



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

Friday, September 22

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News Excerpts

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Ha'aretz

Security Guard Wounded in Stabbing Attack in Jerusalem

An Israeli security guard in his 20s was lightly wounded in a suspected stabbing attack at a light rail station in Givat Hamivtar neighborhood of East Jerusalem. According to [Israel Police](#), the security guard was stabbed and was taken to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem in mild condition. The suspect was shot and seriously wounded, police said. The circumstances of the case are under investigation. Earlier, a 32-year-old civilian security guard was hit by a car at the Qalandia checkpoint in East Jerusalem and sustained minor injuries. The 38-year-old Palestinian suspect was found with cuts on his wrists and a knife with his own blood next to him in the vehicle and was apprehended at the scene. According to the suspect, he cut himself and committed the ramming attack with suicidal intentions. [Read More "Border Police Sniper Shoots Palestinian Gunman During Latest Gaza Border Riots" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Public Figures Raise NIS 1M For Killer of Palestinian Family

Thousands of people raised over a million shekels (\$262K) this week in a fundraising program to better prison conditions or even win the release of Amiram Ben Oliel who murdered a Palestinian family in 2015. The fundraiser was started on Tuesday and ended yesterday after 14 Members of Knesset signed a petition last week demanding better conditions for Ben Oliel. Among others endorsing the project are numerous rabbis and political figures including Otzma Yehudit MK Limor Son Har Melech who has been vocal in her support of Ben Oliel, fellow party member Amichai Eliyahu and Likud MKs Amit Halevi, Ariel Kallner, Avichai Buaron, and Nissim Vaturi. National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who initially represented Ben Oliel after his arrest, has also been working to improve his conditions in prison, Ben-Gvir's wife Ayala said.

I24 News

Abbas: No Peace Without 'Legitimate Rights' for Palestinians

Palestinian Authority (PA) chief Mahmoud Abbas told the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that there could be no peace in the Middle East without a two-state solution, sending a warning amid reports of Israel and Saudi Arabia **progressing** toward a normalization agreement. "Those who think that peace can prevail in the Middle East without the Palestinian people enjoying their full, legitimate national rights would be mistaken," Abbas said. The veteran leader made a new appeal to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to call an international conference on creating a Palestinian state. The United States, historically the peace broker between the two sides, has all but given up on serious negotiations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, which has pushed forward controversial settlements in the West Bank. [Dig Deeper "Abbas Softens Demands to Pave Way for Saudi Deal" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Netanyahu to Address UN on Saudi Peace and Iran Threat

After meeting US President Joe Biden and some world leaders, Prime Minister Netanyahu will address the UNGA today for the first time since 2018. His speech will concentrate on the opportunity for a historic peace agreement with Saudi Arabia on the one hand and the threat to Israel, the Middle East and the world from Iran on the other. Netanyahu will also address the turmoil in Israel, over his government's legislative push to change the judicial system, a move that has seen hundreds of thousands of Israelis take to the streets in mass protests for the past nine months demonstrating against what they see as an assault on Israel's very democracy, and has even brought protests to the US during the prime minister's visit there. [Read More "Netanyahu to Face a Divided and Aggrieved American Jewish Community" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Israel Hayom

Israel Cooperating with US on Saudi Bid to Enrich Uranium

Prime Minister Netanyahu has told top nuclear and security experts in Israel to cooperate with US negotiators on a proposal for a "US-run uranium enrichment operation" in Saudi Arabia, as part of a potential normalization deal between Israel and Saudi, unnamed Israeli and US officials told [the Wall Street Journal](#). In exchange for normalizing ties with Israel, Saudi Arabia is asking the US for a major mutual defense pact, significant arms deals, and cooperation in establishing a civilian nuclear program on Saudi soil, as well as Israeli concessions to the Palestinians. According to the Thursday report, officials from Israel and the US are working together on a plan that would potentially see the Gulf kingdom openly enrich uranium. Experts told the Journal that while there are potential remote shutdown mechanisms that could be put in place in a nuclear facility, or systems that could speed up centrifuges until they break, there were no guarantees such arrangements would be failsafe. [Dig Deeper "27 Experts Urge Biden Not to Allow Saudis to Enrich Uranium for Israel Deal" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Al-Monitor

