

HEBREW MEDIA REVIEW

The China bank is not the issue here, dude

... according to the PM, who maintains cooperating with a US terror case would jeopardize security. But the case seems to go a lot deeper. Also, dude, China bank is not the preferred nomenclature

BY JOSHUA DAVIDOVICH | December 18, 2013, 2:33 pm |

News in Israeli papers tends toward the domestic Wednesday morning, with the corporate takeover of IDB, a massive Israeli conglomerate, dominating front pages.

Yedioth Ahronoth marks a high-profile visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi with an expose on Israel's decision to not cooperate with an American investigation into terror ties by the Bank of China, which the paper says came because of pressure from Beijing, with which Israel wants to foster closer economic ties.

Court documents, released for the first time Tuesday evening, reveal the existence of a secret unit, made up of Mossad, Shin Bet and anti-terror agents, to track money used to finance terror. The unit tracked 17 bank accounts being used to transfer money for Hamas between Syria and Gaza in 2005, but the Chinese, who do not consider Hamas a terror group, did not take action. After it was revealed that the transferred money was used in a 2006 Tel Aviv terror attack that killed a Florida teen, the family sued the Bank of China in US court. Jerusalem originally agreed to cooperate fully and was supposed to send an expert who had flagged the transfers in 2005 to testify, but the Chinese threatened to cancel a visit by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the country, which took place earlier this year. The expert refused to testify and Israel withdrew support for the court case last month, drawing accusations from the US that it was damaging the fight against terror.

The paper reports on court documents that reveal an emotional meeting between Yekutiel Wultz, whose son Daniel was killed in the bombing, and Israeli national security adviser Yaakov Amidror, who informed him that Israel would not cooperate in the case.

“Once Wultz said ‘It’s not possible that the Chinese won’t address with the results of their actions; they were parties to the murder of my son,’ Amidror decided to answer in English: ‘You, Mr. Wultz, are preaching to the choir.’ ‘If the Chinese bank is not punished, Wultz said, that will give a green light to other banks around the world to cooperate with terror.’ Amidror repeated the same phrase: ‘You’re preaching to the choir.’”

The paper concludes by positing that the affair raises a number of questions as to how far Israel should go to appease the Chinese.

“The fact that the government left a mourning family abandoned alone on the front against terror is horrifying. This is not the legacy that Israel’s security system is proud of. We are not talking about one family, but dozens who filed claims in New York on the basis on the Wultz case. The capitulation to China brings the whole system into doubt. There’s no point in enlisting families, bringing in lawyers and dealing with foreign courts if the government can’t stand by its commitments.”

Maariv reports that a number of bereaved families are lobbying for Netanyahu to tell the visiting Chinese diplomat that he will allow the security expert, named as Uzi Shaya by Haaretz, to testify in the US. However, the paper quotes sources close to Netanyahu saying Jerusalem is standing firm on its refusal. “Transferring information could hurt the national security of Israel,” a source tells the paper. “It will endanger the ability of observers here against terror threats and harm international cooperation in the fight against terror.”

Haaretz writes on a report, which first appeared in al-Hayat, that the US has accepted the Israeli position that any peace deal with the Palestinians must include recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. The paper writes that the demand, which is a no-go for Ramallah along with security arrangements in the Jordan Valley, will lead to the collapse of the talks.

A coalition crisis between the prime minister’s ruling Likud-Yisrael Beytenu party and senior coalition member Yesh Atid also gets major play in the newspapers. The crisis is predicated on who will head the powerful Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, which sets the army’s budget, among other tasks. Maariv reports that Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein will likely appoint himself to the post on Wednesday, after several months of fighting over the issue, which has led to a number of intra-coalition tit-for-tat bill vetoes, and may now spell sanctions on Yesh Atid by Likud if it goes ahead with a bill giving equal tax breaks to homosexuals, which it says it will.

Israel Hayom devotes several pages to the takeover of IDB, the country’s largest holding company, by Eduardo Elzstain and Moti Ben Moshe, after tycoon Nochi Dankner, a scion of the Dankner family, was kicked off the board. The company, which is part of a group that controls the mobile operator Cellcom Israel, Clal Insurance and the Super-Sol supermarket chain, was acquired

by Dankner a decade ago, but fell on hard times and owes over NIS 2 billion to banks and shareholders.

The paper's Dan Margalit writes of Dankner's fall from the greatest heights to the court decision yesterday that sealed his fate.

"For several years he was the brightest star in the economic skies. Not only for the decisions that came out of his mouth; indeed the bankers bowed before him and whispered his name with reverence and lavished him with billions without asking why or wherefore. Why use public money to bail out a private concern? Why purchase IsraAir and why acquire Maariv?"

In Yedioth, Aviad Kleinberg says that the American Studies Association might not have been right in boycotting Israel, but that the reason behind the boycott, that Israel is an advanced country that thinks it can get away with violating the rights of Palestinians, is dead on.

"For different reasons, Western governments turn a blind eye to Israeli human rights violations, including what they define as an gross violations of international law (like Israel's settlement policies, for example). They make do with feeble condemnations and worries of the future of the conflict," he writes. "It seems that this will soon end. Western governments are not able to ignore for much longer public opinion – or trends, if you like. The Western public doesn't have a clear solution to the territorial dispute at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Where exactly will the border be? That's our problem. This public is not anti-Semitic and doesn't love Arabs (maybe even the opposite, in fact) and understands one thing: That in the territories occupied by 'normalized' Israel, there is a systemic lack of human and civil rights for the population. People from 'advanced' countries read this in a thousand articles and columns and see this every day in news reports in their countries. This is not propaganda or a PR problem. It is the reality. This reality, which we no longer see, bothers them."

In Haaretz, Zvi Barel says the interpreter on the stage at Nelson Mandela's memorial isn't the only one signing gibberish.

"When it comes to interpretation, we're actually very thrifty; instead of bringing a special interpreter the prime minister is both the speaker and the interpreter into sign language. For example, when Benjamin Netanyahu declared that he was adopting the principle of two states for two peoples, instead of signing two fingers and a hand movement to the left shoulder, while rolling the fingers that denote Palestine, the prime minister's hands and tongue signed a motion of suffocation," he writes. "When the European Union imposed sanctions on products from the settlements, Netanyahu explained in his own voice that 'the sanctions are liable to undermine the diplomatic negotiations with the Palestinians.' But Netanyahu the interpreter displayed amazing knowledge of sign language, stretching out his left hand and slapping his right hand over it. And for anyone who

had difficulty understanding this universal sign, he added a rude gesture for the local audience.”

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