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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Thursday, August 18*

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# News Excerpts

August 18, 2022

Ha'aretz

## **Teenager Killed in Clashes with Israeli Troops**

A Palestinian teenager was killed, and dozens were wounded during clashes with Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian medics said. The Palestinian Red Crescent emergency service said Waseem Khalifa, 18, was killed, and 35 Palestinians were wounded in Nablus. It was not immediately clear what triggered the violence. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. Israel has carried out near-daily arrest raids in the West Bank aimed at what it says are militant networks following a string of deadly attacks inside Israel in the spring. The raids often set off confrontations with stone-throwing Palestinians or exchanges of gunfire with militants. [Dig Deeper "Palestinian Teen Killed as Rioters Attack Jewish Pilgrimage to Joseph's Tomb" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

I24 News

## **Israel's Drones Allowed For 'Surgical' Precision in Gaza**

The Israeli Air Force's fleet of armed and surveillance drones was "an integral part" of last week's fighting against the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in the Gaza Strip, military officials said. According to the Israeli army (IDF), the drones flew more than 2,000 hours around 100 sorties and hit some ten targets during Operation "Breaking Dawn." The drone that saw the most use was the Elbit Hermes 450, which is operated by the Air Force's 161st Squadron and Artillery Corps Unit 5252 from Palmachim Air Base. The IDF claimed to strike 170 targets, including two senior PIJ operatives, 17 observation posts, 45 rocket and mortar launch sites, eight military camps, eight weapons caches, six workshops for the production of weapons, three targets linked to the PIJ naval force, and an "attack tunnel." [Dig Deeper "PIJ: Israel Reneges on Ceasefire Terms, Threatens Escalation" \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

Times of Israel

## **PA Said to Nab 2 PIJ Members with 37 Pounds of Explosives**

Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces last week arrested two members of the PIJ terror group who had in their possession 37 pounds of explosives, according to a Channel 12 report. The explosive material was "substandard" but still considered a large amount, according to the report reported. The two suspects, both residents of Nablus who had joined PIJ, were questioned by PA security services about why they had the explosives and their intended use. The increased presence of the PIJ in the West Bank is seen as a major development in the territory over the past several months, the report said. PIJ's influence has spread to other areas such as Nablus, Tulkarem, and Qalqilya. The expansion is being funded by Iran and Hezbollah, which are funneling cash to the areas. [Dig Deeper " Hamas Arrests PIJ Missile Unit" \(I24 News\)](#)

## **Israel, PA to Transport Water to Farmers in the Jordan Valley**

Israel's Civil Administration has issued a building permit to the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) to build a trunk line, which will be used to transport treated wastewater for agricultural use from the El Bireh Treatment Plant, near Ramallah, to Palestinian farmers in the Jericho Valley. The 18 miles pipeline will carry 2.5 – 3.5 million cubic meters a year of much-needed high-quality agricultural water to farmers in the Jordan Valley – a welcome change, as the El Bireh wastewater treatment plant has poured roughly three million cm of high-quality treated water that is often contaminated with raw sewage from a different source. The successful negotiation between the Israeli Civil Administration and the PWA was facilitated by the Arava Institute – a leading academic and research institution in Israel that advances cross-border environmental cooperation amid stark political conflict.

## **Abbas Faces Outrage Over “50 Holocausts” Remark in Berlin**

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas sparked a diplomatic scandal in Berlin when he said Israel had committed "50 Holocausts" against the Palestinians during a joint press conference with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Scholz said that he had been "disgusted" by Abbas' remarks. Berlin summoned the Palestinian ambassador to demand clarification, and the United States and Israeli officials also objected. As the condemnations accumulated, Abbas' office released a statement this morning calling the Holocaust "the most heinous crime in modern human history" and stressing that he had "not intended to deny the singularity of the Holocaust." Ahead of the Scholz-Abbas meeting, German officials met with Abbas' aides and urged them to tone down the rhetoric and ensure Abbas avoided language that would be unacceptable in Germany, a German official said. [Dig Deeper “Gantz Defends Abbas Meetings Amid Outcry Over PA Chief’s ‘Holocausts’ Comment” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## **Israel Says to Restore Full Diplomatic Relations with Turkey**

