

Newsletter Monday January 28, 2019

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Iran: Russia prevented Syrians from using S-300 against Israel

"There appears to be a strange type of correlation between the Zionist regime's airstrikes and the Russian air defenses not working," says senior Iranian lawmaker • Israeli reports of destroyed Iranian infrastructure in Syria are totally false, he adds.

Neta Bar, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

An S-300 air defense missile system in action | Archives: Reuters

A senior Iranian lawmaker on Sunday condemned the Kremlin for allegedly preventing the Syrian army from using its Russian-supplied S-300 surface-to-air missile systems against Israeli warplanes earlier this month.

Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, the chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said the Russians had made sure to disable the advanced S-300 systems during an Israeli airstrike.

"There appears to be a strange type of correlation between the Zionist regime's airstrikes and the Russian air defenses not working," he said.

Falahatpisheh also said Israeli reports of destroyed Iranian infrastructure in Syria were completely false.

"The Zionists aspire to undermine the stability of the regime in Syria, with the aim of causing Iran to respond and to push into a corner," Falahatpisheh remarked, adding that he had visited the sites bombed by Israel.

Last week, Iran's state-run news network reported that Russian air defenses had failed to function during an Israeli airstrike on Damascus. Russia and Iran have clashed in the past over Moscow's refusal to transfer more advanced models of the S-300 to Syria.

On Friday, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov denied Moscow had formed an alliance with Iran in Syria and said the Kremlin was deeply committed to Israel's security.

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## Israel joins world in recognizing 'new leadership in Venezuela'

PM Netanyahu recognizes Juan Guaidó as country's interim president • Guaidó: "74 years ago the Auschwitz extermination camp was liberated and today, as our country fights for its independence, we are thankful for the support we received" from Israel.

Shirley Var n a g y



Israel on Sunday joined countries in South America and Europe and recognized Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the country's interim president.

Choosing his words carefully and refraining from specifically referring to Guaidó as the country's new leader, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared in a video saying "Israel joins the United States, Canada, most of the countries of Latin America and countries in Europe in recognizing the new leadership in Venezuela."

Venezuela severed diplomatic relations with Israel in 2009.

Guaidó welcomed the announcement on Twitter, writing that "74 years ago the Auschwitz extermination camp was liberated and today, as our country fights for its independence, we are thankful for the support we received from the Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu."

Israel hasn't had an embassy in the capital Caracas for 10 years. The last ambassador, Shlomo Cohen, was expelled in 2009 by then-President Hugo Chávez, to protest what his regime called the Israeli government's attack on Gaza. Ever since, despite diplomatic efforts and meetings between representatives of the country's Jewish community and Chávez and then his successor, Nicolás Maduro, diplomatic relations weren't reinstated.

The moment Chávez ascended to power the Venezuelan government declared its support for the Palestinians and took every opportunity to condemn "the political crimes of the State of Israel." With that, the Jewish community's leadership chose to adopt an apolitical position so that the regime wouldn't make life in the country too difficult. In 1999, Venezuela's Jewish community comprised some 30,000 people. Today, around 3,000 Jews remain in the country. Jewish community centers and synagogues need the government's protection to function. Perhaps this explains Netanyahu's decision to take a cautious approach in declaring his support

for Guaidó on Sunday.

It is worth noting that Israel is the first country in the Middle East to recognize Guaidó, although this puts the Jewish community and its leaders there in an uncomfortable position. In a sign of possible rapprochement just last month, Maduro met with former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, who visited the country.

#### **Maduro: No to flash elections**

Maduro, the incumbent president, refused Sunday night calls from the international community to hold flash elections within eight days. The demand for quick elections came from Great Britain, Germany, France and Spain, which said they would recognize Guaidó's presidency if Maduro fails to convene immediate elections.

Meanwhile, as the United States continues trying to convince other countries to recognize Guaidó as the legitimate president, Venezuela's military attaché in Washington, Col. José Luis Silva, has already defected.

"Today I speak to the people of Venezuela, and especially to my brothers in the armed forces of the nation, to recognize president Juan Guaidó as the only legitimate president," Silva said in a video recorded at the embassy in Washington.

"The top brass of the military and the executive branch are holding the armed forces hostage. There are many, many who are unhappy. My message to the armed forces is, 'Don't mistreat your people! We were given arms to defend the sovereignty of our nation. They never, never trained us to say, 'This is for you to attack your people, to defend the current government in power.'"

The government in Caracas, for its part, has taken steps to de-escalate tensions with Washington.

Maduro had issued American diplomats with an ultimatum to leave the country within three days, but on Sunday his foreign ministry said it was postponing the expulsion of diplomats for 30 days. According to a statement, this would give the sides time to negotiate the establishment of an "American interests office" in Venezuela.

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Interim President Juan Guaidó speaks to supporters in Caracas, Venezuela, Saturday

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Photo: AP

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Qatar to pay aid into Gaza, with Hamas approval

Agreement with the U.N. will be signed on Monday to set up a \$20 million job creation project, Qatari envoy says on Friday • A day earlier, Hamas had refused Qatari funds, claiming Israel had broken agreements about how the money would be paid.

Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff

Qatari envoy Mohammed Al-Emadi in Jerusalem, February 22, 2018 | Photo: Reuters

Qatar on Friday said it will pay \$20 million in humanitarian aid to boost Gaza's ailing economy, a day after the coastal enclave's Hamas rulers stopped the oil-rich Gulf state from paying money directly to impoverished government workers there.

