



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

Thursday, October 31

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News Excerpts

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I24 News

7 Civilians Killed in Hezbollah Rockets in Northern Israel

Hezbollah rocket attacks killed seven civilians in northern Israel. A Hezbollah rocket attack killed five agricultural workers near the northern Israeli city of Metula. Four of the victims are foreign workers, and the fifth an Israeli farmer. A sixth man was seriously wounded. IDF soldiers arriving at the scene provided treatment to the casualties but were forced to pronounce all but one dead. The IDF spokesman stated: "Following the alerts activated in Metula, two launches were identified as having crossed into Israeli territory from Lebanon. The details are being examined." In another incident, a mother and son — said to be aged around 60 and 30 respectively — were killed in the Arab city of Shfar'am as they were picking olives.

Al-Monitor

Netanyahu: 'Ability to Enforce' Key to Any Lebanon Deal

US special envoy to the region Amos Hochstein and the White House's Middle East coordinator Brett McGurk met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in another push to advance a deal between Israel and Hezbollah. A statement issued by Netanyahu's office said the prime minister thanked the Biden administration for its diplomatic efforts to reach an agreement to end the fighting in Lebanon but stressed that the most important element of such an agreement is not the piece of paper it's written on, but "Israel's determination and ability to enforce the agreement and to foil any threat to its security from Lebanon, in a manner that will return residents to their homes safely." After a year of intermittent cross-border fire between Hezbollah fighters and Israeli forces, Israel launched an invasion into southern Lebanon on Oct. 1, targeting the Iran-backed group's weapons and infrastructure.

Times of Israel

Khamenei to Order Reprisal Attack on Israeli Military Sites

Iran's supreme leader has ordered his military officials to prepare a reprisal attack against Israel, a report said, as senior Iranian officials warned of "harsh" and "unimaginable" responses to Israel's strikes on Iranian military sites earlier this month. The report in [The New York Times](#), citing Iranian officials, said Tehran's response would not come until after US voters go to the polls on November 5, though other news outlets have quoted sources saying Iran's response could come ahead of the vote. Iranian leaders have been threatening to carry out a reprisal action after the Israeli Air Force attacked anti-aircraft batteries and radar sites across Iran on October 26 in retaliation for a massive Iranian ballistic missile attack on Israel on October 1. But Iran has so far been seen as seeking to minimize the chances for escalation or a repeat engagement.

Negotiations Continue Despite Hamas Rejecting Partial Deal

Intense negotiations are ongoing to facilitate a hostage and cease-fire deal with Hamas despite the terror group's rejection of Egypt and the US's proposal. Hamas was now demanding guarantees before any "small deal" that it will eventually lead to a halt in fighting and a full withdrawal. Senior Hamas official Taher al-Nunu said in an interview that Hamas opposed a temporary cease-fire. "The idea of a temporary pause in the war, only to resume aggression later, is something we have already expressed our position on. Hamas supports a permanent end to the war, not a temporary one," he said. Meanwhile, the Hamas-affiliated Quds network revealed new details regarding proposals for a partial deal. According to the report, the Egyptian proposal involves a 10-day cease-fire, during which 150 aid trucks would enter Gaza daily, in exchange for the release of four hostages, including two women. The American proposal, according to sources cited by Quds, involves a 30-day cease-fire and the entry of 600 aid trucks per day in exchange for the release of all female and IDF soldier hostages. "Both proposals concern a partial deal that doesn't end the war, nor does it include returning displaced residents to their homes or an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza," the report added.

Reuters

At Least 46 Palestinians Killed in Israeli Strikes, Hospital Hit

At least 46 Palestinians were killed in Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip, mostly in the north where one attack hit a hospital, torching medical supplies and disrupting operations, the enclave's health officials said. Israel's military has accused the Palestinian militant group Hamas of using Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya for military purposes and said "dozens of terrorists" have been hiding there. Health officials and Hamas deny the charge. An Israeli airstrike on two houses in the Nuseirat camp in central Gaza killed at least 16 Palestinians, medics at Al-Awda Hospital in the camp said. The dead included a paramedic and two local journalists, they added. Northern Gaza, where Israel said in January it had dismantled Hamas' command structure, is currently the main focus of the military's assault in the enclave.

Axios

Israel Extends Key Lifeline for Palestinian Economy

Israel's ultranationalist finance minister will sign an extension authorizing financial correspondence between banks in Israel and the occupied West Bank for one more month only, the minister's spokesperson said. The US and other Western countries are worried Israel will cut Palestinian banks off from the Israeli financial system and cause an economic collapse in the West Bank that would destabilize the region even further. The US and other countries pressed Israel to extend the authorization for another year. Israel finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, an anti-Palestinian settler, has taken many steps over the past two years to weaken the Palestinian Authority as part of his ideology of annexing the West Bank.

