



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

October 12, 2018

Times of Israel

Israel to Dramatically Worsen Palestinian Prisoners' Conditions

Israel could soon significantly downgrade the prison conditions for Palestinian terror convicts, in a move likely to spark outrage among the prisoners and outside the prison walls. Hadashot TV news published what it said were conclusions soon to be presented by a committee established four months ago by Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan, tasked with examining the possibility of worsening the prisoners' conditions to the minimum required by international law. Erdan announced the formation of the public committee in June in a bid to put pressure on the terror groups to which they belong, chiefly Hamas, to release Israeli citizens and soldiers' bodies held in Gaza. See also, ["Israel set to worsen prison conditions for Palestinian inmates" \(PressTV\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Army Destroys Gaza Attack Tunnel That Reached Inside Israel

The Israeli military said on Thursday that it destroyed an attack tunnel reaching from the southern Gaza Strip into Israel. IDF Spokesman Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis said the military had known of the tunnel for several months. According to Manelis, the tunnel was one kilometer long – 200 meters of which was located in Israeli territory – and was connected to a wider network of tunnels. "It has different construction methods to what we've seen. It phone and power lines," Manelis said, adding that Israel has knowledge of several other tunnels which it claims Hamas was planning to use for terrorist attack. See also, ["IDF releases footage of Gaza tunnel discovery, destruction" \(TOI\)](#)

Reuters

U.S. Navy Returns to Israeli Port in Sign of 'Deep Alliance'

A U.S. Navy warship has docked in the southern Israeli port of Ashdod, the first such visit there in almost 20 years, in what officials from both sides hailed as a sign of their strong ties in the face of shared adversaries like Iran. Foreign navies generally prefer northern Haifa as their Israeli port of call, so the destroyer USS Ross's arrival at Ashdod potentially signaled Washington's interest in broadened berthing options for its Mediterranean Sixth Fleet. "This visit has significance. It symbolizes the deep alliance between Israel and the United States," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking from the deck of the USS Ross, together with his wife and the U.S. ambassador to Israel. See also, ["PM: US Navy in Ashdod is 'expression of American support'" \(YNet News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Amid Tensions, Hamas Urges Abbas to Lift Gaza Strip Sanctions

Hamas repeated its call to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Thursday to lift the sanctions he imposed last year on the Gaza Strip. The appeal came amid mounting tensions between the two parties, especially after the delivery of Qatari-funded fuel to the only power plant in the Gaza Strip this week. The fuel, which was purchased in Israel, was delivered through the Kerem Shalom border crossing as part of an effort to solve the severe power shortage in the Gaza Strip. At present, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip get only four to five hours of electricity each day because of the PA's refusal to pay for the fuel needed to keep the power plant operating round the clock. See also, ["Rift between PA and Hamas increasing" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

IDF Captures Terrorist who Stabbed IDF Reservist

The Border Police, IDF and Shin Bet, arrested overnight Friday the terrorist who carried out a stabbing attack outside the Samaria Territorial Brigade base in the West Bank on Thursday, in which an IDF reservist was moderately wounded and a civilian woman lightly hurt. The 19-year-old Palestinian from the village of Jamma'in south of Nablus, was taken in by the Shin Bet for further interrogation. On Thursday morning, the terrorist stabbed the reservist, 32, who was standing at a bus stop. Soldiers and passersby then tried unsuccessfully to overcome the terrorist. Soldiers who were on the scene opened fire toward the fleeing terrorist, but he was able to escape. The soldiers' fire hit several nearby vehicles, and shrapnel from the shooting lightly wounded a woman from Elon Moreh. See also, ["IDF arrests suspect in latest West Bank stabbing attack" \(i24 News\)](#)

Arutz 7

German President apologizes for the Holocaust

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Thursday asked Greece for forgiveness for crimes committed during the Nazi occupation. His comments came at the site of the former Haidari concentration camp near Athens. "Unimaginable atrocities were committed under German auspices in the Haidari camp. We bow before the victims," Steinmeier said at the camp, where up to 25,000 people were interned, according to Deutsche Welle. During World War II, between 60,000 and 70,000 Jewish Greeks were murdered in mass shootings and other atrocities. Steinmeier said Germany's moral and political responsibility for this must not be forgotten. See also, ["Steinmeier in Greece apologizes for Nazi crimes"\(DW\)](#)

