

# 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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## SYRIA BOLSTERING ANTI-AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS ON ITS BORDER WITH ISRAEL (Israel Hayom 6/13/18)

The Syrian army is bolstering its anti-air defenses along the border with Israel, a commander serving in the military alliance supporting the Bashar Assad regime said on Tuesday.

According to the Walla news website, the source said additional anti-aircraft batteries will be deployed on the Syrian Golan Heights in the coming days.

The commander, who is not a Syrian national, added that using the Russian-made Pantsir missile system would bolster anti-aircraft fortifications against Israeli warplanes.

For the past several weeks, the Assad regime has been preparing for an offensive in the Quneitra and Daraa districts in southwest Syria, near the borders with Jordan and Israel, where insurgents still hold the remaining vestiges of rebel territory in the war-torn country.

The area is part of the "de-escalation zone" delineated by the United States and Russia last year. Washington has threatened to respond harshly if Assad's military launches an attack in the area.

According to the Assad-allied commander, the preparations for the offensive have been completed, but the regime's forces are presently focusing on repelling Islamic State fighters from the government-controlled enclave near the city of Suwayda, also in the southwest.

## ISRAEL HOLDS JOINT EXERCISE WITH GREECE (YNet 6/11/18)

The Israeli and the Greek air forces conducted a joint drill as part of the wide-scale Air Force exercise that concluded last week.

The drill included long-haul flights, dozens of planes training in unknown territories, and a simulated attack of a missile battery. The two air forces also practiced aerial refueling, while air crews shared knowledge.

Hundreds of fighter jets, helicopters and aircraft carriers took part in the exercise, which included day and night flights.

Israel sent 40 fighter jets from 10 different squadrons, refueling and cargo aircraft, and dozens of air crews to Greece for the drill. The training was conducted entirely in the air, without landing.

The exercise was planned as part of the IDF's 2018 training schedule with the objective of improving forces' battle fitness and preparedness.

"We're talking about a training exercise that takes us far away from home to an unknown territory, to carry out a precise and defined mission in very challenging conditions," said Lt. Col. R., commander of the 105th Squadron.

"The drill was successful due to our initial capabilities and our detailed planning and preparations. Our ability to take the tools we have available and go really far to carry out a mission and then go back is an ability we are ready to implement at any moment, whenever necessary."

The exercise, which lasted five days, simulated fighting on both the northern and the southern borders to improve the IAF's ability to cope with a scenario that involves combat on several fronts simultaneously.

During the drill, dozens of fighter jets practiced an attack on hundreds of targets in the Gaza Strip during a very short timeframe.

## SHIN BET CHIEF REVEALS ISRAEL HAS PREVENTED 250 TERROR ATTACKS IN 2018 (JPost 6/13/18)

Using traditional and new big-data abilities, the Shin Bet has prevented 250 terrorist attacks so far in 2018, director Nadav Argaman told a group of visiting interior security ministers Wednesday at a closed session of a Jerusalem international conference on terrorism.

Argaman said that the agency had succeeded in blocking major terrorist attacks involving suicide bombings, kidnappings and shootings.

One of the flagship issues was to stay ahead of the curve when using technology to fight terrorism. He previously disclosed that under his leadership, the Shin Bet's technological workforce has jumped from single digits to representing around one-quarter of the work force.

Argaman also emphasized the importance of "strategic cooperation with our international partners in Israel and overseas as well as with the Israeli hi-tech community and other civilian bodies."

In December, Argaman told the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that the agency had thwarted over 400 terrorist attacks in 2017, including 13 suicide attacks and eight kidnappings, as well as 1,100 potential lone-wolf attacks. He further noted at that time that in 2017, 54 attacks were successfully carried out, in comparison with 108 successful attacks in 2016.

The major improvement was seen in the 400 potential lone-wolf attacks prevented in 2016, compared to 1,100 such potential attacks in 2017.

Those numbers, however, are the subject of much debate.

