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03.13.22

Shin Bet chief warns FBI, Pentagon Jerusalem tensions could spark violence
Bar shares concerns widespread violence could wash the capital like last year when
nightly clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces during Ramadan triggered
war in Gaza

Yossi Yehoshua | Published: 03.13.22, 17:00

The head of the Shin Bet domestic security agency warned the FBI and the Pentagon of tensions in Jerusalem escalating to a full-fledged round of fighting between Israel and the Palestinians during the holy month of Ramadan, Ynet has learned on Sunday.

In his first official visit to Washington since taking the post five months ago, Shin Bet Director Ronen Bar met with FBI Director Christopher A. Wray and senior security officials to discuss the shared security challenges that Israel and the United States are facing, cementing technology transfer agreements, and sundry cybersecurity issues. The parties also exchanged thoughts about the war between Russia and Ukraine, albeit not on an official footing.

Bar shared his agency's concerns that widespread violence could wash the capital similarly to last year when nightly clashes erupted between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, with tensions rapidly spreading and triggering an 11-day war between Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers.

Ramadan, a time of heightened religious fervor, will start this year at the beginning of April and will overlap with the Jewish festival of Passover, which is expected to draw some 100,000 Jewish pilgrims to the capital.

However, some government officials have argued these warnings were only serving to stoke tensions since current intelligence does not indicate that such a scenario is likely. Critics say that such rhetoric "requires" Palestinian terrorist factions to act, even if only symbolically.

03.13.22

Russia planes fired 30 rockets at Ukraine military base near Polish border

03.13.22

Russia strikes military base near Polish border, 35 dead, Ukraine says
Regional governor says Russian planes fired around 30 rockets at military Yavoriv International Center for Peacekeeping and Security facility; NATO says will enter fight if violence spills into member states

Reuters | Published: 03.13.22, 16:08

A Russian missile attack on a large Ukrainian military facility near the border with NATO member Poland on Sunday killed 35 people and wounded 134, a Ukrainian official said.

Britain said the incident, just 15 miles (25 km) from the Polish border, marked a "significant escalation" of the conflict. U.S. President Joe Biden has said NATO will defend every inch of its territory if Russia's invasion of Ukraine spills over into member states of the Western defense alliance.

Ukraine said foreign military instructors have previously worked at the Yavoriv International Center for Peacekeeping and Security, but a NATO official said there were no personnel from the alliance there. It was not immediately clear whether any non-NATO states might have representatives there.

Regional governor Maksym Kozytsky said Russian planes fired around 30 rockets at facility, adding that some were intercepted before they hit. At least 35 people were killed and 134 wounded, he said. Reuters was not able to verify his statement.

The 360 square-km (140 square-mile) facility is one Ukraine's biggest and the largest in the western part of the country.

The Kremlin did not immediately reply to a request for comment on the reported missile strike so close to the border with NATO, and a short video briefing by Russia's defense ministry spokesman on Sunday made no mention of such an attack.

Nineteen ambulances with sirens on were seen by Reuters driving from the direction of the Yavoriv facility after the reported strike and black smoke rose from the area.

"Russia has attacked the International Center for Peacekeeping & Security near Lviv.

Foreign instructors work here. Information about the victims is being clarified,"

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said in an online post.

A Ukrainian defense ministry representative told Reuters the ministry was still trying to establish if any foreign instructors were at the center at the time of the attack.

Ukraine, whose aspirations to join NATO are a major irritant to Russian President Vladimir Putin, held most of its drills with countries in the Western defense alliance at the base before the invasion. The last major exercises were in September.

In the weeks before Russia invaded on Feb. 24, the Ukrainian military trained there, but according to Ukrainian media, all foreign instructors left the training ground in mid-February, while leaving all the equipment.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, launched by Putin on Feb. 24, has sent more than 2.5 millions fleeing across borders and trapped thousands of people in besieged cities.

While Western nations have sought to isolate Putin by imposing harsh sanctions, the United States and its allies are concerned to avoid NATO being drawn into the conflict.

"There are no NATO personnel in Ukraine," the NATO official said, when asked if any NATO personnel were at the base.

Asked how much of an escalation the attack was, UK cabinet minister Michael Gove told a BBC interviewer: "It is significant." Putin was pushing the boundaries in military terms, he said.

AIRPORT HIT IN WEST

The mayor of another city in western Ukraine, Ivano-Frankivsk, said Russian troops also continued to hit its airport, with no initial reports of casualties.

