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Gantz company NSO Pegasus spying phones of journalists, officials and activists

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Secret Iran documents expose plans for cyber strikes on ships and gas stations

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07.28.21

Gantz company NSO Pegasus spying phones of journalists, officials and activists

07.28.21

Gantz says Israel takes NSO Group spying allegations seriously

Defense Ministry announces officials scrutinize cybersecurity company as minister travels to Paris to meet with French counterpart Parly after reports Macron fell victim to spyware phone hack

Yoav Zitun, Reuters | Published: 07.28.21, 22:53

Defense Minister Benny Gantz told his French counterpart Florence Parly on Wednesday that Israel was probing with due consideration allegations voiced against Israeli cyber intelligence firm NSO Group its Pegasus spyware was used by foreign governments to spy on politicians and journalists.

"Israel is taking the allegations seriously ... Israel grants cyber licenses only to nation-states and only to be used for dealing with terrorism and crime," Gantz's office said in a statement after the meeting.

Gantz met Parly in part to share initial findings from a government assessment of NSO Group exports to France.

The Defense Ministry said earlier on Wednesday that officials arrived at the company's headquarters in Herzliya to examine its use of the controversial spyware technology.

The ministry issued the statement as Gantz was heading to Paris to meet with Parly after it was published that French President Emmanuel Macron was on a list of potential targets for surveillance by Morocco, which used the Pegasus software, French newspaper Le Monde reported. Macron has called for an investigation.

An investigation published earlier this month by 17 media organizations, led by the Paris-based non-profit journalism group Forbidden Stories, said spyware made and licensed by NSO Group had been used in attempted and successful hacks of 37 smartphones belonging to journalists, government officials and human rights activists.

The reporting included a list of 50,000 telephone numbers that were tied to NSO customers.

The reporting into the so-called Pegasus Project stressed that there was no proof that phones on the list were hacked but lab testing showed that at least 37 of 67 devices featured on the list have had traces of the Pegasus technology on them.

The list of telephone numbers was provided by Amnesty International and Forbidden Stories. According to the Washington Post, one of the media outlets involved in the project, the purpose behind the list's release remained unclear. NSO denied allegations that its technology was misused by its customers or that the 50,000 phone numbers were in any way related to the company or its customers.

The cybersecurity company also claimed the Pegasus Project was based on a misconception and was released to the media as part of a "well-organized campaign by interested parties."

NSO said the company was careful to protect human rights and supplied its technology exclusively to governments for the purposes of counterterrorism and fighting crime.

07.28.21

GOP Congress institute oversight as Biden resumed aid to UN for Palestine refugees

07.28.21

GOP lawmakers push UNRWA reform bill

Proposed act would freeze \$150 million in aid to UN body unless the secretary of state certifies to Congress every 180 days that the organization meets a series of criteria claiming taxpayer dollars should not go to corrupt entity that undermines Israel

|24NEWS| Updated: 07.28.21, 17:41

Congressman Chip Roy (R-TX) and Sen. James Risch (R-ID), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, led 12 other republican members of the House on Tuesday, to introduced the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Accountability and Transparency Act in response to US President Joe Biden's recent announcement of the resumption of aid.

The GOP lawmakers said they were attempting to institute appropriate oversight to ensure that US taxpayer dollars would not go to the organization unless it made far-reaching reforms.

The act would freeze aid to UNRWA unless the secretary of state certifies to Congress every 180 days that the organization meets a series of criteria.

UNRWA was established by United Nations General Assembly in 1949 to "carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestine refugees" and has had its mandate periodically extended, most recently extending it until 30 June 2023.

The State Department announced earlier in July that the framework signed with UNRWA includes multiple specific commitments to advance the Agency's ability to deliver effective and efficient aid to Palestinian refugees through strengthened accountability, transparency, and consistency with UN principles, including neutrality.

According to a statement released by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in April the aid includes \$150 million in humanitarian assistance.

Under former president Donald Trump the U.S. suspended its contribution to the UN body in 2018, maintaining that it had failed to make previous commitments to stop its hostility toward Israel.

The GOP house members said: "US taxpayer dollars should never go to a corrupt entity that undermines, Israel, one of our greatest allies and closest friends. UNRWA has a long track record of using educational materials that promote anti-Semitism, violence, and terrorism while maintaining ties to the terrorist organization Hamas," said Roy, according to a statement on his website.

