



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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

News Excerpts

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Times of Israel

2 Hezbollah Commanders Killed in IDF Strikes

The Israeli military and Lebanon's Hezbollah exchanged fire, with the terror group launching two attack drones at northern Israel as two top commanders behind recent attacks were killed in separate airstrikes. Three people were lightly hurt in the Hezbollah drone attack, according to media reports and local authorities. The Israel Defense Forces said the two explosive-laden drones struck areas near the northern community of Beit Hillel. Hezbollah claimed to have targeted an Iron Dome battery in the area. The terror group has made similar claims in recent months, which have been dismissed by the IDF as empty boasts.

Jerusalem Post

US to Impose Sanctions on Iran's Missile and Drone Program

New sanctions targeting Iran and sanctions against entities supporting the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Iran's Defense Ministry will be imposed in the coming days, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said in a statement. "Following Iran's unprecedented air attack against Israel, President Biden is coordinating with allies and partners, including the G7, and with bipartisan leaders in Congress, on a comprehensive response," Sullivan said. It's anticipated that US allies and partners will soon be following with their own sanctions, according to the statement. Sullivan said the White House continues to work through the Department of Defense and US Central Command to "further strengthen and expand" the successful integration of air and missile defense and early warning systems across the Middle East to "further erode the effectiveness of Iran's missile and UAV capabilities." The new sanctions and other measures will "continue a steady drumbeat of pressure" to contain and degrade Iran's military capacity and effectiveness, Sullivan said.

Ynet News

US Worries Israel May Not Give Warning on Iran Retaliation

The US may not receive a heads up about an Israeli retaliation for Iran's unprecedented attack against the country despite Israel's promise to do so, a senior American official told US media outlets. According to the source, Israel so far hasn't officially informed the US of its response plans, nor its timing. "We hope they will give us a heads up so we can make preparations to defend our people (deployed in the Middle East), not only militarily but also diplomatically," he said. However, he added, "there's no guarantee" that Israel will indeed provide advance notice of an attack against Iran. "They know when they give us a head's up we're likely to again register our objection to whatever they're about to conduct," he noted. Israel has assured its allies the attack won't set off a regional war, despite concern worldwide of a possible attack against Tehran's nuclear facilities.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron to Visit Israel

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron is scheduled to arrive in Israel for a one-day visit. During his visit, Cameron is slated to hold meetings with key Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Israel Katz, and potentially war cabinet minister Benny Gantz, though the latter engagement is yet to be confirmed. A British official revealed that one of Cameron's primary objectives will be to emphasize the importance of implementing Israeli commitments regarding expanded humanitarian aid routes to Gaza. Specifically, he will advocate for the opening of the Ashdod Port and a new crossing from northern Gaza, while also stressing the need to enhance coordination with humanitarian groups operating in the region. In addition to addressing humanitarian concerns, Cameron is expected to discuss the recent Iranian missile and drone attack, tensions in Lebanon, and ongoing efforts to secure the release of hostages held in Gaza.

Times of Israel

Israeli Tanks Push into Northern Gaza, Warplanes Hit Rafah

Israeli tanks pushed back into parts of the northern Gaza Strip that they had left weeks ago, while warplanes conducted air strikes on Rafah, killing and wounding several people. Residents reported an internet outage in the areas of Beit Hanoun and Jabaliya in northern Gaza. Tanks advanced into Beit Hanoun and surrounded some schools where displaced families have taken refuge, said the residents and media outlets of the terror group Hamas. Israel has said Hamas regularly operates from civilian sites and that it will act wherever necessary against the terror group. Beit Hanoun, home to 60,000 people, was one of the first areas targeted by Israel's ground offensive in Gaza last October. After urging civilians to evacuate, the vast majority of whom did, Israel's heavy bombardment turned most of Beit Hanoun, once known as 'the basket of fruit' because of its orchards, into a ghost town comprising piles of rubble.

Reuters

UN: It Still Faces Obstacles in Bid to Fend off Famine in Gaza

The UN is still struggling to prevent famine in the Gaza Strip and while there had been some improvement in coordination with Israel, aid deliveries in the enclave still faced difficulties, a senior UN aid official said. The head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory said aid deliveries within Gaza were facing significant checkpoint delays and that last week 41% of UN requests to deliver aid to northern Gaza were denied. The UN has long complained of obstacles to getting aid in and distributing it throughout Gaza. But global outrage at the humanitarian crisis in the enclave of 2.3 million people escalated after Israeli airstrikes on April 1 killed WCK aid workers. Israel has approved reopening the Erez crossing into northern Gaza and temporary use of Ashdod port in southern Israel after President Biden demanded steps to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, saying conditions could be placed on US support for Israel if it did not act.

