



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, November 2

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News Excerpts

November 2, 2018

Ynet News

Report: Palestinian Factions Agree to Temporary Halt of Violence

The Palestinian factions in Gaza have agreed to temporarily halt the violence on the border in order to chance the Egyptian efforts to reach ceasefire understandings with Israel, a source in the strip told Ynet on Thursday. According to the source, the agreement between the Palestinian factions includes a halt to incendiary balloons, tire burning and the nightly protests on the border. The "March of Return" protests will continue on Friday, but without violence or attempts to breach and sabotage the border fence. Earlier, an explosive balloon was found at a kindergarten at the Eshkol Regional Council. A police sapper neutralized the explosive. See also, ["Gaza protest leaders to urge calm on border amid ceasefire efforts" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Netanyahu Asked Trump to Stick with Saudi Crown Prince

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked senior officials in the Trump White House to continue supporting Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman following the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, the Washington Post reported on Thursday. Citing U.S. officials, the report stated that Netanyahu described the Crown Prince as a "strategic ally" in the Middle East. The report said that a similar message was conveyed to the White House by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi. Netanyahu recently visited Oman, a Gulf country that had not hosted an Israeli Prime Minister since the 1990's, in a sign of the warming ties between Israel and Arab monarchies in the Gulf. On his way to Oman, the Prime Minister's plane flew over Saudi Arabia.

Jerusalem Post

France to Offer Its Own Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan if U.S. Fails

French President Emmanuel Macron intends to tackle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a peace plan of his own if the United States fails to do so after the November 6 midterm elections. France relayed its intention to intervene in the process to members of the Israeli parliament last week. In a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu in late September, US President Donald Trump announced that his administration would unveil a comprehensive peace plan within two to four months. Israeli leaders and the Palestinian Authority have been anxiously awaiting the plan, which as Trump has indicated, will entail 'tough' concessions from both sides. See also, ["Macron sends top adviser to Jerusalem, Ramallah as France awaits US plan: report" \(i24 News\)](#)

Times of Israel

Israel Said to Warn Beirut it will Strike Hezbollah Rocket Factories

Israel has reportedly sent a message to the Lebanese government via Paris demanding that it act against the Hezbollah terror group's rocket factories in the country, saying if Lebanon refused to do so, Israel could take military action. The message was delivered by Israel's deputy national security adviser Eitan Ben-David to Orléan la-Chevalier, a top adviser to French President Emmanuel Macron, during the latter's visit in Jerusalem on Monday, according to Israel's Channel 10 news. *"The Lebanese government must be careful when it comes to Hezbollah's rocket factories," the message read, according to the report, which cited unnamed "Western diplomatic sources."*

Netanyahu to Bulgarian PM: Iran Threatens Israel, Europe Alike

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday night called Iran the “most potent force of militant Islam” in the world and warned Europe of possible Iranian attacks on its soil. Speaking to reporters after talks with his Bulgarian counterpart, Boyko Borissov, Netanyahu said radical Islam is a threat to the world, and that Israel has recently revealed a number of Iranian plots to carry out attacks on European soil. He said Israel and Europe “stand together” in the face of such attacks. Israeli officials said Wednesday that the Mossad intelligence service had provided its Danish counterpart with information concerning an alleged Iranian plot to assassinate opposition activists in its territory. See also, [“Israel’s Mossad alerted Denmark to alleged Iranian assassination plot: report” \(i24 News\)](#)

Ha’aretz

Brazil's Bolsonaro: I Intend to Move Embassy to Jerusalem

Brazilian President-elect Jair Bolsonaro said late on Thursday that he intends to move the Brazilian embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. "As previously stated during our campaign, we intend to transfer the Brazilian Embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem. Israel is a sovereign state and we shall duly respect that," Bolsonaro tweeted. Bolsonaro made similar statements in an interview to the Israeli daily newspaper Israel Hayom, published on Friday. "Israel is a sovereign country. If you decide on your capital, we will proceed accordingly," he said. Bolsonaro added that Israel can count on Brazil's vote at the UN, and hinted that he would change the status of the Palestinian embassy in Brazil. "Palestine needs to be a country to have the right to an embassy," he said. See also, [“Brazil president-elect Bolsonaro says he plans to move embassy to Jerusalem” \(Guardian\)](#)

