

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update August 5, 2021 **(27th Av, 5781)**



For the Yachad Report Newsletter For August 2021

Reports of Clashes in Southern Syria near Israel's Golan; Clashes in southern Syria have spread in recent days amid protests against the Assad regime, culminating in reports of gun battles and deployment of Syrian army tanks in Deraa province. If the situation deteriorates it could have major ramifications for Israel and Jordan as well as for the Syrian regime and pro-Iran elements, such as Hezbollah, that have cells and bases near the Golan. The Syrian regime retook areas in Deraa and near the Golan in 2018 after seven years of civil war. The southern front was a largely stable frontline for years but the Syrian rebels collapsed quickly and Syrian civil defense volunteers, called White Helmets, were evacuated through Israel to Jordan in July 2018. A year later pro-Iran elements linked to Hezbollah set up shop near the Golan and even prepared “killer drones” that they intended to use against Israel which carried out airstrikes in late August 2019 against the drone squad.

Ship Operated by Israeli-owned Company Attacked near Oman Amid Iran Tensions; An oil tanker operated by an Israeli-owned company came under attack off the coast of Oman in the Arabian Sea, the British military said Friday, with the company later confirming the reports. The vessel is operated by Zodiac Maritime, a London-based company belonging to Israeli tycoon Eyal Ofer. Israeli officials did not immediately acknowledge the incident, but it comes amid heightened tensions between it and Iran as negotiations remain stalled over Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. In recent months, other Israeli ships have been targeted amid a shadow war between the two nations, with Israeli officials blaming the Islamic Republic for the assaults. A brief initial statement from the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations said an investigation was underway into the latest incident, which it described as happening late Thursday night just northeast of the Omani island of Masirah. The location is over 300 kilometers (185 miles) southeast of Oman's capital, Muscat. The statement did not elaborate, other than to say that it suspected the attack did not involve piracy.

Fitch Reaffirms Israel's A+ Rating, Citing Strong Finances, Pandemic Rebound; On Thursday, July 29, Fitch Ratings reaffirmed Israel's A+ rating with a stable outlook, citing its “strong external finances and solid institutional strength.” The credit rating agency also noted Israel's relatively high government debt to GDP ratio and security risks. Israel's economy contracted by 2.6 percent last year due to the pandemic but is

expected to grow by 5.1% this year and 5.7% in 2022. The economy stood up to pandemic shock relatively well due to Israel's high-tech industries and successful vaccination campaign. The report noted fiscal risks including the government coalition's razor-thin majority in the Knesset, its diverse membership, and security risks, including instability in Syria, tensions with Iran, and potential violence with the Iran-backed Hezbollah terror group in Lebanon. The A+ rating is not Fitch's highest — the agency's scale spans from AAA to D. An "A" rating denotes high credit quality with low risk of default and a strong capacity for paying off financial commitments, but some vulnerability to adverse business or economic conditions.

Israel, US Complete 'Juniper Falcon' Military Drill; US and Israeli troops have finished the week-long Juniper Falcon drill which tested the level of coordination between the two countries in the event of a ballistic missile threat against Israel. Two US Air Force C-130J Super Hercules from the 37th Airlift Squadron landed in Israel last week with equipment and troops from US Air Forces in Europe and Air Force Africa Airmen and ended on Tuesday. Juniper Falcon focused on scenarios that would see the deployment of US forces in Israel under fire during conflict and saw troops train in several locations across the country. According to a statement released by EUCOM, the drill, "serves as an opportunity for US military personnel and the IDF to exercise together and learn from one another" and "represents another step in the deliberate and strategic relationship between the US and Israel and contributes to overall regional stability." Washington and Israel have signed an agreement which would see the US come to assist Israel with missile defense in times of war and a week before the drill began the IDF released an updated intelligence assessment that said that the Lebanon-based Hezbollah terror group has an arsenal of between 130,000-150,000 rockets and missiles and could launch some 3,000 projectiles a day for at least a week should fighting break out.

