



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, November 3

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News Excerpts

November 3, 2017

AP

Syria State TV: Israeli Warplanes Have Struck Inside Syria

Syria's state TV says that Israeli warplanes launched an attack in central Syria overnight and that Syrian air defenses hit back. The TV report says that the attack late on Wednesday targeted the Hissya area in the countryside around the central city of Homs Thursday's report gave no further details. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict, says loud explosions were heard south of Homs, from the location of a Syrian or a Hezbollah military base that is believed to manufacture rockets. The Observatory attributed the explosions to an Israeli airstrike. See also, ["Syria war: Israeli jets 'strike factory near Homs'" \(BBC\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Syria to UN: Take Strict Action Against Israel After Attack

Syria's Foreign Ministry on Thursday called on the United Nations Security Council to condemn Israel's attacks on Syria after an Israeli strike late on Wednesday. The Foreign Ministry asked the Security Council to take "strict and immediate" measures to stop such Israeli attacks, in a statement carried on the state-run SANA news agency. Wednesday's strike hit a copper factory in the industrial town of Hisya, 35 km (21 miles) south of Homs and 112 km north of Damascus, SANA reported. See also, ["Syria to UN: Condemn 'blatant Israeli aggressions'" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

Times of Israel

British PM Rejects Call to Apologize for Balfour Declaration

British Prime Minister Theresa May on Thursday said she would "absolutely not" apologize for the 1917 Balfour Declaration which paved the way for the establishment of the "most extraordinary" State of Israel, while noting that the document's vision of Jewish-Arab coexistence remained "unfinished business." Balfour's landmark document "was a letter that remains very sensitive for many people today – but it was not ignorant of those sensitivities," May said, emphasizing its explicit call to uphold the civil rights of all the non-Jewish communities residing in the country "So when some people suggest we should apologize for this letter, I say absolutely not," she asserted. See also, ["May lauds UK role in creation of Israel at Balfour centenary dinner" \(Guardian\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Netanyahu: World Powers appear Open to Fixing Iran Deal

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has shifted his strategy in opposing the Iran nuclear deal, pushing instead to sway its signatories to change the agreement rather than scuttle it. "The goal that I have in mind is not keeping or eliminating the deal. It's improving the deal and correcting its main flaws," Netanyahu told his British counterpart, Prime Minister Theresa May, on Thursday, when the two met at 10 Downing Street in London. Netanyahu has embarked on a series of conversations with world leaders after finding they are more open to fixing rather than nixing it. See also, ["Palestinians must accept Israel, Netanyahu tells May in London" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

IDF: Humanitarian Help to Hamas when Soldiers Returned

IDF general sets condition on Gaza search for missing terrorists. A top Israeli general said Israel will not allow authorities in the Gaza Strip to search for five missing terrorists in the border area between Israel and the small coastal enclave without progress on the issue of Israelis thought to be held in Hamas's captivity. Israel destroyed a tunnel leading into its territory from Gaza on Monday, leaving seven dead, at least 12 injured and five missing. At some point over the past couple of days, the Hamas-run Civil Defense in Gaza asked the International Committee of the Red Cross to request permission on its behalf from Israel to search for the missing individuals in the border region, the Hamas-linked al-Rai website reported on Thursday. See also, ["No humanitarian help to Hamas until soldiers returned" \(Ynet News\)](#)

AG Opposes Anti-Police Recommendations Bill

Senior officials at the state attorney's office, including the attorney general himself, voiced their opposition Thursday evening against a bill that would prohibit the police from presenting a recommendation to indict. This despite the fact that the police does not, actually, recommend indictment, but rather states whether it has found sufficient evidence to justify an indictment. "We oppose the bill—both in terms of content and timing, which is not right," Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit said, speaking on behalf of the state attorney's office moments before entering its offices ahead of a conference. "I will present my position to the government," he concluded. At the conference, many sided with the AG and his position on the Bill. See also, ["Mandelblit: We're hurrying to finish PM investigations" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

