

Newsbytes

The First Watch

May 27, 2020

No. 971

Since 2001

Newzbytes is a ministry of Calvary Chapel of Appleton

www.ccapleton.org

“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Israeli Hackers Shut Down Iran’s Biggest Port for Days

By JNS May 20, 2020

When you take the field against your enemies, and see horses and chariots—forces larger than yours—have no fear of them, for Hashem your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, is with you. Deuteronomy 20:1 (The Israel Bible™)

Israel carried out a recent cyberattack against Iran that shut down one of the country’s major ports for days, causing chaos, apparently in retaliation for an Iranian attack last month on Israel’s water infrastructure, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

Operations at the Shahid Rajaei port—one of two major shipping terminals in the coastal city of Bandar Abbas in the Strait of Hormuz—came to a sudden halt on May 9 after the port’s computer systems were hacked by an unknown source, according to the report.

Security and intelligence officials from the United States and abroad told The Post that the “highly accurate” cyber attack, which paralyzed the port for days, causing severe maritime and land traffic jams, appears to have been perpetrated by Israeli operatives.

The anonymous officials assessed that the attack was launched in retaliation for an Iranian attempt late last month to breach the command-and-control systems of Israeli water and sewage facilities. The Iranian attack, which took place on April 24, was detected in time for water plant employees to change their passwords, and as a result, no damage was done.

Iran denies that it was behind the failed hacking attempt.

The Israeli embassy did not respond to The Post’s requests for comment—and the Israel Defense Forces declined to comment—on the Shahid Rajaei port incident. Iran and Israel have been engaged in a covert cyber war for the past decade.

The Stuxnet worm, revealed in 2010 and widely assumed to be a joint Israel-U.S. creation, is believed to have caused serious damage to Iran’s nuclear program. Last September, a general in Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said that the “Stuxnet cyber attack had had the positive effect of ‘causing us to pay attention’ to the cyber security of its nuclear installations.”

Last November, members of Israel’s Joint Cyber Defense Division, Intelligence Directorate, air force, navy and ground forces flew to the United States for a joint drill with their American counterparts, dubbed “Cyber Dome.”

The Drones Were Ready for This Moment

May 23, 2020

New Yorkers strolling along the East River early last month glanced up to see an unsettling sight: a mysterious drone claiming to represent something called the “Anti-Covid-19 Volunteer Drone Task Force” barking orders to pedestrians below to maintain social distancing.

“Please maintain a social distance of at least six feet,” the drone intoned, according to a report from CBS News, continuing with gloomy warnings, like “please help stop the spread of this virus” and “reduce the death toll and help save lives.”

It wasn't a police drone. Was it a vigilante drone or an aerial white knight? Was it friend or foe?

That's a highly relevant question about drones in general, which are suddenly everywhere during the coronavirus crisis, taking over any number of human tasks as people hunker indoors.

Drones have been working as police officers, soaring over the banks of the Seine in Paris and the city squares of Mumbai, to patrol for social distancing violators.

They're delivering medical supplies in Rwanda and snacks in Virginia. They're hovering over crowds in China to scan for fevers below.

Coronavirus has been devastating to humans, but may well prove a decisive step toward a long-prophesied Drone Age, when aerial robots begin to shed their Orwellian image as tools of war and surveillance and become a common feature of daily life, serving as helpers and, perhaps soon, companions.

“Robots are so often cast as the bad guys,” said Daniel H. Wilson, a former roboticist and the author of the 2011 science fiction novel “Robocalypse.” “But what's happening now is weirdly utopic, as opposed to dystopic. Robots are designed to solve problems that are dull, dirty and dangerous, and now we have a sudden global emergency in which the machines we're used to fearing are uniquely well suited to swoop in and save the day.”

First, however, we'll have to get past the fears of an actual robocalypse, with robots of the sky rising up to take over while their wetware-enabled former masters huddle in fear below.

Eye in the Sky

The origins of the “Anti-Covid-19 Volunteer Drone Task Force,” which turned out to be the work of a Queens drone enthusiast, may have confused New Yorkers initially, but in most cities, there is no question who is running the current aerial patrol. Law enforcement officials in cities and towns around the world have been using drones to scan parks, beaches and city squares for violators wandering into the safe spaces of others.

In China, drones have served as educators or enforcers, depending on your point of view, alerting citizens with unsettlingly folksy warnings about virus violations in robotic voices from above, as reported by CNN.

“Yes auntie, this is the drone speaking to you,” said one drone, speaking to an elderly woman below in an eerie bullhorn echo, according to a video published by Global Times, a state-controlled newspaper. “You shouldn't walk about without wearing a mask.”

Global Times also published an account of another drone. A voice from above castigated a small child

peering skyward while seated with a man who was violating quarantine rules by playing mahjong in public: “Don’t look at the drone, child. Ask your father to leave immediately.”

