

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update December 15, 2022 (21th Kislev, 5783)



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As Iran-Russia Alliance Grows, Tehran Becomes Bigger Danger to Middle East – Analysis; Reports over the weekend shed light on the growing Iran-Russia alliance. The US is now more interested in this partnership because Iran has supplied drones to Russia. However, the recent developments appear to relate to Russia providing Iran with more defense technology. The reports over the weekend said that the Iran-Russia alliance now relates to Russia providing “unprecedented” support for Iran, according to US national security council spokesman John Kirby. This could now include Russia offering military and technical support to Iran, which might increase risk to US partners in the Middle East. The obvious target is Israel. Iran has already been using proxies, such as Hezbollah, to threaten Israel for years. Iran has also increasingly used drones as a threat and exported not only precision-guided munitions to Hezbollah in Lebanon, but also moved militias and weapons into Syria and Iraq. This includes ballistic missiles, air defenses and other systems, such as drones. The Iranian support for Russia came as a surprise earlier in 2022. Initial reports of Iran sending drones to Russia seemed odd, because Russia is the senior partner in the Iran-Russia relationship.

Saudi Foreign Minister: If Iran Gets a Nuclear Weapon - All Bets Are Off; Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, said on Sunday, December 11, that Iran's Gulf Arab neighbors would act to shore up their security if Tehran were to obtain nuclear weapons, British media reported. "If Iran gets an operational nuclear weapon, all bets are off," Prince Faisal said in an on-stage interview at the World Policy Conference in Abu Dhabi when asked about such a scenario. "We are in a very dangerous space in the region...you can expect that regional states will certainly look towards how they can ensure their own security," he added. "The signs right now are not very positive unfortunately," Prince Faisal said, adding, "We hear from the Iranians that they have no interest in a nuclear weapons program, it would be very comforting to be able to believe that. We need more assurance on that level." Saudi Arabia, which is Iran's regional foe, has long spoken out against the Islamic Republic's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons. During the negotiations between Iran and world powers on the 2015 nuclear deal, Saudi Arabia and other major Sunni states expressed concern over a deal which would allow Iran to produce nuclear weapons – a position which placed them very close to Israel's position on the matter.

Report: Israel Warns Will Bomb Beirut Airport If It's Used for Iran Weapon Shipments; Israel has warned Lebanon that it could bomb Beirut's international airport, according to one report made Saturday, December 10, after an earlier report that claimed Iran had recently transferred weaponry to the Hezbollah terror group via civilian flights. An Arabic-language newspaper published in London, cited unidentified Israeli political sources as saying Israel was investigating claims made by a Saudi-funded Arabic media outlet, that Iran recently smuggled weapons through Beirut International Airport. According to the report, Israel has warned the Lebanese government that it could strike the airport if it is indeed used for smuggling attempts. The Israeli Air Force has admitted to conducting strikes in Syrian territory, targeting Iranian shipments of weapons meant for the Lebanese terror group to use against Israel. The IAF has largely abstained from conducting raids inside Lebanon itself, though it has indicated that it was prepared to do so. Citing unnamed sources, Arabic media said Thursday that Tehran had used the airline Meraj, which recently started flying a direct route between the two nations' capitals, to transfer weapons to Hezbollah.

UN Says Israel Must Give up Nuclear Weapons in Lopsided Vote; The United Nations General Assembly affirmed that Israel must give up its nuclear weapons in a 149-6 vote taken on Wednesday, December 7. An earlier version of the text was approved in the UNGA's Fifth Committee in October with a 152-5 vote. Ukraine had voted against Israel in the Fifth Committee, but this time around was absent from the proceedings after it had been criticized for standing against Israel. Those who opposed the resolution were: Canada, Israel, Micronesia, Palau and the United States. Liberia, which had been absent from the vote in October, changed its position and opposed the text. Another 26 countries, including India and many European states, abstained from the resolution which is part of an annual package of over 15 anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian texts the UNGA approves. The Jewish state is believed to be the only one of nine countries to possess nuclear weapons and the only one in the region, even though it has never admitted to having such an arsenal. The resolution presumes that Israel has such weapons. It calls on Israel to "not to develop, produce, test or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons" and to "renounce possession of nuclear weapons." The resolution was put forward by the Palestinian Authority and 20 countries, including Israel's allies in the Middle East such as Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates.

