

# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update December 16 , 2021 (12<sup>th</sup> Tevet, 5782)***



## ***For the Yachad Report Newsletter For December 2021***

***US Announces 'Largest-Ever' Forfeiture of Iranian Missiles, Oil Seized in US Navy Raids;*** The US Department of Justice successfully forfeited approximately 1.1 million barrels of oil and hundreds of missiles seized by the US Navy from several Iranian vessels in the Arabian Sea late in 2019 and early 2020, the US Department of Justice confirmed in an announcement on Wednesday night, December 8. These represent the largest-ever American forfeitures of Iranian fuel and weapons to have been seized by the US government. Forfeiture of property – penalizing the owner for wrongdoing – allows the US government to take possession of and sell it. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is alleged to have orchestrated the shipments, is designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the DOJ, which allowed for the seizures and forfeitures. “The actions of the United States in these two cases strike a resounding blow to the Government of Iran and to the criminal networks supporting Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps,” said Assistant Attorney-General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division. “The Department of Justice will continue to use all available tools to combat the threats posed by terrorist organizations and all those who seek to harm the United States and its allies.” The two weapons caches of eight surface-to-air missiles, 171 anti-tank missiles, and thermal optics – as well as components for naval surface-to-surface cruise missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles, drones, and other missiles – were alleged by the DOJ to have belonged to the IRGC and were destined for Houthi militants in Yemen. The two flagless vessels, dhow sailboats, were raided on November 25, 2019, and February 9, 2020. The DOJ announcement contains contradictions about the number of different types of missiles seized, in the opening sentence of the press release listing 171 surface-to-air missiles and eight anti-tank missiles.

***Israel, US to Discuss Military Drills to Prep for Worst-Case Iran Scenario, US Says;*** Israeli and American military leaders are set to discuss possible military drills to practice destroying Iranian nuclear facilities in a potential worst-case scenario, a senior US official said on Wednesday, December 8. The comment came as the faltering nuclear talks were set to resume on Thursday in Vienna, and as Defense Minister Benny Gantz flew to Washington for meetings with top US military leaders. US and European representatives at the nuclear talks voiced pessimism and frustration over Iran’s demands last week. The possible military drills would prepare for a scenario with Iran in which negotiations fail and US and Israeli leaders request a military strike, the US official told the Reuters news agency. Ahead of takeoff for the US, Gantz said, “Iran is a threat to world peace and seeks to become an existential threat to Israel. At the meetings,

we will discuss possible courses of action to ensure that it stops its attempt to reach the nuclear arena and expand its activities in the region.” Gantz said he will meet with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The US official did not give details about the potential preparations. “We’re in this pickle because Iran’s nuclear program is advancing to a point beyond which it has any conventional rationale,” the official said.

***Three Shots of Pfizer Covid Vaccine 4x Less Effective Against Omicron;*** The neutralizing ability of even three shots of the Pfizer corona vaccine is four times less against the Omicron than the Delta variant, according to researchers at Sheba Medical Center. The team looked at the ability of serums of 40 vaccinated healthcare workers at Sheba to neutralize the Omicron variant – 20 who received the booster shot within the last month, and 20 who had only received two shots, the last one five or six months ago. The study is based on the exclusive data available in Sheba as part of the large serology study conducted among health workers at the medical center. It was conducted in collaboration with the Health Ministry’s Central Virology Lab, which is located on the Sheba campus. Those who received the second dose did not have any neutralization ability against the variant, while they continued to have some ability against Delta and even the original Wuhan strain. “There was no neutralization ability whatsoever, and that is very worrisome,” said Dr. Gili Regev-Yochay, director of the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Unit at the hospital, in a briefing on Saturday night, adding that these people might also be exposed to serious disease. It is also unclear if people who received two doses more recently would also be protected, she said. Lab tests conducted in South Africa last week showed that antibodies from two shots of the Pfizer vaccine may be up to 40 times less effective against the Omicron variant. In response to these studies, Dr. Sharon Alroy-Preis, head of Public Health Services, said in an interview with N12 Saturday night that the ministry is considering asking people to get their third dose as soon as three months after the second. “People who have received the booster are better protected than those who received only the second, and of course, more than the unvaccinated,” Alroy-Preis said. She noted that the only individual infected with the Omicron who is in serious condition is unvaccinated. There are a million Israelis who have had two shots five or more months ago and have not gotten their boosters, she said, and another 325,000 who had two shots more recently and would be eligible for an earlier third dose if the policy changes. “Two doses are not effective enough,” Alroy-Preis said. On the other hand, the Sheba study found that the booster dose does increase the ability of the vaccine to work against Omicron by about 100-fold, meaning that there is “significant protection,” Regev Yochay said. “It is lower than the neutralizing ability against the Delta – about four times lower. But it is very optimistic.” She added that “it looks like with Omicron there is a chance that people with the booster could get infected, but have much less chance of getting seriously infected.”

