



ISRAEL MATTERS!

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom
1809 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT 06517-1401



Issue Number 93
July/August 2015

Israelis and Saudis Reveal Secret Iran Talks

U.S. Supreme Court Strikes Down “Born in Jerusalem” Passport Law

The Supreme Court struck down a disputed law that would have allowed Americans born in Jerusalem to list their birthplace as Israel on their U.S. passports in an important ruling that underscores the president’s authority in foreign affairs. The court ruled 6-3 that Congress overstepped its bounds when it approved the law in 2002. It would have forced the State Department to alter its long-standing policy of not listing Israel as the birthplace for Jerusalem-born Americans and listing only “Jerusalem.”

The policy is part of the government’s refusal to recognize any nation’s sovereignty over Jerusalem, until Israelis and Palestinians resolve its status through negotiations. Justice Anthony Kennedy said in his majority opinion that the president has the exclusive power to recognize foreign nations, and the power to determine what a passport says is part of this power.

The ruling ends a 12-year-old lawsuit by a Jerusalem-born American, Menachem Zivotofsky, and his U.S. citizen parents. The boy was in court to hear arguments on the separation of powers case that featured his name. After arguments he told reporters, “I’m an Israeli, and I want people to know that I’m glad to be an Israeli.”

U.S. policy has long refrained from recognizing any nation’s sovereignty over Jerusalem and has held that the city’s status should be resolved through negotiations between the parties. [JPost and CNN]

Since the beginning of 2014, representatives from Israel and Saudi Arabia have had five secret meetings to discuss a common foe, Iran. In June, the two countries revealed this covert diplomacy at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington.

It has been an open secret that Israel and Saudi Arabia have a common interest in thwarting Iran. But until the announcement, actual diplomacy between the two was never officially acknowledged. Saudi Arabia still doesn’t recognize Israel’s right to exist. Israel has yet to accept a Saudi-initiated peace offer to create a Palestinian state.

After an introduction, there was a speech in Arabic from Anwar Majed Eshki, a retired Saudi general and ex-adviser to Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the former Saudi ambassador to the U.S. Then Dore Gold, a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations who is slated to be the next director general of Israel’s foreign ministry, gave a speech in English.

While these men represent countries that have been historic enemies, their message was identical: Iran is trying to take over the Middle East and it must be stopped.

Eshki laid out a brief history of Iran since the 1979 revolution, highlighting the regime’s acts of terrorism, hostage-taking, and aggression. He ended his remarks with a seven-point plan for the Middle East. Atop the list was achieving peace between Israel and the Arabs. Second, came regime-change in Iran. Also on the list were greater Arab unity, the establishment of an Arab regional military force, and a call for an independent Kurdistan to be made up of territory now belonging to Iraq, Turkey, and Iran.

Gold, too, warned of Iran’s regional ambitions. But he didn’t call for toppling the Tehran government. “Our standing today on this stage does not mean we have resolved all the differences that our countries have shared over the years,” he said of his outreach to Saudi Arabia. “But our hope is we will be able to address them fully in the years ahead.”

It is no coincidence that the meetings between Gold, Eshki, and a few other former officials from both sides took place in the shadow of the nuclear talks among Iran, the U.S. and other major powers. Saudi Arabia and Israel are arguably the two countries most threatened by Iran’s nuclear program, but neither has a seat at the negotiations scheduled to wrap up at the end of the month.

The five bilateral meetings over the last 17 months occurred in India,

(Continued)

(Continued from page 1)

Italy and the Czech Republic.

Eshki said that no real cooperation would be possible until Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, accepted what is known as the Arab Peace Initiative to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The plan was first shared in 2002.

Israel's quiet relationships with Gulf Arab states goes back to the 1990s and the Oslo Peace Process. Arab countries, such as Qatar, allowed Israel to open trade missions. Others allowed an Israeli intelligence presence, including Abu Dhabi, of the United Arab Emirates.

Those ties became more focused on Iran over the last decade, as shown by documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010. A March 19, 2009, cable quoted Israel's then-deputy director general of the foreign minister, Yacov Hadas, saying one reason for the warming of relations was that the Arabs felt Israel could advance their interests vis-a-vis Iran in Washington. "Gulf Arabs believe in Israel's role because of their perception of Israel's close relationship with the U.S., but also due to their sense that they can count on Israel against Iran," the cable said.

