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Israel and Middle East News Update

Friday, May 30

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Reuters

US says that Israel accepts Gaza ceasefire plan; Hamas cool to it

Israel has agreed to a U.S. ceasefire proposal for Gaza, the White House said on Thursday, and Hamas said it was reviewing the plan although its terms did not meet the group's demands. As a U.S.-backed system for distributing food aid in the shattered enclave expanded, Israeli media reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the families of hostages held in Gaza that Israel had accepted a deal presented by U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff.

Times of Israel

New US deal outline would see 10 live hostages freed, 60-day truce, option to resume war

The new proposal from US special envoy Steve Witkoff for a deal between Israel and the Hamas terror group would see the release of 10 living Israeli hostages held in Gaza and the return of the bodies of 18 deceased hostages, in exchange for a 60-day ceasefire, an Israeli official confirmed to The Times of Israel on Thursday. The confirmation came as right-wing ministers, and some hawkish hostage families, came out in opposition to the proposed deal, arguing that Hamas is weakened and now is the time to force the terror group to surrender.

Jerusalem Post

Hamas demands changes to Witkoff's new Gaza ceasefire proposal

Hamas said Thursday it does not accept the outline of US envoy Steve Witkoff's proposed ceasefire and hostage deal at face value and demands certain changes, according to people familiar with the matter. Hamas feels deceived by the US administration, believing it has been "screwed over" with a pro-Israel proposal that does not guarantee an end to the war, an informed source familiar told The Jerusalem Post.

Times of Israel

Four Palestinians die in storming of Gaza UN food warehouse; IDF was not in area

Hundreds of Palestinians stormed a United Nations food warehouse in central Gaza on Wednesday, shouting and shoving each other and ripping off pieces of the building to get inside, the UN said. Palestinian hospital officials said four people died in the chaos, two of them shot. Israel accused the Hamas terror group of opening fire. There were no Israeli troops in or near the area of the UN's World Food Program warehouse at the time, and the IDF is not operating in Deir al-Balah.

i24 News

Defense Ministry employee David Libi killed in Gaza Strip

David Libi, a 19-year-old Defense Ministry employee, was killed Thursday during Israeli military operations in the northern Gaza Strip, the IDF confirmed. He is the third Defense Ministry worker to be killed since the beginning of the war. According to an initial military investigation, Libi was operating in the Jabaliya

area when he was fatally struck by an explosive device planted by Hamas operatives.

Reuters

[US flag raised in Damascus, envoy says](#)

[Syria-Israel peace is possible](#)

The United States' newly-appointed Syria envoy said he believed peace between Syria and Israel was achievable as he made his first trip to Damascus on Thursday, praising the Islamist-led government and saying it was ready for dialogue. Thomas Barrack raised the American flag over the ambassador's residence for the first time since the U.S. embassy closed in 2012, underlining a rapid expansion of U.S. ties with Damascus since President Donald Trump unexpectedly announced the lifting of sanctions and met Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa.

Ynet News

[15-day-old baby buried beside mother killed in](#)

[West Bank terror attack](#)

A 15-day-old infant who was delivered by emergency cesarean section after his mother was fatally shot in a West Bank terror attack was buried Thursday next to her, following his death in a hospital neonatal intensive care unit. Ravid Chaim Gez was born after his mother, Tzeela Gez, a 35-year-old mother of three and a mental health counselor from the settlement of Bruchin, was critically wounded when terrorists opened fire on her car en route to the hospital.