"Because of this, UNRWA is an obstacle to peace whose flawed mandate perpetuates the Palestinian 'refugee crisis' by using a nonsensical definition of a refugee," the lawmaker added.

Risch said that UNRWA had far exceeded its original mandate regarding refugees from the 1947-48 war, inasmuch as all of their descendants are also considered to have that same status. He added that the organization has employed Hamas-affiliated individuals and its schools have been used as storage sites for the Islamists' weapons.

The UNRWA Accountability and Transparency Act made several stipulations that it would require the Secretary of State to verify, including that no UNRWA employee is affiliated with either Hamas or Hezbollah and that no school or facility should disseminate material that is anti-American, anti-Semitic or anti-Israel in nature.

07.28.21

Israel to issue 16,000 construction and hotel permits for West Bank Palestinians

07.28.21

Israel to issue 16,000 more work permits for Palestinians

COGAT says Israel will increase the quota by staggering 15,000 with most workers employed by construction companies in the West Bank; security official says no Gazans included in charter; move comes after talks between Gantz and Abbas

AFP| Published: 07.28.21, 11:43

Israel announced Wednesday it is to issue 16,000 more permits for Palestinians from the West Bank to work in its construction and hotel industries, taking the total to over 100,000.

"Israel intends to increase by 15,000 workers the quota of Palestinian residents of Judea and Samaria (the southern and northern West Bank) working in the field of construction," the Israeli military body responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, COGAT, said.

Another 1,000 permits will be issued to Palestinians working in Israeli hotels, it added.

The new permits will bring the **number** of Palestinians allowed to work in Israel to **106,000, with another 30,000** Palestinians authorized to work **in Jewish settlements** in the West Bank, a security official who spoke on condition of anonymity told AFP.

The announcement **followed discussions** between Defense Minister Benny **Gantz and** Palestinian President Mahmud **Abbas**. The government is expected to approve it next week, the security source said, adding: "We want to **apply it as fast as possible**. It's in the interest of both sides."

Jobs in Israel offer higher wages than those in Palestinian-administered areas of the West Bank but Palestinians complain they do not get paid as much as their Israeli counterparts or enjoy similar labor protections.

The head of COGAT, Maj.-Gen. Rasan Alian, said the additional work permits "will strengthen the Israeli and Palestinian economies, and will largely contribute to the security stability in the area of Judea and Samaria".

No Palestinian **residents of the Gaza Strip** are currently **permitted to work in Israel**, the security official said.

The COVID-19 **pandemic** prompted Israel to **suspend** the **7,000 permits** previously granted to workers from the impoverished territory of some two million people which has been under a joint Egyptian and Israeli blockade since 2007.

07.27.21

Secret Iran documents expose plans for cyber strikes on ships and gas stations

07.27.21

Leaked secret Iran docs expose plans for civilian cyber strikes

Five leaked documents include explanations on **how ship's** internal systems can be used against it, **how fuel pumps** could be exploited to **cause explosion** and how smart systems can be **hacked** to destroy building air filtration mechanism

i24NEWS, Ynet | Published: **07.27.21**, 12:33

Classified Iranian **documents** allegedly by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps **detail how cyber attacks** could cause **damage** to civilian **infrastructure in the West**, according to a report published in Sky News Monday.

The **documents**, which are actually five different reports allegedly **compiled by** the **IRGC's cyber unit "Shahid Kavid"**, contain worrying information, including on how cyber attacks could be **used against** civilian infrastructure and systems, such as **cargo ships and up gas stations**.

Iran is "creating a target bank to be used whenever they see fit," a security source familiar with the matter told Sky News.

The source added that the reports were compiled by Shahid Kavid's Intelligence Group 13, led by an individual named Hamid Reza Lashga, and that two of the reports were dated to April 19, 2020 and November 19, 2020, while the others were not dated.

One of the Iranian documents said water filtration systems on cargo ships, as well as ballast water systems - found inside a ship's hull for stability - **could be targeted remotely via satellite to sink the ships**. Sky News notes that document's authors seemed to rely on public information rather than confidential one.

Another one of the **documents detailed how fueling pumps** produced by Franklin Fueling Systems, a U.S. company, **could be hacked to cause an explosion**.

"They support many customers in Europe, Africa, America and the Middle East, and they control and manage these systems," the document stated.

