

NEAR EAST REPORT

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I.L. Kenen, Founder, 1905–1988



Palestinian Incitement Fueling Terrorism

The recent surge in Palestinian incitement and terror since mid-Sept. poses a direct threat to the security of both Israelis and Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sought to ease the violence in Jerusalem and the West Bank, but recent inflammatory remarks about the peace process and the Temple Mount made by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and other Palestinian leaders have exacerbated an already incendiary atmosphere. The United States must urge President Abbas to do more to reduce tensions, condemn the recent wave of violence and return to direct bilateral Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

Abbas' Inflammatory United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Speech

- In his UNGA address, Abbas said he was no longer bound by agreements signed with Israel.
- He claimed, incorrectly, that Israel "insists on continuing its destruction of the two-state solution," which he said makes it "an apartheid regime."
- Abbas inflamed the incendiary Temple Mount issue by inaccurately claiming that the Israeli government used "brutal force to impose its plans to undermine the Islamic and Christian sanctities in Jerusalem." Falsely, he argued that Israel was attempting to change the status quo on the Temple Mount, "dangerously transforming the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a diplomatic one to a religious one."
- In fact, Israel's Temple Mount policy since 1967 has been to ban Jewish prayer. Jewish visitors are also prohibited from bringing prayer books or displaying national symbols on the Temple Mount. In recent weeks, Israeli authorities have limited all access to the Temple Mount in order to ease tensions.
- Rather than returning to the direct bilateral negotiations necessary to yield a Palestinian state, Abbas vowed to "continue...[Palestinian] efforts to accede to international conventions and organizations," including more action at the International Criminal Court.

Deadly Attacks on Israelis

- Oct. 9, two Israelis were stabbed in separate incidents in Jerusalem and Hebron.
- On Oct. 8, four separate stabbing attacks occurred in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Afula and the West Bank. Eight Israelis were injured, two of them seriously.
- On Oct. 7, Palestinian terrorists targeted Israeli citizens in four separate attacks. An IDF soldier was stabbed in the southern city of Kiryat Gat, a man was stabbed in Jerusalem, a woman was hit with stones while driving in the West Bank, and a man was stabbed in the central city of Petah Tikvah.
- On Oct. 4, a 15-year-old Israeli boy was stabbed and wounded by a Palestinian terrorist at a gas station in Jerusalem.
- On Oct. 3, two Israeli men were killed by a Palestinian in a stabbing attack in Jerusalem. Two others, the wife and two-year-old toddler of one of the victims, were also wounded in the attack. In response, the Palestinian Authority blamed Israel for killing the terrorist.
- On Oct. 1, almost immediately after President Abbas' UNGA speech, two Israeli parents—one of which was Israeli-American—driving in the West Bank were murdered in front of their children by Palestinian terrorists. Abbas' Fatah party praised the shooting, calling it a "necessary action." Israel has arrested members of a Hamas cell in connection with this attack.
- During the Jewish religious holiday of Rosh Hashanah on Sept. 14, an Israeli man was killed in a car crash after Palestinians stoned his car causing him to veer off the road. A few days later, a mother and her baby were injured in a similar attack.
- Also during Rosh Hashanah, Palestinians barricaded themselves inside the Al-Aqsa mosque with improvised weapons, intending to provoke clashes with the non-Muslim visitors and prevent them from visiting the site. Israel responded by sending riot police to the Temple Mount to disarm them, resulting in clashes.

- In recent weeks, Palestinian youths armed with rocks and firebombs have attacked Israeli drivers and police and instigated clashes on the Temple Mount.
- In a marked departure from previous protocol, Abbas has not condemned the terror, instead criticizing Israel for its efforts to restore security. On Oct. 5, only after the attacks intensified, did Abbas reportedly order his security chiefs to stop West Bank protests.

