

Israel News Faxx

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Netanyahu: Israel Must Prevent Elimination of the Jewish People

By Ha'aretz

The Israeli government has the "right, duty and capability" to prevent the elimination of the Jewish people and the Jewish state, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said Sunday's weekly cabinet meeting.

During the meeting, the cabinet marked the 70th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference on the Nazi "Final Solution" for the Jewish people. Netanyahu said that the Jewish people's ability to defend itself was the main difference between 2012 and 1942.

"There is no lack of bitter enemies today," Netanyahu said. "The will to destroy the Jewish people has not changed. What has changed is our ability to defend ourselves and our determination to do so."

Knesset Preparing 'Corrective Discrimination' of Ethiopians

By IsraelNationalNews.com

The Knesset's Aliyah and Absorption Committee held session at the southern city of Kiryat Malachi Sunday, following reports of racism against Ethiopians who live there. The press recently reported that residents of a neighborhood there had decided not to allow Ethiopian Jews to move into it.

Other press reports showed racism against Ethiopian Jews in Mevaseret Zion, near Jerusalem, where some non-Ethiopian parents reportedly refuse to send their children to kindergartens that take in Ethiopian children.

"I stand here as a representative of the Knesset, and I am full of shame," said Committee Chairman Danny Danon (Likud). "I did not believe that I would have to deal with the matter of racism toward our brothers who came from Ethiopia in such an intensive manner. All those who exclude Ethiopians need to be locked up in jail."

"Black is just a color." Danon said that a broad legislative effort dealing with racism is in its final stages of preparation. The laws being discussed include a ban on discrimination based on country of origin, a law guaranteeing equal wages to Ethiopian Jews, a law placing the burden of proof in charges of racism on the accused, and a widening of the principle of "corrective discrimination."

Mufti Denies He Called to Kill Jews

By IsraelNationalNews.com

The principal Palestinian Authority's religious leader, the Mufti Muhammad Hussein, denied on Sunday that he advocated for genocide of Jews in a speech two weeks ago.

At an event marking the 47th anniversary of PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement, Hussein said that the killing of Jews by Muslims is a religious Islamic goal. The event was broadcast on PA TV, translated by the Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) research organization and presented on its website.

He cited the Hadith (Islamic tradition attributed to Muhammad) saying that "the Hour [of Resurrection] will not come until you fight the Jews. The Jew will hide behind stones or trees. Then the stones or trees will call: 'Oh Muslim, servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.'"

PMW's documentation of the remarks was widely redistributed on Israeli news outlets on Sunday, such as the newspaper Israel Hayom, which published the comments on its front page, and Army Radio which discussed them on its flagship morning talk show.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu responded and asked the Attorney General's Office to investigate. He said that the comments were "a serious crime that all nations must condemn."

The Mufti, however, is now denying that he called for genocide of Jews. According to a report on Channel 2 News, Hussein told an Egyptian media outlet that "sentences were cut from my speech." He added that "Islam calls for respect of all human beings. I am amazed that these comments were attributed to me."

Last week, Turkish Islamic scholar Adnan Oktar made a scorching response to the claim by the Mufti. During his nightly talk show on the A9TV satellite television channel, Oktar clarified that there is no source in the Koran that calls for murder of the Jews -- and no justification for it.

"You can go nowhere by bloodshed. All will inflict affliction upon you if you shed blood; you will simply be on a downward spiral of bloodshed," he warned. "Pull yourselves together. I address those who advocate murder. Jews are the descendants of prophets -- Allah pre-destined them as Jews," he emphasized. "They live as Jews. The Koran refers to them as the People of the Book... one cannot simply go and kill them."

Iran: We'll Confront Anyone That Threatens Us

By IsraelNationalNews.com

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Saturday said sanctions have no effect on Iran and added that anybody who wants to threaten Iranians' rights will be confronted proportionally, the Iranian-based IRNA news agency reported.

According to the report, he made the comments in an interview with Mexican TV after being asked about U.S. officials' threats against Iran. "We believe there are wise people in the U.S. who prevent others to do crazy actions; furthermore, Iranians have learned how to live in hard situations." He added that history has shown that any foreign power that wanted to invade Iran failed and regretted it.

