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New Mossad Chief: Iran Deal ‘Significantly Increases’ Threat To Israel

Democratic Lawmakers Call For Sanctions On Iran

Democratic lawmakers – opponents and supporters of the Iran nuclear deal – recently called on the Obama Administration to impose punitive sanctions on Iran without delay. In a letter sent to President Barack Obama, House Representatives Nita Lowey, Eliot Engel, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Albio Sires, Gerry Connolly, Susan Davis and Jerry Nadler called for immediate punitive sanctions in response to Iran’s recent violations of UN Security Council resolutions by conducting two ballistic missile tests.

“Iran’s destabilizing behavior in the region and continued support for terrorism represent an unacceptable threat to our closest allies as well as our own national security,” the Democrats wrote. “As the international community prepares for implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran must understand that violating international laws, treaties, and agreements will have serious consequences. We call on the Administration to immediately announce new U.S. sanctions against individuals and entities involved in Iran’s ballistic missile program to ensure Iran is held accountable for its actions.”

During the congressional review of the Iran nuclear deal, President Obama promised Democratic lawmakers he would respond forcefully to Iranian malfeasance and would swiftly impose sanctions for non-nuclear issues outside of the JCPOA—including ballistic missile activity. [JewishJournal]



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (center) with outgoing Mossad director Tamir Pardo (right) and incoming director Yossi Cohen, at a ceremony for the newly appointed Mossad head, in Tel Aviv, on January 6, 2016.

The nuclear agreement signed between Iran and six world powers in July 2015 has “significantly increased” the threat to Israel posed by the Islamic republic, Yossi Cohen warned as he was sworn in as the new head of the Mossad intelligence agency. Still, he added, he was confident the spy agency would be able to formulate an “appropriate response.”

“The key challenge is the Iranian threat,” Cohen said during the swearing in ceremony at Mossad’s headquarters in Tel Aviv. “Despite the nuclear deal — I think because of it — the threat has significantly increased.”

Cohen, who previously served as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s national security adviser, also pointed to internecine conflict in the Muslim world and the strengthening of regional terror organizations as threats to the entire world, and to Israel in particular. “Israel is at the epicenter of the storm gripping the Middle East in recent years,” Cohen said. “Fanatical Islamic extremism is rolling across countries, and causing their collapse,” he said.

“Iran continues to call for Israel’s destruction, while intensifying its military capabilities and strengthening its grip on the region,” Cohen said. “It employs terror cells as a means to achieve these goals.” Nonetheless, said Cohen, “I am confident the Mossad will be able to build the strength necessary (to counter the challenges) and form an appropriate response.”

Iran and its funding for terror organizations are by no means a new threat, but the regime’s coffers are soon to be refilled thanks to the lifting of sanctions, and its international standing and image have been improved by the nuclear deal reached last year. Most analysts believe that the likelihood of Israeli military intervention against Iran’s nuclear program has been drastically reduced in the wake of the deal, which Israel bitterly opposed, and which its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called a “historic mistake” that would “pave the way” to an Iranian nuclear arsenal.

Netanyahu presided over the ceremony, which was also attended by

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Cohen's predecessor Tamir Pardo, and other agency officials.

"The responsibility that the Mossad bears is immense," Netanyahu said. "Our strength is contingent on the willingness of some of our best sons and daughters to bear the burden of ensuring life, liberty and prosperity of the nation," he said. "I trust you, Yossi, as does all of Israel."

Cohen, a 54-year-old father of four, was born to a modern Orthodox family in Jerusalem, and grew up near the Netanyahus. His father, a seventh-generation Jerusalemite, was a veteran of the pre-state Irgun paramilitary force. [TimesofIsrael]

Tel Aviv Shooter Killed By Israeli Security Forces

Nashat Melhem, the terrorist who killed three people in Tel Aviv shortly after New Year's Day, was located and shot dead by security forces at a mosque in Arara. When Shin Bet and police counter-terrorism (YAMAM) forces arrived at the Wadi Ara mosque at around 4:20pm, Melhem exited the building, trying to escape, and opened fire at them with the same weapon he used to commit the Tel Aviv attack. The troops returned fire and shot him dead. Shin Bet intelligence led the troops to the mosque.

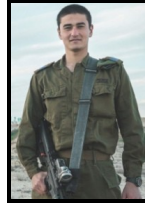
Melhem had been in Arara since the day of the attack and changed hiding places twice. He was apparently aided by family members, and perhaps by members of the Islamic Movement. When the indication of his exact location came in the operation that ended in Melhem's death began.

The idea that Melhem was hiding in Arara had been gaining strength among the Shin Bet. Intelligence bodies, including the Shin Bet, saw several structures which could have been hiding spots after analyzing testimony by his friends and associates who were questioned in the past few days. Thereafter, a more focused intelligence report on the structure Melhem was occupying came in. Before raiding the building, larger numbers of police and IDF forces closed down the surrounding area.

Wide-ranging searches were conducted beforehand. Police forces put up checkpoints in Wadi Ara, arresting one area resident in the process.

It remains unclear if Melhem acted alone or was aided by others. The investigation reportedly continues, and includes the suspicion that he received aid from family members, and might have been influenced by ISIS. Authorities also suspect that Melhem might have acted as part of an organized terror cell. During the week that passed since Melhem's terror attack at the Simta bar, the Israeli police was heavily criticized, particularly that they delayed in publishing Melhem's photo – which could have perhaps aided in capturing him. [YNet]

Awed By His Grandparents' Lives, Japanese Man Joins IDF



Daniel Tomohiro is not the typical Israeli soldier. His Hungarian grandparents survived the Holocaust, made aliyah, and fought in the War of Independence, but they then moved to Australia, where his mother met and married a Japanese man and moved to Iwata, Japan.

Now Tomohiro has come full circle and is serving in the Israel Defense Forces, undergoing basic training with the Nahal Brigade's 50th Battalion. His unit was recently scheduled to take part in a swearing-in ceremony at the Western Wall Plaza in Jerusalem.

"My 88-year-old grandfather lives in Sydney, Australia," Tomohiro said. "He told me that he fought in an artillery unit during the War of Independence, in the Palmach [the Jewish paramilitary organization in the pre-state years], and was an instructor in an officer training course. My grandmother died when I was a child and I still don't know what she did in the Palmach."

Tomohiro's parents met when his father was on a business trip to Australia. "My parents married and moved to Japan, but at home they kept talking about Israel," Tomohiro said. "My family is very pro-Israel and loves the state, and I believe the Israel Defense Forces is the most moral military in the world."

According to Tomohiro, his grandparents imbued him with a sense of curiosity about Israel.

"I felt very connected to the state, but I arrived here for the first time only when I was 18, with my parents and younger brother," he said. "My older brother had already made aliyah and was in the IDF Spokesperson's Unit. After I graduated high school in Japan, I returned to Israel, and four months ago I joined an IDF Hebrew course and later started basic training."

Tomohiro said he was enjoying himself, despite the intense training. "But the service means a lot to me and my family," he said. "My grandmother was in Auschwitz. She survived only because a German nurse covered her with a blanket when Dr. Josef Mengele came to visit. He thought she was dead and this saved her life, because he didn't perform experiments on her. I realized, after hearing such stories, that the Holocaust happened because there was no State of Israel. I am happy to contribute to the security of the state, to make the IDF and Israel strong, and to prevent another Holocaust."

Tomohiro said he was very grateful for the help he received from the Kibbutz Movement's Lone Soldiers Program, which found him a host family on Kibbutz Evron.

[IsraelHayom]