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After Arab Clashes, Israel reversed decision to bar Jews from the Temple Mount festival

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Jared Kushner to finalize \$50 billion Palestinian economic plan on Middle East tour

Israel Navy leads international drill for major earthquake, tsunami

11 countries take part in week-long exercise at Haifa Port that simulates a massive temblor hitting region that would leave country essentially cut off and reliant on maritime-centered assistance

Yoav Zitun|Published: 08.12.19 , 21:34

Israel's navy has been training for a massive earthquake and ensuing tsunami that would lay waste to much of the country's infrastructure and cause tens of thousands of casualties, in a multinational drill involving 11 countries.

According to data, there is a significant earthquake in the region every 100 years, and the last one in Israel occurred in 1927.

"This is the largest international exercise the Israeli navy has led to date," said the commander of the navy's Haifa base, Brig. Gen. Gil Aginsky of the week-long exercise.

The drill practiced for a humanitarian crisis sparked by a magnitude 7.0 temblor and subsequent huge tsunami hitting the coastal plain of Israel. Troops trained to quickly assess the damage and select a port to bring in assistance as the maritime gateway to the country.

The navies of Greece, France and the United States participated in the main exercise at Haifa Port, while other countries including Germany, Italy, Canada, Chile and Cyprus focused on coordinating real-time assistance and providing information based on their own experiences.

As two of its neighbors (Syria and Lebanon) are enemy states and assuming that Egypt and Jordan would also be hit by such an earthquake, Israel would in fact essentially become an island in such a catastrophic event. As such, most of the international aid would arrive by sea and only a minority of the assistance would be delivered by air.

"A small aircraft carrier can deliver in one go what a C17 transport plane could bring in 54 sorties," Aginsky said Monday.

"We also practiced bringing assistance by air, but in such a situation we would have to deliver items that could be brought by sea, such as heavy engineering equipment including cranes and bulldozers for evacuation and treatment at multiple sites of destruction."

The planners of the exercise did not start from scratch, instead using as a basis the lessons learned from the IDF assistance to the 2010 Haiti earthquake, which killed 200,000 people, affected 3 million others and destroyed hundreds of thousands of buildings.

"Then too, they used the naval presence as an independent aid center, with a naval hospital that did not depend on infrastructure on land and created a logistics base at sea," the navy said.

"During our exercise we also practiced our response to the damage to the roads from Haifa southwards. When you act in such a coalition, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and could also be applied to scenarios such as major fires or boats sinking.

"We practiced inter-organizational cooperation with the National Emergency Authority at the Defense Ministry, Haifa Port, Rambam Hospital (in Haifa), the IDF Technology and Logistics Directorate and the Foreign Ministry - each playing their own part."

08.11.19

Israel reversed decision to bar Jews from the Temple Mount at Arab festival

Israel ends ban on Jewish worshippers at Temple Mount for Tisha B'Av

Decision comes as Al-Aqsa Mosque shut, security forces use stun grenades to disperse Muslim visitors to site after riots erupt; Jewish day of mourning for destruction of biblical temples coincides with Muslim festival of Eid al Adha

Yishai Porat and Elior Levy|Last update: 08.11.19 , 10:03

Israel on Sunday morning reversed its decision to bar Jews from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on Tisha B'Av, the Jewish day of mourning for the destruction of the biblical temples that once stood at the site.

The initial decision to prevent Jews from ascending to the Mount was made in light of the fact that the fast day coincided with the Muslim festival of Eid al Adha and tens of thousands of Muslim worshippers were due at the site, which is also holy to Islam.

A short time earlier, major clashes erupted between Muslim worshippers and Israeli security forces at the Temple Mount, where large numbers had gathered to mark Eid.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque was closed as a result of the clashes and police began dispersing the worshippers using stun grenades.

Palestinian medics said at least 14 people were wounded, one seriously, in the skirmishes with police at the site.

Police said at least four officers were wounded, while witnesses said at least two people were arrested.

Following the clashes, security officials also decided that the Gates of the Tribes in the northeastern area of the Temple Mount would be closed to arriving Muslim worshippers. Visitors were allowed to leave via the gate, but the entrance was blocked.

