

ISRAEL REPORT

To provide greater exposure to primary Israeli news sources and opinions in order to become better informed on the issues, and to gain a better understanding of the wide range of perspectives that exist in Israeli society and politics.

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AFTER DECADES OF SILENCE, ISRAEL CONFIRMS IT HIT SYRIAN NUCLEAR SITE IN 2007 (Israel Hayom 3/21/18)

The Israeli military confirmed Wednesday that it had carried out the 2007 airstrike that destroyed a nuclear facility in Syria, lifting the veil of secrecy over one of its most daring and mysterious operations in recent memory.

In Operation Arizona, sometimes referred to in foreign media reports as Operation Orchard, eight F-15 fighter jets targeted the suspected nuclear reactor in Al-Kubar, in the Deir ez-Zor region in eastern Syria, on the night of Sept. 6, 2007. Although Israel was widely believed to have been behind the airstrike, it has never before commented publicly on it.

The White House and Central Intelligence Agency subsequently confirmed that U.S. intelligence had also indicated the site was a nuclear facility developed for military purposes, though Syria denied it.

"We could see that unusual things were taking place that really couldn't be explained any other way," said Brig. Gen. (ret.) Eli Ben-Meir, then head of the technical unit in the Military Intelligence's Research Division.

Once it was confirmed that a nuclear facility was under construction in Syria, Israel set out to figure out its location. Several facilities were flagged before a building in Deir ez-Zor, later dubbed "the cube," was identified as the reactor. The second phase was to determine how close the reactor was to becoming operational.

"It was a race against time. It was clear to everyone that the window of opportunity would be closed as soon as it became operational," Yadlin said.

In April 2007, then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert shared the Israeli intelligence with President George W. Bush's administration.

Washington was also stunned to learn of the Syrian program, as it was focused on the North Korean and Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

"It was clear that we couldn't live with this, that it [the reactor] had to be destroyed," then-Mossad Director Meir Dagan said in a 2016 interview, just prior to his death.

Israel's involvement has been one of its most closely held secrets, and it was not immediately clear why Israel has decided to go public now.

The decision comes after repeated calls in recent months by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the United States and the international community to take tougher action against Syria's ally, Iran.

Netanyahu has repeatedly warned that Israel will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon – "not now, not in 10 years, not ever" – or to build missile factories in Syria that could threaten Israel, or provide advanced weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz suggested Wednesday that the timing of the revelation was meant to send a message to Iran. "The operation and its success made clear that Israel will never allow nuclear weaponry to those who threaten its existence – Syria then, and Iran today," he wrote on Twitter.

From Israel's perspective, the 2007 airstrike was an astounding success since it not only destroyed the site, but prevented further escalation and strengthened its deterrence in the region.

INTELLIGENCE FAILURE: IT TOOK YEARS FOR ISRAEL TO DISCOVER SYRIA'S REACTOR (Ha'aretz 3/22/18)

The excitement of the Israeli political and security leadership after the successful operation to bomb the Syrian reactor quickly obscured a critical question: How did Bashar Assad's secret nuclear project escape the notice of Israel's intelligence community, which boasted for years about its ability to track even the slightest shifts in deployments by its northern neighbor?

A person who held different senior roles in the intelligence community says that the belated discovery of the reactor, about six months before it was due to become active, was "Israel's greatest intelligence failure, maybe even greater than the Yom Kippur War."

"The operation went smoothly, fine," he says. "The government decided to carry it out and it did so, but the scary thing about the whole story is that its detection happened completely by chance. Assad and the North Koreans were building a plutogenic reactor right under our noses in Deir al-Zour for five or six years. God knows how long. And we had no idea, with respect to our most highly covered intelligence target, that there was this reactor that was nearly at the activation stage. The reactor was practically finished when we bombed it, it wasn't just the foundations. If the Mossad hadn't happened to bring in materials from Vienna that proved that a reactor had indeed been built there – the project would have been completed. We had to rev up from zero to 100 very quickly. How could this have happened?"

