



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Ynet News

Netanyahu Attacks Schumer as 'Totally Inappropriate'

Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) said comments from United States Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer in his speech last week calling for elections in Israel were "totally inappropriate," in an interview with CNN, part of a series of interviews he held with foreign news outlets. "I think what he said is totally inappropriate. It's inappropriate to go to a sister democracy and try to replace the elected leadership there. That's something the Israeli public does on its own. We are not a banana republic. Instead, we should focus efforts on bringing down the Hamas tyranny," he said. Netanyahu insisted - despite his consistent decline in polls since October 7, about which he was asked in the interview - that "the majority of Israelis support our government and policies that we're leading."

Times of Israel

Gallant Urges Hostage Deal as Government Stalls

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israel must try every possible avenue to bring home the hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, including a proposal that is in the midst of negotiations. "This commitment, to leave no one behind, is true for the war we are fighting today and will be true for all of Israel's wars," Gallant said at a memorial ceremony for Israel's fallen soldiers whose final resting place is unknown. An Israeli delegation had been said to be ready to travel to Doha for further talks on the widely reported proposal on Saturday, but the two forums needed to approve Israel's position in the negotiations — the three-member war cabinet and the broader security cabinet — had yet to convene to discuss the matter. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied claims he was delaying in the calling the meetings due to alleged opposition to the deal by far-right elements in the government.

I24 News

Hamas Fears Israel May Retrieve Issa's Body From Gaza

Hamas is worried that Israel might attempt to recover the body of Marwan Issa, the deputy commander of the group's military wing, from the Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian sources cited in a Hebrew media report. Issa is believed to have been killed in an Israeli strike on a tunnel in central Gaza's Nuseirat area last week. The report, aired by Kan broadcaster, suggests that Issa's body, along with that of another Hamas brigade commander, is buried under the rubble of the destroyed tunnel. Hamas fears that Israel could use the retrieval of these bodies as leverage in future negotiations. Issa, a key figure within Hamas's military hierarchy, served as the deputy to Mohammed Deif, the leader of Hamas's military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Hamas is hesitant to attempt recovery due to concerns about possible attacks by IDF on any rescue teams deployed in the area.

Scholz: Cannot Stand by as Palestinians Risk Starvation

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz questioned the "terribly high costs" of Israel's offensive on the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas in Gaza, saying the world could not simply stand by and watch as Palestinians risk starvation in the enclave. Speaking after talks with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel, Scholz said he had shared his concerns about the high number of civilian casualties and insufficient aid reaching Gaza where aid agencies say famine is looming. While many countries have expressed similar concerns, the warning was unusually stark for the German leader, who has continuously underscored Israel's right to defend itself after Hamas' Oct. 7 assault on the country that killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies. Scholz's trip to Jordan and Israel came after Israel approved a plan to attack the city of Rafah on the southern edge of the shattered Palestinian enclave where more than half of its 2.3 million residents are sheltering after five months of war.

Fatah: Hamas Is Responsible for Current 'Nakba'

Marking the first time in which a formal Palestinian voice has blamed Hamas for the disastrous outcomes of the October 7 massacre, Fatah said that "those who were responsible for the return of the occupation to Gaza Strip and caused the Nakba [catastrophe] which our Palestinian people live... have no right to dictate national priorities." The accusations came in response to Hamas's critique of the appointment of new Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa, described as a close partner of President Mahmoud Abbas. Hamas said this appointment was an "individual decision," claiming that the PA is "being preoccupied with formal steps devoid of substance," and arguing that the new Palestinian government would lack national consensus. Fatah slammed Hamas, demanding: "Did Hamas consult the Palestinian leadership or any Palestinian national party when it made its decision to carry out the 'adventure' of last October 7, which led to a catastrophe more horrific and crueler than the Nakba of 1948?"

EU and Egypt Sign Deal Focused on Energy, Migration

The European Union and Egypt signed a 7.4-billion-euro financial package to support the indebted North African country, boost energy sales to Europe and stem irregular migrant flows. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was joined in Cairo by the leaders of Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Greece and Italy for the signing ceremony with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. The strategic partnership deal includes billions in credit over coming years and stepping up gas and other energy flows to help Europe "move further away from Russian gas", said a senior European Commission official. The agreement includes five billion euros in loans over four years, 1.8 billion euros in investment and hundreds of millions for bilateral projects including on migration, said the European official. [Read More "EU's von Der Leyen Says Gaza Facing Famine, Ceasefire Needed Rapidly" \(Reuters\)](#)

