

Netanyahu pushes annexation plan as new elections loom

Author:

Sun, 2019-12-08 23:57

JERUSALEM: Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday touted his plan to annex a swathe of the occupied West Bank and Israeli settlements in a last-ditch effort to prevent another general election.

"It's time to apply Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and legalize all the Judea and Samaria settlements, those that are in settlement blocs and those outside of them," he said, using the biblical term for the West Bank.

"They will be part of the State of Israel."

US resolution

On Friday, however, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution supporting a Palestinian state and determining that the US should "discourage" steps such as "unilateral annexation of territory."

Around 400,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank alongside around 2.6 million Palestinians.

The settlements are viewed as major stumbling blocks to peace as they are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state.

Netanyahu has said in the past that the wider moves to annex or "legalize" settlements in the West Bank would be in coordination with US President Donald Trump and his long-awaited peace plan.

Israeli aircraft carried out attacks in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip early on Sunday, Palestinian security officials said, hours after militants in the enclave launched three rockets at the Jewish state.

The strikes targeted two sites belonging to Al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas military wing, in northern Gaza, with another series of sorties at a Qassam site west of Gaza City, Hamas officials said.

There were no immediate reports of injuries.

The Israeli army said "fighter jets and attack helicopters struck a number of Hamas terror targets" in Gaza, as well as "a military post belonging to the Hamas naval force in the northern Gaza Strip."

All three projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome defense system, the army said, amending an earlier statement according to which two of the three rockets were shot down over southern Israel.

Medics had treated three people in the southern Israeli town of Sderot who

suffered minor injuries while seeking shelter as air raid sirens went off, the Magen David Adom emergency medical service said.

There were no immediate reports of material damage.

On Nov. 29, Israeli warplanes struck Hamas positions in Gaza in response to rocket fire at the Jewish state the previous day.

Netanyahu announced in September, a week before general elections, that he planned to annex the Jordan Valley, which accounts for around a third of the West Bank, if re-elected.

His Sunday remarks, at a conference organized by rightwing newspaper Makor Rishon, came alongside an appeal to rival Benny Gantz to form a unity government and save the time and money involved in elections.

“I have offered to Benny Gantz to join a unity government and today too I’m telling him to join a unity government with me,” Netanyahu said. “It’s not too late.”

The September polls yielded no clear winner, and Wednesday is the last day for a member of parliament to propose a coalition before the country heads to another vote – the third in a year.

“I want American recognition of our sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, it’s important,” Netanyahu said, noting he recently discussed the issue with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, without presenting a formal plan.

Pompeo last month announced that the US no longer shared the widely held international position that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)

[Israel](#)

Israel strikes in Gaza after rocket attack Israel detains Palestinian journalists for 'illegal activity'

[Lebanese donor hands Nazi artifacts to Israel, warns of anti-Semitism](#)

Author:

Jonah Mandel | AFP

ID:

1575824605739419300

Sun, 2019-12-08 15:51

JERUSALEM: wealthy Lebanese-Swiss businessman said Sunday he had bought Adolf Hitler's top hat and other Nazi artifacts to give them to Jewish groups and prevent them falling into the hands of a resurgent far-right.

Abdallah Chatila said he had felt compelled to take the objects off the market because of the rising anti-Semitism, populism and racism he was witnessing in Europe.

He spent about 600,000 euros (\$660,000) for eight objects connected to Hitler, including the collapsible top hat, in a November 20 sale at a Munich auction house, originally planning to burn them all.

But he then decided to give them to the Keren Hayesod association, an Israeli fundraising group, which has resolved to hand them to Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial center.

Chatila told a Jerusalem press conference it had been a "very easy" decision to purchase the items when he saw the "potentially lethal injustice that those artifacts would go to the wrong hands."

"I felt I had no choice but to actually try to help the cause," he added.

"What happened in the last five years in Europe showed us that anti-Semitism, that populism, that racism is going stronger and stronger, and we are here to fight it and show people we're not scared.

"Today – with the fake news, with the media, with the power that people could have with the Internet, with social media – somebody else could use that small window" of time to manipulate the public, he said.

He said he had worried the Nazi-era artifacts could be used by neo-Nazi groups or those seeking to stoke anti-Semitism and racism in Europe.

"That's why I felt I had to do it," he said of his purchase.

The items, still in Munich, are to be eventually delivered to Yad Vashem, where they will be part of a collection of Nazi artifacts crucial to countering Holocaust denial, but not be put on regular display, said Avner Shalev, the institute's director.

Chatila also met with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin and visited Yad Vashem. Chatila was born in Beirut into a family of Christian jewellers and moved to Switzerland at the age of two.

Now among Switzerland's richest 300 people, he supports charities and causes, including many relating to Lebanon and Syrian refugees.

The auction was brought to Chatila's attention by the European Jewish Association, which has sought to sway public opinion against the trade in Nazi memorabilia.