Ynet News

AG Rules Out House Demolition for Mentally Ill Terrorists

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit has determined Israel must not demolish the house of a terrorist who is found not responsible for his actions due to mental impairment. In a letter to Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, Mandelblit wrote that in cases of terrorists suffering from mental disorders, the demolition of their homes would not achieve the desired goal of deterrence. "That person would not have the ability to rationally consider the real possibility the home he lives in would be demolished, and consequently decide against carrying out the terror act we wish to deter him from committing," the attorney general wrote. Mandelblit also put other restrictions on the demolition of terrorists' home, basing the decision on the severity of the results of his actions. The attorney general made a distinction between a victim who was wounded and one who was killed.

Reuters

Jim' Mayoral Race Narrows to Religious and Secular Candidates

The race for mayor of Jerusalem, a role shaping Israel's rule over the sacred city at the heart of its conflict with the Palestinians, will go to a run-off between religious and secular Jewish candidates, election tallies showed on Wednesday. Moshe Lion, a skullcap-wearing bureaucrat favored by two key members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rightist cabinet, will face off against Ofer Berkovitch, the 35-year-old deputy mayor, after they came out on top of Tuesday's five-man contest - but neither with sufficient votes to win outright. The ballot was held as part of nationwide Israeli municipal elections in which many candidates run as independents or on non-traditional party lists, making it difficult to gauge any broader political impact from the results.

The Arrangement with Hamas will Never Happen

By Ben-Dror Yemini, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- **We've been told for a long time that the ceasefire is on the way. It had many names in the past, such as tahdiah, hudna, and most recently—"an arrangement." On Friday, once again, reports started emerging that an agreement has been reached. Several hours later, southern Israel was hit with a barrage of rockets. What happened?**
- **For years the Gaza Strip has been a pressure cooker bound to explode. The residents are groaning: a few hours of electricity per day, 60 percent unemployment, filthy water. The conclusion, according to politicians and commentators, is unequivocal: Hamas needs an achievement, quiet, hudna, arrangement, in order to lift the blockade and improve the situation. There is only one problem with this theory. It is based on rational thinking. The logic of Hamas is different. Hamas does not want improvement. Hamas is putting in all the effort into preserving Gaza as the pressure cooker it currently is.**
- **It is worth mentioning that for more than a decade, Hamas has been offered opportunities to improve the situation in the strip. In 2006, immediately after Hamas' elections victory, the international community, through Middle East Quartet, established the three conditions for continuation of the Western aid: recognition of Israel, cessation of terror and recognition of previous agreements. The very next day, Khaled Mashal announced the terror group rejects all of them. The international community remained undeterred, but Hamas has rejected the conditions every single time. There were more proposals and initiatives, and all of them had been dismissed.**
- **We should listen closely to what Yahya Sinwar said in a Yedioth Ahronoth interview a few weeks ago. There was no recognition of the Quartet's conditions, no acceptance of the EU proposal, and certainly no agreement regarding Mahmoud Abbas's demand to restore Palestinian Authority's security control over the Gaza Strip.**
- **There is readiness for a ceasefire there. A senior Hamas official, Mushir al-Masri, made it clear in the past what is a ceasefire as far as Hamas is concerned. "Any quiet that could be achieved is temporary. The meaning of 'quiet' in the dictionary of the resistance is getting ready for the next campaign. The resistance will continue to fill and develop the weapons stockpiles for future campaigns," explained the official.**
- **And what is Israeli policy? There is no policy. Restraint is appropriate, provided it does not become an actual policy. For years there has been no Israeli initiative. Hamas could have been offered the most generous offer. It is in Israel's interests for the strip to prosper. Even if Hamas would have refused the offer, Israel would still have benefited from merely making such a proposal. There is no simple solution to attrition warfare. But when pursuing an arrangement, there is a need for a coherent policy and not illusions. What we have right now is the opposite. We have no policy, and what we do have is based on illusions.**

SUMMARY: It is worth mentioning that for more than a decade, Hamas has been offered opportunities to improve the situation in the strip. In 2006, immediately after Hamas' elections victory, the international community, through Middle East Quartet, established the three conditions for continuation of the Western aid: recognition of Israel, cessation of terror and recognition of previous agreements. The very next day, Khaled Mashal announced the terror group rejects all of them. The international community remained undeterred, but Hamas has rejected the conditions every single time. There were more proposals and initiatives, and all of them had been dismissed. We should listen closely to what Yahya Sinwar said in a Yedioth Ahronoth interview a few weeks ago. There was no recognition of the Quartet's conditions, no acceptance of the EU proposal, and certainly no agreement regarding Mahmoud Abbas's demand to restore Palestinian Authority's security control over the Gaza Strip.

