

# 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.

Issue 1116 • July 27, 2018 • Tu B'Av 5778

## DOUBLE WHAMMY: FEMALE IDF OFFICER DOWNS SYRIAN JET AND DRONE (JPost 7/25/18)

Captain Or Na'aman commanded the Patriot battery which shot down a Syrian fighter jet over Israel's northern Golan Heights on Tuesday, the IDF has confirmed to The Jerusalem Post. As the commander of the Air Force's 138th Battalion's Patriot battery, Na'aman was also in charge of the interception of a Syrian drone which fell south of Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) almost two weeks to the day after the downing of the jet.

The Syrian Sukhoi fighter jet was intercepted Tuesday by two Patriot missiles launched from Safed after it penetrated two kilometers into Israeli airspace. The pilot, identified as Colonel Umran Mare of the Syrian coastal city of Tartus, was confirmed to have been killed.

Israel says it shot down the jet after it entered Israeli airspace from the Golan Heights border. While it is now believed that the pilot likely made a navigation error, the incident is still considered by Jerusalem as a serious breach of Israeli sovereignty.

Syria confirmed that the plane, which was taking part in an offensive against Islamic State fighters in the Yarmouk Basin, was downed by Israel – but Damascus has denied that it crossed into Israeli airspace.

According to a report by the Ynet news site, Russian officials protested the downing of the jet claiming that it had not breached Israeli airspace.

Israel then presented clear radar images which "unequivocally" proved that the Syrian jet had flown into Israel.

Damascus has informed the UN Security Council that Israel has given "unlimited support" to terror organizations in southern Syria and has carried out "repeated military direct aggression" in the war-torn country. "Israel also continues its colonial settlement campaigns in the occupied Syrian Golan and the policies of repression against Golan citizens, looting their resources and arresting the Syrian people in a blatant violation of Geneva treaties."

## REVERSING SUPPORT, BENNETT SAYS NATION-STATE LAW MUST BE 'REMEDIED'

In a surprise move Wednesday, Habayit Hayehudi leader Naftali Bennett called for amendments to the recently adopted nation-state law Wednesday, a law that he supported during the legislation process.

Kulanu leader Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon said Thursday that "we were reckless. The nation-state law was enacted hastily."

Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, a coalition flagship initiative, was enacted last week after months of heated debates between coalition partners. From the time of its introduction, Bennett was one of the bill's most vocal supporters.

Though largely symbolic, the contentious legislation, which states that "Israel is the historic homeland of the Jewish people and they have an exclusive right to national self-determination in it," has been lambasted by Arab lawmakers as "racist" and "verging on apartheid" as it discriminates against Israel's non-Jewish citizens. Currently, 20% of Israel's population is Arab.

On Sunday, Israeli Druze leaders, including three Knesset members, petitioned the High Court of Justice against the law, saying it was an "extreme act of discrimination" against the country's minorities.

In a series of tweets Wednesday, Bennett acknowledged the "damage" the law caused to the Druze community in Israel.

"After speaking with many of our Druze brothers, it has become clear that the manner in which the nation-state law was enacted was particularly damaging to them and to anyone who has tied their fate to that of the Jewish state.

This, of course, was not the government's intention," he wrote.

"Israel's Druze citizens are our brothers. They stand with us, shoulder to shoulder, on the battlefield, and they have struck a covenant with us – a covenant of life. The government has a responsibility to find a way to heal the wounds," Bennett added.

A spokesperson for Bennett explained Wednesday that Habayit Hayehudi's leader had received dozens of calls from Druze leaders, who made it clear that the law was deeply offensive to Israel's minorities in general and particularly to their community.

The Druze are a unique religious and ethnic minority among Israeli Arabs. Most Druze men serve in the Israel Defense Forces and members of the community have served and currently serve in top positions in Israeli politics and public service.

Later on Wednesday, Bennett defended his new position, tweeting that while the nation-state law was "necessary" and "just," there was "a specific mistake regarding our Druze brothers that needs to be remedied."

