

ISRAEL REPORT

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TOP OFFICIAL: US, ISRAEL COORDINATED CLOSELY IN LEAD UP TO IRAN DEAL WITHDRAWAL (Times of Israel 5/9/18)

A senior State Department official said Wednesday that the US and Israel worked closely together leading up to US President Donald Trump's decision to quit the Iran nuclear deal and reimpose sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear program.

"Throughout the entire process in recent months and in particularly the past two weeks, we consulted with Israel and we wanted to make sure we coordinate closely with them," Andrew Peek, deputy assistant secretary for Iran and Iraq, was quoted as saying by Hebrew media.

While Peek did not detail the nature of the coordination, Trump spoke with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu numerous times in recent months and cited the premier's presentation of documents "conclusively showing" Iran's history of pursuing nuclear weapons in his speech Tuesday announcing he would leave the 2015 accord.

Though Trump's decision to leave what he called the "disastrous" deal was praised widely in Israel, the accord's other signatories — Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China — have signaled their commitment to upholding the pact. Speaking with NPR, Peek said the US would be "pushing and asking and cajoling" these countries to disinvest from Iran and would "wind down" sanctions waivers.

While Iranian officials, including the parliament speaker, say they hope Europe will work with them to preserve the deal, President Hassan Rouhani warned Iran could ramp up uranium enrichment in the coming weeks and that there is only a short window to negotiate with the accord's remaining signatories.

Trump warned Iran on Wednesday against resuming its nuclear activities, saying "if they do there will be very severe consequence."

IRANIAN FORCE LAUNCHES MISSILES AT GOLAN (Ha'aretz 5/9/18)

Syrian reports late Wednesday night said that Israeli missiles were launched at Syria. Moments earlier, 20 rockets were fired from Syria towards Israeli military outposts in the Golan Heights. No injuries were reported. Several rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system.

The Israeli army is attributing the attack to members of the Quds force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

The rocket fire struck near the border with Syria. The military said intelligence assessments earlier in the week anticipated that after U.S. President Donald Trump announced that he was withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear accord, Israel was likely to be targeted by rocket fire and Iran would try to retaliate.

Nonetheless, the army has predicted that such an attack would not lead to a full-fledged war.

Tehran has issued several threats over the past month, saying that it would hurt Israel in response to a slew of attacks that were ascribed to the Israeli air force. The latest attack, carried out on May 9, claimed the lives of seven Iranians in the Syrian air force base T4.

Over the past month tensions have been high along the Israeli border with Syria and the army has increased security measures in the area, deploying more Iron Dome batteries across the northern region.

This is the first time Israel accused Iran of firing towards Israeli territory. During the Syrian Civil War errant fire struck the Golan several times; usually local organizations in southern Syria that are affiliated with Iran, Hezbollah and the Assad regime were behind those attacks. This Iran-led strike on Israeli territory, however, is the most extensive of its kind to date.

ISRAELI EMBASSY IN EGYPT MARKS FIRST INDEPENDENCE DAY IN YEARS (Israel Hayom 5/9/18)

The Israeli Embassy in Egypt celebrated an Israeli Independence Day publicly with a large event for the first time in years on Tuesday.

The embassy held a gala reception at the Ritz Carlton in Cairo to mark the 70th anniversary of the country's founding.

In recent years, Independence Day events have generally been held at the ambassador's residence. Since the Israeli Embassy came under attack in 2011, during the Arab Spring riots that took place under former President Hosni Mubarak, the embassy has refrained from hosting large events.

Israel is currently working to expand economic cooperation with Egypt. Ambassador David Govrin praised the Egyptian authorities and security establishment for making the celebration possible.

The event did encounter opposition, with Egyptian groups that oppose diplomatic relations with Israel trying to organize protests against the event. The weekly newspaper Roz al-Yousuf published a copy of the invitation to the event under the title "Israel Celebrates 70 Years Since the Nakba [Catastrophe]." However, there were no reports of disturbances near the hotel while the event was underway.

