



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Friday, August 30*

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# News Excerpts

August 30, 2024

## I24 News

### **Hamas Backs Humanitarian Pause for Polio Vaccination**

Hamas spokesman Jihad Taha said that the group has agreed to a temporary humanitarian pause to allow the administering of polio vaccines to the local Gazan population, according to Qatari newspaper Al-Araby Al-Jadid, or New Arab. This lull in fighting was deemed necessary by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres some two weeks ago to allow UNRWA and UNICEF to launch a vaccination campaign against polio. The virus has been detected in recent weeks, starting in the water in war-torn Gaza and later in a 10-month-old child. Taha said that Israel must agree to this vaccination operation without deceptions, delays, or changing the sites for administering the vaccination. He also stressed that Hamas demands the UN, the international community, and all humanitarian organizations "fulfill their duty towards the Palestinian people and expose the inhumane actions of Israel."

## Reuters

### **Relatives of Israeli hostages try to cross into Gaza**

Families of Israeli hostages being held in the Gaza Strip protested near the border, demanding a deal to secure their release and at one point made a dash to try to cross into the coastal enclave. Relatives of some of the 107 hostages still held by Palestinian militants in Gaza, carrying photographs and wearing shirts marked with red paint, gathered at kibbutz Nirim in southern Israel, roughly 1.2 miles from the border. They began by shouting messages of love and support through a stack of speakers pointed towards the Gaza frontier. Hamas-led gunmen killed some 1,200 Israelis and foreigners and abducted around 250 hostages on Oct. 7, according to Israeli tallies. Since then, Israel's military has leveled Gaza, driving nearly all of its inhabitants from their homes and killing at least 40,000.

## Axios

### **Gaza Talks Focus on "Nitty Gritty" in Hope of Getting Deal**

Talks are continuing this week in Cairo and Doha in an effort to get Israel and Hamas to agree on the details for implementing a hostage-release and ceasefire in Gaza deal, US and Israeli officials said. Israeli officials say the US, together with Qatari and Egyptian mediators, wants to try to get an agreement on as many practical details as possible, fill in the blanks with their own ideas on the broader deal and present it to Israel and Hamas again as one package. US and Israeli officials say they hope that when the package is ready, Hamas will see it is getting most of what it wanted: At least six weeks of ceasefire, hundreds of prisoners released, the return of displaced Palestinians to their homes, an influx of humanitarian aid to Gaza, initial reconstruction, and medical treatment for hundreds of wounded Hamas militants in Egypt.

## **US Pans ‘Deeply Troubling’ IDF Shooting of WFP Vehicle**

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller tweets, “The Israeli Defense Forces shooting of a World Food Program vehicle in Gaza is a deeply troubling incident.”

“Humanitarian workers are there to help innocent civilians, and Israel must ensure they are protected,” Miller adds. The WFP suspended the movement of its employees across the Gaza Strip, saying at least 10 bullets struck one of its clearly marked vehicles as it approached an Israeli military checkpoint. US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood revealed that Jerusalem had informed Washington that an initial review found that shots were fired at the clearly marked vehicle after a “communication error” between IDF units. “We have urged them to immediately rectify the issues within their system,” Wood told a UN Security Council meeting on Gaza. “Israel must not only take ownership for its mistakes but also take concrete actions to ensure the IDF does not fire on UN personnel again.”

## **IDF Knew More Than Was Disclosed about Attack on Jit**

The IDF and the police knew more about the impending attack on Jit from the Shin Bet than the military’s probe of the episode let on. According to sources, the Shin Bet provided a warning to the IDF and the police at 7:30 p.m. on August 15 that certain Jewish residents from Yitzhar were moving in the direction of Jit. However, the agency did not say the name “Jit” or have complete certainty about their final destination. Still, given that the Jewish attackers did not arrive at Jit until 8 p.m., sources indicated that had the IDF mobilized parallel to the movements of the attackers already half an hour earlier, they could have potentially prevented them from penetrating the Palestinian town. Instead, the mobilized IDF forces proceeded to various generic intersections and crossing points, adopting a more passive strategy to potentially intercept the Jewish attackers. The IDF defended its actions, rejecting this narrative.

## **Borrell Asks EU States to Sanction Some Israeli Ministers**

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he asked member states to consider imposing sanctions on some Israeli ministers but did not say who he was targeting. The issue could come up again at the EU summit that will take place in Brussels Sept. 2-3. Borrell said he intends to ask member states to impose joint sanctions on Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. Borrell's request requires unanimous approval of all 27 EU members. Israeli diplomatic sources said that chances of such an approval are low, especially since the EU is currently presided by Hungary, which is considered a friend of Israel. Israel is also hoping for a change of tone in Brussels once Borrell steps down at the end of the year. The EU sanctions regime for human rights violations already includes nine individuals and five entities linked to Israeli settlements and Lehava, a right-wing Jewish supremacist group that is dedicated to preventing Jewish-Muslim mixed marriages.