Never missing a chance to threaten Israel, Ahmadinejad said that the downfall of the "Zionist regime" does not need any atomic bomb and even a war because, as he said, the regime is based on cruelty and massacre so it will collapse automatically.

He once again denied that the Holocaust existed, according to the report, arguing that if the Holocaust is a historical reality, research about it would not be prohibited and the researchers would not be imprisoned. Ahmadinejad said that the Islamic Republic of Iran has never recognized the "illegitimate Zionist regime" and said the UN has also declared that Israel is an occupier and has issued several resolutions against it.

Meanwhile, as the tension regarding Iran increases and speculations continue that Israel will launch a military strike against Iran's nuclear program, on Sunday it was reported that Israeli officials told visiting the U.S. Joint Chief of Staffs' chairman Martin Dempsey that it would give President Barack Obama no more than 12 hours notice if and when it attacks Iran. According to a report in The London Times, the Netanyahu government also said it will not coordinate with the United States an attack on the Islamic Republic.

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Obama Assassination Column Publisher Resigns

By IsraelNationalNews.com & Ha'aretz

The owner and publisher of the Atlanta Jewish Times resigned Monday and put his paper up for sale after he speculated in print (utilizing his First Amendment Freedom of the Press right and his personal constitutional right of freedom of expression) that Israel would consider assassinating President Barack Obama.

According to JTA, Andrew Adler announced he is "relinquishing all day-to-day activities effective immediately" he wrote. Adler named John McCurdy as interim managing editor until a replacement can be found.

His resignation comes after the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta announced it would suspend its relationship with the Atlanta Jewish Times until publisher Adler not only left the paper, but sold it.

"While we acknowledge his public apology and remorse, the damage done to the people of Israel, the global Jewish people, and especially the Jewish Community of Atlanta is irreparable," the Federation said in a statement issued Monday.

The Anti Defamation League, National Jewish Democratic Council, and American Jewish Committee also condemned Adler for his January 13 column, in which he outlined three possible Israeli responses to Obama's weak stance on a nuclear Iran.

"Three, give the go-ahead for U.S.-based Mossad agents to take out a president deemed unfriendly to Israel in order for the current vice president to take his place, and forcefully dictate that the United States' policy includes its helping the Jewish state obliterate its enemies.

"Yes, you read "three" correctly. Order a hit on a president in order to preserve Israel's existence. Think about it. If I have thought of this Tom Clancy-type scenario, don't you think that this almost unfathomable idea has been discussed in Israel's most inner circles?"

"Another way of putting "three" in perspective goes something like this: How far would you go to save a nation comprised of seven million lives...Jews, Christians and Arabs alike? "You have got to believe, like I do, that all options are on the table."

The other two options that he suggested could counter Iran's nuclear weapons are: "Launch a pre-emptive strike against Hamas and Hizbullah; and to mount an attack against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Report: 20% of Germans Still Anti-Semitic

By IsraelNationalNews.com

"Anti-Semitism is deeply rooted in German society" according to an official report conducted for the Bundestag. The conclusions of an independent commission comprising sociologists, police officials, anthropologists and social psychologists who were appointed by the German parliament in 2009 are found in "the German government report on racism in general and anti-Semitism in particular."

The report found that about a fifth of Germans agreed with anti-Semitic statements such as "Jews have too much power in business." The report says that anti-Semitism permeates well into the mainstream of society, and it quotes children as using the words "You Jew" as pejorative on the playground.

The report also cited chants from crowds at soccer matches involving Jewish teams, shouting things like "Jews to the gas chamber," or "bring back Auschwitz." The report did note that the vast majority of anti-Semitic crimes are committed by right-wing extremists, who are estimated to number only about 26,000 of Germany's more than 80 million inhabitants.

The report called for better coordination of local, state and federal strategies to combat anti-Semitism - and singled out the Internet as a major problem. "With regard to modern forms of communication - we point to the Internet in particular - it is virtually impossible to prevent the spread of such thinking," Longenich said.

The report argues the Internet provides a platform for spreading extremism of all flavors, with anti-Semites, Holocaust deniers and Islamist extremists all using it extensively to promote their goals. "Anti-Semitism in our society is based on widespread prejudices, deeply rooted clichés and on sheer ignorance about Jews and Judaism," one of the authors, the London-based German history professor Peter Longenich, told reporters at a press conference to unveil the report in Berlin.

