

ISRAEL REPORT

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IDF STRIKES 'HAMAS VEHICLE USED BY FLAMING KITE LAUNCHERS'; 12 ROCKETS FIRED FROM GAZA (Ha'aretz 6/27/18)

Yet another flare-up between the Israeli army and Hamas militants in Gaza played out overnight on Wednesday, as the IDF struck the car of a Hamas operative said to be involved in the launching of flaming kites into Israel.

The Israeli military confirmed twelve rocket launches toward Israel from Gaza over the course of the night, adding that three projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system. No information is currently available on the other nine rockets.

Multiple rocket sirens began sounded in southern Israeli communities near the Gaza border starting at around 1.30 A.M. on Wednesday, with sixteen alarm sirens sounding in communities such as in Shaar Hanegev, Hof Ashkelon, Eshkol Regional Council, as well as Sdot Negev and Sderot.

The IDF spokesperson said the army targeted two Hamas positions in Gaza using both aircraft and tank fire, adding that a fighter jet also struck a car in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

"At the same time, the Hamas terror organization was carrying out a ballistic attack against Israel. The organization will bear the consequences of terrorism and instability," the statement read.

Last week, some 45 rockets were fired from Gaza toward Israel overnight on Tuesday after the Israeli military struck Hamas infrastructure in the Strip in response to burning balloons being launched from the enclave into Israel.

CHIEF OF STAFF: IDF WELL PREPARED FOR WAR (YNet 6/27/18)

After the IDF ombudsman warned of failures in the army's preparedness for war Monday, IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Gadi Eisenkot responded that the IDF was well prepared.

"I visit training sessions and see the operational activity proving that the IDF has high abilities and good preparedness, along with the duty to locate weaknesses and failures and work vigorously to fix them," Eisenkot said Monday evening at a tribute to the reserve forces at the Knesset. "I am very proud of the command ranks, which has scored noteworthy achievements.

"As part of the five-year Gideon efficiency plan, we have made a significant step in securing the IDF's preparedness for war. We have built an advanced service model implementing the government's decision to shorten the service, develop the commanders and non-commissioned officers and utilize the human capital to the fullest."

According to the IDF chief, "We are in the midst of a complicated period in terms of security, filled with challenges from the north and from the south, and we must remember that the IDF's strength depends on people, spirit, equipment, skills and unity. We will keep reinforcing them through actions expressing their supreme importance, while showing respect for the dedication and loyalty of the reserve forces serving the State of Israel."

Eisenkot noted that "the reserve forces' training and skills increased significantly in 2017. This year, we doubled the number of reserve forces participating in operational occupation, to allow the IDF's tip of the spear forces to increase the training to 50 percent of their time.

"The IDF units on the ground, in the air and in the sea are operating around the clock and tested on a daily basis in thwarting terror in Judea and Samaria, in protecting the state's borders in the south and in the north and in continuous offensive activity to thwart advanced abilities and reduce the threats to the state."

The IDF ombudsman warned on Monday that a new gloomy annual report which he has produced points to a plethora of shortcomings in the military's

operational capabilities, casts doubt on its readiness for a conflict in the south and highlights the subpar standards in the quality among senior military staff. General (res.) Yitzhak Brik published what will be his final annual report as IDF and Defense Ministry ombudsman having occupied the post for a decade. "If I read you these reports, you would fall over," Brik said of the report whose content is not made available to the public.

The report is rife with pessimistic conclusions and highlights a series of failures in the IDF apparatus that he says could come to the fore in the IDF's levels of preparation during the next war.

According to Brik, concerning discrepancies exist between the public declarations and bravado about the IDF's capabilities and the realities on the ground. "There are documents that back up my claims and not only direct statements from senior officers and officers in the field," he explained.

"There is a lack of regular military monitoring of military processes, disciplinary problems and a failure to fulfil orders. Take as an example the fact that two billion shekels were invested in emergency storage units after the Second Lebanon War, but the project was abandoned," Brik said.

