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Israel and Middle East News Update

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Headlines:

- **Nine Palestinians Killed in Israeli Raid in Jenin**
- **US Concerned Over Israeli Raid Ahead of Blinken Visit**
- **Egypt Intervening with PIJ to Prevent Further Escalation**
- **Saudi Arabia Condemns Israeli Counterterrorism Operation**
- **IDF Shoots Down 2 Rockets Fired Into Israel From Gaza**
- **Israeli Gov't to Recognition of Unauthorized Settlements**
- **UN Security Council to Hold Emergency Meet Following Raid**
- **Far-right Ben-Gvir Orders Arrests in Mixed Israeli City**

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: “Netanyahu’s Concerns”**
- By Sima Kadmon
- **Ha’aretz: “The Jenin Raid”**
- By Amos Harel

News Excerpts

January 27, 2023

Al-Monitor

Nine Palestinians Killed in Israeli Raid in Jenin

Nine Palestinians were killed during an Israeli military raid in the West Bank, Palestinian health officials said, in what marked the deadliest escalation in years. The flareup comes on the eve of United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to the Holy Land on Monday. Palestinian officials said the raid killed seven militants and two civilians, including an elderly woman. The Palestinian Authority's (PA) Wafa news agency reported that 20 Palestinians were injured. The PA said the raid targeted "local youths" and accused the Israeli military of disconnecting the camp's power supply and denying access to paramedics. The raid, the Israeli authorities said, was part of a weeks-long operation targeting Palestinians suspected of supporting "terror activities." Israeli authorities said that violence erupted when troops entered the city to arrest Islamic Jihad operatives suspected of planning and carrying out multiple attacks against Israel. [Dig Deeper "Palestinians: Israeli Troops Kill 10 in West Bank Violence" \(Associated Press\)](#)

Axios

US Concerned Over Israeli Raid Ahead of Blinken Visit

Washington is concerned the security situation between the Israelis and Palestinians could worsen ahead of a visit to the Middle East by Secretary of State Blinken, a US official said, after a deadly raid by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank. The top US diplomat will travel to Egypt, Israel, and the West Bank amid spiraling tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. The US was urging de-escalation and coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security forces, even as the PA said it was ending cooperation with Israel in the wake of the raid. Blinken's visit is his first since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new right-wing government came to power after elections in November, stirring concern at home and abroad given some coalition members' opposition to Palestinian statehood and other hardline views. [Dig Deeper "Palestinians Suspend Security Coordination with Israel" \(Axios\)](#)

Ynet News

Egypt Intervening with PIJ to Prevent Further Escalation

A report published by UK-based news site Al-Araby Al-Jadeed (*New Arab*) claimed that Egypt is working to mediate between Israel and authorities in Gaza in order to prevent escalations following a counterterrorism raid on the city of Jenin. At least nine Palestinians were killed in the operation, eight of whom were militants affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist organization. According to the report, Egypt's efforts for mediation were currently unsuccessful, and the PIJ was insisting on retaliation in response to the operation. IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi met with security officials following the operation and instructed the forces to "maintain readiness and carry out operations as needed." [Dig Deeper "IDF Braces for Escalation as Gaza Terror Groups Vow Revenge" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Saudi Arabia Condemns Israeli Counterterrorism Operation

Saudi Arabia strongly condemned the Israeli raid in Jenin that left ten people dead, the state news agency SPA reported. The Saudi Foreign Ministry said it denounced "the Israeli forces' assault on the city," which led to "the fall of a number of casualties." The ministry said Saudi Arabia condemns the "serious violations of international law by the Israeli occupation forces" and calls on the international community to take responsibility to "end the occupation, stop the escalation and aggression Israeli forces, and provide the necessary protection to civilians," according to SPA. Kuwait and Oman also condemned the attack, their national news agencies reported. Mediators from the United Nations and Arab countries said they were in talks with Israeli and Palestinian factions in the hope of avoiding an escalation after the clash in Jenin, one of the areas in the northern West Bank where Israeli operations have intensified over the past year.

