



# ***ISRAEL MATTERS!***

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## **IDF Discloses Scope of Israeli Aid to Syrians Affected by War**

### **Top Palestinian Official Looks to Israel for Life-saving Transplant**

After a career as Israel's chief adversary at the negotiating table, Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat may now be relying on Israel for life-saving treatment.

Erekat is suffering from a serious respiratory disease and is on the waiting list for a lung transplant in Israel or the United States, it was recently reported.

Erekat, 62, who is also secretary-general of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and one of the most recognizable Palestinian public figures, was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis over a year ago and has been on medications that were effectively treating the disease. However, the drugs stopped working several months ago, and his condition has since deteriorated dramatically. Erekat had been receiving additional treatment at a hospital in central Israel, but doctors have warned that his condition cannot improve without an immediate transplant, the report said.

Pulmonary fibrosis is a form of lung disease that can result in lung scarring. As the lung tissue becomes scarred, the sufferer will find it increasingly difficult to breathe.

The reports on Erekat's deteriorating health come in the midst of similar concerns regarding the well-being of PA President Mahmoud Abbas, after the 82-year-old was hospitalized recently in Ramallah due to exhaustion. The the stay sparked resurgent rumors regarding his health as well as speculation over the identity of his eventual replacement.

[Timesofisrael.com; Jpost.com]

Israel has for the past year treated hundreds of Syrians and sent hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid in a new project dubbed "Operation Good Neighbor," the IDF recently disclosed. Begun in June 2016, the initiative was launched with the goal of increasing civilian aid for Syrians while maintaining the principle of non-involvement in the Syrian civil war. More than 110 new aid operations have taken place since August 2016 as part of the initiative.

"This project has a significant impact on Israel's security," Brig. Gen. Yaniv Ashur said during a briefing with journalists close to the border, adding that "we have learned from the Americans who lost the Iraqi population. We realized that we could do more for the population near our border than what we were doing at the time."

While Israel has largely stayed out of the fighting taking place across its northern border, the IDF has begun working with international organizations and donors to transfer aid to over 200,000 Syrians living in villages close to the Israeli border. According to Ashur, the IDF is in contact with the Syrians across the border to determine what exact aid is needed and when. "We have several contact people who deal with one specific issue, be it those who need medical care, water, electricity, education or food," he said.

In the past year alone, over 360 tons of food and flour, 456,000 liters of gas, 100 tons of clothes (55 tons of warm clothes), 12 tons of shoes as well as generators and mobile trailers to use as clinics or classrooms have been given to Syrian civilians with the help of the IDF. In addition, 12,000 packages of baby formula and 1,800 packages of diapers have been sent across the border as well as 600 meters of piping to re-establish ruined water infrastructure, giving 5,000 people running water in the villages.

One of the major aspects of the operation remains treating injured and sick Syrians. The IDF began treating wounded and sick Syrians in 2013 and since then over 3,000 Syrians have been treated in Israel. In the last year alone, over 1,000 children have been treated in Israel. "Once a week a busload of sick children comes into Israel," Ashur said, adding that the army "realized that we also need to provide follow up visits for them," especially those who have chronic illnesses. According to him, over 600 children and their parents come to Israel every month for medical treatment. All children return to Syria with backpacks full of clothes while their mothers return with backpacks

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## Taylor Force Act Passes Senate on Path to Become Law; Senator Christopher Murphy Votes Against the Bill

A Senate bill that would force the Palestinian Authority to end its program of compensating convicted murderers and terrorists in Israel recently passed through a critical committee markup and vote. The Taylor Force Act earned support from Democratic senators and several Israel advocacy organizations that were holding out for edits to the legislation. Sixteen members of the Foreign Relations Committee voted in favor of the bill while five voted against it. Those voting against the bill included Connecticut Senator Christopher Murphy. The legislation will now proceed to the Senate floor for a full vote.

Should it pass, the Taylor Force Act would compel the State Department to cut off funding to the PA over its

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full of medicine that their child might need.

While those who arrive at the Syria-Israel border are both combatants and civilians, all wounded are given emergency field treatment to stabilize them before the IDF transfers them to medical centers. There, medical care is provided free of charge and patients are treated under strict anonymity out of fear that they and their families could be targeted in Syria if their time in Israel becomes public.

According to Ashur, 70% of the wounded treated by Israel are men of fighting age while the other 30% are women and children. Most are transported by ambulance to Nahariya's Western Galilee Hospital (70%) or Ziv Medical Center in Safed (20%), others can only be treated in hospitals in the center of the country such as Sheba Medical Center, near Tel Aviv.

While the field hospital established over the border in 2013 has since been shut down, a new field hospital soon will be opened with two doctors each able to treat 30 patients a day. The field hospital, which is being built by the IDF, will be run by an American organization and has the ability to grow to house 16-18 doctors, therefore providing care to over 500 patients per day. While it will not be able to care for any wounded fighters from the Syrian conflict or those who may need surgery, it will provide care similar to those provided in any medical clinic.

"Israel is saving lives on a daily basis and we are working hard to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground. We will continue to do so and grow the project as needed," the senior officer said. "No one knows what the future of Syria will look like. This project has the potential to have a great impact on the future."

[JPost.com]

"martyr" compensation scheme, which offers monthly stipends to the families of convicted assailants relative to the lengths of their sentences. But new language added to the bill "spells out the steps by which payments to the PA could resume," said the office of Senator Lindsey Graham who authored the legislation. "The longer you're in jail, the more vicious the crime, the more money you get," Graham said of the Palestinian program. "That's inconsistent with peace. It is a sick system – it needs to change." Graham called the scheme a "crime for young Palestinians to incentivize murder and terrorism."

To retrieve US funding, the PA would have to revoke any law, decree or document authorizing a compensation program for prisoners "that uses the sentence or period of incarceration to determine the level of compensation paid." The secretary of state will also have to certify that the PA "has terminated payments for acts of terrorism against American and Israeli citizens after being fairly tried and who have been imprisoned for such acts of terrorism, including family members of the convicted individuals." The PA will need to take "credible steps" against incitement to violence against Israelis and Americans.

"We absolutely cannot accept a policy that rewards acts of terrorism like the one that tragically took the life of Taylor Force," said Senator Bob Corker, Republican from Tennessee and chairman of the committee, referring to the namesake of the bill – a US Army veteran who was murdered in Jaffa last year. Corker confirmed that an amendment to the bill provides the PA with a one-year window to change its program before cuts would go into effect. The committee markup process tightened the legislation into a "clean" and "crisp" document, the chairman said, repeatedly referring to the PA program as "sick." "This legislation will force the Palestinian Authority to make a choice," Corker said: "Either face the consequences of stoking violence or end this detestable practice immediately."

The committee's highest-ranking Democrat, Senator Ben Cardin of Maryland, issued a strong statement of support for the bill after voting for it on Thursday morning. The committee's action was "intended to send an unambiguous signal to the Palestinian Authority that it must stop incentivizing terror," Cardin said.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) endorsed the bill after it achieved Democratic support this week, consistent with its foundational pledge to exclusively support bipartisan legislation. "The legislation does not affect US funding for security cooperation, nor does it cut humanitarian programs if the US government can certify that the PA is taking credible steps to end violence against Israelis and Americans," the lobbying group said in a statement. "AIPAC urges the full Senate to adopt this important legislation."

[JPost.com]