Israel and Turkey have decided to restore full diplomatic ties and will return ambassadors to each other's countries following a steady improvement in relations, Prime Minister Yair Lapid's office said. "Upgrading relations will contribute to deepening ties between the two peoples, expanding economic, trade, and cultural ties, and strengthening regional stability," the statement said. The two countries expelled ambassadors in 2018 over the killing of 60 Palestinians by Israeli forces during protests on the Gaza border against the opening of the US Embassy in Jerusalem. A visit to Turkey by President Isaac Herzog in March, followed by visits by both foreign ministers, helped warm relations after more than a decade of tensions. The move, which comes as Israel has sought to improve ties with regional powers, was agreed two years after the so-called Abraham Accords, which saw relations normalized between Israel, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Morocco. [Dig Deeper “Israel, Turkey Announce Normalization Agreement, Return of Ambassadors” \(I24 News\)](#)

## **Israeli Delegation Pays Rare Visit to Indonesia**

An Israeli delegation visited Muslim-majority Indonesia in late July. The organizer, the Israel-Asia Center, said the trip was intended to explore the potential for bilateral connections through investment, start-up ventures, and social impact initiatives. As the two countries do not maintain diplomatic relations and Israelis rarely receive visas to visit Indonesia, the Israeli delegation was composed of people with dual citizenship. Israel does offer visas under certain conditions for Indonesian Christian and Muslim pilgrim groups wishing to visit the Holy Land. The Israel-Asia Center is an Israeli nonprofit organization that runs a range of leadership programs in a wide array of sectors, including business, investment, media, education, government, diplomacy, tech, health care, and international development. It operates not only in Asian countries with whom Israel has diplomatic ties but also in some countries that have no diplomatic ties with Israel, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. To date, it has secured over \$250 million in investment between Israel and Asia. Israel and Indonesia have taken a few steps toward diplomatic rapprochement, but each time, the Indonesian leadership backed away, saying that relations would be established after advancements on the Palestinian issue.

## **Iran Ready to Swap Prisoners, Urges US to Free Iranians**

Iran is ready to swap prisoners with the US, its foreign ministry spokesman was quoted as saying, calling on President Joe Biden's administration to "act instead of performing theatrical shows." Tehran has sought the release of over a dozen Iranians in the US, including seven Iranian-American dual nationals, two Iranians with permanent US residency, and four Iranian citizens with no legal status in the US. "We are ready to swap prisoners with Washington. The US must release jailed Iranian citizens without any conditions," the semi-official Fars news agency quoted foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani as saying. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeted that Siamak Namazi had now spent 2,500 days "wrongfully detained" in Iran and Washington was determined to secure the freedom of all Americans held by its Middle East adversary. Kanaani spoke as Tehran and Washington sought to revive a 2015 nuclear pact after lengthy negotiations. The European Union and US said they were studying Iran's response to what the EU has called its "final" proposal to save the deal after Tehran called on Washington to show flexibility. [Dig Deeper "Iran Is Preparing Its Public for Return to Nuclear Deal, Says Israeli Official" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## **Dr. Mahmoud and Mr. Abbas: Palestinian Leader Is an Enigma for Israel**