The move was widely seen as a compromise between Qatar, which appears intent on increasing its regional influence, and Hamas.

Qatar's point-man for Gaza relief efforts, Mohammed Al-Emadi, said in Gaza: "It was agreed to allocate the Qatari financial grant to pay for humanitarian projects with full cooperation and coordination with the United Nations."

He said the first agreement with the U.N. would be signed on Monday next week, setting up a \$20 million job creation project.

A Hamas official, Sami Abu Zuhri, on Friday welcomed Qatar's decision to give money to humanitarian projects.

A day earlier Hamas had blocked direct Qatari payments to thousands of unpaid Palestinian civil servants in Gaza, claiming that Israel had broken agreements about how the arrangement would be carried out.

The compromise follows a regional standoff that has left civil servants in Gaza caught up in a bitter power struggle between Hamas and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Abbas has refused to pay them, hoping that by slashing salaries and thereby worsening economic conditions in Gaza, he can force Hamas back to the negotiating table and ultimately surrender control of Gaza.

Israel fears that instability in Gaza will spill over into violence against Israelis. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government initially blocked the latest Qatari transfer but relented on Thursday after the IDF recommended that it be allowed in.

On Friday, Israeli soldiers shot and killed a Palestinian protester along its border with Gaza, Gazan health officials said.

An IDF spokesperson said that about 10,000 Palestinians had amassed along the Gaza border and that some of them hurled grenades and stones toward the soldiers across the way.

"Soldiers responded by using riot dispersal means and in accordance with the rules of engagement," the spokesperson said.

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Hezbollah leader warns Israel over attacks in Syria

Iran, Syria and Hezbollah could "at any moment" decide to deal differently with Israel's actions in Syria, Hassan Nasrallah says, hinting that Tel Aviv might be a target • He warns Netanyahu: "Don't miscalculate" • More tunnels could exist, he intimates.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah speaks to Al Mayadeen TV, Saturday | Screenshot: Reuters

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on Saturday warned Israel over its continued attacks in Syria, saying a miscalculation could drag the region into a war.

Nasrallah made the comment during a wide-ranging interview that lasted more than three hours with the Beirut-based Al Mayadeen TV station.

Video: Reuters

Iran, Syria and Hezbollah could "at any moment" decide to deal differently with Israel's actions in Syria, Nasrallah said, and hinted that Tel Aviv might be a target.

Addressing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he said: "Be cautious. Don't continue what you are doing in Syria. Don't miscalculate and don't drag the region into a war or a major confrontation."

Nasrallah said circumstances in the region have changed as Iran and its allies, including his terrorist organization, expand their influence in the region. This means any war can be on more than one front, Nasrallah warned.

Israel has recently increased its attacks on Iranian military targets in Syria, confirming such targeting in a shift from its longstanding policy of playing down or not commenting on its military activities in the war-torn country.

Israel considers Iran to be its greatest enemy, and it has repeatedly warned that it will not allow Iranian troops – who have been fighting alongside Syrian government forces – to maintain a permanent presence in post-war Syria.

In the latest violence, the IDF claimed responsibility for a series of airstrikes on Iranian targets in Syria last Monday, saying it was responding to an Iranian missile attack a day earlier. The Iranian launch followed a rare Israeli daylight air raid near Damascus International Airport.

Nasrallah said Netanyahu is the person "most disappointed" by U.S. plans to withdraw from Syria and cited the withdrawal as another "failure."

Nasrallah's appearance followed news reports in Israel and elsewhere that his health was failing. He dismissed the reports as "lies."

"I don't suffer from any health problems," said Nasrallah, who seemed relaxed and at times joked with his interviewer and sipped on tea and water. "I have been active, and I also lost weight," he said with a giggle.

Another report said Nasrallah was under house arrest, guarded by Iranian forces, for allegedly embezzling millions of dollars from the terrorist organization's coffers.

The Hezbollah leader has customarily addressed his supporters and made TV appearances about pressing issues in the region and Lebanon, but the 59-year-old had not appeared since November.

Nasrallah described his silence as intentional, saying Hezbollah chose not to address Israel's attacks so as not to feed what he called an Israeli "publicity stunt."

In December, the IDF launched "Operation Northern Shield" to detect and destroy what it Hezbollah's vast network of attack tunnels built for its fighters to sneak across the border into Israel, capture territory and stage attacks. Israel discovered at least six tunnels, which it said were Hezbollah's prime strategic investment for its next potential war.

In the first comments about the tunnel operation, Nasrallah played down the discoveries, saying Hezbollah would need more than a few tunnels if it ever decided to invade Israel.

He also said Hezbollah has "for years" been able to enter Israel and that at least one of the tunnels was built more than a decade ago.

"This is a 13-year-old [Israeli] intelligence failure," Nasrallah said.

"Part of our plan in the next war is to enter [the] Galilee [region in northern Israel], a part of our plan we are capable of, God willing. The important thing is that we have this capability and we have had it for years," Nasrallah said.

He added that all of Israel would be the battlefield and reiterated that the group now had precision rockets that could strike deep into Israel.

He said Israel was still looking for more tunnels, despite having said its operation to find them was over. He said Israel had only discovered some tunnels, adding "it is not known" if more exist.

Last week, U.N. Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov said that at least two of the tunnels found by Israel crossed the Blue Line, the U.N.-demarcated border between Israel and Lebanon, "and thereby constituted violations."

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 war, said both sides must stick to their side of the Blue Line and that Hezbollah must leave the area near the frontier.