Saudi-Israel Normalization 'Off Table' Until Palestinian Statehood

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said Thursday that normalization with Israel is "off the table" until there is a "resolution to Palestinian statehood" and clarified that there is no ambiguity in Saudi policy on the conflict in Gaza. "I would say certainly normalization with [Israel] is not just at risk. It is off the table until we have a resolution to Palestinian statehood," Prince Faisal bin Farhan told the Future Investment Initiative forum in Riyadh. "I would say that it is not just the issue of normalization with the kingdom that is at risk; I would say that the security of the region as a whole is at risk if we do not address the rights of the Palestinians," he added. He also urged the Israeli government under Prime Minister Netanyahu to "do the moral thing" by guaranteeing Palestinians "their rights and their state." Last September, Saudi Arabia was said to be "inching closer" to normalizing relations with Israel, according to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. However, progress stalled following the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas. As the death toll from Gaza following Israel's retaliatory attacks mounted, Saudi Arabia joined other Arab and Islamic nations in condemning Israeli actions. [Read More "Defense Pact with US Possible Before Election, Saudi Foreign Minister Says" \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

Egypt Denies Assisting Israel's Military Operations Amid Reports About Explosives Shipment

Egypt denied it assisted Israeli military operations after media reports that an Egyptian port received a shipment of explosives bound for an Israeli defense contractor. "The Egyptian Armed Forces categorically deny what has been circulated on social media and suspicious accounts and what is being promoted about assisting Israel in its military operations in general and in detail," the army said in a statement. Human rights lawyers filed a court appeal in Berlin seeking to block a 150-metric-ton shipment of military-grade explosives aboard the German cargo ship MV Kathrin, which they said was for Israel's biggest defense contractor, Elbit Systems (ESLT.TA), opening a new tab. LSEG data and vessel-tracking website Marine Traffic showed the MV Kathrin docked in Egypt's port at Alexandria on Monday. The Egyptian Ministry of Transport explained that the ship docked in Alexandria to unload a shipment for Egypt's Ministry of military production, adding that the ship submitted an official request to leave for Turkey. The European Legal Support Center's case argued the explosives could be used in munitions for Israel's war in Gaza, potentially contributing to alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. Because of the explosives bound for Israel, the MV Kathrin was denied entry at several African and Mediterranean ports, including in Angola, Slovenia, Montenegro and Malta, according to the ELSC. It said Portuguese authorities recently required the ship to switch from a Portuguese flag to a German flag before it could continue.

Bleeding Towards an Agreement

By Nahum Barnea

- **Marwahin is a small Sunni village—a total of 220 homes—on the slopes of Jabal Balat, north of Moshav Zarit. Mountain air and breathtaking views, from Tyre in the north to Haifa Bay in the south, the Mediterranean Sea in the west to Mount Meron. Its height gives those who conquer it the illusion of control: In 2006, I made my way across the village at night with the force of the Alexandroni brigade under the command of brigade commander Shlomi Cohen. We came from the light—from the bright sea of lights of Israeli communities behind us into the darkness of war. Lebanon darkened our faces.**
- **At the beginning of that war, the IAF bombarded that village. Between 18 and 28 civilians were killed, most of them children. The Lebanese call it the “Marwahin massacre.” They directed their fury at Israel and at the United Nations: at Israel for rushing to bomb the village, at the UN because its soldiers refused to open their premises to people seeking refuge. Two installations, located between the village and the Israel-Lebanon border, manned by UNIFIL personnel to this very day. Soldiers from Guinea sit at their posts and fill out useless reports. Israel ordered them to evacuate; the UN refused. The IDF and Hizbullah are conducting a war over their heads.**
- **Marwahin is a village that is no more. First, the residents disappeared. Members of the IDF’s 205th reserve brigade who conquered the village found expired food in the homes. The council registry stopped two years ago, either because there were no more residents to register or the head of the village took the updated register with him. Most interestingly, the soldiers found a document citing the transfer of ownership from a local man to Hizbullah. It was signed by Fuad Shukr, the most senior commander in the organization at the time, second only to Nasrallah before being assassinated in Beirut.**
- **The residents were replaced by members of the Radwan Force. They filled the homes with weapons: Everything was standard, registered, and maintained—an orderly, rich, well-funded army. Iran gave Hizbullah a billion dollars a year; the results were visible on the ground: reinforced compounds, ammunition, manufacturing plants, military bases, recruitment and training centers, real estate. The IDF is now busy in Lebanon, mainly destroying value from the air and on the ground. The blockade imposed by Israel on the seaports, Beirut Airport, and border crossings to Syria is hermetic, or almost hermetic.**
- **There is probably no way for Hezbollah to regain the stockpiles it has lost – according to one prevailing estimate, about two-thirds of its rocket stocks. We are often interested in what forces hostile to Israel are doing on all fronts. We are less interested in what they don’t do: the Assad regime sustains attacks almost every night that are attributed internationally to Israel. The attacks have damaged supply routes to Lebanon and the elements responsible for them in the Syrian army. Assad has chosen not to respond. Nasrallah’s war plan was built upon the active participation of Syria. Thousands of rockets were supposed to explode in Israeli territory.**

