



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace
1725 I St NW Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006
The Hon. Robert Wexler, President
Editor: Yousef Bashir

News Excerpts

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Ha'aretz

Bennett Privately Fears That Abbas Will Be Assassinated

“Mansour Abbas is in mortal danger and might be murdered.” This statement was recently made by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in private talks with two political figures. Bennett did not elaborate on the basis of his assessment and whether there was intelligence on the matter, but said the concern is that Israeli Arab citizens who oppose the United Arab List’s (UAL) participation in the coalition will be influenced by what the prime minister called “wild incitement” against the party’s chairman. His interlocutors believed Bennett’s concern was genuine. Last December, Abbas was placed under protection due to fears of attempts to harm him. Abbas announced that the UAL will remain committed to [the coalition](#), after having suspended its membership in it over the clashes on Temple Mount. [Dig Deeper “Liberman Lauds Ra’Am’s Abbas for Recognizing Israel’s Jewish Character” \(Ynet News\)](#)

Times of Israel

Massive Crowds Expected for Burial of Abu Akleh

Israeli [Police](#) were girding for possible unrest today ahead of the funeral of slain al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, with tens of thousands or more mourners expected to attend her Jerusalem funeral with tensions already running high. Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American reporter who covered the Mideast conflict for more than 25 years, was killed by gunfire to her upper body Wednesday morning while covering clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen during a military raid in the West Bank city of Jenin. The death sparked international condemnation, though it’s not yet clear who is responsible for her killing. The procession is expected to depart from the Beit Hanina neighborhood of Jerusalem and eventually culminate at the Christian Mount Zion Cemetery. A police official told the Kan that every effort is being made to ensure the funeral proceeds without interruptions. [Dig Deeper “Palestinian Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh’s Colleagues Recount Her Killing” \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

Ynet News

Israel Asks US to Intervene with PA for Joint Probe

Israeli officials requested United States assistance in persuading the Palestinian Authority (PA) to agree to a joint investigation into the killing of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh. Abu Akleh was shot in the head while covering an incursion of IDF troops into the city’s refugee camp. The officials told their American counterparts that they were concerned that the Palestinians would destroy evidence that may show the reporter was killed by Palestinian militant gunfire. The PA had blamed Israel for the incident. Prime Minister Bennett said he [expected](#) the PA to refrain from contaminating [forensic](#) evidence and disrupting a transparent search for the truth. [Dig Deeper “IDF Probe Said to Zero in on Firefight 150 Meters From Where Reporter Was Killed” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Abbas Threatens to Turn To ICC Over Abu Akleh's Killing

The PA stood firm on its refusal to hold a joint investigation with Israel into the shooting death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, whose funeral procession made its way yesterday from Ramallah to Jerusalem. “We have rejected a joint investigation with the Israeli authorities because they are the ones who committed the crime,” said PA President Mahmoud Abbas as he eulogized Abu Akleh at a state memorial ceremony in Ramallah. Her flag-draped coffin, adorned with a wreath and a rose, was laid out in front of him in the courtyard of the Mukata. At one point a flak jacket with the word “press” was also placed on her coffin. Abbas pledged to seek justice by “immediately going to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute the criminals” responsible for Abu Akleh’s death. The IDF confirmed that troops from the Duvdevan commando unit were located 492ft. from Abu Akleh. [Dig Deeper “Minister on Probe Into Reporter’s Death: ‘Israel’s Credibility Not the Highest” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Israel Authorizes Project to Build 4,427 Homes in West Bank

The Israeli Defense Ministry body that authorizes construction in the West Bank gave permission to plans for 4,427 housing units in the settlements. All 25 plans on the register were submitted to the Civil Administration's planning subcommittee, and more than half of the houses received final approval for construction. While some of the projects are for settlements near the Green Line, other approved plans are for settlements in the heart of the West Bank, which the Israeli government refers to as Judea and Samaria. These include a 56-unit project in Negohot, which passed the first planning stage known as Depot, and a 534-unit project in Shvut Rachel, which passed the final planning stage. Along with adding thousands of new homes, plans retroactively legalize outposts at Mitzpe Dani and Oz v'Gaon. [Dig Deeper “Israel Authorizes Plans for 4,427 West Bank Settlement Homes” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Official: West Should Stop Pressing Egypt on Human Rights

Israeli national security adviser Eyal Hulata said in a closed lecture to the board of governors of Tel Aviv University that Western countries should stop pressuring Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on human rights. In putting increased focus on human rights and democracy, President Biden has kept his distance from the leaders of countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Israel sees those countries as central to regional security and countering Iran. The US canceled \$130 million in security assistance for Egypt in January after previously freezing the aid due to human rights concerns, including over the jailing of hundreds of government critics, activists and journalists. An annual human rights report from the State Department, released in April, found a litany of abuses from the Egyptian government or its agents, including extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture and restrictions on free speech. Both Israel and the US view Egypt as a key security partner, and the Israeli government thinks that relationship should be prioritized over human rights concerns.

