

Newsletter Friday December 14, 2018

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PM vows to 'settle the score' with Samaria terrorists

"Our guiding principle is that whoever attacks us or tries to attack us will pay with their life. Our enemies know this and we will find them," PM says • IDF launches West Bank crackdown following shooting attacks, which it says Hamas is sponsoring.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu | Photo: EPA

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday vowed that Israel would "settle the score" with Palestinian terrorists carrying out attacks against Israelis.

Two Israeli soldiers, Kfir Infantry Brigade Sgt. Yosef Cohen, 19, and Staff Sgt. Yovel Mor Yosef, 20, were gunned down Thursday near the Givat Asaf outpost in the Binyamin region. A third soldier was critically injured in the attack and a civilian, 20-year-old Shira Sabag, sustained serious injuries.

The attack came on the heels of a similar drive-by shooting that took place on Sunday evening at a bus stop near the Samaria settlement of Ofra, just 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) north of Givat Asaf.

Seven Israelis, including a pregnant woman, were wounded in the attack. The woman's baby, delivered via emergency C-section at 30 weeks, was in critical condition for three days. He died on Wednesday evening.

"Last night [Wednesday] we settled the score with the murderers from the terrorist attacks in the Barkan Industrial Park and Ofra, and today [Thursday] we suffered a harsh attack in which two soldiers were killed," Netanyahu said.

"We will settle the score with whoever did this. Our guiding principle is that whoever attacks us or tries to attack us will pay with their life. Our enemies know this and we will find them," he said.

Thursday saw the Israeli military launch a massive manhunt for the Givat Asaf terrorists, setting up checkpoints and blocking roads. As of Thursday, Israeli forces were also surrounding Ramallah and the adjacent villages, where the terrorists may be hiding.

Netanyahu, who is also acting defense minister, **ordered increased IDF deployment across Judea and Samaria, and called for demolishing the terrorists' homes within 48 hours.**

IDF Spokesman in English Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus said augmented security measures were aimed at preventing copycat attacks.

"We know that when there is one attack there may be others," he said. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas condemned Israel's action and accused it of creating a climate conducive to violence.

"This atmosphere created by the frequent Israeli raids of the cities, and the absence of hope for peace, lead to this series of violence that both peoples are paying the price for," he said in a statement.

Israeli defense officials said Hamas, the terrorist group that rules the **Gaza Strip**, was **behind this week's attacks**.

The group lauded the shootings, threatening they were "only the beginning."

Newsletter Thursday December 13, 2018

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Croatia's purchase of Israeli jets stalled over necessary US approval

Croatian PM says tender to be "declared null and void" **if Israeli technological upgrades to the jets are removed prior to delivery** • "The burden of obtaining consent from the U.S. for the delivery of the planes was taken on by the Israeli side," he says.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff

An Israeli F-16 fighter jet | Illustration: AFP

A Croatian deal to buy 12 used F-16 jets from Israel worth \$500 million could be in jeopardy if the United States does not approve the sale, officials said Wednesday.

The tentative deal to purchase the upgraded F-16 "Barak" ("Lightning") fighter jets from Israel was made earlier this year pending a U.S. approval allowing Israel to sell the American-made jets to a third party.

Israel has upgraded the jets with sophisticated **electronic systems – crucial in Croatia's decision to buy** the planes from Israel rather than from the U.S.

The U.S. State Department is now hinting that the upgrades should be removed before the jets can be sold.

Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković said, "We will either buy the planes that were originally offered [by Israel] or the tender will be declared null and void, there is no dilemma about it."

"The burden of obtaining consent from the United States for the delivery of the planes was taken on by the Israeli side," Plenković said. "At this moment, this is a matter of relations between Israel and the United States."

Relations between the Trump administration and Israel have been very close, particularly on defense issues.

The State Department said on Tuesday that it "formally notified Congress of this transfer case." It added: "Although certain details are pending, the department would like to see cooperation from all parties involved to come to a successful resolution."

The deal is Croatia's largest single military purchase since it split from the Yugoslav federation in the 1991-1995 war.