According to the report, the problem is not unique to Germany. Nor are Germans the most anti-Semitic population in Europe. Hungary, Poland, and Portugal all have greater instances of anti-Semitism among their citizens. Representatives from the Jewish community in Germany said, "We need new ways to deal with history. It is necessary for politicians and the education system in Germany to learn how to properly relate to the country's Nazi past."

'Nearly Half of Israelis Won't Receive Gas Masks'

By YnetNews.com

The Home Front Command is poised to run out of gas masks within months, leaving nearly half of the Israeli population without protective kits, Ynet learned Monday.

Last week, IDF Planning Directorate Chief Major-General Amir Eshel alluded that Syria's biological and chemical weapons could fall into the hands of Hizbullah if President Bashar Assad's regime collapses, raising concerns over Israel's preparedness for a possible unconventional attack.

IDF data shows that it has only 400,000 kits left, which are expected to be distributed within the next three months on a "first come, first serve" basis. While the government has commissioned the production of 120,000 additional gas mask kits, the measure was meant to make sure that the factories remain functional; these kits are not to be distributed.

Once the last kits are distributed, 55% of Israeli citizens - 4.2 million people - will be in possession of a gas mask. The other 45%, as well as tens of thousands of refugees and migrant workers, will remain unprotected should an unconventional attack target Israel. Producing enough kits to cover the rest of the population would cost NIS 1.2 billion (roughly \$318 million).

"The distribution will stop because we don't have the budget," a senior Home Front Command official said. "But even if the funds turn up, it would take two years to manufacture the rest of the kits."

The data shows that in the area that is most vulnerable to an attack, stretching from Haifa to Ashdod, 38% of the citizens don't have gas masks. In cities that are less exposed, like Jerusalem and Eilat, distribution centers never opened. As result, only 15% of residents in the capital have a gas mask. Some 52% of Tel Aviv residents are in possession of the protective equipment.

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Israeli Minister: Iran Has a 'Destroy Israel Program'

By *IsraelNationalNews.com*

Minister of Public Diplomacy Yuli Edelstein told the World Jewish Congress on Tuesday that it was a misnomer to say Iran has a "nuclear program." Rather, Edelstein said, Tehran has "a program to destroy Israel."

Speaking at the WJC in Brussels to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Edelstein said, "Tehran doesn't have a nuclear program - it has a program for the destruction of Israel."

Edelstein said, "The technological advances of today mean that there is no need to have a conference to pronounce a 'Final Solution' to exterminate the Jews the way the Nazis did 70 years ago. Today you can just push a button to send a missile to do the job."

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on Tuesday said that even 70 years after the Holocaust much of the world remains silent in the face of continued threats to Israel's survival.

Former U.S. Officials Assess Mideast Peace Prospects

By *André de Nesnera (VOA News)*

The United States and Jordan have recently pledged to cooperate in an effort to revive the Middle East peace process. Negotiations for a lasting peace in the Middle East between Israel and the Palestinians have been stalled for more than a year.

Like many diplomats, John Bolton, a former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, takes a dim view of Mideast peace prospects. "Well I think it's in the ditch and I don't know what's going to get it out anytime soon."

The key issues facing both sides are the geographic outlines of a new Palestinian state, the status of Jerusalem, the return of Palestinian refugees and the construction of new Jewish settlements in occupied territories.

Peace talks ground to a halt in September 2010 when Israel resumed the construction of settlements after a moratorium expired. Palestinian officials say they will not resume talks until settlement building is stopped. Israel refuses to freeze settlements and is calling for talks without preconditions.

Jordan's King Abdullah has hosted low-level discussions between Israelis and Palestinians in an effort to get full negotiations under way. Following a meeting where he briefed President Barack Obama on the talks [Jan. 17th], the king said these talks are in the very early stages.

But former Secretary of Defense William Cohen says time is running out for an agreement. "I don't think time is on anyone's side on this. I

think the Israelis need to have an agreement with the Palestinians. I think the Palestinians should do whatever they can to have a united front as such and one that recognizes Israel's right to security.

"And I think Israel has to recognize the Palestinians have a right to sovereignty, dignity, economic opportunity," Cohen added. "And those goals aren't going to be diminished over time - they are going to increase in terms of the numbers of people and the demand to share in a future filled with prosperity. So at the moment, there doesn't seem to be any movement at all."

