

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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ISRAEL ON HIGH ALERT, PREPARES FOR POSSIBLE IRANIAN RETALIATION AFTER STRIKE ON SYRIAN AIR FORCE BASE (Ha'aretz 4/11/18)

Iran directly threatened Israel on Tuesday following an airstrike on a Syrian air force Monday that killed at least seven Iranian advisers. Israel is taking the Iranian threats very seriously: The northern border is on high alert amid concerns of a possible revenge attack by Iran or Hezbollah, as well as a possible U.S. strike against the Assad regime in retaliation to the chemical attack at Douma.

The airstrike, which Iran, Syria and Russia all blame on Israel, targeted Syria's T-4 airbase near Homs. According to foreign media reports, the strike damaged various capabilities that the Iranians had begun to deploy at the base. Israel has not claimed responsibility for the strike.

The T4 airbase is one of the key sites where the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds force is deployed in Syria. According to Arab media reports, the fatalities included a Revolutionary Guards colonel who was responsible for Iran's drone operations in Syria

The strike also apparently killed or wounded other officers and damaged other armaments aside from the drones. The armaments in question could have reduced the Israel Air Force's freedom of operation in Syrian airspace.

Ali Akbar Velayati, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said in interview with the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese television station Al Mayadeen on Tuesday that "Israel's crime won't go unanswered."

Syria and Russia also issued statements denouncing the strike, and the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned Israel's ambassador in Moscow. "I don't know who attacked in Syria," said Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman during a visit to the Golan Heights town of Katzrin on Tuesday morning. "But I know one thing for certain: We will not allow Iran to set up shop in Syria, regardless of the cost."

This is far from the first time Israel has warned that it would see a transfer of Iranian military assets to Syria or the establishment of Iranian military sites there as a "red line" which it will act to enforce.

On Wednesday, the security cabinet is slated to meet to discuss the tension on the northern border. At the meeting, the intelligence agencies will give the ministers their assessments of recent developments.

PM: IF SOMEONE TRIES TO ATTACK YOU, RISE UP AND ATTACK HIM (Israel Hayom 4/10/18)

The Israeli prime minister and the leader of the Hamas terrorist group staked out tough positions Monday, making de-escalation on the Israel-Gaza Strip border in the near future unlikely.

Since late March, 26 Palestinians have been killed in border riots instigated by Hamas.

Israel has accused the terrorist group of using the protests as a cover for carrying out attacks. The Israeli military said Hamas operatives have also been using the riots to try and infiltrate the border, saying terrorists have also tried to damage the security fence and plant explosives near it.

The IDF maintains that Hamas, as the sovereign ruler of the coastal enclave, is responsible for all that transpires there.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday visited the southern city of Sderot and said Israel's top priority is its security.

"We have one clear and simple rule and we seek to express it constantly: If someone tries to attack you – rise up and attack him," Netanyahu said. "We will not allow, here on the Gaza border, them [Hamas] to hurt us. We will hurt

them."

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, for his part, renewed a pledge Monday that the marches would pave the way for a return of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to what is now Israel.

"We will return to Palestine, our villages and Jerusalem," Haniyeh said in a speech at one of five protest camps set up along the border.

He stopped short of threatening a mass breach of the border, though another Hamas leader has done so in recent speeches.

On Sunday, the chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court warned that Israel and Hamas may both be violating international law at the Gaza fence.

Fatou Bensouda warned that "any new alleged crime committed in the context of the situation in Palestine may be subjected to my Office's scrutiny." She warned Gaza's rulers that "the use of civilian presence for the purpose of shielding military activities" could be a war crime, and at the same time, said Israel's "violence against civilians – in a situation such as one prevailing in Gaza" may also constitute a war crime.

ABAS SAYS PALESTINIANS WON'T ACCEPT ANY AMERICAN PEACE PLAN (JPost 4/12/18)

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday said the Palestinians will not accept any US plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

He made the comment at the beginning of a conference in Ramallah about Jerusalem.

"We honestly will not wait for anything from them, and we will not accept anything from them," Abbas said, alluding to US President Donald Trump's administration.

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Since Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and initiated the relocation of the US Embassy in Tel Aviv to the city, Abbas has said on a handful of occasions that the Palestinians will not accept any US peace plan. However, in the same time period, he and some of his advisers have also said a few times that the Palestinians would engage the US administration on its ideas to resolve the conflict, if it were to enact certain policy changes. For example, on Monday, Abbas told the Fatah Central Committee the Palestinians would listen to the Trump administration's ideas to resolve the conflict, if it were to endorse the two-state solution and recognize east Jerusalem as the capital of "the State of Palestine."