Times of Israel

IDF downs missile fired from Yemen in week's 6th Houthi attack

A ballistic missile launched at Israel by the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen was successfully intercepted by air defenses, the military said Thursday night, in what has recently become an almost daily occurrence. The missile set off sirens shortly after 9:20 p.m. across central Israel, several West Bank settlements, and towns near Jerusalem, sending millions to bomb shelters. The attack also briefly halted the final of the Israel State Cup, held at Bloomfield Stadium in Tel Aviv, where tens of thousands of soccer fans gathered to watch Hapoel Beersheba play Beitar Jerusalem.

i24 News

Iran launches dozens of cyber attacks against leading Israeli figures

The Shin Bet security agency announced on Thursday that it thwarted 85 cyber attacks carried out by Iranians against Israeli citizens, most of them senior in the public sector. These include senior security officials, political figures, academics, leading communications professionals, journalists, and more. The information the Iranians tried to obtain was intended, among other things, to carry out an attack against persons in Israel, through Israeli cells recruited in the country.

Commentary:

Yediot Ahronot

The Level of Anger is Rising: The Tense Conversation Between Netanyahu and Trump and the Preparations for Striking Iran

By Ronen Bergman

- A meeting was scheduled to be held yesterday at the White House between a number of senior American officials and their Israeli counterparts, including Mossad Director David Barnea, who is also responsible for large parts of the covert war against Iran and was also formerly the head of the Israeli negotiating team.
- According to a recent announcement, Barnea might resume playing a role in getting the hostages released. He was to be joined [at the meeting yesterday] by Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, who coordinates the Iran issue on behalf of Prime Minister Netanyahu and also heads the Israeli negotiating team.
- The two men arrived in Washington from Rome, where they met Steve Witkoff, the United States Special Envoy to the Middle East, who is mediating the nuclear negotiations with Iran and was in Italy for that purpose. He returned from the Middle East after a meaningful round of talks about the hostages—a subject that President Trump has also entrusted him with overseeing.
- Different sources have provided multiple accounts about the subjects under discussion. Was it about the nuclear dialogue that the United States has been holding with Iran, about Israel's tenacious objections and its preparations for a strike in Iran? Or was it about the pressure that Israel has been applying in the context of the negotiations by means of its threats to strike, prompting Iran to soften its stance? Or was it about a hostage deal, work on the United States' most recent proposal, the Witkoff outline version 342? Or, maybe, as some sources said, they are trying to do all of the above at once in a bid to reach a comprehensive solution?
- In the meantime, to the best of anyone's knowledge, no breakthrough has yet been achieved, at least not [one that has been met] with Israeli and American consent. It is patently obvious that on both of these critical issues, the assertion that "Israel isn't being taken into account" is, at the very least, an overstatement. There will not be a hostage deal, an end to the war and a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip without Israel. And if Israel decides, it can derail any deal reached between the United States and Iran. By means of a direct attack, covert attacks and special-ops, and, as the Americans are now learning, even by means of implicit threats.
- The word "Israel" can be replaced with the word "Netanyahu." Or, as one senior [Israeli] defense official who interfaces with the political leadership put it: "Under the conditions of the one-man rule that have

been created, there aren't any checks and balances within the government to serve as the responsible adult or, at the very least, to counterbalance Netanyahu's power, which is a measure of health for any government in any democracy. This is the first security cabinet in ages and ages, if not the first ever, in which there isn't a single person with a military past or years of security experience who can contribute from his experience to [facilitate] a sober view of the battle map in Gaza, and who might correctly assess the map of risks and opportunities regarding a possible strike in Iran."

