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Turkey announced open west border to migrants & refugees heading into Europe

03.03.20 – Tu -

Joint List opposition party win 15-seats in the Knesset

03.03.20

Joint List head claims 'huge success' with historic 15-seat win

Odeh urges left-wingers not to despair over results showing right-wing bloc in lead; calls his party, which garnered more than 530,000 votes in Monday ballot, the 'principled alternative for the entire Israeli political map'

Hassan Shaalan, Matan Tzuri | Published: 03.03.20 , 21:11

Joint List chairman Ayman Odeh declared a “huge achievement” in Monday’s elections after nearly final results showed the party had won 15 seats in Knesset, their largest win in any national ballot.

“Brothers and sisters, you have created a historic day,” Odeh said in a recorded statement in Arabic.

“From the first elections in 1949 until today, we have not received this degree of support and this number of seats.”

The near-final results of the elections - the country's third in less than a year - showed that more than 530,000 Israelis voted for the Joint List.

In a separate statement to reporters in Hebrew, Odeh said that Joint List received votes from many Jewish voters and contended that it needed to become “the principled alternative for the entire Israeli political map.”

“I call on left-wingers not to despair or soul search, but rather think about partnership and a principled alternative,” he said, adding that he was talking about “real peace and democracy, actual equality between Arabs and Jews and social justice for all disadvantaged persons.”

“As of this moment, we will strengthen the cooperation between us and the weak groups of Israeli society,” he said.

Asked if the Joint List was the “new left,” Odeh did not directly answer the question but stated that the alliance would “strengthen the left and the Jewish-Arab alternative.”

Several Joint List officials have recently said that they want the alliance to play a greater role in influencing decision-making in Israeli politics.

Odeh also pointed out that the Joint List was the only opposition party that according to the nearly final results managed to increase its numbers in the Knesset.

“With the exception of the Joint List, they all went down,” he said.

The near-final results suggested that Blue & White would retain its role as the largest party in the opposition but would drop from 33 to 32 MKs; they also indicated that the Labor-Gesher-Meretz alliance would only win six seats.

In his statement, Odeh also accused Blue & White of failing to become “an alternative to the right” that had instead chosen to adopt right-wing positions.

Joint List MK Ahmad Tibi told Army Radio on Tuesday that Blue & White came up short in the election because of their strategy of seeking to take votes from the right.

“It turns out that the public prefers the original source, not an imitation,” he said, according to the Israeli media.

03.03.20 – Tu -

Nation vote counted, overseas not; Netanyahu steady at 59 needs 2 Knesset seats

03.03.20

With 92.6% of votes counted, Netanyahu's right-wing bloc holds steady at 59 seats

An earlier count had the ruling party down from 36 to 35 MKs and Joint List up from 15 to 16; prime minister still needs to find 2 lawmakers to get to the 61 he needs to form a stable government

Yaron Drukman | Published: 03.03.20 , 20:17

With 92.6% of the vote counted in Monday's elections, Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud has won on 36 seats in the 120-member Knesset, despite earlier results putting the party on 35 seats.

The previous downturn meant the right-wing bloc was on 58 seats, meaning it was three MKs short of being able to form the stable right-wing and religious coalition he seeks.

The updated count also sees the the predominantly Joint List back to 15 seats from 16. This means that Netanyahu's right-wing bloc is now two MKs short of the 61 that he needs to form a government.

The center-left bloc headed by Blue & White leader Benny Gantz remains unchanged. Netanyahu's Likud emerged victorious after Monday's elections with exit polls initially showing his bloc winning 60 seats and his party winning 37. Blue & White was predicted to win between 32 and 34 seats, with the center-left bloc claiming just 54 MKs.

According to the Central Elections Committee, all polling stations have been counted and results are being calculated and reviewed and will be published Tuesday.

These results will not include an estimated 340,000 votes from military polling stations, the votes of diplomats overseas and the tally from special polling stations including more than 4,000 votes from voters in quarantine due to exposure to coronavirus.

