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Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

May 20, 2022

Ynet News

Coalition Will Survive, Officials Say After Zoabi Resigns

Coalition sources remained hopeful that despite the announced resignation of Meretz MK [Ghaida Rinawie Zoabi](#), which handed the opposition a majority in the Knesset, the government of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett might survive. The surprise move however, raised fears of a snowball effect among government officials, fearing it will prompt further resignations of coalition members who may seek to improve their chances ahead of an election campaign, should the government fall. While party officials said they believed [Rinawie Zoabi](#) might reconsider her move, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett who called his own Yamina party members to an emergency meeting, decided to postpone it, citing technical reasons. The coalition was already dealt a major blow when Yamina legislator and coalition whip Idit Silman defected to the opposition last month. Political sources said they believed elections, which would be fifth in three years, are closer than ever and could take place as early as September. [Dig Deeper "New Elections Creep Closer with Resignation, but Coalition of 59 Not Buried Yet" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Arutz Sheva

Likud to Oppose Law Helping Soldiers in Current Format

The [Likud](#) faction voted unanimously in favor of an amendment to the "From Uniform to University" Law, so that it provide a scholarship of 100% for discharged IDF fighters seeking to enroll in university. The decision means that the Likud will oppose the law in the version promoted by the coalition. The Likud's decision follows an announcement by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid who said they would bring the "From Uniform to University" Law to a vote in the Knesset on Monday, in an attempt to humiliate the Likud. [Dig Deeper "Opposition Celebrates as Coalition Becomes Minority: 'No Right to Exist'" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Israeli Arabs Make Up 90% Of Indictments Over 2021 Riots

Over 600 people have been indicted for offenses allegedly committed during the May 2021 riots in Israel, and nearly 90% of those indicted are Arab, statistics from the State Prosecutor's Office showed. In May 2021, a nationwide wave of violence occurred in Israel, particularly in mixed Jewish-Arab cities, throughout the fighting between Israel and Gaza in "Operation Guardian of the Walls." Of the 616 indictments issued, 545 were against Arabs accused of rioting, acts of terror and violence, while 71 were against Jews; minors were indicted in 162 cases; in the Jerusalem district, 131 indictments were issued; in the Haifa district, 79; and in the southern district, 70. So far, in 80 cases that have been completed, suspects were sentenced to prison time. In some cases, the prosecution appealed lighter sentences issued by a lower court to the Supreme Court, which increased the penalty. [Dig Deeper "Believe in Security' Campaign Rolled Out to Combat Rising Violence, Crime in Arab Areas" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

'Extremists' Clash with Cops as Pilgrimage Ends in Chaos

Dozens of ultra-Orthodox worshippers broke through police barricades to enter the tomb site of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai on Mount Meron, nearly trampling the people inside, in a chaotic capstone to the [Lag B'Omer holiday](#) after police had successfully managed to restrict crowd sizes. Footage showed the throngs of pilgrims pushing through barricades to enter the room in which bar Yochai's tomb is located as those inside push them back and yell for them to stop — exactly the type of situation police had strived to prevent following a last year's gathering when 45 people were crushed to death in the deadliest civil disaster in Israeli history. Additional footage from the scene showed cops clashing with pilgrims attempting to push into the compound. The intruders were later seen celebrating after apparently breaking through the cordon to the site's central courtyard in a densely packed crowd. The riots occurred just ahead of a state memorial service planned to commemorate victims of last year's deadly crush. [Dig Deeper "Police Close Down Religious Festival After Extreme Ultra-Orthodox Rush Meron's Religious Site" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Associated Press

Israeli Military ID's Gun That May Have Killed Abu Akleh

[The Israeli military](#) has identified a soldier's rifle that may have killed Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, but said it cannot be certain unless the Palestinians turn over the bullet for analysis, a military official said. The confirmation marked a small sign of progress in the investigation into the killing of Abu Akleh, who was fatally shot on May 11 while covering an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank. Palestinian officials, along with fellow journalists who were with Abu Akleh, have said Israeli troops stationed nearby killed her. The Israeli army says she was shot during a battle between troops and Palestinian gunmen, and it cannot be determined who fired the fatal bullet without a proper analysis. Israel has called for a joint investigation with the Palestinians. But the Palestinians, who have the bullet, have refused, saying they don't trust Israel. They say they are conducting their own investigation and are ready to cooperate with any country except for Israel.