## DAVID'S SLING MISSES SYRIAN SS-21 MISSILES IN FIRST INTERCEPTION (YNet 7/23/18)

The David's Sling missile defense system failed its first attempt to intercept two Syrian missiles on Monday.

David's Sling, which is part of Israel's multi-layered missile defense program, operates in the layer above the Iron Dome and below the Arrow systems. Meaning, it is designed to intercept tactical ballistic missiles and medium- to long-range rockets and cruise missiles fired from distances of 40-300km.

Monday morning's incident was the first time David's Sling was used against enemy projectiles since it was declared operational in March 2017.

The defense establishment is expected to be able to point to the reason the

Israel Report is a Student Publication of

## Torah Academy of Bergen County

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interception failed within the next two or three days. The cause of the failure is likely technological in nature, and not related to the Air Force operators of the system, who made a reasonable decision to launch the two interceptor missiles from the David's Sling permanent site in the north.

David's Sling is meant to be able to take on the two Soviet-made surface-to-surface SS-21 missiles, which were fired Monday morning by the Syrian army against the rebels. The missiles, which are called SS-21 by NATO, are called "Tochka" in Russian, meaning "dot"—an indication of their precision.

The fact that the chief contractor of the system, Rafael, is based in Israel, as opposed to the US's army's Patriot, will help understand what went wrong quicker, and if necessary, draw the necessary conclusions for the next incident.

### **ISRAEL POISED TO INK \$11 BILLION AIRCRAFT DEAL WITH BOEING** (Israel Hayom 7/25/18)

Israel is considering the purchase of new F-15 fighter jets for its air force as part of the largest defense deal in Israel's history.

The deal with aircraft manufacturer Boeing, worth a combined \$11 billion, is likely to include three main components: A fleet of fighter jets, a fleet of transport helicopters and aerial refueling tankers.

The two latter components are especially critical because the Israeli Air Force's existing transport helicopters and refueling planes are extremely outdated and require immediate replacement.

The Defense Ministry and the IDF have been working to complete this deal for quite some time. The main point of debate surrounded the question of whether to purchase each component from a different manufacturer or all three from the same company – which ultimately came with better payment, supply and maintenance conditions.

Regarding two of the components, Boeing had the clear advantage from the outset. Its refueling tanker, developed from the Boeing 767, has well-established capabilities and could be delivered in a relatively short time.

Boeing's helicopter menu was also advantageous. Israeli officials, however, didn't want to buy just one type of helicopter, rather an entire transport squadron with a mix of CH-47 Chinooks and V-22 Ospreys. It has yet to be determined how many of each will be purchased, but the decision will depend on the air force's recommendations. The air force is expected to gradually phase out its existing fleet of CH-53 Sikorsky transport helicopters.

The primary dilemma surrounding the deal involved the fighter jets. Israel's most recent deal with Boeing was 20 years ago, when it purchased a squadron of F-15i Thunder jets. Subsequent deals were made with Boeing's competitor, Lockheed Martin, first for over 100 F-16i Storm jets and in recent years 50 F-35 Mighty jets – Israel's first plane with stealth capabilities.

Until recently, IDF officials believed the F-35 would be the last manned fighter plane Israel would buy, both to preserve the air force's qualitative edge over other countries in the region and to minimize the types of planes it would have to operate – thereby cutting down on operational expenditures. However, there has been a policy shift and now the plan is to buy another squadron of advanced F-15s, as part of the overall deal with Boeing.

The jet, developed from the original F-15, will be completely new and be known as the IA F-15 (an acronym for Israel Advanced).

Boeing committed to installing improved features, including certain stealth capabilities. With that, for the purpose of maintaining relations with Lockheed Martin and the F-35 project, it's possible that a limited number of additional F-35 will also be bought and delivered over the course of several years.

Officially, the deal is currently waiting on the IAF's professional recommendation, which will be presented to the chief of staff, the director general of the defense ministry and finally to the defense minister, who will jointly formulate the defense establishment's position on the matter. The deal will then be brought before the cabinet for final approval.