Shin Bet Arrests Hamas Operative Who Gathered Intel in Israel; Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip employed him to carry out various missions within Israel, during which he held meetings to promote terrorist activity, as well as to gather intelligence about Shin Bet agents. Sabar Mahmoud Yousef Abu Thabat, a 28-year-old resident of Deir al-Balah was arrested for questioning in November at the Erez crossing, while trying to enter Israel from Gaza. According to the Shin Bet, Abu Thabat, who had a permit to enter Israel for commercial purposes, held several meetings with Hamas operatives at the Beit Hanoun crossing to "promote terror activity and collect intelligence information." The agency said that among the tasks that Hamas asked him to carry out was to reveal the identity of Shin Bet agents and to gather intelligence on sites in Israel. During his investigation, the Shin Bet said that he provided intelligence about the operating methods of the terror group's intelligence apparatus, including the identity of agents, the location of tunnels, as well as stockpiles of weapons and military locations where the group operates. The Shin Bet said that Abu Thabat "took advantage of his stays in Israel, which were intended to give him the opportunity to work in Israel and provide for his family, for the benefit of providing intelligence information to his Hamas operatives and with full awareness of the implications."

Israel is 5th Safest Country in the World for Tourists – Study; Surrounded by a drumbeat of negative news about Israel, a recent survey on the least and most safe travel destinations around the world, by a US insurance comparison website may come as a jaw-dropping surprise. According to this study,

Israel is the fifth safest among the 50 countries in the world most widely visited by tourists. And here you thought that all those studies and surveys that consistently place Israel among the top 10 happiest countries in the world were counterintuitive? If we kvetch so much, one might ask, how can we be happy? Yet study after study, year after year, shows that we are; that in terms of happiness, we are right up there with New Zealand and a bevy of Northern European countries that are the happiest in the world. The study – based on data culled from reports put out by numerous organizations such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, Our World in Data and the WorldRiskReport – came up with a “travel safety index” based on several per capita criteria: the number of homicide deaths, road traffic deaths, unintentional poisoning deaths, death from poor hygiene conditions, life years lost due to communicable disease, life years lost due to injury and a country’s likelihood to be hit by a natural disaster. Death or injury as a result of acts of terror, it is assumed, falls under either the homicide or life years lost to injury categories. Israel’s overall safety index was -60.22, giving it a grade of A. Only Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Singapore were considered safer, with the last two countries earning an A+ grade.

China Opens 'Police Station' to Spy on Citizens in Israel – Report; China has opened a police station in Israel to spy on Chinese nationals abroad, according to the NGO Safeguard Defenders. The station is one of 110 around the world cited by the Madrid-based organization, which seeks to support civil society groups and human-rights lawyers in Asia. The latest update to the list of “stations” includes an unknown location of the Nantong Police. Safeguard Defenders cited a news report from Chinese media on April 29, 2020, describing a meeting between the Nantong Police and Overseas Chinese Linkage Service Centers in which “Xu Weisong from the Israeli workstation,” among others, participated. “The Nantong City Overseas Police and Overseas Chinese Linkage Service Center is an important link between Nantong and the international community and safeguards the rights and interests of Nantong overseas,” the report said. The police stations, most of which are in Europe, are used to harass and silence Chinese nationals and dissidents living abroad and to persuade them to return to China, Safeguard Defenders said. Officially, these “service stations” exist to help Chinese residents or tourists in given countries, as part of a diaspora association. However, these stations may have an alternative role: the persuasion of certain Chinese nationals to return to China. Safeguard Defenders cited specific examples of how these Chinese stations in Spain and Serbia persuaded Chinese nationals to return home.

Morocco’s Muslim King Called on Jews to Pray for Rain. Rain Came; As per Jewish law, on Saturday night, Jews in Morocco began inserting a section in their prayers for rain. Normally a custom marked only inside synagogues, this year’s prayers for precipitation came at the behest of Morocco’s King Mohammed VI, who turned to the Jews to save his nation from drought. Remarkably, the prayers were answered within a few hours. Moroccan media reported that the king’s request from the Jews came in response to an ongoing drought. The Moroccan king’s request coincided with Jewish custom, in which Jews outside of Israel began praying for rain on the night of December 4. Responding to the king’s plea, the Council of Israelite Communities in Morocco, or CCIM, published a statement in which it “invites worshipers to pray in all the synagogues of the kingdom” so that God may “spare our country and help His Highness the King.” Heavy rain began falling in Casablanca on Sunday; just a few hours after Morocco’s Jews began praying for rain. Jewish tradition describes prayers for rain as a stubborn challenge in the face of the divine. The current Moroccan government normalized relations with Israel in 2020 as part of the Israel–Morocco normalization agreement involving the United States. Moroccan Jews constitute an ancient community as Jews began immigrating to the region as early as 70 CE. At its peak in the 1950s, Morocco’s Jewish population was about 250,000 - 350,000. Due to the migration of Moroccan Jews to Israel and other nations, this number has been reduced to approximately 3,000.