03.03.20 – Tu -

Gantz accepts defeat: I share your pain and disappointment

03.03.20

Gantz to supporters: I share your pain and disappointment

Blue & White #3 takes shot at 'the accused' prime minister, saying that Netanyahu does not have the ability to form a government

Ynet| Published: 03.03.20 , 01:59

Blue & White leader Benny Gantz appeared to accept defeat in Monday's election, telling supporters in Tel Aviv that he shared their pain of disappointment.

Exit polls and the slowly trickling final results appeared to put Likud ahead on 37 seats in Knesset and 59 to 60 seats for the right-wing bloc.

Blue & White were predicted to win between 32 and 34 seats and the center-left bloc was expected to have between 54 and 55 seats.

Neither bloc appeared to be over the 61 MK benchmark for forming a government.

Gantz told supporters that the current election cycle was one of the toughest in Israel's history and he shared their pain of defeat.

"I believe that when the final results come in, we will see that we continue to grow," he said at the party headquarters in Tel Aviv.

"I share with you the sense of pain and disappointment because this is not the result that will put Israel back on the right path."

But Blue & White MK Moshe Ya'alon was less circumspect, taking a shot at Benjamin Netanyahu's legal woes calling him "the accused" and saying he does not have the numbers in his right-wing bloc to form a government.

"Even after a nasty campaign of lies and going low - at this moment, the accused Netanyahu does not have the ability to form a government," Ya'alon, who previously served as the Likud leader's defense minister, wrote on Twitter.

"Blue and White was created to restore sanity to the country, to bring back the values with which we grew up and were educated in," he wrote.

"As such, we are united and determined to continue our path until we reach our goal, even if the road is long."

03.02.20 – Mo -

Sanders calling Netanyahu a "reactionary racist: I am pro-Israel. I am pro-Palestinian

03.02.20

Sanders hits back in AIPAC row: I am pro-Israel. I am pro-Palestinian

Jewish senator and presidential hopeful responds to criticism for skipping annual conference of powerful pro-Israel lobby, saying he wants to 'bring people together to finally achieve peace in region'

Ynet| Published: 03.02.20, 14:05

A war of words between Israeli officials and U.S. presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders continued Sunday evening, with the Jewish senator hitting back at criticism for his decision not to attend the annual conference of pro-Israel lobby AIPAC.

"I am pro-Israel. I am pro-Palestinian," Sanders said on CBS' 'Face the Nation' program.

"I want to bring people together to finally achieve peace in that region," he said, insisting that he would do everything he could "to protect the independence and the security and the freedom of the Israeli people."

He added: "What we need in this country is a foreign policy that not only protects Israel, but deals with the suffering of the Palestinian people as well."

"I'm Jewish and I'm very proud of my Jewish heritage...I am not anti-Israel...but what we need in this country is a foreign policy that not only protects Israel but deals with the suffering of the Palestinian people as well."

Earlier Sunday, Israel's Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon lambasted the senator from the AIPAC conference in Washington.

"We don't want Sanders at AIPAC. We don't want him in Israel," Danon said.

Danon also slammed Sanders for calling Netanyahu a "reactionary racist" at the recent Democratic debate in South Carolina.

"Whoever calls the prime minister of Israel a 'racist' is either a liar, an ignorant fool, or both," Danon said.

Netanyahu himself last week appeared to shrug off Sanders' comments, saying that he was "wrong" about the prime minister.

Sanders' rivals for the Democratic nomination, Joe Biden and Amy Klobuchar, sent video messages to the conference while Mike Bloomberg was to appear in person alongside Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Vice President Mike Pence and U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue & White leader Benny Gantz also sent video messages; the usual appearance by Israeli leaders has this year was scuppered by the Knesset election.

Writing on Twitter last Sunday, Sanders accused AIPAC of providing a platform to leaders who "express bigotry" against the Palestinian people.

"The Israeli people have the right to live in peace and security. So do the Palestinian people," Sanders tweeted. "I remain concerned about the platform AIPAC provides for leaders who express bigotry and oppose basic Palestinian rights. For that reason I will not attend their conference."

In response, AIPAC called the Vermont senator's comment "outrageous."
"Senator Sanders has never attended our conference and that is evident from his outrageous comment," AIPAC said.

