



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

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

*Friday, May 9*

**Please Forward News Update to Your Friends & Colleagues. [They Can Use this Link to Subscribe.](#)**

### **Headlines:**

- **Under Trump, Saudi civil nuclear talks delinked from Israel recognition, sources say**
- **Iran's hidden nuclear facility uncovered by satellite imagery - report**
- **Israel mounts heavy airstrikes in south Lebanon**
- **US & Israel mull temporary American control of Gaza after war - report**
- **Israel shuts UNRWA schools in East Jerusalem, in line with ban on aid agency**
- **Dozens of students arrested in pro-Palestinian protest at Columbia University**

### **Commentary:**

- **Israel Hayom: Trying to Regroup, Hamas Terrorizes the Gazan Public**
  - By Shachar Kleiman
- **Yediot Ahronot: Trump Takes “America First” Approach, Leaving Israel Up in the Air**
  - By Itamar Eichner

---

Reuters

**[Under Trump, Saudi civil nuclear talks delinked from Israel recognition, sources say](#)**

The United States is no longer demanding Saudi Arabia normalise ties with Israel as a condition for progress on civil nuclear cooperation talks, two sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters ahead of U.S. President Donald Trump's visit next week. Dropping the demand that Saudi Arabia establish diplomatic relations with Israel would be a major concession by Washington. Under former President Joe Biden, nuclear talks were an element of a wider U.S.-Saudi deal tied to normalisation and to Riyadh's goal of a defence treaty with Washington.

Jerusalem Post

**[Iran's hidden nuclear facility uncovered by satellite imagery - report](#)**

New satellite images obtained by Fox News on Thursday have shown a secret Iranian nuclear weapons facility in an exclusive report by the American source. The facility is located in the country's northern province, the Semnan Province. Iranian officials have code-named the facility the "Rainbow Site" and have masked it as a chemical production company under the name "Diba Energy Siba." The site reportedly covers over 2,500 acres, according to the source, and has been operational for over 10 years.

Reuters

**[Israel mounts heavy airstrikes in south Lebanon](#)**

Israel launched dozens of airstrikes in south Lebanon on Thursday, in one of its heaviest bombardments of the region since a ceasefire ended last year's war with

the Iran-backed Hezbollah. The Israeli military said it had hit a Hezbollah infrastructure site in the south. There was no immediate comment from Hezbollah, which has previously said that it withdrew all its forces from the south in line with the U.S.-brokered truce.

**i24 News**

## **[US & Israel mull temporary American control of Gaza after war - report](#)**

According to five sources close to the case, the United States and Israel have discussed the possibility of Washington leading an interim government in Gaza after the end of the current conflict, Reuters reported. These "high-level" consultations focused on the establishment of a transitional administration led by an American official, who would oversee Gaza until the territory is demilitarized and stabilized, thus allowing the establishment of a viable Palestinian governance.

**Times of Israel**

## **[Israel shuts UNRWA schools in East Jerusalem, in line with ban on aid agency](#)**

Israeli police shut down six schools operated by UNRWA in the Shuafat refugee camp and other neighborhoods of East Jerusalem on Thursday, as they implemented a law prohibiting the UN's Palestinian aid agency from operating in the capital because of its ties to terror organizations, including Hamas. The closures followed a police notice issued to the schools last month and marked the official enforcement of a law banning United Nations Relief and Works Agency operations within Israel's sovereign territory, which came into effect in January. The law does not apply to the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

**Reuters**

## **Dozens of students arrested in pro-Palestinian protest at Columbia University**

Police arrested dozens of Columbia University students who seized part of the school's main library on Wednesday in one of the biggest pro-Palestinian demonstrations on campus since last year's wave of protests against Israel's war in Gaza. At least 40 to 50 students, their hands cuffed with plastic zip-ties, were seen being loaded into New York Police Department vans and buses outside Butler Library as NYPD officers swept through the six-story building to round up other protesters who refused to leave.