Law enforcement and intelligence officials in several countries have told the Post that while Israel is a pioneer in discerning and stopping potential lone-wolf attackers before they launch an attack, the line between busting people for social media posts that are free speech and those that are dangerous incitement is a fine one. Some view the category of "potential attacker" as being too amorphous. Sometimes the Shin Bet thwarts potential attackers by arresting them, but sometimes it counters them on social media or has a serious sit-down talk and merely issues a warning.

## DEFENSE MINISTER UNVEILS STRATEGY TO COMBAT HAREDI DRAFT DODGING (Israel Hayom 6/12/18)

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman on Monday unveiled recommendations

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for "a realistic and relevant arrangement" that would form the basis of a bill to formalize the drafting of ultra-Orthodox men in the Israel Defense Forces.

The recommendations were formulated by a committee of senior military and defense officials. This marks the first time the IDF has outlined its own needs on haredi recruitment objectives.

The issue of mandatory military service for the ultra-Orthodox has been a thorn in the side of Israeli politics for years. Many in the ultra-Orthodox community believe military service should be secondary to Torah study. However, many secular Israelis question why they are expected to shoulder the burden of defending the country without any contribution from a substantial sector of the population.

The committee set minimum annual targets for haredi conscription, with the state to impose financial penalties on haredi seminaries that do not meet the target. Many such seminaries enjoy substantial state funding.

The framework was submitted to government ministries Monday, and will be presented for a Knesset vote in three weeks.

The committee recommended setting new recruitment targets both for the IDF and for the National-Civic Service program, which offers an alternative to mandatory military service. If adopted, the target for 2018 would be just under 4,000 ultra-Orthodox recruits, to increase by 8% annually over the next three years, then by 6.5% annually in the following three years, then by 5% annually in the next four years. "The number of recruits from the ultra-Orthodox sector has increased tenfold in the last decade," the Defense Ministry said in a statement. "We should continue with the efforts to progressively increase the number of recruits to the IDF and National-Civic Service."

The committee recommended "setting new goals for the IDF and National-Civic Service draft, an annual increase in the number of those serving, significant financial sanctions on draft dodgers, and increasing benefits and remuneration for those who serve."

The recommendations come ahead of a September deadline set by the High Court of Justice for the Knesset to re-legislate a previous haredi conscription exemption law that was struck down in September 2017. The court rejected the exemption on the grounds that it undermined the principle of equality before the law.

The court suspended its ruling for one year to allow the government to come up with a new arrangement and pass a new law.

The chairman of the ultra-Orthodox party United Torah Judaism, Yakov Litzman, has warned that unless a new proposal resolving the issue of haredi conscription is enacted into law by June 22, the party will leave the coalition, likely triggering a coalition collapse and early elections.

The committee was headed by the Defense Ministry's chief legal counsel Itay Ophir, and included IDF Personnel Directorate Planning Division head Brig. Gen. Eran Shani, Military Judge Advocate General Maj. Gen. Sharon Afek, Chief Military Rabbi Brig. Gen. Eyal Karim, and the head of the Defense-Social Branch at the Defense Ministry, Moshe Tzin.

The committee's recommendations were approved by Lieberman and IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot. The Defense Ministry said it hopes to push the legislation through by the end of the Knesset's summer session.

"The principle of universal conscription is a key value that is essential for maintaining the character of the IDF as a national army," the committee wrote in its recommendations.

"The IDF needs recruits from the haredi sector, and it needs to be able to absorb them in a way that benefits the IDF while also contributing to their future integration into the workforce.

"The committee recommends expanding the administrative sanctions imposed on draft dodgers and deserters. The IDF and the National-Civic Service Administration will add service tracks adapted to the ultra-Orthodox public that will advance their integration in the workforce."

A group advocating for burden equality criticized the outline, saying that the proposals change nothing.

"Even Defense Minister Lieberman, once one of our greatest supporters, has surrendered to politics and to the desire to hold on to his seat," the Israeli Forum for Equal Rights and Obligations said in a statement.

"This proposal will not change the existing reality and it will only perpetuate the outrageous discrimination. Secular Israelis and some in the religious sector will join the IDF, while the haredim will continue to live as they please, with pay and impunity. This is another law that will not live up to the test of reality and will be struck down by the High Court of Justice."