He adds: "The failure can be ascribed to a conception, one held by the West and not just Israel. This conception says that an Arab state would not enter into a project like this with a third party. Building a nuclear reactor that can only be for military use, when there is no local trained manpower to operate it – this is something that's unprecedented in the history of nuclear weapons. The Koreans did everything there. It's crazy. We didn't know that the number of people within Syria who were in on the secret was so small. There is no technician in Syria who would know how to operate the reactor. The Iraqi reactor in Osirak that we bombed in 1981, on the other hand, was an openly known project."

"Publicly, it's convenient for everyone that the reactor was destroyed – but it was a disgrace," he continues. "Israel was oblivious as the reactor was being developed for years right under its nose. And the United States just didn't want to know. But when they're handing out medals, there aren't going to be

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any commissions of inquiry.”

Haim Ramon – who, at Prime Minister Olmert’s request, rejoined the government in June 2007 as his deputy – recalls a conversation he had with Olmert a few days before assuming his new role.

“He had everyone else leave the room, and then he said to me: I’m about to commit a serious censorship offense, but I’ll be forgiven because I’m the prime minister,” says Ramon. “Then he told me about the reactor. Based on what Olmert described, this was one of the intelligence community’s biggest failures ever. This thing had been moving forward for five years or so and we didn’t know a thing about it. I was in shock.”

According to then-Col. Eli Ben Meir, head of technology in MI’s research branch: “This was a success. Perhaps we could have discovered it three months earlier based on the information that was available. The important thing is that we found it before the reactor became operational.”

Gabi Ashkenazi, Israel Defense Forces chief of staff at the time, says: “Just as the intelligence community is being criticized for not having detected the reactor project earlier, it should be credited for its insistence on clarifying the situation and locating the reactor and preparing the operation to destroy it.”

AIR INDIA TO INAUGURATE FLIGHTS TO ISRAEL VIA SAUDI ARABIA (JPost 3/21/18)

Air India will begin direct flights from Delhi to Tel Aviv via Saudi Arabia on Thursday, the first time ever the Saudis are allowing flights to or from Israel to use their airspace.

The Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling this an “extraordinary diplomatic and economic achievement” that followed a great deal of diplomatic efforts led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who raised the issue with his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, when the Indian leader was in Israel last year, and again when Netanyahu traveled to India in January.

The ministry said the expectation is that this will lead to other airlines flying to and from countries in Southeast Asia to also eventually get rights to fly directly to Israel over Persian Gulf states. A number of other airlines in the East have already shown interest in breaking into the Israeli market, such as Philippine Airlines and Australia’s national carrier Qantas, and the Air India precedent now may make that more probable.

The thrice weekly Air India flights will significantly reduce the cost and time it takes to fly between Israel and India.

The nonstop Air India round-trip flight from Delhi to Tel Aviv was listed on Orbitz on Wednesday night at \$540, and the flight time was given as 7 hours and 15 minutes.

The next shortest flight was 11 hours on Turkish Airlines, which would cost \$909 and necessitate a stopover in Istanbul.

According to Tourism Ministry figures, some 58,000 Indian tourists came to Israel in 2017, a 47% increase from 2015. And just over 60,000 Israelis visited India last year, according to a report in January on the India Today television network. This represents a 20% increase from 2015.

SHAKED: A TWEET COULD END IN A TERROR ATTACK (Arutz-7 INN.com 3/20/18)

Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked on Monday met with Delphine Reyre, Facebook’s director of public affairs in France and Europe.

The two met ahead of a conference to fight hate speech on the Internet which will be held on Tuesday in Jerusalem. Reyre will attend the conference as will the justice ministers of Italy, Greece and Malta. The conference is part of the 6th Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism.

“Terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah have moved to Twitter instead of Facebook,” Shaked told Reyre, adding, “Through Twitter, the terrorist organizations promote terror and incite to violence, including public activity that they carry out without fear. The reason for this is the fruitful cooperation between Israel and Facebook, as opposed to the lack of cooperation on the part of Twitter.”