Palestinian Leaders Deny Jewish Connection to Temple Mount, Jerusalem

- In a Sept. 16 speech, Abbas declared, "Every drop of blood spilled in Jerusalem is pure, every shahid [martyr] will reach paradise, and every injured person will be rewarded by God."
- In that same speech, Abbas said, "They [Jews] have no right to desecrate the mosque with their dirty feet, we won't allow them to do that." U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon reportedly chided Abbas for this inflammatory remark.
- Also on Sept. 16, Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, the head of the High Islamic Council on the Temple Mount, condoned the recent violence. "When a house of God is attacked, that is worse than me personally being attacked. Al-Aqsa is part of our faith. Defending our faith is the most powerful form of defense," he stated.

Israel is Committed to Peace and Access to the Temple Mount

- Israel has worked to address Jewish extremism against Palestinians. Even before the most recent attacks, the Israeli government approved unprecedented measures to hold Jewish terror suspects in administrative detention for up to six-months in renewable increments. So far, three Jewish extremists are being held under the new detention policy.
- In his Oct. 1 speech to the UNGA, Prime Minister Netanyahu called on Abbas to immediately return to negotiations without preconditions. "I remain committed to a vision of two states for two peoples in which a demilitarized Palestinian state recognizes the Jewish state," Netanyahu said.

- Israel is committed to safeguarding access to the holy sites for the three monotheistic faiths in Jerusalem. In his UNGA speech, Netanyahu explicitly stated, "Israel is fully committed to "[...] strictly maintaining the status quo on the Temple Mount and is committed to continuing to do so in accordance with the agreements between us and the Jordanians and the Waqf [Moslem religious council]."
- The Temple Mount is the holiest site in Judaism. For over 3000 years, it has been revered as the location of the two ancient holy temples. From 1948 to 1967, Jordan controlled the area and barred Jews from entering the holy complex. Since coming under Israeli control in 1967, people of all religions have been granted access to the Temple Mount and Jerusalem's holy sites, and Israel has allowed the Islamic religious authorities under Jordanian patronage to administer the Temple Mount complex.

Speech Summaries from the 2015 UNGA

General debate at the 70th Session of the UNGA began on Sept. 28. Below are speech summaries of five heads of state who made remarks about the Middle East:

U.S. President Barack Obama, Sept. 28

President Obama's address defending the use of diplomacy and the international order. He described the Iran deal as a "lasting, comprehensive deal that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, while allowing it to access peaceful energy," lauding it as an achievement of the international system working as intended.

He also discussed Iran's support of terrorist proxies, but did not detail an American strategy to counter their activities, instead urging Iran to "choose a different path." On Syria, he asserted that America is prepared to work with Russia and Iran to resolve the conflict, so long as it is understood that there is no returning to the pre-war status quo. He also urged Muslims to reject ISIL's extremism and non-Muslims to reject the ignorance that equates Islam with terror. The President made a passing reference to the prospect that the JCPOA would open up Iranian society.

There was no mention of Israel or the Palestinians in his speech.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Oct. 1

Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks focused on the threat posed by Iran, the need to ensure its compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and Israel's right to defend itself. He also called on Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to immediately return to peace negotiations without preconditions.

Highlighting Iran's genocidal threats toward Israel, the prime minister presented Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's latest book, calling it "a 400-page screed detailing his plan to destroy the State of Israel." He also requested a 45-second moment of silence to signify the international community's silence in response to Iran's existential threats against Israel. Netanyahu also noted U.N. bias towards Israel, pointing out that last year the Assembly adopted 20 resolutions against Israel and just one against Syria.

Regarding JCPOA enforcement, Netanyahu told the assembly "[M]ake Iran comply with all its nuclear obligations...check Iran's regional aggression... [and] use sanctions and all the tools available to you to tear down Iran's global terror network." Addressing Iran's leaders directly, he stated, "Your plan to destroy Israel will fail. Israel will not permit any force on earth to threaten its future. And here's my message to all the countries represented here: Whatever resolutions you may adopt in this building, whatever decisions you may take in your capitals, Israel will do whatever it must do to defend our state and to defend our people."

