



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

US Set to Sanction IDF Unit in Historical First

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to announce for the first time sanctions against the IDF ultra-Orthodox combat unit Netzah Yehuda Battalion for alleged human rights violations against Palestinians in the West Bank, [Axios](#) first reported. The sanctions will include, among other things, a prohibition on delivering American weapons to the battalion, and its soldiers and commanders will be barred from joint drills between the IDF and the American military. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized the Biden administration's intentions and said, "The IDF shouldn't be placed sanction on." He added, "While our soldiers are fighting the horror of terrorism, the intentions to place sanctions on an IDF unit is most absurd and a moral decay. My government will act against these moves with all means available to us."

Ha'aretz

Officials: Sanctions Due to Conduct of Ben-Gvir, Smotrich

Senior Biden administration officials had warned Israel over the past few weeks that the way the government, army and police are addressing incidents of violence against Palestinians in the West Bank would require the United States to impose additional sanctions not only on right-wing extremists but also on the IDF and police. A senior Israeli source told Haaretz that in many of the discussions, American officials pointed a finger at Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir as giving backing to Israelis involved in the violence. A source in the US government involved in the sanctions discussions said that Ben-Gvir and Smotrich's conduct had strengthened the position of those in the administration pushing for the measures.

Times of Israel

Palestinian Killed Trying to Reach Injured in Settler Raid

An ambulance driver was killed in the West Bank on his way to evacuate people wounded during an alleged violent attack by residents of nearby Israeli settlements, according to the Palestinian Authority health ministry. Hebrew media reported that a group of settlers had arrived at the Palestinian town of As-Sawiya near the settlement of Eli and began throwing stones at Palestinians who retaliated by doing the same. Shortly after the clashes began, IDF troops arrived and began firing at the rioters. Some reports in Hebrew media said that the 50-year-old ambulance driver was killed by IDF fire, while others said that he was shot by armed settlers. Arrests of perpetrators are exceedingly rare and rights groups lament that convictions are even more unusual, with the majority of charges in such cases being dropped. [Read More "3 Palestinians Shot Dead While Attacking IDF Troops in West Bank" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

Baby in Gaza Saved from Womb of Mother Killed in Strike

A baby girl was delivered from the womb of a Palestinian mother killed along with her husband and daughter by an Israeli attack in the Gaza city of Rafah, where 19 people died in intensified strikes, Palestinian health officials said. The dead, killed in hits on two houses, included 13 children from one family, they said. The baby, weighing 3.09lb and delivered in an emergency C-section, was stable and improving gradually, said Mohammed Salama, a doctor caring for her. Her mother, Sabreen Al-Sakani, had been 30 weeks pregnant. The baby was placed in an incubator in a Rafah hospital alongside another infant, with the words "The baby of the martyr Sabreen Al-Sakani" written on tape across her chest. The 13 children were killed in a strike on the second home, belonging to the Abdel Aal family, according to Palestinian health officials. Two women were also killed in that strike.

I24 News

Netanyahu Vows to Pressure on Hamas to Release Hostages

Prime Minister Netanyahu has pledged to intensify efforts to pressure Hamas into releasing Israeli hostages held by the group. In a resolute video message shared online, Netanyahu emphasized the imperative of employing both military and political means to secure the freedom of the captives. "In the days to come, we will increase military and political pressure on Hamas, because this is the only way to free our hostages and achieve our victory," Netanyahu affirmed in his statement, underscoring the gravity of the situation. Netanyahu framed the current conflict in biblical terms, evoking the rabbinic dictum that "in every generation they rise to destroy us." He emphasized that the absence of the hostages during the upcoming holiday of Passover only serves to strengthen Israel's resolve to bring them home safely. "Unfortunately, until now, all proposals for the release of our hostages have been categorically rejected by Hamas," Netanyahu lamented, countering criticism directed at him within the country regarding efforts to secure the captives' release.