#### **JUNE SHOWERS CAUSE FLOODING IN SDEROT, ASHKELON (YNet 6/13/18)**

Heavy showers caused flooding in the cities of Ashkelon and Sderot early Wednesday morning, with vehicles sinking in streets submerged with water.

"The drainage system has collapsed," said Danny Hazan from Sderot. "Since the early morning, the rain hasn't stopped. Everything is flooded. People were not prepared for this. Families have already opened pools in their backyard (for the summer)—all of a sudden it rains. Unbelievable."

Approximately 49 mm of rain were registered by the meteorological center in the Kibbutz Dorot near Sderot from 6am-8am. This is the height of precipitations so far in the past 24 hours.

In Ashkelon, 38 mm have been reported, with 20 millimetres of rain falling during the night in only 20 minutes.

In the Tel Aviv metropolitan area along the coast line it rained heavily as well. During the night, downpours along with thunderstorms also occurred in Western Galilee. Ma'alot and Karmiel suffered power shortages as a result of the storm.

So far, Ashkelon experienced 28 mm of rain, Bat Yam had 36 mm, northern Golan Heights (Ortal) 14 mm, Ma'alot 14 mm, Acre 14 mm, Kfar Saba 9 mm, Kibbutz Negba 9 mm, Rishol LeZion 8 mm, Netanya 8 mm, Zikhron Ya'akov 6 mm, Golan Heights Center 4 mm, Kibbutz Ginosar 2 mm, Tel Aviv and Ashdod 1 mm each.

#### **U.S. OFFICIAL EYES ISRAEL'S EGYPT BORDER FOR MEXICO WALL IDEAS (JPost 6/14/18)**

US Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen inspected Israel's fenced-off border with Egypt on Tuesday for ideas for the US border with Mexico, where President Donald Trump has pledged to build a wall, Israel Radio reported.

Trump has said the United States needs a wall along its 3,200-km (2,000-mile) southern border to prevent illegal immigrants entering from Mexico and that Mexico should pay for the project. Mexico has rejected that idea and the funding dispute has stirred US domestic dissent.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu angered Mexico last year by publicly backing Trump's call and pointing to the towering, sensor-rigged Egyptian border fence as a possible model. Trump, in turn, has admired Israel's barrier.

Nielsen confirmed her visit in remarks to an international homeland security conference in Jerusalem later in the day.

"Border security is national security. Our Israeli partners know that better than anyone and I was fortunate today to see the incredible work they're doing to keep their territory and citizens safe," she said.

A US official told Reuters: "She understood the challenges and opportunities that exist there." The US Department of Homeland Security declined comment. In a June 8 statement, it had said that while traveling in Israel this week Nielsen would "receive an operational briefing on Israeli border infrastructure technology and systems." The razor wire-lined Israeli fence, which is between 5 meters and 8 meters (15 feet and 24 feet) in height, was erected over three years along the 230-km (143-mile) frontier with Egypt's Sinai desert. It cost Israel around \$380 million.

Israel credits the fence with stemming an influx of African migrants and infiltration by Islamic State-linked militants.

In March, Trump signed a federal spending bill from Congress that contained \$1.6 billion to pay for six months of work on his wall. He had asked for \$25 billion for it.

### **NUMBER OF ISRAELIS MARRYING OUTSIDE RABBINATE RISING, EVEN AMONG ORTHODOX JEWS (Ha'aretz 6/13/18)**

A growing number of Jewish couples are choosing to wed in Israel outside the Orthodox-run Chief Rabbinate, knowing full well that their marriages will not be recognized by the state, according to a soon-to-be-published study obtained by Haaretz.

The study, conducted by Panim – the Israeli Judaism Network, found that at least 2,434 Jewish marriage ceremonies were held in Israel outside the Rabbinate's authority in 2017 – up 8 percent from the previous year.

Panim is an association of dozens of Israeli nonprofits dedicated to promoting Jewish pluralism in the country. Its study represents the first attempt to quantify the scope of this phenomenon.