A spokesperson for the company told Sky News it was doubtful if a third party could **cause a fueling station to explode**, citing "redundant safety systems."

Another document explains how systems that control of lighting, ventilation, heating and **security systems in smart buildings might be exploited**. The document further lists various relevant companies in the field, including companies from the United States, France and Germany.

Other documents outline two forms of maritime satellite communications and detailed how electronic devices manufactured by German company WAGO worked.

Ben Wallace, the British Secretary of State for Defense, told Sky News that **if the leaked documents were authentic**, they would further **highlight the dangers of cyberattacks** against Britain and its allies in the West.

"Unless we do something about it our critical infrastructure, our way of life can be threatened quite easily," said Wallace.

Last year, Ynet exposed a failed **attempt by Iran to attack Israel's water infrastructure**, which in turn **prompted a retaliatory cyber attack on Iran's Shahid Rajai port**.

07.27.21

Gantz heading to Paris in wake of Macron spyware claim

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Defense Ministry says **Gantz to meet** with French counterpart following claims that France's president appeared on list of targets **for malware created by Israeli cybersecurity company NSO**, a product whose sale is under supervision of government watchdog
AFP | Published: **07.27.21**, 10:44

Defense Minister Benny **Gantz** will travel to Paris this week **to "keep the French authorities updated"** on the latest developments **concerning Israeli cybersecurity company NSO**, whose **Pegasus malware** was implicated in **spying on French President Emmanuel Macron**.

Gantz will meet with his French counterpart Florence Parly, the Defense Ministry said in a statement Tuesday.

The Pegasus software is at the heart of a global spy scandal that prompted the Reporters Without Borders NGO to demand a moratorium on its sale and German Chancellor Angela Merkel to demand more restrictions on the trade of these systems.

The sale of the software is subject to Defense Ministry approval due to the nature of its capabilities. Pegasus can hack into mobile phones without a user knowing, enabling clients to read every message, track a user's location and tap into the phone's camera and microphone.

The Knesset has set up a commission to investigate allegations that Pegasus was "misused" by some countries, a senior Israeli official said last week.

French paper Le Monde reported that Macron's phone was on a list of potential targets for possible surveillance using Pegasus on behalf of Morocco.

NSO rejected the claims of misuse of its product, calling them "full of wrong assumptions and uncorroborated theories". Pegasus is intended for use only by government intelligence and law enforcement agencies to fight terrorism and crime, the company said.

Gantz's trip was planned before the NSO affair and was meant to focus on the growing economic crisis in Lebanon, which shares a border with Israel, and on world powers' efforts to resume a nuclear deal with Iran, Israeli media said.

Macron called a national security meeting last week to discuss the spyware after reports about its use in France emerged.

"The president is following this subject closely and takes it very seriously," government spokesman Gabriel Attal told France Inter radio, adding that the unscheduled national security meeting would be "dedicated to the Pegasus issue and the question of cybersecurity."

07.26.21

Lapid, Gantz & IDF Chief Kohavi warn US: Iran began making nuclear weapons

07.26.21

Israel warns U.S.: Iran on verge of reaching nuclear threshold

Senior officials including Lapid and Gantz caution American counterparts that Tehran could take advantage of lull in nuke deal talks to advance program, begin manufacturing weapons

i24NEWS | Published: 07.26.21, 15:30

Israel issued a bleak warning to the United States recently, highlighting that Iran is on the verge of becoming a nuclear threshold state and begin to manufacture atomic weapons, according to national broadcaster Kan.

Talks between world powers and Iran on a return to the 2015 nuclear deal abandoned by former U.S. president Donald Trump — attended indirectly by the Biden administration — have been ongoing for months in Vienna, but have stalled in recent weeks.

Several senior Israeli officials, including Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, and Defense Minister Benny Gantz relayed a **message of concern to** their U.S. counterparts - Secretary of State Antony **Blinken** and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

"**Something needs to happen regarding** the negotiations with **Iran**," said a senior Israeli diplomat. "This '**limbo**' **cannot continue** a time when Iran is advancing rapidly to the point where it is a threshold state."