i24 News

Israeli MK's' Reactions to Jewish-Muslim Marriage Spark Outrage

Two Israeli right-wing lawmakers sparked outrage on Thursday after they spoke out against the surprise marriage between popular Israeli-Arab news anchor Lucy Aharish and Jewish "Fauda" star Tzahi Halevy. Reacting to news of the couple's interfaith wedding on Wednesday, Interior Minister Aryeh Deri and firebrand right-wing lawmaker Oren Hazan condemned the coupling and "assimilation" between Jews and Arabs. Hazan, a member of Netanyahu's Likud party well-known for boorish and provocative statements, said Aharish had "seduced" a Jewish man and accused Halevy of having been "Islamicized". "I'm don't blame Lucy Aharish of seducing a Jewish soul in order to hurt our nation and prevent more Jewish offspring from continuing the Jewish line. On the contrary, she's welcome to convert," Hazan wrote. See also, ["She Seduced a Jew': Lawmaker Bemoans Wedding of Fauda Star to Israeli Arab TV Anchor" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Times of Israel

Burial Site Uncovered in Jerusalem Evidence of Bloody Reign

Evidence of a mass slaying, including cruel beheadings, committed during the bloody reign of the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE) was recently uncovered in a courtyard next to the Jerusalem municipality during excavations of an ancient water cistern. "We removed from the pit more than 20 neck vertebrae which were cut by a sword," said Dr. Yossi Nagar, an anthropologist at the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). "We discovered in the pit, bodies and body parts of infants and adult individuals, women and men, who were probably victims of a brutal slaughter." Embryonic bones discovered in the excavation indicate that among victims were even pregnant women.

Netanyahu Generates Iran-Phobia, to Continue Occupation

By Akiva Eldar, columnist for AI Monitor

- **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned Sept. 27 to the UN General Assembly hall in New York to send what he termed “a message to the tyrants in Tehran.” He announced that Israel would never allow a regime calling for its annihilation to develop nuclear weapons and would keep acting against its presence in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Netanyahu’s tough stance on Iran evidently did not impress the young Palestinian who killed Kim Levengrond-Yehezkel and Ziv Hajbi on Oct. 7 at the West Bank’s Barkan industrial area where they worked. The Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip who launch incendiary kites and balloons into Israel to burn the fields of the neighboring Israeli communities were not impressed, either. Netanyahu is unable to defend his people in those places, at this point in time.**
- **In terms of Iran’s nuclear program, Netanyahu actually has cause to boast. The determined campaign he led against it catapulted the issue to the top of the international agenda and accelerated negotiations that resulted in Iran’s signing of the 2015 agreement with six world powers on curbing its nuclear ambitions. That was the agreement about which Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot said this past March, “For now, we cannot detect any Iranian violations of the agreement. ... Right now the agreement, with all its faults, is working and is putting off realization of the Iranian nuclear vision by 10 to 15 years.” Maj. Gen. (Res.) Amos Gilad, former head of the Military Intelligence Research Division and of the Defense Ministry’s Political Affairs Bureau, had reservations about the deal. Still, in July, he said, “Why does it need to be revoked? They [the Iranians] are adhering to the agreement.” Gilad warned, “We are merely pushing the Iranians to strike out at us harder than ever. Instead of 130,000 missiles, we’ll get 200,000,” a reference to rockets Iran is believed to have supplied to its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon.**
- **An unnamed US intelligence official, speaking after Netanyahu’s UNGA speech, dismissed claims of a new Iranian nuclear facility that Israel had allegedly exposed. The official told Reuters that the facility Netanyahu alluded to was full of filing cabinets and documents — not of aluminum pipes or centrifuges for uranium enrichment. “So far as anyone knows, there is nothing in it that would allow Iran to break out of the JCPOA [agreement with Iran] any faster than it otherwise could,” the official was quoted as saying.**
- **At the same time, International Atomic Energy Agency chief Yukiya Amano said that contrary to Netanyahu’s suggestion that Iran was preventing inspectors from entering suspected nuclear sites, the agency enjoys unfettered access to carry out inspections at all the sites it seeks to visit.**
- **The explanation for the gap between Netanyahu’s presentations and press briefings regarding the Iranian nuclear threat and the assessments by Israeli and international experts should be sought in the Palestinian arena. In fact, it can be found in the prime minister’s own comments regarding the murder of Levengrond-Yehezkel and Hajbi. “This despicable terrorist, this evil man, wished to kill Jews and at the same time destroy the fabric of joint [Palestinian-Israeli] life in Barkan,” Netanyahu wrote on Facebook, pledging to remember the two victims forever and to keep developing the Barkan zone.**

