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Abbas praised the surge of violence to expel settlers from the West Bank

02.06.20

Abbas implies U.S. peace plan to blame for recent spike in violence

Spokesman for the Palestinian president says Trump's initiative will be foiled 'whatever the sacrifices might be'; Hamas, in the meantime, praises the attacks, saying the 'revolution will expel the occupation'

Elior Levy | Published: 02.06.20 , 19:27

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Thursday implied the recent terrorist attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem are a result of the recently unveiled U.S. peace plan, saying President Donald Trump's proposal will be foiled "whatever the sacrifices might be."

The violence began late Wednesday, when a Palestinian motorist slammed his car into a group of Israeli soldiers, wounding 12. Some hours later, two Palestinians were killed by IDF forces in the West Bank clashes and another attack took place in Jerusalem after the perpetrator opened fire at police officer stationed at the entrance to Jerusalem's Old City.

"We warned of this more than on multiple occasions and made clear that any initiative that won't realize the rights of the Palestinian people and won't strive for a just and comprehensive peace, will eventually lead to the escalation we can see today," a spokesman for Abbas, told the official Palestinian news agency.

He said the "Deal of the Century" created "an atmosphere of escalation and tension with its attempt to assert fake facts on the ground."

"The Palestinians and their leadership will contend with all the schemes and will foil them as we foiled all the previous ones."

In the meantime, Hamas praised the surge of violence earlier in the day, saying in a statement that "the revolution raging in the West Bank cities and in Jerusalem is the implementation of the Palestinian people's decision to expel the occupation from the West Bank and free it of settlers."

Tensions in the region have soared following last week's release of the Mideast initiative, which the Palestinians say favors Israel and was largely rejected by the Arab world. The violence put the plan on even shakier ground and raised fears of another extended round of fighting in the decades-old conflict.

The plan would allow Israel to annex all of its settlements and large parts of the West Bank - sparking calls from Israeli nationalists to do so immediately. In return it would grant Palestinians limited autonomy in scattered enclaves surrounded by Israel, but only if they meet very challenging conditions.

02.06.20 – Th -

IDF arrest Palestinian who slammed his car into 12 Israeli soldiers

02.06.20

IDF arrest Palestinian who slammed his car into group of Israeli soldiers

The military earlier said it was bolstering the troops in the West Bank after 3 terror attacks took place in the area, as well as in Jerusalem, in less than 24 hours

Ynet| Published: 02.06.20 , 17:51

Israeli military confirmed they arrested a Palestinian motorist slammed his car into a group of Israeli soldiers in central Jerusalem on Wednesday night, wounding 12.

Sand Al-Turman is a 25-year-old East Jerusalem resident with no prior security violations to his name. Shortly before the attack, he published a Facebook post, saying he has "found the answers."

In a statement, the army said the Border Police's elite police counter-terrorism unit arrested the perpetrator. "After extensive operational and intelligence efforts, in cooperation with the Shin Bet and other special units, the forces apprehended the terrorist from yesterday's attack in Jerusalem."

One of the 12 soldiers, who were all from the Golani Brigade, was seriously wounded and underwent surgery, while another sustained moderate wounds. The other troops 10 were lightly hurt.

The manhunt for the Palestinian centered around the town of Beit Jala in the West Bank, where the assailant left the vehicle used in the incident.

Earlier in the day, the army said it will bolster the troop presence in the West Bank after three separate terror attacks in the area in less than 24 hours.

On Thursday two Palestinians were killed by IDF forces in the West Bank clashes and another attack took place in Jerusalem after the perpetrator opened fire at police officer stationed at the entrance to Jerusalem's Old City.

The 202 battalion of the IDF's Paratroopers Brigade will assist the troops in the defensive duties to facilitate the expansion of the manhunt for the assailants.

In addition, several teams from IDF's counter-terrorism school and the elite Duvdevan unit are also set to be deployed in the area.

The head of the predominantly Arab Joint List party Ayman Odeh said he "strongly condemns" the shooting attack against a Border Policeman in the capital, carried out by Shadi Bana, a 40-year-old Israeli Arab from Haifa.