Four Insights on Municipal Elections in Israel

By Akiva Eldar, contributor to AI Monitor

- **No one talked about the “Iranian threat” — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s signature trademark — during the campaigns leading up to the municipal elections held throughout Israel on Oct. 30. In the hallways of Elimelech Rimalt grade school, where a polling station was set up for residents of the coastal town of Netanya, there was no talk of the government’s ineptitude in dealing with the “incendiary kite terrorism” plaguing residents of Gaza’s border communities and setting fire to their fields. Instead, the discourse focused on plans to build new hotels along the beachfront, insufficient spending on education and too much investment in municipal fountains. Naturally, the agenda of local elections is different from the one expected to engage Israelis during the soon-to-come Knesset elections in 2019. Nonetheless, local voting results provide some insight into the prevailing mood in Israeli society these days.**
- **One takeaway has to do with a crisis of trust in law enforcement authorities. More than a dozen local leaders, suspected and even charged with criminal offenses, won voters’ trust. In fact, only four of the 13 candidates under a cloud were denied re-election. For example, Rishon Lezion Mayor Dov Zur, suspected of bribery, garnered enough votes to compete in a second round (as none of the candidates reached the required 40%). Ashkelon Mayor Itamar Shimoni, indicted on charges of bribery, also did quite well in the polling booth, all considering. He lost to his rival by a mere 400 votes. Head of the Tamar Regional Council Dov Litvinoff, who has admitted and been charged with breach of trust, was elected to a second term. The most impressive achievement in this regard is that of Netanya Mayor Miriam Feirberg-Ikar, whom police have recommended indicting for accepting bribes. The recommendation has been awaiting a decision by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit since March 2017. Meanwhile, she was endorsed by Netanyahu and re-elected this week to a fifth term.**
- **The electoral achievements of local leaders tarnished by corruption point to a troubling erosion of public sensitivity to democratic values and ethics. If a mayor accused of corruption can hold on to power, why can’t a politician accused of bribery lead the state? This phenomenon also indicates growing public mistrust of the police and state prosecution — with good reason. The proceedings against Feirberg-Ikar have been going on for over 18 months and, as mentioned, there is still no decision on whether to charge her. The mayor of Ramat, Gan Yisrael Zinger, went through a similar experience until the prosecution decided to drop his case in August.**
- **Netanyahu was obviously one of the first to congratulate Feirberg-Ikar, a member of his Likud party. “The residents of Netanya know you,” the prime minister said, adding, “They don’t need my recommendation; they know what’s good for them.” Reading between the lines, the message was clear: The citizens of Israel do not need the police recommendations in the various criminal investigations against their beloved prime minister. They know what’s best for them: the right-wing regime with Netanyahu at the helm.**
- **This message reflects the spin Netanyahu promoted in December 2017 in preparation for a possible police recommendation to indict him. “So there will be recommendations. So what?” Netanyahu told a gathering of Likud activists. He added, “More than 60% of the time, police**

recommendations are thrown in the garbage ... and meanwhile, it ruins lives, harms reputations.”