Biden to Nominate Holocaust Historian Deborah Lipstadt as US Antisemitism Envoy; US President Joe Biden has picked renowned Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt to be his antisemitism envoy, officials said Thursday. Lipstadt has been a long-time favorite to get the role and pressure has mounted on the Biden administration to fill the position amid a surge in antisemitic incidents in recent months. Lipstadt, 74, is the Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies at Emory University in Atlanta. The Biden administration has faced pressure to name someone to the post, with added urgency after a swastika was found on Monday etched into an elevator in the US State Department building, near the office of the special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism. "Let me be clear: Anti-Semitism has no place in the State Department, in my Administration, or anywhere in the world," Biden tweeted. "It's up to all of us to give hate no safe harbor and stand up to bigotry wherever we find it."

New Iranian President Raisi Takes Office Next Week as Nuke Talks Freeze; Iran's new president, Ebrahim Raisi, is due to take office next week on August 3, though aspects of the transition are expected to continue into mid-August. His ascension to power and replacing outgoing President Hassan Rouhani has brought negotiations between the Islamic Republic, the US, and the world powers to a standstill now for over two months with no clear end in sight. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei remains the final word in the country, especially on major strategic issues like the nuclear negotiations. But Khamenei lined up support for Raisi to be elected president, and Raisi is rumored to be his choice as his successor given that he is 82 and has had health problems in recent years. Both US and Iranian officials have given unclear messages about whether nuclear negotiations will restart once Raisi takes power, whether this may wait multiple months or whether new concessions Raisi may demand will end the negotiations.

These Jewish Athletes Won Medals at the Tokyo Olympics; The Jewish highlights of the Tokyo Olympics kicked off with Jewish basketball superstar Sue Bird serving as one of Team USA's two flag bearers at the opening ceremony, a huge honor. The lasting accolades, though, are the medals that winning athletes take home. Dozens of Jewish athletes are competing in the Games this year, but the fierce competition means that only some will enter the record books as gold, silver, or bronze medalists. Avishag Semberg won

bronze in taekwondo for Team Israel on day one of the competition. Semberg, 19, was third in the women's under-49 kg category, giving Israel its first medal of the Tokyo Olympics and its first-ever in the sport. Jessica Fox of Australia won bronze in women's kayak slalom on day four of the competition. Two days later she took gold in women's canoe slalom. Lilia Akhaimova won gold with Team Russia in the women's team gymnastics competition on day four of the Games. Akhaimova will compete in the women's individual vault competition later in the Games.

Google Cloud to Connect Israel and Europe via Underwater Cable; Google Cloud said on Thursday that it will help construct and operate two submarine cable systems that will connect the Middle East with southern Europe and the Asian continent. In partnership with Sparkle and other communication platforms, the Blue cable will connect Italy, France, Greece, and Israel. The "Raman" cable will connect Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Oman, and India. Increasing the network's capacity is critical for Google users and customers around the world to ensure strong, stable connections. The two submarine cable systems are equipped with 16 pairs of fiber optics and are expected to be ready for service in 2024. Subsequently, the consortium of companies plans to promote the construction of additional connection points and link the two systems through terrestrial network assets.

Israel is Acting Against Iranian 'Existential Threat'; Defense Minister Benny Gantz gave an interview Tuesday, saying that Israel is taking action against Iran's nuclear program and that the nuclear deal with world powers must be changed if it is to bring stability. "We have capabilities and methods that I cannot elaborate about, and we are in high preparedness to ensure Iran doesn't get nuclear weapons," Gantz said, adding that Israel reserves the right to take independent action. Regarding the ongoing — albeit stalled — talks to renew the 2015 nuclear deal, he said: "It has weak spots that must be fixed so that it is tight and brings stability. We need a deal that is stronger, longer, and more comprehensive." On Sunday, the Kan public broadcaster reported that Gantz, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, and other Israeli officials had recently warned US officials that Iran was closer than ever to attaining nuclear weapons. Nuclear talks between world powers and Iran — attended indirectly by the US — went on for months in Vienna, but have stalled in recent weeks.

Secret Files Show Alleged Iranian Plans to Sink Ships Using Cyberattacks; A cache of top-secret documents, allegedly written by Iranian intelligence, show Tehran is building a bank of potential targets for cyberattacks. The files, screenshots of which were published by Sky News, the UK news outlet, show plans for attacks that could sink a cargo ship or blow up a fuel pump at a gas station. They also include researched details about satellite communication devices used by the international shipping industry, as well as computer-based systems controlling the lights, heating, and ventilation in smart homes. The documents were said to have been written by "Intelligence Team 13," and each begins with a quote by Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei: "The Islamic Republic of Iran must become among the world's most powerful in the area of cyber." However, the documents appeared to be based on open sources and internet searches rather than privileged information. Iran's embassy in London declined to comment on the report.