"We strongly condemn the shooting," Odeh said. "There is no place for a citizen of the state to use weapons. Arab citizens of the country have chosen a civil and democratic fight to the end the occupation, [bring] peace and equality. We will not achieve this in any other way."

Bana, a Christian, apparently converted to Islam not a long time ago.

He was killed by security services during a manhunt that erupted as a result of the attack. His two brothers were taken in for questioning on suspicion they'd been aware of Bana's intentions prior to the attack. The two denied having any connection to the incident. **Tensions have soared** following last week's release of President Donald Trump's Mideast initiative, which Palestinians believe favors Israel and was largely rejected by the Arab world. The violence put the plan on even shakier ground and raised fears of another extended round of fighting in the decades-old conflict.

**02.06.20** – Th -

**IDF strikes Hamas targets in Gaza after mortars launched at Israel**

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**IDF strikes Hamas targets in Gaza after mortars launched at Israel**

The strikes targeted underground facilities used by Hamas military wing, are response to mortar shelling were at nearby Israeli communities, explosive-laden balloons being dispatched across border

Elior Levy,Matan Tzuri| Updated: **02.06.20** , 11:33

Israeli **fighter jets struck targets** belonging to the **Hamas** terror group in the **Gaza Strip** overnight **Wednesday** in response to mortar fire, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit said.

The IDF described some of the targets as underground sites used by Hamas military wing.

The attacks were carried out in response to mortar shelling of border area communities and the continued use of balloons attached to explosive devices being dispatched over the border from the Strip.

"The IDF regards any terror activity targeting Israel with severity and will continue to operate against any attempt to harm Israelis," the army said.

Two mortar shells launched from Gaza landed in fields close to the border. No injuries were reported.

The launch of projectiles from Gaza into southern Israel has increased in the past several weeks, ending a short period of calm.

Earlier this week, three rockets fell near the town of Netivot; at least one person was treated after he lost consciousness due to shock. The IDF launched strikes on Gaza in response.

The IDF said Tuesday that it was prepared to react to any number of scenarios and was on high alert.

**Due to the uptick in violence from Gaza, the IDF has restricted the allowed fishing zone** for local Palestinian fishermen to just **10 nautical miles** until further notice.

02.05.20 – We -

Rabbi awarded for calling LGBT - disabled people requiring psychological treatment

02.05.20

Rabbi who called LGBT 'disabled' to receive Israel Prize

Adjudicator refuses to apologize for remarks, says he would have no regrets if stripped from award; 'decision encourages violence, hatred against proud community,' says CEO of LGBT task force

Kobi Nachshoni | Published: 02.05.20 , 21:10

Rabbi Yakov Ariel, who in the past has described members of the LGBT community as "disabled people requiring psychological treatment", will be awarded the prestigious Israel Prize for Rabbinic Literature, Education Minister Rafi Peretz announced on Tuesday.

"Rabbi Ariel is one of this generation's greatest scholars," Peretz said. "He had educated many students over the years and deserves the prize for the scope and depth of his work."

The 82-year-old Ariel, a pillar of the religious Zionist community, is the former chief town rabbi of Ramat Gan and was one of the most important students of Rabbi Kook, a prominent leader of the religious Zionist movement, during his time studying at Mercaz HaRav yeshiva.

In 2014, Ariel ruled that it was forbidden to rent an apartment to two lesbian women, who are "planning to live there in sin and break rabbinic laws" regarding sexuality.

During a 2016 conference in Ramla, Rabbi Ariel referred to members of the LGBT community as "disabled people suffering from a real problem that must be solved with psychological and pharmacological treatments."

"Our role is to strengthen the traditional family unit," Ariel said. "A normal family is a father, mother and children; an abnormal family is not organized and orderly, it suffers from an array of psychological problems."

The choice to award the religious scholar with the prestigious award spawned sharp criticism in the LGBT community.

"The decision to award the Israel Prize to a rabbi who advocates hatred of others is a disgraceful decision that encourages violence and hatred that members of the proud community in Israel endure every day and every hour," said Ohad Hizki, CEO of the Aguda – Israel's LGBT Task Force.

