



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

Friday, December 1

Headlines:

- Chances of Another Gaza Ceasefire Extension Unclear
- Blinken Concludes 3rd Visit to Israel Amid Hostage Crisis
- US Presses Skeptical Turkey to Curb Hamas Fundraising
- Israeli, US Officials Discussing Expelling Hamas From Gaza
- Israel Recalls Ambassador From Spain Over Remarks
- Hamas Gunmen Open Fire at Jerusalem Bus Stop, Killing 3
- France: EU Should Consider Sanctioning Violent Settlers
- ICC Prosecutor to Visit Israel at Request of Hamas Victims

Commentary:

- **Ha'aretz: "Saving Private Netanyahu"**
- By Alon Pinkas
- **Ha'aretz: "Israel Approaches the War's Moment of Truth"**
- By Amos Harel

S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace
1725 I St NW Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006
The Hon. Robert Wexler, President

News Excerpts

December 1, 2023

Axios

Chances of Another Gaza Ceasefire Extension Unclear

Hamas released eight more hostages after reaching a last-minute agreement with Israel to extend the pause in fighting in Gaza to a seventh day. Negotiators are working to extend the humanitarian ceasefire further, but it was unclear if another extension was likely. The latest extension of the ceasefire came just minutes before the pause in fighting was set to end yesterday. The most recent release brings the total number of hostages freed to more than 100, including about two dozen foreign nationals. Israel has released 240 Palestinian women and children from Israeli prisons.

The Media Line

Blinken Concludes 3rd Visit to Israel Amid Hostage Crisis

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken concluded his third visit to Israel since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. During his visit, Blinken held discussions with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas. Blinken reaffirmed the US's support for Israel's mission to prevent a repeat of the events of October 7. He stressed the importance of ending Hamas' control over Gaza but emphasized the need for Israel to minimize civilian casualties in any resumed operations. Additionally, Blinken urged Israel's War Cabinet to establish safe zones in Gaza ahead of continuing their military operation. A critical focus of Blinken's visit was the extension of the humanitarian pause. [Dig Deeper "Blinken Warns Israeli Officials Global Pressure Will Grow Longer War Goes On" \(Axios\)](#)

Ynet News

US Presses Skeptical Turkey to Curb Hamas Fundraising

The US Treasury's top terrorism financing official said he had discussed with Turkish government officials his deep concerns about Palestinian militant group Hamas raising funds in Turkey and potentially breaking local laws. Turkey is "prominent" in Hamas fundraising schemes and the group is likely to take advantage of that as it seeks more cash amid its war with Israel, Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said. Unlike most of its Western allies and some Gulf states, Turkey does not view Hamas as a terrorist group and hosts some of its members. President Tayyip Erdogan has called Hamas "freedom fighters" and criticized Israel as a "terror state" over its bombardment of Gaza in recent weeks. The United States has sanctioned several Turkish entities and individuals in its effort to curb funding for Hamas following its Oct. 7 attack on Israel. Washington says a Hamas portfolio of investments, estimated to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars, includes companies operating in Turkey, Sudan, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and elsewhere.

Associated Press

Israeli, US Officials Discussing Expelling Hamas From Gaza

Israel and US officials have discussed expelling thousands of lower-level Hamas fighters from the Gaza Strip as a possible option to shorten the war between Israel and Hamas, [The Wall Street Journal](#) reported. The proposal rose as part of discussions concerning how Gaza will be run when the war ends and how to prevent a resurgence of Hamas or similar groups. One proposal which has been developed by the IDF's think tank which was shown to The Wall Street Journal would involve the creation of "Hamas-free safe zones" that would be ruled by a new Gaza-based authority backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The proposal seemingly would not include higher-up Hamas leaders such as Yahya Sinwar or Mohammed Deif. Israeli officials have said that the two, and other Hamas leaders located both in the Gaza Strip and abroad, are "dead men walking." [Read More "PA's Abbas a 'Liability' in Planning for Post-war Gaza, Arab Officials Say" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Israel Hayom

Israel Recalls Ambassador From Spain Over Remarks

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez angered Israel again by saying he doubted Israel respected the international humanitarian law and that repeating military action in the strip was not acceptable. The prime minister's comments prompted the Israeli government to summon the Spanish ambassador for reprimand for the second time in less than 10 days. A spokesperson for the Spanish Foreign Ministry was not able to immediately comment. Israel also recalled its own envoy from Madrid for consultations. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said he instructed his foreign minister, Eli Cohen, to call in Spain's ambassador for a reprimand "after the shameful statement by the Spanish prime minister on the same day that Hamas terrorists are murdering Israelis in our capital Jerusalem". [Read More "Israel Summons Spanish Envoy, Recalls Own Ambassador After Madrid Criticizes Gaza War" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

