

Newsletter Friday January 4, 2019

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Egyptian leader: Military cooperation with Israel the closest ever

Egyptian military is working with IDF against Islamic State-affiliated terrorists in Sinai • "We have a wide range of cooperation with the Israelis," Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi tells CBS • Israel, Egypt also maintain close diplomatic ties.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi | Photo: AP

The Egyptian military is working with the Israel Defense Forces against terrorists in the Sinai Peninsula, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi confirmed in an interview with "60 Minutes" on CBS.

In excerpts from the interview that were released on Thursday, the Egyptian leader was asked about the cooperation Cairo and Jerusalem maintain and whether it was, in fact, the closest it has been since the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1979.

"That is correct," el-Sissi said. "We have a wide range of cooperation with the Israelis."

Egypt has been fighting an insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula for several years, battling an estimated 1,000 Islamic State-affiliated terrorists that Cairo has allowed the Israelis to attack by air.

In February, Egypt launched operation "Sinai 2018" in an effort to rid the peninsula of terrorists.

In recent years Israel has allowed the Egyptian military to boost its presence in the peninsula several times as part of the country's war on terror.

Last year, The New York Times reported that Israel launched airstrikes against ISIS targets in northern Sinai with Egyptian approval.

Citing unnamed American and British sources, the report claimed Israeli aircraft struck ISIS targets in Sinai some 100 times in two years.

Cairo denied the report, insisting that the Egyptian military is the sole entity conducting military operations in north Sinai, where most ISIS-affiliated terrorists are believed to be hiding.

Other than on security issues, Israel and Egypt maintain close diplomatic ties, as Egypt is the chief mediator between Israel and Hamas, the terrorist group that controls the Gaza Strip.

CBS will air the "60 Minutes" interview with el-Sissi on Sunday, Jan. 6.

Newsletter Thursday January 3, 2019

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| ['Iran is pulling people out of Syria,' Trump says](#)

American president admits that Iranian forces have been emboldened in Syria, but says Tehran no longer seeks to bolster its presence there • Syria "was lost long ago, we're talking about sand and death," he says, Iranians "can do what they want there."

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U.S. President Donald Trump | Photo: AP

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday acknowledged that Iran was seeking to bolster its presence in the war-torn country but that "Iran is no longer the same country" since [he exited the 2015 nuclear deal](#) and [reimposed financial sanctions](#) on the Islamic republic.

Trump claimed Iran was suffering under the sanctions but admitted it remains a powerful presence in Syria. Blaming the balance of power in Syria on his predecessor, Barack Obama, Trump said that Syria was "lost long ago," adding, "We're talking about sand and death. We're not talking about vast wealth."

Video: Reuters

Iran "is pulling people out of Syria," he told a press briefing at the end of a cabinet meeting in the White House. "They can do what they want there, frankly, but they're pulling people out," he said, referring to Iranian forces in the war-torn country.

Trump, who recently announced he would be pulling American troops from Syria, said he did not want the U.S. military fighting there forever. Still, he gave no timetable for the planned military exit from Syria.

He further denied a report according to which he had set a four-month timetable for the withdrawal of 2,000 American troops stationed in Syria amid a battle against Islamic State militants.

"We're getting out and we're getting out smart. I never said I'm getting out tomorrow," he said.

In recent days, Trump appeared to back off from any hasty pullout and stressed that the operation would be slow.

"We're slowly sending our troops back home to be with their families, while at the same time fighting ISIS," he said.

U.S. officials said that Trump was committed to making sure Turkey did not clash with the Kurdish YPG forces once U.S. troops leave Syria, and was assuring the NATO ally that it would have a buffer zone in the region to help protect its own interests.

Turkey views the YPG as a branch of its own Kurdish separatist movement and is threatening to launch an offensive against the group, igniting fears of significant civilian casualties.

U.S. commanders planning the U.S. withdrawal are recommending that YPG fighters battling Islamic State be allowed to keep U.S.-supplied weapons, according to U.S. officials.

That proposal would likely anger Turkey, where Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, is expected to hold talks in the coming days.

Trump said he was not happy that the Kurds were selling oil to Iran, but that he wanted to protect them either way.

"I didn't like the fact that they're selling the small [amount of] oil that they have to Iran, and we asked them not to sell it to Iran. We're not thrilled about that. OK? I'm not happy about it at all," he said.

