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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Israel Hayom

Gallant: Operation to Expand to Southern Gaza Strip

Israeli forces dropped leaflets warning Palestinians to flee parts of southern Gaza, residents said, signaling a possible expansion of operations to areas where hundreds of thousands of people who heeded earlier evacuation orders are crowded into UN-run shelters and family homes. Broadening the offensive to the south – where Israel already carries out daily air raids – threatens to worsen an already severe humanitarian crisis in the besieged territory. Over 1.5 million people have been internally displaced in Gaza, with most having fled to the south, where food, water and electricity are increasingly scarce. Israeli troops stormed into Gaza's largest hospital, searching for traces of Hamas inside and beneath the facility, where newborns and hundreds of other patients have suffered for days without electricity and other necessities.

Al-Monitor

US Concerned Over Strikes After Jordan's Gaza Facility Hit

Washington said it was "deeply concerned" about a strike on a Jordanian military hospital in Gaza that wounded seven people, underscoring its opposition to air strikes on health facilities. "We are deeply concerned that they were injured," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said, praising the Jordanian government's "incredible work establishing this field hospital" and saying its work must continue. Miller did not condemn the strike nor did he say who was responsible. It took place Wednesday in Gaza City, with Jordanian news agency Petra saying seven health workers were hurt. Washington, which provides significant military aid to Israel, has given unwavering support to its top Middle East ally since the October 7 attack by Hamas, saying Israel has the right to defend itself. However, the US side started voicing concerns over the methods of Israel's military operations and the high number of Palestinian civilian deaths.

Associated Press

All Communications Services Across Gaza Are Down

Internet and telephone services collapsed across the Gaza Strip for lack of fuel, the main Palestinian provider said, bringing a potentially long-term blackout of communications as Israel signaled its offensive against Hamas could next target the south, where most of the population has taken refuge. The Israeli military said it found the body of one of the hostages abducted by Hamas, 65-year-old Yehudit Weiss, in a building adjacent to Shifa. It did not give the cause of her death. The communications breakdown largely cuts off Gaza's 2.3 million people from each other and the outside world, worsening the severe humanitarian crisis in southern Gaza, even as Israeli airstrikes continue there. The UN's World Food Program warned of "the immediate possibility of starvation" in Gaza as the food supply has broken down under Israel's seal and too little is coming from Egypt.

Haniyeh Praises 'Resistance,' Sinwar Stalls Negotiations

Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the Hamas political bureau said that Hamas foiled plans to extract hostages. "The enemy will not be able to take hostages without paying the price for them," he said. Haniyeh called Hamas terrorists "heroes of the resistance who control Gaza and land heavy blows on the enemy forces." He said the "war at shifa" was a violation of all human values. "Our people's victory is an extension of the victory of October 7." Meanwhile, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar had cut off communications leaving negotiations to release hostages stuck. Senior IDF commanders said his ploys could delay further operations in the war. "He must not be allowed to play us," they said. Sinwar claimed he would not negotiate while the IDF was operating inside the Shifa hospital, and therefore no progress in achieving a deal was made. His actions could be considered a tactical problem but his well-recorded cunning makes the attempts to secure hostages' release have become a game with the fortitude of the Israeli public. [Read More "IDF Arrests Relatives of Hamas Leader Haniyeh in Gaza" \(I24 News\)](#)

Settlers Push Plans for Resettling Northern Gaza

A coalition of 11 prominent right-wing organizations has officially launched an initiative dedicated to the resettlement of Gaza and northern Samaria (West Bank),. Termed the "Coalition of 11 Right-Wing Organizations for Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria Resettlement," this endeavor emerged from a series of covert meetings led by Yossi Dagan, head of the Samaria Regional Council, and the Nahala movement. This formidable coalition, comprising organizations such as Samaria Regional Council, the Nahala movement, and several others, has united under a common mission. The coalition's strategic blueprint commences with the resettlement of northern Gaza and subsequently expanding their efforts to areas including the former Jewish settlements of Nitzan, Eli Sinai, and Dugit, all in close proximity to Ashkelon. The overarching objective is to fortify the security belt and reestablish a Jewish presence in these regions. [Read More "France Calls West Bank Israeli Settler Violence 'Policy of Terror'" \(Reuters\)](#)

