



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
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Israel and Middle East News Update

Wednesday, September 9

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News Excerpts

September 9, 2020

Ha'aretz

Nightly Curfew in 40 Coronavirus Hot Spots Goes into Effect

A nightly curfew on 40 towns across Israel began, in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus in hardest hit localities. [The curfew](#), which will last until September 15, takes effect daily from 7 P.M. until 5 A.M. During curfews, all businesses that are not essential will be closed. Knesset members and mayors assailed the decision, terming it disproportionate and ineffective. Ultra-Orthodox MKs also said the curfew was discriminatory, since it was being imposed on ultra-Orthodox towns in their entirety but only on selected neighborhoods of other Jewish towns, with the sole exception of Netivot. The list of localities is based on the list of "red" areas, which included about 30 authorities with a high infection rate. In the last day, ten more localities have been added to the list where the night curfew will be imposed. [See also "Top Cop: 'Police Ready to Enforce Curfews" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Times of Israel

Netanyahu Apologizes to Family of Man Killed by Police

Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly apologized for the Israeli government's claim that a Bedouin teacher shot dead by police was a terrorist. "I would like to express, in my name, my apologies to the Al-Qi'an family. They said he was a terrorist. Yesterday, it turned out that he wasn't a terrorist," Netanyahu said. Yaqoub Abu Al-Qia'an was shot by police officers in January 2017, when officers arrived to oversee the demolition of houses in his home village of Umm al-Hiran, an unrecognized Bedouin village that the state was razing to clear the way for a new Jewish town. Channel 12 reporter Amit Segal published a report revealing that the state attorney at the time, had suppressed evidence that would have challenged Alsheich's assertion that Abu al-Qia'an was a terrorist. [See also "Netanyahu Apologizes for 2017 Killing of Bedouin Man, Says Police Shooting Was Covered up 'to Hurt Me" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Israel Lets in 70 Evangelicals to Volunteer in Settlements

Although Israel's borders have been largely closed to non-citizens since the coronavirus outbreak, roughly 70 volunteers from Hayovel, a Christian evangelical organization headquartered in Missouri, have been awarded visas to enter Israel in order to help with the grape harvest on West Bank [settlements](#). Hayovel appears to be the first case of a special exception being made for agricultural field hands, who were not already living in the country. A spokesman for the kibbutz movement confirmed that none of Israel's approximately 230 kibbutzim had obtained permission to bring in volunteers from abroad to help out in the fields since the coronavirus outbreak. Hayovel brings volunteers only to West Bank settlements and is not active at all within the so-called Green Line.

Chad to Open Diplomatic Office in Jerusalem Within Year

A senior Chadian official told Israeli leaders that the African country will open a diplomatic mission in Jerusalem within a year, N12 reported. Prime Minister Netanyahu and Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen held separate meetings with the son of Chad's President Idriss Déby, Abdelkarim Déby. Déby, Deputy Director of Chad's civil cabinet, arrived with a delegation in Israel to promote ties between the states. It was agreed that an Israeli delegation will visit the Muslim-majority African nation in the near future, in order to deepen the economic cooperation between the countries and advance agricultural and water projects. According to N12, the diplomatic talks also invoked security challenges Chad is facing with Shiite militias on its borders. [See also "Chad Considering Embassy in Jerusalem" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Israel Hayom

Israel, UAE to Sign Historic Deal at White House Next Week

Israel and the UAE will sign their historic deal normalizing relations at a White House ceremony on Sept. 15, US officials said. A senior White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Prime Minister Netanyahu and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, would lead the two delegations to the ceremony. The officials, who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, said the ceremony would either be on the South Lawn, the Rose Garden or inside depending on weather. The ceremony will come just a month after the agreement to establish full diplomatic relations was announced on Aug. 13. The historic deal delivered a key foreign policy victory to [President Trump](#) as he seeks reelection and reflected the changing Middle East in which shared concerns about archenemy Iran have largely overtaken traditional Arab support for the Palestinians. That announcement has been followed by the first direct commercial flight between the countries, the establishment of telephone links and commitments to cooperate in numerous areas. [See also "Palestinians Said to Scale Down Criticism of Israel-UAE Deal" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Serbia Won't Move Embassy If Israel Recognizes Kosovo