“For this purpose we have the content removal law. We called this the ‘Facebook Law’, but the truth is that today we should call it the ‘Twitter Law,’” continued Shaked, referring to a law which would allow Israeli courts to order the removal of online incitement on Facebook.

“We see indications on the social networks of a growing turbulence that could result in a wave of incitement around sensitive dates: Passover, Nakba Day, Land Day, and the march of the millions,” added the justice minister.

Facebook, Twitter and Google have been facing a concerted campaign by Jewish and pro-Israel activists, calling on them to take action against anti-Semitic incitement. Activists and terror victims’ rights campaigners allege the companies are turning a blind eye to the torrent of hate which helps inspire deadly terrorism in Israel.

In 2016, Israel filed 158 requests to remove content on Facebook, and 13 requests to YouTube (owned by Google).

Around 95% of the requested content was removed from Facebook, while YouTube agreed to remove 80% of the content.

ISRAEL’S ECONOMY STRONG, GAPING INEQUALITY REMAINS (YNet 3/11/18)

Israel’s economy is registering a “remarkable performance with strong growth”, while income inequality is on the decline, but economic gaps and lack of social cohesion continue to prevail in the country, according to a 2018 report published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation (OECD).

Average growth has reached 3.3%, marking a higher progress rate than in many OECD countries—a fact which the report says can be partly attributed to strong population growth, which accounted for half of this increase.

Furthermore, the country’s “dynamic high-tech sector” has bolstered Israel’s external standing.

The findings of the survey, presented in Jerusalem by OECD Acting Chief Economist Alvaro Pereira, Shai Babad, Director General of the Ministry of Finance and Yoel Naveh, Chief Economist, also indicate that the coming year will likely yield further healthy growth rates of around 3.5 per cent.

As a result, the general satisfaction among the Israeli public with their lives when compared to the other 34 OECD countries is high.

Despite the glistening report, however, not all can be presented as gold by Israel’s economic leaders. Indeed, inequality—a common grievance voiced by Israelis—remains a problem in need of a remedy.

“Further reforms will be needed to drive down inequality and raise living standards for all Israelis,” the report says.

Unemployment, Naveh said, is at historically low levels, “and the rise in people with jobs has had a significant impact on the continuing convergence of living standards in Israel with those in the most advanced economies.”

However, some groups composing a significant proportion of Israel’s demographics, are in serious need of governmental attention.

“Crucial” measures are required to integrate into the workforce groups who are considered more than others to be economically marginalized such as Israeli-Arabs, ultra-Orthodox Jews and Haredim.

“Enhancing training and education for Israeli-Arabs and Haredim will be essential to improve their economic opportunities and make future growth more sustainable,” the report said. “Reforms and more public investment in education would develop their skills, allowing them to find well-paid jobs in high value-added sectors.”

Despite the recorded rapid employment growth which has boosted income for the poor and improved the lives of disadvantaged groups, the share of working poor, notably Israeli-Arabs and Haredim, spiked because many are in low-paid jobs due to their limited skill sets.

Moreover, low social transfers—social assistance provided by public and civic bodies to those living in poverty or in danger of falling into poverty—indicate that the families, often large among these communities, face deprivations that contribute to the child poverty rates.

Reforms in education, infrastructure and product markets will strengthen the

social economic and productivity, the survey predicted.

ARAB LEAGUE AIMS TO STOP ISRAEL FROM GAINING UN SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT (Israel Hayom 3/21/18)

Arab League nations will meet in Riyadh on April 15 to work to prevent Israel from gaining a seat on the U.N. Security Council, Arab League chief Ahmed Abul Gheit said in a statement on Tuesday.

The summit was originally slated for the end of March, the usual date for the Arab League's annual meeting, but Saudi Arabia's ambassador in Egypt and league delegate Ahmed Qattan said the timing needed to change to accommodate Egypt's March 26-28 presidential elections.