Jerusalem Post

Netanyahu Accuses Hostage Negotiators of Lying to Public

Prime Minister Netanyahu attacked members of the negotiating team responsible for ceasefire and hostage release talks, accusing them of conducting "false briefings" and "seeding desperations among the families of the hostages," during a war cabinet meeting on Sunday, according to Israeli media. "The false briefings from the negotiation team only harm the effort to return the abductees," said Netanyahu, according to N12. "If there is someone on the negotiating team who is not ready to accept the decisions of the political echelon just to get anonymous and false headlines in the media for political purposes - let him be decent and not be here." The war cabinet met on Sunday evening for the first time in 12 days to discuss the issue of the hostages. Netanyahu also accused Defense Minister Yoav Gallant of leaking information from sensitive meetings during a recent security cabinet meeting, KAN reported. Several ministers and leaders of the defense establishment were present at the meeting.

Erdogan Urges Palestinian Unity After Meeting Hamas Chief

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged Palestinians to unite amid Israel's war in Gaza following hours-long talks with Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Istanbul, his office said. Erdogan has failed to establish a foothold as a mediator in the Gaza conflict that has roiled the region, with the Hamas-run Palestinian territory bracing for a new Israeli offensive and a reported Israeli attack on Iran. Erdogan said Palestinian unity was "vital" following the talks at the Dolmabahce palace on the banks of the Bosphorus strait, which Turkish media reports said lasted more than two and a half hours. "The strongest response to Israel and the path to victory lie in unity and integrity," Erdogan said, according to a Turkish presidency statement. Hamas -- designated a terrorist organization by the US, the European Union and Israel -- is a rival of the Fatah faction that rules the semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank. As fears of a wider regional war grow, Erdogan said recent events between Iran and Israel should not allow Israel to "gain ground and that it is important to act in a way that keeps attention on Gaza". [Dig Deeper "As Qatar's Frustrations Grow, Can Turkey Lead Gaza Diplomacy Between Hamas, Israel?" \(AI-Monitor\)](#)

Israel Hayom

Khamenei Hails Iran's Strike on Israel, Urges Readiness

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei thanked the country's armed forces for their operation against Israel on April 13, and urged them to "ceaselessly pursue military innovation and learn the enemy's tactics," Iran's official news agency IRNA reported. The comments from Khamenei signal Tehran's open acknowledgment of targeting Israel for the first time with over 300 missiles and drones earlier this month. Iran said the strikes on April 13 were retaliation for Israel's suspected deadly bombing of its embassy compound in Damascus on April 1. "How many missiles were launched and how many of them hit their target is not the primary question," Khamenei stated. "What really matters is that Iran demonstrated its will-power during that operation." While explosions rocked the Iranian city of Isfahan early Friday in what sources described as an Israeli attack, Tehran downplayed the incident and said it had no plans for retaliation – a measured response seen as aimed at averting a wider regional war. Khamenei's robust praise for the military operation against Israel, coupled with his call for the forces to enhance their capabilities, highlights Iran's continued hostility and willingness to confront its arch-foe Israel despite the recent restraint. The Supreme Leader's comments come amid heightened tensions between Iran and Israel as efforts to revive the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal remain stalled. [Read More "Satellite Image Appears to Show Damaged Iranian Radar Allegedly Struck by Israel" "Israel Used Radar-Evading Missile to Hit S-300 Defenses near Natanz Nuke Site" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Ben Gvir Is Endangering the State of Israel