Meretz Chairman and member of the LGBT community Nitzan Horowitz also condemned the decision to award Ariel with the prize and called it "the Israel Prize for hatred and homophobia."

"The Israel Prize of hatred and homophobia was presented today by the education minister who called us unhealthy to the rabbi who called us "disabled", said Horowitz. "When Labor-Meretz replaces the right, we will finally have education that is pluralistic, tolerant and accepting."

Rabbi Ariel refused in a Wednesday interview to apologize for his past statements, saying he would have no regrets if he were to be stripped from the award.

02.05.20 – We -

IDF strikes Hamas targets in Gaza in response to mid-night rockets on Negev

02.05.20

IDF strikes Hamas targets in Gaza in response to Netivot rockets

The army says the 3 projectiles landed in open areas and no damage was reported; 37-year-old man was treated for shock; the military spokesperson adds one of the sites targeted by IAF was the terror group's weapons manufacturing facility  
Yoav Zitun, Ilana Curie | Published: 02.05.20 , 09:42

Israeli warplanes struck a series Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip in a pre-dawn raid on Wednesday, in response to three rockets fired at the southern city of Netivot just hours earlier.

A spokesperson for the IDF said among the military sites struck in southern Gaza, was a weapons manufacturing facility belonging to the terrorist organization's military wing. "This attack undermines Hamas's ability to reinforce," said the army in a statement.

The rocket alerts sirens sounded in the western Negev city at around 00:12 am, followed by three loud explosions. The military later confirmed the three projectiles launched by Gaza militants all landed in open areas.

Although no damage was reported, a 37-year-old was treated for shock after he fainted and temporarily lost consciousness.

Tensions on the southern border have soared in recent days after Palestinian militants renewed sporadic rocket attacks on Israeli communities bordering the Hamas-controlled enclave.

In addition, incendiary balloon attacks - which involve explosives attached to airborne devices being flown into Israeli territory - have also increased dramatically.

As a result, Israel has announced it has halted the import of cement into the Strip and cancelled 500 entry permits allocated for merchants from Gaza.

02.04.20 – Tu -

EU foreign policy chief favors Palestine & rejects Israel Mideast Peace Plan

02.04.20

EU rejects Trump Mideast plan amid annexation concerns

European senior official says U.S. proposal 'departs' from 'internationally agreed parameters' by **not including right of return and East Jerusalem** as potential capital of Palestinian state; foreign ministry calls statement 'unfortunate'

Associated Press | Published: 02.04.20 , 15:28

The **European Union on Tuesday rejected** U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal for securing peace in the Middle East and expressed concern about Israel's plans to annex more Palestinian land.

Trump's plan, which was unveiled last week, would foresee the eventual creation of a Palestinian state, but it falls far short of minimal Palestinian demands and would leave sizable chunks of the West Bank in Israeli hands.

In a statement, **EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell** underlined the bloc's **commitment to a two-state solution**, based **along 1967 lines** with the possibility of mutually agreed land-swaps, made up of the state of Israel and "an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable state of Palestine."

Borrell said the **U.S. initiative "departs from these internationally agreed parameters."**

"To build a just and lasting peace, the unresolved final status issues must be decided through direct negotiations between both parties. This includes notably the issues related to borders, the status of Jerusalem, security and the refugee question," Borrell said.

The foreign ministry issued a response to **Borell's statement**, calling it "unfortunate".

"The fact that the EU's foreign policy chief chose to use such threatening language towards Israel **shortly after taking up office** and just hours **after his round of meeting in Iran**, is unfortunate, to say the least," read the statement. "Promoting such policies and practices is the best way to ensure that the **EU's role in any peace process will be minimal.**"

Trump's plan was welcomed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but Palestinian President Mahmoud **Abbas has dismissed it as "nonsense."** Gulf Arab states also rejected the White House plan as "biased." While Israeli officials were present for its unveiling, no Palestinian representatives attended.

**Netanyahu** has said he **wants to move forward with plans to annex** West Bank territory.

"We are especially concerned by statements on the **prospect of the annexation of the Jordan Valley** and other parts of the West Bank," Borrell said.

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem - areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war - for an independent state and the removal of more than 700,000 Israeli settlers from these areas.