- **Netanyahu certainly knows there is no “joint life” in Barkan, only the type of coexistence one finds between a rider and his horse. The Palestinians employed as laborers at the Barkan plants are banned from entering nearby Israeli settlements and are forced to lead their lives under military rule. As with other industrial parks Israel has established in the West Bank, Barkan was built on land considered by the international community (including the United States) and international law as occupied territory. A promise to develop Barkan, located in the heart of the West Bank, is tantamount to a commitment to perpetuate and deepen the Israeli occupation there. Occupation with no hope or end in sight is a surefire recipe for violence. During Netanyahu’s nine years in power, 144 Israelis have been killed and hundreds injured in terror attacks, the vast majority of which occurred in territories under Israeli occupation.**
- **Netanyahu succeeded in mobilizing world powers against Iran’s nuclear program and convinced US President Donald Trump to withdraw from the deal. He was also successful recently in distancing the Iranians from the Israel-Syria border. Israel’s Iron Dome anti-missile systems intercept rockets fired by Hamas at southern Israel, and engineers at Rafael Advanced Defense Systems are busy developing means to intercept incendiary balloons and drones carrying explosives launched from the Gaza Strip. However, no democratic regime is able to defend its citizens against a young man born under occupation who foresees living his entire life without a single day of freedom.**
- **Israeli defense chiefs have repeatedly warned that collective punishment of Palestinians, destruction of suspected terrorist homes and mass arrests of Palestinians do not deter lone terrorists and merely strengthen the hand of rejectionist organizations. The heads of the Israel Defense Forces and the Shin Bet have repeatedly warned the government’s defense Cabinet that the ongoing Gaza border insurrection could spread to the West Bank. The “Iranian nuclear threat” appears to be the least of their concerns for the safety of Israel’s citizenry. The residents of Israel’s Gaza border communities are also far more worried about the incendiary kites and balloons landing daily in their fields and orchards than about Netanyahu’s warnings against Iran’s nuclear bombs.**
- **Netanyahu has built his career on generating terror-phobia as an expert in the relentless fight against terrorism. He has portrayed every diplomatic concession to the Palestinians as a surrender to terrorism and campaigned vociferously against the release of Palestinian terrorists from Israeli jails. Having said this, Oct. 18 will mark seven years since the prisoner swap deal in which Netanyahu ordered the release of over 1,000 Hamas inmates in return for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit held captive by the organization in Gaza for five years.**
- **The Iran-phobia Netanyahu has been riding in recent years is a fig leaf designed to ignore the occupation policy of his government. This week, as mentioned, his policy took the lives of two more Israelis. Sadly, they do not appear to be the final victims. Facing this real threat, we are sure to see Netanyahu pursuing his Iran-phobia strategy. Let's prepare for another PowerPoint presentation, depicting a “nuclear facility” in the heart of Tehran and the exposure of missile launchers on the outskirts of Beirut.**

SUMMARY: Netanyahu has built his career on generating terror-phobia as an expert in the relentless fight against terrorism. He has portrayed every diplomatic concession to the Palestinians as a surrender to terrorism and campaigned vociferously against the release of Palestinian terrorists from Israeli jails. Having said this, Oct. 18 will mark seven years since the prisoner swap deal in which Netanyahu ordered the release of over 1,000 Hamas inmates in return for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit held captive by the organization in Gaza for five years. The Iran-phobia Netanyahu has been riding in recent years is a fig leaf designed to ignore the occupation policy of his government. This week, as mentioned, his policy took the lives of two more Israelis. Sadly, they do not appear to be the final victims. Facing this real threat, we are sure to see Netanyahu pursuing his Iran-phobia strategy. Let's prepare for another PowerPoint presentation, depicting a "nuclear facility" in the heart of Tehran and the exposure of missile launchers on the outskirts of Beirut.