NATO member **Croatia faces a mini arms race with Russian ally Serbia**, which recently received six used Russian MiG-29 fighter jets.

Newsletter Wednesday December 12, 2018

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US poised to present Middle East peace plan 'soon,' top official says

The American administration is hopeful that its Israeli-Palestinian peace plan will be released "**in the next couple of months**," says senior Trump adviser Jared Kushner • "Not every side is going to love" the proposed agreement, he cautions.

Yoni Hersch and Israel Hayom Staff

White House adviser Jared Kushner | Photo: AP

Following months of having to focus on the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and its subsequent fallout, the White House is now ready to move its attention in the Middle East back to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"We're focused now on the broader region, which is figuring out how to hopefully bring a deal together between the Israelis and the Palestinians," Jared Kushner, a senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump, his father-in-law, told Fox News on Monday.

Kushner also said the administration was hopeful that its Israeli-Palestinian peace plan would be released "in the next couple of months," but cautioned that "not every side is going to love" the proposed agreement.

"There's enough in it and enough reasons why people should take it and move forward," Kushner said. "And this plan will keep the Israeli people safe and give them a good future, but also give a real opportunity and hope for the Palestinian people so that they can live much better lives."

He added: "I've been saying a lot that you shouldn't be hijacking your children's future because of your grandparents' conflict. This is a conflict that has been going on for way too long."

Newsletter Tuesday December 11, 2018

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Report: Australia to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital

Cabinet national security committee gives green light for controversial measure, just months after Scott Morrison becomes prime minister • Decision to culminate with opening of consular office in Jerusalem rather than relocation of embassy.

Israel Hayom Staff

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison | Photo: Reuters

The Australian government is expected to officially recognize Jerusalem or parts of it as Israel's capital on Tuesday, Australian outlets reported on Tuesday.

According to the local TV station SBS, a national security committee gave the green light for the controversial measure on Monday. The cabinet will reportedly stop short of announcing the relocation of the Australian Embassy to Jerusalem due to the estimated

200 million Australian dollars (\$144 million) it would cost but will open a new consular office in the city.

Israel regards Jerusalem as its capital, but most countries believe the city's final status should be determined through the peace process between Israelis and the Palestinians, who both seek to have it as their official capital. As a result, the vast majority of embassies in Israel are outside the city.

In December 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump said the U.S. recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The following May the U.S. Embassy to Israel relocated to the city, and two days later Guatemala followed suit. Brazil's incoming president told Israel Hayom in November that he would recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital after taking office in January.

In October, newly appointed Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that he was open to officially recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the Australian Embassy there from its current location in Tel Aviv. "When sensible suggestions are put forward that are consistent with your policy positioning and in this case pursuing a two-state solution, Australia should be open-minded to this and I am open-minded to this and our government is open-minded to this," he said, but added that Australia was still committed to a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Morrison, who became prime minister after the Liberal party deposed its leader in August, is pro-Israel and an evangelical Christian.

Morrison's stance may have been designed to woo the large Jewish population in Sydney suburb of Wentworth ahead of the critical by-election in October. But the Liberal Party's candidate, former Australian Ambassador to Israel Dave Sharma, ultimately lost.

In October, former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull was told by Indonesian President Joko Widodo that the latter had "serious concerns" about any move to Jerusalem. "There is no question, were that move to occur, it would be met with a very negative reaction in Indonesia. This is after all the largest Muslim-majority country in the world," Turnbull told reporters following the meeting.

Palestinians have also been outraged by the new government's approach. The Palestinian Ambassador in Canberra Izzat Salah Abdulhadi recently said that moving the embassy to Jerusalem "would hurt Australia's international standing and its relations with Arab and Muslim countries."

Newsletter Monday December 10, 2018

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Amid tunnel tensions, Lebanese army sends troops to Israeli border

Hezbollah tunnels are "blatant violation" of U.N. resolution, IDF chief Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot tells U.N. force in Lebanon head Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col • Syrian news agency reports Israeli targets intercepted near Damascus airport, then retracts report.