Nine Face Death in Iran for ‘Colluding with Israel’ to Kill Top Nuclear Scientist; Nine people will face the death penalty in Iran over the assassination of one of the country’s top nuclear scientists, the judiciary said Tuesday, December 6. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was killed when his car was ambushed on a highway outside Tehran in November 2020, in an attack Iran blamed on its regional arch-foe Israel. The nine defendants were charged with “corruption on earth” and collusion with Israel, both capital offenses in the Islamic Republic, judiciary spokesman Massoud Setayeshi said. “Fakhrizadeh’s case has 15 defendants,” Setayeshi told a news conference. Along with those facing the death penalty, a further six people had “other accusations” leveled against them, he said. In 2018, the Israeli government accused Fakhrizadeh of leading Iran’s efforts to build an atomic bomb, a claim Iran has always vehemently denied. Fakhrizadeh had been under US sanctions for his role in Iran’s nuclear program when he was killed.

Gantz: Iran Conducted 16 Separate Attacks in Past 5 Years in the Gulf and Red Sea; Iran has conducted at least 16 separate attacks on international vessels in the Gulf and Red Sea in the past five years, and can reach a significant quantity of enriched uranium for one nuclear bomb (SQ1) at 90% in only two weeks, Defense Minister Benny Gantz said Thursday, December 1. “Just this month we saw an attack on a commercial vessel using a Shahed 136 UAV, which was launched from the Chabahar region of southern Iran,” Gantz said. This is the same area I discussed a year ago with your ambassadors, as a hotspot of terrorism. In fact, in the last five years, Iran has conducted at least 16 separate attacks on civilian international vessels in the Gulf and the Red Sea.” Gantz, who made the comments during a security briefing for defense attaches of over 30 countries, stressed that the Islamic Republic is not only a threat to Israel, but poses a challenge to the region and the world. “Iran continues to build, expand and fortify its capabilities. Today, should Iran decide to do so, it may reach SQ1 at 90% enriched Uranium in only two weeks. The international community must take action – strengthening alliances, increasing intelligence cooperation, projecting power and responding forcefully to Iranian attacks and aggression.”

Iran Destroys Family Home of Iranian Rock Climber who Competed without Headscarf; Iran has destroyed a villa owned by a family member of an Iranian rock climber, who competed in an overseas competition without her headscarf, a video appears to show. In the undated video, the brother of Iranian rock climber Elnaz Rekabi, an athlete himself, is seen sobbing by the ruins of a home with medals on the ground. Ms Rekabi, 33, and her brother Davoud were both reportedly arrested after Ms Rekabi's return to Iran, following the tournament in South Korea in October, in which she competed without a headscarf. According to local media, the villa was not demolished as an act of retaliation against Ms Rekabi's appearance in South Korea. Iranian media said the house was razed by authorities before Ms Rekabi took part in the competition, adding Mr Rekabi did not hold the correct permit for its construction. Earlier, Ms Rekabi posted a suspicious apology video on her Instagram Stories saying the hijab dropped by mistake and she was returning home, with the athlete and her brother both allegedly detained shortly afterwards. The Iranian government routinely pressures activists at home and abroad, often airing what rights groups describe as coerced confessions on state television.

Blinken: US Will Judge the Next Israeli Government on Policies, not Personalities; US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Sunday, December 4, that the Biden administration will judge with the incoming hardline Israeli government, based on the policies that it implements and not by the individuals slated to fill senior roles in the next coalition. “We will gauge the government by the policies and procedures, rather than individual personalities” said Blinken in the keynote address at the annual conference of the dovish J Street conference in Washington. “We will hold to the... standards we’ve established in our relationship over the past several decades. And we will speak honestly and respectfully with our Israeli friends, as partners always should.” Blinken took the opportunity to again congratulate presumptive prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu — eliciting an audible hiss from a handful among the 1,000-plus conference attendees — and welcomed his commitment to lead a government “that in his

words, will work for the benefit of all residents in the State of Israel without exception.” The remarks come amid speculation that Biden officials will not engage with some of the most far-right members of Israel’s emerging government, such as Religious Zionism chairman Bezalel Smotrich, who is slated to become finance minister, and Otzma Yehudit chairman Itamar Ben Gvir, who is set to become national security minister.

