

# ISRAEL REPORT

To provide greater exposure to primary Israeli news sources and opinions in order to become better informed on the issues, and to gain a better understanding of the wide range of perspectives that exist in Israeli society and politics.

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## ISRAEL THWARTS MAJOR ISLAMIC JIHAD MISSILE ATTACK AGAINST NAVAL VESSELS (JPost 4/4/18)

Security forces thwarted a potential Palestinian attack by Islamic Jihad in Gaza against Israeli naval forces that included a plan to kidnap IDF sailors, as released for publication on Wednesday.

The Secret Service (Shin Bet) published information about the alleged terror plot during the first out of six weeks of the Great March of Return, a series of popular Gaza protests. Since last Friday, thousands of Palestinians in the Palestinian enclave have gathered by the Israeli border fence, with some attempting to break through it.

On Wednesday, the IDF published a video from March 12 that showed the IDF boarding a Gaza fishing vessel from Rafah which had sailed beyond the permissible nautical line. Ten Palestinians were arrested and taken in for questioning.

The Shin Bet said that during his interrogation, Amin Sa'adi Muhammad Jum'a, the alleged ringleader, confessed to a plot by which one Gaza fishing vessel would act as a decoy, forcing an Israel naval ship to approach it. The Palestinians on board a second fishing boat would then launch a Kornet missile targeting the Israeli vessel, and after that, board the vessel from a third ship, so that they could kidnap soldiers who survived the attack.

Islamic Jihad, with Jum'a's help, had been gathering intelligence about the Israeli navy off the Gaza coast for some time in order to prepare for the attack, the Shin Bet said. The prosecution plans to indict the Jum'a in Beersheba District Court on Wednesday.

The naval plot "proves the true intentions of the terrorist organizations in Gaza, that are trying to disguise their murderous intentions by provocative actions against the (Gaza) security fence. Their sole purpose is to provide a cover under which terrorists can carry out attacks against Israel," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said

Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman commented on Twitter that he hoped this time the Israeli Left would not demand an investigation into activities of the Shin Bet and the IDF. He added that Israeli citizens could depend on the army to thwart the complex challenges on the Gaza border.

The IDF charged that this was the latest in a string of attacks against Israel by Islamic Jihad in Gaza, including the terror tunnel it had dug under the border that was discovered in October 2017. The organization also launched mortars from Gaza into Israel in November and December of last year, the IDF said.

## LIKUD CONTINUES TO CLIMB IN POLLS, PROJECTED TO WIN 32 SEATS (Israel Hayom 4/4/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision on Tuesday to revoke a compromise that would have prevented the mass deportation of illegal African migrants in Israel appears to have benefited his Likud Party.

According to a poll conducted by Channel 10 News, if a general election were held now, the Likud would win 32 Knesset seats – far more than any other party. The poll predicted 21 seats for the Yesh Atid party, 13 for the Joint Arab List, and only 12 for the Zionist Union.

Habayit Hayehudi was projected to secure 10 seats. Meretz – which just elected MK Tamar Zandberg as party chairwoman – and Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon's Kulanu Party were predicted to win seven seats each.

The poll showed Yisrael Beytenu, under Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, collecting five seats, the same number projected for United Torah Judaism.

MK Orly Levy-Abekasis's as-yet unnamed new party and Shas would each win four seats.

## HUGE ISRAELI FLAG SPREAD OVER PRESIDENT'S RESIDENCE (Arutz-7 INN.com 4/4/18)

The IDF's satellite unit, along with rappelling experts and textile manufacturers, today hung a huge Israeli flag on the roof of the Israeli president's residence in Jerusalem.

The flag was deployed on a surface area of 1,500 square meters (4,920 square feet) and weighs 270 kilograms (595 pounds). It was manufactured in a special printing press in a factory in for ten days of sewing and stitching, and was raised to the roof of the building to a height of about ten meters (32 feet) with cranes.

