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Israel and Middle East News Update

Tuesday, January 28

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Jerusalem Post

Hamas to release Arbel Yehoud, Agam Berger, male hostage on Thursday, three more on Saturday

After 48 hours of intense negotiations behind the scenes, an agreement was reached between Israel and Hamas on the next steps in the hostage deal on Sunday night. On Thursday, three Israeli hostages will be released in a previously unscheduled hostage transfer. One of those who will be released is Arbel Yehoud, 29, who was supposed to be released last Saturday. The other two hostages that will be released are IDF observation soldier Agam Berger and an additional male hostage.

i24 News

Israel: 8 of 33 hostages to be released in 1st ceasefire stage dead

According to David Mencer, spokesperson for the Israeli government, eight of the 33 hostages mentioned in the first phase of the agreement have died. Hamas has indicated that the other 25 are alive. This announcement comes after Israel received a list detailing the status of the hostages from Hamas. Seven of the 33 concerned hostages have already been released, and the next releases are scheduled for Thursday and Saturday.

Times of Israel

EU to redeploy monitors at Rafah Border Crossing in bid to bolster Gaza ceasefire

The European Union agreed Monday to restart a monitoring mission at the Rafah Border Crossing between Gaza and Egypt as part of efforts to bolster the hostage release and ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas. EU foreign affairs chief Kaja Kallas said the bloc's foreign ministers had agreed to redeploy the mission, which she said "can play a decisive role in supporting the ceasefire" that took effect last week.

Times of Israel

Security contractors check for weaponry in cars returning to northern Gaza

Security contractors have started inspecting vehicles in Gaza to prevent heavy weaponry from being moved to the north of the enclave, where tens of thousands of Palestinians were returning to on Monday. An Egyptian official said Egyptian contractors, along with a US firm, were running checkpoints to inspect vehicles heading to the northern Gaza Strip via the Salah a-Din Road. The contractors are part of an Egyptian-Qatari committee implementing the ceasefire, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Times of Israel

Some released hostages were held in tunnels with no human contact for months, IDF says

Some of the hostages released from Gaza during the ceasefire had been held in Hamas tunnels for up to eight months straight, deprived of daylight and with little to no human contact, an Israeli general said on Monday. "Some of them told us

that they've been in the past few months, that they've been through the entire time, in tunnels, underground," the deputy chief of the Israeli military's medical corps, Colonel Dr. Avi Banov, told journalists online.

Reuters

Gaza residents stream home to the north after hostage breakthrough

Tens of thousands of Palestinians streamed along the main roads leading north in Gaza on Monday, jubilant to be returning home after months of living in temporary shelter but fearing what might remain of their homes amid the bombed-out ruins. Their return, which had been delayed at the weekend, went ahead after Hamas agreed to hand over three Israeli hostages this week and Israeli forces began to withdraw from a main corridor across the enclave under terms of an agreement on a ceasefire in the 15-month-long war.

i24 News

Hezbollah leader: 'Gaza's victory is a victory for the Palestinian people'

In a series of statements on Monday, Naim Qassem, leader of Hezbollah, praised the "success" of the Palestinians in achieving a ceasefire deal in the Gaza Strip, attributing the triumph to Iran, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon. He emphasized the role of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the "sacrifices made," notably mentioning his predecessor, Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed by Israel last autumn ahead of Israel's invasion.

Jerusalem Post

Iran's Revolutionary Guards commander says Iran purchased Russian-made Sukhoi 35 fighter jets

Iran has purchased Russian-made Sukhoi-35 fighter jets, a senior Revolutionary Guards commander said on Monday, amid Western concerns about Tehran and Moscow's growing military cooperation. This is the first time an Iranian official has confirmed the purchase of Su-35 jets. However, Ali Shadmani, who was quoted by the Student News Network, did not clarify how many jets were purchased and whether they had already been delivered to Iran.

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2 reserve soldiers suspected of espionage for Iran

Yuri Eliasof and Georgy Andreyev, two Israeli reservists residing in the Krayot district of Haifa, were arrested on suspicion of carrying out operations for the Iranians, the Shin Bet security agency and Israel Police said Monday. One of them, the police said, passed on classified material he obtained during his military service in the Iron Dome air defense system. They were remanded in custody until Friday for the purpose of filing an indictment against them.

i24 News

Innovations, aerospace & investments: Israel advances in Caucasus

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met with Jonathan Missner, co-founder and member of the Board of Advisors of the Israel Economic Forum (IEF), on Monday. This invitation-only organization allows membership based on specific criteria, including leadership roles and business achievements. The IEF is closely working with US-based Jewish and pro-Israel organizations to bolster support for Israel's economic initiatives. Missner is managing partner of Stein Mitchell Beato & Missner LLP, a prominent law firm based in Washington, DC. Among the

members of the board of advisors of IEF are Michael Oren, former Israel's ambassador to the United States, and Professor Eugene Kandel, chairman of the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange board.

