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Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Israel Hayom

Likud MKs Lament Netanyahu's Offer to Religious Parties

Likud officials expressed harsh criticism over the emerging agreements between Benjamin Netanyahu and leaders of the right-wing bloc. Religious Zionist Party leader Bezalel Smotrich is set to head the Finance Ministry in rotation with the head of the Sephardic ultra-Orthodox Shas party Aryeh Deri, who will start as interior and health minister before taking over the treasury in 2025. Likud MKs lamented that "Netanyahu has given it all to the Religious Zionist Party and Shas and left nothing for" his own faction. In a statement, the Likud said that at the two-year mark, Smotrich will not only become interior minister but will also receive the Aliyah and Absorption Ministry and the to-be-resurrected Settlement Affairs Ministry, and the Civil Administration. [Dig Deeper "Netanyahu Gives Smotrich Broad Powers Over Settlements, Palestinian Construction" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

I24 News

Netanyahu: Jerusalem Pride Parade 'Will Continue to March'

Incoming Prime Minister Netanyahu said the Jerusalem Pride Parade "will continue to march" in response to recent concerns over LGBTQ+ rights in Israel with far-right MK in his government. "My government won't harm the LGBT community or the rights of any Israeli citizen," Netanyahu tweeted. "We will care for all Israeli citizens with mutual solidarity and work to improve our lives. This is our mission." Netanyahu signed a coalition agreement with [Avi Maoz](#), the single member of the fringe, anti-gay Noam party. Maoz is known for his staunch anti-LGBTQ+ positions and has threatened to reverse the previous government's reforms that benefited the community. He has also said he would "study the legal possibilities of canceling the Jerusalem Pride Parade," calling the annual celebration an "offensive provocation."

Times of Israel

Barlev: Ben Gvir Temple Mount Moves Could Spark Intifada

Outgoing Public Security Minister Omer Barlev warned that his successor could spark widescale Palestinian unrest if he tries to change the status quo at Jerusalem's Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif. Far-right MK Itamar Ben Gvir, set to take over the post in the coming weeks, has been a frequent critic of regulations at the Jerusalem holy site. During a meeting summarizing the ministry's conduct during his tenure, Barlev said he advised presumed incoming prime minister Netanyahu to put someone other than Ben Gvir in control of the Israel Police, which currently falls under the jurisdiction of the Public Security Ministry. "If there is a change in the status quo on the Temple Mount there will be a third intifada," Barlev said. The first two intifadas, in the late 1980s and the early 2000s, were marked by deadly terror attacks against Israelis and clashes with troops on a near-daily basis. [Dig Deeper "Conceding to Extremists, Netanyahu Hatches Intolerant, Alienating, Vulnerable Israel" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Fear of Gaza Rocket Launches After Israeli Raid in Jenin

Israeli military and intelligence sources said that there are concerns about possible rocket launches from the Gaza Strip after two Palestinian [gunmen](#) were killed in clashes with the Israeli military in the West Bank. The sources confirmed that the IDF operation in the Jenin area, which led to the death of two members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist group, could prompt rocket attacks from Gaza. However, they noted that Hamas, which rules the enclave, is not currently interested in the confrontation with the Israeli army and will try to stop PIJ. Israeli forces conducted a pre-dawn counterterrorism operation aimed at arresting three wanted suspects. During the raid near Jenin, the soldiers came under fire and killed the two PIJ members in the firefight. Among them was the commander of the group's Jenin Brigade, Mohammed Ayman al-Saadi, also known as Abu al-Yaman. [Dig Deeper "Terror Fighter Killed Near Jenin Helped Plan Abduction of Israeli's Body"](#) (Times of Israel)

Associated Press

Israel Says It Will Deport Palestinian Lawyer to France

Israel announced it has stripped a Palestinian lawyer of his Jerusalem residency and plans to deport him to France, saying the man is an activist in a banned militant group. The decision by outgoing Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked underscored the fragile status of Jerusalem's Palestinians, who hold revocable Israeli residency rights but, with few exceptions, are not citizens. It also threatened to trigger a diplomatic spat with France, which has argued against the deportation. Salah Hammouri has been held since March in administrative detention – an Israeli tool that allows authorities to hold suspects without charge for months at a time. Shaked said that after Hammouri's detention expires this weekend, he would be deported to France as quickly as possible. Hammouri is a lifelong Jerusalem resident but holds French citizenship. [Dig Deeper "Military Court Convicts Palestinian of Murdering Israeli Man in 2015 Terror Attack"](#) (Times of Israel)