The idea of a government eye in the sky doesn’t always play so well in the United States, where personal liberty is a founding precept taken very seriously in many regions.

“Covid-19? More like Covid-1984,” read one recent Reddit post on a thread about police drones flying over encampments of homeless people in cities such as Fort Worth, and Chula Vista, Calif., blasting them with messages about coronavirus prevention. “It really feels like we are living in some dystopian science fiction novel,” read another.

“Did the drone fly over blueprints for a light saber?” another commenter fired back. “Not everything is a conspiracy.”

But automated oversight can be a blunt instrument. A police drone deployed in Fairfield, Conn., to monitor beaches for social distancing also warned a group of “juveniles” trespassing on the roof of a local elementary school, according to one news account.

In nearby Westport, police scrapped plans for their own drone project to scan crowds for fever temperatures, heart and temperature rates, and even sneezes and coughs, after outcry from the American Civil Liberties Union.

“The big concern is that the coronavirus crisis is going to normalize drones and entrench them in American life,” said Jay Stanley, a privacy and technology specialist for the A.C.L.U. “The fear is many of these incursions on freedom will outlast the crisis.”

While a drone itself is just a tool, neither inherently good nor evil, it is a tool with nearly unlimited powers for surveillance, Mr. Stanley added. Drones can be equipped with so-called stingrays to collect information from people’s mobile phones, night-vision cameras, GPS sensors, radar, lidar (laser detection technology for creating three-dimensional maps of an area), as well as thermal and infrared cameras.

Enough people distrust drones that “drone rage” incidents between drone enthusiasts and citizens who do not wish to be filmed from above have become a regular occurrence, Mr. Stanley said. One Colorado town even proposed a tongue-in-cheek ordinance in 2014 allowing citizens to shoot down drones invading their airspace, a proposal that itself was shot down by the F.A.A.

Resistance to pandemic patrol drones has not been confined to privacy watchdogs on the political left. On the right, outlets like Breitbart have also noted that many of the drones surveilling our cities are made in China, often by DJI, the world’s largest drone manufacturer, whose headquarters are in Shenzhen.

Some Republican officials have made the same point.

“Using drones, donated by a Chinese company, to spy on Americans during the #coronavirus pandemic?” read a tweet from the official House Judiciary Republicans account. “That doesn’t seem like a good idea.”

Drones have other uses besides snooping, of course. They have stepped (or soared) up as aerial virus blasters, with authorities in countries around the world — China, Dubai, Indonesia, France, as well as the United States — using them to sanitize city streets.

(It’s up to you to decide if government drones spraying cities for pathogens sounds creepy.)

Drones are also performing crucial roles on the medical front lines that may be described as humanitarian

... if they were performed by humans.

“This is the moment when the drone industry gets to show what it can do,” said Miriam McNabb, the editor of Dronelife, an industry news site, and the C.E.O. of Job for Drones, an online drone services marketplace. “Things like drone delivery are lifesaving applications that are changing people’s perceptions of drones.”

Zipline, a San Francisco-based start-up founded in 2014 that airdrops medical supplies and ferries tests from more than 1,000 hospitals in Ghana and Rwanda by drone, replacing the need for face-to-face contact.

Zipline’s fixed-wing drones have already made 30,600 deliveries of medical products in those countries since the start of the pandemic, the company said: lately delivering cancer drugs, for example, to patients in remote villages who are unable to travel to oncology centers because of quarantine.

“Zipline are the heroes of drone delivery,” Ms. McNabb said. “In parts of Rwanda, where road infrastructure doesn’t support delivery, it’s either three days on the back of a motorbike or 15 minutes by drone.”

In the United States they are at last delivering more quotidian consumer items too, as long dreamed by Jeff Bezos of Amazon.

Last month, Wing, a drone-delivery service owned by Google’s parent company, Alphabet, received the first Federal Aviation Administration approval for commercial package delivery, starting in Christiansburg, Va., a town of about 22,000, which is near Wing’s testing facility at nearby Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. (Wing is also operating in Helsinki, Finland, as well as Canberra and Logan in Australia.)

Wing’s home deliveries of medications from Walgreens have proved particularly popular with quarantined seniors who are most at risk, said Jonathan Bass, a Wing spokesman.

“It’s one of the few emerging technologies that has attracted a lot of early adopters over the age of 65,” he said.

But Wing is also starting to out-Amazon Amazon, delivering must-have items like toilet paper and groceries. Merchandise is kept at a central Wing facility, and orders can be made through the Wing app, which allows customers to chart progress of their drone on a map, as with Uber or Lyft.

While useful for temporary shut-ins, drone delivery has served as a lifeline for small businesses dealing with a collapse in foot traffic.