"At one point, thousands of worshippers who were at the Temple Mount crowded into the area of the Mugrabi Gate and began rioting, shouting for nationalist slogans and throwing stones, chairs and other objects at the officers," the police said.

"In light of this, the district commander issued an order to disperse the rioters up using the crowd dispersal methods and restore public order. The Jerusalem District commander will carry out a further situation assessment later in the day."

In a video filmed on the Temple Mount on Sunday, Waqf director Azzam al-Khatib and Mufti of Jerusalem Muhammad Hussein are seen encouraging those chanting nationalist slogans, calling out to them: "In spirit and blood we will redeem you."

Jerusalem District Police bolstered their numbers on the streets for the Tisha B'Av fast and the Muslim Eid, mainly in the Old City and the predominantly Arab eastern neighborhoods of the capital.

08.13.19

Hong Kong airport 2nd day Clashes between police and protesters

Clashes at Hong Kong airport between police and protesters

Clashes rock Hong Kong airport for second day as political crisis deepens  
President Donald Trump says U.S intelligence believes China is sending troops to its border with the former British colony while Hong Kong's chief executive warns the administrative region risked being 'smashed to pieces' as protests over Beijing's growing influence intensify

Reuters |Published: 08.13.19 , 22:25

Police and protesters clashed at Hong Kong's international airport on Tuesday after flights were disrupted for a second day as the political crisis in the former British colony deepened.

In Washington, U.S. President Donald Trump said the Chinese government was moving troops to the border with Hong Kong and he urged calm.

Trump said the situation in Hong Kong was tricky but he hoped it would work out for everybody, including China, and "for liberty" without anyone getting hurt or killed.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam warned that Hong Kong risked being "smashed to pieces".

Demonstrators who have been protesting for the past nine weeks against Beijing's growing influence in the special administrative region targeted the international airport for a second day on Tuesday.

Thousands of black-clad protesters jammed the terminal chanting, singing and waving banners.

Scuffles broke out in the evening after an injured man was held by a group of protesters. Some claimed he was an undercover mainland Chinese agent and initially refused to let him leave.

Medics, however, bundled him onto a stretcher and forced their way through jeering throngs to an ambulance.

Several police vehicles were blocked by protesters and riot police moved in amid chaotic scenes, using pepper spray to keep people back. A policeman pulled out a gun at one point.

Protesters also barricaded some passageways in the airport with luggage trolleys, metal barriers and other objects. Others clambered onto check-in counters as the protesters appeared to control part of the airport for a short while. At least two protesters were taken away by police.

Another mainland Chinese man was held and tied down by protesters at the airport after they thought he was posing as a reporter. The editor-in-chief of the state-run Global Times newspaper, Hu Xijin, tweeted that the man was a journalist with the paper. He was later taken away by ambulance.

The situation calmed down after a few hours without the violence worsening, and the crowds thinned out. Local media reported that an injunction had been issued by a local court to clear the airport of protesters.

The action followed an unprecedented shutdown of the airport on Monday. Hong Kong's Airport Authority said operations had been "seriously disrupted" on Tuesday and departing passengers had been unable to reach immigration counters.

The weeks of protests began as opposition to a now-suspended bill that would have allowed suspects to be extradited to mainland China and have swelled into wider calls for democracy.

Demonstrators say they are fighting the erosion of the "one country, two systems" arrangement that enshrined some autonomy for Hong Kong since China took it back from Britain in 1997.

The increasingly violent clashes between police and protesters have roiled the Asian financial hub. Hong Kong's stockmarket fell to a seven-month low on Tuesday.

The United Nations human rights commissioner, Michele Bachelet, urged Hong Kong authorities to exercise restraint and investigate evidence of their forces firing tear gas at protesters in ways banned under international law.

China responded by saying her comments sent the wrong signal to "violent criminal offenders".

Chief Executive Lam made an appeal for calm and restraint.

"Take a minute to look at our city, our home," she said, her voice cracking, at a news conference in the newly-fortified government headquarters complex.

"Can we bear to push it into the abyss and see it smashed to pieces?" she said.

Demonstrators want Lam to resign. She says she will stay.

