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Russia actively aimed at salvaging the Iran - US nuclear deal for sanctions relief

01.30.22

UAE Sheikh & Israel's president share concerns over Yemen / Iran & PA rebels

01.30.22

UAE de facto ruler tells Herzog important to battle 'militias and terror forces'
Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed thanks president, who landed in Abu Dhabi hours earlier for his first official visit, for his support in face of deadly drone attack in UAE; 'It is a stance that demonstrates our common view of threats to regional stability,' he says
Ynet, News agencies | Published: 01.30.22, 14:58

The crown prince of Abu Dhabi and United Arab Emirates' de facto ruler told President Isaac Herzog on Sunday the two countries share the understanding on the importance of standing up to "militias and terrorist forces" in the latest sign of deepening ties between the two nations.

Herzog landed in the UAE earlier in the first official visit by the country's head of state as tensions rise in the region.

Upon arrival, Herzog held a diplomatic working meeting with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The meeting lasted over two hours and according to the President's Office, was "warm and cordial".

Herzog said the meeting sends a message to entire region that there is "an alternative of peace and living together, and that the sons and daughters of Abraham can reside and dwell together in peaceful coexistence for the benefit of humanity".
"I also wish to emphasize that we completely support your security requirements and we condemn in all forms and language any attack on your sovereignty by terrorist groups," Herzog said, referring to the drone attack near Abu Dhabi's airport two weeks ago that claimed the lives of three people and injured several others. The attack is believed to have been carried out by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed thanked the president on his stance "regarding the recent terrorist attacks on civilian facilities in the UAE".
"It is a stance that demonstrates our common view of the threats to regional stability and peace, particularly those posed by militias and terrorist forces, as well as our shared understanding of the importance of taking a firm stance against them.
"Through peace, we in the UAE, Israel and the wider region, can direct resources and capabilities towards serving our nations and paving the way for a better tomorrow."

The crown prince also called the Abraham Accords a "major historical shift" that embodied the approach to peace that the UAE believes in, and it has paved the way towards strengthening our partnerships, particularly in the areas of technology, innovation, health, energy, and others".

The UAE and Israel normalized relations in the fall of 2020, part of a series of U.S.-brokered diplomatic deals between Israel and Arab states that had long avoided formal relations with Israel over its decades-old conflict with the Palestinians.

Herzog was also expected to meet members of the country's small but growing Jewish expat community and on Monday to visit Expo 2020, the world's fair in Dubai, where Israel has hosted a series of events at its national pavilion.

01.30.22

Abbas asks Gantz to release prisoners; ministry expedited taxes & work permits

01.30.22

Abbas asks Gantz to release security Fatah prisoners, Palestinian sources say
The request was first made in the Ramallah meeting last August to offset the growing political popularity of Hamas and to show Palestinian voters that diplomacy yields better results than violence

Elior Levy | Updated: 01.30.22, 09:01

Palestinian sources have said that President Mahmoud Abbas requested the release of security prisoners belonging to the Fatah party, who are held by Israel, Defense Minister Benny Gantz during a meeting last August.

The sources told Ynet over the weekend, the request was not reported in the wake of the meeting and was presented by Abbas as a request for a gesture of goodwill.

The two met a second time last December when Gantz hosted the Palestinian president at his home.

According to the sources, Abbas asked that Israel release 25 members of the Fatah organization that have been held in Israeli jails for decades, with some of whom imprisoned before the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993.

Gantz told Abbas that he would look into the matter, but the sources believe the current Israeli government would not agree to the release.

The last time Israel released Palestinian prisoners as a goodwill gesture to Abbas was in 2013, during former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's term. Most of them also were from the Fatah movement and the release was as part of negotiations held at the time to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Among those whose release was agreed upon by Netanyahu, but was ultimately rejected after the negotiations failed, were two Israeli Arab brothers who were jailed for the 1980 murder of Avraham Bromberg. Another prisoner was jailed for the murder of IDF soldier Moshe Tamam in 1984.

Though their names were not confirmed to have been part of the latest request, it is likely that they were among those named by Abbas.

The president stressed in his meetings with Gantz the importance of strengthening the Fatah movement to offset the growing popularity of Hamas in the West Bank. Abbas said such a move on the part of Israel would prove to his constituents that diplomacy could achieve better results than the violence carried out by Hamas.

