



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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I24 News

HRW Accuses Israel of Forced Displacement in Gaza

Israel is using evacuation orders to pursue the “deliberate and massive forced displacement” of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, according to a report by Human Rights Watch. The watchdog highlights that the policy amounts to crimes against humanity. The United States-based group stated that it collected evidence that suggested “the war crime of forcible transfer [of the civilian population],” describing it as “a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and a crime under the Rome statute of the international criminal court.” The report comes amid mounting evidence that Israel is accelerating its efforts to cut the Gaza Strip in two with a buffer zone and is building new infrastructure to support a prolonged military presence with an increased pace of demolitions and destruction.

Al-Monitor

UN: Israel Warfare in Gaza ‘Consistent with Genocide’

Israel's warfare in Gaza is consistent with the characteristics of genocide, a special UN committee said. The UN Special Committee pointed to "mass civilian casualties and life-threatening conditions intentionally imposed on Palestinians," covering the period from Hamas's deadly October 7, 2023, attack in Israel to July. The committee said Israel's siege, blocking of aid, and targeted attacks and killing of civilians, despite UN and ICJ orders, was "intentionally causing death, starvation and serious injury." Israel's warfare practices in Gaza "are consistent with the characteristics of genocide," the committee said in the first use of the word by the UN. Israel, it said, was "using starvation as a method of war and inflicting collective punishment on the Palestinian population." A UN-backed assessment warned famine was imminent in northern Gaza. The operation had forced 100,000 people to flee northern Gaza for Gaza City and nearby areas, UNRWA spokeswoman Louise Wateridge said.

Times of Israel

Org Calls Out 5 Gaza Schools It Says Are Run by Hamas Men

A Middle East education monitoring group accused the UN Palestinian refugee agency of “deep ties” to Hamas, highlighting in a report the hateful curriculum of five UNRWA schools it said are run by senior Hamas members in the Gaza Strip. The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) said the Palestinian refugee agency “has taken no meaningful steps to address the glorification of violence or antisemitic rhetoric in these schools,” claiming many of its staff members who have participated in Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad activities remain on the payroll. The 71-page report detailed activities at five Gaza schools it said are run by terror group members who are also employed as senior educational officers at UNRWA.

90 Democrats Urge Biden to Sanction Smotrich, Ben-Gvir

Nearly 90 Democrats from both houses of Congress urged President Joe Biden to implement sanctions on far-right Israeli ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir. Their letter represents one final push from a significant portion of the Democratic Party, imploring the Biden administration to take further action against extremist Israeli elements endangering the stability of the region. It comes just over two months before President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House. While several US officials have long advocated for sanctions against the far-right ministers, they have been met with opposition due to concern regarding the precedent-setting nature of imposing sanctions on democratically elected leaders of a US ally. There had been renewed hope among Democrats that Biden would implement such sanctions during his lame-duck period before Trump assumes power alongside political appointees favorable toward Netanyahu and his far-right allies' annexationist aspirations for the West Bank and northern Gaza. Much of that hope dissipated this week, however, when the US declined to suspend offensive arms sales to Israel despite it failing to improve humanitarian aid supplies into Gaza.

Jerusalem Post

US Hands Lebanon Draft Proposal for Ceasefire with Israel

US ambassador to Lebanon Lisa Johnson submitted a draft truce proposal to Lebanon's speaker of parliament Nabih Berri, as part of an intense push to end the IDF-Hezbollah war, two political sources said, without revealing details. There is agreement on certain elements of a deal, but also sharp disagreements over Israel's security demand that the IDF would retain the ability to strike at Hezbollah if necessary to prevent it from rearming. Lebanese officials say that "direct enforcement" by Israel has not been formally floated to Lebanon but that it would be rejected by Beirut. "The idea that Israel can enforce at any time - that is unthinkable," one of the political sources said. Samir Geagea, Hezbollah's fiercest political opponent in Lebanon, said he opposed granting Israel that option but said Lebanon had little power to stop it, especially if an excuse remained in the form of Hezbollah's armed presence.

Ynet News

Israel Strikes Damascus During Iranian Official's Visit

Israel attacked a suburb of Damascus, the official news agency Sanaa reported, saying the attack was on the Al Mazzeh quarter in the west of the capital, adding that there were casualties in the strike on two buildings. The strike took place during a visit of a senior advisor to Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei who is, according to Lebanese media reports, visiting the area on "a special mission." According to the Syrian opposition outlet Voice of the Capital, the attack targeted an apartment in the area and ambulances were seen rushing to the scene. The UK based Observatory for Human Rights, another Syrian opposition group, said that at least three people were killed and at least nine were hurt in the attack.