Senior defense officials, meanwhile, have intimated that the Boeing deal enjoys consensus support inside the Defense Ministry and IDF, and that the

cabinet is likely to approve it.

### **STONE FALLS OUT OF WESTERN WALL ABOVE EGALITARIAN PRAYER PLATFORM** (JPost 7/23/18)

A large stone above the egalitarian section of the Western Wall at the Robinson's Arch site fell out early Monday, which could close the section of the prayer platform abutting the stones of the Western Wall for an extended period of time.

The incident occurred the morning after the fast of Tisha Be'av, one of the most crowded days of the year at the Kotel.

Director of the Antiquities Authority Israel Hasson said the possible extended closure is dependent on whether or not a pending survey of the area finds that more stones above the site could be in danger of falling.

The Jerusalem Engineer's office has now closed the prayer platform next to the wall, and the Antiquities Authority will conduct a survey of the stones above the site, which Hasson said could take up to two weeks.

Hasson was part of a delegation inspecting the site on Monday afternoon, which included Culture and Sports Minister Miri Regev, who has authority over the Antiquities Authority, along with Chief Rabbi David Lau and Administrator of the Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz.

The assembled officials agreed that the large stone that fell will be removed from the platform where it fell and put under protection in Rabinowitz's offices until the authority can determine if it is possible to reinsert it.

The egalitarian section, known as the "Ezrat Yisrael" prayer platform, has existed as a place for progressive Jewish prayer since 2000, but was substantially upgraded in 2013 by Diaspora Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett.

The stone fell meters away from a woman who was praying, and security cameras show her fleeing the site in panic.

Roey Shabtay, the Conservative Movement's spokesman, tweeted Monday morning that a "miracle at Ezrat Yisrael" occurred. "Had it happened yesterday when there were many people praying, there could have been a disaster."

Rabinowitz referred to the event as "exceptional and rare," one that has not happened in decades and which is beyond his understanding.

"The fact that such a powerful event took place after the fast of Tisha Be'av, in which we mourned the destruction of our temple, raises questions that the human soul is too small to contain and that demand cheshbon nefesh [accounting of the soul]."

"I thank the Almighty for preventing a major disaster," he said.

The Knesset recently approved a move to renovate the egalitarian section, despite opposition from a number of politicians, most prominently Regev.

In response to the incident, Jerusalem deputy mayor and member of the Jerusalem Municipal Council for Bayit Yehudi Dov Kalmanovitz implied that the falling stone should make the Reform movement change its ways.

"We cannot explain or derive meaning from natural phenomenon as signs from Heaven, because the ways of the Creator are hidden from us," said Kalmanovitz, who then went on to do just that.

He said that the incident coming so close to Tisha Be'av, which commemorates the destruction of the Temples, and the place where it fell – the egalitarian prayer section for progressive Jewish prayer – should set off red lights.

"I suggest to the leaders of the Reform communities and the instigators of the dispute, the Women of the Wall, to inspect themselves and not the Western Wall," said Kalmanovitz. "They should turn to the true teachers of Jewish law and fix the schism they have caused in the nation."

### **'JEWS HAVE RIGHT TO PRAY AT GATES OF TEMPLE MOUNT'** (Arutz-7 7/26/18)

Police removed dozens of worshippers from Yeshivat Torat Hayyim from the Temple Mount gates on Tisha B'Av Sunday, claiming that their prayers could provoke riots and rioting by Muslim local visitors.

Attorney Menashe Yado, who represents the worshipers, wrote to Internal Security Minister Gilad Erdan asking him to change the enforcement policy of the police.

The letter sent to the minister describes the event, during which a group of students from Yeshivat Torat Hayyim arrived from the Binyamin area in Samaria to pray at the gates of the Temple Mount on the day of the fast of Tisha B'Av. The worshipers were wearing tefillin and prayer shawls, and they were praying loudly when the police decided to remove them from. They were removed for a distance of hundreds of meters while the police used force to ensure their movement to another location, even though they did not violate any laws.

