

# Israel Connection

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## Celebrating the Miracle of Israel

**"A GREAT MIRACLE** happened there." The phrase is synonymous with our Hannukah celebration. But what was the miracle exactly? Our sages and teachers suggest there were at least two distinct miracles.

We tell our children the story of the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem where the oil in the *ner tamid* lasted for a miraculous eight nights. Yet this rededication could never have occurred without a second, no less significant marvel: the victory of the Hasmoneans, led by Matathias and the Maccabees, against the Syrian Greeks. Their desire for Jewish independence, their dedication to reestablishing a Jewish kingdom, based on Jewish custom and belief without harassment and oppression from outside forces, prompted the revolt that made Hannukah possible. It was their commitment to Judaism and the Jewish people, combined with a sense of selflessness and bravery, that propelled them to defend their country and assert Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel.

The Sages instituted the practice of kindling lights on Hannukah to commemorate not just the miracle of the light, but also the miracle of the fight.

We recall not only the hand of G-d and the wonder of the Temple, but the strong hands of the Maccabees and their victory as well. In essence then, Hannukah represents our understanding that while we look to G-d for guidance and protection, G-d looks to us as well—to act, to protect the Jewish people and to spread our own light throughout the world.

Today, more than 2,000 years after the story of Hannukah, Israel is still forced to defend itself against external forces bent on its destruction. Despite the tremendous pressures surrounding Israel, this democracy remains a beacon of light in the Middle East, a shining example of freedom and a consistent leader in the fields of science, technology, medicine, art, literature, music and so much more.

When we light our own candles this Hannukah, let us remember not only the bravery of the Maccabees and those charged with keeping Israel safe today, but also the important role each of us can play in keeping Israel strong and secure. Through our own actions, we can ensure that modern Israel survives, thrives and continues to shed its light of innovation and invention throughout the world.

## The Challenges Facing A New Congress

**WHEN NEW MEMBERS OF CONGRESS** and the new administration are sworn into office next month, they will be facing a long list of domestic concerns and foreign policy issues. Given this crowded field of topics begging for attention, the pro-Israel community must ensure that our leaders don't lose sight of a growing threat: Iran's alarming progress toward nuclear weapons.



A report from the International Atomic Energy Agency shows Iran is rapidly overcoming technical obstacles and significantly increasing its ability to enrich uranium—a key step toward developing nuclear weapons. At the current pace, the report states that Iran could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a nuclear bomb within just a few months.

In addition, Iran continues to make substantial progress on the construction of its heavy water reactor at Arak, which according to the report, now appears to be operational. The reactor could be used to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons without having to master the more involved uranium enrichment process.

Congressional and international sanctions have slowed Iran's progress toward a nuclear weapons capability in the past. We must ensure that our newly elected leaders understand the critical nature of this moment and the historic opportunity they have before them to initiate and pass meaningful legislation that helps to halt Iran's nuclear pursuit.

For more information about how to stop Iran, visit [www.aipac.org](http://www.aipac.org).



### THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL

last year signed a landmark joint Memorandum of Understanding that laid the groundwork for enhanced cooperation between the allies in the field of homeland security.

The agreement includes provisions for cooperation on airline security, explosives detection, responding to terrorist and criminal activities and training. It also establishes a joint Homeland Security Steering Committee that will meet annually to ensure the continued implementation of the agreement. In addition to the agreement, here are some examples of homeland security cooperation benefiting both democracies and our world:

- Six members of the Stamford, Connecticut Police Department's Bomb Squad and Homeland Security units, along with the Director of Public Safety, Health and Welfare, traveled to Israel to study the latest in counterterrorism measures.
- A Storage Data Security and Encryption technology developer from Netanya, Israel announced a cooperative agreement with Sun Microsystems, Inc., an American server, software and storage manufacturer.
- Texas' Attorney General cosponsored a homeland security conference, drawing on the expertise of Israel's National Police, Israel's foreign intelligence agency, the Mossad and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI).
- Los Angeles' mayor signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Israeli officials that will enhance cooperation between Israeli airport experts and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX).
- Israel held its 22nd annual international "Security Israel" exhibition, providing homeland security experts from across the world with the opportunity to learn about the latest homeland security technology.

