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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, November 9

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News Excerpts

November 9, 2017

Ynet

Palestinians Resume Security Ties with Israel

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's administration said on Wednesday it had resumed security coordination with Israel in the West Bank, frozen in July, and sought sole security control of the Gaza Strip, where Hamas Islamist forces dominate. The remarks, by the Palestinian police chief, left open the question of how Abbas might bring his former rivals in Hamas to heel given their refusal to disarm as demanded by Israel and the United States.

See also, [*"PA Police Chief: Hamas Must Disarm Under Unity Deal"* \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Washington Post

Lebanon's Political Crisis Raises Specter of War with Israel

Lebanon has often been caught between the political agendas of more-powerful countries. But it now appears more vulnerable to conflict as Israel and Saudi Arabia try to isolate their shared enemy, the Iran-backed movement Hezbollah. Israel has watched with alarm as a battle-hardened Hezbollah has helped Syrian President Bashar al-Assad take the upper hand in Syria's war. Israel has been accused of regularly bombing across its northern border, targeting convoys and military depots in Syria linked to Hezbollah. Israeli officials have also ramped up their bellicose rhetoric in recent months, warning that in any war, Israel won't make a distinction between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah.

Jerusalem Post

American, Israeli Lawmakers Present 'Israel Victory' Project

A right-wing project working to shift the paradigm to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by declaring Israeli victory will make a new push next week to garner public support in the US. "The proposed policy calls for an end to the continuously futile 'peace process'," the project says. "The Israel Victory Project introduces a new policy for a peaceful solution: The Palestinians 'lose' by giving up their century-long rejection of the Jewish state, and Israel 'wins' by truly succeeding in its 150-year quest for a sovereign homeland."

Ha'aretz

Israel Retreats on Contentious 'Nation-State Law

The proposed "Jewish Nation-State Law" will not give precedence to the Jewish character of Israel over its democratic nature. The government coalition has agreed to change the wording of the controversial bill and remove one of the main motifs of the original, which would have required the courts to give precedence to the Jewish character of Israel in cases where it conflicts with democratic values. The decision will now allow the Knesset to hold its first vote on the bill on December 12.

Israel Grants Permits for 240 Homes in East Jerusalem

Jerusalem authorities granted building permits for 240 homes in East Jerusalem Wednesday, with 90 units in the Gilo neighborhood and 150 in the Ramat Shlomo neighborhood. Meanwhile, building permits were granted for 44 units for Arab East Jerusalemites in the Palestinian neighborhood of Beit Hanina. Jewish East Jerusalem neighborhoods have enjoyed an increase in building approvals in recent months.

Housing Ministry Strengthens Jordan Valley Settlements

The Construction and Housing Ministry is drawing up a plan to strengthen the settlements in the Jordan Valley where 6,000 residents currently live. The plan calls for the agricultural communities in the Jordan Valley to receive money from the government for each new family that moves to the area and to remove the obstacles preventing the expansion of existing settlements. The state would finance a marketing campaign to encourage people to move to the Jordan Valley. Housing and Construction Minister Yoav Galant told Israel Radio that there was consent across the board in Israel that the Jordan Valley must be part of Israel in any peace deal. The Jordan Valley has to be strengthened and the size of the settlements must be doubled, he said.

Psychologist: Sex Abuse, Drugs and Despair in Gaza

Mohammed Mansour, who treats Gaza victims of sexual assault, describes the dystopian nightmare that Palestinians are living. "In this visit I encountered a large number of cases of sexual abuse among the children," said Mansour. "That's a phenomenon that has always existed, but... it's become positively huge. More than one-third of the children I saw in the Jabalya [refugee] camp reported being sexually abused... Children who live in conditions of neglect are more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Poverty and trauma go hand in hand."

PM to Be Questioned by Police Today for Fifth Time

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be questioned by Israeli police Thursday for the fifth time as investigations into possible wrongdoing on his part continues only days after two of his closest affiliates were grilled by investigators. Netanyahu will be questioned at his Jerusalem residence on matters involving the so-called 'Case 1000,' in which Netanyahu is suspected of accepting gifts from wealthy benefactors in the form of cigars, champagne and jewelry – worth an estimated total of hundreds of thousands of shekels – allegedly in return for advancing their interests. This is his fifth time being questioned in this regard.

See also, ["Netanyahu Confidants Grilled by Police for 4th Day" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

How Did 'Peace' Become a Dirty Word in Israel?