In eastern Ukraine, Russian troops are trying to surround Ukrainian forces as they advance from the port of Mariupol in the south and the second city Kharkiv in the north, the UK Defense Ministry said on Sunday.

Kharkiv has suffered some of the heaviest bombardment. Videos from one resident, Teimur Aliev, who is helping bring aid to residents, show bombed buildings lining streets, burned out cars riddled with shrapnel holes and debris strewn around.

"We will stitch up the wounds and the pain of our country and our city. We are ready to build it and we are ready to renew it when the war is over. We're not going anywhere," Aliev, a 23-year-old musician, said of his food distribution network, which now has dozens of volunteers.

British intelligence also said Russian forces advancing from Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, were trying to circumvent Mykolaiv as they look to drive west towards Odesa. Air strikes on Mykolayiv killed nine people on Sunday, regional Governor Vitaliy Kim said in an online statement.

Air raid sirens again woke residents in Kyiv on Sunday morning, hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned Russian forces they face a fight to the death if they try to occupy the capital.

Ukraine accused Russian forces on Saturday of killing seven civilians, including one child, in an attack on women and children trying to flee fighting near Kyiv.

Reuters was unable immediately to verify the report and Russia offered no immediate comment.

Moscow denies targeting civilians. It blames Ukraine for failed attempts to evacuate civilians from encircled cities, an accusation Ukraine and its Western allies strongly reject.

MORE ARMS FOR UKRAINE

The United States said it would rush up to \$200 million in additional small arms, anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to Ukraine, where officials have pleaded for more military aid.

The Kremlin describes its actions as a "special operation" to demilitarize and "de-Nazify" Ukraine. Ukraine and Western allies call this a baseless pretext for a war of choice.

Polish President Andrzej Duda warned in an interview broadcast on Sunday that the use of chemical weapons in Ukraine by Russia would be a game changer and NATO would have to think seriously about how to respond.

Russian troops have destroyed 3,687 Ukrainian military infrastructure facilities so far, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov was quoted by Russian news agencies as saying on Sunday. It was not possible to independently verify his statement.

03.13.22

Iran missile attack on Kurds targeted secret Israel base, for officer's assassination

03.13.22

Iran say its missile attack on Erbil targeted 'secret Israeli bases'
Strike on Iraq's northern Kurdish regional said to be Iranian retaliation for Israel's alleged assassination of two Iranian officers last week; U.S. consulate also a potential target; Kurdistan and American officials condemn the attack
Reuters, Ynet| Published: 03.13.22, 10:35

Missile attacks on Iraqi city of Erbil overnight were aimed at "secret Israeli bases", an Iranian state-TV based in Iraq said on Sunday.

A dozen ballistic missiles launched from outside Iraq struck the country's northern Kurdish regional capital pre-dawn Sunday, Kurdish officials said, adding there were no casualties. An official from the U.S. Department of Defense confirmed that the missiles came from Iran, but is still unclear where they landed.

After the strike, broadcasting was temporarily interrupted at a local television station, Kurdistan 24.

Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Masrour Barzani said in tweet Sunday, "Erbil will stand strong against cowardly attacks. I strongly condemn the terrorist attack on Erbil and call on its resilient people to keep calm and follow the guidance of the security services."

The reports overnight in Iran said the missiles also targeted the American consulate in Erbil.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson called the attack "outrageous," but said no Americans were hurt and there was no damage to U.S. government facilities in Erbil. The last time ballistic missiles were directed at U.S. forces was in January 2020, as part of an Iranian retaliation for the U.S. killing earlier that month of its military commander Qassem Soleimani at Baghdad airport. No U.S. personnel were killed in the 2020 attack, but many suffered injuries.

Iraq and neighboring Syria are regularly the scene of violence between the United States and Iran. Iran-backed Shi'ite Islamist militias have attacked U.S. forces in both countries and Washington has on occasion retaliated with air strikes.

News sources from Saudi Arabia have since claimed that the missile strikes were intended to hit a secret Israeli base in response to the assassination of two Iranian officers by Israel last week.

Al-Mayadeen TV, pan-Arabist satellite television channel associated Hezbollah, originally made the same claim. It later added that the attack was a response to other Israeli actions in Erbil, and warned that the response to the Iranian officers' assassination will come "at its' time".

Iranian media sources emphasized that the missile strike occurred at 1:20am (Baghdad time) - the same time Soleimani was assassinated in 2020. Sirens were heard in Baghdad as well, near the American consulate.

