

Israel Hayom Monday Mar 4, 2019

Posted:

Egypt opens Gaza for Mecca pilgrimage

Israel bans senior Islamic clerk from entering al-Aqsa mosque

Abdel Azem Salhab, the highest-ranking official in the Waqf authority overseeing the site, says police handed him and two other Palestinian officials the order on Sunday • Ban issued due to his role in opening the "Gate of Mercy" structure.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 04/03/2019

Sheikh Abdel-Azeem Salhab | Photo: Reuters

Israeli police have banned several Islamic officials appointed by Jordan from entering a Jerusalem holy site following clashes between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli authorities in recent weeks.

Abdel Azem Salhab, the highest-ranking official in the Jordanian-run council overseeing the site, known as the waqf, said that police handed him and two other Palestinian officials the order on Sunday.

Salhab said police informed him the ban was issued because of his role in opening the "Gate of Mercy" structure on the Temple Mount, which has been closed by Israeli court order since 2003 because a Hamas-affiliated group had operated there.

The new waqf leadership, comprising officials from Fatah, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, breached the site around three weeks ago, and thousands of worshippers have already prayed there.

Jordan's Religious Affairs Minister Abdel Nasser Abu Albasal condemned the Israeli decision as "a new escalation" meant to disrupt the council's work.

Last week, an Israeli government official said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had given instructions to enforce the court's order to shut down the Gate of Mercy site "without compromise."

"The political echelon won't allow the site to become a mosque. This directive was passed to the police and this message was delivered to certain authorities and to Jordan as well," the official said.

Israel Hayom Monday Mar 4, 2019

Gazans resume minor pilgrimage after years of Egyptian ban

Palestinians in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip resume a minor pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, known as the "umrah," after nearly five years of an Egyptian ban • Egypt halted the umrah program for Gazans in 2015 over instability in the northern Sinai.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 04/03/2019

Palestinian Muslim pilgrims wait for a bus to the Rafah border en route to the holy city of Mecca | Photo: AP

Palestinians in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip resumed a minor pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, known as the "umrah," on Sunday after nearly five years of an Egyptian ban.

The first convoy of 800 Palestinians passed into Egypt through Gaza's Rafah crossing. Airplanes will carry the Palestinians from the Egyptian capital to Mecca, Islam's holiest city.

"It's an incredible feeling, thank God for that. We have waited for this moment since 2014," said Fathia Abu Eita, a passenger on the Cairo-bound bus.

Egypt halted the umrah program for Gazans in 2015 over instability in the northern Sinai that borders the Palestinian enclave, but still allowed transit for the main hajj pilgrimage.

Egypt largely sealed off its border with Gaza when the Hamas terrorist group forcibly wrested control from the Palestinian Authority in 2007, after winning legislative elections a year earlier.

Over the past few years, Egypt's military has ratcheted up its battle against Islamist terrorists in the northern Sinai. Hamas has also restricted the movement of terrorist on its side of the border, helping to pacify the restive region and paving the way for the resumption of the umrah.

Palestinian officials said Egypt and the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority had reached an agreement to permit the pilgrimage.

Posted for Sat March 2

Netanyahu & Putin in Moscow agreed to remove foreign troops of Iran from Syria

Israel Hayom Monday Mar 4, 2019

PM: Israel, Russia to cooperate on foreign troop exit from Syria

"President Putin and I agreed on a shared goal – the removal from Syria of the foreign forces that came in after the civil war erupted," Netanyahu tells cabinet • "We agreed to set up a joint task force which... will work to advance towards this goal."

Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 04/03/2019

PM Netanyahu with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin in Moscow, February 27 | Photo: Reuters

Israel and Russia will work together on securing an exit of foreign forces from Syria, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday after visiting Moscow to advocate against the Iranian presence in the country.

As Syrian President Bashar Assad beats back an eight-year-old insurgency, Israel worries that his reinforcements from Iran and the Tehran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah terrorist organization will stay on to form a new front against it.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes against suspected Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria. These operations have been largely ignored by Russia, which intervened militarily on Assad's behalf in 2015, turning the tide of the war.

Netanyahu said he had made it "unequivocally clear" to Russian President Vladimir Putin last week that such strikes would continue, with an Israeli-Russian military hotline continuing to prevent accidental clashes between the countries.

"President Putin and I also agreed on a shared goal – the removal from Syria of the foreign forces that came in after the civil war erupted," Netanyahu told his cabinet. "We agreed to set up a joint task force which, together with others, will work to advance towards this goal."

He did not elaborate. Moscow had no immediate comment. In the past, Russia has spoken in favor of other forces leaving Syria, though it plans to keep a long-term garrison there.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in an interview with Kuwait News Agency published on Sunday, said the situation in Syria had visibly stabilized after operations by Syrian government forces with Russian aerial support.

But Lavrov said it was too early to declare the "terrorist threat" in Syria – a reference to Islamist-led rebels – eliminated. The United States has been drawing down its own forces in Syria as Islamic State insurgents appear to be near defeat.

Newsletter Sunday March 3, 2019

Posted:

Britain Parliament decided to outlaw Hezbollah force in Lebanon as terrorist

Opinions Sunday March 3 Yehuda Shlezinger |
Netanyahu's test: Saving the right-wing bloc

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's main concern is not the rise of the Left but the potential defection of Likud supporters to small right-wing parties that may not cross the electoral threshold.

Opinions Sunday March 3 Smadar Bat Adam |

Miki's choice

What would aspiring environment minister Miki Haimovich choose – a love of animals or the desire to take their natural habitats in order to capture the wind and sun?

Opinions Sunday March 3 Tsilla Hersheo |

French Jews: Between a rock and a hard place

Both far-right and far-left "yellow vest" demonstrators have vilified French President Emmanuel Macron for ostensibly supporting Jews or for being "controlled" by them over his recent statements condemning growing anti-Semitism in France.

Newsletter Sunday March 3, 2019

Hezbollah, Iran condemn Britain for outlawing terrorist group

Hezbollah slams U.K. Parliament's decision to outlaw it in its entirety, saying it has a political and popular force in Lebanon • **Britain's move means support for Hezbollah will be a criminal offense** and could carry a 10-year prison sentence.

Associated Press, Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff // **published on 03/03/2019**

Hezbollah forces march in Lebanon | Photo: AFP

The **Lebanese Shiite** organization Hezbollah on Friday strongly **rejected the British** government's **move to ban it as a terrorist** organization, calling the measure an "insult" to the Lebanese people and evidence of subservience to the United States.

The House of Commons approved the government's motion to outlaw Hezbollah in its entirety on Friday. The legislation passed days after the Home Secretary Sajid Javid determined it was impossible to distinguish between Hezbollah's political and military activities.

In a statement issued in Beirut in response to the vote, Hezbollah said it is a "resistance" movement against Israeli occupation but also a political and popular force with representatives in the Lebanese parliament and government.