## **Israel Kills a Top Militant in Its Deadliest West Bank Raids**

The Israeli military said it killed five more West Bank militants, including a local commander, as it pressed ahead with its deadliest operation in the occupied territory since the start of the war in Gaza. Israel says the raids across the northern West Bank — which have killed a total of 16 people, nearly all militants, since late Tuesday — are aimed at preventing attacks. The Palestinians see them as a widening of the war in Gaza and an effort to perpetuate Israel's decades-long military rule over the territory. The raids drew alarm from the United Nations and neighboring Jordan, as well as from British and French leaders, who stressed the urgency of a cease-fire in Gaza after nearly 11 months of fighting between Israel and Hamas. The Islamic Jihad militant group confirmed that Mohammed Jaber, known as Abu Shujaa, was killed during a raid in the city of Tulkarem. He became a hero for many Palestinians earlier in the year when he was reported killed in an Israeli operation, only to make a surprise appearance at the funeral of other militants, where he was hoisted onto the shoulders of a cheering crowd.

## **Iran's Uranium Enrichment Rolls On, Key Issues Stalled**

Iran's production of highly enriched uranium continues and it has not improved cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog despite a resolution demanding this at the agency's last board meeting. Despite the resolution, passed at the last quarterly meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation Board of Governors in June, nuclear diplomacy has largely been on hold with the election last month of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and the US presidential election due in November. "The (IAEA) Director General (Rafael Grossi) expresses the hope that his initial exchange with President Pezeshkian will be followed by an early visit to Iran and the establishment of a fluid, constructive dialogue that swiftly leads to concrete results," said one of the two confidential quarterly IAEA reports sent to member states. There has been no progress in the past quarter on several long-standing issues that have soured relations between the IAEA and Tehran, including Iran's barring of IAEA inspectors specialized in enrichment and Iran's failure to explain uranium traces at undeclared sites, the reports showed. At the same time, the Islamic Republic has added cascades, or clusters, of centrifuges — the machines that refine uranium — at its main enrichment sites in Natanz and Fordow.

## **True Warning**

By Nadav Eyal

- **Yair Lapid testified this week to the civilian commission of inquiry into the October 7 debacle. The opposition chairperson probably had no choice. The entire project is a symbol of the impotence of the Israeli public institutions. The necessity of forming a state commission of inquiry after the greatest disaster in the country's history is self-evident. We shouldn't need a "civilian" committee. But it was not formed. Netanyahu fears and detests state commissions of inquiry. He is a commission rejectionist. What is happening now is what has been happening throughout this war, from assistance to businesses struggling to survive to the memorial ceremony to the commission of inquiry: when the government does not step up, the citizens do. And the opposition chairperson decided that he could not refuse to testify and could not hide information. His testimony was dramatic. Its main details were reported.**
- **In essence, Lapid explained why he gave a statement to the media in which he warned of a regional deterioration. Everything that he said at the time, at the end of September 2023, weeks before the Hamas invasion, deserves to be reported. "I am forced to warn Israel's citizens—we are dangerously close to a violent, multi-theater clash. My media team recommended that I not hold a news conference and I said to them that I need to give warning—a very serious and immediate security threat is not being given attention. I told them that they don't see the intelligence that I see, that it is my public duty to warn the public of a clear and immediate danger.**
- **In his testimony, Lapid talked about several briefings that he had been given, one of them together with Prime Minister Netanyahu—a briefing given by the prime ministers military secretary, Maj. Gen. Avi Gil. All of them warned of a regional deterioration, of Israel's situation worsening in all the theaters, that Israel had no deterrence or that its deterrence had greatly weakened against Hamas and Hizbullah. The backdrop, of course, was the judicial coup. Israel's enemies had the sense that Israeli society was being torn apart because of Minister Levin's initiative with Netanyahu's participation. That it was weak. Details can be reported this morning about these briefings and about Lapid's testimony referring to them, particularly a conversation with GSS Director Ronen Bar on the eve of the Knesset vote on grounds of reasonableness. The vote was on July 24, 2023.**
- **A day before, Bar asked to speak with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and was told he could. This is how their conversation began. The GSS director told Netanyahu: I am hereby giving you today warning of war. I cannot say the exact day and hour. But this is a warning. Bar's position was clear. Our enemies spot weakness. We must broadcast broad national consensus to the region to avert the possibility of war. Bar has no connection to Hizbullah. As GSS director, he is responsible for the Palestinian theater. At that time, the primary concern of the security establishment, it should be stressed, was of two scenarios: Hizbullah starting a war in the north and the West Bank joining, or the other way around—the West Bank exploding in a third Intifada and the other theaters joining in.**

