

'Worst' Ecological Disaster in Israel's History as Pipeline Spews Oil

Published on Thursday, December 04, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#)
by [Jon Queally, staff writer](#)

Black rivers of crude oil could be seen flowing across the desert sands in the eastern part of Israel Thursday morning and people on both sides of the border with neighboring Jordan were rushed to hospitals after inhaling toxic fumes from the massive spill that occurred after a major pipeline ruptured, possibly by a maintenance crew.

Some outlets are reporting this as potentially "[the worst](#)" environmental disaster in the nation's history as millions of gallons have gushed from the broken pipeline directly into one of the nation's prized nature reserves.

"Crude oil flowed throughout the reserve, causing serious damage ... to flora and fauna," Guy Samet, a spokesperson for Israel's Environmental Protection Ministry, [told](#) local news outlets on Thursday. Samet estimated the amount of oil to be in the "millions of litres," though complete and accurate estimates have not been verified by independent sources.

"Rehabilitation will take months, if not years," Samet continued. "This is one of the State of Israel's gravest pollution events. We are still having trouble gauging the full extent of the contamination."

Haaretz [reports](#):

Millions of liters of crude oil gushed out of a breached pipeline in southern Israel early Thursday, causing heavy damage to one of the area's important nature reserves.

Firefighters, police, Environmental Protection Ministry officials and oil pipeline maintenance teams were dispatched to the site of the spill, and managed to curtail the flow after about two hours.

The breach occurred during work on the pipeline that was part of preparations for the planned international airport under construction in Timna, in southern Israel. Once the leak was located, pipeline company officials shut the valves – but not in time to prevent the spillage of millions of liters of oil.

The pipeline, which links Eilat to the port city of Ashkelon, opened in the 1960s to facilitate the movement of Iranian oil from the Persian Gulf to European markets but since the rupture in Israeli-Iranian relations in 1979 has mostly been used to move oil and oil products from Eilat to different parts of Israel.

The Times of Israel [adds](#):

The leak, near the village of Be'er Ora, was caused due to damage to the Trans-Israel pipeline, a major oil conduit between the Mediterranean and Red seas that runs from Eilat to Ashkelon.

In Jordan more than 80 people were hospitalized, including 30 workers at Aqaba's King Hussein International Airport. The city's residents were ordered to remain indoors, Jordanian media reported.

On the Israeli side, at least three people were treated by paramedics after they inhaled poisonous gases.

A preliminary investigation indicated that the spill was caused after the pipeline was struck accidentally during maintenance work.

On Twitter:

[Tweets about Israel Oil Spill](#)

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Papal pilgrimage heads to Bethlehem

 [Papal pilgrimage heads to Bethlehem](#) (via [AFP](#))

Pope Francis arrives in Bethlehem Sunday to begin the most sensitive part of his three-day Middle East tour aimed at forging regional peace and easing an age-old rift within Christianity. After beginning his trip in Jordan on Saturday with an urgent...

Defying Israel, Pope Prays at 'Apartheid Wall'

Published on Sunday, May 25, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#)

– Lauren McCauley, staff writer

During his historic trip to Bethlehem on Sunday, Pope Francis made waves after taking a surprise detour to pray at the wall separating Palestine from the state of Israel.

The stop at the barrier, also known as the "apartheid wall," was made on the second day of the pontiff's Middle East visit after touring Jordan on Saturday.

Describing the detour, the *Guardian* [reports](#):

His route had been planned to pass close by the separation wall. Palestinian officials had hoped he might stop briefly to contemplate the Israeli-built structure, which weaves through the occupied West Bank, but instead the pope stopped his cavalcade, stepped out of the white, glass covered pick-up truck and made his way up to the wall, where he was quickly surrounded by children from the nearby Aida refugee camp.

Approaching the wall, which is close to the main Israeli checkpoint by Rachel's Tomb, the pope put his palm to the towering concrete structure, covered with graffiti appeals to the Palestinian cause, and bowed his head in prayer, flanked by two girls with Palestinian flags. The heads of Israeli soldiers were visible at the window of a nearby watchtower.

Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi said that the Pope's act of touching the wall was particularly notable.

"It was not a kiss or a blessing, it was a sign of contact and I think it was very significant way to demonstrate his participation in suffering," Lombardi said, adding, "it was done in a silent praying way, but without words. It was a profound spiritual moment in front of a symbol of division."

Ahead of the trip, many noted that the pope's decision to arrive first in the West Bank before Tel Aviv was in itself a "symbolic nod towards Palestinian statehood," as *AP* [reported](#).

Others reacted online regarding the larger context of the prayer at the separation wall, saying it was "not an image Israel wanted."

Pope Francis prays at the Apartheid Wall in Bethlehem. This is not an image Israel wanted. [#PopeInPalestine](#) (via AP) pic.twitter.com/CZPkTkkH5M

– Ben White (@benabyad) [May 25, 2014](#)

Decade after Int'l Court of Justice condemned the wall as illegal, [@Pontifex](#) prayer provides iconic images worth 1000s of advisory opinions.

– Jamil Dakwar (@jdkakwar) [May 25, 2014](#)

Following his prayer, while speaking at Manger Square in Bethlehem alongside Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Pope Francis invited Abbas and the President of Israel, [Shimon Peres](#), to come to the Vatican join him in "heartfelt prayer to God for the gift of peace."

"For decades the Middle East has known the tragic consequences of a protracted conflict which has inflicted many wounds so difficult to heal," the pope said.

"Even in the absence of violence, the climate of instability and a lack of mutual understanding have produced insecurity, the violation of rights, isolation and the flight of entire communities, conflicts, shortages and sufferings of every sort," he added.

"In expressing my closeness to those who suffer most from this conflict, I wish to state my heartfelt conviction that the time has come to put an end to this situation which has become increasingly unacceptable. For the good of all, there is a need to intensify efforts and initiatives aimed at creating the conditions for a stable peace based on justice, on the recognition of the rights of every individual, and on mutual security."

The pope continued: "The time has come for everyone to find the courage to be generous and creative in the service of the common good, the courage to forge a peace which rests on the acknowledgment by all of the right of two states to exist and to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders."

Both leaders have reportedly accepted the invitation.

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Calls for Justice After Video Reveals IDF Shooting of Innocent Palestinian Teens

Published on Tuesday, May 20, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#)

Rights group says killings amount to "war crimes," demands international probe

– Lauren McCauley, staff writer

International outcry and condemnation came swiftly on Tuesday following the release of video footage showing two innocent Palestinian teenagers being shot dead by Israeli forces.

[According](#) to rights group Defense for Children International – Palestine, which obtained and circulated the security camera footage, Nadeem Siam Nawara, 17, and Mohammad Mahmoud Odeh, 16, sustained fatal gunshot wounds on May 15 by Israeli

Defense Forces after participating in a demonstration near the Ofer military prison in the West Bank. The teens were there to mark Nakba (or Catastrophe) Day, which commemorates the 1948 mass displacement of Palestinians, and express solidarity with the hunger striking prisoners currently held in the detention center.

After the video was made public, assistant UN secretary general for political affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco demanded an "independent and transparent" probe into the circumstances surrounding the boys' deaths.

"It is of serious concern that initial information appears to indicate that the two Palestinians killed were both unarmed and appeared to pose no direct threat," [said](#) Fernandez-Taranco.

"The UN calls for an independent and transparent investigation by the Israeli authorities into the two deaths, and urges Israel to ensure that its security forces strictly adhere to the basic principles on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials," he said at a briefing of the UN Security Council.

Though the closed circuit television footage showed some rocks being thrown by protesters early on, as one witness reported, "at the moment of the killings, nothing was going on and no stone throwing was taking place."

"The images captured on video show unlawful killings where neither child presented a direct and immediate threat to life at the time of their shooting," said Rifat Kassis, executive director of DCIP. "These acts by Israeli soldiers may amount to war crimes, and the Israeli authorities must conduct serious, impartial, and thorough investigations to hold the perpetrators accountable."

