

The Sabra Report

Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion About Israel

Polish President Approves WWII Restitution Law

Times of Israel, August 14th 2021

Recap:

Poland approved a law that prevents future restitution of property seized by the Nazis, defying strong opposition from Israel and the United States.

The Context:

- ✧ Three million Polish Jews, 90% of the country's Jewish community, were killed during World War II. After the war, Communist authorities nationalized vacant properties of owners that had been killed or fled.
- ✧ Until now, descendants could make a claim that a property had been seized illegally and demand its return, but Polish officials argued this created "legal chaos" [1]. The new law sets a 30-year time limit on challenges to property confiscations, effectively ending pending proceedings involving Communist-era property appropriations.
- ✧ Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Polish President Andrzej Duda to veto the law and Israel immediately recalled its ambassador once he failed to do so. Lapid also recommended Poland's Israeli ambassador remain in Poland "to explain how we will not tolerate contempt for the memory of the Holocaust" [2]. Poland's Prime Minister said Poland "won't pay for Germany's crimes."
- ✧ In 2018, the Polish government made it a crime to accuse the Polish nation of complicity in the Holocaust, setting off a diplomatic crisis after Israeli officials likened it to Holocaust denial.

Conversation Points:

- ✧ At what point should absentee owners forfeit their right to property they once owned?
- ✧ Are Jewish owners disproportionately affected by the law since they are not on the ground in Poland?
- ✧ Even if Poland is not responsible for Nazi crimes, should it reap rewards from wrongfully acquired property?

The Age of Mega-fires: Jerusalem Blaze Is a Wake-up Call for Israel

Nir Hasson, Haaretz, August 16th 2021

Recap:

A forest fire in Jerusalem burned through nearly 6,000 acres of land. The blaze matched the scale of the 2010 Carmel Fire in northern Israel that killed 44 people [3]. It is unclear whether the fire was caused by negligence or arson.

The Context:

- ✧ This year's heat waves brought extreme dryness to vegetation in forests, increasing the risk of wildfires. Environmental groups have called on the government to remove pine trees, whose resins spark fires, from forests and refrain from replanting to create buffer zones.
- ✧ Since the 2010 forest fire, Israel's firefighting services improved their professional capabilities, but most Israeli firefighters still train only in urban firefighting and not in open area firefighting.
- ✧ Greece, Jordan and Cyprus offered support however Israel declined the assistance. It did, however, accept an offer by the Palestinian Authority (PA) who proceeded to send several firefighter teams to fight alongside Israeli divisions [4]. Defense Minister Benny Gantz thanked PA President Mahmoud Abbas for taking "the initiative to send forces to aid Israel [5]." In 2010, Israel also accepted help from the PA although Benjamin Netanyahu's government did not publicly thank the Palestinian servicemen.

Conversation Points:

- ✧ Why did the current government take such a different stance towards the Palestinian firefighters as compared to Netanyahu's government?
 - ✧ Should the global community invest in a shared wildfire response unit given how most countries are ill equipped to battle these ever-increasing types of blazes?
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Israel Braces for Renewed Terrorism Coming from Taliban-Led Afghanistan

Arie Egozi, Breaking Defense, August 16th 2021

Recap:

Following the collapse of Afghanistan's government, Israeli officials expect renewed efforts by Al-Qaeda to launch terror attacks against Israeli targets around the world.

The Context:

- ✧ Following America's abrupt withdrawal after 20 years in Afghanistan, the Taliban quickly reconquered the country, except for the airport - which is currently protected by 2,500 American troops [6].
 - ✧ Monitoring terrorism threats in Afghanistan, a hotbed for insurgency, was difficult even with US troops on the ground. Without a military presence, intel will be hard to come by [7] thus compromising the West's abilities to detect terrorist activity.
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- ✦ US President Joe Biden defended his decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, blaming the Afghan government for allowing the Taliban take over. "Afghanistan political leaders gave up and fled the country; the Afghan military collapsed, sometimes without trying to fight," Biden said [8]. A survey conducted in July found that 70% of Americans backed exiting Afghanistan, a belief that crosses the deep partisan divide.

Conversation Points:

- ✦ What message does America's withdrawal from Afghanistan say to its friends and foes in the region?
 - ✦ Do the events of the past week reinforce America's need to remain in or withdraw from Afghanistan?
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Notes:

1. [Poland Recalls Ambassador To Israel Indefinitely](#), Jerusalem Post, August 16th, 2021
2. [Polish Law On Property Stolen By Nazis Angers Israel](#), Bbc, August 17th 2021
3. [Israel Requests International Aid Amid Largest Fire Since Carmel Blaze](#), Lahav Harkov, Tzvi Joffe, Jerusalem Post, August 17, 2021
4. [Palestinian Firefighters Join The Battle Against Jerusalem Flames](#), Hadas Labrisch , Jerusalem Post, August 17th, 2021
5. Ibid.
6. [Biden Defends Afghanistan Policy Amid Mounting Criticism Of Withdrawal](#), Nbc News, August 16th 2021
7. [Officials Fear Taliban Conquest Of Afghanistan Could Boost Other Terror Groups](#), Times Of Israel, August 16th 2021
8. [Biden Defends Afghanistan Policy Amid Mounting Criticism Of Withdrawal](#), Nbc News, August 16th 2021

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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