Ha'aretz

US Warns Against Unilateral Israeli Steps in the West Bank

Senior White House officials recently warned Israel that transferring responsibility for the Civil Administration, the governing body in over 60% of the West Bank, from the defense minister could hurt bilateral relations. The officials said the move could endanger cooperation between Israel and the United States in dealing with regional challenges, including the threat posed by Iran. Officials have warned that the US and other countries would interpret a change in policy towards the West Bank population as unilateral annexation. While Israeli far-right figures claim they intend to equalize the settlers' status to that of all other Israelis, US officials said this would be seen as racist discrimination between Jews and Palestinians, and the international community will not stand for it. Annexation that would keep the Palestinians in an inferior status would be tantamount to practicing an apartheid regime, they said. [Dig Deeper "Israel's Far-right Leader Ben-Gvir Greeted Warmly by UAE Ambassador at Embassy Event"](#) (Ha'aretz)

Heightened Security Ahead of Herzog's Bahrain Visit

Israeli President Isaac Herzog is set to take off on Sunday for an official visit to Bahrain at the invitation of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, amid concerns amongst Israeli security officials. The visit will mark the first of an Israeli President to an Arab kingdom in the Persian Gulf. The Shin Bet decided to significantly heighten Herzog's security due to calls from Bahrain's pro-Iran opposition to boycott and disrupt the visit. Security officials in Bahrain have instructed similar security reinforcements. The main concern amongst Israeli officials is that Iran and its agents will attempt to disrupt the visit, as they did when the Houthis launched a missile at the United Arab Emirates (UAE) while Herzog visited Abu Dhabi in January of this year. Authorities in Bahrain have prohibited the pro-Iran opposition from protesting on the day of Herzog's arrival but specified nothing regarding the day before the visit. The Israeli President is set to stay at the Sakhir Palace and will be welcomed by a ceremony at the King's demand. He will be welcomed to the palace with Israeli flags and a military orchestra that will play the Israeli national anthem, "Hatikvah." [Dig Deeper "Turkey's New Envoy to Israel Begins Work After Four Years of Suspended Ties" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Netflix Film Depicts Murder of Palestinian Family by IDF

The Jordanian film Farha, by director Darin J. Sallam, in which IDF soldiers are seen murdering a Palestinian family during the War of Independence, was released on [Netflix](#). The film takes place in 1948 in Mandatory Palestine and is about a 14-year-old Palestinian girl whose father locks her in a warehouse because of IDF attacks in the village. The film includes, as mentioned, among other things, a scene in which Israeli Defense Forces soldiers execute a family with a baby. Farha was also chosen to represent Jordan at the Oscars this year. Ben-Gvir, said: "The Jordanian incitement film that will be broadcasted on Netflix proves how much hypocrisy there is in the world towards Israel, which was attacked by murderous terrorism even before its establishment. This mind engineering should be handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with determination by informing and presenting the true picture of who the murderers and the bloodthirsty are. We must not pass in silence over the attempted blood libel that will echo throughout the world." The director said that her film is based on true stories she heard. "I heard about a Palestinian girl who was locked in a room to protect her life. She also shared this story with a Syrian girl who grew up and got married, and she shared this story with her daughter, which is me. Since then, I haven't stopped thinking about this girl," she said. The trailer for the film states that it is based on true stories. [Dig Deeper "Expulsion of Jews From Arab Countries on Display at UN Headquarters" \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

