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Iranian Brig.-Gen. urges destruction of Israel prior to nuke talks

"We will not back off from annihilation of Israel, even one millimeter."

By BENJAMIN WEINTHAL

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Iranian Brig.-Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi.
(photo credit: Wikimedia Commons)

The spokesman for the Islamic Republic of Iran's armed forces, Brig.-Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi, on Saturday urged the total elimination of the Jewish state during an interview with an Iranian regime-controlled media outlet.

"We will not back off from the annihilation of Israel, even one millimeter. We want to destroy Zionism in the world," Shekarchi told the Iranian Students News Agency.

Shekarchi's genocidal antisemitic remarks come just days before the nuclear talks are set to restart in Vienna Monday on curbing the Islamic Republic of Iran's illicit nuclear program. The United States and other world powers are seeking to provide Tehran with economic sanctions relief in exchange for temporary restrictions on its atomic program. Israel and other countries believe Iran's regime seeks to build a nuclear weapons device.

The Iranian general also blasted Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates for normalizing diplomatic relations with Israel, terming the diplomacy "intolerable" for Iran's clerical regime. "Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and other countries considered as Muslims, for us they part of the Zionist regime and this is very important," said Shekarchi.

Shekarchi has previously lashed out at Israel, saying that Iran's regime can "level Haifa and Tel Aviv in the shortest possible time."

The US State Department said last year that the Islamic Republic is the top state-sponsor of antisemitism.

Sheina Vojoudi, an Iranian dissident who fled the Islamic Republic and now lives in Germany, told *The Jerusalem Post* that "A normal Iranian government, made by the Iranian people, would try to normalize ties with Israel. We could have great deals which can help both nations. Israeli water technology can help us to pass a serious water problem in Iran and an Iranian government would try to exchange knowledge about environmental issues especially water scarcity that we're facing right now but the Islamic Republic instead of solving all these problems, plans for the destruction of Israel and shoots people who ask for water."

She added that "This regime is ruining Iran and some other countries in the Middle East and makes the region a war zone. We have domestic problems and our people never think of fighting other countries. They don't even know why they should hate Israel. Our people will be happy to use Israeli water technology instead of planning to destroy Israel. We must save our country from this evil regime and turn the occupied Iran to a free Iran."

Israel barring tourists, renewing travel quarantine rules to contain Omicron variant

Coronavirus cabinet also approves Shin Bet tracking for confirmed virus carriers, in race to prevent spread of new COVID strain

By [TOI STAFF](#) 28 November 2021, 12:34 am



Travelers at Ben Gurion Airport on September 13, 2021 (Nati Shohat/FLASH90)

The high-level coronavirus cabinet on Saturday night approved fresh restrictions to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 Omicron variant, with ministers voting to ban non-citizens from entering the country for two weeks.

The new rules going into effect on Sunday night will see foreign nationals barred from entering Israel for 14 days, unless they receive special permission from a government panel. Israel reopened to foreign tourism in early November, for the first time since the start of the pandemic.

Ministers on Saturday night also expanded mandatory quarantine for vaccinated Israelis arriving from abroad and gave the Shin Bet security agency the go-ahead to resume tracking infected people, according to Hebrew media reports.

Vaccinated Israelis — who under the existing rules had to take a coronavirus test upon landing and remain in isolation until receiving a negative result — will now be required to enter quarantine for 72 hours and take another COVID test on the third day after they arrive. Unvaccinated travelers must remain in quarantine for at least a week, and can leave isolation upon receiving a negative test result conducted on the seventh day.

Israelis coming from high-risk “red” countries will have to quarantine in designated state-run hotels until they receive a negative virus test result.

Top ministers sparred over the restrictions during the meeting, with Justice Minister Gideon Sa’ar and Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton opposing strict limits to contain the Omicron variant.

The controversial Shin Bet tracking program, which had been utilized in the early stages of the pandemic, also got the green light after the director of the agency reassured ministers it would be used in a limited fashion for a short period, and only for those infected with Omicron, according to the Walla news site.