UN Committee Unable to Agree on PA Full Membership

A UN Security Council committee considering an application by the Palestinian Authority to become a full UN member "was unable to make a unanimous recommendation" on whether it met the criteria, according to the committee report. The Palestinian Authority is still expected to push the 15-member Security Council to vote - as early as this week - on a draft resolution recommending it become a full member of the world body, diplomats said. In November 2012, the UN passed a resolution recognizing "Palestine" as a non-member observer state. The PA recently revived its UN membership application, prompting the Security Council to launch a formal review process. This included the ad hoc committee that failed to reach a consensus. Any request by the PA to become a UN member state must first pass through the Security Council, where the US has veto power, and then be endorsed by the General Assembly. Asked recently if the US would use its Security Council veto to block the PA's bid, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller replied, "I'm not going to speculate about what may happen down the road." He added, however, that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with security guarantees for Israel "is something that should be done through direct negotiations between the parties - it's something we are pursuing at this time - and not at the United Nations." The US in 2022 urged the PA not to pursue a vote at the UN Security Council on gaining full UN membership, stressing it will likely veto any such move.

Ha'aretz

Court Order Evicting Palestinians from E.Jerusalem Homes

Two Israeli courts ordered in the last few days the eviction of 35 Palestinians from their homes in the East Jerusalem's flashpoint Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah neighborhoods, ruling in favor of right-wing Jewish nonprofits. In the first case, Israeli Supreme Court Justice Noam Sohlberg issued a ruling last Thursday, ordering 15 members of an East Jerusalem Palestinian family to vacate their home in the city's Silwan neighborhood. The court ruled that the family's home is owned by a right-wing Jewish group that acquired the interests of a Jewish trust that bought the site prior to Israel's establishment in 1948. Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara had been due to issue a legal opinion on the issues presented in the case, but after extensive delays, Sohlberg subsequently decided to rule in favor of the far-right Ateret Cohanim organization without waiting further. In his ruling, Sohlberg gave the Shehadeh family until June 1 to vacate the building and ordered the family to pay 5,000 shekels (\$1,340) of legal fees to the far-right nonprofit, which has been working to move Jews into predominantly Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem. [Read More "Ben Gvir Forms Police Team Targeting Left-Wing Activists in the West Bank" "Two Nonprofits Linked to Arab Ra'Am Party to Be Shuttered over Alleged Terror Ties" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Illusions Versus Reality

By Michael Milshstein

- **Foiling the Iranian attack was without doubt a brilliant military achievement. That said, the Israeli debate over the ramifications of that event reflects our usual lack of balance, our absence of a consolidated strategy and our limitations in trying to analyze in-depth the rationale of the actors in the region—the primary fundamental problem that came to the fore in the October 7 debacle. The Israeli conversation ranges between two poles. From the depth of the wound of October 7, the troubling impasse in the war in Gaza, the hostage deal and the war of attrition in the north, while Israel’s international standing plummets—the public conversation shifted to euphoria, in which some people described the foiling of the Iranian attack as a mortal blow to Tehran and even as the start of a new regional order. Before these sentiments get turned into a new preconception, we must conduct a balanced and critical analysis.**
- **First, along with the impressive achievement on a global and historic scale, it is important to examine the shadowy aspects of the Iranian attack. Tehran carried out an unprecedented attack, acting boldly (despite Biden’s warning) and felt that it had changed the equation in the conflict between the two countries. The event also highlighted Israel’s dependence on external aid and, to a large degree, the erosion of its deterrence in the time since October 7. The assertion that a “new regional coalition” against a common enemy—Iran—was formed, must also be put in perspective. So far, Israel is the only one using the term “coalition” to describe the unprecedented cooperation of Western states, first among them the United States, along with Arab states, according to reports.**
- **There are some Israelis who have gone so far as to call this a strategic reversal: Israel has pivoted from a state of deep isolation as a result of the war in Gaza to one in which it enjoys international support and legitimacy as a result of the Iranian attack. They describe this as a historic inflection point. Jordan made a contribution to this, but it is Jordan that exemplifies the fact that an Israeli-Western-Arab coalition against Iran is still a distant vision. Officially, Jordan announced that it had taken action against “flying objects” that had infiltrated its airspace, refraining from drawing any link to Israel. Jordan is in a state of tension with Iran after the latter implicitly accused it of cooperating with the IDF. Those who go so far as to describe this as revealing the “close alliance” between Israel and Jordan should be made to realize that Jordan’s decision to take part in the interceptions stemmed from the kingdom’s own existential interests.**
- **Jordan is terrified by the threat posed to it by Iran and the exploitation of its territory in Iran’s battle against Israel. Even though the majority of the countries in the region view Iran as a more dangerous enemy than Israel, not a single Arab ruler has been prepared to risk openly saying that, since doing so would invite either a direct threat from Tehran or domestic agitation among those who continue to harbor deep-set hostility toward Israel.**