Multiple White House officials have recently said the Trump administration is finalizing a plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In his speech, Abbas also accused Israel of opening fire on "peaceful protesters," in the border region between Gaza and Israel, who he said were standing far away from the border fence separating the two territories. "You are clearly attacking someone really far away," Abbas said, referring to Israeli snipers located on the Israeli side of the border fence. During the past two-and-a-half weeks, Palestinians in Gaza have participated in protests in the border region to support the return of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to their former homes in Israel.

The IDF has described the protests in the border region as "violent riots," asserting that protesters have thrown Molotov cocktails and rocks at its soldiers, opened fire on them, set tires on fire, exploded a bomb and attempted to pass into Israel's territory.

A total of 32 Palestinians have died in the border region since the start of the protests on March 30.

Abbas also congratulated Hamas for "beginning to adopt popular peaceful resistance" during the protests.

"I congratulate them for waking up. It has now been proven to them that popular, peaceful resistance is more effective than that nonsense," Abbas said, in an apparent reference to armed conflict.

ISRAEL LABOUR PARTY SUSPENDS TIES WITH UK COUNTERPART OVER ANTI-SEMITISM ALLEGATIONS (Israel Hayom, 4/11/18)

Israel's Labor party has temporarily suspended ties with its British counterpart, citing U.K. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's failure to eradicate anti-Semitism in the party.

The relationship between the two sister parties has deteriorated in the wake of Corbyn's surprise election in 2015, which came after decades on the left-wing fringes of the party. Corbyn has repeatedly faced accusations of turning a blind eye to anti-Semitism in Labour and among groups he supports. In a letter to Corbyn, Labor leader Avi Gabbay said, "It is my responsibility to acknowledge the hostility you have shown to the Jewish community and the anti-Semitic statements and actions you, as leader of the Labour party in the U.K., have allowed.

"You are not fulfilling your role in curbing anti-Semitism around you, and your public statements carry a load of hatred toward Israel," Gabbay wrote. He further accused Corbyn of crossing "a dangerous line" between legitimate criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitism, saying the latter has expressed "very public hatred of the policies of the Israeli government, many of which regard the security of our citizens and actions of our soldiers – policies on which the opposition and coalition in Israel are aligned."

The Israeli Labor leader lauded his party's "long history of friendship" with Britain's Labour, saying that circumstances mandate a "temporary suspension of all formal relations" between the two parties, as ties cannot continue "while you fail to adequately address the anti-Semitism in the Labour party.

"I have informed all Labor staff in Israel, its Knesset members and elected leaders of the suspension of ties with your office," Gabbay continued. "I have asked the international secretary of the Israeli Labor party to update me

quarterly on this situation and should this suspension change, you will be updated accordingly."

'FIGHTER PLANES WE LACKED AT AUSCHWITZ NOW ENSURE OUR EXISTENCE (Arutz-7 INN.com 4/11/18)

Today, unlike previous generations, "Israel will always defend itself by itself," Minister of Education and Diaspora Affairs Naftali Bennett said Wednesday evening.

Speaking at the Masua Institute at the start of Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel, Bennett stressed Israel's ability and responsibility to protect itself, while also praising and celebrating the bravery of the many Jews who fought the Nazis.

"What should Israeli students remember? That in the darkest days of the Jewish People no one stood with us. We were alone, defenseless. The French handed us in, the Ukrainians butchered us, the Poles often helped the killers, the Dutch didn't care. And the Americans and allies who in June 1944 already knew of Auschwitz and didn't bomb it. A few bombs on the gas chambers and the murder machine would have halted. But the bombs weren't dropped," Bennett stated. "Those pilots and planes which we did not have 74 years ago in Auschwitz are he pilots and planes which ensure our existence today."

Saluting the Jews who fought with the allied forces, Bennett recalled how as a child he thought only certain individuals showed bravery during the Holocaust. "Only when I grew up did I realize the bravery of Jews in the Second World War was not confined to stories from school, but was a wide phenomena, with a million and a half Jews who fought the Nazi devil. Jews who fought to free their People, and at times their own families, from the deathly grasp of the Nazi monster. We owe them so much, but history did not give them enough attention. I wish to use this stage and shine the spotlight on them, the way they deserve."