Chairman of the President's Residence Harel Tubi, who oversaw the placing of the flag, said today that "We wanted to create this unique flag, viewed through the satellite from every point and angle, as an expression of pride and joy in this special time, the seventieth year of Israel, which fills one with Israeli pride over the years of creativity and activity in all fields."

"We are very grateful to all the organizations that have helped us in this complex operation that required initiative and creativity alongside security and safety solutions, and hope that it will warm the hearts of many Israelis and Jews in the State of Israel and throughout the world."

The flag will be spread out on the roof until Jerusalem Day, and during the historic of Independence Day flight show will serve as a salute to the security forces in the seventieth year of the state.

## SOLDIERS ON ISRAEL'S BORDER WITH JORDAN DO MORE THAN DEFEND LIVES (Israel Hayom 4/4/18)

Israeli soldiers stationed near the Jordanian border have been canvassing

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the area in an effort to find ideal places to construct natural wildlife corridors before a new border fence is constructed.

Operation Living Together is being carried out in conjunction with academic experts, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel and IDF trackers. The Jordanian army is also taking part in the conservation efforts.

The fence is expected to be completed within a year.

One purpose of the operation is to help migrating birds and animals access drinking water by strategically dispersing mobile water tankers in the area.

Operation Living Together was inspired by lessons from the construction of the Egyptian border fence. While vital from a security perspective, the fence adversely affected animals previously accustomed to freely moving on both sides of the border. To provide a solution, the fence was fitted with specially designed crossings that allow only wildlife to move back and forth.

"The current operation serves as a very tangible example of how the army takes wildlife into consideration during its routine missions and helps to preserve it. Subsequently, we would also like to raise awareness to minimize the effects of all types of military activity on the desert ecology," said Guy Selai, founder of the "Nature Defense Forces" initiative.

"Nature Defense Forces" is a joint initiative with the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and IDF. Its goal is to instill in officers and soldiers a greater sense of responsibility for the environment in which they operate and motivate them to be proactive in preserving it.

#### **SUPREME COURT: DROWNED BABY WILL RECEIVE AUTOPSY (Arutz-7 INN.com 4/4/18)**

The Supreme Court approved the performance of an autopsy on the body of a one-month-old infant who drowned in a jacuzzi at a hotel in Ashdod this this, despite the objections of the baby's family.

The judges rejected the family's petition but ordered the operation to be performed gradually and in the presence of a family physician.

The judges emphasized that they are paying attention to the arguments made by defense attorneys Itamar Ben-Gvir and Moshe Elmaliah regarding the preservation of the dignity of the deceased, but in this case, they believe, there is no choice but to order an autopsy.

Attorney Ben-Gvir, who represented the family, said: "We regret the Supreme Court's decision, which harmed not only the family and the public, but first of all the body of a month old baby."

"I think that the staff of the Institute of Forensic Medicine is feckless, and that they conduct operations for the dead even where there is no need for it," Ben-Gvir added.

The baby's parents were arrested by the police. A gag order has been placed on further details of the case.

#### **HAREDI EXTREMISTS ATTACK DEPUTY MINISTER IN BET SHEMESH (JPost 4/4/18)**

Dozens of members of the hardline haredi Jerusalem Faction swarmed Deputy Education Minister Meir Porush's car in Bet Shemesh Thursday, in anger over his work to reach a compromise on the ultra-Orthodox exemption from IDF conscription.

In a video posted on Kan Bet's Twitter account, the men surrounded Porush's car, shouted at him and threw eggs, so that he couldn't get out, and drove away.

Porush's office told The Jerusalem Post's sister publication Ma'ariv that this is not the first time this has happened to him.

The Jerusalem Faction has been behind multiple violent protests in recent months, in which members threw stones, among other offenses, and dozens were arrested.

Thousands of yeshiva students associated with the Jerusalem Faction have refused to cooperate with the IDF to obtain their military service exemptions and demonstrations are staged for every one of them that is arrested.

The overwhelming majority of haredi yeshiva students obtain their military service exemptions by undergoing a bureaucratic process at IDF enlistment offices. Students from the Jerusalem Faction refuse to even do this, and are therefore technically absent without leave and liable to arrest by the military police.