Iran also reported this morning that the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security in Western Iran had arrested a spy squad that was operating for Israel. Reports in Iran state that "the network acted to recruit rioters with the aim of sending them to carry out sabotage operations inside Iran".

An Israeli air strike in Syria on Monday killed two members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) - Murtaza Saeed Najad and Ihsan Karbala Bo - in Damascus last week. The IRGC vowed to retaliate, it said.

This marks the first Israeli air attack associated with Israel since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The Syrians reported: "the Israeli enemy carried out an air attack at around 5am towards south Beirut, that hit several targets in Damascus. Our air defense systems were activated against the missiles and intercepted most of them".

Following the death of the two officers, Iranian forces said "there's no doubt that Israel will pay the price for this crime".

03.13.22

China seeks to prevent escalation in Ukraine as Russia asked them for weapons

03.13.22

Russia reported to have asked China for weapons, Beijing calls for de-escalation in Ukraine. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman says Russia showing signs of a willingness to engage in substantive negotiations over Ukraine after enormous pressure from U.S.

Agencies | Published: 03.13.22, 23:37

China's priority is to prevent the tense situation in Ukraine from getting out of control, its embassy in the United States said on Sunday, responding to media reports Moscow had asked Beijing for military equipment since launching its invasion.

"The high priority now is to prevent the tense situation from escalating or even getting out of control," spokesperson Liu Pengyu said in a statement.

According to the report that was published by the Financial Times quoting U.S. officials, the White House was concerned that Beijing may undermine western efforts to help Ukrainian forces defend their country.

In earlier reports, Russia was said to be showing signs of a willingness to engage in substantive negotiations over Ukraine.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said in an interview with Fox News Sunday, that the United States was putting "enormous pressure" on Russian President Vladimir Putin to agree to a cease-fire in its weeks-old invasion of Ukraine and to allow the creation of humanitarian corridors to allow civilians to escape.

"That pressure is beginning to have some effect. We are seeing some signs to have real, serious negotiations. But I have to say ... so far it appears Putin is intent on destroying Ukraine," Sherman said.

More than 140,000 civilians have been evacuated from conflict zones in Ukraine, the country's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said in an interview on national television on Sunday.

Vereshchuk said a humanitarian convoy once again failed to reach the besieged port city of Mariupol, due to Russian shelling.

"The column has stayed in (the Russian-occupied city of) Berdiansk, and will tomorrow again attempt to reach Mariupol," she said.

Following a Russian attack on a military base near Poland's border where NATO defenses are deployed, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said he did not believe a NATO-imposed no-fly zone over Ukraine would have prevented that adding that such a move by NATO would hurl the United States into war with Russia.

"There is very little that you can see that would make sense for this war to be escalated between two nuclear powers," Kirby told ABC's "This Week."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday that Britain would continue to pursue more options for bolstering Ukraine's self-defense.

Johnson added that Britain will work with its partners, including at Tuesday's meeting of the Joint Expeditionary Force countries in London, to pursue more options for bolstering Ukraine's self-defense.

03.12.22

Russia receiving 16,000 troops from Middle East, eager to join action in Ukraine

03.12.22

Russia strikes near Ukraine's capital; mosque reported hit

Russian forces continue pounding Ukrainian cities into rubble as fighting rages on; Zelensky encourages people to keep up their resistance, reports that 1,300 Ukrainian soldiers have died in fighting

Associated Press| Published: 03.12.22, 19:03

Russian forces pounding the port city of Mariupol shelled a mosque sheltering more than 80 people, including children, the Ukrainian government said Saturday. Fighting also raged on the outskirts of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, as Russia's expanding invasion bombarded other resisting cities into rubble.

There was no immediate word of casualties from the shelling of Mariupol's elegant, city-center mosque. The encircled city of 446,000 people has suffered some of the greatest

misery from Russia's war in Ukraine, with unceasing barrages thwarting repeated attempts to bring in food and water, evacuate trapped civilians and to bury all of the dead.

An Associated Press journalist witnessed tanks firing on a 9-story apartment building in the city and was with a group of hospital workers who came under sniper fire on Friday. A worker shot in the hip survived, but conditions in the hospital were deteriorating: electricity was reserved for operating tables, and people with nowhere else to go lined the hallways.

Among them was Anastasiya Erashova, who wept and trembled as she held a sleeping child. Shelling had just killed her other child as well as her brother's child, Erashova said, her scalp crusted with blood.