"The British government, by adopting this decision, has insulted the feelings, emotions and will of the Lebanese people which consider Hezbollah to be a significant political and popular force and granted it large representation in parliament and in the new government," the statement said.

It was the first comment by the Iran-backed group on Britain's move earlier this week to ban Hezbollah as a terrorist group, accusing it of further destabilizing the Middle East.

The British government's decision means being a member of, or inviting support for, Hezbollah will be a criminal offense, carrying a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. Until now, the military wing of the Lebanon-based group has been outlawed in Britain, but not its political arm.

Hezbollah – Arabic for Party of God – **is a Shiite Muslim movement** that emerged during the **early 1980s to fight Israel**, with financial backing from Iran. The group maintains a formidable military force that rivals the Lebanese army. It is also a powerful political force that participated in elections, has members in parliament and the government, and dominates the country's politics.

The U.S. and others accuse the group of destabilizing the region through its military intervention in Syria on the side of President Bashar Assad's government.

The Hezbollah statement added that the U.K. decision is proof that the British government is "merely a puppet" that does the bidding of its American "masters."

"No country in the world that embraces terrorism, funds and supports it has the right to accuse Hezbollah or any other resistance movement of being terrorist," it said.

Long the most powerful group in Lebanon, Hezbollah's influence has expanded at home and in the region. It controls three of 30 ministries in the government led by Western-backed Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the largest number ever.

Iran also criticized Britain over the weekend, saying the decision ignored both the will of a large portion of the Lebanese people and the Tehran-backed group's role in fighting Islamic State.

"This British measure signifies deliberately ignoring a large part of the Lebanese people and the legitimacy and the legal position of Hezbollah in Lebanon's administrative and political structure," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi was quoted as saying by state-run Islamic Republic News Agency.

"In addition to ... helping preserve Lebanon's territorial integrity over recent decades, Hezbollah has been one of the pillars of the fight against terrorism and terrorist groups such as Islamic State in the region," Qasemi added.

Newsletter Sunday March 3, 2019

IDF attacks in Gaza after explosive device lands in Israel

IDF attacks Hamas outpost after incendiary device tied to balloons falls in Israeli community without causing damage • Some 8,000 protesters clash with troops in weekly demonstrations along Gaza border fence, Hamas report 11 hurt.

Lilach Shoval and Nikki Guttman

Israeli troops clash with Palestinian protesters on Friday | Photo: EPA

An Israel Defense Forces aircraft attacked a Hamas outpost in the southern Gaza Strip on Saturday after an incendiary device was flown into a nearby Israeli community.

The incendiary **device was attached to balloons** but did not cause any damage.

On Friday, some 8,000 protesters resumed the weekly demonstrations against Israel along the border fence along the Gaza Strip, throwing grenades and improvised explosive devices toward Israeli troops.

Some protesters also tried to cross into Israel. According to Palestinian officials, 11 protesters sustained moderate wounds.

The weekly demonstrations will mark their one-year anniversary at the end of the month. IDF Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi considers the Gaza theater to be particularly combustible and has recently instructed troops to gear up readiness for a potential flare-up.

Newsletter Friday March 1, 2019

Opinions Friday March 1 Yossi Beilin |
Netanyahu should do the right thing

The presumption of innocence is not the same as the right to lead, even if the law permits it. Israel deserves a prime minister who is entirely dedicated to matters of state.

Opinions Friday March 1 Ariel Kahana |
Freedom of the press was almost lost

If the alleged collusion in Case 2,000 had gone ahead, the country's two largest newspapers would have been unduly influenced by the prime minister, but the media preferred to focus on cigars.

Opinions Friday March 1 Rachel Avraham |

Unrest on the Temple Mount: **Why now?**

Following both **Turkey's and the PA's increased control over east Jerusalem** and the Temple Mount, the Fatah-influenced waqf is using the **Gate of Mercy issue as an excuse to stir up trouble.**

Newsletter Friday March 1, 2019

Posted:

Trump, contradicting allied general: All ISIS territory retaken: Total victory in a week

Trump, contradicting allied general: All ISIS territory retaken

Addressing U.S. troops on progress made in Afghanistan, Mideast over past two years, U.S. President Trump says U.S.-backed forces in Syria have retaken 100% of territory once held by Islamic State • SDF commander: Total victory will come in a week.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 01/03/2019

U.S. President Donald Trump speaks to service members at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Thursday | Photo: AP

The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces expect a "fierce battle" with Islamic State terrorists who are still holed up in the group's last enclave in eastern Syria, Mustafa Bali, the head of the SDF media office, said Friday.

Bali's remarks followed U.S. President Donald Trump's assertion, Thursday, that the SDF had retaken 100% of the territory once held by Islamic State.

But Bali said Islamic State militants were still holed up in Baghouz, a village on the Iraqi border, and had not surrendered. "We won't storm the village and declare it liberated unless we have completely confirmed the departure of civilians."

U.S. President Donald Trump told American troops that U.S.-backed forces in Syria have retaken 100% of the territory once held by Islamic State terrorists, contradicting the commander of the U.S.-allied Syrian Democratic Forces, who said it would take another week.

"We just took over, you know, you kept hearing it was 90%, 92%, the caliphate in Syria. Now it's 100% we just took over, 100% caliphate," Trump told troops at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson during a refueling stop in Alaska. He was on his way home from meeting in Vietnam with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Earlier on Thursday, the commander of Syrian Democratic Forces, Gen. Mazloum Kobani, said in a video released to the news media that the SDF would be able to announce "the complete victory over Daesh [Islamic State] in a week."

When asked about Trump's comments, the Pentagon referred reporters to the White House.

In December, Trump announced that he was pulling all American troops out of Syria but last week he partially reversed course and agreed to keep a residual force of perhaps a few hundred troops as part of an international effort to stabilize northeastern Syria.

While the United States has withdrawn some troops, Trump responded to criticism of his move by deciding to leave some 400 U.S. troops in the country over the longer run: 200 to remain in the northeast as part of a multinational force and 200 to remain at an outpost in the southeast to counter Iranian influence.

The U.S. president said on Feb. 6 that he expected a formal announcement the following week that coalition forces had recaptured all territory previously held by Islamic State in Syria. That announcement has yet to be made.

U.S. and other Western countries are backing a Syrian group known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, comprised of local Kurdish and Arab fighters, who have battled Islamic State for more than three years.

According to a U.S. assessment, Islamic State fighters and civilian residents are on in a small sliver of land along the Euphrates River. Officials say military operations have paused in order to separate civilians from the terrorists in that area.

The SDF does biometric checks on all adult-aged males to determine if they are Islamic State fighters hiding in the population that is fleeing. Officials said that military operations to clear out the remaining Islamic State fighters will likely restart soon and will probably take some time.

Iraqi militias said Thursday they launched dozens of missiles targeting Islamic State terrorists holed up in a Syrian village across the border. This is the area along the Euphrates that has been the terrorist group's last stand.

Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan has characterized Islamic State in Syria as on the brink of defeat while cautioning that measures are required to prevent its revival and return to areas of Iraq and Syria that have been liberated since 2014.