Experts say one stumbling block to the peace process is the division in Palestinian leadership between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The West Bank is run by Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority while the Gaza Strip is under the control of Hamas, considered a terrorist group by the State Department.

Bolton said that Palestinian split makes it difficult for leadership to emerge. "The biggest problem, at this point, is that there is not a sufficiently strong interlocutor on the Palestinian side who can make the very hard political decisions that they would have to make and then carry through on some of these difficult commitments. The Israelis will have to do the same thing, but they have a functioning government. The Palestinians, unfortunately, don't have that. And it doesn't seem to be a situation that's improving."

Bolton repeated a statement made by former Secretary of State James Baker, though, that peace depends on the participants. "The United States can't want peace more than the parties themselves."

Looking ahead, neither Bolton nor Cohen believes there will be any significant progress this year in the Middle East peace process because it is a presidential election year in the United States and both sides want to see what Washington will have to offer next.

Iranians in Azerbaijan Plotted to Kill Chabad Rabbis

By *IsraelNationalNews.com*

Azerbaijan officials said they uncovered an Iranian-linked Muslim gang that plotted to assassinate Chabad rabbis and others in Baku. The rabbis teach at the Chabad Jewish school in Baku.

Azerbaijan's National Security Ministry named one of the gang members as Balagardash Dadashov, an Azerbaijan citizen who lives in the Iranian city of Ardabil, according to the Azerbaijan News.az website. He and two others, Rasim Farail Aliyev and Ali Alihamza Huseynov, were charged with smuggling weapons and explosives into the country.

The National Security Ministry said that Dadashov had contacts with Iranian intelligence agencies and promised Aliyev, his brother-in-law in Ardabil, \$150,000 to kill foreigners in Baku "in order to put an end to their public service."

Aliyev agreed, received a down payment and then promised half of the money to Huseynov to carry out the assassinations with a sniper rifle that

could be used out of the view of security cameras. He also considered using a pistol to kill the victims at their homes. Huseynov agreed bought vehicles and prepared maps and photographs of the intended victims and their cars. Two of them were Chabad rabbis.

Israel to UN: Tomorrow Will Be Too Late For Action Against Iran

By Ha'aretz

"The Arab world is in flames and the Security Council is dealing with construction permits in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank)," Israel's United Nations envoy Ron Prossor said in a speech at the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

Prossor used the Security Council's monthly meeting on the situation in the Middle East to direct harsh criticism at the body. "The obsession with Israeli and the ignoring of countries where civilians are tortured and killed undermines the credibility and calls into question the relevance of the Security Council.

"Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons represent the greatest threat to peace and security in the world," Prossor said. "The silence of the Security Council will be very costly. You must act today. Tomorrow will be too late.

"The thought of Iran equipped with nuclear weapons should take sleep from the eyes of Security Council member states," Prossor said. "The international community cannot stand by idly while the Ayatollah's regime works to combine extremist ideology with nuclear technology."

Prossor also attacked the Security Council for its silence on continued rocket fire at Israel from the Gaza Strip. He mentioned a letter he sent to the council protesting the rocket fire. But we have still not heard condemnation from the Security Council or the Palestinian Authority."

On UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's expected upcoming visit to Israel, Prossor said: "I hope that the Secretary-General's visit will provide a new perspective on the real barriers to peace and security in the region and illuminate the true problems of terror, extremism and incitement in our region."

Israeli Consulate in Boston Evacuated over Anthrax Scare

By IsraelNationalNews.com

The Israeli Consulate in Boston was evacuated Monday and five others in the world were on alert after Anthrax white powder scares. A powder-like substance in an envelope marked "Anthrax" was found in the Consulate offices in the Boston Park Plaza hotel mid-day Monday.

The consulate was shut down for the day, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the U.S. State Department are investigating. "The item was field tested and indicated no immediate threat to public safety," FBI Special Agent Greg Comcowich said. "Additional testing will be done."

The local CBS outlet quoted Fire Chief Steve Dunbar as saying, "The initial reports were that there was some white powder. They felt the envelope and the particles of grain, so they wisely decided to isolate it into their specialized containment vessel, and that was a smart move on their behalf."