Israeli recognition of Kosovo as an independent country will strain relations with Serbia, despite it being in the framework of agreements the Balkan countries signed in the White House, a source close to Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić told The Jerusalem Post. The source added that "many have argued that Israel recognizing Kosovo would be akin to countries unilaterally recognizing 'Palestine.'" Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, but Belgrade considers it to be an autonomous zone. Israel did not recognize Kosovo for over a decade, out of concern for damaging strong ties with Serbia and for setting a precedent for recognition of a Palestinian state. Serbia and Kosovo signed separate agreements with the US at the same time, sitting on opposite sides of President Trump in the Oval Office on Friday. [See also "Serbia Warns Israeli Recognition of Kosovo Independence Will 'Destroy' Ties with Belgrade" \(I24 News\)](#)

Lebanon, Israel Closer to Negotiating Border Disputes

Israel and Lebanon are getting "closer" to resolving their border disputes, a senior US official said. "I think we're getting closer, and this will open the opportunity for both Lebanon and Israel to make some real progress on actually starting to negotiate on the borders," US Assistant Secretary of Near Eastern Affairs David Schenker told reporters in a phone briefing. Schenker added that the administration was in the process of developing a framework for negotiations which should have been made "a long time ago." He refused to provide further details on the main hurdles to negotiations. Lebanon and Israel remain in a state of war. In recent years disputes have erupted over the maritime borders of the two states due to the discovery of offshore gas fields. The US has repeatedly sought to mediate an agreement to finalize the borders between Israel and Lebanon. [See also "U.S. Blacklists Ex-Lebanese Ministers Over Hezbollah Ties, Vows More Action" \(Reuters\)](#)

Times of Israel

UN to Handle Gaza Medical Transfers to Israel, West Bank

The UN said that it had reached a temporary arrangement in which the World Health Organization would coordinate between the Palestinian Authority and Israel to ensure Gazans could receive exit permits to be treated in Israel and West Bank hospitals. According to Kan, Israel had already agreed to the proposal, but the Palestinian Authority delayed accepting the arrangement. Since the Hamas terror group took over the Gaza Strip in 2007, Gazans have seen their freedom of movement tightly regulated by neighboring Israel and Egypt. Those wishing to travel, even for humanitarian reasons, face a byzantine permit system. The number of humanitarian exit permits issued for Gaza residents in July dropped to some 260, compared to 2,910 in February, according to the WHO. Rights groups who have been trying to mediate between Israel and the patients say there is a huge backlog of sick people who have not been able to access treatment because they could not get exit permits.

Unsatisfactory Apology

By Ben-Dror Yemini

- As far as the police in the field are concerned, it was a tragedy. They were on a security mission to evict Bedouin families from their homes. It was an early winter morning. A vehicle that one of the locals was driving hit a policeman, the late Warrant Officer Erez Amadi-Levy, who was killed on the spot. A few hours later, during the funeral, then-police commissioner Roni Alsheich said: “Sadly, there are those who will exploit any situation in order to commit terrorism, including a vile terrorist who took advantage of a window of opportunity and accelerated while ignoring the policemen who were deployed on both sides of the road, signaling for him to stop.” An investigation was begun. It already had been known for a while that this was not an exploiting of a propitious moment, it wasn’t an act of terrorism, the driver hadn’t sped up, he’s unlikely to have noticed anyone telling him to stop the car at all, and he wasn’t a terrorist. But that’s what those who immediately and fatally shot the driver, Yaqub Abu al-Qiyan, probably thought. He was a math teacher and a vice principal.
- The prime minister apologized yesterday for the rash statements that had portrayed al-Qiyan as a terrorist. The problem was the timing. On Monday, journalist Amit Segal uncovered some of the behind-the-scenes conduct. The Police Internal Investigations Department’s investigation had drawn conclusions about al-Qiyan very quickly, but Alsheich insisted that he was a terrorist and undermined the PIID. Instead of rebuking the commissioner, the top ranks of the State Attorney’s Office backed him. Until yesterday, in spite of the fact that the conclusions of the investigation have been reported in the media, no official representative had seen fit to apologize to the family. Matters remained unclear. When does the picture become far more unequivocal? Only when it’s linked to the never-ending battle between the law enforcement agencies and Netanyahu.
- One can complain about Netanyahu. Why did you only apologize now? After all, you were supposed to know. One can say that he’s taking advantage of the exposé to settle a score with the police. But under the circumstances of the matter, Netanyahu is not the problem. The problem is Alsheich and the people who covered for him, above all former state attorney Shai Nitzan. We’ve become used to investigations that leave cases open for years, particularly when they involve public figures. Even the case of the pointless killing of al-Qiyan remained open, even though all of the findings indicated that he rammed the police officer by accident.
- Netanyahu’s apology, regardless of his motives, is not the end. It must be admitted that this time it’s correct to demand an investigation, even if that demand comes from the political fringes MK Bezalel Smotrich on one end, and the Joint List on the other. They’re right, because Nitzan admitted that Alsheich’s behavior had been “scandalous.” Yet he gave him cover, which is equally scandalous and leaves unanswered questions. Why did Alsheich insist that al-Qiyan was a terrorist? Why did Nitzan keep silent? What went wrong there? The era when that sort of conduct could remain hidden in darkness is over.

