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Gantz pushes 200 bed field hospitals staffed by military as infection skyrockets

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Bahrain reforms laws that blocked civilian militants from being tried in military courts

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Five Jews impact Israel in 5780; Kushner, Kantor, Zuckerberg, Adams, Netanyahu

09.22.20

Hamas quit chairing Arab League in Turkey seeing no honor in Arab ties with Israel

09.22.20

Angered by Arab-Israel ties, Palestinians quit chairing Arab League sessions

Palestinians decide to concede right to chair League's council of foreign ministers after failing to convince other members to condemn Israel-Bahrain-UAE agreements, claiming accords created 'deep crisis' within organization

Reuters| Published: 09.22.20 , 23:35

The Palestinians have quit its current chairmanship of Arab League meetings, the Palestinian foreign minister said on Tuesday, condemning as dishonorable any Arab agreement to establish formal ties with Israel.

Palestinians see the accords, which the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain signed with Israel in Washington a week ago, as a betrayal of their cause and a blow to their quest for an independent state in the West Bank.

Earlier this month, the Palestinians failed to persuade the Arab League to condemn nations breaking ranks and normalizing relations with Israel.

The Palestinians were supposed to chair Arab League meetings for the next six months, but Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki told a news conference in the West Bank city of Ramallah that it no longer wanted the position.

"Palestine has decided to concede its right to chair the League's council (of foreign ministers) at its current session. There is no honor in seeing Arabs rush towards normalization during its presidency," Maliki said.

After initial remarks, Maliki read from a letter he said he sent to Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit informing him of the Palestinian move and criticizing the UAE and Bahrain, both Gulf Arab nations that share Israeli concerns about Iran. The UAE's deal with Israel "created a deep crisis in the Arab League" and the accord was followed "by a similar collapse by the Kingdom of Bahrain", Maliki said, quoting from the letter.

In a new move addressing internal Palestinian divisions, officials from West Bank-based President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah faction and the Islamist Hamas movement were due to hold reconciliation talks in Turkey on Tuesday.

Hamas seized the Gaza Strip in 2007 from Fatah forces during a brief round of fighting. Differences over power-sharing have delayed implementation of unity deals agreed since then.

09.22.20

UAE aim for December F-35 jet sale that needs permission code for each pilot

09.22.20

U.S., UAE said aiming for December deal on fighter jet sale

Sources close to negotiations say sides want letter of agreement on F-35s in place in time for Emirati National Day on December 2, and to ensure the deal does not impair Israel's qualitative military edge in region

Reuters| Published: 09.22.20 , 14:59

The United States and the United Arab Emirates hope to have an initial agreement on the sale of F-35 stealth fighter jets to the Gulf state in place by December, as the Trump administration studies how to structure a deal without running afoul of Israel.

Sources close to the negotiations said the goal is to have a letter of agreement in place in time for UAE National Day celebrated on Dec. 2.

Any deal must satisfy decades of agreement with Israel that states any U.S. weapons sold to the region must not impair Israel's "qualitative military edge," guaranteeing U.S. weapons furnished to Israel are "superior in capability" to those sold to its neighbors. With that in mind Washington is studying ways to make the Lockheed Martin Corp F-35 more visible to Israeli radar systems, two sources said. Reuters could not determine if this would be done by changing the jet or providing Israel with better radar, among other possibilities.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz was due to meet his U.S. counterpart Mark Esper in Washington on Tuesday.

The UAE embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The White House declined to comment.

A Pentagon spokeswoman said, "as a matter of policy, the United States does not confirm or comment on proposed defense sales or transfers until they are formally notified to Congress."

Once a letter of agreement is signed, a fine may be levied against any party that terminates the deal. Several political and regulatory hurdles must be cleared before the sale may be completed and Capitol Hill aides cautioned a deal may not be possible this year.

Ellen Lord, the Pentagon's chief weapons buyer, told reporters in August that in general, the United States aims to complete a letter of agreement for new F-35 sales in about six months.

Because of the qualitative military edge restriction, which is enshrined in American law, the Lockheed Martin-made F-35 has been denied to Arab states while Israel has about 24 jets.

The United Arab Emirates, one of Washington's closest Middle East allies, has long expressed interest in acquiring the stealthy jets and was promised a chance to buy them in a side deal made when they agreed to normalize relations with Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied that the deal with the UAE announced last month included the sale of the advanced aircraft, but that was later debunked by

American officials and U.S. President Donald Trump, who said he would have "no problem" selling the Gulf states previously denied military hardware.

Sources familiar with the negotiations said a working idea was for Israeli air defenses to be able to detect the UAE F-35s with technology that effectively defeats the stealth capabilities of the jets.

F-35 fighter jets sold to the United Arab Emirates could also be built in a way that ensures the same planes owned by Israel outperform any others sold in the region, defense experts say.

Washington already demands that any F-35 sold to foreign governments cannot match the performance of U.S. jets, said both a congressional staffer and a source familiar with past sales.