"In fact, many of his own Senate and House Democratic colleagues and leaders speak from our platform to the over 18,000 Americans from widely diverse backgrounds - Democrats, Republicans, Jews, Christians, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, progressives, Veterans, students, members of the LGBTQ+ community - who participate in the conference to proclaim their support for the US-Israel relationship."

Out of all the Democratic candidates running for president, Sanders has been the most outspoken on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, calling for an "even-handed" approach more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

That has included **openly considering cutting American aid to Israel** to pressure the nation to curb its settlement enterprise, enter peace talks with the Palestinians and **improve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza**.

"I would use the leverage of \$3.8 billion," he said last October. "It is a lot of money, and we cannot give it carte blanche to the Israeli government, or for that matter to any government at all. We have a right to demand respect for human rights and democracy."

Sanders, who is Jewish, has long ties to Israel. He spent months living on a kibbutz in the 1960s — an experience he has cited in the past to affirm his commitment to Israel's security.

"I am very proud to be Jewish and look forward to being the first Jewish president," he said at a J Street conference in October 2019. "I spent many months on a kibbutz in Israel. I believe absolutely not only in the right of Israel to exist but the right to exist in peace and security. That's not a question."

"But what I also believe," he continued, "is the Palestinian people have a right to live in peace and security as well."

03.01.20 – Su -

Danon: We don't want Sanders at AIPAC conference. We don't want him in Israel

03.01.20

Israeli diplomat at AIPAC: We don't want Sanders here

Danny **Danon lashes out at Jewish Vermont senator** for saying pro-Israel lobby provides platform for 'bigotry', says **anyone who calls PM a 'racist' is 'either a liar, an ignorant fool or both'**

Ynet| Published: **03.01.20**, 16:19

Israel's UN ambassador lashed out at presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders on Sunday, lambasting him at **the annual conference** of the powerful **pro-Israel lobby** AIPAC, which the Jewish Vermont senator said last week that he would not attend.

"We don't want Sanders at AIPAC. We don't want him in Israel," the Israeli media quoted Danny Danon as saying during the conference in Washington.

Danon also slammed Sanders for calling Netanyahu a "reactionary racist" at last week's Democratic debate in South Carolina.

"Whoever calls the prime minister of Israel a 'racist' is either a liar, an ignorant fool, or both," Danon said, according to the Israeli media.

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03.01.20 – Su -

Shopping center in central Israel evacuated amid coronavirus fears

03.01.20

Shopping center in central Israel evacuated amid coronavirus fears

An employee at Givatayim Mall tells Ynet that a man, who recently arrived from Italy, came to his HMO on the upper floor and said he may have contracted the virus; 'There's a lot of hysteria,' says employee

Ynet| Published: 03.01.20 , 10:52

The emergency services evacuated parts of a shopping center in central Israel after a suspected coronavirus patient came to his HMO located on the top floor after recently arriving from Italy.

Italy is now among the countries severely affected by the health crisis, with 29 confirmed fatalities and over 1000 confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus. On Wednesday the Health Ministry issued a travel warning to the country, adding that anyone returning from the European state must immediately self-quarantine for 14 days.

One of the employees at the Givatayim Mall told Ynet that a man who came to Maccabi clinic, said he suspects he may have contracted the COVID-19 virus after travelling from the United States to Israel via Italy.

As a result, the upper floor of the mall has been evacuated.

"He is still here in the clinic and the floor has been cleared," she said. "They told people to evacuate the HMO offices and there is a lot of hysteria in the mall right now."

The officials at the clinic said the man is suffering from flu-like symptoms, which prompted the staff to contact the mall's management who decided to evacuate the floor.

The Health Ministry said the patient was being tested for the new virus at Maccabi HMO and will be evacuated to a hospital once all the tests are completed.

The ministry said there is no directive against visiting the mall and shopping can continue as usual.

So far seven people in Israel have tested positive for coronavirus.

Four returned from Japan after being quarantined for two weeks on the coronavirus-hit cruise liner, the Diamond Princess. One of the patients has since recovered and was released from hospital.

Three others contracted the disease while visiting Italy and tested positive upon their return: One person from Migdal HaEmek in northern Israel and a couple from the community of Irus, located south of Rishon LeZion in central Israel.