***Bennett to Meet with UAE Crown Prince in Historic First;*** Prime Minister Naftali Bennett departed to Abu Dhabi on Sunday, December 12, to meet with Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on the first trip by an Israeli prime minister to the United Arab Emirates. Bennett was greeted by an honor guard and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed. “I’m excited to be here, on the first official visit of an Israeli leader here,” Bennett said. “We look forward to strengthening the relations between the countries.” Bennett said on the tarmac at Ben-Gurion Airport that Israel-UAE relations are “excellent and extensive,” and called to “nurture and strengthen them, and build the warm peace between the two nations.” Bennett is set to meet with MBZ, as the Emirati leader is known, on Monday, as well as with other ministers and senior officials. Relations between Israel and the UAE were officially established in August 2020, in what became known as the Abraham Accords. The meeting comes at an important juncture for relations between the countries, which grew closer in the years before the accords were signed, over shared concern about the Iranian nuclear threat.

***Israel and Morocco Celebrate One Year of Normalization;*** On Thursday, December 9, Israel and Morocco marked one year of normalized relations at a joint celebration at the Watergate Hotel in Washington,

D.C. In December 2020, the State of Israel and the Kingdom of Morocco reestablished diplomatic ties through a trilateral agreement with the United States. Since this historic breakthrough, the two countries have grown closer through government relations and on a people-to-people basis. This connection builds upon decades of kinship towards the Jewish community in Morocco, from Moroccan kings to the Moroccan people, and lies at the heart of the bond between both countries. Morocco's Ambassador to the US Lalla Joumala and Israel's Ambassador to the US Mike Herzog celebrated this milestone together along with distinguished guests, including the State Department's Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Yael Lempert and Representatives Ted Deutch (D-FL) and Steve Cohen (D-TN). Ambassador Herzog reiterated his commitment to working together with the Moroccans to not only expand upon relations between the two countries but to collaborate on innovative projects that will better the region.

***Immigration Minister Reports 27,000 New Arrivals to Country, Jump from Last Year;*** By the end of the year, the number of new immigrants to Israel in 2021 is set to reach 27,000, a rise of 30% compared to the year before, Immigration Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata said at a conference in the United States, according to Hebrew-language media reports Sunday, December 12. At the annual conference of the Israel American Council in Florida, Tamano-Shata said the numbers surpass the target she had set of 25,000 new arrivals. Tamano-Shata called it "a very good year, even when compared to regular years when there was no coronavirus," according to a report by the Ynet website. The figure matched that of 2016. In 2017 there was a slight climb to 29,000 and that continued into 2018 with 30,000, reaching a record of 35,000 in 2019. However, with the start of the coronavirus pandemic and the restrictions it caused to international travel, numbers tumbled. In 2020 there were just 22,000 who moved to start a new life in Israel. Tamano-Shata highlighted increased immigration from North America and France. There was a 34% increase in immigration from the US, with 4,000 arriving this year. France saw a 41% leap, with 3,380 arriving so far in 2021 and over a hundred more expected by the end of the month. There were 7,000 immigrants from Russia and 2,800 from Ukraine this year

***2nd-Temple-Period Synagogue Found Where Gospel's Mary Magdalene Was Born;*** A 2,000-year-old synagogue was discovered in the ancient Jewish settlement of Migdal in Galilee, the second synagogue from the Second Temple Period uncovered in the town, also known as Magdala. The location is prominently featured both in the Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus' writings and as the birthplace of Mary Magdalene in the Gospels. "The discovery of a second synagogue in this Galilean settlement casts light on the social and religious lives of the Jews in the area in this period, and reflects a need for a dedicated building for Torah reading and study and for social gatherings," said Dina Avshalom-Gorni, one of the directors of the excavations. "We can imagine Mary Magdalene and her family coming to the synagogue here, along with other residents of Migdal, to participate in religious and communal events." According to the Gospels, Mary Magdalene – also known as Mary from Magdala – was one of the women who traveled with Jesus and witnessed his crucifixion and resurrection. The first synagogue was uncovered in Migdal in 2009 when an excavation by the Israel Antiquities Authority unearthed Jewish ritual baths (mikvaot), streets, a marketplace, and industrial facilities. A unique artifact stood in the middle of the synagogue's main hall: a large stone portraying the Second Temple of Jerusalem, with a carved seven-branched menorah on one of its sides. It represented a crucial discovery because the depiction was engraved in the stone when the temple was still standing. The newly discovered synagogue was shaped as a square and built with basalt and limestone. It featured a main hall and two other rooms. The main hall was coated in white plaster and featured a stone bench along the walls, also coated in plaster. One of the smaller rooms presented a stone shelf. According to the experts it might have been used to store Torah scrolls. The excavation was initiated as a salvage excavation before construction works at the Migdal intersection. According to Israeli law, all development projects need to be accompanied by such an excavation.