# The Festival Of Lights And The Golan Heights

By Barry Rubin



**ONE OF THE MOST** remarkable aspects of the Bible is how the basic geopolitics it describes in ancient times remain valid to this day.

Obviously there have been many changes, yet there is also a great deal of continuity.

The most important geostrategic fact about ancient Israel is that it was sandwiched between two large, fertile areas that gave birth to powerful empires—Egypt to the southwest and Mesopotamia (the land of the Assyrians, Babylonians and later, the more friendly Persians) to the northeast. Ancient Israel's problem—and the Prophets' frequent obsession—was how to survive living next to those two giants.

The historical facet of Passover deals with the Egyptian aspect of that

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Hizballah is now more powerful than before...and determined to drag Lebanon into conflict...

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problem; Hannukah focuses on the Mesopotamian part, most immediately with the land now known as Syria.

To its due north—today's Lebanon—ancient Israel had far less of a problem. Indeed, one could argue that the Land of Israel has had a naturally friendly relationship with the country to its north along the Mediterranean.

There are solid reasons for this relationship. Both have had fairly natural geographic borders and centers which, along with their relatively small size, have made them uninterested in expansion into each other's territory. They also have had larger neighboring enemies that have posed far bigger threats to them than they have to each other. Historically, they were inhabited by

national communities—the Phoenicians and the Israelites—that were more interested in preserving rather than extending their relatively homogenous nation-states. They conducted profitable trade, illustrated by the origin of the Temple's cedar wood, Lebanon's proudest product.

Today, of course, things are more complex. Lebanon is an arena of various communities which, like the Jews, combines religious with communal identities. The main contenders are the Christians, Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims and Druze, though there are also subdivisions and other groups. Recently, Lebanese politics have developed as follows:

Most of the Christians, Sunnis and Druze—constituting more than 60 percent of the population—have formed a patriotic Lebanese coalition, called the March 14 movement, to free the country of Iranian and Syrian influence. Their enemy is the leader of the Shia community—Hizballah—a radical Islamic group sworn to Israel's extinction and a close ally of Tehran and Damascus.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the people of March 14 look on the people of May 14 (the eve of Israel's Independence Day) as allies. Yet many of them hate Israel far less in private than they seem to in public. If they had a choice—which they don't—they would probably prefer peace with Israel. They don't view the conflict as being in their interest and don't want to be dragged into war with Israel (as happened in 2006) by Hizballah and its sponsors. For them, Iran, Syria and Hizballah are the main threat and enemy. Unfortunately, Hizballah is now more powerful than before, participating in the government and determined to drag Lebanon into conflict—and possibly war—in the future.

As for Syria, it's important to remember the problem of the Syrian-based Seleucid empire, whose emperor, Antiochus IV, provoked the Maccabean revolt that led to Hannukah. There also are some important historical parallels.



The Golan Heights rise above the Hula valley in northern Israel.

Antiochus perceived his political strategy as preserving his diverse subjects by imposing religious homogeneity. If Israel were allowed to be independent and practice its own religion, he believed, his empire's survival would be threatened.

Today, President Bashar Assad rules Syria. The ruling elite are Alawites, followers of a non-Muslim religion (although they pretend otherwise) who comprise only about 12 percent of the population and have been historically

Sunni Muslims might embrace radical Islam to try to overthrow the “traitorous” regime.

Thus, Syria would find it hard to make peace with Israel or give up its protector and funder, Iran, as senior ally. What Damascus does want is to break out of its isolation from the West by being seen as engaging in peace talks. But the main prize it seeks is not the Golan, whose return it refused when Israel offered it in 2000.

## The question remains: What are Assad's intentions?

scorned by the Sunni Arab majority (about 60 percent—five times larger).

Assad's solution—and that of his father, who ruled Syria for 30 years before him—has been to use radical Arab nationalism as the glue to hold the country together. To this, Assad has added a religious element to what was formerly a fairly secular regime. He poses as the great champion of Islamic resistance to the West and Israel. Thus, he allies with Iran, supports radical Islamic terrorist insurgents in Iraq, Lebanon and among the Palestinians, and strongly opposes the United States.