But only now has open cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel become a possibility. For Gold, it represents a major change. In 2003, he published a book, "Hatred's Kingdom," about Saudi Arabia's role in financing terrorism and Islamic extremism. He explained that he wrote that book "at the height of the second intifada when Saudi Arabia was financing and fundraising for the murder of Israelis." Today, Gold said, it is Iran that is primarily working with those Palestinian groups that continue to embrace terrorism.

Gold said that Iran is now outfitting groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon with precision-guided missiles, as opposed to the unguided rockets Iran has traditionally provided its allies in Lebanon. He also said Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps forces propping up the Bashar al-Assad regime are now close to the Israeli-Syrian border.

A few years ago, it was mainly Israel that rang the alarm about Iranian expansionism in the Middle East. It is significant that now Israel is joined in this campaign by Saudi Arabia, a country that has wished for its destruction since 1948.

The two nations worry today that President Barack Obama's efforts to make peace with Iran will embolden that regime's aggression against them. It's unclear whether Obama will get his nuclear deal. But either way, it may end up that his greatest diplomatic accomplishment will be that his outreach to Iran helped create the conditions for a Saudi-Israeli alliance against it.

[Bloomberg Review]

Steve Tisch's \$10 Million Donation to Tel Aviv University Elevates Film School

Like well-regarded U.S. film schools, the Tel Aviv University School of Film and Television has developed its own brand of excellence, with successful alumni such as Gideon Raff ("Homeland"), Hagai Levi ("The Affair"), Ari Folman ("Waltz With Bashir"), all heavyweights of the Israeli film and television industry, and known for their crossover success into the American market. And now Tel Aviv U. has an endowment from a Hollywood benefactor.

Recently, producer Steve Tisch ("Forrest Gump," "The Equalizer") donated \$10 million to the school — funding that will completely transform the campus and, Tisch hopes, further position Israeli film and television projects in the international arena.

Last year, Tisch traveled to Tel Aviv, having been invited to serve as honorary chair of the annual student film festival. Once there, he was inspired by the talent and commitment of the would-be filmmakers. "Every student I met at Tel Aviv U., every class I sat in on — the passion, the desire and the creativity of those students was tangible," Tisch says. "These are filmmakers who really have a vision, and to me that's exciting."

Gail Reiss, president and CEO of American Friends of Tel Aviv U., was among those who helped recruit Tisch to attend the film festival. At the time, the producer — whose family endowed NYU's Tisch School of the Arts in the 1980s — had not been to Israel for several decades. But it was clear, Reiss says, that he wasn't there as a sightseer. "From the moment he landed, he was all ours," she says. "He lectured and had conversations and sessions with students and faculty."

The Israeli film and television industry is known for its relentless inventiveness and ability to produce international hits with severely limited funds. The university's Dept. of Film and Television is something of a microcosm of this ferocious creativity — and it was that rawness, Reiss says, that Tisch liked. "It was a rough cut," she says. "It's not a polished school. What he fell in love with was the ability to see a department grow into a school."

Tel Aviv U. is one of a number of educational institutions in Israel with a program that specializes in the cinematic arts, but unlike its competitors, including the highly regarded Sam Spiegel Film & Television School in Jerusalem, TAU's is the only one that has a four-year academic curriculum, giving students a well-rounded education.

As a result of Tisch's gift, the department has been elevated to the status of a full-fledged film school. It is currently ranked among the top 15 international schools of film and television in the world, and the donation will allow for the purchase of new equipment, and boost the school's ability to attract top faculty, offer scholarships, and increase international collaborations. [Variety]

Israeli Veterinarians Help Salvage Tbilisi Devastated Zoo

A day after severe floods ravaged the Tbilisi Zoo, prompting predatory animals to flee toward city streets, a team of Israeli veterinarians arrived in the Georgian capital to lend a hand to zoo officials. "All the infrastructure in the lowest part of the zoo was destroyed," said Dr. Igal Horowitz, head veterinarian of the Ramat Gan Safari and the director of the Israeli Wildlife Hospital. "It's quite a catastrophic situation for them."