Lockheed Martin and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems to Make New Laser Weapon; Lockheed Martin and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems will work together to develop a ground-based laser weapon for Israel, the companies announced on Tuesday. Israel's Defense Ministry has been working on laser technology and has made several breakthroughs in the development of the system that can intercept a variety of aerial threats, including rockets and unmanned aerial vehicles. The method of airborne interception using a powerful laser has many advantages, including a low cost per interception, the ability to effectively intercept long-range threats at high altitudes regardless of weather conditions, and the ability to defend vast areas.

Israel's Newest Ship Changes how the IDF Combats Naval Threats; The INS (Israeli Navy Ship) Magen, the Israeli Navy's most advanced Sa'ar 6 corvette missile ship, docked in Haifa's port in December but the ship still smells new and is still being fitted with all its weapons systems. "It's making history," said Lt.-Col. Omer Karmi. "The whole ship is new, in every single way. Even some of its technology is completely new to the Navy." The 90-meters long 2,000-ton ship is one of four Sa'ar 6 corvettes that will form the backbone of the Israeli Navy for the decades to come. It is expected to be operational next year. The new ships mark a transition in the Navy's combat doctrine that is geared towards the ever-changing regional threats that face the Jewish State and will play a greater role in detecting and destroying enemy targets and threats.

Coalition Passes Amendment to Basic Law that Guarantees PM Rotation; Following a 27-hour filibuster, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's governing coalition succeeded in passing an amendment to Basic Law: The Government that guarantees a rotation in the Prime Minister's Office. The law now sets August 27, 2023, as the date when Bennett will be replaced by Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid, whose term is set to end on November 11, 2025. The legislation sets rules to ensure parity between the right- and left-wing blocs in the coalition. If the state budget does not pass or MKs rebel and vote to disperse the Knesset, the changeover can happen earlier. But in a display of trust, a clause that would make Lapid prime minister if Bennett tried to join a government led by another MK was removed. The law also permits Bennett to appoint a second deputy in the Prime Minister's Office in addition to Yamina MK Abir Kara. This clause is intended for Ra'am (United Arab List) leader Mansour Abbas, but he is not expected to take the post immediately.

Winning Judo Silver in Tokyo, Iranian Defector Mollaei Dedicates Medal to Israel; Saeid Mollaei, a former Iranian judoka now representing Mongolia, took home the silver medal in the men's 81-kilogram division, losing the gold to Takanori Nagase of Japan. It was the first Olympic medal for Mollaei, two years after he left his native Iran, revealing that his national team coaches had ordered him to lose in the semifinals of the 2019 World Championships in Tokyo to avoid facing Israel's Sagi Muki in the final. Mollaei subsequently moved to Germany and then acquired Mongolian citizenship. Mollaei told the Israeli Sports Channel that he was thankful for the support he's received from Israel over the years. "Thank you to Israel for the good energy. This medal is dedicated also to Israel," he told the network. "I hope the Israelis are happy with this win." He added in Hebrew: "Todah" (thank you).

Netanyahu Urging 3rd COVID Dose after Test Shows his Antibodies Low; Opposition Leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who was the first person in Israel to be vaccinated, has been urgently pushing for a third booster shot after recently discovering his level of coronavirus antibodies had dropped. Netanyahu was vaccinated in December last year while serving as premier. Recently he conducted a serological test, which found his antibody count significantly dropped some eight months after being vaccinated. Netanyahu has recently been urging Israel's new government to begin administering the third vaccine dose to the elderly, despite many experts saying such a move is unnecessary at this time.

Jewish Billionaire Michael Lewis Marries Niece of the late Princess Diana; Jewish billionaire Michael Lewis, 61, has married Lady Kitty Spencer, 30, niece of the late Princess Diana. Lewis was born in South Africa and has an estimated net worth of £80 million (\$110 m.). He is the chairman of the South African listed Foschini Group. British media reported in early 2020 that Lady Spencer was converting to Judaism for her betrothed. Friends of the couple reported that she was taking preparatory classes at the time. She has been seen attending synagogue with Lewis. The two were wed in Rome this past weekend. Lewis will be the first Jewish member of the royal family. Previous members who have joined via marriage have been baptized into the Church of England, such as Meghan Markle.

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