



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

Friday, January 26

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News Excerpts

January 26, 2023

Reuters

Gaza Starves as Israel Presses War on Hamas

In battered, hard-to-reach north Gaza, rare aid deliveries get mobbed by desperate, hungry Palestinians and aid workers report seeing people thin and visibly starving with sunken eyes. Hunger stalks the entire Gaza Strip, the tiny enclave where 2.3 million people have been living under Israel's bombardment since Oct. 7 as it battles Hamas militants. The United Nations warned this week that pockets of the territory face famine. While areas near the Egyptian border get limited supplies of imported food, people in the north and center of the strip, where fighting has been fiercest, face catastrophe aid workers say. A UN-backed report said the whole population of Gaza faced crisis levels of hunger and a growing risk of famine. Medics in Gaza hospitals describe babies born sick to malnourished mothers, infants losing weight, mothers unable to produce breast milk and injured patients too weak from hunger to fight off infection.

Times of Israel

Scores Protest Against War in Khan Younis

A large crowd of Palestinians marched in the streets of Khan Younis, calling on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar to end the war in Gaza. "The people want a ceasefire! Netanyahu and Sinwar, we want a ceasefire. Enough with war and enough with the destruction!" they are heard chanting. While calls for a ceasefire directed at Israel are common, ones by Palestinians in Gaza directed at Sinwar are rare. It is unclear when exactly the published footage was taken but it is published a day after the [IDF](#) published a video of Palestinians protesting in Gaza with a sign calling on Hamas to release the hostages. While the protest in that clip featured largely women and children, the most recent protest appears to be largely men in a possible sign that discontent is growing.

Jerusalem Post

Gallant: Hamas Is Collapsing in Its Own Gaza Tunnels

"Hamas is collapsing within its own tunnels," Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said to soldiers of the Yahalom unit of the Combat Engineering Corps in a visit to the unit training base. "Unfortunately, this operation has costs, and the unit paid a heavy price," he continued. "On the other hand, the results are clearly seen - Hamas dug tunnels to use them against us with all kinds of methods - but in reality, Hamas is collapsing into its own tunnels that it dug with great effort. Every place they thought would be a trap for IDF soldiers became an area where we defeated them in various ways." "Hamas has suffered hundreds of casualties underground as a result of your and your friends' operations. And besides, we've only been in the last day and a half, yet we have over 100 terrorists who have come up, some of them underground, in the Khan Yunis area, and in other places - because they understand that they can't fight against the IDF. It's thanks to you and your friends."

Reuters

US Sets up Channel Seeking Answers on Civilian Casualties

The United States has created a channel with Israel to discuss concerns over incidents in Gaza in which civilians have been killed or injured by the Israeli military and civilian facilities have been targeted. The channel was set up after a meeting earlier this month between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Israel's war cabinet during which Blinken expressed concern about the "constant" reports of Israeli strikes that either hit humanitarian sites or resulted in large numbers of civilian deaths. Blinken told Netanyahu, Defense Minister Gallant and Minister Benny Gantz that Washington needed to know "what the answers are" when it comes to reports of strikes, and sought a "reliable channel" through which the US can raise such issues with the Israelis regularly. The channel comes as a response to the mounting pressure on the Biden administration over the steep toll on Palestinian civilians of Israel's campaign against Hamas which has killed more than 25,000 people. It also underscores Washington's frustration with Israel's failure to alleviate the plight of civilians deprived since mid-October of most of the aid that previously flowed into Gaza, and of medical care for the more than 62,000 wounded people.

Ynet News

Israel Takes Another Step Toward F35I Deal with US

A deal for the purchase of Israel's third F-35I fighter jet squadron is expected to be finalized with the Pentagon and manufacturer Lockheed Martin in the coming weeks. The additional squadron is slated to begin arrival in Israel in the second half of the decade. The approval of the deal for Israel's acquisition of a third F-35I fighter jet squadron was announced last July, before the outbreak of the war. At that time, the IDF Chief of Staff announced the acquisition of a third squadron the aircraft, bringing the Israel Air Force's stealth fighter jet fleet to 75 aircraft. The estimated value of the substantial deal with the US stands at \$3 billion, to be paid for by the US military aid package.