Netanyahu's Far-Right Gov't Could Herald Three Dramatic Crises

By Amos Harel

- The internal dispute that's raging in Israel over an incident in Hebron, one that's not so unusual, overrode the news of the other events in the West Bank this week. Throughout that territory, the third intifada continues to simmer on a medium flame. When a furor erupted over the punishment meted out to the Givati Brigade soldier who promised that a new order was at hand under Itamar Ben-Gvir, five Palestinians were shot and killed in the West Bank by the Israel Defense Forces and the Israel Police. The only reason the television newscasts didn't ignore the daily killing altogether was that one of the Palestinians was shot after he had run over and wounded a (female) soldier. The next day another Palestinian was killed, and yesterday two more. Since the beginning of the week, eight Palestinians have been killed in various incidents with the IDF. According to the army, all the incidents involved people who fomented violence and, in some cases, were armed. The week hasn't yet ended, and there may be more to come.
- In a first interview with an American media outlet since his election victory, Benjamin Netanyahu chose to send a calming message. In a podcast of the conservative journalist Bari Weiss, Netanyahu said, "It's not merely that we [Likud] are joining them [the smaller parties]; they're being joined to us." As proof, he cited his refusal to give his coalition partners the defense portfolio, "That's a red line. Defense is... not merely preventing incoming missiles. It's also deciding on policies that could be quite inflammatory. I'm trying to avoid that," he said. The prime minister-designate was signaling his intention to preserve the policy line of his past governments. Indeed, there has always been a disparity between Netanyahu's militant rhetoric and his recoil at launching military operations that are liable to slide into a major war.
- In the three large operations he conducted in the Gaza Strip, he deliberately refrained from recapturing that territory and from toppling the Hamas government; he was also careful to avoid entanglement in Lebanon, unlike his predecessor, Ehud Olmert. And everyone knows what didn't happen in Iran. Even so, the circumstances look different this time. The sheer fact of the alliance he has forged with Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, and his readiness to give them key portfolios and positions of theoretical influence in the security cabinet (more on that below), suggest that the next Netanyahu government may look somewhat different. After the issue of the defense portfolio was removed from the agenda (it will likely go to Likud's Yoav Gallant), the US administration is particularly worried about the intention of the next government to legitimize the settler outposts in the West Bank. Messages of concern about this have been transmitted to the outgoing defense minister, Benny Gantz, and to ranking officials in his ministry for a number of weeks. Even before the government takes office, the danger looms that the new Netanyahu era could bring with it three potential dramatic crises: judicial (over the plans for sweeping legislative revisions), national (the struggle over the face of the IDF), and perhaps also security (continued escalation in the territories).

- And that's without having mentioned the Arab public in Israel. Ben-Gvir will see to the conflagration there, especially if he's given the opportunity to visit the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif as a cabinet minister. Alon Eviatar, an expert on Palestinian affairs, tells Haaretz that public opinion in the territories is increasingly occupied with the possibility that Ben-Gvir will visit the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, as he has declared in the past that he intends to do. Ekrima Sabri, the aged chief preacher of Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif and formerly the mufti of Jerusalem, has already asserted that the Palestinian people will not allow Ben-Gvir or people acting on his behalf "to violate the sanctity of the mosque." Eviatar anticipates a Palestinian attempt "to turn the mosques into a fortified site" should that scenario play out. He recalls past precedents: Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif on the eve of the second intifada and the provocations fomented by Ben-Gvir himself in Jerusalem before the start of the IDF's Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021.
- The army is hoping that the public storm over the incident in Hebron will abate in the next few days. During the week, IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi adopted an estimable approach. He defended the army's freedom of action and its values and rebuffed attempts at external political intervention. Ben-Gvir, who sallied forth with a military tone, executed a tactical retreat in the face of the media's shock at the vitriolic attacks on the commander of the Givati Brigade battalion in the social networks. But it's worth paying close attention to his response to Kochavi. We love and embrace the chief of staff, Ben-Gvir told Kan, the state broadcaster, in dulcet tones, but added that we recommend that he himself should not get involved in politics.
- Mario Puzo, author of "The Godfather," couldn't have put it better. Kochavi's approach in the controversy, and his vigorous words, apparently also reflect the fact that he will conclude his tour of duty as chief of staff in another month and a half. But his intervention comes critically late. For a long time, the high command has hardly addressed questions of combat morality and policing activity in the territories; indeed, it has flinched from such issues. On the ground, a gradual process of deterioration in norms and behavior continues. The truth is that at this stage, it's probably impossible to take the politics out of the IDF.
- In February 2020, shortly after Naftali Bennett became defense minister, an incident occurred on the border of the Gaza Strip. Bennett demanded that the army collect bodies of terrorists in the hope (which was dashed) that they would be bargaining chips with Hamas in the negotiations for the return of the bodies of two soldiers that are being held in the Strip. An IDF bulldozer was filmed trying to evacuate the body of a Palestinian for about 20 minutes as it repeatedly slid off. It was a shameful sight, and the forces also shot at Gaza youths who tried to recover the body. In the debriefing after the incident, when senior officers sought to raise the issue of the morally flawed behavior, the chief of staff stopped them, stating that this was not the main issue of the debriefing. Kochavi, like some of his predecessors, preferred to deal with highfalutin issues such as the technological revolution in the IDF and force building for the next war. Those are indeed vital matters. And the relative quiet that prevailed in the West Bank for a lengthy period gave the army the feeling that the territories could remain at a lower priority.

