



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Times of Israel

Smotrich's Demand Could Lead To 'de Facto Annexation'

The left-wing activist organization Peace Now has warned that if the far-right Religious Zionism party achieves its desire for control of the Civil Administration, which directs aspects of civilian life in some 60% of the [West Bank](#), it could lead to Israel's "de facto annexation" of the territory. In its coalition negotiations with presumptive incoming prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, Religious Zionism is demanding that the Civil Administration agency be transferred from the purview of the Defense Ministry to the Finance Ministry. Religious Zionism leader Bezalel Smotrich, the intended finance minister, is eager to take control of the agency and advance his agenda of expanding Israeli settlements in the West Bank and thwarting Palestinian aspirations for an independent state in the territory. Despite its reported progress in negotiations with other prospective coalition partners, Likud's talks with Smotrich have been bogged down in mutual accusations.

Ynet News

Israeli-Druze Held by Palestinian Gunmen Laid to Rest

Tiran Fero was laid to rest in his hometown in northern Israel after Palestinian gunmen returned his body following the kidnapping on Tuesday. Fero, 18, and his friend were injured in a car accident in the West Bank city of Jenin and taken to a local hospital. While his companion was receiving treatment, Fero's body was taken by Palestinian gunmen who reportedly believed he was a soldier. It was reported that the Palestinian militant factions were working on releasing the body after determining that Fero was not an Israeli soldier. Fero's body was returned to his family following 30 hours of intense [negotiations](#) between Israel's defense establishment and the Palestinian Authority (PA). [Dig Deeper "Top Court Upholds Ban on Screening of Documentary 'Jenin Jenin' in Israel" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Israel Police: Be'er Sheva Car Ramming Was Terror Attack

An 18-year-old air force student at the Israeli Air Force Technological College was moderately injured when he was hit by a vehicle that drove on the sidewalk in the southern Israeli city of Be'er Sheva, police reported. The driver went off the road and onto the sidewalk, where he hit the pedestrian. The suspect claims he was racially vilified by a Jewish man during an altercation. He posted footage of the incident on social media and issued a call to his Bedouin brethren to "look after yourselves...we live in a racist country." The hit-and-run comes at a time of heightened tension after the bombing terror attack in Jerusalem, where one Israeli-Canadian teenager was killed and 22 were injured at a bus stop. Police believe that the two charges were detonated remotely using a mobile phone. [Dig Deeper "Israeli Shoots, Wounds Another Israeli Following Apparent Argument in West Bank" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Israel Rescinds Gaza Work Permits, Citing Bomb Worries

Israel has canceled 200 out of some 15,500 permits issued to Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to work in its territory after a laborer was accused of planning to carry out a bombing, the Shin Bet internal security agency said. [The suspect](#), arrested on October 30, told interrogators that relatives had recruited him from the militant group Islamic Jihad to plant a bomb on a bus in southern Israel. "The attempt by terror groups to exploit the jobs of workers in Israel in order to carry out attacks endangers the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of residents of the Gaza Strip," Defense Minister Benny Gantz said on Twitter. Gantz, part of Israel's centrist outgoing government, has championed expanding the allotment of entry permits in order to ease Gaza's grinding poverty and stave off conflict. "We are conducting an ongoing assessment of the situation, and if it appears that a trend is developing of recruiting workers from Gaza to carry out attacks, Israel will consider its steps in the context of the departure of workers from the Gaza Strip and other civilian relief," Gantz continued.