A similar scare was reported at a Rhode Island government office and at five other Israeli missions, including New York, Houston, Texas and London. The substances were found to be harmless.

The Anthrax scare appears to be a new epidemic that began last week with a scare in Florida, where the Palm Beach International Airport was partially evacuated, White powder was found on the carpet and later was determined to be harmless.

Israeli Comedy Show Parodies the Birthright Experience

By Ha'aretz

In a rare jab at visiting Diaspora Jews, Israel's premier satirical television show, Eretz Nehederet (A Wonderful Country), took on Taglit-Birthright Israel during its Monday night season premier.

The program, known for mocking famous political leaders and providing Israelis with topical parodies of the weekly news, included a clip that mocked Birthright, a program that sponsors free 10-day trips for Jews from across the world to tour Israel.

The clip, which follows a Birthright group as they travel by bus through Israel, plays largely on stereotypes of American Jews. It takes a swipe at JAPs (Jewish American Princesses), while caricaturizing overgrown frat boys who get far too excited about anything and everything, Israeli tour guides whose spiel has as much to do with instilling guilt as it does explaining Israeli history, and South American Jews whose only interest, as portrayed in the sketch, is debauchery.

Furthermore, the clip is rife with references to everyday Israeli life, playing on the Israeli perception of American Jews as borderline fanatic Israel lovers who cannot seem to get enough of the country's sites, cuisine, and historical resonance.

In one of the clip's highlights, the tour guide takes the group on a quick emotional roller coaster ride. While in transit, he announces a potential trip to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, to which the group cheers unexpectedly. The tour guide manages to calm the participants using a cynical and melancholy explanation of the museum's significance to worldwide Jewry:

Tour guide: "The Yad Vashem Museum is based on the Holocaust [plays somber music]. We will give you time to be sad, and at the same time you should all send text messages to your parents, urging them to continue donating money to the State of Israel...so that there won't be second Holocaust, since the sequel is always worse than the original. "

After the participants enthusiastically agree to badger their parents for funds, the guide proceeds to send around a Jewish National Fund tzedakah box complete with a credit card machine attached to it, urging the participants to donate generously.

Doron Karni, VP of International Marketing for Taglit-Birthright Israel said the organization was "very pleased" that the show featured Taglit-Birthright Israel on "one of the most important programs in the Jewish world." According to Karni, the parody is a testament to the way in which Taglit-Birthright Israel "has become so entwined in Israeli culture."

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Missile Threat to Israel Exaggerated, Expert Says

By IsraelNationalNews.com

The threat posed by a missile attack on Israel is not as terrible as people think, according to Haim Rosenberg, the former head of long-term planning at Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd.

In a paper published by the BESA Center at Bar Ilan University, Rosenberg explains that at this time, missile attacks by Muslim countries would only be able to inflict limited physical damage on Israel. He further argues that it would be a mistake to prepare mostly for missile strikes, when a future war could also involve ground attacks.

"Recent discussions around a preemptive strike on Iran have included the possible repercussions of such a move, namely missile attacks on Israel," he writes. "The threat of ballistic missile warfare is perceived as a paradigm shift capable of radically altering modern warfare. Those who believe that Middle East battlefields of the future will primarily consist of missile attacks upon Israeli cities therefore argue that Israel must prepare itself for such a situation."

He explains, however, that "no war in which missiles were employed – from the Iran-Iraq War to the Second Lebanon War – has ever been won without the additional use of maneuvering ground forces. In other words, the use of missiles has never been a deciding factor in any armed conflict."

Missiles have limitations on accuracy that prevent them from becoming a decisive weapon, argues Rosenberg. While missiles like the Russian SS-26 are extremely accurate, no Arab country possesses them. "A bird's-eye view of any town will show that due to public areas and numerous spaces between buildings, only a fraction of any area is in fact occupied by buildings," he says. "It is therefore likely that an attack by dozens of missiles will only cause a small number of direct hits and result in a relatively small number of casualties."

However, the psychological impact of such an attack would be quite significant, he admits. In addition, a direct hit to a facility containing hazardous materials could "extremely high" damage.

Israel-PLO Talks End in Amman, Jordan Mulls Sanctions?