US Approves \$500M Sale of Spare Parts to Saudi Military

The Biden administration approved a major \$500 million sale to fund spare and repair parts for Saudi Arabia's military. The proposed sale, which the State Department notified Congress, would fund components for Saudi Arabia's existing Abrams and M-60 tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, light armored vehicles and Humvees. The proposal would also fund spare and repair parts for rifles and pistols as well as crew-served weapons systems, such as the kingdom's TOW anti-tank missile launchers, radar sets, recoilless rifles as well as computer units, radar sets and night vision devices, among other equipment. The sale is a far cry from the advanced arms sales Saudi has been seeking from the US as part of its conditions for normalizing ties with [Israel](#). But the Biden administration doesn't typically announce controversial major foreign arms sales without some confidence that it will be approved by lawmakers, suggesting a thaw on Capitol Hill towards Saudi Arabia, even if only for spare parts. [Read More "US Weighing Defense Pacts with Israel, Saudis as Part of Normalization Talks" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

Erdogan: Turkey, Israel to Take Steps in Energy Drilling

Turkey and Israel will soon begin taking joint steps in energy drilling, President Tayyip Erdogan was cited by Turkish media as saying, adding the two countries would also operate energy networks to Europe through Turkey. Erdogan and Prime Minister Netanyahu met in person for the first time at the United Nations this week, in a milestone as the two countries have been working to repair relations long strained by disputes over policies toward the Palestinians. Erdogan said he and Netanyahu had agreed on mutual visits in the coming period, and that energy cooperation would ramp up after these. "God willing, we will take this step without much delay and we will start energy drilling operations with Israel. We will also start operating energy transfer networks to Europe through Turkey, not just to Turkey," he was cited as saying. "At the moment, our total trade volume is \$9.5 billion. We agreed to raise this \$9.5 billion trade volume to a minimum of \$15 billion in the first phase," he said. Erdogan added that he and Netanyahu had discussed forming a mechanism between their countries, including some ministries, to increase cooperation in energy, tourism, and technology. Ties between the former allies unraveled after Israel's forces killed 10 Turks in a 2010 raid on a pro-Palestinian activist ship that tried to breach its blockade on the Gaza Strip, which is ruled by Hamas Islamists proscribed in the West. [Dig Deeper "Erdogan Returns to Turkey After Securing Thaw with Israel on US Trip" \(AI-Monitor\)](#)

Times of Israel

IDF Tanks Shell Syrian Army Structures Near Truce Line

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in a rare statement said it carried out tank strikes against two structures in the Syrian Golan Heights that violated a 1974 disengagement agreement. The IDF said the temporary structures — erected in the Mount Hermon area — were used by the Syrian Arab Army and were a violation of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement signed in 1974 between Israel and Syria, which concluded the Yom Kippur War. "The strike was carried out after IDF soldiers identified the two structures in the area of the security zone yesterday," the military said. The IDF said the structures were "a clear violation" of the 1974 agreement, and it held "the Syrian regime responsible for all activities occurring within its territory and will not allow any attempts to violate Israeli sovereignty." In Syria, the pro-government Sham FM radio station said Israel's military struck an area on the edge of the Golan Heights in the village of Hadar. It said there were no casualties. Israel has repeatedly accused the Syrian military of actively assisting the Iran-backed Hezbollah terror group in the area. [Read More "Red Carpet, Honor Guard and Flowers: Syria's Assad Receives Lavish Welcome in China" \(AI-Monitor\)](#)