Times of Israel

IDF Shoots Down 2 Rockets Fired Into Israel From Gaza

Two rockets launched from the Gaza Strip at southern Israel were intercepted by the Iron Dome air defense system, the military said, hours after terror groups threatened to respond to a deadly raid in the West Bank. Incoming rocket sirens sounded in the southern coastal city of Ashkelon, as well as in its industrial zone and the nearby towns of Zikim and Karmia. Footage showed Iron Dome interceptor missiles exploding in the air. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said both rockets were downed by the air defense system. There were no reports of injuries or damage. According to Israeli officials, the IDF had foiled a "ticking time bomb" in Jenin after receiving "accurate intelligence" from the Shin Bet security agency about the cell's hideout apartment in the camp. Nine Palestinians — including several members of the Islamic Jihad cell, other gunmen, and at least one uninvolved civilian — were killed, and another 20 were wounded in the clashes. [Dig Deeper "Will Jenin Battle Prove IDF Victory, Quagmire or Lead To Broader War?" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Israel Hayom

Israeli Gov't to Recognition of Unauthorized Settlements

The government is poised to vote on a series of measures aimed at retroactively approving dozens of unauthorized outposts in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) at a cost of several billions of Israeli shekels. Under the coalition agreements signed between Likud and Otzma Yehudit, the government must start the process of formalizing the status of the small communities, often set up by young settlers without official permits from authorities. The deal stipulates that a ministerial forum headed by Prime Minister Netanyahu will have to be formed within 30 days of the government being sworn in and that within sixty days, the cabinet will have to pass a resolution to have those communities get official recognition, launching an 18-month process that would culminate in them being connected to the electricity grid and water infrastructure, as well as other essential services and security.

UN Security Council to Hold Emergency Meet Following Raid

The United Nations Security Council will convene for an emergency session today to discuss an Israeli raid in Jenin in which nine Palestinians were killed, according to two diplomats. The meeting will be the second emergency session of the Security Council to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since Prime Minister Netanyahu swore in his hardline right-wing government. Security Council members will receive a briefing from Mideast peace process envoy Tor Wennesland, said the diplomats, who represent countries on the panel. The meeting was requested by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is the Arab League's representative on the council, as well as China and France, according to the diplomats. Unlike the session earlier this month that was to discuss far-right National Security Minister [Itamar Ben Gvir's](#) visit to Jerusalem's flashpoint Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, today's session will be held behind closed doors. [Dig Deeper "UN Envoy 'Alarmed' After Deadly Jenin Raid; PA Calls for International Intervention" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Far-right Ben-Gvir Orders Arrests in Mixed Israeli City

Israeli Police made arrests in Lod on orders from National Security Minister Ben-Gvir, even though, by law, ministers aren't supposed to give orders in the field. Ben-Gvir issued the order due to pressure from Lod residents over several shooting incidents that took place following his visit to the city. After 15 suspects were arrested, he also announced the arrests on Twitter even before police put out an official press statement. But contrary to what Ben-Gvir said in his tweet, a police source said that none of the people arrested were suspects in the shooting incidents. Ben-Gvir deemed his surprise visit to Lod together with Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai an "emergency visit." Yet there have been no out-of-the-ordinary incidents in the city recently; in Lod, shooting incidents are a routine occurrence. [Read More "Acre Named Most Hospitable City in Israel by Booking" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Netanyahu's Concerns

By Sima Kadmon

- **The economic issue is Netanyahu's final religious conversion, said someone this week who worked with the prime minister in the past. He also related to previous issues when Netanyahu "converted": he was against releasing terrorists and made a career out of this and then released terrorists in the Shalit deal. He was against a Palestinian state—and then he made the Bar Ilan speech. He was the defender of the justice system—until he made a U-turn and is now leading (or being led) to pass the justice minister's judicial reform that threatens to change the structure of Israel's system of government. Wednesday was his last religious conversion, after which there will probably be nothing left. At a hastily-called press conference, with a sense of hysteria in the air, Netanyahu faced all the people he admires.**
- **The people whose proximity he always seeks and with whom he often consults—leaders of the economy, tycoons, high-tech entrepreneurs, people whom he appointed to the highest economic offices, and the economic advisers with whom he is closest—and brazenly lied to them. People like Eugene Kandel, who for six years served as the chairman of the National Economic Council in the Prime Minister's Office; Prof. Eytan Sheshinski, who headed public committees; Prof. Daniel Kahneman, the Nobel Prize laureate for economics; and even Governor of the Bank of Israel Prof. Amir Yaron, who warned Netanyahu this week that Israel's credit rating would be damaged as a result of the implementation of the judicial reform. He lied to them because he himself does not believe what he said. How can we know this? It is enough to see the archived articles in which Netanyahu says the exact opposite to understand how far he went. This event, this hasty and unnecessary press conference, is the best proof that Netanyahu is panicking. Nobody has to teach him that economics is psychology, not math.**
- **That investments and markets go places that have the rule of law and where there is no corruption. And when a place has an image of being corrupt and with no stable system of government, that hurts it economically. It's no secret that in those countries where the justice system was undermined and democracy weakened, foreign investment stopped almost entirely. The credit rating of some of them dropped. In Hungary, for example, the weakened economy led the interest rate to rise to 13 percent. If the interest rate in Israel rises to that level, mortgage payments will multiply by 3.5 times. In Erdogan's Turkey, which perhaps alarms Netanyahu more than the European countries, inflation rose to over 50 percent.**
- **Foreign investments dropped to almost zero. The national debt swelled. Netanyahu knows these figures. He is worried, because he knows that this is a matter that cannot be solved by 64 votes in the Knesset. He understands the significance of having the people whom he most admires speaking out against him. As far as he is concerned, this is a dramatic event of the first order—even more than the mass demonstrations, the strikes, and the petitions, if I am permitted to guess. From the letters from officers, things have begun to snowball, and he is the only one who can stop it.**