***Drug for Rare Disease Could Treat Alzheimer's, Autism Symptoms;*** A Tel Aviv University study found that a drug that was designated as an “orphan drug” by the FDA – meaning it is used to treat rare diseases and is subject to separate regulations – can also treat a variety of symptoms associated with autism, intellectual disabilities, and Alzheimer’s disease. Prof. Illana Gozes of the Tel Aviv University Sackler Medical School’s Department of Human Molecular Genetics and Biochemistry discovered the drug – named NAP – in 2020. The drug is meant to treat symptoms related to ADNP syndrome, a rare genetic disease that causes symptoms associated with intellectual disabilities and autism. Prof. Gozes then commissioned this most recent study, which was published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Biological Psychiatry*, with the intention of studying the drug's effect on those suffering from diseases other than ADNP that also exhibit similar mental symptoms. Researchers studied the effects of NAP on mice with ADNP syndrome, finding that the NAP treatment restored a large portion of typical brain function. “To our amazement and joy, we discovered that treatment using NAP normalizes the functioning of these mice for most of the symptoms indicated above,” said Gozes. Prof. Gozes summarized: “We examined the effect of the ADNP gene’s most prevalent mutation in a broad spectrum of aspects and found extensive impairment in physical and cerebral functioning parallel to the symptoms of autism, developmental delay, mental disability, and Alzheimer's disease in humans,” said Prof. Gozes. “Similarly, we examined the potential use of the NAP drug for treating these diseases, and discovered that it is effective against most of these symptoms in lab models.” “This study is an important milestone on the way to developing a drug, or drugs, that will help children with autism stemming from genetic mutations, as well as Alzheimer's patients,” Gozes concluded.

***IDF Completes Tunnel-Busting Gaza Barrier;*** Standing in the shadow of a 30-foot-high concrete wall, top defense officials announced Tuesday, December 7, that Israel had completed construction of a massive barrier running the length of the Gaza Strip both above and, critically, below ground. The NIS 3.5 billion (\$1.1 billion) project has taken over three years to complete and is meant to end the threat of cross-border attack tunnels from the Palestinian enclave, which the Strip’s Hamas rulers have utilized to deadly effect. “This barrier, a creative, technological project of the first order, denies Hamas one of the capabilities that it tried to develop and puts a wall of iron, sensors, and concrete between it and the residents of the south,” Defense Minister Benny Gantz said at the ceremony on Tuesday afternoon. Construction of the barrier was a massive industrial undertaking, requiring some 1,200 workers, the removal of 330,000 trucks’ worth of sand, dirt, and rocks, two million cubic meters of concrete, and enough rebar that if laid out in a single line would reach Australia, according to Brig. Gen. Eran Ofir, who oversees the construction of defensive barriers for the Defense Ministry. The 40-mile (65-kilometer) barrier lies all along the Gaza border and extends out to sea to ensure that terror groups in the Strip do not dig underwater tunnels, as they have attempted in the past. The barrier is made up of several components: an underground reinforced concrete wall that is studded with sensors to detect tunnels; a 20-foot (six-meter) steel fence; a network of radar arrays and other surveillance sensors; and remote-controlled weaponry

***China, Russia Shocked by Iran's Intransigence;*** A senior US State Department official said that Iran had proven it was “not serious” about the negotiations to return to the 2015 nuclear deal. “As you all know, we’ve been waiting patiently for five and a half months. The Iranian government said that it needed time to get ready to resume the talks on a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA, and I think what we’ve seen over the last week or so is what getting ready meant for them. And more importantly, not only did we see it, I think our partners and others – Russia, China, others – have seen – have witnessed what Iran meant by getting ready,” the official told reporters. “It meant continuing to accelerate their nuclear program in particularly provocative ways, and their latest provocation as reported by the IAEA only on Wednesday, i.e. while we were still in the middle of talks, was to prepare for the doubling of their production capacity of 20 percent enriched uranium at Fordow. What getting ready meant was to continue to stonewall the IAEA despite efforts – again, by all of the P5+1 – constructive efforts to find a way forward between Director General Grossi and Iran.” He continued to say, “Secretary Blinken has said we can’t accept a situation in which Iran accelerates its nuclear program and