"We came to my brother's (place), all of us together. The women and children went underground, and then some mortar struck that building," she said. "We were trapped underground, and two children died. No one was able to save them."

Ukraine's military said Saturday that Russian forces captured Mariupol's eastern outskirts, tightening the armed squeeze on the strategic port. Taking Mariupol and other ports on the Azov Sea could allow Russia to establish a land corridor to Crimea, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky encouraged his people to keep up their resistance, which many analysts said has prevented the rapid offensive and military victory the Kremlin likely expected while planning to invade Russia's ex-Soviet neighbor.

"The fact that the whole Ukrainian people resist these invaders has already gone down in history, but we do not have the right to let up our defense, no matter how difficult it may be for us," he said. Later Saturday, Zelensky reported that 1,300 Ukrainian soldiers have died in fighting since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Zelensky also accused Russia of employing "a new stage of terror" with the alleged kidnapping of the mayor of Melitopol, a city 192 kilometers (119 miles) west of Mariupol. After residents of the occupied city demonstrated for the mayor's release Saturday, the Ukrainian leader called on Russian forces to heed the calls.

"Please hear in Moscow!" Zelensky said Saturday. "Another protest against Russian troops, against attempts to bring the city to its knees."

In multiple areas around the capital, artillery barrages sent residents scurrying for shelter and air raid sirens wailed. Britain's Defense Ministry said Russian ground forces massed north of Kyiv for most of the war had edged to within 25 kilometers (15 miles) of the city center and also spread out, likely to support an attempted encirclement.

As artillery pounded Kyiv's northwestern outskirts, black and white columns of smoke rose southwest of the capital after a strike on an ammunition depot in the town of Vasylykiv caused hundreds of small explosions. A frozen food warehouse just outside the capital also was struck in an apparent effort to target Kyiv's food supply.

Ukraine's military and volunteer forces are preparing for a feared all-out assault. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko has said that about 2 million people, half the metropolitan area's inhabitants, have left and that "every street, every house is being fortified."

Maintaining his forceful portrait of his country, Zelensky said Russia would need to carpet-bomb the Ukrainian capital and kill its residents to take the city.

"They will come here only if they kill us all," he said. "If that is their goal, let them come."

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a 90-minute call with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Saturday. Putin spoke about "issues related to agreements under discussion to implement the Russian demands" for ending the war, the Kremlin said without providing details.

The Kremlin said Putin also told Macron and Scholz about video calls between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators over the past few days. The Russian leader also repeated his allegation that Ukrainian forces using civilians as shields had thwarted efforts to evacuate civilians from combat zones.

Russia's slow tightening of a noose around Kyiv and the bombardment of other population centers with artillery and airstrikes mirror tactics that Russian forces have previously used in other campaigns, notably in Syria and Chechnya, to crush armed resistance.

The Ukrainian Embassy in Turkey said 86 Turkish nationals, including 34 children, were among the people who had sought safety in Mariupol's mosque of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent and his wife Roksolana, which was modeled on one of the most famous and largest mosques in Istanbul.

Before Mariupol became a target of the biggest land conflict in Europe since World War II, the city promoted the white-walled building and its towering minaret as a scenic attraction. The death toll in Mariupol passed 1,500 on Friday, from 12 days of attack, the mayor's office said.

With electricity, gas and water supplies knocked out, aid workers and Ukrainian authorities described an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in the surrounded and shelled city. Aid group Doctors Without Borders said residents are dying for lack of medication and draining heating pipes for drinking water.

Russian forces have hit at least two dozen hospitals and medical facilities since they invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, according to the World Health Organization. Ukrainian officials reported Saturday that heavy artillery damaged a cancer hospital and several residential buildings in Mykolaiv, a city 489 kilometers (304 miles) west of Mariupol.

The hospital's head doctor, Maksim Beznosenko, said several hundred patients were in the facility during the attack but no one was killed.

Russia's invaders have struggled far more than expected against determined Ukrainian fighters. Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's Interior Ministry, said Saturday that a Russian general was killed in fighting for Mariupol. Maj. Gen. Andrei Kolesnikov would be the third Russian general reported killed in action since the war started.

Kolesnikov's death was not confirmed by the Russian military, which has kept a lid on information about its losses.

Still, Russia's stronger military threatens to grind down the defending forces, despite an ongoing flow of weapons and other assistance from the West for Ukraine's westward-looking, democratically elected government.

