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Isranet Daily Briefing, November 1, 2016
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OBAMA’S ISRAEL SURPRISE?

Editorial

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[Wall Street Journal](#), Oct. 31, 2016

The Middle East has few bright spots these days, but one is the budding rapprochement between Israel and its Sunni Arab neighbors, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, thanks to shared threats from Iran and Islamic State. Now the Obama Administration may have plans to wreck even that.

Israeli diplomats gird for the possibility that President Obama may try to force a diplomatic resolution for Israel and the Palestinians at the United Nations. The White House has been unusually tight-lipped about what, if anything, it might have in mind. But our sources say the White House has asked the State Department to develop an options menu for the President’s final weeks.

One possibility would be to sponsor, or at least allow, a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlement construction, perhaps alongside new IRS regulations revoking the tax-exempt status of people or entities involved in settlement building. The Administration vetoed such a resolution in 2011 on grounds that it “risks hardening the position of both sides,” which remains true. But condemning the settlements has always been a popular way of scoring points against the Jewish state, not least at the State Department, and an antisettlement resolution might burnish Mr. Obama’s progressive brand for his postpresidency.

Mr. Obama may also seek formal recognition of a Palestinian state at the Security Council. This would run afoul of Congress’s longstanding view that “Palestine” does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood, including a defined territory and effective government, though Mr. Obama could overcome the objection through his usual expedient of an executive action, thereby daring the next President to reverse him.

Both actions would be a boon to the bullies in the Boycott, Divestment and

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Sanctions movement, while also subjecting Israeli citizens and supporters abroad to new and more aggressive forms of legal harassment. It could even criminalize the Israeli army—and every reservist who serves in it—on the theory that it is illegally occupying a foreign state. Does Mr. Obama want to be remembered as the President who criminalized Israeli citizenship?

The worst option would be an effort to introduce a resolution at the U.N. Security Council setting “parameters” for a final settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The French have been eager to do this for some time, and one option for the Administration would be to let the resolution pass simply by refusing to veto it. Or the U.S. could introduce the resolution itself, all the better to take credit for it.

As the old line has it, this would be worse than a crime—it would be a blunder. U.S. policy has long and wisely been that only Israelis and Palestinians can work out a peace agreement between themselves, and that efforts to impose one would be counterproductive. Whatever parameters the U.N. established would be unacceptable to any Israeli government, left or right, thereby destroying whatever is left of a peace camp in Israel.

The Palestinians would seize on those parameters as their birthright, making it impossible for any future Palestinian leader to bargain part of them away in a serious negotiation. Arab states would find their diplomatic hands tied, making it impossible to serve as useful intermediaries between Jerusalem and Ramallah. It could refreeze relations with Israel even as they finally seem to have thawed.

President Obama may be the last man on earth to get the memo, but after decades of fruitless efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it might be wiser for the U.S. to step back until the Palestinians recognize that peace cannot be imposed from the outside. If Mr. Obama is still seeking a Middle East legacy at this late stage in his presidency, his best move is do nothing to make it worse.

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OBAMA AND PALESTINIAN UNITY

Jonathan S. Tobin

[Commentary](#), Oct. 31, 2016

Last week there was some progress toward peace in the Middle East. Unfortunately, that progress wasn't made between Israel and Palestinians seeking to create a two-state solution that would end the century-long conflict between the two peoples. Instead, the leaders of Fatah and Hamas took the first steps toward a breakthrough. Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, who runs the West Bank and Hamas leaders Khaled Meshal and Ismail Haniyeh had what appears to have been a productive meeting in Qatar. But while the lack of Palestinian unity has long been decried as an obstacle to peace with Israel, the conclave is not good news for those who hope for progress. To the contrary, what this shows is not a desire for a Palestinian unity government that is strong enough to make peace but rather one that is brought together by a determination to avoid it.

The split between the two leading Palestinian groups is a detail that is usually ignored by peace process advocates. Those who hope to further empower Abbas by granting the Palestinians statehood tend to forget that Gaza is for an independent state in all but name run by Hamas. The nine years since Hamas toppled the Fatah administration of the Strip in a bloody coup have provided a sobering preview of what a two-state solution might actually mean. The Islamist group not only turned the strip into a theocracy but also into a heavily fortified terrorist base from which it launched thousands of rockets against Israel before the Jewish state's 2014 counter-attack brought about an uneasy cease-fire.

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The hope among peace process advocates has always been that Hamas would either collapse due to dissatisfaction with its despotic rule or eventually come to its senses and join with the supposed “moderates” of Fatah to end the conflict. But though Gazans are as sick of Hamas incompetence and dangerous belligerence as West Bank residents are of Fatah’s corruption, there is no sign of any weakening of its grasp on power. Nor has there been any shift in its ideology, which not only demands Israel’s elimination but also the slaughter of its Jewish population.