"When we talk about what's occurred in Syria recently, it's been the decimation of the caliphate," he said in Brussels on Feb. 14. "And we talk about that in a military context. So, ISIS, Daesh, they no longer hold geography. They no longer govern in the spaces they once held. Their finances have been annihilated. Their ability to communicate on social media has been destroyed. You know, in that regards, they've been defeated."

"Does that mean they've been eliminated? Are there remnants that are scattered or that are hiding in those communities? Well, they are. But that's the nature of the next phase: How do we maintain security? How do we keep them suppressed?"

Israel Hayom

Newsletter Thursday February 28, 2019

Posted:

Congress to view bill recognizing Israeli sovereignty on Golan

Congress to view bill recognizing Israeli sovereignty on Golan

Bill emphasizes the strategic importance of Israeli control to protect civilians against threats from Iran in Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon • It also states it is "unrealistic to expect" Israeli-Syrian peace deal to end in Israeli withdrawal from Golan.

JNS and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 28/02/2019

An observation post on the Israeli Golan Heights overlooking the Syrian side of the Quneitra crossing | Illustration: Reuters

U.S. Senators Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas) and Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wisconsin) introduced companion resolutions on Tuesday urging the United States to officially recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

The bill emphasizes the strategic importance of Israeli control over the area, which the Jewish state captured in the 1967 Six-Day War, in protecting civilians against threats from Iran in Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Israel annexed the region in 1981, a move that has not been recognized by the international community.

It also states that "it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria will be an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights."

The bill adds that "it is in the United States' national security interest to ensure that Israel retains control of the Golan Heights [and that] the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad faces diplomatic and geopolitical consequences for its killing of civilians, the ethnic cleansing of Arab Sunnis, and the use of weapons of mass destruction."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu raised the issue of the Golan Heights during a meeting with U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton in January. Although the United States does not recognize Israeli control over the Golan Heights, it voted for the first time in November against an annual U.N. resolution condemning the Israeli position.

The measure is also sponsored by Senators Marco Rubio (R-Florida), Kevin Cramer (R-North Dakota) and Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina), and Representatives Brian Mast (R-Florida), Doug Lamborn (R-Colorado), Jim Banks (R-Indiana), Elise Stefanik (R-New York), Tom Cole (R-Oklahoma), Mark Meadows (R-North Carolina), Bill Johnson (R-Ohio), Scott Perry (R-Pennsylvania), Roger Marshall (R-Kansas), Mark Green (R-Tennessee), Lee Zeldin (R-New York), Ted Budd (R-North Carolina) and Jody Hice (R-Georgia).

Although no Democrats are currently behind the bill, members such as House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Maryland) have voiced support for such U.S. recognition in the past.

In December, Cotton and Cruz introduced a similar measure.

Newsletter Thursday February 28, 2019

Netanyahu vows to bar Iran from securing presence in Syria

After meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Netanyahu reiterates that Iran comprises the biggest threat in the region • "We are determined to continue our aggressive action in Syria," he says • Putin accepts invitation to Israel

Erez Linn and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 28/02/2019

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting in the Kremlin in Moscow, Wednesday | Photo: Pool via AP

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Wednesday to prevent Iran from securing a lasting presence in Syria as he visited Moscow for talks focusing on regional security.

For Netanyahu, it was the first trip to Moscow since September's downing of a Russian warplane by Syrian forces that were responding to an Israeli air strike. The incident left 15 Russian crew dead and threatened to derail close security ties between Russia and Israel.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the start of Wednesday's talks that "it's very important to discuss the situation in the region and security issues."

He added that the high-level consultations are essential in view of the evolving situation.

Netanyahu began the talks by reaffirming Israel's strong determination to block attempts by Iran to establish a foothold in Syria.

"The greatest threat to stability and security in the region comes from Iran and its satellites," he said.

"We are determined to continue with our aggressive action against the efforts of Iran, which calls for our destruction and against its attempts to entrench militarily in Syria."

Moscow has played a delicate diplomatic game of maintaining friendly ties with both Israel and Iran. Last summer, Moscow struck a deal with Tehran to keep its fighters away from the Golan Heights to accommodate Israeli concerns about the Iranian presence in Syria.

Netanyahu noted that **he and Putin have had 11 meetings since September 2015** and hailed "the direct, open and true way in which we maintain the relationship between Russia and Israel."

"The direct connection between us has been an essential element that has prevented risks and conflicts between our militaries and that has contributed to regional security and stability," the Israeli leader said.

Netanyahu congratulated Putin on the military holiday Russia marked last weekend and invited him to visit Israel to attend the opening of a monument to the Nazi siege of Leningrad during World War II.

"We will never forget the role of Russia and the Red Army in the victory over the Nazis," he said.

Putin, a native of the city, accepted the offer. The Russian Embassy in Israel tweeted confirmation of his attendance although no date has been set.

Netanyahu praised "excellent bilateral relations," noting "more than one million Russian speakers who have made a great contribution to Israel, have turned into a part of us and have made Russian culture a part of Israeli culture."

Speaking after the meeting, Netanyahu said that relations between Israel and Russia following the fighter jet incident had not been discussed.

"We talked about the main issues of interest to us, mostly Iran – and its attempts to base itself in Syria. We went into great detail on that issue and showed examples of that entrenchment as well as the steps we [Israel] are taking to prevent it," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu said that Putin had been presented with various intelligence findings about Iran and Syria.

"I always make it clear that we will continue to maintain Israeli freedom of action that we retain as part of our right to self-defense against actors who want to gain a foothold in Syria and I'm saying this publicly in the most honest way possible, as well as in closed-door talks.

Netanyahu said that Putin had expressed an understanding of Israel's defense needs.

Newsletter Thursday February 28, 2019

IDF hits targets in Gaza after explosive balloon damages home

"Over the past three weeks they [Palestinians in Gaza] have launched a lot of balloons and because they do it at night, it's hard to stop it," says Rachel Danzig, whose home in Eshkol region is damaged • IDF: Hamas is responsible for what happens in Gaza.

Daniel Siryoti, Nikki Guttman and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 28/02/2019

An Israeli airstrike in Gaza | Archives: Reuters

Israeli warplanes struck numerous Hamas posts in southern Gaza late Wednesday night after a small bomb attached to a bundle of balloons was launched into Israel from the Hamas-controlled coastal enclave.

The explosive device damaged the front window of a home in the Eshkol region.

No casualties were reported.

The bomb exploded near the home of Rachel Danzig, whose home was almost hit by a rocket fired from Gaza during the previous spat of hostilities.

"I'm shaking right now," she said. "The balloon exploded next to my house, I thought it was literally inside the house. It's scary because there's no deterrence. My neighbor has a hole in her garden, glass is shattered all over my home and everything moved from the blast. I'm still traumatized by the first time. My neighbor is absolutely frightened. She's 70 years old and is in shock.