Senior officials in the defense establishment said they would not object to the release of certain Fatah prisoners who have already served a decades-long sentence. The defense ministry said in response to Ynet's request for confirmation, that they would not comment on the details of private security related meetings.

Following his meetings with Abbas, Gantz said some confidence building gestures were approved by the ministry towards the PA that included an expedited transfer of hundreds of millions of shekels in taxes and an increase of hundreds of work permits for Palestinians in Israel, as well as the approval of residency for thousands of Palestinians on a humanitarian basis in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.

01.27.22

Police arrest 45 suspects in riots across East Jerusalem

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Police arrest 45 suspects in riots across East Jerusalem

Jerusalem Police receives dozens of reports of rioters throwing rocks and snowballs at passersby and vehicles throughout the capital; additional arrests expected
Haim Goldich | Published: 01.27.22, 23:52

Israel Police on Thursday arrested 45 suspects who took part in a slew of clashes between law enforcement and Palestinian and Jewish rioters across East Jerusalem.

Jerusalem Police received dozens of reports of rioters throwing rocks at passing vehicles near the Old City's Damascus Gate and the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood — two prime flashpoints of nationalist-driven violence. Police arrested 22 suspects in the area.

Similar instances were reported around the predominately Palestinian Shu'afat neighborhood where Palestinian youths were seen throwing snow-covered rocks at the light rail, passing vehicles and police forces.

Several Palestinians were recorded throwing heavy objects at a Border Police patrol car on the capital's Mount Scopus and assaulting police officers with clubs and iron rods. Here too, police refused to engage with the attackers.

In the Armon Hanatziv neighborhood, dozens of Palestinians hurled stones and snowballs at passersby and vehicles. Police responded with riot control measures and arrested several suspects.

Law enforcement and Border Police reported that the situation began to calm down toward the evening hours but searches after additional suspects were ongoing.

01.26.22

One million vaccine doses delivered to Gaza by rival to Abbas canceled elections

01.26.22

Abbas rival delivers one million COVID vaccine doses to Gaza

Consignment donated by UAE and facilitated by exiled Palestinian politician Mohammed Dahlan, constitutes the largest single shipment of COVID vaccines to coastal enclave

AFP| Published: 01.26.22, 21:35

The United Arab Emirates on Wednesday sent one million doses of the Russian COVID-19 vaccine to Gaza, the latest donation facilitated by Mohammed Dahlan, an exiled rival of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Dahlan, a Gaza native now based in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi, was once a top Palestinian Authority official who served as Abbas's security chief in the territory before its takeover by the Islamist Hamas movement in 2007.

Gaza health ministry spokesman Mahmoud Hammad told journalists that the consignment of one million doses of the Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine marked the largest single shipment of COVID-19 vaccines to Gaza - which has thus far recorded 196,578 coronavirus cases and 1,744 deaths.

The vaccines were delivered through Gaza's Rafah crossing with Egypt, the only one not controlled by Israel.

The same route was used for previous shipments organized by Dahlan, who has increasingly sought to position himself as a benefactor for the Palestinian people. Dahlan had been expected to emerge as a key player from Palestinian elections scheduled for last year but the polls were postponed indefinitely by Abbas in a move that also infuriated Hamas.

The ministry's head of preventive medicine, Magdy Duhair, warned that Gaza's health system was under increased strain due to the fast-spreading Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

While Gaza's beleaguered medical system has struggled at times during the pandemic, coronavirus transmission has been limited by the tight controls Israel and Egypt enforce on travel in and out of the coastal enclave.

01.26.22

Israel to resume US & Lebanon maritime border talks, exploring gas-rich area

01.26.22

Israel to resume U.S.-brokered Lebanon maritime border talks

Energy minister Elharrar set to meet with Washington mediator next week to rekindle defunct efforts to settle longstanding maritime dispute between Jerusalem and Beirut
Reuters, Ynet | Published: 01.26.22, 20:06

U.S.-brokered negotiations to demarcate the maritime border between Israel and Lebanon will resume next week, the Energy Ministry said on Wednesday.

Lebanon and Israel started indirect negotiations through U.S. mediation in 2020 at a UN peacekeeping base in Lebanon's Naqoura, but the talks have stalled several times — effectively halting any exploration of the potentially gas-rich area.