slow-walks its nuclear diplomacy. That's not a situation with which we or others can live. So... in terms of the next steps, I think what's clear is that – again, and we've heard this not just from our traditional partners, we've heard this from the Russians, we've heard this from the Chinese, we certainly have heard it from the GCC countries when a U.S. delegation visited there not long ago – the world is prepared to support a mutual return to compliance by both sides. The world is prepared even to engage economically with Iran and diplomatically with Iran. But for that, Iran has to show seriousness at the table and be prepared to come back in short order in compliance with the deal, as the U.S. has said that it is prepared to do and as President Biden has said he is prepared to do and to stay in compliance with the deal as long as Iran is.”

***Israeli Prime Minister Urges Countries to Take a Hardline Stance on Iran;*** Israel tapped the U.S. and other countries to take a hardline stance against Iran as the countries deliberate reviving the failed nuclear deal. On Sunday, December 5, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett urged countries to be wary when dealing with Iran, stressing Iran cannot continue to violate agreements while trying to negotiate new ones. Bennett's sentiments came after deliberations in Vienna ended in a stalemate with U.S. and foreign negotiators reporting Iran had taken a hardline stance of its own. He said, “We got an example of the nuclear blackmail I was talking about when, during the Vienna talks, it was published that they (the Iranians) began enriching uranium to 20 percent in advanced centrifuges in the underground facility of Fordow,” said the Israeli Prime Minister. “This is a very serious stage. I call on every country negotiating with Iran in Vienna to take a strong line and make it clear to Iran that they cannot enrich uranium and negotiate at the same time.”

***NATO Spy Plane Forced Flight from Tel Aviv to Dive to Avoid Catastrophe;*** A US spy plane forced a civilian aircraft that took off from Israel to dive toward the ground to avoid a mid-air collision above the Black Sea, Russia said. On Friday morning, December 3, a NATO CL600 reconnaissance aircraft descended rapidly across the planned route for an Aeroflot plane from Tel Aviv to Moscow with 142 people on board, Russia's Federal Air Transport Agency said in a statement. The Aeroflot flight reportedly had to drop 500 meters (1,600 feet) to keep its distance from the reconnaissance aircraft, which the pilots saw from the cockpit with the naked eye. A second plane, a smaller CL650 aircraft, flying from the Black Sea resort Sochi to Skopje, the capital of Northern Macedonia, also had to divert to avoid the spy plane, the Russian air transport authority said Saturday, December 4. “The direction and altitude of the commercial flights were immediately altered” to avoid a collision, the agency said, adding that the unknown plane did not respond to radio calls from air traffic control. “Increased activity by NATO aircraft near Russia's borders, including above the Black Sea, creates a risk of dangerous accidents involving civilian aircraft,” the agency said. The incident came as tensions rise between Russia and Western nations, which accused Moscow of massing troops on its border with Ukraine in preparation for a possible invasion. Russia has denied it has any such plans, in turn accusing NATO countries of “provocations” including military exercises near its borders. In 2001, a passenger plane from Tel Aviv to Novosibirsk, Russia, was shot down over the Black Sea by an errant Ukrainian missile during a military drill.

***Nearly Twice as Many Israelis Prefer Benjamin Netanyahu over Naftali Bennett;*** Nearly twice as many Israelis prefer opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister over current Prime Minister Naftali Bennett or his Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid, a new poll showed Monday, December 6. Forty-five percent of respondents to the Channel 12 poll said they would like Netanyahu to be prime minister, while only 25 percent preferred Bennett and 24 percent Lapid. The Bennett-Lapid government, which has a premiership sharing deal, has so far avoided major scandal for the six months it has been in power – despite comprising right-wing, centrist, and leftist parties. Yet Israelis still prefer Netanyahu, who was unable to cobble together a coalition following the last election. Forty-three percent of respondents prefer the previous government led by Netanyahu, while 36 percent preferred the current government. However, the poll also showed that if elections were to be held today, Netanyahu would still lack the seats needed to form a government. Respondents were also asked to give their approval rating of current ministers. Surprisingly,

Defense Minister Benny Gantz, whose political career was panned following his own rotational deal with Netanyahu, received the highest rating, with 55 percent satisfied with his overall performance, compared to 33 percent who were dissatisfied.

