



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
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## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Friday, October 15*

### Headlines:

- Qatar resumes distribution of monetary aid to Gaza
- Gantz orders 'aggressive' crackdown on settler violence
- US elected back to UN Human Rights Council
- Hamas releases gunman who killed Israel Border Police officer
- Settlement leaders prepare protest campaign against building freeze
- Government approves NIS 85 Million for firefighting stations in Arab Communities
- Lebanon looks for answers after deadly violence
- Israeli far-right groups on Facebooks secret 'dangerous' blacklist

### Commentary:

- **Ma'ariv: "The Source of Salvation"**
  - By Jacky Hugi
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "The Failed Gamble"**
  - By Nahum Barnea

# News Excerpts

October 15, 2021

## Ynet News

### **Qatar resumes distribution of monetary aid to Gaza**

Tens of thousands of impoverished families in the Gaza Strip began receiving Qatari humanitarian funds on Thursday after Israel agreed to a new distribution mechanism involving the United Nations. Recipients of the money queued from the early hours outside 300 distribution centers spread across the Hamas-ruled Palestinian enclave. Qatari envoy Mohammed al-Emadi said the \$100 handouts would be provided to "95,000 needy families" in Gaza through the UN. Qatari support is considered a crucial lifeline for impoverished Palestinians living in Gaza, which has been under Israeli blockade since 2007. Before the [latest flare-up between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in May](#), the flow of funds from Qatar was considered vital to maintaining relative calm between the two sides.

## Times of Israel

### **Gantz orders 'aggressive' crackdown on settler violence**

Defense Minister Benny Gantz called on the military to act "systemically, aggressively and uncompromisingly" against violence by Israeli settlers toward Palestinians and Israeli security forces, after a number of cases of attacks by far-right nationalists in the West Bank in recent weeks. Gantz issued the directive following a meeting with top officials from the Israel Defense Forces and Defense Ministry regarding the recent violence and the military's preparations for the upcoming olive harvest, a sensitive period in the West Bank that regularly sees attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians and their olive groves. "Gantz ordered the IDF to act systemically, aggressively and uncompromisingly — together with the Shin Bet security service and the police — against all forms of violence, against Palestinians, Jews and of course against security forces," his office said in a statement.

## Jerusalem Post

### **US elected back to the UN Human Rights Council**

The [UN General Assembly](#) elected the United States to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on Thursday, more than three years after the Trump administration quit the 47-member body over its chronic bias against Israel and a lack of reform. The US, which was unopposed, received 168 votes in the secret ballot by the 193-member General Assembly. It begins a three-year term on January 1, pitting Washington against Beijing and Moscow, which began council terms this year. US President [Joe Biden](#) took office in January, pledging that human rights would be the center of his foreign policy and his administration has not shied away from criticizing China over Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Taiwan, while also calling out Russia. Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho), ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said, "The United States should not be lending its legitimacy to a body that includes perpetrators of

human rights abuses like China, Venezuela and Cuba. Additionally, the council continues to disproportionately spend the majority of its time and attention persecuting our ally Israel.

#### I24 News

### **Hamas releases gunman who killed Israel Border Police officer**

Hamas has released from custody the Palestinian gunman who shot Israel Border Police officer Barel Hadaria Shmueli in August during clashes at the Gaza border, *Yediot Aharonot* reports. Shmueli [succumbed to his wounds](#) nine days after being shot in the head when clashes erupted between Palestinian rioters and Israeli security forces during protests along the fence separating Israel from the Gaza Strip. The terrorist who shot Shmueli is not a Hamas member, but is active in the military wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, according to the reporting. He was transferred to a Hamas detention center in Gaza and held there for several weeks before being released. The man's identity was kept secret for fears of Israel eliminating the terrorist, but with the gunman's release his picture has now been publicized.

#### Arutz Sheva

### **Settlement leaders prepare protest campaign against building freeze**

The Supreme Planning Council, the body that is supposed to approve the construction of housing units in Judea and Samaria, has still not convened. and as a result there is a de-facto construction freeze in Judea and Samaria. In an interview with *Arutz Sheva*, the head of the Benjamin Regional Council, Yisrael Ganz, clarifies that if no date is set for the convening of the council, the leaders of the settlements are expected to begin a public protest campaign soon. Ganz notes that council has not met since months before the current government was formed. "This means thousands of housing units are not being built. We will have to go back and sit in front of the prime minister's office and maybe even more than that."

#### Jerusalem Post

### **Government approves NIS 85 million for firefighting stations in Arab communities**

The Social Equality and Pensioners Ministry and the Public Security Ministry announced on Thursday that they will be allocating NIS 85 million to open firefighting stations in Israeli-Arab communities. In addition, some 140 firefighters and firefighting personnel will be added to the firefighting force within the next five years, the ministries announced. The goal is to reduce the arrival time of firefighters to Arab cities and towns and also as part of a larger effort to prepare for gigantic wildfires and national emergencies, the ministries said.