The events present Chinese President Xi Jinping with one of his biggest challenges since he came to power in 2012.

Hong Kong legal experts say Beijing might be paving the way to use anti-terrorism laws to try to quell the demonstrations. On Monday,

Britain, a guarantor of the agreement that transferred Hong Kong to China in 1997, on Tuesday condemned the violence and urged dialogue.

"Concerning to see what's happening in Hong Kong and the worrying pictures of clashes between police & protesters at the airport," Foreign Minister Dominic Raab said on Twitter.

"I think paralysing the airport will be effective in forcing Carrie Lam to respond to us...it can further pressure Hong Kong's economy," said Dorothy Cheng, a 17-year-old protester.

Despite the trouble, some flights were still scheduled to take off early on Wednesday morning with some tourists still waiting in the departure hall and dining areas, according to Reuters journalists in the airport.

Some passengers challenged protesters over the delays as tempers began to fray.

Flag carrier Cathay Pacific said flights might still be cancelled at short notice. The airline, whose British heritage makes it a symbol of Hong Kong's colonial past, is also in a political bind.

China's civil aviation regulator demanded that the airline suspend staff who joined or backed the protests from flights in its airspace, pushing the carrier's shares past Monday's 10-year low.

Other Chinese airlines have offered passengers wanting to avoid Hong Kong a free switch to nearby destinations, such as Guangzhou, Macau, Shenzhen or Zhuhai, with the disruption sending shares in Shenzhen Airport Co Ltd surging.

08.13.19

Russia Nyonoksa village Nuclear rocket engine blast zooms radiation to 16 times danger

Russia recommends villagers leave area of accident as radiation levels spike

Russia's state weather service says radiation levels have risen by up to 16 times since last week after an explosion during a rocket engine test; Russia's state nuclear agency said 5 of its workers were killed in the blast

Reuters|Published: 08.13.19 , 16:26

Russian authorities have recommended residents of Nyonoksa leave their village while work is carried out nearby following a rocket engine accident that caused a spike in radiation last week, Interfax news agency cited local officials said.

Russia's state weather service said radiation levels spiked in the Russian city of Severodvinsk by up to 16 times last Thursday after what officials say was an explosion during a rocket engine test on a sea platform.

"We have received a notification...about the planned activities of the military authorities. In this regard, residents of Nyonoksa were asked to leave the territory of the village from August 14," authorities in Severodvinsk were quoted as saying.

In addition, medics who treated victims of the accident have been sent to Moscow for medical examination, TASS news agency cited an unnamed medical source as saying earlier on Tuesday.

No official explanation has been given for why the explosion caused a radiation spike. Russia's state nuclear agency has said five of its workers were killed.

The medics sent to Moscow have signed an agreement promising not to divulge information about the incident, TASS cited the source as saying.

07.22.19

Jared Kushner to finalize \$50 billion Palestinian economic plan on Middle East tour

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Palestinians poured scorn on the Trump administration's \$50 billion investment plan to help achieve Middle East peace, but U.S. Gulf Arab allies said the economic initiative had promise if a political settlement is reached

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White House senior adviser Jared Kushner will lead a U.S. delegation on a tour of the Middle East to finalize details of his proposed \$50 billion economic development plan for the Palestinians, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon, an administration official said on Sunday.

Kushner, Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt, State Department official Brian Hook and Kushner aide Avi Berkowitz are expected to make stops in Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the official said.

They leave late this month and return to Washington in early August.

The official said the purpose of the trip is to "continue on the momentum that was created at the workshop in Bahrain and finalize the economic portion of the plan."

They will also discuss the possibility of locating the development fund in Bahrain, the official said.

Kushner, U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law and the plan's main architect, sought to build support for his ambitious economic proposals for the Palestinian territories at an international meeting in Bahrain in June.

Palestinians poured scorn on the Trump administration's \$50 billion investment plan to help achieve Middle East peace, but U.S. Gulf Arab allies said the economic initiative had promise if a political settlement is reached.

Kushner and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin last week discussed creation of the fund with World Bank President David Malpass, the official said. The World Bank has a role in managing the fund.

The delegation was not expected to discuss Trump's long-awaited political plan for the Middle East, and when it will be released remains unclear.