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

UNIFIL Commander Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col | Screenshot: YouTube

The Lebanese army is sending reinforcements to the border with Israel, Lebanese media outlets reported Sunday. The move comes amid fears of a security escalation once IDF engineering units begin working on the Lebanese side of the border to neutralize cross-border terrorist tunnels dug by the Hezbollah terrorist group.

Last week, Israel began an open-ended operation to destroy the tunnels, which is expected to continue for weeks and possibly months.

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot met with Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col, head of the U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon, on Sunday to discuss Hezbollah's attack tunnels.

IDF Spokesperson's Unit

IDF chief of staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot with UNIFIL commander Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col, Sunday

Eizenkot told Del Col the tunnels are a "blatant violation" of U.N. cease-fire Resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 Second Lebanon War between Israel and Hezbollah.

He expressed the importance of the peacekeepers in enforcing the resolution and working to neutralize the tunnels on the Lebanese side of the border, and said responsibility for the tunnels ultimately falls on the Lebanese government.

Hezbollah, for its part, maintained its policy of "denial and ridicule" toward Israel's anti-tunnel operation.

Meanwhile, Syria's state-run news agency, SANA, reported that Syrian air defenses had intercepted Israeli targets in the skies around Damascus international airport.

But later in the day it retracted the report, saying the attack did not actually happen.

"Our air defenses intercepted enemy aerial targets in the vicinity of Damascus international airport in southern Damascus," SANA said in its initial report.

It was speculated that Iranian militias stationed in the area were the actual targets of the alleged attack.

The agency later removed the report from its website. Later, it quoted a source at the Damascus international airport as saying, "There was no attack on the airport and the air traffic is normal."

However, U.K.-based war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said there had been firing near the airport.

"Several explosion sounds were heard in Damascus suburbs ... as air defenses were launched" close to the airport, it said.

Newsletter Sunday December 9, 2018

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Brazil delivers on promise to vote with Israel

Brazil departs from decades-old stance by voting with Israel at the U.N. in support of a General Assembly rebuke of Hamas • Son of President-elect Jair Bolsonaro: Brazil no longer diplomatic dwarf • Incoming president has vowed to be pro-Israel.

Sandra Rejwan

President-elect **Jair Bolsonaro** in Jerusalem | Screenshot: Twitter

The symbolic victory against Hamas at the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday, in which 87 nations supported a draft resolution condemning Hamas, marked another milestone: Brazil took an unprecedented step by siding with Israel and the U.S.

The U.S.-sponsored text would have for the first time condemned the Islamic terrorist group Hamas, which controls Gaza. Although it won a plurality of votes in the assembly, it failed to win the required two-thirds majority.

Eduardo Bolsonaro, the son of **Brazil's President-elect Jair Bolsonaro** and a member of the national parliament, tweeted: "**This is the first time Brazil votes in favor of Israel and against the terrorist groups**, this is a victory! Brazil will no longer be a diplomatic dwarf." Bolsonaro said that this new diplomatic posture was a result of his father's statements and

the efforts behind the scenes to influence the country's foreign policy in the transition period (Bolsonaro is set to take office in January 2019).

A month ago the president-elect told Israel Hayom **that his incoming administration will depart from Brasilia's pro-Palestinian stance**. He further said that it would recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and that Israel "can count on having our vote in the U.N." He added: "I know that often the vote is almost symbolic, but it helps to define the position a country intends to take. Rest assured that you can depend on our vote in the U.N. on almost all the issues having to do with Israel."

After Thursday's vote, the incoming president tweeted a picture of himself on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, with the caption "Good Night Everyone!"

Bolsonaro ran as an anti-establishment candidate who would take Brazil on a new path, including on foreign policy. His latest pro-Israeli statements can be credited, in part, to the work of Israeli Ambassador to Brazil Yossi Shelley.

Newsletter Sunday December 9, 2018

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Survey: 38% of Jews in Europe are thinking about leaving

Majority of **over 16,000** European Jews surveyed say **anti-Semitism has spiked** in the past five years • 30% have experienced anti-Semitic attacks • Acting head of World Zionist Organization demands immediate implementation of policies to fight anti-Semitism.