Rabbi Mehachem Margolin, head of the association, said Chatila's surprise act had raised attention to such auctions.

He said it was a powerful statement against racism and xenophobia, especially coming from a non-Jew of Lebanese origin.

Lebanon and Israel remain technically at war and Lebanese people are banned from communication with Israelis.

"There is no question that a message that comes from you is 10 times, or 100 times stronger than a message that comes from us," Margolin told Chatila.

The message was not only about solidarity among people, but also "how one person can make such a huge change," Margolin said.

"There's a place for optimism."





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Nazis](#)

[Israel](#)

[artifacts](#)

[Air strikes kill five pro-Iran fighters in Syria: monitor](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-12-08 18:07

BEIRUT: Air strikes by unidentified warplanes have killed five pro-Iran fighters in Syria's eastern province of Deir Ezzor near the Iraqi border, a Britain-based war monitor said on Sunday.

The strikes late Saturday targeted "positions of Iranian forces and allied militias" on the edge of the town of Albukamal, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"Five non-Syrian fighters were killed," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP, without being able to provide their nationalities.

Regime troops, Iranian forces and allied Iran-backed fighters, including from Iraq, are present in the area on the western banks of the Euphrates River, he said.

According to the Observatory, 10 Iraqi fighters were killed in September in air strikes of unknown origin in the same area.

At the start of that month, air raids killed 18 pro-Iran fighters, the monitor reported.

In June 2018, strikes near the Iraqi border killed 55 pro-regime forces, mostly Syrians and Iraqis, the Observatory said.

An American official said at the time that Israel was responsible, but the Jewish state declined to comment.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes in Syria on what it says are positions of Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah and Iranian forces, which it has vowed to prevent gaining a foothold in Syrian territory.

But the US-led coalition that has been fighting Daesh has in the past also admitted to carrying out air strikes against pro-regime fighters.

The coalition is backing Kurdish-led fighters on the eastern shores of the Euphrates.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

[Air strikes](#)

[Iran](#)

US military completes pullback from northeast Syria, Esper says

Protests grip Iraq's capital and south despite rising toll

Author:

AFP

ID:

1575816462888628800

Sun, 2019-12-08 12:57

BAGHDAD: Thousands of Iraqi protesters streamed into streets and public squares in the capital and restive south on Sunday, saying they were not deterred by deadly violence meant to "scare" them.

In Baghdad, crowds of anti-government demonstrators thronged Tahrir Square, the epicenter of their movement.

Late Friday, unidentified gunmen attacked a parking complex near Tahrir where demonstrators had been squatting for weeks, leaving 20 protesters and four police officers dead, medics told AFP.

Protesters feared it signalled that their movement would be derailed but by Sunday, the numbers gathered under the sun in Tahrir were staggering.

"They're trying to scare us in whatever ways they can, but we're staying in the streets," said Aisha, a 23-year-old protester.

At least 452 people – the vast majority of them protesters – have died and 20,000 have been wounded since the rallies erupted.

In Nasiriyah, a protest hotspot where dozens were killed in a spree of violence last month, protesters regrouped in downtown along with representatives of powerful tribes.

"We will keep protesting until the regime collapses," pledged Ali Rahim, a student.

In other southern cities, local authorities had declared Sunday – the first day of the work week in Iraq – a holiday for civil servants.

Road blocks and massive strikes also disrupted work in Hilla, Amara, Diwaniya, Kut and the shrine city of Najaf, AFP's correspondents there said. The rallies have persisted despite the resignation of premier Adel Abdel Mahdi earlier this month, with protesters demanding the complete ouster of the ruling class.

Iraq is ranked the 12th most corrupt country in the world by watchdog group Transparency International, with billions of dollars pilfered each year from the state budget of OPEC's second-largest producer.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

[toll](#)

Iraqis protest to defy 'slaughter' in Baghdad as drone hits cleric's home

[Egyptian officials say policeman, militant killed in Sinai](#)

Author:

By ASHRAF SWEILLAM | AP

ID:

1575814207838346700

Sun, 2019-12-08 10:39

EL-ARISH: Egyptian officials say a militant attack has killed a police conscript in the restive northern part of the Sinai Peninsula.

The officials say that the militants attacked a police checkpoint in the town of Rafah early on Sunday, wounding another two conscripts who were taken to a nearby hospital for treatment.

Authorities say that security forces killed a militant, and wounded others,

in clashes that followed the assault.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to talk to reporters.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack, which bares the hallmarks of a Daesh affiliate based in northern Sinai.

Egypt is battling a Daesh-led insurgency in the Sinai that intensified after the military overthrew an Islamist president in 2013.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[Sinai Peninsula](#)

[policeman](#)

Egypt army kills 83 militants in North Sinai
Egypt officials: Attack kills 3 soldiers, 3 militants in Sinai