

# ISRAEL REPORT

To provide greater exposure to primary Israeli news sources and opinions in order to become better informed on the issues, and to gain a better understanding of the wide range of perspectives that exist in Israeli society and politics.  
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## NETANYAHU TO VISIT CHAD 'SOON' TO DECLARE RENEWAL OF DIPLOMATIC TIES (YNet 11/27/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will travel to Chad "soon" where he is expected to officially announce the renewal of diplomatic ties between Israel and the central African nation, the Prime Minister's Office said Tuesday. So far, no date has been set for Netanyahu's trip.

Netanyahu held a meeting with the Chadian President Idriss Déby at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem on Tuesday, where they discussed increasing bilateral cooperation in agriculture, counter-terrorism, border defense, technology, solar energy, water and health, among other fields.

The meeting Tuesday morning between the two leaders was their third after a work meeting and a dinner at the Prime Minister's Residence on Monday.

On Monday, Déby said that the purpose of his visit to Israel was to renew relations between the two countries, after the central African nation severed them back in 1972.

He said his decision not to meet with Palestinian representatives during the current visit stems from the fact that diplomatic relations between his country and the Palestinian Authority are already stable.

"We came here this time with a plan because we have not had diplomatic relations with Israel since 1972 and the aim was to renew these relations. We have no problem with Abbas or the Palestinians, they are our friends who participated in all the African Union committees, but we have not held talks with Israel since 1972, and I came here for that," Déby stressed.

One of the issues that was discussed with Deby during his visit, is Israel's desire to have direct flights from South America to Israel over Central Africa—which entails flying over Niger, Chad and Sudan. President Deby reportedly agreed in principle to allow flights over his country.

Déby also made it clear that Israel is very close to a breakthrough when it comes to relations with Sudan—which is defined by law as an enemy state but has undergone positive change in recent years and is developing close ties with the United States. Deby has promised to help Israel's efforts in renewing diplomatic relations with the Sudanese.

"The world is changing before our eyes. Crises and wars we knew are changing as well. We don't wish them on today's generation or future generations. There's a time for war and a time for peace. Our message is global to all leaders—Chad doesn't presume to speak for black Africa. Chad comes to renew bilateral diplomatic relations, but if Chad can be a facilitator, Chad will not hesitate."

## US STAYING IN MIDDLE EAST 'FOR ISRAEL,' TRUMP SAYS (Israel Hayom 11/28/18)

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that the American presence in the Middle East should be reduced, adding that Israel is one of the main reasons U.S. troops remain in the region. In an interview with the Washington Post, Trump floated the idea of removing U.S. troops from the Middle East, citing the lower price of oil as a reason to withdraw.

"Now, are we going to stay in that part of the world? One reason to is Israel," Trump said. "Oil is becoming less and less of a reason because we're producing more oil now than we've ever produced. So, you know, all of a sudden it gets to a point where you don't have to stay there."

Since being elected in 2016, Trump has stated several times that he would like to pull U.S. troops out of Syria, saying he would do so only after the Islamic State group was defeated. More recently, he said he would remove

U.S. troops from Syria on condition that Iran withdraws its forces from the war-torn country.

## HAMAS SEEKS ASSISTANCE FROM THE UN (Arutz-7 11/29/18)

Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the political bureau of the Hamas terrorist organization, on Wednesday night wrote a letter to the United Nations General Assembly president, Maria Fernanda Spinoso, in response to the US and Israel's efforts against Hamas in the UN.

The United States has been leading a push at the United Nations to win backing from European countries for a resolution condemning Hamas. The General Assembly is expected to vote in the coming days on the proposed resolution which will condemn rocket firings into Israel and demand that Hamas end its use of violence.

In his letter, Haniyeh claimed he is "following up with great anger and condemnation the ongoing and miserable efforts by the United States of America, not only by adopting the Israeli narrative of the conflict, but also by providing all the necessary material and moral support for the Israeli occupation to continue its aggression against our people and deprive them of their basic rights of freedom, independence and self-determination."