The F-35's technical sophistication is tied to its mission systems and processing power and "it's the computing power that allows you to sell a higher tech jet to Israel than to the UAE," said Doug Birkey, executive director of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies in Washington.

"When foreign pilots are in training in the U.S. they type a code into a user interface as they board the jet, the code will pull a different jet for each pilot based on legal permissions," Birkey said.

Either way, actual delivery of new jets is years away. Poland, the most recent F-35 customer, purchased 32 of the jets in January, but will not receive its first delivery until 2024.

09.22.20

Gantz in US for earlier supply of KC-46 refueling & F-15 advanced IDF bombers

09.22.20

Gantz heads to U.S. with shopping list of weaponry

Defense minister's Washington talks to include expediting sale of aircraft earmarked for Israeli Air Force as well as advanced weapons systems meant to guarantee Israel's qualitative military edge amid talks to F-35 sale to UAE

Yoav Zitun, Itamar Eichner | Published: 09.22.20 , 11:10

When Defense Minister Benny Gantz departed for the United States late Monday for meeting with American counterpart Mark Esper, he took with him a list of munitions Israel says it needs to maintain its military superiority in the Middle East.

The two were expected to discuss U.S. weapons sales following the purported sale of F-35 fighter jets and other advanced weapons systems to the UAE, as part of that country's decision to sign a normalization agreement with Israel.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced his intentions of completing the sale to the UAE despite concerns Israel would lose its military advantage in the region if the F-35 is in the hands of an Arab nation.

Gantz held consultations with IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi and senior defense officials before his departure.

Sources said Israel may demand an earlier supply of Boeing KC-46 Pegasus is a military aerial refueling and strategic military transport aircraft that was scheduled to be delivered in four years time.

The U.S. has green-lighted the sale of eight jets to Israel for \$2.4 billion dollars.

Israel may also be able to purchase advanced F-15 EX, earmarked to become the next generation IDF bombers by 2023, with improvements to its engine power, weaponry, aeronautic attributes and its cyberwar capabilities.

Gantz was also to discuss future acquisition of advanced long-range capabilities.

The Defense Ministry said in a statement that Gantz would be holding talks vital to maintaining Israeli military superiority in the region and to the ongoing efforts to combat Iranian aggression.

The defense minister, though flying on a commercial airliner, was separated from the rest of the passengers and was expected to quarantine for five days upon his return.

He was accompanied by two staff members and a security detail.

09.22.20

Former Gaza security chief Dahlan is arrested; seen as potential successor to Abbas

09.22.20

PA arrests supporters of Abbas rival close to UAE

Political movement associated with Mohammed Dahlan, ex-Fatah strongman in Gaza, said in statement that dozens of its members have been detained or summoned for questioning by PA security forces in West Bank

Associated Press| Published: 09.22.20 , 10:13

Palestinian Authority security forces have detained dozens of supporters of Mohammed Dahlan, an ally-turned-rival of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas who is based in the United Arab Emirates, his political group said Monday.

Dahlan, the former PA security chief in Gaza who was banished from the West Bank in 2010 after a falling-out with Abbas, has denied any role in the UAE's agreement to normalize ties with Israel, which most Palestinians view as a betrayal of their cause.

Dahlan's political movement said in a statement that dozens of its members have been detained or summoned for questioning by Palestinian security forces in the West Bank in recent days, calling it a "stark violation of the law."

Palestinian security officials declined to comment.

Dahlan, has long been seen as a potential successor to the 84-year-old Abbas. In exile, Dahlan has cultivated close ties with Egypt and the UAE, where he is based.

His forces battled the Hamas terror group in the months before it seized power in Gaza in 2007, but in recent years he has worked with them to provide aid to the territory, which has been under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since the takeover. He has denied having any political aspirations, but the aid has helped him to develop a small base of support in Gaza. The UAE deal has stoked speculation he may stage a return to Palestinian politics.

The decision of the UAE and the small Gulf nation of Bahrain to normalize relations with Israel has upended the longstanding Arab consensus that recognition should only be granted in return for concessions in the peace process, leaving the Palestinians increasingly isolated.

Abbas has seen his popularity drop in recent years as he has failed to end the Israeli occupation, the blockade of Gaza or the internal political split with Hamas.

His Palestinian Authority is widely seen as corrupt and dysfunctional. The Palestinians have not held elections since the split with Hamas, and Abbas has not named a successor.

09.21.20

Israeli parents push; if workplaces open during lockdown, lower grades will also reopen

09.21.20

Israeli parents push for reopening of schools amid lockdown

Many parents who were forced to stay at home due to the nationwide closure, are asking the government to reopen at least kindergartens and schools up to 4th grade; Knesset committee set to discuss the issue on Wednesday

Tamar Trabelsi Hadad, Alexandra Lukash | Published: 09.21.20 , 19:50

Many Israeli parents on Monday demanded their children be allowed to return to school amid the nationwide lockdown due to their inability to go to work and a barrage of technical difficulties plaguing students who are forced to attend classes remotely.