Times of Israel

Turkish FM Planning to Visit Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu is expected to visit Israel next week and plans to go to the flashpoint Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif holy site, according to a report. Cavusoglu visiting Israel would be a diplomatic breakthrough for the two countries, but his intention to visit the sensitive site in Jerusalem's Old City has sparked some tensions between Turkey and Israel, Kan reported. Cavusoglu plans to go to the compound without any Israelis accompanying him, the report said, citing "an official familiar with the details." His plan has also sparked an argument involving the Shin Bet internal security service about the security protocol for his visit, the report said. Cavusoglu was supposed to visit in April, but that the date was pushed back because Israel wanted to avoid further stoking a tense situation in Jerusalem during Ramadan, Kan reported. Foreign officials sometimes visit the Western Wall, but not the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, while in Jerusalem.

Jordan King Places Half-Brother Under House Arrest

Jordan's King Abdullah said he was restricting the movements of his estranged half-brother Prince Hamza and curtailing his contacts with the outside world to ensure he does not act against his country's interests. Hamza, a former heir to Jordan's throne who was placed under house arrest last year, was accused in April 2021 of trying to destabilize the monarchy in a foreign-inspired plot, but was spared punishment after pledging allegiance to the King. A royal court statement said the monarch had approved a recommendation by a royal family council that decreed restrictions on the estranged prince's movements, place of residence and communications. A royal chief adviser, Bassem Awadallah, and a minor royal were sentenced to 15 years in jail for their involvement in the alleged plot. Hamza, 42, was named Crown Prince when King Hussein died in 1999 and Abdullah became king, but lost that title five years later when Abdullah installed his own son as heir as stipulated under the constitution. The feud shook Jordan's image as a haven of stability in the unpredictable Middle East. [Dig Deeper "Jordan King Places 'Erratic' Half-Brother Under House Arrest" \(Associated Press\)](#)

Biden Could Meet with Saudi Crown Prince as Soon as June

The White House is working on setting up the first meeting between United States President Joe Biden and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as early as next month, CNN reports. The potential in-person meeting would take place while the president is on an overseas trip, which would likely include his first visit to Israel and the Middle East since assuming office. The diplomatic exchange would likely take place during a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Riyadh — the Kingdom currently holds the presidency of the GCC. CNN cited "current and former US officials" in its reporting. "You should count on something like this happening, it just comes down to when, not if," a former US official familiar with the discussions told CNN. In a break from his predecessor Donald Trump's friendly relations with the Saudis, Biden has taken a more critical stance toward Riyadh's human rights record. The talk of rapprochement with the Saudis comes at a time of higher gas prices in the US. Saudi Arabia is the world's largest exporter of crude oil. A team from the Biden administration was in Israel earlier this month to prepare for the potential presidential visit to the Jewish state. The president is likely to add Israel and possibly the West Bank to meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as a stop on his Europe trip, either before a G7 meeting in Germany or after a NATO summit in Spain.

