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## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Monday, October 2*

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- Two Dead After Car Explosion, Shootout in Israel's South
- Israel Reopens Gaza Crossings, Lets Palestinian Workers In
- Israeli Troops Kill Hamas Man in the West Bank
- Gazan Terror Group Vows to Renew Border-Fence Riots
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# News Excerpts

October 2, 2023

## Times of Israel

### **Thousands Take Part in Anti-overhaul Demonstrations**

Tens of thousands of people rallied nationwide against the Israeli government's judicial overhaul for the 39th week after a week that saw the country's religious-secular divide bitterly exposed by Yom Kippur clashes at a public prayer service in Tel Aviv. Organizers said that this week's protests would highlight the fractious and destructive nature of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rule. The protests come after a religious organization attempted to hold a public Yom Kippur prayer service in the heart of Tel Aviv with an improvised gender divider, sparking bitter confrontations between organizers and attendees and protesters, and unprecedented scenes of anger and accusations on the Jewish Day of Atonement last week. [Dig Deeper "Netanyahu Has Yet Another New Plan For Choosing Judges. It, Too, Is Highly Problematic" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Two Dead After Car Explosion, Shootout in Israel's South**

A 37-year-old man was fatally shot after his car exploded on Route 40 in Israel's south, according to police. The explosion was caused by a device attached to the car intended to kill its owner. Another man in his 30s was injured in the incident and taken to Kaplan Medical Center in Rehovot. The two individuals who allegedly planted the car bomb fled the scene toward Re'em Junction, where undercover Israel Police officers chased them. There was an exchange of fire, and both suspects were injured. One of the suspects, a man in his 20s, was mortally wounded, and the other suspect, in his 40s, was moderately wounded. Both suspects were members of the Jarushi crime family. [Dig Deeper "With 71% Spike, Crime in Arab Israeli Towns Threatens Local Elections" \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

## I24 News

### **Netanyahu Dismisses Reports of Rift with Ben-Gvir**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to quash rumors of a rift between him and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, describing such reports as malicious attempts to sow discord amid the ruling coalition. The reports followed an apparent snub by the leader, who did not invite Ben-Gvir to a meeting with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and other senior security officials. Netanyahu clarified that the meeting "was focused on Iran and did not address any internal security matters" that are part of Ben-Gvir's purview. Meanwhile, a source within Ben-Gvir's entourage issued a statement appearing to give credence to reports of a rift. Ben-Gvir, a hard-right nationalist firebrand, has clashed with numerous officials including Netanyahu, since the latter appointed him as the internal security minister. [Read More "Ben Gvir Again Excluded From Top-Level Security Meeting" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

## **Israeli Troops Kill Hamas Man in the West Bank**

Israeli soldiers killed a member of the Hamas Islamist group who the army said was among assailants who threw firebombs at a military post in the occupied West Bank. The military said the attack on the post was near Psagot, an Israeli settlement. The Palestinian Health Ministry said one of the men later died of his wounds. Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip but has strong support in the West Bank as well, claimed the man as a member. [Violence in the West Bank has raged for more than a year, amid stepped-up Israeli military raids, increased settler assaults on Palestinian villages, and a spate of Palestinian attacks on Israelis. \*\*Read More "After Shots Fired, Kibbutz Residents Enter Nearby Palestinian Village" \(Times of Israel\)\*\*](#)

Ynet News

## **Gazan Terror Group Vows to Renew Border-Fence Riots**

Some 750 Jewish pilgrims visited the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, including Knesset member Yitzhak Kroizer from the Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party. As is the case every year, some of the pilgrims attempted provocative actions by bringing "sacrificial offerings" and were subsequently detained by authorities. Thousands more are anticipated to visit the site in the coming days. The Revolutionary Youth terror group, known for leading disturbances along the Gaza border, has announced a renewal of hostilities with the Israel Defense Forces on the eastern border of the strip. They have referred to the Jewish ascent to the holy site as "provocations akin to the incidents at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem." Hamas, thus far, has refrained from openly endorsing the renewed riots that have erupted after several relatively calm years, despite tacit approval as a means to exert pressure and concessions from both Israel and Qatar, which handles the transfer of aid funds to the Gaza Strip.