The Minister shared the stories of US General Morris Rose, the soldiers of Lithuania's 16 division, and Etzel commander David Raziell who was sent by the British to stop the German advance in Iraq. All, and many others, were Jews who actively fought the Nazis and their helpers. "A quarter million Jews died in battle. The Jewish Nation have a large debt to these heroes, and we cannot forget their contribution to the victory over the Nazis," Bennett stated.

NIKE BUYS ISRAEL COMPUTER VISION STARTUP INVERTEX (Times of Israel, 4/11/18)

Nike, Inc. has acquired Israeli startup Invertex Ltd., a developer of computer vision technologies, in a bid to strengthen its hold on digital technologies, the US maker of sports shoes said in a statement.

The Israeli team "will focus on building groundbreaking innovations to help Nike serve millions of members around the globe," the statement, released by Nike on April 9, said. Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

The Tel Aviv-based startup has developed a technology that it hopes will revolutionize the way people buy shoes, using artificial intelligence and 3D imaging technology to analyze users' feet in stores and to suggest models and sizes that would fit best. The software can also help with online shopping, enabling smartphones to scan feet via an app and making suggestions about what would be the best buy.

A year ago the Israeli company said it closed a \$2 million seed funding round, led by the Jerusalem-based equity crowdfunding VC OurCrowd. Permoda, an international retail and fashion group, also participated in the round together with other angel investors, the company said. "The acquisition of Invertex will deepen our bench of digital talent and further our capabilities in computer vision and artificial intelligence as we create the most compelling Nike consumer experience at every touch point," Nike chief digital officer Adam Sussman said in the statement.

"Nike's connection to and understanding of their consumer is unsurpassed and we look forward to joining their team," said David Bleicher, the CEO of Invertex, who founded the firm in 2015.

ISRAELI BLIND GOLFER CONTINUES TO RACK UP TITLES (JPost, 4/12/18)

Golfer Zohar Sharon is surely one of Israel's most dominant athletes.

But what is truly amazing about Sharon is that he doesn't only beat his rivals time and again, but does so without seeing.

The 64-year-old has claimed multiple world titles and added yet another major trophy to his collection over the weekend with the help of coach, caddie and best friend Shimshon Levi, winning the ISPS Honda 2018 US Blind Golf Open at the Haven Golf Course in Green Valley Arizona.

"The tournament was very challenging. I competed against the very best, including some youngsters who gave me a run for my money," said Sharon, who is also hearing impaired and suffers from a host of neurological problems. "But my experience ended up making the difference and I managed to finish in first place."

Sharon began losing his eyesight in the 1970's following a chemical injury while working for the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency), but he only took up golf on a full-time basis in 2000.

He claimed the B1 title, the category of the totally blind, on his debut at the ISPS HANDA World Blind Golf Championship 14 years ago and went on to retain his status as world champion in the five editions of the event since, the last of which was played at the Shinrin-Koen Golf Club in Japan during November 2016.

The International Blind Golf Association was set up in 1998, with Japanese businessman Dr. Haruhisa Handa still providing financial support to the IBGA.

The IBGA is also involved in a bid to introduce disabled or "paragolf" into the Paralympics in 2020.

Thanks to the funding of the IDF Disabled Veterans Organization and the Defense Ministry's rehabilitative department, Sharon and Levi can travel the world and represent Israel with honor.

While not all the competitions award prize money, Sharon, who trains and competes at the Caesarea Golf Club, transfers the IDF Disabled Veterans Organization all his winnings.

BEIJING'S 'SILICON VALLEY' PARK TO SET UP OFFICE IN TEL AVIV (Times of Israel 4/11/18)

Beijing's Zhongguancun Science Park (Z-Park), also known as "China's Silicon Valley," said it plans to open a liaison office in Tel Aviv, similar to ones it already has in Silicon Valley and in Canada and Europe.

The announcement of the planned liaison office was made earlier this week in a meeting between the Vice Mayor Yin Hejun of Beijing and Tel Aviv Deputy Mayor Doron Sapir. The park is a technology, science and education hub in the Haidian District in the northwestern part of Beijing, and the combined turnover of the high-tech industries located at its premises exceeded 5 trillion RMB, almost \$800 billion, last year.

The Tel Aviv office is the 11th set up by the Science Park globally, with others having been set up in Washington, Munich, Toronto, London, Finland, Sydney and Tokyo.

Beijing and Tel Aviv have been twin cities for the past 20 years, and in recent years the cooperation between the cities has increased in technology, municipal knowledge exchange, education, culture and art. The new office aims to be a base for Chinese companies seeking to do business in Israel, and for Israeli firms seeking business opportunities in China. The opening of the new office will further strengthen the relations between the cities, a statement said.

