



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Friday, June 14*

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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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Reuters

## **Israeli Forces Advance Into Rafah as Diplomacy Falters**

Israeli tanks advanced deeper into the western area of Rafah, amid one of the worst nights of bombardment from air, ground, and sea, forcing many families to flee their homes and tents under darkness, residents said. Residents said the Israeli forces thrust towards the Al-Mawasi area of Rafah near the beach, which is designated as a humanitarian area in all announcements and maps published by the Israeli army since it began its Rafah offensive in May. The Israeli military denied in a statement it had launched any strikes inside the Al-Mawasi humanitarian zone. Israel said its assault aimed to wipe out Hamas' last intact combat units in Rafah. Most of those people have now moved north towards Khan Younis and Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza Strip. The military said it had struck 45 targets across the Gaza Strip from the air, including military structures, militant cells, rocket launchers and tunnel shafts. Israel has ruled out peace until Hamas is eradicated, and much of Gaza lies in ruins.

Ha'aretz

## **Israel Will Not Discuss Hamas Changes to Cease-Fire**

Israel says that the changes Hamas made to President Biden's outline for a deal that would stop the war and free the hostages held in Gaza eliminate the pressure points intended to ensure that the group doesn't hold off the release of the hostages while the agreement is being carried out. Israel will not send a delegation to continue the cease-fire talks as long as Hamas does not withdraw the many changes it demanded to implement in the outline. Despite that, Israel will continue the negotiations and attempt to advance a deal that meets Biden's original outline.

I24 News

## **Poll: 73% of Palestinians Support Oct 7 Attacks by Hamas**

A recent poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research reveals that more than eight months into the war in Gaza, 73% of Palestinians support Hamas' decision to launch the October 7 attacks on Israel. The support is somewhat lower among Gazans, with 57% expressing approval. The survey indicates a notable increase in satisfaction with Hamas and its leader, Yahya Sinwar, compared to a similar poll conducted three months ago. Hamas remains the most supported political party among Palestinians, while support for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has dwindled to 12%. Regarding the future of Gaza post-war, less than half of Gazans believe that Hamas will win the war and remain in power. Additionally, 75% of respondents reject the idea of deploying a joint Arab peacekeeping force in the Gaza Strip. The survey also reveals a strong opposition to the two-state solution among Palestinians, with 65% against it, despite a 30% increase in support for the solution among Gazans since the last poll. Furthermore, 63% of those surveyed support armed resistance as a means of achieving their goals.

## **Blinken Pressed PM to Release Frozen Palestinian Funds**

Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to release Palestinian tax revenues Israel's ultranationalist minister of finance Bezalel Smotrich froze in early May. The Biden administration is extremely concerned the PA could collapse if the tax revenues are not transferred soon, say. An economic crash could in turn lead to an escalation in the West Bank in addition to the war in Gaza and rising tensions between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Tax revenues Israel collects for the PA under an agreement between the parties are a major source of income for the PA, which is already in a deep financial crisis. After the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israel, Smotrich suspended the transfer of all tax revenue funds to the PA. Israel, Norway, the PA and the US reached a deal to resume the transfer of the tax revenues. But Smotrich once again put a hold on the Palestinian tax revenues. After Norway recognized the state of Palestine, Smotrich demanded Norway give back the portion of Palestinian tax revenues it was holding in escrow as part of the agreement.

### Israel Hayom

## **Fires Rage After Drone Barrage Launched at Northern Israel**

Hezbollah launched a barrage of rockets and a swarm of explosive-laden drones at northern Israel, setting off sirens in numerous communities, sparking fires and injuring two people, as the terror group continued what it said was a response to the killing of a senior commander in an Israeli airstrike earlier in the week. Another two soldiers were injured in a Hezbollah anti-tank guided missile attack in the Galilee Panhandle. According to the IDF, some 40 rockets crossed the border from Lebanon in the major attack setting off sirens near Safed in the Upper Galilee, and in the Golan Heights town of Katzrin. The IDF said many of the rockets were shot down by air defenses, while others impacted several areas in northern Israel. The rocket impacts and falling shrapnel following interceptions sparked at least 15 fires in the Galilee and Golan, mostly near Katzrin, the Fire and Rescue Service said.