"We want to protect the Kurds, nevertheless. We want to protect the Kurds, but I don't want to be in Syria forever. It's sand. And it's death."

Also on Wednesday, Syria's Defense Ministry said a convoy of Syrian Kurdish fighters has pulled out of the flashpoint area of Manbij in northern Syria, close to territory controlled by Turkey.

The town, some 20 miles from the Turkish border, is a critical spot on the map of the Syrian conflict, near the junction of three separate blocks of territory that form spheres of Russian, Turkish and – for now – U.S. influence.

"According to information, approximately 400 Kurdish fighters have left Manbij so far," the ministry said. "Their departure was in line with an agreement "for the return of normal life to the area of northern Syria."

Newsletter Wednesday January 2, 2019

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Report: Former defense minister reveals part of 'deal of the century'

Avigdor Lieberman divulged details on U.S. "deal of century" before resigning, Al-Hayat reports • Plan calls for Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and expanded powers for Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria • Lieberman: The report is false.

Israel Hayom Staff

MK Avigdor Lieberman | Archives: AFP

Former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman shared with Palestinian officials key details of emerging U.S. peace plan and its vision for a two-state solution, the London-based Arabic daily Al-Hayat reported on Wednesday.

Lieberman (Yisrael Beytenu) served as defense minister for more than two years until he resigned in November. The right-wing lawmaker left Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government after another flare-up in the Gaza Strip, saying Netanyahu was being too soft on the Palestinians and undermining Israel's deterrence.

According to the Al-Hayat report, some two weeks before his departure Lieberman told senior Palestinian officials that under the plan, a Palestinian state would be established in the Gaza Strip. The plan would also supposedly bolster the Palestinian Authority's rule in Judea and Samaria by expanding its powers to certain areas where Israel currently has complete or partial control. As a result, Palestinians living in Judea and Samaria would become citizens of the new state in Gaza.

Lieberman further told the Palestinian officials that the plan would not include the dismantling of Israeli settlements. Likewise, it will let Israel maintain a military presence at the border crossings and keep control over most of east Jerusalem.

The economic component of the plan, according to Lieberman, will see the international community provide aid to the Palestinians to allow for the construction of major infrastructure in the new state in Gaza, including an airport and a seaport.

Lieberman's spokesperson denied the Al-Hayat report, telling the Israel Broadcasting Corporation that the former minister has not seen the U.S. plan. "This is just false," the spokesperson said.

This is not the first time alleged details of the so-called "deal of the century" are supposedly divulged. The Trump administration has repeatedly dismissed various reports on the plan, calling them misleading and false. The administration has also made it clear that the plan has not been shown to any party and that it will be unveiled only when the time is right. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said this week that it would only be presented after the Israeli elections in April.

Newsletter Wednesday January 2, 2019

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Pompeo, Netanyahu vow to continue cooperation over Syria, Iran

PM Netanyahu says Israel is seeking ways to increase intelligence and operational cooperation with U.S. in Syria and elsewhere to block Iranian "aggression" • Secretary of State Pompeo: U.S. committed to Middle East stability, Israel's security.

Ariel Kahana, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

U.S. Secretary of state Mike Pompeo and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meet in Brasilia, Tuesday | Photo: Avi Ohayon / GPO

The United States and Israel vowed on Tuesday to continue cooperating over Syria and in countering Iran in the Middle East, even as President Donald Trump plans to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said before a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the Brazilian capital that he planned to discuss how to intensify intelligence and operations cooperation in Syria and elsewhere to block Iranian "aggression."

In his first public comments on Trump's decision, Pompeo said it "in no way changes anything that this administration is working on alongside Israel" and that campaigns to counter Islamic State and Iranian aggression would continue.

"The counter-ISIS campaign continues, our efforts to counter Iranian aggression continue and our commitment to Middle East stability and the protection of Israel continues in the same way it did before that decision was made," he said.

Trump announced last month that he planned to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, declaring that they had succeeded in their mission to defeat Islamic State and were no longer needed in the country.

In making the announcement, Trump ignored the advice of top national security aides and did so without consulting lawmakers or U.S. allies participating in anti-Islamic State operations. The decision prompted Jim Mattis to resign as defense secretary.

