

Newsletter Friday September 7, 2018

Trump to US Jews: No aid for Palestine until Israeli deal, Abbas refuses meeting

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Israeli aircraft hits terror cell launching arson balloons from Gaza

Strike comes after nearly three weeks of decline in Palestinian arson terror • Arab media reports Palestinian leader Abbas threatens to sever all ties with Israel if the PA is excluded from cease-fire talks with Hamas • No injuries immediately reported.

Lilach Shoval and Israel Hayom Staff

An Israeli strike on a terrorist target in the Gaza Strip | Illustration: AFP

A military aircraft on Friday opened fire on a group of Palestinians who were gearing up to launch incendiary balloons over the Israel-Gaza Strip border. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The incident comes after nearly three weeks in which Palestinian arson terrorism has ebbed after wreaking havoc on Israeli communities near the border in near-daily assaults over the course of three months.

Hamas, the terrorist group that controls Gaza, has also urged Palestinian demonstrators to stage mass protests near the border on Friday after weeks of relative calm.

Also on Friday, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas warned that any cease-fire agreement reached between Israel and Hamas could cost Israel its relationship with Ramallah.

The London-based Al-Hayat newspaper quoted senior Palestinian officials as saying that Abbas has threatened to sever all ties with Israel if Ramallah is excluded from the negotiations, as it has been so far.

Abbas recently admitted that Ramallah was actively trying to torpedo Egypt's efforts to broker a long-term cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. He argued that Hamas, which ousted Abbas' Fatah-led government from Gaza in a 2007 military coup, lacks the authority to engage in any type of negotiations with Israel.

The rivalry between Hamas and Fatah has intensified over the past year after Abbas imposed economic sanctions on Gaza in an effort to wrestle control of Gaza from Hamas.

A Ramallah official also noted that Abbas will not meet with U.S. President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York later this month, as he was "not invited to do so."

Abbas has refused to engage with Trump's Middle East envoys since the American president recognized Jerusalem as the Israeli capital on Dec. 6 and moved the American Embassy there.

In a conference call with several dozen American Jewish leaders on Thursday, Trump said that his administration would not give aid to the Palestinian Authority or to the United Nations' Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, which the U.S. cut last week, unless the Palestinians express willingness to resume the peace process, which has been frozen since 2014.

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Trump to US Jews: No aid for Palestinians until deal with Israel

U.S. was paying Palestinians "tremendous amounts of money. And I say, 'You'll get money, but we're not paying until you make a deal,'" president tells American Jewish leaders in conference call • Trump: Iran not the same country as when I took office.

Israel Hayom Staff

U.S. President Donald Trump | Photo: EPA

U.S. President Donald Trump marked the upcoming Jewish New Year in a conference call with several dozen American Jewish leaders on Thursday and discussed with them his administration's policies on Israel, the Palestinians and Iran.

He said the U.S. would resume funding to the Palestinian Authority and to the United Nations' Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, but only if the Palestinians reached a deal with Israel.

"What I will tell you is I stopped massive amounts of money that we were paying to the Palestinians and the Palestinian leaders," Trump said.

"The United States was paying them tremendous amounts of money. And I say, 'You'll get money, but we're not paying until you make a deal. If you don't make a deal, we're not paying.'"

Referring to U.S. aid being used as a bargaining chip, Trump said, "I don't think it's disrespectful at all. I think it's disrespectful when people don't come to the table."

Trump also said he had removed Jerusalem as the first obstacle to a peace deal. Last December, Trump recognized the city as Israel's capital and in May he moved the U.S. Embassy there.

"The fact is that I took something off the table," he said.

"If you go back and look at your negotiations with the Palestinians over the years, the first thing was Jerusalem and moving the embassy to Jerusalem, thereby making it the capital. And I will tell you, we've taken that off the table.

"A few days before the declaration on Jerusalem, I stopped taking calls from foreign leaders who wanted to persuade me not to do it [relocate the embassy]. We took Jerusalem off the table, and I believe it will help get a deal done," he said.

He added that Israel would have to do something for the Palestinians but did not specify what that might be, and vowed to continue to defend Israel in international institutions.

Trump also praised the newly imposed economic sanctions on Iran, saying Iran was "no longer the same country" as when he entered office in 2016.

"I would imagine that they'll be calling in the not-too-distant future to try and make a deal. If we can make a real deal, we'll do it. If they don't call, that's okay too. Eventually, they're going to have no choice," he said.

Trump concluded the call by wishing the Jewish leaders and their communities a happy new year and noting his personal link to Judaism.