Commentary:

Israel Hayom

Provocations Begin—but Things Remain Quiet

By Shahar Kleiman and Lilach Shoval

- The IDF yesterday accused the Hizbullah terrorist organization of trying to foment unrest in southern Lebanon by dispatching rioters to the Israel Lebanon border.
- According to the Lebanese Health Ministry, at least 22 people were killed and 124 wounded by IDF fire. Later, the Lebanese Armed Forces announced that one of its soldiers had been killed and another wounded by IDF fire.
- One military official told Israel Hayom the IDF is continuing to operate in several parts of southern Lebanon and is deployed across the area for the purposes of “forward defense.” The military official added that beginning in the early hours of yesterday morning, hundreds of civilians, as well as Hizbullah terrorists, tried to reach the first line of villages along the Israel Lebanon border in an attempt to carry out “showcase processions” and to create provocations. The military official added that several individuals “who posed a threat to [IDF] troops” were detained, and denied reports that a Lebanese soldier had been killed by IDF fire. The official said the incident was the subject of an inquiry.
- According to Arab media reports, clashes erupted at several flashpoints in the eastern sector of the border region, including in Kafr Kila, Meiss El Jabal and Yaroun. Despite the number of Lebanese casualties and in keeping with Israeli projections, Hizbullah did not open fire at Israel.
- At the moment, Israel plans to retain a military presence in villages overlooking Israeli towns and villages until Hizbullah meets the terms of the agreement, even if that takes a significant amount of time. In addition, the IDF is prepared for ongoing provocations similar to the ones that were mounted yesterday. Israel says the agreement does not oblige an

- IDF withdrawal within 60 days unless the Lebanese Armed Forces deploys in keeping with the terms of the agreement.**
- **In an official statement, the IDF said, “Vehicles flying the flag of the Hizbullah terrorist organization approached IDF forces and threatened the troops, who acted to remove the threat.” Similarly, military officials said IDF troops had opened fire in order to repel dozens of rioters. IDF Arabic language Spokesman Lt. Col. Avichay Adraee said, “The party that dispatched the rioters is Hizbullah, which is trying to heat up the situation in order to cover up its situation and its standing in Lebanon and in the Arab world.”**
 - **At the same time, the Lebanese Armed Forces announced that its troops had entered Maroun a-Ras and Bint Jbeil, in addition to other areas near the Israel-Lebanon border. The Lebanese Armed Forces said in a statement: “The troops are standing by the civilians in the clash with the Israeli enemy, which has continued to refuse to uphold the ceasefire agreement by withdrawing from Lebanese territory.”**
 - **US National Security Council Spokesman Brian Hughes expressed support for the Israeli position two days ago: “A short, temporary ceasefire extension is urgently needed,” he said, and expressed satisfaction with Israel’s withdrawal in the central district of the border region.**
 - **Meanwhile, Ali Fayyad, a Hizbullah member of the Lebanese parliament, said, “Despite the casualties, residents of Kafr Kila are insisting they be allowed to enter their village. We are experiencing historic hours, and residents have broken the status quo Israel is trying to make permanent.**
 - **Fayyad made the comments from Kafr Kila, where he said Israel has destroyed 90 percent of the homes.**
 - **Earlier, Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri praised the return of residents to southern Lebanon. “Today, you are proving that sovereignty is more than just a slogan. The fallen and the wounded confirm with conclusive proof that Israel continues to violate Lebanese sovereignty. The blood of residents of the south is an urgent call to the international community, and to the countries that served as guarantors to the agreement, to take immediate action to force Israel to withdraw.”**
 - **Lebanese President Joseph Aoun continued to hold talks with negotiations with a goal of putting pressure on Israel. In a statement, Aoun said, “Today is a day of victory for Lebanon. I share your joy, but also call for restraint and trust the Lebanese forces to ensure the defense of [our] sovereignty and your return to your homes and areas of residence. Lebanon’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is not a subject**

for negotiation.” Hizbullah also commented on the events with a short statement praising the Lebanese people who returned to their villages and towns.