Reuters

Iran Tells IAEA Chief It Will Negotiate but Not Under Pressure

Iran is willing to resolve outstanding disputes over its nuclear program but won't succumb to pressure, its foreign minister told the UN nuclear watchdog head, as European countries push for diplomacy before Trump's return to the White House. "The ball is in the EU/E3 court," Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi wrote on X following talks in Tehran with IAEA chief Rafael Grossi, referring to three European countries - France, Britain and Germany - which represent the West alongside the United States at nuclear talks. "Willing to negotiate based on our national interest and inalienable rights, but not ready to negotiate under pressure and intimidation," Iranian state media quoted Araqchi as saying. "I hope the other side will adopt a rational policy." A senior Iranian official said that Tehran would send a message to the three European powers through Grossi about Tehran's seriousness to resolve its nuclear standoff while stressing that any pressure on Tehran would have the opposite effect. Diplomats told said that Britain, France and Germany are pushing for a new resolution against Iran by the International Atomic Energy Agency board next week to pressure Tehran over what they view as its poor cooperation.

Al-Monitor

Amnesty: French-Made Military Technology Used in Sudan War

French-made weaponry is being used in Sudan's ongoing civil war, according to a new report released, in what could amount to a violation of the United Nations' arms embargo covering the western Darfur region. Amnesty International published a new report saying it identified French-manufactured military technology incorporated into UAE-made weapons in various parts of Sudan, including in Darfur. Photos and videos shared on social media and verified by Amnesty showed armored vehicles destroyed or captured by the Sudanese army that were made by the Emirati defense contractor Edge Group. The vehicles are equipped with the Galix reactive defense system, which is manufactured in France by Lacroix Defense and KNDS France. The French companies have not responded to Amnesty's request for comment. The London-based watchdog accused the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces of using these weapons in their fight against the Sudanese Armed Forces that has been ongoing since April 2023. Amnesty also called for expanding the arms embargo to the rest of Sudan.

What 'Lame Duck' Biden Can Do to Stop the Gaza War

By Dahlia Scheindlin

- **Six months have passed since US President Joe Biden began advocating for a cease-fire in Gaza. President-elect Donald Trump has also said the war must end. So will Biden use the "lame duck" period ahead of Inauguration Day to take a dramatic step toward ending the war in Gaza? The putative common aim of ending the war is misleading, though, since there are actually two paths to do so: One is by limiting Israel's capacity to wage it; the other is by giving in to Israel's most maximalist goals, in what has long since transformed from a defensive military response to a war of conquest.**
- **The Trump administration could well take the latter path: Trump's former ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, has published his plan to crush Palestinian self-determination forever. Friedman could also play a key role in the next Trump administration. There's no question which path the outgoing Biden administration should take. If Biden wants to assert a coherent Democratic alternative, he needs to admit that bear hugs and bribery have not worked. What's left is to constrain Israel's capacity.**
- **A Democratic policy should anchor a cease-fire in Gaza to a long-term end of the occupation as a whole – this is not a punishment but a service to Palestinians and Israelis alike. Parting policies that advance these aims – limiting Israel's ability to continue its conquest, doubling down to reach a cease-fire or advancing a future of Palestinian independence – should be on the president's lame duck agenda. The following ideas have been swirling around progressive policy circles for months.**
- **Many conversations among American progressives – including some liberal Jews – begin and end with an arms embargo on Israel. This is a straightforward idea that has no bearing with the reality. It can't be pushed through in a lame duck phase but, more than that, it's a nonstarter politically in the United States and for Biden himself. However, there is a much more mainstream and feasible call to apply existing US laws limiting the overwhelming flow of weapons to Israel, when these are employed in severe human rights violations. There is an extremely compelling case for doing so: it's US law.**
- **It's also US policy. In mid-October, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin issued a warning letter giving Israel 30 days to prove its compliance with National Security Memo-20, specifically demanding far more humanitarian aid in northern Gaza. The 30 days expired on Tuesday. According to the United Nations, Israel rejected more humanitarian coordination efforts in October than ever; a group of international nongovernmental organizations found that over 30 days, Israel had failed on all of the US demands.**
- **And yet, before Tuesday was over, the State Department gave Israel the all-clear, finding that it had not violated US law. This raises doubts about whether the administration ever intended to take action against Israel for the humanitarian disaster in northern Gaza.**