The video below contains graphic and disturbing footage:

After viewing the video, people demanding accountability for the killings flooded Twitter under the hashtag "#Justice4NadeemandMohammad."

[Tweets about "#Justice4NadeemandMohammad"](#)

Brad Parker, an attorney and International Advocacy Officer with DCIP, told *Vice News* that their organization is currently in discussion with the victims' families about pursuing complaints with both the Israeli Army and international bodies. However, he is not optimistic that they will be successful.

"We think the likelihood of having an impartial, open and thorough investigation opened is very slim," he said. "But we think that the key to child protection in occupied Palestinian territories is accountability, because Israeli soldiers can do whatever they want at the moment with essentially no repercussions."

The teens' deaths raise the number of Palestinian children killed by Israeli forces in 2014 to four, according to data collected by DCIP. Since 2000, over 1,400 Palestinian children have been killed as a result of Israeli military and settler presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Reacting to the news, many expressed grief for the other Palestinian children whose deaths were not caught on camera.

I shudder to think how many other unspoken causalities there are or how many Nadeem & Mohammads have been killed.

[#Justice4NadeemandMohammad](#)

– Anam (@AnamR_Syed) [May 20, 2014](#)

NSA Memo Shows US Gives Israel Access to 'Raw' Spy Data

Published on Wednesday, September 11, 2013 by [Common Dreams](#)

Obama's 'rigorous safeguards' to protect US citizens' sensitive data a farce

– Jacob Chamberlain, staff writer



U.S. President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv on March 20. (Reuters/Nir Elias)

The National Security Agency openly shares unfiltered intelligence files with the Israeli government, [according to a classified document leaked to the *Guardian*](#) newspaper by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

As the *Guardian* reports Wednesday, the NSA memorandum details an "intelligence-sharing agreement" between the two countries and shows that the "US government handed over intercepted communications likely to contain phone calls and emails of American citizens" to Israeli intelligence.

According to the *Guardian*, the agreement places "no legally binding limits" on how Israel could explore or handle the data.

"The disclosure that the NSA agreed to provide raw intelligence data to a foreign country contrasts with assurances from the Obama administration that there are rigorous safeguards to protect the privacy of US citizens caught in the dragnet," writes Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras and Ewan MacAskill, the team of journalists behind the report. "The intelligence community calls this process 'minimization,' but the memorandum makes clear that the information shared with the Israelis would be in its pre-minimized state."

The Guardian published the NSA memorandum in full [here](#).

According to the document, raw files shared with Israel come from the NSA's collection of "signature intelligence" or Sigint—which includes both electronic and telephonic metadata swept up in any number of NSA surveillance programs.

That data, according to the *Guardian*, includes, but is not limited to, "unevaluated and unminimized transcripts, gists, facsimiles, telex, voice and Digital Network Intelligence metadata and content." Much of this unfiltered data, the *Guardian* suggests, contains detailed information belonging to unsuspecting U.S. citizens whose communications have been caught up in the NSA's extensive surveillance dragnet.

The reporting continues:

According to the agreement, the intelligence being shared would not be filtered in advance by NSA analysts to remove US communications. "NSA routinely sends ISNU [the Israeli Sigint National Unit] minimized and unminimized raw collection", it says.

Although the memorandum is explicit in saying the material had to be handled in accordance with US law, and that the Israelis agreed not to deliberately target Americans identified in the data, these rules are not backed up by legal obligations.

"This agreement is not intended to create any legally enforceable rights and shall not be construed to be either an international agreement or a legally binding instrument according to international law," the document says.

In a statement to the Guardian, an NSA spokesperson did not deny that personal data about Americans was included in raw intelligence data shared with the Israelis. But the agency insisted that the shared intelligence complied with all rules governing privacy.