A senior Russian diplomat warned that Moscow could target foreign shipments of military equipment to Ukraine. Speaking Saturday, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Moscow has warned the United States "that pumping weapons from a number of countries it orchestrates isn't just a dangerous move, it's an action that makes those convoys legitimate targets."

Russia's troops are likely to see their ranks bolstered soon from abroad. Denis Pushilin, the Russia-backed head of a separatist region in eastern Ukraine, said Saturday that he expects "many thousands" of fighters from the Middle East to join the rebels and fight "shoulder-to-shoulder" against the Ukrainian army.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's said Friday that Russian authorities received requests from over 16,000 people from the Middle East who are eager to join the Russian military action in Ukraine. He added that many of them previously fought together with Russia against the Islamic State group.

Thousands of soldiers on both sides of the war in Ukraine are believed to have been killed along with many civilians. At least 2.5 million people have fled the country, according to the United Nations refugee agency.

The Ukrainian chief prosecutor's office said Saturday at least 79 children have been killed and nearly 100 have been wounded since the start of the war. Most of the victims were in the Kyiv, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Sumy, Kherson and Zhytomyr regions, the office said, noting that the numbers aren't final because active fighting continues.

As the conflict drags on, the United Nations is seeking agreement with Ukraine and Russia for establishing aid delivery corridors in Ukraine. Amin Awad, the UN's crisis coordinator for Ukraine, told The Associated Press that progress was being made but he expressed frustration over slow implementation.

Earlier attempts to establish evacuation routes from Mariupol failed under ongoing shelling. Russian forces are also blockading Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Ukraine's emergency services reported Saturday that the bodies of five people - two women, a man and two children - were pulled from a Kharkiv apartment building struck by shelling.

On the economic and political front, the U.S. and its allies have moved to further isolate and sanction the Kremlin. President Joe Biden announced that the U.S. will dramatically downgrade its trade status with Russia and ban imports of Russian seafood, alcohol and diamonds.

The move to revoke Russia's "most favored nation" status was taken in coordination with the European Union and Group of Seven countries.

"The free world is coming together to confront Putin," Biden said.

03.12.22

Israel, Ukraine deny report Bennett recommended yielding to Russian demands

03.12.22

Israel, Ukraine deny report Bennett recommended yielding to Russian demands
Adviser for Ukrainian president says 'Bennett has at no point told Zelensky how to act';
senior Israeli official calls report 'patently false' as PM continues mediation efforts
Reuters| Published: 03.12.22, 14:24

A top Ukrainian adviser and an Israeli official on Saturday pushed back against a media report suggesting Israel tried to nudge Ukraine into caving to Russian demands during talks.

Israel has been engaged in diplomatic efforts to try to end the war in Ukraine. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and spoke by phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

A report carried by Israel's Walla news, the Jerusalem Post and U.S. news site Axios had suggested, citing an unidentified Ukrainian official, that Bennett had urged Ukraine to give in to Russia.

Israel, "just as other conditional intermediary countries, does NOT offer Ukraine to agree to any demands of the Russian Federation," Ukrainian adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said on Twitter. "This is impossible for military & political reasons. On the contrary, Israel urges Russia to assess the events more adequately."

A senior Israeli official, who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, called the report "patently false".

"At no point did Prime Minister Bennett advise President Zelensky to take a deal from Putin - because no such deal was offered to Israel for us to be able to do so," the official said.

"Bennett has at no point told Zelensky how to act, nor does he have any intention to."

Bennett met with Putin in the Kremlin last Saturday to discuss the war in Ukraine and later spoke by phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, according to a spokesperson for the Israeli leader.

Israel, at the behest of Zelensky, has offered to mediate in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, though officials have previously played down expectations of any breakthrough.

03.10.22

Knesset law; PA/Jew marriage must emigrate or live apart, source of acts of terror

03.10.22

Controversial 'citizenship law' passes in Knesset

Law, which would force Palestinian families to either emigrate or live apart, passes by a 45-15 majority vote that crossed party lines; proponents say it helps maintain 'Jewish character'

Moran Azulay | Published: 03.10.22, 23:26

The Knesset on Thursday passed a controversial, so-called citizenship law, denying naturalization to Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza married to Israeli nationals.

The law, which would force thousands of Palestinian families to either emigrate or live apart, passed just before the Knesset disbanded for a holiday recess by a 45-15 majority vote that crossed party lines. The only parties that opposed the bill were the left-wing Meretz party and the Islamist Ra'am faction.