- **After Israel has breached so many administration "red lines," how low can US credibility go? What power can America ever have if it can't enforce its own ultimatum with an ally, let alone opponents? But National Security Memo-20, which requires all recipients of U.S. military aid in active conflicts to commit that US weapons are not implicated in human rights violations, is only one of numerous mechanisms for regulating America's export of weapons if used for the wrong purposes.**
- **The Leahy law(s) prohibit the export of US weapons if employed for gross violations of human rights. Section 502b of America's Foreign Assistance act prohibits security assistance to countries that might be violating human rights – for example, through indiscriminate bombing. Section 620i carries the same prohibition for countries blocking US humanitarian aid and is one of the legal bases for the current memo. Annelie Sheline, who worked for a year in the State Department's human rights bureau before resigning over the administration's Gaza policies and is now a fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, believes security assistance must stop under these existing provisions. She also observes that these laws stipulate "security assistance," including weapons but also training and other partnerships. Theoretically, it seems this gives the Americans leeway to constrain Israel's conduct in the war.**
- **Military aid is just one pillar of America's tripartite military, political and economic support. On the political-diplomatic level, reflexive US vetoes of UN Security Council resolutions that Israel doesn't like have maintained Israel's impunity for years. The United States can signal a change by allowing a cease-fire resolution that applies to both Israel and Hamas, just as the Obama administration – also in its lame-duck phase – abstained from voting on UNSC 2334 in 2016, which reaffirmed that settlements are illegal. The United States has permitted two cease-fire resolutions so far, in March and June – but these were ultimately limited and toothless. Speaking of settlements, US policy is becoming absurd.**
- **Under Trump's first administration, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reversed long-standing U.S. policy that settlements are illegal under international law, basically on the argument "Yes, they are (legal)." Blinken theoretically reversed Pompeo's position earlier this year. But the administration has failed to turn a position into policy. Instead, it dawdled for four years before considering plans to revert to longtime US regulations that products made in settlements be labeled as such after the Trump administration changed the policy in 2020 so that settlement imports would be described as "Made in Israel." Now Congress is advancing legislation to lock in the "Israel" label. The Biden administration could still reset the rules before going home.**
- **The administration's sanctions against a handful of violent Israeli settlers and organizations – 27 in total, according to US government sources from October 1 – was a first and a start. But they are also a knuckle rap in the face of a massive acceleration of West Bank annexation activity. For months, the Americans have been considering upping the ante: sanctions against the Netanyahu government ministers directly responsible for annexationist policies, Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, whose very presence in government goads settler violence.**

- European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has called to sanction them as well. What in the world is stopping the administration from doing so now? Sheline thinks the United States needs to show greater overall commitment to international law and institutions more broadly. Indeed, the international system as a whole is failing miserably in the face of wars that defile the very values it was established to protect. For example, she wishes the United States would support the request of the International Criminal Court prosecutor to issue warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and now-ex-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Frankly, no American government will do that.
- And as it happens, the current ICC prosecutor, Karim Khan, is facing an investigation for sexual misconduct. But at a bare minimum, could the Biden administration please stop trashing the court? Why not signal displeasure with Congress for threatening legislation against ICC officials, and express some support for the international body? After all, it did so when it came to investigating the crimes of then-President Omar Bashir of Sudan.
- In July 2023, David Scheffer, the lead US negotiator of the Rome Statute (the treaty that founded the ICC), argued that the United States must finally ratify the treaty it helped to write and even signed. "The double-standards perception," wrote Sheffer, "cripples our influence on so many fronts, including international criminal justice." He was not singling out Israel; he was advocating for justice for Darfur and trying to strengthen proceedings against Russia. The Senate ratifies treaties, but Scheffer listed numerous ways the administration can advance the process, and convey a message.
- Thanassis Cambanis, director of Century International (where I am a fellow), proposed steps aimed at advancing longer term Palestinian independence, such as conditioning US aid based on hard Israeli commitments to a two-state solution. This too sounds remote, but at least it would convey that humanitarian aid is not enough: US policy supports a cease-fire and a comprehensive political end to the conflict. The most far-reaching such idea would be US recognition of Palestinian statehood or advocating for full UN membership.
- Both are fantastical at present; I even opposed this type of move in the past, fearing empty gestures. But in the current political wilderness, even a signpost of American policy can matter. And why not go regional? Cambanis mooted the idea that the Biden administration could offer a parting plan, or even an outline, for restarting diplomacy with Iran. Diplomacy is still the only tool that briefly constrained Iran, before the efforts were sabotaged under the Trump administration. Iran's reaction has been disastrous for Israel, the Americans and the region. At this point, it's diplomacy or full-out war.
- The list of caveats is almost as long as the list of policies. Some, if not many, of these ideas could be reversed by the Trump administration. Perhaps US recognition of Palestinian statehood or advancing its full UN membership would be the boldest statement of US policy, and the latter would be particularly hard to reverse. But even that move is only a signpost – statehood recognition and bilateral relations must be filled with substance over time under the next administration. Conversely, any item too easily reversed can look more foolish than if it hadn't been done at all.