Responding to the new revelations on Twitter, the ACLU's deputy legal director Jameel Jaffer thought these three questions should be among the first to be asked:

First question: On what authority is [#NSA](#) monitoring the phone calls of US judges, legislators? <http://t.co/YLWJ8rXHcH>

– Jameel Jaffer (@JameelJaffer) [September 11, 2013](#)

Second question: On what authority is [#NSA](#) sharing Americans' info with Israel? <http://t.co/YLWJ8rXHcH>

– Jameel Jaffer (@JameelJaffer) [September 11, 2013](#)

Third question: Did the FISC sign off on this, and, if so, where's that opinion? <http://t.co/YLWJ8rXHcH>

– Jameel Jaffer (@JameelJaffer) [September 11, 2013](#)

And commenting dryly on the fact Israel has seemingly been given more access to NSA surveillance data than even questioning members of Congress or the American people, Jaffer added:

Seems the only info actually being "minimized" is the info [#NSA](#) shares with the American public. NSA is really good at

minimizing that.

– Jameel Jaffer (@JameelJaffer) [September 11, 2013](#)

When questioned by the *Guardian*, the Obama administration refused to discuss how many other countries the NSA shares raw data with or whether the FISA court, designed to act as a check on NSA overreach, approved the agreement.

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How Hezbollah Trained an Operative to Spy on Israeli Tourists

by Sebastian Rotella ProPublica, April 26, 2013, 1:58 p.m.

A rare inside look at Hezbollah during a recent terror trial in Cyprus portrayed a militant group with the prowess of an intelligence service: meticulous overseas reconnaissance, Western operatives with elaborate covers, training at secret bases where recruits and instructors wear masks for maximum security.

And the conviction last month of a confessed Hezbollah operative for doing terrorist surveillance of Israeli tourists has heated up a debate that continues to divide the West: Whether the European Union, like the United States and Israel, should designate Hezbollah as a terrorist group.

In a report to be published by a West Point think tank next week, a former U.S. counterterror official argues that the Cyprus case and an attack on Israelis in Bulgaria last year show that Hezbollah has returned to aggressive operations on European soil. Western counterterror agencies largely share that analysis, which has spurred a proposal by Britain for the European Union to designate Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist organization.

"In Cyprus you have a case that underwent full judicial scrutiny, and a conviction in a European court," said Matthew Levitt, the report's author, a former top Treasury Department intelligence official who is now a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "You have all this evidence. You have a European Hezbollah operative who was also doing courier work across Europe. What else do they need?"

Decisions in the 27-nation European Union move slowly through a bureaucratic labyrinth, especially on diplomatically sensitive questions. But the current debate departs from traditional European reluctance to confront a militant group that is a powerhouse in the government and on the streets of Lebanon.

In Paris, Berlin and other capitals, the terrorist activity and Hezbollah's military support for the Assad regime in Syria's civil war have challenged a strategy of maintaining cordial relations with Hezbollah to prevent retaliation and preserve diplomatic leverage.

"It has been and will be the most serious discussion on Hezbollah they've had," said a U.S. counterterror official who requested anonymity because he is not authorized to speak publicly. "Stability in Lebanon has been one of the main European arguments for not designating Hezbollah. But when they see what Hezbollah is doing Syria, which is exacerbating instability there and creating spillover into Lebanon, causing instability there as well, it changes this perspective."

On July 18 last year, the bombing of an airport bus carrying Israeli tourists at the Bulgarian beach resort of Burgas killed six people. Investigators said they identified two alleged Hezbollah operatives as suspects, although little evidence has been made public.

The court verdict in Cyprus carries more weight in the legalistic European Union. There are also parallels between the Burgas bombing and the surveillance and potential targets described by Hossam Yaakoub, the Lebanese-Swedish operative whom police in Cyprus arrested days before the attack in Bulgaria. His statements are extraordinary because of the wealth of detailed revelations about the inner workings of Hezbollah.

“The case provides unique insights into how (Hezbollah) recruits and trains new operatives,” Levitt writes in a case study of the Cyprus trial that will appear Monday in the CTC Sentinel, a publication of the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point.