Reuters

Soccer Qataris Wear Pro-Palestinian Armbands Amid Row

A handful of Qataris wore armbands featuring a pro-Palestinian design at the Japan-Germany World Cup match on Wednesday, according to photos posted on Twitter, amid a row over political symbols that are permitted at soccer's main event. The armbands bore the black-and-white design of the keffiyeh scarf that is synonymous with the Palestinian cause and were an apparent response to players and officials protesting FIFA's move to sanction players who wear the "OneLove" arm-band on the pitch. Qatari officials have appeared increasingly vexed by what they see as unfair criticism of the decision to award Qatar World Cup hosting rights, especially by German officials. The tournament has buoyed pro-Palestinian sentiments among some locals, especially in response to the Qatari government's decision to allow direct flights from Tel Aviv to Doha, as well as a delegation of Israeli diplomats to handle logistics. [Dig Deeper "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Catches up with Qatar World Cup" \(Associated Press\)](#)

Associated Press

Iranian Soccer Player Arrested Amid World Cup Scrutiny

Iran arrested a prominent former member of its national soccer team over his criticism of the government as authorities grapple with nationwide protests that have cast a shadow over its competition at the World Cup. The semi-official Fars agency reported that [Voria Ghafouri](#) was arrested for "insulting the national soccer team and propagandizing against the government." Ghafouri, who was not chosen to go to the World Cup, has been an outspoken critic of Iranian authorities throughout his career. He objected to a longstanding ban on women spectators at men's soccer matches as well as Iran's confrontational foreign policy, which has led to crippling Western sanctions. In recent days he also called for an end to a violent crackdown on protests in Iran's western Kurdistan region. [Dig Deeper "Tehran Jewish Community Says It Sides with Regime Amid Iran Protests" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Israel to Review Foreign Investments After US Pressure

Israel's Security Cabinet reached a decision earlier this month that significantly tightens government oversight on foreign investments, according to two senior Israeli officials. While the decision doesn't explicitly mention China, Israeli officials say the new policy is a response to two years of pressure by the Biden administration to limit China's role in sectors like energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, and transportation. The Foreign Investment Review Committee will review all investments that amount to more than 20% of the value of companies in a broad range of sectors and more than 5% in cases of particular relevance to national security. All foreign investments in government tenders will also be reviewed. The Cabinet left it up to government regulators to determine which companies fall into each category in consultation with the committee. According to the decision, the status of the Foreign Ministry on the committee will be upgraded from observer to full member, giving greater importance to foreign policy considerations. This is a significant change of policy for the review committee, which was formed three years ago after pressure from the Trump administration. Until now, the review process was voluntary, and it intervened only in rare cases. [Dig Deeper "Israel Lobbies Allies with Intel on Iranian Arms Transfers to Russia" \(Axios\)](#)

Kohavi: Joint IDF-US Military Activity to Be Expanded

The US relationship with Saudi Arabia is still under review despite a Biden administration ruling that the Saudi crown prince has immunity from a lawsuit over the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist, then living in the US, was killed and dismembered in 2018 by Saudi agents in the kingdom's consulate in [Istanbul](#), in an operation US intelligence believes was ordered by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The prince has denied ordering the killing, which has cast a pall over relations between the two countries. The Biden administration's ruling last week came at a time of increased strains between Washington and Riyadh over energy supplies after the OPEC+ oil group decided at its last meeting to cut output targets over US objections. [Dig Deeper "At World Cup, Saudi Crown Prince Moves Back on to Global Stage" \(Reuters\)](#)