Iran's Leader Warns Qatari Emir About Israel

Israel appeared to have been the main topic in a meeting between Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the visiting Qatari emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, in Tehran. "Wherever they set their feet on, the Zionists [Israel] cause corruption," Khamenei declared, according to a report published by his official website. In what appeared as a word of caution to Sheikh Tamim, the Iranian leader suggested that relations with Israel do not promise any "power and privilege" and that Israel "is in no position that one should be sacred by." The Islamic Republic has relentlessly expressed its ferocious opposition to a chain of normalization pacts between Arab states and Israel, slamming the rapprochement as "treason." Khamenei concluded that "we in the region ought to strengthen our ties through consultation and cooperation" as he condemned the "malicious Zionists" whose "decades-long oppression against Palestinians ... has dealt a blow to the Islamic and Arab world." The Qatari emir, according to the Khamenei website, "admired the distinguished position" of the Iranian leader in the Islamic world, lamented Israeli "crimes" and urged unity in the face of "the developments in Palestine." Before sitting down with Khamenei, the Qatari leader appeared at a joint press conference with Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, where the focus was regional developments and calls for political settlements to conflicts from Syria and Yemen to Afghanistan. [Dig Deeper "Israel Not Trying to Drag US Into Military Conflict With Iran, PM Adviser Says" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

Saied Hints He Won't Accept Foreign Observers in Elections

Tunisian President Kais Saied indicated he will not accept foreign observers for votes he plans this year to change the political system after having already taken control of the previously independent electoral commission. Saied has consolidated his one-man rule since seizing executive power last summer and dissolving the parliament to rule by decree in moves his foes call a coup. He has since said he will change the democratic 2014 constitution via a referendum in July and has said he wants to hold new parliamentary elections in December. Tunisia has been widely praised for the fairness of its elections since the 2011 revolution that introduced democracy, with the last such vote in 2019 returning Saied as president in a second-round landslide. Saied's consolidation of power has accelerated in recent weeks. As well as taking control of the electoral commission, he has replaced the top judicial body and threatened to restrict civil society groups, giving the 64-year-old almost total control. The crisis has endangered democratic gains made since 2011, when Tunisians toppled longtime autocrat Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, sparking a wave of revolts against authoritarian leaders across the Arab world. [Dig Deeper "Tunisia Denies Report of Former PM Jebali's Arrest" \(Reuters\)](#)

Crisis Expert

By Sima Kadmon

- **My man of the week is Mansour Abbas. If I were to choose a man of the month, I'd still choose the UAL party chairman. If I didn't think it would draw all the Bibi-ites out of their holes, I'd probably choose him as man of the year. Why? Because he is an exceptional politician. Revolutionary. He is a brave man, unafraid to express his views despite the constant threats to his life. He is a leader because only a real leader could stand up with his party colleagues a day after the journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed and announce that the party would end its boycott of the government and resume full participation. Prior to Abbas, we had never seen the leader of an Arab party pushing for such dramatic changes.**
- **We've seen them as members of the Meretz and Labor Parties, but not at the head of an Arab party. Even Liberman, in a very uncharacteristic step, praised his Islamist coalition partner. For the first time we have a leader who stands up in public, not behind closed doors, and says openly that Israel is a Jewish state and will remain a Jewish state, all the while facing off against Yahya Sinwar. Liberman isn't alone. I heard complete right-wingers praise Abbas this week and admit that he had taken a very brave stance and put his life at risk. To say nothing of Lapid: When he is asked what Abbas is really like, his answer always includes just one word: Leader. If leadership means the ability to affect change despite all the opposition he faces, he told me this week, then the dentist from the village of Maghar is a real leader.**
- **It's hard to argue. Abbas managed this year to bring an Arab party into the governing coalition for the first time. No less impressive, he managed to lead the party through all the crises. Time after time he has managed to take control of the second-most splintered party in the coalition (the first belongs to the prime minister). His restraint and his ability to remain quiet and to keep smiling in the face of Ben Gvir's violent, shameful outbursts about [the UAL] at a press conference is yet more proof. But Abbas is no sucker. One can only wonder about his ability to drive Netanyahu out of his mind time after time by revealing more and more details about the negotiations they held. The very fact that that Abbas has documentation of these meetings causes the former prime minister to lose sleep.**
- **In addition, the negotiations he held with the prime minister, during which he made some very nice economic and social gains—which should be considered a national interest, not a narrow one limited to Abbas—shows that he knows precisely what he is doing. So yes, some people say he created a coalition crisis and then stepped back from it; any party can do that. And that the crisis he created over the events on the Temple Mount went on too long and led to a situation in which the whole thing nearly fell apart. But when you think about what sort of pressure Abbas and his party are facing, one can understand his need for these types of crises. It was a good week for the coalition.**