**02.04.20** – Tu -

**Rivlin hosted 30 US Military Officers, stressing IDF defend itself in negotiations**

**02.04.20**

**Rivlin calls for direct negotiations with Palestinians**

President sees Trump's Mideast peace initiative as opportunity to reignite long-dormant peace talks between two parties; says Israel 'will never compromise the security of our citizens'

Ynet| Published: **02.04.20** , 17:22

President Reuven Rivlin called on Israel and the Palestinians Tuesday to use U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan as a foundation for renewed direct negotiations between the two parties.

"As we continue to face the threats from Iran and its proxies today, including the terrorist organizations in Gaza, we also look to the opportunities and challenges of the future. The vision for peace which President Trump presented last week, recognizes Israel's need to retain security responsibility for all areas west of the Jordan River. Israel must always be able to defend itself by itself," Rivlin said as he hosted some 30 U.S. Armed Forces officers visiting Israel.

"Yet, while we will never compromise the security of our citizens, I believe that a vision of peace with our Palestinian neighbors is a realistic one. Israelis and Palestinians are not doomed to live together, it is our destiny to live together. I hope that both sides will take this opportunity to restart direct negotiations."

Trump's plan, which was unveiled last Tuesday, would foresee the eventual creation of a Palestinian state, but it falls far short of minimal Palestinian demands and would leave sizable chunks of the West Bank in Israeli hands.

The American president's so-called Deal of the Century was welcomed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has dismissed it as "nonsense." Gulf Arab states also rejected the White House plan as "biased." While Israeli officials were present for its unveiling, no Palestinian representatives attended.

Earlier Tuesday, the European Union rejected Trump's proposed plan and expressed concern about Israel's plans to annex more Palestinian land, mainly the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea, after Netanyahu confirmed his intentions to move forward with plans to annex the West Bank territories.

In a statement, EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell underlined the continental bloc's commitment to a two-state solution, based on the 1967 armistice lines drawn after Israel's overwhelming victory in the Six-Day War, with the possibility of mutually agreed land-swaps, made up of the state of Israel and "an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable state of Palestine."

Borrell said the U.S. initiative "departs from these internationally agreed parameters."

"To build a just and lasting peace, the unresolved final status issues must be decided through direct negotiations between both parties. This includes notably the issues related to borders, the status of Jerusalem, security and the refugee question," Borrell said. "We are especially concerned by statements on the prospect of the annexation of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank."

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem - areas captured by Israel from Jordan in the Six-Day War - for an independent state and the removal of more than 700,000 Israeli settlers from these areas, but Trump's plan sides heavily with Netanyahu's hard-line nationalist vision for the region and shunts aside many of the Palestinians' core demands.



02.01.20 – Sa -

Gaza rocket fired at Israeli community during Gantz visit

02.01.20

Gaza rocket fired at Israeli community during Gantz visit

The army says the projectile landed in an open area in Nahal Oz, where the former IDF chief along with his fellow party member were meeting with local residents

Ynet| Published: 02.01.20 , 23:38

The militants in the Gaza Strip on Saturday fired a rocket into the neighboring Israeli community of Nahal Oz, during the visit of Blue & White leader Benny Gantz in the area.

The former IDF chief's fellow party member Gabi Ashkenazi - also a former chief of staff - was also at the southern Kibbutz where the two were meeting with the locals.

The army said the rocket landed in an open area and no casualties or damage was reported.

The firing comes after a tense day of cross-border rocket launchings from the Hamas-controlled territory and Israeli artillery and airstrikes.

The Strip has been relatively calm as part of an informal truce between its Hamas rulers and Israel, but tension has simmered this week after President Trump unrolled his plan to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"I expect the coming days to be challenging given the events of the past few days," said Gantz, referring to earlier statements by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas who threatened to cut off security ties with Israel following the unveiling of Trump's peace plan.

Gantz also thanked the residents of the southern communities for their resilience and said they deserve for the issue of security to be resolved.

Earlier in the day, explosive devices attached to clusters of balloons were discovered in the southern city of Sderot as well as the regional councils of Lakhish and Merhavim.

