



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
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Israel and the Middle East News Update

Tuesday, September 3

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- Hezbollah: Flare-Up with Israel Over but a 'New Phase' has Started
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- PM: "We'll Apply Sovereignty Over all the Settlements in Judea and Samaria"
- Gantz Pledges No Disengagement Without Referendum
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News Excerpts

September 3, 2019

Times of Israel

Hezbollah Missiles Narrowly Miss Armored IDF Car with 5 Soldiers

An IDF medical vehicle carrying five soldiers very nearly sustained a direct hit from Hezbollah anti-tank fire during Sunday's attack along the northern border, as it drove along an unprotected road in a breach of army directives — with luck, rather than effective military planning, preventing the death or injury of the soldiers inside, Hebrew media reports said late Monday. The reports appeared to contradict Israeli military sources' claims on Sunday that an IDF vehicle that Hezbollah targeted was empty at the time. The reports appeared to tally with footage released by Hezbollah-affiliated TV earlier Monday. See also, "[IDF vehicle 'very lucky' to come out unscathed in Hezbollah attack: report](#)" (*i24 News*)

Reuters

Hezbollah: Flare-Up with Israel Over but a 'New Phase' has Started

Lebanon's Hezbollah leader said on Monday that while a flare-up with Israel at the border was over, the episode had launched a "new phase" in which the Iran-backed group no longer has red lines. In a televised speech, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said the new focus would be on targeting Israeli drones that enter Lebanon's airspace, and this would be handled by fighters in the field. Hezbollah and the Israeli army exchanged cross-border fire on Sunday after a drone attack last week in a Hezbollah-controlled Beirut suburb. Hezbollah blamed that incident on Israel, raising fears of a wider regional conflict. In his speech, Nasrallah said Sunday's missiles sent Israel "a clear message that if you attack, then all your border, your forces and your settlements at the border and (deep inside)" will be at risk. See also, "[Lebanon president: Israel drone attack a declaration of war](#)" (*Aljazeera*)

Ha'aretz

Netanyahu, Trump in Intensive Talks for Diplomatic Gesture Soon

PM Netanyahu is trying to arrange a dramatic diplomatic gesture from the Trump administration that will help him win the Israeli election on September 17. In recent weeks, there have been intensive talks between some of Netanyahu's advisers and people close to President Trump over a potential statement by the president, in which he could commit to protecting Israel in the future from any existential threat. In addition, Netanyahu is also trying to orchestrate some form of gesture from Russian President Vladimir Putin — either in the form of an official Putin visit to Israel or a trilateral meeting of the national security advisers. See also, "[Reports: Hezbollah missiles narrowly missed armored car with 5 soldiers inside](#)" (*TOI*)

Ma'ariv

Netanyahu: "We'll Apply Sovereignty Over all the Settlements"

Netanyahu yesterday attended the first day of school at a state religious school in the settlement of Elkana and used the opportunity to say that Israel would apply "Jewish sovereignty" over all the settlements in Judea and Samaria. "We are building new homes. This new home is the old and original home of the Jewish people and we will build another Elkana. We won't uproot anyone. There won't be any more uprooting and, with God's help, we'll apply Jewish sovereignty over all the settlements, which are part of the Land of Israel and the State of Israel. This is our land," Netanyahu promised. Netanyahu's remarks, which were made in run-up to elections, drew a wave of reactions across the political spectrum. See also, "[Netanyahu repeats pledge to annex Israeli settlements](#)" (*Reuters*)

Gantz Pledges No Disengagement Without Referendum

Blue and White leader Benny Gantz promised on Monday that if he becomes prime minister and decides to withdraw from any territory, he would bring it to the public in a national referendum. Speaking at a conference organized by the religious Zionist website Srugim, Gantz said there would not be a repeat of the 2005 Gaza Strip withdrawal, in which he said too many mistakes were made. "When we get to such a juncture, the public will decide," Gantz said in an interview on stage with Srugim editor Or Izraeli. Gantz spoke at the event in an effort to attract religious Zionist voters. He earned applause from the crowd when he promised that the Joint List would not be part of a governing coalition, and called for Israeli Arab citizens to perform national service inside their communities. See also, ["Gantz Pledges No Disengagement Without Referendum, No Unilateral Annexations" \(Hamodia\)](#)