The Islamic Republic took the view in 2018 that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was void after Trump withdrew from the deal claiming that Iran was in breach of the agreed-upon nuclear thresholds and worries over its ballistic missile program. Israel has consistently warned the United States and the international community about Iran's atomic ambitions, including **IDF Chief** of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kohavi's recent Washington trip to brief U.S. officials, where he **torched** the plan to return the **nuclear deal**.

07.26.21

Israel hits Gaza military base in response to incendiary balloon launches

07.26.21

Israel hits Gaza in response to incendiary balloon launches

IDF says it struck Hamas military base, no casualties reported; COGAT cuts enclave's fishing zone in half from 12 nautical miles to six nautical miles in response to attacks that caused three blazes in south

Associated Press| Published: **07.26.21**, 10:36

Israeli warplanes struck a **target** in the **southern Gaza Strip**, the IDF announced early Monday, saying it was responding to the launches of incendiary balloons that caused at least three blazes in southern Israel.

The military said it had struck a Hamas military base. It said the base was near civilian areas that included a school but gave no further details. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The airstrike came several **hours after the incendiary balloons** were **launched into Israel** by militants linked to Gaza's ruling Hamas militant group. Photos and **video posted on social media showed them sending the balloons into Israel**. On one of them was written the message: "Time is running out."

The launches came two months after an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas. The Islamic militant group is upset that Israel has done little to ease a crippling blockade on the territory since the fighting ended, and over delays in indirect negotiations with Israel to resume Qatari financial aid to Gaza.

Israeli media reported at least three fires set in southern Israel, breaking a three-week lull in the launches of the balloons.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has compared the balloon launches to rocket fire and has ordered airstrikes following previous instances as well.

In an initial response, COGAT, the Defense Ministry body that oversees Palestinian civilian affairs, announced Sunday that Israel was cutting the fishing zone for Gazan fishermen in half, from 12 nautical miles to six nautical miles. Reducing the fishing area is a common Israeli response to fire emanating from Gaza.

Israel and Egypt have maintained a blockade of Gaza since Hamas, a group sworn to seek Israel's destruction, seized power in 2007.

07.25.21

Israel freezes UAE oil deal over concerns of Ashkelon pipeline in sensitive sector

07.25.21

Israel freezes UAE oil deal over environmental concerns

The agreement would see Gulf oil brought to the Red Sea port of Eilat by tanker, then moved by pipeline through mainland Israel to the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon, from where it would be shipped to Europe

AFP | Published: 07.25.21, 22:55

Israel's environmental protection ministry said Sunday (July 25) it was delaying implementation of a proposed oil transport deal with the United Arab Emirates, freezing a project that has angered environmentalists.

The agreement, which followed the UAE and Israel establishing diplomatic ties last year, would see Gulf oil brought to the Red Sea port of Eilat by tanker, then moved by pipeline through mainland Israel to the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon, from where it would be shipped to Europe.

The oil deal, involving Israel's state-owned Europe-Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC) and an Israeli-Emirati company called MED-RED Land Bridge Ltd, has not launched. Israel's environmental protection ministry said Sunday it was delaying implementation of a proposed oil transport deal with the United Arab Emirates, freezing a project that has angered environmentalists.

The agreement, which followed the UAE and Israel establishing diplomatic ties last year, would see Gulf oil brought to the Red Sea port of Eilat by tanker, then moved by pipeline through mainland Israel to the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon, from where it would be shipped to Europe.

The oil deal, involving Israel's state-owned Europe-Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC) and an Israeli-Emirati company called MED-RED Land Bridge Ltd, has not launched.

But on Sunday, Israel's environmental protection ministry said the risk assessment "did not meet the conditions" stipulated by the ministry, and was therefore not valid. The ministry told EAPC in a letter it was "delaying the evaluation of your preparations to increase activity in the Eilat port, until the government has a discussion and reaches a decision" on the project.

The decision to freeze the deal's implementation was made by recently sworn-in Environmental Protection Minister Tamar Zandberg of the left wing Meretz party, who has been an outspoken opponent of the EAPC-Emirati agreement. The oil deal, involving Israel's state-owned Europe-Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC) and an Israeli-Emirati company called MED-RED Land Bridge Ltd, has not launched.urt for an extension of time, in order to respond to the petition filed by the environmental organizations." A spokeswoman for EAPC had no comment.

Activists argue the deal evaded tough regulatory scrutiny because of EAPC's status as a state-owned firm working in the sensitive energy sector.