Tell the Cops

By David Horovitz

- On Monday night, during a long and large funeral procession in and outside Jerusalem's Old City for a 21-year-old Palestinian, Walid a-Sharif, Israeli police came under sustained violent attack. A-Sharif had died after being injured in contested circumstances during clashes with Israeli police on the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif last month. The Palestinians claim he was hit by a sponge-tipped bullet; police said he fell and hit his head while throwing rocks at them outside Al-Aqsa Mosque; Hadassah hospital, which tried to save his life, said he had not been hit by live ammunition. After his death, a-Sharif was claimed by Hamas as a member.
- In the course of a funeral march joined by thousands, stones, bottles and fireworks were hurled at the cops, as were slabs and various other heavy objects, some from high up in buildings overlooking the funeral procession. Police responded with riot control and crowd dispersal methods, including the use of clubs, rubber bullets, and stun grenades. At the height of the violence, parts of East Jerusalem resembled a war zone. Several people — cops and Palestinians — were injured. Moshe Nussbaum, a veteran Israeli TV police reporter who has covered innumerable similar incidents, marveled on Channel 12's prime time news that nobody had been killed. Assessing one more in an endless stream of challenging operations, the police force might chalk up its handling of the night's events as a relative success.
- Bitter Palestinian nationalist violence in the heart of Israel's sovereign capital, pumped up by Hamas and other Palestinian extremists hostile to Israel's very existence, was faced down without loss of life and with order eventually restored to the streets.
- Understaffed and underfunded, Israel's police routinely grapple with an array of extraordinary challenges such as Monday night's funeral march. Along with the rest of the security establishment in recent weeks, the cops have been battling a surge in deadly terrorism — desperately trying to prevent the attacks, to tackle the perpetrators while the attacks are underway, to locate the killers when they've fled. They're on constant alert for a repeat of last May's intra-Israel Arab-Jewish violence in our so-called mixed cities. They're called into action to prevent Jewish extremists — now led by the far-right Knesset member Itamar Ben Gvir — adding fuel to the fire. They're belatedly attempting to crack down on organized crime, “honor killings” and other murderous horrors in the Arab sector.
- On Wednesday and Thursday they've been deployed in their thousands working to prevent a repeat of last year's devastating crowd crush at the Mount Meron Lag B'Omer festivities, where 45 people were killed in Israel's worst-ever civilian disaster. And that's only a small part of their responsibilities and obligations. All of which is essential to say before turning to Friday's funeral in Jerusalem of the Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh — an unmitigated fiasco for police, and by extension, Israel.

- The Israeli news cycle has quickly moved on — to the IAF’s drills for an Iran strike, new coalition twists, Meron, the Netanyahu trial — but the global and regional impact will not fade quickly. An experienced reporter, familiar and trusted by millions upon millions of viewers in this region and beyond, Abu Akleh was shot dead in immensely contested circumstances last Wednesday. She was covering an IDF operation — part of the army’s escalated counterterrorist activities in the hotbed Jenin area — that turned into a massive firefight between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian gunmen. In a case cynically misrepresented by Hamas (of course) and the Palestinian Authority (dismally but unsurprisingly) as a deliberate Israeli killing, Abu Akleh was apparently caught fatally in the crossfire — possibly by an Israeli bullet that missed the Palestinian gunman it was aimed at, and possibly too by errant Palestinian gunfire. We await a credibly definitive answer; we may have to wait some time.
- Israel’s official public handling of the tragedy was not particularly impressive. It failed to explain what the IDF was doing in Jenin in the first place; its leaders from the prime minister on down asserted that Abu Akleh was likely killed by Palestinian fire when, as the IDF chief Aviv Kohavi subsequently explained, there was no way yet of knowing whose bullet killed her. But Israel promised a full investigation, reached out to (and was rebuffed by) the Palestinians, and Kohavi found the right tone and vocabulary to express regret at her death. Her funeral was another matter altogether. The orders given to the police, and the way in which they were carried out, reflected a failure to internalize the significance of the death of a prominent, even iconic, journalist killed in hugely contested circumstances, now being laid to rest in Jerusalem.
- Attacking mourners outside the Jerusalem hospital where her casket was setting off en route to the Old City and thence the Mount Zion cemetery, all but toppling the casket to the ground in the process, even marauding, batons drawn, into St. Joseph’s hospital itself, the cops showed spectacular heavy-handedness and insensitivity at a landmark event in our capital city — and wound up doing the absolute opposite of ensuring law and order.
- With apparent reluctance, the police force is now investigating its handling of the incident. In a series of official statements, it has thus far claimed that it was compelled to intervene outside the hospital “to disperse the mob” of “300 rioters” who had seized the casket and were planning to walk it to the Old City rather than have it transported in a hearse, against the agreements reached by police with Abu Akleh’s family. Anton Abu Akleh, Shireen’s older brother, told The Times of Israel this claim was illogical and untrue: “Everyone who was there was there to mourn Shireen. What’s this mob they’re talking about? And even if there were one or two, how many police do you need to deal with it?” Officers went into the hospital itself, the police said, because there were hundreds of “lawbreakers” inside who were throwing stones, bottles and other objects at them. Footage and witnesses from the funeral also indicate that the police sought throughout the protracted funeral to prevent mourners raising the Palestinian flag — and that this effort fueled repeated confrontations.