I24 News

ICC to Reopen Israel War Crimes Probe into Gaza Flotilla Raid

The International Criminal Court on Monday ordered the tribunal's prosecutor to reopen a probe into whether Israel should face charges over a deadly 2010 raid on a flotilla attempting to carry aid to the Gaza Strip. Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda first ruled in 2014 that she would not prosecute Israel after ten Turkish citizens were killed when Israeli navy commandos stormed the Mavi Marmara along with a number of vessels trying to break the naval blockade on the Gaza Strip. The case was first filed by the Comoros, where the ship's flag was registered but Bensouda ruled that it was "not of sufficient gravity," meaning the case would not be determined as inadmissible for the ICC. The prosecutor again affirmed the decision in 2017 after judges said she must take another look at the case. See also, ["ICC orders prosecutor to reconsider closure of 'Mavi Marmara' probe" \(JPost\)](#)

Ha'aretz

PM Recorded Intervening in Media After Being Forced to Drop Portfolio

Netanyahu was still involved in the communications market and instructed his successor as communications minister Ayoub Kara on how to act, even after he was forced to give up the communications portfolio, recordings released Monday evening by Channel 13 New reveal. A response from Netanyahu's bureau said that he acted per the instructions of the attorney general. In the recordings, Netanyahu can be heard telling Kara to intervene in order to allow Channel 20 to broadcast news, and instructing Kara to abolish the Cable and Satellite Broadcasting Council. The recordings document consultations between Netanyahu, Kara in December 2017. In them, Netanyahu is heard discussing restrictions that barred the right-wing Channel 20 network from airing news programs.

Ha'aretz

Son of PM Accuses Martin Indyk of Trying to 'Destroy the Jewish State'

Yair Netanyahu, the son of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk engaged in a snarky game of one-upmanship on Twitter over the weekend, culminating in a charge by Netanyahu's son that the former diplomat sought to "destroy the Jewish state." The sniping began after Indyk posted a news story by Channel 13 (and former Haaretz) journalist Barak Ravid, reporting that Netanyahu had "frantically" called President Donald Trump trying to head off any initiative that could result in a meeting between the U.S. leader and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif. Indyk commented "I've been on the other end of those phone calls many times from desperate Bibi aides insisting that he has to speak to the President IMMEDIATELY. When he's in panic mode the fact that the President is in meetings with other world leaders is irrelevant." See also, ["Netanyahu's son: Ex-US envoy to Israel trying to 'destroy Jewish state' \(MEM\)](#)

Inside the Inner Chambers of the Lunacy

By Ben Caspit, columnist at Ma'ariv

- Presumably, the daily talking point from the Likud's campaign will be something along the lines of "Ayoub Kara is a leftist who has collaborated with Israel's enemies, the New Israel Fund, the Cable and Satellite Broadcasting Council and George Soros, with the goal of ousting an incumbent prime minister, establishing a Hamas state with Channel Thirteen's offices in Givatayim as its capital and appointing Azmi Bishara as defense minister."
- Yes, this is the very same Ayoub Kara who served in recent years as a doormat and a footrest for the prime minister and his inner circle. Ayoub Kara, who couldn't be more right wing; Ayoub Kara, who found no task in the service of the supreme leader or Her Highness his wife too demeaning to perform. Yes, it's now become evident that our Ayoub spent all that time plotting a coup against the man who was elected to serve for his entire lifetime. Who would have believed it?
- The recordings that were provided yesterday by Sefi Ovadia on Channel Thirteen News are a document of lunacy. It isn't clear whether there is a criminal element to the contents of the recordings. The exposure of the public, ethical, behavioral and psychotic contents are at least as important as any possibly criminal aspects. The report provided a rare opportunity to raise the curtain and provided us with a glimpse into the inner chambers of the obsessive lunacy that grips Netanyahu and his family members in all that pertains to the media.
- This is the male version of that infamous enraged scream: "psy-cho-lo-gist" [a recording of Sara Netanyahu]. In both instances, the reason for that volcanic eruption was a petty matter. In Sara Netanyahu's case, it was a news item was published that she deemed to have been insufficiently complimentary towards her. In the current case, Netanyahu was documented pressing on with the endless war that he had declared against the media as a whole, even though he already controlled half of it and had been governing as prime minister for several consecutive terms.
- A reminder: Netanyahu stopped serving as communications minister after Attorney General Mandelblit, fashionably very late, imposed on him restrictions in that sphere of activity. Netanyahu wanted to appoint a communications minister who would serve him, but all the top Likud officials refused that job in a panic. They knew exactly what would lie in store for them. Poor Ayoub Kara apparently didn't know.
- The recordings reveal that Kara was less than a ragdoll. Netanyahu continued to control every aspect, small and large alike. Incidentally, Sefi Ovadia published the same report in March, a short time before the last elections. The only thing he didn't have at the time was the recordings.
- What was the Likud's reaction to the report that Netanyahu had continued to meddle in the Communications Ministry, had continued to press to save Channel 20 and to shut down the Cable and Satellite Broadcasting Council? This is it, in all its glory: "Nonsense. This is another attempt to manufacture fake headlines about nothing, with the goal of hiding the central question in these elections..." The communications minister's bureau issued a statement claiming to be "unfamiliar with an incident of this kind..."
- We haven't yet talked about the fact that we have a prime minister who is recorded by his cabinet ministers. About his enraged outburst when he learned that the reviled Ayelet Shaked received