Major University Weighs Anti-Semitism Charges Against Pro-Palestine Student Group; George Washington University (GWU) held two hearings regarding the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapter and its president, after several Jewish student group meetings were disrupted by the organization. GWU’s SJP chapter reportedly disrupted multiple Jewish events on campus, going so far as to call for an “intifada revolution,” according to Jewish media, and protested an event featuring a former Israeli official. The university responded by scheduling two hearings to determine if the chapter had violated any university policies, and charged both the president and group itself with student conduct violations, according to GWU’s student newspaper. StopAntisemitism’s Executive Director Liora Rez said that in early October, the SJP chapter stood outside the building of GW Hillel, a Jewish campus group, chanting and screaming, “Israel is a terrorist state.” Later in the month, the chapter disrupted a Hillel event featuring former senior commander in the Israel Defense Forces Doron Tenne, claiming Tenne had committed war crimes, according to Rez. “I want to say a dozen, a little bit more than a dozen or so students, GWU students, with Students for Justice in Palestine were protesting the events” she said. “And they weren’t just simply protesting. We have the video on Twitter and those other videos, but they were screaming Israel is a terrorist state.”

125 Lawmakers Urge Biden to Form Anti-Semitism Task Force; A bipartisan slate of 125 lawmakers from both chambers are calling on the Biden administration to adopt a “whole of government” policy to combating anti-Semitism. A letter sent Tuesday, December 6, to President Joe Biden, spearheaded by the chairmen of congressional task forces for combating anti-Semitism, called for action from officials from an array of agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, the FBI, the State Department, the White House, the Department of Education, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. The letter pushes for the creation of “an interagency task force led by an official at the Assistant Secretary rank or higher,” and it cites an FBI report saying there was a 6% rise in anti-Semitic hate crimes in 2020. “Because many individual agencies play a critical role in combating anti-Semitism, closer coordination is needed to share best practices, data, and intelligence; identify gaps in efforts; streamline overlapping activities and roles; and execute a unified national strategy,” the letter said. The letter comes a day ahead of a roundtable on anti-Semitism to be convened at the White House bringing together top administration officials with Jewish organizational leaders, and a week after the Department of Homeland Security issued a terrorism advisory bulletin.

Saudi Arabia Wants to Normalize Ties with Israel – Report; Saudi Arabia is looking to normalize ties with Israel, although it will be a while before this ever properly manifests, Israeli news outlet reported Tuesday, December 6. The article cited Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Abdel al-Jubeir, who recently spoke to senior American Jewish leaders. There, he guaranteed that Israeli-Saudi normalization will happen eventually but stressed that it will take time. In addition, in a meeting with US officials visiting Riyadh, courtesy of the Washington Institute, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman listed three main demands that must be met for Saudi Arabia to join the Abraham Accords and normalize ties with Israel. According to the report, these demands did not include anything about the Palestinian conflict or requests for Israel. Rather, they hinged entirely on the US, specifically affirming a US-Saudi alliance, proper weapons supply to the kingdom as if it were a NATO country and allowing Riyadh to have a restricted civil nuclear program. These requests by Saudi Arabia for the US come amid strained ties between Washington and Riyadh. While the Biden administration had always been less warm towards the

Saudis compared to their predecessors, relations suffered after OPEC decided to cut oil production by two million barrels per day in early October.

Herzog Arrives in the UAE after Wrapping up Visit to Bahrain; President Isaac Herzog left Bahrain on Monday morning, December 5, and landed in the United Arab Emirates for the second leg of his trip to meet with Israel's allies in the Gulf. Herzog was greeted at the airport in Abu Dhabi by UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah Bin Zayed. The Israeli president was set to meet with Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the ruler of Abu Dhabi, later on Monday. He was also set to attend the Abu Dhabi Space Debate, a forum on space exploration policy that also features Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As president, Herzog already visited the UAE earlier this year to participate in the Expo 2020 Dubai. The president's trip to Bahrain, the first by an Israeli head of state to the island kingdom, centered on the unrealized business potential between the two nations. Iran, a threat that occupies the minds of Israeli and Bahraini officials, was not mentioned by Herzog, Bahrain's King Hamad, or Foreign Minister Abdul Latef Al-Zayani in their public statements. Instead, they hammered home the importance of upgrading the economic ties between the nations, which signed the Abraham Accords in 2020.



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