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## **Israel and Middle East News Update**

*Friday, December 27*

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Al-Monitor

## **Israel launches new airstrikes in Yemen, hits Sanaa airport for first time**

Israel launched aerial strikes on Thursday against multiple targets in Yemen, including the international airport in the capital, Sanaa, the Hodeidah seaport and at least two power plants. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu arrived at the Defense Ministry headquarters in Tel Aviv to closely monitor Israeli airstrikes targeting Houthi positions in Yemen. "We are determined to cut off this terror arm of Iran's axis of evil. We will continue doing so until this task is done," Netanyahu said. An Israeli military spokesperson confirmed the strikes.

Jerusalem Post

## **Israeli air force carries out strikes in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon**

The Israeli air force reportedly struck the Bekaa Valley region of Lebanon, Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese media outlet Al Akhbar reported on Friday morning. According to the report, Israel targeted the outskirts of Qousaya with two missiles. Al Akhbar added that echoes were heard across the Bekaa valley.

Times of Israel

## **Report: Israeli, US officials say low odds of a hostage deal before Trump's return**

American and Israeli officials said Thursday that the chances of reaching a hostage-ceasefire deal with the Hamas terror group before the inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump on January 20 are low, the Walla news site reported. The comments came as Israel and the terror group traded blame for yet

another failure to reach an agreement after a burst of renewed negotiations, more than fourteen months since Hamas-led terrorists took 251 people hostage during its October 7, 2023 attack, of whom 96 — including 34 confirmed dead — remain in captivity in the Gaza Strip.

**AI-Monitor**

## **Iran's energy crisis shuts 80 power plants as rial plummets**

An ongoing energy crisis in Iran has left 80 power plants, the country's principal source of power, out of service. Iran's semi-official Tasnim News Agency reported on Thursday that at least 80 of Iran's 600 thermal power plants were out of operation due to a lack of gas, cutting Iran's power capacity by 8,000 megawatts. One megawatt of power can supply electricity to approximately 400 to 900 homes annually. Gas-fueled power plants made up 85% of Iran's total electricity output in 2022, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

**i24 News**

## **Itamar Ben Gvir visits Temple Mount, drawing condemnation**

National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir visited the Temple Mount on Thursday morning, the first day of Hanukkah. According to a statement from his office, the minister prayed for "the peace of soldiers, the return of hostages, both living and dead, and total victory in the war."

**AP**

## **Israeli attorney general orders probe into report that alleged Netanyahu's wife harassed opponents**

Israel's attorney general has ordered police to open an investigation into Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's wife on suspicion of harassing political opponents and a witness in the Israeli leader's corruption trial. Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara made the announcement in a terse message late Thursday, saying the investigation would focus on the findings of a recent report by the "Uvda" investigative program into Sara Netanyahu.

Times of Israel

## **Burned, beaten, starved: Health Ministry compiles hostage testimonies to submit to UN**

The Health Ministry has completed a draft report on the abuse that Israeli hostages suffered while held in the Gaza Strip, cataloging the physical and mental suffering they experienced and the lasting effects it has had on them, some of whom are children. Israel plans to submit the report to the United Nations. Compiled from the testimonies of hostages who were released in a November 2023 deal and those who were later rescued by Israeli forces, it details how they were burned and beaten, starved and humiliated, as well as how the abuse impacted their mental and physical health, even long after they were freed.

Commentary:

Israel Hayom

## **President Herzog Joins Call for State Commission of Inquiry**

By Elinor Shirvani Kofman

- Defense Minister Yisrael Katz instructed the IDF to provide families of the female soldiers who staffed the Nahal Oz outpost on the morning of October 7 with the complete recordings of that morning's

communications “except for short sections that have clear security restrictions.” Katz made the decision after the families received the recordings from the IDF on Monday—and they turned out to be partial recordings.

- Earlier in the day, President Yitzhak Herzog responded to the recordings being handed over, saying “The heartbreaking cry of the [soldiers’] families hones the urgent need for a state commission of inquiry.”
- Eyal Eshel, father of Roni who was killed at the outpost, said, “I received nothing. I got nothing about Roni from these recordings. This contradicts the investigation we carried out. They tossed us a few recordings. At least [they could have] given them to us in an organized fashion, if only out of respect for our fallen daughters.”
- Eshel added: “They deceived us. This wasn’t done right. Even after the legal proceedings, we’ve learned that there are large holes in the files we received.” Attorney Gilad Bar-Tal, representing the families, said, “The heartbreak is too much to bear. To our great regret, the IDF has continued to treat the spotters’ families contemptuously.”
- IDF Spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said in a statement: “The recordings were handed over after an in-depth process was undertaken to map out the communications frequencies used by the communications devices used in the spotters’ war room. The segments provided were only the recordings in which the voices of their loved ones could be heard.”
- Hagari added later, “Between the hours of 4:48 and the outbreak of the attack, no voice recordings of female spotters were heard, and therefore no recordings of these hours were turned over [to the families] in the first place.” In response to the defense minister’s instructions, the military added: “The IDF regrets any offense, if caused.”
- The Association of Bereaved Families “October Council” welcomed Herzog’s statement, saying: “Investigating the truth is a moral duty, [both] for the sake of remembering the fallen and the murdered and in order to correct the failures. Every day that goes by that a state commission of inquiry has not been established is another day of cover-up, concealment and denial. Only a state commission of inquiry will be able to investigate the truth... we will continue with our resolute fight and call on the Israeli public to join us.”

