

Ynet-News – January 23, 2020 – Thursday -

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Macron says France determined avoid all military escalation in Iran's nuclear ambitions

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49 World leaders in Israel Holocaust Forum, with Putin, Pence, Prince Charles & Macron  
Wednesday

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Disgruntled Palestinians launch Incendiary balloons to protest the crippling blockade

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IDF places seismic and acoustic 'tunnel-buster' sensors along northern Lebanese border

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Saudi spyware by Israeli NSO hacks phones by mp4 file that leaks data a month after

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Trump Senate impeachment trial formally began on Thursday

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**Lebanon** forms Hezbollah government Tuesday under Prime Minister Hassan **Diab**

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**Islamic State** replaced Baghdadi who was killed in October, with non-Arab Turk, **Salbi**

01.22.20 – We -

Macron says France determined avoid all military escalation in Iran's nuclear ambitions

01.22.20

Macron says France 'inflexible' over Iran's nuclear ambitions

In a press conference in Jerusalem as part of **World Holocaust Forum** events, the French leader added that **anti-Semitism** must be fought by any means and warned that it **is spreading over Europe like a disease**

Reuters, Ynet| Published: 01.22.20 , 15:57

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Wednesday that France will be inflexible about Iran's nuclear ambitions and that his country is determined Tehran will never acquire nuclear weapons.

The French president made the comments in Jerusalem after meeting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Reuven Rivlin as part of the World Holocaust Forum events, marking 75 years since the liberation of the Auschwitz extermination camp. "In the current context, France is determined that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon, but also that we avoid all military escalation in the region," Macron said.

Macron met with Netanyahu over a breakfast where the two discussed the current situation in the Middle East. Netanyahu's office later said the two have agreed to "establish a strategic dialogue" between the countries in an effort to advance common interests.

"This is a very important change in Israeli foreign policy. It could assist us regarding things that are very important to the security of the state," said Netanyahu.

The French leader later joined Rivlin for a special press conference where the two warned about the rise of anti-Semitic sentiments in Europe. "We can see the dark shadow cast by anti-Semitism as it spreads over Europe, indicating an illness and a great danger."

Macron reiterated that France has been working hard to combat anti-Semitism. "I am committed to continuing the fight against anti-Semitism, racism, hate and all that divide our society."

The 42-year-old made clear anti-Zionism was an extension of anti-Semitism in the view of his government saying that "challenging Israel's right to exist is nothing other than anti-Semitism." and there is no denying that fact.

Macron said anti-Semitism is fought through legislation and the criminal system but sometimes it is not enough. "We must concentrate efforts on education," the president said, adding that his education minister and a delegation of schoolchildren have arrived in Jerusalem with him.

01.22.20 – We -

49 World leaders in Israel Holocaust Forum, with Putin, Pence, Prince Charles & Macron Wednesday

01.22.20

World leaders arrive in Israel for country's biggest diplomatic event

Fifth World Holocaust Forum, commemorating the 75th anniversary of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp's liberation, is set to kick off on Wednesday with delegations from 49 countries, including 41 heads of state, attending the event

Ynet,i24NEWS| Published: 01.22.20 , 09:19

At least 6,300 police officers and other security forces were deployed to Jerusalem ahead of the arrival of high-profile dignitaries including Russian President Vladimir Putin, U.S.

Vice President Mike Pence and m 49 countries, including 41 heads of state, the diplomatic event is set to become the biggest in the country's history.

The two-day event, which includes political meetings between world and Israeli leaders where discussions are expected to be held on the latest Iran tensions and the Mideast peace process, culminating in commemorations ceremony at Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial and museum on Thursday afternoon.

At least 6,300 police officers and other security forces were deployed to Jerusalem to ensure the 48-hour even, which includes high-profile dignitaries such as Russian President Vladimir Putin, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and Prince Charles, goes smoothly.

Emmanuel Macron, who arrived on Tuesday shortly before midnight, met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Reuven Rivlin in the morning hours. The prime minister during the meeting urged the French leader to join the United States and Israel in putting pressure on Iran to stop its “aggressive nuclear activity.”

Macron replied that France will be "inflexible" about Iran's nuclear ambitions and that his country is determined Tehran will never acquire nuclear weapons.