Govrin spoke in Arabic and English, stressing that because of events in the Middle East in recent years, especially the increased nuclear threat from Iran, Arab countries were changing their attitudes toward Israel.

"Arab countries no longer see Israel as an enemy, but as a partner in creating a new reality of stability and cooperation," Govrin said.

PM NETANYAHU SEEKS UNDERSTANDING ON IRAN WITH PUTIN (YNet, 5/9/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Russian President Vladimir

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Putin at the Kremlin Wednesday on a day marking Russia's World War II victory over Germany, stressing to him Iran's similarities to the Nazi regime and Israel's right to defend itself against it

"We in Israel do not forget for a moment the great sacrifice of the Russian people and the Red Army in the victory over the Nazi monster," Netanyahu remarked at the beginning of their meeting, ahead of a parade commemorating the occasion. "Neither do we forget the great lesson of the need to stand against a murderous ideology in time," he continued. "It is unbelievable, but 73 years after the Holocaust, there is a country in the Middle East, Iran, that is calling for the destruction of another six million Jews." Following the parade, Netanyahu and Putin attended a wreath-laying ceremony for the unknown soldier at the memorial for Red Army soldiers who fell in World War II and whose resting place is unknown. They laid flowers on the stones of the Moscow Hero City Monument in the presence of an honor guard, while the Israeli anthem played.

The prime minister then joined Putin for a reception at the Kremlin. The two met to discuss military coordination amid yet another attack on Tuesday night on a Syrian base housing Iranian militias, which was attributed to Israel.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said missiles targeted depots and rocket launchers that likely belonged to Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard in Kisweh, killing at least 15 people, 8 of them Iranians.

"I appreciate the opportunity to discuss regional problems with you, the attempts as you put it, to resolve the crises, to lift the threats in a prudent and responsible manner," Netanyahu told Putin ahead of their meeting.

"I conclude and say to you that I am very moved that you invited me to this parade as Prime Minister of Israel, as head of the state of the Jews, and you mentioned the Holocaust of the Jews today. This is additional testimony to the deep ties between our two peoples and I thank you for this."

AMID TALKS OF WAR, ISRAELIS ARE KEEPING CALM AND CARRYING (Times of Israel 5/9/18)

When war broke out on Israel's northern border in 2006, Avigdor Guy remained calm. He lived in the northern port city of Haifa, but he didn't think the war would hit home — until, that is, it did.

"Twelve years ago, they asked me if I was worried, and I said no, of course I'm not worried," Guy said. "And then missiles began to fall in Haifa, and it felt really bad."

Now, as fears of a war on Israel's northern border heat up once more, Guy, again feels fine. But this time, he says his confidence is justified. Guy, 50, thinks that Israel is even better prepared on its northern front than it was in 2006.

Recently, he says, Israel has been appropriately focused on threats coming from Syria.

"I'm pretty optimistic that everything will be calm," he said. "I think that all in all, our government is taking Iran's deepening presence in Syria seriously."

Israelis who spoke with JTA echoed Guy's feelings on Wednesday, a day after President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal sparked heightened fears of conflict between Israel and Iranian forces in Syria. Israelis expressed no desire for war, but said that if one breaks out, they trust their army to protect them.

As Trump was preparing on Tuesday to withdraw from the deal, which rolls back Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, Israel alerted residents of the Golan Heights to open their bomb shelters. The Golan, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, has endured fire from forces in Syria, and could be vulnerable if Iran or its proxies attacked Israel.

On Wednesday, Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot visited Israel's north for a situation assessment.

But the government has urged Israelis to keep calm and carry on. Schools in the Golan opened as normal on Wednesday. And in Tel Aviv, far from the threats up north, there was no sign of impending conflict: People strolled the boulevards, sipped their coffee and rode their bikes.

INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS BEING MADE TO PREVENT GAZA ESCALATION AHEAD OF US EMBASSY MOVE (YNet 5/9/18)

The Palestinian March of Return campaign is expected to climax next Monday when the United States inaugurates and completes the process of moving its embassy to Jerusalem.