**Maariv**

# **Jerusalem Concerned That Turkish Involvement in Syria Will Lead to Clash**

By Avi Ashkenazi

- The fall of Bashar Assad's regime in Syria stands to change the balance of power in the Middle East, with Turkey's reemergence as a regional power that could lead to a direct clash with Israel.
- Turkey has been operating behind the scenes in the Syrian revolt. As far back as 2011, Ankara invested economic and military resources into an invasion of Turkey [sic], first of all in order to strike at the Kurds, and also so as to prevent emergence of ties between Kurdish areas in Turkey and those in Syria.
- But Turkey has an imperialist vision for the region, which includes a reconstitution of sorts of the Ottoman Empire, starting in Syria. "After they succeeded, with a rapid move, in pushing Iran and Russia out of Syria, they will then want to fill that void that will be created in Syria," said Dr. Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, a researcher at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, and an expert on contemporary Turkish politics and society.
- In recent days, the Turkish government has released statements, including by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, announcing Turkey's intention to attack the Kurdish area in Syria as well as other parts of Syria, including the south.
- Turkey's statements have also addressed plans including, but not limited to, rebuilding the Istanbul-Damascus line of the Hijazi railroad; building a Turkey-Syria highway and establishing Turkish air and naval bases in Syria.
- This is in addition to annexing parts of Syria, something that would take some of Cyprus's territorial waters and prevent the laying of gas pipes to connect Israel, Cyprus and Greece. "This process will lead to two main coalitions in the region: an Israel coalition that is comprised of Cyprus and Greece, accompanied by Jordan and the United Arab Emirates with Saudi Arabia bringing up the rear. The opposing coalition will be Turkey, together with Syria, Lebanon and Libya," Yanarocak said.
- Israel's defense establishment, which has been keeping close tabs on developments in Turkey, shares this analysis. "No one envisioned the process that unfolded so quickly in Syria. Al-Jolani didn't expect the domino to fall this quickly. He was gunning for Aleppo, not for such a

- quick takeover of all of Syria,” said IDF officials. “This is a country with imperialistic dreams. Turkey is very interested in us at the moment.”
- “It is a country with a population of 84 million, the 17 th largest economy in the world and especially effective manufacturing power. It has a large, significant naval force, their air force is like ours in terms of numbers, but not in terms of quality, and they also have a significant, strong ground force.”
  - Israeli military officials said that Israel and Turkey still have ties and that the two countries have continued to engage in dialogue, including at a variety of security work levels. Israel is waiting for President-elect Donald Trump to take office on January 20. Trump is the missing factor: the IDF and defense establishment are prepared for two possible eventualities on that issue.
  - The first is that Trump wants to act powerfully against Iran and will want to tidy up [i.e. to create stability and calm] the region. He will want to accomplish this by creating a coalition of agreements between Israel and the moderate Sunni countries, headed by Saudi Arabia. In doing so, he would send a message of strength to the Russians and to the Chinese, and after months of fighting he would create a reality of regional calm and American power; that, in turn, would allow for continued calm while focusing on domestic issues and the American economy. The second possibility is that the United States will abandon military operations in the region.
  - That would allow Turkey to maximize its ambitions in Syria while simultaneously granting the Americans the freedom of action they want in the region. The immediate cost of that will be borne by the Kurds, who are in Turkey’s crosshairs at the moment.
  - Military officials claim that alongside the new situation that is unfolding in Syria, the IDF had wanted to continue to fight in Lebanon before the ceasefire was concluded. Three things prevented this from happening and led eventually to the IDF and the defense establishment to support the ceasefire. “Had we been operating in just one theater of fighting; if we had more resources, if we’d had more international legitimacy.”
  - Jerusalem is determined to strictly enforce the ceasefire in Lebanon, even after the initial 60-day period is over. Israel illustrated its resoluteness last night when the IAF attacked Hizbullah arms warehouses in the Bekaa Valley, deep inside Lebanon. Some of the arms that were destroyed had been smuggled into Lebanon from Syria in recent days.

- **The IDF also stressed that if the Lebanese Armed Forces fails to meet its commitment to enforce the ceasefire agreement in areas the IDF is slated to retreat from, the IDF will delay its withdrawal in keeping with the terms of the ceasefire. In addition, the military stressed that the IDF Northern Command has the operational ability and the operational availability to enter any parcel of land in southern Lebanon that the IDF pulls out of in response to ceasefire violations and/or a lack of enforcement by the Lebanese Armed Forces.**