



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, November 30

Headlines:

- Israeli Army Says Syrian Missile Fired at Golan Heights
- Syria: We Downed 'Hostile Targets' in Suspected Israel Attack
- Europe Agrees to Back UN Resolution Condemning Hamas
- CNN Fires Contributor Calling for 'Free Palestine from River to Sea'
- Committee Disapproves Appointment of Police Commissioner
- Sara Netanyahu to Head Diplomatic Mission to Guatemala
- UN: Israelis, Palestinians Must Reaffirm 2 States Based on 67 Lines
- Rabbinate Publishes List of Recognized Diaspora Courts

Commentary:

- **AI Monitor: "Why Iran is Also a Strategic Asset for Israel"**
 - By Ben Caspit, columnist at AI Monitor
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "ICC Judges' Bias Against Israel"**
 - By Ben-Dror Yemini, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

News Excerpts

November 30, 2018

Ha'aretz

Israeli Army Says Syrian Missile Fired at Golan Heights

Syria's air defence forces shot down an Israeli war plane and four missiles on Thursday, Russia's RIA news agency said, citing a Syrian security source, but Israel's military said the report was bogus. The Syrian air force shot down a "hostile target" flying over the town of Kiswah, south of the capital Damascus, state media said. Saudi-owned TV station Al-Arabiya reported that Israeli planes attacked Iranian militia positions in the country's south. State media quoted a military source but did not specify what the target was or where it came from. Syrian opposition sources on the ground said the area was close to where the Iranian-backed Lebanese Shi'ite group Hezbollah has a powerful presence with several bases. See also, ["Israel reportedly strikes pro-Iranian militia sites in Syria" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

Syria: We Downed 'Hostile Targets' in Suspected Israel Attack

Syria's air defense forces shot down an Israeli war plane and four missiles on Thursday, Russia's RIA news agency said, citing a Syrian security source, but Israel's military said the report was bogus. The source said the missiles aimed at the town of Kiswah, south of the capital Damascus, were struck before they reached their targets that Syrian opposition sources said were Iranian-backed strongholds. The area where the incident is said to have occurred is where Lebanon's Hezbollah, a group backed by Iran, has its communications and logistics hub for southern Syria near the Israeli border, according to two senior regional intelligence sources. See also, ["Syria: we downed Israeli plane and missiles" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Times of Israel

Europe Agrees to Back UN Resolution Condemning Hamas

The European Union agreed to support a US-sponsored United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning Hamas, following negotiations with Washington, diplomats said Thursday. The draft resolution will likely be voted on in the United Nations General Assembly on Monday, an official in Israel's mission to the UN told The Times of Israel on Thursday. After the US agreed to make some changes to the initial draft, the EU on Thursday agreed to support the text. All 28 EU member states are expected to vote in favor. "All 28 members will support the US text," a European diplomat told AFP. See also, ["US circulates UN resolution that would condemn Hamas rockets" \(Washington Post\)](#)

I24 News

CNN Fires Contributor Calling for 'Free Palestine from River to Sea'

CNN said Thursday it had fired a contributor who called for a "free Palestine from river to sea" -- a slogan associated with Palestinian extremists' calls for the destruction of Israel -- in a speech at the United Nations on Wednesday. "Marc Lamont Hill is no longer under contract with CNN," a spokesperson for the channel said in a brief statement published on the television channel's website. Marc Lamont Hill, a Temple University professor and CNN political commentator, used the slogan during an address at the UN at an event marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. "We have an opportunity to not just offer solidarity in words but to commit to political action, that will give us what justice requires and that is a free Palestine from the river to the sea," Hill said.

