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'Abbas: "Statehood in September will Fulfill Obama's Vision"

Palestinian Authority head Mahmoud 'Abbas made the option of a unilateral declaration of statehood to be made in September even more likely in an interview given to the Palestinian daily *Al Ayyam*. 'Abbas reiterated that the Palestinians are prepared for statehood and asserted that declaring statehood would fulfill the vision of U.S. President Barack Obama, who has called for the state to be established by September. He said that 130 nations have already expressed willingness to recognize an independent Palestinian state on pre-1967 borders, and that number could swell significantly before September and include Western nations. There is speculation that when Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu addresses Congress next month, he will suggest a Palestinian state on temporary borders as part of his plan. That suggestion, 'Abbas said, is unacceptable to the Palestinians.

Iranian-Egyptian Relations Quickly Warming; New Cairo Overture to Hamas

Thirty years of diplomatic estrangement between Iran and Egypt is being quickly reversed in the aftermath of Hosni Mubarak's ouster from the Egyptian presidency. The latest move came from Iran, which has appointed an ambassador to Egypt for the first time in three decades and comes on the heels of a meeting between a high-ranking Iranian diplomat and Egypt's new foreign minister. Israel and Western nations

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are looking closely at Egyptian overtures to Hamas as well. Previously, The Media Line reported concern in Israel over contact by the new Egyptian leadership with Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip. Now Egypt's Foreign Ministry has confirmed that a visit to Gaza by the new foreign minister is in the offing.

Yemeni Forces Open Fire on Demonstrators; 3 Dead

Yemeni police opened fire on demonstrators in the capital of Sana'a and in the city of Taiz on Tuesday killing three protestors. In Sana'a, two died when police loyal to the government fired into the crowd in order to prevent it from marching onto a main street where the vice president resides. Hundreds were reported wounded. One protestor was killed by police bullets in Taiz after setting fire to tires in a street. Meanwhile, mediators from the Gulf States were trying to broker a meeting between besieged President Ali Abdullah Saleh and leaders of the opposition.

U.K. Sending Military Advisers "On the Ground" in Libya

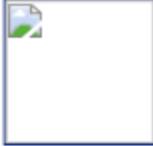
The British are sending a team of military advisers to Libya to help rebel forces fight strongman Mu'amar Al-Qaddafi. Newspapers in the U.K. are reporting that a senior officer is heading a 20-man team to Benghazi that for the first time includes armed soldiers. *The Independent* reported that the advisory team will not be allowed to leave Benghazi and accompany rebel forces on operations. Nevertheless, word of the Libyan-bound team has stirred opposition to what many see as the beginning of a military commitment that could turn out to be another long-term involvement. The French government is considering sending a similar force to Libya.

Al-Asad's Token Concession Fails to Convince

Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad ordered new legislation that rescinds emergency powers that have been in effect for forty-eight years, but the move has failed to alleviate the popular pressure from the people who continue to insist upon true democratic reforms. The draft legislation was passed on Tuesday and still has to be signed by the president. But protestors say the president can remove the offensive laws by edict if he really wants to; and that protests will continue until there is freedom of speech, political prisoners are released and a multi-party system of government is installed. Rights groups estimate that more than 200 Syrians have been killed protesting the Al-Asad regime in recent weeks.

Netanyahu Under Fire for Planning Policy Speech on Foreign Soil

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Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is under fire from across the political spectrum for planning to make a major policy speech in the United States rather than on home soil. Critics representing a broad spectrum of the population agree that the prime minister's plans for establishing peace with the Palestinians should be shared first with the Israeli people. Opposition leader Tzippi Livni voiced her criticism when it was first learned that Netanyahu was considering making his promised speech in the U.S., and right wing Minister Uzi Landau, a longtime political ally of the prime minister, voiced his opposition when the speech before a joint session of Congress was announced last week.

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