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

*Tuesday, December 3*

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Ynet

## **IDF launches wave of strikes on Lebanon following Hezbollah attack**

The IDF announced that the Israeli Air Force (IAF) conducted widespread strikes on Hezbollah terrorists, dozens of rocket launchers and other terrorist infrastructure across Lebanon on Monday night. Among the targets was a launcher in the Berghoz area of southern Lebanon, struck shortly after Hezbollah fired two projectiles toward Mount Dov. The IDF said that Hezbollah's actions constitute a clear violation of the cease-fire agreement between Israel and Lebanon and called on Lebanese authorities to take responsibility and prevent Hezbollah from operating within its territory.

Reuters

## **Trump promises 'hell to pay' if Gaza hostages not promptly released**

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump said on Monday there would be "hell to pay" in the Middle East if hostages held in the Gaza Strip were not released prior to his Jan. 20 inauguration. Making his most explicit comments on the fate of the hostages since his election in November, Trump said on social media: "[If] the hostages are not released prior to January 20, 2025, the date that I proudly assume Office as President of the United States, there will be ALL HELL TO PAY in the Middle East, and for those in charge who perpetrated these atrocities against Humanity." Trump added: "Those responsible will be hit harder than anybody has been hit in the long and storied History of the United States of America."

Jerusalem Post

## **State Dept. says Israel, Lebanon ceasefire 'broadly' successful despite reports of violations**

The ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon has been "broadly speaking" successful in stopping the fighting and limiting the daily loss, the State Department determined on Monday following reports of violations on both sides of the agreement. State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller would not comment on reports of specific allegations of violations, only pointing to the mechanism in place run by the US and France to monitor violations.

Jerusalem Post

## **IPS Chief Kobi Yaakobi named suspect in bribery and abuse of office probe**

The senior Israel Prison Service (IPS) high-ranking officer who was detained for alleged crimes, including bribery, breach of trust, disclosure in breach of duty, and abuse of office, is the IPS chief, Commissioner Kobi Yaakobi, Israeli media reported on Monday night. Yaakobi previously served as the security advisor to National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who criticized the accusation, as well as Attorney-General Gali Baharav-Miara, saying that "a red line was crossed," The Jerusalem Post reported.

Times of Israel

## **Digging in, IDF builds dozens of bases in and around expanded Netzarim Corridor**

The IDF has significantly bolstered its presence in the central Gaza Strip in recent months, and the territory controlled by Israel in and around the so-called Netzarim corridor has rapidly expanded, according to a report Monday, in an apparent indication the IDF is preparing to remain inside the Palestinian enclave

for at least the foreseeable future. By analyzing satellite images and video footage, the New York Times reported that Israeli forces have also constructed several dozen new bases in and around the corridor over the last three months.

**Arutz Sheva**

## **The day after the war: Fatah and Hamas agree on independent committee to govern Gaza Strip**

Representatives of Fatah and Hamas, meeting under the auspices of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, have reached understandings that could advance indirect negotiations with Israel regarding a ceasefire agreement and a hostage release deal. This deal would include the return of hostages being held by Hamas in exchange for the release of terrorist prisoners, according to the newspaper Al-Araby Al-Jadeed. A senior Hamas official told the newspaper on Monday that significant progress was made during the talks in Cairo, and it was agreed to establish a civilian committee to govern the Gaza Strip. Only a few procedural issues remain to be resolved.

**i24 News**

## **Shin Bet thwarts 200 Iranian cyber attacks against Israelis**

The Shin Bet security agency uncovered 200 cyber attack attempts by Iran against Israelis, according to a statement on Monday. The targets included public personalities and political figures, the statement said. Computers belonging to these individuals were hacked, with Iranians seeking personal information to carry out attacks. In recent months, nearly 10 Iranian attempts to recruit Israelis for espionage missions were exposed by Israeli authorities.

**Commentary:**

Yedioth Ahronoth

## Is an Agreement Within Reach? Generals:

### “Conditions for a Hostage Deal Have Ripened”

By Yossi Yehoshua

- Defense officials say an opportunity may be at hand to achieve a breakthrough in the negotiations to bring home the hostages, and they have urged the political leadership to seize this opportunity to conclude an agreement to halt the war in Gaza temporarily and to secure the hostages' release.
- That assessment is held by a number of high-ranking IDF officers in key positions, including officers who in the past were skeptical about the possibility of concluding a deal. Their position is based on the simultaneous convergence of several developments that, when combined, have changed the situation: The end of the war in Lebanon, the decoupling of the Lebanese and Gazan theaters of operations, the renewed focus of military action in the Gaza Strip, the [global] preoccupation with Syria, domestic pressure in Gaza, domestic pressure in Israel and the election of a new American president. Amid all that, the military officials cited the Egyptians' high-powered efforts to set a deal in motion.
- Despite the fact that Hamas has not yet put forward a concrete proposal for a deal, IDF and other Israeli defense officials say that they have seen signs in recent days that the convergence of circumstances might prompt Hamas to move swiftly to cut a deal with Israel. A senior Israeli official told us that even if a deal were to be reached, its specifics could not be anticipated at present. He said that Israel is currently poised at a crucial juncture that could change the face of the war in the Gaza Strip.
- The biggest change occurred 200 kilometers from Sinwar's hideout in the Gaza Strip—in Lebanon. Despite the fact that some Israeli defense officials view the ceasefire agreement that was reached last week as a missed strategic opportunity, they say that it could potentially create meaningful pressure on Hamas in Gaza. Hizbullah had served as an “insurance policy” for Hamas after October 2023; the end of hostilities with Lebanon is perceived by some Hamas officials as a betrayal of the axis and as a decision to abandon Gaza to fight against Israel on its own. Israel's attention will no longer be divided between its northern and southern fronts, and the renewed military focus on the Gaza Strip and the

united Israeli-American front—certainly with the incoming American administration—have impacted the Gaza Strip and the decision-makers in it who are still living in the tunnels.