- **But it makes no difference; Bar gave warning of war. Not of a raid or of a terror attack, not of an Intifada. Bar received the permission and blessing of the prime minister to meet with the opposition chairperson. He told him the same thing: “I hereby give you today warning of war. We do not know the day or the time that it will erupt.”; Lapid asked Bar: “;Did you tell this to the prime minister?”; Bar said yes. Seventy-six days later, Hamas invaded Israel and 77 days later, Hizbullah began its attack on northern Israel. None of this diminishes the responsibility of the IDF and the GSS for the failure. They are supposed to give precise warning of war (or of a large-scale Palestinian action). They are supposed to be prepared. And they failed terribly.**
- **At the same time, in a functional country, the supreme responsibility is that of the leader and the government. The moment the words “; warning of war”; were uttered, several steps should have been taken. Prime Minister Netanyahu can pretend that there was no shortcoming on his part, that there are no questions that he must answer. But his responsibility will not vanish or fade. It will be there forever. The Prime Minister’s Bureau issued a statement: “Prime Minister Netanyahu did not receive warning of a war in Gaza—not on the date mentioned and not a moment before 06:29 on October 7. It was just the opposite. All the security officials explicitly made it clear—as the minutes of the meetings on the eve of the war show—that Hamas was deterred and wished to reach an arrangement. Furthermore, a few days before October 7, the GSS assessment was that stability in the Gaza Strip was expected to be maintained over time”; The statement noted that the prime minister had not received a warning of war in Gaza. It did not deny that the GSS director told Netanyahu that he was giving him a warning of war.**

## **Making a Discovery**

By Ben Caspit

- Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his wife met with hostages who had returned from Gaza captivity last week. Extensive quotes and recordings from the conversation were made available to Channel 12. The couple's disconnect and narcissism flew like a sick black flag over the event in which Netanyahu compared the hostages' suffering in captivity to that he endured in the army, and his wife even complained about, "the lies they've been telling about her" since marrying her beloved. What caught my eye was something Netanyahu said in the course of the conversation: "What's become clearest to us is, and to you too – we understand there's an annihilation program against us. Iran wants to annihilate us. It wants to destroy and conquer the country. It wants to rain down an inferno on us, to destroy us." "This is what has become clearest to us, and to you too," he said.
- Were it not backed up by a clear recording, I wouldn't have believed he said this. Even he, who struggles to get a single word of truth out his mouth. So what Netanyahu, this has been made clear to you now? You've suddenly discovered that Iran wants to destroy us? You? But us too? You said, "This is what has become clearest to us, and to you too." So, as for us, you're mistaken. This was made clear to us long ago. Around 20 years ago. You know when it started becoming clear to us? When you started talking about it in speeches, endless speeches, replete with details, punchlines, visual descriptions and tactical aids. It became clear to us years ago. You were among those making the matter most clear.
- Your predecessors also spoke about it, along with the select few briefly replacing you since becoming prime minister. Anyone spending 15 minutes here know this. The suffocating ring of fire that Iran has built up around us for generations is very well known to us. What hasn't been clear to us until now is: What have you done to prevent it? What measures have you taken to avert the threat? No, I don't mean speeches, I mean actual measures. I wasn't at the meeting and I hope you turned pale when you said that it has become clear to all of us. You don't turn pale when you lie. You do turn pale inadvertently speaking a word of truth. And the truth is simple: The Iranians have been building this ring of fire around us in front of your eyes.
- All you've done is give speeches. The "containment" policy is your own creation. Instructions to the IDF to contain Nasrallah's military build-up on the border came from you. The Qatari cash funding Hamas came from you. You sold the public on your being "Mr. Security." You explained that, "When terrorism smells weakness, it raises its head against us and when it encounters strength, it folds" as you're folding like origami in the face of everything that has raised its head against us. And now, with the south destroyed and the north deserted and bombed, you discover "what has become clearest to us." I interviewed Brig. Gen. Hasson Hasson, a true Israeli hero, in 2012 for the Ma'ariv weekend supplement. One of the IDF's most decorated generals, who spent many years facing the enemy, was very concerned.