"Over the past three weeks, they [Palestinians in Gaza] have launched a lot of balloons and because they do it at night, it's hard to stop it. People could get hurt," Danzig said.

"The Hamas terrorist organization bears responsibility for anything that occurs in the Gaza Strip and for all the consequences of its terrorist activity there," the IDF said in a statement.

Newsletter Wednesday February 27, 2019

Posted:

Minister Bennett calls to reveal peace plan: accusing PM establishing a Palestinian state

Opinions Wednesday February 27 Ariel Schmidberg |

Aliyah is the only answer

In Argentina, some 25 years after the terrorist attacks on a Jewish community center and the Israeli Embassy, the Jewish community continues to demand justice that will never come.

Opinions Wednesday February 27 Yossi Mansharof |

Zarif defeated at home

The resignation of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif didn't come as a complete surprise and reflects the utter supremacy of the Revolutionary Guard in the Iranian political sphere.

Opinions Wednesday February 27 Clifford D. May |

America as sheriff rather than cop

Unlike the cop on the beat, the Wild West lawman isn't expected to make arrests for every transgression. But he will appoint deputies and raise a posse to stop the worst outlaws.

Newsletter Wednesday February 27, 2019

Israeli spacecraft hits first snag on lunar voyage

Engineers at nonprofit SpaceIL say onboard computer system unexpectedly reset, canceling a maneuver that would keep the small spacecraft, called Beresheet, on track for its April landing • Team says it is examining the data to understand what happened.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 27/02/2019

The unmanned Israeli spacecraft Beresheet | Photo: Reuters

An Israeli spacecraft that blasted off last week for the country's first attempted lunar landing has encountered a technical glitch on its voyage to the moon.

Engineers at the nonprofit SpaceIL said Tuesday that the onboard computer system unexpectedly reset, canceling a maneuver that would keep the small spacecraft, called Beresheet, on track for its April landing. The team says it is examining the data to understand what happened.

On its winding journey, Beresheet is to slingshot around the Earth at least six times. If the mission succeeds, it will be the first privately funded lunar landing. It will also be a major accomplishment for Israel, which seeks to become the fourth nation to reach the lunar surface, after the U.S., Russia and China.

Newsletter Wednesday February 27, 2019

Posted for Saturday Feb 23

Dutch Green Left Party Feb 16, voted to help Palestine fight for justice

Dutch Green Left Party votes to support Israel boycott

GroenLinks becomes Holland's first mainstream political party to endorse the BDS movement, which it calls "a legitimate means to help Palestinians in their fight for justice" in a new resolution • Dutch Jewish and pro-Israel group slams the motion.

JNS and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 27/02/2019

Green Left "will be alert and resist forcefully attempts in any country to criminalize BDS" | Illustration: AP

GroenLinks, a green political party in the Netherlands, became Holland's first mainstream political party to endorse the anti-Israel boycott, sanctions and divestment movement.

Known as the Dutch Green Left Party, the motion was passed during the General Congress of the party on Feb. 16. The party holds 14 seats out of 150 in the Dutch parliament's lower chamber.

"BDS is a legitimate means to help Palestinians in their fight for justice," the resolution said.

It also said that Green Left "will be alert and resist forcefully attempts in any country to criminalize BDS."

The Dutch Center for Information and Documentation on Israel, a Jewish and pro-Israel group that combats anti-Semitism, slammed the motion.

"Green Left conveniently ignored how, in practice, BDS goes hand in hand with expressions of anti-Semitism and is linked to terrorist groups," said the organization.

Newsletter Wednesday February 27, 2019

Former minister sentenced to 11 years in prison for spying for Iran

As part of a plea deal, Gonen Segev admitted to spying for Iran for five years and providing them with top-secret information but argued that he wanted to serve as a double agent • Many of the details of the case remain under a gag order.

Israel Hayom Staff // published on **27/02/2019**

Former minister Gonen Segev in court, Tuesday | Photo: EPA

The Jerusalem District Court on Tuesday sentenced former Israeli minister Gonen Segev to 11 years in prison on Tuesday for spying for Iran.

As part of a plea deal, Segev admitted to spying for Iran for five years using a clandestine channel and providing it with top-secret information; but argued that he wanted to serve as a double agent, providing information to Iran while concurrently obtaining more significant information he could give to Israel.

Many of the details of the case remain under gag order.

Segev previously served as Israel's energy and infrastructure minister, represented the Tzomet and Yi-ud parties in the Knesset and spent time in jail for forgery, fraud and drug-smuggling. He was extradited from Equatorial Guinea in May and charged with spying against the State of Israel, assisting the enemy in a time of war and providing intelligence to the enemy.

Segev was said to have met his Iranian handlers in secret locations and attempted to network between them and Israelis in the defense establishment under the guise of creating business partnerships in the area.

He lived in Nigeria for almost 10 years, during which time he practiced medicine. His medical license had been revoked in Israel. He was arrested for drug smuggling and credit-card fraud while attempting to smuggle 32,000 ecstasy tablets from the Netherlands to Israel in 2005.

Newsletter Wednesday February 27, 2019

Bennett calls on Trump to reveal peace plan before election

Education Minister Naftali Bennett accuses PM Netanyahu of conspiring with Trump adviser Jared Kushner to establish a Palestinian state • Trump is leaving Israelis in the dark before a crucial election and "friends do not keep secrets," he says.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on **27/02/2019**

Education Minister Naftali Bennett and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Knesset | Archives: Oren Ben Hakoon

Education Minister Naftali Bennett called on U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday to reveal his much-anticipated "deal of the century" for Middle East peace before the upcoming Israeli election, scheduled for April 9.

Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner said this week that his plan will address all "final status" issues, including borders, and require compromises by all sides.

He made no mention of establishing a Palestinian state and said the plan would focus heavily on offering economic "opportunities" to the Palestinians.

Bennett, however, accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of conspiring with Kushner to establish a Palestinian state.

He said Tuesday that Trump is leaving Israelis in the dark before a crucial election and "friends do not keep secrets" from each other.

Newsletter Tuesday February 26, 2019

Posted:

Netanyahu orders removal of furnishings & renovations at the Gate of Mercy structure

Opinions Tuesday February 26 Isi Leibler |

Lessons from the Polish imbroglio

Jewish cooperation with outright fascists is unthinkable. But if the leaders of right-wing populist parties repudiate their antecedents' crimes, it would be a major mistake to spurn their support.

Opinions Tuesday February 26 Ariel Bolstein |

Leftists in disguise

It appears Benny Gantz and his advisers are trying to recreate the electoral success Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak achieved in the 1990s through the branding of left-wing candidates as centrists.

Opinions Tuesday February 26 Ariel Kahana |

A welcome sight

Were it not for their expected exit from the EU, we can assume the British would still be playing the EU's game of pretend when it comes to distinguishing between Hezbollah's military and diplomatic wings.

