

# 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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## IDF STRIKES THREE MILITARY TARGETS IN SYRIAN GOLAN HEIGHTS (JPost 7/12/18)

The IDF spokesperson confirmed in a statement early Thursday morning that Israel attacked three military posts in Syria late Wednesday night.

The attack was carried out in response to the crossing of a Syrian drone that the IDF intercepted earlier on Wednesday, the IDF spokesperson explained.

"The IDF will continue to act decisively and resolutely against attempts to violate the sovereignty of the State of Israel and act against any attempt to harm its citizens," the statement read, "The Syrian regime is responsible for what is happening in its territory and is warned against acting against our forces."

"The IDF is highly prepared for a variety of scenarios and will continue to act as necessary for the safety of the citizens of the State of Israel," the statement added.

The attack near Hader village at the border of the Israeli Golan Heights caused only material damage, state news agency SANA cited a military source as saying.

Israel has been on high alert as Syrian government forces advance on rebels in the vicinity of the Golan, worrying Assad could let his Iranian allies entrench near its lines.

With the help of heavy Russian air power, the Syrian army has seized swathes of Deraa province from insurgents in the south in the past three weeks. The offensive is expected to turn next to rebel parts of Quneitra closer to the Golan.

## DOZENS OF SYRIANS CROSS INTO ISRAEL FOR DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT (YNet 7/11/18)

Keeping a doctor's appointment in Israel, Syrian children and their mothers stepped across a tense Golan Heights border in the dead of night under the watchful gaze of Israeli soldiers.

The patients, Israeli medical officials said, were not the walking wounded of the seven-year-old Syrian civil war but children with chronic health problems coming across the frontier for a day's treatment in a hospital in northern Israel.

Israel says it has treated between 4,000 and 4,500 war casualties from Syria since a humanitarian aid program, was begun some five years ago.

The group of more than 40 mothers and children that crossed over in the pre-dawn hours of Wednesday were among the 3,000 Syrians who Israel says have received separate treatment in what it calls "Operation Doctor's Appointment".

Watched by Israeli soldiers with night-vision equipment, one woman—carrying one child and holding the hand of another—stepped through a gate built into Israel's security fence in the Golan Heights.

After a brief security check, she joined others at the roadside to wait for a bus that would take them to Ziv Hospital in the northern town of Safed, where a medical clown entertained the children.

"They are treated in hospital and go back the same day," said Major Sergei Kutikov, an Israeli military health officer. "Sometimes they return twice or three times for further treatment or ... surgery."

Israel, which captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, has largely stayed out of the current conflict.

But it has carried out scores of air strikes on suspected Iranian or Hezbollah deployments and arms transfers in Syria, and only hours after the latest batch of patients came across, sirens sounded in the Golan when an Israeli

missile intercepted a drone from Syria.

For Israel, the medical aid program can help win hearts and minds in border areas where the number of refugees has increased in recent weeks as Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces advance in an offensive to recover southwest Syria.

Michael Harari, a paediatrician at Ziv hospital, said medical infrastructure in southwest Syria has largely broken down, and groups of Syrian children are brought to the facility every two to three weeks.

"We were afraid in the beginning to come (because we regarded Israelis) as Zionists and enemies," said one woman, who brought her son for treatment. "It's the opposite."

## ISRAEL FEARED DOWNING OF SYRIAN DRONE WOULD OVERSHADOW NETANYAHU-PUTIN MEETING (Ha'aretz 7/12/18)

Even as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plane was en route to Moscow on Wednesday, Israel's top security officials were dealing with an aerial incident in the north. An Israeli Patriot battery had taken down a Syrian drone that had penetrated Israeli territory after it had first crossed from Syria over Jordan.

But the interception was preceded by hesitation. Only after Israel made sure that the drone did not belong to the Russian air force was final approval given to shoot it down.

A calculated risk was taken. The drone was shot down when it was nearly 10 kilometers into Israeli air space. One can assume that the preliminary checks included a phone call to the Russians via the dedicated line for preventing friction that the two countries have maintained for the past three years.

