

# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update February 7, 2019*** **(2 Adar-A, 5779)**



## ***For the Yachad Report Newsletter For February 2019***

**ISRAEL BEGINS BUILDING MASSIVE FENCE ON GAZA BORDER:** Israel's Defense Ministry announced on Sunday 3 Feb. 2019 that it has begun the final phase of construction of a galvanized steel barrier 20 feet high that will run the length of its frontier border with the Gaza Strip. The 20,000-ton barrier will extend for 40 miles along the Gaza border and have a "smart fence" that can detect Hamas attack tunnels underground. "Over the weekend we began building the above-ground barrier along the Gaza border," PM Benjamin Netanyahu told journalists. The barrier "will prevent terrorists from Gaza from penetrating into our territory on the ground," he said. "The barrier is similar to the one on the Egyptian border, but it has significant improvements and includes innovative security elements," according to the statement from the ministry. The project will be completed by the end of 2019 and will cost approximately \$833 million. Israel began constructing the new barrier around the Strip in 2016. Israel first focused on the underground portion after the 2014 Gaza war in which Hamas used underground terror tunnels to attack Israeli troops. Palestinians have gathered almost weekly for a year for protests that have often turned violent. Israel accuses Hamas of using the protests as cover to carry out violence, including killing two Israeli soldiers, launching rockets and arson balloons.

**UN AMBASSADORS TOUR HEZBOLLAH TUNNELS:** Dozens of UN ambassadors toured a site near Metula in the north of Israel, where the IDF discovered a Hezbollah terror tunnel during Operation Northern Shield. Engineering troops gave the diplomats a tour of the tunnel using a robotic camera. The tour was organized by Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Dannon. The diplomats met with President Reuven Rivlin and PM Benjamin Netanyahu in the morning before flying, with seven helicopters, from Jerusalem to the north of the country. During their meeting, Netanyahu stressed the Iranian chokehold on Lebanon via Hezbollah. "Iran has many branches, one of them is Hezbollah, which has now joined the Lebanese government. This is a misleading description — Hezbollah actually controls the Lebanese government and this means that Iran controls the Lebanese government," Netanyahu said. "It is important to convey this

powerful message — just as we prevented the terror tunnels from reaching Israel, we will thwart any aggression from Lebanon, Syria or Iran itself.” Danny Dannon briefed the group on the tunnels discovered by the IDF. He also stressed the high cost of their construction and the Iranian funding for them.

"The ambassadors hear a lot about our border with Lebanon and Hezbollah, but when you come here and see the tunnel, you cannot argue with the facts. The Iranian money reaches our border and threatens the citizens of Israel. On the day we move to defend ourselves and the UN will want to condemn us, the ambassadors standing here will understand the reality," Dannon said. The Panamanian Ambassador Melitón Arrocha Ruíz said that he came to see firsthand the hostile activities against Israel. “We will pass on what we saw and convey how Israel is thriving, open and democratic and that we all certainly share similar rule of law values,” he said. South Sudan Ambassador Akuei Bona Malwal noted the importance of coming to see the facts on the ground: “For those of us who work in NY and hear all sorts of things, the best way is to come and see and feel exactly what is happening. We came to Israel to see the challenges and how they are being handled.” The ambassador also pointed out the absurdity of the tunnels being dug under the nose of UN peacekeepers.

**USA WILL RETAIN SOME TROOPS IN SYRIA TO ‘PROTECT ISRAEL’:** President Donald Trump said the United States would retain influence in Syria in order to protect Israel, even as USA troops are withdrawn. “We’re going to be there and we’re going to be staying. We have to protect Israel,” Trump told Margaret Brennan on CBS’s “Face The Nation” on Sunday 3 Feb. 2019. Trump suggested the continued USA presence in Iraq would be a bulwark against Iran’s influence in the region. “I want to be able to watch Iran. We have an unbelievable and expensive military base built in Iraq. It’s perfectly situated for looking at all of the different parts of the troubled Middle East. And this is what a lot of people don’t understand. We’re going to keep watching and we’re going to keep seeing and if there’s trouble, if somebody is looking to do nuclear weapons, we’re going to know it before they do,” he said. He called Iran “a vicious country that kills many people.”

