

# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update January 6, 2022*** ***(4<sup>th</sup> Shvat, 5782)***



## ***For the Yachad Report Newsletter For January 2022***

***Jerusalem Post Website Hacked with Iran Warning on Anniversary of Soleimani Killing;*** Two Israeli media outlets were hacked early Monday, January 3, with warnings from an Iranian propaganda video linked to the second anniversary of the assassination of top general Qassem Soleimani. The website of The Jerusalem Post showed a scene from an Iranian missile drill last month in which Tehran destroyed a mock-up of Israel's nuclear reactor in Dimona. In the picture, the rocket appears to be fired from the iconic ring Soleimani wore, with the caption: "We are close to you where you do not think about it," in English and Hebrew. The Twitter account of the Maariv newspaper, which has the same owners as the English-language Post, briefly held the same message, but soon took it down. Maariv said its website was also hacked. "We are aware of the apparent hacking of our website, alongside a direct threat of Israel. We are working to resolve the issue," the Post tweeted. Former US President Donald Trump sent shock waves through the region on January 3, 2020, with the targeted killing of Soleimani, who was commander of the Quds Force, the foreign operation arm of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards. The Quds force is designated by the US as a terrorist organization. Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad ordered by Trump, along with his Iraqi lieutenant Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, infuriating Iran and its allies. Iran is preparing to launch week-long activities to mark the anniversary of Soleimani's killing. Authorities said the main event of the commemoration would be held on Monday, without elaborating. They added that a display of "Iran's missile capabilities" would be held on January 7. Iranian officials have pledged repeatedly that Soleimani would be avenged.

***Iran is Racing Ahead While Bennett Remains Silent;*** A spokesman from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, General Ramzan Sharif, has issued threats against Israel, saying that, "The process toward the downfall of the Zionist regime has reached the most important stage in the last 70 years." Responding to the statements, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "Iran is racing forward while Bennett remains silent and buckles before it. The Bennett government is dangerous for Israel." According to Israeli intelligence estimates (as reported on Kan 11), Iran is now closer than ever to obtaining enough enriched uranium to make a nuclear bomb – between six weeks and two months away from reaching that stage. Last Saturday, December 25, the head of the Iranian Atomic Organization, Muhammad Aslami, said that Iran was capable of producing nuclear fuel on its own, and that it would soon commence the process at the Bushehr site. Aslami added that if the Vienna nuclear talks broke down and U.S. sanctions were not removed, Iran still did not intend to progress beyond enrichment of uranium to 70 percent. "Iran is already capable of producing its own nuclear fuel using

its own resources,” he said. “We have been holding talks with the Russians and I hope that within the framework of our cooperation, based on the plans and contracts we have signed, we will be able to begin producing fuel and using it at the Bushehr plant.”

***With Iran in Mind, Israel Signs Deal with US for Heavy Choppers, Refueling Planes;*** On Thursday, December 30, Israel signed a long-awaited agreement to purchase a dozen heavy transport helicopters and two additional refueling planes from the United States, in a weapons deal worth over \$3 billion, the Defense Ministry said. These aircraft, along with a number of additional F-35 fighter jets that Israel plans to purchase from the US, are specifically meant to counter threats posed by Iran, including its nuclear program. According to the ministry, in addition to fighter jets, transport helicopters, and refueling planes, the deal includes “advanced aerial munitions, air defense systems, new naval and land-based platforms, and cyber and digital systems.” The 12 CH-53K Sikorsky CH-53K King Stallion heavy transport helicopters will replace Israel’s aging fleet of CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopters, which have been in use for over half a century and have seen a number of maintenance issues in recent years. The first CH-53K helicopters are scheduled to arrive in Israel in 2026, according to the ministry. Under the agreement, Israel has the option to purchase six more CH-53K helicopters in the future as well. In addition, the delegation of the ministry’s purchasing department signed a deal to buy two more Boeing KC-46 refueling planes, which would be needed in order to conduct strikes against targets in Iran, some 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) from Israel and far outside the regular flight range of Israeli jets. Israel has already agreed to purchase two of these refueling planes, which are scheduled to arrive in 2025. Israel has asked that this date be moved up by a year — a move that would require the US to give up its spot in line to receive the planes from Boeing — but Washington has thus far rejected the request. The helicopter deal will cost Israel roughly \$2 billion and the refuelers will cost another \$1.1 billion, with the money coming from the \$3.8 billion that Israel receives from Washington as part of the 10-year memorandum of understanding between the two countries, the ministry said.