By Avi Issacharoff

- **Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has a penchant for Holocaust denial. Although he has never done so outright, he has been understating its significance for decades, comparing it to the trials of the Palestinian people and occasionally peppering hints that the Jews were behind it. It started with Abbas' infamous doctoral dissertation he wrote during his studies at Moscow State University in the 1980s, in which he explained that the exact number of Jews killed in the Holocaust couldn't be ascertained. "It could be six million, and it could be much lower, fewer than a million even," he wrote. But it did not end there. Four years ago, Abbas said that the Holocaust was caused by Jewish actions, not due to their racial origins. He apologized the next day and clarified he had no intent "to insult the Jews." And here we are again. It seemed like Abbas let the little Holocaust denier in him slip out again, this time on German soil.**
- **He claimed Israel has committed "50 Holocausts" against the Palestinians. He issued an apology the very next morning in which he said that the Holocaust is "the most heinous crime in modern human history." Abbas, 86, can't use his advanced age as an excuse for such rhetoric since he made similar remarks when he was younger. The initial instinct of every Jewish and non-Jewish person living in Israel would be to excommunicate him and storm his office in Ramallah. But reality presents us with a complex person who is far from an Israel lover, but his presidency is, in large part, an important factor in keeping the relative peace across the West Bank.**
- **Even the cadre of politicians who lashed out at him with bellicose statements, including Alternate Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, understand that the PA under Abbas is a stabilizing factor in the West Bank. Without the two, the situation in the territory would have looked completely different, and not for the better. As odd as it might come off against the backdrop of his antisemitic remarks, many Israelis owe him their lives, soldiers and civilians alike, within the West Bank and elsewhere. Abbas maybe talks a blue streak about the Holocaust and continues to pay stipends to Palestinian terrorists, but at the same time, his security apparatus has been acting against Palestinian militants and preventing attacks on Israeli targets since he took office in 2005.**
- **Abbas played an integral part in stopping a tsunami of suicide attacks and terror shootings between 2006 and 2007, and it was he who pushed to get militants off the streets of Palestinian cities, from Hamas to Islamic Jihad and even his own faction, Fatah. Even in the last few days, these Islamist groups have reported about the PA security apparatus arresting their people and the torture they were subjected to in PA prisons. Abbas has worked for many years to stamp out any Palestinian violence against Israel. He preached about the use of diplomacy to end the Israeli occupation, which raised the ire of Israeli decision-makers.**

- **But as one former senior Israeli official once told me: "If anyone would have told us the Palestinians would appeal to the International Criminal Court instead of carrying out suicide bombings against us, thus saving the lives of 1,200 Israelis, we would have kissed their hands." Ultimately, every such incident or statement these days is amplified amid the ongoing Israeli election cycle. Those who pride themselves on not having met with Abbas while attacking Defense Minister Benny Gantz for having done so forget that the PA and Abbas at its helm are helping to prevent attacks and preserve the relative peace here. And by the way, these are the same politicians who practically allowed Hamas to establish its rule and build itself up in the Gaza Strip while turning a blind eye to Israel. So, although they did not meet with Hamas leaders and did not shake hands with Holocaust deniers, they agreed to do business with a terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel and, unlike Abbas, also encourages terrorist attacks against Israelis at this very moment.**

## **Ignoring Iranian Aggression, Biden Pushes to Seal Nuclear Deal**

By Amos Harel

- In the finest tradition, Iran's response to the European proposal on renewing the nuclear agreement arrived at the last moment, with a few small requests for changes and improvements. The negotiations between the sides are expected to continue longer, and the world intelligence community, similar to the local one in Israel, is divided in its opinion: Will the long dialogue, which has been proceeding on and off for over a year, end in a new agreement – with the support of the United States and Iran? Most of the question marks focus on Tehran's final position. As for Washington, not a lot of doubt exists. Since Joe Biden replaced Donald Trump in the White House, it has been clear that Biden intends to erase his predecessor's decisions and bring the United States back into the nuclear deal. If the Iranians toss him a strong enough anchor to latch on to, then Biden will agree to the new deal.
- Over the past few months, the claim was raised that before the midterm elections for Congress in November and given the forecasts of a defeat for the Democratic Party – Biden would prefer to postpone the dispute over the nuclear agreement. When Biden accepted the Israeli recommendation and left the Iranian Revolutionary Guards on the list of sanctioned bodies, it bolstered the assumptions that it would not be possible to reach an agreement before November. But over the past few months, Biden's political situation has improved somewhat: Gasoline prices are going back down after the steep increase that came after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he is advancing a new round of legislation in Congress, and the optimism in his party over the coming election is once again on the rise. This approach can also spill over into diplomatic considerations and strengthen his natural inclination to sign a deal – if only the Iranians will agree.
- In its clear preference for an agreement, the Biden administration is willing to restrain itself in response to the aggression Iran has been displaying on other fronts. Just this last week, a Revolutionary Guards conspiracy to assassinate two very senior Trump administration officials, former National Security Adviser John Bolton and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, was exposed. True, the plot came in revenge for the Americans' killing of Revolutionary Guards General Qasem Soleimani during Trump's term in office. Also, an American Muslim from a Lebanese Shi'ite family stabbed and severely injured author Salman Rushdie – and in doing so, carried out the death sentence decreed by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 – and Iranian-backed militias are suspected of launching drone attacks against the American military base in Al-Tanf in eastern Syria. It is hard to ignore the dissonance in the US approach toward the Iranians: Washington is focused on the nuclear deal, yet it seems that other Iranian expressions of aggression interest them less. Karim Sadjadpour, an expert on Iran at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Georgetown University, described it in a very instructive way in an article in [The New York Times](#).

