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- - Message on Aug 6, 2018 - (Some element) can attain a Lattice of 55

02.06.22

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Netanyahu trial in danger following spying reports

Revelations of unauthorized police use of powerful spyware against key witness prompts voices to demand for a mistrial to be called in former prime minister's corruption cases  
Associated Press| Published: 02.06.22, 19:55

Reports that Israeli police allegedly used sophisticated spyware against a key witness in the corruption trial of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, appear to jolt the trial, shining a light on a contentious Israeli-developed surveillance tool.

Netanyahu is in the midst of a lengthy corruption trial over charges of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. In the initial report by Channel 13 last week, police were said to have used spyware to collect information off the witness' phone without first obtaining authorization, sparking an uproar.

Netanyahu's lawyers have demanded answers from the state about what was gathered and how. The report has reenergized Netanyahu's supporters, who have long seen the trial as

part of a conspiracy to topple the polarizing former leader. Even Netanyahu's political opponents are outraged.

"This is an earthquake that would justify a governmental commission of inquiry," Cabinet Minister Tamar Zandberg, who sits in the coalition that ousted Netanyahu last year, told Army Radio Sunday. That the spyware was likely Israeli-developed was a "point of shame," she said.

Amnon Lord, a columnist at the pro-Netanyahu Israel Hayom daily, called for a mistrial. The witness whose phone was reportedly hacked, Shlomo Filber, is expected to testify in the coming days and Netanyahu's lawyers are expected to request a delay to his testimony. It remains unclear whether any of the evidence allegedly gathered was used against Netanyahu.

Police, as well as a lawyer for Netanyahu, did not respond to a request for comment. The Justice Ministry declined to comment. State prosecutors have told Netanyahu's lawyers that they are "thoroughly examining" the reports, according to internal communications seen by The Associated Press.

The report comes after Ynet's sister publication Calcalist reported that Israeli police tracked targets without proper authorization. Last week, Israel's national police force said it had found evidence pointing to improper use of the spyware by its own investigators to snoop on Israeli citizens' phones. The revelations shocked Israelis and prompted condemnations from across the political spectrum.

Authorities have not said which spyware might have been improperly used.

But the Calcalist report said at least some of the cases involved the Israeli company NSO. This studio photographic illustration shows a smartphone with the website of Israel's

NSO is Israel's best-known maker of offensive cyberware, but it is far from the only one. Its flagship product, Pegasus, allows operators to seamlessly infiltrate a target's mobile phone and gain access to the device's contents, including messages and contacts, as well as location history.

NSO has faced mounting scrutiny over Pegasus, which has been linked to snooping on human rights activists, journalists and politicians across the globe in countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

NSO says all of its sales are approved by the Defense Ministry. Such sales have reportedly played a key role in Israel's development of ties with Arab states in the Gulf. Aluf Benn, editor of the Haaretz daily, said it was a surprising twist that Netanyahu was now portraying himself as a victim.

"What an irony: The man who leveraged Pegasus for foreign-policy gains now believes he lost his domestic power on account of the spyware," he wrote.

02.06.22

Abbas, of PLO & 141-member Council, appoint two for Abbas succession vote

02.06.22

Rare meeting of Palestinian council could provide Abbas succession clues  
PLO last met in 2018 and experts say Sunday's talks could yield significant  
advancements on finding Mahmoud Abbas successor, who has been serving as PA's  
president since 2005; Hamas and Islamist Jihad turned down invitations  
Ali Sawafa, Nidal al-Mughrabi | Published: 02.06.22, 15:32

A key Palestinian decision-making body will convene on Sunday for the first time in  
nearly four years, in a session that could be a stepping stone for two potential successors  
to 86-year-old President Mahmoud Abbas.

The Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) Central Council last met in 2018, where  
progressions were hampered by internal divisions among Palestinians. The upcoming  
meeting on Sunday could yield significant advancements, yet Hamas and Islamist Jihad  
terror groups turned down the invitation, saying that Abbas had to institute power-sharing  
reforms first.