The background to this incident, the second one of its kind in recent weeks, is connected to the campaign Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime is

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Alex Ostrin, Yoav Zolty, Editors-in-Chief

Akiva Sturm, Eli Jarashov, Ezra Sepowitz and Bentzion Rotblat, Editors

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conducting against the rebels in southern Syria. In the Daraa region it has obtained surrender agreements, even though the city itself has yet to be conquered by Syrian army forces. Accordingly, the regime is moving its efforts westward, closer to the Israeli border.

The aircraft shot down Wednesday afternoon was an unarmed intelligence drone. It's possible that it strayed from its flight path. But it's hard to dismiss the possibility that its operators were taking advantage of the chaos at the border to photograph sites in Israel. Israel's policy in any case, is consistent: An immediate response to every violation of sovereignty, fire into our territory, or a violation of the 1974 cease-fire accords on the Golan Heights (a recent addition since the regime's return to southern Syria).

Now that the fighting is getting closer to the Golan, Israel is upholding its policy more firmly. In the previous incident in late June, a Patriot missile was fired at a drone (apparently belonging to either Iran or Hezbollah) that was approaching the area of the dilution of forces on the Golan. The Patriot missed the target, but the feeling in the Israel Defense Forces was that the message was conveyed to the other side. This past weekend a Syrian army position was attacked after a mortar fired by Assad's soldiers at rebels in Quneitra "slipped" toward the border with Israel.

The IDF emphasizes that the drone was spotted when it was still in Syrian territory, that its movements were monitored and that fighter planes and helicopters were dispatched and the Patriot battery in Safed was placed on alert. During an internal air force inquiry it presumably will be debated whether the drone should have been intercepted earlier, before penetrating so deeply into Israeli air space.

Still, it can be assumed that the ultimate consideration here was diplomatic-strategic: Netanyahu would not want to land in Moscow to find that his first task was to explain to his host, President Vladimir Putin, why a Russian drone had been shot down. Israel now needs Russia badly, first and foremost to make good on its promise to keep Iranian forces and Shi'ite militias away from its border in the Golan Heights. When this is the top priority, Israel is willing to take certain risks.

### **DESPITE THREAT OF TERROR, ISRAELIS CLAMOR TO LIVE IN GAZA-AREA COMMUNITIES** (Israel Hayom 7/9/18)

Four years after Israel's 2014 war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, it seems that despite the constant threat posed by terrorist groups in Gaza, Israeli residents of border-adjacent communities are showing no sign of faltering resolve or desire to leave.

In fact, over the last four years, the opposite has been true: Thousands of people have relocated to communities near Gaza, of all places.

Israel Hayom spoke with several residents, and while many say tax benefits from the state play an important role in attracting families to the area, most if not all point to the added value the communities have to offer: supportive and diverse community life, a tight-knit network of neighbors, breathtaking nature and the tranquility that comes with it.

Kibbutz Kerem Shalom, which has a mixed religious-secular population, will welcome 30 new families over the next two years.

Lital and Moshe Ben-Ezra and their two children are planning to move to Kerem Shalom next month.

"My husband and I have always dreamed of living on a kibbutz," Lital told Israel Hayom. "After two years of searching, we came to Kerem Shalom and fell in love, mostly with the people. We are aware this is a sensitive area from a security standpoint and there is quite a bit of concern, but above all else, what's important to us is the Zionism. We're moving with pride to settle our country."

Yifat Ben-Shushan, a mother who lives in Netiv Haasara, described the unique quality of life the area offers.

"There's a super-supportive community here, quality education, nature and quiet, and personal security, despite our location on the border fence and despite the incendiary kite terror. An outsider wouldn't get it," she said.

"What you hear on the news is one-sided. Life here is good, let no one doubt that," Ben Shushan said. "I'm staying here for many, many years to come because I want to. Ever since Protective Edge things have happened around here, billions [of shekels] were invested in the security barrier and the communities' defenses. The kite terror will end one day."