ISRAEL SEIZES HAMAS FUNDS GIVEN TO TERRORIST'S FAMILY IN EAST JERUSALEM (JPost 6/27/18)

Police and the Shin Bet raided the home of a terrorist's family that received funds and support from Hamas, police said on Wednesday, after a joint operation conducted in the morning.

The raid was the result of a covert operation in which police and intelligence units gathered information regarding money that they say Hamas gave to the family of Hisham Hussein Abu Dhaim, who carried out the deadly terrorist attack on the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem in 2008, in which eight students were murdered.

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During Wednesday's operation, police units searched the home of the terrorist's family in east Jerusalem and seized NIS 43,000 in cash and money in foreign currencies.

The raid was carried out as part of a wider operation to prevent funds from Hamas making their way into the hands of the families of terrorists who have murdered Israelis, police said.

In 2017, police and the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) seized over NIS 300,000 from the families of seven different terrorists.

"The involvement of Jerusalem residents in any form of activity financed by Hamas is a serious offense and constitutes an attempt to gain a foothold inside Jerusalem," the police said in a statement, stressing that the police would not permit any type of support by a terrorist organization to families of terrorists who carried out murderous attacks.

DEVELOPERS OF TERROR TUNNEL DETECTION SYSTEM WIN ISRAEL DEFENSE PRIZE (Israel Hayom 6/28/18)

The military team responsible for developing the breakthrough technology used to detect and destroy terror tunnels under Israel's borders was awarded the 2018 Israel Defense Prize on Tuesday.

This award is the defense establishment's highest honor. Created in 1958, it recognizes projects that have made significant operational and technological contributions to national security and the defense of the State of Israel.

The counter-tunnel technology project is a joint venture by the Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure at the Defense Ministry, GOC Army Headquarters, Elbit Systems and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, credited with revolutionizing the way Israel is dealing with the threat posed by Hamas' grid of terror tunnels.

Two other teams heading clandestine intelligence projects were also awarded the prize, for their contribution to thwarting hundreds of terrorist attacks and other threats to national security.

These teams comprised personnel from Military Intelligence, the Central Command's Intelligence Unit, the C4I Corps' Software Development Division, the Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure at the Defense Ministry, and Israel Aerospace Industries' MLM Division, which develops integrated combat systems.

President Reuven Rivlin, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot and Director General of the Defense Ministry Maj. Gen. (res.) Udi Adam, presented the teams with the awards in a ceremony hosted at the President's Residence in Jerusalem.

"In presenting you with this prize, the defense establishment expresses its strong belief in the superiority of the human factor," Rivlin said.

"The systems and teams selected for this year's prestigious award are living testament to the tremendous changes that have taken place with respect to the security challenges facing Israel.

"In recent years, we have been dealing with the various new threats, chief among them the Iranian threat, which is both near and far and requires us to maximize the capabilities. But at the same time, new battlefields are formed – terrorism, cyber, underground warfare and the challenge of managing the daily friction with the Palestinian population," he continued.

"These complex threats, all together and individually, have reshaped the threat map. Faced with these challenges, our excellent defense establishment is quick to learn and adapt. We have updated our combat doctrine, revised our operational objectives, redefined our troops' deployment and, above all, we have developed excellent systems that allow us to defend ourselves optimally."

Lieberman lauded the winners for "dramatically changing security realities in Israel. The tunnel detection project is based on cutting-edge technology that is first of its kind in the world, something bordering on science fiction. Thanks to the brilliant minds here we have stripped Hamas of its strategic weapon, in which it invested hundreds of millions of dollars.

"The system that has been able to thwart hundreds of terrorist attacks is

equally amazing and it is safe to say that many Israelis owe you their lives," he told the winners.

SECRET MEETING HELD BETWEEN INTEL CHIEFS (Arutz-7 6/28/18)

Beneath the surface, relations between Israel and moderate Arab countries are growing, but a significant expression of this was given ten days ago at a secret meeting of heads of intelligence agencies from all over the region.