As part of the government's efforts to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, Israel's education system was shuttered during the nationwide lockdown, with the exception of special needs education facilities and boarding schools.

As a result, many students around the country were forced to utilize their personal computers for remote studies, which many parents claim have proven impractical, consequently forcing them to miss work in order to aid their children.

Chairman of the National Kindergartens' Committee Ahaz Agam called on the parents whose children attend kindergartens to boycott remote studies to force the government to allow for kindergartens to reopen.

Agam, a father of four children aged 3, 5, 11 and 13, has been **missing work in order to be with** his young **children**. "This **situation is impossible**," he said.

"There is **no justification** for children **not to go** to kindergarten, especially **when the parents are working**. Remote studies are **inefficient and disables parents** because a child in a kindergarten **needs parental assistance**," he added.

Tzofit, a mother of a sixth grader, also says remote **studies have proven near-impossible**. "They should reopen the schools in light of the low infection rates in educational institutions," she said. "**Remote learning is impossible - though we are told it is mandatory**."

Shirley from Lod, a mother of a third grader, reiterated the sentiment. "My son went up to third grade even though he did not exactly **finish second grade** because of the pandemic and the first lockdown," she said. "The **teachers do their best**, but they also **can't operate the technology effectively**. Most of the time is **devoted to getting organized** and asking whether the children can hear them."

The Knesset's Education, Culture and Sports Committee is expected to discuss the parents' demand on Wednesday. The committee's chairman, MK Ram Shefa from Blue & White, said his goal is to bring children attending kindergarten and grades first through fourth back to school as early as Thursday.

"**If workplaces remain open during the lockdown**, kindergartens and **lower grades will also reopen**," Shefa told Health Minister Yuli Edelstein and coronavirus czar ,Prof. Ronni Gamzu, ahead of the lockdown.

"We are vital to the economy, because we allow parents to go to work in an orderly manner," said Shoshi Eisenstadt, who **runs a chain of private kindergartens**. "We adhere to the guidelines. We have skilled staff and we have capsules, so the children do not mix with each other."

09.21.20

Gantz pushes 200 bed field hospitals staffed by military as infection skyrockets

09.21.20

Gantz pushes field hospitals as coronavirus wards overflow

The defense minister's orders come after Health Ministry DG tells hospital chief the number of seriously ill will increase by 200-300 in the next 10 days, putting the health system 'in a state of emergency'

Ynet| Published: **09.21.20** , 17:00

Defense Minister Benny **Gantz** on Monday **instructed the IDF** to begin **preparations** for the **opening of field hospitals** as coronavirus wards at medical centers overflow with patients.

Israel went into lockdown on Friday after the COVID-19 infection rate has skyrocketed over the past few weeks.

The first field hospital will contain about 200 beds, with the doctors, nurses and paramedics provided by the military.

"The construction plan will be submitted to the Health Ministry and will be implemented solely in accordance with the urgent need of the health system," Gantz's office said in a statement.

Gantz also instructed the defense establishment to begin working on an exit strategy from the current lockdown and to further strengthen police forces in case the closure continues or expands.

Health Ministry Director General Hezi Levi said in a letter addressed to hospital chiefs earlier on Monday that in the next 10 days the country will see up to 300 new coronavirus patients in serious condition.

"Based on the forecasts presented to us last weekend, we are expected to end the next ten days with additional 200-300 serious patients, including ventilated and critically ill," Levy wrote in a letter.

"I ask you all, without exception, to treat this situation as an emergency for the health system, and as such I expect the management staff of all the hospitals and geriatric institutions to all join the national effort to deal with the expected burden."

09.21.20

PM aides allegedly skirt 2-wk quarantine, virus czar says no leniencies

09.21.20

PM aides allegedly skirt quarantine, Gamzu calls for legal action

Coronavirus czar says there will be 'no leniencies' to public officials as Netanyahu advisers spotted in public after recently returning from White House peace signing ceremony

Itamar Eichner, Alexandra Lukash | Published: 09.21.20 , 14:51

Two senior aides to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are suspected of breaking quarantine after they both were sighted outside their homes over the past days, spurring calls to pursue penal actions against them by coronavirus czar Prof. Ronni Gamzu.

Following a peace accord signing ceremony at the White House last week between Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, members of the Israeli delegation were ordered to enter preventative isolation in accordance with Health Ministry regulations.

All 120 delegation members underwent coronavirus tests over the past two days and were instructed to stay in isolation until all have been confirmed to not carry the virus.

El Al welcomes new owner - 27-year-old New York yeshiva student
However, protesters outside Netanyahu's Residence in Jerusalem spotted and filmed the premier's social media adviser Topaz Luk observing and taking photos of the demonstrations on Saturday night.
Likud said in a statement that Luk was on his way to get tested for coronavirus.