He stressed the need for "hard work to thwart the American efforts to condemn the resistance" at the UN.

Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon, said in response that "Hamas speaks about international law while it fires rockets into civilian populations, holds the bodies of IDF soldiers and Israeli citizens, and uses its own people as human shields. A terrorist organization going to the UN for assistance is like a serial killer asking the police for assistance. Israel and the United States will continue to mobilize the countries of the world into a united front against the terrorism that Hamas engages in on behalf of Iran."

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## **SOUTH KOREA TO BUY ISRAELI RADAR SYSTEMS TO COUNTER NORTH'S MISSILES** (Israel Hayom 11/28/18)

South Korea plans to buy two Israeli early warning radar systems as it reinforces air defenses against North Korea despite fast-improving relations.

The two Green Pine Block C radar systems were built by ELTA Systems, a subsidiary of state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries, and the decision to adopt them was made by a defense acquisition committee, South Korean arms procurement agency DAPA said Tuesday.

DAPA did not specify the value of the order, but a South Korean Defense Ministry official put it at \$292 million and said the systems would be deployed in the early 2020s.

The project is intended to boost South Korea's capabilities to "detect and track ballistic missiles from a long distance at an early stage," DAPA said in a statement. It did not mention North Korea.

But South Korea's Defense Ministry said last December it would buy additional early warning radars after North Korea successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile and declared completion of the "state nuclear force" a month earlier.

## **JEWISH AMERICANS SUE AIRBNB OVER JUDEA AND SAMARIA DECISION** (Arutz-7 11/29/18)

A group of Jewish Americans on Wednesday sued Airbnb Inc. in a US federal court following the home rental website's decision last week to remove listings for about 200 homes in Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria.

The plaintiffs accuse the company of religious discrimination, according to *Reuters*.

The 18 plaintiffs include Israeli-American families and individuals who said they own or wish to rent affected homes and who accuse Airbnb of "redlining" Jewish-owned properties while letting Muslims and Christians rent their homes, said the news agency.

The plaintiffs argue this effectively left Airbnb taking sides in the dispute over Judea and Samaria.

In response, Airbnb said in a statement quoted by *Reuters*, "We don't believe this lawsuit will succeed in court, but we know that people will disagree with our decision and appreciate their perspective."

The complaint was filed in federal court in Delaware, where Airbnb is incorporated, and which the plaintiffs said has jurisdiction over the San Francisco-based company's alleged violation of US laws against housing discrimination.

"Airbnb has made a religion- and nationality-based decision about who can list," Robert Tolchin, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said in an interview. "It decided in the United States, 'We will not list for Jews in the West Bank.' It should be equal access for all."

The plaintiffs are seeking injunctive relief and unspecified damages, including for lost rental income, according to *Reuters*.

Airbnb sparked outrage when it announced last week that it would remove home listings in Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria.

Tourism Minister Yariv Levin (Likud) on Monday blasted Airbnb's decision as "disgraceful and miserable" and demanded that the site cancel the decision.

He instructed his ministry staff to formulate immediate measures to limit the company's activity throughout the country and instructed ministry management to implement a special program to encourage tourism and accommodation in vacation apartments throughout Judea and Samaria.

On the other side, Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian Authority (PA) chief negotiator, praised Airbnb's decision.

"While we believe that this is an initial positive step, it would have been crucial for Airbnb to follow the position of international law that Israel is the occupying power and that Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem, are illegal and constitute war crimes," he said.

A separate lawsuit challenging Airbnb's policy was filed in a Jerusalem court on November 22.

## **RING OF ROMAN GOVERNOR PONTIUS PILATE WHO CRUCIFIED JESUS FOUND IN HERODION SITE IN WEST BANK** (Ha'aretz 11/29/18)

The name of the man who ordered Jesus crucified and ran his trial, the ancient infamous Roman governor of Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate, has been deciphered on a bronze ring found in excavations at the site of Herodion near the West Bank's Bethlehem, some 50 years ago.

The ring was found during a dig led by Professor Gideon Forster from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a short time after the Six-Day War in 1968-69, as part of preparations to open the site to visitors.

