



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

*Tuesday, April 10*

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# News Excerpts

April 10, 2018

The New York Times

## **Video Shows IDF Shooting a Palestinian, Then Rejoicing**

Grainy video footage surfaced on Monday showing Israeli troops shooting a Palestinian man across the border fence at a time when he posed no obvious threat — and then rejoicing. In the video, the man is standing motionless, just inside Gaza. An Israeli sniper is told to take him down. A shot rings out and he falls to the ground. Another soldier who appears to be videoing the scene whoops with excitement. After the footage, from an unknown source, was widely broadcast by Israeli news media on Monday night, the Israeli military said the event it depicted apparently occurred a number of months ago and would now be thoroughly investigated. Even if months old, the latest video appeared to undermine Israel's arguments as it battles accusations of employing disproportionate force.

Ha'aretz

## **Israel Accuses Assad Regime of 'Crimes Against Humanity'**

Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded Monday evening to the alleged chemical attack in eastern Ghouta, saying it strongly condemns the attack and accused the Syrian government of "crimes against humanity." The suspected chemical weapons attack late on Saturday killed at least 60 people, with more than 1,000 injured in several sites in Douma, a city near the capital, Damascus, according to a Syrian aid organization.

Associated Press

## **Threats, Innuendo in Israeli Questioning of Palestinian Teen**

The family of Palestinian protester Ahed Tamimi on Monday released excerpts from a video in which an Israeli interrogator threatens the then-16-year-old with the arrest of her relatives if she refuses to cooperate. The interrogator also comments on her body, fair skin and "eyes of an angel." The Israeli military said a complaint of improper conduct, filed by Tamimi's lawyer, has been handed to the Justice Ministry and is being "thoroughly examined." A West Bank-based rights group said a majority of minors have reported being verbally abused, intimidated or humiliated in Israeli custody.

Times of Israel

## **Amid Fatah-Hamas Feud PA Withholds Gazan Salaries**

The Palestinian Authority has paid salaries to its West Bank employees this month, but not those in the Gaza Strip, officials said Monday. It was not immediately clear why the salaries had not been paid and if the delay was temporary. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has been vowing to step up sanctions against Hamas. The PA has kept paying its tens of thousands of employees in Gaza, despite most not going to work since Hamas seized control of the territory from the PA in a 2007 near civil war.

Associated Press

## **Hamas, Israel PM Dig In on Gaza Border Flare-Up**

The leader of Gaza's ruling Hamas group and Israel's prime minister staked out tough positions Monday, making de-escalation on the Israel-Gaza border in the near future unlikely. Since late March, 26 Palestinians have been killed and hundreds wounded by Israeli fire in mass border protests led by Hamas, but also driven by widespread desperation over the territory's decade-old border blockade by Israel and Egypt. The protests are seen, in part, as an attempt by Hamas to break the blockade. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh renewed a pledge Monday that the marches would pave the way for a return of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to what is now Israel. Israel has accused Hamas of using the protests as a cover for carrying out attacks and bringing infiltrators into Israel. It has said some of those at the border tried to damage the fence, planted explosives or hurled firebombs.

Jerusalem Post

## **PM: We'll Strike at Those Who Strike At Us**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threw his support behind the IDF's early-morning aerial attack Monday against a Hamas compound in the northern Gaza Strip. Netanyahu said: "We will not let those on the Gaza border, within touching distance, strike us. We will strike them." The IDF said it viewed "with great severity any attempt to damage the security fence or security infrastructure and would not allow the region to become a combat zone.... Hamas is responsible for all events originating from the Gaza Strip and its consequences."

Ynet

## **Some Arabs Back Israel, Slam Hamas**

A surprisingly large number of people in the Arab world voiced their support of Israel following Friday's Hamas-led protest on the Gaza border. The ministry's Facebook and Twitter pages were brimming with comments from residents of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan and other Arab countries, who backed Israel's side of the conflict and lambasted Hamas for its exploitation of the inhabitants of Gaza.

