



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Friday, August 9*

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# News Excerpts

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## I24 News

### **Netanyahu 'Deeply Sorry' for October 7 Attack**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voiced his deep regret for the October 7 attack on Israel, speaking to TIME magazine in an article. "Apologize? Of course, of course. I am sorry, deeply, that something like this happened," he told the magazine. "And you always look back and you say, could we have done things that would have prevented it?" This comes as Israel is preparing with the United States and other allies for an expected Iranian attack, in conjunction with Iranian proxies in the region, most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon. "We're facing not merely Hamas," Netanyahu said. "We're facing a full-fledged Iranian axis, and we understand that we have to organize ourselves for broader defense." Regarding his wartime goals in the Gaza Strip, he vowed to "completely destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities."

## Axios

### **Israel to Send Delegation to 'Finalize' Cease-Fire Deal**

Israel says that it will send a negotiating team to Doha or Cairo on August 15, after the US, Qatar and Egypt announced that the framework for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and a hostages-for-prisoners deal is "now on the table." In a joint statement, President Joe Biden, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Qatar's Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani said that "only the details of implementation [are] left to conclude." "It is time to bring immediate relief both to the long-suffering people of Gaza as well as the long-suffering hostages and their families," the leaders said in their joint statement.

## Reuters

### **Israel Kills 40 in Gaza Airstrikes Amid Fears of Wider War**

Israeli forces stepped up airstrikes across the Gaza Strip, killing at least 40 people, Palestinian medics said, in further battle with Hamas-led militants as Israel braced for potential wider war in the region. Israeli airstrikes hit a cluster of houses in central Gaza's Al-Bureij camp, killing at least 15 people, and the nearby Al-Nuseirat camp killed four. Nuseirat and Bureij are among the densely populated enclave's eight historic camps and are seen by Israel as strongholds of armed militants. Israeli aircraft also bombed a house in the heart of Gaza City in the north, killing five Palestinians, while another airstrike in Khan Younis killed one person. 15 Palestinians were killed and 30 injured in Israeli bombings of two schools east of Gaza City. The Israeli military said it struck Hamas command and control centers embedded in the Abdel-Fattah Hamouda and Al-Zahra schools in the Tuffah neighborhood. Hamas-led militants set off the Gaza war on Oct. 7 last year with a shock, cross-border rampage into Israeli communities, killing 1,200 Israelis and seizing 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Since then, at least 39,699 Palestinians have been killed, and 91,722 injured in Israel's devastating air and ground war in Gaza, the Gaza health ministry said.

## **Party Formed to Repeal Disengagement Law in Gush Katif**

An Israeli party was formed to repeal the disengagement law in Gush Katif, and a bill proposal on the matter will be submitted at the opening of the next Knesset session. The party, which was given the name "Civil Parliamentary Working Group," was formed by Knesset Members Amit Halevi and Ariel Kallner from Likud, Member of Knesset Zvi Sukkot from the Religious Zionism party, and Samaria Regional Council head Yossi Dagan. [The disengagement law](#), approved in 2005, led to the dismantlement of the Gush Katif settlement in the Gaza Strip. This new bill to be proposed follows the law passed in March repealing the disengagement in northern Samaria.

## **Israel Strips Norway's PA Diplomats of Status**

Foreign Minister Israel Katz announced that Israel is canceling the diplomatic status of Norway's representatives to the Palestinian Authority in response to Oslo's recognition of a Palestinian state and decision to join South Africa in its lawsuit against Israel at the International Criminal Court. Katz made the government's position unequivocal, warning that "those who attack us and pursue a unilateral policy against us will pay a price." The eight Norwegian diplomats tasked with representing their country's interests vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority will now have their entry permits revoked within the next seven days. They will be forced to decide whether to remain in Tel Aviv in a bid to mend Israel-Norway relations or return home. In summoning the head of the Norwegian Embassy in Israel, the Foreign Ministry delivered a diplomatic note informing Norway of the punitive measures. According to the ministry, the new policy will be implemented immediately, stripping the eight diplomats of their diplomatic status and severing their connection to the PA.

## **US Sends Stern Warning to Iran Against Attacking Israel**

The US sent a stern warning to Iran against attacking Israel directly, the Wall Street Journal reported. In the message, Washington said the Iranian economy could suffer a devastating blow. "The warning has been communicated directly to Tehran as well as through intermediaries," the paper said, quoting an official who declined to provide specific. The Biden administration has been working to discourage Iran and its proxies and Israel, from escalating the crisis and risking regional war. At the same time, the US has been working toward reaching a cease-fire and hostage release deal with Hamas in Gaza. The Americans made clear to Iran that it would use force to defend Israel against an attack as it did in April when Iran attacked in response to the killing of an Iranian senior official in Syria. [CENTCOM](#) said that the US Air Force moved stealth F-22 fighter jets to the Middle East as part of the preparations for Iran's strike. CENTCOM commander Michael Kurilla was in Israel for the third time in a week, to meet with Israeli security officials. [Dig Deeper "Iran Defiant as World Powers Work to Avert Retaliation Against Israel" \(AI-Monitor\)](#)