"My connection to Judaism is also personal. I am the very proud father of a Jewish daughter, Ivanka, and my son-in-law, who I'm very proud of also – I will say that very loudly – Jared, and my several Jewish grandchildren, namely three beautiful Jewish grandchildren that I love," he said.

**Newsletter Thursday September 6, 2018**

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**Palstinian riot prompts IDF to shutter Gaza's main pedestrian border crossing**

Erez crossing in northern Gaza to close for extensive repairs over damage caused by Palestinian rioters • Crossing was reopened merely a week ago • Military stresses this measure will not affect humanitarian cases, which will be approved on merit.

Lilach Shoval and Nikki Guttman

Palstinian protesters at Erez crossing, Wednesday | Photo: AP

The military on Wednesday closed the Erez crossing linking Israel and the northern Gaza Strip following a Palestinian riot that caused extensive damage to the premises.

Erez crossing is the only pedestrian crossing between Israel and the coastal enclave and thousands of Palestinians use it daily.

"A violent demonstration at Erez [crossing], which included hundreds of rioters, resulted in extensive damage to the infrastructure on the crossing's Palestinian side. Erez crossing will be shut down until the damage caused by the rioters is repaired," a statement by the IDF Spokesperson's Unit said.

"This measure will not affect humanitarian cases, which will be approved on case-by-case merit," the IDF stressed.

A Palestinian source said demonstrators were protesting a recent U.S. decision to cut funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which supports the residents of Gaza.

Also on Thursday, an incendiary balloon sent over the Gaza border sparked a fire in Kibbutz Kerem Shalom, less than half a mile from the Israel-Gaza Strip border.

The fire caused some damage to agricultural land in the kibbutz before it was extinguished.

The now-waning Palestinian terrorist arson campaign, launched in late April, has so far decimated nearly 10,000 acres of forest and farmlands on the Israeli side of the border. Incendiary kites and balloons have caused millions of dollars in damage to the area over the past three months and environmental experts say it will take at least 15 years to rehabilitate the vegetation and wildlife that have been destroyed.

Newsletter Thursday September 6, 2018

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Paraguay reverses embassy move to Jerusalem prompting closure of Israeli mission

Asunción closes embassy in Jerusalem just months after ceremonious inauguration, weeks after new president assumes office • PM Netanyahu laments decision that will "cloud bilateral relations" • Palestinians take credit for Paraguayan change of heart.

Ariel Kahana and Daniel Siryoti

Paraguay stops embassy move to Jerusalem, Israel closes Paraguay Embassy

Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benítez and first lady Silvana López Moreira | Photo: Reuters

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the closure of Israel's embassy in Paraguay on Wednesday, hours after the Latin American nation's new government announced it would move its embassy back to Tel Aviv from Jerusalem.

"Israel views with the utmost gravity the extraordinary decision by Paraguay, which will cloud bilateral relations," Netanyahu said.

Paraguay's decision comes just months after it relocated its embassy to the capital in May, becoming the third country to do so – after the United States and Guatemala. It comes just weeks after President Mario Abdo Benítez was sworn in as the country's new leader.

Abdo Benítez defended his decision on Monday as part of an effort to support "broad, lasting and just peace" among Israelis and Palestinians.

"Paraguay is a country of principles," Abdo Benítez tweeted.

The status of Jerusalem is considered one of the thorniest obstacles to forging a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, who envision east Jerusalem as the future capital of a Palestinian state. Israel captured the eastern part of the city during the Six-Day War and annexed it in 1980.

In December, U.S. President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, reversing decades of U.S. policy and sparking fury in the Arab world and among Western allies. The United States inaugurated a new embassy in Jerusalem on May 14. Guatemala followed suit shortly thereafter and then Paraguay opened an embassy there as well.

Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid backed Netanyahu and condemned Paraguay's decision on Wednesday, saying: "We have only one capital and no other capital, a united Jerusalem."

MK Ayelet Nahmias-Verbin (Zionist Union) attacked Netanyahu saying: "Diplomatic relations should not be founded on tantrums; despite Paraguay's unfortunate decision, it must not be used as a pretext for cutting diplomatic ties."

Paraguay's foreign minister called Israel's reaction "disproportionate."

Abdo Benítez, who took office last month, belongs to the same conservative party as his predecessor Horacio Cartes, who inaugurated Paraguay's new embassy in Jerusalem in May.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki has pushed the new Paraguayan president to reverse his predecessor's embassy relocation and restore the Paraguayan mission to Tel Aviv, the Palestinian foreign ministry said Wednesday, hailing Abdo Benítez's announcement as "a new Palestinian diplomatic achievement."

Malki met Abdo Benítez two weeks ago, the ministry said.

"Minister Malki exerted a big effort during his meeting with the new president, who instructed his foreign minister to arrange the issue," the Palestinian ministry said.

