



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

IDF Launches Renewed Offensive on Jabaliya

The IDF announced that Israeli forces stationed at the Philadelphi Corridor in the southern Gaza Strip have redeployed to Jabaliya, following intelligence that Hamas is attempting to rearm and reorganize in the Palestinian enclave's north. "Following prior IDF intelligence, an ongoing situational assessment, and IDF activity in the field that all indicated the presence of terrorists and terror infrastructure in the area of Jabaliya in the northern Gaza Strip, as well as efforts by Hamas to rebuild its operational capabilities in the area, the 162nd Division began operating in the Jabaliya area," the IDF said in a statement. "The troops of the 401st Brigade and the 460th Brigade have successfully encircled the area and are currently continuing to operate in the area," it added. The IDF added that during the operation "the IAF struck dozens of military targets in order to assist ground troops. Among the targets struck were weapons storage facilities, underground infrastructure sites, terrorist cells, and military infrastructure sites.

Ha'aretz

Netanyahu to Discuss Transferring Aid Responsibility to IDF

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will soon convene a meeting to address the demands of Ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir regarding the transfer of responsibility for humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip to the Israeli army. The discussion will involve political and security officials and will feature detailed plans for this transfer. These plans include procurement, transportation, security, and distribution of aid. This initiative has raised concerns among senior defense officials, who warn that assigning responsibility to the IDF could jeopardize soldiers' safety and impose billions of shekels in costs on the defense budget. With the IDF's incursion into Rafah in southern Gaza, international organizations, including the UN, have struggled to continue delivering aid to the region.

Jerusalem Post

Sinwar Silent with Mediators, Surrounded with Hostages

Hamas's chief Yahya Sinwar has disappeared and is no longer communicating with Qatari mediators, Qatari officials involved in the hostage deal negotiations told hostages' families last week, according to an exclusive N12 report. The officials also told the families that they believed Sinwar surrounded himself with hostages. "Sinwar is currently not communicating with us. He has disappeared for us too and has not made contact," the officials were cited as saying by the Israeli news outlet, adding that due to the eliminations, Sinwar had ceased to communicate via phones. Sinwar is communicating through "paper and pen," officials reportedly claimed, adding that there was no evidence that the Hamas leader was killed.

Reuters

Hamas Says Israel Still Blocking Ceasefire Agreement

A year since the start of the war in Gaza, Israel is still blocking a ceasefire agreement despite Hamas' flexibility, Hamas chief negotiator and deputy Gaza chief Khalil Al-Hayya said in a speech shown on Hamas' Aqsa television. Arab mediators Qatar and Egypt, backed by the United States, have so far failed to end disputes between the two warring sides and broker a ceasefire agreement that would end the war and see the release of Israeli and foreign hostages held in Gaza as well as many Palestinians jailed by Israel. Hayya said that despite the flexibility on a ceasefire deal shown by Hamas, Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government continued to stall and undermine talks. Israel and Hamas have traded blame for the failure so far to reach an agreement, with each accusing the other of making conditions that are impossible to meet. Hayya said the group was not prepared to make concessions on its demands that Israel end the war, pull out its forces from Gaza, return internally displaced residents to their homes, and strike a prisoners-for-hostages deal. Hayya accused the world of double standards over Gaza and Lebanon, which he said would lead to more disruption and instability in the region.

Times of Israel

Officials Warn PM That Hostages' Conditions Are Dire

Israeli security officials warned Prime Minister Netanyahu that there has been a steady decline in the amount of intelligence being gathered on the 101 people still held captive in Gaza but that it is nevertheless clear the conditions in which they are held have deteriorated significantly. The information was relayed to Netanyahu during a discussion on the plight of the hostages on the eve of the first anniversary of the October 7 Hamas onslaught in southern Israel, when some 1,200 people were slaughtered and 251 were seized as hostages. The discussion was attended by heads of security agencies, several government ministers and the government's hostage point man Gal Hirsch. security officials reiterated the grim estimation first shared last month that around half of the hostages are still alive but that those who have survived until now are experiencing steadily worsening conditions. Defense officials also warned Netanyahu and others at the meeting that Hamas has ordered those guarding hostages to execute them if they feel the army is getting close

