



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Friday, September 29*

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# News Excerpts

September 29, 2023

## Ha'aretz

### **2 Arab-Israelis Killed; PM: Anti-crime Measures After Break**

A 70-year-old resident of Bedouin Al-Azazma village in the Negev, Israel's south, was shot to death near the Beit Kama interchange on Highway 6. According to preliminary suspicions, the initial background for the incident is a criminal dispute within the victim's family. Hours Later, a young man, around 20 years old, was shot and critically injured in Fureidis, Israel's north, and his death was confirmed at Hillel Yaffe Medical Center. The killing continues an unprecedented homicide rate in Israel's Arab community. Israel's Arab community suffered 192 homicides since the start of 2023, a sharp rise compared to 112 homicides reported in 2022. Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara approved the use of NSO's Pegasus spyware in the investigation of the murder in Basmat Tab'un yesterday which claimed five family members. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called recent killings "shocking and heart-wrenching." [Dig Deeper "Netanyahu Government Nixed Effective Programs to Fight Arab Crime, Experts Say" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Israel National News

### **Homes of Batsheva Nigri's Murderers to Be Demolished**

The IDF announced its intention to confiscate and destroy the homes of the terrorists from Hebron who murdered Batsheva Nigri in a terrorist attack at the Beit Hagai intersection. Last month, IDF troops raided the homes of the two terrorists and mapped the homes, in preparation for their expected demolition. Batsheva Nigri, a mother of three daughters about 40 years of age, from Beit Hagai, was murdered in a shooting attack at the Beit Hagai intersection. Her six-year-old daughter was with her in the car at the time of the attack, and was miraculously unharmed. [Read More "Israel's Justice Ministry Asks Family of Palestinian Boy Burned Alive for View on Reducing Killers' Sentences" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## Israel Hayom

### **Israel Reopens Gaza Crossings, Lets Palestinian Workers In**

Israel reopened crossing points with Gaza, allowing thousands of Palestinian workers to get to their jobs in Israel and the West Bank, after nearly two weeks of closure prompted by violent protests along the border. Around 18,000 Gazans have permits from Israeli authorities to work outside the blockaded enclave, providing an injection of cash amounting to some \$2 million a day to the impoverished territory's economy. The move comes amid stepped-up international efforts by Egypt and the United Nations to defuse tensions and prevent a new round of armed conflict in the enclave. For around two weeks, protestors throwing stones and explosive devices have faced off against Israeli troops who have responded with live fire, killing at least one man and wounding dozens more. [Dig Deeper "UK Study: Gaza Electricity Crisis Creates Major Mental Health Problems" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## **Netanyahu and Biden Agree to Keep 2-State Solution Viable**

United States President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu have agreed on a crucial condition for a potential agreement with Saudi Arabia - the preservation of the possibility of a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, according to a report by Walla. Sources cited by the Israeli outlet said that while Biden did not present a list of specific demands for Palestinian concessions, he emphasized the need for Israel to take steps within the framework of a Saudi deal to ensure the viability of a two-state solution. The White House has been actively working to reach a comprehensive package deal with Saudi Arabia in the coming months, ahead of the presidential election taking over Biden's agenda. As part of this package, the US government has indicated that Israel must make significant concessions to the Palestinians while normalizing relations with Saudi Arabia. [Dig Deeper "Does Netanyahu Have to Feel Biden's Love?" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

### Axios

## **Senate Bill Aims to Strengthen US Palestinian Security Post**

A bipartisan group of senators led by Jon Ossoff is introducing a [bill](#) that aims to strengthen the position of the US security coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) and protect it from being downgraded by future administrations, according to the text of the bill. The post is one of the most sensitive general officer positions in the US military and plays a key role in coordination between the IDF and Palestinian security forces. The position, which also has a diplomatic function, has become especially important as the security situation in the occupied West Bank continues to deteriorate and the PA weakens. The US security coordinator's role was critical after the killing of Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during an Israeli raid in the occupied West Bank. Axios last year revealed that the Pentagon considered downgrading the post from the rank of three-star general to that of a colonel. [Read More "US Tells Israel Settlements Serious Issue, Raised at Highest Level" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

### Ynet News

## **Gallant Cools Normalization Deal Hype Over Nuclear Issue**

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israel intends to take appropriate steps to ensure its security amid expectations of a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia. "Peace with Saudi Arabia is a blessing for Israel, but alongside that, we are making every effort to assess the risks and ensure that we are moving in the right and responsible direction." Gallant spoke in a press conference during his official visit to Germany. Although the Israeli military was not a party to the deliberations over the pending peace deal and was not briefed on its components until recently, Gallant said he had established work teams to ensure the flow of information with the IDF and Mossad to address any concerns. Gallant was received by an honorary guard at the German Defense Ministry. He signed a new security cooperation agreement with his German counterpart, which includes the sale of the Israeli [Arrow 3 missile defense system](#) to Germany as part of the largest-ever Israeli arms deal, estimated at four billion euros.