### **HERZOG'S PARTING SPEECH: BE CAREFUL HOW YOU TALK** (Arutz-7 7/11/18)

Opposition leader Yitzhak Herzog, who will finish in his current capacity at the end of the month, will leave the Knesset and take over as chairman of the Jewish Agency.

At the end of his speech during the special session marking "Jabotinsky Day," which honors the life of Zionist leader Zeev Jabotinsky, Herzog said: "There may, of course, be other stormy discussions until my retirement at the end of the month from the Knesset, but this is my last official speech on this stage for the time being. For fifteen years, I have worked in this plenum and in the Knesset for my people, my homeland and my movement. Out of these, for five years I have served as the head of the opposition in the Knesset - a very important role in our democracy, in providing a different voice in the internal arguments within us."

"I enjoyed every moment. I now turn to the service of the people and the state in an important, challenging and fascinating arena at a crucial crossroads in the history of the Jewish people. It was Jabotinsky who wrote constantly about the danger of losing Jewish identity, the danger of losing the continuity of our people and the danger of division that threatens our people. And just as then, so now, the challenges are similar but different. I will enter my new position as chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel out of a deep sense of mission."

Herzog concluded, "I appeal to you, members of the Knesset, to understand and appreciate both the size of the Jewish people in the Diaspora and the relative smallness of the Jewish people among the nations. Appreciate and understand what Jabotinsky wrote about the Jewish people and its ways. Appreciate and understand the existence of 'Jerusalem' and 'Babylon' and the need for dialogue between the two great communities, Israel and North America. Understand and internalize that every word uttered here is liable to ignite a fire among our people in vain."

"Honor the immigrants. Be careful of your language, respect all Jews no matter who they are. They are all sons and daughters of our people. We do not have this privilege and let us not forget the magnitude of the disasters that have afflicted our people. Thousands of years of exile we hoped for political independence. Jabotinsky hoped for it but did not get to see it. We have been privileged to live in the nation-state of the Jewish people in independence and security - a great deal thanks to the Jewish people dispersed in all its countries. It is a tremendous responsibility."

### **ISRAEL RANKED EIGHTH MOST POWERFUL COUNTRY IN THE WORLD**

(Ha'aretz 7/11/18)

Israel has been ranked as the eighth most powerful country in the world, in an annual poll compiled by U.S. News and World Reports.

Israel ranks particularly high in terms of life expectancy, education and per capita income. But while its economy is highly developed thanks to the high-tech, pharmaceutical and diamond-cutting industries, Israel also ranks as one of the most unequal societies.

The rankings are based on surveys that ask participants for their opinions on each of the countries according to certain indicators. The surveys and rankings are based on nine categories, incorporating 65 indicators. The nine categories are adventure, citizenship, cultural influence, entrepreneurship, heritage, movers, open for business, power and quality of life.

Israel garnered a 9.8/10 in terms of perception of the strength of its military and 7.9/10 for its political influence. It was also deemed to have strong international alliances and to be economically influential. However, it did not

score high on the leadership indicator. These factors combined made Israel the eighth most powerful country in the world, for the second year in a row. Israel, however, was ranked only 30th out of 80 in the overall list of "Best Countries," behind Russia, Greece and China.

### **IDF TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO SOLDIERS WITH HAREDI BACKGROUND** (YNet 7/11/18)

The IDF for the first time decided to allow soldiers who left the Jewish religion and Haredi soldiers who didn't enlist as part of the Haredi IDF framework, to receive an opportunity to study, either learn professions or finish their high school education, in the last four months of their service, as part of the "Perek Mesima" program.

Today there are around 1,300 soldiers, who were educated in ultra-Orthodox schools, left the religion and had been drafted as regular soldiers.

The Lobby for Graduates of ultra-Orthodox Educational Institutions convened on Tuesday in the Knesset, led by the Out for Change advocacy group and headed by MK Karin Elharar (Yesh Atid) and Michal Rozin (Meretz).

The Lobby will focus on the existing gaps, and the damage it does to those who grew up as Haredim and are now trying to integrate into secular society.

The IDF has over the years invested in helping those who received an ultra-Orthodox education and later had been integrated into designated military tracks such as Netzah Yehuda Battalion and Shachar Battalion, in order to help them overcome educational gaps.