Netanyahu later said the two have agreed to “establish a strategic dialogue” between the two countries in an effort to advance common interests.

Macron was to meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the city of Ramallah in the West Bank shortly after 4 pm.

Rivlin is set to host the delegations at his Jerusalem residence on Wednesday evening.

On Thursday, Putin is scheduled to inaugurate a memorial in honor of the victims of the Siege of Leningrad - a prolonged blockade of the Soviet city by the Nazi forces - at Jerusalem's Sacher Park.

The ceremony will be attended by World War II veterans and survivors of the siege living in Israel. A delegation of at least 600 people, mostly from Russia, is expected to arrive in Israel for the ceremony.

01.21.20 – Tu -

Disgruntled Palestinians launch incendiary balloons to ease the crippling blockade

01.21.20

Hamas official threatens more explosive balloons into Israel

Terror group's representative lauds act of aggression on Gaza border, says calm contingent upon Israel further abiding by Hamas conditions

Associated Press| Published: 01.21.20 , 21:10

**Incendiary balloons** Palestinians launched from the Gaza Strip recently were a signal to Israel to accelerate unofficial "understandings" **meant to ease the crippling blockade** on the Hamas-ruled territory, a senior official from the Islamic militant group said Tuesday.

The resumption of flammable balloons and other explosive devices flown across the border broke a month of calm that has largely prevailed since Hamas suspended its weekly protests along the Israeli-Gaza frontier.

The quiet is meant to bolster an informal truce between Israel and Hamas brokered by international mediators.

Speaking to journalists, Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya accused the Israelis of moving too slowly.

He said the balloons had been **launched by disgruntled individuals**, not Hamas. But he said his group was "satisfied" with the launches and is ready to send more "if the occupation doesn't pick up the message."

Israel and Egypt imposed a blockade on Gaza after Hamas, a militant group that seeks Israel's destruction, seized control of the territory in 2007. The blockade, combined with Hamas mismanagement, has devastated the local economy.

Hamas and Israel have been working through Qatari, Egyptian and U.N. mediators to reach a series of "understandings" that would ease the blockade in exchange for guarantees of quiet.

Al-Hayya said Hamas expects Israel to allow in more medical supplies, unlimited trade between Gaza and the world, help create more jobs and extend Qatari payments for electricity and poor families.

The incendiary balloons have not caused any damage or injuries on the Israeli side. But last week, an Israeli military helicopter struck an alleged Hamas target in Gaza in response to the resumption of the launches.

**UN Mideast Envoy** Nickolay Mladenov **called** the renewed **balloon launches "concerning and regrettable"** in a briefing to the Security Council on Tuesday.

**01.19.20** – Su -

**IDF places seismic and acoustic 'tunnel-buster' sensors along northern Lebanese border**

**01.19.20**

**IDF places 'tunnel-buster' sensors along northern border**

Military engineers begin work near Kibbutz Misgav Am on Lebanon frontier; new system will use **seismic and acoustic devices** that according to army are 'merely **preventative measures**' and do not signify new efforts by Hezbollah

Yoav Zitun| Published: **01.19.20** , 14:05

The IDF began Sunday to place special underground sensors along the Lebanese border to detect any tunnels dug by Hezbollah or other terror groups in an attempt to infiltrate into Israel.

The deployment comes almost a year after Operation Northern Shield, during which the IDF detected and neutralized six tunnels dug by Hezbollah with the intent of sending terrorists through them.

IDF engineers and drills have begun digging along the Israeli side of the northern border near Kibbutz Misgav Am.

Army officials said there is no information regarding fresh Hezbollah attempts to dig new tunnels and that the deployment is merely a preventative measure.

The area around Misgav Am will be the first place the new technology will be implemented due to its proximity to the Lebanese border; other spots will also be considered, subject to security and budget assessments.

The sensor system, which uses seismic and acoustic devices, will alert to any tunnels that are dug close to the border, but in a limited capacity.

"We want to prevent any 'calculative mistakes' since the construction work can be seen on both sides of the border," said IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Hidai Zilberman.

"This is insurance for the future. We have no intelligence that Hezbollah is renewing their efforts. The construction work will last for the next few months."

