

Netanyahu praises 'historic' move to reinstate US sanctions on Iran on Monday

Newsletter Sunday November 4, 2018

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Netanyahu praises 'historic' move to reinstate US sanctions on Iran

Days before U.S. sanctions targeting shipping, financial and energy sectors in Iran take effect, Trump administration grants temporary waivers to eight countries • Prime Minister Netanyahu welcomes renewed sanctions on the "murderous terror regime in Iran."

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff

An image used by U.S. President Donald Trump to announce the reimposition of sanctions against Iran | Photo: AP

Just before restoring U.S. sanctions on Iran, which had been lifted in 2015 under an international nuclear deal, the Trump administration carved out exemptions on Friday for eight countries that can still import oil from the Islamic republic without penalty.

The U.S. sanctions take effect Monday and cover Iran's shipping, financial and energy sectors. They comprise the second round of sanctions that the administration has reimposed since U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from the nuclear accord in May .

The 2015 deal gave Iran billions of dollars in sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, which many believed was geared toward developing atomic weapons. Trump repeatedly denounced the agreement as the "worst ever" negotiated by the United States and said it gave Iran too much in return for too little.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a staunch opponent of the nuclear agreement, praised the restoration of U.S. sanctions on Iran, saying that Trump had made a "historic" decision by restoring sanctions against "the murderous terror regime in Iran that is endangering the entire world."

In a statement issued by his office, Netanyahu said "the effect of the initial sanctions is already felt," referring to a financial crisis in Iran that has triggered sporadic protests.

Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Ron Dermer echoed Netanyahu's sentiments, tweeting Friday: "Thank you, Mr. President, for restoring sanctions against an Iranian regime that vows and works to destroy the Jewish state."

But proponents of the nuclear deal, including the world powers that struck the agreement together with the U.S. in 2015 – Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the European Union – have vehemently defended it.

The Europeans have mounted a drive to save the agreement without the U.S., fearing that the new sanctions will drive Iran to pull out of the deal and resume its nuclear work at full speed.

Friday's announcement comes just days before congressional midterm elections in the U.S., allowing Trump to highlight his decision to withdraw from the deal – a move that was popular among Republicans.

Shortly after the announcement, Trump tweeted what looks like a movie poster image of himself that takes creative inspiration from the TV series "Game of Thrones" with the tagline "Sanctions are Coming, November 5."

In a statement issued Friday night, Trump said, "Our objective is to force the regime into a clear choice: either abandon its destructive behavior or continue down the path toward economic disaster."

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the sanctions are "aimed at fundamentally altering the behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

He has issued a list of 12 demands that Iran must meet to get the sanctions lifted that include an end to its support for terrorism and military engagement in Syria and a halt to nuclear and ballistic missile development.

Pompeo said eight nations will receive temporary waivers allowing them to continue to import Iranian petroleum products as they move to end such imports entirely. He said those countries, which other officials said would include U.S. allies such as Turkey, Italy, India, Japan and South Korea, had made efforts to eliminate their imports but could not complete the task by Monday.

The waivers will be valid for six months, during which time the importing country can buy Iranian oil but must deposit Iran's revenue in an escrow account. Iran can spend the money but only on a narrow range of humanitarian items.

Pompeo defended the oil waivers and noted that since May, when the U.S. began to press countries to stop buying Iranian oil, Iran's exports had dropped by more than 1 million barrels per day.

He said the Iranian economy is already reeling from the earlier sanctions, with the currency losing half its value since April and the prices of fruit, poultry, eggs and milk skyrocketing.

Some Iran hawks in Congress and elsewhere said Friday's move should have gone even further. They were hoping for Iran to be disconnected from the main international financial messaging network known as SWIFT.

With limited exceptions, the reimposed U.S. sanctions will hit Iran as well as countries that do not stop importing Iranian oil and foreign firms that do business with blacklisted Iranian entities, including its central bank, a number of private financial institutions, and state-run port and shipping firms, as well as hundreds of individual Iranian officials.

"Our ultimate aim is to compel Iran to permanently abandon its well-documented outlaw activities and behave as a normal country," Pompeo told reporters in a conference call with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

Mnuchin said 700 more Iranian companies and people would be added to the sanctions rolls. Those, he said, would include more than 300 that had not been included under previous sanctions.