- **The dismal saga raises innumerable questions about the police preparation for, and handling of, what was manifestly going to be a globally resonant event — one for which international media outlets had set up live and protracted coverage. Among them: Why did police apparently believe that Abu Akleh’s family would be capable of ensuring that the funeral played out as the police hoped it would? Why did officers enter the hospital grounds at all? If mourners wanted to carry the coffin for longer distances than anticipated, so what? Is it the case, as reported by the Haaretz daily, that police preparations for the event were overseen by the Jerusalem District police chief, Doron Turgeman... from Germany where he was on an official visit? Also, did Turgeman give long-distance orders that Palestinian flags be confiscated? And if so, why? It is not illegal to raise the Palestinian flag in Israel; rather, police are generally told to intervene only where the flying of the Palestinian flag is causing public disorder, to prevent an escalation. In this case, it would seem, it was the very police intervention that escalated the public disorder.**
- **The policing of Shireen Abu Akleh’s funeral was plainly intended to underline Israeli sovereignty in and around Jerusalem’s Old City, and clamp down on displays of Palestinian nationalism. Instead, it utterly contradicted Israel’s strategic interest in acting, and being seen to act, as the responsible, temperate authority in our bitterly contested capital, and bolstered international empathy for Palestinian claims and complaints here. And however untenably eager officers were to carry out their orders on the day, it is the top echelons, and their political overseers, who need to answer for that. This was not the funeral of a Hamas-linked rioter. It was the ultrasensitive burial of a journalist killed in intensely controversial circumstances in the course of her work, being laid to rest in the city where she was born — a disputed city, in which Israel has taken on historic rights and solemn responsibilities.**

Now is a Bad Time for Biden to Visit Israel

By Ruthie Blum

- No good can come of a visit to Israel by US President Joe Biden. If he does show up, as reportedly planned, at the end of June or beginning of July, it will only serve to enhance the fantasies of the faltering government of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Alternate PM and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. What such a sojourn will not accomplish is a strengthening of the sane patriotic majority in both countries. Though the administration in Washington reiterates statements about the important US-Israel bond, many of its members have an unhealthy affinity to enemies of the Jewish state. The Democratic Party from which Team Biden hails includes among its ranks politicians who talk about the need for Israelis and Palestinians to “return to the negotiating table” for the purpose of achieving a “two-state solution.” They suffer from peace-process-related amnesia.
- This is a condition whose key symptom is forgetting or ignoring repeated Israeli concessions, all of which were both preceded and followed by an uptick in Palestinian jihadist operations. People suffering from this disorder point to Israel’s “occupation of Palestine” after the 1967 Six-Day War. They continue to harbor the ridiculous notion that the conflict is rooted in real estate, and cling to the failed “land for peace” formula. BUT THE party favored by American Jews also contains open anti-Semites. These radicals no longer even bother adding the tired caveat about legitimate criticism of Israel. They go right for the jugular, making no bones about their opposition to the Zionist enterprise.
- Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib is a prime example. The House rep from Michigan with Palestinian parents accuses Israel of original and perpetual sin. To vindicate this hatred, she and her cohorts in the so-called “Squad” spew venom by distorting history and current events. Though such is the stuff that Hamas, the PLO, Islamic Jihad and ISIS propaganda is made of, Tlaib is an elected legislator in the US Congress. And she’s milking that for all it’s worth. Her latest act of aggression is a resolution that she introduced earlier in the week in honor of the 74th anniversary of the “Nakba,” the “catastrophe” of Israel’s establishment.
- “This Sunday was a day of solemn remembrance of all the lives lost, families displaced, and neighborhoods destroyed during the violent [sic] and horror of the Nakba,” she wrote in a press release on Monday. “The scars bourn [sic] by the close to 800,000 Palestinians who were forced from their family homes and their communities, and those killed are burned into the souls of the people who lived through the Nakba.” Her lies about 1948 wouldn’t be complete, of course, without an equally vitriolic reference to the present. Calling the May 11 killing of Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh in the crossfire between IDF forces and Palestinian terrorists an “assassination” by Israel, she said that the incident “made all the too clear [that] the violence and war crimes are an ongoing and ever-present assault on the existence and humanity of the Palestinian people. The Israeli apartheid government’s ongoing ethnic cleansing seeks to degrade Palestinian humanity and break the will of the people to be free.” She then let her true allegiance show, and it’s not to the United States.