- The expectation from all the heads of Southern Command was to generate quiet for the General Staff on the Palestinian front and allow the generals to deal with what was perceived as the main thing. Accordingly, the forces in the West Bank were scaled down, and the routine activity there was left to Border Police companies, the battalions of the Kfir Brigade, and, at a lower intensity, the infantry brigades. In addition, most of the special units returned to their regular duties outside the West Bank. And if, in the period of the second intifada and the years afterward, a stint as the commander of a territorial brigade in the West Bank was considered a required station on the way up, in recent years, it wasn't necessarily only the most outstanding commanding officers who were given those assignments.
- These choices are now exploding in the face of the General Staff after years of a slow-burning fuse. It looks as though the more you flee from the territories, the more they will pursue you. Things took a sharp turn last March with the eruption of the current wave of terrorism (which has since extended itself into something of a mini-intifada). The IDF was once again required to deploy, without warning or preparation, large regular forces in the West Bank and along the seamline between Israel and the territories. During the year, many reserve battalions joined them, and their number will grow apace in the year ahead. In the meantime, however, the soldiers have changed, too. The rightward ideological shift within the public and the army was translated into a radicalized approach on questions of combat morality, as was apparent back in 2016 in the case of Elor Azaria ("the Hebron shooter").
- Compounding this situation is the inherent disparity in views and in communications between 50-year-old generals, nearly 40-year-old brigade commanders, and 18-19-year-old soldiers. In the eyes of many of the combat troops, the top officers engage in lofty talk about morality but are cut off from the situation on the ground and everyday difficulties. That approach is also correct to some degree in regard to the public. If the surveys that examine the public's confidence in the IDF were divided into sub-questions, such as confidence in the regular army as compared to the career army, the results would likely be very different, as reflected also in the public criticism of the army's contribution-free pensions.
- The indications of the change in the political atmosphere in the wake of the right wing's victory in the election were felt on the ground almost immediately. The incident in Hebron is an initial indicator of what can be expected further down the line. Netanyahu's silence during five days of verbal attacks, in the Knesset and in the social media, on the chief of staff and then on the battalion commander, cannot be viewed as a chance development. According to one interpretation, he is captive to his partner Ben-Gvir and all his efforts are devoted to extricating himself from his trial, beginning with the coalition negotiations. But in my view, this is also a signal to the security leadership to toe his line and not attempt to conduct an overly independent policy in the territories. (Netanyahu finally issued a statement, albeit vague, in which he called for the IDF to be kept separate from politics.)

- **Netanyahu's messages to the gatekeepers are transmitted by a variety of methods. An item by Michael Shemesh, a Kan News reporter, should probably have attracted greater attention. Netanyahu, he reported, is demanding that all the current drivers in the prime minister's vehicle convoy be replaced "by his drivers, whom he trusts." This does not refer to his personal driver but to the other drivers in the convoy, who worked for his predecessors, Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid. The individuals in question, who work alongside members of the VIP guard unit in the Shin Bet security service, undergo filtering and basic preparation by the Shin Bet. This too is a message: The prime minister is the supreme authority in matters relating to him, and it's he who will decide how things will be managed from now on, even in minor matters like this.**

