



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Al-Monitor

Fighting Rages Across Gaza as Death Toll Tops 35,000

Israel struck Gaza and troops were battling militants in several areas of the Hamas-run territory, where the health ministry said the death toll in the war had exceeded 35,000 people. The Israeli military said its jets had hit "over 150 terror targets throughout the Gaza Strip". In Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city which sits on the border with Egypt, the Kuwaiti hospital said it had received the bodies of "18 martyrs" killed in Israeli strikes. The health ministry in the territory said that at least 63 people had been killed over the last 24 hours, bringing the overall death toll from Israel's bombardment and offensive in Gaza to at least 35,034 people, mostly women and children. Months after Israel said it had dismantled Hamas's command structure in northern Gaza, fighting has resumed in Jabalia refugee camp and Gaza's Zeitun neighborhood.

I24 News

Blinken: Hamas Presence Will Continue Despite Rafah Op

In an interview with CBS's "Meet the Nation," United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized his belief that Hamas will continue to pose a challenge in Gaza regardless of Israel's actions in Rafah. Blinken's remarks come as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) prepare to dismantle the last remaining Hamas strongholds in Rafah. Blinken asserted, "Without a plan for the day after the war, Israel will be left holding the bag on an enduring insurgency because a lot of armed Hamas will be left, no matter what they do in Rafah." Highlighting concerns about the potential toll on civilian lives, Blinken suggested that any initial gains achieved by Israel in Rafah would not justify the potential repercussions. He underscored the necessity for a comprehensive strategy that addresses the broader implications of military operations in the region. In discussing the broader objectives for Gaza, Blinken emphasized the need to prevent Hamas from resuming governance in the region.

Ynet News

US Offers Valuable Intel in Exchange for Restraint in Rafah

The US offered Israel intelligence on the location of Hamas leaders and strategic tunnels in Gaza, in exchange for restraint in the IDF offensive on Gaza, the Washington Post reported. Israel launched its offensive last week, taking hold of the Rafah border crossing to Egypt and surrounding the eastern sections of the city. According to the Post, Officials including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) told the government that it would take months to evacuate civilians safely out of Rafah and offered their assistance in constructing adequate tent cities in safe zones, food, water and medicine for displaced Gazans, the report said. The American offer was made to Israel in recent weeks while discussions were underway on the planned Israeli offensive, and with the hope that it would be a limited one.

Egypt Warns Rafah Operation Puts Peace Treaty at Risk

A senior Egyptian official said that Cairo had lodged protests with Israel, the US and European governments, warning that its peace treaty with Israel — a cornerstone of regional stability — was at high risk. The news agency did not report any further comments from the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. At the same time, at a Cairo press conference with his Slovenian counterpart, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry sought to calm worries over the future of the peace deal. “The peace agreement with Israel has been Egypt’s strategic choice for 40 years, and it represents a core pillar of peace in the region for peace and stability,” he said, adding that there are mechanisms for adjudicating violations of the agreement. Nevertheless, Egypt announced it would support South Africa’s ongoing lawsuit in the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza.

Erdogan: ‘Netanyahu’s Methods Make Hitler Jealous’

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “has reached a level that would make [Adolph] Hitler jealous with the genocidal methods he has put forward,” according to Turkey’s Anadolu News, citing comments given to Greece’s Kathimerini newspaper. Erdogan also called the Gaza Strip an “open-air prison, not just after October 7, but for years before, like a concentration camp.” The statement follows a series of similar accusations the Turkish leader has made towards Netanyahu in the past months. Erdogan has compared him to the Nazi leader on multiple occasions as well as the USSR dictator Joseph Stalin and Italy's fascist leader Benito Mussolini. Such comments along with Erdogan's consistent support of Hamas have led to a dramatic deterioration in Israel-Turkey relations. Most recently, earlier in May, Ankara announced it would stop all exports and imports to and from Israel.