The conference was initiated by senior adviser and son-in-law of US President Donald Trump, Jared Kushner, and Middle East special envoy Jason Greenblatt.

The conference was attended by Jordanian General Intelligence chief Adnan al-Issam al-Jundi, General Abbas Kamel, head of the Egyptian Mukhabarat, Khaled bin Ali al-Humaidan, head of the Saudi intelligence agency, and Mossad chief Yossi Cohen. On the explicit request of the American emissaries and despite the PA's boycott of the United States, PA intel chief Majed Faraj also joined the meeting.

Faraj also met with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo two months ago for a conversation that dealt mainly with the situation in the Palestinian Authority on the day after Abbas leaves office.

FIRST-EVER FEMALE TANK COMMANDERS MAKE IDF HISTORY (JPost 6/28/18)

For the first time in IDF history, four female soldiers, including a new immigrant from England, have become tank commanders after a 16-month pilot program and will be deployed to the Egyptian border with Division 80, the military announced on Thursday.

"There has never been such an experience in the IDF," said chief armored officer Brig.-Gen Guy Hasson, adding that the four female tank commanders are "four amazing and determined women."

"We understand the potential in the operational value of both the Border Defense Forces and the Armored Corps," Hasson said, stressing that "there is potential here for girls who really want to work for the defense of the state."

The pilot program began with 15 female recruits beginning basic training in southern Israel, with two recruits dropping out just after two weeks. The 13 remaining recruits then moved to Shizafon where they were divided into three squads headed by a senior tank commander, completing their tank training on the Merkava Mark-3 model, which they would be operating.

This part of the program was designed to test the recruits' ability to perform routine border security, differentiating them from their male counterparts who also train for all-out war exercises. Throughout the training, the recruits were monitored by army nutritionists, doctors and exercise instructors.

In December, the recruits finished their training and were applauded by the head of the corps' training brigade Col. Moran Omer during a ceremony at the Armored Corps monument in Latrun, outside Jerusalem.

"We're standing before a bit of history. For the first time, a tank operator medal will be pinned on the uniform of female IDF soldiers," he said.

"You stood up to the difficult physical challenges, learned the profession and, no less importantly, you learned to love the power of metal," he said.

"We demanded you complete the full and long training program... after you were fully trained as fighters in the Border Defense Force – no simple mission in itself – and you did so successfully."

One of the first female tank commanders, 20 year-old Sgt. Charlotte Feld-Davidovici made aliya to Israel from England two years ago.

"Becoming one of the first female tank commanders in the IDF means not only do I get to fulfill my role of defending the country, but I also get the opportunity to bring women forward in combat and open up chances for them to defend their country just like their male counterparts," she said.

When the IDF announced that it was considering having women serve in the armored corps, several former high-ranking officers and religious groups come out against it, including former IDF chief rabbi Yisrael Weiss.

Weiss argued said that if a male and female soldier are put "into a closed box

for a week... you'll get a little tank soldier in another nine months."

The IDF responded to the criticism stating that even if the pilot program is deemed successful, there would be no mixed-gender tank crews and female tank crews will not be part of battalions which would operate in enemy territory. Rather, they would only be deployed to the borders.

Hasson confirmed that there will be no mixed tanks. Every tank under female command will have only female fighters.

"It's a first-of-its-kind role for women and opens a door for women for a new roles," said 20-year-old Noga Shina, another graduate of the course. "People around me think this is a very positive opportunity because this is the first job of its kind and I get to be a pioneer and to be one of the first women in the Armored Corps."

According to Hasson, if they are required to engage an Islamic State group terrorist squad attempting to infiltrate from Sinai, they will be able to do so.

While an additional three recruits dropped out during their tank training, the other 10 finished and will serve as combat soldiers in the IDF's Caracal Battalion.