Jerusalem Post

Committee Disapproves Appointment of Police Commissioner

The government committee which approves the appointment of high-ranking officials, decided late Thursday night not to approve the candidacy of Moshe "Chico" Edri the next chief of the Israeli police. Two of the committee members voted against the appointment and two voted in favor. When there is a tie, the chairman of the committee, former Supreme Court justice Eliezer Goldberg, receives the final say. In this case, he voted against Edri's appointment. The committee said that it decided to disqualify Edri due to a meeting he held with an attorney representing one of the people who filed a complaint to the committee against his appointment. The meeting took place just days before Edri was scheduled to meet with the committee. See also, ["Vetting panel rejects police chief nominee Edri, but ministers want him anyway" \(TOI\)](#)

Ynet News

Sara Netanyahu to Head Diplomatic Mission to Guatemala

Prime Minister Netanyahu's wife Sara will depart on an official diplomatic mission in two weeks on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, following an invitation by Guatemala's President Jimmy Morales's wife Patricia to visit the Central American country. Mrs. Netanyahu and the Israeli delegation were invited to take part in a cornerstone laying ceremony for a new neighborhood in a village called "Jerusalem," which was recently built to house the victims of the Fuego volcano that erupted six months ago. By the end of December, 42 families are expected to join the eight families that are currently residing in the village. The improvised village was an initiative of Guatemala's Jewish community rabbi, Joseph Gramon, with help from the ZAKA organization and local organizations. See also, ["Sara Netanyahu to head delegation to Guatemala" \(TOI\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

UN: Israelis, Palestinians Must Reaffirm 2 States Based on 67

Israeli and Palestinian leaders must recognize a two-state resolution to the Israeli based on the pre-1967 lines with east Jerusalem as its capital, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday. "I call on all actors, and first and foremost the leadership of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, to take bold steps and restore faith in the promise of Resolution 181, of two states living side-by-side in peace and security, fulfilling the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples, with borders based on the 1967 lines and Jerusalem as the capital of both states – East Jerusalem being the capital of the Palestinian state," Guterres said.

Ynet News

Rabbinate Publishes List of Recognized Diaspora Courts

The Chief Rabbinate publishes a list of foreign rabbinical courts recognized for the performance of conversions and divorce. The move follows a petition by ITIM Institute against the so-called 'blacklists' of disqualified courts. Their goal is to finally regulate a domain that has been characterized by vagueness and uncertainty. However, criteria have not yet been determined for the Rabbinate to recognize individual rabbis from abroad. To date, the Chief Rabbinate has denied the claim that it maintains lists of recognized rabbis or rabbinical courts, and certainly the existence of a secret "black list" of those who are disqualified in their eyes. According to the Chief Rabbinate, each case is examined on its own merits. The rabbinate also admitted that it had never formulated criteria for the recognition of rabbis abroad.

Why Iran is Also a Strategic Asset for Israel

By Ben Caspit, columnist at AI Monitor

- There is broad agreement in Israel about the fact that Iran has captured the top spot on the list of the Jewish State's bitterest enemies over the past decade. Israel views the "Iranian threat" as the sole existential threat to the country's future. Iran is Israel's last remaining significant strategic threat in all security-related respects. The Iranian nuclear program is considered a direct strategic threat, and Iran's expansion throughout the Middle East and the Shiite axis it heads from the Persian Gulf in the south to the Syrian port of Latakia in the north are regarded as a significant conventional threat. To top it all off, Iran is also the main purveyor of state-sponsored terrorism against Israel and the prime funder of the Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah movements, all committed to Israel's annihilation. Whereas Iran describes Israel as "little Satan," for Israel, Iran is undoubtedly "big Satan."
- By the same token, one can describe Iran as one of Israel's most significant strategic assets at this time. This is no exaggeration, but a fact. Recent months have seen the unveiling of a growing number of clandestine contacts Israel is conducting with Arab and Muslim states in the region and the world with which it does not have diplomatic ties. The budding romance between Israel and several Sunni states is also turning slowly into an up-front relationship. This is all being enabled "thanks" to Iran. The Shiite threat and Iranian expansion westward are of great concern to a large number of regional leaders. Israel is being sucked into the center of this arena as the only response to the primeval fear of a reconstituted Persian Empire and the growing Shiite influence on the region. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with the energetic help of Mossad Chief Yossi Cohen and national security adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat, is effectively leveraging the emerging situation to fortify Israel's standing as a bastion of regional defense and a magnet for all those who fear Iran.
- The president of Chad, Idriss Deby, made a surprise visit to Israel on Nov. 25, at the end of which Netanyahu announced that he would soon pay a reciprocal visit to that Muslim African state during which the two would announce the renewal of the diplomatic relations Chad ruptured 46 years ago. At the same time, Channel 10 news reported that a special emissary of Israel's Foreign Ministry met in Turkey last year with senior Sudanese officials to discuss the possibility of advancing bilateral contacts. The meeting came against a backdrop of intensive contacts between Israeli officials and some Persian Gulf states, among them Bahrain, regarding an upgrading of their secret ties with the Jewish State. On Oct. 26, Netanyahu paid a historic visit to Oman as the personal guest of its ruler, Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The tip of the diplomatic iceberg between Israel and Saudi Arabia was also revealed recently, with Netanyahu playing principle advocate of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman over his alleged role in the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. All of the above is still only an iota of the actual events that have turned Israel into a vital port of call for any ruler seeking survival in the chaotic environment of the Middle East.
- As previously mentioned, none of these developments could have occurred without the growing Iranian presence throughout the Middle East. Israel is perceived as the only true response to the Iranian threat and the only one truly able to confront it. The Gulf States, including the Saudis,