***Large Increase in Terror Attacks in Judea and Samaria in 2021;*** Judea and Samaria recorded a significant increase of terrorist attacks in 2021, according to end-of-year data published by the IDF Tuesday, December 28. In 2021, 5,532 stone-throwing incidents were recorded across Judea and Samaria compared to 4,002 last year, an increase of 1,530 incidents. There has also been a significant increase in the number of firebomb attacks, with 1,022 incidents this year compared to 751 last year. The number of shooting attacks against Jews doubled to 61 shootings in 2021 compared to 31 last year. The number of stabbing attempts also doubled - 18 stabbing incidents in 2021 compared to nine last year.

***Up to a Third of Israelis Predicted to get COVID in Next 3 Weeks; Tests are Running Out;*** A leading health expert advising the government predicted Sunday morning, January 2, that one out of every three or four Israelis will be infected with the Omicron variant of the coronavirus over the next three weeks, cautioning that most won’t know they’ve been infected because the country is quickly running out of test kits. Testing facilities across the country were inundated with huge crowds on Sunday as thousands of Israelis lined up on foot or in cars to get tested, with many waiting hours to be swabbed. Health Ministry figures published Sunday morning showed that 4,197 new cases were confirmed on Saturday, January 1, a figure representing reduced testing on weekends, with the rate of positive tests rising to 4.57 percent. Daily infections in Israel have spiked from under 1,000 new cases some 10 days ago to almost 5,500 on Friday, December 30, and active cases have almost tripled in a week to 31,958. The total confirmed infections since the start of the pandemic stand at close to 1.4 million. However, serious cases have seen a far more moderate increase, from 77 on December 22 to 110 on Sunday. The death toll remained at 8,244. There have been four COVID-related deaths in the country since December 21. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said Sunday at the outset of the weekly cabinet meeting that there will soon be tens of thousands of daily infections. He hailed far-reaching travel restrictions imposed in recent weeks, saying they delayed Omicron’s arrival and enabled Israel to study the outbreaks in South Africa, Britain, the United States and other places, effectively “seeing into the future.”

“Our goal is always the same goal: to enable the economy to function as fully as possible, while protecting the most vulnerable among us,” Bennett said, adding that the government was discussing potential solutions to the heavy strain on testing sites and reported shortage of testing kits. Bennett suggested that Israel may need to change the criterion for who can be tested due to the shortage of testing kits, a phenomenon he said was being experienced worldwide. In an official report handed to the coronavirus cabinet and in a series of media interviews, Prof. Eran Segal of the Weizmann Institute estimated that 2-4 million out of Israel’s total population of some 9.5 million will end up catching Omicron, but the number of simultaneous serious cases won’t surpass the current record of approximately 1,200. Segal urged Israelis who haven’t received their booster vaccines to get them, retweeting new British data showing that the third shot increased the protection against Omicron hospitalization from 52 percent to 88%.

***Over a Third of Food Produced Last Year Went to Waste;*** Some 2.5 million tons of wasted food in 2020 cost the country NIS 19.1 billion (\$6 billion), or the average household NIS 3,600 (US \$1,140), according to Leket Israel’s 6th annual Food Waste and Rescue Report, published in partnership with the Environmental Protection Ministry on Monday, December 27. This waste accounted for 35 percent of the food produced in Israel. Half of it was edible and could have been resold. The cost to the environment was an additional NIS 3.4 billion (\$1 billion), the study found, when waste of land resources, water, waste collection, and processing was taken into account, as well as air pollution and the emission of an estimated 5 million tons of greenhouse gasses, accounting for 6 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions in Israel. In total, just under one in five (18.7%) of Israeli households suffered from food insecurity last year, equivalent to half a million households, Leket found. Food insecurity has been defined as the inability to ensure a constant supply of food that contains all the nutritional elements necessary for proper development and health.

***Israel's Population at Nearly 9.5 million as it Enters 2022;*** Israel’s population grew by 160,000 (a growth of 1.7%) in 2021, reaching 9,450,000 people as it enters 2022, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) announced on Thursday, December 30. As of the end of 2021, 6.98 million (73.9%) of Israel’s residents were Jewish, about two million were Arab, and 472,000 were from other sectors, including non-Arab Christians and residents not classified by religion in the population registry. Most of the population growth in the country this year was natural (83%), while the rest (17%) came from immigration. About 25,000 olim (immigrants) arrived in 2021, 5,000 more than last year, with 30% of the new immigrants coming from Russia, 14.6% from France, 13.9% from the US, and 12.4% from Ukraine. An additional 9,000 migrants entered the country as well this year. There were 22,700 immigrants arriving in Israel from January to November, a 28.8% rise compared with the same period last year.

