

Ynet-News, Dec 02, 2021 – Thursday

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Meta takes down over 150 Arabic social media accounts linked to Hamas

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i24NEWS| Published: 12.02.21, 21:48

Meta said on Wednesday that it removed a network of over 150 Facebook and Instagram accounts believed to be linked to Palestinian terror group Hamas.

"We removed 141 Facebook accounts, 79 Pages, 13 Groups and 21 Instagram accounts from the Gaza Strip in Palestine that primarily targeted people in Palestine, and to a much lesser extent in Egypt and Israel," the company announced in its monthly Adversarial Threat Report.

"We found this activity as part of our internal investigation into suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior in the region and linked it to Hamas."

Coordinated inauthentic behavior is "efforts to manipulate public debate for a strategic goal where fake accounts are central to the operation," as Meta defines it.

The report states that some of the Pages claimed to be operated by news entities and communities from the West Bank, Israel and Sinai, while others purported to be independent news Pages in the West Bank and Gaza.

Many accounts posted as young women in the West Bank or Sinai. Most of these accounts were already detected and disabled for being fake or for other standards violations before the network was taken down.

According to the report, the individuals behind the accounts posted news stories, cartoons and memes in Arabic about current events, criticism of Israeli defense policy, Fatah and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and supportive commentary about Hamas.

About 407,000 accounts followed one or more of these Facebook Pages and roughly \$21,000 was spent by the network for ads on Facebook and Instagram.

12.02.21

Iran's recent moves & rhetoric in Vienna talks will become clear within days

12.02.21

Mossad head vows Iran will never have nuclear weapons

As talks in Vienna to resurrect 2015 nuclear deal continue, David Barnea says Israel finds the possibility of a 'bad' deal between Tehran and world powers 'intolerable'

Yuval Karni| Published: 12.02.21, 20:55

Mossad chief David Barnea said on Thursday that the agency will take any action needed in order to ensure Iran will not come into possession of nuclear weapons.

"Iran will not have nuclear weapons — not in the coming years, not ever. That is my promise, that is Mossad's promise," he said at a ceremony honoring exceptional agents alongside Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and President Issac Herzog.

His comments came as Iran and major powers are trying, in talks in Vienna, to revive a 2015 deal under which Tehran limited its nuclear program in exchange for relief from U.S., EU and UN economic sanctions.

The United States withdrew from the pact in 2018, during the administration of then-President Donald Trump, and Iran responded by violating the agreement's limits. "Our eyes are open, we are prepared, and we will do with our partners in the security establishment everything that is necessary to alleviate the threat against Israel and thwart it by any means."

Barnea said that a "bad" deal between Iran and the world power will be intolerable. The top spy said there was no need for any country to have three nuclear sites able to enrich uranium to 60%, for anything other than military purposes and the production of a nuclear weapon.

Earlier Thursday, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett urged world powers to halt nuclear talks with Iran immediately, citing a UN watchdog's announcement that Tehran has started producing enriched uranium with more advanced centrifuges.

"Iran is carrying out nuclear blackmail as a negotiating tactic, and this should be answered by the immediate halt to negotiations and the implementation of tough steps by the world powers," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office quoted him as saying in a call with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

An Israeli official said Bennett told Blinken of his objections to any lifting of sanctions against Iran, particularly under an interim deal, which would effectively mean "the massive flow of funds to the Iranian regime".

"Iran is carrying out nuclear blackmail as a negotiating tactic, and this should be answered by the immediate halt to negotiations and the implementation of tough steps by the world powers," the prime minister said according to an official statement released by his office.

Blinken told reporters during his visit to Stockholm that Iran's intentions in the talks will become clear within days.

"I have to tell you, recent moves, recent rhetoric, don't give us a lot of cause for ... optimism. But even though the hour is getting very late, it is not too late for Iran to reverse course and engage meaningfully," he added.

12.02.21

Israel public backlash halts controversial phone tracing of Omicron patients

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Israel halts controversial phone tracing of Omicron patients

Government scraps controversial program only five days after its cabinet approval, saying it followed 'an up-to-date situational assessment,' rendering it unnecessary; Health Minister Horowitz praises decision  
Ynet ,Reuters| Published: 12.02.21, 18:59

Israel said on Thursday it was halting the use of Shin Bet cellphone tracking technology to curb the spread of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, following public backlash of the measure.