The letter further states that "the determined support of the police for the prayer of Jews outside the gates of the mountain will inform the Muslim public that the Jews have rights in the Old City and will enable the Jews to realize their national, religious, constitutional and elementary rights." The letter further claimed that the purpose of the police was to prevent unrest in the area, but the public removal of the worshipers conveyed a message to the Muslim public that Jews should not pray at the gates of the Temple Mount.

The letter included a condemnation of the manner in which the police acted during the incident. "The police acted in a pattern ... which created unrest between the worshipers and the policemen, where it would have been appropriate to contain the Jewish prayer and create a positive atmosphere."

The letter asked Minister Erdan to ensure that the proper lessons were learned from the incident and that "a policy will be formulated with proper weight to the Jewish rights to realize their national feelings and freedom of worship at the gates of the Temple Mount."

Attorney Menashe Yado of the Honenu legal organization noted: "Minister Erdan announced when he entered the Knesset that he intends to strengthen the Jewish hold on the Temple Mount. He promised and acted. During his term of office, the policy changed and became a policing policy that recognizes the fact that the Temple Mount is in our hands and gives substance to this fact, while respecting the status quo on the one hand and respecting the rights of the Jews on the Temple Mount on the other."

Yado explained that the purpose of the appeal to Minister Erdan is "to draw his attention to the fact that outside the gates of the Temple Mount the norms dictated do not exist, and Jews cannot pray there properly, not even on Tisha B'Av, which is a clear day of prayer. We hope that Minister Erdan will continue with the positive and correct trend he created on the Temple Mount, and will work to allow Jews to pray outside the gates of the Temple Mount."

"We hope that our letter to Minister Erdan will draw his attention to the fact that the Israel Police, in our view, out of fear of violence by extremist Islamic elements, has not allowed dozens of Jews to pray a prayer outside the gates of the Temple Mount on Tisha B'Av.

"We believe that Minister Erdan has the power to cause a change in the operational perception of the police on this issue and to shake it in such a way that it will fulfill its function and protect the right of Jews to express their national feelings outside the gates of the Temple Mount. This is how we turned, and we believe that he can change things, especially since he has proved in the past that he has the correct tendencies in the matter," concluded Yado

#### **ISRAEL HOTEL OCCUPANCY UP 2.5% IN FIRST HALF OF 2018 (YNet 7/25/18)**

Hotels in Israel had an occupancy rate of 67.3% in the first half of 2018, a 2.5% rise compared to the same period in 2017, according to data released Tuesday by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics.

According to the data, Tel Aviv had the highest rate of hotel room occupancy in the country with 76.8% in the first six months of 2018, compared to 73.4% in the same period the previous year. Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, and the southern resort town of Eilat followed with 70%, 69.8%, and 69.3%,

respectively.

Hotels in the country registered 11.9 million overnight stays during the period, compared to 11.2 in H1 2017, the data showed. This number was calculated per person staying overnight. 5.9 million of the stays (50%) were attributed to tourists from abroad.

June was the busiest month in the period examined with 2.2 million stays, 42% of which attributed to foreign nationals.

According to data published by the bureau earlier this month, 2.18 million people entered Israel in the first half of 2018, a 19% rise compared with the same period the year before. Of those who entered the country during this time, 2.1 million were foreign nationals.

#### **UNREASONABLE PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS (Gabi Avital, Israel Hayom 7/24/18)**

The "failed interception," the "interception that wasn't." The various headlines competed for the title of most alarming and most depressing. Judging by the headlines, one could be led to believe that Israel's security had sustained a critical blow. It reminded me of the coverage of the Israeli F-16 fighter jet that was shot down several months ago. The television studios featured somber commentators with dejected expressions explaining one after another how Israel's power of deterrence had eroded – badly. On the night of the Israeli attack on Iranian forces in Syria, it felt like World War III had erupted.