What Has Been Will Be Again

By Yoaz Hendel, commentator at Yedioth Ahronoth

- They call the next round of elections the "wasted elections". Who are they? Likud ministers, two party leaders and two potential candidates. This column is based on a summary of observations made during a string of conversations I had with them. This is not exact science. If the wind changes and polls prove otherwise, their opinion of what is to come will change as well. There are no great principles here but one: Netanyahu. The sad thing about this story is that things were said off the record. Why? because for them, talking on the record will probably be a political mistake.
- The attitude towards Netanyahu is a resource in Israel of 2018. The flatterers do this for political reasons, the silent players are unable to butter up, and so they prefer to talk about political birds flying according to the migration season. The holidays of Tishrei are a time of reckoning filled with children's noise, at least for me. Part of the process is political self-examination.
- I write this without mentioning names because there is no other way. They talk a lot, always circling around the answers when asked about Netanyahu, they are afraid, perhaps politically wise. Unfortunately, in these talks, moral issues are rarely raised, what is right for the state, the way leaders present themselves, setting a personal example, integrity, and many other terms seem to apply to the common taxpayer alone.
- What comes up in these talks are possibilities and connections, situations that can instigate a political storm and those that cannot—I heard enough to know that they expect things to change in the upcoming elections. They want to be in the race, without losing too much.
- The assumption of my interlocutors is that Netanyahu will be re-elected prime minister in the next elections. He enjoys public's support more than ever before. His political path is accepted by most Israelis—including yours truly. The populist method of pointing fingers at the left and the media works for him as well.
- When he stands on the podium and speaks impeccable English at the United Nations, while demonstrating tremendous rhetorical skills, everyone around him seem like grasshoppers. He is destroying the Bayit Yehudi party and Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman— we will touch upon it soon—and collects odd mandates here and there, including those belonging to Shas.
- Those who support the prime minister, in particular, apparently do not mind the prime minister's affairs currently being investigated, they apparently do not care about his corruption and hedonism. Some of them are sworn 'Bibists' who support him through thick and thin. Others rely on cost-benefit considerations and are willing to turn a blind eye—a healthy logic that cannot be discounted, even if I think otherwise. That is how these senior politicians reach a point of despair, or make peace with the situation, or wait—you decide.
- On the one hand, they can't tolerate the prime minister's mixing of the personal and national, the character assassination, and, perhaps mainly, his attitude towards them.

On the other hand, they have no choice. They must go with Netanyahu because it is not possible to go anywhere without him. Their words are more severe than any newspaper article Netanyahu enjoys criticizing, but outside they are the teacher's pet, expert at evasions and staying silent.

- One of them fantasizes about a deal in which Netanyahu resigns before the next elections and all cases against him drop. He clings to the fact that one of his lawyers, Eyal Cohen—who once represented Dep. Comm. Roni Ritman, and Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit —specializes in closing criminal cases quietly, through deals.
- In my opinion, this fantasy is based on wishful thinking, since even if Netanyahu wants a deal, it is better for him to sign it as prime minister. The others talk about a ticking clock that will start ticking immediately after the elections and the formation of the next coalition. The time for filing indictments is a mystery that depends on Mandelblit. The police should submit another recommendation in case 4000, followed by a hearings and decision making.
- One of the biggest failures in Israel is the slow pace of the justice system. Innocent and guilty people alike are being crushed by the wheels of justice. They suffer from injustice and delay of justice, but this is the reality nowadays. Netanyahu, according to their assessment, will enter the next elections as a strong and successful leader on one hand and as a victim of the system on the other.
- Publicity-wise, he is branded as a right-wing leader, right as the Bayit Yehudi party—in words, not in deeds— so they are not really needed, Shas is on the election threshold, and so is Lieberman. That is why Bennett abandoned his plan to create an alternative to the Likud party, and combine different groups into one audience. He gathers around Netanyahu, trying to preserve what is, while attacking Lieberman and refraining from mentioning the prime minister in public.
- This is why Lieberman hopes the election threshold, which he himself has raised, will drop again under Netanyahu's command. This is also the reason for the public squabbling over the strategy regarding Gaza and Hamas—A strategy that does not exist.
- The next step according to agreed upon scenario is the looming indictment. For that reason, the next elections could take place in the middle of 2019 and a month later an indictment would be filed, which will shuffle the cards all over again. A year may pass. In a just world, a prime minister cannot serve as prime minister when going in and out of court. There were those in the Likud—including Netanyahu—who said in the past that a prime minister under investigation cannot function properly. They forgot that statement. That is why Netanyahu will try to reach a coalition agreement in the next elections which will allow him to serve in office even if an indictment against him is filed. What is such an agreement worth? Nothing. Netanyahu knows that best of all.
- And so, the scenario of the "wasted elections" comes into play: the coalition will be taken apart, a month or six months after Netanyahu's indictment and his ensuing downfall, maybe via a plea deal. And they will wait, and let Miri Regev and Ayoob Kara keep up their good flattery work, paying lip service. "What do you want me to do?" a Likud member asked, "that's the last act"— Netanyahu will go and they will take his place.
- The problem is that after a strong leader leaves—chaos comes knocking. It is reasonable to assume that the stock exchanges will fall, as will the shares of the ruling party. No one is going to get the title of the running prime minister from others, especially not those I talked to. They

wait together, careful not to stand out by presenting alternatives, or criticizing the prime minister, thus successfully avoiding their own beheading.

- Only one element was left out of this discussion: the element of surprise. US President Donald Trump surprised Hillary Clinton in America. Netanyahu surprised even himself in the last elections, when he received 30 mandates. Before Netanyahu there were Lapid, the Pensioners Party and others. Parties can fail to pass the election threshold. Benny Gantz, Orly Levy-Abekasis , Moshe "Bogie" Ya'alon, Aryeh Deri, Lieberman and Bennett—Each and every one of them entered the casino.

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