- A second thing that has changed is the Gazan public. The Gazans have been suffering the brunt of the IDF's high-intensity warfare against Hamas; they have been repeatedly displaced and have been living in temporary tents that they pitched for want of any other choice; and they are suffering from the difficulties of the Middle Eastern winter, which has already begun to leave its mark on them. "There are large clans that are challenging Hamas and no longer really bow to its violent authority, but the distance from here to a coup remains large," said one Israeli defense official.
- He added, "Hamas's military infrastructure is all-but completely gutted at this point. The only thing it still has currently is the public. And that's why it has been investing all of the meager efforts [probably means capabilities] it still has in retaining basic governance capabilities." Defense officials say that a deal now might help Hamas stabilize and preserve its standing in Gazan public opinion and, more importantly, would allow it to remove actors who are an opposition to its reign of terror, such as the above-cited clans—which it has been fighting with, sometimes violently, over the humanitarian aid and its distribution to the public.
- Having said that, Israeli defense officials recognize that Hamas won't easily be persuaded to release all the hostages, since the hostages are the organization's last remaining bargaining chip. Those Israeli men and women, alive and dead, are the only thing standing in the way of the complete dismantlement of the military and governmental structures that the terrorist organization has built in the Gaza Strip since 2007.
- Moreover, the working assumption is that Hamas might be prepared to compromise on some of the components of a future agreement, such as an IDF presence along the Philadelphi Corridor and a buffer zone between the Gaza Strip and the neighboring Israeli communities. But Israeli officials are not sure that Hamas will be prepared to compromise on the demand for an IDF withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor, which would end the Israeli military presence in the Gaza Strip.
- Another nettlesome issue that will have to be addressed if a deal is to be reached is the question of a Palestinian prisoner release. The IDF and GSS have been working for more than a year at purging the Gaza Strip of terrorists. A deal, if reached, might serve to reinfuse Gaza with "new

- blood,” terrorists with blood on their hands, who would immediately rejoin the ranks of the battered organization in the Gaza Strip.
- Notwithstanding the anticipated difficulties and phony demands that Hamas and Egypt are likely to inject into a future agreement, Israeli defense officials believe that now is the optimal moment to conclude a deal. The IDF’s operation in Jabalya and the northern Gaza Strip is ongoing, Rafah is finished and 90% of Gaza’s population is concentrated in the area of Khan Yunis and Al-Mawasi. The IDF has already begun to prepare to ratchet up military pressure significantly in the other parts of the Gaza Strip, in the event that no deal is reached. That will be done despite the winter weather and will probably receive American support, once the new administration takes office.
  - Amid the above developments and following the release of a video featuring the hostage, Edan Alexander, President Herzog and his wife met yesterday with Edan’s family. “There are negotiations behind the scenes, and it’s feasible. Now is an opportunity to bring about a special change that will lead to a hostage deal,” President Herzog said to them.

Israel Hayom

## **Watching Syria Concern: New Threats to Israel Would Sprout from Collapse of Assad Regime**

By Shirit Avital Cohen and Shahar Kleiman

- Prime Minister Netanyahu convened a security meeting last night to review developments in Syria. Israel believes Assad is allowing Iranian forces to enter Syria in order to defend his regime. That could have a direct impact on the northern front.
- Yesterday, Arab sources reported an increase in pro-Iranian militias arriving in eastern Syria, and said meetings were held there with Iran’s Revolutionary Guards. Last night, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived in Damascus to meet with Assad.
- Before the meeting, [Israeli] political officials said Israel is monitoring developments closely, with emphasis on the potential impact it could have on the ceasefire with Lebanon. In addition, they are tracking Russia’s influence, given the role it played in preventing the delivery of weapons and armaments from Syria to Lebanon and into Hizbullah’s hands.

- In talks over the past day, it has also emerged that the fall of northern Syria into rebel hands has damaged Iranian and Hizbullah infrastructure and has impeded their efforts to rebuild the terror organization, which is good news for Israel. In addition, these estimates say that under fire, Assad is likely to be more pressured and less receptive to serving Iranian interests in the region.
- On the other hand, there is a concern that the Assad regime's collapse could create fertile ground for other military threats against Israel to flourish. In any event, Israeli officials have reiterated that Jerusalem reserves the right for the IDF to act freely in Lebanon and in Syria to prevent Hizbullah from rearming.
- In the short term, a weakening of the Iranian axis in Syria is also seen as a positive development, but there are many questions for the longer term. Defense officials believe that the fall of Aleppo, the largest city in Syria, to the HTS militia, was very embarrassing to Moscow and is likely to impact its relevance to the ceasefire in Lebanon—among other things, with regard the military resources Russia that possesses and which will not be invested currently in reining in Iran, which will act to arm Hizbullah.
- Before visiting Damascus, against the background of the fall of Aleppo to the rebels, Araghchi accused the United States and Israel of the “resurgence of terror elements in the region.” In a speech, Araghchi said, “Every day we are witness to a new conspiracy. The presence of terror elements in the region is growing. The infidel forces are marching shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States and Israel. Their defenders have to know that all their attempts will fail.”
- Surrender Will Be Accepted Gracefully - At the same time, Assad's army announced it had increased troop numbers in the northern part of the country, near Hama, to support troop advances. They claimed that the Syrian rebel forces have fled after their progress was halted by Russian and Syrian army aerial strikes on rebel forces, military command centers and armories.
- Similarly, Assad's military forces reported that its soldiers had thwarted rebel forces in the region of Hitab, north-west of Hama.[...]