Israel is willing to continue negotiations, the Energy Ministry said, adding that Energy Minister Karine Elharrar would meet U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein next week as part of efforts to settle the dispute.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun also expressed his country's willingness to attempt and settle the longtime maritime dispute.

"Lebanon is ready to resume negotiating the demarcation of the southern maritime borders, in a way that preserves the rights and sovereignty of the Lebanese state," Aoun said.

Lebanon, which has yet to find commercial gas reserves in its own waters, is currently grappling with its worst-ever financial crisis, which effectively left it reliant on foreign donors such as Iran amidst a deepening economic meltdown.

Hochstein last year claimed that resolving the border issue would help alleviate Lebanon's power shortage and economical troubles by allowing it to develop its offshore gas resources.

Israel already pumps gas from several huge offshore fields.

01.25.22

Israel President Herzog to pay official visit to UAE next week at the Dubai Expo

01.25.22

In historic move, President Herzog to pay official visit to UAE next week

Herzog, who was invited by UAE's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, says he is privileged to become first Israeli president to visit Gulf state, where he will open 'Israel Day' at Expo 2020 in Dubai during 2-day trip

Itamar Eichner | Published: 01.25.22, 18:35

Isaac Herzog will travel to the United Arab Emirates next week, in what is set to be the first official visit by an Israeli president to the Gulf state.

During the **two-day visit**, Herzog is set to meet with Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, Vice President and Vice Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, representatives of the Jewish community and other local officials.

In addition, **he will open "Israel Day" at the Expo 2020 in Dubai**, where the Jewish state has its own pavilion. The president is also set to visit Abu Dhabi.

"We are privileged to make history by making the first visit of the president of the State of Israel to the United Arab Emirates," Herzog said in a statement. "I believe that this new and courageous partnership will bring about positive change in the Middle East and inspire the whole region."

He added that he is hoping the visit will contribute to creating "a better, more tolerant and more secure world for future generations. I thank Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed for his kind invitation, which is a historic opportunity to deepen the bonds of friendship between our people."

The visit comes **a month and a half after Prime Minister Naftali Bennett made the first official visit by an Israeli leader to the UAE in December.**

The UAE became the first Arab state in recent history to normalize ties with Israel under a U.S.-sponsored initiative dubbed the "Abraham Accords" after the biblical patriarch revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Shortly after Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco also joined the initiative.

01.25.22

Israel shows increase in public corruption in international survey

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Israel shows increase in public corruption in international survey

Country seen **increasingly corrupt since 2016** in Corruption Perceptions Index and most corrupt among OECD members; chair of local Transparency International branch says ranking is warning sign for future

Itamar Eichner| Updated: **01.25.22**, 11:31

Israel ranked 59 out of 100, according to the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), released on Tuesday, in perceived levels of public corruption.

Israel's ranking **declined from 64th** place in 2016 and is the first time it dropped below 60.

The CPI is a product of Transparency International which measures 180 nations worldwide and is an effective means to determine the advisability of business transactions between countries, seen as corrupt.

Since 2016, Israel's corruption levels increased according to the survey.

Israel's ranking is worst among the 37 OECD members, after it dropped four places compared to the 2020 survey. Poland, Italy, Turkey, Greece and Hungary are also seen as corrupt according to the CPI.

Former Judge Nili Arad, who heads the local Transparency International branch said the 2021 survey is indication of corruption spreading in Israel, which was compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, that was harmful to the foundations of democracy.

"Israel's poor ranking is a warning sign," she said.

As in 2020, the 2021 survey did not rank any of the nations with the highest possible number.

Denmark, Finland and New Zealand were all given the ranking of 88, followed by Sweden, Singapore and Norway, which were placed at 85.

The United States was ranked 67 for the second year in a row, down from 75 in 2015. Britain also showed increased corruption

01.24.22

Israel concerned as Syrian-Russian jets patrol Golan Heights to limit IAF airstrikes

01.24.22

Israel concerned joint Syrian-Russian jet patrol to limit IAF airstrikes

Israeli leadership wonders what made the Russians change their policy, and whether it is just a signal meant to pressure Washington, NATO; the IDF and the Russian military in conversation to defuse tension

Yossi Yehoshua | Published: 01.24.22, 22:43

Israel is concerned amid Syrian and Russian military jets' joint patrol on Monday along Syria's airspace and borders, including the armistice line along the Syrian border with Israel.