**DOZENS OF HAMAS, PFLP MEMBERS HOLD SENIOR POSITIONS IN PRO-BDS NGOS:** Israel's Strategic Affairs Ministry has found more than 100 links between the internationally-designated terrorist organizations Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the BDS movement. More than 30 members of Hamas and PFLP hold senior positions in BDS-promoting NGOs. Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan said the new report "reveals the true nature and goals of the BDS movement and its connection to terrorism and anti-Semitism. BDS rejects Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state within any borders. They want to see Israel wiped off the map. Promoting boycotts is just a different means to achieve this goal. I am calling on all governments, EU institutions, philanthropies, banks, and fundraising platforms to end all support for organizations linked to terror."

**DOZENS PROTEST OUTSIDE CARNEGIE HALL AS ISRAELI PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA PLAYS:** Dozens of anti-Israel demonstrators gathered outside New York’s prestigious Carnegie Hall on Sunday 3 Feb. 2019 to protest a performance by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. The demonstration was organized by Adalah-NY, a group that supports the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel. Protesters held up signs reading “Israel fiddles while Palestine burns” and “Boycott Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.” Despite the demonstration, the performance went ahead as planned. Over 100 musicians from the orchestra were in the USA for a week of concerts set to include performances in New York, Florida, and Michigan. Israel’s consul general in New York, Dani Dayan, was at the Sunday show. “I am proud that Israel’s Philharmonic Orchestra came to New York. Israeli culture is sought after all over the world and brings pride to Israel,” he said in a statement. “No protest will stop Israeli culture from blossoming in Israel and beyond. The dogs bark, and our melody continues.”

**JULIAN EDELMAN IS THE FIRST JEWISH SUPER BOWL MVP:** Wide receiver Julian Edelman was named Most Valuable Player as the New England Patriots beat the Los Angeles Rams in Super Bowl LIII in

Atlanta on Sunday 3 Feb. 2019. Edelman provided some of the rare offensive highlights in a torpid defensive game with a game-high 10 catches for 141 yards. Eight of those receptions led to first-downs, keeping the ball out of the hands of the Rams' potent young quarterback, Jared Goff. Edelman, 32, is one of only a few Jewish players in the league. Edelman has become renowned in large part because of his clutch performances in the playoffs. He has made a series of memorable catches, including one in the 2017 Super Bowl that ranks among the wildest in championship games. Edelman also has the second most postseason receptions of all time. Edelman has three seasons of over 90 receptions and two seasons of more than 1,000 receiving yards.

**JANUARY TOURISM TO ISRAEL JUMPS BY 11% COMPARED TO LAST YEAR:** The number of tourists who entered Israel in January of this year represented an 11% increase in relation to January 2018, and a 35% increase from January 2017, according to the Tourism Ministry. "The rise in the number of tourists over several years is proof of the quality of the Israeli tourism industry," said Tourism Minister Yariv Levin. "I hope and believe that 2019 will continue this unprecedented momentum in tourism that we have created in the past several years." The majority of tourists to Israel are Christians (61%) followed by Jews (22%). Most hail from the USA, France, and Russia.

**CRANES DESCEND ON ISRAEL:** Tens of thousands of cranes were seen in Israel's Hula Valley on their annual migration it was reported on Mon. 4 Feb. 2019. Early pioneers drained the swamps of the valley, which nestles among the foothills of Mount Hermon, creating an artificial lake with abundant fresh waters. Hula is now an important stopping point for birds migrating from Europe to Africa. The lake is often visited by more than half a billion birds during the migrating season and is one of the world's most important bird observation sites on earth.

**40 UN AMBASSADORS VISIT CITY OF DAVID:** A delegation of 40 UN ambassadors visited the City of David on Friday 1 Feb. 2019. They were led by Israel's UN Ambassador, Danny Danon. The ambassadors met Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Leon and Vice-President of the City of David Foundation Doron Spielman. Leon told media sources: "I am excited to be here and I have no doubt that they will become our ambassadors in their countries and in the UN. Danon showed the ambassadors a 2,000-year-old Hebrew coin that was used by the Jewish rebels just before the destruction of the Second Temple. "The relationship between the Jewish people and its eternal capital, Jerusalem, began over 3,000 years ago," he declared, "and this coin is only one of the many proofs of this. No UN decision can erase this bond, and no one can argue with this archaeology."