Hasson explained that the reason for the recruits dropping out of the trial was similar to male recruits, with two dropping out due to medical issues not related to the program, two did not meet the requirements and one due to motivation.

"We didn't give in to them by an inch and we didn't compromise. It can be said for them that they did it like real fighters," he said, adding that while they have not yet been involved in any operations, they have partaken in various operational activities like their male counterparts.

EXAMS EASED FOR GAZA-AREA RESIDENTS (Arutz-7 6/28/18)

Education Minister Naftali Bennett today instructed his Ministry to grant a half-hour extension to all students in the Gaza area for their matriculation exams following a series of incidents in southern Israel in recent weeks.

Minister Bennett explained his decision, saying "the tense security situation in the south has an adverse effect on the students. The lack of sleep, stress, and anxiety make it difficult for them to concentrate on their studies. We'll continue to strengthen the residents of the south and give them full backing."

Following the decision, approximately 2,300 high school students from schools within a distance of 0 to 7 kilometers from Gaza will receive a half hour extension matriculation examinations taking place this coming July.

ISRAEL APPROVES SOLAR FIELD TO INCREASE POWER SUPPLY TO GAZA (YNet 6/27/18)

Israel has approved a plan to build a solar field on Israeli territory to ease the electricity crisis in the Gaza Strip. The construction of the facility at the Erez Crossing will be funded by private Israeli and foreign elements.

Israeli officials stress that this is a one-sided humanitarian move which is not part of an agreement with Hamas.

The field's construction, and further ideas to improve the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, were discussed in meetings held this week by US President Donald Trump's envoys to the Middle East, Jason Greenblatt and Jared Kushner. The two met with leaders in the Gulf states, Jordan and Egypt, and held two long meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the weekend.

Another idea aimed at easing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was discussed in meetings between Netanyahu and representatives of the defense establishment: Bringing some 6,000 laborers from Gaza to work in the Gaza vicinity. The idea has been rejected so far at the recommendation of the Shin Bet, citing a serious security threat.

Shin Bet officials believe that a mass entry of several thousand laborers from Gaza into Israel would serve Hamas' intelligence collection system and would be used to smuggle funds for terrorist activity within and outside the strip.

According to state officials, the idea to build a solar field that would provide electricity to Gaza was raised by Israel in the beginning of 2018 at an

international conference on the strip's reconstruction held in Washington. The original idea was to build the solar fields on Egyptian territory, but the Egyptians made it clear that as long as Gaza wasn't ruled by the Palestinian Authority, they would not allow construction on their territory.

The American administration and the Egyptians agreed that the amount of electricity pumped into the Gaza Strip would be doubled. Today Egypt supplies the strip of 27 megawatt of electricity, and it has agreed to increase the amount to 55 megawatts. In recent weeks, however, the Egyptians completely halted the power supply to the strip, after they said power lines in northern Sinai were vandalized by ISIS operatives.

The Egyptians have also agreed with the Americans to increase the transfer of goods from Sinai to the strip, going around the PA. The goods would be transferred through the Salah al-Din Crossing near the Rafah Crossing, which is directly controlled by Hamas. The Egyptians plan on doubling the Egyptian army's cement factories to increase the supply of cement to the strip. The Egyptians are also planning—in coordination with the Americans—to increase the amounts of fuel and food transferred into the strip.

Since Egypt opened the Rafah Crossing to the strip's residents in mid May, some 35,000 people have left and entered Gaza through the crossing, easing the sense of a siege in the strip. Meanwhile, Egypt has decided to extend the opening of the crossing by two more months from the end of the month of Ramadan.

A Cypriot government spokesman confirmed on Tuesday that Israel had asked Cyprus to examine the possibility of establishing a shipping point on the island for sending goods to the Gaza Strip. This move also points to the efforts made by Israel and other countries in the region to ease the humanitarian crisis in the strip.