Officials said they wondered what caused Russia's apparent policy change, after it had enabled the IDF to act freely against the Iranian intrenchment on Syrian soil and even increase the attacks in recent months, to halt the Iranian Revolutionary Gard Corp's Quds Forces' plan to establish a Hezbollah like military presence.

According to the Russian Defense Ministry, the path of the areal patrol included the Israeli and Syrian Golan Heights that has seen regular Israeli airstrikes against suspected Iranian and Hezbollah positions. The ministry also said the patrol flights "will continue to operate on a regular basis".

The joint patrol included Russia's latest fighter jets: the Sukhoi Su-34 attack aircraft; Sukhoi Su-35 multi-mission fighter jet; A-50 command and control aircraft, as well as the Syrian army's MiG-23 and MiG-29 aircrafts.

One possibility for such action is that the Russians estimated that a break in winter weather would prompt an Israeli attack in Syria and saw this as an opportunity to

demonstratively thwart such a move. This may indicate the Russians think Israel exaggerated in its attacks in Syria.

But it is quite clear that pushing the Iranians out of Syria is in the interest of both Israel and the Russians.

Another explanation could be the growing tension between the United States and Russia, over the situation in the Ukraine. and the **Russians may want to signal** to the **Americans and NATO** that their military capabilities include the Middle East, or perhaps even hope Israel might pressure Washington to avoid military conflict.

Israel will have to see if the Russian Syrian alliance will effect their ability to act against threats from Syria

Israeli and Russian military officials are in **talks** to reduce tension but they **may result in a new reality** that would make Israel's war against Iranian entrenchment in the region, **much more difficult.**

01.24.22

West Bank rioters celebrate custody release, hurling stones at store windows & cars

01.24.22

Settler riot in West Bank village causes damage, injuries

Rioting settlers hurl stones and damage storefront windows and cars in village of Huwara near Nablus as they celebrated release from custody of one of their number accused of hurling a stun grenade at a Palestinian home

Elisha Ben Kimon, Elior Levy | Published: 01.24.22, 22:00

At least three Palestinians, including a three-year old boy, were slightly wounded and property was damaged when dozens of settlers rioted in a West Bank village on Monday.

Police say they have launched an investigation after considerable damage was caused in Huwara near Nablus, where settlers apparently hurled stones at cars and shops, breaking windows.

The settlers who drove through the West Bank village in a convoy of cars as they rioted, were celebrating the release of one of their number from detention, after he was charged with hurling a stun grenade at a Palestinian home.

In clips filmed at the scene the settlers are seen hanging out of their cars as they drive around the circle at the entrance to the village shouting and singing before driving through the village streets.

IDF forces separated local residents from the rioters.

The incident comes a day after cars were allegedly vandalized by settlers and two days after a group of settlers attacked Palestinian farmers and left-wing supporters using stones and sticks near an illegal outpost on the West Bank causing injuries. Defense Minister Benny Gantz condemned the incident and the previous violence saying he intended to act forcefully against the perpetrators.

"Whoever hurls stones, sets cars on fire, and uses any kind of weapon is a terrorist and we will treat them as such," gantz said.

"We are in the midst of a process to strengthen the forces on the ground [in the West Bank,] including the police and the Shin Bet and focusing our legal efforts there," he said.

01.24.22

Syria, Russia start joint air force patrols near Israeli border at Golan Heights

01.24.22

Syria, Russia start joint air force patrols near Israeli border
Russian Defense Ministry says patrol included Golan Heights, southern border of Syria, Euphrates River and northern Syria; ministry says patrols will be carried out on a regular basis and will include practicing of air attacks and maneuvers
Reuters, Ynet| Published: 01.24.22, 13:01

Syrian and Russian military jets on Monday jointly patrolled the airspace along Syria's borders, including the armistice line with Israel, and plan to make such flights regular, Russia's defense officials said.

According to the Russian Defense Ministry, the path of the patrol included the Israeli and Syrian Golan Heights that has seen regular Israeli air strikes against suspected Iranian and Hezbollah positions.

The ministry said the patrol flights "will continue to operate on a regular basis".