Axios

US, Israeli Intelligence Chiefs to Discuss Gaza Hostage Deal

CIA director Bill Burns will meet with the head of Israel's Mossad, the Egyptian intelligence chief and the Qatari prime minister in Europe in the coming days to discuss efforts to reach a deal to secure the release of hostages held in Gaza. A senior Israeli official said the meeting is crucial to the efforts to reach a breakthrough in the talks over a new deal that would include a two-month pause in return for the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The official said Israel hopes the meeting will encourage both Qatari and Egyptian mediators to put more pressure on Hamas and go more into the details of the possible deal to find compromises. US officials have acknowledged that reaching a deal might be the only path that could lead to a ceasefire in Gaza. A senior Israeli official who is directly involved in the talks said the impression is that there's a willingness on all sides to get a deal and momentum has been created. But the official said that Hamas must recognize that Israel won't commit to ending the war as part of a hostage deal.

Israel Considers Ending Water Deal with Jordan

Kan reports that the Ministry of Energy is considering refusing to extend Israel's water agreement with Jordan due to several Jordanian officials denouncing Israel. According to the current agreement, Israel provides Jordan with 100 million cubic meters of water, twice as much as the amount provided for in the treaty between the countries. The water is provided in exchange for electricity from Jordan to Israel. According to the reports, there has been no final decision, and Israel continues to monitor Jordan's behavior and the statements of its officials. Over the course of the war, the Queen of Jordan has publicly doubted the October 7th massacre and sharply criticized Israel. "I want to emphasize that the conflict did not begin on October 7th. For many Palestinians, the war never ended. It is a story 75 years long. It is a story of conquest, and apartheid regime that conquers lands and demolishes houses and conducts nighttime raids," she told CNN. She has also attempted to cast doubt on claims of the murder of children in Israeli towns. Ayman Safadi, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, has stated: "Nothing justifies the war in Gaza, a war that is not a matter of self-defense but blatant aggression by Israel, and Jordan will do anything necessary to prevent the displacement of Palestinians."

[Read More "October 7' Restaurant Opens in Jordan, Drawing Israeli Ire" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Israel Declassifies Docs to Prove Efforts to Protect Civilians

Before the International Court of Justice at The Hague is set to give its interim ruling on the genocide charges brought against Israel by South Africa, The New York Times has revealed the existence of documents declassified by Israel in an attempt to show it has taken steps to protect and minimize civilian casualties during the Gaza war. When a case of alleged genocide is brought, the court addresses the "interpretation, application or fulfillment of the convention," and the threshold must be proven "intent." The Israeli defense argued that [Israel](#) did not have the "special intent" needed to commit the crime of genocide. They pleaded that the World Court needs to consider Israel's war cabinet orders and decisions, rather than statements made by politicians who are not decision-makers. In the initial ruling, which will be given today, the ICJ will not deal with the main question of whether [Israel](#) is committing genocide. The court will just look at possible emergency measures, meant as a kind of restraining order, while the court looks at the full case, which usually takes years. [Dig Deeper "Not Just ICJ: Palestinians Sue Biden, Hoping to Bar Him From Backing Israel in Gaza War" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