The Security Council is considered the U.N.'s most powerful body, charged with maintaining international peace and security, as well as accepting new members to the United Nations.

The Security Council consists of 15 members, five of whom – the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France – are permanent members and have veto power over its resolutions. Ten rotating members are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms based on regions: five from African and Asian countries; one from Eastern European countries; two from Latin American and Caribbean countries; and two from Western European and other countries – the bloc to which Israel belongs.

The Security Council presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Israel is the only country in the Middle East that has never sat on the Security Council. Only 66 other countries in the U.N., many of them small island states, have not held a Security Council seat.

Winning a Security Council seat requires a two-thirds majority in the 193-nation General Assembly. Candidates are proposed by the five regional groups but election to the council is voted on by the full assembly.

Israeli Ambassador to the U.N. Danny Danon said last year that he had discussed the issue with U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, and he believed the U.S. would "actively support" Israel's candidacy ahead of the 2019 rotation.

Last year's annual Arab League summit was held in Jordan on March 29, with the participation of the 22 member states except for Syria, whose membership has been suspended since the advent of the Syrian war in 2011.

ISRAELI TECH COMPANY PICKED UP FOR \$3.4 BILLION (Arutz-7 INN.com 3/20/18)

A California-based company is acquiring the tech firm Orbotech for \$3.4 billion in what is one of the largest buyouts of an Israeli company.

KLA-Tencor Corp., a manufacturer of semiconductor equipment, and Orbotech announced the deal on Monday.

Orbotech, based in the central Israel city of Yavne, develops technologies used in the manufacture of advanced electronic products such as flat panel displays, printed circuit boards and semiconductors. It will continue to operate under its name and remain based in Israel, its CEO, Asher Levy, said in a statement issued by the company.

The board of directors of each company approved the sale, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2018.

ABBAS SLAMS US ENVOY AS A 'SON OF A DOG' (YNet 3/19/18)

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas on Monday called the US ambassador to Israel, David Friedman a 'son of a dog' and slammed him and his family as "settlers."

His scathing comments came after Abbas blamed the Hamas terror group for the March 13 bomb attack on the convoy of Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah in Gaza, saying it was a "despicable and sinful act."

"The US is lending legitimacy to settlements. That is what senior American officials have done who are led by their ambassador in Tel Aviv, David Friedman. He said: 'They are building on their land.' You son of a dog. They're building on their land? He himself is a settler and his family are settlers," Abbas scathed.

He also launched into another tirade against the US decision last December to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, reserving harsh insults for US President Donald Trump's ambassador to Israel.

Shortly after, Friedman responded to the invective, implying that Abbas's comments may have been anti-Semitic.

"Three Jews were murdered in cold blood and the response of the Palestinian Authority was silence. Abbas chose to respond, I saw his response on my iPhone a few minutes ago. His response was to refer to me as son of a dog. Anti-Semitism or political discourse? Not for me to judge, I leave that all up to you," Friedman said at the 6th Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism.

Earlier, the US ambassador tweeted about recent terror involving Adiel Kolman and the two IDF soldiers murdered in a car-ramming on Friday.

"Tragedy in Israel. 2 young soldiers, Netanel Kahalani and Ziv Daos, murdered in the North, and father of 4, Adiel Kolman, murdered in Jerusalem, by Palestinian terrorists. Such brutality and no condemnation from the PA! I pray for the families and the wounded – so much sadness," he wrote.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded to the Palestinian president's invective as well, saying, "Abbas lashing out at US Ambassador Friedman says it all. For the first time in decades, the American administration stopped indulging Palestinian leaders and told them that, 'Enough is enough.'

Education Minister and Bayit Yehudi leader Naftali Bennett was also quick to defend Friedman, describing him as a true friend of Israel.

"David, after just a year in your job, it can already be said that you will be recorded in Israel's history book as a friend—a true friend of the state of Israel," Bennett said.