02.29.20 – Sa -

Hijab and handgun: Israel's first Muslim female detective is breaking the mold

02.29.20

Hijab and handgun: Israel's first Muslim female detective is breaking the mold

Already serving as an juvenile investigator, Sabrin Sa'adi wants not only to be the first police officer to wear the Muslim head covering, but also a role model for other Arab women to see the force as a viable career option; 'I want to be the first police chief with hijab,' she says

Israel Moskovitz | Published: 02.29.20 , 18:49

Police Master Sergeant Sabrin Sa'adi, an investigator for the juvenile division in the northern Arab village of Kafr Kanna, will become the first hijab-wearing religious Muslim female to be a police investigation officer.

"I want to become the first hijab-wearing commissioner," says Sa'adi.

Sa'adi was born and raised in the northern Bedouin village of Basmat Tab'un and studied in Haifa.

After graduating from high school, Sa'adi volunteered for national service in the police, trying to enlist after her service was up.

Since at the time there were no open positions, she worked as a retail manager for a clothing store in Haifa in the meantime.

Everything changed after three years ago, she received a phone call from Deputy Commissioner Jamal Hakrush for the Israel Police Northern District, who offered her to join the force after positions were open to religious Muslim Arab women.

Sa'adi leaped on the opportunity, enlisted and went through basic and investigation training at the National Police Academy in Bet Shemesh.

After she finished her training, she was posted to the Kafr Kanna police station, a newly built station that oversees the 60,000 residents of Kafr Kanna, Tur'an, Mashhad, Al-Batuf, Hoshaya and Kibbutz Beit Rimon.

Sa'adi is the only investigator for the station's juvenile division, along with two youth inspectors.

"I grew up in a religious Muslim home, my mother is very religious, and we prayed five times a day and wear hijabs," says Sa'adi, who lives with her family. "There are no other hijab wearing women who ever went to officer training."

For her, it's not only a matter of personal achievement but also a sense of duty.

"I want to convey a message to all other religious Muslim women like me," she said.

"The police is a good home for us, the organization lets you climb up the ranks, to prove yourself and feel equal."

Despite her prestigious position, the way to the top was not easy for her. Along with the admiration and encouragement from her family and friends, she has had to deal with some unwanted side effects.

"When I first enlisted there were threats to hurt me on Facebook," she says. "I'm not afraid, I live by my beliefs and I am not hurting anyone. I'm only afraid of God."

Even today Sa'adi says that she comes across comments by other Arabs who don't want to see a religious Muslim Arab woman in police uniform.

"It's only because I'm religious, they expect me to stay at home," she says.

Northern District Commander Maj. Gen. Shimon Lavie emphasizes the importance of Arab women joining the force.

"The Northern District is working to promote the enlistment of Arab women in a variety of roles and work for their advancement," he says.

"We wish the best of luck to Sabrin in officers' training and await her return as an investigative officer in our district."

02.27.20 – Th -

IDF F-15 shoot down Hamas drone from Gaza; probe will determine drone's targets

02.27.20

IDF fighter jets shoot down drone dispatched from Gaza

F-15 fighter jets intercept unmanned aircraft over Mediterranean sea upon exiting coastal enclave's airspace; Military says it launched probe into incident

Yoav Zitun | Published: 02.27.20, 13:29

IDF fighter jets have intercepted a drone dispatched from the Gaza Strip, the IDF confirmed on Thursday.

The army said the drone was heading westward over the Mediterranean sea upon exiting the coastal enclave's airspace.

The drone, which is speculated to belong to Hamas, was under constant surveillance from the moment it took off.

Ultimately, Israel Air Force F-15 fighter jets were dispatched and intercepted the drone at 10:55 am at an altitude of 1,700 feet, 8 miles off the Gaza shore.

Security officials say a probe into the incident was launched to determine what were the drone's targets.

The incident comes just a day after Israel lifted restriction imposed on Gaza following the last round of fighting earlier in the week.

Border crossings were reopened and Gaza's fishing zone was extended back to 15 nautical miles off the coast.

In this recent round of violence, which lasted less than 48 hours before a ceasefire brokered by Egypt took hold, the Islamic Jihad terror group had launched at least 80 rockets targeting Israeli communities in the south of the country.