By IsraelNationalNews.com

The final "exploratory" meeting between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization ended Wednesday in Amman with no progress, officials said. PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat and Israeli attorney Yitzhak Mocho made little headway in their fifth meeting, the last before the January 26 deadline set by the Quartet of peacekeeping nations to break the impasse and re-launch direct talks for a final status agreement between the two sides. "Israel has not advanced one step towards resuming negotiations," a PLO representative told the AFP news agency.

Nevertheless, Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh characterized the talks as "serious" despite the disagreements on both sides. "The coming days will be

devoted to evaluating the results [of the talks] with the relevant parties in consultation with the Quartet and the Arab Committee for Peace," he told Jordan's official Petra news agency.

Earlier in the day, a report in the London-based Al-Quds al-Arabi newspaper claimed King Abdullah II was considering a possible reduction in ties with Israel if the Jewish State did not "make significant concessions which allow the Palestinian leadership to justify their return to the negotiating table." The veiled threat was not confirmed by any other publication, however – nor was it mentioned later in the day.

Some lawmakers in Israel are also frustrated with the lack of progress and the PA's unending insistence on preconditions for talks.

Knesset member Aryeh Eldad warned U.S. Ambassador Dan Shapiro on Wednesday at a meeting of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that America should look at the fact that the "exploratory" meetings are going nowhere. Eldad suggested that Shapiro instead think about what might happen if the Hashemite Kingdom were to come to an end, pointing out that the "two-state solution" west of the Jordan River is at a "dead end."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced he will arrive in the region next week in effort to further "encourage" Israel and the PLO to resume the talks. Ban told reporters he will visit Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority in hopes of creating "a positive atmosphere for moving forward."

European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who arrived in the region earlier this week, and who has been in Amman to try to move the process forward, has already insisted that informal talks continue despite the obvious lack of progress and the apparent -- or at least, publicly stated unwillingness of the PLO side to do so.

Ex- Israeli Envoy to U.S.: Replace Obama

By IsraelNationalNews.com

President Obama should be replaced, former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Dan Gillerman told a women's Zionist conference. In a 180-degree turn from the usually complimentary, if not patronizing, views of diplomats serving terms in foreign countries, Gillerman told the annual Women's International Zionist Organization conference in Tel Aviv Tuesday that Obama's "weakness" has left Israel with having "to keep apologizing for itself all the time."

"We shouldn't have to be on the defensive," added Gillerman, who served as ambassador from 2003 to 2008. He once referred to former President Jimmy Carter as a bigot for his meeting in Syria with Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal.

Concerning the president's bid for re-election this November, Gillerman said that the changes in regimes in the Middle East make it more imperative for a change in favor of what he said is the need for a stronger president. The new Middle East to which Gillerman referred has catapulted blatant anti-Israeli and anti-American Muslim parties into the political spotlight, particularly in Egypt.

Obama used his annual State of the Union speech to defend his foreign policies and claiming credit for the apparent demise of the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad and uniting most of the world against Iran.

Israel is a "key for securing Jewish support in November," according to the Politico website, which noted that Obama added "iron-clad to his prepared version of the speech in which he spoke of his "commitment to Israel's security."

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Peres to Iranians: Rise Up Against Ahmadinejad

By IsraelNationalNews.com

President Shimon Peres Thursday called upon the Iranian people to topple the regime of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Speaking at the World Economic Summit in Davos, Switzerland, Peres blamed the Iranian president for harming the chances for peace in the Middle East. He urged the international community to encourage the Iranian people to bring down Ahmadinejad.

"The Iranians turned Gaza into a base for launching rockets against Israel, and Hizbullah almost destroyed Lebanon," Peres said. "The international community needs to cause people in Iran to believe that they can topple their government. Iran is the only nation in the world that openly calls for the destruction of another country – Israel."

Israeli Hackers Counterstrike Arab Sites

By IsraelNationalNews.com

An Israeli hacker team called "IDF Team" succeeded Thursday in temporarily disabling the website of the Iranian English language television station, and of the Teheran Health Ministry. The sites were hacked at about 4:30 p.m. Israel time and were operational again about one hour later.

The attack was in retaliation for Muslim hackers' attacks yesterday that hit the Ha'aretz news website, the Dan bus company, Assuta Hospital and the Cinematheque.