"Beijing and Tel Aviv, like China and Israel, are completely different in size,

but share many common values: adopting technology and modernization, cherishing education, and striving to always improve our municipal systems," said Sapir in the statement. "Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai has defined the relationship with Beijing as a prime strategic goal for our foreign relations. In recent years we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of delegations and visits from Beijing to Tel Aviv and vice versa. The opening of an economic office of Beijing here in Tel Aviv is an important development."

Zhongguancun hosts nearly 20,000 high-tech enterprises, including tech giants Lenovo, Baidu, Xiaomi and JD; 40 Chinese universities and colleges, including Peking University and Tsinghua University; and more than 200 national scientific institutions and state-level laboratories.

"The Chinese Government attributes great importance to Zhongguancun science park, as home to innovation and breakthrough technologies," said Hejun. "We know how famous Tel Aviv is for its innovation, and openness to new ideas. We have a lot to learn from you."

The Israeli office will be run by the ShengJing Group, one of China's largest management consulting and private equity advisory firms.

ISRAELI NONPROFIT 'SAVE A CHILD'S HEART' WINS UN AWARD (Israel 21c, 4/5/18)

Israeli-based international nonprofit organization Save a Child's Heart (SACH) has received the 2018 United Nations Population Award.

Established by the General Assembly in 1981, the award recognizes outstanding achievements in population and health. The Committee for the United Nations Population Award, which made the selections, is chaired by Ghana and includes Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Benin, Gambia, Haiti, Iran, Israel, Paraguay and Poland.

Based at Wolfson Medical Center in Holon, SACH was founded in 1995 with the mission of improving the quality of pediatric cardiac care for children in developing countries and creating centers of competence in these countries.

To date, SACH has saved the lives of more than 4,400 children from 58 countries in Africa, South America, Europe, Asia and throughout the Middle East, and trained more than 100 medical team members from these countries.

"We are honored to receive this prestigious award from the UN," said Simon Fisher, executive director. "The work of Save a Child's Heart over the past 23 years represents so well the ethos of the Israeli society, the State of Israel and so many Jewish universal values that are at the core of Save a Child's Heart. Today our medical team at Wolfson accepted a first child from Myanmar as well as a first child from Fiji, representing the 57th and 58th countries that we are reaching out to. All being well, they should be in Israel for the 70th Independence Day."

In most cases, all medical, travel and accommodation costs are covered by SACH and its partners, even if the child requires a lifetime of cardiac care. The Israeli surgeons volunteer their time.

SACH was granted special consultative status by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (ECOSOC) in 2011.

'ISRAEL IS CAPABLE OF BRINGING DOWN ASSAD' (Res. Maj.-Gen. Amos Yadlin, Arutz-7 INN.com 4/11/18)

Two significant events are developing in the north: The US is discussing operations against Syria, after Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons; and Iran is discussing a response to Israel's alleged attack on the T-4 airbase in Homs.

These two events seem to be separate, but they could consolidate into a very significant development.

The Iranians will respond to the alleged Israeli attack, even if not immediately, and even if not from Iran. Possible options include Syria, Lebanon, or around the world, and in addition to their usual emissaries, they will want to include an official Iranian response to the murder of their soldiers,

in an effort to deter Israel from further harming Iranian bases in Syria. Israel, meanwhile, has declared publicly that its strategic goals are to prevent Iran from gaining a foothold in Syria, and to cancel the 2015 "Iran deal." Both of these goals are important to Israel, and they aim to prevent enormous dangers in the future, even if they include dangers in the present. We need to prepare for the next possible steps in this operation, including for our enemies' response, and Iran's possible establishment [in the area] in the future.

Israel is capable of dealing with many threats on its own - and if necessary, could deal with Assad's regime, and even topple it. However, if the escalation to open conflict with Iran continues, or brings in Russian interference - Israel will need US aid.

Here, too, the Israeli and American interests are similar. It's very important to strategically coordinate with the US, in preparation for such a scenario.

Regarding an expected US attack in Syria: US President Donald Trump has a few options. He can decide on a punitive act, such as the one last year. But true deterrence will be achieved only with a widescale and continuing operation. That is possible, but only if the strategic goals in Syria are widened to include, other than the conflict with ISIS, the goal of stopping Iran.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE TRUMP AND PUTIN, ISRAEL HAS NO ONE TO RELY ON (Alex Fishman, YNet 4/10/18)

This is what happens to a country with two lovers—a brawny but unfaithful one from Moscow, and a hot but unstable one from Washington: It ends up all alone, in the Middle Eastern dark.