In addition, Netanyahu's foreign affairs adviser Reuven Azar was also spotted at a supermarket in Mevasseret Zion Friday morning.
This was not the first time Azar was caught skirting health regulations after he reportedly went for a jog in Washington on Monday, in violation of the Health Ministry's orders to the delegation.
When Azar was questioned by officials, he said he did not notice the message from the Health Ministry before leaving his home on Friday, the Prime Minister's Office said.
The message was sent out more than 24 hours before Azar's violation.

"Azar's superiors called him to order so that such cases would not reoccur," a Prime Minister's Office statement read.
Gamzu, commenting on the incidents, told Ynet on Monday that public health orders should be adhered and enforced, and that all those who violate them will be punished accordingly.

"It does not matter who is the person. Breaking quarantine is a serious violation, as bad as spreading the virus," he said. "This action is subject to criminal punishment. There will be no leniencies. Public officials are the same as everyone."

09.21.20

Honduras, Kosovo & Serbia to open embassies in Jerusalem when pandemic allows

09.21.20

Honduras hopes to move Israel embassy to Jerusalem by end of year
Honduran President Hernandez announces the move in a bid to strengthen the strategic alliance between both nations following similar proclamations by Kosovo and Serbia
Reuters| Published: 09.21.20 , 09:38

Honduras hopes to move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv by the end of 2020, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday.

"To strengthen our strategic alliance, we spoke to arrange the opening of the embassies in Tegucigalpa and Jerusalem, respectively," Hernandez wrote on Twitter. "We hope to take this historic step before the end of the year, as long as the pandemic allows it."

The Central American nation has signaled in the past that it may move its embassy to Jerusalem. Netanyahu said the intention was to open and inaugurate their embassies

before the end of the year. Israel currently has no embassy in Honduras but opened a diplomatic office there last month.

Only two countries - the United States and Guatemala - have already opened embassies in Jerusalem. The Honduran statement followed announcements by U.S. President Donald Trump and Netanyahu this month who said Kosovo and Serbia would also open embassies in Jerusalem.

The status of Jerusalem has been one of the thorniest issues in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Palestinians want East Jerusalem, captured by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War, as the capital of a future state. Israel regards all of the city as its capital, including the eastern sector over which it extended its sovereignty after 1967.

Last Tuesday, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed agreements in Washington to establish formal ties with Israel, a move forged partly through shared fears of Iran but one that could leave the Palestinians further isolated.

Trump hosted the White House ceremony, capping a month when first the UAE and then Bahrain agreed to reverse decades of ill will without a resolution of Israel's dispute with the Palestinians.

09.20.20

Thousands at Netanyahu residence restart protest hours after Rosh Hashanah ends

09.20.20

Thousands protest Netanyahu; many ignore Israeli virus rules

protesters calling on Netanyahu to resign while he is on trial for corruption charges and accusing him for 'bungling' the country's coronavirus crisis

Associated Press| Published: 09.20.20 , 23:39

Thousands of Israelis resumed their weekly protest Sunday outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's official residence in central Jerusalem, despite a new nationwide lockdown order aimed at curbing a raging coronavirus outbreak.

An exception allowing people to hold public demonstrations was included in the three-week lockdown imposed last Friday. But many participants in the gathering appeared to ignore social-distancing rules that order them to remain in small separated "capsules" of people.

Thousands of Israelis have participated in the protests throughout the summer, calling on Netanyahu to resign while he is on trial for corruption charges and accusing him of bungling the country's coronavirus crisis.

In the ultra-Orthodox town of Bnei Brak near Israel's commercial hub of Tel Aviv, over 100 activists took to the streets and burned garbage to protest restrictions on gatherings for public prayers.

The demonstrations restarted hours after the end of the Jewish new year holiday, Rosh Hashanah. Netanyahu's government imposed the new lockdown just hours before the holiday began.

Israel's first lockdown, in March and April, put a damper on Passover, the Jewish spring holiday marking the deliverance of the ancient Hebrews from slavery in Egypt.

Netanyahu is charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. His criminal trial began in June, but he has refused to step down from office and denies any wrongdoing.

After moving quickly to contain an outbreak last spring, Israel appears to have reopened its economy too quickly. The country now has one of the highest per-capita rates of coronavirus in the world, and critics say the new lockdown measures will hurt an already struggling economy.

Israel has recorded more than 180,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 1,200 deaths.

09.18.20

Israel sees New Year under three-week lockdown enforced by police & military

09.18.20

Israel sees in Jewish New Year under lockdown

Lockdown includes the closure of many businesses and strict limits on public gatherings, and will largely confine people to their homes; Netanyahu blamed by protesters for 'disastrous' move

Associated Press, Ynet | Published: 09.18.20 , 14:19

Israel has begun a full lockdown Friday to try to contain a coronavirus outbreak that has steadily worsened for months as its government has been plagued by indecision and infighting.