There'll Only Be a State if the PLO Disengages From Hamas

By Zvi Bar'el

- Josep Borrell, the European foreign policy chief, had a burst of enlightenment when he stated how the war in Gaza should end, and how the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians will be solved. Talking at Spain's Valladolid University, where he received an honorary doctorate, the EU foreign policy chief said, "We only believe a two-state solution imposed from the outside would bring peace. That's despite, and I insist on this, that Israel is again opposing this solution, and to prevent it, they went as far as establishing Hamas itself. Hamas was financed by the Israeli government to weaken the Palestinian Authority of Fatah," referring to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' party.
- In fact, Israel didn't establish Hamas and the Palestinian Authority isn't "of Fatah," but Borrell doesn't need to be confused with marginal details. He has an orderly plan that he presented to a meeting of the EU council of foreign ministers in Brussels, which was also attended by foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan as well as a representative of the Arab League and Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz. The plan focuses on paving the way for the convening of an international conference that would consider how to achieve a two-state solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.
- Borrell had harsh comments about Israel. "What other solutions do they have?" he asked. "Making all the Palestinians leave? Killing all of them? The manner in which they're destroying Hamas isn't the way to do that. They are instilling hate for generations." A call to action from a foreign policy chief who hasn't so far chalked up major achievements in the EU's foreign relations. The idea of convening an international conference to resolve the conflict isn't something that Borrell invented. Mahmoud Abbas suggested it more than two months ago in talks with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.
- Such a gathering, Abbas said, under international and particularly American auspices could serve as proof that the US is serious in its intention to advance a two-state solution. It would also enable the process to fulfill the basic conditions that the Palestinian Authority has demanded to take over responsibility for running the Gaza Strip after the war. The United States still hasn't signaled its readiness to promote such an international conference, which by virtue of it being convened could place it on an explosive collision course with Israel. Washington, which coined the term "revitalized Palestinian Authority," also hasn't presented a plan for such a revitalization – what Abbas needs to do to gain the White House's seal of approval, and more importantly, whether the United States can and wishes to force Israel to let the PA control Gaza, and under what conditions. Palestinian Authority officials and journalists are reporting that American envoys who have met with Abbas raised various points to him, about the need to appoint a deputy with broad authority; ridding the PA of corruption; and recruiting new forces into the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

- They also have stressed that however the Palestinian Authority is constituted, Hamas cannot be a partner to it. On this last point, senior Hamas officials have had informal contacts with senior PLO officials in a bid to come to understandings about how Hamas could join the PLO. However, so far, Hamas leadership has rejected the two fundamental conditions that Abbas has presented for such a step: adopting a non-violent approach to resisting the Israeli occupation instead of an armed struggle; and recognition of international resolutions, especially the Oslo Accords, which recognizes Israel's right to exist. These conditions were rejected back in July when the heads of the Palestinian factions met in Egypt to advance reconciliation.
- There is no knowledge of a change of any kind in Hamas's stance. Despite that, the official Palestinian position has been and still is that during and after the war, Hamas is an inseparable part of the Palestinian people and that as a movement, it has to be represented in the PLO's institutions. This stance relies on a fundamental contradiction: the PLO's leadership has no solution to the ideological differences regarding a permanent solution to the conflict. While the PLO recognizes the State of Israel and seeks to bring a two-state solution to fruition, Hamas is at a different place entirely. More than three months into the war, Hamas has released an 18-page document entitled "This is our narrative – Why the Al-Aqsa Flood?" a reference to its October 7 attack on Israel, in which at least 1,200 were killed in Israeli Gaza border communities and well over 200 people taken hostage.
- In the document, Hamas explains the reasons and circumstances that it says caused the organization to plan and carry out the attack. This is a political document that is actually not directed to a Palestinian audience but to Arab and global public opinion. There's no point dealing here with the distorted factual descriptions included in it or the effort to portray its horrific atrocities as a "mistake" and even as a failure in controlling its forces. It would have been expected that such a document would include a diplomatic vision for the political role that Hamas foresees for itself down the road. In the document's last section, Hamas presents eight demands, all of which deal with the necessity to continue its armed struggle. They call on the Arab world and the international community to boycott Israel, to bring about a cease-fire, to punish Israel and most importantly – to halt any plans to shape Gaza's future based on a model that the Zionist occupier seeks, "because no one has the authority to impose its patronage on the Palestinian people other than the people itself."
- There is no reference in the document to a partnership with the PLO, to the diplomatic solution, or to any readiness to consider a two-state formula. As Palestinian researcher and journalist Hesham Dibsi asked in an article published Wednesday on the Lebanese Al-Janoubia website: "Is Hamas at all capable of reaching a solution outside the legitimate Palestinian framework, or will it continue to conduct separate negotiations with Israel and the United States under Qatari auspices?" Dibsi, who is highly critical of the document, presents Hamas' stance as one that prefers "the historic right" over "the political right." That's an important distinction that makes the disparity with the PLO's position very clear.