By Shmuel Rosner

- On Saturday night, tens of thousands of Israelis gathered in Tel Aviv's main public square, as they do every Nov. 4, to remember the man who was murdered in that spot in 1995 and whose name the square carries: Yitzhak Rabin. But even though more than two decades have passed since the Saturday when Mr. Rabin, who was then the prime minister, was shot and killed, Israelis have still not recovered from the trauma.
- In the weeks before this year's rally in Mr. Rabin's memory, there was a debate over the former prime minister's true legacy and the proper way to commemorate his assassination. (In fact, this debate has become something of annual Israeli tradition.) Mr. Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish fanatic who opposed his government's peace policy with the Palestinians. In the early 1990s, Mr. Rabin began a process of negotiations with the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat that resulted in the Palestinian Authority taking over some of the West Bank. For that reason, there are many Israelis — supporters of the peace process on the left — who expect Mr. Rabin's annual memorials to reflect his quest for peace. On the other hand, Mr. Rabin was the prime minister of all Israelis, including the many who opposed his policies. These Israelis expect a memorial to Mr. Rabin to be sober and unified, a call for civility and a denunciation of political extremism — not a political event in support of the policies they still oppose.
- The debate was especially fierce this year because the organizers of the event — the Commanders for Israel's Security and the Darkenu movement, both of which call for separation of Israel from the Palestinians — decided to hold the event under the theme "We Remember: We are One People." In promoting the rally, they initially avoided the words "murder" and "peace" — and the list of speakers included Israelis who were fierce opponents of Mr. Rabin's policies. The left was furious, accusing the organizers — as one member of the Knesset from the Labor Party put it — of presenting the rally as if Mr. Rabin had "died peacefully in his bed" rather than been killed by a right-wing extremist.
- Why would the organizers want to take "peace" out of the rally? Their reasoning was solid: The more the commemoration was about Mr. Rabin's controversial policies, the less it would unify Israelis. So they made a choice: eliminate the "peace" to gain the participation of the right wing, which opposes the peace process prescribed by Mr. Rabin and his followers on the left who want to see Israel's settlements in the West Bank withdrawn.
- It was the right choice. It was also a troubling one. Most Israelis haven't believed in peace for a long time. And by "peace" in this context, I mean what Mr. Rabin wanted: a concrete and stable peace with their Palestinian neighbors. Most Israelis still support negotiations for peace, but only a small minority believes that negotiations will lead to peace "in the coming years." As a realistic goal, peace is out of fashion, and for good reasons: Both Israelis and Palestinians refuse to make the compromises necessary for a lasting peace.

- But it's one thing to realistically assess that peace is not coming anytime soon, and quite another to forgo the ideal of peace. It is one thing to realize that holding a politically charged rally is not a good way to preserve Mr. Rabin's memory, and it's quite another to act as though mentioning a desire for peace in the public square is unacceptable. How has "peace" become such a politically charged term? Jews include the word "shalom," or peace, in their daily prayers; they use the word as a greeting regularly. But in the political arena, many Israelis are no longer willing to say that peace is their goal for their country, because they fear that saying so will make them sound fainthearted or deluded or — God forbid! — like leftists.
- Israelis have developed two strategies as they shun the politically poisonous word "peace." The right generally avoids the subject entirely. Since it believes peace is not a realistic goal, there is nothing to talk about. For its part, the left has replaced "peace" with more technical terms, like "separation" or "political settlement." This is the way for leftist leaders to indicate to their base that peace is still their goal, while not scaring away potential voters who are skeptical. Both these strategies make sense, and both make Israel a lesser place.
- The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel proclaims: "We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness." Indeed, peace with Israel's neighbors is an ideal that our leaders have never abandoned. "Israel never ceased to call for a true peace of mutual respect between our neighbors and ourselves," said Prime Minister Golda Meir of the Labor Party in 1969. In 1978, upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for Israel's peace accords with Egypt, Prime Minister Menachem Begin of the Likud Party said that there is "no mission in life more sacred" than working for peace.
- Our leaders should go back to this habit of reminding Israel and the world that Israel's goal is peace. "Peace" should be a usable, mainstream word, and an aspiration that everyone shares. That won't be easy. The left has gotten used to using "peace" — whether by this name or by other uninspiring euphemisms — as a weapon against the right. The right has gotten used to using "peace" as weapon against the left, which, they say, chases a pipe dream. But peace shouldn't be a political weapon for either side. It should be an ideal and a goal dear to all Israelis who remember Mr. Rabin's murder with horror and sorrow.