- **Just the opposite, the majority of the rulers in the region have persisted with their policy of appeasement toward Tehran, on the understanding that it is better to engage with it than to count on the United States to annihilate it. As for Israel, it has to realize that just like the issue of normalization with Saudi Arabia—it will not be able to establish a coalition as long as the obstacles on the Palestinian issue remain, first and foremost in the war in Gaza and in the impasse in relations with the PA. Once the euphoria subsides, Israel will have to contend with the same two strategic problems that have been begging for a decision for over six months: the fight against Hamas—with the hostages at the center—and the situation in the north. Saturday night’s achievement did not affect either of these challenges, and it certainly did nothing to make them go away.**
- **Furthermore, it is essential to understand that the clash [with Iran] took place after Israel failed once again to read the enemy’s intentions (analyzing the consequences of assassinating a top IRGC officer in Damascus) and that the problem is still evident: Israel’s belief that Tehran feels a sense of failure (the situation appears to be the opposite) and that the Sunni Arab states have also been swept up in the enthusiasm to form a coalition against Tehran, at a time that the fighting in Gaza continues. Once again, this highlights the need to address our shortcomings in understanding the enemy. Technological superiority, as proven, certainly does facilitate military achievements, but without decoding the rationale of “the other,” those achievements cannot be translated into a strategic rewards, and might even result in major damage.**

War and Diplomacy

By Yossi Yehoshua

- The intensity of the fighting in Gaza has diminished significantly, while Israel faces two other important fronts: Iran, which is the more urgent and immediate front, and Hizbullah, which is linked to Iran and to Gaza as well, given Hizbullah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's pledge [to attack Israel until the fighting in Gaza is over]. Yesterday, hostilities escalated on the front against Hizbullah. The prevailing view held by the IDF General Staff is that Iran was [initially] convinced that it had scored an operational success and a strategic achievement but that with the passage of time, Iranian officials came to recognize that its attack had been an operational failure.
- The question now is how Israel will leverage its strategic achievement by, for example, securing international legitimacy to operate in Rafah, to help with the hostages and Lebanon, and whether the Israeli political leadership might decide that the war's objectives need to be revised in light of the developments vis-à-vis Iran. The IDF is pushing for an operation against Iran. Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi already said as much in public and IAF Commander Maj. Gen. Tomer Bar has spoken out decisively in favor in closed-door meetings. The reasons in favor include, among others, that it is clear with a high degree of certainty that Iran tried to destroy the IAF's Nevatim airbase and that had it not been for Israel's air defenses and the international coalition that was formed, it might have succeeded.
- Israeli military officials believe that that is how it ought to be viewed. "The Iranians attacked us aggressively with more than 500 munitions," said Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. "Not a single cruise missile or UAV reached Israeli territory and, out of the more than 100 surface-to-surface missiles, four landed in Israel—as a result of the preparatory work we did with our partners and the high-quality operation by all IDF units." Meanwhile, international pressure on Israel not to attack has mounted so as not to risk losing the broad support of the international coalition. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Minister Benny Gantz, and told him that the United States does not want to see any further escalation. But members of the political leadership have been pressing for an operation. As for the nature of the future Israeli operation, we will have to wait and see. Israeli officials are taking into account that time may be running out given the upcoming Passover holiday. Hostilities in the north have also escalated.
- Four Golani Brigade soldiers were wounded in a cross-border operation, and dozens of rockets were fired in the past 24 hours at IDF bases, including the Mt. Meron base and a second base that, according to Hizbullah, houses an Iron Dome battery. In addition, two Hizbullah armed drones infiltrated Israeli airspace from Lebanon and exploded yesterday afternoon near Beit Hillel in the Galilee panhandle, slightly wounding three Israelis. Meanwhile, the IDF successfully killed two high-ranking Hizbullah commanders yesterday. The first was the commander of Hizbullah's coastal district, Ismail Yousef Baz, who was killed in a strike on a car near Tyre. "Baz served as a senior and seasoned official in Hizbullah's military wing in a number of capacities.

- **His current rank is the equivalent of a brigade commander. In the context of his job, Baz was involved in advancing and planning rocket and anti-tank missile fire at the State of Israel from the area of the coast in Lebanon, and during the war he organized and planned a range of terror attacks against Israel,” said the IDF Spokesperson’s Office. Later in the day, a second Hizbullah field commander was killed, Muhammad Hussein Mustafa Shehoury, the commander of the Radwan Force’s rocket and missile unit in the western sector. The IDF has killed a large number of prominent Hizbullah field commanders. Hizbullah has suffered nearly 300 casualties so far in the war. In summary, one can say that the Israeli political leadership has not yet made Lebanon one of its war objectives, and it remains unclear whether an operation in Lebanon will come before Rafah. But the more remote the chances of a hostage deal become, the closer we come to the possibility of fighting in Lebanon to allow the residents of northern Israel to return home before September 1.**