

Newsletter Friday January 25, 2019

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Egypt issues ultimatum to Hamas on cooperation with Iran

Cairo officials: Hamas must decide whether group "takes its orders from Tehran or continues to implement understandings for calm" on Israel-Gaza border • Hamas must contain IDF attacks on Gaza if it wants Qatari cash, Egyptian official tells Israel Hayom.

Daniel Siryoti

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

Israel Hayom has learned that alongside Jerusalem's decision to postpone the transfer of Qatari funds to Hamas following the escalation on Israel's border with the Gaza Strip, Egypt has issued the terrorist organization's political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh an ultimatum. Cairo has made it clear Haniyeh must decide whether "Hamas takes its orders from Tehran or continues to implement the understandings for calm" formulated by the head of Egyptian intelligence Abbas Kamel.

A senior Egyptian intelligence official told Israel Hayom that senior Hamas members, chief among them Haniyeh, had contacted Kamel with the request that Israel be sent the message that "Hamas was not involved in the grave events on the border."

Hamas further asked the Egyptian intelligence chief to "prevent the postponement of the transfer of the money from Qatar." Haniyeh clarified that "Hamas will not ignore the Islamic Jihad's provocations, which were carried out at the direct order of Tehran."

The source said that while "Hamas was furious that senior Islamic Jihad officials did everything they could to bring about an escalation in the security situation in Gaza that postponed the transfer of money from Qatar to the [Gaza] strip," they did not expect the Egyptian ultimatum, which pushed them into a corner.

The Egyptian official's remarks come as Egypt and other Sunni Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states are hoping to keep Iran from establishing itself militarily in Gaza as it has done in Yemen and Syria, at the same time as it eyes other Sunni Arab states.

Israel Hayom has further learned from the Egyptian official that Cairo made it clear to Haniyeh that "Egypt has no plans to take part in the indirect talks Qatari emissary [to Gaza] Mohammed al-Emadi is conducting on the issue of the postponed transfer of funds to Gaza." This is due to the bitter rivalry between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the UAE.

Reuters

Qatari envoy Mohammed Al-Emadi meets with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Gaza City, Thursday

Qatar has been accused of providing support, funding and shelter to terrorist organizations and their operatives, including radical Sunni Islamic terrorist groups directed by Hamas' umbrella movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was outlawed in Egypt and other Gulf states, as well as Shiite terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, which take their orders from Tehran.

The **Egyptian official** emphasized that "it was made clear to Haniyeh and the heads of Hamas that Cairo would not lay the groundwork for Qatar's moves in Gaza, and Egypt has no intention of intervening in the event a military confrontation breaks out in Gaza because Hamas is looking the other way at the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's provocations that come at the orders of Tehran."

He said Cairo relayed to Hamas the message that it was to blame for the crisis "and that they will need to deal with it and contain the IDF's attacks so that they can get the money from Qatar."

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**Hamas refuses to let Qatar pay Gaza salaries**

"We won't be part of Israel's election theatrics, and therefore we told Qatari Ambassador Mohammed Al-Emadi that we refuse to accept the Qatari payment," says senior Hamas official Khalil Al-Hayya after Netanyahu agrees to allow \$15 million into Gaza.

Daniel Siryoti, Ariel Kahana, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Khalil al-Hayya of Hamas | Photo: Reuters

Gaza's ruling Hamas on Thursday refused to let Qatar send in \$15 million of aid, part of a tortuous standoff involving Israel and rival Palestinian factions that has left thousands of civil servants there short of pay.

In November, Qatar began a six-month, \$150 million program to fund the wages of government functionaries and shipments of fuel for power generation in Gaza.

The staggered payments, widely seen as a Qatari bid to increase its regional role, need Israel's permission to get through – an involvement that has riled many among Hamas' Islamist leadership.