Hamas Gunmen Open Fire at Jerusalem Bus Stop, Killing 3

Two Hamas gunmen killed three people at a Jerusalem bus stop, and Israel reiterated its commitment to wiping out the Palestinian Islamist faction, whose Oct. 7 killing spree triggered the Gaza war. The attackers, Palestinians from East Jerusalem, were shot dead by off-duty soldiers and an armed civilian, police said. At least eight people were also wounded in the shooting. The Shin bet security agency identified the gunmen as 30- and 38-year-old brothers who were affiliated with Hamas. Both had previously been jailed in Israel. Israel's far-right minister for police, Itamar Ben-Gvir, told reporters at the site of the attack that it "proves again how we must not show weakness, that we must speak to Hamas only through the (rifle) scopes, only through the war." Separately, in the occupied West Bank, the Israeli military said two soldiers were injured in a car-ramming attack at a checkpoint. Troops at the scene "shot and neutralized the assailant," it said.

France: EU Should Consider Sanctioning Violent Settlers

France's foreign ministry spokesperson said that the European Union should consider sanctioning violent Israeli settlers who attack Palestinians in the West Bank. "We believe that the international community has a role to play to end these acts of violence which are extremely destabilizing for the region, but also harm the prospects for a two-state solution," Anne-Claire Legendre said during a briefing. The French spokesperson did not elaborate on the type of sanctions she had in mind, but the comments came less than two weeks after US President Joe Biden threatened to issue US visa bans against violent settlers. A French diplomatic source said that Paris would prefer if the sanctions against settlers are issued by the entire EU, as opposed to individual members, but another European diplomat said not all of the bloc's members back the idea — which would require unanimous approval — and that a formal debate hasn't even begun. According to activist groups such as B'Tselem and Peace Now, which oppose Israeli rule in the West Bank, as well as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), this wave of attacks has led to the displacement of over 1,000 Palestinians from 15 communities beyond the Green Line. Since October 7, Israeli troops have arrested some 2,000 wanted Palestinians across the West Bank, including more than 1,100 affiliated with Hamas. According to the PA health ministry, some 200 West Bank Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces, and in a few cases settlers.

Israel Hayom

ICC Prosecutor to Visit Israel at Request of Hamas Victims

International Criminal Court (ICC) chief prosecutor Karim Khan will visit Israel at the request of Israeli survivors and the families of victims of the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks from Gaza, the court said. Khan will also visit Ramallah in the West Bank to meet with senior Palestinian officials, the ICC said. The visit will not be investigative, the ICC said, adding that it "represents (an) opportunity to express sympathy for all victims and engage in dialogue." Last month, Israeli families of victims of the Hamas attacks appealed to the ICC to order an investigation into the killings and abductions. The families had urged Khan to focus his investigation on Hamas' Oct. 7 actions in southern Israel, including enforced disappearances, which the court views as a crime against humanity. Hamas terrorists murdered 1,200 people and took 240 hostages, Israel said. That prompted an air and ground counterattack by Israel in which more than 15,000 Gazans have been confirmed killed, according to Palestinian health authorities deemed reliable by the United Nations. A further 6,500 are missing, many feared still buried under rubble.