Eldad Beck

A gravestone is vandalized at a Jewish cemetery in Poland | Archives: Adam Shidlovsky

Growing anti-Semitism has prompted 38% of European Jews to consider leaving Europe, a new report by a European human rights agency reveals.

The report was compiled by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, which was established to uphold human rights and fight all forms of racism. According to the report, 89% of Jews surveyed said that anti-Semitism in the EU had risen significantly in the past five years, with 85% saying that anti-Semitism was the most serious problem they faced.

The report is based on the largest survey on anti-Semitism conducted anywhere in the world, which included **16,400 respondents from 28 EU member nations**.

Nearly one-third (30%) of respondents said they had personally experienced anti-Semitic attacks. Most of those were people whose appearance identified them as Jews.

Of the tens of thousands of Jews surveyed, 80% told the EUAFR that they had refrained from reporting anti-Semitic incidents to the police or other authorities, thereby skewing official reports on the scope of anti-Semitism in a number of countries. A third of respondents said they chose to stay away from Jewish events or Jewish institutions out of fear for their personal safety.

Respondents reported that the most common anti-Semitic comments they encountered included "Jews have too much power and influence"; "Jews exploit the Holocaust for their own interests"; and "Israel treats the Palestinians like the Nazis treated the Jews."

Yaakov Hagoel, vice chairman of the World Zionist Organization, said that the report showed that decisions taken to combat anti-Semitism must be implemented immediately.

"We expect ... legislation and enforcement, budgets to implement decisions, education [about anti-Semitism], public outreach and security at Jewish institutions," Hagoel said.

"Jews are loyal citizens of the countries where they have decided to live, and the governments of those European countries have a responsibility to ensure their safety," he added.

Newsletter Friday December 7, 2018

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Despite broad support, US fails to win UN condemnation of Hamas

Resolution, condemning Hamas' "obvious, grotesque terrorism," would have been first

General Assembly censure of Hamas • Resolution wins simple majority but fails to

secure required two-thirds • Hamas thanks states "that stood by our people's resistance."

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Outgoing U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley | Photo: Reuters

A U.S.-sponsored draft resolution that for the first time would have condemned the Islamic terrorist group Hamas, which controls Gaza, failed to win the required two-thirds majority in the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday.

Before the vote on the resolution, the 193-member world body had narrowly voted to require a two-thirds majority for approval as sought by Arab nations for rather than the simple majority urged by the United States.

Outgoing U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley told the assembly before the vote that it could make history and unconditionally speak out against Hamas, which she called "one of the most obvious and grotesque cases of terrorism in the world."

"What the U.N. chooses to do today will speak volumes about each country's seriousness when it comes to condemning anti-Semitism," she said. "Because there is nothing more anti-Semitic than saying terrorism is not terrorism when it's used against the Jewish people and the Jewish state."

Haley had written to member states on Monday to urge them to vote for the U.S.-drafted text, warning them: "The United States takes the outcome of this vote very seriously."

Haley, who will step down at the end of the year, has been a staunch defender of Israel.

"Before the General Assembly can credibly advocate compromise and reconciliation between the Palestinians and Israel, it must on record, unambiguously and unconditionally, condemn Hamas terrorism," Haley told the body before the vote.

But the vote on the resolution to condemn Hamas was 87 in favor against 57 opposed, with 33 abstentions – a plurality, but short of the two-thirds requirement to adopt it. The vote to require a two-thirds majority was much closer, 75-72, with 26 abstentions and several countries changing their votes to "yes" at the last minute.

In an official statement, Hamas thanked U.N. member states "that stood by our people's resistance and the justice of their cause" and attacked Haley, who, it said, "is known for her extremism and her positions that support the Zionist terrorism in Palestine."

Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters that "rejecting the American drafted resolution against the resistance represents a blow to the American administration and reaffirms the legitimacy of the resistance."

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, whose Fatah party is locked in a bitter decade long split with Hamas, also welcomed the resolution's defeat saying: "The Palestinian presidency will not allow for the condemnation of the national Palestinian struggle."