Mnuchin defended the decision to allow some Iranian banks to remain connected to SWIFT, saying that the Belgium-based firm had been warned that it will face penalties if sanctioned institutions are permitted to use it. He further said that U.S. regulators would be closely watching Iranian transactions that use SWIFT to ensure any that run a foul of U.S. sanctions would be punished.

Saturday Nov 3: Many countries planning to move embassies to Jerusalem, official says

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Many countries planning to move embassies to Jerusalem, official says

Inspired by Brazilian President-elect Jair Bolsonaro, many countries intend to announce their plans to relocate embassies to Jerusalem, senior diplomatic official says •

Meanwhile PA asks Egypt's el-Sissi to use his influence to thwart move by Brazil.

Ram Liran and Daniel Siryoti

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (right) meets with the leaders of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Romania in Varna | Photo: EPA

Following Brazilian President-elect Jair Bolsonaro's announcement in an interview with Israel Hayom that he plans to transfer the Brazilian Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, a senior diplomatic official told Israel Hayom additional countries are expected to announce they also intend to relocate their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. According to the official, the Czech Republic may be the first country to make the move.

Netanyahu has called Bolsonaro's announcement "a historic, correct and moving step."

The official said the subject came up in talks Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held during his official visit to Varna, Bulgaria over the weekend, as part of Israel's efforts to bolster ties with existing alliances inside the European Union.

The same official revealed Israel was examining the possibility of initiating additional intra-European associations in an effort to decrease the transfer of funds to left-wing organizations. It was the official's assessment that Israel could find common ground with many countries inside Europe in its campaign against the policy of support for these anti-Israel nongovernmental organizations.

Netanyahu asked Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, who will soon take on the role of rotating EU president to use her senior role to influence the EU's treatment of Israel.

At the Craiova Forum in Varna, Netanyahu revealed that Israel had recently prevented dozens of terrorist attacks on European soil, including in Denmark .

The official told Israel Hayom that Netanyahu had recently met with Oman's Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi, who was in Ramallah for a meeting with PA officials in Ramallah last week.

Officials in Jerusalem said they were impressed by the foreign minister's conciliatory remarks, which were criticized throughout the Arab world.

The official refused to comment on a report that appeared in the London-based pan-Arab newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat, Friday, according to which Netanyahu was expected to visit yet another Persian Gulf state in the near future.

AP

Brazil's President-elect Jair Bolsonaro

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry in Ramallah has refused to comment officially on Bolsonaro's remarks but a senior Palestinian diplomatic official told Israel Hayom that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas raised the issue in a meeting with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi in Cairo over the weekend.

Abbas shared with el-Sissi the Palestinians' concerns about Bolsonaro's intentions and asked Cairo to use its influence to pressure the Brazilians not to change their foreign policy. The official emphasized that the Palestinian Foreign Ministry had begun to prepare for the possibility Bolsonaro would order the embassy's transfer and downgrade the status of the Palestinian Embassy in Brasilia.

"It is still too early to take any steps because right now these are just statements," Palestinian Ambassador to Brazil Ibrahim Mohamed Khalil Alzeben said.

"I believe the political system in Brazil will make sure to follow and ensure that the president-elect does act in accordance with international law."

Israel's outreach to Gulf Arab states no longer secret as Sultans embrace Israel

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Israel's outreach to Gulf Arab states no longer secret

Recent visits by Prime Minister Netanyahu to Oman, Culture Minister Regev to UAE break long-standing taboo of public appearances by Israeli officials in Gulf states • Driving force behind warming ties seems to be shared concern over Iran's regional aspirations.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff

Omani leader **Sultan Qaboos bin Said** and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Muscat, last week | Photo: AP

It was a scene unthinkable just weeks ago: an Israeli cabinet minister, tears of joy filling her eyes, proudly singing her country's national anthem at a sports event in the heart of the Arab world.

The spectacle of Culture and Sport Minister Miri Regev singing "Hatikva," which describes the Jewish yearning for a homeland in Zion, was just one in a series of taboo-busting public appearances by Israeli officials in Gulf Arab states that have thrust the once-secret back channels of outreach into public view.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has for years boasted about warming ties with key Arab states that have no diplomatic relations with Israel. But those ties – still largely unpopular among the Arab public – were rarely visible.

That changed on Friday, when Netanyahu made an unannounced visit to Oman, where he met longtime ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said. It marked the first visit by an Israeli leader in more than 20 years to the tiny Gulf state, a U.S. ally that has in the past facilitated negotiations between the United States and Iran.