The three-week lockdown which began at 2 p.m. (1100 GMT), that will be enforced by 7,000 police and military troops, will include the closure of many businesses and strict limits on public gatherings, and will largely confine people to their homes. The closures coincide with the Jewish High Holidays, when people typically visit their families and gather for large prayer services.

In an address late Thursday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that even stricter measures may be needed to prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed. There are currently more than 46,000 active cases, with at least 577 hospitalized in serious condition.

“It could be that we will have no choice but to make the directives more stringent,” Netanyahu said. “I will not impose a lockdown on the citizens of Israel for no reason, and I will not hesitate to add further restrictions if it is necessary.”

Under the new lockdown, nearly all businesses open to the public will be closed. People must remain within 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) of home, but there are several exceptions, including shopping for food or medicine, going to work in a business that’s closed to the public, attending protests and even seeking essential pet care.

Israel has reported a total of more than 175,000 cases since the outbreak began, including at least 1,169 deaths. It is now reporting around 5,000 new cases a day, one of the highest per capita infection rates in the world.

Israel was among the first countries to impose sweeping lockdowns this spring, sealing its borders and forcing most businesses to close. That succeeded in bringing the number of new cases to only a few dozen per day in May.

But then the economy abruptly reopened, and a new government was sworn in that was paralyzed by infighting. In recent months authorities have announced various restrictions only to see them ignored or reversed even as new cases soared to record levels.

The occupied West Bank has followed a similar trajectory, with a spring lockdown largely containing its outbreak followed by a rise of cases that forced the Palestinian Authority to impose a 10-day lockdown in July. The PA has reported more than 30,000 cases in the West Bank and around 240 deaths.

The Gaza Strip, which has been under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since the Islamic militant group Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007, was initially insulated from the pandemic. But authorities detected community spread last month, and there are now more than 1,700 active cases in the impoverished territory of 2 million, straining its already fragile health system. At least 16 people have died.

In Israel, the government has come under withering criticism for its response to the virus and the economic crisis triggered by the earlier lockdown. Netanyahu, who is also on trial for corruption, has been the target of weekly protests outside his official residence. Israel’s insular ultra-Orthodox community, which has a high rate of infection, has also been up in arms about the restrictions, especially those targeting religious gatherings.

In Tel Aviv, hundreds of people protested the renewed lockdown on Thursday, including doctors and scientists who said it would be ineffective.

Dr. Amir Shahar, head of an emergency department in the city of Netanya and one of the organizers of the demonstration, said the lockdown is “disastrous” and would do “more harm than good.”

09.21.20

Iran cyber attacks on satellites driving US Space Force to new frontier in Qatar

09.21.20

U.S. Space Force deploys to vast new frontier: Arabian Desert

U.S. military deploys 20-strong squadron of newly formed military service to Qatar in bid to secure national interests against nations that are extremely aggressive in preparing to extend conflict into space'

Associated Press| Published: 09.21.20 , 12:51

The newly formed U.S. Space Force is deploying troops to a vast new frontier: the Arabian Peninsula.

Space Force now has a squadron of 20 airmen stationed at Qatar's Al-Udeid Air Base in its first foreign deployment. The force, pushed by President Donald Trump, represents the sixth branch of the U.S. military and the first new military service since the creation of the Air Force in 1947.

It has provoked skepticism in Congress, satire on Netflix, and, with its uncannily similar logo, "Star Trek" jokes about intergalactic battles.

Future wars may be waged in outer space, but the Arabian Desert already saw what military experts dub the world's first "space war" — the 1991 Desert Storm operation to drive Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Today, the U.S. faces new threats in the region from Iran's missile program and efforts to jam, hack and blind satellites.

"We're starting to see other nations that are extremely aggressive in preparing to extend conflict into space," Col. Todd Benson, director of Space Force troops at Al-Udeid, told The Associated Press. "We have to be able to compete and defend and protect all of our national interests."

In a swearing-in ceremony earlier this month at Al-Udeid, 20 Air Force troops, flanked by American flags and massive satellites, entered Space Force. Soon several more will join the unit of "core space operators" who will run satellites, track enemy maneuvers and try to avert conflicts in space.

"The missions are not new and the people are not necessarily new," Benson said.

That troubles some American lawmakers who view the branch, with its projected force of 16,000 troops and 2021 budget of \$15.4 billion, as a vanity project for Trump ahead of the November presidential election.

Concerns over the weaponization of outer space are decades old. But as space becomes increasingly contested, military experts have cited the need for a space corps devoted to defending American interests.

Threats from global competitors have grown since the Persian Gulf War in 1991 when the U.S. military first relied on GPS coordinates to tell troops where they were in the desert as they pushed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's forces out of Kuwait.

Benson declined to name the "aggressive" nations his airmen will monitor and potentially combat. But the decision to deploy Space Force personnel at Al-Udeid follows months of escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

Hostilities between the two countries, ignited by Trump's unilateral withdrawal of the U.S. from Iran's nuclear accord, came to a head in January when U.S. forces killed a top

Iranian general. Iran responded by launching ballistic missiles at American soldiers in Iraq.