### Times of Israel

## **US Says It Destroyed Houthi Missiles, Drones Over Red Sea**

The US military says it destroyed two Houthi patrol boats, one uncrewed surface vessel and one drone over the Red Sea over the last 24 hours. Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who control most areas of Yemen, launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles from a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen into the Red Sea, the US Central Command says in a statement, adding there was no damage or injuries from those missiles. It adds that Polish-operated bulk cargo carrier M/V Verbena, flying under a Palauan flag, was hit for a second time. Authorities earlier reported that a sailor was seriously injured in a missile strike on the ship. "The Houthis claim to be acting on behalf of Palestinians in Gaza and yet they are targeting and threatening the lives of third-country nationals who have nothing to do with the conflict in Gaza," CENTCOM says.

Reuters

## **Israeli Forces Kill Three Palestinians, Seize Weapons in West Bank Raid**

Israeli forces raided a town in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinians and detaining several others in what the army described as an operation to pre-empt militant attacks. The West Bank, among territories where Palestinians seek statehood, has seen a surge in violence since the outbreak of the war between Israel and the militant Islamist group Hamas in the Gaza Strip. During the raid in Qabatiya, troops surrounded a building where two gunmen were holed up, exchanging fire with them, the army said. The two Palestinians were killed and witnesses saw the body of one of them being lifted out by an armored bulldozer. A third Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli troops elsewhere in the town, medical officials said. There was no immediate claim of the dead men by any armed Palestinian faction. The army described the two killed in the building as "senior terrorists" without elaborating and added that weapons were seized in the raid. Several Palestinians were detained by troops, who also "exposed explosives planted into roads which were intended to be used to attack the forces", the army statement said. A soldier was wounded during exchanges of fire, it added.

Associated Press

## **UN Adopts a Resolution Demanding That Sudan's Paramilitary Force Halt Its Siege of a Darfur City**

The UN Security Council adopted a resolution demanding that Sudan's paramilitary force immediately halt its siege of the only capital in the vast western region of Darfur that it doesn't control and where more than a million people are reportedly trapped. The British-sponsored resolution, which was approved by a vote of 14-0 with Russia abstaining, also calls on the paramilitary Rapid Support Force and Sudanese military "to seek an immediate cessation of hostilities" leading to an end to their more than year-long war. It expresses "grave concern" at the spreading violence and credible reports that the Rapid Support Forces are carrying out "ethnically motivated violence" in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, as well as last year in El Geneina in West Darfur. Sudan plunged into conflict in mid-April 2023 when long-simmering tensions between its military and paramilitary leaders broke out in the capital Khartoum and spread to other regions including Darfur. The UN says over 14,000 people have been killed and 33,000 injured. Two decades ago, Darfur became synonymous with genocide and war crimes, particularly by the notorious Janjaweed Arab militias, against populations that identify as Central or East African. Up to 300,000 people were killed and 2.7 million were driven from their homes. That legacy appears to have returned, with the International Criminal Court's prosecutor, Karim Khan, saying in January there are grounds to believe both sides may be committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide in Darfur.

## **Without Deal, Gaza Fighting Will Aimlessly Drag On**

By Amos Harel

- **After tarrying for almost two weeks, Hamas finally delivered its response to the latest Israeli-American offer for a hostage deal. Not surprisingly, Hamas continues to demand a total cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, as well as international guarantees that Israel will abide by its commitments, two things it will apparently not receive. The response from Gaza will make it even more difficult to reach an agreement. Meanwhile, things are heating up in Lebanon following Israel's assassination of a senior Hezbollah commander. In response, the Shi'ite organization launched heavy barrages at the Galilee and the Lake Kinneret area.**
- **Over the last few days, senior American officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Israel earlier this week, and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, have been delivering somewhat optimistic messages regarding the negotiations over a hostage deal. They praised Israel's flexibility in the latest proposal, presented by President Joe Biden in a speech on May 31, as well as by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who tried to evade referring to some of the proposal's formulations. While waiting for Hamas' answer, the two placed the responsibility for advancing the deal on the terror group.**
- **The answer arrived, evoking the usual controversy. Israel rushed to announce that Hamas had rejected the proposal Biden laid out in his speech. Hamas said in response that it had responded positively, and that the problem lay in Israel's response. According to Hamas, it didn't reject the proposal but only asked for clarifications. It appears that we're stuck in a time loop that repeats itself every few months. Blinken, who continued from Israel to Qatar, tends to accept Israel's position. Speaking from Qatar, he said that instead of giving a one-word affirmative reply, Hamas waited a long time and then demanded many changes. The question, Blinken added, choosing polite words under the circumstances, is whether Hamas is acting in good faith.**
- **As in previous rounds of proposals, the crux of the gap between the sides relates to the uncompromising position of Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' leader in Gaza, that the release of hostages (in two stages) must also lead to the end of the war – implying the survival of his rule in the Strip. This is a demand Netanyahu has no intention of meeting, which is why the fighting will apparently continue.**
- **Hamas is meanwhile gradually toughening its demands for a withdrawal and for guarantees. Given Israel's numerous hints that an agreement will not hold for very long, it's no wonder that Hamas will not make do with the somewhat vague formulations in Biden's proposal. The Wall Street Journal published a piece that explained the background for Sinwar's position. Its correspondents, who said they had viewed dozens of messages exchanged by Sinwar and Hamas leaders outside Gaza (how they obtained these documents is not mentioned), describe Sinwar's satisfaction with the way the war is proceeding.**