- Here is the first question I posed, and the first response he gave: Why are you concerned? On the face of it, the security calm is unprecedented. The IDF is operating freely against Iran entrenchment in Syria, and Hizbullah is quiet. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank are relatively quiet. “This is only appearances. Iranian strategy hasn’t changed. Quite the reverse. They’re only making progress. Their resolve is still there and hasn’t budged a millimeter. They’re striving to turn the whole world Shiite and starting with the Middle East. They have a structured and organized plan, and nothing, not even our activities, will stop them. This is the reality on the ground.” In this extensive and comprehensive interview, Hasson described the entire Iranian ring of fire: in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, on the tripoint Israel-Jordan-Syria border – where not? He talked about the Israeli policy of containment.
- He warned. Shortly before this, as Hizbullah terrorists crossed the border and attacked the Israeli Gladiola outpost, our soldiers were ordered to shoot near their legs and drive them away—not to kill them. When I asked the IDF where this defeatism was coming from, they hinted that these were instructions from the political echelon. “They want calm” someone told me. “The B&Bs are full, the public is happy. They don’t want to set fire to the theater.” This was Netanyahu’s policy. When he returned to government in 2022, things reached actual boiling point when three Hizbullah tents with armed men were discovered on the Israeli side of the Blue Line. What did Netanyahu do? Nothing. Nothing at all. It’s now “become clear” to him that they’ve been building a ring of fire around us.
- Or, as his wife says, “If no one tells him anything, how could he know?” Or as he himself told the Mt. Meron disaster commission of inquiry, “There were thousands of safety hazards. If they’d have told me a terrible disaster would occur, I’d have dealt with it... If they’d have caught me by my coattails and told me a terrible disaster would happen – I’d have addressed it.” The problem is that on the matter of the Iranian ring of fire, he caught himself by his own coattails. He went on and on about it for years, and he’s now claiming he didn’t know. So that’s it’s perfectly clear to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, here are few more things happening on this front. If you go over intelligence briefings you’re given, you know. But it’s not just intelligence.
- Everything I write here has been published. Some of these things have been said by Avigdor Lieberman (who also provided a chilling warning about what could be expected from Gaza on the eve of October 7), who has recently been talking about implementing the Iranian “annihilation plan.” Many more details are constantly disseminated in Arabic on Telegram and WhatsApp accounts of terrorist elements, Shiite militia etc. Iran and Hizbullah have taken over CERS [Centre D’Etudes et de Recherches Scientifiques], effectively the Syrian military industry – a bit like Rafael. Assad stepped back and handed over the keys to Nasrallah’s people and the Revolutionary Guard. CERS manufactures chemical weapons, and the systems to make missiles accurate and other weapons. This is a strategic military buildup incident that Israel mustn’t accept. Furthermore, according to foreign reports, a tunnel system is currently being built leading from the Damascus International Airport to various storage and concealment sites across the country to “bypass” IAF bombings.



- In recent years, and with the use of detailed intelligence, Israel can bomb arms and game-changing means flown to Damascus, and from there onto trucks destined for Beirut. This network of tunnels will grant Nasrallah immunity from being hit by Israel and will speed up his military buildup. These shipments will soon be able to go underground immediately after being unloaded from the planes and disappear from Israel's watchful eyes. Iran and Hizbullah have recently been using the Assad regime's "spice route," one of which's centers for smuggling guns and weapons being the tripoint Jordan-Syria-Israel border. This is about smuggling standard explosive devices, shoulder-held and anti-tank missiles and further weapons through Jordan and into Judea and Samaria where they are used against our forces and civilians.
- This is a drug-smuggling network that has been financially supporting the Assad regime for many years, that is now being used to spread terror against Israel that meanwhile is taking no action and is sufficing with military operations in Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarm rather than cutting it down at its roots. The Shiite militia that Iran has tried concentrating in Iraq and Syria for the day orders are given against Israel, have recently kicked off extensive, largest-ever ground operations. This occurred in the Dir ez-Zor area beyond the border at Abu Kamal. Syrian special commando units are also training in the area. The goal is to prepare this force of tens of thousands of Shiite (non-Iranian) soldiers to attack the Golan Heights and when a conflict develops between Israel and Hizbullah on the Lebanese border decoying Israel from its primary efforts to a secondary sector. What's Netanyahu doing against all of this? Mainly giving speeches. As usual. When he should have dealt Hizbullah a severe blow in the early hours of Sunday morning, Netanyahu went for the "easy" option offered him by the army and even that, he ordered to water down and reduce at the moment, so that the theater wouldn't, Heaven forbid, ignite. I am not in a position to make calls regarding military and operational decisions in this case. I just look at the dry statistics over the years. The man is the very negative of his speeches. He's a weak coward, who has been "containing" throughout his career. And we are now paying the price.