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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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November 24, 2017

Ha'aretz

Trump Revealed Israeli Commando Operation in Syria

When U.S. President Donald Trump revealed Israeli intelligence to senior Russian officials in March, he disclosed details of a covert Israeli mission to penetrate an Islamic State cell deep in Syria, claimed Vanity Fair's Howard Blum on Wednesday. Israel's counterterrorism unit, working along with members of the Mossad, obtained information that a Syrian Islamic State cell had developed bombs that could be placed in laptops and then go through airport security undetected. Trump allegedly gave this information to the Russian officials. Trump reportedly passed the intelligence to the Russians without first notifying and discussing the decision with Israeli principals. See also, ["EXCLUSIVE: WHAT TRUMP REALLY TOLD KISLYAK AFTER COMEY WAS CANNED"](#) (Vanity Fair)

Ynet News

Netanyahu Pans Deputy FM Comments on US Jews

Prime Minister Netanyahu attempted Thursday to allay furor sparked by Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely, who on an interview with i24NEWS the previous day, said that Jews living in the US fail to understand "the complexity of the region" and live "quite convenient lives." Seeking to distance himself from Hotovely's comments, Netanyahu stepped in to clarify matters, issuing a statement against what were described as "offensive remarks." "The Jews of the Diaspora are dear to us and are an inseparable part of our people," Netanyahu said. "There is no place for such attacks, and her remarks do not reflect the position of the State of Israel," he added. See also, ["Under-fire deputy minister sorry for offending US Jews, but doesn't retract"](#) (Times of Israel)

i24 news

Daily Stormer: Hotovely Remarks Show US Jews are 5th Column

The flagship website of US neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements interpreted the controversial remarks made by Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister on the subject of US Jews as an admission that the Jewish community represents a fifth column in America. In [an explosive interview with i24NEWS](#), Tzipi Hotovely said American Jews were "people that never send their children to fight for their country, most of the Jews don't have children serving as soldiers." "An Israeli diplomat just admitted a very inconvenient fact," reads the report in the *Daily Stormer* website. The report in the site stated that Hotovely's remark "highlights how insane the current situation is. Why are we fighting wars for a group of parasites like the Jews?" See also, ["US Reform chief demands Netanyahu give Hotovely the boot"](#) (i24 News)

Jerusalem Post

Gabbay vows to Fix Crisis Between Israel and US Jews

Labor Party leader Avi Gabbay said he intends to solve what he termed a "harsh crisis" between Israel and US Jews if he is elected prime minister. "My message will be that we will return to power and fix what this government did to harm the critical bond with American Jewry," Gabbay said in an interview with *The Jerusalem Post* ahead of the newspaper's December 6 Diplomatic Conference at the capital's Waldorf Astoria Hotel. "I respect all streams, and they are all Jews in my eyes," Gabbay said. "They are a tremendous asset for Israel and we can't forget it."

Thyssenkrupp: We Knew of Shimron's Ties to Netanyahu

German conglomerate Thyssenkrupp, which is at the center of the submarine affair investigation, knew of the ties between attorney David Shimron and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but it did not raise suspicion because Shimron was presented to them as Miki Ganor's lawyer, the head of the company's legal department, Dr. Donatus Kaufmann, said Thursday. "Shimron's connection to the prime minister was familiar, but we were not the ones who chose him—Ganor did," Kaufmann said at a press conference about the company's economic performance and forecasts for the coming year. "A lot of people know each other in Israel." See also, ["Revealed: ThyssenKrupp paid Michael Ganor €10.2m" \(Globes\)](#)

Times of Israel

Talks on Shabbat Train Coalition Crisis to Resume Friday

Prime Minister Netanyahu and Health Minister Yaakov Litzman on Thursday failed to reach a compromise over the ongoing infrastructure work on rail lines during Shabbat after the ultra-Orthodox coalition member threaten to quit the government over the issue. The late-night talks that included Welfare Minister Haim Katz continued until after midnight without an agreement. The negotiations are expected to resume Friday morning. Litzman, who leads the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party, has threatened to pull his party and its six Knesset members out of Netanyahu's coalition, leaving it with 60 out of 120 Knesset members. See also, ["Deal over Shabbat coalition crisis is close, but still not finalized" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Iran Army Chief: Next War Will See 'Eradication' of Israel

Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, the chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), issued new threats against Israel on Thursday, vowing that any future conflict will be the Jewish state's last. "It is a proven claim that today we say any new war will lead to the eradication of the Zionist regime," said Jafari at a Tehran press conference, according to Iran's semi-official Fars news agency. Jafari also told reporters that Lebanon is Israel's primary target today and that "resistance" experienced by Israel in previous conflicts with Iran-backed Hezbollah and Hamas was minor in comparison to their current capabilities. "They have seen a part of the resistance front's power during the 33-day and 22-day wars and today that the great resistance front has been formed, this word has been proven," said Jafari, referring to the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009. See also, ["Iran declares armed Hezbollah will stay to counter enemy Israel" \(i24 News\)](#)

Times of Israel

ADL Demands Poland's Action Over Hotel with No Jews Sign

The Anti-Defamation League has urged Polish authorities to investigate and take action against a hotel displaying a sign outside saying no Jews allowed. "Entry forbidden to Jews, Commies, and all thieves and traitors of Poland," said the large red sign, photographed recently by Polish media hanging outside a hostel in Cesarzowice, just outside the major western Polish city of Wroclaw. "The ADL is urging Polish authorities to investigate the illegal and anti-Semitic banner at the hostel and take appropriate action against those responsible," the Jewish organization said in a statement. See also, ["Polish Hostel Hangs Banner With Hateful Message: 'Entry Forbidden to Jews'" \(ADL\)](#)

Netanyahu Owns Hotovely's Arrogant, Hypocritical Anti-Semitic Attack on U.S. Jews

By Chemi Shalev, columnist at Ha'aretz

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu chose the young, arrogant, inexperienced right-wing radical Tzipi Hotovely to serve as his top Foreign Ministry official, so he shouldn't be surprised when she behaves accordingly.
- At a time when Israel's relations with U.S. Jews are in critical condition and require patience, tact and nuance, he has allowed an outspoken and tactless anti-diplomat like Hotovely to set the tone. His quick denunciation of Hotovely's bombastic bile against American Jews on Thursday, and even her possible dismissal, won't remove the mud she has left on Israel's face, as well as his own.
- In one short interview on the English language i24 News, Hotovely managed to step on each and every conceivable land mine. She slandered the American-Jewish campaign for egalitarian prayer at the Western Wall, describing it as a purely political ploy. She used the recent cancellation of her appearance at Princeton University to lambast a so-called "liberal dictatorship" that stifles free speech on U.S. campuses. She undermined the legitimacy of American-Jewish criticism of Israel with the stale rationale that they don't live here. But worst of all was her assertion that American Jews not only refrain from sending their children to fight in the Israel Defense Forces; they don't send them to fight for the U.S. Army, either. They lead "convenient lives," she said.
- Of all her statements, this was the most egregious – and not because it's factually wrong. Statistically speaking, American Jews comprise roughly 2 percent of the U.S. population, but less than 0.5 percent of its armed forces. There are myriad reasons for this, including the simple fact that American Jews have fewer children. But there is no denying that since the Vietnam War, the American-Jewish community has contributed to American society in ways other than sending their children to serve in a voluntary army.
- The only people who use this issue to denigrate American Jews are dedicated anti-Semites and, it seems, the person in charge of Israel's diplomatic corps and its relations with American Jews. Which shouldn't really come as a surprise: In the year since Donald Trump's election, Israel's right-wing government has shown nothing but affection for white supremacists who share their admiration for Israel and, it often seems, their disdain for liberal American Jews.
- Anti-Semites will delight in Hotovely's statements, using them to attack unpatriotic, combat-shirking American-Jewish sissies. For a right-wing nationalist like Hotovely, the only valid litmus test for determining whether one can comprehend life in Israel – and thus knowledgeably criticize it – is apparently military service. Those who don't partake are condemned to the "convenient lives" she sneers at.
- American Jews may have played, and may continue to play, an oversized role in American arts and letters, academia and intelligentsia, medicine, law, philosophy and the entertainment industry; they may have been among the pioneers of minority rights, women's rights, LGBT rights and many others; they may have staunchly stood up for equality and against

discrimination; indeed, American Jews may have contributed to modern American society and democracy above and beyond any comparable religious or ethnic group. And they have certainly supported Israel through thick and thin, especially in times of need. But they should shut up, as far as Hotovely is concerned, because their kids haven't patrolled Hebron and Nablus, haven't looked at the enemy through gun sights, haven't actually felt the sensation of pulling the trigger.