Expecting violence, international brokers are lobbying Hamas to organize a mass rally near the Gaza border with Israel, but position its members along the border line to prevent a spontaneous effort to breach the fence by the masses; an action that is likely to trigger a deadly Israeli response.

It is not yet clear what Hamas is being offered in return, as their support of such a breach has already been made clear.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians are expected to participate in next week's protests at several locations along the Gaza border. Hamas is hoping for more than 100,000 people to show up.

If the fence is indeed breached by the massive crowds, there can be an exceptionally large number of casualties that can even spiral into a military conflict, which both seem to be trying to avoid.

A Palestinian source said that the Qatari Ambassador to the Gaza Strip Mohammad Amadi, who is in charge of aid to rebuild Gaza on behalf of the Emir of Qatar and maintains good communication lines with Israeli officials, recently entered the strip.

UN Envoy to the Middle East Nikolay Mladenov also visited Gaza and met with Hamas leadership officials recently.

The Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar confirmed Wednesday that international negotiators approached Hamas before the start of the March of Return campaign in March in an effort to stop it from proceeding.

"We said that Gaza is like a starved tiger, they tried to humiliate and destroy it for 11 years," Sinwar said. He refrained from revealing what Hamas's response was to the request.

In recent weeks, Hamas has increased the tension in the Gaza Strip, ahead of the pinnacle of the campaign, and is trying with all its might to preserve the flame after public participation in the demonstrations has diminished in the last month.

Hamas understood that they had succeeded in bringing the Gaza Strip back into the public and media agenda in the Arab countries and in Europe, and therefore it seems that they want to keep the cards close to their chest regarding the upcoming demonstrations.

LIBERMAN TO IRAN: DO NOT TEST US (Arutz-7 5/9/18)

Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman said Wednesday that Israel would respond harshly to any provocation by Iranian forces in Syria.

"We are taking a very simple policy: If someone is about to launch missiles at us - we will target him," Liberman threatened in an interview with News 2.

He explained that the main threat presented in Syria by Iran is to undermine the operation of civilian and military flights in Israel. "The Iranians are trying to build a third front from the Syrian Golan Heights, and like Hezbollah in Lebanon, they are trying to build something similar on the Syrian side."

Regarding the question of what will happen if rockets are fired at Israel, Liberman replied, "It is impossible to completely seal everything 100%, but we must make a 100% effort to ensure the security of the citizens of Israel. We act with discretion and responsibility - but also with determination. I hope our message will get where it is needed - you should not launch missiles at us."

"I do not think we are on the eve of war. We are doing everything in order that the situation does not escalate. But at the same time we are preparing for every scenario," the minister concluded.

23 SCIENCE MINISTERS TO ATTEND INNOVATION MEGA-EVENT IN JERUSALEM (JPost 5/9/18)

An unprecedented number of ministers and deputy ministers, 23, plan to attend a conference on science policy in Jerusalem later this month, Science

and Technology Minister Ofir Akunis said on Wednesday.

Among the countries whose ministers are attending the event, titled "The First International Ministerial-Level Scientific Conference: Thinking Out of the Box," are India, Argentina, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom.

Even more countries plan to send lower-level delegations, including chief scientists and other officials. According to Akunis, his flagship event is set to break an all-time record for ministers from foreign countries participating in one event of Israel. "The professionals said to expect only 10 countries to participate," Akunis said.

"This is an unprecedented diplomatic achievement; 23 is a massive number by every parameter." The minister said the positive response "is a great show of faith in Israeli science and technology, and shows how Israel is admired around the world. 'It's a salute to Israel, and I'm glad I initiated it. I'm happy to see the international admiration,'" Akunis added.

The Science Ministry's three-day conference is set to begin on May 28, and will open with an event in Jerusalem, featuring a greeting by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

All Israeli cabinet ministers and MKs were invited to attend. The ministerial-level attendees from around the world will attend a dinner at the Knesset, during which Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein plans to address them, and Akunis to talk to them about Israeli democracy.