Soldier Killed, 5 Wounded in Attack at West Bank Checkpoint

An IDF soldier was killed and five were wounded shooting attack by Palestinian terrorists targeting the "tunnels" checkpoint on the West Bank's Route 60, south of Jerusalem, police and medics said. Police said the three gunmen had planned to carry out a much larger massacre, in Jerusalem. Cpl. Avraham Fetena, 20, a Military Police soldier from Haifa was critically wounded in the attack and later succumbed to his wounds at Jerusalem's Shaare Zedek Medical Center, the army said. One of the victims of the attack said all the doors of a white Skoda opened at once, with each gunman shooting in a different direction, and security forces quickly returning fire. National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said the Palestinian Authority and Hamas in the West Bank should be given the same treatment as Hamas in Gaza.

American Jewish Voters Back Biden's Handling of War

American Jews overwhelmingly approve of US President Joe Biden's handling of Israel's war in Gaza following the Hamas attack, according to the first poll dedicated to US Jewish voters since October 7. US Jewish voters back Biden's overall approach, his emergency military aid package for Israel and his call for 'humanitarian pauses.' The poll, commissioned by the Jewish Electorate Institute and conducted by GBAO Strategies, stands in contrast to much of the recent polling of the overall US electorate that has signaled increasing skepticism and disapproval of Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war. Support for US policy towards Israel in wartime has captured a plurality of Jewish voters, according to the JEI poll. 74% of Jewish voters support Biden's approach, nearly the totality of Jewish voters who say they particularly care about Israel. In contrast, a recent AP-NORC poll found that only 50% of Democrats approve of Biden's handling of the conflict. And despite the 74% approval, Jewish voters aged 18-35 are much more divided. Only 53% of these voters approve, while 47% disapprove. [Read More "Biden: Israel's Gaza Operation Will End When Hamas No Longer Able to Murder Israelis" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Israel National News

Poll: Benny Gantz Wins 36 Seats, Likud Wins 17

A poll conducted by the Midgam institute and published on Channel 12 News shows that if elections were to be held today, the National Unity Party led by Benny Gantz, would win 36 seats and the Likud would win 17. Yesh Atid receives 15 seats, Shas 10, Yisrael Beytenu 9, United Torah Judaism 7, Otzma Yehudit 7, Hadash-Ta'al 5, Ra'am 5, Meretz 5 and the Religious Zionist Party wins 4. The bloc of Netanyahu's opponents jumps to 70 seats compared to the bloc made up of parties in the current coalition, which receives 45 seats. The participants in the poll were asked what the political map would look like if a center-right party, led by former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, would announce an election bid. Such a party will win 17 seats and will mainly take a share from the National Unity Party, which drops to 25 seats. Yesh Atid and Yisrael Beytenu lose one seat to such a party. [Dig Deeper "Poll Finds Netanyahu Would Be Trounced by Gantz Were Elections Held Today" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Think About the Ending Now

By Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilad

- The IDF's performance in Gaza has been very impressive so far—and precisely for that reason, Israel needs to start formulating an exit strategy from the war. The clear objective set by the security cabinet was to dismantle Hamastan. That certainly is a worthy, correct and essential objective—but the supreme objective is to free all the hostages, and there is no objective more noble. The prime minister recently said that after the war the IDF would remain in Gaza for as long as necessary and said emphatically that the PA would not be allowed to take power there again. In other words, responsibility for meeting the needs of the Palestinian population in Gaza, roughly 2.3 million people, would be given to some other unnamed parties.
- An international force? An Arab force? A NATO force? None of these options have been prepared and the likelihood of any one of them being enacted is low. Israel is liable to find itself with a long-term military presence in Gaza, a sort of temporary occupying force, in which the temporary ultimately becomes permanent and Israel comes to be considered by the United States and the rest of the free world as the party responsible for any major civilian problem that might become a humanitarian disaster. Israel will not be able—even if some people believe otherwise—to shirk its responsibility and will have to establish a civilian and military administration.
- The outcome of that is liable to be a strategic liability that will complicate our relations with the US, the free world and the Arab countries. That might give our enemies—first and foremost Iran—a powerful propaganda weapon against us—difficult pictures that will be circulated to the world media outlets. Taking a sober view, the format that could put us on the high road at the end of the process of destroying Hamas is the establishment of an international framework led by the US. Biden—and this is no secret—wants to shore up his country's status in the Middle East as part of the global fight of the sons of light against the forces of darkness and to bolster the peace axis.
- There are two tracks—military and civilian—to that end, and together they form a strategic axis that will be helped with strong support from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE and other countries. Contrary to what Netanyahu implied in his statement, Israel should formulate an exit strategy from the war in Gaza in full coordination with Biden's United States—which deserves our help and cooperation, and not just out of gratitude for standing firmly by Israel's side at its most difficult hour. More importantly, the strategic axis led by the US is essential for the State of Israel's security, economy and ongoing existence. In the absence of an exit strategy—the horizon at the moment is quite grim.
- In practice, what needs to be done? First, Israel must join hands in the effort to restore the PA to power in a demilitarized Gaza Strip. The PA must assume civilian responsibility in all spheres—education, health, water and electricity infrastructures, marshaling resources and overall municipal control.

- **The PA's return to Gaza must be backed by massive support from the Arab world, primarily for the comprehensive rehabilitation of a Gaza Strip that was kept in abject poverty and as a hothouse for terrorism while under Hamas. The IDF must not be forced to allocate resources to that end—the bulk of its resources will be needed to cope with a range of anticipated threats. It is important to be clear: the IDF cannot have military control without civilian responsibility. There is no disputing that Israel must destroy Hamas and hunt down its leaders until they are killed, following the model in which Fatah leaders were assassinated after the 1972 Munich massacre, but the primary challenge that we face is the axis of evil headed by Iran.**
- **Israel needs international cooperation under the United States' leadership to weaken the Iranian axis, which has increasingly come to rely on world powers such as Russia and China. The developments along our northern front illustrate that point keenly: some argue that Israel should launch a preemptive strike against Hizbullah, but it seems that working in stages is the more desirable approach—first defeat Hamas, and then prepare to change the reality in Lebanon, in coordination with the US. We are waging a complex and complicated war against Hamas. The military success is in the hands of the IDF, but its correct ending is in the hands of the government—in the hope that it makes the correct strategic decisions.**

War in Gaza Won't Diminish Hamas' Political Influence

By Zvi Bar'el

- “There can no more business as usual with Hamas,” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during his October 13 visit to Qatar. Blinken was joined by Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who didn't need much in the way of clarification. Blinken's forceful assertion – though made in general terms and aimed at anyone with ties to Hamas – was clearly directed at Doha. The Qatari prime minister squirmed. Asked if his country would no longer host Hamas leadership on its territory or cut ties with the organization, he replied: “Right now, we are focused on keeping open channels of communication and ending this conflict.”
- The “open channels of communication” between Qatar and Hamas is currently almost the **only hope for even negotiating to release the hostages**. This channel relies on years of Qatari aid and support for Hamas, which began long before Israel allowed Doha to transfer funds to the Hamas government in Gaza. Qatar is well aware of the pressure US President Joe Biden's administration is currently exerting on it to sever ties with Hamas. For example, the day before Blinken's visit to Qatar, Rep. Max Miller, a Republican from Ohio, demanded that the US “go after our allies that we have, like the Qataris... and extradite these Hamas terrorists.”
- Doha vividly remembers the blockade imposed on it by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates in 2017. This alliance demanded that it sever its relations with Iran, shut down Al Jazeera, and stop supporting terrorist organizations in exchange for lifting the blockade. But four years later, even though Qatar did not acquiesce to any of these demands, the boycott was lifted, and it returned into the Arab world. The Hamas leadership realized that its Qatari safe haven would continue to serve it well. It is perhaps premature to ask what will happen to **the Qatar-Hamas relationship** after the war when this relationship is continuing with full force. This is even more of an open question, given that the current working assumption is that the terrorist organization will cease to exist as a military and political entity in the Gaza Strip when the war is over.
- But Hamas is no mere terrorist squad whose elimination removes the threat. It has military and political infrastructure in Lebanon, investment companies in Turkey, and a representative office in Malaysia, where its personnel have undergone training. The resumption of ties between Hamas and Syria, which were severed in 2012 following the Assad regime's massacre of hundreds of thousands of civilians, has opened up a further option for the organization to re-establish itself. Iran will certainly agree to host Hamas' leadership if Qatar decides to accede to American pressure. The US House of Representatives has already passed a bill that would allow sanctions to be imposed on countries that aid groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and it is now being heard in the Senate. But even if passed, the law would have relatively little impact on countries such as Syria, which is already under a strict sanction regime, or Iran and Malaysia, the latter of whose prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, has said it is a “unilateral law” and that his country is committed only to United Nations Security Council sanctions.

