

# The Sabra Report

Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion About Israel

## Israel Launches Probe into Allegations Against NSO

Business Standard, July 30<sup>th</sup> 2021

### Recap:

Israel will investigate allegations of wrongdoing against a homegrown manufacturer of controversial spyware software.

### The Context:

- ☆ An investigation by 17 major news organizations claimed that Israel's NSO Group sold its Pegasus cellphone malware, which can turn on microphones and cameras, to countries that target journalists, activists and politicians.
- ☆ Israel's 2007 Defense Export Control Law requires companies to undergo a rigorous licensing process prior to export but officials admit that once a license is issued, the Israeli government does not know how the tools are used [1]. Israel only permits companies to export cybersecurity products to "government figures [who] investigate crimes and combat terrorism [2]."
- ☆ The leaked list of 50,000 phone numbers hacked by Pegasus includes people targeted by the governments of Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Hungary, India, and the United Arab Emirates. France's Emmanuel Macron, Iraq's Barham Salih and South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa were also targeted, sparking diplomatic tensions with their Israeli counterparts.
- ☆ A hearing on the NSO affair is scheduled although through a secretive subcommittee [3].
- ☆ **Conversation Points:**
- ☆ Is the NSO Group acting in the spirit of the law when selling its products to countries with poor human rights records?
- ☆ Do democracies and autocracies share the same definition of terrorism?
- ☆ If arms companies aren't held responsible for the end use of every weapon sold, shouldn't software companies be held to the same standard?
- ☆ Why is the NSO investigation happening behind closed doors?

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## Israeli Court Floats Compromises to Prevent Palestinian Evictions in Jerusalem

Jack Jeffery, LA Times, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021

**Recap:**

Israel's Supreme Court proposed a compromise that would prevent the evictions of dozens of Palestinians in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. Attempts to expel the Palestinians from their homes helped spark an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas in May.

**The Context:**

- ✧ The Palestinians of Sheikh Jarrah claim decades of land ownership although Israeli courts ruled that the homes in question were owned by Jews prior to the 1948 war [4]. Israel captured East Jerusalem in the 1967 and annexed the territory shortly thereafter. Israeli law permits Jews to reclaim property lost due to its wars but denies Palestinians the same right.
- ✧ The Israeli Supreme Court offered the Sheikh Jarrah residents "protected" status, preventing eviction for decades in exchange for recognizing the settlers' ownership of the land [5], but the proposal was rejected. There are over 2 dozen families in the neighborhood facing similar legal battles [6].
- ✧ Israeli courts previously ruled that the Jewish plaintiffs are the lawful property owners and, although it is highly unlikely the decision will be overturned, the plight of the Sheikh Jarrah families has drawn widespread international attention and criticism.

**Conversation Points:**

- ✧ Is it fair to frame the case of Sheikh Jarrah as discriminatory to Palestinians or is it simply a legal dispute?
  - ✧ Should Israeli law allow Palestinians to reclaim property lost in previous conflicts?
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## Israel's Olympic Gold Victory Raises Jewish Identity Debate

Ilan Ben Zion, Associated Press, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021

**Recap:**

Ukrainian-born Israeli gymnast Artem Dolgopyat won Israel's second-ever gold medal. Celebrations were tempered once it was revealed that Israel will not allow him to wed since he is not considered Jewish according to Orthodox law.

**The Context:**

- ✧ Under Israel's "Law of Return," anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent is eligible for Israeli citizenship. While Dolgopyat's father is Jewish, his mother is not. Under religious law, one must have a Jewish mother to be considered Jewish.
  - ✧ Attempts to legalize civil marriage have repeatedly failed due to opposition by ultra-Orthodox parties. Israel does not have a system of civil marriage and Israeli law mandates that Jewish marriages be conducted by the Chief Rabbinate. Christian and Muslim couples must also get married within their faith.
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- ☆ Yair Lapid, Israel's foreign minister, responded to Dolgopyat's situation saying, "it's intolerable that someone can stand on the podium, hear Hatikvah, and get a gold medal in the name of Israel, and then not be able to wed here." Ultra-Orthodox officials responded saying, "I wouldn't want to live in a country that makes winning a sporting medal the standard for conversion" to Judaism [7]."
- ☆ In addition to Dolgopyat's gold, Israel currently has one bronze medal in Tae Kwon Do and another in Judo during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

**Conversation Points:**

- ☆ What could happen if the state fails to recognize the tens of thousands of Jews living in the country but not accepted as Jewish?
  - ☆ How should Israel balance religion and state?
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**Notes:**

1. [Israel is loath to regulate its spyware exports](#), The Economist, July 31<sup>st</sup> 2021
2. [After NSO bombshell, Gantz asserts that Israel complies with international law](#), Amy Spiro, Times of Israel, July 20<sup>th</sup> 2021
3. [Israel is loath to regulate its spyware exports](#), The Economist, July 31<sup>st</sup> 2021
4. [Court pushes deal for Palestinians to stay in Sheikh Jarrah homes](#), TOVAH LAZAROFF, Jerusalem Post, AUGUST 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021
5. [Politics Surrounding Sheikh Jarrah Case Could Put Off Legal Ruling for Years, Argue Experts](#), Sharon Wrobel, Algemeiner, August 4<sup>th</sup> 2021
6. [Court pushes deal for Palestinians to stay in Sheikh Jarrah homes](#), TOVAH LAZAROFF, Jerusalem Post, AUGUST 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021
7. [Lapid, Michaeli vow to enable gold medal winner to marry](#), GIL HOFFMAN, Jerusalem Post, AUGUST 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021

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**The Sabra Report** is a newsletter intended to stimulate conversation about Israel by recapping major events & providing context. Our conversation points are meant to encourage discussion amongst friends and family.

**The Sabra Report** is written by Irving Safdieh.

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