Newsletter Tuesday February 26, 2019

Kushner: US peace plan very detailed, will focus on borders

Senior White House adviser, to Sky News Arabia: "We focused on what prevents Palestinians from using full potential and Israelis from integrating in region" • Plan would tackle few issues, offer "realistic and fair solutions" to improve people's lives.

Ariel Kahana // published on 26/02/2019

Senior Adviser to the President Jared Kushner | Photo: EPA

White House senior adviser Jared Kushner unveiled the general themes of U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan on Monday, saying it would put a big emphasis on improving the conditions of both Israelis and Palestinians.

"We were not able to convince people from both sides on a compromise," Kushner told Sky News Arabia in an interview. "Therefore, we did not focus a lot on the issues, despite our deep knowledge of them. We focused instead on what prevents the Palestinian people from using their full potential, and what prevents the Israeli people from integrating properly in the entire region." But despite this, he said that "the American peace plan is very detailed and will focus on drawing the border and resolving the core issues."

The Trump administration has been in the works for the past two years, but the administration's peace team, led by Kushner, has repeatedly dismissed various reports on its supposed content, saying they are false and misleading. The plan is due to be released after the April 9 Israel election.

Kushner added his team "tried to find realistic and fair solutions ... to allow people to have better lives" and that the plan will focus on four ways to achieve that goal.

Netanyahu orders removal of furnishings & renovations at the Gate of Mercy structure

Newsletter Tuesday February 26, 2019

PM: There won't be another mosque on the Temple Mount

PM Netanyahu orders removal of recently installed equipment from the Gate of Mercy site on the Temple Mount • Arab officials: Israeli government efforts "to Judaize Jerusalem and erode the status quo at Al-Aqsa will be met with strong resistance."

Nadav Shragai, Ariel Kahana, Daniel Siryoti and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 26/02/2019

Arab-Israeli leaders at the Gate of Mercy site on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem,
Monday | Photo: Balad - Ra'am spokesperson

Tensions continued to bubble Monday on the Temple Mount after the Gate of Mercy structure near Al-Aqsa mosque was certified as another mosque, with silent agreement from Israel – despite official denials issued by Israeli authorities.

Government officials said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued an order to remove equipment from the site and disallow prayer there.

The structure was recently fitted with rugs and other furnishings along with renovations. Eran Tzidkiyahu of the Forum for Regional Thinking visited the site on Monday and assessed that it would soon be used as a permanent prayer area for Muslims.

Meanwhile, the Islamic authority that oversees Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, known as the waqf, announced it has already appointed an imam for the Gate of Mercy structure and that its status would be identical to other sites of worship on the Temple Mount.

Israeli police on Sunday arrested the head of waqf authority, Sheikh Abdelazeem Salhab, and other waqf leaders, following violent protests last week on the Temple Mount. Salhab, who was released shortly after his arrest and barred from the area for one week, was appointed by neighboring Jordan.

From one mosque to five

If Israel does not act to reverse the trend, the number of mosques at the Temple Mount compound will stand at five. Some 52 years ago, immediately following the Six-Day War, there was only one mosque, Al-Aqsa mosque. Over time, the Dome of the Rock was also certified as a mosque and mostly serves Muslim women on Fridays. In the 1990s, two other mosques were certified, but underground: the Gate of Mercy area, which some Muslims in recent days have hailed as the "fifth mosque," was shut down by Israel in 2005 after a Hamas-linked group carried out activities there.

The new waqf leadership, comprising officials from Fatah, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, breached the site around two weeks ago, and last Friday thousands of worshippers prayed there. The waqf leaders arrested by Israel, as stated, were released a short while later on shaky legal grounds, as the aforementioned Hamas-affiliated group that had operated there, and which served as the pretext for shutting the site down, no longer exists, and doubts emerged over the legality of the most recent closure order.

'Strong resistance'

It should be noted that before 2005, although the compound was controlled by the Muslims it didn't function as a mosque and people normally didn't use it for worship.

Senior Arab-Israeli figures, among them the head of the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab citizens of Israel, former MK Mohammad Barakeh, together with representatives of the Balad and Ra'am parties, visited the structure on Monday and met with waqf leaders.

"It is the right of every Muslim to prayer at Al-Aqsa mosque. The actions of the Israeli government to Judaize Jerusalem and erode the status quo at Al-Aqsa will be met with strong resistance," they threatened.

An Israeli government official said: "The prime minister gave instructions to enforce the court's order without compromise. The political echelon won't allow the site to become a mosque. This directive was passed to the police and this message was delivered to certain authorities and to Jordan as well. The prime minister has instructed the public security minister [Gilad Erdan] to remove the rugs and other equipment from the site."

Newsletter Tuesday February 26, 2019

Syria's Bashar Assad visits Iran in rare trip abroad

Assad accuses U.S. and its regional allies of creating rifts among various religious and ethnic groups in Syria • Iran is "proud" of the help it offers Syria, Ayatollah Khamenei says • PM Netanyahu to fly to Moscow Wednesday to discuss situation in Syria.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 26/02/2019

Syrian President Bashar Assad with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran, Monday | Photo: AP

Syrian President Bashar Assad has made an unannounced trip to Iran, where he met with the supreme leader and other top officials to discuss the planned U.S. troop withdrawal and Turkey's efforts to set up a buffer zone in northern Syria, state media reported Monday.

The visit to Iran comes a day before a trip by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Russia for talks expected to focus on Iran's role in Syria. Israel has said it will not tolerate a permanent Iranian military presence in Syria, and it has carried out scores of airstrikes against Iran-linked targets there.

Assad met with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani on the rare trip abroad – his third since the civil war broke out in 2011. The other two trips were to Russia.

Tehran has given the Syrian government billions of dollars in aid and sent Iran-backed fighters to battle alongside his forces – assistance that, along with Russian air power, has helped turn the tide in Assad's favor.

Syrian and Iranian media released photos showing Assad warmly embracing Khamenei and shaking hands with Rouhani. The visit was not announced beforehand, and both countries made it public late Monday.

Iran's semiofficial Fars news agency said Khamenei told the visiting Assad that "the buffer zone the Americans are after in Syria is among the dangerous plots that should be rejected," and that the U.S. plan to maintain a presence in Syria near the Iraqi border "is another sample of their designs."

U.S. President Donald Trump announced in December that all American forces would leave Syria, but he recently backtracked in the face of intense criticism, saying about 200 soldiers would remain indefinitely to help keep the peace alongside Syrian partners and prevent a resurgence of the Islamic State group.

U.S. officials said Trump's decision authorizing a small number of U.S. troops to stay is a key step in creating a larger multinational observer force that would monitor a so-called safe zone along Syria's border with Turkey. The buffer zone is meant to prevent clashes between Turkey and U.S.-backed Kurdish forces. It is also aimed at preventing Assad's forces and Iran-backed fighters from seizing more territory.

Syrian officials have blasted Turkey's plans for such a safe zone, saying both Turkish and U.S. troops are occupiers.

Assad accused the U.S. and its regional allies such as Saudi Arabia of creating rifts among various religious and ethnic groups in Syria, saying such efforts have backfired.