The ring was one of thousands of items found in the dig. The famous name on it was discerned after a thorough cleansing, when it was photographed with the use of a special camera at the Israel Antiquities Authority labs. The inscription on what was apparently a stamping ring included a picture of a wine vessel surrounded by Greek writing translated as saying "Pilateus."

The name Pilatus has been linked to that of Roman governor Pontius Pilate, mentioned in the New Testament as Jesus' executioner. Pilate was the fifth of Roman leaders in Judah, and apparently the most important of them. He ruled in the years 26 to 36, and some say even from the year 19. The name was rare in the Israel of that era, says Professor Danny Schwartz.

"I don't know of any other Pilatus from the period and the ring shows he was a person of stature and wealth," Schwartz said.

A stamping ring of this type is also a hallmark to the status of the cavalry in Roman times, to which Pilate belonged. The ring is quite simple, therefore researchers believe it was used by the governor in day to day work, or belonged to one of his officials or someone in his court, who would use it to sign in his name.

There has been one other find in Israeli archaeology with the name Pilatus on it, which is also attributed to the infamous Roman. In the 1960s, Prof. Forster found a stone with the name inscribed on it as well.

The Herodion fortress was built by King Herod who also gave it its name. Following his death in the first century, it became a huge burial site. But the upper part of the complex continued to be used by Roman officials ruling over Judea at that time. It is likely that Pilate also used the Herodion as a central government administrative headquarters.

Pilate is a well-known historic figure, whose image was one of a powerful ruler. The historian Josephus says he moved iconic medallions bearing the imperial bust of Caesar into Jerusalem against Jewish law which forbade such idols in the holy city. There was a huge outcry after this act was discovered, which ended when Pilate threatened the protesters with mass slaughter.

"The Jews seemed to have rehearsed it ahead of time, falling to the ground as one, craning their necks to proclaim how they would sacrifice their lives not to violate the teachings of the Torah." Pilate responded by immediately ordering the statues taken out of Jerusalem, Josephus wrote.

In another instance, Josephus tells of how Pilate used treasures from the holy temple to pay for renovations of the water system Herod had built in Jerusalem.

Researchers point at stories in the New Testament about the Bethlehem region where Herodion later became the site of a large Christian village.

"You can see he had a natural link to the Herodion," Porath said. "Even for Herod it was more than just a tomb site with a palace. It was also a significant site of government. You can see the unusual significance this site had."

The research into the ring was led by Professor Shua Amurai-Stark and Malcha Hershkovitz, and an article about it appeared last week in the *Israel Exploration Journal*.

## **ISRAEL TO INVEST BILLIONS TO GET RAIL, ROADS UP TO SPEED** (Israel Hayom 11/29/18)

Israel is unrolling a major pipeline of investments to get rid of persistent traffic jams that are hampering economic growth.

To unclog the developed world's most congested roads, the government will partner with private contractors and banks, both Israeli and foreign, marking a shift in policy after a series of transport projects were criticized for delays and mismanagement.

Finance Ministry Accountant General Rony Hizkiyahu, who oversees government spending, said the infrastructure push could double investment to some \$16 billion a year.

Projects like a Tel Aviv subway, expanding Jerusalem's light rail system and construction of highways and toll roads are drawing interest from banks and global contractors.

Israel is a high-tech powerhouse but years of underinvestment and bungled state management have left its transport network lagging.

Road traffic density, measured by the number of vehicles per kilometer of road, is three times the average among the 36 industrialized countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Road users lose on average an hour a day in traffic congestion, a hit to productivity that costs the economy about 1.5% of the annual gross domestic product, according to the International Monetary Fund. That comes out at about \$5 billion.

Outdated infrastructure is the main culprit in Israel's growing gridlock problem. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cut the ribbon in late September, rushing to meet a promise to inaugurate the fast train by the Jewish holidays. But for now, it runs only as far as Ben-Gurion Airport, 23 kilometers (18 miles) from Tel Aviv.

Until now the government has preferred to finance most projects through the state budget, giving it more control and access to cheaper financing than the private sector.