- In point of fact, hundreds of American-Jewish volunteers serve in the Israeli army at any one time, and many thousands have already served. If Hotovely would have limited her comments to serving in the Israeli army, rather than portraying the entire American-Jewish community as slackers, she would have at least been on more solid ground, Zionistically speaking. Not only would such an assertion be viewed as acceptable by many Israelis, it was the focal point of the original confrontation that defined relations between the new Jewish state and the largest Jewish Diaspora.
- Although David Ben-Gurion appreciated American Jews, cultivated them and even agreed to curtail Israeli statements and activities regarding American Jews in his famous agreements with American Jewish Committee leader Jacob Blaustein, he couldn't bring himself to abandon his core Zionist belief in an ingathering of all the exiles, including American Jews. He never discarded his vision of American youths coming to Israel in multitudes to toil the land and defend it. And when he got particularly angry with American-Jewish leaders, he would threaten to go over their heads and recruit American-Jewish children directly. He would then respond to the ensuing uproar by claiming his words had been taken out of context – an excuse that held up well until another one of his speeches to Israeli audiences was translated into English.
- But this was almost 70 years ago, and many things have changed – though not for Hotovely and many others of her right-wing settler ilk. They adhere to Ben-Gurion's Zionist credo that the only Jewish life worth living is in Israel – some would say only in Judea and Samaria – but they have added numerous other prisms, besides principled negation of the Diaspora, through which to look down on the bulk of American Jews.
- Hotovely and her kind are ultra-nationalist conservatives who scoff at liberal, pluralist and cosmopolitan American Jews and their values; they are mostly Orthodox, who thus mock the modernized Reform and Conservative movements and sympathize with the Haredi claim that they're not really Jewish.
- In many ways, they represent the antithesis of the most widely held American-Jewish position and beliefs. They support Jewish settlements, oppose a two-state solution, abhor illegal immigrants, endorse a fusion of religion and state, and couldn't give a fig about the personal freedoms and democratic safeguards that are cherished by American Jews. In this regard, Hotovely was simply representing the true attitude of many right-wing Israelis, including a majority of Netanyahu's governing coalition.
- But Hotovely's name is nonetheless hypocrisy. She rails against abrogation of her alleged right to speak at Princeton, but ignores her own government's efforts to stifle dissent in Israel – never mind the war it's waging against boycott, divestment and sanctions supporters and other anti-occupation critics around the world.
- Supporters of Hotovely's line of thinking have virtually expelled proponents of left-wing views from American-Jewish institutions by threatening to cut donations. And one wonders if the list of American Jews who live "convenient lives" and should mind their own business

encompasses right-wing magnates such as Sheldon Adelson and the late Irving Moskowitz, who not only voice their opinions but pour hundreds of millions of dollars into Israeli causes and campaigns that have boosted the right and changed Israeli history.

- Netanyahu has allowed Hotovely to wreak havoc on Israeli hasbara and to paint Israel – accurately, perhaps – as a country run by right wing reactionaries, but she may have crossed too many red lines this time. The fierce condemnations by everyone from Netanyahu and President Rivlin on down indicate their distress. This may ultimately cost Hotovely her job especially if American Jews, incensed by Netanyahu’s decision to renege on the Kotel deal, decide to go to town on her statements, which they might. The fault, however, lies not in Israel’s deputy foreign minister – no matter how outspoken she may be – but in the Netanyahu government itself.
- The prime minister has arrogantly precipitated and presided over an unprecedented breach in relations between Israel and American Jews, which may no longer be repairable. Netanyahu can distance himself from Hotovely all he wants. But he is ultimately responsible for the discord and damage, and the hurt that both of them have sowed.

SUMMARY: Netanyahu has allowed Hotovely to wreak havoc on Israeli hasbara and to paint Israel – accurately, perhaps – as a country run by right wing reactionaries, but she may have crossed too many red lines this time. The fierce condemnations by everyone from Netanyahu and President Rivlin on down indicate their distress. This may ultimately cost Hotovely her job especially if American Jews, incensed by Netanyahu’s decision to renege on the Kotel deal, decide to go to town on her statements, which they might. The fault, however, lies not in Israel’s deputy foreign minister – no matter how outspoken she may be – but in the Netanyahu government itself.