The last similar incident, where IDF fighter planes shot down a drone from the Gaza Strip, occurred in October 2019.

02.27.20 – Th -

Gantz attacks: Netanyahu 'poisoning Israel' not worthy of prime minister one more day

02.27.20

Gantz on personal attacks: Netanyahu 'poisoning Israel'

Blue & White chairman and former IDF chief hits back at PM after Likud campaign questions his competence, suggests he's susceptible to extortion; Gantz reveals Netanyahu offered him top spot in Likud, defense minister's job

Ynet,i24NEWS| Published: 02.27.20 , 11:39

Blue & White Chairman Benny Gantz launched a fierce attack Wednesday on main rival Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a heated press conference in which he accused the premier of fueling tensions within Israeli society in an effort to avoid justice in his corruption cases.

"Netanyahu, look me in the eye. Your obsession with evading prosecution has driven you to lie, to tear us apart, to sow division... to spread malicious rumors and incitement," Gantz said. "Netanyahu, you are poisoning Israel."

The centrist leader also responded to personal attacks launched at him by Netanyahu and his Likud party's campaign, trying to portray the former head of the Israeli military as an inept candidate who cracks and stutters under pressure.

In an interview with Army Radio, Netanyahu said that "a prime minister in Israel has to withstand tremendous pressures. Gantz cannot stand the pressure of debating me," referring to his invitation to a debate on live television before Monday's parliamentary elections to which Gantz declined.

Netanyahu himself has repeatedly avoided election debates for over a decade.

“Every opponent who runs against you faces this campaign of mud, starting two days before the election and magically disappearing two days afterward,” the former IDF chief said.

Gantz revealed for the first time that Netanyahu had offered him to join his Likud party and serve as his defense minister before the Blue & White chairman made his entry to the political life.

He has also closed all prospects of joining a government featuring Netanyahu – a possibility sought parties sought desperately just two months prior.

“Just a year and a half ago, you asked me to join Likud and be your defense minister, and just two months ago you called for a partnership and offered me to be prime minister [in a rotation agreement],” Gantz said.

“Netanyahu, you’ve lost it, and you aren’t worthy of being prime minister for one more day. I won’t sit with you [in a coalition].”

Netanyahu upped his rhetoric Wednesday against Gantz, reigniting old speculations that Iranian intelligence has allegedly hacked a cellphone belonging to Gantz and compromised sensitive data, making him vulnerable to extortion by Israel’s enemies.

“No one threatens me,” Gantz said. “Not Hamas, not Hezbollah, not Iran, and surely not you [Netanyahu]. When you were taking acting lessons in New York, I was fighting in the army.”

02.25.20 – Tu -

Days before election PM vows settlement building in West Bank E=1 spot

02.25.20

PM vows settlement building in sensitive West Bank spot

Just days before election, Netanyahu tells right-wing voters he will build 3,500 homes, effectively connecting Ma'ale Adumim settlement to Jerusalem in a project that was previously shelved due to international condemnation

Reuters| Updated: 02.25.20 , 15:38

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday he is moving forward with a plan to build some 3,500 homes in the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim in the E-1 area of the West Bank, a project frozen after international criticism.

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"I have given instructions to immediately publish for deposit the plan to build 3,500 housing units in E-1," Netanyahu said, using an administrative term for the first phase of a planning process.

Palestinian and foreign opponents of the plan had cautioned that building houses in the area could bisect the West Bank, cut off Palestinians from Jerusalem and further dim their hopes for a contiguous state.

"This had been **delayed for six or seven years**," Netanyahu said in a speech six days before the third national election in less than a year, in which the right-wing leader is seeking to shore up backing from settlers and their supporters.

The E-1 plan would expand the large settlement of Ma'ale Adumim, effectively connecting it to Jerusalem, about a 15-minute drive away.

Last week, Netanyahu announced he was reviving a project to build 3,000 new settler homes at Givat HaMatos in the West Bank, on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Palestinians and much of the world view Israel's settlements in the West Bank, captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War, as illegal under international law.