The team reportedly brought down the Saudi Arabian Stock Exchange website, and the United Arab Emirates stock exchange website, nine days ago. That attack was in retaliation for Muslim hackers' attacks that disabled the websites of Israeli banks and of El Al.

The team posted a warning that read: "If the lame attacks from Saudi Arabia will continue, we will move to the next level which will disable these sites longer term [sic] may come to weeks or even months. You have been warned."

Former IDF Chief: Israel Must Prepare for Possible Attack on Iran

By Ha'aretz

Former IDF chief Gabi Ashkenazi said Thursday that Israel must operate under the radar against Iran, but it should also prepare for a possible strike against the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities.

During a lecture at the Institute for National Security Studies, Ashkenazi stressed that Israel's strategy on Iran must be a combination of several approaches. "Israel must do all it can under the radar and combine that with paralyzing sanctions, but at the same time keep a reliable military option on the table with the willingness to use it if necessary," Ashkenazi said. "When the moment comes I don't know if we won't be alone, and for this reason Israel must also rely on itself," he said.

During his term as IDF chief, Ashkenazi was considered a supporter of a more moderate approach on Iran, in which all diplomatic options must be exhausted before any attack is launched.

Terrorist Punished for Interview

By IsraelNationalNews.com & Ha'aretz

Marwan Barghouti, a Fatah kingpin serving five consecutive life sentences for terror murders, was sent into isolation Wednesday as punishment for granting interviews to Israeli and foreign journalists when he appeared in a Jerusalem court.

Palestinian Authority minister of prisoners Kadura Fares informed an AFP reporter in Ramallah that Barghouti's lawyer was informed of the punishment when he tried to visit him in jail.

Barghouti appeared in court to testify in a lawsuit filed by the family of the late Esther Kleiman. Kleiman, 23, of Neve Tzuf, was killed in a March 2002 shooting attack northwest of Ramallah, while traveling to work in a reinforced Egged bus.

Kleiman's family turned to a U.S. court and asked it to make the PA pay millions of dollars in compensation for its responsibility for the murder. Barghouti was brought to court on Wednesday in order to testify over ties between the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Fatah and the PA. He refused to cooperate with the court and used the opportunity to communicate with the press.

Barghouti, who is likely to become the next Palestinian President, was convicted by the Israeli justice system of five counts of murder – four Israelis and a Greek monk - during the second intifada. There is no question he supported and encouraged violence.

Barghouti is considered a senior Tanzim member (Fatah's armed wing) and was in close contact with members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades through his assistant and nephew, Ahmad Barghouti (a French national).

Yet Barghouti's involvement in past terror attacks does not change the fact that in light of the political developments on the Palestinian side – the possible reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah and especially the lack of contenders against President Mahmoud Abbas – Barghouti remains the only Fatah member who could inherit Abbas' place when the time comes.

In the past, Barghouti spearheaded the Fatah faction that called for terrorist attacks against Israeli targets in the West Bank, and from January 2002 he even supported attacks within the Green Line. Like many Palestinians, Barghouti drew inspiration from Hizbullah, which forced Israel to retreat from southern Lebanon in May 2000, and thought that adopting the Shiite group's tactics will cause Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian territories.

However, in recent years Barghouti admitted that the Palestinians made a grave mistake by turning to terrorism. In countless interviews he said he supports "popular resistance" – that is, unarmed resistance.

Some of the people close to Barghouti have no doubt he intends to run for president, even if it means being elected while still behind bars. He also understands that after the Gilad Shalit prisoner swap – in which he was not included – his only chance of being released is to be elected president. Israel will have a hard time dealing with the international pressure to release an imprisoned president.

There is still no date for elections in the Palestinian territories. There is also no guarantee Abbas will not run again, despite his statements. But if nothing unexpected happens, "prisoner number one" will become "citizen number one" of the Palestinian Authority.

Record Number of Israeli Jews Believe in God *Baby Bites Off Snake's Head*

By Ha'aretz

Fully 80% of Israeli Jews believe that God exists - the highest figure found by the Guttman-Avi Chai survey since this review of Israeli-Jewish beliefs began two decades ago.

The latest survey of the "Beliefs, Observance and Values among Israeli Jews" was conducted in 2009 but the results were released Thursday, after a detailed analysis had been completed. The two previous surveys were in 1999 and 1991.