I24 News

Casualties Reported as Haifa Struck by Hezbollah Rockets

Casualties were reported in the northern Israeli city of Haifa after air defenses failed to intercept a barrage of Hezbollah rockets. Footage taken by Haifa residents showed a street in the northern coastal city was damaged by direct impact. Five people were wounded in the rocket impact in Haifa, Rambam Hospital says. It says one of the victims is listed in good-to-moderate condition, and the other four are lightly hurt. All five were hit by shrapnel, according to the hospital. Rambam says none of them are in a life-threatening condition. One more person was taken to the hospital for acute anxiety. [Read More "IDF Strikes 150 Hezbollah Targets in 24 Hours; Rocket Attack Wounds Man in North" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Fresh Israeli Strikes Hit South Beirut

Official Lebanese media reported four Israeli strikes on south Beirut shortly after calls by Israel's army for residents to evacuate the Hezbollah stronghold which has been bombarded for several days. "Enemy warplanes launched two strikes on the southern suburbs; the first targeted the Saint Therese area, and the second targeted the Burj al-Barajneh area," Lebanon's National News Agency said. The NNA later reported two additional strikes, including one it described as "violent." Israeli warplanes hit targets belonging to Hezbollah's intelligence headquarters in Beirut, the statement added. They had also hit "Hezbollah weapons storage facilities in the area of Beirut," reporting secondary explosions after the strikes "indicating the presence of weaponry." The southern suburbs were hit by more than 30 strikes, the NNA said, in one of the most intense barrages yet. Lebanon's Hezbollah movement and its foe Israel have been exchanging near-daily cross-border fire for nearly a year in fallout from the Gaza war. But since September 23, Israel has launched devastating air strikes on targets in Lebanon that have killed more than 1,110 people and forced more than one million to flee their homes. Israel last week killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in south Beirut, a densely populated area, before residents fled Israel's intensifying bombardment.

Reuters

Iran's Quds Force Chief Out of Contact Since Beirut Strikes

Iran's Quds Force commander [Esmail Qaani](#), who traveled to Lebanon after the killing last month of Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in an Israeli airstrike, has not been heard from since strikes on Beirut late last week, two senior Iranian security officials said. One of the officials said Qaani was in Beirut's southern suburbs, known as the Dahiyeh, during a strike that was reported to have targeted senior Hezbollah official Hashem Safieddine, but the official said he was not meeting Safieddine. A Hezbollah official said Israel was not allowing a search for Safieddine to progress after it bombed Beirut's southern suburbs. The officials said the group would only announce Safieddine's fate when the search concluded. Safieddine is seen as a likely successor to Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli strike on Dahiyeh on Sept. 27. The Iranian official said Iran and Hezbollah had not been able to contact Qaani, named by Tehran as the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps' overseas military-intelligence service, or Quds Force after the United States assassinated his predecessor Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike in Baghdad in 2020.

Israel Is in a Regional War

By David Rosenberg

- If wars were measured solely by their economic impact, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could have long ago proclaimed "total victory." The Gaza Strip is in ruins, the West Bank's economy is shattered and Lebanon's is reeling under the Israeli onslaught of the past three weeks. If or when it ever declares victory, the word "pyrrhic" will never be uttered by the Prime Minister's Office. But in economic terms, it would be no less apt an adjective than "total." As of June 30, the Israeli economy is about 1.5 percent smaller than a year earlier because it has yet to fully recover from the collapse of the war's first few weeks. The country's credit rating has been cut by all three agencies: Moody's, S&P and Fitch. Exports and investment are down, supply constraints are boosting inflation, and the mushrooming bill for the war will take years to pay off.
- And the damage continues to grow. S&P Global, the last of the credit rating agencies to act, expects the Israeli economy to achieve zero growth in 2024 and 2.2 percent growth in 2025, less than half its previous estimate. In per capita terms, gross domestic product will shrink this year and increase just 0.2 percent in 2025, according to S&P. The high-tech sector is still in the doldrums, with fundraising down 20 percent in the third quarter from the second quarter, according to IVC Research Center. Did it have to be this bad? There are two factors to take into consideration – one is whether the war had to go on this long, and the other is whether the government could have better managed the economic impact of the conflict. It was obvious from the outset that the Gaza war was not going to be like the others with Hamas, which lasted for no more than a few weeks. October 7 taught Israel that Hamas could no longer be contained – it had to be defeated, and Hezbollah no less so because it posed a similar threat. That would necessarily entail a longer and more costly war, but how much longer and how costly first and foremost depended on Israeli leaders.
- The government has been calling for "total" victory. For Netanyahu, that appears to mean a victory that would erase the stain on his career from October 7 and allow him to keep his job as prime minister. For his far-right partners, victory means the reoccupation and resettlement of Gaza to erase the "stain" of the 2005 withdrawal. One year into the fighting, their ideas of victory remain elusive, and so the war goes on with no end in sight. Israel's leaders could have chosen to take a broader view of the war and its goals, in particular, its impact on the economy and Israel's international standing. They could have set for themselves reasonable military goals, such as ensuring Hamas would be so weakened militarily that it would be unable to stage another October 7 and setting up mechanisms for governing and rebuilding Gaza when the fighting was over. If they had, it is quite possible that victory in Gaza could have been proclaimed months ago and attention redirected to Lebanon early enough that on October 7, 2024, we might have been marking the anniversary of a conflict that was over. The hit to the economy of a shorter war would have been serious, but it would have been a lot less and the recovery would already be underway.