- **Netanyahu, who began the Knesset summer session feeling like a bill to dissolve the Knesset would get through a preliminary reading this week, ended the week having seen the coalition emerge victorious on every vote. Apart from one, and the coalition lost that one thanks to deputy minister Yair Golan's appetite for the media—he continued giving an interview while the vote was underway, at the same time that MK David Amsalem (Likud) stepped away from an interview he was giving and ran to vote. And all this includes the no-confidence motions that were introduced on Monday, when the coalition was in a weakened state (the UAL wasn't supporting the government). We can attribute more than a little bit of the salvation to Minister Elkin, who has resumed taking an active role in running the coalition.**
- **This week, in a particularly spicy address on the Knesset floor, Elkin quashed rumors that there would be defectors from the New Hope Party. And of course there is Lapid, who worked nonstop this week to bring the UAL back to full activity. This week was important first and foremost because the elections bill did not pass; if even a preliminary reading had been approved, it would have created the dynamic of a snowball effect. The UAL declared an end to the crisis and did not even employ intermediate tactics like boycotting coalition votes. All Netanyahu's promises that he had recruited another defector have gone up in smoke for the moment. The potential defectors are voting with the coalition. Most importantly, the coalition was able to function even without the UAL; that also showed the coalition could function without Idit Silman, who found herself stuck in limbo this week and is becoming less and less relevant.**

We Need the Truth

By David Horovitz

- In a TV interview hours after the death of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, killed while covering clashes between IDF troops and Palestinian gunmen during an army operation in Jenin, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid rejected the suggestion that Israel had already lost the public relations war over who was to blame. Indeed, Lapid told Israel's Channel 12 on Wednesday evening, the Israeli narrative, "that we still don't know what happened," had been accepted by the Americans and even in the European arena. His immediate, publicized — and subsequently rejected — suggestion to the Palestinian Authority to work together on an investigation, said the foreign minister, had also resonated internationally.
- Of course, Lapid went on, nothing had helped with the Palestinians, "where we are immediately blamed." But lessons had been learned, he insisted, from previous contentious incidents in which Israel froze, misled and otherwise failed to quickly disseminate what it credibly believed to have occurred. Lessons learned? Well, partially. Defense Minister Benny Gantz's briefing to the foreign press on Wednesday, in which he stressed Israel's commitment to "uncover the truth" about how Abu Akleh's death unfolded, was important. But the IDF's spokesman, in an early response to her death, described Abu Akleh and other journalists as "filming and working for a media outlet amidst armed Palestinians. They're armed with cameras, if you'll permit me to say so." For several hours thereafter, leading Israeli political and military figures declared that it was likely Abu Akleh was killed by Palestinian gunfire, before IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kohavi, while noting that IDF troops came under "wild, indiscriminate" Palestinian fire, clarified that, at this stage, it was simply "not possible to determine whose gunfire she was hit by, and we are sorry for her death."
- Very little was said by Israeli officials about the specific context for the army operation — the reason the IDF was there in the first place. The army has escalated its activities in the Jenin area in recent weeks to try to prevent more of the stream of recent terror attacks, several of which — including the fatal shootings of three Israelis at a central Tel Aviv bar on April 7, and the axe murders of three more Israelis in Elad last week — were carried out by Palestinians from Jenin and its environs. A point quite important to make, one would think, when trying to explain to a non-expert watching world the death of a journalist caught up in a gunfight. And that's without getting to the open question of whether the IDF has more information and material from Wednesday's deadly clash that it did not see fit to make quickly available — as belatedly proved to be the case, for instance, regarding the deadly Israeli Navy interception of the Gaza-blockade-busting Mavi Marmara in 2010, when the IDF initially chose not to release footage showing naval commandos being attacked when they boarded the vessel. Like several such past incidents to which Lapid alluded, the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh threatens substantive damage to Israel — diplomatically, in the court of international public opinion, and as a driver of more terrorism.