"These were important talks, both for the state of Israel and very important talks for Israel's security," Netanyahu told his cabinet on Sunday. "There will be more."

As he spoke, Regev was in the United Arab Emirates with an Israeli delegation at a judo tournament – the scene of her happy tears after Israeli judoka Sagi Muki won the gold medal – and Netanyahu's communications minister was headed to the UAE for a security conference.

Israeli Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz is scheduled to head to Oman next week for a transportation conference where he plans on presenting his plan for a rail link between the Gulf states and Israel.

The driving force in these visits seems to be a shared concern over Iran.

Israel and many of the Gulf Arab states consider Iran a destabilizing force, meddling in conflicts and supporting rivals across the region. Oman, which borders Saudi Arabia and lies at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, has often played the role of regional mediator.

It also provides an opportunity for these Arab countries to curry favor in Washington. President Donald Trump has promised to present a plan for the "Deal of the Century" for Middle East peace, and Saudi Arabia's dependability as an influential conduit has been thrown into question amid the fallout from the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate.

Regev's emotional appearance Sunday at the gold medal ceremony in Abu Dhabi was unprecedented and especially remarkable, given her political leanings. At home, she is an outspoken nationalist popular with hard-liners.

AP

Culture and Sport Miri Regev visits Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, Monday
In Abu Dhabi, Regev also toured the grand Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Wearing a loosely wrapped headscarf and the traditional floor-length gown known as an abaya, she was warmly welcomed by local officials.

While the visits by Netanyahu and his Likud party ministers are a huge public relations boost for him domestically, they do not immediately signal an Arab embrace of Israel.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains an emotional issue with the Arab public, and relations will likely remain limited without a peace agreement.

The peace process has been frozen for years, and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas cut ties with Washington after the White House recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital last year and moved its embassy to the city.

The Palestinians fear that Trump is trying to rally support from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states in order to pressure the PA into accepting a peace plan that falls far short of their demands.

In Muscat, Netanyahu's meeting appeared aimed at dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and his close ties with the Trump administration. With Netanyahu's urging, the U.S. this year pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal, which Oman had supported.

After the visit, Oman's Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi suggested the meeting was merely a strategic attempt at dealing with some of the Middle East's most pressing issues. In an interview with Qatari news network Al Jazeera, he said Netanyahu had initiated the meeting to present his views on Mideast issues to Qaboos.

"What Sultan Qaboos is doing now is nothing short of an intervention," said Sigurd Neubauer, a Washington-based expert on Oman.

"Oman is interjecting itself into the Israeli-Palestinian peace process for one obvious reason, and that is [because] the Arab states are so divided."

Oman is also the only Arab country in the Gulf that could have hosted Netanyahu without fear of destabilizing backlash, Neubauer said.

That is because Qaboos, in power since 1970, has direct lines of communication with a range of players in the region, thanks to his longstanding policy of noninterference. Oman has brokered the release of Western hostages in Yemen and provided a backdoor for communications between Washington and Tehran under the Obama administration. It is a member of the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council but it did not join the kingdom in its boycott of Qatar or the war in Yemen.

Even statements by the Palestinian Fatah party and Iran fell short of directly condemning Oman after Netanyahu's visit, instead criticizing Israel's attempts to normalize relations with Arab states before a peace deal is reached.

For Oman, hosting Netanyahu sent a message to the Trump administration that Muscat is a valuable regional player.

"The currency is American currency," Yoel Guzansky, a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies, said. "Oman can show that it's a go-between, a conduit not just between Israel and the Palestinians, but more ambitiously between Iran and Israel."

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President-elect of Brazil promises: Israel can count on our vote

Jair Bolsonaro gives his first foreign media interview to Israel Hayom, says he will promote cooperation with Israel • As a sovereign state, Israel is the only one that can decide its capital, he says • I love the Israeli people and Israel, he declares.

Boaz Bismuth

Brazil's President-elect Jair Bolsonaro waves after voting in the runoff election in Rio de Janeiro, Sunday | Photo: AP

Until a few weeks ago, Jair Bolsonaro, now the president-elect of Brazil, was a little-known legislator. No one thought he would go on to become the leader of the country. But on Wednesday, a week after he astonished everyone by winning the presidential election in Brazil – the largest democracy in Latin America – Bolsonaro chose Israel Hayom for what appears to be his first interview with the foreign media, and made it clear that his support for Israel and promises about Jerusalem were not just an election gimmick.