Palestinian Public Sector Salaries Squeezed by Israel

The Palestinian Authority said the Israeli finance ministry was continuing to withhold tax revenues and as a result only a part of public sector salaries would be paid this week, keeping up a squeeze on payrolls that has lasted for months. The Authority said it would pay Palestinian public sector employees 50% of their March salaries after Israel withheld a transfer due for the month of April. It said the arrears would be paid once the financial situation allowed. The Israeli finance ministry confirmed it had been decided not to transfer tax revenues this month but declined to provide details. The squeeze on public sector salaries, and the fact that tens of thousands of Palestinians have been prevented from working in Israel since the start of the war in Gaza in October, have added to growing economic hardship in the occupied West Bank. Israel collects tax on goods that pass through Israel into the West Bank on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and transfers the revenue to Ramallah under a longstanding arrangement between the two sides.

Kuwaiti Emir Dissolves Parliament Following ‘Unsatisfying’ Election Process

The Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, issued an Emiri decree to dissolve the country’s National Assembly and temporarily suspend certain provisions of the Constitution for a period of four years. This measure was taken roughly one month after the last round of elections in April 2024, which in turn were called for a year after the last dissolution of the parliament in February 2023. During a televised address, the Emir stated that during these four years, “a comprehensive review of the democratic process will take place.” According to the Emiri decree, both the Emir and the government will assume the responsibilities of the National Assembly, effectively amalgamating the legislative and executive branches during this interim period. The decision was met with mixed attitudes. Critics, mostly from abroad, denounced the Emir’s “coup against the constitution,” pointing out that the royal family now yields complete power. [Read More “Kuwait’s Emir Dissolves Parliament Again, Amid Political Gridlock in Oil-Rich Nation” \(Associated Press\)](#)

Associated Press

Sudan’s Military Fends off an Attack by Paramilitary Forces on Darfur

Sudan’s military and allied armed groups staved off an attack by a paramilitary group and Arab militias on a major city in the western region of Darfur, officials and residents said. The attack was the latest by the Arab-dominated Rapid Support Forces against el-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur province, where hundreds of thousands of people are sheltering, many of them having fled fighting elsewhere in Darfur. The RSF, which has been at war with the military for more than a year, has built forces up in recent months to wrestle control of el-Fasher, the last city that is still held by the military in the sprawling Darfur region. Sudan’s conflict began in April last year when soaring tensions between the leaders of the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum and elsewhere in the country. The conflict wrecked the country and pushed its population to the brink of famine. It killed more than 14,000 people and wounded thousands more amid reports of widespread sexual violence and other atrocities that rights groups say amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Time to Decide

By Yossi Yehoshua

- The top IDF brass has demanded that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu make decisions on two major issues. The first is the “day after” in Gaza—namely, a decision on which governmental authority he would like to see in Gaza instead of Hamas. The second is the purchase of two flight squadrons of F-15 and F-35 combat planes—a deal that has been delayed because of a disagreement between Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. Things have come to a boiling point, and defense establishment officials have demanded a political decision be made to complement the military operation, and [other] decisions, even if difficult, that military officials say need to be made to prevent the ongoing erosion of the operational achievements.
- The IDF has resumed operating against Hamas infrastructure in parts of the Gaza Strip in which it had already maneuvered, such as Jabalya and Zeitoun, and the price for Israel has been high. Five more soldiers were killed this past weekend. At issue are raids that IDF units have carried out and will continue to carry out to dismantle Hamas’s capabilities. Notably, the IDF said from the outset that that would be the method used in Gaza after the divisions were pulled out of the Strip, similar to the method that has been used in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) in the wake of Operation Defensive Shield to “mow the grass” of terrorism, to prevent its resurgence and to prevent it from posing a threat to the residents of the Gaza periphery communities. Military officials have said that a decision has to be made about the regime that will take the reins in Gaza in the future. Security officials have said that no one wants Hamas.
- As such, the options remaining are either the Palestinian Authority or moderate forces in the Gaza Strip that enjoy the support of Arab countries. The third option, one of an Israeli military administration, is untenable because of the number of troops who will have to be deployed in the area and the defensive and economic resources that maintaining it will entail. That means that there are only two Palestinian options. “They are bad,” said Israeli security officials frankly, “but we need to choose the least-bad one because there isn’t any other, and the one that currently exists—Hamas—is very bad for Israel.” “There aren’t any magic solutions. The most important thing is to decide. The failure to decide has led us to the current reality,” said one high-ranking military official. To be fair, we have to say once again that the option of local Palestinian figures will be very difficult to implement. It is hard to see a force rise to power and come to enjoy popular Palestinian support—and for Hamas to refrain from fighting against it.
- The other option, the option of the Palestinian Authority, is also bad. Public opinion polls that were taken in Judea and Samaria show how much support the October 7 massacre has [among Palestinian residents of the West Bank]. Nevertheless, Israeli security officials say that those options are better than the current situation, a situation that should not be maintained because it is eroding the achievements the IDF has racked up to date. “We keep on returning to the same places over and over again because decisions aren’t being made,” said top military officials.