In his speech, Abbas went on to accuse Israel, the US and Hamas for staging a 2007 coup in Gaza. "Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar told us in a conversation in Cairo that 'if we had four tunnels, they would become 100 and if we had rockets they would become thousands of rockets. That which is above ground in Gaza belongs to the government and that which is below ground belongs to Hamas,'" Abbas claimed.

Hamdallah and Palestinian security chief Majid Faraj were uninjured when a roadside bomb exploded as they entered the Gaza Strip on their way to a ceremony in the enclave that is dominated by the Hamas faction and is a rival of Abbas's Fatah faction.

"We give congratulations to the two big brothers (Hamdallah and Faraj) that they are safe after the sinful and despicable attack that was carried out against them by the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip," Abbas said in a speech in Ramallah.

Abbas went further and called for the imposition of new sanctions on the Gaza Strip. "I have decided to take legal and economic steps against the Gaza Strip for the protection of the national project," Abbas announced.

He also asserted that had the assassination attempt succeeded, Palestinians would have been on the brink of a bloody civil war, and stressed that he had no interest in receiving information on the investigation into the matter from the Hamas security apparatus.

Abbas also hinted that the bombing threatened the durability of the recently-signed reconciliation agreement between Hamas and the PA.

"If all responsibility, including security responsibility, is in our hands, we will take responsibility for Gaza. If responsibility is not in our hands—meaning only civil responsibility and not security—Hamas can take full responsibility."

Shortly beforehand, Palestinian political parties in Gaza met with Hamas, who called upon Abbas to visit the strip and participate in an investigation into the assassination.

'PEACEFUL' PALESTINIAN PROTESTS (Dr. Reuven Berko, Israel Hayom 3/21/18)

The Palestinians are busy planning mass processions toward Israel ahead of the U.S. Embassy move to Jerusalem in May, in an attempt to create a "third intifada" that copies the murderous First Intifada of 1987-1991, which they

define as a success. The Second Intifada, of course, was defeated by the Israel Defense Forces with our resilient nation's backing. Most Palestinians understand that these attempts will bring nothing but the loss of life.

This was also true of Sari Nusseibeh's plan. A partner to the 1973 Geneva Conference, he spearheaded the effort to form a human chain of protesters along the length of the 1967 borders. In early 2002, police found a screensaver on a computer belonging to this "man of peace" that showed a Palestinian human chain planned for June that year. It showed figures closing in on Israel from all sides, dividing the country in two, against the background of a bloody clock. Hand grenades were also shown being thrown at the "occupation." In the accompanying caption, Nusseibeh expressed confidence that Europe would support the Palestinian struggle.

This presentation is a reflection of the hateful mindset of the Palestinians.

Terrorist acts carried out by "victims" under the false pretenses of arguments about peace, sometimes with Israelis' assistance, and the exploitation of anti-Semitic hatred for their benefit: Experience shows us that in these cynical "non-violent demonstrations," people serve as pawns.

The Palestinians thank Allah that the Jews are their enemy. They interpret military ethics, the value attributed to life, the trepidation at war and sensitivity to international opinion as a weakness to be used as leverage for deception, blackmail and terrorism.

However, as a result of international terrorism, the Europeans and the Americans, and even the Arabs, have grown frustrated with Palestinian terrorism and lies, and as a result, their plight has been sidelined. U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital put an end to their illusions of establishing the capital of a fake Palestine there. The dead end in Gaza, the realization that the conspiracy to flood Israel with "refugees" under a "Palestinian right of return" and thus eradicate Israel through demographics has been foiled, and the knowledge that Israel will act to prevent the border with Jordan from turning into another Philadelphia Corridor, the 14-kilometer (8-mile) road along the Gaza-Egypt border, which prior to the 2005 disengagement from Gaza was used as a buffer zone controlled and patrolled by Israeli forces – all of the above have been seen as disasters by the Palestinian murder syndicate.