**JEWISH LAWMAKER ELECTED PRESIDENT OF BRAZILIAN SENATE IN HISTORICAL FIRST:** An ally of Jair Bolsonaro won a fraught vote for the head of Brazil's Senate on Saturday 2 Feb. 2019, a boost for the far-right president's legislative efforts to open the economy, tackle crime and enact socially conservative measures. Davi Alcolumbre, from the Democratas party, was supported by the president's son, Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, and Bolsonaro's Chief of Staff, Onyx Lorenzoni. He won 42 votes, one more than was needed to become Senate president. His election comes the day after Rodrigo Maia, also of the Democratas party, won his bid to remain leader of the lower house. Their victories should help Bolsonaro as he seeks to pass a divisive pension reform, which is widely seen as necessary to shore up Brazil's creaking public finances but is likely to face stiff opposition. The leaders of Brazil's legislative bodies have broad powers to pick and choose what bills are debated, and when. With two business-friendly legislature heads, Bolsonaro's pension reform bill stands a better chance.

**BRAZIL'S PRESIDENT THANKS ISRAEL FOR POST-DAM DISASTER AID:** Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro thanked Israel on Thur. 31 Jan. 2019 for providing emergency relief to the victims of a recent dam collapse. "The brave Israeli troops sent by Prime Minister Netanyahu finish today their mission here in Brazil," he tweeted. "On behalf of the Brazilian people, I thank the state of Israel for the services provided in Brumadinho MG in partnership with the Brazilian Armed Forces and Firefighters." A team of 100 Israeli military personnel arrived in Brazil on Sunday 27 Jan. 2019 to assist in search operations after a dam

collapsed in Brumadinho in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais. The Israeli delegation included medics, rescue specialists and a scuba unit. Israel was the only country to send a team of this kind to Brazil. The IDF team was unable to locate any survivors of the disaster, but recovered some 37 bodies. One of the soldiers who took part in the mission was an army psychologist, who spoke about the traumatic impact of the dam collapse, saying, "One of the bodies we recovered turned out to be a partner of the driver who drove us to the disaster area. We saw a picture of her in his car and realized who she was. He burst out crying, and said that he knew from the start she didn't survive."

**ROUHANI: WE'RE FACING UNPRECEDENTED PRESSURE:** Iran's president said last week that the country was facing the toughest economic situation it had seen in 40 years. "Today our problems are primarily because of pressure from America and its followers. And the dutiful government and Islamic system should not be blamed," he added. He vowed that the nation would "endure" the external pressure. "The USA administration will definitely fail in its latest move against the Iranian nation," he said. "Nobody can harm us as long as we follow the Supreme Leader." USA President Donald Trump re-imposed sanctions on Iran in May of last year. As a result, the value of the Iranian rial fell sharply, and many foreign companies left the country amid the recession. On Thur. 31 Jan. 2019, Trump tweeted, "When I became President Iran was making trouble all over the Middle East, and beyond. Since ending the terrible Iran Nuclear Deal, they are MUCH different, but a source of potential danger and conflict. They are testing rockets and more, and are coming very close to the edge. Their economy is now crashing, which is the only thing holding them back."

**FACEBOOK REMOVES HUNDREDS OF IRANIAN ACCOUNTS:** Facebook removed hundreds of Iranian accounts which were used to spread misinformation in Israel and around the world. According to Facebook's announcement, 783 fake accounts and groups on Facebook and Instagram, which originated in Iran, presented themselves as real accounts. According to the Hebrew site, The Marker, the fake accounts included anti-Israel compositions in English and other languages, including articles which deny Israel's right to exist. The accounts that were removed were opened in dozens of countries, including Israel, the USA, Germany, France and Spain. "The page managers and bookkeepers generally presented themselves as locals, often using fake accounts and posting news stories about current events," Facebook stated. Israel's Likud party said in response that "it is not surprising that Iran is trying to topple PM Netanyahu, who blocked its nuclear program, destroyed its efforts to establish military bases in Syria, crushed its economy and sent the Mossad to steal its secret nuclear archive under its nose. It will not work for them. As long as Netanyahu is the prime minister of Israel - Iran is in trouble," the party added.

**TEHRAN DOWN THE SINKHOLE: HOW DROUGHT THREATENS IRANIAN STABILITY:** Massive sinkholes are spreading around the Islamic Republic, leading some to question the stability of a regional player. For the first time, Iranian officials admit that the ground around Tehran is sinking. Slower than an earthquake, sinkholes and massive cracks can be just as destructive over long stretches of time. A 30 year drought and excessive water pumping created a series of underground air-pockets which then implode, creating cracks or massive holes in the ground that endanger agriculture, roads and public safety, the Christian Science Monitor reported. In the neighborhood of Yaft Abad in Tehran, residents fear poorly built buildings will collapse after water-pipes already burst and cracks appeared on several walls. The ground is sinking under airports, oil refineries, and factories without distinction, leading many in the Islamic Republic to support much over-due reforms in water usage and agriculture.