From the Back Door

By Ben Caspit

- According to reports this week, Itamar Ben Gvir and the Likud agreed that he would continue to visit the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif even after he is appointed public security minister. Bravo. However, that agreement also has some fine print. Kan News reported that Ben Gvir will coordinate with the police when he visits the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, will not surprise it, and will not publicly announce his visits in advance, but only after the fact. That agreement could easily be described this way instead: Up until now, he would visit the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif through the front door. From now on, he will sneak in through the back door. Up until now, he would give advance notice to the whole world, flaunt, agitate, drop bombshells, pose for pictures, and defy the rest of the world (live on the air, of course). From now on, he's going to do everything quietly, like a thief in the night. He'll visit, leave, and only then make the announcement.
- One of Otzma Yehudit's most effective campaign slogans was about showing the Arabs "who's the master of the house." Well, the incoming public security minister is about to show the Arabs that they are the master of the house, whereas he is an uninvited guest who quietly sneaks in through the back door so as not to anger the neighbors. This chain of events proves that none of Ben Gvir's visits to date to the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif were made out of any religious, spiritual, or divine imperative but as a nationalistic imperative. He wanted to set the ground on fire, just like Netanyahu said out loud a year and a half ago. Had Ben Gvir wanted to bask in the holiness of the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, he would have done so quietly and humbly. Instead, he did it noisily and made a scene. But life is funny, and Ben Gvir has changed jobs. He's not the pyromaniac anymore but the firefighter. Let's see how he combines the job of the neighborhood punk and the responsible adult.
- From now on, he has to do better than merely disrupt public order; he's the person in charge of imposing order. Good luck to him (and to us). On Wednesday, he went to the scene of the terror attack in Jerusalem early. Incumbent Public Security Minister Omer Bar-Lev only got there after him. Anyone looking for similarities between his dances on the blood at previous terror attacks (before the election) and his (relatively) judicious and restrained performance this time won't find any. He even said that he would not answer questions (although he couldn't resist). He had no answers and no solutions. He came by force of inertia and maybe because of the criticism that he had "skipped" the previous attack in Ariel. He knows that soon enough, this will all be his [burden to bear]. Very soon, he's going to find himself running short on excuses, and the pool of people to blame will run dry. Moving forward, it's all going to be on him. Let's review what he said there by the bombed-out hitchhiking post. He enumerated the latest string of terror attacks (Ariel, Kiryat Arba, the hitchhiking post, Jenin) and said that it was only a miracle that had averted dozens of casualties. He said three times that "a price must be exacted" for terrorism.

- Then he dropped the bombshell: “Targeted killings must be resumed!” he said vociferously. Besides that, he said that Israel needed “to end the partying in the prisons, stop the payments by the terrorist-supporting Palestinian Authority, investigate where the terrorists have come from, get to the same village, regardless of whether it’s in the territory of the smaller State of Israel or in Judea and Samaria (West Bank), impose a curfew and restore deterrence and governance.” Now let’s analyze the text. First, let’s discuss the “miracle” thanks to which, according to Ben Gvir, we didn’t suffer dozens of Israeli fatalities recently. I presume that the “miracle” to which Ben Gvir refers is the courage, sacrifice, dedication, creativity, and technological superiority of the GSS, the IDF, Military Intelligence, the Special Unit for Counter-Terror Warfare, the Border Police, and the Israel Police. It reminds me of what one of the rabbis of Safed told the [pre-state paramilitary] Palmach commander Yigal Allon (Google him, he was a leftist) at the end of the War of Independence: “You must know,” said the rabbi, “that Safed was saved by two things: the action and the miracle.
- What was the action? That the people of Safed chanted Psalms. And what was the miracle? That the Palmach showed up.” I surmise that Ben Gvir, who didn’t serve in the IDF (he wanted to, but the army didn’t want him), will soon realize that we need miracles when the system fails. That’s what happened on Wednesday. A rare breach in the assorted intelligence of the GSS and Military Intelligence caught them by surprise. In a situation like that, all that’s left to do is pray for a miracle. But no miracle arrived. The terrorists managed to detonate two explosives and kill 16-year-old Aryeh Schupak. Another injured person is in critical condition. Yes, the security establishment cannot deliver one hundred percent success. There is no such thing as that. No other country has capabilities even remotely like what our best and brightest have developed. But even that falls through sometimes. It’s inadvisable to mock the fact that the other side is studying the map, knows the radar, is learning lessons, and looking for breaches. In short, we didn’t get divine mercy this time.
- Let’s get back to Ben Gvir’s remarks. He repeatedly said, “to exact a price for terrorism.” I suppose that during training for the job, he will be briefed on the number of Palestinians who have been killed since the start of the incidents. And how many have been injured? And how many have been arrested? He’ll also get a sense of the incomprehensible scale of the IDF and GSS’s activity in the focal points of violence. He’ll be impressed by the fact that the Special Unit for Counter-Terror Warfare no longer needs to train because it does the real deal in Jenin and Nablus, and soon [the Palestinians] will pay extra for it, and that all of the IDF’s elite units spend every night in nests of murderers. In the casbahs, the refugee camps, the labyrinthine alleyways. They are doing the Lord’s work. They operate without limits. Whatever has to be done, they do. So we’ve made it to Ben Gvir’s highlight from Wednesday morning: “Resume the targeted killings.” That’s what he demanded there while standing on the blood. Not only did Ben Gvir say that, but so did his wife, Ayala, this week on the radio. They probably coordinated it with each other and are probably less coordinated with reality. When he studies the topic, he’ll discover that the Bennett-Lapid government has already resumed the policy of targeted killings.

