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## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Thursday, September 9*

### Headlines:

- **Questions Plague Israeli Security Forces after Jailbreak**
- **Rioting Reported throughout West Bank after Prison Break**
- **Israel Strikes Gaza as Palestinians Celebrate Prison Break**
- **Bennett to Make Rare Public Visit to Egypt**
- **Turkey, Egypt Pledge Further Talks to Normalize Ties**
- **Egypt, Jordan and Syria Agree to Bring Energy to Lebanon**
- **Iran Warns West as US Says Time Running Out to Save Deal**
- **Taliban to Establish Relations with All Nations Except Israel**

### Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: “The Forgotten Lesson of 1973”**  
- By Michael Milstein
- **Ma’ariv: “We’ve Become Addicted to Quiet”**  
- By Ben Caspit

# News Excerpts

September 9, 2021

Ynet News

## **Questions Plague Israeli Security Forces after Jailbreak**

Israeli authorities remained short on answers over how six Palestinian prisoners' escape from a high-security jail went unnoticed and where they could have gone, with a vast manhunt still underway. The group's early-morning flight, through a hole made below a sink in a Gilboa prison cell to a tiny tunnel exit discovered by guards and police, sounds almost like a plotline from Israeli-Palestinian conflict drama "Fauda". It has made the escapees "heroes" to many Palestinians, with celebrations in the Jenin area of the West Bank. But the full weight of Israel's security arsenal has been deployed to catch them, including aerial drones, checkpoints on roads and an army mission to Jenin, where many of the men locked up for their roles in attacks on Israel grew up. The search continued as Israel was celebrating Rosh Hashana, after the "Great Escape" hailed by some Palestinian newspapers. [Dig Deeper "Israeli Troops Arrest Family Members of Fugitives in West Bank Raids" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

## **Rioting Reported throughout West Bank after Prison Break**

Palestinians were holding large-scale demonstrations across the West Bank and Jerusalem, some of them violent, in solidarity with the six security prisoners who broke out of Israel's Gilboa Prison. In at least one case, rioters were reported to use live fire against Israeli troops, but missed them. Unrest was reported near Jerusalem's Damascus Gate, in Hebron, Hawara, Azzoun, near Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, and in other locations in the West Bank. Meanwhile, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said it was extending its closure of the West Bank, amid fears of escalating violence in the area. Security prisoners in several Israeli facilities have held riots and Palestinians have held at times violent demonstrations in support of the fugitives. Israeli defense officials also fear that Palestinian terror groups in the Gaza Strip, specifically [Islamic Jihad](#), may renew rocket fire from the enclave in solidarity.

Associated Press

## **Israel Strikes Gaza as Palestinians Celebrate Prison Break**

Israel launched airstrikes on what it said was a militant site in the Gaza Strip after Palestinians sent incendiary balloons into Israel in support of six Palestinian prisoners who had escaped from an Israeli prison. Fighter jets struck a Hamas rocket manufacturing workshop as well as a Hamas military compound in Khan Yunis, a city in southern Gaza, according to the army statement. The army said the compound houses a cement factory used for building militant tunnels. The strikes came in response to incendiary balloons launched by Gaza's ruling Hamas into Israeli territory, the army said. The devices were a show of support for the prison break, which Hamas and other Palestinian militants hailed as a heroic victory. For Israel, the escape — through a secret tunnel, likely with outside help — marks an embarrassing security breach. [Dig Deeper "Palestinians Decry Measures against Inmates, Praise 'Heroic' Fugitives" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Axios

## **Bennett to Make Rare Public Visit to Egypt**

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is expected to travel to Egypt next week for the first public visit by an Israeli prime minister in over a decade. Israel officials speculate that by inviting Bennett publicly so early in his term, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government is trying to signal Egypt's importance in the region to the Biden administration. Other than establishing a personal relationship, the meeting is expected to focus on Gaza. Egypt is engaging both Hamas and Israel to try to stabilize and extend the ceasefire there while also seeking to broker a possible prisoner exchange between the sides. Sisi is also expected to raise Israel's relations with the [Palestinian Authority \(PA\)](#) and the possibility of a political dialogue of some sort with Abbas. Bennett recently publicly ruled out any such talks. Ahead of Bennett's visit, Abbas visited Cairo last week for a trilateral summit with Sisi and King Abdullah of Jordan. [Dig Deeper "Biden Reiterates Plan to Reopen Jerusalem Consulate despite Israeli Objections" \(Axios\)](#)