On Monday, Israel activated the "David's Sling" air defense system – which represents the layer of air defense directly above the more famous Iron Dome. Its job is to eliminate midrange missiles flying at higher altitudes from Israeli airspace. After David's Sling, the next layer of the country's air defense is occupied by the Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 systems, which can intercept long-range ballistic missiles – such as the Iranian Shihab missile – far above and beyond our own borders.

Although David's Sling was delivered to the IDF several years as fully operational, its first live-fire test this week – when it attempted to shoot down Syrian SS-21 ground-to-ground missiles over the Golan Heights – didn't go well and the missiles landed in Syrian territory, not far from the Israeli border. The defense establishment is investigating the incident. We are receiving erratic information and opinions, and the explanations aren't necessarily convincing.

Something has happened here in recent years. The performance bar has been set extremely high, and it demands direct, reliable and detailed coverage of every military action, every errant bullet or mobilized tank. This bar is so high that there isn't even the slightest room for failure; or what engineers call a "lack of success." A shell leaving its cannon has to hit the mark. A plane taking off has to land home safely with its pilots unscathed. A military operation has to be perfect – as if we are shooting at fake targets and people on the other side aren't fighting for their lives exactly like us. There is no room for error. Is this trend warranted?

One of the more famous mathematical terms, the "Gaussian curve" is named after renowned mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss who lived in the 18th century. This curve allows for natural outliers: There are average occurrences and there are exceptions. No engineering system in the world – from a fighter jet to a space shuttle to a home food processor – is free of glitches.

One system – for example, a cigarette lighter – can have a simple purpose, while another – shooting down one missile with another midflight – can be the pinnacle for aeronautical engineers. In any system, from the smallest to the largest, there will be "lacks of success" – or what the media likes to call "failures." The difference is semantic but it establishes essence. As the world makes technological strides in a variety of fields, usually we only hear about the successes. It takes a long time for a complex system to function properly. It's very possible that the David's Sling system wasn't delivered entirely ready. It's possible this one error falls within the minuscule range of expected flaws. However, there's quite a distance between these possibilities and the

current lamentations surrounding the failed interception. Israel's security doctrine won't collapse because a missile fell from the sky, just as it doesn't collapse when a satellite's trajectory isn't figured properly. The defense establishment will overcome the failures and rebound with unprecedented achievements.

### ISRAEL: THE SECOND LARGEST MOROCCAN DIASPORA IN THE WORLD (Einat Levi, YNet 7/21/18)

The World Cup in Russia generated unique images in the Israeli media related to Israel-Morocco relations. Fans of the Moroccan national team and Israeli football fans who attended the tournament posed for joint photos and were publicly speaking warmly about each other on. These images were very different from interactions between Israel and its Arab neighbors that we usually see.

This can be attributed to the Moroccan perception that sees the Moroccan Jews living in Israel as part of the Moroccan Diaspora. This perception is grounded in a report issued in March 2016 by the Moroccan Ministry of Diaspora, in which Israel was mentioned as the second largest Moroccan Diaspora after France, with about 800,000 Moroccans. This issue has also been raised in Moroccan public discourse over the question of the right of the Moroccan Diaspora to vote for parliament, and if so, does this right apply to Moroccans living in Israel.

In addition, an Israeli citizen of Moroccan origin who wants to obtain Moroccan citizenship can do so because the right to Moroccan citizenship applies by filiation up to fourth generation descendants. Not only that, in July 2011 an amendment was introduced to the Moroccan constitution, in which Judaism was mentioned as part of Moroccan heritage. Where else can we find a Muslim country that views Israel as one of its Diaspora, recognizes Judaism as part of its heritage, and even offers citizenship to some of its Diaspora there?!