- **Sadjadpour wrote that the United States does not give enough weight to the strong anti-American sentiments that guide the Iranian regime's actions. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, reflecting the generation of the Islamic revolution that has been ruling the country since 1979, acts "with the hyper-vigilance and brutality of a man who believes that much of his own society, and the world's greatest superpower, aspire to unseat him." Sadjadpour writes that Iran, similarly to Russia, has scored successes in recent years in its battle with the United States, which Iran, like Russia, views as weakness. While a broad Shi'ite axis of influence is being established across the Middle East, and at the same time the United States beat a humiliating retreat from Afghanistan, Tehran is convinced the United States is in "an inevitable decline" and that Iran will be able to extract concessions in the nuclear negotiations. "The more committed the United States has been to diplomacy, the lesser Iran's sense of urgency to compromise," writes Sadjadpour.**
- **The determination to stick to its nuclear program has cost Iran easily over \$200 billion in lost oil revenues, notes Sadjadpour: "Even if the nuclear deal is revived, Tehran's worldview will endure." Tehran will continue its reservations about normalization with the United States because any such change could seriously undermine the stability of "a theocratic government whose organizing principle has been premised on fighting American imperialism." Moreover, the revolutionary elite close to Khamenei have their own private mafias, which have been profiting from the corruption. Opening up to the West would not serve their interests. Sometimes, when the isolation is too harsh, Khamenei is willing to consider compromise.**
- **He is interested in selling oil all over the world without interference, but does not want his country to fully integrate into the global system, said Sadjadpour. This is the heart of the problem. The United States "has sought to engage a regime that clearly doesn't want to be engaged, and isolate a ruling regime that thrives in isolation." This is how the long-term paradox works: The international community needs the sanctions to force the regime to compromise, but these sanctions are actually strengthening the regime's hold on power. The Islamic republic tends to compromise only when it is under heavy pressure, but it is this same pressure that is keeping it alive and in power. This is a game that Khamenei has excelled at for decades, according to Sadjadpour.**
- **From an Israeli perspective, another complex issue exists: The relations between Russia and Iran are growing even closer – as a result of Russian President Vladimir Putin's entanglement in the war in Ukraine. The optimistic forecasts voiced at certain points by both the political and military leadership that Israel, by its operations in Syria, could succeed in driving a wedge between Moscow and Tehran were proven to be completely wrong. Russia needs Iran, receives drones from it that it needs to continue the war, and could very well wind up paying Iran back in diplomatic and economic currency – by supporting Iranian actions in the face of the international community in the nuclear deal. What is also worrying, from the Israeli point of view, is the possibility that Putin will intervene for the first time to make things more difficult for the Israel Air Force to attack in Syria as part of the "war between the wars."**

- **Once again, it seems the balance between the forecasts concerning the nuclear agreement is swinging gradually in the direction of a new agreement being signed. As far as Israel is concerned, the agreement is riddled with holes and was not a very good one even when it was originally reached under the Obama administration in 2015. Nonetheless, at the time, it looked like the least bad alternative among the choices – and the main path to stop Iran from getting closer to nuclear weapons. Trump’s decision to withdraw from the agreement in 2018, with the active encouragement of then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has been revealed to be a serious mistake.**
- **The Trump administration’s campaign of maximal pressure on Iran failed, and the regime in Tehran, as Sadjadpour notes, did not really fold under the sanctions. In fact, the opposite happened: For over two years, the Iranians have returned to enriching uranium to high levels, and they are closer to their goal of producing a nuclear weapon than they ever were in the past, even though it seems that mounting a nuclear warhead on a missile will require almost another two years. A new nuclear agreement, if it is signed in the end, will seemingly put the Iranian nuclear project in a much better position than what it was in 2015. Nonetheless, it still looks to be the preferred alternative for Israel’s security, in spite of all its misgivings.**