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Danny Danon said the countries that rejected the draft resolution should be ashamed.

By contrast, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised the "large majority" – 87 countries – "that took a stance against Hamas" for the first time, calling it "an important achievement for the United States and Israel."

The U.S. attempt to condemn Hamas and demand that the terrorist group stop firing rockets into Israel, using "airborne incendiary devices" and putting civilians at risk sparked a Palestinian-backed amendment sponsored by Bolivia.

It outlined the basis for comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace and referred to a December 2016 Security Council resolution that condemned Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem as a "flagrant violation" of international law. It also reaffirmed "unwavering support" for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – issues not included in the U.S. draft.

But before the vote on the U.S. draft resolution, Bolivian Ambassador Sacha Llorenty Soliz withdrew the amendment.

That was because the Palestinians and their supporters wanted a vote instead on a short rival resolution titled "Comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East" sponsored by Ireland that included the exact language of the amendment – but no mention of Hamas.

After the U.S. draft on Hamas failed to win adoption, the General Assembly overwhelmingly approved the Irish resolution by a vote of 156-6, with 12 abstentions.

It calls for "the achievement, without delay" of lasting Mideast peace on the basis of U.N. resolutions, singling out the December 2016 measure. And it reaffirms "unwavering support ... for the two-state solution of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders, based on the pre-1967 borders."

The rival resolutions reflect the deep divisions among the 193 U.N. member states over the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and the failure to end it.

Representing the Arab position, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the U.N. Abdallah al-Mouallimi said the U.S. resolution would "undermine the two-state solution, which we aspire to."

He said it would also divert focus away from Israel's occupation, settlement activities and "blockade of Gaza."

Haley sharply criticized the United Nations as having an anti-Israel bias, noting that "over the years, the U.N. has voted to condemn Israel over 500 times" – an average of 20 times a year.

She stressed that the Hamas charter "openly calls for the destruction of Israel" and cited a variety of "barbaric terrorist tactics" it has used including suicide bombers and thousands of rockets, flaming kites and balloons.

Haley called condemnation of Hamas "an essential step" to a peace settlement.

The United States changed its initial draft resolution to get backing from the 28-nation European Union, adding that it supports a comprehensive peace agreement "bearing in mind relevant United Nations resolutions."

But the resolution that was voted on never mentioned a two-state solution or referred to Israeli actions against the Palestinians, which some countries considered unbalanced.

The overwhelming support for the Irish resolution reflects global support for action "without delay" toward an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a two-state solution.

Newsletter Thursday December 6, 2018

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Report: Hezbollah mobilizing missiles from Syria to south Lebanon

Shiite terrorist group is concerned the Israeli operation to neutralize its cross-border terror tunnels heralds a wider IDF campaign • Hezbollah said to deploy Soviet-made ballistic missiles, Iranian short-range projectiles near south Lebanon border.

Israel Hayom Staff

An OTR-21 Tochka missile | Illustration: Urek Meniashvili / Wikipedia

Hezbollah has begun mobilizing missiles from Syria to southern Lebanon in a bid to counter a potential Israeli strike, rebel-affiliated media outlets in Syria reported Thursday.

The Shiite terrorist group is reportedly concerned that the Israeli operation to neutralize its cross-border terror tunnels is the opening move to a wider military campaign, the reports said.

Syrian opposition officials said that Hezbollah was moving OTR-21 Tochka missile batteries to southern Lebanon. The OTR-21 is a Soviet-made tactical ballistic missile system ranging between 15 and 185 kilometers (9 to 115 miles).

Other reports said Hezbollah was also deploying short-range Iranian-made projectiles in southern Lebanon, adding that the group has blocked dozens of roads in the area to allow the convoy smooth transport.

Newsletter Wednesday December 5, 2018

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PM: Hezbollah tunnels built with direct support, funding from Iran

"Hezbollah tunnels were built with one purpose in mind, to murder innocent Israelis" and are "an unacceptable act of wanton aggression," PM Netanyahu asserts • "At this time, there is no subterranean threat from the Lebanese border," IDF official says.