- A second takeaway suggests Netanyahu might be losing his magic touch: There is no city with which Netanyahu’s political and personal identity is more closely linked than his hometown of Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. Elections for Jerusalem’s mayor and city council members carry more of a national political overtone than in any other Israeli city. Netanyahu, who sensed the results of the Jerusalem vote early on, was careful not to get too close. He endorsed Likud’s Ze’ev Elkin only late in the race and half-heartedly. But Elkin did not even make it to the second round. The crushing defeat of Elkin — the Jerusalem affairs minister and a former close associate of Netanyahu — as well as the blow dealt to the Likud faction in the city council — which only won one seat — shows that Netanyahu’s support isn’t necessarily sufficient. On the other hand, the independent faction of young Ofer Berkovitch garnered six seats in the city council. Berkovitch himself garnered enough votes for the second runoff (against candidate Moshe Leon), leaving the ruling party’s candidates far behind.
- In Israel’s two other major cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa, voters only left crumbs for the political right. The results in the northern border town of Kiryat Shmona could also indicate that even places intrinsically identified with the Likud are not in Netanyahu’s pocket or those of his allies (the incumbent, Likud’s Nissim Malka, failed to win the first round). Visiting Kiryat Shmona on Oct. 16, Netanyahu told activist Orna Peretz that she was a bore for complaining about the local health services. Judging by the election results, Kiryat Shmona’s Likud members were not at all bored by the complaint.
- The third takeaway concerns the racism that has seeped into politics. On the 2015 Knesset election day, Netanyahu warned that “Arab voters are heading to the polling stations in droves. Left-wing NGOs are bringing them in buses.” Anyone who incites in this manner should not have been surprised at the Likud billboards gracing Tel Aviv streets ahead of the local elections. “It’s us or them — the Hebrew city or the PLO,” read one such billboard, in reference to the Arab population in Jaffa — which is part of the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality. Anyone who whispers in the ear of an important rabbi that Israelis on the political left have forgotten what it means to be Jews — as Netanyahu famously did in 1997 — shares responsibility for the Likud’s municipal council elections slogan. “It’s either us, the Likud that will leave Tel Aviv and Jaffa in Israel, or the pro-Palestinian parties that want an Islamic Jaffa and an infiltrators’ state in the south,” read the slogan — a reference to African migrants in the city’s southern neighborhoods.
- Billboards posted in the central town of Ramle in the run-up to the elections showed a woman with telltale blue eyes covered in a black hijab against a backdrop of Sabbath candles and wine for the Sabbath benediction. The slogan on the billboards plastered all over the mixed Jewish-Arab town read, “Only a strong Jewish home will preserve a Jewish Ramle” — a reference to right-wing HaBayit HaYehudi, which means “Jewish Home” in Hebrew. They echo the racist insults hurled by right-wing public figures at the recent wedding of popular Israeli-Arab TV presenter Lucy Aharish and Israeli Jewish actor Tzahi HaLevi. Netanyahu was mum when Likud Knesset member Oren Hazan spoke out against the young couple’s nuptials.
- Tarnishing the public space with incitement did not advance HaBayit HaYehudi’s cause in the Tel Aviv city council. It was Labor Party candidate and incumbent Mayor Ron Huldai’s and left-wing candidate Asaf Zamir’s factions who garnered most of the votes. In Ramle’s city council, HaBayit HaYehudi got only two seats.

- The final takeaway from the elections relates to public sentiments on changing the rule: 3.67 million Israelis — 57% of eligible voters — came out of their homes to exercise their right to participate in local elections. The first-time decision to declare a holiday in order to encourage people to vote obviously had something to do with the 6% turnout increase compared to 2013. On their way to the beach or the mall, millions of Israelis exercised their right to vote for politicians who will influence their lives in the coming years. Many also took the opportunity to protest against the current regime and demand change.
- The gap between the agenda of local elections and that of national politics has widened over time, fortunately so. Nonetheless, crooked ethical standards espoused by municipal candidates did not prevent them from achieving good results at the voting booth. And so, the municipal elections could certainly point to the direction in which the wind is blowing through Israeli society — the evil wind as well as the propitious one.

SUMMARY One takeaway has to do with a crisis of trust in law enforcement authorities. More than a dozen local leaders, suspected and even charged with criminal offenses, won voters' trust. In fact, only four of the 13 candidates under a cloud were denied re-election. For example, Rishon Lezion Mayor Dov Zur, suspected of bribery, garnered enough votes to compete in a second round (as none of the candidates reached the required 40%). Ashkelon Mayor Itamar Shimoni, indicted on charges of bribery, also did quite well in the polling booth, all considering. He lost to his rival by a mere 400 votes. Head of the Tamar Regional Council Dov Litvinoff, who has admitted and been charged with breach of trust, was elected to a second term. The most impressive achievement in this regard is that of Netanya Mayor Miriam Feirberg-Ikar, whom police have recommended indicting for accepting bribes. The recommendation has been awaiting a decision by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit since March 2017. Meanwhile, she was endorsed by Netanyahu and re-elected this week to a fifth term.