This spring, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard launched its first satellite into space, revealing what experts describe as a secret military space program. The Trump administration has imposed sanctions on Iran's space agency, accusing it of developing ballistic missiles under the cover of a civilian program to set satellites into orbit.

World powers with more advanced space programs, like Russia and China, have made more threatening progress, U.S. officials contend. Last month, Defense Secretary Mark Esper warned that Russia and China were developing weapons that could knock out U.S. satellites, potentially scattering dangerous debris across space and paralyzing cell phones and weather forecasts, as well as American drones, fighter jets, aircraft carriers and even nuclear weapon controllers.

"The military is very reliant on satellite communications, navigation and global missile warning," said Capt. Ryan Vickers, a newly inducted Space Force member at Al-Udeid. American troops, he added, use GPS coordinates to track ships passing through strategic Gulf passageways "to make sure they're not running into international waters of other nations."

The Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of the world's oil flows, has been the scene of a series of tense encounters, with Iran seizing boats it claims had entered its waters. One disrupted signal or miscalculation could touch off a confrontation.

For years, Iran has allegedly jammed satellite and radio signals to block foreign-based Farsi media outlets from broadcasting into the Islamic Republic, where radio and television stations are state-controlled.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration has warned that commercial aircraft cruising over the Persian Gulf could experience interference and communications jamming from Iran. Ships in the region have also reported "spoofed" communications from unknown entities falsely claiming to be U.S. or coalition warships, according to American authorities.

"It's not that hard to do, but we've seen Iran and other countries become pretty darn efficient at doing it on a big scale," said Brian Weeden, an Air Force veteran and director of program planning at the Secure World Foundation, which promotes peaceful uses of outer space. "There's a concern Iran could interfere with military broadband communications."

Responding to questions from the AP, Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesman at Iran's mission to the United Nations, said "Iran will not tolerate interference in our affairs, and in accordance with international law, will respond to any attacks against our sovereignty." He added that Iran has faced numerous cyber attacks from the U.S. and Israel.

Failing an international agreement that bars conventional arms, like ballistic missiles, from shooting down space assets, the domain will only become more militarized, said Daryl Kimball, the executive director of the Washington-based Arms Control Association. Russia and China have already created space force units and the Revolutionary Guard's sudden interest in satellite launches has heightened U.S. concerns.

Still, American officials insist the new Space Force deployment aims to secure U.S. interests, **not set off an extraterrestrial arms race.**

“The U.S. military would like to see a peaceful space,” Benson, the director of Space Force troops stationed in Qatar, said. **“Other folks’ behavior is kind of driving us to this point.”**

09.20.20

Bahrain reforms laws that blocked civilian militants from being tried in military courts

09.20.20

Saudi state TV says Bahrain stops militants planning attacks

Officials claim terror plot was to be retaliation for the U.S. killing of Qassem Soleimani in January; **militants arrested**, weapons found; some 7,000 serve **in American bases in Bahrain**

Associated Press | Published: **09.20.20**, 21:23

Bahrain broke up a plot by militants **backed by Iran** to launch attacks **on diplomats and foreigners** in the island nation home to the **U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet**, just **days after normalizing** relations with Israel, Saudi state television reported Sunday.

Bahraini government officials, who **routinely claim breaking up plots by militants backed by Iran**, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Saudi state TV report aired footage of what appeared to be police raiding a home with a hidden passage. The footage showed **assault rifles and explosives**, apparently **seized** in the raid.

Netanyahu and Mossad at war with Defense Ministry over UAE weapons deal

A Saudi state TV reporter said those planning the attacks wanted to carry them out in **revenge** for the U.S. **killing** of Iranian Gen. Qassem **Soleimani** **this January** in a **drone strike** in Baghdad.

Some **militants have been arrested**, while others are believed to be in Iran, the Saudi state TV report said.

Iranian state media acknowledged the reports of the Bahraini arrests, but no official commented on them.

Bahrain is home to the 5th Fleet, which patrols the waterways of the Mideast. Officials have worried in the past that the sailors and Marines attached to the base in Manama could be **targeted**, as well as others who make up the **7,000 American troops there**. Cmdr. Rebecca Rebarich, a spokeswoman for the 5th Fleet, declined to comment and referred questions to the Bahraini government.

Bahrain, an island kingdom off the coast of Saudi Arabia, just last week normalized relations with Israel alongside the United Arab Emirates. The Saudi state TV report did not mention that.

Bahrain's Shiite majority long has accused its Sunni rulers of treating them like second-class citizens. They joined pro-democracy activists in demanding more political freedoms in 2011, as Arab Spring protests swept the wider Middle East. Saudi and Emirati troops ultimately helped violently put down the demonstrations.

Bahrain promised change after the protests. But since April 2016, has engaged in a new crackdown on dissent, overturning reforms that blocked civilians from being tried in military courts.