- **"We've brought the Israelis exactly to where we wanted them to be," says Sinwar in a message to negotiators on behalf of Hamas. In his correspondence from Gaza's tunnels, Sinwar displays a cold and indifferent attitude toward human lives, including those in Gaza, the Journal wrote.**
- **Sinwar compares the death of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians (according to Hamas figures) to the people who died in Algeria's war of independence against France in the 1950s, describing these deaths as a "necessary sacrifice." For him, his survival and that of his rule at the end of the war will constitute victory over Israel. In one arena, Hamas' success is definitely exceeding Sinwar's wildest dreams: the support the terror organization is receiving from left-wing and student movements in the West, while Israel is assailed for the destruction and death it is wreaking on Gaza. It's possible that for him, everything is proceeding according to plan. Given Hamas' response, the Biden administration is at a loss.**
- **Another ostensible channel with influence is the UN Security Council, which approved a resolution supporting Biden's proposal. This could lead to the imposition of an agreement on the two sides, including the use of sanctions, which are mainly a threat to Israel. Israel also faces another problem. In the coming weeks, its military operation in Rafah will have exhausted itself. It appears that the US still objects to the complete conquest of the city, and for now, Netanyahu is acceding to its demand. The question is, what should be done after the Israel Defense Forces has operated aggressively on the ground in almost every part of the Gaza Strip but hasn't defeated Hamas, and there is still no hostage deal on the horizon.**
- **The absence of a deal, on the backdrop of Netanyahu's continued empty promises of a total victory, will put pressure on the army to continue attacking in Gaza without a visible strategic goal. This will endanger the lives of the remaining hostages in Gaza. There really is no way of replicating the impressive rescue of four hostages held in the Nuseirat refugee camp. This situation apparently determines the continuation of hostilities in the north, since Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has already declared that his men will not hold their fire until there is a cease-fire in Gaza.**
- **Meanwhile, the situation in the north continues to escalate. Israel assassinated Taleb Abdullah, the commander of Hezbollah's Nasser force, who was killed in an airstrike along with three other Hezbollah operatives in a town east of Tyre. Abdullah, whose rank was comparable to that of a division commander in the IDF, is the most senior fatality the organization has sustained, along with Wissam al-Tawil, the commander of the Radwan Force, who was killed in a similar operation attributed to the IDF in January. Hezbollah responded with a barrage of more than 200 rockets directed at the entire Galilee and the western side of Lake Kinneret, the heaviest since the beginning of the war. No casualties were reported. Media outlets associated with Hezbollah have threatened of more to come. This is a more extreme form of the "formula of responses" adopted by Nasrallah over the years, but it doesn't seem to be a total reshuffling of the deck as far as Hezbollah is concerned. The organization may try to hit a senior Israeli official as an act of revenge.**