Last month, the coalition was in crisis, because haredi parties sought to pass a law that would allow the exemption of most haredi men from the mandatory draft to continue, while Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman wanted his ministry to draft a bill on the matter. The sides are meant to reach a compromise on the matter in the coming months, as the Supreme Court gave the government a deadline of September 2018 when it struck down its exemption policy.

#### **GUNPLAY MAY HAVE CAUSED ACCIDENTAL FATAL SHOOTING ON IDF BASE (YNet 4/4/18)**

The Military Court in Jaffa extended Wednesday the remand until next Thursday of an IDF combat soldier who accidentally shot and killed his friend Shachar Strug last month by an unintentional discharge.

The Duvdevan Unit soldier told investigators after the incident that "it was accident, not gunplay. We practiced drawing a gun in a room on-base, as is common in the unit. He's my best friend and I didn't know it was loaded."

During the court discussion on Wednesday, however, the investigative team claimed that the incident occurred due to incorrect use of his gun.

On the evening of the incident, 20-year-old Staff Sgt. Strug, from Givatayim, entered the suspect's room, and the two pointed their guns at each other. According to the latest suspicions, the soldier pulled the trigger and shot a bullet at Strug's upper body.

Moreover, during the investigation, further suspicions were raised that guns had been habitually and consistently misused in the unit, a matter which is being investigated further by the Military Criminal Investigation Division (CID). "The need was raised to clarify the incidents in which suspicions were raised of incorrect use of a weapon by other soldiers, which differ in essence from the incident in which the suspect is involved. These incidents are currently being investigated," the military prosecutor said.

According to evidence given by a soldier to the CID, drawing handguns and pointing them at each other outside a military exercise became the norm in the commando unit among the soldiers, even though it is strictly forbidden.

The IDF is currently investigating how unit officers allowed the practice to take place, or how they were unaware of it.

"The suspect pointed his gun at the chest of the deceased, while loading it with a magazine inside and without an anti-fire mechanism," the military prosecutor added. "The suspect loaded it and pulled the trigger and the bullet hit the deceased's torso and caused his death."

The claims, the prosecutor went on, are underpinned by the suspect's testimony. "The above is based on findings in the area, the suspect's spontaneous statements after the incident, expert evidence, and to a certain extent, a description by the suspect's of the incident in the course of his investigations."

The suspect's defense attorney, Maj. Merav Hershkowitz Yitzhaki, claimed during the court discussion that her client is in serious condition and has been suffering tremendously since the incident.

She also said on Tuesday night that the soldier contacted a psychiatric hospital where he wanted to be admitted, but was refused. "The deceased was his best friend and he is agonizing over it. This was a tragic accident," he said.

"We have still not received the information of the investigation, but any punishment that any court decides on will not compare to the punishment that the soldier will have to carry with him until his last day, which includes feelings of guilt, pain and missing his friend, Shachar," Yitzhaki continued in an emotional appeal.

"He thinks about Shachar all the time. He said how when he arrived at the

unit he didn't know any songs in Hebrew and all the songs that he learned were songs that Shachar taught him. He will have to live with this pain until his dying days and no punishment will equal this pain."

## **OVER 200,000 ISRAELIS TOUR THE COUNTRY DURING PASSOVER**

(YNet 4/2/18)

About 220,000 Israelis visited nature reserves and national parks throughout the country at the start of the intermediate days of Passover.

Among the popular sites were Yarkon National Park, Gan Hashlosha (Sachne), Qumran National Park—which holds family activities about the search of the hidden Qumran scrolls—the Caesarea Maritima National Park where the Israel Nature and Parks Authority holds the hippodrome horse show, and the Ein Gedi and Einot Tzukim nature reserves.

The Golan Heights alone saw some 20,000 visitors on Sunday, while on Monday visitors flocked to Park Hama'ayanot and Goren Park, as well as Agamon Hula and Jordan Park.