- **Some of the ideas here are small and technical and will justifiably garner cynicism for being too little, far too late. Perhaps the biggest caveat of all follows from the first two: If President Biden had been truly committed to either stopping the war or advancing conflict resolution – he could have taken the steps above already. The State Department's decision to drop the threat of military export sanctions seems like a sure sign that he won't start now. But never let it be said that "ein ma l'asot" – there's nothing to be done. If not this list, fine – but Joe Biden must do something.**

Netanyahu Hoped the War Would Keep Him off the Witness Stand

By Gidi Weitz

- "In matters of war and peace, the unexpected is always to be expected for anyone living in Israel," wrote former Supreme Court President Moshe Landau in the 1970s. The conservative and right-wing justice, the darling of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and of Justice Minister Yariv Levin, wrote these words in a sentence dealing indirectly with the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The three judges of the Jerusalem District Court are likely familiar with the quote and understand that war is not an excuse to avoid testifying. Therefore, they did not grant Defendant No. 1 the outrageous "celebrity privilege" he requested – a delay of two and a half months in his scheduled appearance on the witness stand.
- The judges were apparently not impressed by the pompous arguments given by Netanyahu's lawyer Amit Hadad. "Don't we want a prime minister who is totally devoted to the war?" Hadad asked the judges in solemn seriousness, without batting an eye when arguing that Netanyahu prefers the interests of the state over his personal ones. To anyone who knows Netanyahu, it was obvious months ago that he would try to maintain the emergency situation at least until December 2, so that he would be able to mark his escape route. The judges did not buy it.
- Netanyahu's request to defer his testimony is yet another expression of the world of illusions and deception he's constructed ever since the Supreme Court permitted a person under a criminal indictment to serve as prime minister. When the High Court of Justice faced this volatile issue four years ago, Netanyahu's people argued that his governing responsibilities would not interfere with the trial's management and that a Great Wall of China would be placed between his role as a person under indictment and his role as prime minister. This wall did not fall all at once. In fact, it was never erected. Never has a person in power used the immense power they wield to disrupt and derail a criminal trial against themselves the way Netanyahu has done in his trial.
- Three senior police officers – Korash Bernor, Yoav Telem, and Eli Assayag – who managed and oversaw the investigations in the Netanyahu cases, were forced to retire from the organization due to the ongoing vendetta of his government against those who dared to investigate. Their promotions were blocked, and those who replaced them got the message and now steer clear of corruption investigations at top levels of government like the plague. On the other hand, prosecution witnesses who aligned with the puppet master, such as Shlomo Filber and David Sharan, later received power, money and respect from the government. And this is only the tip of the iceberg that is visible. The investigations currently being conducted by the Shin Bet security service and the police regarding security offenses in Netanyahu's close circle are directly influenced by the ripple effect of his current trial.

- **The message that the government is stronger than the law has trickled down, and suspects or others holding sensitive information about powerful people are hesitant to cooperate. They have seen how the government and the propaganda machine attempted to crush anyone who stood in the way. As of this writing, it's hard to assess whether the official limousines, the entourage and numerous security guards will arrive in three weeks to the Jerusalem District Court. Netanyahu may have some aces up his sleeve, such as a threat of drones, which will force court administrators to locate a more secure location in which he can testify, or an escalation of the war, following which he will again ask for the court's grace. Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara, who refused to show flexibility and agree to the deferral, is convinced that Netanyahu will not show up. She believes that he will do everything he can to evade such a situation. If he decides not to testify, he is expected to launch a new campaign in which he will cry that he prefers to fight for us all rather than proving his innocence.**
- **By doing so, he will increase his chances of being convicted, since the law stipulates that an accused person's avoidance of giving testimony bolsters the prosecution's case. By not showing up, he will also shorten the path to a ruling in this trial, which has been stretched out over many needless years, generating irreparable damage to this country. In the debate held on Wednesday on this issue, the defense lawyers complained about the trial's long duration, pinning this on the opposition of the attorney general and the State Prosecutor's Office to a bridging process. In their arguments, they left out the most critical detail, which is Netanyahu's uncompromising demand that he remain in office for a significant duration, even if he agrees to admit to several of the charges.**
- **If Netanyahu cared about this country more than he cares for himself, he would have long ago summoned attorney Hadad to his office, closed the door, and asked him to embark on direct negotiations with the attorney general over a plea bargain, including admission to some charges and a retirement from political life. A similar deal was almost reached with former Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, when Netanyahu was exiled to the opposition. But at this point in the battle, Netanyahu is not ready to leave the arena under any circumstances. For him, the state and its citizens are hostages to his embroilment in a criminal indictment.**