Wreaking havoc for human residents of the nation's capital as well, media reports said the flood had resulted in the deaths of 16 people. Among the fatalities were three zookeepers, Horowitz said.



Horowitz landed in Tbilisi along with the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo's head veterinarian, Dr. Nili Avni-Magen, [two at left in photo] on a trip sponsored by the Foreign Ministry. In addition to providing advice to zoo officials, Horowitz and

Avni-Magen brought medicines, anesthesia and other medical supplies – most of which were destroyed by the floods, according to Horowitz. "All the animals in the lowest level of the zoo drowned or escaped. The rest of the animals were OK," Horowitz said. "The main problem is all their drugs also drowned."

Nearly all of the animals that had escaped during the disaster were shot and killed, with just one hippopotamus and two wolves tranquilized and safely returned to their home, he explained. Horowitz said four animals were still missing, likely drowned in the massive amounts of water and mud that deluged the city.

The zoo officials discovered that eight lions, seven tigers and at least two of three jaguars were killed, while just two of 14 bears and eight of 17 penguins survived, reports said. "That's the worst nightmare a zoo staff member can ever think about – animals roaming in the streets and escaping their enclosures," said Keren Or, a zoologist at the Ramat Gan Safari's Zoological Center. "It's also devastating that so many animals must be killed because there is no way to capture so many dangerous roaming animals. It's simply not possible and not safe. It's really very, very sad."

Horowitz and Avni-Magen planned to stay in Tbilisi, predominantly to provide moral support. The two veterinarians also met with Israeli Ambassador to Georgia, Yuval Fuchs. "We will ask them if we can give them a hand and if there's something else we might do," Horowitz added. "We told them if they need anything, like gloves or anything else, we will be delighted." [JPost and Ministry of Foreign Affairs]

Amid Quiet, IDF and Hamas Intensively Prepare for Next Round

Last summer, the agricultural fields of Eshkol and Sdot Negev regions, near the Gaza border, were battle grounds that were filled with military vehicles, booming artillery guns, non-stop Hamas projectiles and tunnel attacks. Today, the military is largely out of sight, but not out of mind. Like Hamas nearby, the IDF is very much still there, and both are quietly preparing for the possibility that the fragile quiet shatters.

In Gaza, Hamas' weapons factories are churning out new rockets. Hamas is digging new tunnels in earnest, its guerrilla-terrorist military wing, Izzadin Kassam, is holding combat training drills, and its planners are coming up with new ways to try and surprise the IDF. In Israel, the IDF's Gaza Territorial Division is monitoring all of these developments, while working on staying a few steps ahead of Hamas, by heavily fortifying defenses in new ways.

The Gaza Division has been busy installing multiple layers of new defenses. These include new electronic sensor fences around communities. The fences are linked up to IDF company and battalion control rooms, which in turn can scramble forces that are always nearby.

A year after the Gaza war, numerous communities still host IDF forces on a permanent basis due to their proximity to the Gaza Strip. Across the border, the IDF has seen Hamas dig tunnels intensively. In response, the IDF has begun deploying components of a new hi-tech underground tunnel detection system. The system is still at an early stage, and it is incomplete. But it can detect tunnels. It is one component of a multi-layered defensive military network, spread out across the area, which the IDF's Gaza Division believes puts Israel in a far better place than it was prior to last summer's Operation Protective Edge.

The IDF's Combat Intelligence Collection units look not only at enemy activities in Gaza. The units have also turned their gaze inwards, back into Israel, to ensure they can detect and respond to cross-border infiltrations quickly. They rely on high-rise masts that have radars and day and night electro-optical sensors. The masts dot the entire border region. Large numbers of mobile field intelligence units also quietly move around the region, and some of them look back into Israel, scanning for infiltrators.

The IDF has begun receiving new radars that track short-range fire, and provide longer alert times for local residents, for whom every second counts. Some radars are still in the procurement stage, and others have already arrived. The same radars should enhance the IDF's ability to fire back at the sources of attack within seconds. [JPost]