In addition to the people, over 50 flamingos landed at Agamon Hula as a pit stop on their way to Turkey, where their nesting areas are.

According to KKL-JNF, by 3pm Sunday 5,000 people visited the Agmon Hahula Nature Reserve. A similar number of visitors was also noted in Achanatus Parking located in Britennia Park.

About 3,500 visitors arrived at Jordan Park, and approximately 1,000 hiked in the Elad forest. Thousands flocked to Canada Park and Ben Shemen Forest. Goren and Admit Parks were completely packed with visitors.

Many chose to visit the Western Galilee, and particularly Nahal Kziv.

The Treasures of the Galilee project, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and the Drainage and Streams Authority of the Western Galilee are subsidizing shuttle services for the 5,000 visitors arriving at Nahal Kziv. The shuttles go all day long and connect the parking lot with the beginning of the track. Visitors can use the shuttles for the nominal cost of NIS 5.

Nadav Harel from the Galilee Project said that all touristic sites are at very high occupancy. The visitors can enjoy the nice weather, hike the tracks and take part in creation workshops, marine attraction on the beaches of the Western Galilee, go to restaurants and more.

Around 2,000 people visited the synagogue and ancient ruins in the city of Katzrin in the Golan Heights, where a song festival took place for the fifth year in a row. The Hallel prayer, which is said at the beginning of every Hebrew month and during holidays, was recited.

Thousands of Israelis went south to visit the Arabah region. Some 800 people hiked in Nahal Nekarot, and many visited the Vidor Center to learn about agriculture in the Arabah.

As the weather got warmer, many sought respite in streams. Thousands hiked along streams in northern Israel, and kayak sites in Kibbutz HaGoshrim and Kfar Blum were jam packed with people.

Many visited Guru Garden where the Nature of the Animals Festival takes place. The festival opened on Sunday and will last throughout the intermediate days. Starting on Sunday, one can also enjoy free paid guided tours to the battle hills on the upper level of the Hermon site.

Since Passover began, approximately 12,000 people visited the 15 quiet beaches of the Association of Municipalities Kinneret on Monday. There were more than 30,000 visitors in the area surrounding the lake.

## **ISRAEL IS USING TECHNOLOGY TO AVOID FACING WHAT IT'S DOING TO PALESTINIANS** (Ofri Ilany, Ha'aretz 4/4/18)

In the summer of 2017, Israeli news sites reported on a new technology developed in the labs of the Israel Defense Forces: software to combat post-traumatic stress disorder. The computer program was intended for initial use among combat soldiers at the front, training them to identify "threatening motifs" and boost their resistance to post-traumatic stress.

The development was publicized around the time it was reported that 143 soldiers who fought in the 2014 Gaza war had been officially recognized as

suffering from PTSD. Israeli society had moved on quickly since then, leaving behind the bloody Gaza incursion to deal with countless other issues. But for the returning soldiers, the horror didn't just fade away. The cries of terror, the shattered bodies and the feelings of helplessness return in flashbacks at unpredictable moments.

Jewish Israelis were almost universally convinced that the war in Gaza was just and necessary, and the highly motivated troops who raided Gaza neighborhoods were backed by expressions of encouragement, uplifting songs by top singers and the exhortations of military rabbis and television personalities. Still, it turns out that when you send Generation Y on military incursions into densely built areas, it leaves a certain mark on their souls.

How does Israel deal with the problem? It invents a new technology, of course. "Attention training" is what the head of the mental-health branch of the ground forces called it, explaining that it would improve performance and reduce the dropout rate from military service. And in the future there will reportedly be trauma treatment using virtual reality, and perhaps also the assistance of MDMA (aka ecstasy). These may well be important developments, but they also encapsulate modern Israel's essential problem: the conviction that any difficulty has a technological solution.

Over his years as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has managed to boost Israeli morale to unprecedented levels. Many Israelis feel an ongoing sense of euphoria – as if they lived in a utopia that has been realized. Columnist Israel Harel was actually quite right when he wrote in a column last week that Israel is currently at full blossom.