find it hard to trust President Donald Trump; he himself told The Washington Post on Nov. 28 that the United States maintains its presence in the Middle East to defend Israeli interests.

- In addition, Israel has cleverly leveraged its defense capabilities. It has used its varied defense technologies, especially its well-developed cyber capacities, to lure states in the region seeking access to these “treasures.” An intermediary who sought his help in buying offensive cyber technology for Saudi Arabia reportedly contacted former Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 2015. Many Israeli cyber firms have signed hefty contracts in countries with which Israel has no diplomatic ties that are preparing and arming themselves against the danger from Iran. “I have no idea where we would be in this respect today were it not for the Iranian threat,” a senior Israeli defense official tells Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity. “Thanks to them [the Iranians], Israel has not been the regional pariah for a very long time, but rather the state whose closeness and favors everyone seeks.”
- This is a dramatic change, an ongoing strategic process of recent years that shows no signs of abating. On the contrary, it appears to be strengthening. This process also has a very important side effect for Netanyahu: Whereas in the past, a threshold condition for any Arab or Muslim state to conduct ties (even clandestine ones) with Israel was progress on an agreement with the Palestinians, nowadays this is almost a moot issue. “The Palestinians are no longer of interest to the Arabs,” a former top Israeli diplomat told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity. “Once it was the first question at every secret meeting. Today, they pose the question to be polite, at the end of the meeting.” Israel is no longer being forced to promise progress on the Palestinian issue and not even to discuss the prospects of negotiations with the Palestinians. Instead of making these demands, Israel’s Arab interlocutors are asking Israel to maintain a low profile. Keep quiet, they urge the Israelis, so that the Palestinian issue does not re-emerge on the agenda.
- In other words, Arabs and Muslims in the region are content to maintain the Israeli-Palestinian status quo in order to continue advancing their ties with Israel, both the open ones and those behind the scenes. This is perhaps one of the reasons that made Netanyahu opt to end the latest crisis with Hamas without being drawn into a full-scale war in Gaza, to swallow his pride and help Qatar fund Hamas despite its terror activity against Israel. All he wanted was to douse the flames on the southern front.
- Given this state of play, Iran has become a type of strategic Israeli asset in recent years. The question of whether it is more of a burden than an asset does not have a clear answer for now. President Trump adopted in full the Israeli approach vis-a-vis Iran, taking a hard-line position on the Shiite state, while Israel continues to exploit the situation to its advantage. As far as Netanyahu is concerned, the current situation can be frozen in place forever. Iran can keep being a “threshold” nuclear state threatening the region while Israel joyfully reaps the fruit.

SUMMARY: one can describe Iran as one of Israel's most significant strategic assets at this time. This is no exaggeration, but a fact. Recent months have seen the unveiling of a growing number of clandestine contacts Israel is conducting with Arab and Muslim states in the region and the world with which it does not have diplomatic ties. The budding romance between Israel and several Sunni states is also turning slowly into an up-front relationship. This is all being enabled "thanks" to Iran. The Shiite threat and Iranian expansion westward are of great concern to a large number of regional leaders. Israel is being sucked into the center of this arena as the only response to the primeval fear of a reconstituted Persian Empire and the growing Shiite influence on the region. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with the energetic help of Mossad Chief Yossi Cohen and national security adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat, is effectively leveraging the emerging situation to fortify Israel's standing as a bastion of regional defense and a magnet for all those who fear Iran.