"Today in Syria, Kurds and tribes have good relations with the government," he said, according to Fars.

Syrian state TV said Assad "thanked the Islamic republic's leadership and people for what they have given to Syria during the war." Assad's office said, "Both sides expressed their satisfaction with the strategic levels reached between the two countries in all fields."

Khamenei said Iran is "proud" of the assistance it offers to Syria, Fars reported.

Syria's conflict began almost exactly eight years ago when Arab Spring-inspired protests broke out against the Assad family's decadeslong rule.

The protests prompted a harsh response from Syrian security forces, which led to the emergence of an insurgency. The resulting war has killed some 450,000 people and displaced millions of others.

Newsletter Tuesday February 26, 2019

Iran's foreign minister resigns as his nuclear deal teeters

Mohammad Javad Zarif steps down without warning late Monday, offering an "apology" to Iranians • Still unclear why Zarif chose to resign now and what effect it will have on the nuclear deal • "Our policy is unchanged," says U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 26/02/2019

Mohammad Javad Zarif | Photo: EPA

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif resigned without warning late Monday, offering an "apology" to the nation as the nuclear deal he negotiated with world powers is on the verge of collapse after the U.S. withdrawal from the accord.

Zarif's resignation, if accepted by Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, would leave the cleric without one of his main allies in pushing the Islamic Republic toward further negotiations with the West.

It remains unclear why Zarif chose to leave his post now and what effect it will have on the atomic accord, which Iran has been complying with. He likely briefed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei before offering his resignation. Khamenei, who has final say on all state matters, previously backed the American-educated envoy through the nuclear negotiations.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a post on Twitter, dismissed Zarif and Rouhani as "front men for a corrupt religious mafia."

"We'll see if it sticks," Pompeo added. "Our policy is unchanged – the regime must behave like a normal country and respect its people."

The veteran diplomat first hinted at his resignation with a vague Instagram post in which he offered an "apology" for his "inability to continue to his service." The post included a drawing honoring Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, as Iranians commemorate her birth Tuesday.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi confirmed to the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency minutes later that Zarif had resigned but gave no reason for his departure.

Earlier Monday, Zarif met with members of the activist group Code Pink in Tehran, smiling as he posed for a photograph with them. However, he was not seen in images later in the day showing Syrian President Bashar Assad meeting with Khamenei and Rouhani. Iran has been one of Assad's main supporters during the yearslong war in Syria.

On Sunday, Zarif criticized Iranian hard-liners in a speech in Tehran, saying: "We cannot hide behind imperialism's plot and blame them for our own incapability."

"Independence does not mean isolation from the world," he said.

Analysts say Rouhani faces growing political pressure from hard-liners within the government as the nuclear deal unravels. Iranian presidents typically see their popularity erode during their second four-year term, but analysts say Rouhani is particularly vulnerable because of the economic crisis assailing the country's rial currency, which has hurt ordinary Iranians and emboldened critics to openly call for his ouster.

Reaction to Zarif's resignation was swift. A prominent reformist lawmaker, Mostafa Kavakebian, wrote on Twitter that Rouhani should reject Zarif's resignation as his departure would only "make enemies of Iran's dignity happy."

Hassan Mohammadi, a Tehran-based political analyst close to Rouhani, said he understood it was Zarif's third time submitting his resignation in the last year.

"It is part of [the] plan for changing the track in foreign policy in Iran. A negotiation-seeking foreign minister is not a favored person anymore," Mohammadi told The Associated Press. "Iran needs a tough foreign minister from now on. Someone who does not offer smile towards the West."

The son of a wealthy family, Zarif overcame hard-line objections and Western suspicions to strike the accord with world powers that saw Iran promise to limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.

But the deal was later challenged by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, which pulled America out of the accord. In doing so, Trump also fueled doubts of Iranians still wary of U.S. interests, decades after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Zarif himself faced withering criticism at home after he shook hands with former U.S. President Barack Obama.

Meanwhile, officials in the Trump administration have also been pressuring Iran through social media, with one State Department official tweeting an unflattering image of Zarif saying: "How do you know @JZarif is lying? His lips are moving."

Zarif, 59, served as Iran's ambassador to the United Nations from 2002 to 2007, first under reformist President Mohammad Khatami and then under hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad wanted him replaced, but Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei intervened to keep him in the position for another two years as Iran soon found itself an international pariah over its nuclear program.

Secret backchannel talks between the United States and Iran in Oman became full-fledged negotiations over its nuclear program. During the talks, Zarif met with then-U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry more than 50 times – something that would have been unimaginable only a few years earlier.

Kerry and Zarif's rapport extended beyond just the nuclear negotiations. Kerry directly reached out to his counterpart in January 2016 to help secure the release within 24 hours of 10 U.S. Navy sailors seized by Iran after they mistakenly entered Iranian territorial waters.

Cliff Kupchan, chairman of the Eurasia Group and a longtime Iran watcher, described Zarif's resignation as a "bolt from the blue" from a diplomat who had served as "the face of Iran" for years. He said that while it was still too early to determine what prompted Zarif's resignation, it didn't necessarily signal a major shift away from the nuclear deal.

"I think Zarif can charm the fangs off a snake and has done so many, many times," Kupchan told AP. "Whether it's dealing with Bashar Assad or [Russian President] Vladimir Putin, he's their ambassador to a very tough neighborhood."

"The Iranians are pretty good at making their life even harder than it has to be and this would be another step in that direction if he was forced out," Kupchan said.

Newsletter Monday February 25, 2019

Posted:

EU asks Egyptian coast guard to return migrants leaving Libya to Africa

Opinions Monday February 25 Izhak Hildesheimer |

Fake news on US Jews

As a veteran reporter familiar with issues important to the Jewish Diaspora, I know that there is no group that purports to represent the entire American Jewish community.

Opinions Monday February 25 David Hyman |

Blue and White's economics are deep red

Blue and White candidate Miki Haimovich's stance on Israel's gas reserves are an indication that if the Center-Left wins, we will see the most socialist government since the state was founded.

Opinions Monday February 25 Nadav Shragai |

Digging in near the Golden Gate

Despite Israel's unusual step of arresting a Waqf official, it is unlikely that government will be able to keep the Muslims from using the area near the Golden Gate for prayer.

Newsletter Monday February 25, 2019

EU, Arab leaders discuss Europe's migrant challenge at summit

EU asks Egyptian coast guard to return migrants leaving Libya to Africa, ensuring they do not become Europe's responsibility • In return, Egypt to receive high-profile European recognition, muted criticism of government's human rights record.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 25/02/2019

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, center, chairs a meeting at an EU-Arab summit in Sharm El Sheikh, Sunday | Photo: AP

Leaders from European Union and Arab League countries pledged Sunday to boost cooperation in the fight against terrorism and to tackle unauthorized migration at a first-ever summit steeped in symbolism but likely to yield few concrete results.