- **Assad decided to remain neutral. Optimistic commentators say he is now trying to adjust the course between the Iranian axis and the Saudi axis. The Russians have their own way of being in the story without being in it. They are present in Syria but maintain their distance. They have taken note of the efficiency with which our air force demolished the S-300 batteries that provided aerial defense for Iran. Will they now provide Iran with new-and-improved S-400 batteries? Not necessarily. Every Israeli prime minister that has suggested it to Putin, from Barak to Olmert to Bennett to Netanyahu, has gotten the same firm answer: I will do only what is good for Russia.” Or, as one Israeli who used to negotiate with the Russians on the ground, “Everyone is working according to their own interests, but for the Russians, it is much firmer. They have no sentiment.” US Special Envoy Amos Hochstein, who arrived in Israel yesterday, opened the current round of talks in an optimistic atmosphere. It appears that everyone wants a ceasefire in Lebanon: the Americans, British, French, Russians, the Lebanese government, the IDF, Hizbullah, and perhaps even the Iranians.**
- **The basis is the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 from 2006. The disagreement is over the terms. The defense establishment thought understanding with the United States, stating that the US would support Israel if and when the agreement was violated and the IDF responded with firepower and by entering Lebanon, would be sufficient. Now, against the background of military gains, against the background of the expectations of residents of northern Israel, against the cost of the war that Israel is paying in blood—88 deaths in October alone in Lebanon, in Gaza and in Metulla and the northern suburbs of Haifa [known in Hebrew as “the Krayot”]—Israel is demanding additional commitments. Netanyahu, who was wary of going into Lebanon, is now wary of leaving. Gallant threatened to return Lebanon to the Stone Age. In Marwahin and other villages adjacent to the Israel- Lebanon border, the threat has been carried out in full. When I toured the area two days ago, I wrestled with the question of what will happen once we leave. What we want to happen. The soldiers I met imagine a strip of land devoid of human beings, desolate. The way is now. So do the residents of the north. Is that the correct solution? Is it possible?**

Could Harris' Approach to Arab-American Voters Cost Her the White House?

By Ben Samuels

- One of the most persistent storylines of the 2024 US presidential election has been the Democratic nominees' failure to quell concerns from voters disillusioned by the Biden administration's policies toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When US President Joe Biden announced he was dropping out of the race in July, many of these frustrated voters – hundreds of thousands of whom reside in battleground states where their votes could very well swing the election – expressed optimism that new nominee Kamala Harris would adopt a more progressive track. She has accordingly taken pains to articulate her vision for a potential two-state solution with a cease-fire to the Gaza war being the first necessary step, hinting at potential changes should she be elected. On the campaign trail, however, she has undoubtedly prioritized securing the support of moderates and portions of the electorate more traditionally sympathetic toward Israel over the Palestinians.
- To the Harris campaign and many of its liberal surrogates, this should not be considered a binary issue and approaching it as such is among the core reasons the conflict has been so intractable. However, her approach – and the rhetoric of her surrogates – during the campaign's home stretch has done nothing but stick a finger in the eye of her disillusioned base. And all this at a time where she needs to secure support from every corner she can find it. One of her biggest own goals, in the eyes of these voters, was the Democratic National Convention's failure to afford time to a Palestinian-American speaker. The Uncommitted National Movement provided the DNC and the Harris campaign with a list of speakers and prepared remarks, in an effort to indicate that it was not trying to antagonize or self-sabotage the party.
- Months after this request was ignored, the campaign has again declined to provide any of these speakers with a platform in hopes of securing their vote. Instead, Harris has prioritized the support of "moderates" like Liz Cheney – one of the Republican Party's most vocal foreign policy hawks for years before she found herself exiled from the GOP. Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has seized upon Harris' embrace of Cheney to illustrate why he deserves the support of the Arab-American community.
- He has parlayed this into support from leading community members while also emphasizing the support of socially conservative Muslims, as Republican operatives funded by megadonors have attempted to further drive a wedge using bad-faith tactics and oversimplified arguments amid the backdrop of antisemitic tropes. Even Harris' traditional Democratic allies, such as former US President Bill Clinton, have been overtly dismissive of these voters while trafficking in bizarre overcomplications of their own. " Hamas did not care about a homeland for the Palestinians. They wanted to kill Israelis and make Israel uninhabitable. I got news for them – they were there first before their faith existed.

- They were there in the time of King David in the southernmost tribes, had Judea and Samaria," he told a Michigan rally. "When I read people in Michigan are thinking about not voting because they're mad at the Biden administration for honoring its historic obligation to try to keep Israel from being destroyed, I think that's a mistake," he added. Sen. Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, has attempted to directly engage with these voters, stressing that Trump would be far worse than Harris on this issue and there is potential to move her in the desired policy direction. Harris' running mate, Tim Walz, directly addressed these voters in an interview with CBS earlier this week, saying: "There's one ticket here that is going to find the pathway to stabilization in the Middle East, but also one that is going to respect their human rights here." While this may be true, the Harris campaign is heading into the weekend before the election, leaving many of these voters on the table. Whether or not this serves as a validation of her strategy or a precursor to her defeat will be clear soon enough.