Yedioth Ahronoth

Shocked and Alarmed, Arab World Takes Trump’s Initiative Seriously

By Michael Milshtein

- **Some of the world might view Trump’s talk about relocating Gazans to Jordan and Egypt as merely another presumptuous statement—similar to [Trump’s remarks about] his desire to buy Greenland or to incorporate Canada into the United States. In the Middle East, however, his statements were taken seriously and were met with alarm.**
- **Trump [told journalists] on Saturday that he had discussed with King Abdullah of Jordan the possibility of relocating Gazans to Jordan, and said he would discuss the issue with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.**
- **Trump said he raised the idea because the Gaza Strip has been destroyed and rendered uninhabitable, and said the relocation might be short-term or long-term.**
- **Like many of Trump’s proposals, the idea was framed as a “deal” that is underpinned by material logic and considerations, while ignoring ideological and cultural aspects, historical memory, and the ongoing tensions between Israel, the Arab world and the Palestinians—all of which are components that have proved to be more powerful than any other in the Middle East after October 7.**
- **The Palestinians, who had been cautiously optimistic about the possibility that Trump in his second term in office would be different from the president they during his first term, are now seeing the “return of the old nightmare.” During his first term in office, Trump undercut the paradigm the Palestinians had sought to entrench, in which regional peace could only be achieved after first solving the Palestinian problem. Trump moved the American embassy to Jerusalem, advanced the Abraham Accords and hammered out the deal of the century—all moves that produced a fierce crisis in relations between Ramallah and Washington. Now, the Palestinians are afraid that he will forcibly make a sea change in the reality on the ground.**

- The Arab world was similarly stunned by Trump's statement. It stirred primordial fears in Jordan and Egypt that, given their geographical proximity to the Palestinian arena and their historic ties to it, are afraid that an attempt will be made to solve the Palestinian problem at their expense.
- Cairo and Amman routinely bristle at any statement in that context—be that Minister Gila Gamliel's proposal to relocate Gazans to the Sinai Peninsula or the idea that has been bandied about by Religious Zionist Party members as well as MKs Ram Ben Barak and Danny Danon to encourage "voluntary emigration." Those ideas are perceived as a current iteration of an old Israeli plot to empty the Gaza Strip of its residents ideas that certainly were seriously discussed in the past, mainly in the aftermath of the Six-Day War.
- For the time being, the Arab world has responded cautiously, given their familiarity with Trump's personality and their desire to refrain from clashing with him. Arab leaders reject the idea outright, and realize that even a hint of willingness to consider it would stir powerful domestic unrest, especially in Jordan. As such, they will probably try to "put the issue to rest" quickly through diplomatic means and, by doing so, to prevent the emergence of a fierce disagreement with the new American administration.
- The Palestinians are facing an even worse dilemma, and they quite obviously reject the idea completely. Last night, the Sama news website described the new idea as a "new Nakba." The cautious approach that the Arab countries are expected to take is likely to be emulated by the Palestinian Authority, which would prefer to start its relations with the Trump administration "on the right foot." The same probably goes for Hamas, which sent uncharacteristic signals in the past number of weeks indicating that it wished to engage in dialogue with Washington—amid Hamas's understanding that doing so might help it retain its power in the Gaza Strip, even if it is no longer formally the sovereign power there.
- Israel will have to respond cautiously as well, and not to respond with the kind of enthusiasm that was shown by top Religious Zionist Party officials, on the argument that the initiative would allow the Palestinians a better life and help them move away from extremist ideologies—an argument that is a rehash of the preconceptions that led to October 7, as if ideological zeal might be tempered by financial incentives. It is imperative that Israel recognize that the idea might damage relations between Washington and the Arab world, and that it might subsequently be damaging for Israel itself, primarily in all that pertains to the desire to

sign normalization agreements that the Arab world will reject if they feel that they have been forced on them by the United States in conjunction with the effort to relocate the Palestinian population to their territory.

- **Israel would be best advised not to publicly side with the United States in its call [on Arab countries] to take in large numbers of Palestinians—an initiative that is very unlikely to get off the ground and which will only create Arab antagonism towards Israel. It is important that Israel should be part of the conversation, but that should remain limited to secret diplomatic channels, and should not take the form of public statements.**
- **That method might even produce an agreement about the absorption of a limited number of Gazans who are defined as humanitarian cases for a brief period of time, which would prevent the emergence of a fierce crisis.**
- **Israel's chief focus should remain on forcing Hamas to make substantive concessions in exchange for the Gaza Strip's reconstruction, and guaranteeing its own freedom to act against any threat that might emerge from the Gaza Strip in the future.**