Police sappers were called to neutralize the devices.

02.05.20 – We -

Senate acquits Trump in historic Dem- vs-Rep vote as Romney joins forces of hell

02.05.20

Senate acquits Trump in historic vote as re-election battle looms

Acquittal marks second time in 10 months Trump withstands existential threat to his presidency, strengthening incumbent's reelection bid later this year

Reuters| Published: 02.05.20 , 23:47

U.S. President Donald Trump was acquitted on Wednesday in his Senate impeachment trial, saved by fellow Republicans who rallied to protect him nine months before he asks voters in a deeply divided America to give him a second White House term.

The businessman-turned-politician, 73, survived only the third presidential impeachment trial in U.S. history - just like the two other impeached presidents - in his turbulent presidency's darkest chapter. Trump now plunges into an election season that promises to further polarize the country.

Trump was acquitted largely along party lines on two articles of impeachment approved by the Democratic-led House of Representatives on Dec. 18, with the votes falling far short of the two-thirds majority required in the 100-seat Senate to remove him under the U.S. Constitution.

The Senate voted 52-48 to acquit him of abuse of power stemming from his request that Ukraine investigate political rival Joe Biden, a contender for the Democratic nomination to face Trump in the Nov. 3 election. Republican Senator Mitt Romney joined the Democrats in voting to convict. No Democrat voted to acquit.

The Senate then voted 53-47 to acquit him of obstruction of Congress by blocking witnesses and documents sought by the House. A conviction on either count would have elevated Vice President Mike Pence, another Republican, into the presidency. Romney joined the rest of the Republican senators in voting to acquit on the obstruction charge. No Democrat voted to acquit.

On each of the two charges, the senators voted one by one on the Senate floor with U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts presiding.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and other Republicans engineered a stripped-down trial with no witnesses or new evidence. Democrats called the trial a sham and a cover-up. Trump called the impeachment an attempted coup and a Democratic attempt to annul his 2016 election victory.

Throughout the impeachment drama, Trump and his Republican allies kept up their attacks on Biden's integrity. It remains to be seen how much political damage it inflicted. In the first of the state-by-state contests to determine the Democratic challenger to Trump, Biden placed a disappointing fourth in Iowa, according to incomplete results from Monday's voting. Biden has accused Trump of "lies, smears, distortions and name-calling."

'APPALLING ABUSE'

Trump faces no serious challengers for his party's presidential nomination. He is poised to claim the nomination at the party's convention in August and previewed in his State of the Union address on Tuesday campaign themes such as American renewal, economic vitality and hardline immigration policies.

Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee, broke with his party to vote to convict Trump on the abuse-of-power charge. Romney called the president's actions in pressuring Ukraine to investigate Biden "grievously wrong" and said Trump was "guilty of an appalling abuse of public trust."

"What he did was not 'perfect,'" Romney said on the Senate floor, as Trump has described his call with Ukraine's president that was at the heart of the scandal. "No, it was a flagrant assault on our electoral rights, our national security and our fundamental values.

Corrupting an election to keep one's self in office is perhaps the most abusive and destructive violation of one's oath of office that I can imagine."

Romney, a moderate and elder statesman in his party, paused during his speech as he became choked with emotion after mentioning the importance of his religious faith.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham lashed out at Democrats, saying: "What you have done is unleash the partisan forces of hell."

Chuck Schumer, the top Senate Democrat, said Trump's acquittal in an unfair trial was worth nothing.

"No doubt, the president will boast he received total exoneration. But we know better. We know this wasn't a trial by any stretch of the definition."

In his speech, McConnell said: "The architects of this impeachment claimed they were defending norms and traditions. In reality, it was an assault on both."

#### BIGGEST VICTORY YET

Democrats expressed concern that an acquittal would further embolden a president who already challenges political norms. They have painted him as a threat to U.S. democracy and a demagogue who has acted lawlessly and exhibited contempt for the powers of Congress and other institutions. They also have voiced concern over Russia interfering in another American election.

Trump's legal team offered a vision of nearly unlimited presidential powers, a view Democrats said placed any president above the law.