CHIEF RABBINATE PARTLY BACKS KASHRUT REFORMS AHEAD OF HIGH COURT DEADLINE (JPost 6/28/18)

The Chief Rabbinate has endorsed in theory a new model of kashrut supervision whereby kashrut supervisors will no longer be employed by restaurant and business owners, but by manpower companies.

It failed, however, to fully adopt a comprehensive reform proposal, due to internal opposition, and will be extremely hard pressed to implement the new model it did adopt by the time a High Court deadline passes in September.

Disconnecting the kashrut supervisor-business relationship was one of the critical demands made by the High Court of Justice in May last year, and it set the Chief Rabbinate a deadline for the end of June 2018 to propose a model whereby the supervisor is not employed by the business owner, and September 2018 for its implementation.

The reality in which kashrut supervisors in the Chief Rabbinate's kashrut supervision service are directly employed by the restaurants and businesses they supervise has been flagged by several State Comptroller reports and the High Court as a prime cause of corruption in the system.

A special committee of the Chief Rabbinate has been drafting comprehensive reforms for its kashrut supervision service ever since the High Court issued its deadline, and on Monday, owing to the pressure of the High Court's deadline, the Council of the Chief Rabbinate approved only a small section of the reform pertaining to overturning the kashrut supervisor-business owner relationship. It did not, however, adopt the wider reform proposals, as several rabbis on the council declined to support it.

In addition, the council's decision on Monday included a large caveat, since the Chief Rabbinate would much prefer that kashrut supervisors be employed by local religious councils, the public bodies that run religious services in municipal jurisdictions, and not by manpower companies.

The Finance Ministry is, however, opposed to this idea, since it would add several thousand people to the public payroll who would also need to be given state benefits, which would be highly expensive for the public purse.

The decision taken by the council stated therefore that a tender would be published shortly for manpower companies to take over the employment of

kashrut supervisors, but that the Chief Rabbinate would continue efforts to convince the ministry to have them employed by the local religious councils. Should those efforts succeed, the proposal for using manpower companies and the tenders will be scrapped.

One serious obstacle to the implementation reform adopted on Monday is that the full version of the kashrut reforms proposed by the special committee states explicitly that legislation will need to be approved in order to enforce the employment of supervisors through the manpower companies.

However, with the Knesset summer session set to end on July 19 and reconvene in October, there is no way that such legislation can be drafted and approved before the High Court's September deadline.

A spokesman for the Chief Rabbinate conceded that it is likely that a request for an extension from the High Court would be sought.

The reason that the council voted on Tuesday for the supervisor-business reform was likely to show the High Court that there is at least a plan, although the failure to adopt the comprehensive set of reforms and the caveat regarding employment of supervisors through a manpower company may not be viewed favorably by the court.

The Ne'emanai Torah Va'Avodah organization, which has proposed opening up the kashrut market to competition, said that as long as the rabbinate does not do so, the root problems of its kashrut supervision system will not be fixed. "We call on the religious services minister and the Chief Rabbinate to adopt the principles of our kashrut model, which is based on giving licenses to kashrut corporations and turning the rabbinate into a regulator," the organization said in a statement to the press. "Complete this process and advance competition that will improve the quality of kashrut for kashrut consumers in Israel and for the good of the institution of kashrut."

EL AL FACES SCRUTINY AFTER MOVING FEMALE PASSENGERS (Israel Hayom 6/25/18)

Israeli airline El Al is facing new allegations of discrimination after moving two female passengers under pressure from four male ultra-Orthodox travelers who refused to sit next to women.

In 2016, a similar case of discrimination was filed against the Israeli flag carrier by a female passenger. Israel's Supreme Court ruled that asking passengers to move their seat based on gender is a form of discrimination.

The most recent incident occurred on a New York to Tel Aviv flight last week. The flight was delayed by an hour until the women were forced to move.

Chen Rotem, a passenger on the flight, took to Facebook writing that the crew tried to reason with them, but as they were also women, the four haredi men would not speak to them. "The crew tried to resolve the issue but they [the haredi men] wouldn't even look at them," he wrote.