ISRAEL BECOMING MORE POPULAR AS A TOURIST DESTINATION (Arutz-7 5/9/18)

Israel's tourism industry continues to grow, with the number of tourists rising 61% in two years.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, 408,400 tourist entries were recorded in April 2018, 17% more than April 2017, and 61% more than in April 2016.

The average number of visitors per day was 24,400, for a 27% increase since 2017. Of the total number of tourist entries, 353,800 were via air, representing an increase of 13% when compared to April 2017 and an increase of 54% in comparison to April 2016. An additional 54,700 tourists arrived via Israel's land crossings, for a 17% increase since 2017 and a 91% increase since 2016.

Between January- April 2018, approximately 1.36 million tourist entries were recorded, representing a 25% increase when compared to the same period last year. Revenue from tourism in April reached approximately NIS 2.166 billion.

Tourism Minister Yariv Levin (Likid) said, "We end yet another month with a continuous increase in incoming tourism and we continue forward with this upward trend. This is the result of intensive marketing activities and we witnessed an example of this just a few days ago when we hosted the events in Israel surrounding the Giro d'Italia."

Chuck Robbins, "We ran a huge marketing blitz in the target countries and we estimate that, to date, over half a billion people around the world in different countries have been exposed to the ministry's campaign within the context of the Giro."

LEG BONE TURNS INTO NEW JAW FOR 18-YEAR-OLD BOY AT TIBERIAS HOSPITAL (JPost, 5/1/18)

An 18-year-old's upper jaw was reconstructed using a bone and blood vessels from his leg, after the jaw was destroyed by a severe infection.

The life of Alkish Nijad from Bukata changed drastically as a result of the destruction by infection of his jaw. After five years of suffering, surgery and various treatments, he arrived at Poriya Hospital's oral and maxillofacial surgery department, headed by Dr. Imad Abu El-Naaj.

There, a specialist in plastic surgery and microsurgery, Dr. Amin Abu Jabel, decided to perform the operation, reconstructing the missing part of the upper jaw and connecting the blood vessels from his leg to those in his neck.

For 12 hours, a multi-disciplinary team of about 30 medical staffers examined

the young man.

"During this operation, we took the bone marrow with the blood vessels and turned it into the shape of the jaw," Abu El-Naaj explained. "Then we performed a complex reconstruction and under a microscope connected the bone and blood vessels that feed it."

The doctor added that the case was very unusual. Now the patient will undergo rehabilitation and have a normal, completely different quality of life. Two weeks after the surgery, Nijad said that he felt much better, and the doctors announced that he could be discharged.

"I'm glad the surgery was successful," the boy said. "I've been through hard years with a lot of pain, I'm glad it's all over." Abu El-Naaj said that Poriya has established a regional center in this field, providing an answer to all the modern problems requiring head and neck reconstructive surgery.

ISRAELI WARNING LEADS HAWAII TO BAN SUNSCREEN INGREDIENT (Israel 21c 5/7/18)

On May 4, the Hawaii state legislature passed a ban on sunscreen ingredient oxybenzone (BP3) after a team of researchers from Israel and the United States provided significant evidence that BP3 has caused coral bleaching at sites in Hawaii as well as in Eilat and the Caribbean.

Under the new legislation, which takes effect in 2021 once signed by Governor Dave Ige, sunscreens containing this chemical will be banned since only a drop of the substance can contribute to coral bleaching.

The European Union attempted a similar ban and may now gain traction since the Hawaii bill passed. BP-3 is used in more than 3,500 personal-care products sold around the world to protect against the damaging effects of ultraviolet light.

The Israeli-American findings, originally published in October 2015 in the Archives of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology and reported by ISRAEL21c, indicate that oxybenzone coming from swimmers' skin, municipal sewage discharge and coastal septic systems pollutes coral reefs.

"We found that oxybenzone caused gross morphological deformities, DNA damage and endocrine disruption, which causes the coral to close up and die," explained Prof. Ariel Kushmaro of the Environmental Biotechnology Lab in Ben-Gurion University of the Negev's Avram and Stella Goldstein-Goren Department of Biotechnology Engineering.