The acquittal handed Trump his biggest victory yet over his Democratic adversaries in Congress. Democrats vowed to press ahead with investigations - they are fighting in court for access to his financial records - and voiced hope that the facts unearthed during the impeachment process about his conduct would help persuade voters to make him a one-term president.

Trump's job approval ratings have remained fairly consistent throughout his presidency and the impeachment process as his core conservative supporters - especially white men, rural Americans, evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics - stick with him.

The latest Reuters/Ipsos poll, conducted on Monday and Tuesday, showed 42% of American adults approved of his performance, while 54% disapproved. That is nearly the same as when the House launched its impeachment inquiry in September when his approval stood at 43% and disapproval at 53%.

The trial formally began on Jan. 16. The Senate voted 51-49 last Friday to defeat the Democrats' bid to call witnesses such as Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton, with only two Republicans joining them.

In the previous presidential impeachment trials, Andrew Johnson was acquitted in 1868 in the aftermath of the American Civil War and Bill Clinton was acquitted in 1999 of charges stemming from a sex scandal.

In the hours before the vote, numerous senators gave speeches on the Senate floor explaining their vote.

#### SHADOW OF INVESTIGATION

Trump, now seeking a second four-year term, has been under the shadow of some sort of investigation for most of his presidency. The acquittal marked the second time in 10 months that he withstood an existential threat to his presidency.

In March 2019, Special Counsel Robert Mueller found insufficient evidence that Trump engaged in a criminal conspiracy with Russia in its interference on his behalf in the 2016 election. Mueller did not exonerate Trump of obstruction of justice in seeking to impede the investigation but stopped short of concluding the president acted unlawfully. Trump declared full vindication.

Last July 25, Trump asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during a phone call to "do us a favor" and open an investigation into Biden and his son Hunter Biden and into a discredited theory beneficial to Russia that Ukraine colluded with Democrats to meddle in the 2016 election to harm Trump.

Hunter Biden had joined the board of Ukrainian energy company Burisma while his father was U.S. vice president. Trump accused the Bidens of corruption without offering substantiation. The Bidens denied wrongdoing.

Democrats said Trump further abused his power by withholding \$391 million in security aid approved by Congress to help Ukraine battle Russia-backed separatists and by dangling a coveted White House meeting as leverage to pressure Zelenskyy to announce the investigations.

02.05.20 – We -

Psycho-Pelosi rips Trump's State of Union speech calling it a manifesto of mistruths

02.05.20

Trump-Pelosi feud erupts at State of Union speech

Amid impeachment trial, president refuses to shake House speaker's hand, and she rips his speech into pieces on the podium, calling it 'a manifesto of mistruths'

Reuters | Published: 02.05.20 , 08:40

A bitter feud between U.S. President Donald Trump and top Democrat Nancy Pelosi boiled over at his State of the Union speech on Tuesday, with Trump denying her a handshake and Pelosi ripping apart a copy of his remarks behind his back.

Trump avoided the subject of his impeachment drama in a pugnacious 80-minute speech, but the raw wounds from the battle were evident with fellow Republicans giving him standing ovations while rival Democrats for the most part remained seated.

The Republican-led Senate was expected to acquit him of charges he abused his powers and obstructed Congress during a vote beginning at 4 pm EST on Wednesday.

Seeing Pelosi, the U.S. House of Representatives speaker, for the first time since she stormed out of a White House meeting four months ago, Trump declined to shake her outstretched hand as he gave her a paper copy of his remarks before starting to speak.

Despite having not spoken to Trump since their last meeting, Pelosi appeared to be taken aback. She avoided citing the customary "high privilege and distinct honor" that usually accompanies the speaker's introduction of the president to Congress.

"Members of Congress, the President of the United States" was all she said in introducing Trump.

When his speech ended, Pelosi stood and tore up her copy of the remarks he had handed her, later telling reporters it was "the courteous thing to do, considering the alternative," and calling "a manifesto of lies."

