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War in Israel: Update on Current Situation

December 5, 2024 - October 7 War, Day 426

Heartbreak: Two American Lone Soldiers

- On Monday, the IDF announced that **Captain Omer Neutra**, aged 22, was killed on October 7, 2023. Neutra, an Israeli-American lone soldier from Syosset, Long Island, was believed to be on the live hostages held by Hamas. Although the terror group still holds Neutra's body, meaning that no funeral service can take place, a memorial service was held yesterday with over 1000 people in attendance. Watch the CBS News coverage [here](#).
- On Sunday, Hamas released a [video](#) of American-Israeli hostage **Idan Alexander**. Alexander also enlisted in the IDF as a lone soldier, and was captured on October 7. In the video, which Israeli

authorities called “ **Hamas psychological warfare,**” Alexander appeals to Prime Minister Netanyahu to do everything he can to reach a deal. He then appeals to US President-elect Trump in English to ask him to help reach a deal for the release of the hostages.

Gaza and the Hostages

- Last night, the IDF announced that the **body of Itai Svirsky**, who was taken hostage on October 7 from Kibbutz Be'eri, had been recovered, and returned to Israel for burial. Noa Argamani, a hostage rescued in June, had been held together with Svirsky when he was alive, but it is believed that he was killed last January. His parents were both murdered by Hamas on October 7, as were his three Golden Retrievers.
- There are now exactly 100 hostages who remain in captivity in the Gaza Strip, 14 months after they were kidnapped. Many are no longer alive.
- There is **renewed hope that a ceasefire and hostage-release deal** may be reached with Hamas in Gaza. Hamas is thought to be more inclined to reach an agreement at this, because:
 - Hamas has been significantly weakened, with much of its senior leadership and fighters either killed or captured.
 - US President-elect Donald Trump has publicly threatened severe action (he wrote that there will be “hell to pay,”) against Hamas should the hostages not be released by the time of his inauguration.
 - Hamas’s ally Hezbollah has cut a separate deal with Israel, and Hamas’s main backer, Iran, seems

to be backing away from further confrontation with Israel, following several humiliating defeats.

- According to Israeli officials, an **updated ceasefire proposal**, agreed to by Israel, has been given to Egypt, who are now serving as the main negotiators for a deal.
- **The proposal** offers a ceasefire with Hamas lasting 42 to 60 days. During this period, the terror group would release female hostages, male hostages over 50, and hostages in critical medical condition. Israel initially demanded the release of 33 individuals in these groups, but now understands that numerous hostages may be dead so the number may be smaller. According to some reports, the strategic Philadelphi Corridor along the border between Egypt and Gaza would be controlled by the Palestinian Authority.
- Earlier this week, the IDF today presented the families of **six hostages killed on February 14** with the results of an investigation into the circumstances of their deaths. The inquiry determined that Alex Danzig, Yoram Mezger, Haim Perry, Avraham Mondar, Yagev Buchshtab, and Nadav Popplewell were killed by their Hamas captors when IDF forces approached the Gaza tunnel where they were being held. According to the findings, the IDF attacked the terror tunnel without knowing that the hostages were inside. The Israelis were found shot to death inside the tunnel, 500 feet from where the IDF had fought the Hamas terrorists.

Ceasefire in the North

- The ceasefire in Israel's north **seems to be holding** steady, despite several infractions.
- The most serious challenge to the truce occurred two days ago when Hezbollah fired a **number of rockets** at the Har Dov area. Israel's military and political leadership quickly ordered several limited, but significant, retaliatory strikes and declared that any breach of the ceasefire would not be tolerated. Israel's defense minister added that since an agreement was now in place, the IDF would no longer distinguish between Hezbollah and Lebanese Army targets. There have been no further rockets or other attacks.
- Israel has **begun to withdraw** from some area in southern Lebanon, with the Lebanese Army assuming control over evacuated positions. Lebanese citizens have attempted to return to areas that had been evacuated, where Israel has not yet relinquished control. Fearing that Hezbollah fighters may be infiltrating with the civilians, the IDF has fired warning shots to keep people out until the Lebanese Army can assume control.
- The IDF's Home Front Command has **eased many restrictions in the northern part of Israel** following the relatively calm situation. Larger gatherings are now allowed, and schools in all non-evacuated areas have reopened, including in Israel's third-largest city, Haifa.
- **Evacuees** have not yet been allowed to return to their homes in the north, but many people are entering their evacuated towns for short visits. Some are seeing their homes for the first time in over a year; they are assessing damages and retrieving personal items. Even for those whose houses were

not damaged, a full return of the evacuees may take a while, until the IDF confirms that the situation is safe enough for civilian life to resume.

- According to the IDF, between October 8, 2024 and the ceasefire:
 - 19,500 projectiles were fired at Israel from Lebanon and Syria
 - 2,874 hits were recorded in Israeli kibbutzim, towns and cities along the northern border
 - A total of 1,669 private homes were hit in Israel
 - 213 public facilities were struck, including schools, municipal buildings, bus stations and more.
 - 157 farming facilities were hit, including dairy farms, chicken coops and greenhouses.

Syria

- **Rebel forces** in Syria have been attacking Syrian Army strongholds over the past five days, capturing a **large part of Aleppo**, the second largest city in the country, and making grounds in the strategic city of Hama, located on the road to Damascus. Today, rebel forces freed hundreds of their fellow fighters being held in a Hama jail.
- The rapid advance by the rebels (mainly from an Al Qaeda offshoot group) **was almost entirely unexpected**. The 13-year old civil war in Syria had basically been won by Bashar Assad's regime. Despite sporadic fighting, the regime maintained control of around 70% of the country, with almost no

changes in the last six years, until this week's dramatic events.

- According to most Syria-watchers, the likely reason for this sudden change is a perceived **significantly-weakened Syrian government** as a result of:
 - The "defeat" of Hezbollah, one of the regime's closest allies. Hezbollah troops had fought alongside the Syrian Army in many fights against rebel groups.
 - The weakness of Iran due to its failed confrontations with Israel. Iran and Syria are very close allies.
 - The Syrian government is apprehensive about what actions the incoming US Administration may take against it.
 - Russia, another key Syrian ally, is preoccupied in Ukraine.
- Following recent developments in Syria, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened his **security cabinet in special sessions** to monitor and discuss the rebel offensive and its possible implications for Israel.

For Further Reading

- Foreign Affairs: [Israel's Trump Delusion](#)
- [Deterrence is not dead: With necessary modifications, it remains central to Israel's defense doctrine](#)
- [What Can We Learn From the Public Opinion Polls in Palestinian Society?](#)
- [Iran Rethinks Strategy amid Trump's Return to Power and Regional Shifts](#)