Reuters

## **Turkey, Egypt Pledge Further Talks to Normalize Ties**

Turkey and Egypt agreed to continue talks to repair and eventually normalize strained ties after wrapping up a second round of discussions meant to address differences, the two countries said in a joint statement. The talks were held in Ankara over two days and led by the respective deputy foreign ministers. They marked the second high-level political consultations between the estranged regional rivals since May, when Egypt hosted a Turkish delegation amid a push by Ankara to ease tensions with a handful of countries. Ankara's ties with Cairo have been frosty since the Egyptian military toppled Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood - strongly supported by Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan in 2013. The two are also at odds over the Libyan war, where they backed opposing sides, and control of Mediterranean waters. The talks addressed bilateral and regional issues, including Libya, Syria, the east Mediterranean, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the countries said in the joint statement. [Dig Deeper "Tense Turkey-UAE Relations Improve" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

I24 News

## **Egypt, Jordan and Syria Agree to Bring Energy to Lebanon**

Energy ministers from Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon agreed on a plan to bring gas and electricity to Lebanon, following a meeting in Amman. Egypt's Oil Minister said that his country would "be ready to transfer gas to Lebanon as soon as possible" via the transnational Arab Gas Pipeline. But damage to the pipeline and electricity lines during a decade of [civil war](#) in Syria means that energy supplies cannot start flowing until repairs are carried out. Fuel and power shortages are one of the most acute symptoms of Lebanon's economic collapse, paralyzing the economy and vital services. The World Bank has labelled Lebanon's situation the worst economic crash since the mid-19th century. Lebanon is also "working with the World Bank" to ensure it possesses enough capital to pay for the Egyptian energy imports. [Dig Deeper "Iranian Fuel, Hezbollah 'Savior' of Lebanon and Iran's Goal for Chinese Investment" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## **Iran Warns West as US Says Time Running Out to Save Deal**

Iran's President warned Western states against rebuking Tehran at the UN atomic watchdog after its latest reports criticized Iran, while Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said time was running out to revive a nuclear deal with world powers. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in reports to member states that there had been no progress on two central issues: explaining uranium traces found at several old, undeclared sites and getting urgent access to some monitoring equipment so that the IAEA can continue to keep track of parts of Iran's nuclear program. "In the event of a counterproductive approach at the IAEA, it would not make sense to expect Iran to react constructively. Counterproductive measures are naturally disruptive to the negotiation path also," President Ebrahim Raisi said in a phone call with European Council President Charles Michel, according to Iranian state media. The criticism by the IAEA means the United States and its European allies must now decide whether to push for a resolution at next week's meeting of the 35-nation IAEA Board of Governors pressuring Iran to yield. [Dig Deeper "US, Germany Press for Iran to Return Soon to Nuclear Talks"](#)

## **Taliban to Establish Relations with All Nations Except Israel**

The Taliban are willing to establish ties with all countries except for Israel, a spokesman said as the extremist group announced its new government after taking control of Afghanistan. Spokesman Suhail Shaheen told Russia's Sputnik news that The Taliban were willing to work with the US after they swiftly toppled the 20-year-old Western-backed government last month just as President Joe Biden was completing a pullout to end America's longest war. "Yes, of course, in a new chapter if America wants to have a relation with us, which could be in the interest of both countries and both peoples, and if they want to participate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, they are welcome", Shaheen said. However, there was no chance for ties with Israel. The Taliban named as their acting prime minister Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, who is on a UN sanctions list and served in the Islamists' brutal 1996-2001 regime. His deputy will be Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a co-founder of the Taliban who was released by Pakistan under US pressure to take part in negotiations on the withdrawal of US troops. And the interior minister will be Sirajuddin Haqqani, part of a US-designated terrorist group, despite a US offer of millions of dollars for information leading to his arrest. The US said it was concerned about members of a Taliban government but said it would judge it by actions, including letting Afghans leave freely. [Dig Deeper "The West Owes Qatar a Favor over Afghanistan. That Was the Point" \(Reuters\)](#)