Jerusalem Post

## **PM Meets with Families about Hamas-Held Remains**

Netanyahu met Monday with the families of two fallen Israeli soldiers whose remains are being held by Hamas, the Palestinian terror group that controls the Gaza Strip. He promised them that Israel was working to return their sons. The families have been very critical, charging Israel was not doing enough to bring them home. Netanyahu spoke with the families of IDF soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul in a meeting also attended by Yaron Blum, who coordinates efforts to return Israelis held by Hamas, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

## **Mr. Prime Minister, I Am Ashamed of You**

By Rabbi Donniel Hartman, President, Shalom Hartman Institute

- Dear Mr. Prime Minister: It's not easy to be both proud and ashamed at the same time. As a politician, it is particularly difficult, as protecting yourself from constant criticism is a prerequisite of the job. As prime minister, you have much to be proud of, both personally and nationally. You have navigated our country through perilous times and circumstances. As we approach our 70th birthday, we do so with confidence and joy, for Israel is strong and secure, prosperous and successful. The source of your political success and longevity is that so many Israelis feel indebted to you and feel secure because of your leadership.
- However, together with your well-deserved pride, you should also feel a measure of shame. It seems like a lifetime, but it was less than a week ago, that you forged a new low. Instead of embracing the moral high ground on the issue of the African refugees in Israel and following through on what was your negotiated agreement with the United Nations, you chose the path of moral obtuseness, while making sure to lay the blame on others. Such actions, although common in our world, are not worthy of Israel and the Jewish people. Shame on you for turning human rights discourse in Israel into a political football, dividing the Left and the Right. Shame on you for peddling fear to buttress your political standing. Shame on you for singling out false enemies for vilification to galvanize national loyalty and self-righteousness.
- Your morally bankrupt rhetoric, branding all asylum seekers as “infiltrators,” instead of allowing that, at the very least, some are refugees, and supporting the false claims that they pose a danger to the Jewishness of Israel and the well-being of southern Tel Aviv, caught up with you. Or more correctly, infected us all. When you propagate fear and hatred of so many different “others,” and employ fake enemies to encourage phony nationalist sentiments, it is indeed difficult to turn around and admit that the strong and vibrant Israel you helped to produce has nothing to fear from 16,000, 26,000, or even 36,000 refugees. It is difficult, even during Pesach last week, to speak of our people's responsibility to remember that we were slaves in the land of Egypt.
- Fear and hatred are cancerous, and once introduced into the national discourse, have a destructive life of their own. While you have mastered their political use, as we saw last week, they have become your masters. For the sake of a short-term high as the proclaimed “protector of Israel,” “lover of Jews,” and “the one who cares about the disadvantaged neighborhoods,” you were willing to throw the lives of tens of thousands of human beings into chaos and turmoil and yet again divide the Jewish people. You know that the Supreme Court will challenge any policy of forced expulsion, further weakening it, and will also lead to extensive divisiveness, both within Israel and among the Jewish people.