Khalil Al-Hayya, a senior Hamas official in Gaza, said on Thursday that Israel had broken previous agreements brokered by Qatar and Egypt. He said Hamas had told Qatar's ambassador, Mohammed Al-Emadi, that it refused the money "in response to the occupation policy."

"We won't be part of Israel's election theatrics, and therefore we told [Al-Emadi] that we refuse to accept the Qatari payment," Al-Hayya added.

Consequently, the IDF and other security agencies on Friday were bracing for a tense day of Gaza border riots, also amid concerns that Palestinian Islamic Jihad would seek to test the situation by firing rockets at Israel

Gaza economist Mohammad Abu Jayyab said that he believed Qatar had told Hamas leaders that Israel had put new conditions over the mechanism for paying out the money. Israeli officials refused to comment.

The civil servants have also become a symbol of a bitter and protracted power struggle between Hamas, which has its power base in Gaza, and the Western-backed Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank. With Hamas hardly able to pay its own employees, and Abbas refusing to, the workers were caught in the middle.

Qatar's intervention angered Abbas, whose strategy has been to pressure Hamas back to the negotiating table by slashing salaries, thereby worsening economic conditions in Gaza.

The Qatari largesse has also posed problems for Israel's government, which detests Hamas but does not want to see Gaza's economic problems spill over into violence against Israelis.

Israel initially blocked the latest Qatari transfer, then relented on Thursday after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government accepted a "recommendation" by the defense establishment to let the money in.

Opposition Leader MK Shelly Yachimovich (Labor) said of Netanyahu's decision that "transferring the money directly to Hamas and to [its military leader] Yahya Sinwar while completely neglecting the Palestinian Authority is a serious security and diplomatic mistake. It's ridiculous that we compensate the worst of our enemies and repeatedly kick the PA, with whom we share tight and fruitful security cooperation on a daily basis that prevents terrorist attacks and saves lives. This is what happens in a government with zero diplomatic initiative and which leaves the army as Israel's only defense."

Newsletter Thursday January 24, 2019

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The price of terror: New data shows scope of PA's funding of terrorists

The Palestinian Authority paid over \$137 million to living terrorists – either in Israeli prison or released – over the course of 2018 • The longer the prison sentence, the higher the salary; in other words, the worse the crime, the better it pays.

Efrat Forsher and Israel Hayom Staff

Palestinian security prisoners in Israel | Illustration: Moshe Shai

For the Palestinians, terrorism is one sure way to make a living – and it seems that the worse the crime, the better the pay.

According to a report released by the Palestinian Authority Treasury on Wednesday, the PA paid upwards of NIS 502 million (\$137 million) to living terrorists – either in Israeli prison or released – in 2018.

This was the first time since 2015 that the PA Prisoner Affairs Ministry has revealed such details of its budget. Between 2015 and 2018 it kept these figures under wraps, with the payments transferred to terrorists appearing in different reports and documents.

At the end of this month, Prime Minister and acting defense minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to present the diplomatic-security cabinet with a report on these payments so the government can deduct the amount paid out to terrorists from the taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and turns over to the PA.

Although the report does not specify precisely how the funds were disbursed to terrorists in Israeli prisons and ones who have been released, a report by the Israeli NGO Palestinian Media Watch indicates that terrorists incarcerated in Israel received at least NIS 203 million (\$55 million) over the course of 2018.

According to Palestinian Media Watch, at least NIS 176 million (\$48 million) was allotted to released terrorists, and NIS 96 million (\$26 million) was used to supplement the stipends that go to of imprisoned and released terrorists and their families, providing them with other financial benefits. Moreover, the longer the prison sentence a terrorist serves, the higher the salary; in other words, the worse the crime, the better the pay.

The longest-serving Palestinian terrorists – Maher and Karim Younis, who murdered IDF soldier Avraham Brumberg in 1980 and have been in jail since 1983 – each receive a monthly salary of NIS 12,000 (\$3,266).