Israel Is Growing Increasingly Worried About the Trump Administration

By Brian Katulis & Yoram Schweitzer, fellows at the Center for American Progress

- **Israel’s reaction to U.S. President Donald Trump’s Iran speech last month was best summed up by a former senior official we recently met in Tel Aviv: “It sounds very nice, and I like it very much, but what’s next?”**
- **What we heard last month in Israel on Iran was less focused on the fate of the nuclear deal and more concerned about glaring gaps in U.S. strategy to deter Iran’s destabilizing actions and support for terrorist groups in the wider Middle East.**
- **If and how the Trump administration addresses these gaps in its regional strategy will have implications for America’s security and its allies for years to come — and what we heard in Israel is a growing worry that Trump lacks any operable plan at all on Iran.**
- **Historically, Iran has based its own regional foreign policy on opportunism. For decades since the 1979 revolution, Iran’s regime has worked to shift political dynamics in key countries across the region to their favor. And for the last 15 years, it has sought to take quick advantage of changing regional dynamics and direct them in its favor. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq eliminated two of Iran’s greatest adversaries: the Taliban and Saddam Hussein regimes. Feeling insecure and encircled by the U.S. military in the immediate aftermath of those two wars, Iran quickly adapted and built new networks of proxies and political allies as balances of power shifted in its immediate region.**
- **Indeed, the past decade witnessed a historic expansion of Iranian influence throughout the Middle East, rattling countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia in the process. Iran’s regional approach has been one akin to jiu-jitsu — the martial arts method of neutralizing an adversary by using that opponent’s own energy and force against him. This strategy has enabled Iran to build and strengthen political relationships over time and deeply embed itself in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria.**
- **By the start of this year, Iran had realized more gains in Middle East influence than any other country since 2011 when popular uprising shook many Arab countries — largely due to the deep fractures and divisions within Arab countries. As one leading academic in Israel told us, “the story has not been so much about Iran’s inherent strength, but rather one of weaknesses within Arab countries.”**
- **Iran’s foreign policy thrives off of this endemic poor governance, weak institutions, and political polarization. But in many ways, Iran is more exposed and vulnerable regionally due to how overstretched it is. Because Iran has taken advantage of division and corruption among its neighbors but hasn’t remedied those problems, there is an important opening with the populations of places like Iraq and Lebanon for the United States and its partners to counter it smartly and compete with Iran’s influence.**
- **But doing so will require deft diplomacy, alliance building, and long-term investments in relationships that seem to be beyond the reach of the Trump administration and its obvious**

disdain for cohesive strategic planning and investments in key tools of U.S. power like diplomacy. Making matters worse, Trump and his incoherent foreign policy have alienated America's partners and shredded U.S. credibility as a trustworthy global leader.

- Put simply, the Trump administration's unclear and disjointed approach to the Middle East has unnerved key allies like Israel while giving the emerging coalition of Russia, Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah a free pass. Many Israelis were dismayed earlier this week when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that Iran's presence in Syria was legitimate and that they would not force Iranian-aligned Shiite militias to withdraw from positions close to Syria's border with Israel.
- The Trump administration's passive and incoherent Middle East policy has also fostered moral hazard with some of our closest partners in the region, as seen in the recent actions by Saudi Arabia to use threats and psychological warfare to pressure Iran's partner in Lebanon, Hezbollah. The move appears to have backfired by prompting a backlash in Lebanon, and it may have forced Saudi Arabia to recalibrate, as the Washington Post's David Ignatius reported.
- In the absence of a more coherent approach by the United States, key powers in the Middle East will continue to test the limits of their power. The Saudi-led move against Qatar earlier this year and the Iraqi Kurdistan referendum this fall are two examples. And new alignments may emerge and deepen — an unprecedented interview in a Saudi news outlet by Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot this week is the latest sign of Israel and Saudi Arabia sharing a common interest in addressing the threats they see coming from Iran.

SUMMARY: the Trump administration's unclear and disjointed approach to the Middle East has unnerved key allies like Israel while giving the emerging coalition of Russia, Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah a free pass. Many Israelis were dismayed earlier this week when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that Iran's presence in Syria was legitimate and that they would not force Iranian-aligned Shiite militias to withdraw from positions close to Syria's border with Israel. The Trump administration's passive and incoherent Middle East policy has also fostered moral hazard with some of our closest partners in the region, as seen in the recent actions by Saudi Arabia to use threats and psychological warfare to pressure Iran's partner in Lebanon, Hezbollah. The move appears to have backfired by prompting a backlash in Lebanon, and it may have forced Saudi Arabia to recalibrate, as the Washington Post's David Ignatius reported.