## **The Forgotten Lesson of 1973**

By Michael Milstein

- **The Yom Kippur War, quite correctly, has earned the status of being a formative trauma in the Israeli intelligence community. In wake of the great failure of 1973, generations of intelligence officers were schooled in the most minute details of the dynamic that produced the erroneous assessment and were instructed to assimilate its lessons, first and foremost: humility and caution, pluralism in research, staunch skepticism and encouraging officers to express their independent opinions and to be leery of “herd thinking.” However, the more we review the archival material, a more complicated picture emerges about the past, particularly about the roots of the “preconception,” necessarily also raising questions about the lessons that were learned and instilled in the intelligence community for half a century.**
- **A review of the cabinet meetings in the 24 hours preceding the outbreak of the war shows that the top political and military echelon was not surprised by the fact that war had broken out. As early as on the morning of October 6, it was clear to the country’s leaders that war would break out in the course of the day. But the assumption made by many of the decision-makers was that even if the Arabs were to dare to attack, they would be easily repelled. The surprise for the leaders, therefore, was not Egypt and Syria’s initiative to go to war but rather the fact that the Arab side displayed tenacity, and they did not adjust their fundamentally disparaging assessments about its fighting ability, which was pejoratively described as “the limitations of Arab logic.”**
- **This further highlights the realization that the 1973 intelligence failure is deeply rooted in a lack of familiarity and a lack of understanding of the logic and the culture of the other side, and that this stems, in the main, from deep-felt contempt for it. Eli Zeira, who was the director of the IDF Military Intelligence Directorate, said that the prevailing assessment in the army was “in any case, we’ll beat them easily;” Yoel Ben Porat, the commander of Unit 8200 during the war, complained about the ignorance of the intelligence leaders about Arab culture and pinned a great deal of the failure on this; poet Haim Gouri described it best when talking about his meeting in Cairo in 1977 with Husayn Fawzi, a prominent Egyptian intellectual, who told him: “Had Israeli intelligence read the Egyptian poetry that was written after 1967, it would have known that October 1973 was inevitable.**
- **An intelligence officer must read poetry.” However, it seems that the lesson of our limited familiarity with the other’s culture was shunted to the sidelines and never gained as strong a foothold as the imperative to hear a range of views or to avoid categorical conclusions. Half a century after the Yom Kippur War, there are many questions about Israeli society’s familiarity with its neighbors, a failure that is prominently evident in the ever-decreasing number of high school students who learn Arabic, of university students who major in Middle East studies or Jewish citizens who are capable of holding a conversation in Arabic.**

- **The situation is no different among the decision-makers and among intelligence officials, a fact that naturally is liable to impact their ability to correctly read the intentions of the “other” and to understand its logic. This was evident in Operation Guardian of the Walls and in Hamas’s conduct in the Gaza Strip in the last few months. It is unclear whether we are correctly deciphering the strategic goals and the ideology of this movement and are being careful not to apply our own logic to it, as can be seen in the disparity between Israel’s serious approach toward a truce arrangement in Gaza and the less committal way that Yahya Sinwar perceives this.**
- **We have to capitalize on the meditative atmosphere of Yom Kippur to bring to the fore the forgotten lesson of the 1973 war. Intelligence officials must internalize that learning the language and culture of the other side is sometimes more important than keen strategic and logical analytical capabilities (usually based on Western thinking). Israeli society must recognize the essentiality of learning the Arabic language, perhaps by means of legislation that will make that compulsory. This will enable us to have a better understanding of the enemy and of our surroundings, but mainly, it will give us a tool for engaging in direct dialogue with the region that is gradually opening up to Israel, and most important—with the Arab citizens who live here.**