Lilach Shoval and Israel Hayom Staff

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Tuesday | Photo: Reuters

Operation Northern Shield, seeking to expose and neutralize terror tunnels dug by Hezbollah under the Israel-Lebanon border was over a year and a half in the making, the military said Tuesday.

Operations were currently focused on neutralizing a tunnel breaching nearly 200 meters (656 feet) into Israeli territory near the northern town of Metula. The tunnel is 2 meters (6 feet) high and 2 meters wide, and runs 25 meters (82 feet) deep, the IDF said.

Video: Reuters

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot and IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis held a special press conference at the IDF's headquarters in Tel Aviv Tuesday, in which they elaborated on the operation.

"This morning, the IDF launched a campaign to expose and neutralize a network of cross-border terror tunnels built by Hezbollah with direct support and funding from Iran," Netanyahu said.

"[The tunnels] were built with one purpose in mind – to attack and murder innocent Israeli men, women and children. This is a grave violation of Israel's sovereignty and a gross violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701. It is an unacceptable act of wanton aggression.

"The terror tunnel that was exposed today was built under a home in a civilian neighborhood in southern Lebanon. Now, this is just one more example of how Hezbollah is committing a double war crime. They target civilians while hiding behind civilians. And this must be condemned loudly and clearly by all nations that care about peace, freedom and human dignity," Netanyahu said.

"I have a message for the people of Lebanon: Hezbollah is putting your lives in danger. They are sacrificing your well-being to serve the aggressive purposes of Iran. Israel holds the Lebanese government accountable for all terror activity emanating from Lebanon against Israel.

"Like any other nation, Israel maintains the right to defend itself," he asserted. "We will continue to do all that is necessary to defend ourselves against Iran's efforts to use Lebanon, Syria and Gaza as terrorist bases to attack Israel.

"Just as we have exposed and dismantled terror tunnels build by Hamas under our border with Gaza, we will expose and dismantle the terror tunnels of Hezbollah alongside our border with Lebanon."

Reuters

An IDF bulldozer digs near the Israel-Lebanon border, Tuesday
Netanyahu, who on Monday met with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Brussels, said the two discussed "imposing new sanctions against Hezbollah after this act of aggression. I will also speak in the coming days with other world leaders along the same lines, including U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres."

The prime minister said he has ordered the Israeli mission to the U.N. to call on the Security Council to convene an urgent meeting to discuss Hezbollah and its actions.

Netanyahu noted that the decision to greenlight the operation was made by the Diplomatic-Security Cabinet weeks ago.

Lauding IDF activities, Netanyahu stressed that "Hezbollah knows that anyone who attacks Israel will be made to pay a heavy price. Israel will continue to do all that is necessary to protect our people and defend our borders."

Eizenkot noted that "since late 2014, an intelligence, engineering and technological effort has been made to track Hezbollah's tunnel enterprise. This morning [Tuesday] we launched an operation aimed at removing this threat and undermine Iran's efforts to entrench its presence on the northern border.

"The operation was launched before the tunnel threat became imminent on Israeli communities and bases near the border. I want to express my great appreciation to the troops on the ground. The IDF remains ready for any development.

Manelis said that Hezbollah's tunneling efforts were discovered thanks to the IDF's "painstaking work," adding it may be weeks before Operation Northern Shield is concluded.

"This operation will take time and we are preparing for every scenario. Our grip of Hezbollah's tunnel project is very good. We launched this operation before the tunnels became operational. At this time, there is no subterranean threat from the Lebanese border," he said.

The IDF believes Hezbollah's tunneling project was a well-kept secret even within the Shiite terrorist group.

Defense officials said neutralizing the tunnels would take several weeks, during which the IDF will map them out and destroy them.

Bracing for a potential border flare-up, the military has bolstered deployment along the northern frontier, including air defense systems as well as regular and special forces.

IDF Spokesman in Arabic Maj. Avichay Adraee posted a message on Twitter warning the Lebanese army and Hezbollah to stay away, saying: "Your lives are in danger, you have been warned."