- A political official told Yedioth Ahronoth in response that any talk about the “day after” while Hamas still maintains a standing military power that can threaten any future substitute is out-of-touch with reality and populist. There is no way of tapping a civil administration that might replace Hamas until the mission of eradicating Hamas as a military force is completed. As noted, the IDF has resumed offensive action in the Gaza Strip, returning to Jabalya in the northern Gaza Strip and to Zeitoun in the central Gaza Strip. Five soldiers from the Nahal Brigade’s 931st Battalion were killed in Zeitoun by a bomb and gunfire.
- In Jabalya in the northern Gaza Strip, where between 100,000 and 150,000 people now live, the IDF has been applying pressure from the air and from the ground. In the meantime, troops have continued to carry out raids in Gaza City’s southern Zeitoun neighborhood. This is the third time that IDF troops have operated in the neighborhood [in the current war]. The IDF has also somewhat expanded its operation in Rafah and has called on more civilians to leave. So far, an estimated 300,000 Palestinians have left Rafah since the evacuation was ordered, according to the IDF. Hamas responded to the military pressure on Rafah by firing rockets at Beer Sheva for the first time in five months. The prevailing assessment is that Hamas will try to expand the range of its rocket fire as the operation in Rafah intensifies. Hamas has rockets in Rafah that are capable of reaching central Israel.
- A second issue about which Netanyahu needs to make a decision is the purchase of combat planes. The United States approved the sale and is now waiting for confirmation from the Israeli government. Finance Minister Smotrich has continued to prevent a ministerial committee that is supposed to discuss and approve the deal from the meeting. Smotrich said he first wants a meeting to be held to discuss Israel’s defense doctrine. Gallant said that Israel cannot afford to waste time and that this delay could hold up the planes’ delivery by several years since other countries will come ahead of Israel in line if it fails to sign. “Delaying the purchase is damaging to Israeli security, and the implications, while we are fighting a multiple-theater war, are clear,” said Gallant.
- Military officials said that the planes in question are supposed to replace older planes that will be decommissioned due to their age. Smotrich’s demand for a discussion is legitimate. “Israel,” he said, “needs to allocate a lot of money to defense, but not to failed defense as was built in recent years in keeping with the old view held by the leaders of the misconception. To pour money out that will be sucked into a black hole of the security establishment, when there is truly no certainty that that money will buy Israel’s citizens real security.” On this issue too, the decision resides with Prime Minister Netanyahu. The delay in making that decision is nothing short of damaging to national security.

