



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Monday, September 11*

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- **Hamas Ponies Up for Fuel from Egypt, Seeking to Boost Power in Gaza**
- **PA Suspends Funds to Prisoners 'Due to Israeli, U.S. Pressure'**
- **Shin Bet: Temple Mount Crisis Sparked Huge Increase in Terrorism**
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# News Excerpts

September 11, 2017

## Israel Hayom

### **Palestinians Accuse Israel of Sabotaging Trump-Abbas Meet**

Ahead of the annual United Nations General Assembly this month, the Palestinians have accused Israel of trying to sabotage U.S. efforts to hold a three-way summit – with Israeli, Palestinian and American leaders .. The 72nd Regular Session of the U.N. General Assembly will convene at U.N. Headquarters on Sept. 12.

*See also, [“Arab League forms committee to foil Israeli bid for UNSC membership” \(Times of Israel\)](#)*

## Times of Israel

### **Hamas Buys Fuel from Egypt, Seeking to Boost Power in Gaza**

Hamas has recently bought large quantities of diesel fuel from Egypt in an effort to increase the output of the Gaza Strip's only power station, after months of refusing to shell out money to provide electricity to the Palestinian enclave's residents. The purchase of some 30 million liters of diesel from Egypt, at a cost of \$25 million, marks a change in attitude on the part of Gaza's rulers, likely indicating a bid to stave off a repeat of street protests that roiled the enclave last winter.

*See also, [“Haniyeh makes first trip to Egypt four months after election as Hamas head” \(Times of Israel\)](#)*

## Haaretz

### **PA Suspends Funds to Prisoners 'Due to Israeli, U.S. Pressure'**

The Palestinian Authority has suspended payments to the Palestinian Prisoners Club, a nongovernmental organization that is considered the leader of the public and legal fight for prisoners' rights. Figures in the prisoners club said the PA's decision to seemingly withdraw funding is due to pressure from Israel and the United States regarding assistance to Palestinian prisoners, plus the PPC's support for the hunger strike in Israel by Fatah-affiliated prisoners earlier this year.

## Times of Israel

### **Shin Bet: Temple Mount Crisis Sparked Increase in Terrorism**

The Shin Bet security service has noted a significant increase — a threefold rise, by one metric — in terrorist activities in the wake of July's Temple Mount crisis, the agency's chief said Sunday. Nadav Argaman said that July and August, the Shin Bet prevented approximately 70 terror attacks. He added that since the beginning of the year, his agency has thwarted some 200 terror attacks, including suicide bombings, shootings and kidnappings.

*See also, [“Terror attacks against Israelis drop following harsh July” \(Times of Israel\)](#)*

Associated Press

## **Palestinians Release Activist Jailed for Facebook Post**

The Palestinian Authority has released a prominent Palestinian activist a week after he was arrested for writing a Facebook post criticizing the government of PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Issa Amro's lawyer said Sunday that his client was released on \$1,400 bail after being held under a recent edict that allows the government to crack down on social media critics. In a Facebook post earlier this month, Amro criticized the detention of a local journalist who had called for Abbas's resignation.

*See also, ["PA releases Issa Amro on bail amid charges of 'causing strife' over Facebook post" \(Ma'an\)](#)*

Haaretz

## **Israel Complicating Foreign Spouses' Stay in West Bank**

In recent months, citizens of foreign countries who are married to Palestinian residents of the West Bank have noticed that Israel has been putting more limits on their ability to stay put. Women claim that after years of being issued visas (officially called "visitor permits") that were valid for a year, suddenly, with no explanation, they received a visa that was only good for a few weeks. Other women, who not long ago received visas valid for six or seven months, have recently been given visas valid for just over two weeks and which must be renewed over and over.