It has shut down political parties, arrested political activists and forced others into exile. Militant groups have launched small, sporadic attacks amid that crackdown.

09.22.20

Security source: Technical error causes Hezbollah arms depot to blow up in Lebanon

09.22.20

Security source: Technical error causes Hezbollah arms depot to blow up in Lebanon
Explosion shakes the southern village of Ain Qana, above the port city of Sidon, sending grey smoke billowing over the village; Hezbollah members impose a security cordon around the area

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An arms cache belonging to the Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah blew up in southern Lebanon on Tuesday because of a technical error, a security source said, injuring several people and sending a new shockwave across a nation grappling with its deepest crisis in three decades.

Hezbollah imposed a security cordon around the area of the blast in the village of Ain Qana, above the port city of Sidon, another security source said earlier. Journalists were prevented from approaching the area.

I received this video via Whatsapp - the cause of this explosion that was followed by a huge fire in South Lebanon is still unclear. Videos from Ain Qana village, explosion was heard in further villages too. #Lebanon pic.twitter.com/G8UWP0zEBU

Both spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to give official statements but said there were several injuries without giving figures.

A witness near the village said they felt the ground shake.

Footage broadcast by the local Al-Jadeed station showed men walking over scorched ground littered with debris. Damage was shown in an adjacent house where the floor was covered in glass and what appeared to be a pool of blood.

At least one fire was still burning in the location, the footage showed.

The mysterious explosion comes seven weeks after the massive explosion at Beirut port, the result of nearly 3,000 tons of improperly stored ammonium nitrate detonating. The explosion killed nearly 200 people, injured 6,500 and damaged tens of thousands of buildings in the capital, Beirut.

It is still **not clear what caused the initial fire** that ignited the chemicals, and so far no one has been held accountable.

The blast has further rattled a nation grappling with its worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war and still reeling from the devastating explosion that ripped through the capital.

Since the Beirut blast on Aug. 4, subsequent fires at the port and elsewhere in the capital have **caused panic in Beirut** and the country, whose **economy is in meltdown**.

09.17.20

Five Jews impact Israel in 5780; Kushner, Kantor, Zuckerberg, Adams, Netanyahu

09.17.20

Five Jews who made a splash in Israel in 5780

From changing the face of the Middle East to building a world-class cycling team, redefining our social media to recruiting world leaders in the fight against anti-Semitism - these five men have made an undeniable **impact** on Israeli life over the past 12 months

Eti Abramov | Published: **09.17.20**, 18:07

Jared Kushner

Year of birth: 1981

Family status: Married with three children

Country of birth: U.S.A.

Country of residence: U.S.A.

Interesting fact: Kushner did not like the way the American media covered his family - so he bought a newspaper for \$10 million.

The man who managed to divert attention from the coronavirus crisis and the fire from Benjamin Netanyahu even for a few hours, due to the formulation of an historic peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain - and his hand is still on the wheel.

Even before that, he was considered the architect of the U.S. "deal of the century" for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and in fact, is the man who largely shapes our political destiny.

For example, according to reports, he is the one who gives instructions to U.S.

Ambassador to Israel David Friedman and decided that Israel's annexation of West Bank territory will not take place in the foreseeable future. He is also involved in deciding which American weapons systems to sell and to whom.

An independent businessman who as a son-in-law shares Friday night dinners with U.S. President Donald Trump, Kushner has all the right economic-government connections – and has his own personal money interests, of course.

"I believe that all Arab countries can normalize relations with Israel, and that will happen one day," he said after meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, whose country is another candidate for normalization with Israel.

"Many countries look with appreciation and envy at the UAE move. Many people are interested in access to technological and other resources in Israel. Normalizing relations will make the Middle East a stronger and more stable place."

On another occasion he said: "Israel has shown a real desire to reach peace by agreeing to a Palestinian state and also to a map drawn by the president that sets future borders.

Israel's move to annex areas of the West Bank containing large numbers of settlers, which will realistically never be returned [to the Palestinians] has upset a lot of people in the region. Trump has managed to use this uncertainty to mediate this great deal between Netanyahu and [UAE leader Mohammed] bin Zayed."

Dr. Moshe Kantor

Year of birth: 1953

Family status: Married with five children

Country of birth: Russia

Country of residence: England

Interesting fact: As a physicist, he developed a satellite reflector that can reflect light with twice the intensity of the moon.

Kantor is the man responsible for the biggest event of the year in Israel, at least until the pandemic broke out, the Fifth World Holocaust Forum, held at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

It was the largest diplomatic event in the country's history: against the background of rising anti-Semitism in the world and marking the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, some 50 heads of state and leaders from around the world arrived in Israel, including French President Emmanuel Macron, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Britain's Prince Charles.

Ahead of the Forum, which was held in cooperation with President Reuven Rivlin and Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, Dr. Kantor explained that the commitment to fight anti-Semitism should be an international one and not just Jewish. He called for a global coalition of leaders who could send a message that would resonate around the world - that anti-Semitism is not acceptable in modern society.