A formerly frightened and anxiety-ridden Israel has become a confident society reveling in its prosperous state. In the past couple of years, even the sort of paranoia that was once so characteristic of Israelis has been replaced by a new kind of attitude: Everything's great, we're strong, we're popular, everyone loves us and we love ourselves.

Actually, Israel managed to overcome many of the problems that threatened it in the past with the help of technological solutions. The rockets that threatened Israel's border areas are now intercepted by the Iron Dome system. The wave of refugees from Africa was stopped by a wall. A water crisis was contained by desalination plants. The demographic threat is countered by advances in infertility treatments. And BDS is countered by the efforts of trained teams of responders and propagandists on social media.

Even the "knife intifada" was neutralized by some sort of algorithm that enabled a potential attacker to be identified before he even knew that this is what he was. For nearly every threat, the country has come up with an appropriate technological solution. A patch has been fashioned for every security breach. This can be seen as quite impressive and admirable.

But in fact no political problem has been resolved. The Palestinians are still here and there is evidence that they are the majority in the area between the sea and the Jordan River. So the situation remains unchanged, solely thanks to means of brutal coercion.

The Jewish state has developed an amazing ability to manage human masses on a large scale. With the aid of walls, checkpoints, alliances, hormones, software programs and other sophisticated measures, it manages the Palestinian and Jewish populations so as to rein in the pressure exerted on the regime. Using history-stopping technology, it has been able to slow down historical processes that seemed unavoidable.

But over time, the tension entailed in the Zionist regime having subjects who don't enjoy political rights is pushing the authorities to employ ever more desperate measures. Pleasure-loving Israel yearns to repress its consciousness of the Palestinians and is itching to get them out of its system, lest it be forced to acknowledge that there are other human beings here with legitimate aspirations. These aren't people just like you, we're told, they're "threatening motifs," video-game monsters that must be eliminated in order to advance to the next stage. And they keep popping up all the time.

At this stage, we've resorted to using technological manipulation on ourselves to put ourselves through some mental training so we'll be able to

cope with this challenge.

In this way, we've reached a situation in which hundreds of snipers fire at unarmed protesters and kill them at a rate of 10 a day – and no one refuses an order. In the first intifada, or even the second, such a situation would have been cause for shock and horror. But not anymore. We've trained ourselves – using ideology, religion, algorithms, mindfulness, whatever – to reach a state of consciousness that enables us to overcome the basic instinct of compassion that's normally aroused in the face of human suffering.

These thousands of people on the other side of the fence are described by every type of label. Politicians and analysts depict them as rioters, inciters, terrorists, enemies, infiltrators, Islamists, anti-Semites, even homophobes. But as the television commentators like to say, let there be no mistake about it: These things – with arms and legs and heads – are also called "human beings." And their refusal to accept a life in which they're penned in is just what makes them human. Their main crime, for which they're being sprayed with tear gas, rubber bullets and live fire, is having had the audacity to appear in our field of vision just when we were about to sit down and eat matza with haroset.

A year ago, Israel managed to nearly completely obscure the 50th anniversary of the occupation. Consequently, its arrogance grew, and it plans to stage its 70th birthday celebration this month as an orgy of self-pleasure. Empowered by Donald Trump's declarations of love, Netanyahu and his government aim to bury the Palestinian project once and for all under 70 hours of hora dancing. But then somebody had to go and spoil the fun.

So in a way, the marches held by the Palestinians are cause for hope – because they force Israelis to remember that they live in this land alongside another people, with desires of its own. With or without Trump's support, we'll have to take this into account. Or we could always develop new technologies of self-deception and look for other ways to heal the psyches of the snipers who shoot at civilians on the border. Hallucinogenic mushrooms, perhaps.

#### **IS YOUR MAROR TOO STRONG?** (Shimshon haKohenNadel, JPost 4/2/18)

While many have the custom of eating raw horseradish at the Passover Seder, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook questioned whether one can fulfill the mitzva of maror (bitter herbs) if the maror is too strong. The mitzva, after all, is to eat the maror. If it burns one's mouth and tongue and throat, Rabbi Kook reasons, that is not "eating." Rabbi Kook writes that the commandments are not supposed to cause pain. He invokes Proverbs 3:17: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace."