- Or as MK David Bitan said in typical candor to Army Radio: “Netanyahu was pressured by the economists’ letter, and that’s why he held the press conference. He could order the judicial reform to be toned down if he were to decide that that is what he wants, he is the prime minister, of course, he could.” Perhaps Netanyahu could, but he is incapable. He is incapable because he needs to solve his legal problems, and that still matters more to him than remaining loyal to his economic principles. He is incapable because he is hostage to his partners, who will not let him flee, and because he has no other partners. And the worst thing is the Deri story, which is mixed up with all of this. After the High Court of Justice ruling, Deri’s decision to go all the way left Netanyahu with no room to maneuver.
- Deri had other options. He could have, for example, accepted the position of the Knesset speaker that he was offered; he could have kept his head down, accumulated power and influence, and become a moderating and uniting force, the truly responsible adult. But he went with his emotions. With a burning desire for revenge. He decided that he will be back in government, and the country can burn. What is happening now is that everything has become secondary to bringing Deri back to the cabinet table. Even if this means changing Levin’s reform and inserting, for example, a clause that the court cannot intervene in any appointment approved by the Knesset. The significance of that is that if the prime minister wants to bring in a criminal gang leader who did not run for Knesset, and if the Knesset approves this—they can be a minister.
- Everything will now be altered and adapted for the purpose of returning Deri, to the point that in the end, Levin’s reform will be known as the “Deri reform” and not the judicial reform. That is exactly what worries Netanyahu. Public opposition to Levin’s reform among Netanyahu’s base is 10-20 percent. But opposition to everything relating to Deri is about 70 percent, people who are against reinstating him in the cabinet. A majority of Likud and Religious Zionist Party voters are against his return. The moment that the reform becomes about Deri, it will look like an ad hominem reform, not a judicial reform. These are two events that are interrelated.
- Netanyahu is stuck between a rock and a hard place: he understands the economic price of the judicial reform but can no longer back down. He is subordinated to Deri’s will to return to the cabinet table, and he also knows that it will be impossible to reach agreements if that means manipulating the reform for Deri’s sake. You might call this a kind of Pyrrhic victory. Levin wanted Deri to support his reform, and indeed, the clause about the High Court of Justice led to Deri and Shas being the first to support it. On the other hand—this victory comes with a price. The reform might be labeled as being meant to serve Deri and could hurt its base of support.

The Jenin Raid

By Amos Harel

- It's best to take the security establishment's statements that the Palestinian squad from the West Bank town of Jenin was a "ticking bomb" with a grain of salt. The operation carried out Thursday morning in the Jenin refugee camp by the Israel Defense Forces, the Yamam police anti-terrorism unit, and the Shin Bet security service targeted a dangerous and violent group of Palestinian militants. Some of those who were killed in the incident had been involved in shooting attacks on the IDF in the past. Recently they had apparently begun to plan more ambitious terrorist attacks using explosive devices. But a "ticking bomb" of the kind that we remember from back during the second intifada is a rather elastic term, the contours of which are stretched at the will of the user. In this case, it doesn't necessarily mean that an attack was thwarted just before the perpetrators set out. So far, no solid evidence has been presented of that.
- The operation was approved at all the required levels up to the head of Central Command, with the IDF chief of staff briefed in advance. The squad in Jenin included several members of the military wing of Islamic Jihad, some of whom are also apparently connected to the local network known as Sons of the Camp – the counterpart of the Lion's Den in Nablus. The Shin Bet knew that a number of armed militants who were linked to preparations for attacks were in a building in the city on Thursday morning.
- In view of a chance to arrest them, the start of the operation was authorized for an unusual time, 7 A.M. Currently, almost every incursion by Israeli forces into the Jenin refugee camp by Israeli forces is met with heavy fire. An operation in broad daylight heightens such a risk. And because, as a practical matter, the Palestinian Authority is not in control of the Jenin refugee camp, the option of asking the Palestinian security forces to detain the suspects – as sometimes happens in some West Bank cities – was not considered.
- When the Yamam unit approached the house where the wanted men were located, an exchange of fire broke out in which a number of Palestinians were killed, including two armed men who had tried to escape. From that point on, things got complicated. The police officers found themselves dealing with a firefight with dozens of armed militants, while in the meantime, other Palestinians streamed into the area and attacked the IDF troops on the outer perimeter with weapons of fire. Improvised barricades were erected in the camp's streets to disrupt the movement of the Israeli forces. Hundreds of local residents threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the soldiers and the police. The Israeli forces left the camp after three hours without sustaining casualties. They left nine Palestinian fatalities in their wake, most of whom were active in the Palestinian organizations – in addition to dozens of wounded. The Israeli incursion into the Jenin camp took place after a relatively restrained week in the West Bank in the context of recent months.