But that strategy has often backfired, said Lior Mentser, head of project finance and infrastructure at the country's biggest bank, Hapoalim.

"It's double the time and money if the government does the project," he said. With the \$4.6 billion first line of the Tel Aviv metro delayed and over budget, the next two lines, a combined investment of \$7.6 billion, will be built in partnership with the private sector. Bidding is open until the end of January.

### **THE SOUTH BLOOMS GREEN AGAIN (YNet 11/28/18)**

Over the summer, the sight of blackened earth and ashes where there was once an abundance of natural greenery - until the incendiary kite and balloon terror consumed the fields and vegetation in the Gaza vicinity, was depressing. But nature has its way of rebirth and the recent rainfall has washed away the ashes replacing the depressing black with optimistic green. Dozens of millimeters of rain has fallen in recent weeks and have almost completely eliminated the scars of the fires caused by the thousands of fiery kites and balloons launched into Israel by Palestinians in Gaza as part of the their "march of return." Thousands of dunams of agricultural land and nature reserves were destroyed.

The locations that suffered the most fire damage were the Be'eri Crater, the Be'eri woodlands, the Kissufim woodlands and Tel Gama, beautiful areas that attract many vacationers. In the Be'eri Crater, for example, more than 80 percent of the land was burnt and the cattle, fed by the grass, were transferred to nearby pens.

But now, after the rain, the scorched earth is carpeted with green. Cows can graze again and they roam freely around the area enjoying the grass. The agriculture too is recovering. Thousands of acres of wheat have been planted in recent days in the same fields that were burned last summer.

In the Gaza vicinity of the northern Negev, people know that the cease-fires are fragile, but they also note that when the land is soaked in rainwater, there is no chance of a fire, so the Palestinians do not have the option of incendiary balloon terror during this season of the year.

"The forecasts this year predict a harbinger of rain, and this is welcome, certainly in an agricultural area like ours," said Livnat Ganzburg, a tourism coordinator in the Gaza region. "The northern Negev is undergoing a big

change, from the black of the fires to green vegetation; a drastic and exciting change. The view of burnt expanses has not been pleasant but we always knew that the rain would come and wash away everything and the vegetation will grow again.

"We are opening a new chapter in our lives and this is the time to call upon the citizens of Israel to come visit this beautiful region," she continued. "There were rumors that the fires damaged the blossoming of the anemones, this is not true, and in a few months we expect a spectacular flowering of anemones. We only hope for calm on the security front and lots of rain."

Evyatar Kipnis of Kibbutz Be'eri who is in charge of the kibbutz firefighting team said: "The big test will be this coming summer. It is true that now everything is green and beautiful, but every blade of grass that grows is a potential kindling for fires next summer. The Palestinians know this... Unfortunately, as long as there is no political solution and everything is stuck, the situation with Gaza will be the same. In the summer we will have black and in the winter we will have green. Meanwhile let us enjoy the green."

### **ISRAELI MACHINE SENT TO CALIFORNIA TO AID AUTHORITIES BATTLING CAMP FIRE (JPost 11/26/18)**

An Israeli machine that can pull water out of the air was sent to northern California to provide clean drinking water for police and firefighters battling the Camp Fire.

On Sunday, officials announced that the fire had been brought 100 percent under control. At least 85 people were killed and more than 200 are still reported missing in the fire that burned for 17 days and destroyed more than 153,000 acres north of Sacramento, including 17,000 building structures. Thousands are living in emergency shelters and hotels.

The atmospheric water generator called the GEN-350, produced by the company Watergen USA, can produce up to 156 gallons of water per day and is transportable. It is carried by an emergency response vehicle, which is equipped with a generator and charging stations.

"Providing the police and firefighters with the basic necessity of drinking water allows them to serve and help for longer periods of time," said Ed Russo, CEO of Watergen USA.

"If we can help relieve the burden by providing them with clean water, that is something that we will most definitely do," said Yehuda Kaploun, president of Watergen USA.