Saving Private Netanyahu

By Alon Pinkas

- Ever since 6:29 A.M. on October 7, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been doing nothing but plotting how to save himself, shedding any form of responsibility, deflecting accountability, and blaming the military and intelligence services for what was the worst and deadliest day in Israel's history. That was expected and very much on brand. What was less predictable was how quickly he would resort to gaslighting an entire nation, offering a completely "parallel universe" narrative of what transpired on and after October 7. These antics have all the hallmarks of vintage Netanyahu: mendacity, prevarication, spaciousness and hubris.
- He has upped the bravado: "We will continue." "I will change the Middle East." "We will eradicate Hamas." "There won't be a Hamas after Hamas." "I will never allow a Palestinian state." "We will get all the hostages back." "We will ensure Gaza never poses a threat again." Gone are his arrogant statements on how strong and resolute he always was against terrorism, how he single-handedly deterred Hamas, how the Palestinians no longer matter. If he forgot those words, so should the ungrateful Israeli public.
- In terms of political evolution, we've now entered a new phase of the war: Operation Saving Private Netanyahu. The current version of Mr. Netanyahu may be the sum of all his weaknesses, but one thing he is still capable of is trying and saying whatever it takes to save himself from what seems an inevitable fate: being held accountable for the worst debacle in Israel's history.
- He is doing it using two instruments. First, politically, by managing his far-right governing coalition and paying the ultra-Orthodox community billions of dollars, some of which will come from the US "emergency aid" of \$14.3 billion. Second, by introducing a completely new narrative about October 7 and its aftermath: it sort of never really happened. The only real thing is a "second War of Independence," which he has been placed by history to navigate and win. Anything else is just his petty political detractors trying to undermine him during a war and denying him deserved glory. The political calculus underlying the fabricated narrative is simple: Netanyahu must survive or the country cannot survive; survival is possible only if the war is prolonged since it is a formative national struggle; you achieve that by stalling and through instilling doubts and second thoughts. That's gaslighting on a national level.
- The narrative flows along these lines: Ignore October 7 and the devastation; that's in the past. Instead, concentrate on a heroic, no-choice war. Whatever happened on October 7 was the result of an intelligence fiasco and the Israel Defense Forces negligence. They never gave the trustful Netanyahu any early warning while he was hard working on his "judicial reform" and peace with Saudi Arabia. The military let him down. In fact, the IDF and the Shin Bet security service set him up to fail for political reasons: to undermine his courageous constitutional reform.

- **Look to the future and revert to an imaginary, frightening Palestinian state “that only I can prevent the establishment of.” Go back to a toxic, prevaricated division of right and left – or, more precisely, “the left against us.” Take credit for US support and aid because “only I can manage relations with Joe Biden,” but actively seek disagreement to show how tenacious and tough you are on national security. The 1,200 murdered victims? A tragic result of the IDF’s negligence and the price of being in a permanent state of war – one “I am leading” not only on behalf of Jewish history but also Western civilization, so some gratitude is due.**
- **This false narrative can be debunked easily, point by point. It has been done profusely, but Netanyahu’s populist-demagogic approach requires that the more others try to unravel this twisted story, the more credibility and equal footing it gets in the public discourse. Relitigating the Palestinian state issue especially stands out. His collection of casual one-liners – “I will not allow” or “There will never be” a Palestinian state – creates the bogus impression that the issue is actually on the table. He could just have easily, and yet might, declare that only he can stop an alien invasion.**
- **Yes, the United States keeps on reiterating that the two-state solution is the desirable end result of future negotiations, but Netanyahu is cynically talking about it as if it is an ominous development just around the corner. In fact, the same Netanyahu signed a document supporting an eventual Palestinian state. It’s called the Abraham Accords, and he signed it with his soulmate Donald Trump standing alongside him. His bogus narrative also precludes any talk about Israeli policy regarding Gaza on “the day after,” Who will control Gaza? Will Israel stay in Gaza? How does this relate to the West Bank? He is evading any dialogue with the Americans, but that is calculated. In his mind, any talk about a political framework for Gaza undermines the idea that this is a formative war that he is leading. Once the war stops short of a decisive, Hamas-obliterating victory, he is back to answering questions and being held accountable by the Israeli public – especially if the IDF chief of staff, head of Military Intelligence and director of the Shin Bet all resign. To avoid that, you need to perpetuate the made-up narrative, even confront the United States. He is doing exactly that.**