Reuters

## **US Strikes at Houthi Targets After Claim of Attack on Destroyers**

US military forces have struck at targets in Houthi-controlled Yemen in the past 24 hours, destroying two drones, a Houthi ground control station, and three anti-ship cruise missiles, CENTCOM said. The Iran-aligned Houthi movement said it had attacked a container ship in the Red Sea and two US destroyers in the Gulf of Aden. CENTCOM said in a statement on the US strikes: "These weapons presented a clear and imminent threat to US and coalition forces, and merchant vessels in the region." It said this "reckless and dangerous behavior" by the Houthis threatened regional stability, but it gave no further details and did not confirm that any US vessels had been attacked. CENTCOM is the US military command that covers the Middle East. Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree said earlier that the Houthi air force had launched drones against the US destroyer Cole and fired a number of ballistic missiles at the US destroyer Laboon. The Liberia-flagged container ship Contship Ono was also targeted with ballistic missiles and drones, he said. Contships Management in Athens told Reuters the vessel had not been hit and its crew were safe. A US official said there was no data or information to corroborate the Houthis' claim that the two warships had been attacked. The Houthi militants have carried out repeated drone and missile strikes on ships in the crucial shipping channels of the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden since November to show their support for Palestinians in the Gaza war.

Times of Israel

## **Syria Says Four Troops Hurt in Alleged Israeli Strike**

Syrian state media reported that four soldiers were wounded by an Israeli strike in central Syria, citing a military statement. The statement said the strike also caused "material losses," without further elaborating. Reports claimed that explosions were heard at the Shayrat Airbase in Homs. Israel has not commented on the alleged strike, which came nearly a week after a reported Israeli attack on a Hezbollah convoy crossing into Lebanon near the Syrian border village of Hawsh al-Sayyid Ali, which is around 20 miles southwest of Homs. Israel has been carrying out airstrikes inside Syria since the outbreak of that country's civil war in 2011, mainly targeting attempts to transfer weapons to the Iran-backed Hezbollah or to keep Iranian fighters themselves from gaining a foothold near Israel's border. Hezbollah has been exchanging near-daily fire with Israel since it started launching attacks from Lebanon a day after its Palestinian ally Hamas's terror onslaught, which sparked the war in Gaza. The Lebanese terror group is currently threatening to retaliate for the Israeli airstrike last month that killed its top military commander Fuad Shukr, with Israel on high alert as it braces for the potential attack. [Read More](#)  
["Syria Military Chief Allows Iranian Drones to Strike Israel Without Assad's Knowledge"](#)  
["Security Cabinet Convenes in Underground Bunker as Iran Attack Looms"](#) (Ynet News)

## **The Iranian Coalition**

By Smadar Peri

- On Monday, five days after the assassination of Ismail Haniya, Sergei Shoigu, the secretary general of Russia's Security Council, arrived for a series of meetings in Tehran. As per protocol, he met with the new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, and then immediately held closed-door meetings with Rear Admiral Ali Akbar Ahmadian, a very senior Revolutionary Guard officer, and with other security officials whose identity was not disclosed. Shoigu's goal was to inform his Iranian interlocutors that the "revenge operation" for the assassination of its guest from Hamas should not, because of the risks involved, be disproportionate given the risk of setting the Middle East on fire. Iran unsuccessfully tried to frame the Russian secretary general's appearance as a routine visit, as part of a round of meetings after the new Iranian president had assumed office.
- But Russia was quick to make it clear that the senior Russian envoy had delivered an unequivocal message to Iran: we don't want the response to Haniya's assassination to be disproportionate. President Putin, who deliberately refrained from commenting after Haniya's assassination and did not criticize Israel, sent Shoigu to Iran with warnings that its response must not ignite a regional war. It is important to note that Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE all remained silent. It was Jordan that decided to do something: a day before Shoigu's arrival, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi arrived in Tehran. After more than 20 years in which no senior Jordanian official had visited Tehran, Safadi's message was clear and unequivocal: Remember that Jordan is a neutral country, the Jordanian foreign minister told his host, the acting Iranian foreign minister, Ali Bagheri (no foreign minister has been formally appointed yet). Don't involve us (as you did two months ago) in your war with Israel.
- A few hours after the explosion that killed Haniya and his Palestinian bodyguard in the official guesthouse in Tehran, a first work meeting was held by the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. The leaders of the various branches—the Revolutionary Guard, the Quds Force, the Air Force and the two intelligence agencies—were invited to raise ideas for a "harsh response." The round of meetings lasted four days, and on each day a different group presented its proposals to Khamenei and his senior advisers. At the same time, foreign envoys, whom Nasrallah described as "the idiot messengers" in his speech—began to arrive, effectively confirming American media reports about a series of messengers who left for Beirut for meetings with "people affiliated with Hizbullah."
- Two of them relayed messages to Iran: beware of a regional war because Israel is prepared and ready to strike back. The envoys, according to sources in Beirut, "recommended" attacking buildings either in Israel or overseas, on condition that they were empty. The Iranians, so it was learned, said that civilians had been involved in both attacks—the one that caused Fuad Shukr's death in Beirut and the one that caused Ismail Haniya's death in Tehran. Nobody knows for now whether Iran intends to execute its "revenge operation" exclusively on its own, taking lone action against Israel, or whether secret cooperation is currently being woven between Iran and its proxies: Hizbullah, the

Houthis in Yemen who said they wished to be part of a revenge plan, and Islamic Jihad and Hamas, which announced that they would enlist to fire missiles at Israel in a timetable set by Iran.