No official figure exists for the number of marriages performed in Israel outside the Rabbinate, because couples who wed in such ceremonies cannot register as married with the Population Registry at the Interior Ministry. Couples who wed in civil ceremonies abroad, however, are allowed to register as married upon their return.

The report notes that Israel is the only country in the Western world that does not permit civil marriage.

The ceremonies in question were conducted by Conservative, Reform and, in some cases, even Orthodox rabbis, as well as by nonaffiliated wedding officiants. The couples married in these ceremonies did not register with the Rabbinate or hold their ceremonies with one of its certified representatives, as is required.

The findings provide further evidence of the growing contempt in Israel toward the Rabbinate and the power it wields, even within Orthodox circles.

The study found that most Israelis who opted for these private ceremonies were eligible to wed under the auspices of the Rabbinate – i.e., there was no question about their Jewishness – but chose not to.

Israeli couples who want to avoid the Rabbinate are increasingly opting to hold their ceremonies in Israel rather than overseas, according to Panim CEO Michal Berman. “They want to have their families present and save the money involved in traveling abroad for the ceremony,” she said.

Another advantage of holding a private ceremony in Israel is that if the couple does not follow up with a ceremony abroad in order to register as married in Israel, in the event of divorce they can avoid the Rabbinate. By contrast, Israeli couples who wed abroad in civil ceremonies and then register as married upon their return – as many do – are required to go through the Rabbinate if they get divorced.

The Rabbinate controls all matters of marriage and divorce among Jews in Israel.

Jewish couples are required to register at the Rabbinate's offices before marrying and, in many cases, are required to provide proof that they are Jewish according to halakha (Jewish religious law) during this registration process. (According to halakha, a Jew is someone born to a Jewish mother or converted by an Orthodox rabbinical court approved by the Rabbinate.)

An estimated 400,000 Israelis – mostly immigrants from the former Soviet Union and their offspring – cannot marry in the country because they don't qualify as Jewish based on the Rabbinate definition.

“The State of Israel has created an absurd situation in which the basic right to marry is withheld from hundreds of thousands of its citizens,” said Berman. “While the Rabbinate engages in tiny cosmetic adjustments, Israelis are voting with their feet and choosing to hold their own egalitarian and dignified Jewish weddings.”

A key phenomenon highlighted in the study is the growing number of Orthodox rabbis officiating at weddings not sanctioned by the Rabbinate.

Officiating at such ceremonies is against the law for Orthodox rabbis and

they could face two years in jail if convicted. To date, though, no Orthodox rabbis have been charged or convicted for officiating at such weddings.

The findings show that 150 such weddings were performed in Israel last year, by 14 Orthodox rabbis.

According to the study, most couples holding private wedding ceremonies in Israel – 55 percent – are secular Jews opposed to the institution of the Rabbinate and what it represents. Their share in the total number is growing: According to the findings, these Israelis live mainly in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area, where a corresponding drop has been registered in recent years in the number of couples registering to marry at local offices of the Rabbinate.

One-third of these couples are Russian speakers who cannot marry in the country because they are not considered halakhically Jewish. Some 8 percent are gay couples, who also cannot marry in Israel, while 4 percent are individuals who appear on a blacklist of “unmarriageables” kept by the Rabbinate. This list refers to individuals who are recognized as Jewish by the Population Registry but who are prohibited from marrying in Israel for various reasons. These include mamzerim (the offspring of relationships forbidden by Jewish law), individuals suspected of still being married and divorced couples who have resumed living together.

In the past, the study notes, most secular Israeli couples marrying outside the Rabbinate were driven by “ideological passion” and wanted to make a political statement. In recent years, though, these couples tend to view their decision more as a reflection of personal style and values.

The study found that even among secular Israelis, most of the ceremonies include classic Jewish wedding rituals such as the traditional blessings and the breaking of a glass at the end. They tend to be far more egalitarian, however, than their Orthodox counterparts.

Russian speakers who marry outside the Rabbinate, the study found, show a preference for Orthodox-style ceremonies – going so far as to request that the officiating rabbi have a beard.

“It seems that the main reason for this is their perception of the wedding ceremony as ratification of their Jewishness and their (status as) equal citizens in the state and society,” the study notes.