IDF officials stated that no units will be redeployed to the construction sites where the sensors are being placed, so as to endure full defense along the northern border and to avoid disruptions to the IDF operation tasked with strengthening defenses in the area. In May 2019, the IDF destroyed Hezbollah's "flagship" cross-border tunnel using 600 trucks and thousands of cubic gallons of concrete.

The tunnel, more than 80 meters deep, was dug from the Lebanese Shiite village of Ramyeh towards the Western Galilee, near the communities of Shtula and Zar'it.

As well the primary tunnel, five other smaller digs were uncovered during Northern Shield - two in the Ramyeh area and three more near the northern border town of Metula, not far from the Lebanese village of Kfar Kela.

01.22.20 – We -

Saudi spyware by Israeli NSO hacks phones by mp4 file that leaks data a month after

01.22.20

UN experts: Israeli spyware may been used in Bezos phone hack

United Nations special rapporteurs point to 'possible involvement' of Saudi Crown Prince bin Salman in alleged 2018 cyberattack; Saudi officials call allegations 'absurd'

Reuters| Published: 01.22.20 , 17:11

An examination of Jeff Bezos' mobile revealed "an anomalous and extreme change in phone behavior" after the Amazon CEO received a file from a WhatsApp account associated with the Saudi crown prince, two UN special rapporteurs said on Wednesday.

There is a "reasonable belief" that the behavior on Bezos' phone was the result of Pegasus spyware sold to the Saudis by the Israeli NSO Group, the rapporteurs said in a statement summarising the findings of an "in-depth, forensic level examination."

Cybersecurity experts hired by Bezos, the world's richest man, concluded his phone was probably infiltrated by a video file sent from a WhatsApp account purportedly belonging to Prince Mohammed in 2018, according to a person familiar with the matter. They said the device began leaking massive amounts of data about a month afterward, the source said.

Callamard, the special rapporteur for extra-judicial killings, and Kaye, special rapporteur for free expression, said the allegation of Saudi involvement "demands immediate investigation by the U.S. and other relevant authorities."

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud dismissed the allegations on Wednesday.

"I think 'absurd' is exactly the right word," he told Reuters in an interview in Davos, Switzerland. "The idea that the crown prince would hack Jeff Bezos' phone is absolutely silly."

The allegations could nonetheless further damage relations between tech tycoon Bezos and Riyadh, and risk harming the kingdom's reputation with foreign powers and investors.

The alleged cyberattack is said to have taken place months before the 2018 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a fierce critic of the Saudi government and a columnist for the Bezos-owned Washington Post.

In October 2018, Citizen Lab reported on the use of NSO software to spy on the inner circle of Jamal Khashoggi just before his murder.

Citizen Lab's October report stated, with high confidence, that NSO's Pegasus had been placed on the iPhone of Saudi dissident Omar Abdulaziz, one of Khashoggi's confidantes, months before.

Abdulaziz stated that the software revealed Khashoggi's "private criticisms of the Saudi royal family," which according to Abdulaziz "played a major role" in Khashoggi's death. Prince Mohammed said last year that the killing was carried out by rogue operatives and that he did not order it.

In another previous flashpoint, Bezos' security chief said last year that the Saudi government had gained access to the Amazon CEO's phone and leaked messages to U.S. tabloid the National Enquirer between Bezos and Lauren Sanchez, a former TV anchor who the newspaper said he was dating.

A month before, Bezos had accused the newspaper's owner of trying to blackmail him with the threat of publishing "intimate photos" he allegedly sent to Sanchez.

The Saudi government has denied having anything to do with the National Enquirer reporting.

Saudi Arabia's U.S. embassy also dismissed the allegations. "We call for an investigation on these claims so that we can have all the facts out," it said in a message posted on Twitter.

01.16.20 – We -

Trump Senate impeachment trial formally began on Thursday

01.16.20

Trump impeachment trial opens; White House faulted on Ukraine aid freeze

Assessment from nonpartisan Government Accountability Office is setback for president, while unclear if it will figure in trial in GOP-led Senate, with issues such as whether witnesses appear or new evidence considered stay up in air

Reuters| Published: 01.16.20 , 23:14

The Senate impeachment trial on whether to remove U.S. President Donald Trump from office formally began on Thursday even as a congressional watchdog found that the White House broke the law by withholding security aid for Ukraine approved by Congress.