Abbas is head of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority (PA), which exercises limited  
self-rule in the West Bank. His main rival, Hamas, runs the Gaza Strip, which also has  
strong Islamic Jihad influence.

The elderly leader has a history of heart problems, and has yet to propose a successor.  
Both Islamic groups have accused Abbas, who hasn't held a presidential election since  
2005, of not mending Palestinian divides and putting off a ballot. Meanwhile, Abbas  
blames Hamas for the disputes.

The 141-member Central Council, scheduled to meet on Sunday and Monday, is expected  
to appoint two of Abbas's confidants, Hussein Al-Sheikh and Rawhi Fattouh, to senior  
posts, Palestinian analysts said.

Abbas, scheduled to speak at the opening session, wants 61-year-old Sheikh, a key  
Palestinian liaison of Israel and the United States, to fill the post of secretary-general of  
the PLO's Executive Committee, replacing Saeb Erekat, the analysts said.  
Fattouh, 73, another confidant of Abbas, is his choice to head the PLO's National Council,  
it's strongest decision-making body. Both men are close to Abbas and are not expected to  
drastically change policies regarding the handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.  
Even if the appointments are ratified by the Central Council, replacing Abbas could prove  
to be complicated. "There is a long list of successors to (Abbas) and there is a clear  
internal conflict," said West Bank-based political analyst George Giacman. "If something  
happened to (him) there will be disputes."

Relations with Israel are also supposed to be discussed at the council session.

02.05.22

Biden restored nuclear waiver to Iran with training services, to help the talks in Vienna

02.05.22

U.S. restores sanctions waiver to Iran with nuclear talks in final phase  
State Department says restoring waivers will help return Iran to the tattered 2015 deal, will serve U.S. non-proliferation and nuclear safety interests  
Reuters| Published: 02.05.22, 09:08

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on Friday restored sanctions waivers to Iran to allow international nuclear cooperation projects, as indirect American-Iranian talks on reviving the 2015 international nuclear deal with Tehran enter the final stretch.

The waivers had allowed Russian, Chinese and European companies to carry out non-proliferation work to effectively make it harder for Iranian nuclear sites to be used for weapons development. The waivers were rescinded by the United States in 2019 and 2020 under former President Donald Trump, who pulled out of the nuclear agreement.

The State Department has sent a report signed by Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Congress explaining that restoring the waivers will help the talks in Vienna on returning to the tattered deal - dubbed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"The waiver with respect to these activities is designed to facilitate discussions that would help to close a deal on a mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA and lay the groundwork for Iran's return to performance of its JCPOA commitments," according to the report, a copy of which seen by Reuters.

"It is also designed to serve U.S. non-proliferation and nuclear safety interests and constrain Iran's nuclear activities. It is being issued as a matter of policy discretion with these objectives in mind, and not pursuant to a commitment or as part of a quid pro quo," the report said.

The activities, according to the report, include redesign of Iran's Arak heavy-water reactor, the preparation and modification of its Fordow facility for stable isotope production, operations, training and services related to its Bushehr nuclear power plant, among several other things.

The waiver was needed to allow for technical discussions that were key to the talks about a return to the deal, said a senior State Department official, also speaking on condition of anonymity. The official added that restoring the waiver was not a signal that the United States was on the verge of reaching an understanding to return to the deal.

Israel, on its part, has previously warned that sanctions relief for Iran could mean 'terror on steroids', adding it would not be bound by any agreement reached in the nuclear talks with Iran and sees itself free to act against the threat to its security from the Islamic Republic.

02.06.22

Lattice of 55 in African Union summit, urged by PA to dispute Israel's membership

02.06.22

Israel dispute erupts at African Union summit

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh says Israel should not be rewarded for 'apartheid regime' it imposes on his people after its acceptance into the African bloc last July

i24NEWS| Updated: 02.06.22, 09:03

Palestinian National Authority Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh urged the African Union to withdraw Israel's accreditation, on Saturday, awakening simmering tensions as the 55-member bloc opened a two-day summit in Addis Ababa.