ICC Judges' Bias Against Israel

By Ben-Dror Yemini, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- A year ago, on December 1, 2017, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Fatou Bensouda, decided to close the "Marmara case." This is the same old story from 2010, in which Israeli forces commandeered a flotilla, led by the Mavi Marmara, on its way to Gaza. Nine activists were killed during the takeover. Following the incident, a number of investigation committees were established, most prominently that of the UN Security Council, led by former Prime Minister of New Zealand Jeffrey Palmer. The Palmer Committee determined that Israel used excessive force, but that the blockade itself was legal. Following that conclusion, Bensouda decided to close the case in 2014.
- In 2015, a committee of three ICC justices demanded the case be reopened. Bensouda appealed the decision. After her appeal was rejected, she again investigated and again decided to close the case. But last week, a panel of judges ordered the prosecutor to open an investigation, in order to file a claim against Israel. The authority to file a claim, it should be noted, is that of the prosecutor alone. Thus, for years the prosecutor has ruled that there are no grounds for an investigation, and various panels of judges insist on having one anyway.
- That Gaza flotilla was an initiative by IHH, a Turkish-Islamic organization. Even before the flotilla set sail, European intelligence sources noted that IHH was linked to the global Jihad movement, including al-Qaeda. The European Union's delegate to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, Jean-Louis Burgier, affirmed that IHH is connected to the global terrorist network.
- When members of the organization were aboard the Mavi Marmara on their way to Gaza, they chanted the song of annihilation, "Khaybar Khaybar, ya Yahud, Jaish Muhammad, sa Yahud" ("Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews, Mohammed's army will return" is a thinly disguised call to murder Jews, referring to a battle in Khaybar when Mohammed slaughtered scores of Jews).
- One of the flotilla's prominent members was Sheikh Raed Salah, leader of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, who energized the participants with hate speech. Like other members of the global Jihad, IHH members made it clear, even before the incident, that they were destined to be martyrs. Of the 500 participants in the flotilla, 40 were members of the IHH and of the nine killed, eight were IHH members. A few months after they returned to Turkey, members of IHH traveled to Tehran to meet their ally, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, then president of Iran. Saleh Ozer, the organization's leader, declared: "We are here today with the yearning and determination to build a Middle East without Israel and America." Similar statements were made by IHH leaders later on.
- All this information, and probably additional information, was available to Bensouda. One cannot "accuse" her of being overly sympathetic to Israel, but she understood that this was a planned provocation by a terrorist organization that forged an alliance with "progressive forces"—the red-green alliance of jihadists and the radical left, whose only common denominator is anti-Semitism. Considering these facts, an investigation should have been launched against Turkey, which sponsored the flotilla and the IHH, and encouraged and

equipped them. In the struggle between Jihad and its supporters and a free country, the West was supposed to side with the latter.

- But presumptions go through a dangerous change when it comes to Israel. It is fighting an organization that is recognized as a terrorist organization, whose members declare in advance their desire to become martyrs, an anti-Semitic ideology dominated the deck, but wonder of wonders—the ICC court's judges repeatedly demand an indictment against Israel.
- During the last round of discussions at the UN General Assembly, various committees submitted nine condemnations of Israel—and not even one proposal against any other country in the world. This is a shameful extension of the obsessive bias against Israel. These organizations have an automatic majority against Israel, but what about the judges?!
- In the United States, a bipartisan majority in Congress passed the "Hague Invasion Act," which states that if there is an attempt to arrest an American soldier or an American citizen for prosecution, the United States will invade The Hague in order to release the detainee, which sounds like a strange law. But reality, it turns out, is even stranger.

SUMMARY: Judges in The Hague decide to reopen the investigation against Israel in the Mavi Marmara incident despite the prosecutor repeatedly closing the case over flotilla organizers IHH's ties to global Jihad.