The assessment from the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office was a setback for Trump, even though it was unclear if it would figure in his trial in the Republican-led Senate given that key issues such as whether witnesses will appear or new evidence will be considered remain up in the air.

Democrat Adam Schiff, who heads a team of seven House of Representatives members who will serve as prosecutors, appeared on the Senate floor to read the two charges passed by the House on Dec. 18 accusing Trump of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress arising from his dealings with Ukraine.

Chief Justice John Roberts, wearing his black judicial robe, was led onto the Senate floor by four senior lawmakers.

He took an oath to preside over the trial and then swore in the assembled senators, instructing them to raise their right hand, asking, "Do you solemnly swear that in all things appertaining to the trial of the impeachment of Donald John Trump, president of the United States, now pending you will do impartial justice according to the Constitution and laws, so help you God?"

The 99 senators present signed their assent one by one. One senator - Republican Jim Inhofe - was in his home state of Oklahoma to be with a family member facing a medical issue, according to his office, but was due to sign later in the day.

Opening statements in the trial were due to start on Tuesday. The Senate is expected to acquit Trump, as none of its 53 Republicans has voiced support for removing him, a step

that **requires a two-thirds majority**. Trump has denied wrongdoing and has called the impeachment process a sham.

The abuse of power cited in the House articles of impeachment included Trump's withholding of \$391 million in security aid for Ukraine, a move Democrats have said was aimed at pressuring Kiev into investigating political rival Joe Biden, the president's possible opponent in the Nov. 3 U.S. election.

"Faithful execution of the law does not permit the President to substitute his own policy priorities for those that Congress has enacted into law," the GAO report released on Thursday stated, referring to the fact that Congress had already voted to appropriate the funds.

An arm of Congress, the GAO is viewed as a top auditing agency for the federal government that advises lawmakers and various government entities on how taxpayer dollars are spent.

"This reinforces - again - the need for documents and eyewitnesses in the Senate," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, told a news conference.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican, has said senators should consider only the evidence amassed by the House.

Democrat sought report

The GAO issued its opinion after receiving a letter inquiring about the aid from Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen. The agency's findings are not legally binding, but its reports are seen by lawmakers as objective, reliable and generally uncontested. The GAO has no prosecutorial power.

Its report noted that the U.S. Constitution grants a president no unilateral authority to withhold funds in the way that Trump did. Instead, a president has a "strictly circumscribed authority" to withhold spending only in limited circumstances expressly provided by law.

Holding up money for a policy reason, which the Trump administration did in this case, is not permitted, the report said.

Asked about the GAO report, House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy defended Trump's withholding of aid, citing concerns about corruption in Ukraine's new government.

"I think it was the rightful thing to do," McCarthy told a news conference.

Congress approved the \$391 million to help Ukraine combat Russia-backed separatists in the eastern part of the country. The money ultimately was provided to Kiev in September after the controversy had spilled into public view.

A pivotal event leading to Trump's impeachment was a July 25 call in which he asked Ukraine's president to investigate Biden and his son Hunter Biden over unsubstantiated allegations of corruption and to look into a discredited theory that Ukraine, not Russia, interfered in the 2016 U.S. election.

Schiff indicated that the **House** prosecutors were considering **calling Lev Parnas, an associate of Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, as a witness** if the Senate permits testimony in the trial.



"We are continuing to review his (media) interviews and the materials he has provided to evaluate his potential testimony in the Senate trial," Schiff said in a statement.

Giuliani has said Parnas, a Ukraine-born U.S. citizen, helped him in investigating the Bidens. Documents released this week indicate Parnas was also involved in monitoring the movements of former ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch before Trump removed her in May after being urged to do so by Giuliani.

01.21.20 – Tu -

Lebanon forms Hezbollah government Tuesday under Prime Minister Hassan Diab

01.21.20

Lebanon forms government with backing of Hezbollah and allies

PM describes cabinet as technocratic 'rescue team' that would work to achieve goals of protesters; anti-Hezbollah Christian and Druze parties left out of coalition

Reuters| Published: 01.21.20 , 23:28

Lebanon formed a new government on Tuesday under Prime Minister Hassan Diab after the Shi'ite group Hezbollah and its allies agreed on a cabinet that must urgently address the economic crisis and ensuing protests that toppled its predecessor.