PMW also found that in January 2018 alone the PA paid almost NIS 20 million (\$5.4 million) to Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Israel.

'We won't accept support for terror'

Palestinian Media Watch based its findings on the figures the PA chose to publish. Therefore, it was not possible to fully determine the actual amount paid to families of terrorists in 2018, some 18,000 people. Families that benefit include relatives of suicide bombers and terrorists killed by Israeli forces as well as relatives of Palestinians either killed or wounded in violent clashes with security forces.

Last July, the Knesset enacted a law to financially penalize the Palestinian Authority for paying stipends to terrorists imprisoned in Israel and their families.

Lawmakers voted 87-15 in favor of the law, which orders the government to withhold part of the tax revenues that Israel collects for the PA each month.

MK Elazar Stern (Yesh Atid), who co-sponsored the bill, said the withheld money would be put aside and the government would be allowed to use its discretion on whether to return it to the Palestinians at some point or not.

"The law that imposes monetary sanctions on the Palestinian Authority for payments to terrorists is one of the more important [laws] passed in Israel in recent years," said PMW founder and director Itamar Marcus.

"It sends a clear message to the Palestinian Authority that Israel will not accept its support for terror in any way, shape or form.

"I hope Israel implements the law to the fullest as soon as this month [January], as stipulated by the law, so the PA understands that Israel will do everything in its power against any show of support for terror on [the PA's] part," Marcus said.

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| Russia says 'arbitrary' Israeli air strikes in Syria must stop

Syria must never be allowed to become an arena "where geopolitical scores are settled," says Russian Foreign Ministry • PM Netanyahu: IDF is the only military that is fighting the Iranian army in Syria. I am certain in our ability to defeat the enemy.

Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff

An Israeli air strike in Syria | Archives: Reuters

Russia said on Wednesday that Israel should stop carrying out what Moscow called "arbitrary" airstrikes on Syria, days after the Israeli air force hit numerous Iranian targets in the war-torn country.

Israel has repeatedly attacked Iranian targets in Syria and its proxy militias, including Lebanon's Hezbollah terrorist organization.

"The practice of arbitrary strikes on the territory of a sovereign state, in this case, we are talking about Syria, should be ruled out," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said, in answer to a question from Russian news agency TASS.

She said such strikes added to tensions in the region, which she said was not in the long-term interests of any country there, including Israel.

"We should never allow Syria, which has suffered years of armed conflict, to be turned into an arena where geopolitical scores are settled," TASS cited her as saying.

Her comments follow Israeli strikes in Syria on Monday. Israel did not immediately respond.

Earlier on Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signaled that Israel would continue to combat Iran's efforts to establish a military foothold in Syria.

"The IDF is the only military that is fighting the Iranian army in Syria," he said during a visit to an IDF base. "I am certain in our ability to defeat the enemy."

The strikes have long caused friction between Israel and Russia, which apart from Iran is Syrian President Bashar Assad's other major foreign backer.

Israeli officials have spoken in the past of an agreement with Moscow under which they have made clear their strikes on Syria would not threaten Assad, while Russia has promised to keep Iran away from Israel's northern border. A hotline set up since 2015 is aimed at ensuring Russian forces in Syria are not surprised by Israeli attacks.

Newsletter Wednesday January 23, 2019

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| [A new generation takes up the hunt for Dead Sea Scrolls](#)

Archaeologists return to Qumran area in hopes of repeating one of the most sensational discoveries of last hundred years – the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls • Hundreds of caves remain unexcavated, and experts are in a race against antiquities robbers.

Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff

Archaeologists work near caves in the Qumran area in the Dead Sea region | Photo:  
Reuters

In the cliffs high above the Dead Sea, archaeologists chip away with pickaxes, hoping to repeat one of the most sensational discoveries of the last hundred years – the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The scrolls, a collection of manuscripts, some more than 2,000 years old, were first found in 1947 by local Bedouin in the area of Qumran, about 20 km (12 miles) east of Jerusalem.