***More Evangelicals are 'Dismissive' of Israel Than Loyal to It;*** A higher percentage of Evangelical Christians are “dismissive” toward Israel than loyal to the state, according to a new study by Infinity Concepts and Grey Matter. The report found that 28% of Evangelicals reject the idea that Jews were ever God’s chosen people and place Israel and the Jewish people at a very low priority among their charitable behavior. In contrast, 20% of Evangelicals can be considered “Israel loyalists,” meaning they see the Jews as God’s chosen people and put supporting the Jews and Israel as a high priority. However, the majority of Evangelicals (53%) are neither dismissive nor loyal but rather unsure of how they view the Jewish people and Israel, the study found. “This 53% is wide open to becoming loyalists,” said Infinity Concepts founder and CEO Mark Dreistadt. “There is a lot of opportunity for growth here and that is my big takeaway from this.” Specifically, the report is based on a survey of more than 1,000 American Evangelicals, defined as people who agree with the following principles: The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe; it is important for me to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their savior; Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin, and only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation. According to Infinity and Grey Matter, Evangelicals by this definition amount to 23% of American adults - about 59 million people.

***Anti-Semitism in Australia Increasing at Alarming Rate;*** Anti-Semitic incidents in Australia have soared over the past year, with 447 reported cases amounting to a 35% increase over the same period in 2020. Julie Nathan, research director of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), told the organization’s annual conference on Sunday, November 28, that the number of incidents was 167 higher than the annual national average of 280 recorded between 2013 and 2020, the Australian Jewish News reported. She blamed the May conflict between Israel and Hamas and the pandemic for fueling a rise in anti-Semitism. Incidents included 272 cases of physical assault, verbal abuse, harassment, graffiti, and threats made through email, phone, and mail. She added that while abuse, harassment, and vandalism were significantly higher, incidents of graffiti had surged by 152%, and anti-Semitic stickers and posters by 157%. The eight physical assaults that occurred matched the number from 2020. The organization noted that during the May fighting, the Australian Jewish community experienced targeted attacks on synagogues, schools, Jewish businesses, and homes. Signs at demonstrations featured the Star of David compared to swastikas and other Nazi symbols. Nathan also spoke about an extreme anti-Israel rally that occurred in Sydney in May organized by the Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir group where speakers led chants attacking Jews and vowed to “destroy the Jews” and “give us the necks of the Jews.” That event is currently under police investigation.

***UNRWA on Brink of Collapse;*** The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) is “on the brink of collapse” and can’t pay its November salaries on time, Commissioner-General Phillipe Lazzarini said. “Decades of investment in excellent services now risk being reversed,” Lazzarini said in a statement he put out about the crisis on Wednesday, December 1. He spoke in the aftermath of the meeting the group’s Advisory Commission held in Amman this Monday and Tuesday, November 29 & 30. “In meetings with UNRWA’s main partners in the last two days, I called for immediate funds for health/education/social services for Palestine refugees for 2021,” Lazzarini tweeted. Such funding is particularly important in the absence of any resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said. “I reminded donors that in the absence of a political solution that includes Palestinian refugees, UNRWA is irreplaceable for their rights+services as per mandate by UN General Assembly,” Lazzarini said. Earlier this month UNRWA raised \$38 million toward its \$100 million shortfalls in its \$1.2 billion budget, but the remaining gap has left it scrambling for funds. “Last Thursday, I was forced to inform over 28,000 UN personnel that UNRWA does not have sufficient funds to pay their November salaries on time,” Lazzarini told his advisory

body on Monday. He warned that this would interrupt services and fuel anger and frustration among Palestinians. UNRWA services 5.7 million Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem. It has been hard-pressed to maintain services in an era of diminished donor funding and political attacks against the organization. The Trump administration halted America's annual contribution of \$360 million. Both Israel and the US under Donald Trump charged that UNRWA perpetuated rather than resolved the Palestinian refugee issue, and allowed textbooks in its schools that promoted antisemitism and anti-Israel rhetoric. The Biden administration has restored most of that funding in exchange for reform in the education curriculum. Lazzarini has pledged a no-tolerance policy toward antisemitism and incitement, but at the same time has warned that such attacks are political in nature and aimed at destroying UNRWA for political reasons. UNRWA schools, he said, must reflect the reality of the "occupation" that Palestinian children live under and that information should not be erased. "We need to put an end to sensationalist and baseless accusations which undermine the Agency's reputation, its funding and the rights of Palestine refugees," Lazzarini said.



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