07.25.21

Russia intends to arm Syria against Israel; believing Biden will not oppose

07.25.21

Report: Russia intends to arm Syria against Israeli strikes

Russian source tells Arab paper decision stems from Kremlin's lack of 'patience' with Israeli air raids, moreover believing move would not encounter stiff opposition from U.S. President Joe Biden's administration
i24NEWS| Published: 07.25.21, 09:03

Russia intends to curtail Israel's military operations in Syria by supplying the regime of President Bashar al-Assad with stronger air defenses, a report claimed on Saturday.

The anonymously sourced report by the London-based Asharq Al-Awsat cited a "well-informed" Russian official as saying that the Kremlin has "run out of patience" with Israeli air raids in Syria.

Moreover, Moscow believes this move wouldn't encounter stiff opposition from the administration of President Joe Biden, as Russian officials have been given the impression that Washington doesn't approve of Israeli strikes either.

Since the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, Israel has routinely carried out raids in Syria, mostly targeting government positions and allied Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces and weapons convoys.

Israel rarely confirms strikes in Syria, however, the IDF has said it hit about 50 targets in the war-ravaged country last year, without providing details.

Israel has said it is trying to prevent its arch-foe Iran from entrenching in Syria, and thus gaining a permanent military foothold on its doorstep.

While Russian President Vladimir Putin had a close personal relationship with former premier Benjamin Netanyahu, Russia has routinely criticized Israeli strikes in Syria.

Russia, a key supporter of the Assad regime, has built a strong military presence in the country.

07.22.21

Hungary Prosecutors investigate Pegasus spyware targeting PM critics

07.22.21

Hungary launch investigation into Pegasus spyware reports

Prosecutors launch the probe after police said they had received 2 complaints about the alleged spying abuses; according to local media, 300 Hungarian numbers suspected to have been targeted, including critics of PM Orban

Reuters| Published: 07.22.21, 18:11

Hungarian prosecutors on Thursday said they had launched an investigation into suspected unlawful surveillance following multiple complaints in the wake of allegations of misuse of Israeli-made spying software.

Hungarian police this week said they had received two complaints about the alleged abuses, one from a private individual and one from a politician.

The investigative website Direkt36, part of a media consortium that published the expose, said a list of more than 300 Hungarian phone numbers suspected to have been targeted using the software included those of journalists, business people, lawyers and people critical of Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government.

It's not clear which parties alleged to have deployed the "Pegasus" spyware.

NSO Group, the Israeli developer, has rejected the reporting by the media consortium as "full of wrong assumptions and uncorroborated theories".

It has said Pegasus is sold only to vetted foreign governments, and only for use against terrorists or criminals.

Orban's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyas, told a weekly press briefing that details about Hungarian government surveillance activity were "not public information".

"In such issues there is only one question to be examined, namely whether intelligence gathering took place lawfully or not," he said. "We state that all secret intelligence gathering took place lawfully."

On Monday, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said the government was not aware of the surveillance activity reported in international media, adding that the Information Office, an intelligence agency under his supervision, had not used Pegasus.

07.21.21

Israel 2022 budget to cut import cost, opening Israeli farmers to competition

07.21.21

Government shakes up agriculture sector to cut produce costs

New tax plan will see taxes dropped or reduced on items of fresh produce that are as much as 80% more expensive than Western averages, as well as easing of regulations on fruit and vegetable import

Reuters| Published: 07.21.21, 16:39

The government on Wednesday unveiled a plan to lower fresh produce costs by cutting customs duties and opening the sector to competition, potentially ending years of prices in Israel being far above Western averages.

The plan, which includes an aid package of direct and other support to Israeli farmers, is expected to save consumers 2.7 billion shekels (\$820 million) a year, the finance and agriculture ministries said in a joint statement.

It will be part of an economic package accompanying the 2021–2022 budget, the first since Benjamin Netanyahu was unseated after 12 years of premiership during which farmers benefited from import barriers and quotas that stoked prices.

The ministries said fruit and vegetable prices rose more than 80% in recent years, prompting public outrage.

Under the plan, taxes would be dropped or reduced on eggs and many other items of fresh produce.

It also includes an easing of regulations on fruit and vegetable imports through the adoption of European standards, and as a result, the ministries expect a significant increase in the range of products offered in Israel.