- Tomorrow's problems, however, are not allowed by you to outweigh a bump in the polls, today. This is doubly true, when tomorrow you, or your coalition partners, can transform the Supreme Court itself into the enemy du jour of Israel and Zionism, and blame all of poor Government of Israel's problems on all-powerful foreign conspirators, such as the New Israel Fund. The Bibi of just a few years ago would be ashamed. It was you who in your previous terms served as the ultimate protector of the Supreme Court, the rule of law, and the unity of the Jewish people. In the past, these were values that you held as central to Israel. Today, outside of national security and preserving your coalition, it is difficult to identify anything that you hold as holy.
- When you withdrew your support for your resolution, you knew that Friday was but a few days away, and that you could count on Hamas and Gaza to change the focus of our national discourse. You knew that the next car-ramming in Europe or gas attack on innocent civilians in Syria were but a few news cycles away. Who could reasonably criticize you for deporting a few Africans, when our country and soldiers are facing a new threat from Gaza? Who can criticize you as morally wanting, when such moral depravity surrounds us? Only an anti-Semite or an anti-Zionist, of course. As Israelis we live in a macabre reality. Together with our well-deserved sense of strength, prosperity, and success, we know that danger and instability constantly threaten us. Be it Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iranians in Syria, or lone wolf Palestinian terrorists, we live with the ever-present sense that somebody wants to kill us. Someone sees our destruction as their principal mission. I don't know of any other Western democracy whose citizens have to live with this consciousness, daily. Most Israelis trust you, Mr. Prime Minister, above all others, to help navigate us through this treacherous reality. In truth, much of that trust has been earned and well-deserved.
- Israel, however, does not merely have to learn how to survive in the Middle East, but also survive the Middle East itself. Remaining a liberal democracy and a Jewish and democratic state and upholding our commitments to human rights and the Jewish values of peace, justice, freedom, and equality, as outlined in Israel's Declaration of Independence, is a challenging task in today's Middle East. It is difficult to achieve and even more difficult to continue to care. However, after survival, doing precisely that is Israel's greatest challenge and responsibility. Israel needs a leader and not merely a politician. A leader provides vision and challenges the people to expend resources for the sake of their values. A leader inspires sacrifice for a greater cause. A leader also experiences shame when they fail in their responsibilities.
- There are voices in Israel and in the Jewish world who, after your debacle last week, expressed shame in Israel. I am not ashamed of Israel. Israel and Zionism transcend our political leaders and are not defined even by the current will of the majority. Israel embodies the mission to build a safe and secure homeland for the Jewish people which is committed to the noblest of Jewish, moral, and democratic principles. I am not ashamed of Israel, because we are in the middle of Zionism's journey, a journey undertaken under the most challenging of circumstances. Mr. Prime Minister, I am not ashamed of Israel. I am ashamed of you.

## Marching in Gaza, My Brother Risks Death - to Feel Free

By Muhammad Shehada, Gazan Activist and Organizer

- My asthmatic younger brother, Salah 18, is scheduled for an urgent eye operation in Egypt, without which he might permanently lose the sight in his right eye. He's also been awarded a scholarship to study in Algeria, and has been fighting to get out of the Gaza Strip to take up his place for nearly two years, without success. His life is being entirely stolen from him by Israel's blockade, yet his future stares back at him just a footstep away, from behind the giant concrete walls that seal Gaza. He's in a race against time not to lose his sight, his mind, and his life as well. Almost every day, my brother shows up for the Gaza "Great Return March," although my mother has desperately tried almost everything to stop him from running bare-chested towards his death.
- The border protests are the only place where it feels that he's at least doing something about his own slow death, even if only to scream at the top of his lungs, telling the world "We are here!" It's the only place where he and all of my friends in Gaza can catch a breath of freedom, despite the stinging tear gas, even if it's just for a moment. Salah quickly learned the "rules of engagement" and exercises extreme caution not to get hurt. "If you stand 300 meters or less from the separation fence, with a Palestinian flag and a keffiyeh, you're liable to get shot in the legs, kneecaps or feet, and the wounded part is likely to be amputated," my brother explained. "If you hold a handful of rocks, or try to breach the fence, the snipers will aim at your abdomen, chest, neck or head."
- Nonetheless, there have been Palestinians who've been wounded and killed while actually running away from the buffer zone. They were given no second chance. Even my brother, standing outside of the danger zone, fainted repeatedly because of the tear gas; he saw the kid next to him getting shot in the leg. At the hospital, my brother is always terrified that if he'd sign his name amongst the wounded, Israel will ban him from ever leaving Gaza, for having taken part in the protests. Yet, for despite the seemingly arbitrary live-fire and tear gas raining down on the protestors, 1600 of whom have been injured and 29 have died, including a young journalist whose sole dream was to step foot out of Gaza for once in his life, Hamas believes the victims are carefully selected. "Israel knows who to wound, maim or kill," a Hamas leader told me by phone. At least 10 young men, affiliated with Hamas and its Qassam brigades, have been shot while maintaining order at the protest.
- Hamas believes Israel is deploying facial recognition technologies besides the numerous war-drones that obliterate the sky above. The movement warned its members to keep their faces covered, and leave their phones at home. Hamas has deployed its security and intelligence personnel to maintain what it sees as the three critical parameters of the protest: independence, non-violence, and no breach of the fence into Israel. The security forces are assigned to prevent individual attempts to disrupt the protest's non-violence, such as young