The heavily indebted country has been without an effective government since Saad al-Hariri resigned as premier in October, prompted by protests against a political elite seen as having caused the crisis through state corruption.

The Iranian-backed Hezbollah and allies including President Michel Aoun nominated Diab as premier last month after efforts failed to strike a deal with Hariri, Lebanon's main Sunni leader and an ally of the West and Gulf Arab states.

Weeks of wrangling over portfolios among Hezbollah's allies held up an agreement until Tuesday when the heavily armed group delivered an ultimatum to its allies to make a deal or suffer the consequences, sources familiar with the talks said.

The cabinet is made up of 20 specialist ministers backed by parties. Economist Ghazi Wazni was nominated finance minister with the backing of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri. Nassif Hitti, a former ambassador to the Arab League, was named foreign minister with the backing of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement.

Diab described his government as a technocratic "rescue team" that would work to achieve the goals of protesters who first took to the streets on Oct. 17. His first trip abroad would be to the Arab region, particularly the Gulf.

But analysts said Hezbollah's role in the government's formation meant it might have difficulty convincing other states to provide urgently needed financial support.

Hezbollah is designated a terrorist group by the United States, and Sunni-led Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Arab states that have provided Lebanon with financial aid in the past have for years been deeply concerned by its rising influence in Beirut.

"It will certainly not be easy for a government of this type to convince the outside world to help Lebanon," said Nabil Boumonsef, deputy editor-in-chief of the An-Nahar newspaper.

The absence of a government had left Lebanon rudderless as ordinary people suffered in the crisis.

A liquidity crunch has led banks to restrict access to cash and the Lebanese pound to slump. Job has been lost and inflation has soared. Over the last week, hundreds have been injured in clashes between the security forces and demonstrators.

Hariri and his Future Movement have stayed out of the government, along with the staunchly anti-Hezbollah Christian Lebanese Forces party and the Progressive Socialist Party of Druze leader Walid Jumblatt.

Mohanad Hage Ali, a fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center, said the new government of "one color" could further polarise Lebanese politics. Hariri's absence meant that old Sunni-Shi'ite tensions might be reactivated.

In some parts of Beirut, protesters greeted the new government by burning tires.

One of the government's first tasks will be to decide its approach to **looming sovereign bond repayments, including a \$1.2 billion Eurobond maturing in March.**

Lebanon's union of **exchange dealers said on Tuesday** it had decided to set the exchange rate at a maximum of **2,000 pounds to the U.S. dollar** in agreement with the central bank governor.

**01.21.20** – Tu -

**Islamic State replaced Baghdadi who was killed in October, with non-Arab Turk, Salbi**

**01.21.20**

**New leader of Islamic State said confirmed by intel agencies**

Amir Mohammed Abdul Rahman al-Mawli al-Salbi grew up in the ranks and received preferred status because of his scholarly background in Islamic studies, which he used to justify the enslavement of Yazidis

AFP| Published: **01.21.20** , 15:49

Intelligence services have identified the **new leader of the Islamic State as Amir Mohammed Abdul Rahman al-Mawli al-Salbi**, British newspaper The Guardian reported.

The paper, citing officials from two unnamed spy services, described him as **one of the terrorist group's founding members** and said he had led the enslavement of the Yazidi minority in Iraq.

It said he also oversaw operations around the world.

The organization had named Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi as its new head just days after its previous leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was killed in a raid by U.S. special forces in October.

But some analysts suggested the group were caught off guard by Baghdadi's killing and that the true identity of its new leader remained uncertain.

The Guardian said Salbi was selected within hours of the death and that Quraishi was a nom de guerre not recognized by other senior leaders or intelligence agencies.

The newspaper described him as "a hardened veteran in the same vein as Baghdadi, unflinching in his loyalty to the extremist group."

It said he was born into an Iraqi Turkmen family in the town of Tal Afar, and is one of the few non-Arabs among the group's leadership.

Holding a degree in Sharia law from the University of Mosul, he rose through its ranks in part thanks to his background as an Islamic scholar, the paper added.

Salbi gave religious rulings that underwrote the attempted genocide of Yazidis by IS, it said.