Newsletter Tuesday December 4, 2018

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| PA President Abbas discusses Jerusalem with pope at Vatican meeting

Vatican backs two-state solution, encourages renewal of peace process, notes "legitimate aspirations of both" Jews and Palestinians • Pope urges end to "extremism and

fundamentalism" in the Middle East • PA president tells pope: We are counting on you.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

PA President Mahmoud Abbas meets with Pope Francis at the Vatican, Monday | Photo: Reuters

The Vatican on Monday voiced support for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and expressed concern over the status of Jerusalem as Pope Francis and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas held their first meeting since the United States moved its embassy to Jerusalem, officially recognizing the city as Israel's capital.

The U.S. move drew outrage among Palestinians, who envision parts of Jerusalem as the future capital of an independent Palestinian state.

At Monday's meeting, Abbas and Francis embraced and kissed on the cheek as the pontiff ushered the Palestinian leader to a library in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace for a **private, 20-minute meeting.**

"Particular attention was reserved for the status of Jerusalem, underlining the importance of recognizing and preserving its identity and the universal value of the holy city for the three Abrahamic religions," a Vatican statement said, referring to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The statement also said Abbas and the pope discussed efforts to reactivate the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and hoped for "a renewed commitment on the part of the international community to meet the legitimate aspirations of both peoples."

They also urged an end to "extremism and fundamentalism" in the Middle East, and called for reconciliation among Palestinian factions. Abbas' Fatah party is dominant in the West Bank, while the Islamist terrorist group Hamas controls Gaza, and the two rival factions have been at odds since Hamas violently routed Fatah from Gaza in 2007.

The Vatican expressed concern last year at Trump's decision to relocate the American Embassy to Jerusalem, saying the city's "status quo" should be respected. Francis has called for all to honor U.N. resolutions on the city.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said Abbas briefed the pope on "the implications of the U.S. decision."

As Abbas was leaving the library, he told the pope: "We are counting on you." It was not clear what he was referring to.

Newsletter Tuesday December 4, 2018

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Israel launches operation to counter Hezbollah tunnels

Israeli military on high alert as Operation Northern Shield aims to neutralize multiple terror tunnels running under the Israel-Lebanon border • "Those who try to harm the State of Israel will be made to pay a heavy price," Prime Minister Netanyahu says.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

An IDF bulldozer digs near the Israel-Lebanon border, Tuesday | Photo: Reuters

The Israel Defense Forces on Tuesday launched an operation to expose and neutralize cross-border terror tunnels dug by Hezbollah under the Israel-Lebanon security fence. The military did not disclose how many tunnels snake into Israeli territory from Lebanon or how long the operation would last.

In a statement, the military stressed that the operation, code-named "Northern Shield," was underway on the Israeli side of the border. The military added that with the exception of a few hundred feet near the security fence, which were declared a restricted military zone, the residents of the Israeli communities near the border could maintain their usual daily routine.

Video: IDF Spokesperson's Unit

The operation comes against the backdrop of an urgent meeting between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Brussels Monday, where the two discussed "regional developments."

Israeli media reported that Netanyahu was poised to ask Pompeo for the United States' support in the event of an Israeli strike on Hezbollah infrastructure in Lebanon.

The Prime Minister's Office said the two discussed ways to "work together to curb Iranian aggression in the region – Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere," as well as the joint effort "to achieve peace and security for all."

Later on Tuesday, Netanyahu issued a statement saying, "This morning, the IDF launched Operation Northern Shield with aim of exposing and neutralizing cross-border terror tunnels from Lebanon. We are proud of IDF officers and soldiers who carry out these complex missions and for the operational success noted so far."

"Those who try to harm the State of Israel will be made to pay a heavy price," the statement continued. "We are operating with determination in all sectors and we will continue to launch overt and covert operations to ensure Israel's security."

A senior political source told Israel Hayom that members of the Diplomatic-Security Cabinet were barred from commenting on the operation in the media.

According to defense officials privy to the issue, Operation Northern Shield was launched after lengthy overnight consultations between IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot and senior defense officials.