Far from acting as a moderating influence on Hamas, it ought to be clear that it is Abbas, the man that President Obama has claimed is a “champion of peace,” and his group that has begun sounding more like the Islamists. The so-called “stabbing intifada” of the last year was largely the product of a conscious decision by Abbas to ramp up religious hatred against Jews by promoting a canard that Israel planned to harm the Temple Mount mosques. The PA’s successful campaign to get UNESCO to designate both the Temple Mount and the Western Wall as exclusively Muslim holy sites is also significant. It is both a sign that Abbas believes the only to compete with Hamas for popularity in the Muslim street is by mimicking their hatred and an indication of its clear refusal to accept the legitimacy of a Jewish state no matter where its borders might be drawn.

This is not the first such try at Palestinian unity. A Fatah-Hamas accord helped destroy Secretary of State John Kerry’s attempt to broker peace in 2014. But the seriousness of this latest attempt was demonstrated by the presence in Qatar of the heads of the two Hamas factions — Haniyeh, who runs Gaza and Meshal, who runs the political operation outside of the strip.

It’s likely that Abbas is hoping to rope them into some kind of agreement that will present a united front to the world in advance of the PA’s next attempt to gain statehood or a condemnation of Israel at the UN this fall. Seen in that context, the unity efforts are not just more pointless Palestinian posturing but a clear strategy

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aimed at providing a false veneer that President Obama can use to justify a betrayal of the Jewish state. If Obama uses the period after the presidential election to launch a parting shot at Israel before his term expires he needs to be able to pretend that the Palestinians are ready for peace. But this unity effort is the opposite of peace.

Though the administration’s illusions about Abbas remain, the United States government still rightly labels Hamas as a terrorist group. If Washington were serious about peace it would be demanding that Abbas renounce any effort at unity with Hamas unless it changed its character and embraced peace. The unity meeting ought to ensure that the U.S. continues to oppose any effort by the PA to avoid direct peace talks with Israel. The fact that it may instead be used to help the president undermine Israel’s diplomatic position and further isolating it in a way that the next administration may not be able to reverse further demonstrates the bankruptcy of Obama’s approach to the Middle East.

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OH THOSE SANDS! THOSE SHIFTING SANDS!

Dr. Mordechai Kedar

[Arutz Sheva](#), Oct. 31, 2016

A little over two years ago, in mid-August, I ended my weekly article with the following sentence: “The Middle Eastern see-saw is leaning heavily towards the Saudi-Egyptian axis, but it is not at all clear whether that coalition will continue to direct the Middle East in another year or two. Israel must not be tempted to align its security and future with a temporary constellation, no matter how good it appears to be. Israel must always base its policy on long term planning that gives

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priority to Israel and its territorial possessions and not to agreements resting on the shifting sands of the Middle East.”

Unfortunately, for the last two years Israelis and many others have been talking about the importance of a treaty between Israel and the so-called “coalition of moderate Sunni nations” - to wit, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, The United Arab Emirates, and the Palestinian Authority - all of them united against the Iranian threat and ISIS which threaten the stability and welfare of their regimes. There are even those who accuse Israel’s government of not being wise enough to make use of the present situation in the Middle East to forge a peace agreement with the Arab and Islamic world on the basis of the Saudi Peace Plan adopted by the Arab League.

The foundation of the “moderate Sunni coalition” was the close cooperation between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, that began when King Abdullah, all heart and outspread hands, supported General Sisi, who in July 2013 ousted elected president Mohammed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, this in sharp contrast to the will of the US government and Europe. The Saudi billions saved Egypt from bankruptcy, and the cooperation between the two countries reached the point where Egyptian soldiers came to the aid of the Saudis in their struggle against the Iranian and Houthi forces in Yemen. Except that since then, the sand dunes on which the aforementioned “coalition” was built have shifted in the wake of the north winds coming from the battlegrounds of Syria, putting paid to the bets on what seemed like a winning hand just a short while ago. Today the relations between Egypt and the Saudis are a far cry from cooperation and Egypt is now in close cahoots with Saudi Arabia’s enemies, headed by Iran.

How did the turnabout happen? The answer is clearly to be found in the situation in Syria for the past two years, especially Russia’s involvement, the Aleppo campaign and the resolutions concerning Syria passed by the UN Security Council, of which Egypt is a member this year. The Assad issue polarizes all the countries involved in Syria: Russia, Iran, Iraq and Hezbollah support Assad actively, not only politically, and are taking part in the fighting. Assad would be long gone without

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this involvement. On the other side of the court, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and some of the Emirates are undermining Assad politically and financially, arming and training those rebelling against his regime.