- **“Fortunately, as Palestinians and their allies prove time and time again, we will persist no matter the circumstances, until peace, freedom, equity and respect for all people are secured and protected,” she insisted. She proceeded to provide background from the Institute for Middle East Understanding, a far-Left, George Soros-funded pro-Palestinian advocacy NGO as proof of Israel’s inherent evil. The Nakba, she explained, is the “mass expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from British Mandate Palestine during Israel’s creation (1947-49).” This “catastrophe,” she asserted – in a rambling, run-on sentence rife with errors of punctuation and grammar – “did not end in 1948 and continues to this day in the form of Israel’s ongoing theft of Palestinian land for illegal settlements and segregated communities in the Palestinian West Bank, including East Jerusalem, its destruction of Palestinian homes and agricultural land, revocation of residency rights, deportations, periodic brutal military assaults that result in mass civilian casualties such as the one that took place in Gaza in the summer of 2014 and spring of 2021, and the denial of the internationally-recognized legal right of return of millions of stateless Palestinian refugees.”**
- **Tlaib’s proposed resolution, cosponsored by fellow House Democrats Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez and Jamaal Bowman of New York, Ilhan Omar and Betty McCollum of Minnesota and Cori Bush of Missouri – and endorsed by the anti-Zionist NGOs Jewish Voice for Peace Action, Americans for Justice in Palestine Action, Project48 and the United States Campaign for Palestinian Rights – “promotes better education about and understanding of the tragedy, while rejecting the efforts of Nakba denialists [sic] to enlist the US government’s support for their deeply bigoted historical revisionism.”**
- **AS OF YET, Biden hasn’t commented on this travesty. Perhaps the press is too fearful of a gaffe on his part to request a reaction. In any case, Biden has been nervous from the get-go about the disproportionate power of and pressure from the loud-mouthed “progressives” in his party. This is why he sucked up to Tlaib exactly a year ago, in the midst of Operation Guardian of the Walls, Israel’s war against Hamas terrorists in Gaza. Intercepting him as he landed in Michigan to deliver a speech at the Ford Motor Co. truck plant in Dearborn, she dressed him down for expressing to then-Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu “his firm support for Israel’s right to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks, [and] welcomed efforts to address intercommunal violence and to bring calm to Jerusalem.” He could have reminded her, however sheepishly, that his conversation with Netanyahu included a call for a ceasefire. Instead, he paid tribute to her during his talk at the Ford plant.**
- **Flubbing her first name by referring to her three times as “Rashid,” he announced: “I want to say to you that I admire your intellect; I admire your passion; and I admire your concern for so many other people. And from my heart, I pray that your grandmom and family [in the Palestinian Authority] are well, and I promise I’m going to do everything to see that they are on the West Bank. You’re a fighter, and God thank you for being a fighter.” THE IRONY is inescapable. Despite Biden’s many moves to reverse his predecessor’s policy of holding the Palestinian Authority accountable for its intransigence and “pay for slay” mechanism, as long as he so much as mentions that Israel is a US ally, he cannot appease the likes of Tlaib.**

- **Nor will he be able to satisfy her quest for the “liberation of Palestine, from the [Jordan] River to the [Mediterranean] Sea” – the wiping of the Jewish state off the map – by admonishing the Israeli government for plans to build some 4,000 housing units in the communities of Judea and Samaria. If Biden thinks, for example, that she was happy with his State Department’s warning against settlement expansion, on the grounds that it “exacerbates tensions, undermines trust between the parties and deeply damages the prospects for a two-state solution,” he’s kidding himself. Ditto for Bennett and Lapid. If they imagine that their approval of the construction of at least 1,000 additional Palestinian homes will be sufficient to allay White House concerns, they’re living in la-la land. The rest of us grasp that it would be preferable for Israel if Biden canceled his trip.**