- Israel has been in a strategic bind with regard to Hezbollah for a long time, with many tactical achievements not adding up to a significant advantageous position in the confrontation. The assassination of Abdullah is an expression of a familiar pattern: an intelligence and operational opportunity crops up and a decision to assassinate is made, without necessarily taking into account all the strategic implications. In early April, the assassination of Iranian Gen. Mohammad Reza Zahedi (also known as Hassan Mahdavi) in Damascus brought Israel to an unprecedented confrontation with Iran, in which 350 missiles and drones were launched at Israel by Iran and its proxies.
- This time, Iran is not part of the picture, but a further escalation with Hezbollah is possible. It's important to know whether some strategic thinking took place before a decision to act was made, or whether this is another instance of the tail wagging the dog. The army is frustrated, sustains criticism and then takes action – which, while successful operationally, could bring us closer to the brink of war, apparently without political echelons having seriously considered the significance of this action. In tandem, there is pressure by the public and the media to take more drastic action in the north, given the widespread destruction there and the lack of a resolution for 60,000 internal refugees while hostilities continue without any result on the horizon. Such circumstances could also drive the two sides into an all-out war.
- One can't help but note the intolerable gap between the complex situation of the war, with the huge and dangerous burden placed on the shoulders of conscript and reserve soldiers, and the conduct of coalition members. The Knesset approved, in a 63-57 vote, a bill that would allow Netanyahu to perpetuate the avoidance of military duty by ultra-Orthodox men. Of all the coalition lawmakers, only Defense Minister Yoav Gallant was true to his conscience and dared vote against the position of Likud and the government. Netanyahu's broad smile at the end of the vote will be remembered as one of the seminal photos of this war. The fury of the public and on social media is immense. In the meantime, what isn't happening is this anger translating into an effective protest movement or political moves that can achieve anything. Over time, the government's conduct will also impair the war effort. Many civilians and soldiers will no longer be able to lend a shoulder, knowing clearly that their government is screwing them over and lying to them, subordinating its moves to the interests of a public that doesn't share the burden at all.

## **Gila Gamliel's Note to Netanyahu**

By Amir Ettinger

- It happened in the middle of the night at the Knesset. While all the opposition speeches strongly denounced the Haredi draft bill and coalition members ascended the rostrum to respond, Innovation, Science and Technology Minister Gila Gamliel was caught on camera passing a note to Prime Minister Netanyahu. Israel Hayom caught the [contents of the] note on film; it contains a list of demands. Some of the demands are security-related; others are political. According to political sources in the know, the note was an attempt by Gamliel to broker negotiations with a party currently outside the government to join the government. As noted, the note contained six clauses that appear to be a list of initial demands. The first four clauses deal with security.
- The first says, “setting strategy to complete intensification in the Strip;” it also appears to speak about setting a strategic plan for the war in Gaza, and perhaps also for the day after—something Netanyahu has yet to decide on. The second clause says, “Striving for a Hostages Deal.” The third says “Reaching Agreement 1701—in other words, reaching an agreement with Hizbullah based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) that calls for Hizbullah to withdraw from South Lebanon. According to the word “agreement,” it can be surmised that we are talking about reaching that via negotiations rather than by war, but it could be that the intent is also to achieve an agreement by means of a broader military clash. The fourth section says, “Entering Talks for Normalization with Saudi Arabia.”
- The two final clauses deal with politics and talk of “reaching an agreed election date,” and forming an “agreed upon” commission of inquiry into the October 7 massacre failure. The term “agreed” seems to refer to the formula regarding the committee and its members’ authority, a committee that Netanyahu doesn’t want as it would be headed by Former President of the Supreme Court, Esther Hayut. Israel Hayom asked Minister Gamliel about the contents of the note; she declined to comment or answer questions about the identity of the person in whose name she passed the note to Netanyahu. Gamliel just said that these were not her personal demands. Meanwhile, in recent days, there has been unrest in the Likud after all the MKs on the list with the exception of Gallant complied with the coalition whip, supporting imposing the law of continuity on the draft exemption law.
- The bill will be presented for debate by the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, chaired by MK Yuli Edelstein (Likud), who wants to insert significant changes into the bill – against the wishes of the Haredi parties. Likud MKs told Israel Hayom, “There will [either] be no law, or there’ll be a real law that will draft the Haredim.” They say the previous vote was technical and that they will, at present, not support the law proposed by the government if significant changes are not made. MKs angered by the bill and who oppose it include MKs Saada, Iluz, Dellal, Bareket, Gottlieb and Halevi. MKs opposing the bill from other parties in the coalition include Minister Ophi Sofer, MK Ohad Tal (Religious Zionist Party) and MK Yitzhak Kroizer (Otzma Yehudit).