The law is based on a temporary order that first passed during the height of a Palestinian uprising in 2003 and was renewed annually until it expired last July, when the Knesset failed to secure a simple majority needed to extend it.

Proponents say the law helps ensure Israel's security and maintains its "Jewish character".

"Today we have proven that our determination to pass the law, has paid off," Religious Zionist legislator Simcha Rothman said. "The State of Israel is Jewish and so it will remain," he said.

Rothman, a member of the opposition who brought the law forward with Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked, added that what he called 'Israel's defensive shield,' will be significantly strengthened.

Left-wing coalition member the Meretz party, which opposed the law, said its members "will continue to fight this law, out of concern for equality in Israel.

"We will stand by families affected by it in the Knesset and government," a statement issued by the party said.

Right-wing legislators said the law was critical for the security of the state, claiming that Palestinians who were granted Israeli citizenship after marrying citizens, or their children, had participated in acts of terror.

03.10.22

Ukraine urges Europe & Israel's chance to cleanse & defeat this total evil Putin

03.10.22

Ukraine's Jewish ex-PM urges stronger Israeli response to Russia

Ukraine's first openly Jewish prime minister says 'blankets will not protect Ukrainians from missile and bomb attacks' amid reports of Israel's refusal to send non-humanitarian aid; says Russian invasion opportunity for the West to deal with Putin

AFP | Published: 03.10.22, 22:54

Former Ukrainian premier Volodymyr Groysman compared Russia's invasion of his country to Nazism and said the West and Israel needed to do more in response.

Groysman -- who lost much of his family in the Holocaust -- was **Ukraine's first openly Jewish prime minister**, serving in office from 2016 to 2019. He later served just under President Volodymyr Zelensky in 2019, making **Ukraine the only country in the world besides Israel to have a Jewish head of state and head of government**.

"Part of my family survived the Holocaust... the other part did not," Groysman, 44, told AFP in Jerusalem from his hometown of Vinnytsia, southwest of Kyiv.

"What's happening **now**, I'm not exaggerating, **is a continuation of the Nazi policy on a national basis**," rather than religious, he said.

"**Hitler was not stopped by economic sanctions**... We need more weapons, we need to close the sky," he added, echoing calls from the Kyiv government to enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine, something **NATO has so far ruled out** for fear of starting a World War III.

'Blankets' not enough

Ukrainian officials, including Zelensky, have made direct appeals to the international Jewish community to take action in response to the Russian invasion, especially after last week's Russian strike beside Kyiv's Babi Yar Holocaust memorial site.

But Zelensky and his envoys have been more pointed in addressing the Israeli response to the crisis.

Prime Minister Naftali **Bennett has so far avoided** forceful **condemnation of** the Russian **invasion**, seeking to maintain delicate security ties with Moscow, especially in relation to neighboring Syria - where Moscow's presence is significant.

Bennett has also attempted to play a mediation role, speaking repeatedly to Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin, including a three-hour meeting at the Kremlin on Saturday.

Last week, Zelensky voiced gratitude at images of Jews praying at Jerusalem's Western Wall wrapped in the Ukrainian flag, but told reporters he did not feel "that the Israeli government had wrapped itself with the Ukrainian flag".

Speaking to journalists this week, Ukraine's envoy to Israel, Yevgen Korniychuk, thanked **Bennett** for his **mediation efforts** but grew emotional when expressing **frustration** that Israel had **not yet approved** the **export of defensive equipment** -- specifically **helmets** and **flak jackets** -- to Ukraine.

"I don't know what (Israeli officials) are afraid of, to provide personal security to Ukrainians," Korniychuk said, as he put on the type of helmet he said Ukrainians were seeking to acquire.

Groisman, who drew plaudits while in office for talking openly about his Judaism in a country with a history of anti-Semitism, also voiced gratitude at Bennett's mediation efforts but said **Israel needed to approve non-humanitarian forms of assistance**. "Your blankets will not protect Ukrainians from missile and bomb attacks," he told AFP.

According to Israeli media, Bennett has repeatedly rebuffed requests by Zelensky for military assistance.

Groisman said the war offered a **"historic chance" for the West to defeat Putin** and **"cleanse Russia** from this total **evil"**.

Rejecting notions that **Putin could be "stopped from within"** by internal rivals, he said military defeat of Russia was essential to safeguard "a sustainable peace".

"Russia is a potential threat for Israel, and for Europe, and for other democratic countries. It's time to end this - this is the perfect chance," he said.