Under tight security at the Red Sea resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi opened two days of talks with a speech celebrating what he described as historic cooperation between the two organizations.

But despite the public display of unity, just drafting a summit statement has proved difficult. EU and Arab League foreign ministers failed to agree earlier this month on a text after Hungary objected to the section on migration, and work on the document is continuing.

In it, the leaders are likely to commit to addressing conflicts in Syria and Yemen or stalled Middle East peace efforts, yet paper over major differences about how to resolve them or who might be responsible.

Some said that merely sitting down together at the same table for the first time is a result in itself.

"The meeting is the message," European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told reporters, summing up the largely symbolic nature of the summit, while EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said, "This summit is, in itself, a deliverable."

Europe's migration challenge is at the heart of the two-day meeting, being held under the slogan "Investing in Stability." Desperate to bring migrant arrivals under control, the EU offered the summit last October as a symbolic sweetener to el-Sissi, much as they did with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2015.

The EU wants el-Sissi to order the Egyptian coast guard to pick up migrants leaving Libya and take them back to the African mainland, ensuring they do not become Europe's responsibility. El-Sissi, in return, would receive high-profile European recognition, promotion for Sharm el-Sheikh and a muting of criticism of his government's human rights record.

"We must work together — countries of origin, transit and destination — in order to break the business model of smugglers and traffickers who lure people into dangerous journeys and feed modern-day slavery," said EU Council President Donald Tusk.

While the number of people crossing the central Mediterranean has now dropped to a seven-year low, Europe's inability to agree on how to manage the arrivals has sparked a major political crisis, as nations bicker over who should take responsibility and whether other EU partners should help out. Some, like Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Hungary, contend that extremists are among those entering the EU as refugees.

Just days before the summit, the head of the EU's border and coast guard agency praised the authorities in Cairo for preventing any migrant from setting out for Europe from the Egyptian coast since 2016.

"There are no boats coming directly from Egypt to the European Union," Frontex director Fabrice Leggeri said. "The cooperation with Egypt is really encouraging and is developing."

The EU — a major trading partner and investor in the Arab world — routinely trumpets an agreement it reached with Erdogan for slowing migrant arrivals to a trickle in exchange for up to 6 billion euros (\$7 billion) in aid for Syrian refugees there and other incentives. It has pledged to replicate the deal in northern Africa.

El-Sissi also called for a broad plan to combat terrorism that would deprive extremists of funding and "include a strict security offensive to counter the terrorist organizations and other elements of terrorism. And there should also be an effective ideological offensive against their ideological platforms."

Saeed Sadek, professor of political sociology at the Canadian University in Cairo, told The Associated Press that security would be of prime concern in Sharm el-Sheikh, but he too played down expectations from the summit.

"The timing is very important because it comes after eight years of instability in the Mediterranean affecting Europe and the Middle East," Sadek said.

"Both sides want to know how can we stabilize the area further, produce stability, how can we deal with the consequences and prevent any further escalations."

"But the imbalance of power between the two sides may not produce the concrete results that people imagine," he added.

Tusk too noted: "I am aware that there are differences between us. We are not here to pretend that we agree on everything. But we face common challenges and have shared interests."

Newsletter Monday February 25, 2019

Meretz leader: We expect support from the Arabs

Chairwoman of the far-left Meretz party Tamar Zandberg says that if Blue and White leader **Benny Gantz gets a chance to form the next government**, Meretz will join and "be the Left in the 'Center-Left'" • Calls Otzma Yehudit a "terror organization."

Erez Linn // published on **25/02/2019**

Meretz chairwoman Tamar Zandberg | Photo: i24NEWS

Meretz chairwoman Tamar Zandberg intends to help the Blue and White list establish a governing coalition, and pull the Center-Left list to the Left, Zandberg said Sunday on the Israel Hayom-i24NEWS weekly election broadcast.

Zandberg attacked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for forcing a merger between Habayit Hayehudi-National Union and the far-Right Otzma Yehudit party and stressed that the move proved Meretz must be part of the next government.

"We will recommend any candidate, right now it looks like it's Benny Gantz together with Yair Lapid, who could form a **Center-Left coalition**, and we will be the left in that 'Center-Left,'" Zandberg told Israel Hayom editor-in-chief Boaz Bismuth and anchor Nurit Ben.

"If he [Gantz] has a chance to form a government, we will recommend him and we will definitely aspire to be a part of that coalition," Zandberg said.

"You know that the best ministers of education came from my party, Meretz. If we have an opportunity to be in the Education Ministry, instead of [Naftali] Bennett ... or [Bezalet] Smotrich or the Kahane Hai representatives [a reference to Otzma Yehudit], a terror organization that Prime Minister Netanyahu just helped bring into the Knesset that just got condemned by AIPAC, it would be to our advantage," she added.

When asked whether she would try and encourage Arab voters to support Meretz in the election, Zandberg replied that her list intended to court Arab votes, and "We expect to gain support from [the] Arabs and Druze."

In response to Zandberg's remarks about Otzma Yehudit, party leader Itamar Ben-Gvir said, "It's one thing for Tamar Zandberg to prostrate herself on the grave of [PLO founder] Yasser Arafat and get mixed up about who loves us and who is the enemy, but the problem with what she says is that **she apparently doesn't recognize the authority of the Supreme Court**, which has discussed [activist] Baruch Marzel and Otzma Yehudit."

Newsletter Sunday February 24, 2019

Posted;

IDF arested senior Muslim making new Temple site in area that was sealed in 2003

Opinions Sunday February 24 Dr. Miriam Adelson |

In heaven's name

An entire generation of Israeli scientists will be enriched by SpaceIL's achievement and future generations of Israeli scientists will be inspired to follow their example.

Opinions Sunday February 24 Prof. Eyal Zisser |

War will likely rise from the south

Palestinian Islamic Jihad, operating out of Gaza, has chosen to put its fate in Iran's hands, which is uncustomary not only in the Palestinian arena but in the entire Sunni world.

Opinions Sunday February 24 Dror Eydar |

AIPAC is being irresponsible

For the sake of its important work, the lobby – which is not the American Jewish community – **must refrain from making an ill-informed leap into Israeli politics**, especially at such a sensitive time.

Newsletter Sunday February 24, 2019

Police arrest, release senior Muslim official in Jerusalem

Sheikh Abdelazeem Salhab, who heads the Islamic Waqf authority that oversees Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, is banned from entering the Gate of Mercy shrine for one week • Jordan minister blasts arrest as a "dangerous and an unacceptable escalation."

Daniel Siryoti, Efrat Forsher, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 24/02/2019

Muslims enter the Gate of Mercy in the Golden Gate area of the Temple Mount, Friday | Photo: Reuters

Israeli police on Sunday arrested the head of the Islamic authority that oversees Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, following violent protests last week on the Temple Mount.

Sheikh Abdelazeem Salhab, a cleric appointed by neighboring Jordan, was arrested early Sunday.

Jordanian Islamic Affairs Minister Abdul Nasser Abul Basal said the Israeli action was "dangerous and an unacceptable escalation" that affected Jordan's role as the custodian of Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, according to the Petra news agency.