The ways of our Torah are pleasant. They are not supposed to cause us pain or discomfort, physically or emotionally. This is especially important to remember on Passover.

Unfortunately, today many are confused by unnecessary stringencies. They mistake the Festival of Freedom for the Festival of Stringency. Whether it's cleaning the home, throwing out food products that can instead be sold or donated, or prohibiting products that are technically permissible, many go overboard, doing more than Jewish law requires. They drive themselves – and their families – crazy.

Some of these stringencies are innocuous, but some are dangerous. Every year there are house fires all over Israel and abroad caused by those improperly "kashering" the kitchen.

Sadly, some rabbis even mislead their congregations. Just last week the website Kikar Hashabbat reported on a rabbi in Petah Tikva who instructed his community to "kasher" their mouths before Passover with boiling water.

The hassidic master Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) was against stringencies in general, and on Passover in particular. His disciple, Natan of Nemirov, records: "Our Rebbe cautioned us not to be overly stringent in any observance, as 'God does not rule over His creatures with tyranny,' and 'The Torah was not given to the ministering angels...."

"He did not agree at all with those who observe additional stringencies on Passover, as it brings them to a deep, dark depression. He spoke about this

at length. One of his followers once asked him how to act with regard to a stringency. And he [Rebbe Nachman] made a joke of it.

"...Once he [Rebbe Nachman] worried about the drinking water used during Passover. He was afraid that a small amount of leaven might have fallen into the well from which they drew water. The only alternative would be to prepare water in advance, as some people do. But this was also not good enough, for the water had to be carefully safeguarded from leaven from the day before Passover, and this proved very difficult. The Rebbe finally came to the conclusion that the only satisfactory water would be water drawn from a flowing spring. He could then obtain perfectly fresh water without any possibility of it being contaminated. The problem was that the only such spring in the area was very far from his home. He thought about traveling to a place near a spring, and spending Passover there.

"The Rebbe had become involved in such unnecessary stringencies and entered into a dark depression. But then he later ridiculed this, and taught that one does not have to search for additional stringencies, even on Passover.

"The Rebbe spoke about this at length and concluded: 'True devotion consists mainly of simplicity and sincerity. Pray much, study much Torah, do many good deeds, and do not worry yourself with unnecessary restrictions. Just walk in the way of our forefathers.'"

Another hassidic master, Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, was famous for being scrupulous when baking matza for Passover. One year, Levi Yitzchak was ill and unable to participate in the baking himself. His students asked, "Rebbe, what stringencies should we employ in order to bake the matza to your liking?" The rabbi answered: "Let me tell you where I am most stringent. The women that work baking the matza are very poor. Some of the men who oversee the baking, do not always treat them well. At times they even raise their voices due to the great pressure involved. In this area I am most stringent. Be sensitive to them. Do not raise your voice at them. Anyone who gets angry with them during the baking of the matza makes the matza into hametz!"

The very same Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev used to wish everyone a "Kosher Purim" and a "Happy Passover," the opposite of the traditional greetings. He explained: "On Purim one needs to be sure not to go overboard while celebrating, so the day should be observed in a kosher way. However, on Passover everyone is very careful to make sure that everything is kosher, but in the midst of all our concern we might forget to be full of joy!"

One is indeed obligated to "rejoice in the festival" (Deuteronomy 16:14). Part of that obligation is to "make the members of his household happy on the festival" (Pesachim 109a). This means purchasing nice things for them to enjoy over the holiday (see Rambam, Hil. Yom Tov 6:18; Shulchan Aruch, OC 529:2). This mitzva, of course, should also include not burdening them with additional work and stress because of unnecessary stringencies.

We are obligated to leave the Seder table with the taste of the Afikoman on our tongues. How sad and tragic if Passover leaves a bitter taste in our mouths.