The military think tank provided ProPublica with an advance copy of the article, “Hizb Allah Resurrected: the Party of God Returns to Tradecraft.” ProPublica separately obtained the 26 pages of depositions that Yaakoub, 24, gave Cypriot police.

During the past decade, arrests, raids and infiltration by spy agencies have produced a great deal of information about the operations, training camps and leadership of al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In contrast, Hezbollah remains a secretive, disciplined militant group with worldwide reach and a vast war chest.

Iran, a close ally, provides arms, funds, training and strategic direction. Hezbollah’s paramilitary operations, social welfare work and political power have won a formidable reputation in the Arab world and beyond. It is a militant group that increasingly resembles a state entity.

“I believe in the armed struggle of Hezbollah until the liberation of Lebanon,” Yaakoub told his interrogators, according to the Cypriot police depositions. “Hezbollah is the political party, which supports the people of Lebanon and fights for the rights of our country 2026 Although I believe in the armed struggle for the liberation of Lebanon from Israel, I am not in favor of the terrorist attacks against innocent people. For me, war and terrorism are two different things.”

A three-judge panel in Cyprus nonetheless found that Yaakoub was preparing the terrain to attack Israeli tourists and other Jews on the island as part of Hezbollah’s holy war. The Cypriot police presumably received a tip about him from Israeli intelligence, Levitt said, and followed him as he documented and photographed flights arriving from Israel, buses transporting Israeli tourists, kosher restaurants and other potential targets.

Step-by-Step Training

After his arrest last July 7, Yaakoub reacted with the practiced cool of a well-trained operative, according to the depositions. He denied everything. He explained that he was traveling with a Swedish passport because his family had moved to Sweden six months after he was born and he had lived there until he was 14. He described himself as a Beirut-based trader in souvenirs, clothes and other merchandise. He backed up his story with company documents and names of local clients.

As police confronted him with detailed evidence, however, his resistance began to crumble. During an interrogation that began after midnight a week after his arrest, he admitted the truth: “I am an active member of the Hezbollah for about four years now. I was recruited by a Lebanese called Reda in 20072026 He told me that he needed me for the secret mission of Hezbollah 2026 my secret mission would be surveillance and undercover activities.”

Yaakoub fits a classic profile, according to Levitt and other experts. Hezbollah takes advantage of the global Lebanese diaspora to recruit operatives with Western passports. Bulgarian authorities, for instance, are seeking two Lebanese suspects who traveled with authentic Australian and Canadian passports 2014 and fake U.S. driver licenses 2014 in the airport bus bombing last year.

Canadians, Swedes and Colombians of Lebanese descent have allegedly taken part in past plots. And Yaakoub told police he trained in Lebanon alongside a fighter who spoke English with an American accent, according to the deposition.

The training began with five to seven months of lessons in tradecraft in Beirut from an instructor named Yousef. He taught the recruit about cover stories and clandestine operations, sending him at one point to deliver an envelope to a man in Istanbul. Next came military training with pistols, rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and C-4 explosives at secret camps in south Lebanon. The sessions were designed for maximum operational security.

“They took me from different spots in Beirut, using closed vans so I could not see,” Yaakoub said, according to the deposition. “Each training group consisted of 10-13 people. Both the trainees and instructors wore hoods, so they could not recognize each other. We had individual tents and exercises were performed in a separate place. It was forbidden to see each other.”

Soon Hezbollah chiefs sent Yaakoub on courier missions to the French city of Lyon and to Amsterdam, where he thought he recognized the voice of his contact as one of his masked classmates from Beirut. The deployment of Yaakoub in Europe coincides with a dangerous strategic shift by Hezbollah, experts say.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Hezbollah and Iran conducted bombings,

kidnappings and hijackings on Israeli, American and European targets from Argentina to Lebanon to France, inflicting hundreds of casualties. In the early 2000s, the group curtailed operations outside the Middle East theater, focusing on its struggle with Israel.