Israel Chooses Sides in Syria

By Ben Caspit

- The momentous announcement came on Nov. 3. For the first time, Israel warned publicly that it would intervene militarily in the war in Syria. "The army is prepared and ready to help the residents of the village [of Hader]," announced the spokesperson for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). "It will prevent the occupation of the village or any attempts to harm it, out of a commitment to its Druze population." Hader is a Druze village on the eastern slopes of Mount Hermon, about 2 miles inside Syria, in Quneitra province. The Israeli announcement instilled a sense of calm and restored relative quiet in the Golan Heights. At the same time, however, it introduced an entirely new situation to the region. Military action by Israel in Syria is now a possibility.
- That Israel has not been sucked into the Syrian war, which has raged across its northern border for the past six years, is a first-rate strategic achievement. Israel's government has somehow managed to remain outside the circle of bloodletting despite the frequent drizzle of mortar and artillery fire onto the Israeli side of the Golan Heights, despite the veritable War of Armageddon being fought along the border of the Golan Heights between various rebel groups, despite the reported increase in Israeli aerial attacks on arms convoys from Syria to Hezbollah, and despite at least two attempts by Hezbollah to open a second front against Israel on the Golan. It did this while maintaining its capacity for deterrence on the one hand and by sticking to the red lines that it established on the other. That is no small feat.
- There have been calls in Israel to intervene militarily in response to events in Syria. These intensified after reports of chemical weapons having been used against civilians and of a crematoria maintained by Bashar al-Assad's government in Damascus to dispose of the bodies of regime opponents. All the calls went unanswered. Israel demonstrated that it was determined to remain far from the conflict, unless the redlines set by the Cabinet were crossed, or in other words, unless tiebreaking weaponry is transferred from Assad's armories to Hezbollah. The Israeli taboo was broken for the first time on Nov. 3, and it was because of the Druze. The residents of Hader are loyal to the Assad regime. The Druze constitute a small minority in many Middle Eastern states, and their strategy for survival has been simple: loyalty to the central government. The Druze in Israel have a blood alliance with the Zionist state, which considers them its most loyal citizens and its bravest soldiers. Military cemeteries are filled with the graves of Druze troops who fought in the IDF. At the same time, Israel has a firm and longstanding commitment to its Druze population.
- There are also strong bonds between the different Druze communities in the Middle East. Israeli Druze are close to their brothers and sisters in Syria, and in many instances belong to branches of the same extended families. These relationships have resulted in a strange situation, whereby an Israeli Druze loyal to the government of Israel can be a close relative of a Syrian Druze loyal to Assad. When Israel and Syria are at war — their de facto status since Israel was

established in 1948 — these same Druze can find themselves on both sides of the divide. They each remain loyal to their respective states, but at the same time to their community and family.

- Rebel forces, mainly from Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, the al-Qaeda affiliate formerly called Jabhat al-Nusra, attacked Hader on Nov. 3. The operation began with a car bomb and a suicide bomber, killing at least 10 residents and wounding dozens more. Among the victims were six members of the family of Kulanu Knesset member Akram Hasoon. The news from Hader spread quickly among Druze villages in Israel and on the Golan. Dozens of Israeli Druze streamed toward the border fence on Golan, with the goal of bursting through it to defend their brothers and sisters in Hader. The IDF invested considerable energy in blocking the wave of Israeli Druze about to storm the fence. They even chased down some 10 men who had managed to get through the barrier and began charging toward Syria. For a few hours, it looked like Israel was losing control of a rapidly deteriorating situation.
- Meanwhile, Israel announced that it would not hesitate to intervene and would not acquiesce to the capture of or any harm to Hader. The public statement had the desired effect. The Jabhat Fatah al-Sham assault was blocked and dispersed by local fighters, and Hader residents were able to regain control of the routes leading to the village. Tensions have since decreased, but the Golan front is still seething, and the Assad regime is trying to establish control along the Israeli border. In Israel, people have noted that things ended quietly this time, but no one has any illusions about what lies ahead. "It could happen again," one high-ranking Israeli security source told Al-Monitor on the condition of anonymity. "It's important for the other side to know that we have no plans to play games here. Israel's statement is clear. We have a commitment to the Druze on the Syrian side of the border too. We will treat anyone who tries to harm them as if they hurt us."
- The current assessment is that Israel has no plans to take control of any territory in the region. The idea of establishing a security strip in Syria has been raised on several occasions, but rejected each time. Israel's military superiority vis-a-vis all the other forces active along the Syrian front is so decisive, with its air force and various other special means available to the IDF, that no one doubts its ability to thwart any attempt to occupy the Druze village. Thus, added to Israel's firm redline on a Syrian transfer of tiebreaking weapons to Hezbollah, the world has now learned of another no less firm boundary: Don't touch the Druze. Period.