However, those who prior to enlisting left the religion, do not qualify for these benefits since they came through regular IDF drafts.

After years of campaigning, especially by Out for Change, for the first time all the graduates of ultra-Orthodox educational frameworks, will be eligible for "Perek Mesima".

The project will be overseen by Haredi director in the IDF and the Fund and Unit for Directing Discharged Soldiers.

"There is no reason that people from the same cultural background and with similar educational gaps will not be eligible for the same benefits," explains the vice president of Out for Change, Yossi Klar.

"This is the responsibility of our country and of course it's in the country's interests to allow those who wish to be integrated in the secular Israeli society, to do so. This step by the IDF is appreciated and I hope other government ministries will join the IDF in bringing the discrimination of those brought up in the Haredi society—even if they don't wear a skull cap, to an end," added Klar.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit explained the decision to extend the "Perek Mesima" program.

"In light of the increase of those with an ultra-Orthodox educational background enlisting through the regular IDF draft, Haredi director in the IDF and the Fund and Unit for Directing Discharged Soldiers, established a program which provides an adequate and appropriate answer to soldiers with a Haredi background," said the official statement.

### **ISRAEL TO ATTEMPT ITS FIRST MOON LAUNCH LATER THIS YEAR** (Israel Hayom 7/12/18)

Israeli nonprofit group SpaceIL said on Tuesday that it will attempt the first-ever private lunar landing this February, making Israel the fourth nation to land a spacecraft on the moon, after the Soviet Union, the U.S. and China.

The spacecraft, which is shaped like a round table with four carbon fiber legs, is set to blast off in December from Florida's Cape Canaveral, aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, Ido Anteby, chief executive of SpaceIL, said Tuesday.

It is expected to land by February 13, 2019, after which it will plant an Israeli flag on the moon, transmit pictures and videos back to Earth, as well as measure magnetic fields.

"Our spacecraft will be the smallest ever to land on the moon," said Anteby.

Since 1966, the United States and the former Soviet Union have put around

12 unmanned spacecraft on the moon using braking power to perform soft landings. China did so in 2013.

The engineers had to sacrifice size and operational capabilities for more efficient travel. The craft, unveiled on Tuesday at state-owned defense contractor Israel Aerospace Industries, is about 1.5 meters (5 feet) tall and weighs 585 kg (1,290 lb). The bulk of the weight, some two thirds, is fuel.

At 60,000 km (37,000 miles) above Earth, the spacecraft will deploy. It will orbit Earth in expanding ellipses and, about two months later, cross into the moon's orbit. It will then slow and carry out a soft landing causing no damage to the craft.

"The landing is the most complicated part. The spot chosen is relatively flat and the spacecraft has eye contact with Earth for communication," Anteby explained. "From the moment the spacecraft reaches the point that it begins the landing, it will handle it totally autonomously."

SpaceIL is backed mainly by private donors, including U.S. philanthropist and businessman Sheldon Adelson and South African billionaire Morris Kahn.

"This is a tremendous project," Kahn said Tuesday. "When the rocket is launched into space, we will all remember where we were when Israel landed on the moon."

### **ISRAEL TO HOST BIGGEST INTERNATIONAL LACROSSE EVENT IN HISTORY** (JPost 7/11/18)

Israel will host the World Lacrosse Championship (WLC) beginning on July 11 in Netanya as it welcomes teams from 46 countries and thousands of fans for the biggest Federation of International Lacrosse event to date.

Occurring every four years, the championship dates back to 1967. It has been dominated by two teams: Canada and the United States. Canada is the reigning champion and has won three of 12 WLC titles. The United States has been victorious the other nine times.

No country outside of United States, England, Canada and Australia has hosted the WLC before Israel. English Lacrosse withdrew its bid to host the tournament in May 2017 citing financial risk. Israel Lacrosse Association assembled a bid in three weeks and submitted it in July to become the host nation.