02.25.20 – Tu -

43 of 398 immigrants from Ethiopia met approved criteria & arrive in Israel

02.25.20

43 Falash Mura arrive in Israel after years of waiting

New arrivals from **nine different families** had been housed in a camp in Gondar, were greeted at Ben-Gurion Airport by family members already in country and will be housed in several absorption centers, including at kibbutz in Jezreel Valley

Amir Alon | Published: **02.25.20**, 12:47

After years of waiting, 43 members of the Falash Mura community landed in Israel on Tuesday on a flight from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The immigrants, from nine different families who have been waiting years in a camp in Gondar to immigrate to Israel, will be housed in several absorption centers, including at Kibbutz Beit Alfa in the Jezreel Valley.

Falash Mura is the name given to those of the Beta Israel community in Ethiopia and Eritrea who converted to Christianity, often under duress, as a consequence of the mission during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Falash Mura cannot immigrate under the Law of Return, because the Interior Ministry does not consider them to be Jewish, and therefore must get special permission from the government to move to Israel.

The **43 new immigrants** were accompanied on their journey to Israel by a delegation of Likud members, including Minister of Immigration and Absorption Yoav Galant, Minister of Communications David Amsalem, and **Ethiopian**-born former Knesset members Gadi Jibrakan, who defected from Blue & White, and Avraham Neguise. The new immigrants were reunited with family members at Ben-Gurion Airport.

"I haven't seen my two brothers for eight years," said Edisa Kanadi, 25, of Be'er Sheva. "They've been waiting for Gondar for 20 years. I'm so happy they have arrived in Israel, I cried a little," she said.

"I immigrated to Israel without my two children," said 60-year-old Zauda Bogala, who was at the airport to welcome five family members.

"I so very happy to finally see them and my three grandchildren," she said. "I know there are other people who like me had been waiting for their loved ones, and I wish for them to all see them soon in our country."

Bogala, who arrived in Israel last year and lives at the Beit Alfa absorption center, added: "This is my happy moment, hugging my grandchildren."

A decision to bring all the remaining 8,000 or so members of the community to Israel was made back in 2015, but so far just less than one third have arrived.

Caretaker Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised in recent weeks that if he were elected on March 2, he would make it a priority in his first 100 days to bring the rest of the community to Israel.

The current interim government two weeks ago approved the immigration of 398 Falash Mura, aiming to complete the process before the elections.

The move was opposed by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, who argued that there was no urgent reason to bring the people to Israel at this time and that it was a clearly a politically motivated decision.

Even so, the Population and Immigration Authority was only able to find in the time frame allotted 43 people in the Gondar camp who met new government-approved criteria.

In order to expedite their immigration, the Health Ministry put together a truncated vaccine procedure, through which the immigrants received some of the required vaccines before immigrating and the remainder will be administered after they arrive.

03.03.20 – Tu -

UN: Iran violation 3-undeclared nuclear warehouses triples stockpile of enriched uranium

03.03.20

UN: Iran nearly triples stockpile of enriched uranium

In separate report, the International Atomic Energy Agency said it identified three locations possibly storing undeclared nuclear material without declaring it to international observers

Associated Press| Published: 03.03.20 , 16:43

Iran has nearly tripled its stockpile of enriched uranium over the last three months in violation of its deal with world powers, the United Nations nuclear watchdog agency said Tuesday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) made the statement in a confidential report distributed to member countries that was seen by The Associated Press.

The agency said as of Feb. 19, Iran's total enriched uranium stockpile amounted to 1,020.9 kilograms (1.1 tons), compared to 372.3 kilograms noted in its last report on Nov. 3, 2019.

The nuclear deal that Iran signed in 2015 with the United States, Germany, France, Britain, China and Russia allows Iran only to keep a stockpile of 202.8 kilograms. The deal promised Iran economic incentives in return for the curbs on its nuclear program, but since U.S. President Donald Trump pulled America out of the deal unilaterally in 2018, however, Iran has been slowly violating the deal's restrictions.

With the violations, Tehran has said it hopes to put pressure on the other nations involved to increase economic incentives to make up for hard-hitting sanctions imposed by Washington after the American withdrawal.

