of the Knesset's Land of Israel Lobby MKs Bezael Smotrich (Habayit Hayehudi) and Yoav Kisch (Likud) issued a statement saying, "The government has already decided

to regulate new settlement ventures and now it must act vigorously to implement this decision and actively promote this issue – not the other way around."

Samaria Council head Yossi Dagan expressed disappointment with the number of homes approved for construction, saying, "While we're happy about every other home in Samaria, the truth is that a few hundred housing units are not enough for an area that constitutes 12% of Israel, and where the demand for homes is in the thousands every year.

"We expect the government to stop worrying about what the international community might say and promote the development of this beautiful region in the heart of Israel, whose strategic and historical importance is clear to everyone," he said.

The Yesha Council, the umbrella organization of municipal councils of Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria, issued a statement saying it was "greatly disappointed" with the "scant number" of homes approved for construction.

"This is the smallest number of housing units approved over the past year and a half. **Previous committees have approved between 2,000** and 3,000 [new homes], which was in itself a small number compared to the building permits issued for tens of thousands of homes nationwide," the council's statement said.