During the meeting, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said Israel needs to be cautious and minimize risks amid uncertainty over the new Omicron COVID-19 variant.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (left) opens a meeting of the coronavirus cabinet, on November 17, 2021. (Kobi Gideon/GPO)

“We’re currently in a period of uncertainty. It’s not a simple or comfortable place to be,” Bennett said.

“The key here is caution and minimal risks until we learn more. We want to maintain Israel’s tremendous achievement during the Delta wave — an open and functioning Israel, with a functioning economy, and an active education system with children going to school. That’s the top priority,” Bennett said.

“To this end we need to maintain tight control over the country’s borders,” said Bennett. “Every day, we will learn more and know more.”

Bennett said he had spoken with the CEOs of Pfizer and Moderna on Saturday night, as well as top officials in the Health Ministry and leading health experts.

He called on Israelis to get vaccinated and get booster shots, even if they have recovered from the virus, and said children should be vaccinated ahead of the Hanukkah holiday, which begins on Sunday night.

“Especially now, before the variant breaks out, this is exactly the time to get vaccinated. This is the opportunity to protect your family, your children and yourself. Whoever has not had a booster is giving up on a vital layer of defense at a critical time,” he said.

The coronavirus cabinet convened after news of the variant raised red flags worldwide over the weekend and at least one case was confirmed in Israel.

The Health Ministry confirmed one case of the new Omicron COVID-19 variant in Israel on Saturday, and reported seven suspected infections, including three people who have not recently traveled abroad, raising fears of community transmission within Israel.

The confirmed case recently returned from a trip to Malawi, and four suspected cases had returned from international trips in recent days.

Three of the suspected cases were vaccinated and four had not been inoculated. All were awaiting virus test results.

The person with the confirmed infection traveled on a bus before being diagnosed, potentially exposing fellow passengers to the variant. Contact tracers had tracked down half of the passengers by Saturday evening. The military's Home Front Command was racing to locate 800 potential cases to quickly cut off any infection chains of the variant, which is feared to be more infectious than previous strains, Deputy Defense Minister Alon Schuster said.

The potential cases will be ordered immediately to self-isolate and Home Front Command soldiers will conduct home virus tests, Bennett said.

The military said it had doubled its forces dedicated to receiving arrivals from abroad and transferring them to quarantine hotels.

The Health Ministry said Saturday it had designated 50 African countries as "red" countries due to the high risk of Omicron transmission, representing all but four countries on the continent.

Egypt and Morocco, which both have important diplomatic ties to Israel, were left off the list. Morocco signed a defense agreement with Israel last week, in a major breakthrough in diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Israel has banned travel from Israel to red countries, with some exceptions that the Interior Ministry will decide on a case-by-case basis. All arrivals from red countries will be required to quarantine, including those who have been vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19, the Health Ministry said.

Non-citizens from red countries will not be allowed to enter Israel, with some exceptions.

Citizens who are coming from South Africa, Ethiopia, Botswana and Malawi will need to quarantine in a designated hotel until they receive a negative PCR test result. Other African countries will be added to the mandatory quarantine list on Monday.

Travelers who are leaving Israel for other areas will be required to formally declare they will not go to red countries.

Traveling to red countries, or attempting to, without special permission, will result in a fine of NIS 5,000 (\$1,570).

The new restrictions are expected to last for at least several weeks, until authorities have a better grasp of the threat posed by the Omicron variant. Beyond the airport, another area of concern is the education system, where health officials fear the outbreak could be most prominent.

Government officials, including Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked and leading health authorities, urged Israelis to get vaccinated to counter the new variant, and called on parents to vaccinate their children.

Israel approved the vaccine for children aged 5-11 last week, but only 6.5 percent of children in that age group, or around 65,000 out of 1 million, have so far been inoculated or have an appointment.

Eran Segal, a leading epidemiologist, said 600,000 eligible adults have not been vaccinated at all, and 1.1 million Israelis who are eligible for a booster shot have not received one.