“The first two weeks after Covid hit were rough; it felt like somebody put the e-brake on,” said Luke Brugh — conveniently pronounced “brew,” as he owns Brugh Coffee Co. in Christiansburg with his wife, Cassie. Wing, he said, has allowed them to double the sales of canned cold brew, which has helped make up for the loss.

And this may just be the beginning. Just as World War II hurried the development of emerging technologies like computers, rocketry, jet aircraft and atomic energy, the pandemic may speed the development, and adoption of, drone technology.

“Major world events can alter technological development cycles, causing them to accelerate or to slow down,” said Richard Yonck, the founder of Intelligent Future Consulting in Seattle and a former board member of the Association of Professional Futurists. “We’re seeing that now with drones and other automation in response to the pandemic. There’s a push to develop new tools that can reduce people’s

exposure to the virus. What can we automate and by how much?

“Of course, this could also accelerate future job losses,” he said, “which is something we’d have to deal with down the road.”

Invading the Dream Factory

On a Tuesday night in April, a company called Verge Aero flew 140 illuminated drones in the sky above the University of Pennsylvania. The drones performed as synchronized points of light as they formed giant hearts, medical crosses and American flags, as part of the #PhillyShinesBlue and global #LightItBlue campaigns honoring health care professionals and other essential workers.

This 21st-century equivalent of a fireworks display was a case of drones serving to uplift, as opposed to, you know, simply lift — or spray, or fire missiles, or seize human jobs in an economy where unemployment is nearing Great Depression levels.

And it also may prove to be one of many examples of the pandemic helping to make drones seem more endearing.

During the lockdown, drones have also shown their potential as investigative reporters, bringing to light heart-wrenching stories like the mass graves for unclaimed bodies of Covid-19 victims on Hart Island in New York.

The footage was shot by a photographer, George Steinmetz, whose drone was confiscated by police for photographing the island without permission from the city’s Department of Correction. It was widely shared, illustrating the death toll beyond the statistics in Governor Cuomo’s daily briefing.

And at a time when professional storytellers — novelists, bloggers and many journalists — find themselves walled off to the global story around them, drones have pierced the veil of quarantine. They have created hauntingly poetic imagery of countless empty cities — San Francisco; Las Vegas; Wuhan, China — that says as much about loss in the coronavirus age as any written account.

“Drones sell this idea of emptiness, this lack of life better than anything,” said Dexter Kennedy, 29, a drone photographer in Hoboken, N.J., who has been shooting aerial footage of abandoned streets in Philadelphia, as well as the empty boardwalks of Atlantic City and Jersey City during the lockdown.

“You get 100 feet up and you can really see the big picture,” Mr. Kennedy said. “A boardwalk that would normally have thousands of people on it is totally empty. All the rides are empty. The Ferris wheel is not moving. You can see the grid patterns of the street, but no one’s out. It looks like an apocalypse movie.”

Wait ...what?! :

Alan Dershowitz: State has right to ‘plunge a needle into your arm’

MAY 19, 2020

Harvard Law School emeritus professor Alan Dershowitz claimed in an interview that the government has a constitutional right under the 10th Amendment to forcibly vaccinate a citizen to curb the spread of a contagious disease.

“Let me put it very clearly, you have no constitutional right to endanger the public and spread the disease, even if you disagree. You have no right not to be vaccinated, you have no right not to wear a mask, you have no right to open up your business,” he said.

The interviewer, Jason Goodman, interjected, asking if the famed constitutional scholar was saying that if the government decides “you have to be vaccinated, we have to be vaccinated.”

“Absolutely,” Dershowitz replied. “And if you refuse to be vaccinated, the state has the power to literally take you to a doctor’s office and plunge a needle into your arm.”

“Where is that in the Constitution?” Goodman asked on his web show, “Crowdsource the Truth,” which was posted Sunday on YouTube.

Dershowitz clarified that if a person is threatened with a deadly disease that is not contagious, he can refuse treatment.

“But you have no right to refuse to be vaccinated against a contagious disease,” he said.

“Public health, the police power of the Constitution gives the state the power to compel that,” Dershowitz said. “And there are cases in the United States Supreme Court.”

Dershowitz added that there are “cases after cases after cases” in which courts have ruled in favor of “reasonable actions to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.”

The Harvard professor – who defended President Trump in his Senate impeachment trial – was referring to the state police power doctrine derived in part from the 10th Amendment.

The Supreme Court has recognized each state’s “police power” – defining “police” as polity or government rather than law enforcement specifically – which gives the state authority to enact health laws, including quarantine and vaccination requirements, to protect public health.

See Dershowitz’s remarks:

The argument against forcible vaccination is based on the 14th Amendment’s provision that no state “shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.”