- Netanyahu has neutralized large swaths of his adversaries, whom he has replaced with loyalists and people who do his bidding. "What Ben Gvir did to the police," said a senior judicial official, "Netanyahu is trying to do to the entire country." With the exception of the High Court of Justice and Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara, there is no one in Israel at present who is challenging Netanyahu's one-man rule. But they [the AG and the court] have no bearing on issues such as a strike on Iran, a hostage deal or the ongoing ground maneuver.
- In the current situation, Netanyahu is, in practice, the sole decision-maker about the fate of the hostages and the war. And seeing as he apparently decided long ago not to make any decisions for the time being and to press ahead, the only person who might change anything and/or save hostages is Trump. Will he apply enough pressure on Netanyahu to force him to agree to a deal and a ceasefire? Netanyahu won't do it by himself or of his own accord. Envoy Witkoff told his associates that he and Trump believe the war needs to end (remarks he made three weeks ago). But the president has not instructed him—at least not yet—to exert pressure on Netanyahu on that issue.
- **What Does Netanyahu Really Want?**
The situation is more complicated when it comes to Iran, and not only because Netanyahu is holding his cards close to his chest. While he was en route back to Israel after his hastily-called meeting in the White House in April, Netanyahu said he would agree to a deal with Iran, but only if the agreement was based on the "Libyan model."
- In other words, only if the entire Iranian enrichment program was dismantled. Officials in Tehran said long ago that that was out of the question, and Netanyahu knows with certainty that it will be very hard to force them. That is why Netanyahu and his mouthpieces have repeatedly said that unless a Libyan-styled agreement is reached, Israel will attack and destroy the Iranian nuclear program

- So what does Netanyahu really want? While the Trump administration is trying to negotiate a nuclear agreement with Iran, Prime Minister Netanyahu has threatened, according to several reports, to derail the talks by attacking Iran's principal uranium enrichment facilities. Last night, the New York Times reported (in an article co-written by this author) about at least one tense telephone conversation between Trump and Netanyahu, and about a series of recent meetings between senior administration officials and senior Israeli officials. The Prime Minister's Bureau dismissed the entire report as "fake news," only to get slammed with confirmation from Trump a few hours later when the president himself said he had told Netanyahu not to attack Iran right now, while negotiations for a new nuclear agreement are underway.\
- Netanyahu might argue that Iran's vulnerability won't last long, and that the time is ripe for a strike. Conversely, Trump believes that Iran's weakness is the perfect moment to negotiate ending Iran's enrichment program, amid the threat of military action should the talks fall apart. "When Trump is the judicious actor, the responsible adult who needs to cool down [Netanyahu] and who is trying to reach a diplomatic solution, you understand just how screwed up the situation is," said one Israeli official.
- Meanwhile, according to information out of Washington—which has been the subject of anxious reports back to Israel—the United States and Iran intend to sign an interim agreement that will say nothing except that the two sides have agreed to come to an agreement. It is clear to everyone that that is intended mainly [as a message] to Israel, to create a state of ongoing negotiations in order to make it harder for Netanyahu to justify a strike before the talks have yielded results.
- But sources in Washington say Netanyahu is in a rush. Other issues intersect here as well: the Haredi parties' threat to quit the coalition; a range of efforts to purge the top tiers of the law enforcement agencies, the intelligence services, the IDF and the justice system; Netanyahu's cross-examination [which is expected to begin next week]; weather factors (not metaphorically speaking, but weather conditions that might either facilitate or impede the ability to carry out air strikes); the end of US CENTCOM commander General Michael Kurilla's tenure; the hostages and the war in Gaza; and more.
- The last time the United States signed an interim agreement [with Iran], it took two years until a final agreement was reached. "Given the pace of things and Netanyahu's wishes, I'm not sure that he'll wait for two months," said an American official.

