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Israel Marks 5-years in Hamas Captivity; High-Profile Events Urge Government to Make the Deal

Five years after Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was taken prisoner in a cross-border raid by Hamas, Israelis are holding high-profile public events aimed at pushing the government to conclude a deal that would see Shalit repatriated at the cost of an estimated 1,000 Hamas loyalists – many who have vowed to continue perpetrating violent acts against Israel – being set free. On Friday, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that prison conditions will worsen for Hamas operatives – perks such as recreational opportunities and family visits will be suspended in an effort to make their incarceration more in-line with what it is presumed Shalit is being subject to. Israelis were livid when Hamas accused Israel of violating international law by virtue of the new policy, citing Hamas' refusal to allow a single Red Cross visit to Shalit during his five-year captivity. Over the weekend, Shalit's parents and brother entered the grounds of the prime minister's residence in Jerusalem, chaining themselves to each other. For 24-hours on Sunday at a television studio near Tel Aviv, a progression of celebrities and notables are each spending one hour in simulated solitary confinement. The national debate was summarized by the second notable to sit in solitary. Ami Ayalon, who formerly headed the Israeli navy and the Shin Bet domestic intelligence service, explained that Shalit's continued captivity is harming the nation's security because every soldier must know that the state will do everything possible for them. While virtually all Israelis sympathize with Shalit's plight, a large segment of the population believes the security risk of returning 1,000 avowed terrorists to the streets is too large a price to pay for one soldier's return. On Friday, Israeli, Palestinian and International Human Rights organizations issued a joint statement demanding that those holding him must immediately end his inhumane and illegal treatment, marking the first time Palestinian organizations have called for Shalit's release.

Hizbullah Moving Missiles from Syria to Lebanon Fearing Fall of Patron Al-Asad

The French newspaper Le Figaro is reporting that Hizbullah is moving its missile arsenal from Syria to Lebanon as a precaution against the possible fall of its patron, Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad. The report, citing an unidentified "Western expert," identified the missiles as Iranian-made Fajr 3s and Fajr 4s. The paper reports Hizbullah concerns that the moving process by truck will expose the missiles to Israeli surveillance satellites. The report reiterates concerns for the American government in light of the involvement of Hizbullah in the new Lebanese government. U.S. law prohibits

supporting a government that includes an entity found on the list of terrorist organizations, as is Hizbullah. So far, though, lawmakers who have been vocal in calling for aid to the new Palestinian government in-formation to be stopped because Hamas is on the terrorist list have been silent regarding Lebanon and Hizbullah. On Friday, Hizbullah chief Sheikh Na'srallah admitted in a televised speech that his group was infiltrated by CIA agents. He claimed the CIA became involved when Israel itself was unable to penetrate Hizbullah. There is no confirmation from the U.S. or Israel that any of those arrested had any links to the respective governments.

Syrian Troops Kill 20 Civilians on Friday; Demonstrators Reject Al-Asad's Insufficient Promises

Protestors remained on Syria's streets over the weekend despite the continue killing of demonstrators by President Bashar Al-Asad's forces. On Friday, at least 20 were shot dead as they demanded Al-Asad's overthrow, including a 12-year old and 13-year old. Government sources blamed the deaths on the anonymous "armed men" that Al-Asad insists are behind the unrest. The state-run news agency reported that thousands of Syrians were demonstrating in support of the Al-Asad regime, but because foreign journalists have been banned from the country, independent verification is not possible. Over the weekend hundreds more Syrians – some with gunshot wounds – crossed the border into Lebanon according the Beirut-based Daily Star. In Yemen on Friday, violence appeared to follow the Syrian playbook when government troops backed by tanks fired point-blank into a funeral procession for a man beaten to death by police. At least 14 people were reported killed in the incident in the southern port town of Aden. The man who was being buried was killed a year ago, but his family refused to bury him until an investigation into his death was complete. Three policemen who were found guilty in the torture and killing of the man await sentencing.

Abbas: We'll Move Ahead with Unity Government Despite Disagreements

Palestinian Authority head Mahmoud 'Abbas said on Friday that despite the continued inability to resolve a number of outstanding issues between Fatah and Hamas, the Palestinians will nevertheless push forward with plans to form a unity government that will remain in place until elections are held one year later. Speaking from Ankara where 'Abbas was meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the PA leader said "there is no turning back." Ending the bifurcation between Fatah in control of the West Bank and Hamas in control of the Gaza Strip is seen by Palestinians as the major goal in preparation for statehood. A reconciliation agreement was announced in May, but the pact failed to include resolution of any of the outstanding issues, such as control of the rival security forces. The cancellation of a meeting set for last week between 'Abbas and Hamas leader-in-exile Khalid Mashal gave rise to new doubts that the rapprochement will hold. The primary obstacle at the moment is Hamas' refusal to accept the continuation of Salam Fayyad as prime minister.

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