Video: Reuters

They gave insight into Jewish society and religion before and after the time of Jesus and spurred a decade of exploration before the search fizzled.

Recent finds have stirred fresh excitement, however, and archaeologists are probing higher and deeper than before. Hundreds of caves remain unexcavated and the experts are racing against antiquities robbers.

"In the last few years we noticed new pieces of scrolls and parchments arrive on the black market," said Oren Gutfeld, an archaeologist at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

"It drove us to return to the caves," he said, sitting at the entrance of a cliffside grotto known to his team as "52B."

In 2017 his team discovered remains of storage jugs in a previously-unexcavated cave at Qumran, though any scrolls they may have held were missing.

At about 200 meters (yards) above the level of the Dead Sea, 52B is higher than where the scrolls were found in the 1950s, which may or may not have made it an ideal hiding place.

Toward the back of the cave is a narrow burrow, packed with debris from centuries of wind and flash floods, that when cleared could extend about 10 meters. Volunteers sift through buckets of dirt.

"People thought there was nothing left to find ... there just wasn't incentive to do this," said Randall Price, a professor at Liberty University, a Christian campus in the United States, who helped fund the dig.

But 52B did not appear on previous surveys and could yield precious secrets, Price said.

#### Lost treasures

In the narrow streets of the open-air market of Jerusalem's Old City, Eitan Klein of the Israel Antiquities Authority stops by dealers to make sure their goods appear in an official registry and are not being traded on the black market.

Klein is deputy director of the authority's robbery prevention unit, which in late 2016 recovered a fragment of text on a piece of papyrus mentioning the word 'Jerusalem' from the 7th century B.C.E. that had been plundered from a cave by antiquities robbers.

Following the papyrus' discovery and other intelligence operations, Klein said "the assumption is that there are still artifacts inside the caves waiting to be found. The question is, who will discover them?"

New discoveries could also help solve the debate over who authored the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Expanding the search to further possibilities is the Copper Scroll, found in Qumran in 1952. Unlike its companions that were written on parchment or papyrus, this was a list of 64 hiding places for gold and valuables, etched on copper.

Hebrew University's Gutfeld said the treasure referred to may be from the ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem. In 2006 he finished excavating two manmade tunnels not far from Qumran that he believes matched a description in the Copper Scroll of the so-called Valley of Shadow.

One of the tunnels, a two-meter high, shoulder-width corridor, extended 125 meters underground. No treasure was found, but Gutfeld promised to continue searching in new spots.

"I'm not a treasure hunter. I'm an archaeologist," Gutfeld said. But he added: "We hope to find any hint or relationship to what we know from the text of the Copper Scroll."



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| Iran reportedly behind latest escalation on Gaza border

Head of Iran's Quds Force wants to divert attention from his failures in Syria, Gaza news outlets report • IDF tanks, jets attack Hamas targets after Palestinian sniper shoots IDF officer • Netanyahu cancels Qatari donation of \$15 million to Gaza.

Nikki Guttman, Lilach Shoval, Daniel Siryoti, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

An explosion is seen during Israeli air strikes in Gaza, overnight Tuesday | Photo: Reuters

Israeli tanks shelled Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, killing one Hamas terrorist after an IDF officer was shot and wounded by a Palestinian sniper near the border. Armed Palestinian factions in Gaza later convened "to discuss a proper response to the crimes of the Zionist occupier."

Later Tuesday, Israeli aircraft carried out multiple strikes on a Hamas military site in northern Gaza.

Reports that largely cited Hamas sources inside the coastal enclave, however, said the commander of Iran's Quds Force, Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, is behind the current efforts to escalate hostilities in Israel's south.