"We have a lot to discuss," said Netanyahu, who like Pompeo was in the Brazilian capital for the inauguration of Jair Bolsonaro as Brazil's new president.

"We're going to be discussing our, the intense cooperation between Israel and the United States which will also deal with the questions following the decision, the American decision, on Syria and how to intensify even further our intelligence and operational cooperation in Syria and elsewhere to block Iranian aggression in the Middle East."

Netanyahu said Israel was very appreciative of the "strong ... unequivocal support" Pompeo gave Israel's "efforts at self-defense against Syria" in the past few days.

State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said Pompeo and Netanyahu "discussed the unacceptable threat that regional aggression and provocation by Iran and its agents poses to Israeli and regional security" and Pompeo reiterated the U.S. commitment to Israel's security and right to self-defense.

Netanyahu said last month after Trump's announcement that Israel would escalate its fight against Iranian-aligned forces in Syria after the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

Newsletter Tuesday January 1, 2019

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PM: Trump won't roll out Mideast peace plan before Israeli election

In Brazil, PM Netanyahu says the Trump administration plans to present "deal of the century" at a time "they believe would be the most conducive to its success" • U.S. agrees

that presenting plan during election time would undermine its chances, he says.

Ariel Kahana

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump in the White House, February 2017 | Photo: AP

The Trump administration will not present its long-awaited Middle East peace plan before the Israeli election, set for April 9, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday.

The rollout for the plan, which U.S. President Donald Trump has dubbed the "deal of the century," has been postponed several times. The deal is being crafted by senior White House adviser Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, and U.S. Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt.

Netanyahu, who is on a state visit to Brazil, told reporters that Washington seeks to present the plan "at a time they believe would be the most conducive to its success. They believe that presenting it during election time would undermine its chances."

Also on Monday, a senior official on the prime minister's entourage to Brazil told Israel Hayom that there are growing assessments in Israel that the strikes on Iranian assets in Syria, which foreign media often attributes to the Israeli Air Force, have been successful in pushing the Islamic republic out of the war-torn country.

He also said that it appears that Operation Northern Shield to eliminate the grid of Hezbollah terror tunnels snaking under the Israel-Lebanon border has prevented a war with the Iranian-backed Shiite terrorist group.

Newsletter Monday December 31, 2018

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IDF looks back on 2018: 865 strikes, 20 terror tunnels destroyed

Military's annual operational activity report says IAF combat squadrons conducted 2,000 sorties in 2018 • Gaza terrorists fired 1,000 rockets at Israel's south • There were 33 shooting and 17 stabbing attacks in West Bank; 3,173 suspected terrorists arrested.

Lilach Shoval

An Israeli F-15 fighter jet | Illustration: Dudu Grunshpan

The Israeli military on Sunday issued its annual operational activity report, tallying up strikes and missions alongside security incidents.

According to the report, the IDF mounted a combined 865 air and ground strikes in the Gaza Strip in 2018, destroyed 15 terror tunnels breaching Israeli territory from Gaza and five tunnels snaking under the Israel-Lebanon border, and dealt with 87 high-profile terrorist attacks across Judea and Samaria.

Seven soldiers and nine civilians were killed in terrorist incidents over the passing year.

The data further showed that overall, the Israeli Air Force's combat squadrons conducted some 2,000 sorties, of which 600 involved IAF helicopters. The various transport squadrons engaged in some 2,300 flights. Overall, manned aircraft logged 32,166 flight hours, with Alaska being the farthest destination.

The military did not release any official numbers on its strikes in Syria in 2018, but it is believed to have launched hundreds of sorties there since 2017.

According to IDF data, Gaza-based terrorist groups fired some 1,000 rockets and mortar shells at Israel's south, 460 of them in a span of 36 hours during November's flare-up on the border, which was the worst since 2014.

The Iron Dome defense system intercepted 250 projectiles, and an unspecified, low number of rockets hit urban areas.

Security forces operating across the West Bank arrested 3,173 suspected terrorists in 2018. The sector further saw 2,057 stoning incidents, 893 firebomb incidents, 33 shooting attacks and 17 stabbing attacks.

For the sake of comparison, in 2017 there were 5,082 stoning incidents, 34 shooting attacks, and five stabbing attacks.

The IDF conducted four divisional maneuvers in 2018, as well as 14 drills involving brigades in the various sectors and 46 military exercises involving regular and reserves forces.