In a second report issued Tuesday, the IAEA said it had identified three locations in Iran where the country possibly stored undeclared nuclear material or undertook nuclear-related activities without declaring it to international observers.

It said it had sent questions to Iran in three separate letters but received no answers. "The agency identified a number of questions related to possible undeclared nuclear material and nuclear-related activities at three locations in Iran that had not been declared by Iran," the agency said in the report.

The IAEA had previously said that uranium particles of man-made origin had been discovered at one location outside Tehran that had not been declared, which appeared to confirm allegations made by the U.S. and Israel about a secret nuclear warehouse.

The agency said Tehran responded to its latest concerns in a letter on Jan. 28 that "Iran will not recognize any allegation on past activities and does not consider itself obliged to respond to such allegations."

The IAEA responded that its requests for clarification were in line with Iran's broader commitment to allow inspections of its nuclear facilities and not tied into the landmark nuclear deal with world powers.

03.01.20 – Su -

Turkey announced open west border to migrants & refugees heading into Europe

03.01.20

Turkey hits back at Syria strikes with Idlib offensive

Ankara announces move after weekend attacks killed dozens of Turkish fighters in northwestern Idlib province amid regime onslaught that has displaced almost a million people

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Tensions between warring neighbors Turkey and Syria ratcheted up further Sunday as Ankara announced a new military operation in northwestern Syria, days after airstrikes by the Damascus regime killed 33 of its soldiers.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, speaking from military headquarters near the Syrian border, said Sunday that Turkey aimed to confront Syrian government forces rather than Russian troops who are also present in the country to help embattled president Bashar Assad regain control of his war-torn country.

Akar on Moscow to persuade Assad to withdraw to 2018 cease-fire lines on the edges of Idlib, which borders Turkey.

Referring to losses inflicted on Syria, he said Turkey had "neutralized" more than 2,200 Syrian troops, 103 tanks and eight helicopters.

"The Spring Shield operation, which was launched following the abominable attack in Idlib on Feb. 27, continues successfully," Akar said, referring to the air strikes that killed 33 of his country's soldiers.

The operation is Turkey's fourth in the war-torn country since 2016.

The heavy fighting in northwest Syria has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe and the single largest wave of displacement in the nine-year Syrian civil war.

Meanwhile, the Syrian military threatened to down any aircraft over northwest Syria after Turkish drone strikes killed dozens of pro-regime forces in the embattled region.

"Syrian military high command announces the closure of the airspace for planes and any drone above northwestern Syria and especially above the Idlib region," state news agency SANA reported a military source as saying.

"Any aircraft breaching our airspace will be treated as enemy aircraft that needs to be downed and prevented from carrying out its goals," the source said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Turkish drone strikes killed 26 soldiers in northwest Syria on Saturday.

That brought the number of soldiers killed in Turkish drone strikes and bombardment since Friday to 74, said the Britain-based monitor, which relies on sources inside Syria. Ten Hezbollah fighters and four allied militiamen also died, the Observatory said. Since December, Russia-backed regime forces have led a military offensive against the last major rebel stronghold of Idlib in northwest Syria, where Turkey supports some rebel groups.

The onslaught has caused almost a million people — mostly women and children — to flee their homes and shelters, the United Nations says.

Neighboring Turkey already hosts around 3.6 million Syrian refugees, and is reluctant to let more in.

Tensions have spiked in recent weeks between Ankara and Moscow, whose relationship has been tested by violations of a 2018 deal to prevent a regime offensive on Idlib.

Turkey deployed troops to observation posts in northwest Syria under that deal.

Syria's war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced Saturday his country had opened its western borders to migrants and refugees hoping to head into the European Union.

The United Nations said Sunday that at least 13,000 people were massed on Turkey's land border with Greece.

Erdogan did not explicitly link his decision to open the gates to Europe to the military escalation in Idlib, although he has warned that Turkey "can't handle a new wave of migration."

Turkey is worried it might come under renewed international pressure to open its now sealed border with Syria and offer refuge to hundreds of thousands more Syrian civilians, despite the fact that it already hosts 3.6 million refugees from the country.

Erdogan's decision to open his country's borders with Europe made good on a longstanding threat to let refugees into the continent.

His announcement marked a dra