Among gay couples, the number choosing to hold private ceremonies in Israel has remained steady in recent years, the study notes. Most Israeli gay couples prefer to marry abroad or to hold small, intimate ceremonies in Israel that, in most cases, do not find their way into the data.

The number of weddings performed outside of the Rabbinate in Israel is probably much higher than the estimate provided in the study, its authors believe, because it was impossible for them to include every single ceremony in their tally.

“The research provides a database and a comparative benchmark for future studies,” said Jotam Brom, the lead author. “But it is important to note that there are dozens of wedding officiants active in Israel who were not included in the study. Moreover, an unknown number of couples choose to marry without a professional officiant, and we did not try to reach out to them through this study,” he added.

The study notes that the increase in the number of Israeli couples boycotting the Rabbinate has been accompanied by a corresponding drop in the number of marriages registered through it.

According to figures from the Religious Services Ministry that are cited in the report, 36,205 Jewish couples married in Israel in 2017 through the Rabbinate – a drop of 4 percent from the previous year.

### **NOW IS THE TIME TO TAKE JERUSALEM TO THE NEXT LEVEL (Editorial, JPost 6/11/18)**

Jerusalem's municipal elections are heating up. Scheduled for October, the election has already brought out close to a dozen candidates – including Knesset members, ministers and businessmen. Some are residents of Jerusalem. Others are moving to the city so they can run for its top post.

As of now, the two leading candidates seem to be Likud Minister Zeev Elkin and Deputy Mayor and past candidate Moshe Lion. A lot will depend on who the haredi residents of the city give their support to in the election. While haredim are not yet a majority in Jerusalem, they tend to vote as a bloc and have the potential to determine the election's outcome.

Other candidates include deputy mayors Meir Turgeman (Jerusalem Will Succeed) and Ofer Berkowitz (Hitorerut), attorney Yossi Havilio, formerly the municipality's legal adviser, and Avi Salman, a former aid of outgoing Mayor Nir Barkat. MK Nachman Shai from the Zionist Union is also mulling a run.

The question that voters ultimately need to ask themselves is what is in Jerusalem's best interest and who, among the candidates, stands the best chance at advancing the city and dealing with its growing challenges.

Work needs to be done to improve the quality of life and municipal services in east Jerusalem, haredi neighborhoods and the city's overall state of cleanliness. Investments need to be made in creating more jobs in the city and building affordable housing for young couples. As the city becomes poorer and more religious, the next mayor will need to take serious steps to keep – and even try to increase the number of – secular Israelis in Jerusalem.

More leisure and entertainment spots need to be open on Shabbat for Jerusalem residents and for tourists who visit the city over the weekends. The First Station and Yes Planet, which are open, are anomalies, and while they fit the status quo – entertainment centers, open, commerce places, no – there are growing efforts to get them closed as well.

What is happening in the city, though, is no longer a battle just over Shabbat. There are efforts to completely change Jerusalem's character. An example of this are the recent calls by haredi politicians to shut Mahaneh Yehuda, a popular venue with bars and restaurants, on weeknights. That has nothing to do with Shabbat, during which the shuk is closed, but with haredi efforts to simply ban any entertainment in the city. The fact that this has become an election issue speaks to the seriousness of this threat.

The mayoral candidates need to clarify their stance on these issues. While they will understandably not want to say something that could cost them haredi votes, red lines do need to be drawn in order for Jerusalem to remain a sustainable and vibrant city with an economic future.

But while Jerusalem faces many challenges, the single most pressing problem seems to be the inequality between Arab east Jerusalem and Jewish west Jerusalem. The socioeconomic chasm between the two parts of the city, exacerbated by the security barrier that has left neighborhoods such as Shuafat and Kafr Akab without municipal services, raises questions about the future of Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel.

When politicians and mayoral candidates talk about a united and undivided Jerusalem, what exactly are they referring to in a city that is becoming increasingly divided, both demographically and geographically? How can anyone talk seriously about sovereignty over the city if there is a reluctance to take responsibility for all of its parts? With rights need to come responsibilities.