"We are pleased to see our research will have a measurable impact on saving shrinking coral reef communities under siege from chemicals, waste runoff and climate change," Kushmaro added.

As much as 14,000 tons of sunscreen lotion are emitted into coral reef areas annually, much of which contains between one and 10 percent oxybenzone. The authors estimate that this year at least 10 percent of global reefs are at risk of high exposure, based on reef distribution in coastal tourist areas.

Corals in danger

According to the study, oxybenzone was observed in seawater within coral reefs in Hawaii and the US Virgin Islands in concentrations as low as 62 parts per trillion, the equivalent of a drop of water in six-and-a-half Olympic-sized swimming pools, and as high as 800 parts per trillion to 1.4 parts per million – more than 12 times higher than the concentrations necessary to adversely impact coral.

The study found that oxybenzone is a photo-toxicant with adverse impacts exacerbated in light. But even in darkness, planulae (larval coral) were transformed from a mobile state to a deformed, immobile condition and exhibited an increasing rate of coral bleaching in response to increasing oxybenzone concentrations.

The scientists say this is particularly relevant for areas facing mass bleaching events, including Hawaii and the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat.

"In Israel, there is widespread use of sunscreens utilizing chemicals from the benzophenone group," said Kushmaro.

"According to measurements not included in the study, similar concentrations of benzophenone have been found near the coral reefs in Eilat. Since it is

likely that these chemicals are being washed off of swimmers' bodies, it stands to reason that concentrations would be higher in swimming and snorkeling areas, such as the coral reef reserve in Eilat."

UN SECURITY COUNCIL GIVES ABBAS A PASS (Daniel S. Mariaschin, Times of Israel 5/8/18)

Mahmoud Abbas, he of Holocaust denial fame, was saved by the bell last week, when Kuwait, a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, prevented a US-sponsored condemnatory statement of the Palestinian leader for his anti-Semitic comments from moving forward.

Kuwait cited an apology by Abbas as mitigating any action against the president of the Palestinian Authority. It also called the measure "one-sided," which, given the anti-Semitic tropes put forward by Abbas in a "history lesson" speech in Ramallah, it certainly was — against Jews.

The Security Council statement, introduced by US Ambassador Nikki Haley, called out Abbas for "vile anti-Semitic slurs and baseless conspiracy theories, and do not serve the interests of the Palestinian people or peace in the Middle East."

Given Abbas' history of Holocaust denial and minimization, his remarks came as less a surprise than a confirmation that his views about history's worst crimes have not changed. He said very clearly that Jews had brought the Holocaust on themselves. He then leavened his remarks with other charges that have increasingly been a part of his public utterances, including Israel being a "colonialist" enterprise, and that Ashkenazi Jews are interlopers, and not real Jews.

To be sure, Abbas' comments, when they became known, were roundly criticized. Britain's top foreign office official called them "deeply disturbing," while Germany's new foreign minister issued a strong statement, calling Abbas' "anti-Semitic remarks" unacceptable; the new UNESCO secretary general termed "all forms of anti-Semitism, including Holocaust denial and relativization unacceptable." Even the New York Times Editorial Board, which in the past had promoted Abbas as a worthy partner for peace, said that "by succumbing to such dark, corrosive instincts, he showed that it is time for him to leave office."

Which brings us back to the stymied effort to adopt a Security Council statement. Kuwait cited Abbas' May 3rd "apology" as the principal reason for tossing the US effort aside. As a statement of contrition, the apology was rather boilerplate: "If people were offended," said Abbas, "especially people of the Jewish faith, I apologize to them." He pledged "full respect for the Jewish faith and other monotheistic faiths."

The Abbas apology had the look and feel of a quickly-done throw-away that could have come from a damage control team at a public relations firm. For 50 years, he has been dismissing the Jewish people's connection to its historic homeland, encouraging his minions to utilize the United Nations and its agencies to erase Jewish history (next up: the Dead Sea Scrolls, whose ownership will be challenged at the World Heritage Committee next month); allowing Palestinian schools to inculcate raw hatred against Jews; and minimizing the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust. Indeed, his now well-publicized doctoral dissertation on the subject seems to have been nothing but a warm-up for his most recent barrage of offensive comments.