03.10.22

Lapid & Jordan King Abdullah discuss Jerusalem tensions of Ramadan & Passover

03.10.22

Lapid, Jordan's King Abdullah discuss Jerusalem tensions

Meeting in Amman comes ahead of the **upcoming** Muslim holy month of **Ramadan** and Jewish **Passover**; Jordanian news agency says Abdallah 'emphasizes need to step up efforts to achieve peace based on a two-state solution'

Ynet, Reuters| Updated: **03.10.22**, 19:42

Foreign Minister Yair **Lapid met** Thursday with **Jordan's King** Abdullah II at his palace in the kingdom's capital of **Amman**, the Foreign Ministry reported.

According to the ministry, the **two met to discuss** the [Muslim holy month of] **Ramadan**, as well as growing tension in Jerusalem and **on the Temple Mount**.

"We agreed that we should work together, especially in the run-up to Ramadan and Passover, and worry about the tense security situation in Jerusalem." Lapid said.

"Our special relationship with the Kingdom of **Jordan promises a better future** for our children. Peace is not only about being neighborly, but it is also our moral responsibility to both of our people."

This was the second meeting Lapid had with the king, the first taking place in September of last year.

Lapid's office reported that the two also discussed regional and international policy issues, the progress of normalization and peace, as well as **joint projects** pertaining to renewable energy and trade.

Jordanian news agency "Petra" said that during the meeting the king "emphasized the need to step up efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive peace based on a two-state solution, in a way that will ensure the establishment of a sovereign and sustainable independent Palestinian state along the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital." Petra further reported that the king "reiterated the need not to harm the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem, to maintain total peace, and to stop all unilateral measures that undermine the two-state solution."

The meeting was also attended by Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi, with whom Lapid also met separately.

Thursday's meeting follows a string of violent incidents in Jerusalem, the last of which took place last Monday, when two policemen were stabbed and moderately injured by a Palestinian man near the Old City.

Officials in the defense establishment stated that there was a need to increase the presence of security forces in the area ahead of April - during which Ramadan, Nakba Day, when Palestinians mark the 1948 war when 750,000 either fled or were expelled and the Passover holiday, all take place.

The officials added that the recent clashes between Palestinians and security forces in the contested neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem have also contributed to the recent spike in tensions in the flashpoint area.

03.10.22

Israeli West Bank Jewish growth using military presence, despite hostile US policy

03.10.22

Israeli settlement growth proceeds despite hostile U.S. policy

Growth of West Bank's Jewish population far outpacing Israel's overall annual growth rate as territory's Jewry tends to be younger and more religious, with a higher average birth rate

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The growth of Israel's West Bank Jewish population accelerated last year, according to figures released by a pro-settler group on Thursday, despite renewed American pressure to rein in construction on territory that the Palestinians want for a future state.

The figures show that a settlement surge initiated when U.S. President Donald Trump was in office shows no sign of slowing down. Trump provided unprecedented support for Israel's claims to land seized in war, reversing decades of U.S. policy.

President Joe Biden's administration has returned to the previous approach, criticizing settlement expansion as an obstacle to resolving the conflict. But Israel has continued to build and expand settlements, and major road projects are expected to bring even more Jews into the territory.

The statistics, compiled by WestBankJewishPopulationStats.com and based on official figures, show the Jewish population grew to 490,493 as of Jan. 30, a nearly 3.2% rise over 13 months. The population has risen by 16.5% since the group began compiling statistics in 2017, it says.

Israel's overall annual growth rate, by comparison, is around 1.7%. In 2020, the last year of the Trump administration, which also saw repeated coronavirus lockdowns, the Jewish population in the West Bank grew by 2.6%, according to the group.

"There's a tremendous amount of construction going on," said its CEO, Baruch Gordon, including in his community of Beit El, just outside the West Bank city of Ramallah, where the Palestinian Authority is headquartered.

"Right now there are 350 units going up that will probably be finished within a year, year and a half. So when that hits, that's going to increase the size of our town by about 25%," he said.

The Jewish population in the West Bank tends to be younger and more religious, with a higher average birth rate. Many Israelis are drawn to state-subsidized settlements for the quality of life. They resemble suburbs or small towns and offer lower housing prices than Israel's crowded and increasingly unaffordable cities. The pandemic might have made the settlements even more attractive.

"Just like in America, people moved out of Manhattan and went to suburbs and found that they could live in more open spaces, and the same is happening in Israel," Gordon said.