Enemies with a common cause, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority continue to fund terrorists, incite toward "sacrifice," memorialize murderers and pay their families. The Palestinian doctrine strives for Israel's destruction and is not dependent on any particular leader. In their schools and mosques, on social media and in statements by Palestinian leaders, the incessant incitement is proof the masses have not changed their mindset when it comes to Israel.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas appears to have removed his stately veneer, cursing U.S. President Donald Trump and calling U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman a "son of a dog."

Although we are now in the cyber era, the Palestinians and Hezbollah have yet to change their anti-Semitic mindset. In light of the atrocities being perpetrated across the region, they should know: When we change our mindset, it will be more than the Dahiyeh neighborhood of Beirut and two buildings in Gaza that come tumbling down.

The profile of Alaa Kabha, the terrorist who killed two soldiers and wounded two others in a ramming attack Friday, isn't unusual among young Palestinians: His beliefs, his feelings, and especially his hatred and desire to take revenge against Israel in general and against the occupation in particular, are no different from those of many young Palestinians in Bethlehem, Nablus, Hebron or Gaza.

In the reality of the territories, he too is disheartened, frustrated, hopeless. So he needed no orders from Hamas, Islamic Jihad or Fatah to murder soldiers, nor did he need the protests marking 100 days since US President Donald Trump's Jerusalem announcement or the raging incitement on Palestinian social media.

The toolbox of the Palestinian diplomatic struggle is empty: They have no

Arab or European support, and the United Nations, as they see it, has become a center of useless verbal wrangling. Trump's US, since the decision to relocate the embassy, has become a real enemy, and Vladimir Putin's Russia isn't really interested in them.

Furthermore, they have lost all hope of making any diplomatic progress with Israel, especially since the Right's rise to power. Instead, they see a reality of a binational state of animosity and alienation taking shape before their eyes—a recipe for an escalation of the conflict and an acceleration of terror.

The only thing the Palestinians are left with, as far as they're concerned, is the toolbox of terror. While the Shin Bet, the IDF and the Palestinian Authority have been making successful efforts to thwart and prevent organized terror, they are incapable of thwarting the sporadic lone-wolf attacks, which have become a common pattern of action in recent years.

Alaa Kabha, like many terrorists operating on their own, needed neither planning nor weapons or partners. He likely made the decision to kill as soon as he spotted the soldiers. According to Shin Bet reports, there have been about 400 attempts to carry out terror attacks in Judea and Samaria and in Jerusalem in the past three months, and they have all been defined as lone-wolf acts.

Lone-wolf terrorism, which has become the leading pattern in recent years, is gaining popularity among the Palestinians in light of the support it receives from the Palestinian public and leadership. Shortly after Friday's attack, the terrorist already entered the dubious list of Palestinian "heroes": A poster was distributed in his honor and the murder he committed was praised and glorified.

Terrorist Alaa Kabha is about to join several thousand jailed Palestinian terrorists and a list of more than 600,000 Palestinians who have passed through Israeli prison gates since 1967.

After he is likely sentenced him to several life terms by the military court, he will join several thousand jailed Palestinian terrorists and a list of more than 600,000 Palestinians who have passed through Israeli prison gates since 1967. The PA, for its part, will follow its own rules and grant him and his family members a salary and an allowance.

Let there be no illusions: The Israeli punitive measures, as harsh as they may be—for example, proposals to destroy Hamas or dissolve the PA and impose economic sanctions—won't reduce the amount of hatred towards Israel or the level of motivation to keep carrying terror attacks. Lone-wolf terrorism is taking place while the fragile Palestinian society goes through far-reaching changes: The governance in the PA territories is weak, the refugee camps are flooded with weapons and nearing anarchy, and Hamas is taking over the civil centers of power (especially in the universities and professional associations).

Add that to the economic trouble, the soaring unemployment rate among educated young Palestinians, the rift with the settlers and the ongoing Israeli annexation policy, and you've got a series of processes that are shortening the fuse leading to a renewed outburst of the powder keg in the territories.

Dry Bones