Israel Approaches the War's Moment of Truth

By Amos Harel

- **The Israel-Hamas cease-fire in the Gaza Strip, which was supposed to end Thursday morning, is now expected to be extended for a few more days due to understandings reached between the parties. On Wednesday, Hamas was slated to release a sixth group of hostages, and it promised the Qatari mediators that it would release additional Israelis held in Gaza in the coming days. It has also released two Russian women kidnapped in Gaza, in a step it portrayed as a gesture to Russian President Vladimir Putin. But because the organization seeks to retain the hostages whom it deems to be more valuable bargaining chips – around 100 Israeli soldiers and younger adult civilians – negotiations over continuing the deals may well hit an impasse early next week.**
- **Under those circumstances, the chances of the Israeli offensive in Gaza resuming, at high intensity, would grow significantly. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, “There is no situation in which we won’t resume fighting to the end.” Over the past few days, there have been reports, mainly speculative, about a deal of “everyone for everyone” being put on the table – that is, a Qatari proposal to free all the Israelis held by Hamas in exchange for all (or most) of the thousands of Palestinians jailed in Israel, together with a long-term cease-fire. But even if feelers have been put out on this issue, it doesn’t appear to be practical at the moment, since it most likely wouldn’t receive broad public support in Israel.**
- **It’s not inconceivable that the leaks about this proposal are actually meant to serve Netanyahu, who seeks to portray himself as standing up to external pressure. The prime minister, whose support has collapsed in the polls, is also portraying himself as the only person who can prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. A permanent cease-fire, without destroying Hamas as both a government and a military force, wouldn’t meet the war’s declared goals and likely seal Netanyahu’s political fate. Hamas, and in fact Qatar as well, have other considerations. It’s reasonable to assume that from Hamas’ standpoint, it achieved its victory on October 7, when it perpetrated the most lethal terror attack in Israel’s history.**
- **A mass release of Palestinian prisoners would entrench its position as a Palestinian and pan-Arab player, the only one that ever inflicted a double humiliation on Israel. This would also guarantee it massive support in the West Bank and Gaza and throughout the Arab world. The Qataris also have an interest in a deal that ultimately saves Hamas’ government. They have invested billions of dollars in the Hamas regime in Gaza, and a new order in destroyed Gaza that was achieved with their help would likely ensure them an even bigger foothold, both economic and political, on the Mediterranean coast. There are two other actors in this movie whose interests are more complex. The United States wants to restrain Israel’s military moves, but at this stage, it isn’t trying to force a deal on Israel or prevent it from continuing military operations in Gaza. And the region’s Sunni Arab states are speaking in two voices.**

- Publicly, some of them (like Egypt and Jordan) are falling in line with public opinion in their countries and condemning the civilian deaths caused by Israel's military response. But behind the scenes, almost every leader in the region, including in most of the Gulf states, is urging Israel to end the war only after Hamas is defeated, since they view the organization as a dangerous domestic enemy. The problem, according to Israeli defense officials, is that within a few days, Israel will find itself running into a wall. Hamas will finish returning the hostages included on the original list (mothers, children, the sick and the wounded), or else it will announce that it hasn't been able to locate some of them. On Wednesday, the organization was already claiming that the Bibas family – mother Shiri and children Ariel and Kfir – were killed in captivity.
- At this point, the delusion that Israel can both continue the fighting and further the release of more hostages is likely to be dispelled. Another deal will be needed, and it will be harder to achieve, due to the price Hamas will demand from Israel. Yet without a deal, the Israel Defense Forces will resume intensive operations and thereby increase the risk to the hostages' lives, whether due to the fighting itself and the difficult conditions it creates or due to the possibility that Hamas will kill them. It's also worth giving the fighting-to-date a sober look. Hamas suffered heavy losses and enormous damage in northern Gaza, and it has lost civilian control there. But it still seems far from being militarily defeated.
- Its leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, may well prefer to take the risk of continuing to fight, on the assumption that Israel will only get itself into trouble during military operations in southern Gaza, where its forces will have to maneuver amid a denser civilian population. Nor can we rule out the possibility that even if Hamas eventually finds itself with its back to the wall, Sinwar would prefer to go down fighting and thereby end with what he considers a holy death, in battle. Among intelligence agency directors from Israel, the United States, Egypt and Qatar, a new Qatari proposal was reportedly discussed. It calls for sorting the hostages remaining in Gaza once the current stage ends into several categories, in preparation for future deals.
- The Washington Post cited a "knowledgeable source," who sounded like one of the Qatari hosts, as saying the hostages will be divided into five categories – men too old for army reserve duty (Hamas insists on treating all the male hostages as potential soldiers), female soldiers, male civilians who are also reservists, male soldiers (whether conscripts or career soldiers), and hostages who are already dead. The source said the method of their release, the price Hamas will receive and the amount of humanitarian aid that would flow into Gaza have yet to be discussed.
- In conversations between Biden administration officials and Israeli officials, various American proposals were discussed. Washington is interested in trying to continue the hostage deals in the coming days, while extending the cease-fire. If the fighting resumes, the administration would prefer that Israel first focus on further operations in northern Gaza rather than beginning operations in the densely populated south. It is also asking the IDF to be careful to use precision weaponry and exercise great care when fighting in crowded areas.

- **Nevertheless, as noted, the moment of decision seems to be approaching. The IDF's plans for an offensive in southern Gaza have already been presented to the war cabinet, including efforts to deal with the enormous challenge of relocating the Palestinian civilian population in an area where half the people now present have already been forced to move once, when Israel demanded last month that they move from Gaza's north to its south.**