Israel Hayom

## **US-Saudi Defense Pact Moves Forward Without Palestinians**

Saudi Arabia is determined to secure a military pact requiring the United States to defend the kingdom in return for opening ties with Israel and will not hold up a deal even if Israel does not offer major concessions to Palestinians in their bid for statehood, three regional sources familiar with the talks said. A pact might fall short of the cast-iron, NATO-style defense guarantees. Instead, a US source said it could look like treaties the US has with Asian states or, if that would not win Congress approval, it could be similar to an agreement with Bahrain, where the US Navy Fifth Fleet is based. Such an agreement would not need congressional backing. The US could also sweeten any deal by designating Saudi Arabia a Major Non-NATO Ally, a status already given to Israel, the US source said. Agreements giving the world's biggest oil exporter US protection in return for normalization with Israel would reshape the Middle East by bringing together two longtime foes and binding Riyadh to Washington after China's inroads in the region. For Biden, it would be a diplomatic victory to vaunt before the 2024 US election. As with other Arab-Israeli deals forged over the decades, the Palestinian core demand for statehood would take a back seat, the three regional sources familiar with the talks said.

Reuters

## **Gallant to Meet US Counterpart in Washington**

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant is slated to meet with his American counterpart, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, in Washington later this month, his office said in a statement. The meeting signals an end to an apparent ban by Prime Minister Netanyahu on minister visits to Washington until he's invited to the White House. Netanyahu met two weeks ago with President Biden on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, and not at the White House as Netanyahu had sought. But Biden opened their meeting by indicating he would invite Netanyahu to the White House in the near future. Gallant has met with Austin twice already since entering the role in late December — in Israel and in Brussels. The pair have also held numerous phone calls over the past 10 months. The upcoming meeting between Gallant and Austin is likely to focus on the issue of [the Iranian threat](#) in the Middle East, and a potential US-backed [normalization](#) agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. [Read More "Iran's Raisi Slams Normalization with Israel as 'Reactionary and Regressive'" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Associated Press

## **US Acknowledges Iran Satellite Successfully Reached Orbit**

The US has quietly acknowledged that Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard successfully put an imaging satellite into orbit this week in a launch that resembled others previously criticized by Washington as helping Tehran's ballistic missile program. The US military has not responded to repeated requests for comment from The Associated Press since Iran announced the launch of the Noor-3 satellite last week, the latest successful launch by the Revolutionary Guard after Iran's civilian space program faced a series of failed launches in recent years. The image-taking capabilities of the Noor-3 remain unclear. International sanctions on Iran have locked it out of accessing commercially available imagery, forcing it to develop its own homegrown satellites. The head of the US Space Command dismissed the Noor-1 as a "tumbling webcam in space" that would not provide vital intelligence. Another video released by Iranian state TV showed the Guard using a Dutch-Italian IVECO truck to pull the mobile launcher used in the launch. The truck manufacturer did not respond to a request for comment. The US says Iran's satellite launches defy a UN Security Council resolution and has called on Tehran to undertake no activity involving ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. UN sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile program are due to expire Oct. 18. [Read More "US: Iran Can Produce Fissile Material for Nuclear Bomb Within 2 Weeks" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## **Allowed to Dream**

By Orly Azulai

- It's not that a night train from Tel Aviv Hashalom Station is about to depart for Riyadh tomorrow morning. It is not that Israelis will be invited on jeep tours through the deserts of Saudi Arabia and enjoy the exoticism that masks a rotten country, a "pariah" as Biden himself called it, due to the lack of human rights and women, and a constant lack of respect for enlightenment. But we're allowed to dream. It's good to dream since only big dreams have led to stormy revolutions and political dramas. Martin Luther King's dream changed the face of America when it came true. Barack Obama's dream was an important chapter in the United States' history.
- This dream is about a new Middle East. Saudi Arabia will keep oil prices down so as not to hurt the Americans in their pocketbook and will receive shiny gifts wrapped in cellophane: a civilian nuclear reactor on its soil (with American supervision of uranium enrichment), the best weapons the American military industries have to offer and, the icing on the cake, a defense pact of sorts with the United States. This is a great bonanza for Mohammed bin Salman, who just five years ago was accused by the world of being involved in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey because Khashoggi had dared to write against the benighted regime of Riyadh.
- John Kirby, spokesperson for the National Security Council, revealed that in fact a basic framework for the expected arrangement has been formed. He said there are common denominators and that like in any deal, each side will have to compromise. He led us to understand that something is happening. Biden, in an ambitious move, decided to close the gaps and to bring about a normalization agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, something that in his view will lead to calm and prosperity in the entire Middle East. Biden is not going out of his way for this deal. He knows that in the end, American presidents get elected based on the state of the economy. Here Biden is in trouble.
- According to the latest polls, 58 percent of Democrats believe he is not doing a good job on the economy. Still, he is casting his net, maybe he will catch a big fish that will stir up his campaign. The person who really needs this deal, which will be ostentatious and grandiose, is Netanyahu, but he is also the person who can bring it down or not participate in it. Both the Saudis and the Americans have clarified that any deal will include the Palestinian clause, meaning not only concessions to the Palestinians, but also maintaining the two-state solution, meaning a freeze on construction in Israeli settlements. In the current situation in Israel, with a government reliant on messianic extremists, this is not a deal that can pass, and Netanyahu, who is neck-deep in his trial and the judicial overhaul he is leading, can't usher in peace of the brave. He is the wrong man in the wrong place and he is committed to his own survival above all else. Moreover, in Israel, no one is really interested in the fate of the Palestinians, what is happening in the turbulent West Bank is perceived by most as an event beyond the mountains of darkness.