- Tehran, so it emerges, is good at listening and gathering information, but the final decision, as always, is in the hands of the ruler, Khamenei. It was interesting to learn that Washington and Moscow have a similar view of the Iranian “operation.” Neither has spared an effort to warn the Iranians about Israel’s response to its response, saying that “Bibi is definitely liable to go crazy.” Tehran received a reminder this week about Netanyahu and his so-called “Iran syndrome,” who now has, according to information on Khamenei’s desk, two objectives: to continue to prosecute the war in Gaza until Sinwar’s death and to respond very powerfully and strongly in the event of a “disproportionate” Iranian strike on Israel.

## **Assessment: Chances for a Deal are Increasing**

By Shirit Avitan Cohen

- **When Hamas launched the war on October 7, it was planning to carry out a three-stage attack. The first stage: was murder, conquest, and destruction in the Gaza periphery in the early hours of the operation. The second stage focused on defense: for ten months, the IDF worked vigorously to dismantle Hamas battalions while Hamas tries to maintain its power underground, reserving battalions for when they are needed and fighting above ground using limited forces. The third stage is the stage of saving Sinwar—kidnapping civilians on October 7 was to have been his card to get out of the tunnels, a mass-release of Palestinian prisoners and the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. From his perspective, this was supposed to have been the moment the October 7 massacre was crowned a success. This analysis is known to quite a few senior officials in the security establishment and at the top of the political echelon, against which it is trying to prosecute a long campaign, as well as getting the hostages back without being extras in Sinwar’s play.**
- **The IDF is working to achieve the goals of the war in Gaza with operational plans that enable Hamas to survive from a civilian-administrative aspect as well as a terror organization, even if without military capabilities. The entry and exit of the IDF from combat sites enable the enemy to regroup and exact a price from Israel. Open criticism by senior officials in the defense establishment has not led to a change among the policymakers so far; as a result, this war, within the limits of the plans, is not nearing an end. That said, the political leadership believes that the conditions are ripe for a deal and that Sinwar will accede to Israeli pressure, including in the matter of the Philadelphi Corridor. Senior officials in the Biden administration are optimistic for the first time in a long time that a deal will be reached to release the hostages and a ceasefire in Gaza for a limited time.**
- **The more pressure builds on Sinwar as a result of the assassination of Haniya and pushes him into a corner—that will be the moment a deal will be signed to release living hostages. Hamas, which had hoped up to now that Israel would be the side facing pressure, is discovering that the United States is busy at the moment putting together a defensive coalition to defend the Jewish state. Israeli officials discern unprecedented momentum for a deal. The first stage would allow for the return of civilian hostages. As for the second stage—renewed warfare or the return of captive IDF soldiers—no one is prepared to commit. This is also the reason Netanyahu is demanding holding onto the means of pressure for future use, including the Philadelphi Corridor and a resumption of the fighting with a clear American guarantee. As reported last week, at the moment Hamas can buy itself weeks without war without giving up hostages—this formula needs to be updated. Even though a ceasefire now serves both the Democrats (just before elections) and Israel, the approach of senior right-wing officials in Israel (in favor of waiting for changes in the White House and a friendlier administration), the decision of**



possibly resuming the war must be solely an Israeli decision, without the involvement of any other international entity.

- The transition period that will be created by the deal would allow both for the return of the hostages and the choice of a more convenient time for the war with Hizbullah, and apparently also with the snakehead, when Republicans who have a more amenable approach to Israel are in the White House. At least, that is what senior government officials believe when they look towards the November elections as a point that could change the course of things in the Middle East. Of course, this is only if Trump, who is currently lagging behind in the polls, is elected president; even if that does happen, he won't take office for nearly six months. A senior minister told us in the last week that messages regarding normalization with Saudi Arabia had been conveyed by Donald Trump and his people to senior officials in Israel. They said the momentum for normalization with the approval of both houses in Congress had passed because of the upcoming elections.
- The Republicans will no longer be ready to sign onto a deal that would win Biden praise; in light of the ongoing war in Gaza, it seems that Israel, too, isn't concerned about waiting a bit longer. Until then? An attack by Hizbullah is a done deal, Israel believes, and is only a matter of time. The political and security leadership is planning a response that is proportional to the results of the attack, and not according to its actual execution. This is the same equation that enabled 20 years of mortar shell and rocket fire at the Gaza periphery communities without destroying Hamas's capabilities. Those overseeing the war have yet to drop this preconception. But this time it will be difficult to see how the suffering residents of the north will agree to return to their homes after a deal of any kind is signed with a terror organization that retains its capabilities. While Israeli leaders make plans, it is the citizens who continue to suffer.