- The PLO is prepared to adopt diplomatic solutions that would require concessions over the "historic right" to control over all of Palestine, including the right of return of all the Palestinian refugees. By contrast, Hamas views that preferring the right to any Palestinian state would be a loss of historic rights. No convoluted rhetoric can bridge these two ideological positions, which so far have prevented Hamas and the PLO from establishing a practical and applicable common denominator, that could generate the joint administration of a State of Palestine that would be established.
- At the same time, as long as the PLO and its leadership, including the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, insist on a political and institutional partnership with Hamas, the call for a two-state solution will remain futile. In that regard, the American demand that the PA enact administrative reforms to be a partner in running Gaza appeals to a convenient tactical narrative. It ignores, however, the fact that without the PLO's ideological disengagement from Hamas, particularly by Fatah, the prospects for the diplomatic channel are slim. This is true as long as Israel, the United States and the international community adopt the principle that Hamas doesn't and won't have a place as a partner in running the Palestinian state, and certainly not Gaza. It's worth mentioning that all of those countries, that now oppose Hamas as a part of any future Palestinian administration, maintain diplomatic and economic relations with governments such as Lebanon and Iraq in which terrorist organizations are an inseparable part of the legitimate regime.

Israel's Bluff, Hamas' Bluff

By Nahum Barnea

- “It’s like a puzzle with 1,000 pieces,” says a military official. “You can’t do it if you aren’t shown the picture.” What is this a metaphor for, I asked. For the army’s difficulty in dealing with Netanyahu’s insistence on avoiding a discussion of the day after. If you don’t know where you’re going, every road will get you nowhere, Henry Kissinger said. The war that Israel is prosecuting in Gaza is justified. It is vital for Israel’s security, for the security of the region and for the security of the West against the axis of evil. The question is how it should be prosecuted, what is the definition of the objectives, what are the expectations, what is the endpoint, what is more important than what. It is being prosecuted under unusual circumstances, after a huge debacle, with hundreds of hostages who were forsaken, under a leadership that according to one security cabinet member who speaks truthfully, lies to the people.
- Many people would prefer to get through the war living in a kind of fantasy world, listening to the morale officers on television and the cheerful interviews. If only this were the reality. Much depends now on the man whom I wouldn’t want to run into a dark tunnel. His name is Yahya Sinwar. It seemed this week that there had been a certain display of flexibility in his positions in the negotiations. Some said that he was so confident of victory that he was willing to be forthcoming; others said just the opposite, that he was so alarmed and pressured that he was willing to be forthcoming. I do not presume to know what goes on in Sinwar’s mind.
- To this day, everyone has failed in that, first and foremost, those whose job this was. But I do see that both sides have an interest in a deal. If there is a deal, it will necessarily entail a bluff, both on the Israeli side and on the Hamas side. The deal will not specifically state that the war is over, but it will include a long ceasefire after which, if Hamas does not violate it, it will be very difficult to resume the war. It will not state openly that the PA will receive control over Gaza and that the diplomatic negotiations will resume, but it will open the door to this; it will not specifically state that Hamas will lose its governmental control over Gaza, but it will aim to that.
- On the positive side, it will bring back the hostages and will enable Israelis to return to the Gaza periphery and to the Lebanese border. Israel will receive a ladder to stop a war that has reached an impasse. The army draws a distinction between dismantling Hamas’ capabilities and destroying its capabilities. Using a car as an example, it is the difference between removing the engine and destroying the engine. In Operation Defensive Shield, for example, Hamas’s capabilities in the West Bank were dismantled, but not destroyed. In the war in Gaza, the IDF dismantled some of Hamas’ capabilities. It will not be able to destroy them at this stage of the war. A hostage deal will pave the way to the larger deal, the one that was cooked up by the White House, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Egypt. In this deal, Israel is supposed to receive normalization with Saudi Arabia. Even more, it will receive a status of respect in the pro-American Sunni coalition. It will pay for this with renewed recognition of the Palestinian institutions and with the two-state solution.

- **Netanyahu doesn't want and cannot agree to this, and he is thus causing the entire package to unravel. There is no coalition, no Saudi Arabia, no Gaza rehabilitation, nobody in control in Gaza, no America. Instead, there is Hamas in Gaza, Hizbullah on the border with Lebanon, and the residents cannot come home. Netanyahu provoked the Qataris, Egypt and the Americans this week. These were not slips of the tongue; they were spikes placed on the road to puncture the tires of the process. Netanyahu is the king of spikes. It could be that an interim formula will be found. No one is built for a war without an end. Particularly not the hostages and their families.**