In 2010, however, leaders of Hezbollah and Iran launched an aggressive new terror campaign. They wanted to retaliate against Israel for the assassinations of Hezbollah warlord Imad Mughniyeh in 2008 and of Iranian nuclear scientists in subsequent years, according to Western counterterror officials.

“Even before the Burgas attack, we were growing concerned about what Hezbollah is doing around the world,” the U.S. counterterror official said. “They are plotting in a way we hadn’t seen since the 1990s. There is certainly a feeling that Iran and Hezbollah have ramped up their networks.”

Reactivating Terror Wing

Iran and Hezbollah decided on a new offensive in which the Quds Force, the external operations wing of Iran’s intelligence service, would hit hard targets such as Israeli and Saudi diplomats, according to Levitt’s article. Hezbollah, meanwhile, would focus on Israeli tourists and other soft targets, Levitt asserts, citing information from U.S., Israeli and European security agencies.

As a result, Hezbollah revamped the Islamic Jihad Organization, its international terrorist wing, according to Levitt.

“New operatives were recruited from the elite of (Hezbollah’s) military wing for intelligence and operational training, while existing IJO operatives were moved into new positions,” the article says. “At the same time, the IJO invested in the development of capabilities and tradecraft that had withered since the 2001 decision to rein in operations.”

The past two years have brought a spate of attacks and plots. The Iranian security forces are accused in cases including the assassination of a Saudi diplomat in Pakistan, a bomb attack on an Israeli diplomat in India and a foiled plot to kill the Saudi ambassador in Washington, D.C.

Alleged Hezbollah plots have been discovered as well. In January of last year, Thai police found a warehouse full of bomb-making chemicals for an alleged plot against Israeli targets. The chief suspect in that case resembles Yaakoub: an accused Hezbollah operative with dual Lebanese and Swedish citizenship.

Meanwhile, Yaakoub did patient undercover work in Cyprus, according to his confession and evidence at his trial. Hezbollah provided expense money and a salary of \$600 a month. He burnished his cover story by registering his import-export firm, looking into acquiring a warehouse, meeting with clients and, on his handler's advice, developing a social life on the island.

Acting on instructions from Beirut, he watched Israeli tourists arrive on flights and charted their movements on airport buses and at hotels, using codes to disguise his notes and communicate with fellow operatives, according to his confession.

The surveillance takes on ominous significance in light of the Burgas attack, in which a young man with a backpack bomb blew up a bus as it picked up Israeli tourists at the airport. The attacker died in the blast. European investigators believe he was not a suicide bomber, but rather a dupe or the victim of a premature explosion. Hezbollah has denied any role in Burgas.

Yaakoub's reconnaissance featured very specific tasks for reasons that are not yet clear. He identified Internet cafes for his handlers. He obtained three SIM cards for mobile phones. He meticulously studied an area behind a hospital,

taking photos and drawing a map.

“I am not aware of the organization’s objectives on the matter, nor do I know why they sent me to this mission,” he told interrogators, according to the deposition. Despite his confessions, he refused to accept that he was involved in terrorism, declaring:

“It was just collecting information about the Jews, and that is what my organization is doing everywhere in the world.”

Reaction in Europe

The conviction of Yaakoub adds to mounting evidence of Hezbollah activity across Europe. And it creates a headache for the European Union. Most governments in Europe have a markedly different view of Hezbollah than Israel or the United States, which see it as a terrorist organization pure and simple. Only the Netherlands agrees with that assessment. Britain has designated Hezbollah’s military wing as a terror organization, but not the political leadership.

The motives of other European governments vary. Especially on the left, sectors of European political parties and public opinion tend to see Hezbollah more favorably than Americans do. They accept the view that it is a resistance movement, not a terrorist organization.

Nations such as Spain and Italy are also reluctant to confront the group because they have military peacekeeping contingents in Lebanon that are vulnerable to retaliation. In addition, key European powers such as France and Germany described their relationships with Hezbollah on pragmatic grounds.