***Meet Some of the Newest Medical Inventions Changing Surgery;*** The surgical robots market crossed the \$4.6 billion mark in 2020, and is expected to grow by more than 17.4% between 2021 and 2027, according to research in the field. Several companies in Israel and around the world have identified the popular market and have developed technologies that combine robotics and artificial intelligence, creating a new reality in the field of surgery and allowing unprecedented accuracy during operations, along with a shorter recovery and hospitalization for patients. For example, the Israeli company Human Xtensions has developed a small robot that allows the surgeon to accurately perform very complex operations in the abdominal cavity, in hard-to-access areas. "The development addresses the increase in the frequency of minimally invasive surgeries and the need for a solution that combines the advantages of robotic technology with the flexibility and economic advantage of minimally invasive tools," explained Tami Frenkel, Human Xtensions co-founder and CEO. The company is traded on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange and has approval from the FDA to market its products in the US. The Haifa-based start-up Beyeonics has developed digital headsets for eye surgeons, orthopedic surgeons and brain surgeries. The system combines augmented reality, 3D imaging and artificial intelligence-based information processing, which present the data to the surgeon, supporting real-time decision making. "Due to the increase in life expectancy, there has been an accelerated growth in the number of eye diseases of

the past decade that require surgeries such as cataracts and glaucoma,” explained Beyeonics CEO Ron Schneider. Another giant company in the field is Medtronic, which works to relieve pain and prolong life for millions of people in more than 150 countries. Among the technologies Medtronic has developed is the Transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), a minimally invasive procedure to replace the aortic valve in patients with severe aortic stenosis. The metal frame is a blend of nickel and titanium. This material allows the frame to shape itself to a patient’s anatomy. In the past, patients who needed a valve replacement had to undergo invasive treatment including open-heart surgery, which involved a months-long recovery. Today, using TAVI technology, the catheterization is performed in about half an hour, at the end of which the patient remains under supervision for only two days - and then can go back to normal life.

***Iran Threatens Nuclear Explosion in Israel’s Dimona Facility;*** A Twitter account run by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on Friday, December 24, threatened to blow up the city of Dimona in the Negev desert, where a nuclear facility is located. The IRGC account, with its 12,100 followers, posted a video showing multiple explosions in a desert. “Then on the day, we [God] will deal you the fiercest blow. We will surely inflict punishment, “ the IRGC wrote in Arabic, citing a quote from the Koran, adding the hashtag “Dimona.” The video is post-dated to Friday. The account provides a link to the IRGC’s Telegram account, with its 376,084 subscribers. Both the IRGC Twitter account and Telegram account show the IRGC logo—an arm raised while clutching a rifle. The IRGC Arabic account only follows the Farsi language Twitter account of the Islamic Republic’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, as well as a backup account for IRGC Arabic. A December 13 tweet from the IRGC account reads: "In the event of foolishness on the part of the Zionist regime, the Islamic Republic of Iran is no longer ready to destroy Tel Aviv and Haifa but to liberate Holy Quds. If the security of the Holy Land of Iran is compromised, no one will taste the moment of security, whether those who are at 1,000 km or at 10,000 km. “Quds is the Arabic name for the capital of Israel, Jerusalem. In 2019, the US designated the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization. The US State Department—under both Democrat and Republican administrations—has classified the Iranian regime as the world’s worst state-sponsor of terrorism. The IRGC is estimated to have murdered over 600 US military personnel in the Middle East. Last week, an Arabic language Twitter account of the Islamic Republic of Iran published an image on December 17 that showed the planned burned elimination of the Jewish state in 2022. The picture shows Israel composed of nails and matches and a book of matches next to words in Hebrew and English declaring: “Just try and you will see.” The book of matches, which is situated next to Israel in the image, says “Ballistic matchstick” and shows an Iranian regime flag on it. The apparent message is that the clerical regime is prepared to detonate the matches to destroy Israel in 2022.