"All the men in the crew, except for the captain, are now dealing exclusively with this issue instead of preparing for takeoff. One of the crew members told them, 'If you don't sit down, you can get off the plane right now,' but they didn't even blink. After a lot of yelling and maneuvering an elderly American woman and a young Israeli woman agreed to switch seats, allowing the flight to finally take off," he wrote.

One of the men was "particularly devout – he boarded the plane with his eyes closed tightly, led by his friend, and stayed that way the entire flight," Rotem said, adding that other Orthodox men on the flight expressed "shock and revulsion" at the haredim's conduct.

The post went viral, sparking calls for a class action suit against El Al, as well as a consumer boycott. El Al apologized for the incident but said the plane was not held up as long as reported. "The flight left 18 minutes late and not as claimed," said Anat Friedman, a spokeswoman for El Al.

El Al added in a statement, "Any discrimination by passengers is strictly prohibited. El Al crew members spare no effort to provide good and courteous service to a wide range of passengers and to try to assist them, in order to take off on time and to bring passengers to their destination with the utmost security and comfort."

The Israel Religious Action Center, a progressive group that led last year's lawsuit, accused the airline of breaking its commitments and said the female passengers who were forced to move can sue the airline.

BENNETT'S DISSERVICE TO GAZA BORDER RESIDENTS (Nahum Barnea, YNet 6/25/18)

Forty-five rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip at the Gaza border kibbutzim on Tuesday night. As there were no injuries—miraculously, there was only a lot of property damage—the IDF interpreted the rocket fire as part of the ongoing exchange between Israel and Hamas.

The dispute is over the cost—the price Gaza should pay for burned fields or a destroyed border fence, and the price Israel should pay for killed jihadist and for rioters shot on the fence.

In a Turkish bazaar, the seller tells the buyer: You set the price. No, the buyer tells the seller, you set the price. In the Gaza bazaar, each side wants to determine the last price.

This is a controlled war. The question of what shouldn't be done is as important as the question of what should be done. Hamas made sure to launch its rockets at communities adjacent to the fence, and only at dawn. It could have launched rockets at Netivot, Ofakim, Be'er Sheva and Rishon Lezion, but it preferred to hold its fire there.

The IDF made sure to attack abandoned Hamas posts. The government compound in the hear of Gaza, the symbol of Hamas' rule, wasn't attacked. No targeted assassinations were carried out.

Israel believes Hamas isn't interested in a war. It contains a huge risk and no profit. Hamas believes Israel isn't interested in war. It's busy with the Syrian front, with building the obstacle in the Gaza vicinity, and is afraid of ruining the World Cup for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

But both sides are subject to internal pressure: Hamas doesn't want to be seen as a collaborator; the Israeli politicians don't want to be seen as helpless. The kites are negatively affecting their personal dignity. As a result of this internal pressure, the IDF started shooting incendiary balloon and kite launchers. As far as Hamas was concerned, it was a one-sided change of the cost. It responded accordingly.

Instead of holding a serious cabinet discussion on diplomatic, economic and military moves to change the reality in Gaza, the ministers flexed their muscles in front of the microphones. Education Minister Naftali Bennett went as far as suggesting that the IDF shoot every child flying a kite. Children's funerals in Gaza, he believes, will bring peace to the Gaza vicinity communities.

In honor of Bennett's concern for the Gaza vicinity's residents, I went back to Krylov's Fables. Krylov has a few fables which Bennett can be likened to. One of them tells the story of a hermit and a bear who became friends. One day, the two went for a walk in the woods. The man got tired. "Lie down, rest," the bear said to him. "I will guard you from all enemies."

And then the drama began. The bear took to driving flies away from his friend's face, but one of the flies kept returning to attack the hermit's nose. "Now I shall have you, most definitely," said the bear, grabbing a stone and giving the man a violent blow on the face. He successfully hit his target, leaving his friend to lie there forever.