The government authorized the surveillance technology, which matches virus carriers' locations against other mobile phones nearby to determine their contacts, to be used for Omicron cases on Nov. 27.

That authorization will not be renewed after it lapses at midnight between Thursday and Friday, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office said in a statement, citing "up-to-date situational assessments".

The technology, originally developed by the Shin Bet domestic security agency, had "contributed over the last week to the effort to break the chain of infection", the statement said.

However, the statement added that possible reintroduction of the tracking will be debated according to the level of morbidity in the country.

Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz said following the decision that he "stressed from the first moment that the use of such a tool should be limited and short-term."

"Now we're ending it, because alongside protecting [public] health, we must protect privacy and human rights, even in times of emergency."

Israel has used the practice of tracking confirmed COVID-19 patients in the early days of its coronavirus outbreak last year, insisting it was a necessary measure to keep track of the spread of infection.

However, unlike previous times the tool was in use, it will be limited only to those who have tested positive for the new strain as opposed to every single confirmed virus case.

Rights groups, meanwhile, argued the measure is unconstitutional and blatantly encroaches on the civil rights and liberties of citizens.

Earlier on Thursday, Israel's Supreme Court rejected a petition by four rights groups seeking to repeal the measure.

"Considering the uncertainty around the Omicron variant and its effects..., it has not been proven that the Shin Bet authorization poses a disproportionate infringement on the right to privacy which would justify its striking down," the ruling said.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel welcomed Thursday's decision and expressed "hope that this is the last time the secret service will be used to monitor the citizens of the State of Israel."

12.02.21

## Orthodox Rabbinate protest government infringement upon kosher certification

12.02.21

### Religious leaders call for protests against government

Former Bennett ally among signatories calling for action against government; right wing, religious factions view cabinet as insufficiently protective of Jewish life and customs in Israel

i24NEWS | Published: 12.02.21, 16:17

A group of influential Israeli rabbis has called for demonstrations against the government in protest of what they see as its infringement upon Judaism's relationship with the state.

Following discussions between themselves earlier in the week, the religious leaders released a statement Wednesday urging "the public to unite and protest against the attempt to make the state a state of all its citizens."

The rabbis are angered over government moves to reform religious conversions and kosher certification, as well as indications that it may advance a deal to enable non-segregated prayer at the Western Wall.

They are affiliated with the national-religious movement which tends to lean rightwards and was represented prominently in factions that sat in the government of former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We returned to Eretz Israel because we want a Jewish state and not a state of all its citizens," the statement said. "Now the government is promoting a series of laws that will endanger the essence of the state and change its identity."

Among the signatories were Rabbi Chaim Druckman, the head of the Ohr Etzion Yeshiva, Rabbi Dov Lior, former chief rabbi to the settlements of Hebron and Kiryat Arba, Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, the chief rabbi of Safed, and former parliamentarian Rabbi Eliezer Waldman.

A large right-wing demonstration is scheduled to take place in Tel Aviv next week. Druckman and Prime Minister Naftali Bennett were once allies.

While the prime minister was previously connected to the national religious movement, he burned his bridges to the bloc when he formed Israel's latest government, dethroning Netanyahu and his allied parties.

Bennett was subjected to a large degree of criticism following the move, criticism that Israeli authorities indicated may border on incitement.

Israel's government previously indicated it intends to reform kosher certification due to the monopoly that is held over the process by the ultra-Orthodox-linked Chief Rabbinate.

12.02.21

Gantz acquires 12 US Stallion helicopters and stock of Iron Dome missiles

12.02.21

Israel arms up for a possible strike in Iran

Analysis: Jerusalem has spent billions preparing for an attack in Iran, stocking up on Iron Dome missiles, advanced precision weapons and hosting a bunch of drills in all frontiers; Hezbollah would most likely join the campaign but it remains unclear to what extent  
Yossi Yehoshua | Published: 12.02.21, 14:26

Israel is very pessimistic regarding the nuclear talks between Iran and world powers in Vienna which were renewed this week, and an official document shows the country is preparing to spend some five billion shekels on weaponry.