Reuters

Military vehicles are seen from the village of Kafr Kila, in south Lebanon, Tuesday
Israel views the Iranian-backed Hezbollah and its vast arsenal of some 150,000
projectiles as a major threat.

Bracing for a potential border flare-up, the military has bolstered deployment along the
northern frontier, including air defense systems as well as regular and special forces.

'A blatant violation of U.N. resolutions'

In a press briefing, IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis offered more details on
the operation.

"The IDF first identified Hezbollah efforts to dig tunnels near the border in 2006. These
efforts increased after the [Second Lebanon] War [in 2006], and in 2012, we learned of a
plan that [Hezbollah leader Hassan] Nasrallah refers to as the 'plan to conquer the
Galilee,' which led us to believe that the offensive tunnels were the surprise element in
this scheme.

"In 2013, the IDF examined several indicators for the existence of tunnels near the
northern border and ruled it out given their [Hezbollah's] technological capabilities," he
said.

"In October 2014, after Operation Protective Edge [in Gaza], a special technological-
intelligence team was set up in the Northern Command and tasked with exposing
Hezbollah's tunnel enterprise. The team worked for four years, compiling the intelligence
that culminated with today's operation."

According to Manelis, "Over the years, various operational technologies from other
sectors were deployed along the Blue Line [the border demarcation between Lebanon and
Israel set by the U.N.] and allowed Military Intelligence to provide the Combat
Engineering Corps with better information on which to base and launch the operation and
neutralize the tunnels. Then, when the operational conditions presented themselves, the
IDF launched Operation Northern Shield."

Eyal Margolin / JINI

The IDF did not disclose how many tunnels snake into Israeli territory from Lebanon or
how long the operation would last

Hezbollah's cross-border tunnels "are a blatant violation of Israeli sovereignty and of U.N.
Resolution 1701," he continued. "The tunnels are built on Lebanese soil and pose a threat
to both the Lebanese population and Lebanon itself. The IDF holds the Lebanese
government responsible for everything that happens on its side of the Blue Line.

"The fact that Hezbollah is building tunnels under Israeli surveillance proves that the Lebanese army has no control on the ground and that Hezbollah dominates south Lebanon and uses Iranian money and knowledge to do so."

He further said that IDF deployment in the northern sector has been increased and that "we are ready for any development. Nevertheless, there are no special instructions for the area's residents. Local mayors have and are being kept abreast of the necessary developments," he said.

Manelis noted that the IDF was operating under the assumption that Hezbollah was monitoring its progress.

"We are on high alert and if needed – we know what to do. The operation was launched at this time because the operational conditions are right and we have the technological abilities at our disposal."

He stressed that "the tunnels pose no threat to the Israeli public – we're dealing with them before they can become a threat. We are determined to make sure this doesn't pose a threat to the border-adjacent communities."

Commenting on the operation, Foreign Ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon tweeted, "Hezbollah attack tunnels crossing from Lebanon into Israel is a blatant violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, it is an act of aggression. Israel will do its utmost to protect its citizens and its territory against such aggression."

Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser, a senior researcher at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and former head of the Military Intelligence's Research Division noted that Operation Northern Shield may prompt a security escalation on the border.

The IDF, he said, has humiliated Hezbollah, and while the Shiite terrorist group has not reacted thus far, the IDF must remain alert.

According to Kuperwasser, while the operation is being carried out in Israeli territory, it concerns infrastructure that Hezbollah has spent years developing, thus exposing its intelligence vulnerabilities and increasing the potential for retaliation that could result in a border flare-up.

Sivan Yechieli, head of the Forum of Frontline Communities in the North, told Israel Hayom that the residents were not surprised by the tunnels' discovery.

"Residents in the area have been very concerned about this issue for years, and they remain concerned," he said.

"We were always told that the IDF had no knowledge of existing terror tunnels in the area, and it's clear to me that once the IDF had the intelligence and the technological ability to identify tunnels, the operation was launched."

"Israel cannot tolerate a violation of its sovereignty in the north," he added. "Clearly, a threat of this nature requires a response. We have every faith in the military."