***In ‘Warning’ to Israel, Iran Says it Fired 16 Ballistic Missiles Able to Hit Country;*** Iran fired multiple ballistic missiles Friday, December 24, at the close of five days of military drills that generals said were a warning to Israel and included a mock strike on Israel’s nuclear facility. “These exercises were designed to respond to threats made in recent days by the Zionist regime,” armed forces chief of staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri told state television. “Sixteen missiles aimed and annihilated the chosen target. In this exercise, part of the hundreds of Iranian missiles capable of destroying a country that dared to attack Iran were deployed,” he added. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps chief Major General Hossein Salami added: “The military exercise... is a serious warning to Zionist regime officials... Make the slightest mistake; we will cut off their hand.” Iranian Revolutionary Guards forces finished the drill by blowing up a target set up to resemble Israel’s Dimona nuclear complex, Reuters reported. Iranian TV broadcast images of missiles striking the target structures and issued a threat to Israel. The short-range and medium-range missiles, Iran has said, can reach Israel as well as US bases in the region. Iranian officials said the missiles fired during the drill successfully hit one target at the same time as 10 drones simultaneously hit their targets. State TV showed missiles launching in the desert.

***Lebanon's Top Christian Party Signals Possible End of Hezbollah Alliance;*** Lebanon's top Christian party has indicated it is considering ending a political alliance with Iran-backed Hezbollah, threatening a fragile union that has shaped Lebanese politics for nearly 16 years. Gebran Bassil, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) party said earlier this week there would be "political consequences" for action taken against his party by Lebanon's two main Shiite parties Hezbollah and Amal. Prominent figures close to the party have also said the 2006 Mar Mikhael Agreement between FPM and Hezbollah is at an end. The party's support was critical in bringing President Michel Aoun, the FPM's founder, to power in 2016, and the FPM has provided critical Christian political cover for Hezbollah's armed presence under Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system. Pro-Hezbollah Sheikh Sadiq Al-Nabulsi said on Wednesday, December 22, that Hezbollah had "a very high tolerance for pain and criticism" but Bassil was at risk of losing its support. "Today the FPM has no real ally other than Hezbollah, so why are you letting go of your last ally?" he said. Bassil's party has faced growing political pressure to distance itself from Hezbollah since the country's 2019 financial meltdown. Traditional allies in the Arab Gulf have been unwilling to provide Lebanon with aid, as they have in the past, because of what they have said is Hezbollah's grip on the country and its support for Iran-backed Houthi rebels battling Saudi-backed forces in Yemen. The group is classified by the United States and major western nations as a terrorist group.

***France Closes Mosque After Imam Used Sermons to Incite Hatred Towards Christians, Gay People, and Jews, and Defend Jihad;*** France has ordered the closure of a mosque in the north of the country because of the radical nature of its imam's preaching, regional authorities told AFP (Agence France-Presse) on Tuesday, December 28. The mosque in Beauvais, a town of 50,000 people some 62 miles north of Paris, will remain shut for six months, according to the prefecture of the Oise region where Beauvais is located. It said the sermons there incite hatred, violence and 'defend jihad'. The move comes two weeks after Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said he had triggered the procedure to close the site because the imam there 'is targeting Christians, homosexuals, and Jews in his sermons. This, the minister said, was 'unacceptable'. Local authorities were legally bound to launch 10 days of information-gathering before taking action but told AFP on Tuesday that the mosque would now be shut within two days. A lawyer for the association managing the mosque said that his remarks had been 'taken out of context', and said that the imam had been suspended from his duties following the prefecture's letter. The French government announced earlier this year that it would step up checks of places of worship and associations suspected of spreading radical Islamic propaganda.

***Bird Flu Outbreak Kills Hundreds of Thousands of Birds in What Officials Call the Deadliest Wildlife Disaster in Israel's History;*** A bird flu outbreak in northern Israel has killed at least 5,200 migratory cranes and forced farmers to slaughter hundreds of thousands of chickens as authorities try to contain what they say is the deadliest wildlife disaster in the nation's history. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met his national security adviser and other experts to discuss efforts to contain the outbreak and prevent this 'mass disaster' from passing into humans. So far no human transmission has been reported, Bennett's office said. Many of the birds are dead in the middle of the water body so it's difficult for them to be taken out.' Uri Naveh, a senior scientist at the Israel Parks and Nature Authority, said while also noting the situation is not yet under control. Wildlife officials in Israel said it is believed that the cranes were infected by smaller birds that had contact with farms suffering from outbreaks. Environmental Protection Minister Tamar Zandberg called the crisis 'the most serious damage to wildlife in the history of the country.' 'The extent of the damage is still unclear,' she tweeted. Bird flu, or avian influenza, is a virus that primarily infects birds, but can also infect humans. The virus often spreads in the fall and winter months as birds migrate across the world. An infected bird will often carry the flu with them, introducing it to a new part of the world, and infecting animals there. The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention warns that a person can contract the virus by being around or touching an infected bird. If virus particles get into a person's eyes, nose or mouth they could be infected.