Associated Press

## **Israel PM's Son Under Fire for Anti-Semitic Post**

Israeli political leaders lashed out at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's eldest son Sunday for posting an anti-Semitic caricature aimed at his father's critics. Yair Netanyahu's meme shows American Jewish billionaire George Soros and a figure that resembles Nazi depictions of world Jewry manipulating former Prime Minister Ehud Barak and two leaders of weekly protests calling on Netanyahu to step down over corruption allegations. The post was shared by former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke and other anti-Semites.

## **Is Abbas under international pressure to relieve Gaza?**

By Adnan Abu Amer

- The Palestinian Authority (PA) started taking punitive measures against the Gaza Strip in April, notably reducing the salaries of government employees, no longer transferring funds to certain ministries such as the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, and cutting the purchase of fuel to operate Gaza's sole power plant. The international community remained silent and showed no overt interference to put an end to the repercussions of these measures on the deteriorating living conditions in Gaza. However, the Palestinian media recently spoke of pressure exerted by European countries on Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to stop these harsh measures against the Gaza Strip.
- On Aug. 30, a Palestinian source told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity that Abbas' reduction of some punitive measures against Gaza was due to pressure exerted by the European Union. On Aug. 26, Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah decided, with Abbas' approval, to allow about 6,000 workers in the educational sector of Gaza to return to their jobs after the government forced them into early retirement on July 4. Meanwhile, on Aug. 29, Hamas-affiliated radio station Al-Aqsa Voice reported that Abbas had asked for a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, but the latter reportedly refused to meet due to Abbas' sanctions against Gaza that have damaged vital sectors such as education, health and infrastructure.
- Ramy Abdu, the president of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor in Gaza, told AI-Monitor, "There is no serious European pressure to end Gaza's suffering. The EU's action since the beginning of the Gaza siege in 2006 and its talks with the PA have always been calculated so as not to embarrass itself when it comes to the PA's violation of human rights. The EU is the main supporter of the PA, but the latter is playing the Europeans on the subject of sanctions in Gaza from two angles.
- First, the PA said these were short-term measures, which is not the case. Second, it claimed it only cut off the salaries of employees who are not working, which the EU itself had requested in February. This is why the Europeans are not going above and beyond with their rejection of the sanctions." On Aug. 28, Al-Resalah newspaper reported that the EU is considering cutting financial aid to the PA if it continues to implement its measures against the Gaza Strip, because they fall under the framework of collective punishment. The EU covers 15% of the PA's budget by providing 450 million euros (\$541 million) annually.
- In a press statement Aug. 28, Shadi Othman, a spokesman for the Office of the European Union Representative in Jerusalem, denied the alleged EU ultimatum, stressing the strong EU-PA strategic relations and the continuation of the EU's financial commitment to the PA. Ghassan Khatib, the former minister of labor and planning in the Ramallah government, told AI-Monitor, "President Abbas would never risk taking harsh decisions against Gaza without consulting with the international community first — regardless of whether we believe they are positive or negative steps. Abu Mazen [Abbas] had obviously considered the possible international reactions before carrying on with his new policy

toward Gaza because he believes that the time has come to bring Gaza back under the Palestinian legitimacy. If Gaza were to remain isolated, the dream of a Palestinian state would never be realized. Abbas wants to convey to the international community that Gaza is still subject to official Palestinian influence.”

- Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem told Al-Monitor, “The international community is called upon to exert strong pressure on Abbas to stop his actions against Gaza because they violate international law, and the situation in Gaza is on the verge of exploding. Most international parties reject these inhumane sanctions, and although Abbas is displeased with these [international] positions, he insists on his non-nationalist positions.” Qassem added, “Hamas, on the other hand, is conveying to all the international parties it can communicate with the catastrophic results of Abbas’ sanctions. Hamas has sought and continues to seek breakthroughs in the region to try to overcome the devastating effects of these measures, as it did with the understandings it reached with Egypt in July.”
- In his Aug. 30 article on the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs website, Yoni Ben Menachem, a former officer in the Israeli military intelligence service, said that Abbas was under local, regional and international pressure to ease the sanctions he imposed on Gaza's residents. He therefore froze these sanctions on the eve of his departure to Turkey on Aug. 27, as a goodwill gesture toward Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Menachem noted that on Aug. 30, US envoy Jason Greenblatt visited the Gaza border and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres arrived in Gaza. Both men relayed to Abbas their concerns over the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.
- However, no Palestinian official has yet to announce the freezing of all sanctions imposed by the PA against Gaza. Mohammed Abu Jayyab, the editor-in-chief of local newspaper Al-Eqtessadia, told Al-Monitor, “Perhaps Abu Mazen would never take action against Gaza without a European and international consensus. I have learned from prominent sources in the Palestinian Finance Ministry in Ramallah — which oversees most of the measures taken against Gaza — that it provides regular reports to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the EU. These reports have indicated that the sanctions resulted in a reduction in [the PA’s] expenditure, as it [the ministry] seeks international support for such actions.”
- No one knows the truth behind the European and international pressure on the PA to stop its punitive measures against the Gaza Strip, but it is likely that Abbas may not have the courage to take such sanctions, especially the suspension of salaries and the reduction of expenditures for Gaza, without any implicit or explicit agreement with those international parties.

## Why Syria Hasn't Retaliated to the Alleged Israeli Strike

By Amos Harel

- Syria didn't retaliate to the airstrike, which it has attributed to Israel, on a missile-production plant in the west of the country on Thursday. The statement by the Syrian military was carefully crafted and low on detail. The release described the bombed facility, part of the Scientific Studies and Research Center, as a military outpost and said two guards were killed in the attack.
- Iran, which is leading the project to improve the accuracy of Hezbollah's missiles, was also cautious in referring to the incident. So were Hezbollah and Russia, which provides an aerial umbrella for the forces supporting the Assad regime. At the moment it seems the bombing won't lead to a conflagration with Israel.
- The airstrike's timing was sensitive because it came after the partial cease-fire achieved in Syria, under Russian auspices, in July. The aerial attack also came after Russia and the United States didn't heed Israel's protests about the cease-fire deal, which didn't keep the Iranian forces out of Syria. The strike was different from earlier ones attributed to Israel, which targeted weapons convoys intended for Hezbollah or the makeshift arsenals in which those weapons were kept. This time the bombed site was a large, permanent facility clearly identified with the Assad regime.
- It appears, however, that the timing isn't convenient for sabre rattling by the Assad regime and its supporters. The regime scored an important victory last week when the Syrian army and Shi'ite militias took over Deir el-Zour in eastern Syria and drove out Islamic State fighters. Iran is explaining its active military involvement in Syria with the need to help the Assad regime, more than opening a front with Israel, while Hezbollah is playing down the assistance it receives from Iran and Syria.
- A military retaliation against Israel could create difficulties for the parties bolstering Hezbollah. The response could come at a later stage and indirectly, like the tightening of Russian-Iranian cooperation. Recently, reports have said Russia will provide air defense in western Syria, mainly via S-400 missiles, for Iranian arms plants as well. As far as is known, Iran operates such facilities in Syria in coordination with the Assad regime, but so far hasn't implemented plans to set up similar ones in Lebanon.
- On Sunday, Israel's military will continue the large drill in the north that began last week; numerous infantry units and aircraft will be involved. The exercise, which is taking place in a Lower Galilee area that simulates Lebanon, will move this week from defense to offense. Presumably, Hezbollah and Syria will also have to take the Israeli army's high alert into account if they're considering a retaliation to the airstrike.
- Former Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said he didn't know who attacked the plant in Syria, "but whoever it was did Israel an excellent service." As Ya'alon put it, "The Russians, even if they think we did it, aren't saying a word. There's a hotline between our defense establishments and

understandings that we won't get in their way and they won't get in ours. I don't see a fear of an escalation, but we have to keep evaluating the situation."