- Another question is how Turkey will act; Ankara agreed to expel the Hamas leadership from its territory as part of its renewal of relations with Israel, but there are still Hamas representatives in the country who received Turkish citizenship. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent statement that Hamas is not a terrorist organization but a political party that won the 2006 elections may be an indication of his intentions.
- Turkey and Qatar are more sensitive to American sanctions than any other country that supports Hamas. Another point is that Erdogan is not implementing the sanctions the US imposed on Russia over the war in Ukraine, and has bypassed sanctions on Iran in the past. Qatar, like all the Gulf states, is not implementing the US sanctions on Moscow.
- The fact that it hosts the largest American base in the Middle East, its a huge investment portfolio in the United States and Western countries in general, and its being one of Europe's most important gas suppliers could serve as a check against sanctions. The immediate question is whether the US will be willing or able to take the step of relocating its military base in Qatar to another country if Doha persists in providing shelter to Hamas' leadership.
- While Qatar serves as a base for Hamas' political leadership, Lebanon is the most convenient operational base that Hamas and Islamic Jihad currently have, mainly because of its proximity to Israel, which gives them the ability to launch direct attacks on it. However, their activity in Lebanon is subject to coordination with Hezbollah, which does not necessarily have the same considerations as these groups. This is evident from the limited scope so far of Hezbollah's participation in the "unification of the arenas."
- In 1969, the Cairo Agreement, imposed by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, was signed between Yasser Arafat and Lebanese Armed Forces commander Emile Bustani. The agreement allowed the Palestinians to bear arms and participate in their national struggle against Israel from Lebanese territory. This was the basis for the establishment of Fatah-land in Lebanon, but this was abolished in 1987 by Lebanese President Amin Gemayel.
- It would be absurd to assume that Hezbollah, with all its sympathy for the Palestinian cause and its support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad, would lend a hand to the establishment of a Hamas land on Israel's border in a way that would remove its monopoly on the use of weapons against Israel and rock the fragile status quo in Lebanon, which Hezbollah is attempting to steer in its favor.
- Turning Lebanon into an arena for Palestinian operations against Israel would undermine the foundations of the Shi'ite organization's strategy. Hezbollah presents itself as a national organization that maintains an equation of deterrence with Israel for Lebanese reasons – not for foreign interests, be they Iranian or Palestinian.
- Hamas, however, **could continue to play an important role in Palestinian politics in Lebanon**, in a way that could potentially influence Palestinian politics in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem; it could even initiate attacks against Israel from there.

- **At the moment, it is hard to assess the impact of the war on Palestinian public support for Hamas – and it may try and call on that support in the future – but when senior Fatah officials, including those who have held senior positions in the Palestinian Authority such as former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, talk or write about the day after the war, they do not rule out the possibility of Hamas also having a role in shaping the future political regime in Ramallah.**
- **In Hamas' view, the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority must undergo structural and ideological reforms in order to better serve Palestinian interests – and to that end, all factions, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, must be included so that they can boast the title of “sole representative” of the Palestinian people. These are not new ideas. We should recall that [Marwan Barghouti](#), who is held in an Israeli jail and is considered the natural candidate to lead the PLO and head the PA after Mahmoud Abbas, is very close to Hamas. Seven years ago, he even drafted a strategic document for political cooperation with Hamas. Hamas, in turn, has always demanded Barghouti's release in any prisoner deal and may even subordinate itself to his leadership.**