The latest steps follow another plan announced last week by the government to overhaul Israel's import policies to cut the cost of consumer goods that are as much as 80% more expensive than Western averages, largely by reducing regulations.

07.21.21

NSO Business first, diplomacy later; sold Pegasus spyware to Saudis

07.21.21

Report: Israeli government okayed NSO's Pegasus sale to Saudis

The Guardian, one of many news outlets leading investigation into the data leak, claims Israel gave permission to the Israeli-based company to sell spyware to Riyadh following several meetings with Saudi intelligence in 2017

Ynet| Published: 07.21.21, 09:35

The Israeli government gave permission to the company manufacturing the phone-hacking spyware Pegasus to Saudi Arabia, the Guardian newspaper reported Wednesday.

The use of the software, called Pegasus and developed by a private Israeli company NSO group, was reported Sunday by the Washington Post, the Guardian, Le Monde and other news outlets who collaborated on an investigation into a data leak.

The leak was of a list of up to 50,000 phone numbers believed to have been identified as people of interest by clients of NSO, among whom was Saudi Arabia, the reports said.

Among the numbers found on the list were two belonging to women close to Saudi-born journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who was murdered by a Saudi hit squad in 2018.

In the latest piece on the data leak published by the Guardian, which part of the newspaper's "The Pegasus project" series, the news outlet claims the NSO Group had been "given explicit permission by the Israeli government" to sell the spyware to the Saudis back in 2017.

Representatives from the NSO Group then met with Saudi officials in the summer of 2017 in Vienna, Cyprus and Riyadh. The Israeli businesspeople reportedly demonstrated to the Saudis how the spyware can take over an iPhone and even remotely operate its camera.

"You don't need to understand the language to see they were amazed and excited and that they saw what they needed to," said a source who attended the meeting in June 2017 in Cyprus with senior Saudi intelligence officials.

The NSO eventually sold the spyware to Saudis in a deal reportedly worth at least \$55m.

"In Israel there is a strong political movement to make diplomacy through business," said the source. "Business first, diplomacy later. When you make a deal together, it opens a lot of doors to diplomacy."

07.20.21

IDF strikes Lebanon as rockets fired into Galilee where Bennett was due to visit

07.20.21

IDF strikes Lebanon in response to rocket attack on northern Israel

Military says 2 rockets were fired into Galilee just hours before Bennett was due to visit the area; IDF believes 'Palestinian elements' in Lebanon are responsible for the launch; Bennett says those responsible 'will pay painful price'

Ynet,News agencies| Published: 07.20.21, 08:33

The Israeli military on Tuesday fired **artillery shells** **into Lebanon** after **two rockets** had been fired into northern Israel earlier.

Two rockets were launched into **Western Galilee** overnight on **Tuesday** setting off sirens in northern cities and towns but causing no damage or injuries. One of the rockets was shot down by missile defenses and the other landed in an open area, the military said.

The military said it believes that "Palestinian elements" in **Lebanon** are **responsible** for the overnight rocket launch.

"Two rockets were fired from Lebanon toward northern Israel. One of the rockets was intercepted by the Iron Dome Aerial Defense System & the second rocket fell in an open area inside Israel," the IDF said in a tweet.

The attack occurred just hours before Prime Minister Naftali **Bennett was due to visit** the city of Ma'alot-Tarshiha in the **Galilee**.

Visiting the town, Bennett said that "anyone who tries to harm us will pay a painful price in return."

Defense Minister Benny Gantz said in a statement that Lebanon was responsible for the overnight rocket fire and that "Israel will act against any threat to its sovereignty and its citizens."

"We will not allow the social, political and economic crisis in Lebanon to turn into a security threat to Israel," Gantz said. Lebanon has struggled with an unprecedented crisis, including an economic meltdown that has raised concerns of a surge in militancy there.

UNIFIL said it was in contact with military officials in **Lebanon and Israel** to "**urge maximum restraint**" to avoid further escalation. Both the peacekeepers and the Lebanese army increased security in the area and launched an investigation, the mission said.

The last time rockets were fired from Lebanon into Israel was in May, during an 11-day conflict fought between Israel and Palestinian terror groups in the Gaza Strip.

Israel fought a 2006 war against Hezbollah terrorists, who have sway in southern Lebanon and advanced rockets. The border has been **mostly quiet since then**.