- It worked excellently in Gaza during Operation Breaking Dawn, but not only there. Some of the major figures in the Lion's Den were assassinated in targeted killing operations. For example, a moped that blows up in the middle of the night is a targeted killing operation. I believe that Ben Gvir will realize in his first meeting with GSS Director Ronen Bar (I'd be willing to be a fly in their soup) that there is no real operational need for targeted killings in Judea and Samaria (West Bank). That would be dead weight. Targeted killing operations are reserved for cases when the IDF does not have the ability to arrest the terrorist, so it is compelled to kill him instead. If there's intelligence in Judea and Samaria (West Bank), the GSS and the IDF know how to apprehend the terrorists quickly and easily, with surgical precision. That yields valuable intelligence; it doesn't cause collateral damage, it doesn't kill civilians, and doesn't get us in trouble with the international courts (which we'll get back to soon). When intelligence is lacking, targeted killings don't help. In any case, armed drones are already flying in the skies of Judea and Samaria (West Bank).
- Whomever [the drones] need to target will be targeted, not by slogans, but bombs. Not through talk but action. Ben Gvir concluded his remarks by saying it was time "to end the partying in the prisons, stop the payments by the terrorist-supporting Palestinian Authority, investigate where the terrorists are coming from, get to the same village, whether it's in the territory of the tiny State of Israel or in Judea and Samaria (West Bank), impose a curfew and restore deterrence and governance." Bravo, Ben Gvir. Let's see you change something in the security prisons. You'd be advised to check why Netanyahu's security cabinet didn't even discuss the conclusions of the Katabi Committee, which recommended making substantial changes in the conditions of incarcerated terrorists. If you manage to touch this without doing more harm than good, you'll receive praise from all of us.
- As for the rest, it's all happening out on the ground. Our troops go to every village from where murderers come. While you talk, they're working. Despite all the above, I am waiting eagerly for Ben Gvir to become public security minister. This is a dangerous appointment, but it is also an intriguing one. It also has potential. I'm one of the people who think that Ben Gvir truly has become more moderate in recent years. No, nothing can whitewash his past, but he was elected, and we have to pray that he'll know how to inject the necessary adrenaline into the system, shake up the police, think outside the box, and make something happen with regard to governance, personal safety, the fatal neglect, the intolerable ease of death rampaging in our streets, on both sides of the Green Line. Or, as he personally described it on Wednesday: both in tiny Israel and in Judea and Samaria (West Bank).