- But even now, there are attempts to perpetrate attacks, such as the incident on Wednesday when a Hamas militant tried to stab a Golani Brigade soldier at the checkpoint adjacent to the settlement of Kedumim before the assailant was shot and killed. Because conspiracy theories will be floated, it's worth noting this at the outset: The people at operational levels who planned the incursion weren't out to spark a conflagration in the territories to divert the public and media discourse from the protests over changes to the judiciary that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is pursuing.
- In practice, however, that might be the final result because of the longtime connection between the Gaza Strip and what happens in Jenin. Because Jenin is a territory where Islamic Jihad is relatively strong, immediately after the incident, as in previous cases in which Jihad militants in the city had been killed, Israeli intelligence warned about a revenge attack by the organization's members in Gaza. We need to recall that this was almost how the most recent confrontation with Israel in the Gaza Strip – Operation Breaking Dawn – began in August 2022.
- The IDF had arrested a ranking Islamic Jihad figure in Jenin in what was described as a humiliating action. The organization prepared for a revenge attack, and ultimately Israel struck first by assassinating another top Jihad figure in Gaza. The result was three days of fighting in which rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip at Israeli border communities and at the center of the country. But the fact that this is how things played out doesn't mean that Netanyahu can't exploit them now for his benefit. A period of security tension that is also liable to involve the center of the country would be an excellent diversion from the widening public protest against his policy toward the judiciary.
- Thursday morning began with a series of announcements by large Israeli-owned investment funds about their diversion of investments out of the country against the backdrop of opposition to the judicial overhaul. This Saturday night, tens of thousands of protesters are expected to attend a fourth weekly protest in Tel Aviv. If the discourse over the weekend can be returned to the evilness of our enemies, along the way accusing the leftists of dealing with trivialities while the Arabs are attacking, that would be an opportunity Likud would not permit itself to pass up.
- And here's where a problem arises. During most of his years at the helm, as has been noted in this column, Netanyahu pursued a cautious and responsible security policy. He rarely risked steps that were not necessary, and he was very conscious of the danger of becoming entangled in actions that could cost the lives of a large number of soldiers. But if there's one thing we've learned in the few weeks since his return to power, it's that Netanyahu's is a government that lies as it breathes. That's not a good point of departure to persuade citizens, half of whom voted against it, of the purity of its intentions at a time when the air is saturated with gasoline fumes, and the government is in the driver's seat when it comes to security. Here the heads of the security establishment again have a critical task: maintaining a statesmanlike and professional line. That's true in the backrooms and in what's said in consultations with the political decision-makers. It's also true when it comes to the accuracy required of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit and the Shin Bet in their statements to the media.

- **As for the credibility of the police spokespeople, who of late have been operating as a clearly political and flattering extension of National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, there's nothing to ramp up expectations over. And speaking of Ben-Gvir, it's worth examining the degree of influence that the new minister wields overtime over the conduct of Yamam and the Border Police, which report to him in the field. The outgoing and incoming IDF chiefs of staff can talk as much as they wish about a unified chain of command and pledge that only the army commander sets open-fire rules. On the ground, however, the utterances of the responsible minister carry weight, and he's demanding that the police officers produce more and more bodies of terrorists and isn't terribly upset if some elderly Palestinian woman happens to get caught in the crossfire.**
- **For his part, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant paid a private visit to the United States on the eve of the operation. His bureau, which issued statements about his participation in security situation appraisals on Thursday afternoon, somehow forgot to inform the public that it was taking place from some distance. While the new Netanyahu government has been coping with its first security crisis, the acting defense minister is Eli Cohen, who only a month ago was upgraded to foreign minister. But Gallant can take consolation at least from the fact that the task was not assigned to his new rival, Bezalel Smotrich, the finance minister, who is also a minister in the Defense Ministry.**