some of the credit in a news report for saving Channel 20. About his burning hatred for the free press and media, and the jihad that he declared against them.

- This is the first time in which he can't pin the blame on a "state's witness who is trying to save his own skin," a former close associate who was pushed outside the loop, or the legendary "deep state." This time it was Ayoub Kara, our Ayoub, the flesh of our flesh, may his soul rest in peace.
- The recordings expose the real Binyamin Netanyahu. The visceral, irritable, fuming Netanyahu who failed to learn his lesson even after having been questioned about Case 2,000 and who continued with his toxic meddling in the media market even after he was forced out of the Communications Ministry, and continued to manage it from afar.

Summary: The recordings that were provided yesterday by Sefi Ovadia on Channel Thirteen News are a document of lunacy. It isn't clear whether there is a criminal element to the contents of the recordings. The exposure of the public, ethical, behavioral and psychotic contents are at least as important as any possibly criminal aspects. The report provided a rare opportunity to raise the curtain and provided us with a glimpse into the inner chambers of the obsessive lunacy that grips Netanyahu and his family members in all that pertains to the media. This is the male version of that infamous enraged scream: "psy-cho-lo-gist" [a recording of Sara Netanyahu]. In both instances, the reason for that volcanic eruption was a petty matter. In Sara Netanyahu's case, it was a news item was published that she deemed to have been insufficiently complimentary towards her. In the current case, Netanyahu was documented pressing on with the endless war that he had declared against the media as a whole, even though he already controlled half of it and had been governing as prime minister for several consecutive terms.

The Two-Week Offensive

By Moran Azulay and Itamar Eichner, columnists at Yedioth Ahronoth

- The Israeli public seems to take a dim view of the upcoming elections. A common refrain that I've heard lately from every direction—from right wingers and left wingers, from people who are politically involved to people who are not—has been: “There's no one to vote for.”
- I don't have any professional tool that I can use to measure this in advance, by my gut feeling is that at the current pace, voter turnout is going to be especially low this time. The reason appears to be the swift dissolution of the 21st Knesset after just a single month, and the decision to call new elections. We've seen everything by now when it comes to our politicians—a prime minister and a president who were sent to prison, cabinet ministers and MKs who are facing indictment—but this time the sense of disgust appears to have been too much.
- Things usually follow a carefully crafted script. The politicians try to inspire hope in us in the course of their election campaign, which is followed by a term in office replete with ups and downs, but they always make sure to have that term end in a way that will pluck at our heartstrings and make us want to go out to vote. For peace or for war—we feel compelled to go out to vote for it.
- As in the sausage industry, when it comes to politics, you're better off not knowing exactly how the job gets done. But this time the shtick was laid bare for all to see. They didn't have four years to work on the process, and the Israelis are frustrated to see how it all works. Most of the public isn't intimately familiar with the fine details. The public knows that there were some politicians who took steps to dissolve the Knesset and there were others who were opposed. There were some who tried to form an alternative coalition in the same Knesset, but there were others who prevented that from happening. Most of the public isn't interested. People are frustrated.
- This isn't a question of right or left. The disgust is pervasive, and that is going to benefit only the hard-nosed ideologues, people who are devoted to the cause at any cost: the voters for the parties to the right of the Likud, the voters who support the Democratic Union and, of course, the Haredim.
- The Israeli public's frustration with its politicians is liable to deliver an even worse political outcome for the absolute majority of the public. In the last elections, the voters gave 70 seats to the two larger parties. The majority of the Israelis are in the center. But when voter turnout is low, it's the fringe parties that benefit.
- With that being the case, even if you're fed up, even if you don't want to go to the bother of queueing up at the polling station for the second time in five months, even if you feel that you don't have a good party to vote for—go out to vote for the party you deem to be the least bad. Otherwise you're only going to strengthen political forces that you truly dislike.