## Senate Foreign Relations Chair to Look At Turkish F-16 Deal

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee's new chairman said he would look at Turkey's \$20 billion Lockheed Martin (LMT.N) F-16 fighter jet deal and that more issues than Sweden's ascension to NATO would affect the decision on lifting his predecessor's longstanding hold. "I need to talk to the administration on a lot of these issues, because it's beyond just one issue involved, and I need to understand that" Senator Ben Cardin, a Democrat, told reporters, one day after he took over leadership of the influential panel. Cardin said he had discussed Sweden's NATO accession with Turkish officials at a NATO ambassador's meeting. The previous chairman, Senator [Bob Menendez](#), had blocked the sale for months, over Turkey's objections to Sweden joining NATO but also over President Tayyip Erdogan's human rights record and overflights of the airspace of neighboring Greece. Sweden and Finland applied last year to enter NATO after Russia invaded Ukraine. While Finnish membership was sealed in April, Sweden's bid remains held up by Turkey and Hungary. Turkey has said Ankara and Budapest are working in close coordination on the issue. The top Republican on the Senate panel, Senator Jim Risch, has put a hold on arms sales to Hungary over the issue.

### The Media Line

## Critics Question Timing of Egypt's Presidential Election

Egyptian officials announced earlier this week that the country would hold presidential elections in December. Although multiple candidates have already entered the race, long-standing President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is expected to win and stay in power until at least 2030. Experts attribute the early elections to the government's plan to devalue the Egyptian pound in order to unlock the International Monetary Fund's aid program, a move that will likely cause social unrest. National Election Authority Chair Waleed Hamza announced that the election is scheduled for Dec. 10-12 and that a runoff will occur from Jan. The elections were originally expected to take place in 2024. Riccardo Fabiani, North Africa director at the International Crisis Group said that despite the long-standing rumors that the presidential elections might be called earlier than expected, the announcement was in fact triggered by the country's deteriorating economic situation. He explained that el-Sisi plans to introduce unpopular and difficult measures, such as a policy of exchange rate depreciation, in order to become eligible for IMF aid. Holding an election before introducing these measures will allow him more control over the situation, he said. [Read More "Menendez Indictment Prompts Calls in Us Congress for Egypt Aid Rethink" \(Reuters\)](#)

## **Israel Should Decline the Offer of an American Defense Treaty**

By Yitzhak Klein

- **As part of the trilateral negotiations between Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United States, talk of an American-Israeli defense treaty is in the air. The Saudis want such a treaty with the United States, and the Saudi-Israel peace treaty is in the interest of both nations. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, it is not in Israel's interest to sign such a treaty with the United States. The security of both countries will be stronger without it. An American-Israeli security treaty does not mean that Israel receives a carte blanche to do whatever it feels necessary to defend its security, safe in the conviction that the United States will protect it against the worst.**
- **On the contrary, such a guarantee will come with the requirement that Israel do nothing that the United States perceives as reckless or provocative, which would have obligated the United States to save Israel from any mess it gets into. The United States will expect Israel to conform to its own perception of Israel's security needs. A security treaty may also lead the United States to question Israel's desire to obtain certain weapons systems (with American aid, i.e. at American expense,) or to preserve Israel's qualitative military superiority in the Middle East. After all, an American administration can argue, we're here to protect you, so what do you need all this stuff for?**
- **Fundamentally, the best guarantee for Israel's security – for any nation's security – is the autonomy to decide when its security is at stake and to act accordingly. No treaty with a foreign nation can take the place of a nation's ability to decide on its own what it needs to do to defend itself. Today, Israel serves America's current security needs in myriad ways that a defense treaty will not reinforce. What Israel needs from the United States is what it already possesses: An American guarantee that if it sells weapons to potential enemies of Israel, America will provide Israeli access to the weapons Israel needs to ensure its qualitative superiority.**
- **As democratic nations in a world challenged by rising authoritarianism, Israel and the United States share fundamental interests. That does not mean that their interests are in every respect equivalent. America's perception of Israel's security needs will always be colored by the United States' perception of its own interests, and America's perception of what it needs to do to live up to any security guarantee it gives to Israel will not always be congruent with what Israel believes needs to be done. Too often American policy – like many nations' policies – will be governed by myopia and short-term interests.**
- **Contemporary examples abound. The United States wants Israel to get off the fence and provide arms and military technology to Ukraine. No NATO ally in Europe is as directly threatened by what Russia can do to harm its security as Israel is, yet this apparently does nothing to reduce American impatience with Israel.**