Jerusalem, as well as the IDF, are seriously preparing for the possibility that Israel will be left alone in the face of the Iranian nuclear threat. The possible strike in Iran seems closer than ever, although there is still time, and military and diplomatic limitations to overcome.

Nevertheless, the Israel Defense Force prepares for the possible strike, mostly by training the Israeli Air Force (IAF) and intelligence gathering. However, it turns out that the ministerial committee in charge of military equipment, convened Sunday, and confirmed, along with Defense Minister Benny Gantz, the acquisition of 12 new CH-53K King Stallion helicopters, and additional stock of missiles for the Iron Dome.

The Americans also approved Israel's request for purchasing classified bombs and precision weapons for the IAF a few months ago at an estimated cost of one billion dollars. And according to an official document, classified as "top secret", the total cost of these purchases is estimated at around five billion shekels.

Other military means will be provided by Israel's security industries in two additional deals, and these deals stress the seriousness of the Iranian issue for Israel. Over the last few years, the IDF diverted its resources to upgrading its land and intelligence capabilities, under the intelligence assessment - which was based on the agreement between world powers and Iran - that this upgrade could be done while calculating and managing the Iranian risk and addressing the army's more pressing needs.

However, the United States withdrew from the nuclear agreement in 2018, and that begs the question, why Israel didn't prepare for the attack back then in order to show the seriousness of the issue and to make it clear that a military option is on the table?

The General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces said they learned their lesson, and even if the U.S gets a good agreement, which most likely won't happen, the preparation for a military strike won't be slowed down, and will continue in the planned course.

In such an event, there are two key questions: whether the Americans will join the attack or not, or will they back Israel, by providing security assistance during the strike and after. Regarding the first option, in light of the Biden administration's policy in the region, the likelihood of cooperation is lower than before. But, for support, at this point, the

estimations are positive, especially if it would be clear beyond any doubt that the Iranians led to a point in which Israel had no other choice.

Another main question is **whether Hezbollah will join** the campaign **against Israel**, and if so, in what way. In the past, the answer was unequivocal, **yes**, and with everything they got, because that's the reason the Iranians invested some one billion dollars a year in an organization that holds the capabilities of a military.

However, Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah no longer sees himself as an Iranian proxy but an almost equal regional leader. He is more occupied by Lebanon's crisis along with fights over control.

These reasons make Israel believe that he won't rush into such war, in which even if he causes significant damage to the Jewish state, he would have to sacrifice both Lebanon and Hezbollah, because **Israel won't respond carefully anymore, it will use its full force** against him.

The possible war raises a dilemma, among both political and security officials, about how to broker the issue to the public, particularly about the possible damage that would be caused by a total of some 2,500 rockets fired towards Israel per day. This issue can create stress and anxiety among civilians, and also empower the enemy.

IDF officials estimate that Hezbollah will most likely join the campaign after the strike in Iran but they can't determine the intensity of their retaliation. As a result, Israel buys more Iron Dome missiles, which raises further criticism on why this wasn't done before and as a result, the **"National Air Defense" plan - deployment of Iron Dome batteries throughout the country - would be already finished.**

**12.02.21**

**Israel calls on world powers to stop nuclear talks as Iran ramps up enrichment**

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As Iran and world powers are **trying to revive 2015 deal**, PM tells Secretary of State Antony Blinken **Tehran using 'nuclear blackmail as a negotiating tactic'**; meanwhile, **Gantz tells Ynet an attack on Iran is an option**

Reuters, Ynet | Published: **12.02.21**, 12:53

Israel on Thursday urged world powers to halt nuclear talks with Iran immediately, citing a U.N. watchdog's announcement that Tehran has started producing enriched uranium with more advanced centrifuges.

"Iran is carrying out nuclear blackmail as a negotiating tactic, and this should be answered by the immediate **halt to negotiations and the implementation of tough steps** by

the world powers," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office quoted him as saying in a call with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Wednesday that Iran had started the process of enriching uranium to up to 20% purity with one cascade, or cluster, of 166 advanced IR-6 machines at its Fordow plant, dug into a mountain.

Iran and major powers are trying, in talks in Vienna, to revive a 2015 deal under which Tehran limited its nuclear program in exchange for relief from U.S., EU and U.N. economic sanctions. The United States withdrew from the pact in 2018, during the administration of then-President Donald Trump, and Iran responded by violating the agreement's limits.