The study also found that 70% of respondents believe the Jews are the "Chosen People," 65% believe the Torah and mitzvot (religious commandments) are God-given, and 56% believe in life after death.

Overall, the survey found an increase in attachment to Jewish religion and tradition from 1999 to 2009, following a decrease from 1991 to 1999, which was the decade of mass immigration from the former Soviet Union. Among other things, it found that less than half of Israeli Jews think that, in a clash between Jewish law and democracy, democratic values should always prevail.

The study, conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute's Guttman Center for Surveys and the Avi Chai Foundation, is based on interviews with 2,803 Israeli Jews. It found that only 46% of Israeli Jews now define themselves as secular, down from 52% in 1999, while 22% define themselves as either Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox, up from 16% in 1999. The remaining 32% term themselves traditional, virtually unchanged from 1999.

This change in self-identification was also reflected in the proportion of those subscribing to traditional Jewish beliefs. For instance, 55% said they believe in the coming of the Messiah, up from 45% in 1999 but similar to 53% in 1991, while 37% said that "a Jew who does not observe the religious precepts endangers the entire Jewish people," up from 30% in 1999 but again similar to the 1991 figure of 35%.

The study's authors cited two reasons for the rise in religiosity. One is that immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who contributed to the drop in religiosity from 1991 to 1999, have now assimilated into Israeli society. Various studies have found that this process of assimilation has resulted in Soviet immigrants becoming more traditional. The second reason is the demographic change caused by the higher Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox birthrates.

The survey found that, even when individuals were asked about how their own attitudes had changed over the previous decade, the number of those that said they felt more religious and were more careful about observing the Sabbath and kashrut was higher than the number of those who said they had become more secular.

The rise in religiosity was also reflected in attitudes toward other issues. For instance, only 44% said that if Jewish law and democratic values clashed, the latter should always be preferred, while 20% said Jewish law should always be preferred and 36% said "sometimes one and sometimes the other."

The study also found an upswing in religious practice. For instance, 85% of respondents said that "celebrating the Jewish holidays as prescribed by religious tradition" was "important" or "very important," up from 63% in 1999, while 70% said they "always" or "frequently" refrained from eating hametz (leavened bread) on Passover, up from 67% in 1999.

Fully 61% of respondents said the state should "ensure that public life is conducted according to Jewish religious tradition," up dramatically from 44 percent in 1991. But respondents also insisted on preserving their freedom of choice. For instance, between 58 and 68% said that shopping centers, public transportation, sporting events, cafes, restaurants and movie theaters should be allowed to operate on Shabbat (exact figures ranged from 58% for shopping centers to 68% for cafes, restaurants and movie theaters).

Moreover, 51% responded "yes," "absolutely yes" or "perhaps yes" when asked if they favored the introduction of civil marriage in Israel. Those in the first two categories, at 48%, were down from 54% in 1999 but up from 39% in 1991.

By YnetNews.com

An encounter between a snake and a baby ended in a surprising outcome Thursday, when the infant's mother walked into his room to find him chewing on the dead reptile. The infant, Imad Gadir, whose family resides in Shfaram, was not hurt when he bit the unlucky coin snake, but was taken to Haifa's Ramabam Medical Center just in case.

According to Imad's grandfather, Shaheen Shaheen, who recalled the family's tumultuous morning, the boy woke up when his father left for work at 6:30 a.m. The 1-year-old left his parents' bed and headed to his room, where he found the 35-centimeter (13-inch) snake.

He then grabbed it and bit its head off. "It wasn't a pretty sight," Shaheen said. "He's a baby; he didn't know what he was doing. He thought it was a game. I don't wish this kind of thing on anyone."

When Imad's mother realized what had happened she began screaming, until a neighbor jumped the house's fence, entered the room and snatched the snake out of the boy's hand. "I went to the kitchen to get him some milk, and when I came back I saw he was already eating," the mother, Alain, said. "I screamed until the neighbors came. I still can't believe what I saw."

Veteran snake-catcher Eli Cohen said he has never come across a case of this kind. "I guess the kid acted out of a childish instinct when he put the snake in his mouth," he said. "Luckily for him, the coin snake isn't poisonous; otherwise it could have ended in a tragedy."

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