A Challenge Netanyahu Can't Handle

By Alon Pinkas

- **Before casting judgment, ask yourself a simple question: Had there not been a UN General Assembly in New York this week, would US President Joe Biden have met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu? The answer is most probably no. Netanyahu and his minions seem near-delirious, actually believing that his meeting with Biden – and a vague promise to meet again in Washington “before the end of the year” – represents a full rehabilitation of his status and recognition of his foreign policy bona fides. Now it’s back to business as usual, they think: only he knows how to masterfully manage relations with America and not give up anything. They are dangerously delusional.**
- **Some of Netanyahu’s opponents in the pro-democracy protest movement seem bitter and dejected, believing that Biden fell for the prime minister’s mendacity and manipulations. By meeting with him and discussing initiatives such as the Saudi normalization deal, they think Biden threw the pro-democracy movement under the bus and effectively normalized the Israeli leader. They are equally wrong and delusional. In both cases, Biden did no such thing.**
- **Both are quickly and prematurely jumping to misguided conclusions for the exact same reason: they are likely misinterpreting what happened in the meeting. The meeting took place in a New York hotel, not the Oval Office. Biden hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the White House and also extended an invitation to the prime minister of Iraq, Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani – who, ironically for Mr. Netanyahu, was commended in an official statement for his commitment to the strengthening of the Iraqi judiciary.**
- **This was not a meeting that Biden, the self-professed Zionist president, really wanted. He berated Netanyahu, ignored, ostracized and refused to invite him because of the antidemocratic constitutional coup that Netanyahu launched last January. But political calculations and geopolitical ideas made the meeting almost inevitable. Netanyahu is not perceived as a dependable US ally but Israel is, and Biden cares about Israel. Many who have spoken to him recently say his commitment to defending Israel is unwavering.**
- **For many years, Netanyahu managed to frame his UN General Assembly visit as part of the High Holy Days, with his speech a feature in the Israeli political calendar. In no other country do people care or talk and dissect their leader’s UN speech so much. Netanyahu always turned his annual speech into a substitute policy. How many Britons care that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak skipped the UN General Assembly? How many Americans really know or care what President Biden said in his speech? Very few. Netanyahu always treated the UN General Assembly as a sacred ground he loathed yet felt most comfortable in. It provided him with the perfect forum to whine about how “the world is against us,” and at the same time brag and boast about how he and only he can defend Israel and be its ferocious advocate.**

- All that changed this year. Suddenly, the narrative was not about Netanyahu's inevitable and historic hyperbolic speech about Iran being Nazi Germany and the Israeli premier being Winston Churchill, but instead about "would there be a meeting with President Biden?" – a meeting that would normally be held at the White House in a separate, ceremonious and glitzy visit to Washington.
- From Biden's point of view, the meeting was justified for three reasons: domestic, ideological and geopolitical. From a domestic perspective, there is no upside or real benefit to a meeting with Netanyahu. However, continued shunning draws political criticism and might provide cynical and vociferous Republicans with a free talking point. Excluding Netanyahu from a list of meetings at the UN event would have been seen as crudely insolent, and there's no harm in a short meeting in New York where you can give your guest a piece of your angry mind.
- The ideological reason is that Biden – committed since his 2020 presidential campaign to the democracy-autocracy division in the world order – sees Israel under Netanyahu ominously backsliding into the "autocracy" camp. He has vocally voiced his disappointment and resentment: ideological, political and personal. And with Netanyahu intent on moving forward with his judicial coup, this was an opportunity for Biden to directly confront Netanyahu and get him to scale it back or face the consequences. Geopolitically, there is the mysterious allure of the US-Saudi-Israeli tripartite deal. The viability and framework of such a deal warrants separate treatment, but Biden needed to directly convey to Netanyahu what it would entail regarding the Palestinians.
- According to people who have spoken with him recently, Biden is not yet convinced about the feasibility of such a deal and doubts the cost-effectiveness of an exorbitantly high-priced defense pact with Saudi Arabia. He felt it necessary to clarify to Netanyahu that he needs to make serious changes to his annexationist West Bank policy and his collusion with and deference to the far-right fanatics in his governing coalition. It is very doubtful that Biden – as experienced and seasoned a politician to have ever occupied the White House – fell for Netanyahu's mendaciousness on how he is working hard to reach a compromise on the constitutional crisis, and how he genuinely intends to strengthen the Palestinian Authority and refrain from expanding settlements. Netanyahu's deceptive and duplicitous style is his default mode.
- And so Biden met with Netanyahu in a New York hotel – such a great achievement for the prime minister of a "staunch ally" and "strategic asset" that has "an unbreakable alliance with the United States." But Biden put Netanyahu to the test with an expiration date: Scale back your anti-democratic coup and change your policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians by the end of the year and we will meet. Surely he knows this is a challenge Netanyahu is neither willing nor capable of meeting.