- In 2007, the Arab League met in Riyadh to approve the Saudi plan for peace in the Middle East. I was invited to the event as a guest of the royal family, for the first time they hosted an Israeli journalist openly. Throughout the kingdom, the feeling of the making of history was palpable, the Arab League approved the plan for two states side by side. It was a big dream that shattered. Now they are trying to breathe new life into the remnants of the Saudi plan in relation to Israel and the Palestinians. A lofty dream that will come in an American package. But one would have to be moonstruck to think that even this dream will not come to an end.

## **Israeli Aid to PA Surges**

By Ariel Kahana

- **Israel recently slashed by 50% the tax it levies from the Palestinian Authority for fuel [gasoline and diesel]. That tax now stands at 1.5% instead of the 3% that has been levied ever since Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) signed economic agreements in 1994. That tax cut, which was reported last week by the coordinator of government activities in the territories, will save the Palestinian Authority \$20 million every year. According to that report, other economic decisions that Israel made for the Palestinian Authority's benefit in 2023 have produced an additional \$70 million windfall. That includes increasing the sums paid in taxes to the PA to an average of \$190 million every month, as opposed to just \$130 million, which was the average three years ago. It bears noting that Israel has increased the payments it makes to the Palestinians for taxes that it supposedly levies on the Palestinians' behalf, despite the fact that the authorities [presumably, Israel Tax Authority officials] know that a significant part of the reports are falsified and the goods in question are sold in Israel, and not the PA.**
- **For example, Israel Hayom has learned that Palestinian importers submit falsified reports, [on the basis of which] Israel pays the PA hundreds of millions of shekels annually. Other funds that were disbursed to the PA were justified as stemming from "calculations" and "greater transparency in VAT payments." In total, the Palestinian Authority's budget has received an additional \$91 million that Israel has turned over to the PA in the time since the current government took office. The decision to slash the fuel tax on the PA was made several months ago by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has ministerial purview over the Israel Tax Authority and the Civil Administration, approved that tax cut on the grounds that that was a promise that Netanyahu had made to the American administration.**
- **The Biden administration has been pressuring Israel to improve the economic situation in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) on the argument that the PA is on the verge of economic collapse. Israel's willingness to cooperate with that policy while Abu Mazen has continued to pay out generous salaries to terrorists elicited criticism in Congress. Speaking at a meeting last week by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, members of Congress attacked the Biden administration's decision to increase aid to the Palestinian Authority in violation of the Taylor Force Act, which prohibits the administration from transferring funds as long as the PA continues to pay salaries to terrorists.**
- **Elliott Abrams, who held high-ranking positions in several American administrations, said that under the Trump administration, the United States had completely stopped economic aid to the Palestinian Authority, remarking that it nevertheless had not collapsed economically since it had received funding from alternative sources, including the Israeli government, which has kept the PA afloat. Representative Rich McCormick (Georgia) said: If Israel makes mistakes, that's on it. But if we make mistakes with our money and we finance terrorism that hurts Israelis and Americans—that's on us.**

- In the context of the efforts to advance normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the US has ratcheted up its pressure [on Israel] to take steps that the administration defines as designed to “strengthen the Palestinian Authority,” including that Israel allow the Saudis to funnel money to the PA. In light of the ongoing payment of terrorist salaries by Abu Mazen, people have begun to look into ways of preventing those funds from reaching the PA. One possible solution was presented last week by the former secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, and Sander Gerber, a businessman who spearheaded the legislation in Israel and the United States to stop terrorist salaries.
- In an article they published in The Hill, Pompeo and Gerber wrote that “it is financially and morally irresponsible to distribute funds through the corrupt, terrorist-funding PA.” Instead of direct support to the PA, Pompeo and Gerber proposed forming a “new nongovernmental organization,” which “would enable the Saudis to support fellow Muslims, develop a responsible organization to tangibly improve Palestinian lives, foster a civil society more amenable to Arab-Israeli normalization outside of the PA’s repression and create a much-needed alternative to the PA’s endemic misgovernance.” Following the publication of that article, the proposal put forward in it is currently being considered and might serve as a solution that all the parties can accept. The Americans and the Saudis will be satisfied by the increased economic support for Palestinians while, simultaneously, Israel’s interest will be met by preventing Saudi funds from being funneled to the PA and used to incentivize terrorism.