**Commentary:**

**Israel Hayom**

## **Trying to Regroup, Hamas Terrorizes the Gazan Public**

**By Shachar Kleiman**

- More than 400 terrorists from different organizations have been killed since the fighting was resumed, but the ceasefire that was upheld between January and March provided Hamas with an opportunity to recruit thousands of new terrorists in addition to others it had recruited while the war was underway.
- On the one hand, Hamas restored some of its capabilities, a process that has manifested itself on the ground. On the other hand, after most of its top commanders and 20,000 of its troops were killed during the war, and after much of its arms infrastructure was destroyed, Hamas's capabilities remain far diminished relative to the capabilities it possessed on the eve of the October 7 massacre. Currently, only two of its most senior commanders are still alive: Muhammad Sinwar, who is effectively the commander of Hamas's military wing, and Ez al-Dine al-Haddad, who commands its forces in the northern Gaza Strip.

- **Israel has killed most of Hamas’s politburo members who were based in Gaza. Ten of its 17 members have been killed, three of whom were killed in the past few months. Six others remerged overseas, and one is still in Gaza—the 80-year-old Mahmoud a-Zahar. The politburo served as a “shadow government” of sorts, a governmental apparatus that was subordinate to Yahya Sinwar, the organization’s former leader who was killed by IDF troops last October.**
- **Despite its ongoing recruitment of terrorists, Palestinian sources reported that Hamas has faced real difficulty in paying salaries. That problem stems partially from restrictions that were recently imposed on digital payment platforms. It has been compounded by the death of its financial officers, the most high-ranking of whom was Ismail Barhoum, who was killed a month ago.**
- **Asharq al-Awsat reported that Hamas has barely paid salaries to its civil servants in recent months, and only one-month’s salary was paid to the terrorists who serve with its military wing.**
- **The New “Police” - Hamas’s Interior Ministry, fearing a loss of control over the Gazan street, established police force of its own to improve its control over the Gaza Strip. According to Palestinian sources, that police force consists of 5,000 terrorists who have been given free rein to shoot any person who threatens to disrupt public order.**
- **Hamas officials said that the chief reason for establishing the new police force was to act against “gangs of thieves” that have stolen humanitarian aid. In practice, however, sources in Gaza said that the real reason is Hamas’s desire to suppress protests, such as the demonstrations that were held recently in the northern Gaza Strip. Hamas has begun to take measures to suppress protests, measures that include following, threatening, arresting, interrogating and executing people who have taken part in anti-Hamas demonstrations. Hamas hopes to completely stifle all dissent.**
- **Terrorizing the Public - According to sources, Hamas has used its new police force to terrorize the civilian population under the pretext of “maintaining public order and defense.” The source described this as the same “oppressive and bloody mechanism” that was first formed in 2006, and which Hamas subsequently used in its 2007 coup against the Palestinian Authority and Fatah.**
- **Another contributing factor to the decision to reestablish that force is the losses that were suffered by Hamas’s domestic security forces. In the course of the war, Israel killed the commander of the police and his**

deputy, as well as two other top domestic security officials: Hassan Awada and his successor, Bahjat Abu Sultan.

- Even prior to the resumption of the war, the Hamas police reported that the IDF had killed 1,400 senior officials, officers and policemen, had wounded more than 1,950 and had arrested 211. Furthermore, the prevailing assessment is that a large number of policemen left the Gaza Strip.
- Hamas's police force had 10,000 men before the war. The few thousand that still remain have now been incorporated into the new/old police force. The Saham Unit, which is effectively tasked with stealing goods on Hamas's behalf and with executing "thieves," was formerly part of Hamas's police force, but is now operating under the auspices of the new police mechanism.
- According to media reports out of Gaza, the IDF carried out several air strikes in the past number of days that targeted police squads that tried to confiscate goods from merchants.

**Yediot Ahronot**

## **Trump Takes "America First" Approach, Leaving Israel Up in the Air**

**By Itamar Eichner**

- People in the know said that when the presidential election was between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, Netanyahu preferred Biden on the assumption that he is a staunch Zionist and supports Israel, and that Netanyahu would be able to maneuver in a way that would serve Israel's interests.
- When Biden was removed from the ticket and Kamala Harris became the candidate, things became more complicated. Throughout the entire time Israel knew that it had the unequivocal support of the Republican Party, but Trump is not a typical Republican. Above all, he believes in MAGA Make America Great Again—and his worldview is informed by risk management and maximizing profits for the United States.
- Trump's upcoming visit to the Middle East will focus on economic issues, huge deals that are to be signed between the countries and investments that will create close ties between the Arab states and the US for years to

come. Trump currently is not scheduled to visit Israel, despite ongoing efforts, which might denote his priorities.