U.S. Welcomes PA in Gaza, Urges Hamas to Accept Israel

The Trump administration on Thursday expressed support for the deployment of the Palestinian Authority's forces at Gaza's border crossings. A statement issued by Trump's special envoy to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Jason Greenblatt, said that "the United States believes it is essential that the Palestinian Authority assume full responsibility for Gaza." Greenblatt added that "any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognize the State of Israel, accept previous agreements and obligations between the parties - including to disarm terrorists - and commit to a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Poll: 68% of Israeli Jews Support Prayer on Temple Mount

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Jewish Israelis think Israel should maintain its sovereignty over the Temple Mount in whatever diplomatic agreements it signs, a poll conducted for the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies and released this week found. In addition, 68% think it is important for Jews to be allowed to pray on the Temple Mount, as opposed to the status quo, in which they may only visit and only Muslims can pray, while 32% said it was not important. See also, ["The Strategic Importance of Jerusalem" \(IJSS\)](#)

Have Israelis Forgotten that Rabin was Killed over Politics?

By Mazal Mualem, columnist for AI-Monitor's Israel Pulse

- At a ceremony beside Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's grave to mark the 22nd anniversary of his assassination, Rabin's son, Yuval Rabin, launched a stinging attack against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Yuval Rabin's remarks were yet another attempt to bring discussion of the assassination back to the political arena, after years in which various elements in Israeli society tried to focus the commemorative narrative on such neutral and artificial terms as "tolerance" and "unity."
- Rabin once attempted to get closer to Netanyahu to win his support for various diplomatic initiatives. It is possible that Rabin has since come to the conclusion that his own actions also helped obfuscate the memory of his father's assassination and the causes that led to it.
- On Nov. 1, he used the only public forum left to him — his speech at the memorial service for his father — to remind everyone that the assassination was politically motivated and that it was preceded by uninhibited incitement. As he pointed out, 22 years later, "The mechanism of incitement and divisiveness continues to strike at us, and anyone who thinks otherwise is branded a traitor." Rabin didn't mention Netanyahu by name. Nevertheless, his stinging arrows were clearly hurled at the man who served as opposition chairman head of the Likud at the time of the assassination, and who has been accused ever since of failing to rein in the incitement against Yitzhak Rabin, when it reached a frenzied pitch among the right following the Oslo Accord.
- Yuval Rabin recalled that his father was also criticized by the Supreme Court and extra-parliamentary organizations (for his role as defense minister during the first intifada). Nor did Yitzhak Rabin receive preferential treatment from the media. Nevertheless, "He did nothing to silence people, he did not try to evade his responsibility and he did not whine about it. Even his harshest critics found his door open, when they approached him. ... He was the prime minister of everyone," Yuval Rabin said.
- The comparison with Netanyahu was obvious. So was Yuval Rabin's insinuation that in an atmosphere where anyone on the left who criticizes the government is immediately branded a traitor, another political assassination cannot be excluded. Rabin stressed that his father's assassination was political: "That is the truth that we must deal with. Tempering the message and whitewashing the facts will not clear the way for the kind of solidarity that is so important to us. ... It is time for a statement from the house on Balfour Street, calling for the complete eradication of violence and hatred from all of our homes."
- The commemoration at Yitzhak Rabin's grave is one of a number being held this year; the main rally at Rabin Square is planned for Nov. 4, the actual anniversary of the assassination.
- In the evolution of the remembrances for Rabin, this year's speech by his son marks a return to the kind of commemorations typical of the years immediately following the assassination, in which there was a clear political component. Back then, the Labor Party organized the main

memorial event in Rabin Square, as the party had been headed by Yitzhak Rabin when he was killed.