Israeli police confirmed the arrest Sunday, and the waqf later said police had released Salhab and banned him from entering the site for a week.

In Jerusalem on Friday, protesters chanting "Allahu akbar" (God is great) streamed into the Golden Gate area, a sealed-off part of the Temple Mount.

Tensions at the Gate of Mercy shrine, adjacent to the Golden Gate, have escalated in recent days and similar protests turned into scuffles with police earlier this week. Anticipating unrest, police arrested 60 Palestinians overnight Thursday suspected of causing disturbances and inciting violence.

Israel blocked off the Gate of Mercy structure in 2003 because it was home to a heritage organization with terrorist affiliations.

Police accused the waqf of attempting to change the status quo at the sensitive site by convening in the closed area last week.

Israel Hayom reported last week that the Palestinians and Jordanians have established a joint council to manage the Temple Mount and holy sites in Jerusalem as the first step of

a plan to torpedo the Trump administration's "deal of the century" for peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Middle East analyst Yoni Ben-Menachem of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, who discovered the plan, called it a "move that violates the Oslo Accords and strikes a dangerous blow to Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem."

Senior officials in Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' office and the Fatah movement confirmed to Israel Hayom that cooperation with Jordan had been stepped up recently, ahead of the expected publication of U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan.

On the Gaza border, meanwhile, IDF troops on Friday shot and killed a Palestinian teenager and wounded around 40 others at the weekly March of Return protest attended by thousands.

The IDF said it was acting against rioters, some of whom tried throwing grenades and explosive devices at troops.

An IDF spokeswoman said soldiers had used "riot dispersal means" and opened fire "in accordance with standard operating procedures."

Newsletter Sunday February 24, 2019

UK lawmaker sought to revoke citizenship for British who join IDF

In 2014, John McDonnell, a minister in Labour's shadow government and an outspoken critic of Israel, said British citizens who serve in the IDF should receive the same punishment as those who join ISIS • Ninth Labour MP quits party citing anti-Semitism.

Eldad Beck, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 24/02/2019

British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn | Photo: AP

Following British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's public call last week to allow a British woman who went to Syria to join ISIS to return home, the Daily Mail reported over the weekend that a senior member of his party demanded to revoke the citizenship of British citizens who enlisted in the Israel Defense Forces to fight against the Palestinians.

In 2014, John McDonnell, the finance minister in Labour's shadow government and an outspoken critic of Israel, wrote to then-Home Secretary Theresa May saying she should censure British citizens who served in the IDF and administer them the same punishment to those who joined ISIS.

In the letter, McDonnell said: "Will you be warning any British citizens considering engagement with the IDF that such engagement may put their British citizenship in jeopardy? Given the seriousness of the current situation in Gaza [Operation Protective Edge] and the apparent escalation of the Israeli attacks on Palestinians, I urge you to address these questions promptly so that any British citizen currently participating or planning to participate in these attacks [against Palestinians] is warned of the potential consequences and thus may be deterred from acting in this way."

In response, a Labour spokesman said: "[The letter was written] at the height of the barbaric bombing and attacks on Gaza when hundreds of Palestinian men, women and children were being killed. This is a simple statement of law and standard practice by the government aimed at deterring and pointing out the risks involved in British citizens joining any foreign conflict. For those holding joint citizenship, it does not entail making them stateless."

According to Corbyn, Shamima Begum "was born in Britain, she has that right to remain in Britain and obviously a lot of questions she has to answer but also some support that she needs. She obviously has, in my view, a right to return to Britain. On that return, she must face a lot of questions about everything she's done. And at that point, any action may or may not be taken."

Britain's Home Secretary Sajid Javid revoked the jihadi bride's passport after the 19-year-old from London fled to Syria aged 15 and married an Islamic State terrorist.

Meanwhile, a ninth British lawmaker left Labour over the weekend as fallout from Brexit continues to splinter U.K. politics.

Ian Austin said Friday he quit Labour due to its "culture of extremism, anti-Semitism and intolerance" under Corbyn. The party is "broken" and has been taken over by the "hard Left," Austin said.

Austin added that he was appalled at the treatment of Jewish lawmakers who had taken a stand against anti-Semitism and that the "the party is tougher on the people complaining about anti-Semitism than it is on the anti-Semites."

"The Labour Party has been my life, so this has been the hardest decision I have ever had to take, but I have to be honest and the truth is that I have become ashamed of the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn," he told the Express and Star newspaper.

"I could never ask local people to make Jeremy Corbyn prime minister," he said.

A Labour spokesman said the party regretted that Austin had decided to leave.

"He was elected as a Labour member of Parliament and so the democratic thing is to resign his seat and let the people of Dudley decide who should represent them," he said.

A Labour lawmaker since 2005 and a former government minister, Austin supports Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal and is not in favor of holding a second referendum, putting him at odds with the other Independent Group members.

Newsletter Sunday February 24, 2019

US-backed Syrian forces return 150 Islamic State members to Iraq

Islamic State fighters will be interrogated • Syrian Democratic Forces says they have captured 650 Islamic State militants • Kurdish-led forces completing the evacuation of thousands of civilians from radical Sunni group's last stronghold in the area.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff // published on 24/02/2019

Members of an Iraqi special forces intelligence team talk to suspected Islamic State fighters in Mosul, last November | Photo: Reuters

Iraqi security officials say they have received custody of a second batch of 150 Iraqi Islamic State fighters from U.S.-backed forces in Syria.

Two officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of media regulations, said the Syrian Democratic Forces handed over Iraqi nationals on Saturday night.

The fighters will be interrogated about their participation with the jihadist group, the officials said.

The SDF has told Iraqi authorities it has captured 650 Iraqi militants in the fighting for Baghouz, an Islamic State-held village in eastern Syria, according to the officials.

On Thursday, the SDF handed over 150 militants, in the first significant transfer to Iraq.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi has said Iraq is also preparing to receive thousands of Iraqi women and children living in SDF camps in Syria.

Meanwhile, Kurdish-led forces in Syria said they would complete the evacuation of thousands of civilians from Islamic State's last redoubt in the area on Friday, and welcomed a White House reversal of U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to pull out all U.S. troops.

With Washington's allies poised for victory against Islamic State fighters who are making a final stand in a pocket near the Iraqi border, the White House announced plans on Thursday to keep "a small peacekeeping force" in Syria.

The announcement partially reversed Trump's abrupt decision in December to withdraw the entire 2,000-strong U.S. contingent, which had alarmed Washington's Kurdish allies and prompted Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to quit.

An administration official on Friday put the total number of troops to stay at 400, split between a safe zone being negotiated for northeastern Syria and a U.S. military base at Tanf, near the border with Iraq and Jordan.

Although the U.S. contingent would now be small, the official indicated that the 200 troops in the northeast would be part of a wider commitment of about 800 to 1,500 troops also drawn from European allies to set up and observe a safe zone.