In their speeches at the event, the leaders warned of the dangers of anti-Semitism and pledged to fight it and intolerance, as well as promising to preserve the memory of the Holocaust.

As president of the European Jewish Congress and founder and president of the World Holocaust Forum Foundation, Dr. Kantor has been at the forefront of the fight against anti-Semitism for the past 15 years.

In his role as a Jewish leader during one of the most turbulent periods in modern Jewish history, he has worked to preserve Jewish life in the Diaspora, to protect European Jewry and strengthen its position on the global Jewish map.

Kantor summed up the event thusly: "We have succeeded in putting the importance of the fight against anti-Semitism on the world agenda. The next step must be a coordinated and well-designed international plan of action."

Since the outbreak of the Coronavirus crisis, there has been a significant increase in anti-Semitic attacks around the world, including the unprecedented resurgence of blood libels. This rise is reflected on social networks, with the increasing use of social media, as well in politics and the media. This development, in parallel with dealing with the social and economic consequences of the crisis, increases the need to address the rise of populism, hatred and extremism.

Mark Zuckerberg

Year of birth: 1984

Family status: Married with two children

Country of birth: U.S.A.

Country of residence: U.S.A.

Interesting fact: For years Zuckerberg defined himself as an atheist, but in the last year he has said that he had begun to become closer to Judaism once again.

The last Jewish year did not start well for Zuckerberg. In October 2019, during the High Holiday season, he was summoned to appear at the U.S. Congress as part of a hearing by the House Financial Services Committee regarding Libra, the crypto-currency his company was about to issue.

Members of Congress took the opportunity to attack the Facebook founder on other issues on the agenda - from targeted advertising, through interference in election campaigns, blocking competition, content monitoring and terms of employment of contracted workers.

The committee members attacked the limited freedom of expression on the social network and wondered aloud if Zuckerberg, a 35-year-old man who holds information on 2.7 billion people, could be trusted while his company's policies on political issues and censorship of information were unclear, and sometimes even ranged from alarming indifference to contempt.

The Congressional attack continued in other arenas and Zuckerberg became a popular target as enemy of the people. In November 2019, he came under harsh criticism from British Jewish actor Sasha Baron Cohen.

In a scathing speech at a conference of the Anti-Defamation League, Cohen sharply criticized the conduct of the major social networks, and in particular Facebook and its founder, whom he said allowed the spread of lies and hate speech.

(Sasha Baron Cohen addresses hate speech on social media)

"Democracy, which depends on shared truths, is in retreat, and autocracy, which depends on shared lies, is on the march," Cohen warned. "What do all these dangerous trends have in common? ... All this hate and violence is being facilitated by a handful of internet companies that amount to the greatest propaganda machine in history... Facebook, YouTube and Google, Twitter and others – they reach billions of people. The algorithms these platforms depend on deliberately amplify the type of content that keeps users engaged – stories that appeal to our baser instincts and that trigger outrage and fear."

This is also why Zuckerberg is on our list. In the last three election campaigns in Israel in the past year, social networks, most notably the Zuckerberg-owned Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, have been a significant tool for disseminating information and campaigns, but also for unprecedented dissemination of misinformation, "fake news" that dramatically affected Israeli discourse and perhaps even voting patterns in elections.

Sylvan Adams

Year of birth: 1958

Family status: Married with two children

Country of birth: Canada

Country of residence: Israel

Interesting fact: Adams recently renovated his Tel Aviv home to the tune of NIS 120 million.

Sylvan Adams, the son of Holocaust survivors, is probably the least known man on this list. But he is also one of the people who most influences Israeli sports, and more than that - its sports culture.

He established Israel's first Velodrome in Hadar Yosef, brought the Giro d'Italia to Israel about two years ago, and together with Ron Bar-On promoted the "Start Up Nation," the best group of cyclists in Israel to compete in the world's leading races, including an historic Tour de France appearance.

The last Jewish year will be remembered as one in which Adams, a Canadian billionaire who made aliyah, signed Chris Froome, one of the greatest cyclists in history and a four-time Tour de France champion, in order to stake Israel's claim as a world-leader in the sport.

He also did not hesitate to say that "the Tourism Ministry should name me as deputy minister, because these projects bring attention to the country and promote tourism."

Benjamin Netanyahu

Year of birth: 1949

Family status: Married with three children

Country of birth: Israel

Country of residence: Israel

And above all of these talented people, there is one Jew who, for better or worse, has impacted on every aspect of our lives for a decade, and more so in the past year: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Three election campaigns, two waves of coronavirus and one agreement with two Arab countries - it seems that there was no conversation in Israel this year that did not include Netanyahu's name.

Or as Israeli journalist Amit Segal said as he summed up the attitude towards the prime minister: Netanyahu is like coriander. Some people like it and some people don't, but everyone has an opinion.