French officials assert that if they designated Hezbollah as a terrorist group, it would cut them off diplomatically from a powerful force in Lebanon and the Middle East. Tensions between Hezbollah and Europe could further destabilize the conflict-ridden political environment in Lebanon, the argument

goes.

The common wisdom has begun to change because of increasing exasperation with Hezbollah's actions in Europe, signs of involvement in crime and corruption, and its military role in Syria, experts say. Earlier this year, British diplomats began to push their proposal that the EU label Hezbollah's military wing a terrorist group.

This would curtail funding and political support for the group in Europe, but maintain a channel for dialogue, British officials say. U.S. officials and experts think there is no distinction between Hezbollah's political and military leadership, but they think the proposal would be powerful and timely.

"It would send a strong message," Levitt said.

The discussions about the proposal have intensified in the European Union in recent weeks, according to U.S. and European officials. Political and economic crises in Bulgaria and Cyprus have complicated matters, however, because those countries were taking a lead role along with Britain.

"We have been pretty active on this issue," a senior British diplomat said. "We are keen to do it. But it is a slow process."

**Massive deepwater natural gas
field found off coast of**

Israel

A US-based [oil and gas](#) firm has “confirmed the discovery of a huge offshore gas field called Leviathan, 130km off the coast of the Mediterranean port of Haifa”.

Texas-based Noble Energy has been drilling in the area with Israeli partner Delek Energy, in Tamar.

Leviathan is estimated to have 450 billion cubic meters of gas and there is talk of geopolitical implications because Israel has always been dependent upon imports for energy needs.

Experts pointed to a world glut in natural gas that may exclude Israel from becoming an exporter but a steady supply of natural gas maintaining stable pricing would have an impact on trade in the area and allow for the development of non energy related natural gas products.

Will juicy AIPAC scandal at last allow Israel and Palestine to achieve peace?

Aipac (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), for reasons I have never understood, wields a lot of influence towards continuing discord between Israel and Palestine. Now it seems, Steve Rosen, Aipac’s former second in command and blamed for previous failed peace talks between the two governments. Rosen was indicted under the espionage act, fired, [received \\$670,000](#) from a dozen supporters and is now suing his former employer.

Rosen is asking \$20M or he will release damning evidence of

AIPACs board relating to his charges but the good news is AIPAC may be [too busy to interfere](#) with peace talks.

There is great cause for celebration in Aipac's fight to stave off extinction because a bleeding, flailing Aipac is far less dangerous than an Aipac riding high (which is where it usually rides).

Here is what Aipac would like to be devoting its energies and financial resources to right now. One, making sure that President Obama is unable to pressure Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to freeze settlements and move to final status negotiations. And, two, boxing the president in so that he has no choice but to either strike Iran's nuclear facilities or, more likely, let Israel do it. In fact, it is already planning its huge spring "policy conference," slated to be devoted to warmongering over Iran followed by congressional passage of Aipac-drafted Iran-must-be-stopped resolutions.

These are immense undertakings and they take lots of money and lots of time.

But, thanks to Rosen, Aipac is spending \$10mn of its donors' money on legal fees. Its top people are working with lawyers virtually nonstop. And the whole place is in the grips of fear – fear that one former employee who has the goods on Aipac will bring the whole house down.

The Daily Show – Indecision 5769 – Middle east accord?

Isreal held historic elections except no one won a big



enough majority even though the top vote getter was a Jew.

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The best of times, the worst of times and Gaza

Until now I have been unable to post anything about Gaza because it has evoked the same helpless feelings that smothered me when my son crossed the Kuwaiti border into Iraq in March, 2003. We have a new president, almost, presumably a 'new deal' to look forward to yet somehow things seem eerily the same. It took awhile, it took the reality of having a child in a war, it took the tidbits of information he let slip about life over there for me to find my voice here.

The extremes that mark our country, its economy, its foreign policy and its self esteem remind me of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present

period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

Maybe I am just tired but I wish I could find my voice to express how I feel as Israel shoots fish in a barrel day after day after relentless day. Feeling helpless, I thought I had thrown that out long ago... and nary a word from Obama.