**ISRAEL WARNS HAMAS: STOP RIOTING OR FACE WAR:** Israel relayed a warning message to Gaza terror group Hamas, through mediators, demanding Hamas stop the riots along the border fence or face an Israeli military campaign. Israel's message was: "Warn Hamas – elections will not prevent a military campaign." Hamas sources reported on Saturday 2 Feb. 2019 that at least 32 people were wounded by IDF fire, in the 45th consecutive week of riots along the border with Israel. About 10,000 people rioted for several hours in several locations, throwing explosives and rocks at IDF soldiers.

**JAPANESE FIRMS PURSUING OPPORTUNITIES IN ISRAEL:** The number of Japanese companies doing business in Israel has tripled since 2013 to 80. Some 200 people from 100 companies accompanied Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko on a visit to Israel in Jan. 2019. Japanese investments in Israel have increased dramatically, from \$10 million in 2013 to \$1.2 billion in 2017. Japanese companies used to be reluctant to advance into Israel for fear of the Arab boycott of Israel. However, with better relations between Israel and Arab nations now, Seko said: "The Arab boycott has lost substance. There are companies in Israel that have great innovative ideas, and Japan has technology to turn those ideas into reality. We have a mutually complementary relationship."

**INTEL TO INVEST AN 'UNPRECEDENTED' 11 BILLION IN ISRAEL OPERATIONS:** USA technology giant Intel Corp is to invest an "unprecedented" \$10.9 billion in the company's Israel-based operations, Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon announced earlier this week, significantly expanding its multi-billion dollar presence in the country. "This is huge news for everyone who cares about the State of Israel, the Israeli economy and Israeli citizens," Kahlon said, adding that the "unprecedented decision" following a year of government efforts would create thousands of jobs for residents of the South. Israeli media reported that it is planning to use its largest investment in Israel to date to construct a vast production facility in the southern city of Kiryat Gat. "Our continued confidence in Intel's future and excellent partnership with the State of Israel is at the foundation of the business plan we will submit," said Yaniv Garty, Intel VP and Intel Israel General Manager. The new factory is expected to span some 370,000 square meters, and the land will be allocated by the government without having to go through a tender process. "Intel's choice to continue to significantly invest in Israel is an important expression of confidence in the Jewish state and the Israeli economy," said Economy Minister Eli Cohen.

**USA SECURITY AID TO PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY ENDING:** The Palestinian Authority - the interim self-government body of Gaza Strip Areas A and B - stopped accepting security aid from the United States on Thur. 31 Jan. 2019 which is an indirect consequence of an anti-terrorism law that went into effect the same day. The Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act (ATCA) will allow Americans to sue recipients of USA foreign aid in American courts over alleged complicity in "acts of war." With the Palestinian Authority now being potentially liable starting this week, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has opted not to accept further security aid. Senator Chuck Grassley introduced the bill last May while eleven others, some Democrats and other Republicans, co-sponsored it. A Palestinian official said anonymously, "We do not want to receive financial aid, including aid provided to the security forces, so as not to be subject to the anti-terrorism law approved by Congress." Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely said when asked about the cut in USA funding, "Israel cannot save the failing leadership of the Palestinian Authority."

**ISRAEL EXPELS FOREIGN OBSERVERS FROM HEBRON AFTER 22 YEARS:** Israel's PM Netanyahu decided on Tues. 29 Jan. 2019 to oust the international observers of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) after 22 years. The 64 international civilian observers are from Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. A recent report by Minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan found that TIPH members had interfered with the work of IDF soldiers and the police, created friction with Israeli residents, and cooperated with organizations that promote the delegitimization of Israel. In incidents caught on video, TIPH's legal counsel can be seen slapping a 10-year-old Jewish child across the face, and a staff member is seen slashing a tire of a car belonging to a Jewish resident in Hebron.