These policies are not arbitrary or easily reversed. They are useful for the regime's survival. If, for example, Israel were to return the strategic Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for peace, the regime would lack the rationale of the Arab-Israeli conflict for justifying its own failures at home. Syrians would demand more democracy, while many

Rather, it wants to regain full control over Lebanon, which is very profitable for a Syria whose economy is otherwise in shambles. It wants to destroy any investigation into its involvement with terrorism, and get Western funding in return for minimal political concessions.

The question remains: What are Assad's intentions? Should he decide to go the way of his ancient ancestors, the Seleucids, he won't succeed. Today, Israel is independent and strong. And the Jewish people not only keep alive the memory of the Maccabees but also put it into practice both religiously and politically.

*Barry Rubin is director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center and editor of the Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal. His latest books include The Israel-Arab Reader, The Truth About Syria, A Chronological History of Terrorism and The Long War for Freedom: The Arab Struggle for Democracy in the Middle East.*

## Casting A Light Unto The Nations

Israelis are credited with developing the technology that led to MRIs, cell phones and computers, to name just a few innovations. And the list goes on. Take a look at just some of the recent Israeli discoveries benefiting our world.

An Israeli doctor has invented an artificial nose, capable of detecting some types of cancer when the patient simply breathes into the nose. The invention can detect, through tiny sensors, if the patient has one of three types of cancer and how far the cancer has developed. The invention is still in the research phase, but eventually doctors believe it will aid in early detection so that treatment can be determined more quickly.



A unique cholera prevention program developed by students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has been adopted by the Red Cross in Kenya. The program, which was utilized in the displaced persons camps during the recent political crisis in Kenya, was found to be highly effective in prevention and management of the disease.



The Israeli firm, Ayala Water and Ecology, has been chosen to develop ecological sewage treatment systems in Shelter Island, New York. The idea is to transfer the sewage to ponds on various levels that contain plants whose roots absorb materials from it. At each pond, the water undergoes additional purification.

**For more information about Israel's advancements, visit: [www.israel21c.net](http://www.israel21c.net).**

# Activists Make a Difference Around the Clock

AT ANY GIVEN TIME, synagogue activists are working with AIPAC, their fellow congregants and elected officials to strengthen and secure the U.S.-Israel relationship.



**8:00 am** Rabbi Yosie Levine, of The Jewish Center in Manhattan, gets Israel Update, a weekly e-mail with news paragraphs about events in the Middle East. He includes the information in his Shabbat bulletin.



**3:00 pm** Fran Victor, who is leading her synagogue's delegation to this year's AIPAC Policy Conference, May 3-5, goes online in Detroit to register for the conference ([www.aipac.org](http://www.aipac.org)).



**9:00 am** Members of B'nai Torah Congregation in Boca Raton, Florida, receive an early morning Middle East briefing from a member of the AIPAC staff.



**4:30 pm** Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, of Kehillat Yavneh in Los Angeles, speaks with his congresswoman, Diane Watson (D-CA), about the importance of foreign aid to Israel.



**Noon** Congregation Anshei Israel's monthly bulletin goes to print in Tucson, Arizona, with *Israel Connection* inserted in each copy, reaching more than 1,000 homes.



**5:00 pm** From his home in Northbrook, Illinois, AIPAC Capitol Club member Paul Lapping participates in a conference call with a key member of Congress and AIPAC President David Victor.



**12:15 pm** Helane Goldstein greets fellow synagogue members at a lunch-and-learn program at her home in suburban Maryland to find out more about the latest legislation affecting the U.S.-Israel relationship and to meet their congressman.



**7:30 pm** Members of the AIPAC Committee at the Stephen S. Wise Temple make calls, inviting congregants to a parlor meeting in two weeks at the Beverly Hills home of fellow congregant and AIPAC member Eve Kurtin-Steinberg.



**1:30 pm** Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) speaks at Temple Emanuel in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to discuss pending pro-Israel legislation with members of the congregation and her district.



**8:30 pm** Rabbi Jay Kornsgold, of Beth El Synagogue in East Windsor, New Jersey, checks his e-mail for the Middle East Spotlight, monthly news items he can include in his synagogue bulletin.



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