In all likelihood, it was also Soleimani who gave the "green light" to the Palestinian sniper who shot the IDF officer, who miraculously was only lightly wounded after the bullet hit his helmet.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad has orchestrated the provocations along the border in recent days and unlike Hamas, it is beholden first and foremost to its patrons in Iran. As a reminder, Soleimani's forces in Syria were dealt a resounding operational blow on Sunday by Israel, which destroyed numerous Iranian military targets in response to an Iranian missile fired at the Golan Heights.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also canceled a Qatari donation of \$15 million for the impoverished enclave that had been due on Wednesday as part of international efforts to head off an escalation. The prime minister made the decision after consulting with senior defense officials and convening an emergency meeting of the Diplomatic-Security Cabinet.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said: "Israel is solely responsible for the latest escalation in Gaza. Israel continues to hurt our people and the brave resistance will not

agree to a situation where Netanyahu uses elections for his personal interests and harms the Palestinian people in a premeditated manner."

Worried about a potential flare-up escalating into a full-on conflict, Egypt and the United Nations have sought to calm the situation in Gaza, while Qatar in November pledged \$150 million in donations, to be transferred via Israel over six months, in the hope of easing economic pressure.

The Israeli official who announced the postponement did not say when the next \$15 million payout might now take place. Netanyahu has previously stipulated that the cash injection was contingent upon calm along the Gaza border.

In a statement, the IDF said it "sees the Hamas terror organization as being solely responsible for what happens in and originates from Gaza. The IDF is prepared and willing to act against all acts of terror from Gaza and is determined to defend the citizens of the State of Israel."

'A disgrace to the residents of the south and the IDF'

Also on Tuesday, residents of southern Israel protested against the transfer of the Qatari funds to Hamas.

One protester, a member of Kibbutz Ruhama, said that transferring the third Qatari payout would be a slap in the face to the residents of the south and the IDF.

"When you see the deterrence in the north, it's hard to understand the weak policy in the south. The IDF is very capable of coping on all fronts, and here we have an evil organization whose might is equal to one one-hundredth of the might of the enemy in the north, so what's the problem with preventing Hamas terror?" he said. "Why surrender and give them \$15 million when they use some of the money for terror in Gaza and in Judea and Samaria? It's absurd."

Newsletter Tuesday January 22, 2019

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Israel, US report successful test of Arrow 3 missile defense system

Defense Ministry says trial, conducted early Tuesday morning in central Israel, marks an "important milestone in Israel's operational capabilities when it comes to countering future and current threats" • System tested as tensions with Iran run high.

Lilach Shoval

The Defense Ministry conducted an Arrow-3 interceptor test launch on Tuesday | Photo: Defense Ministry Spokesperson

Israel and the U.S. successfully tested the Arrow 3 long-range missile interceptor system early Tuesday morning.

During the test, the Arrow 3's radar successfully identified a target. The data was then relayed to the command center, which launched the interceptor, which engaged the target.

Arrow 3 is designed to intercept ballistic missiles outside the atmosphere.

Arrow 3 comprises part of Israel's multitiered air defenses, which include Iron Dome, which is designed to intercept and destroy short-range rockets and artillery shells; David's Sling, which counters medium- to long-range rockets and missiles; and the Arrow 2 short- and medium-range ballistic missile interceptor.

The test was carried out at 6:44 a.m. at an IDF base in central Israel. Representatives from the Defense Ministry's Homa Directorate, which oversees the development of Israel's missile defenses; Israel Aerospace Industries, the Israeli Air Force and the U.S. Missile Defense Agency were present.

"The successful test marks an important milestone in Israel's development of operational capabilities to counter future and current threats," the Defense Ministry said.

Although the test had been scheduled in advance, it coincided with heightened tensions in the north.

On Sunday, after Israeli aircraft hit Iranian assets in Damascus, Iran fired a missile toward Israeli territory. The missile, which targeted the Golan Heights, was intercepted by Iron Dome.

Several hours later, Israel announced that it had attacked additional Iranian targets in Syria in retaliation for the missile attack.