Today, the State of Israel has no world power it can rely on and trust when it comes to the Iranian expansion in the region. It is left with no other choice but to launch independent military operations to curb the Iranian foothold in Syria, hoping that this military activity won't deteriorate to all-out war.

There's a reason why IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot told Yedioth Ahronoth in a special Passover interview that the chance he would lead the army to war this year was higher than in the first three years of his term.

One of the ways to curb an escalation after military activity is to keep it secret and to avoid taking responsibility. The problem is that our two lovers, each for his own reasons, wanted to tell the guys what their girlfriend had done that night.

The Russians couldn't resist and rushed to issue a very unusual statement in the morning about two Israeli F-15 planes that had flown over Lebanon and carried out a strike from 3:25am to 3:53am, firing eight cruise missiles at the Syrian air force's T-4 (Tiyas) airbase, which is located about 100 kilometers north of Damascus, near Homs. The Americans resisted the urge a bit longer, until Monday afternoon, when the NBC network quoted senior American officials as saying that Israel had informed the United States about the strike beforehand.

The lovers' betrayal is already taking its toll: The Iranians couldn't hide it, and on Monday evening Iranian television presented the pictures of four Iranian nationals who the Iranians say were killed in the Israeli attack. This is a statement, perhaps even a threat.

If the strike was indeed carried out by Israel, it wasn't just a military move but a diplomatic defiance of both Russia and the US: You can't ignore Israel while devising different plans concerning Syria's fate. If you fail to consider our interests, we'll destroy any arrangement you make.

The conference held in Ankara on April 4, which focused on dividing Syria into zones of influence between Turkey, Iran and Russia, apparently ended with real results, way beyond the public statements that were issued after the meeting. Israel is mainly concerned about the achievements scored by the Iranians, who likely received permission to continue their military, economic and diplomatic presence in Syria and influence the Syrian regime. The Russians sold us out in this conference.

Three days later, in a phone call described by the Americans as "tense,"

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked US President Donald Trump not to withdraw from Syria and to work to remove Iran from the Syrian arena, but Trump gave him the cold shoulder. The US president has already decided to end any involvement in Syria, and the only reason the move is being postponed for now is due to pressure from the American security establishment, mainly the Pentagon.

Trump wants to call it a day in Syria and slightly warm up his relations with the Russians in a bid to reach achievements in the North Korean arena and on the nuclear disarmament issue. An American abandonment of the Kurds will also be welcomed by Turkey, which the American administration still views as an important ally.

As far as Israel is concerned, pulling the American army out of Syria isn't just a license for the Iranians to do as they please in the war-torn country, but also a loss of military abilities. The Americans have invested a lot of intelligence in Syria. Moreover, a US withdrawal from the Kurdish area in eastern Syria opens the door to an Iranian takeover of Syria's major energy resources and the passways of Iranian equipment into Syria and Lebanon. Our great friend in Washington is getting us in deep trouble in Syria.

The T-4 airbase has become both an Iranian military-logistic center, from where Iranian equipment is transported to Lebanon and Syria, and an Iranian operational base for aerial and other activities. As far as Israel is concerned, this place cannot exist as it is today, in spite of the Syrian and Russian presence there. If the Russians and Americans fail to understand the message that was allegedly conveyed in the latest strike, the level of military activity will likely increase in a way that would provoke the Iranians and the Syrians, which may spoil the reconciliation process the Russians are trying to create in Syria.

By the way, if the strike was indeed carried out by the Israel Air Force, it seems the army has drawn conclusions from the previous attack on T-4 on February 10, as the planes managed to escape the Syrian antiaircraft defense system.

Symbolically, the day of the strike was also the first day in office of the new national security advisor of the United States, John Bolton—Iran's greatest enemy in the American administration. This guarantees full backing for Israel in targeting Iranian interests, as much as it wants and wherever it wants.

Later Monday, the Russians somewhat came to their senses and tempered their tone. President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, announced that Putin had no contact with the Israeli leadership and that the dialogue was being held on the regular channels. The radical comments attributed to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov against the strike didn't mention Israel's name. The Russians still value their relationship with Israel, which is preventing misunderstandings in Syria's skies and basically preventing a military flare-up in the region. If the attack was indeed carried out by Israel, it was a reminder to the Russians: We have an interest in Syria too and we plan to forcefully protect it.