Kayleigh McEnany, Trump's campaign spokeswoman, said of Pelosi: "Her hatred for @realDonaldTrump has blinded her to the repulsive nature of her smug, elitist behavior." After the event, Pelosi tweeted a photo of her with her hand reaching out to Trump and said, "Democrats will never stop extending the hand of friendship to get the job done #ForThePeople. We will work to find common ground where we can, but will stand our ground where we cannot. #SOTU"

The tension was a sign that little legislative progress should be expected with the presidential election nine months away.

The impeachment case has intensified bitter feelings between Trump, a former reality TV star-turned conservative politician, and Pelosi, a California liberal, that have existed throughout his presidency. He routinely calls her "Crazy Nancy" at his campaign rallies. 'FOUR MORE YEARS'

As he began the speech, Republicans from both houses of Congress chanted "four more years" while he stood at the lectern in the chamber of the House.

Democrats sat silently and some could be seen shaking their heads as Trump declared, "The state of our union is stronger than ever before."

Pelosi, who dropped her opposition to impeachment and allowed Democratic lawmakers to seek the charges against him, sat stoically and grim-faced behind Trump and paged through a paper copy of his speech as he spoke.

Trump entered the chamber with Democrats experiencing unease and chaos after technical glitches delayed the results of voting in Iowa on Monday, the first 2020 contest as the party seeks a nominee to face the incumbent Republican.

Trump presented himself as a big improvement over Democratic President Barack Obama, whom he succeeded three years ago, saying he had bolstered U.S. economic growth and increased jobs.

"In just three short years we have shattered the mentality of American decline and we have rejected the downsizing of America's destiny," he said.

The House impeachment managers, acting as prosecutors in the Senate impeachment trial, were seated together at the front of the Democrats' section.

#### DEMOCRATIC WOMEN PROTEST

Many House Democratic women wore white for a second year in a row, a sign of the suffrage movement that won women the right to vote 100 years ago. Several Democratic lawmakers refused to attend the annual speech to protest Trump, such as liberal firebrand Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Trump, using the speech to lay out his vision for a second four-year term, said a Democratic plan to expand government-funded health insurance amounted to a "socialist

takeover" that would bankrupt the country, cut benefits for those who have them now and provide care to illegal immigrants.

Democratic presidential candidates and many lawmakers have proposed healthcare plans that would be run by the government, a sharp departure from the current, private system in which millions of Americans receive medical insurance from their employers.

Trump's lack of a healthcare plan has left him open to criticism that he has not put enough work into finding a way to reduce rising insurance costs that burden middle-class Americans.

"We will never let socialism destroy American healthcare!" Trump said.

Democratic women stood and chanted "HR 3" - a reference to a Democratic bill that would lower drug costs.

In the televised Democratic response to Trump's speech, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer said: "Democrats are trying to make your healthcare better. Republicans in Washington are trying to take it away."

Trump offered an upbeat portrayal of his presidency in hopes of persuading Americans to give him another four-year term in the Nov. 3 election.

He saluted surprise guest Juan Guaido, the Venezuelan opposition leader, and made cancer-stricken conservative talk radio host Rush Limbaugh an immediate recipient of the presidential Medal of Freedom, with Trump's wife Melania pinning the ribbon around Limbaugh's neck.

Trump also revived his polarizing arguments that migrants should be stopped from crossing the southern U.S. border and that so-called "sanctuary cities" where migrants are protected are wrong. His immigration policies are opposed by Democrats.

Pelosi could be seen shaking her head as Trump spoke of his views on immigration.

01.30.20 – Th -

WHO declares global emergency over virus from China

01.30.20

WHO declares global emergency over virus from China

Health ministry publishes guidelines for Israelis traveling back from areas hit by coronavirus; directive urges patients not to go to public spaces for two-week period  
Reuters, Itay Blumenthal, Inabr Tvizer | Published: 01.30.20 , 22:54

The World Health Organization declared the outbreak sparked by a new virus in China that has been exported to more than a dozen countries as a global emergency Thursday after the number of cases spiked more than tenfold in a week.

The UN health agency defines an international emergency as an "extraordinary event" that constitutes a risk to other countries and requires a coordinated international response.

China first informed WHO about cases of the new virus in late December. To date, China has reported more than 7,800 cases including 170 deaths. Eighteen other countries have

since reported cases, as scientists race to understand how exactly the virus is spreading and how severe it is.