For decades, many of the same folks who finally saw fit to criticize Abbas were mum on years of anti-Jewish incitement from the official Palestinian camp. It was either written off as just rhetoric for home consumption, or ignored altogether. Abbas is not the first Palestinian leader to engage in this kind of language; Yasser Arafat, his predecessor and mentor at the Palestine Liberation Organization, was a full-time peddler of revisionist history and inflammatory rhetoric.

But Abbas has repeatedly been presented as the last, best hope for peace and a partner on the way to a two-state solution. Over the decades, as each attempt at effectuating an agreement fell by the side of the road, international opprobrium has largely been heaped on Israel. Like Arafat, who is said to

have told US President Bill Clinton that the Jews have no connection to the Temple Mount, Abbas has for years made the same kinds of outrageous comments, which have repeatedly fallen on deaf ears in the international community, and been left off the hook.

If you deny the Holocaust, or say Jews brought it on themselves because of their "social behavior;" if you allow children to be taught that Jews are hiding behind rocks and trees waiting to kill Palestinians; if you write Jews out of their own history because you say your narrative in the region is the only one that counts; and if, after being caught in public saying all of this for the umpteenth time, you then "apologize" to those who might be offended, then what kind of partner for peace can you be?

Shame on the other members of the Security Council for trying to wish this all away by accepting Abbas' hollow apology. The statement introduced by Haley called for a "firm and unequivocal rejection of anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial," and demanded that Abbas "refrain from anti-Semitic comments." Why would one now believe this apology after a lifetime of engaging in this type of rhetoric? The only difference is, this time he got caught. The Security Council should not have let him off the hook. Was that too much to ask?

MESSAGE TO TEHRAN: AN UNUSUAL IDF ORDER AND A 'PREVENTIVE STRIKE' (Ron Ben-Yishai, YNet 5/9/18)

The Syrian report that Israel attacked a base near Damascus used by Iranian militias on Tuesday night leads to the conclusion that Tehran has been constantly trying over the past few days to launch missiles or rockets at a target in Israel.

Furthermore, there is concern the Iranians may try to attack targets on the ground through their militias, and even communities in the Golan Heights. Israel is thwarting these intentions both through the media and, according to reports, through preventive strikes. We can also assume that the targets of the strike were missile depots and missile launchers, which the Iranians took out of hiding and were planning to use. Israel spotted the activity—and attacked.

Earlier Tuesday evening, the IDF issued an unusual order to open bomb shelters in the Golan Heights due to "abnormal movements" spotted among the Iranian forces in Syria.

It's quite possible that the purpose of the public order, which was unusual by any standard, was to make it clear to the moderate camp in Iran, led by President Hassan Rouhani, that the Revolutionary Guards are adopting a policy that could harm Iran at this time.

After all, Iran needs every bit of sympathy and aid in Europe and Russia, and offensive actions against Israel could worsen its situation in the international arena and reinforce US President Donald Trump's claims. The Iranian forces and the militias operating on its behalf in Syria are relatively weak and unable to cause real damage in Israel. Hezbollah won't operate from Lebanon because the Iranians are interested in keeping the Shiite organization as a strategic arm in case Israel attacks their nuclear facilities.

It's reasonable to assume, therefore, that Qassem Suleimani, the Revolutionary Guards' strongman and head of the Quds Force, won't issue an order to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah to activate his huge missile arsenal simply for the sake of revenge.

In any event, the IDF has taken every required measure, including advancing missile-interception batteries and unmanned aircraft, to thwart any attempt made by the Revolutionary Guards to target Israeli territory. IDF officials are saying that Israel's response to any Iranian attack will be extremely harsh, but are hoping there will be no need for such a response. The IDF's announcement on the security measures it is taking should deter the Iranians from making a move that would escalate the situation and harm the Syrian regime as well, and this is something Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made clear to Russian President Vladimir Putin in their meeting in Moscow on Wednesday morning.