- At the time it was obvious that the assassination of Rabin was, first and foremost, a political act. Rabin pushed ahead with the Oslo Accord process. That was why the right incited against him. That was why Yigal Amir fired the three bullets that killed him. Over the years, however, that specific point was muffled. Instead of focusing on the causes and processes that led to the assassination, annual commemorations in Rabin Square began to focus on "reconciliation" and "solidarity" in order to draw a larger crowd. Labor Party leaders didn't even address the crowd, nor did they insist on doing so. One highlight in this disturbing trend occurred last year, when the Likud's David Bitan, chairman of the governing coalition, made the disturbing remark that Rabin's assassination wasn't politically motivated.
- There seems to be a parallel between the decline of Labor as a major party, whose leader is also the head of the peace camp, and the gradual erasure of the political component from the official commemoration of Rabin.
- Anyone who attended the first memorial events in Rabin Square will certainly remember Labor's show of power, even though the party lost an election to Netanyahu and the Likud just eight months after the assassination. Speeches then by Labor Party leaders Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak were razor sharp and unapologetic. So, for example, on the fourth anniversary of Rabin's assassination, in 1999, after the Labor Party under Barak was swept back to power, Rabin's diplomatic approach was a prominent theme of the event, with Barak featuring it proudly in his speech.
- "We have come here to remember that it is impossible to forget," Barak told tens of thousands of people who came to the square to commemorate Rabin back then. "The promise will come forth from here: No more political violence, or violence in society, the family and on the roads. ... From the site where Yitzhak Rabin was murdered, Israel sends out a call tonight: Despite everything, we will move forward toward peace, with no hesitation, with determination, while standing firm on our principles."
- The first cracks in the political commemoration could already be seen in 2001, on the assassination's sixth anniversary. The Likud, headed by Ariel Sharon, had returned to power, and the second intifada had erupted in October 2000. The commemoration occurred just weeks after the assassination of Tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi on Oct. 17, 2001, and there were those on the right who drew parallels between the two events. It made no difference that Rabin was shot dead by a religious Jew, while Zeevi was killed in a terrorist attack by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.
- In the ensuing years, the commemorative event in Rabin Square turned into an anemic demonstration by the country's youth movements. Labor, which had dwindled in size, gradually stepped back from organizing the event. This process took place at the same time as the public was losing trust in the possibility of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians, a shift to the right among the population, and an effort by the left and center to win support from Likud voters by leaning closer to their positions.

- The Labor Party was in an uproar in 2010, when one of its Knesset members, Einat Wilf, called for the removal of Rabin's portrait from the party's Knesset conference room and went on to say that the party should consider canceling the annual commemoration event. The culmination of this process occurred after Shelly Yachimovich was chosen chair of the party in 2011. Yachimovich distanced herself from Rabin's legacy as much as she could in an effort to win support from voters on the right. She later admitted that this was a mistake.
- Last year, the Labor Party assumed responsibility for organizing the Rabin Square event at the very last minute, only after learning that it might be canceled because of a lack of funding. While Labor is not taking any part in organizing this year's event, its new Chairman Avi Gabbay announced that starting next year, the party will lead the commemorative event again. As he put it. "Rabin was murdered in a political assassination. We must not forget this for a moment. The obscurity of the messages harms his legacy."
- The left woke up after learning that the words "assassination" and "peace" did not appear in the invitation to the Nov. 4 event, which is being organized by two extra-parliamentary organizations: Commanders for Security and Darkenu ("Our Path"). Yachimovich, a member of the Knesset, may once have distanced herself from any hint of association with the Oslo peace process, but now her reaction was tinged with irony: "A stranger might think that Rabin died peacefully in bed at a ripe old age."
- As they say, better late than never. It was from the Labor Party that Rabin set off on the task of his life, never to return. Now it must take responsibility for commemorating him.