The Last Bastion

By Sima Kadmon

- It didn't just begin now. What happened this week between the political leadership and the IDF are processes that began with the [Elor Azaria](#) affair more than six years ago. The backflip that then-Prime Minister Netanyahu did, who at first gave backing to the IDF and then called Azaria's father under pressure from social media, sowed the seed of calamity. And yet, this is the first time that the kind of conversation that took place this week between the chief of staff and a politician—soon to be the national security minister—ever took place. On one side is the letter that Aviv Kochavi wrote and the harsh things he said about political meddling in command decisions and exploiting the army to promote a personal agenda. On the other side is Ben Gvir, whose meddling in the Hebron incident went beyond anything we had seen before. What we saw was no less than the top IDF command ranks being undermined.
- It is irrelevant what one thinks about the chief of staff's letter or the punishment that the Givati Brigade soldier was given—the IDF is a hierarchic organization based on orders. And like in the Azaria affair, where IDF values and purity of arms pit it against public sentiment—hatred for the terrorist who came to commit murder—in this case too, Ben Gvir is exploiting this sentiment, knowing that there is a large public who identifies with the soldier who hit a left-winger. This is just the beginning. After all, this is a political position from which he can only gain. Ben Gvir will want to brand himself the same way that he did in the elections and which worked for him: we Jews are in a war for our existence, the soldiers protect us, and we must protect them. Protect them from what? From shooting a defenseless man? From beating a civilian? Ben Gvir will probably not be able to keep all his promises to his voters. But this sentiment, as if he is protecting the soldiers, is one that he will keep. Netanyahu has shown that he fears the reactions on social media and is not willing to confront them.
- It is therefore not surprising that his response, fashionably late by almost a week, was so limp and pale: the designated prime minister called on everyone, right-wing and left-wing, to keep the IDF out of the political debate. What an odd comparison between right-wing and left-wing. On one side is a civilian, an anarchist in right-wing language, and on the other side is a minister who will soon be in the security cabinet, who attacks the chief of staff and IDF decisions. Now, think about what will happen when Netanyahu keeps his promise to Ben Gvir and gives him responsibility over the Border Police's Judea and Samaria unit (and gives the Civil Administration to Smotrich). These are military units that are deployed in Judea and Samaria next to IDF soldiers. We will have an Army A and an Army B. One army will be under the authority of the defense minister and the second army will be under the authority of the national security minister. The two armies will receive different instructions and will have to carry out different policy. It will no longer be the IDF, the people's army. It will be the IDF, the army of two peoples. What we saw this week was an attack by the new government, and not just on the justice system. This attack will not skip any of the state institutions: the army, the GSS, the police.

- In the agreement with Ben Gvir, it was reported that he wants to change the police command ranks so that he will be a super police commissioner. The result will be anarchy, dismantling the establishments in the way typical of places in the world where the far right views them as a deep state and dismantles the national institutions in the name of national values. The quarrel this week between Ben Gvir and Kochavi will continue to the next chief of staff, Herzi Halevi, who will most likely reflect the same values as his predecessors. They come from the same school and feel derision for Ben Gvir and what he symbolizes. But clearly, the big clashes will be between Ben Gvir and Smotrich and the incoming defense minister, Yoav Galant, a tough, humorless, inflexible man who will be the “left-winger” in the next government, the scapegoat on whom everyone will dump everything, from the leaders of the coalition parties to the Likud ministers. And this is without mentioning the insane divisions of the ministries.
- The dis- and reassembly, the alternating arrangements, and the authorities, whose peak (as far as we know so far) was to transfer responsibility for the external programs and promoting partnerships in the Education Ministry—in short, all the enrichment programs—to the most benighted, racist, homophobic and chauvinistic man in the coalition, Avi Moaz. If we thought that Netanyahu had reached the pinnacle—or the nadir—of appointments, then this one set a new record. On Monday, a new Knesset speaker will be chosen. Temporary or not temporary, that is not the issue. Temporary is the new permanent. Even a temporary speaker receives a burial plot on Mount Herzl, even if they only served a week, and they can only be dismissed by a majority of 90 MKs. The choice of the speaker will make it possible to promote a speedy procedure of the Deri bill so that within a week, it will be possible to swear in a government. Everything is being done so quickly; everything is so extreme, and everything is so inconceivable that the public hasn’t had the time to note the sheer impudence of this bill.
- A man makes a plea bargain agreement and resigns from the Knesset in order to prevent the court from ruling on whether his offense bears a mark of moral turpitude or not. He knows that if he wishes to be appointed a minister one day, the law states that he will need the Central Elections Committee chairman to confirm that his offense does not carry a mark of moral turpitude. Since Deri knows that his offense does bear a mark of moral turpitude, the Knesset is resolving the problem for him. An ad hominem bill is being passed that will exempt him from moral turpitude. In what other country in the world does a man who was convicted of criminal offenses, who did jail time, and who was convicted again for breaking tax laws have the law amended a few months later so that he can be a minister? And alternating finance minister to boot, the ministry in charge of the tax systems? Even though a clear majority of the public, as the polls show, is opposed to this bill, among them many members of the right-wing, nobody in the Likud faction utters a peep. When the most sacred cows are slaughtered, the lambs are silent. Everyone is waiting for the portfolio distribution. Everyone works for Bibi, and Bibi works for Deri. But this will happen gradually. First, it will be the Deri bill, then will come the Bibi bill. Because if you can use the law to make the courts into a joke, you can also make a joke out of a process that takes place in court.