## Lebanon looks for answers after deadly violence

Armed clashes erupted on Thursday in Beirut during a protest organized by the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah and its allies against the lead judge probing last year's blast in the city's port. At least six people were killed and dozens were wounded in some of the most serious fighting in years, authorities said. The hours-long exchange of fire along a former front line from the 1975-90 civil war involved snipers, pistols, Kalashnikovs and rocket-propelled grenades, and was reminiscent of that conflict. The clashes were the worst since 2008, when the Shiite Hezbollah briefly overran parts of Beirut. It was not immediately clear how Thursday's violence erupted, but tensions were running high after the Iran-backed Hezbollah and its Shiite allies from the Amal Movement demanded the removal of the judge leading the investigation into the massive August 2020 port explosion. The two parties called for a protest near the Justice Palace, along the former front line between Muslim Shiite and Christian areas.

## Israeli far-right groups on Facebook's secret 'dangerous' blacklist

Facebook's blacklist of dangerous groups and people includes Israeli far-right organizations and individuals, according to a list published by The Intercept on Thursday. The list published by The Intercept categorizes the Kahane Chai movement – made up of supporters of the [anti-Arab extremist Rabbi Meir Kahane](#) – as a terror organization. Lehava, an organization that says it is against Jewish-Arab mixed marriages and was behind a march this year in Jerusalem that resulted in [over 100 Palestinians being hurt](#), is listed as a hate group. Lehava Chairman Benzi Gopstein, who was [blocked from WhatsApp](#) in May, also appears on the list under the hate category, as do dozens of members of the far-right Otzma Yehudit party.

## **The Source of Salvation**

By Jacky Hugi

- Ever since the peace treaty was signed, it's doubtful if the Jordanians have consented to release pictures from joint events with Israeli officials. On Tuesday, Energy Minister Karine Elharrar and Jordanian Water Minister Mohammed Al-Najjar signed a new bilateral water agreement. They signed it, and they rushed to tell their pals, meaning journalists. Under the agreement, Israel will add 50 million cubic meters to the water that it has been sending the Hashemite kingdom ever since the peace treaty was signed. The addendum is valid for one year, with an option for one more year. The total quantity will thereby be doubled, amounting to 100 million cubic meters annually.
- Political circles raised an outcry: how dare [the Israeli government] give a gift to the Hashemite kingdom? Former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu blamed Bennett for Israel not demanding any diplomatic achievement in return. Gilad Sharon, son of former prime minister [Ariel Sharon], speculated whether Israel had demanded the enclaves of Tzofar and Naharayim in return. In this region, Sharon preached to the policymakers, you don't give gifts for free.
- Israel has not been giving away this water for nothing. It's an export deal that is paid for. Although the Israel Water Authority's revenues are relatively modest for the sector (2.3 shekels per cubic meter), the water is not top-grade. It has to be purified, which the Jordanians do. The Israeli economy is not experiencing a water shortage. The time when we were at the mercy of the skies has been over ever since the desalination plants were opened along our shores. And even though this is a business arrangement, from Israel's standpoint the primary motive is political. Jordan is not only a client, but also a key partner in preserving our national security. You do business with partners, and it's even customary to give presents. Out of the headlines, Israel gets them too.
- There's also a human aspect. Why not help out a neighbor in distress? The Jordanians need 1.3 billion cubic meters annually, but they manage to collect no more than 900 million. Neighboring Iraq is arid, barely able to provide for its own water needs. In contrast, Syria has good water sources, but its relationship with Jordan has suffered its ups and downs, and it is not a reliable source. While Jordan does have access to the sea (via Aqaba), it will take a delivery canal to quench the thirsty mouths in Amman. This is a costly project that will take years to build. Israel is the kingdom's most stable source of water, and it has been so even in times of crisis.
- There are Israelis who are bothered by the anti-Israel mood in Amman: the demonstrations against Israel, the call to expel the ambassador, and even the demand to make peace with the Palestinians. On the other hand, the same palace, army and security forces subordinate to it are responsible for the quiet that has been prevailing along the several-hundred-kilometer-long shared border. Imagine if they didn't bother doing that.
- Surprising as it is, there were also those in Amman who grimaced. The king's critics were furious at how he dared to pay for water whose provenance lay in the land of

**Palestine, which is all theirs after all. If the water is Palestinian property, as they see it, then Jordan and the Palestinian Authority are its legal owners. If it were up to the king's opponents on the one hand, and on Bennett's detractors on the other, the deal never would have taken place. Israel would have been spared the diplomatic rapprochement, and Jordan would have been spared precious drinking water. Yet while for us this story is grounds for political bashing, for the Jordanians it's a matter of an existential need. The tap will tell just how existential. Many households in Amman have already learned to live without water. Other cities also have a customary stop in the flow of water for hours or days. Whoever can buy water privately does so. Whoever cannot, lives with strict discipline.**

