

The Sabra Report

Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion About Israel

Netanyahu Vows to Annex Jordan River Valley if Re-Elected

Dov Lieber and Felicia Schwartz, Wall Street Journal, September 10th 2019

Recap:

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would extend Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley if re-elected. 11,000 Jews and 65,000 Palestinians live in the Valley today.

The Context:

- The Jordan Valley, an area of 1,500 square miles [1], stretches from the West Bank's northern borders to the Dead Sea. The valley is a contentious negotiation issue between Israel and the Palestinians since Palestinians view the area as essential for a future state while Israel contends it needs the geographical buffer for security purposes.
- Netanyahu's comments seek to capitalize on the "unique, one-off opportunity" afforded him by US President Donald Trump's administration, which has expressed openness to Israeli annexation of at least parts of the West Bank. "We haven't had such an opportunity since the Six Day War, and I doubt we'll have another opportunity in the next 50 years [2]."
- The Yesha settlement umbrella council lauded Netanyahu's announcement, calling it "unprecedented news for the State of Israel," although Yesha founder Yisrael Harel called the announcement a "bold-faced lie [3]", citing previous unrealized promises. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas warned that annexation would lead to the nullification of previous agreements between Ramallah and Jerusalem.
- Israel conquered the West Bank, Sinai Desert, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights in 1967. It returned the Sinai to Egypt in exchange for peace and unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005. Israel annexed the Golan Heights in 1981 but has not officially annexed the West Bank or East Jerusalem where it currently has approximately 140 towns and settlements [4].
- Nearly 50% of Jewish Israelis favor annexation if supported by the Trump administration, whose eagerly awaited peace plan will be released after Israel's September 17th elections [5].

Conversation Points:

- Would Netanyahu have the confidence to annex the Jordan Valley if not for Trump's support?
- Will a democratic successor to Trump withdraw recognition of Israeli annexation?
- What won't Netanyahu say to shore up support before the upcoming elections?
- Why has Israel stopped short of annexing the West Bank and East Jerusalem until now?

High Court Petition Seeks to Decriminalize Marriages Outside Rabbinat

Marissa Newman and Michael Bachner, Times of Israel, September 11th 2019

Recap:

The Israeli High Court heard a petition by an orthodox Israeli couple who married without involving the country's Chief Rabbinat. It is the first time a controversial law that bans such weddings, and also carries a potential penalty of two years in prison, will be tested in Israel's top court.

The Context:

- Israel's Chief Rabbinat oversees all personal status issues for Jews and does not recognize marriages performed by non-Rabbinat officiators. In July 2018, police briefly arrested Rabbi Dov Haiyun over weddings conducted without the Rabbinat's consent.
- Chupah Pratit, an Israeli organization created to challenge the Chief Rabbinat's marriage monopoly, married 160 Orthodox couples last year. The initiative was formed by Hashgacha Pratit – the organization that seeks to loosen the Rabbinat's control over kashrut supervision [6].
- 600,000 Jewish Israelis do not meet the Rabbinat's criteria for marriage and are denied a religious wedding ceremony, including 400,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union and converts whose conversion process was overseen by non-Orthodox rabbis [7].

Conversation Points:

- What will it take for grassroots organizations, like Chupah Pratit, to spark institutional change?
- Should a single Rabbinat have the mandate to oversee all personal status issues for all Jews?
- Is it a double standard if citizens are considered Jewish enough to immigrate but not Jewish enough to marry?
- Are the Rabbinat's actions aligned with Torah values?

Israel Retains A+ Credit Rating with Fitch

Zeev Klein, Israel Hayom, September 2nd 2019

Recap:

The company confirmed Israel's A+ credit rating.

The Context:

- Israel has had an annual surplus on its external balance sheet every year since 2003 and foreign currency reserves totaling \$120 billion as of July 2019.
- Fitch forecasts that Israel's growth will remain strong in 2020-2021, supported by the new Leviathan offshore natural gas field, although political and security risks will continue to constrain Israel's ratings despite its "resilience to periodic conflict and political shocks over an extended timeframe [8]."

- Israel's Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon boasted that "the rating proves once again that the world believes in the strength of the Israeli economy [9]."

Conversation Points:

- Why is a strong credit rating important for a country?
-

Notes:

1. [Netanyahu announces post-election plan to annex Jordan Valley](#), Al Jazeera, September 10th 2019
2. [Netanyahu, Facing Tough Israel Election, Pledges to Annex Much of West Bank](#), David M. Halbfinger, Times of Israel, September 10th 2019
3. [Settler leaders lionize Netanyahu for 'historic' annexation pledge](#), Jacob Magid, Times of Israel, September 10th 2019
4. [Israel PM Netanyahu vows to annex occupied Jordan Valley](#), BBC, September 10th 2019
5. [Netanyahu, Facing Tough Israel Election, Pledges to Annex Much of West Bank](#), David M. Halbfinger, Times of Israel, September 10th 2019
6. [CHUPAH PRATIT MARRIES 160 COUPLES IN ITS FIRST YEAR](#), ILANIT CHERNICK, Jerusalem Post, AUGUST 15th 2019
7. [Israel's Undemocratic Marriage Laws](#), Phil M. Cohen, Tablet, August 19th 2019.
8. [Fitch Affirms Israel's A+ Rating, Citing Strong Growth](#), Omri Milman, Algemeiner, September 11th 2019
9. [Fitch Affirms Israel's A+ Rating, Stable Outlook](#), Aryeh Green, Jewish Press, August 30th 2019

The Sabra Report is a newsletter intended to stimulate conversation about Israel by recapping major events & providing context. Our conversation points are meant to encourage discussion amongst friends and family.

The Sabra Report is written by Irving Safdieh.

DON'T MISS AN ISSUE!
SUBSCRIBE TO OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER AT
www.sabrareport.com