- **The current American administration pays lip service to the idea that Iran must not obtain nuclear weapons, yet it is as clear as day that the United States will do nothing effective to prevent Iran from obtaining these weapons and wants Israel to refrain from doing anything either. The current administration is a prisoner to the perspective that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is Israel's fault and that it is incumbent upon Israel to do less against the threat of Palestinian terror, even if it has to pay a price in Israeli civilian lives. To be frank, all these American policies threaten vital Israeli security interests, and Israel cannot comply with them. The American-Israeli alliance is an important asset for Israel, but even today it comes at a price, in terms of the constraints it imposes upon Israel's ability to defend itself.**
- **America is large and powerful enough to survive many years of foolish policy, but this is not necessarily true of all America's allies – as Taiwan is likely to discover its cost in a few years' time. America's long-term security interests are best served when Israel is strong, independent, and can take care of itself, even if America sometimes wishes it had more control over Israel. Israel's greatest asset in the United States is the respect most Americans have for our democracy and our independence: Our commitment, from the days of Ben-Gurion, to defend ourselves and never to submit to the temptation to let someone else do our fighting for us. An Israel dependent upon American security guarantees will become just that – a dependent state, the object of contempt rather than admiration.**
- **An American-Israeli security treaty represents a Faustian bargain for Israel – giving up more control over our own security in return for someone else's promise to do the job for us. We should think back to 1975, the year the United States walked away from South Vietnam, an American ally, and let it fall. That year Golda Meir warned her people that an American security guarantee was a false promise that Israel should never rely upon. Israel should heed that warning today.**

## **Hamas Has Other Plans**

By Amos Harel

- Intensive talks have taken place recently among Israel, Hamas, the United Nations, Egypt and Qatar in an attempt to calm the escalation along Israel's border with the Gaza Strip. For two weeks, Palestinians have held violent protests at the border fence every evening, facing off with Israeli soldiers. The Hamas government is pulling the strings, but it has so far avoided publicly taking ownership of the demonstrations. These aren't just popular protests. The demonstrators include young men armed with handguns who shoot at Israeli soldiers from a few dozen meters away.
- In one incident in mid-September, five Palestinians were killed in a "work accident" while laying a bomb; such a bomb would presumably have caused casualties even had it been detonated against one of the army's armored vehicles. Events at the border are connected both to Hamas' effort to bolster its stature in the internal Palestinian arena and its demands of Qatar and Israel. It wants Doha to pay the full sum of its promised financial aid, and Jerusalem to increase the number of Gazans allowed to work in Israel.
- But Hamas leaders' conclusion that Israel has limited room to maneuver has also been a contributing factor. In their view, Israel's government is preoccupied with a political crisis that is entirely of its own making, and will therefore have trouble mustering the attention and effort needed for a military operation in Gaza. But Hamas could be wrong. If so, it will discover that clashes actually serve the Netanyahu government, as a temporary diversion from its domestic woes.
- The demonstrations along the border, which were initially dubbed the "March of Return," began in 2018 and continued for around two years, until they were halted by the coronavirus pandemic. Then, shortly after Israel's May 2021 operation in Gaza, the Bennett-Lapid government came to power and instituted a policy change. It allowed 17,500 Gazans to work in Israel for the first time in about two decades.
- Its thinking was that economic improvement, after long years of crisis, would calm Hamas and oblige it to rein in the violence so the money would continue to flow – even if that required clashing with smaller Palestinian militant organizations. The system worked, more or less, and was adopted by the Netanyahu government after the right-wing returned to power, despite its frequent statements about the need to take a harder line on Hamas. But even the current system has its weak points.
- First, Hamas continued energetically inciting terror in parts of the West Bank controlled by the Palestinian Authority; it also sent money and instructions for attacks to its own military cells there. Second, being a resistance organization that is ideologically committed to fighting Israel, Hamas never ceased building up its military power in Gaza and recently resumed enabling violent activity along the border as well. In the West Bank, Hamas' efforts have combined with those of Iran and Hezbollah to smuggle rifles, handguns and standard-issue explosives into the territory. (Some of these arms have also reached Arab organized crime rings inside Israel.)

- **The current tensions are also connected to what is happening in Jerusalem. Next week, large numbers of Jews are expected to visit the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif during the intermediate days of the week-long Sukkot holiday. This is causing unrest among the Palestinians, and there have been calls to use violence to prevent Jews from ascending the mount. The diplomatic moves now taking place behind the scenes are intended not only to calm Gaza but also to prevent another eruption in Jerusalem. One proposal now being discussed in the indirect talks with Hamas is to increase the number of Gazans allowed to enter Israel to work to 20,000, in line with a plan prepared by the defense establishment several months ago. (Recently, the entry of workers was halted completely in response to the violence along the border.) But what both the government and the defense establishment have refrained from doing is reconsidering the entire policy toward Gaza.**
- **One could argue, with considerable justice, that given the threats on other fronts (the internal crisis, the Lebanese border and the West Bank), the goal should be to calm Gaza even at the price of taking some risks. Nevertheless, Israel currently seems to be selling itself two false ideas – that Hamas is completely committed to a long-term calm, and that Gazans have fallen in love with the economic improvement and will therefore pressure Hamas not to disrupt it. In practice, even though Gazans have been losing around 10 million shekels (\$2.6 million) a day since Israel stopped letting in workers, they so far haven't blinked.**