Nuclear Dispute

By Tal Lev-Ram, Anna Barsky, and Matan Wasserman

- **For the time being, security officials have refrained from reacting in any way to progress towards an agreement with Saudi Arabia due to the sensitivity of the matter. In a dramatic sequence of events and reports that began on Wednesday, the topic played a starring role in US President Joe Biden's meeting with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. A few hours later Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman gave an interview on Fox News about the progress in the normalization talks. It peaked when the Wall Street Journal reported that Netanyahu had already instructed senior security officials to cooperate with the United States on everything to do with the possibility of enriching uranium in a civilian nuclear reactor in Saudi Arabia.**
- **Despite the absence of an official response from Israel's security establishment, as of now there has been no change in its prevailing view. It has doubts about the Americans' ability to guarantee that uranium enrichment will remain a civilian matter and will not put Israel in jeopardy. For that reason, security officials believe that decisions must be made only after extensive and complex preparatory work is finished, after which the entire range of security agencies will consolidate an official position.**
- **Security officials emphasized that bin Salman even declared in his interview in the clearest way possible that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia will need them too—which attests to the Saudis' strategy, who consider a civilian reactor to be a step towards military capabilities. While the security establishment consolidates an orderly position, it will have to conduct a thorough examination of the ramifications that an agreement could have on a nuclear race in the Middle East and on steps that other countries in the region, like Turkey and Egypt, will take.**
- **Besides the Saudi nuclear issue, security officials believe that thorough preparatory work is needed in the IDF and the Defense Ministry in order to ensure that Israel retains a relative advantage after signing an agreement, if and when that happens. Political officials expressed reservations about permitting the Saudis to enrich uranium. Opposition Chairman Yair Lapid said, "A normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia is a blessing, albeit not at the price of giving the Saudis a chance to develop nuclear weapons and a nuclear arms race in the entire Middle East. Just last night the Saudi crown prince spoke about the possibility of Saudi Arabia having nuclear weapons. Netanyahu has spent his whole life fighting precisely this kind of steps. These are the fundamentals of our nuclear strategy. Strong democracies do not abandon their security interests for politics. It's dangerous and it's irresponsible. Israel must not consent to any kind of uranium enrichment in Saudi Arabia."**
- **MK Tally Gotliv (Likud) said in response to the Wall Street Journal's report, "Normalization with Saudi Arabia—yeah, right. Great headline. "Normalization that includes consent to make Saudi Arabia a nuclear power under the auspices of a right-wing government is dangerous madness.**

- **I expect the Prime Minister’s Bureau to issue a statement clarifying that there are no secret negotiations to promote consent to enrich uranium in Saudi Arabia. Otherwise, we have simply gone off the rails.”**
- **In contrast, a senior Israeli official who has been involved in the particulars of the talks with the Americans about the inchoate agreement said, “The Saudis’ wish for enrichment capability has been known for many years in the Saudi–US talks. The Americans didn’t acquiesce to it. Until recently, Israeli officials hadn’t reached the level of such advanced talks about this type of concrete demands. Now the talks are getting down to the details and the smaller resolutions. “As for solutions that will allow Israel to approve uranium enrichment on Saudi soil as part of the agreement, that depends on the level of flexibility that the Saudis show regarding creative options that the Americans can propose. It’s not easy, but not impossible either.”**