Outgoing Mayor Nir Barkat can be commended for raising Jerusalem's scepter on the international stage and for bringing high-profile events to the city like the Marathon, Formula 1 and more. The planned opening of the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv fast train in December – assuming there are not more delays – would be a nice end to his two terms in office.

Now is the time to take Jerusalem to the next level.

The challenges are not going away.

### **WITH NO MORE TRICKS UP ITS SLEEVES, HAMAS HAS BECOME MORE DANGEROUS** (Alex Fishman, YNet 6/10/18)

The Security Cabinet, which met Sunday to discuss the Israeli policy vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip, should be presented with the main lesson from last Friday's events on the border fence: Hamas has no more tricks up its sleeves.

It has no more patents to improve its status. All it is left with to remain

relevant is continuing the protests to secure the sequence of violence and maintain the military tension vis-à-vis Israel.

After dozens of Palestinian fatalities and thousands of wounded, Hamas has reached a dead end. It has no answers to give its public. It tried a reconciliation with the Palestinian Authority—and failed. It turned to Egypt—and was let down. It tried a "hudna" (calm) with Israel—but received no response. It's even losing Qatar's support. It also tried the "Marches of Return" on the fence, but learned over the weekend that the move failed to yield any diplomatic fruit.

This organization is suffering from a governance crisis, but is still standing on both its feet. Hamas hasn't been dealt a real blow from Israel that would give it the feeling its rule might be in danger, which is why the failure of the "Marches of Return" project in the past few months has turned it into an even more radical organization, looking for a way into the Iranian axis. As a result, the anarchy on the Israel-Gaza border will continue.

The riots on the fence will likely die down in time for the Eid al-Fitr holiday in the coming week, and during the World Cup. Then, in the summer months we are expected to see different levels of violent outbursts, which could reach a wide-scale conflict.

Last week, the Air Force practiced a plan for simultaneous fighting on two fronts. The timing isn't coincidental: Following situation assessments, the IDF chief of staff instructed the army to be prepared for a conflict breaking out in the north followed by a conflict breaking out in Gaza. An opposite situation, in which a conflict in the strip sets the north on fire too, is less likely to happen, but it exists in light of the tightening relations between Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran.

Friday's events didn't turn into the highlight of the protest that began in late March, as Hamas had hoped. On the contrary. Israeli officials explain, in retrospect, that it was a failure foretold, as the last Friday of the Ramadan holiday is a family event and many preferred to stay home in the heavy heat. The "Iranian Jerusalem Day" idea didn't exactly excite Gaza's residents either, and Israel's threats—including an IAF show of force—did the trick. The Palestinians reported activity of IAF and ground forces in the strip, burning tires, kites and encampments to disrupt their logistic preparations.

On the security side, the IDF provided the required results and curbed the waves of protestors trying to breach the fence. The "marches of millions" threat evaporated. But the army's activities reinforced a new pattern of routine security conduct on the fence: Since March 30, the IDF has been operating vis-à-vis a hot and threatening border 24/7.

The shock on the Palestinian side following Nakba Day, in which 62 people were killed, has largely shaped the nature of the battle: The two sides haven't put out the flames but have limited their height for now, so as not to reach dozens of casualties again.

If it wishes the change the violent status quo on the fence, the cabinet will have to make some decisions. First of all, it should accept the IDF recommendation to ease the siege in order to give Hamas an opportunity to present an achievement. For example, to allow—at the request of the Gaza border communities, and with the IDF's encouragement—thousands of laborers from the strip to work in Israeli fields. It won't be easily approved as long as the Shin Bet objects.

The cabinet can also decide to advance the project led by the UN envoy to transfer funds to Gaza, bypassing Hamas and the PA. There is goodwill in the world, but no one wants to fund infrastructures that could be erased in a bombing.

The victims Hamas sacrificed don't justify its poor diplomatic achievements. Europe is the only place where it has recorded an international achievement: For the past three months of violence, Israel has failed to get through to the public opinion in friendly Western countries and to torpedo the Palestinian narrative. The European leaderships—even if they do sympathize with Israel—are subject to hostile public opinion against Israel. And this is another reason for Hamas to keep creating shahidim.