- On the second issue of economic management, one need only look at how Netanyahu treats his defense and finance ministers. Even though he keeps threatening to fire him for purely political reasons, the fact is the prime minister has kept Yoav Gallant in his job because he realizes that the country cannot be without an experienced and capable defense minister, certainly when Israel is on the precipice of war with Iran. War-time Israel also needs an experienced and capable (and full-time) finance minister, but Netanyahu is content to let the inexperienced and indifferent Bezalel Smotrich remain at his job. Unlike Gallant, who has no voter base and contributes nothing to keeping the coalition together, Smotrich is critical to Netanyahu politically.
- Twenty years ago, Netanyahu launched unprecedented economic reforms; he once prided himself on being Mr. Economy no less than Mr. Security. Today, the economy comes in a distant second to political calculations. So, despite a swelling fiscal deficit, a 2025 budget-making process composed of smoke and mirrors, a string of credit downgrades and accelerating inflation at a time when the rest of the world's inflation is falling, Smotrich's job remains safe. For the world economy, the war has barely registered a blip on the screen. Outside the war zone of Israel, the West Bank/Gaza and Lebanon, the only countries that have felt its impact are Egypt (due to lost Suez Canal revenues as a result of Houthi attacks on maritime trade) and Jordan (whose foreign trade has also been hurt by Houthi attacks). A war with Iran could change all that. If Israel retaliates for last week's Iranian missile barrage by striking at Iranian oil facilities, the world could lose four million barrels of oil a day, or about 4 percent of the world total. Just hitting Iranian exports – which militarily wouldn't be hard to do since 90 percent of Iranian exports go through a single massive terminal at Kharg Island – would reverberate across the globe since about half of Iranian production is exported.
- ClearView Energy Partners, a consulting firm, estimates that an attack on Iran could raise oil prices by \$13 a barrel. That's up from the \$78 a barrel for benchmark Brent crude after oil prices began rising last week after Netanyahu vowed retaliation. It could be worse if Tehran (or its Houthi proxies) retaliate for an Israeli attack by attacking the oil installations in Saudi Arabia and/or the United Arab Emirates and/or closing the Straits of Hormuz. A fifth of the world's oil passes through that narrow body of water between Iran and the UAE. Members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries are producing about five million barrels a day less oil than they could, so they could ramp up production to replace Iranian petroleum. But it would take time: ClearView says a seven-day interruption in all Gulf exports could raise oil prices by as much as \$28 a barrel.
- Moreover, the extra OPEC capacity is mainly in the Gulf, so if Iran attacked Gulf producers, they might not be able to increase output for some time. An Israeli attack on Iran could easily boomerang back on the Israeli economy by raising the cost of imported petroleum and eventually raising costs for all products due to increased energy costs. It is hard to believe that Iran would choose to strike out at the world economy like that. But Tehran might be gambling that by spreading the pain of the Gaza war to the rest of the world, the United States will get serious about forcing Israel to bring an end to the conflict and bring relief to Iran's proxies. In that scenario, the war would finally come to an end, but at an especially steep price to the Israeli and world economies.