Hungary May No Longer Stop EU From Sanctioning Settlers

Hungary may drop its opposition to European Union action against settlers engaged in violent actions against innocent Palestinians as early as today, The Jerusalem Post has learned. The United States and the United Kingdom have already issued sanctions against such Jewish extremists. For the EU to follow suit, it would need consensus from all 27 of its member states. Hungary had been the sole country opposing such a step, but a diplomatic source told the Post that Budapest may no longer be able to maintain such a solitary position. It is possible, the source said, that it may be wiser to allow the issue of settler sanctions to move forward in exchange for movement on other issues, such as expanding the list of Hamas terrorists personally sanctioned by the European Union, the diplomat speculated. [Read More "Smotrich Seeks to Cede West Bank Construction Enforcement From Israeli Army to Settler Confidant" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Israel Concerned Biden Officials Might Slow Arm Shipments

Senior security officials are concerned over the possibility that the US will slow down arms shipments to Israel in light of the growing tension between the two governments on the war effort in the Gaza Strip, Israel Hayom has learned. According to sources familiar with the details, since the start of the war, there has been no slowdown in arms shipments, but in recent days concerns have grown about their supply amid the harsh exchanges between senior Biden administration officials and Prime Minister Netanyahu. According to the sources, the US could ostensibly conduct business as usual, but in practice slow down shipments by creating many bureaucratic hurdles without explicitly saying it was delaying deliveries. Since the beginning of the war, more than 300 planes and about 50 ships carrying munitions and military equipment, containing about 35,000 tons of weapons systems, munitions, and other arms, have arrived in the country. A small portion of the shipments have from several countries around the world, but the main supplier was and remains the United States. The arms shipments and the clear US support for Israel have allowed the IDF to fight in Gaza for the past five months while maintaining readiness for war in the north. The security establishment's concern on this issue has grown in recent days amid what appears to be a policy shift in the White House, which is trying to create a distinction between its support for the State of Israel and its citizens and its backing of Netanyahu's government.

Time to Sober Up

By Michael Milshtein

- In the midst of the sixth month of the war, three realities have evolved in the Gaza Strip that exist simultaneously: Limited areas that are under full and ongoing Israeli control, mainly in the corridor that divides the Gaza Strip into two as well as along the Israeli border; areas in which Hamas remains dominant, primarily in the southern Gaza Strip; and “twilight zone” areas, in which the IDF operated but then withdrew, thus creating “pockets of control” by Hamas, alongside armed local gangs and clans—mainly in Gaza City. This is a situation that will not allow for a “new order” to be instated. Chaos inside the Gaza Strip has expanded gradually, as has civilian distress, both of which have commanded the preponderance of international attention and have raised increasing questions about Israel’s ability to create a new reality in Gaza and to meet the local population’s needs.
- That is what prompted the large-scale operations to airdrop humanitarian aid and to build a pier, which reflects mounting doubts about Israel. That discomfiture has produced burgeoning signs of Israel sobering up and abandoning theories that were put forward about the type of arrangement and the identity of the government on the “day after,” even though that day has yet to become visible on the horizon given Hamas’s ongoing hold over areas and large swaths of the Gazan public. That mounting sobriety was most saliently reflected in a meeting that National Security Council Director Tzahi Hanegbi held with the Commander of the Palestinian General Intelligence Service Maj. Gen. Majed Faraj, who is one of the most powerful PA officials.
- According to reports, Hanegbi and Faraj discussed the option of having PA security officials take responsibility for the receipt and distribution of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip and for maintaining public order in part of the Gaza Strip. This development was complemented by the spat between the defense minister and some Likud cabinet ministers last Friday. Gallant proposed moving forward with local Fatah operatives in the Gaza Strip, at which point he came under attack for acting to effectively integrate the Palestinian Authority into Israel’s plans for the day after. Israeli officials have begun to sober up in response to the demise of the idea of having local clans run the Gaza Strip, an idea that Israel recently tried to advance.
- The various clan leaders publicly refused to cooperate with Israel, primarily in response to angry threats that were made by Hamas and given the fact that Israel does not maintain an ongoing presence on the ground in a way that might inspire their confidence. But even before the various clan leaders’ rejection, one had to question the feasibility of Israeli cooperation with dubious actors, which looked like an attempt to duplicate Israel’s bitter history of collaboration with the Phalangists in Lebanon. In the same context, other ideas that were raised in the past several months also ought to be called into question. First and foremost among those ideas was to deploy Arab or international troops that would do the “dirty work” for Israel (there has been no sign whatsoever of any interest by anyone to do that), or to rely on Gazan businessmen and Fatah operatives who aren’t

identified with the PA and who might serve as an effective alternative government. Enough time has passed for Israel to look itself squarely in the mirror and to see what is feasible and what isn't in the Gazan context.