A Threat Along with an Opportunity

By Michael Milshtein

- Things have been turbulent in the Gaza Strip in recent weeks, and not necessarily due to the apparent security tension in the region. Within a short period of time, the Gaza Strip went from being one of the safest and “cleanest” places in the world in terms of the coronavirus to an area whose residents are growing increasingly anxious about losing control over the pandemic. All of this happened after the initial carriers were found in the community (and outside the quarantine facilities): about two weeks ago there were four of them, and now they number 1,150. Everyone in Gaza knows that [the results of] the tests being conducted are very incomplete since the number of actual carriers is higher than has been revealed, and that Hamas has no real ability to cope with the challenge.
- The threat of the coronavirus spreading in Gaza first appeared about six months ago, although it dissipated after Hamas managed to block the disease. Now it’s bursting out again with a vengeance. This is not “the Palestinians’ problem,” but a threat with strategic ramifications for Israel in the civil, diplomatic and security realms, which requires it to take vigorous action in order to deal with it. The main objective is currently to avert a humanitarian disaster, a scenario that is looking more realistic than ever and is likely to make life worse for the Gazan population, which has been suffering prolonged civilian distress in any event. And yet, the growing threat from the south is also likely to present a strategic opportunity for Israel in the form of reopening the window of opportunity with regard to the missing Israelis and the bodies of fallen IDF soldiers whom Hamas has been holding. That same window opened briefly about six months ago when Yahya Sinwar was apprehensive about the coronavirus potentially breaking out in the Gaza Strip, which led him to declare that he was willing to promote any “deal” in exchange for civilian aid.
- The window of opportunity is now open again in view of the mounting pressure on Hamas and the Gazan street to halt the spread of the coronavirus. This time Israel should make clear by any possible means—both through mediators and through public statements—that the Gaza Strip’s salvation is conditioned on Hamas’s toning down its dogmatic positions about the fallen soldiers and the missing Israelis. This is a message that Hamas’s top officials need to hear loud and clear, but it’s important for the Gazan public to hear it as well, and that requires intensive Israeli discourse in the media and on social networks.
- It is necessary to establish a connection in the Palestinian public’s mindset between Hamas’s conduct vis a vis the MIAs and the missing civilians and the dire reality in the Gaza Strip, which embodies one of Hamas’s most concrete and primal fears in the form of public upheaval breaking out in the Gaza Strip. Israel must exercise humanitarian judgment and provide aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip, but it must demonstrate the same discretion with the families of the MIAs and the missing civilians as well. The scale of the aid to the Gaza Strip, not the aid itself, must not be conditioned. The greater the aid, so the Gazan public must understand, the greater the flexibility Hamas will be

expected to show. This time, the traditional ideological rigidity to which Hamas has clung is posing a serious threat to the public's lives.

- Israel can therefore likely turn the coronavirus challenge in the Gaza Strip to its own advantage. It can make it possible to consolidate a newer and more binding truce arrangement, which would be accompanied by promoting the issue of the MIAs and the missing civilians, which to this day has been separated from the broader talks about reaching understandings with Hamas for fear that [including the issue] would scuttle the talks. The current situation has proven that it is an issue that has not derailed the understandings, but actually strengthened Hamas's leverage, which is likely to be more effective under the new circumstances that have emerged in the Gaza Strip.