The scales of war tipped towards Assad during the past year once Russian military involvement began to increase in strength. One can say with certainty that Russia has become the Syrian Army’s main source of power, mainly from the air, and that a good part of the Russian navy, armed with rockets and aircraft carriers, is concentrated opposite Syria’s shores. The air defense systems that Russia has spread along the Syrian coast threaten the activities of the US, Israeli and Turkish warplanes in the area. Russia acts without legal or moral constraints, and bombs civilian neighborhoods mercilessly, forcing their citizens to become human shields for the rebels - those that Saudi Arabia supports, mostly in the eastern quarters of Aleppo.

In the political arena, Russia managed to force Erdogan to stop helping the rebels and concentrate instead on preventing Syria’s Kurds from establishing an independent state that might threaten Turkish stability. Sisi has been faced with the dilemma of whom to support from the first day of his regime in July 2013 - wondering whether he should stand behind Assad or behind Assad’s Islamist enemies, the ideological brothers of Sisi’s own opponents in the Sinai and along the length of the Nile.

While Sisi was politically and financially dependent on the Saudis, he abstained from supporting Assad publicly, but the direct and massive Russian intervention in Syria made him rethink what policy it would be best to pursue. He realized that Assad might succeed in overcoming his opponents and that the Saudi regime might fail in its war against the Syrian dictator, so he decided to bet on the winning horse. He abandoned the Saudis, crossed the lines, and now feels that Assad can remain in power no matter what future agreement lies ahead. The US decision to stay out of the fray also helped convince Sisi that the power in the Middle East is in the hands of Russia and its Iranian allies, making it worth his while to join the winning team and abandon the losers.

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The October 8th vote in the Security Council saw the Egyptian delegate take a stand supporting Russia’s suggested resolution and not that of the Saudis. In response, Saudi Arabia’s UN delegate said that Egypt’s support of Russia is a “sad thing” and the Saudis promptly stopped an oil shipment headed for Egypt and placed restrictions on Egypt Airlines flights to Saudi Arabia.

Egypt’s police removed the concrete barriers that protected the Saudi Embassy in Cairo, claiming that a traffic tunnel is being constructed exactly at that spot, and the Saudi ambassador got the hint, leaving Cairo and returning to his homeland. Sisi, at a military ceremony, announced that “Egypt bows only to Allah,” meaning to no man or other country, alluding to the Saudi regime. The media received reports that a former senior Egyptian officer sold patrol boats to the Houthis in Yemen, the tribes that Iran supports and Saudi Arabia is trying to destroy. And all this deterioration in the relations between the two countries occurred over 5 days, from the 8th to the 13th of October...

The Palestinian Authority (PA) had also joined the list of the “moderate Sunni coalition” with which Israel was supposed to reach a peace agreement, according to the pundits. Except that it turns out that this very same PA rests on shaky legs at best. For the past decade, we have been accustomed to a political and territorial split in the Palestinian Arab sector, with Gaza a Hamas state and Judea and Samaria’s Arabs in love with the PLO. All that was until last month, when the PLO dream was shown to be totally divorced from reality, as the organization itself split between Abbas supporters and those who support Mohammed Dahlan, corresponding to a growing schism between urban Arabs and refugee camp dwellers.

Throughout the past year, and particularly last month, there were violent outbursts between civilians and PA security forces in which the Palestinian police behavior towards these civilians was on a level of cruelty and violence equal to that which was prevalent in the Arab world for many years until the “Arab Spring”

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broke down the cruelty barrier. The reason is obvious: The security organizations are filled with personnel brought from Tunisia, not native Palestinian Arabs, and are therefore not considered legitimate by local residents.

What is going on today in the PA can be considered preparation by public and political institutions for the day after Abbas: Hamas is getting stronger, accruing arms and planning a takeover of Judea and Samaria. The fear of Hamas on the part of PLO supporters is behind their search for a young, energetic and proven rival to Hamas. Mohammed Dahlan suits the bill almost perfectly, but is strongly opposed by Abbas and his cohorts. Is the PLO going to remain a united organization in the future? It is hard to predict, but Middle Eastern dynamics perpetuate controversies and deepen them, so it is quite possible that this internecine war will destroy the PLO just as its struggle with Hamas destroyed the dream of one Palestinian State even before its birth...