- First, it is important to come to terms with the fact that it is going to be impossible to create a new order or to destroy Hamas's military and governmental capabilities without controlling the entire territory of Gaza in practice. Second, while it may be essential to consider the option of involving the PA in the Gaza Strip, it is important to recognize that the PA, which suffers from poor public standing, cannot currently enforce its rule on the enclave. Instead, it would be best to help establish a civilian Palestinian administration that is based on local forces, first among them Fatah, an administration that would be directly linked to the PA, while simultaneously retaining Israeli security responsibility, at least for the coming number of years. Israel is now facing several bad options, and it will have to choose the least bad one among them. That choice is certain to be rife with problems, but it would still be preferable over empty slogans about a war that is devoid of a time component that is to end in certain victory, or delusions about partners that might change the reality and the fundamental Palestinian mindset. Israel must not make any concessions on its vital national interests, but it does have to be willing to set out on a long and exhausting historical journey.

Strategic Folly

By Amos Gilad

- Prime Minister Netanyahu's unprecedented verbal attack on President Biden is an extreme expression of ingratitude and strategic failure of the highest order. The United States is Israel's only true friend, and Joe Biden is the friendliest president to Israel in history. There is no strategic logic to attacking him and the Democratic majority leader in the Senate, Chuck Schumer, and one can only suspect that at play here are petty domestic politics that have replaced a strategy that is vital for Israel's security and future.
- Throughout his many years in power, Netanyahu has initiated head-on collisions with American presidents, a mistake that has cost Israel dearly. Yes, a quarter of a century ago the prime minister keenly discerned the Iranian threat and justifiably swore to remove it. But in the time since, at least in the past 12 years, he has repeatedly made grave policy mistakes that have left Israel in a position of weakness in the face of the Iranian threat. Iran today is a nuclear threshold state that needs only to make a decision that is exclusively at its discretion to break out to develop nuclear weapons within a short amount of time. That is very likely to precipitate a nuclear arms race that would provide all of the terrorist organizations, from Hizbullah in the north to the Houthis in Yemen, with a defensive umbrella.
- The root of this state of affairs lies in Netanyahu's 2011 initiative, which has already been publicly exposed, to attack Iran militarily without strategic coordination with the United States and its president at the time, Barack Obama. Furthermore, Netanyahu humiliated President Obama for no reason when he addressed Congress against the nuclear agreement with Iran without coordinating with him. As a result, the United States signed the agreement with Iran behind Israel's back. Even though it was a bad agreement, its abrogation by President Trump a few years later at Netanyahu's behest produced the worst situation imaginable. Iran, freed from the constraints of any agreement whatsoever, decided to advance on the path toward military nuclear capability up to its current dangerous threshold state.
- On the cursed Sabbath of October 7, the United States saved Israel and allowed the IDF to get back on its feet and pummel Hamas powerfully. But then came Netanyahu's public statements about his strategy of total victory, which is doomed to fail and will detract from the IDF's achievements—since it ignores the alliance with the United States. Washington has offered Israel a dream package deal that includes a strategic axis that is based on the larger Arab countries, headed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the signatories of the Abraham Accords, which would integrate Israel into a regional military alliance under its leadership. Furthermore, the United States has offered Israel a pathway to Gaza's reconstruction with generous funding from the Persian Gulf states—when, in the absence of reconstruction and without an authentic Palestinian leadership, Israel might find itself drawn into directly occupying the disaster-stricken and poverty-stricken enclave.

- Moreover, if Israel wants to allow the tens of thousands of residents of northern Israel to return to their homes, it has two options: either a full-scale conflagration with Hizbullah, which will come at a very high strategic price and in which we will not have the United States help, or improved security arrangements on the basis of an upgraded iteration of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which will facilitate the redeployment of the Radwan Force north of the Litani River. The IDF's achievements in southern Lebanon are very important, but without political action, they will not produce an end to the conflict and a return home by the residents.
- Beyond that, an incursion into Rafah might damage Israel's special relationships with the United States and Egypt since an operation of that kind, despite the vital need for one, would be impossible without coordination with both countries. Egypt, as the pioneer of peace, will make it possible for Israel to forge future relationships that are very important militarily and economically with the moderate Arab countries. The United States will continue to provide Israel with a security, economic, diplomatic and legal steel dome. But cracks might begin to form in that dome if the rifts and insults continue. The biblical verse about a nation that "dwells alone" is lovely, but it is ill-suited to a small country like Israel. It is sad to see that some people fail to understand that. Netanyahu has to present getting the women and men who are being held hostage back home alive as a preeminent goal that must be attained. Israel can translate the IDF's achievements in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon into strategic gains that will strengthen our national future and security, but a decision to cling to the strategy of total victory and the absence of coordination with Washington will undermine that. Now is the time for strategic wisdom based on our impressive military achievements.