For Israel, hosting the WLC is a huge boost for one of its fastest growing sports. The Israel Lacrosse Association (ILA) was founded in 2011. Now more than 2,000 children are playing the sport at some level. In fact, the first generation of players who grew up playing lacrosse here are now old enough to compete on the national team.

Over 150 games are slated over the 10 days of the tournament. The teams are divided into 11 groups. These teams will play each member of their group over the first four days before the play-in bracket is determined. The Blue group, by far the most impressive of them all, is exempt from the play-in stage. It comprises Australia, Canada, England, the Iroquois Nation, Scotland and the United States.

The United States announced in January that it will bring eight veterans from its 2014 silver-winning team to Netanya. The 23-man American roster includes alumni of 13 different colleges and one current student, University of Denver senior Trevor Baptiste. In the 2014 WLC in Denver, Colorado, the United States won all five of its games in the group stage, but fell to Canada 8-5 in the gold-medal contest. The Canadians will be coming to Israel after all with a roster of 10 athletes from their 2014 gold medal roster.

Several other teams, mostly from the Blue division, are worth keeping an eye on as well. The Iroquois won the bronze medal game in 2014 and their storied relationship with lacrosse commands respect. They are the only Native American team authorized to play a sport internationally.

Australia is also a renowned power in the sport. Although the country has hosted three WLCs, they failed to medal in 2014 when they finished in fourth place. They will look to turn it around in Netanya.

Then there's Israel. They defeated a capable Japan team in 2014 to claim seventh place, a remarkable achievement considering how young the sport

still is here. The native Israelis on the national team will be joined by US players who have made aliyah. They will compete in a relatively weak red division against Russia and Jamaica in the group stage.

#### **A MISSED OPPORTUNITY IN SYRIA** (Ariel Kahana, Israel Hayom 7/11/18)

Absent some shocking development, U.S. President Donald Trump's upcoming summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki next week will mark the end of the Syrian civil war. True, there are pockets of opposition in some parts of the country, including some 1,000 Islamic State members of the Khalid ibn al-Walid Army terrorist group not far from Israel's border, but ultimately, it seems Syrian President Bashar Assad has done the unthinkable and emerged the victor from a hell of his own creation.

And how does Israel emerge from all this? Despite a plethora of unprecedented possibilities, with no achievement to speak of. We were not swept up in the fighting on the other side of the border, and that is not a given. Israel's strategic goal right now is merely a return to the state of affairs that existed before the war, or as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has put it, "strict adherence to the separation agreement from 1974."

It is difficult to describe just how modest our ambitions are. What is the separation agreement anyway? It means that Assad gets to rebuild his military, the renewed threat of conventional war between Israel and Syria, eternal vigilance on the Golan Heights for fear of a 1973-style surprise Syrian attack, tank brigades on constant alert in the Golan. In sum, the geostrategic arena will be turned on its head. But Israel is not concerned by any of this.

To be honest, beyond a return to square one, our situation will be exponentially worse. It is not just Syria that will threaten us from the north now, but its great patrons, Russia and Iran, whether directly or through its militias and its attempts to establish itself permanently in Syria. We can also add Hezbollah to this psychotic cast of players. Iran's strategic arm will return to Lebanon well-trained, skilled, armed and now free to threaten us whenever it sees fit.

Israel does not seem poised to reap any benefits on the political front, either. There has been talk here and there about working toward international recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the Golan, but according to leaks coming out of Washington, Trump will likely not acquiesce on the issue. In a matter of days or possibly weeks, Syria will go back to being Syria. Things will go back to the way they were, as if the war did not go on for several years, as if there had never been any opportunities or possibilities for change.

But there were. We could have established facts on the ground regarding Israeli settlements on the Golan, taken advantage of Hezbollah's distress to deal a crushing blow to its missile arsenal or assisted the Kurds. We could have demanded the more serious demilitarization of Syria than the miserable agreements reached in 1974. This is not the wisdom of hindsight. We can still make this demand. These proposals were raised in real time in cabinet meetings, in the press and in other platforms. But in Israel, from the prime minister to the alternating ministers to the defense establishment, strategic shortsightedness has bred stagnation.