Everything Gets Sewn Up in the Family

By Sima Kadmon

- The Likud faction members are not going to have a quiet Sabbath. Fates will be determined: who will get this (medium) portfolio, and who will get that (little) one? The leaders of the pro-Sara and pro-Yair camps within the Likud will decide who gets the rod and who is spared, whom Yair likes, and who has fallen out of Sara's favor. And, of course, how to frame those who, until recently, were considered senior Likud officials and now need to have something arranged for them just to keep them quiet. You can really imagine the alert goings-on at the house in Caesarea, the stress, the assertions based primarily on the family's personal relationships, and the heavy pressure on the future prime minister to seat only those who have won his household's complete confidence around the cabinet table.
- When Ariel Sharon coined the term "stay on the Ferris wheel," he certainly didn't mean to hold on from the outside and risk getting squashed every time it turns. However, that's probably the situation that many of the Likud faction members are in today, looking as airless and crushed as a flat tire. Agitation within the Likud is mounting. Everyone's longing for the portfolios that are being generously divvied out to the allied parties. Not one or two portfolios, but sometimes three or even four. They don't dare speak up, complain, or criticize the party chairman's deeds. The only one to speak out is David Bitan, both because he cannot be a minister and because he always tends to say what's on his mind. Whoever does dare to go to the media, on his own behalf or someone else's, explains that the Likud has enough portfolios for everyone and that there's no cause for concern—all with a cloud of concern hanging over his face.
- What's obvious is that the Likud members are far from satisfied with the way that Netanyahu is doing his work. Everyone can see that he's giving his partners far more than their electoral weight. Deri, the "victim" of the mini-drama that unfolded over the past week and a half, the great man who made concessions and agreed to give Smotrich the finance portfolio (just for two years) has come out with far more than he'd hoped to achieve. [Netanyahu has offered Shas] the interior, health, welfare, and religious services portfolios, and the Negev and Galilee and the diaspora affairs portfolios that Deri wants still haven't been sewn up. By the time the cabinet is sworn in, the Shas faction will constitute a third of it. The other partners' appetite has grown accordingly, of course.
- United Torah Judaism envies Deri, who successfully manufactured a crisis and then compensated so handsomely, and Smotrich, who long since crossed the line from an ideology into the realm of small-time accounting, who wants another portfolio and more power, here in the state Orthodox education system and there regarding the settlements in Area C, and to transfer the Civil Administration to him, and maybe he'll ultimately have a deputy minister appointed to the Defense Ministry. You can be sure that Ben Gvir is nobody's sucker, either. The public security portfolio is clear, but the agriculture portfolio? That's probably too minor for him. Let Yisrael Katz have it. He's going for the Negev and Galilee portfolio, which Deri received as compensation.

- It's incredible how a homogenous 64-seat bloc that was supposed to form a government within a short time with no special surprises has managed to create so many problems. One can already say that Netanyahu has become a complete hostage to his partners' demands, and the problems within the coalition that is emerging frighteningly slowly are because of the internal contradictions between its components, indicating what is yet to come and sketching a map of future tension and camps within the cabinet. The opposition has already found the formula: the way to complicate matters for the next government is to give it reasons for infighting. A counter-campaign can be waged—against the override clause, for example—but that will only strengthen and unite the coalition. When they don't have an external rival, they'll fight among themselves. The next thing that will probably happen before the cabinet is even sworn in will be legislation to allow Deri to serve as a minister.
- The argument will be that because he was not sentenced to prison, it doesn't count as moral turpitude, and therefore there is nothing wrong with appointing him. Shortly, while we get to the matter, we came here for open clues, which we see every day: the legal advisors bill, which is intended to politicize the entire public legal service. From now on, a minister will appoint and dismiss political advisors to his ministry as if they were secretaries. The possibility that a legal advisor appointed by the minister will warn him about what he is supposed to do, and particularly what he is not supposed to do, is practically nil. It will abolish every defensive restraint on public corruption and begin a process of transitioning from a democratic to a totalitarian system of government, where whoever has political power can do anything with no oversight, and the citizens will have no ability to prevent it or receive aid to protect themselves from one offense or another.
- It's only a matter of time until the attorney general is dismissed or resigns under duress. She'll face crazy decisions to which she'll have to object, and then they'll say that it's impossible to work with her and carry out the policy of the elected government. When Barkat and Kisch said that she needed to be ousted during the campaign, [Likud officials] said their position was not representative of the Likud. This week MK Tally Gotliv repeated it, and this time we didn't hear any objections from the Likud. A government will be formed in another week or two. It will be hard to manage this government by any aspect, regarding the Palestinians, security, and the settlements. As opposed to the Haredim, who solely want to serve the interests of their sector, Smotrich and Ben Gvir won't let Netanyahu do anything without their approval and will drag him into constant conflict with America, the international community, and the Palestinians. They've already proven this week that at any moment they can escalate the security situation and challenge the government that has promised to restore governance and to eradicate terrorism. Or as outgoing Justice Minister Gideon Saar put it this week: one can only hope the government will wage war on Palestinian terrorism as resolutely as it does on the justice system.