Watergen's initiative to provide clean drinking water around the world earned the company its place on the World Economic Forum's list of the world's top technology pioneers in 2018.

### **9,000-YEAR-OLD MASK TO FEATURE AT PREHISTORY CONFERENCE (Israel Hayom 11/28/18)**

A 9,000-year-old stone mask dating to the pre-pottery Neolithic B Period will be presented at a conference of the Israel Prehistoric Society on Thursday, Channel 10 News reported Wednesday.

The Israeli Antiquities Authority's Unit for the Prevention of Antiquity Robberies received a tip about the mask at the beginning of the year. Researchers were able to track it down and pinpoint the excavation from which it had been removed, in the south Hebron Hills region.

According to Ronit Lupo of the unit, the mask is a "unique" archaeological find, made even rarer because researchers know where it was discovered.

"The fact that we have confirmed information about where it was found makes this mask more important than most of the masks from the same period," she said.

The limestone mask was created using stone tools and mimics the features of a human face. The edges of the mask have four holes, which might have been used to tie it onto a person's face or a post.

Lupo noted that the mask had been finely worked and finished.

"The stone is completely smooth. The facial features are completely symmetrical, and it was even given cheekbones. But what is more impressive

is the mouth with teeth," she said.

Dr. Omry Barzilai, head of archaeological research at the IAA, said the mask was contemporary with the agricultural revolution.

"The transition from a hunter-gatherer existence to the cultivation of plants and animals was accompanied by changes to cultural structure and a sharp increase in ritual-religious activity," Barzilai said.

Lupo said the period was characterized by ancestor worship.

"We find skulls buried beneath stone floors that were treated and cared for in various ways. The stone masks are similar in size to a human face, so we tend to associate them with that form of worship," Lupo said.

#### **WHY IS THE US IN THE MIDDLE EAST?** (Herb Keinon, JPost 11/28/18)

In the run-up to the 2016 US presidential campaign, one concern heard in Jerusalem about then-candidate Donald Trump was that his "America First" policy contained the seeds of isolationism. And American isolationism is not good for Israel.

Since his election, however, those concerns were largely put to rest, as Trump took a number of steps that have been extremely good for Israel.

Israel has been careful never to ask for US troops to be deployed in the region. It has lobbied Washington long and hard for weapons and funds to buy arms, saying "Give us the wherewithal to defend ourselves." But it has never asked America to do the actual defending.

Trump's answer could be construed as meaning that the US is in the Mideast – its troops are engaged throughout the region – because of Israel. Israel's position is that the US is engaged in the Middle East because it is a US interest to be engaged in the Middle East, since it is vital for US security and for Washington's strategic position in the world to be involved in this region, and keep it from falling into the hands of Islamic radicals – be they Sunni or Shia. Those radical forces would like nothing more than to see a Mideast without any US presence or influence.

The argument that the US is in the Mideast because of Israel may have a certain appeal to some of Trump's Evangelical backers, who see this as a good enough reason since it fits their belief in God's promise to Abraham in Genesis: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee." But for US Jews, the argument is uncomfortable. If America is in the Mideast because of Israel, then if something goes wrong – if US troops are killed – Israel is to blame, and that is definitely not something for which Israel wants to bear responsibility. The second problematic aspect in Trump's answer is that because of growing US oil independence, "all of a sudden it gets to a point where you don't have to stay there."

Jerusalem wants to see the US engaged, influential and active in the region. It doesn't want to see it disengaged and concerned only about its own domestic problems.

This sentiment is in no way unique to Israel. Saudi Arabia, the rest of the Persian Gulf countries, Egypt and Jordan are all fearful of a situation where the US would withdraw within itself.

If that were to happen, other actors would fill the vacuum, as was the case in Syria, where in 2015 Russia moved in, as the US waffled during the Syrian civil war. And two things are certain if other actors fill the vacuum left by the US: First, those actors will be much less benign; second, they will be much less concerned about Israel's interests.

Jerusalem wants the US to remain in the region, but it wants the US to do so because this is good for the US – even if it no longer is dependent on Mideast oil – not only because it is also good for Israel.