## **The Failed Gamble**

By Nahum Barnea

- **Most of the harsh words that Netanyahu and Bennett hurl at each other from the Knesset rostrum and on social media are not fit to print. Both of them inflate nonexistent disagreements. In many ways, the Bennett government is a sequel. That is certainly true regarding Israel's foreign and defense policy.**
- **On one critical issue for Israel's survival, the disagreement is very real and highly charged: the Iranian nuclear program. The disagreement is focused on the past and reaches into the present and future. Netanyahu has been telling one story; Bennett has been telling the opposite. Netanyahu's story is heroic: using his talents, his connections, and his willingness to fight, come what may, he managed to make the president of the United States withdraw from the nuclear agreement and impose far-reaching sanctions on the Iranian regime. It was a huge diplomatic achievement. Bennett, in contrast, in his amateurism, his cowardice, and his meager actions, has let the American administration rejoin the agreement with Iran. Because of him, Iran will go nuclear.**
- **Bennett's story of what played out is less heroic: Netanyahu did persuade the Trump administration to withdraw from the nuclear agreement. He was certain that Trump would win the election, that he would institute a policy of maximum pressure on Iran, and then would either break the Iranian regime and force it to give up its nuclear program, or else he would go to war with Iran. This was no act of heroism, says Bennett. It was a crazy gamble, which failed. Sources close to Bennett went rummaging through the files to figure out whether Netanyahu had a backup plan. They found no such thing.**
- **Trump's secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, was in Israel this week. Pompeo plans to run for president in 2024, if and when Trump withdraws his candidacy. During the talks that he held in Israel, Pompeo said that if he were president of the United States today, this is what he would do to Iran: maximum pressure and preparations for military action. That doesn't mean that Trump would have acted that way. According to what Trump said not long ago, he had absolutely no intention of launching military action against Iran. Either way, the American voters have spoken. The bet on Trump failed. Unbound by the nuclear agreement, Iran has continued to move forward with its program.**
- **Netanyahu had three partners in his gamble: Mossad Director Yossi Cohen, National Security Council Director Meir Ben-Shabbat, and Israeli Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer. Cohen mobilized this week to mitigate the criticism of the 2018 decision. Iran is no closer to a nuclear bomb today than it was in the past, he said. That was a bizarre remark, from every standpoint: towards the end of his term in the Mossad, Cohen traveled to Washington and met with President Biden. He worked all his charm on the president, but Biden wouldn't budge: if Iran would agree, then America would rejoin the JCPOA. The campaign to enlist the Americans in the war on Iran yielded neither Iran nor America.**

- Bennett contends that when he became prime minister, he discovered that Netanyahu had not done a thing to prepare militarily versus a nuclear Iran. In fact, he had put all his eggs in Trump's basket. Bennett, unlike Netanyahu, decided to invest in outfitting and preparing the IDF: we're talking billions. Not that anyone believes that the Iranians plan to drop an atom bomb on Tel Aviv, but Israel has to prepare for that possibility too.
- In a sense, the Iranians are going about their nuclear program by following in Israel's footsteps: their nuclear program is as much a political declaration as it is a strategic weapon. Writing in the new volume of *The Israeli Journal of Society, Military and National Security*, which will be published next week, Prof. Avner Cohen, the number-one researcher of Israel's nuclear program, tries to answer the question of who actually decides on nuclear issues in Israel. The article was cleared for publication by the Military Censor's Office.
- His answer is surprising. Cohen argues that Ben-Gurion made sure to keep the IDF away from the nuclear program. He was afraid of a budgetary controversy. In particular, he was afraid of the generals who objected to Dimona. The IDF would fight with conventional arms, he decided. The nuclear assets would be administered by civilians—neither generals nor politicians, but professionals. The nuclear program was intended to be an insurance policy for a rainy day. Its administration requires caution. The nuclear assets will always remain “a certain distance from a situation in which they are ready to be used.”
- In Israel, the prime minister controls the nuclear assets but cannot operate them on his own. The American policy says that the president can push the red button on his own. According to Cohen, Israel behaved differently, using the two-key system: the prime minister can make decisions on strategic matters only in consensus with the defense minister. If the prime minister is the defense minister, he has to choose another minister. Rabin chose Avraham “Beiga” Shochat in his second term; Peres chose Ehud Barak; Barak chose David Levy. I imagine that Bennett acted like his predecessors, and that he shares decisions on the nuclear issue with Benny Gantz. It turns out that the Iranians can learn something from us, on their road to the bomb.