His figures do not include East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed in a move not recognized internationally, and which is now home to more than 200,000 Jews. The West Bank and East Jerusalem are together home to some 3 million Palestinians.

Israel captured both territories from Jordan, along with Gaza, in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Palestinians view the growth of settlements as the main obstacle to peace because they cut off Palestinian communities from their land and from one another, and make it nearly impossible to create a viable state. Settlements have expanded under every Israeli government, even at the height of the peace process in the 1990s.

There have been no serious peace negotiations in over a decade, and Israel's current prime minister, Naftali Bennett, is a former West Bank settlement leader opposed to Palestinian statehood. Israel's political system is dominated by pro-settler parties that view the West Bank as the biblical and historical heartland of the Jewish people.

The international community still considers a two-state solution to be the only realistic way of resolving the century-old conflict, but it has provided no incentive for Israel to end its presence in the territory — now well into its sixth decade.

Hagit Ofran, an expert at the anti-settlement monitor Peace Now, says the population figures are an imprecise measure of growth, as they reflect the higher birth rate and people moving into homes built after years of planning and approvals.

She says that while U.S. pressure appears to have succeeded in pausing some of the most controversial settlement projects, the overall enterprise is proceeding in the same way it

always has, with several projects gradually advancing and **new homes and roads being built**.

“The Americans, as far as I know, are trying to stop it and have had very limited success,” she said.

The seemingly **permanent military presence** has led three well-known human rights groups to conclude that Israel is committing the international crime of apartheid by systematically denying Palestinians equal rights. Israel rejects those accusations as an attack on its very existence as a Jewish-majority state.

The increasingly authoritarian and unpopular Palestinian Authority, established through agreements with Israel in the 1990s, administers parts of the West Bank, while the Islamic militant group Hamas controls Gaza, from which Israel withdrew troops and Jewish civilians in 2005.

Israel's current **government**, which relies on the support of parties from across the political spectrum, has **vowed to preserve the status quo**, with **neither** a settlement **freeze** **nor** any formal **annexation**. It has also taken some steps to improve economic conditions for Palestinians.

But Ofran says that in practice, pro-settler ministers and other **officials do as they please**, and the government does damage control when it is called out.

“The foreign minister gets phone calls from the Americans, or whatever, and suddenly the government needs to do something about it,” she said.

03.10.22

US House budgets \$1 billion Iron Dome in addition to \$3.8 b defense assistance

03.10.22

U.S. House approves \$1 billion for Israel's Iron Dome

Funding will help replenish defense system's interceptor missile stock after last year's Gaza war; Bennett hails House lawmaker for 'overwhelming commitment to Israel's security'

Itamar Eichner,news agencies| Published: **03.10.22**, 10:59

The **U.S. House of Representatives** on Wednesday approved **\$1 billion in funding** for **Israel's Iron Dome** missile defense **system** after months of delay due to internal political disputes.

This comes as **part of a \$1.5-trillion omnibus spending bill** for the fiscal year **2022** to fund the federal government through the end of **September**. The Iron Dome funding will come **in addition to** the annual **\$3.8 billion defense assistance package** for Israel.

The budget will now be **submitted** for the U.S. Senate's approval before stopgap funding for the government ends **Friday**.

The funding will help replenish Israel's stock of Iron Dome interceptor **missiles** which was heavily **depleted** in the country's **latest round of fighting with Gaza Strip** terror

factions last May, during which more than 4,300 rockets were indiscriminately fired at civilian targets all across Israel.

The funding's approval faced some hiccups along the way amid stiff opposition from progressive House Democrats who had objected to the move, citing among other things the many Palestinian casualties as Israel responded to Hamas rocket attacks in May. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) welcomed the move to replenish the defense system, which it calls "a hallmark of the U.S.-Israel relationship and a byproduct of consistent American support for Israel's safety."

"The House just passed the largest-ever funding package to Israel — including \$4.8 billion in security assistance & missile defense funding — demonstrating overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress for the U.S.-Israel relationship", the pro-Israeli lobbying group tweeted.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett also took to Twitter to thank U.S. lawmakers.

"Thank you to the U.S. Congress for your overwhelming commitment to Israel's security & for passing the critical security package — including the replenishment of the life-saving Iron Dome," he wrote.

"Thank you [U.S. President Joe Biden] for your leadership & friendship. Together, we are stronger."

The 2,741-page spending bill also includes increased funding for Jewish causes in the United States and the Jewish Diaspora worldwide such as nonprofit security and services for Holocaust survivors.

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