An Israeli official said Bennett told Blinken of his objections to any lifting of sanctions against Iran, particularly under an interim deal, which would effectively mean "the massive flow of funds to the Iranian regime".

Under the 2015 deal, no uranium enrichment is supposed to be carried out at Fordow at all. Until now Iran had been producing enriched uranium there with IR-1 machines and had enriched with some IR-6s without keeping the product.

In a video interview on Thursday with Ynet, Defense Minister Benny Gantz voiced confidence that U.S. President Joe Biden would make good on a promise not to let Iran obtain nuclear weapons.

"I believe that the United States as a world leader will stand behind its promise and responsibility... I don't think we are alone," he said.

"I do think we always have to prepare the option for the moment when we may find ourselves alone. I say again, an attack (on Iran) is an option. It doesn't have to be the first one."

He said if no progress on the issue is made, there will eventually come a time when "the world, the region and the State of Israel will have no choice but to act, and it could happen."

12.01.21

PA income for the first 10 months of 2021 totaled NIS 11.4 billion

12.01.21

U.S. resumes financial aid to Palestinian Authority, report shows

Budget data shows Washington transferred \$10 million to fund hospitals in East Jerusalem; Palestinian source says Ramallah in need of \$600 million in emergency to ensure payment of salaries to employees and suppliers

TPS| Published: 12.01.21, 15:07

The U.S. has resumed its financial aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) since suspending it in 2017, according to a general budget report published on Wednesday.



According to data released by the Palestinian Finance Ministry, Washington has transferred \$10 million to fund hospitals in East Jerusalem.

Under former president Donald Trump, the U.S. suspended its support for the PA in early 2017 and later also suspended its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Sources in the PA told TPS that United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has also significantly expanded its activities East Jerusalem, and with its representatives meeting Palestinian tourism and industry officials. USAID has suspended its work in 2018, but two months ago announced that it will renew its support for local projects. The PA is suffering from a sharp decline in external grants, both from Arab sources and from European Union countries.

According to a source in Ramallah, it is now in need of \$600 million in emergency aid to ensure the payment of salaries to its employees and suppliers.

In 2021, there was a sharp decline in foreign aid to the PA budget, receiving \$49 million compared to \$321 million over the same period the previous year.

However, financial reports released by the PA show that its revenues during the first 10 months of 2021 were the highest in its history.

According to the PA's financial report, its net income for the first 10 months of 2021 totaled NIS 11.4 billion, reflecting a rise of NIS 1.798 billion in comparison to 2019, and over NIS 3 billion in comparison to 2020.

11.30.21

West Bank Highway 60 PA students throwing stones, requiring IDF troop presence

11.30.21

IDF troops begin walking Palestinian children to school due to stone throwing

After claims by settlers of an increase in attacks along major West Bank highway, IDF vows to bolster troop presence, while videos from social media showed Israeli soldiers walking Palestinian children from local villages to school amid threat

Elisha Ben Kimon | Published: 11.30.21, 15:12

Most of the incidents appear to have occurred near a school in the Palestinian village of Al-Lubban al-Gharbi, near Ramallah, close to the settlements of Eli, Ma'ale Levona, and Shilo - along a major West Bank highway.

Orel Gurfinkel, 28, who uses Highway 60 every morning, says she was ambushed by rocks thrown at her car twice in just five days.

"It's a fear that is hard to explain, I was with my one-year-old son in the car, and the rocks luckily hit the front windshield and he wasn't hurt, it's a nightmare, and we can't keep driving like this, we are like sitting ducks in there."

Settlers demonstrations outside a military base in Binyamin Region on Sunday during a visit there by Defense Minister Benny Gantz and IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi.

In a meeting that ensued, they were told that the military was taking their concerns seriously. "The meeting was good, they heard what we had to say, they understood our point, and they said that rock-throwing is a life threat by all means," one settler said. They also reported a decision by the security forces to bolster Border Police forces along the highway, while school teachers and other settlers would also increase their presence on the road to prevent students from throwing stones.

Following the meeting, pictures appeared on Palestinian social media sites, showing soldiers walking with students as they made their way to school.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit said in response to a question that troop presence will be increased.