But Dershowitz points to the Supreme Court’s *Jacobson v. Massachusetts* decision in 1905, which concluded a state may require vaccination if the board of health deems it necessary for public health or safety.

The court found the police power of a state included reasonable regulations established by the legislature to protect public health and safety.

The regulations didn’t violate the 14th Amendment right to liberty, the court said, because they fell within the restraints to which everyone is subject for the common good.

If any individual is allowed to act without regard to the welfare of others, true liberty does not exist, the court argued.

More than a century later, the *Jacobson* decision “has not been revisited in any meaningful way,” noted the *AMA Journal of Ethics* in 2006.

It has stood all this time, not allowing “a single individual to refuse vaccination while he or she remains within the general population on the grounds that to make such an exception would strip the legislative branch of its function to care for the public health and safety when threatened by epidemic disease,” wrote

Sarah Fujiwara, MD, then a student at DePaul University College of Law and an intern at the American Medical Association.

“This ruling prevails despite occasional injurious results from vaccinations and the impossibility of determining whether a particular person can be safely vaccinated,” she wrote.

“The only exception to a mandatory vaccination is an offer of apparent or reasonably certain proof to the state’s board of health that the vaccination would seriously impair health or probably cause death.”

Russia to convene Mideast quartet for talks on West Bank annexation plans

Russian, US, UN and EU envoys to meet via video conference as Moscow works to bring Palestinians back to peace process amid anger over Trump peace plan

By TOI STAFF 22 May 2020

Representatives of the so-called Middle East Quartet were set to meet Friday via video conference amid efforts by Moscow to deter Israel from annexing parts of the West Bank and bring the Palestinians back to talks.

“Today, a video conference of the ‘Quartet’ on the Middle Eastern settlement will take place at the level of special representatives,” said Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, according to the TASS news agency, adding that Russia will be represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin.

The Quartet is made up of the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia.

According to Channel 13, Russian Special Presidential Envoy for the Middle East Mikhail Bogdanov spoke Thursday with the Israeli Chargé d’Affaires in Moscow, Eli Belotserkovsky, to update him on the planned conference call.

According to the report, senior Russian officials confirmed that Russia is seeking to promote an international conference with the participation of the quartet, several Arab nations and the Palestinians.

It was unclear whether an invitation would be extended to Israel to attend the conference.

The senior Russian officials said that Israel had been warned several times by Russia that unilateral annexation would lead to an escalation of violence.

“We are extremely concerned that Israeli annexation would be a provocation that will lead to a deterioration of the situation in the West Bank that will lead to violent confrontation and undermine stability in the entire region,” the report quoted unnamed officials as saying.

On Wednesday, the Russian foreign ministry issued a call to Israel and the Palestinians to refrain from taking any steps that could lead to regional escalation.

Senator Cruz slams NYC mayor for 'gleeful tweet about sending cops after Jews'

May 22, 2020

"The next time NYC's mayor sends out a gleeful tweet about sending cops after Jews, the DOJ should investigate," Cruz tweeted.

By Aaron Sull, World Israel News

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) blasted New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio for his "gleeful" tweet about closing a yeshiva for coronavirus violations.

"The next time NYC's mayor sends out a gleeful tweet about sending cops after Jews, the Department of Justice should investigate to make sure he's not violating constitutionally guaranteed religious liberties," Cruz tweeted.

On Monday, the NYPD shut down an Orthodox Jewish seminary, or yeshiva, in Brooklyn after locals reported to officials that a large gathering of students was seen on the premises.

Following the closure, de Blasio tweeted, "Earlier today the NYPD shut down a Yeshiva conducting classes with as many as 70 children. I can't stress how dangerous this is for our young people. We're issuing a Cease and Desist Order and will make sure we keep our communities and our kids safe."

In response to Cruz's accusation, de Blasio's press secretary, Freddie Goldstein, told Fox News that the mayor was not interested in Cruz's "sudden interest" in 'New York Values'.

"Enforcement is the last resort, but we will not stand idly by when it comes to gatherings that endanger New Yorkers," Goldstein said.

This is the second time in under four weeks that Cruz attacked de Blasio's "enthusiasm" in calling out the Jewish community when coronavirus regulations are violated.

In a letter to the DOJ last month, Cruz urged the department to "closely monitor New York City" for instances of "constitutional violations," a reference to a funeral gathering for a prominent Brooklyn rabbi in which de Blasio personally participated in dispersing the crowd for coronavirus violations.

Following the funeral procession, de Blasio was attacked for condemning the entire Jewish community for the actions of a few.

"Something absolutely unacceptable happened in Williamsburg tonight: a large funeral gathering in the middle of this pandemic," de Blasio tweeted at the time. "When I heard, I went there myself to ensure the crowd was dispersed. What I saw WILL NOT be tolerated so long as we are fighting the coronavirus."

"My message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed," he wrote.