This is part of Bolsonaro's desire to lead Brazil on a new path and free his country of the policies that he believes to be outdated – policies instated by the Left, which has been in control almost continuously since the early 2000s.

Bolsonaro is under attack for his blunt, politically incorrect style, but that's exactly what prompted the Brazilian masses to put their trust in him as their new leader. They wanted a leader that would make them proud of their country, which is currently plagued with violence and economic distress.

Many believe, incorrectly, that Bolsonaro is an extreme right-wing nationalist. But he isn't bothered by the misperceptions and says that the claims that he will end democracy say more about his opponents than they do about him.

Israel Hayom Editor-in-Chief Boaz Bismuth spoke to Bolsonaro by telephone, with the help of an interpreter.

Q: Did you know that your name, Jair, means "bringing light" in Hebrew?

"Yes, I was informed not long ago. I have the moral compass of a man who intends to do his best for his country and intends to tighten relations with other countries that think the same way we do and champion democratic elections, liberty and respect for others.

"I was in Israel two years ago and I intend to return. The Israeli ambassador to Brazil [Yossi Shelly] visited me twice this week, and I've always had excellent relations with him. I'm very happy that I'm treated so warmly and that the official envoy of the State of Israel treats me this way, and it is truly mutual. I love the Israeli people and Israel. You can depend on the fact that I will promote closeness and fruitful cooperation between us starting in 2019."

Q: You've said several times that you intend to relocate the Brazilian Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Will you? And do you intend to change the status of the Palestinian Embassy in Brasília?

"Israel is a sovereign state. If you decide on your capital city, we will act in accordance. When I was asked during the campaign if I'll do it [relocate the embassy] when I was president, I said yes, and that you're the ones who decide on the capital of Israel, not other people.

"As for the Palestinian Embassy, it was built too close to the presidential palace. ... No embassy can be so close to the presidential palace, so we intend to move it. There's no other way, in my opinion. Other than that, Palestine first needs to be a state to have the right to an embassy."

Q: Can Israel expect fairer, more supportive votes from Brazil in international forums, such as the U.N., on matters involving Israel?

"You can count on having our vote in the U.N. I know that often the vote is almost symbolic, but it helps to define the position a country intends to take. Rest assured that you can depend on our vote in the U.N. on almost all the issues having to do with Israel."

Q: To what do you attribute your electoral victory, and what is your administration's general plan?

"The victory is down to a number of things – the weariness of politicians who made politics a profession here in Brazil; corruption; contempt for family values; and the previous governments' very close ties to socialism and communism, and of course, to the fact that we flew the flag of truth."

Q: Were you surprised by the popular support, the results, and your [party's] increased representation in the National Congress?

"Our party had one member in parliament and now we have 52, despite the fact that we don't get any television coverage or [government] funds. The campaign relied heavily on social media and now we're 10% of the parliament and we've managed to get the support of other parties as well as independent lawmakers, so governing isn't a problem.

"I wasn't surprised, because I started crisscrossing Brazil four years ago. Brazil is very large. Israel is smaller than our smallest state [Sergipe], so imagine if you were 26 times bigger. Over the course of four years, we managed to get to every part of Brazil. By speaking the truth, we gained the sympathy and trust of the Brazilian electorate, and even though I was in the hospital for 23 days and at home for another 20 and couldn't go out [following an attempt on his life], we won by a large margin of votes."

Q: Are you proud of the long political road you've traversed, and will the assassination attempt affect your presidency?

"For 28 years I've been part of a parliament that receives no support from the public. It is a parliament that has turned its back on the people long ago. But the fact is that I'm a

survivor of that parliament. Before I entered politics, I was in the Brazilian army for 17 years, and as far as I know in Israel almost everyone has military experience. ... [In the military,] one experiences nationalism. It shapes your values and principles – gives you responsibility, patriotism, sacrifice and meaning. All of this molds your personality."

Q: Why do you think people are saying that you pose a threat to democracy?

"They can't go after me for being corrupt. Meanwhile, their government [the previous left-wing government] operated in a number of ways – controlling the public with the media; rewriting the constitution; nationalizing assets, which lowered the value of private property; submitting to dictatorships all over the world. That's what the Left does, as it walks around carrying Lenin's works on communism under its arm. The Left always blames others for the very things it does itself. But the Brazilian population, which has been liberated from the traditional media, trusted my word and my past."