Even as the continent reels from a spate of military coups and the COVID pandemic, the relationship with Israel is expected to shift during the summit this weekend.

The dispute was set in motion last July when Moussa Faki Mahamat, chair of the African Union Commission, accepted Israel's accreditation to the bloc, triggering a rare dispute within a body that values consensus.

As heads of state gathered in Ethiopia's capital, Shtayyeh called on the body to reject Faki's move: "Israel should never be rewarded for its violation and for the apartheid regime it does impose on the Palestinian people," he said.

"Your honor, I'm sorry to report to you that the situation of the Palestinian people has only grown more precarious." Faki responded.

The summit may see a vote on whether to back or reject Faki's decision, which could yield an unprecedented split in the bloc.

Israel's accreditation last year drew quick protest from influential members, including South Africa and Algeria, which argued that it abruptly contradicted AU statements supporting the Palestinian Territories.

Earlier Saturday, Faki said the AU's commitment to the Palestinian push for independence was "unchanging and can only continue to go stronger."

However, he defended Israel's accreditation, saying it could be "an instrument in the service of peace" while calling for "a serene debate" on the issue.

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02.05.22

83 Russian battalions on Ukraine border & 14 more in transit, prompt NATO forces

02.05.22

Russian forces at 70% of level needed for full Ukraine invasion, U.S. officials say

By Phil Stewart and Humeyra Pamuk

A service member of the Ukrainian armed forces walks in a trench at combat positions near the line of separation from Russian-backed rebels outside the settlement of Zaitseve in the Donetsk region, Ukraine February 5, 2022. REUTERS/Oleksandr Klymenko/File Photo

Military vehicles are seen during the joint exercises of the armed forces of Russia and Belarus at a firing range in the Brest Region, Belarus February 3, 2022. Vadim Yakubyonok/BelTA/Handout via REUTERS

A service member of the Ukrainian armed forces walks in a trench at combat positions near the line of separation from Russian-backed rebels outside the settlement of Zaitseve in the Donetsk region, Ukraine February 5, 2022. REUTERS/Oleksandr Klymenko

Military vehicles are seen during the joint exercises of the armed forces of Russia and Belarus at a firing range in the Brest Region, Belarus February 3, 2022. Vadim Yakubyonok/BelTA/Handout via REUTERS

WASHINGTON, Feb 5 (Reuters) - Russia has in place about 70% of the combat power it believes it would need for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and is sending more battalion tactical groups to the border with its neighbor, two U.S. officials said on Saturday.

In the last two weeks, the number of battalion tactical groups in the border region has risen to 83 from 60 as of Friday and 14 more are in transit, the officials told Reuters on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the information.

As to the timing of an invasion, the ground is expected to reach peak freeze around Feb. 15, the officials said, allowing for off-road mechanized transit by Russian military units. Such conditions would continue until the end of March.

That timeline and the growing number and capability of Russian forces close to Ukraine could suggest the window for diplomacy is shutting.

The U.S. officials did not provide evidence to back up their estimates of Russia's forces.

As Russia masses more than 100,000 troops near the border, it has said it is not planning an invasion but could take unspecified military action if its security demands are not met. Those include a promise that NATO will never admit Ukraine, a demand Washington and NATO have said is unacceptable.

Washington believes Russia may choose other options than a full-scale invasion, including a limited incursion, and does not believe President Vladimir Putin had made a final decision, the officials said.

But they said Putin is putting in place a force that can execute all scenarios.

If Russia were to invade the capital of Kyiv, it could fall within a couple of days, the U.S. officials said.

A full-scale invasion would cause major casualties, one of the officials said.

Ukraine could suffer 5,000 to 25,000 troop casualties, while Russia's troop casualties could be between 3,000 and 10,000, and civilian casualties could range from 25,000 to 50,000, according to U.S. estimates, the official said.

A full **invasion** **would** also **prompt** the flight of millions of **refugees** and internally displaced persons in Europe, Washington believes.

Reporting by Phil Stewart and Humeyra Pamuk; Editing by Mary Milliken and Daniel Wallis

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