By Itzik Saban

- **Since his appointment as national security minister and a member of the security cabinet, everything that Itamar Ben Gvir has touched—locally, nationally and internationally—has proved he suffers from a twisted sense of reality. He has no stopguards or limits in his desire [to generate] ratings and media exposure. His goal is to maximize his power and control, and he feels all means are kosher to achieve this. Like a bull in a china shop, from morning to night Ben Gvir is involved with combing the area and spotting his prey. His finger is perpetually “on the trigger,” and his keyboard fires in all directions. From his perspective, national security can also go to hell—the main thing is for him to emerge unscathed in the eyes of his voters.**
- **More than a few people who have worked or currently work with him, directly and indirectly, civilians and soldiers—have experienced his ability to spot targets and to strike at them. Most of the civilians have left. Those in uniform, as embarrassing as it sounds, have been walking on eggshells the past few months. One time, his arrows are pointed at the hostages, another at the prime minister; one time they’re pointed at the war cabinet, another time at the GSS director; once at the chief of staff, another time at the commander of the IDF Central Command; once at the former director of the Prison Service, another at Gallant; once at Gantz, another at the Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara, and once again at the chief of police.**
- **No one is exempt from his perspective; in a reality in which his political base is hungry for power and more power, for another statement, for more hate and more escalation—Ben Gvir provides it, even when the cost is damage to national security. To him, the facts don’t change. What changes are the headlines and the spin that presents Netanyahu and co. as being dardaleh [Hebrew slang for ‘weak’ or ‘pathetic,’ a word he used to describe the presumed Israeli attack in Iran]—as opposed to a strong right-wing with Ben Gvir at the head. On a tactical level, Ben Gvir is right. In the reality of the Middle East, people only speak about and only understand strength. But one also needs wisdom to know when to shut up when need be and to maneuver.**
- **When he wasn’t in the government, maybe we could overlook it, even when his behavior was annoying. But as a member of the government—there is no question that he is expected to stop firing inside the tank. One might have thought he would grow up and stop with tricks and shticks. But Ben Gvir takes all Netanyahu’s nasty tricks, ramps them up a level and uses them without shame against him. Bibi 2.0. It could yet work for him. Ben Gvir has got to understand that the war against terror, and against countries that support terrorism, is not a ‘wham-bam-thank-you-ma’am’ proposition, especially not while Israel is fighting on multiple fronts and at a time when somewhere in a Gaza hiding place, 133 hostages are being held in terrible conditions. And if he doesn’t understand this—we must force him.**

- **So when he repeats his assertion about how Israel needs to “go crazy”—we need to listen to him. The time has come, Mr. Prime Minister, for you to listen to other people too. Put him in his place, once and for. Don’t be a “dardaleh” once again.**

No Longer Tolerant

By Daniel Edelson

- After the last obstacle was removed and the US House of Representatives approved the unprecedented \$15 billion in military aid to Israel, the White House demonstrated what strings may have been attached, when according to reports, for the first time sanctions could be imposed on a battalion in the IDF. US State Department officials briefed reporters that Secretary of State Antony Blinken was expected to announce American funding would not be extended to the ultra-Orthodox combat unit Netzah Yehuda Battalion.
- According to the State Department, these soldiers are systematically harassing and violating the human rights of Palestinians on the West Bank and are therefore in violation of American law. The sanctions will reportedly include, among other things, a prohibition on delivering American weapons to the battalion, and its soldiers and commanders will be barred from joint drills of the IDF and the American military.
- Blinken said a decision has been made and will be put into effect within days. “I think you’re referring to the so-called Leahy Law and our work under that,” Blinken told a reporter who asked about the upcoming sanctions. So, this is a very important law, and it’s one that we apply across the board. I think it’s fair to say that you’ll see results very soon.”
- The 1997 law by former Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy, prohibits the United States from providing military aid or training to security forces, the military, or the police when there is reliable information about human rights abuses. The officials at State said the matter had been under consideration for a while, even before the war and that the extremist rhetoric of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, contributed to the decision.
- To enforce the law, U.S. embassies around the world and the relevant arms of the State Department must compile information and consider testimonies from human rights groups or from media reports, about the conduct of local security forces who are recipients of US aid as they search for any blatant violations of human rights. In those violations, the State Department includes extreme conduct such as murder of innocents, torture, abduction and rape as a tactic of war. If there is credible information that a certain unit is involved in such conduct, the aid is suspended until the relevant government takes necessary disciplinary steps to bring those involved to justice. The Leahy Law was enacted in the past in Turkey, Lebanon, Indonesia, Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nigeria and St. Lucia.
- The State Department did not specify what would be considered "credible" information, other than to say it must meet the standard of the US courts. Officials, therefore, would rely on a variety of sources, including annual reports by human rights groups, records of government and non-governmental organizations and media reports.

- **Over the year, the law has been criticized by American military commanders who said it was applied too broadly and on occasion, interferes with training programs in foreign forces, on the other hand, rights groups and administration officials claim the law is not enforced enough and cite US support for foreign militaries such as in Cambodia, despite documented human rights violations there.**
- **An article published in the UK's Guardian newspaper last January cited what the publication claimed were internal State Department documents outlining methods used by successive administrations to protect Israel from such laws so as not to disrupt the supply of military aid, despite accusations that the laws were being violated. In 2016, Senator Leahy and ten other Democrat members of Congress wrote then Secretary of State John Kerry demanding an investigation of Israel be launched after suspicions were raised that Israeli security forces, "executed" Palestinians without trial.**
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