**TRUMP CALLS USA INTELLIGENCE CHIEFS 'EXTREMELY PASSIVE AND NAIVE' ON IRAN:** President Donald Trump on Wed. 30 Jan. 2019 called top USA intelligence chiefs "extremely passive and naive" on Iran and dismissed their assessments of the threat posed by North Korea a day after they contradicted his views during a congressional testimony. Leaders of the USA intelligence community told a Senate committee the previous day that the nuclear threat from N. Korea remained and that Iran was not

taking steps toward making a nuclear bomb, drawing conclusions that contrasted starkly with Trump's assessments of those countries. "The Intelligence people seem to be extremely passive and naive when it comes to the dangers of Iran. They are wrong!" Trump said in a Twitter post. The Republican president cited Iranian rocket launches and said that Tehran was coming very close to the edge. "Perhaps Intelligence should go back to school!" he said. Trump last year pulled out of an international nuclear deal with Iran put in place under his Democratic predecessor Barack Obama, saying Tehran was "not living up to the spirit" of the agreement, and re-imposed sanctions.

**TOP SAUDI OFFICIAL: BARACK OBAMA LIED, SET MIDDLE EAST BACK 20 YEARS:** Former USA president Barack Obama lied to Saudi Arabia when violating the redlines he famously declared regarding Syria's use of chemical weapons and then not acting when they were used, a former senior Saudi official said in a media interview. Bandar bin Sultan served for years as head of Saudi intelligence as well as the Saudi ambassador to the United States. In the interview, he recalled a last phone call between the late Saudi King Abdullah and Obama, during which the Saudi leader told the USA president: "I did not expect that after this long life, I would see the day when an American president lied to me." Obama, bin Sultan said, "would promise something and do the opposite." He said that the president took the Middle East back 20 years and also spoke critically of the Iran nuclear deal and how the former president spoke publicly about curbing Iran's activities, but then went behind Saudi Arabia's back and negotiated the nuclear deal. These policies by Obama, he said, emboldened Russia and Iran and paved the way for them to enter Syria and interfere in the civil war that has raged there since 2011. Syrian President Bashar Assad, he said, was a "kid" and that while his late father Hafez was capable of making decisions, Bashar could not. Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, bin Sultan said that the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat committed a "crime" against his people by rejecting the peace plan proposed by former president Bill Clinton.

**'MISSILES FROM GAZA AND LEBANON ARE READY TO BE FIRED AT ISRAEL':** General Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, referred for the first time to the espionage affair involving former minister Gonen Segev, whom he called "the Israeli cabinet minister who became a source of intelligence information." Shamkhani said additionally that "the affairs of corruption are about to suffocate the Israeli prime minister, whose cabinet ministers have become a source of information for Iran and under whose feet hundreds of kilometers of tunnels have been dug." He warned that accurate missiles are in the strong hands of the resistance fighters in Gaza and Lebanon," and they are ready to fire at Israel if it commits an act of stupidity. The shooting of the missiles can make their lives hell," Shamkhani said. He added that Iran would not accept any threat to the realization of its plans to increase the range and accuracy of its missiles.

**ISRAEL'S HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS DOWN TO SOME 200,000 AHEAD OF REMEMBRANCE DAY:** Ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Sunday 27 Jan. 2019, newly released figures regarding Israel's survivor population reveal that the number of those remaining has dropped by 8,500 people in the course of one year. The statistics published by the Central Bureau of Statistic show that 220,800 people were eligible for survivor benefits at the end of 2016 in comparison with 212,300 survivors a year later. The numbers will drop more steeply in coming years as survivors are increasingly dying off: Israel expects the number of survivors to plummet drastically to 167,000 by next year, 102,000 by 2025, and to just 53,000 by 2030 who will all be over the age of 90.

**VA CONSIDERING BILL LEGALIZING ABORTION UP TO 40 WEEKS IN PREGNANCY:** Virginia is considering a bill allowing women to abort their unborn child until the moment the baby is born. Democratic Delegate Kathy Tran introduced the Repeal Act, which seeks to annul the state's current restrictions on late-term abortions. If passed, the measure will do away with the state's requirement that second and third-trimester abortions be performed only to preserve the health or life of the woman. A woman seeking to abort would no longer need to obtain an ultrasound before having an abortion, under the proposed

law. Currently, three physicians must conclude that a third-trimester abortion is necessary to preserve the health or life of the woman. Those requirements are stripped under the proposed legislation, which also removes the state's mandate that second and third-trimester abortions be performed in hospitals. "The third trimester goes all the way up to forty weeks," according to Tran. The bill would allow a doctor to perform an abortion when a woman is dilating, meaning she is about to give birth. The proposal saw its first subcommittee hearing on Mon. 28 Jan. 2019 and has received support from Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam as well as a number of Democratic lawmakers.



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