A War Between Two Ideologies - Israel & Hezbollah Make Plans For Next War

BY YAAKOV LAPPIN/JNS.ORG | NOVEMBER 30, 2021

The Israel Defense Forces are developing upgraded intelligence and firepower strike capabilities, and is drilling these new abilities on a regular basis. At the same time, Israeli intelligence sources acknowledge that Hezbollah has morphed from a guerilla-terror organization into an organized terror army.

These developments were clearly on display this month, during an extensive war drill conducted by the IDF's 36th Armored Division, a multi-area division capable of maneuvering into enemy territory and attacking targets in a range of ways.

"We are preparing ourselves in better ways. We hope we don't have to get there," said Deputy Intelligence Officer for the 36th Armored Division Maj. A (full name withheld), during the drill.

When assessing Hezbollah, Maj. A stated that the Iranian-backed Shi'ite group has learned from its experience in Syria's battlefield how to go on the offensive.

As opposed to only trying to target IDF patrols with IEDs, anti-tank missiles and other guerilla tactics, Hezbollah of 2021 is focused on mobilizing forces into Israeli territory and employing tactical lessons it has learned from its partners in Syria since 2011.

"They will look to achieve a very big success early on in a conflict or a serious 'success' against the [Israeli] civilian front," he cautioned. This could mean attacking an Israeli village near the Lebanese border and holding families hostage, exploiting Israel's heightened sensitivity to the welfare of its civilians.

Hezbollah will "look to achieve its objective early on, allow the media coverage to go viral, and after that, it doesn't care what happens in the rest of the war. It will have its picture--Israelis embarrassed on the world stage," the intelligence officer said, providing an insight into Hezbollah's strategy.

Drawing on its experience in Syria, Hezbollah has spent the past decade planning attacks into the Galilee, deploying thousands of armed operatives "the second the war starts." The IDF's destruction of cross-border Hezbollah tunnels in 2018-19 put a dent in those plans, though Hezbollah is planning new overland attacks and collecting intelligence on the IDF's day-to-day activities as part of its "early achievement" strategy.

When it comes to Hezbollah's large projectile arsenal, estimated at 140,000-plus, the organization understands that rockets form a "very practical weapon" when fired from civilian areas at civilian areas, said Maj. A.

It has closely been studying Hamas's rocket attacks against Israel and "trying to understand what the best way to challenge us is in the next conflict," he added.

Hezbollah also has some 100,000 mortars deployed on the border, aimed at villages and frontline IDF posts within a 10-kilometer radius. "This is a rate of fire we are not used to down south," said the officer.

In light of this challenge, the IDF has not been resting on its laurels. In addition to developing unprecedented airpower strike capabilities--based on unleashing thousands of munitions every 24 hours--the Israeli military is planning its next ground offensive to be nothing like past operations and wars.

A core part of this change is the ability to gather the most precise intelligence in real time and send it to just the right company, battalion, brigade and division in the field, enabling the rapid, surgical destruction of enemy targets and minimal harm to noncombatants, explained Maj. A.

With Hezbollah deeply embedded in the Shi'ite civilian population of Southern Lebanese villages, coupled with its fortifications and posts in those villages, the IDF's dependence on rapid, reliable intelligence is more important than ever.

The goal, said Maj. A, is for maneuvering forces to be able to see the enemy, tell it apart from noncombatants, and be precise and lethal all at the same time.

Much of the intelligence picture is "under the surface, in more ways than one," said Maj. A. Hezbollah is deployed both in Lebanon and in Syria, backed by the Iranians. The Islamic Republic is building a pipeline of munitions that travels from Iran into Iraq, and ends up in Syria and Lebanon, impacting the entire Middle East.

Hezbollah has amassed a drone fleet for intelligence and attack capabilities they can use against both Israeli civilians and the IDF.

"When you build a capability you believe in, this also makes you more ambitious. You develop it by yourself, see it succeed--and this gives you more nerve," Maj. A. said, providing a glimpse into Hezbollah's mindset.

Using schools, mosques and hospitals is a core part of Hezbollah's modus operandi, as well as concealing itself with mass human-shielding tactics to make it harder for the IDF to respond.