How Israel Should Attack Iran

By Yossi Melman

- It was and remains only a question of when and how, not if. Tuesday evening's barrage of 200 ballistic missiles launched from Iran, which Israel's air force and air defenses blocked amazingly well – with the assistance of the United States, Britain and, according to CNN, Jordan – leaves Israel no choice but to retaliate. On this, there is broad consensus in the governing coalition and in the opposition. US President Joe Biden said Thursday that Israel will not strike back against Iran "today," implying that an Israeli response was only a matter of time. It could take place at any given moment, and though it may tarry, it will certainly come. There are two reasons for the several-day delay. First and foremost was the desire of Israel's government and defense not to ruin Rosh Hashanah – a small consolation for a year that could best be likened to a crazy ride on a roller coaster or a game of Russian roulette.
- There is also a blessing in this delay. When angered, Israel has a tendency to react immediately, to follow the gut instead of the head. Restraint, even if temporary, is actually strength, and it indicates power. It is also a kind of reversal: In the past it was Iran and Hezbollah that did not hasten to respond to Israeli attacks; the waiting period sent Israelis into a panic, leading them to hoard food, remain in their homes or travel abroad.
- Iran is now a mirror image of Israel. According to reports in international media outlets, fear of an Israeli and possibly an American attack has caused many Iranians, especially in the cities of Tehran and Isfahan, to stockpile food and pack go-bags so that they'll be ready to leave their homes at short notice if necessary. The second reason for the delay in Israel's response, and it's good that it's there, is the desire to coordinate actions in advance with the Biden administration. The president, national security adviser Jake Sullivan and other officials sent seemingly contradictory messages to Israel in recent days. A few of them said that Iran's actions would have serious consequences, suggesting that America might join the expected Israeli attack.
- One month before the election, a US attack could actually help Vice President Kamala Harris to demonstrate determination and leadership. It would bolster the eroding American deterrence, restore the United States to superpower status against China and Russia and curb Iran's aggressive efforts to continue consolidating its hegemony in the region. But it is doubtful whether Biden and senior administration officials are ready and willing, in their final months in power, to change their spots in a surprise move. The president and top US officials called on Israel not to strike Iranian nuclear and petroleum facilities. I believe that Israeli decision-makers are agonizing over which targets to hit. The uranium enrichment plants at Natanz and at Fordo are dozens of meters underground. There are a number of important possibilities that Israel must consider. The first is that the attack on Iran's nuclear sites will not succeed or will not cause significant damage. This would be a blow to the reputation of Israel and the Israel Air Force.

- **The second concern is that a too-successful strike could cause radioactive fallout and emissions of hazardous chemicals that would harm tens of thousands of people. An additional concern is that if other strategic targets are chosen, such as petroleum refineries and other gas and oil infrastructure, this would deal a severe blow to Iran's already shaky economy. But it could also cause huge fires that would kill and injure large numbers of people and lead to an ecological disaster. And Israel would be blamed for the resulting spike in world oil prices.**
- **Theoretically, the Israel Defense Forces has three types of weapons at its disposal: warplanes, cyber weapons and, according to foreign publications, also Jericho ballistic missiles, which can carry nuclear warheads. Israel has never admitted that it has these missiles, nor have they been used, so it is reasonable to assume that this weapons system, if it does exist, is "beyond the pale," kept as an ultimate strategic weapon. It therefore appears and is preferable, that Israel's counterattack will involve IAF planes – likely F-35s, to minimize the risk of the planes being shot down and of pilots being killed or captured.**
- **In my opinion, the attack should focus on Revolutionary Guards' targets, such as their main headquarters in Tehran, air force bases, air defense systems and command, control and communication centers, concurrent with a cyberattack that will temporarily paralyze civil infrastructure such as gas stations, rail traffic, ports, power stations and airports. In the last few years, Israel gave Iran a taste of its cyber capability, when it briefly shut down gas stations, train stations and ship traffic to Bandar Abbas port. Israel's response must be measured and considered. The Netanyahu government should make every effort to avoid getting caught up in a long war with Iran, and also think about how it plans to end the wars in Gaza and Lebanon in order to release the hostages and free Israelis from this prolonged nightmare and accumulating economic harm.**