- President Obama began his first term in office with a visit to Cairo and Istanbul, and skipped over Israel, which started his relationship with Israel on the wrong foot.
- The Republican Party is divided over foreign policy issues. On the one side of the divide are classic Republicans such as Mike Waltz, who support Israel and want to attack Iran. On the other are neo conservatives, such as Don Jr. (Trump's son) and Vice President JD Vance, who would prefer to refrain from an attack and want to focus on the United States. They have advocated an isolationist stance. For the time being, and following Waltz's ouster as the national security adviser, the latter group appears to have the upper hand.
- Despite the fact that most of the people who were appointed to high ranking jobs with a foreign policy purview are considered to be pro-Israel, Israel has been left behind.
- The "America first" policy is not necessarily anti-Israel; rather, it advocates promoting American interests. When the Americans first began to attack Yemen, Vice President Vance believed that the US should not attack since it was not the Americans' problem. Israel's interests are less relevant than America's interests, and that is what is most troubling when it comes to Iran.
- The United States is galloping towards a nuclear agreement and has been openly talking about allowing Iran to have nuclear energy. Israel was informed about those negotiations at the last moment and was stunned: the United States had suddenly forgotten that the Iranians deceive everyone; it had forgotten that this was the same Iran that had planned to assassinate Trump and his former secretary of state, Mike Pompeo; and it had forgotten that Iran was the head of the octopus that controls and bankrolls the various tentacles.
- Israeli officials were also stunned when Trump revealed that he had persuaded Netanyahu not to attack Iran. Jerusalem has been hard put concealing its frustration with Trump's behavior. Israel had not been informed at all about Trump's decision to stop attacking the Houthis, and learned about that from television reports.
- That was already one step too many, and the message that was sent to the Middle East is that Israel is not truly at the top of the United States' priorities. If the Houthis and Iranians can reach agreements with the US behind Israel's back—attacks on Israel can continue.

- This trend can also be seen in Syria, where the United States is packing up its troops and is planning to remove them. This can also be seen vis-à-vis Turkey amid Trump's flirtation with Erdogan, who has not reined in his antisemitic rhetoric and has made increasingly inflammatory threats.
- Even the sale of F-35 planes has been put back on the table with Turkey. This can also be seen with Saudi Arabia in the deals that Trump is advancing. Normalization is no longer at the top of his set of priorities, perhaps because he knows that Netanyahu is in no rush to end the war in Gaza and isn't prepared to discuss any formula that might allude to any willingness to consider the two-state solution—which is the bare minimum from Riyadh's perspective. This can also be seen with Trump's Gaza relocation plan, which he has stopped pushing.
- Has Trump abandoned Israel? Depends on whom you ask. Some say that he was never truly with us to begin with. Trump isn't truly enamored with his own policies, and that is why he keeps changing them while Israel keeps trying to influence policy without success. If Biden had done what Trump has done in the past number of weeks, Netanyahu probably would have already boarded a plane and asked to address Congress. But his hands are now tied, mainly because Trump knows that he is considered to be the most pro-Israel president there is.
- Israel needs to think hard and to figure out a way to become relevant in the American worldview. A number of genuine Israel-supporters are still in the administration: Marco Rubio, Steve Witkoff and the new American ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, who paid an historic visit yesterday to ancient Shilo and held an official meeting with Yesha Council officials.
- We can only hope that he is able to persuade Trump to be forthcoming with Israel on issues that are crucial to it. Some Israeli officials prefer to look at the half-full glass and say reassuringly that Trump has not abandoned Israel at all on the Houthi issue. He said from day-one that the goal of the operation was to restore freedom of shipping in the Red Sea, and that is precisely what was agreed to through Omani mediation. He never pledged to act in response to the Houthi attacks against Israel, and has continued to help Israel defensively.
- Regarding emigration from Gaza, the optimists in Jerusalem say that Trump's vision is alive and well, and is contingent on finding countries that will take in Gazans. What about the negotiations with Iran? It is hard to anticipate how the talks will end, but without real negotiations Trump will have no way to justify military action. Israeli officials are praying that the talks will fail, at which point the military option will be back on the table.