- **Friction with the US and the Iranian Arsenal**
From the United States' perspective, the bottom line is that Israel continued to make preparations for striking Iran even after Trump told Netanyahu in their meeting that he is opposed to a strike. Anger with Israel has been gradually rising in the American administration irrespective of the question of whether Israel ultimately strikes or not. American officials believe that the very fact that preparations were made has ratcheted up tensions in the region and has damaged negotiations. Netanyahu truly did instruct the IDF and the IAF to prepare for a strike that Israel would carry out on its own, even without the United States. Some believe that Israel has an historic opportunity that it must not miss. As reported, the IDF has continued to make preparations for a strike, which was originally planned for May, in the time since. The New York Times reported last night that American intelligence officials believe that the Israeli forces are in such a heightened state of readiness that an attack can be ordered within seven hours.
- However, it isn't clear either to the informed Israeli officials or to the Americans whether the preparations in question are designed to apply pressure on the negotiations, to maintain readiness for an immediate attack if they fail or preparations for an attack that will be ordered in any event.
- All of the above has occurred amid gradually increasing friction with the United States over a series of issues that pertain to the hostages and the war in Gaza. Israeli officials are convinced that the administration leaked the story to CNN in an effort to scuttle the strike, a method that has been used on several occasions in the context of the complicated relations between the two countries.
- Israeli officials are concerned that Trump is so eager to reach an agreement of his own that he might allow Iran to keep its uranium enrichment facilities. Conversely, many are confident that even if Israel does attack without American authorization and without coordination and assistance, if Iran strikes back powerfully, the United States will come to Israel's defense in any event. But even if that defensive help is provided, it may not be enough.
- Even after its rounds of fighting with Israel, Iran has roughly 2,000 ballistic missiles, and nearly twice that number of drones and cruise missiles. Presumably, in the wake of an Israeli strike, the Iranian barrage will be far less selective and, as opposed to previous attacks, will also target residential areas. Israel may not have enough batteries and interceptor missiles to cope with barrages of that extent.

Israel Hayom

Whither Jerusalem?

By Jalal Bana

- I deeply pitied the hundreds of young right-wing supporters who attacked left-wing activists and chanted “death to Arabs” on Jerusalem Day, a day that is supposed to symbolize above all the unity of the holy city, the nation’s capital. But my pity was for their ignorance, their lack of understanding of what their words mean to 20% of the country’s citizens and more, as well as to the quarter of a billion Arabs living in the Middle East. Whether they like it or not, at some point, they will come into contact with an Arab.
- Still, I wondered to myself what would happen if the chants were reversed—against Jews in Jerusalem or in any other European capital. They probably would be denounced as racist and antisemitic against the Jewish people, and the government—from the prime minister on down—would rush to issue condemnations and demand urgent and immediate action be taken against those responsible.
- But when the chants are against Arabs, the world simply carries on. No one reacts, no one cares. That’s a shame, mainly because the meaning and impact of such chants are felt months, sometimes years later.
- The police managed to contain this confrontation relatively quickly. This fact reveals not only the deep fracture and division within Israel and the polarization among all sectors of society—religious and secular, Jews and Arabs, right and left—but also the fact that the State of Israel does not have a united capital.
- The fact of the matter is that for a long time, Jerusalem has not been a united city in any sense, politically, economically or socially. Geography may be the only metric on which the city can be considered a single area. But on the ground, it is the most divided city in Israel, far more than any other city. This is not so much the fault of the municipal government as of the central government, which makes all the decisions regarding the capital and strives to maintain the status quo regarding the city’s various divisions and disparities.
- People who visit Jerusalem, especially the eastern part of the city—not just the Old City—understand perfectly well that it is the only capital city in the world that is not united. Jerusalem, which is supposed to be the most sacred of cities, is a capital that cannot exist for even a single week

without serious incidents and clashes. From the sanctity of Shabbat to the drafting of yeshiva students to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- A country that views its capital as a united city should act accordingly to unite the population and to see its various components as integral elements of a comprehensive Jerusalem mosaic. But the Israeli government—every Israeli government so far—has acted to preserve the status quo in every sense, never giving up on marking the day of the city’s “unification,” which is in fact the day of the conquest of East Jerusalem 58 years ago. Aside from declarations of unity, there is almost no real unity among its residents.
- Aside from the political divide, is it acceptable for the capital city to be one of the poorest cities in the country? This situation has existed for decades, and nothing ever changes. The municipality serves the Jewish residents, while the Arab and ultra Orthodox neighborhoods do not recognize the sovereignty of either the municipality or the state.
- Before marking Jerusalem Unification Day, the city should first belong to all its residents, in all their diversity, and racist incidents like those that occurred earlier this week must disappear from our lives. Otherwise, what good is marking a day on either the Jewish or Gregorian calendar under the title “unity” when the city is divided, fractured, and full of hatred and racism?