"Following the growing number of rock-throwing incidents on Israeli cars in the area of Al-Lubban al-Gharbi village in recent weeks, the IDF decided to bolster its Border Police deployment.

"The IDF, together with other security forces will continue their mission to keep local residents safe," the military spokesperson said.

11.28.21

MK's to airlift & immigrate 3,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel for family-unification

11.28.21

Israel to allow thousands of Ethiopian Jews to immigrate

Ministers say the decision to allow some 3,000 people to move to Israel comes in part as a response to the precarious security situation in the African state as fighting between government and Tigray forces persists

Associated Press| Published: 11.28.21, 21:38

Israel on Sunday approved the immigration of several thousand Jews from war-torn Ethiopia, some of whom have waited for decades to join their relatives in Israel.

The decision took a step toward resolving an issue that has long complicated the government's relations with the country's Ethiopian community.

Some 140,000 Ethiopian Jews live in Israel. Community leaders estimate that roughly 6,000 others remain behind in Ethiopia.

Although the families are of Jewish descent and many are practicing Jews, Israel does not consider them Jewish under religious law. Instead, they have been fighting to enter the country under a family-unification program that requires special government approval. Community activists have accused the government of dragging its feet in implementing a 2015 decision to bring all remaining Ethiopians of Jewish lineage to Israel within five years.

Under Sunday's decision, an estimated 3,000 people will be eligible to move to Israel. They include parents, children and siblings of relatives already in Israel, as well as orphans whose parents were in Israel when they died.

"Today we are correcting an ongoing injustice," said Immigration Minister Pinna Tamano Shata, herself an Ethiopian immigrant. She said the program was a response to people who have waited "too many years to come to Israel with their families" and to resolve a "painful issue."

In a joint statement with Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked, she said the decision came in part as a response to the precarious security situation in Ethiopia, where tens of thousands of people have been killed over the past year in fighting between the government and Tigray forces.

It was not immediately clear when the airlift would begin. The government appointed a special project coordinator to oversee the effort.

Kasaw Shiferaw, chairman of the group Activists for the Immigration of Ethiopian Jews, welcomed Sunday's decision but said there was still a long way to go.

"On one hand, this decision makes me happy. Three thousand people are realizing a dream and uniting with their families," he said.

"But it's not a final resolution. Thousands are still waiting in camps, some for more than 25 years. We expect the government to bring all of them," he said.

11.25.21

Israel to rein in exports of spyware as Apple Inc sues NSO for customer hacking

11.25.21

Israel said to slash list of countries that can buy cyber tech

Defense Ministry revises number of eligible countries from 102 to just 37 states, dropping allies Morocco and UAE, following NSO Group's Pegasus spyware scandal and subsequent claims of human rights abuses by governments

Reuters| Published: 11.25.21, 21:21

Israel slashed its list of countries eligible to buy its cyber technologies following concern over possible abuses abroad of a hacking tool sold by Israeli firm NSO Group, Ynet's sister publication and financial newspaper Calcalist reported on Thursday.

The newspaper, which did not disclose its sources, said Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and the United Arab Emirates were among countries that would now be barred from importing Israeli cyber tech. The list of countries licensed to buy it had been cut to just 37 states, down from 102.

The Defense Ministry, responding to the report, said in a statement it takes "appropriate steps" when terms of usage set in export licenses it issues are violated, but stopped short of confirming any licenses had been revoked.

Israel has been under pressure to rein in exports of spyware since July when a group of international news organizations reported that NSO's Pegasus tool had been used to hack into phones of journalists, government officials and rights activists in several countries. Those reports prompted Israel to review the cyber export policy administered by the Defense Ministry.

Morocco and the UAE, which both normalized relations with Israel last year, as well as Saudi Arabia and Mexico were among countries where Pegasus has been linked to political surveillance, according to Amnesty International and the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab which studies surveillance.

NSO has denied any wrongdoing, saying it sells its tools only to governments and law enforcement agencies and has safeguards in place to prevent misuse.

Earlier this month, U.S. officials placed NSO on a trade blacklist for selling spyware to governments that misused it. The company said it was dismayed by the decision, since its technologies "support U.S. national security interests and policies by preventing terrorism and crime."

NSO has also faced lawsuits and criticism from big tech firms who accuse it of exposing their customers to hacking. Apple Inc was the latest to sue NSO this week.