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THE FUNERAL OF THE OSLO ACCORDS

Guy Millière

[Gatestone Institute](#), Oct. 25, 2016

The death of former Israeli President Shimon Peres led to a wave of almost unanimous tributes. Representatives from 75 countries came to Jerusalem to attend the funeral. Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas even left Ramallah for a few hours to show up. Such a consensus could seem to be a sign of support for Israel, but it was something else entirely. Those who honored the memory of Shimon Peres put aside the years he dedicated to creating Israel's

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defense industry and to negotiating key arms deals with France, Germany and the United States. Those who honored the memory of Peres spoke only of the man who signed the Oslo Accords and who embodied the "peace process." They then used the occasion to accuse Israel.

Barack Obama delivered a speech that could have resembled a mark of heartwarming friendship, until he evoked the "the unfinished business of peace talks." A harsh and negative sentence followed, saying that "the Jewish people weren't born to rule another people." The next sentence implied that Israel is behaving like a slave-owner: "From the very first day we are against slaves and masters;" but it is clear to anyone in Israel that there is no such relationship even resembling that. His conclusion followed: "The Zionist idea will be best protected when Palestinians will have a state of their own." British Prime Minister Theresa May and French President François Hollande issued press releases in the same direction.

Despite the unceasing waves of murdering innocent Israeli civilians, Western politicians speak as if Israel were not under attack. They are not interested in seeing the spilled blood, the threats, the hatred constantly spread by Palestinian newspapers, and the incessant and ugly consequences of that hatred. European and American politicians are not interested in hearing what Palestinian leaders say when they call for the ethnic cleansing of Jews. These leaders seem happy to forget the chaos in the Middle East, the ruthless global violence of Islamic extremists, and the outspoken, genocidal intentions of the rulers of Iran. Instead, they speak abstractly of "peace" as if it is something that can be dropped down from sky on people who every day are threatening to kill the Jews.

These politicians practice willful blindness and seem obsessed by a desire illegally to impose the creation of a Palestinian state — whatever the consequences for Israel. These Western leaders can well imagine what those consequences would be if the Arabs had their way: genocide. One can only assume they are pleased with that. Israelis, however — Muslims, Christians and Jews — cannot practice willful blindness. The spilled blood is not an abstract headline; it is their red blood. The

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threats, the hatred and the consequences of that hatred are real. Israelis hear clearly what the Palestinian leaders say. They cannot forget what is happening in the Middle East: Jerusalem is 150 miles from Damascus and 1000 miles from Tehran; Hezbollah has more 120,000 missiles aimed at Israel from Lebanon. Hamas, a designated terrorist group openly dedicated to destroying Israel, rules Gaza just a few miles away. Israelis note the genocidal threats from Iran: Iran can obtain nuclear weapons at any time, along with long-range missiles to deliver them.

Even though many Israeli citizens were proud to see that so many Western leaders came to honor Shimon Peres, they were not fooled. A recent survey showed that only 28% of the Israeli population believe that a peace agreement is even conceivable; 64% think no agreement will ever be signed. Another survey from July 2016 showed that a clear majority of Israelis are opposed to any withdrawal from Judea and Samaria, and resolutely hostile to any foreign interference in Israeli affairs. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu politely received Western leaders when they came to Jerusalem. He paid tribute to Shimon Peres – without omitting the first decades of Peres' life. He also answered those who speak of "peace" as if no other factors mattered, and firmly stated his position: security comes first; there is no way that peace can exist without security...

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[Congress Blasts Obama for Preparing Anti-Israel Offensive: Jenna Liphits, Weekly Standard, Oct. 9, 2016](#)—The Obama administration is manufacturing a crisis with Israel in anticipation of a post-election diplomatic push targeting the Jewish state, and this past week launched a series of broadsides criticizing the Israelis through

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the media and in press briefings, according to congressional sources and Jewish-American officials who spoke to *the Weekly Standard*.

[The Next President and the Middle East](#): Editorial, *Washington Post*, Oct. 29, 2016— The self-defeating passivity of President Obama’s policies in the Middle East may have reached its apotheosis earlier this month at a National Security Council meeting that he chaired.

[Jordan’s Chilly Peace with Israel](#): Michael Freund, *Jerusalem Post*, Oct. 26, 2016—Yesterday marked the 22nd anniversary of the signing of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty, an event heralded at the time as a historic breakthrough, one that would bring about a warm and lasting reconciliation between the two countries for generations to come. So much for the desert-driven delusions of the past.

[The Two Sides of Shimon Peres](#): Father Raymond J. de Souza, *National Post*, Oct. 3, 2016— The world joined Israel to pay tribute to Shimon Peres in Jerusalem Friday, but it seemed as though the world and Israel were burying different men. This may simply reflect the fact that, after 70 years, the public life of the last of the founders of the modern state of Israel was simply too large to be fully addressed in one funeral.