Experts say there is significant evidence the virus is spreading among people in China and have noted with concern instances in other countries - including the United States, France, Japan, Germany, Canada and Vietnam - where there have also been isolated cases of human-to-human transmission.

Speaking to reporters in Geneva, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus noted the worrisome spread of the virus between people outside China.

The main reason for this declaration is not because of what is happening in China but because of what is happening in other countries, Ghebreyesus said. "Our greatest concern is the potential for this virus to spread to countries with weaker health systems which are ill-prepared to deal with it."

"This declaration is not a vote of non-confidence in China...on the contrary, WHO continues to have the confidence in China's capacity to control the outbreak," Ghebreyesus said.

On Thursday, France confirmed that a doctor who was in contact with a patient with the new virus later became infected himself. The doctor is now being treated in an isolated room at a Paris hospital. Outbreak specialists worry that the spread of new viruses from patients to health workers can signal the virus is becoming adapted to human transmission.

A declaration of a global emergency typically brings greater money and resources, but may also prompt nervous governments to restrict travel and trade to affected countries.

The announcement also imposes more disease reporting requirements on countries.

The health ministry published on Thursday guidelines for Israelis traveling back from areas hit by the coronavirus.

The new directive urges Israelis who have been to China in the past 14 days not to go to public spaces for a two-week period.

In any case of a fever, coughing or shortness of breath, patients are instructed to contact a health care provider or emergency room and notify them in advance that the patient has been in China recently.

Patients are also instructed to cover their mouth and nose with masks or other available cloth.

Absence from work during this two-week period would not require patients to obtain sick leave from a physician.

Earlier Thursday, Health Minister Yaakov Litzman banned the entry of flights from China to Israel as a precautionary against the coronavirus outbreak in the East Asian country.

Litzman announced the new directive at the end of a meeting at the Emergency Department of the Ministry of Health revolving around confinement and treatment of the virus.

"After extensive consultations, we've made a number of decisions pertaining to the coronavirus," said Litzman. "The numerous cases of the virus discovered in Europe require us to do everything we can to keep the Israeli people safe. We do not currently allow flights from China to Israel until further notice."

"We shall examine tourists arriving in Israel from other countries as well and those who return from China will have to spend two weeks in solitary confinement at their homes - the period when they may still be contagious."

Also on Thursday, Israeli airline El Al on sa

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6 Militants bomb gas pipeline in northern Sinai, but flow continues undisturbed

02.02.20

Report: Militants bomb gas pipeline between Israel, Egypt in northern Sinai

Al-Jazeera reports attack carried out on pipeline; Egyptian authorities confirm at least 6 militants involved in attack; energy ministry, pipeline's owners deny

Daniel Salami, Itamar Eichner | Published: 02.02.20, 23:21

Unknown militants have bombed a part of the gas pipeline between Israel to Egypt, located in the Bir al-Abd region in the northern Sinai Peninsula, Al-Jazeera reported on Sunday.

Egyptian security officials confirmed at least 6 militants were involved in the attack on the gas pipeline in northern Sinai.

The energy ministry issued a statement shortly after reports of the attack emerged, saying that the flow of natural gas in the pipeline currently continues undisturbed.

The ministry examines the reports of the attack in cooperation with the pertinent sources.

A statement released by the pipeline's owner-companies denied any reports of an attack and said that the flow of natural gas in the pipeline to Egypt continues as usual.

This is not the first time such an attack is carried out on a gas pipeline between the two countries. A gas pipeline transferring natural gas from Egypt to Israel and Jordan had been bombed at least 15 times between the years 2011-2012 in protest of a gas deal inked by then-Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Israel.

The pipeline was only launched last month after the two countries carried a new deal into effect, transferring gas from Israel's Leviathan natural gas field to its southern neighbor. This marked the first time natural gas was transported from Israel to Egypt and not vice versa.

Last year, Israel's Delek Group and the American company Noble Energy – which together own 85% of the Leviathan field - completed the purchase of 39% of the Egyptian gas pipeline in partnership. The purchase was carried out in conjunction with Egypt's state-owned company EGAS for about \$520 million.