SUMMARY: At the time it was obvious that the assassination of Rabin was, first and foremost, a political act. Rabin pushed ahead with the Oslo Accord process. That was why the right incited against him. That was why Yigal Amir fired the three bullets that killed him. Over the years, however, that specific point was muffled. Instead of focusing on the causes and processes that led to the assassination, annual commemorations in Rabin Square began to focus on "reconciliation" and "solidarity" in order to draw a larger crowd. Labor Party leaders didn't even address the crowd, nor did they insist on doing so. One highlight in this disturbing trend occurred last year, when the Likud's David Bitan, chairman of the governing coalition, made the disturbing remark that Rabin's assassination wasn't politically motivated.

Remember What Really Happened

By Ra'anana Shaked, columnist at Yediot Ahronot

- A prime minister is replaced in the ballot box. This is subject to the regulations that say, in fine print, that if he is not one of us, he can also be replaced in the city square. Because for certain Israelis, a prime minister who is not one of us comes with a certificate that enables him to be replaced at any time; and if he does not suit us, there's no reason to wait for the ballot box—let's return him to his maker in almost new condition, and then, at some point, ask for credit.
- To this end, a delusional incitement campaign can be staged against him, orchestrated by rabbis and senior right wing politicians. His picture in a Nazi uniform can be disseminated, people can demonstratively follow the coffin for his anticipated burial, issue a *din rodef* decree against him [the law of the “persecutor,” according to which someone who persecutes a Jew with murderous intent may be killed extrajudicially—INT], and pretend that they have no idea what this means in practice.
- Well, in actuality, Rabin was assassinated. That was the plan, that was the intention, and there is no reason to play innocent now under the phony heading “We're one people.” Because Rabin was not assassinated by accident. Not by mistake. Not by a lone lunatic who does not represent anyone. Yigal Amir represented many people who didn't believe in Rabin's path, and preferred to enthrone their man in his stead.
- Twenty-two years, another rally. Almost every year the debate is rekindled on the question of to what degree this rally belongs to the camp that lost a leader (the other camp gained a leader, at least from its point of view), and to what degree we are compelled—at this time, more than ever—to turn the grief into a unifying, joint, national, non-partisan event.
- This is, as always, the annual season when the hypocrisy of the right wing camp peaks; throughout the year, a person governs here who makes it clear in every way and at every opportunity that he is the prime minister of his supporters only, that state responsibility is like a doormat to him, and that in the next elections—if we want to be realistic—the party's name should be changed from “Likud” [literally, “cohesion”] to “Division.” For the Likud, and mainly its leaders, have no interest in “unity.” They score their points on the street and in the polls by doing the opposite. A Rabin rally that sanctifies a non-existent unity—or as its organizers this year prefer to call it, “We're one people”—is willing to house a speech by a settler from Ofra who claims that “the public discourse on both sides enabled this thing.”
- There is nothing wrong with this claim except for the fact that it is an utter lie, but as the right wing has taught us, if you repeat a lie enough times, at least half the public is willing to swallow it and ask for seconds. A few more years of such “one people” rallies in Rabin's memory, and this saccharine-laden, easily palatable narrative will become the official version. The man was barely murdered; he may have simply become fed up. It's everyone's fault.

- **A rally with such a narrative cuts itself—and mainly those who need it—a lot of slack. As far as I am concerned, it is better to stay at home and try to remember what really happened. If you were alive at the time, I think you will succeed in doing that.**

SUMMARY: Well, in actuality, Rabin was assassinated. That was the plan, that was the intention, and there is no reason to play innocent now under the phony heading “We’re one people.” Because Rabin was not assassinated by accident. Not by mistake. Not by a lone lunatic who does not represent anyone. Yigal Amir represented many people who didn’t believe in Rabin’s path, and preferred to enthrone their man in his stead. Twenty-two years, another rally. Almost every year the debate is rekindled on the question of to what degree this rally belongs to the camp that lost a leader (the other camp gained a leader, at least from its point of view), and to what degree we are compelled—at this time, more than ever—to turn the grief into a unifying, joint, national, non-partisan event.