- **Abu Akleh’s producer, fellow Palestinian journalist Ali Samoudi, who was hospitalized in stable condition after being shot in the back in the same incident, said any suggestion that they were shot by Palestinian gunmen was a “complete lie.” An initial Israeli army probe has reportedly determined that IDF troops did not fire at Abu Akleh. The Palestinian coroners who examined the body and the bullet, meanwhile, were quoted saying that, thus far, it was “not possible” to determine whether she was hit by an Israeli or Palestinian bullet. Getting to the bottom of what happened — be it exculpatory or problematic — won’t alleviate Palestinian hostility, reverse closed-minded conclusions, or sweep aside mis- and disinformation. But it will make a considerable difference for those — at home, abroad, in governments and among ordinary people — for whom the truth does still have a lasting value. In the immediate, unshakable Palestinian narrative, as Channel 12’s Palestinian Affairs reporter Ohad Hemo noted, Abu Akleh was not only shot by Israeli troops rather than hit by indiscriminate Palestinian gunfire, but deliberately targeted by Israel in order to silence the voice of the Palestinians.**
- **With both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas definitively blaming Israel — PA President Mahmoud Abbas immediately decided that Abu Akleh was executed by Israel — that misrepresentation can only foster greater hostility to Israel and a more fertile recruiting ground for terrorism and violence. The death of Abu Akleh is potentially more resonant than many of the previous landmark incidents Lapid presumably had in mind, affecting more people, more deeply, than the Mavi Marmara affair or even the death of Palestinian boy Muhammad Al-Dura in Gaza in 2000 — two incidents dismally handled by Israel’s spokespeople and officialdom that resonated for years. That’s because Shireen Abu Akleh was a veteran reporter trusted by and familiar to tens of millions of Al Jazeera viewers across this region and beyond.**
- **She was killed in the course of her journalistic work, while clearly identified as a member of the press. A Jerusalem-born Christian, she also held American citizenship, making the question of responsibility for her death a matter of direct significance for Israel’s most important ally. The general in charge of the Central Command area that includes Jenin, Yehuda Fuchs, told Channel 12 Wednesday night that “hundreds, even thousands of bullets” were fired by the sides in the gun battle, and “I don’t know which bullet” hit Abu Akleh. “I am sorry for every innocent person who is hurt in the course of IDF operations. We do our best to avoid it.... And I’m sorry about the death of Shireen Abu Akleh.”**
- **He presented himself as the officer who was responsible for the operation — in that “I am the Central Command general. I’m responsible for ensuring that terrorist attacks do not come out of Jenin. I’m responsible for sending combat troops, risking their lives, into Jenin refugee camp to extract people who are planning terror attacks, people who have carried out attacks, and people who are making weaponry to harm Israelis.” Entering Jenin is always immensely risky, he said, since gunfire erupts from all directions. It’s not simple. It’s an urban area. And it’s dangerous.” Asked about the concerted Palestinian campaign of blame against Israel, Fuchs was dismissive: “I don’t deal with [propaganda] campaigns. The only campaign I’m engaged in is to protect the state of Israel.**

- In 99 percent of the operations against terror in urban areas, including in Jenin where we are fired on in all directions, we don't hit innocents. We succeed at that. But sometimes... when you're fighting in a refugee camp, and dozens of [gunmen] are coming at you and firing from 270 degrees, from almost all directions, sometimes innocent people do get harmed. The journalist Shireen, who was really very close to the line where the forces were — ours and the Palestinian terrorists — was hurt there." Fuchs said the IDF had no choice but to continue anti-terror operations, and would continue to do so with caution and professionalism — in contrast to the "wild gunfire" it encounters. "That's our responsibility to the people of Israel," he said. It's a first rule of public diplomacy that you don't put grizzled, gruff-talking generals in front of the cameras. Fuchs, with his no-nonsense candor, proved rather an exception.
- No media-trained spokesman, he came across as straightforward but far from callous — as he spelled out precisely what he understood to have occurred and why. This was an authentic Israeli narrative — not spin or PR. Delivered, obviously, in Hebrew, and doubtless too forthright anyway for international consumption. But resonant, at least, with the watching Israeli public. Who also, not incidentally, need to understand what's being done in their name and for their defense. The Palestinian Authority, as Lapid had predicted, declared that "all the evidence confirms" that the IDF killed Shireen Abu Akleh, and refused his offer of cooperation on the investigation and a subsequent appeal by Gantz to give Israel access to the bullet for specialist analysis. "Those who have nothing to hide do not refuse to cooperate," Israel's Army Radio quoted unnamed Israeli officials saying in response. The fact is that a journalist was killed while trying to do her job. How? Who by? Could it have been prevented? Many of us think we can figure out what transpired, but we don't actually know. The sooner we get to the bottom of all this — which the PA claims it has, but hasn't; and as Israel has properly vowed to do — the better. We've had the predictable narratives. Now, we need the truth.