Hamas Will Only be Defeated if it is Replaced

By Yoav Limor

- This was a difficult weekend. Six soldiers were killed in an IDF operation in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood, while a Hizbullah assault set the Ramim Ridge on fire, both incidents served as a reminder of the complex situation that Israel is coping within its two primary theaters of warfare. The operation in Zeitoun was launched in response to information that Hamas had begun to rebuild its infrastructure in the neighborhood. A similar process is underway in other parts of the Gaza Strip in which the IDF has already operated, including in Khan Yunis. The moment the IDF left, armed Hamas operatives returned to reestablish their hold. New commanders have been appointed to replace the ones who were killed, and the process has begun to rebuild Hamas's infrastructure, including tunnels and lines of defense against future incursions.
- The five soldiers from the Nahal Brigade who were killed were killed by a bomb in Zeitoun. That was a localized incident that illustrated not only what happens in any parcel of territory that is vacated by the IDF but which also illustrated the truth of the maxim about how there aren't any vacuums. The refusal to discuss the day after is costing us precious blood. Instead of another actor entering the territories that have been vacated by Israel, Hamas has returned, and Israel is forced to operate in them all over again. That state of affairs will remain unchanged unless the government comes to its senses and makes a strategic change.
- The IDF dropped leaflets in Jabalya calling on the thousands of people who returned to the refugee camp to leave it ahead of a military operation. Similar operations will probably also have to be carried out in other Gazan neighborhoods as well. Israeli officials hope that the operations help ratchet up the pressure on Hamas and facilitate progress in a deal that would free the hostages. However, as long as those operations remain localized and without a broader plan, Hamas will not be defeated. Its defeat will only become possible if an alternative to its rule is created. That is the thing that Sinwar is afraid of: for someone else to distribute to the civilian population food and water and provide it with education and health services.
- Alongside the recurring operations in the northern Gaza Strip, the IDF also announced its plans to expand its operation in Rafah as well. For the time being—and contrary to public statements—the government has not yet decided to order the full conquest of the city and has limited the operation to pinpoint activity only. That caution stems from three reasons: fear for the lives of the hostages who are being held in Rafah; a desire to avoid casualties among the more than one million Palestinian refugees who are concentrated in the city; and fears of worsening the crisis in relations with the United States and Egypt. Officials in Cairo are very worried about the Israeli operation in Rafah. In response to the decision to seize control of the [Palestinian side of the] Rafah border crossing, the Egyptians halted the delivery of humanitarian aid via the crossing. They also deployed reinforcements along the length of the border lest hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees should try to flee to the Sinai Peninsula.

- **That Egyptian nightmare scenario is not far-fetched; Hamas has a vested interest in seeing it materialize to increase the scope of chaos and worsen Israel's dilemmas. If Israel wants to avoid playing into Hamas's hands, it needs to coordinate positions with Cairo and Washington. That coordination has been made on the military level—US CENTCOM commander General Michael Kurilla left Israel after yet another work meeting—but less so by the political leadership. The UN vote to upgrade the Palestinian Authority's status was a warning sign about the diplomatic tsunami that Israel is going to face if it continues to bang its head against the wall. The State Department report about the inappropriate use that was made of American weapons ought to worry the decision-makers because of the precedent it set. That said, we can only hope that the fact that the report did not provide examples will allow for the arms shipments that have been suspended to be released for shipment.**
- **The entanglement in the south has also directly impacted the situation in the north. While it may be true that the IDF has stepped up its fight against Hizbullah, it has found itself being repaid in the same currency. Israel currently does not have a solution to its problem with Hizbullah. As such, it hasn't been able to provide the tens of thousands of Israelis who have been displaced with any horizon either. The fact that the cabinet has yet to hold even a single strategic discussion of that issue—a discussion that at the very least would improve the state's response to the displaced persons' needs and businesses—is a failure that reflects a combination of emotional obtuseness and a loss of direction.**
- **All that is happening during one of the most difficult Memorial Days in our country's history. Alongside the hundreds of civilians who were killed in hostilities—most of whom were killed in the October 7 assault—620 soldiers have been killed in the course of the current war, including 14 who were killed just this past week: four were killed in the mortar attack on Kerem Shalom, six were killed in the Gaza Strip, three were killed in the north and one was killed in Judea and Samaria (West Bank). That high price is a daily reminder of the endless fight that we are forced to wage over this country. Our publicly elected officials and top security officials need to do truly everything possible so that we might be worthy of the fallen, and to restore quiet and sanity to Israel to the extent possible.**