people trying to throw molotov cocktails towards Israel. Some cases slip their attention; others are dealt with firmly.

- Last Friday, my brother accidentally walked into a tent where the wounded were being attended to. He and his friends were dragged into interrogations by Palestinian internal security personnel for taking photos of the tent and for holding spontaneous interviews with the wounded. Hamas, despite remaining dismissive of the protest's ability to challenge Israel's blockade, has, like all political parties would have done, jumped with alacrity into the protests to accrue political capital, recognizing the backdrop as an opportune moment for photoshoots, for fueling popular support and to advance its vested interests.
- When Israel responds to the protests with violence, Hamas cheers those dramatic photographs' ability to return Gaza to world headlines, and to concentrate the people's anger on Israel and its "complicit partner," the Palestinian Authority. If Israel still resorts to a different strategy, Hamas believes that, given Netanyahu's government crisis, the best offer Israel would have made would be to respond to the protest with a few measures to ease Gaza's incarceration, such as expanding besieged fishing and farming zones and opening the borders for the movement of goods and civilians.
- But such measures, as earlier experiences shows, are conferred and then revoked at the earliest opportunity, since Israel's declared goal of its siege on Gaza is to "keep the population's heads above water, but their bodies drowned." Hamas hopes the protest will go some way to counter the pressure that's been ramping up since the assassination attempt on Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah. The Palestinian Authority initially blamed Hamas for the explosion which targeted Hamdallah's convoy as he was visiting Gaza. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas then threatened to impose even more severe sanctions on Gaza than those that already make the enclave unlivable.
- Hamas hopes the protests will convince Abbas to give the reconciliation a second chance and avoid being blamed by Israel for pouring more fuel into Gaza's imminent explosion. Hamas is also calculating that both Israel and Egypt are watching how swiftly and easily it's mobilized the masses. That's in order that Israel might put pressure on Egypt to ease its part of the blockade to assuage popular tension and anger. It would be a mistake for onlookers to assume that Hamas' hijacking of the protest undermines its authenticity and the genuine pain of Gazans. Yes, the protests are being pushed hard, by blanket promotions in street talks, schools, mosques, universities, shops and on taxies, the pictures of Ismail Haniya playing football close to the border, Yahya Sinwar's inflammatory speeches, and Hamas paying \$3000 to the families of the dead (despite the organization itself receiving the tenfold that amount).
- But Hamas cannot drag young people out of bed at gunpoint and shuttle them to the borders to dance to its tune. Young Gazans are making their way there by their own free will. Was it not for the misery inflicted by Gaza's status quo, no one would show up for that date with death. Although some have joined out of mere curiosity, to see an area they never dared to step foot in

before, and others joined out of national pride, or to simply take photos, many of the people present felt they had to participate in the march to challenge their sense of their own slow and painful deaths. Every protestor has a heartbreaking story and a profound reason to stand in front of immediate danger, unarmed. Gazans have been living on the edge of death, starvation and collapse for 11 years, pushing the boundaries for human survival. These grievances can never be faked, and they must be addressed. Despite the evident danger, my brother, like most people I know in Gaza, is going to keep showing up at the protests every day, until he perishes - or breaks free.