Netanyahu has an intimate and unprecedented relationship with both Putin and Trump. In the Syrian arena, these relationships have proven highly effective, first and foremost by preserving Israeli freedom of action in Syria.

Time and again, Netanyahu explained that "the Middle East is in a state of historic turmoil." Was accepting that Assad is back in power and on our border the best we could do?

#### **PROTECTIVE EDGE DETERRENCE HAS ERODED** (Yossi Yehoshua, YNet 7/9/18)

Four months ago, we could still say that the IDF had succeeded in the test of deterrence against terror elements in the Gaza Strip. Despite the mismanagement of the war, the IDF has given the Gaza border communities the longest period of calm.

However, the escalation of hostilities since March, and the renewed rocket

fire on the Gaza border communities, indicate that despite the military achievement, the government has failed to turn it into a diplomatic one.

Hamas found itself on its knees by the end of the operation, but Israel appears to have missed an opportunity to take advantage of it in order to achieve a long-term quiet. And the last few months have been proof of that.

It's important to remember that the scale of the rocket fire has declined over the past three years and eight months, with only 60-70 rockets and mortar shells being fired. In addition, the number of terrorist infiltrations from the strip into Israel has been limited. And perhaps most important is that Hamas could not smuggle advanced weapons or acquire exceptional capabilities, unlike Hezbollah, that since the Second Lebanon War in 2006 has been able to build up its military capabilities in quite the concerning manner.

The diplomatic window of opportunity that opened by the end of Protective Edge has closed in the last few months. Since March, we have been witnessing a change of direction and in the power relations in the region.

The deterrence achieved in 2014 has eroded, and Hamas is actually the one that sets the rules of engagement. The group begins and concludes escalations on the southern border when it's convenient for it. Moreover, over the past three months, Hamas has managed to burn many acres of agricultural land and inflict a painful, economic blow to the border region's economy.

The IDF is also paying the price. Over the last few months, we have seen that the short rounds of fighting against Hamas and Islamic Jihad did not achieve the desired result. Even when the army has the justification to act, it does not end the fighting with the desired result of eliminating rocket-launching cells or senior terrorist commanders.

It has been four years since the operation and we need to ask, where are the commanders of Protective Edge? Well, defense minister Moshe Ya'alon has long since lost his office in the Kirya base to Avigdor Lieberman and is now looking for a future in politics, while former IDF chief of staff Benny Gantz is testing the waters and examining options to enter politics. The GOC Southern Command, Sami Turgeman, is at a research center in Washington and is expected to return next month, and then-Gaza Division commander Mickey Edelstein has been appointed as Israel's military attaché to Washington.

Finally, what about the field commanders? Paratroopers Brigade commander Eliezer Toledano and Nahal Brigade commander Uri Gordon were promoted, while Givati Brigade commander Ofer Winter and Golani Brigade commander Ghassan Alian were passed over for a promotion.

What lessons did we learn? On the eve of Protective Edge, Hamas had 32 underground tunnels, 15 crossing the border fence and merely 11 known to the Military Intelligence. The IDF has improved its tunnel detection capabilities, established an underground barrier that won't be completed for another year, but by next summer will already provide a hermetic solution.

In addition, a tech lab was established by the Gaza Division, which manages to locate the tunnels' route—an achievement that recently won it the Israel Defense Prize. A new method of sealing tunnels has also been developed. The result: ten new Hamas tunnels have been foiled over the past year alone.

In light of that, the terror group made a strategic decision to stop digging new tunnels and to accelerate the digging of the existing ones, since the window of opportunity to use this modus operandi is closing.

There have also been improvements in our air defense capabilities: The Iron Dome is currently capable of not only intercepting missiles with an accuracy rate of 90 percent, but also to intercept mortar shells intended to strike in shorter distances.

Overall, our military capabilities have indeed improved, but the overall deterrence has been eroded. Despite the impressive military achievements over the past four years, the general policy adopted by the government not only failed to neutralize the threat from the strip, but it also exacerbated the pressure cooker that could soon explode in our faces.