***Israel's Economy Grew by 7% in 2021, Beating Global Average;*** Multinational business information company Dun & Bradstreet said Monday, December 27, that Israel's economy grew by 7% in 2021, beating out a global average of 5.9%. According to the study, India's economy grew by 9.5% and China's by 8%. The Dun & Bradstreet report noted that although Israel's economy was showing significant improvement, driven by a strong tech sector and booming real estate activity, several industries such as tourism, restaurants, and entertainment continued to suffer in 2021. The report noted the continued uncertainty surrounding the Omicron strain of the virus but said that Israel was showing resilience so far during the pandemic, especially due to the widespread vaccine rollout. Meanwhile, unemployment has dropped throughout the year with the lifting of various pandemic-related restrictions. The report said that while approximately 46,000 businesses closed in Israel in 2021, around 63,000 had opened or returned to operation. The report said that as of the end of 2021, there were around 620,000 active businesses, of which around 96.5% (about 600,000) were defined as small businesses. "The entire global economy, and the Israeli economy in particular, showed an improvement in economic and business indices in 2021, after in 2020 it, like many local economies, was significantly affected by the coronavirus crisis," said Efrat Segev, vice president of data and analysis at Dun & Bradstreet Israel.

***Ancient Underwater Treasure Found in Caesarea with Christian Gold Ring;*** Some time ago, a team of divers from the Antiquities Authority's (IAA) Marine Archaeology Unit was surveying an area just outside the harbor of Caesarea, as they routinely do off the entire coast of Israel. "We spotted a broken metal anchor and decided to see if there was more in the area," said archaeologist Jacob Sharvit. "We soon started to find many other artifacts." That diving led to the discovery of an incredible underwater treasure, from two ancient ships dating back to the third and 14th centuries CE that wrecked in the same spot just meters off the coast – over 1,000 years apart, as the IAA revealed Wednesday, December 22. The treasures included hundreds of coins and some unique jewelry. First established in the fourth century BCE, in the first century, Caesarea was selected by Herod to build a port city. The city remained an important center throughout Roman and Byzantine times. The artifacts from the Roman period included silver and bronze coins – which allowed the expert to date the findings – a precious gemstone with a lyre carved on the surface, bronze bells, an eagle figurine, a symbol of the Roman rule, another figurine shaped like a dancer wearing a comic mask, and pottery vessels. Perhaps the most extraordinary find, however, was the gold ring. Thick and shaped as an octagon, the ring carried a green stone with the figure of a young shepherd wrapped in a tunic and carrying a lamb on his shoulders engraved on it. The "good shepherd" is one of the earliest expressions to refer to Jesus, used multiple times in the Gospels. "I am the good shepherd," reads a verse in John. "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11) "We know that similar images were found in the Christian catacombs in Rome," said Helena Sokolov, a curator at the IAA Coin Department. Caesarea was home to an important early Christian community and it is mentioned several times in the New Testament.

***Mohammad Rises to Most Popular Baby Name in Israel;*** Mohammad was the most popular name overall given to newborns in Israel in 2020, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) reported this week. The name was given to 2,394 Israeli-Arab babies in 2020. Yosef or Yusef, a name given to both Jews and Muslims, came in second with 1,176 Jewish boys and 656 Muslim boys receiving it. The third most popular name following Mohammad was the unisex Ariel, with 1,223 Jewish boys and 579 Jewish girls given the name. Ahmad and Adam were also rising in popularity among Muslim boys. The most popular girl's name among Muslims was Maryam. Among Jewish newborn girls, the most popular names were Tamar and Maya, followed by Abigail, Noa, Sarah, Ayalah, Adele, Yael, Shira, and Esther. Israeli-Arab Christians opted for George, Charbel, Jude, Niel, Elias, and Liam for boys and Maria, Lin, Sama, Celine, and Leah for girls.

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*Robert I. Solomon: Messianic Rabbi, [rabbisolomon@yachad.com](mailto:rabbisolomon@yachad.com)*

*Jeffery Blalock: Ministries Coordinator, [jeffery@yachad.com](mailto:jeffery@yachad.com)*

*Yachad Ministries, 950 Pine Grove Road, Roswell, Georgia 30075*

*E-mail: [info@yachad.com](mailto:info@yachad.com), Web Page: <https://www.yachad.com/>*

*Phone: 770-641-3000 (ext. 6)*

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