Hezbollah looks "ahead of time at the terrain where it thinks we will enter certain areas from and make use of that terrain. It will set up observation posts in high access points. It will take anti-tank missiles ... Russian products and places them in specific vantage points. It builds underground fortifications within the center of urban areas, next to civilian sites," said Maj. A. "That's the strength of the urban system we maneuver in, and the battleground is a civilian battleground whether we like it or not. That's the challenge that makes us have to be precise."

Hezbollah's capabilities also include making use of the electromagnetic spectrum for jamming and for intelligence collection.

'A war between two ideologies'

In light of the above, the IDF General Staff has instructed the military to build the ability to flow relevant intelligence directly down to the maneuvering units in a fast, accurate manner. Otherwise, the officer said, the intelligence will simply be irrelevant or will not enable effective action.

The division-wide exercise tests just this ability. End-to-end intelligence was streamed to the division's brigades, including through the use of a new intelligence center in central Israel that sifts through massive quantities of data and highlights relevant insights for those in the field.

Signals intelligence, human intelligence, visual intelligence--all are fused into a big picture of the combat arena, and teams put it together like a jigsaw puzzle into a relevant "product." This then turns into "targeting packages" that are sent with the press of a button" to the ground forces.

"This allows us to be more relevant against the enemy and more lethal. But more importantly, it allows us to avoid innocent casualties," said the source.

The exercise saw units examine terrain, enemy activity in civilian infrastructure and then initiate a full process of preparing strikes for the battlefield.

Many of these capabilities rely on new advances in digital combat capabilities and intelligence-gathering means. Asking the right questions and getting the relevant answers to those who need it in the line of fire is critical, said Maj. A, describing a shift towards "intelligence-oriented warfare."

"We're interested in peace, in the status quo," he said, adding that he assessed that Hezbollah is not interested in a conflict right now either. However, the history of this troubled region has already demonstrated that this is no guarantee that one won't erupt suddenly anyway.

The fact that Hezbollah has been seeking to develop precision-guided missiles, for example, is an explosive red line that Israel has said it will enforce. If Israel is forced to take preemptive action, that could form a trigger for a wider conflict. Similarly, Iran's nuclear program continues to lurk in the background as a potential trigger point for regional conflict despite Israel's obvious preference for the status quo.

If Iran orders Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah to act, he will most likely do so since Iran is the source of funding leading to Hezbollah's force build-up, and Iran is the party telling Hezbollah what to do in Syria.

"Nasrallah is a very religious man and will follow what the Iranian supreme leaders tell him," said Maj. A.

Israel is warier these days of attempting to predict Nasrallah's precise future moves after recent years have shown that he is more than capable of unexpected action, added to the very different cultural mentality that guides his worldview compared to the West.

The 36th Division's drill was joined by the IDF's Golani Brigade. During the drill, Col. Barak Hiram, Brigade Commander, stated: "The challenge isn't to win a battle against several Hezbollah fighters; we know how to do that very well. Western armies know how to do that. The main challenge is to win the entire war--and to stay humane. To win and to stay with our morals."

He pointed out that an Israel-Hezbollah war is not only an armed conflict but a war between two ideologies, with Israel at the forefront of Western modern democracies confronting Islamic fundamentalist ideologies.

"If we win the battle but lose the war because we become one of them; this is victory for their morals," he said, explaining just how critical it was for the IDF to strike the right balance between combat effectiveness and sticking to its own rules of engagement.

"In any escalation entering Lebanon, we very much will put the focus on how to kill as many Hezbollah combatants as possible and destroy military infrastructure without harming the civilian population," he added.

During the 2006 Second Lebanon War, in which Hiram was injured, the Israeli government decided not to move forward into Lebanon, creating a static war in which the IDF held ground that it captured and stopped moving ahead.

"I think that most of our plans for the next time will be much more active, including maneuvering further on, which will take the Hezbollah organization to different dilemmas that it did not have in 2006," he said.

Asked by JNS whether this meant an IDF maneuver into Beirut, Hiram stated that no one knows for sure how wars end. "We are here to stay for good. Lebanon is here to stay," said Hiram. "We are willing and hoping that one day, we'll be able to have peace with the Lebanese state that is on our northern border.