07.19.21

Bennett retracts claim on Temple Mount; Egypt and Jordan allow Muslims only

07.19.21

PM backtracks on claim that Jews have freedom of worship on Temple Mount

Bennett's office issues **clarification** after prime minister appeared to endorse break from long-standing status quo at site holy to Muslims and Jews; Jewish worship prevented on **Jerusalem hilltop compound** where al-Aqsa Mosque was built atop the remains of two biblical temples

Itamar Eichner | Published: **07.19.21**, 12:46

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office on Monday appeared to **backtrack** on his **assertion that Jews should be able to pray on the Temple Mount** in Jerusalem - a site holy to both Jews and Muslims where Jewish prayer is banned under the terms of an agreement struck after the 1967 Six-Day War.

The clarification came after **Bennett** on **Sunday** thanked the law enforcement agencies for "upholding freedom of worship for Jews" who journeyed to the hilltop site to mark Tisha B'Av (the ninth day of the month of Av in the Hebrew calendar), which commemorates the destruction of the two biblical temples that Jews believe once stood there.

According to the status quo maintained at the site since the end of the 1967 war, the **Jordanian waqf** (Islamic religious authority) **has responsibility** for the area and Muslims have long **protested any Jewish presence on the mount** - the holiest site in Judaism - as a "provocation" and a **catalyst for unrest**.

Bennett's statement also included a **pledge to uphold** freedom of **worship for Muslims at the site**, which is also holy to them. But the visit Sunday by hundreds of Jews marking Tisha B'Av drew widespread Muslim condemnation, including from the Islamist Ra'am Party that is a member of the current Israeli government.

"The Al-Aqsa Mosque on its 144 dunams [35 acres] is the sole property of Muslims and no **one else has any right to it**," said Ra'am.

The party also expressed disapproval over police officers clearing the area of stone-throwing Palestinians early Sunday morning and the subsequent arrival of Knesset members, some of whom sang Israel's national anthem Hatikvah close to the mosque.

Ra'am warned that such **actions could lead to a renewed escalation** of violence at the site. Repeated clashes between Muslim protesters and Israeli police were cited by Hamas as a catalyst for the terror group launching thousands of rockets at Israeli communities during the 11-day conflict in May.

"The events that may result from [this visit] could kindle the situation in Jerusalem and the entire region, leading to a catastrophic religious war," Ra'am said.

"The blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, on all its land, is the sole right of all Muslims. The Islamic Movement and the Palestinian people will stand as an impenetrable dam against all attempts by extremists to establish new facts on the ground" at al-Aqsa," the party said.

The **presence of Jews on the Temple Mount on Sunday** also **drew criticism from Egypt and Jordan**, Israel's two neighbors with which it has a peace agreement.

Amman issued a letter of protest over what it called the "storming of the holy compound by extremist settlers under Israeli police protection."

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry said it condemned the "renewal of violations at the al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli extremists."

Cairo also said that **Egypt** had previously **warned** of an "attack" on the al-Aqsa Mosque, and that "the **responsibility for maintaining the security** of worshipers **rests with Israel**."

07.21.21

Netanyahu speaks to Pfizer, Moderna heads behind Bennett's back

07.21.21

Netanyahu speaks to Pfizer, Moderna heads behind Bennett's back

Opposition leader bypasses successor to get update on vaccine's status and supply rate as country comes to grips with Delta variant, urges government to stop 'mucking around'

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Opposition Leader Benjamin Netanyahu spoke with the CEOs of Pfizer and Moderna several times in recent days to push for a third coronavirus vaccine dose while leaving Prime Minister Naftali Bennett out of the loop.

"The government must immediately bring the third vaccine to Israel, there is no other way to save lives and leave the economy open," the former prime minister said in a Twitter post with an accompanying video message.

Netanyahu apparently neglected to notify Bennett neither prior to nor after calling Pfizer and Moderna chiefs Albert Bourla and Stéphane Bancel, respectively.

Following those conversations, the Likud leader came to the conclusion that Israel must immediately order millions more vaccines to protect the country's adult population over the age of 50 from the highly transmissible Delta variant.

However, Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz claimed on Wednesday Israel is not currently experiencing any dearth of vaccines.

Netanyahu has offered scathing criticism of Bennett's leadership since the new government was sworn in last month, removing Netanyahu from power after 12 years as Israel's longest-serving prime minister.