#### **ISRAEL BOLSTERS HAMAS AT PA'S EXPENSE** (Alex Fishman, YNet 11/27/18)

The ramming attack in Gush Etzion on Monday does not necessarily indicate a new wave of terror attacks in the West Bank. But it serves as another painful reminder of the clumsy and arrogant manner with which Israel conducts itself vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority.

Israel is building up Hamas, not just in Gaza but also in the West Bank. To be precise: Israel is elevating Yahya Sinwar as the dominant Palestinian leader. And when Sinwar rises, courtesy of Israel, Mahmoud Abbas will lose the last remnants of his support in the West Bank, paving the way for increased terrorism in the West Bank; Tuesday's attack was only an example.

The past two weeks serve as a clear example of this policy of strengthening Hamas and weakening the PA—a policy emanating from the Prime Minister's Office while the defense establishment, for its own reasons, goes along.

On November 13, after Hamas launched hundreds of rockets into Israel and the Cabinet accepted the IDF's recommendation for a ceasefire, defense establishment spokespeople embarked on a PR campaign telling the Israeli public that Hamas was dealt a severe blow, was begging for a cease-fire and could barely overcome the shock upon discovering that Israeli forces operated right under their noses in the Gaza Strip.

Perhaps all that is true, but they forgot to mention how Israel turned the vilified Hamas leader into a national hero. Sinwar owes a debt of gratitude to Netanyahu for those wonderful two days of military confrontation with Israel that rapidly caused a dramatic turnaround in his status.

Prior to the discovery of the IDF Special Forces operation in Gaza, Sinwar was at a low-point. He was accused of "selling out" Gaza for a fistful of dollars (in the Qatari ambassador's suitcase), and everyone—the Palestinian Authority, the Arab media, the residents of Gaza—ridiculed him and presented him as one who had given up on the Palestinian national struggle.

At the same time, the US administration announced a \$5 million reward for information regarding the number 2 man in Hamas, Saleh al-Arouri, who resides in Beirut. At the time, Hamas was also willing to make far-reaching compromises with the Palestinian Authority just to survive another day.

And then, Israel did Hamas a great favor, to which they responded in a bland and predictable manner. The resignation of Avigdor Lieberman from his post as defense minister provided Hamas with the psychological victory it sought, and the day the shooting stopped, Sinwar became the ultimate Palestinian leader.

This initiated a very dangerous process, which could lead to an explosion not only in Gaza but primarily in the West Bank. Hamas leaders became overconfident. Al-Arouri, a "wanted man" by the US, arrived in Cairo (where no one thought of turning him over to the Americans) for reconciliation talks with the Palestinian Authority last week, and it turns out that all previous agreements reached between Hamas and the PA over the last year had been erased. Al-Arouri put an end to talks about bringing in PA officials from Ramallah to govern Gaza.

Hamas is talking about forming a national unity government now, elections now, joining the PLO now. Moreover, the Hamas delegation headed by al-Arouri is presenting the Egyptians with a list of demands to Israel, demands which Israel will never accept.

It seems that al-Arouri is so shocked and embarrassed by the blow Hamas suffered in the last round of fighting—according to Israeli intelligence experts—that he allows himself to make bizarre demands. He demanded, for example, to expand the Gaza fishing zone from 9 nautical miles to 20 miles. The Operation Protective Edge agreements spoke of up to 12 miles. But after the last round, Hamas feels that it has leverage. It also demanded the removal of most of the restrictions on imports and exports of goods from Gaza, as well as another electric power line from Israel—funded by Qatar—fully knowing that Israel cannot do so, since any infrastructure project needs to be approved by the Palestinian Authority.

A situation in which Israeli military and political activity strengthens Hamas and weakens the PA makes no sense and forces Israel to formulate a new military and political strategy. When the PA is weakened, the Palestinian security apparatus is weakened, the population in the West Bank becomes more confrontational with the PA, as Israel makes it increasingly clear that violence pays off. From this, the road is short to the inevitable conclusion: a military escalation.