Another interesting development is recently happening within the Israeli society. Although some would assume that the Moroccan Jews living in Israel had forgotten about their Moroccan heritage, in reality, the opposite is true. The young generation of Moroccan Jews is searching everywhere in an effort to rediscover its Moroccan origin. They wish to strengthen the Moroccan identity's representation as part of the Israeli narrative. Others are even visiting Morocco through study tours aiming to learn from Morocco and bring back home some powerful insights. Those who get the chance to visit Morocco feel welcomed in the Muslim country, an experience that can alleviate even the toughest fears and bring up hope. Morocco can teach Israelis an important lesson that can one day bring peace and tolerance to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Beyond the Jewish heritage that lasted for more than 2,000 years in Morocco, the Israeli-Moroccan friendship began in the late 1950s with security cooperation and a need to regulate the immigration of Jews from Morocco to Israel. In the 1970s, relations continued to develop thanks to Moroccan mediation throughout the peace process between Israel and Egypt. In the early 1990s, following the signing of the Oslo Accords, relations between the countries improved significantly and became overt. In 1994, liaison offices were opened in Rabat and Tel Aviv, but since October 2000—following the second intifada—Israel and Morocco do not have official diplomatic relations any more.

Nevertheless, there are many surprising types of cooperation that do take place between the two countries. For example, approximately 45,000 Israeli tourists visit Morocco each year. The number of Moroccan tourists visiting Israel is much lower, and is estimated at about 3,500 a year, also due to difficulties in obtaining visas to Israel. Significant, albeit limited, cooperation can also be found in agriculture. Morocco supplies Israel with agricultural produce such as sardines and olives, while Israel supplies Morocco with professional knowledge and technological equipment. Morocco also attracts agricultural entrepreneurs because it does not impose agriculturally-related

taxes and even provides subsidies. In this context, some Israeli farmers established farms in Morocco and are growing almonds, dates, olives, and citrons there.

However, the most striking cooperation takes place in the civil sphere, and is reflected in the exchange of delegations, the preservation of the Jewish-Moroccan heritage, festivals and music events, cinematic creations taking place in Morocco and Israel, cross-border research, student exchanges, and more. In June 2018 alone, three Moroccan civil society delegations arrived in Israel, joining a long list of delegations from Morocco in recent years. Similarly, Israeli delegations visited Morocco in recent years on various occasions, such as the International Climate Conference held in November 2016 in Marrakesh (COP22); The Judo Grand Prix competition that took place last March in Agadir; The Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly held in the Moroccan Parliament in Rabat in October 2017, a study tour conducted by the Maoz Organization for Leadership Development.

The human movement between Israel and Morocco, and the media coverage and attention on social networks it enjoys, make the relations commonplace, and generate what can be called the "routinization effect". The frequent contacts between the two countries, which take place in various sectors, are transforming the reality on the ground while making the parties involved more used to Israeli-Moroccan interactions. The media coverage in Morocco, even if not always positive, encourages open and courageous dialogue in Morocco on issues related to relations with Israel and to Israel's relations with the Arab and Muslim world. Thus, the Moroccan public is becoming less sensitive towards signs of public cooperation, and the routinization effect gradually stretches the boundaries of cooperation.

The cooperation between Israel and Morocco takes place despite movements in Morocco that support the Palestinian cause and call to boycott Israel. These movements, that influence Moroccan public opinion through the media and social networks, operate within the professional unions and mobilize the Moroccan public for protest. For example, they led protests against the activity in Morocco of the Israeli shipping company ZIM, and against the selling in Morocco (especially during Ramadan) of Israeli-made Majhul-type dates. These protests have had limited success to date. They do not prevent cooperation altogether, but limit it and prevent Israel and Morocco from realizing the full potential of their relations.

The multi-facet cooperation between Israel and Morocco, along with the mutual interest expressed by civil societies in both countries, attest to the great potential for cooperation that has not yet been realized. Progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process will enable Israel and Morocco to move forward in their relations, as they did in the past.

Until that happens, the two countries should continue to develop their unique relationship, which is so different from Israel's relations with other countries in the region. The hugs between the Israeli and Moroccan fans in the World Cup give room for cautious optimism and indicate that there are real opportunities in Israel-Morocco relations that can be pursued, even if not all of them can be implemented in the current regional reality.

The Israeli-Moroccan relations are more than just relations between two countries, these are relations between a country and its second largest Diaspora.