"The mission route included the Golan Heights, the southern border of Syria, the Euphrates River and northern Syria," the statement said. "The Russian pilots took off from Khmeimim Air Base, while the Syrians took off from the Sayqal and Al-Dumayur bases near Damascus."

According to the ministry, the joint patrol included Russia's latest fighter jets: the Sukhoi Su-34 attack aircraft; Sukhoi Su-35 multi-mission fighter jet; A-50 command and control aircraft, as well as the Syrian army's MiG-23 and MiG-29 aircrafts.

In addition, the Syrian pilots who took part in the patrol practiced air attacks and maneuvers, while the Russian pilots practiced air to ground attacks, the ministry added. Russian forces have been present in Syria since 2015 when they helped turn the tide in a civil war in favor of President Bashar al-Assad.

This month, witnesses and rebel sources said Russian jets have bombed areas near the northwestern Syrian city of Idlib, the last opposition-held bastion.

01.23.22

Lapid, Bennett & Gantz on both sides of the Palestinian political spectrum

01.23.22

Lapid meets senior Palestinian minister in surprise move

Hussein Al Sheikh, charged with civilian and security coordination with Israel, is a close ally of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and considered a contender to replace him; Bennett, Gantz advised of the meeting ahead of time

Elior Levy | Published: 01.23.22, 22:12

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on Sunday met with a senior member of the Palestinian Authority and a close ally of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Hussein al Sheikh in his ministerial capacity oversees civilian and security coordination between the PA and Israel.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was advised of the meeting ahead of time, as was Defense Minister Benny Gantz.

Lapid was reported to have met earlier this month with Majid Faraj - the PA's chief of intelligence.

The Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the meeting.

Palestinian sources said al-Sheikh hoped to bring up matters of policy concerning Israeli-Palestinian relations, among other things, during the meeting.

Israel's coalition government is made up of parties on both sides of the political spectrum and has agreed to refrain from irreversible moves regarding the future of the West Bank and the resolution of the decades-long conflict with the Palestinians.

Hussein al Sheikh is considered a possible contender to replace Abbas as president and is seen as one of the stronger politicians in the Palestinian leadership.

Gantz hosted the Palestinian president at his home last month, a meeting that was followed by Israeli confidence-building measures that included an addition of hundreds of work-permits in Israel for Palestinians in the West Bank.

Al Sheikh who was present at that meeting said it was a last ditch effort to prevent a crisis in the relations between Israel and the PA.

01.22.22

Russia actively aimed at salvaging the Iran - US nuclear deal for sanctions relief

01.22.22

Report: Russia proposes interim nuclear deal to Iran with U.S. consent
Citing U.S. officials, NBC says Moscow proposed limited sanctions relief in return for re-imposition of some restrictions on Tehran's nuclear program, which would serve as a first step in Iran returning to JCPOA with world powers
Ynet| Published: 01.22.22, 14:14

Russia has proposed to Iran an interim nuclear agreement since world powers are struggling to revive the 2015 deal with the Islamic Republic, NBC News reported Saturday.

Citing U.S. officials, the report said the Americans are aware of the proposal, which includes limited sanctions relief in return for re-imposition of some restrictions on Tehran's nuclear program.

The Trump administration withdrew the U.S. from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2018, and talks in Vienna that are meant to revive the agreement appear to be stuck.

The report said the interim deal would act as a first step in Iran returning to JCPOA and not as a separate agreement.

Despite sources saying the U.S. has given its consent to the proposal, senior official in the administration of President Joe Biden said "an interim arrangement is not under serious discussion".

"Though we cannot speak for any discussions that may have taken place between Russia and Iran, at this stage we are certain that no such interim arrangement is being seriously discussed," the official said.

In addition, those familiar with the details of the affair said Tehran has so far refused to discuss an interim deal and rejected Russia's proposal.

The NBC report came just three days after Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Moscow as part of an official state visit.

Russia and Iran have joined forces to shore up Syrian President Bashar Assad, helping his government reclaim most of the country's territory after a devastating civil war.

Moscow has performed a delicate balancing act, maintaining contacts with Iran while also building warm relations with Israel, which views the Iranian presence in Syria as a red line. In 2018, Russia struck a deal with Iran to keep its fighters away from the Golan Heights to accommodate Israeli concerns about the Iranian entrenchment in Syria.

Russia also has actively taken part in international talks aimed at salvaging the nuclear deal. Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China are still part of the agreement.