## **We've Become Addicted to Quiet**

By Ben Caspit

- **The easiest thing is to attack the Prison Service, the most neglected and weakest security agency in Israel. Obviously, the Prison Service bears direct responsibility for the resounding fiasco that enabled six dangerous security prisoners to escape from the most guarded prison in Israel. So with all due regret and unrelated to her responsibility [for the break], direct or otherwise, Prison Service Commissioner Lt. Gen. Katy Perry cannot continue in her position for even one minute longer. But the problem is much bigger and more strategic than the Prison Service. At issue is an historic problem of neglect, of capitulation, of a policy of sweeping the prisoners under the rug and an addiction to quiet. It's not the Prison Service; it's the entire security establishment, followed by the political echelon. In any case, if I were Public Security Minister Omer Bar-Lev, whose voice should have been heard last night when the holiday was over, I would call on R, the candidate who was not chosen to be GSS director, and assign him the task of Prison Service commissioner.**
- **Before that, I would work out with Prime Minister Bennett and Finance Minister Liberman an extra and very major budget (at least one billion shekels a year for four years) and give R a simple instruction: you are getting the Prison Service for four years in order to turn it into the GSS. On all levels: manpower, intelligence, work ethic, reporting credibility, training, professionalism, responsibility, seriousness. The writing was on the wall, smeared in blood-red letters. More than a decade ago, I wrote a story in Ma'ariv that detailed the five-star summer camp conditions enjoyed by security prisoners in Israeli jails. Unlimited television channels, separate kitchens, a wealth of provisions, brand name clothes, academic degrees, smuggled cellphones, what not? Since that day and until today, almost nothing at all has changed. The Prison Service is a neglected, sidelined organization.**
- **Promotion is usually based on connections, on groveling and on who you know. There is no orderly hierarchy, no proper training; instead there are cliques and intrigue. For example: the Prison Service's chief intelligence officer until recently was Dr. Yuval Biton, who has no experience in intelligence. He is a dentist. He, by the way, is the one who saved Yahya Sinwar's life, when he treated him inside the prison (that is not to his disparagement. Even security prisoners are entitled to medical care). Senior positions are awarded based on connections, sometimes political, sometimes personal. And that result is in kind. On the other hand, dumping all the responsibility on the Prison Service would be shirking responsibility. That belongs to the political echelon, which time after time has capitulated to the warnings of the security/military echelon of the IDF and the GSS: every time there was a strike in a prison, GSS agents and the IDF officers would come along and frighten Prime Minister Netanyahu and the security cabinet and tell them that the prisons must be kept calm, otherwise they would "set the whole area on fire." The effort to keep the West Bank and Gaza quiet affected the prisons, which became a neglected and independent hothouse.**

- If you will, it is exactly the same story for the Gaza Strip: it was the desire of the last 15 years not to cause an explosion that enabled Hamas to grow into what it is today. We became addicted to quiet, but our inability to pay a certain price here and now to resolve a strategic problem that will cost much more later is what gave rise to the monster on Ashkelon's border. Take Gilad Erdan, for example, who was public security minister until 2019. When he realized the extent of the neglect, he put all his energy and abilities into changing the situation. He even appointed a committee headed by a former commissioner to receive legitimacy for a number of essential steps, including putting an end to the cellphone fiasco and ending the separation between the organizations in prisons. Separation between the organizations was a demand posed by Hamas, Fatah and Islamic Jihad. They don't trust each other and had they been mixed in their cells, they would have been leery of informants. Israel capitulated to that demand.
- Erdan wanted to overturn it. The committee submitted the conclusions and the decisions that he wanted. Who stopped that from happening? You guessed it. Prime Minister Netanyahu. Not personally, of course. By means of National Security Council Director Meir Ben-Shabbat. When Erdan began to implement the recommendations of his committee, he was blocked and he was instructed to receive the approval of the security cabinet. When he demanded a debate in the security cabinet, again he was blocked, and eventually he gave up. That is how Netanyahu put an end to the attempt to revamp Israel's security prisons from vacation and entertainment resorts into places of incarceration. To Bibi's credit it should be said that he always did this this at the recommendation of security officials.
- The policy was simple: it's the Prison Service's problem. Just let them keep things quiet. As long as they don't agitate the West Bank. That's the most important thing. And so now they are setting fire to the ground and agitating the West Bank, because the six escapees have become superheroes for Palestinian society. Ongoing neglect leads to rot that leads to collapse. That is what we discovered on Rosh Hashanah eve at Gilboa Prison, which was supposed to be the most secure prison in all of Israel and turned out to be a hybrid of Blaumilch Canal and Undernose [two Israeli films, one a satire about bureaucracy and the other about a true case of police ineptness].