Newsletter Wednesday September 5, 2018

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Report: Abbas to declare 'Palestinian state under occupation' at UN

Arab media reports Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas plans to use his speech at the General Assembly to declare the end of the 25-year-old Oslo process • This will effectively disband the PA • PLO official: Move has yet to be finalized.

Yoni Hersch, Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas speaks at the U.N. General Assembly in 2017 | Photo: AP

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas plans to use his speech at the upcoming U.N. General Assembly to declare a "Palestinian state under occupation," the London-based Arab newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat reported Wednesday.

A senior official with the Palestine Liberation Organization said Abbas has briefed PLO officials of his intention to declare statehood at the world leader's forum during his speech, scheduled for Sept. 27.

The official noted that Abbas' declaration means to stress that statehood process launched with the 1993 Oslo Accords has effectively ended and that it was time to shelve the concept of the "Palestinian Authority" in favor of the "state of Palestine."

An Israeli source said that a unilateral move of this nature on Abbas' part would effectively mean the Palestinian Authority's withdrawal from the Oslo Accords.

PLO Executive Committee member Wasel Abu Yousef told Asharq Al-Awsat that despite Abbas' plan, the move has yet to be finalized. He noted that the PLO had already agreed in principle to declare an end to the 25-year-old Oslo process, but has yet to set up the necessary state institutions to take over for the Palestinian Authority, which will disband in the wake of such a move.

Over the years, Abbas has repeatedly threatened to exit the Oslo Accords and stop the Palestinian security forces' coordination with their Israeli counterparts.

While he has never followed through on his threat, recent months have seen the Palestinian leader become increasingly furious with U.S. President Donald Trump over the latter's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the relocation of the U.S. Embassy there.

Abbas has refused to engage with Trump's Middle East envoys and has accused Trump of being "grossly biased" toward Israel, saying the U.S. could no longer serve as an impartial mediator in the Middle East peace talks.

He was further infuriated by the White House's announcement that given his position, the Trump administration may go over his head and push ahead with its peace plan, with the support of the moderate Persian Gulf states.

Abbas has also admitted that Ramallah was actively trying to torpedo Egypt's efforts to broker a long-term cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, the terrorist group that rules the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian leader claims that Hamas, which ousted his Fatah-led government from Gaza in 2007 in a military coup, lacks the authority to hold any type of negotiations with Israel.

Ramallah sources said that Abbas may pursue the move at the U.N. to prevent his exclusion from any deal involving Gaza's future.

#### Newsletter Wednesday September 5, 2018

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#### Syria accuses Israel of bombing military targets in Hama, Tartus

Syrian media says country's air defenses intercepted five "enemy missiles" • London-based war monitor: Three Syrian soldiers were killed and 23 people – 14 Syrians and nine Iranians – were injured • Strikes allegedly carried out from Lebanese airspace.

Daniel Siryoti, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

A previous alleged Israeli strike in Syria

Syria on Tuesday accused Israel of bombing military positions in the Western province of Hama and the coastal city of Tartus.

Syrian and Arab media outlets reported of casualties in the strikes, but their numbers varied: Syrian state media said three people were killed and 23 others were wounded in the strike, while other Arab outlets said one person was killed and four were wounded.

The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said three Syrian soldiers were killed and 23 people – 14 Syrian and nine Iranians – were injured.

An Israeli military spokeswoman declined to respond, saying the IDF does not comment on foreign media reports.

The Syrian military said its air defenses successfully intercepted several missiles launched by Israeli warplanes.

Citing a military source, the Syrian Arab News Agency said that Israeli aircraft had targeted "our military positions in the provinces of Tartous and Hama. ... Syrian air defenses confronted and downed five of the enemy's rockets."

Damascus often inflates the number of missiles it intercepts.

The Syrian accusations came shortly after Lebanese media reported that Israeli fighter jets had breached Beirut's airspace and were flying in low and medium altitudes.

This fueled speculations in the Syrian media that the alleged Israeli strike was carried out from Lebanese airspace and targeted Iranian assets in neighboring Syria, including weapon arsenals and a research center.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said several explosions had been heard in the areas around Masyaf and Wadi al-Uyoun near Hama city, and around the coastal city of Tartous, targeting areas with Iranian military facilities.

Lebanon's Al-Mayadeen TV, which is affiliated with Hezbollah – Iran's regional proxy – said Israeli fighter jets "released countermeasures against anti-aircraft fire" and "withdrew towards the sea at the same time as the sounds of explosions were heard in Hama countryside."

On Tuesday, a senior Israeli official said Israel has carried out more than 200 airstrikes against Iranian assets in Syria over the past two years.