The prime minister called on President Abbas to immediately return to negotiations without preconditions, declaring that he "[...] remain[s] committed to a vision of two states for two peoples in which a demilitarized Palestinian state recognizes the Jewish state." Responding to Abbas' UNGA comments regarding the situation at the Temple Mount, Netanyahu said "President Abbas, here's a good place to begin: Stop spreading lies about Israel's alleged intentions on the Temple Mount. Israel is fully committed to maintaining the status quo there."

Netanyahu also downplayed tensions between the United States and Israel, telling the assembly that “in Israel, we never forget one thing. We never forget that the most important partner that Israel has has always been, and will always be, the United States of America. The alliance between Israel and the United States is unshakeable.” Also, “President Obama and I have both said that our differences over the nuclear deal are a disagreement within the family. But we have no disagreement about the need to work together to secure our common future.”

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Sept. 30

President Abbas’ comments accused Israel of failing to meet its Oslo obligations and threatened that the Palestinian Authority was no longer bound by its agreements. “So long as Israel refuses to commit to the agreements signed with us...We will not remain the only ones committed to these agreements.”

However, he did not provide timetables or specifics.

Describing Palestine as a state under occupation, Abbas derided negotiations and called on “international efforts to oversee an end to the occupation.” Notably, he did not threaten to resign or dismantle the PA. While he did not say he would end security coordination with Israel, he did refer to a March decision by the Palestinian Central Council to do so as “binding.”

The speech included incitement and deceit about Israeli intentions to change the status quo at holy sites in Jerusalem. He characterized the Palestinians as innocent victims and did not acknowledge any Palestinian responsibility for acts of terrorism. He also accused the Israeli government of running “an apartheid regime” in the West Bank, while misrepresenting negotiations by accusing Israel of being solely responsible for their collapse.

Abbas vowed to “continue...efforts to accede to international conventions and organizations,” including more action at the International Criminal Court. His speech was tailored to his domestic audience and to galvanize international attention towards creating Palestinian statehood rather than changing his modus operandi.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Sept. 28

President Rouhani's address hailed the end of Iran's international diplomatic isolation. "I am speaking on behalf of a nation that two years ago again voted for constructive engagement with the world, and I can now proudly announce that today, a new chapter has started in Iran's relations with the world," said Rouhani. The president declared that during nuclear negotiations with the P5+1, Iran maintained its national principles, yet was able to diplomatically resolve the impasse and end the U.N.'s sanctions regime against Iran.

Rouhani spoke of his desire for a liberal new world order predicated upon mutual respect, constructive engagement, non-violence and non-intervention in the affairs of other states. He noted that he hopes the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will be the first step in Iran continuing to work with the international community to pacify and stabilize the Middle East.

Despite sharing his hopes for a fresh start, Rouhani blamed the Middle East's turmoil, including the Syrian civil war, on America and Israel. He stated, "If we did not have the U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the...United States' unwarranted support for the inhumane actions of the Zionist regime against the oppressed nation of Palestine, today the terrorists would not have an excuse for the justification of the crimes."

Rouhani did not get into specifics regarding Iran's role in Syria, only stating that "we [Iran] are prepared to help bring about democracy in Syria..." and that Syria is an example of a crisis "[...] being stoked through terror, extremism, violence, bloodshed, invasion, and the indifference of the international community." He also blamed the roots of the conflict on the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Rouhani concluded by noting that he hoped America would stop pursuing dangerous policies in support of its Middle Eastern allies—implying moderate Arab states as well as Israel—which would reduce division and extremism. Rouhani's speech continued his efforts both to smooth relations with the international community and to promulgate anti-U.S. messaging.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, Sept. 28

President Putin argued that the international coalition needs to fight the Islamic State terror group and support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Portraying all rebel groups as enemies, Putin stated that the power vacuum in the Middle East was being filled by terrorists. "We think it is an enormous mistake to not cooperate with the Syrian government and its armed forces," said Putin. He also proposed "a genuinely broad international coalition against terrorism."

Putin placed emphasis on non-interference in the affairs of sovereign states and support of "legitimate" governments, overcoming "bloc thinking,"—a criticism directed at NATO—in favor of economic integration, and the joint response to common threats.

Iran's Bad Behavior

Iran has ramped up its malign efforts to destabilize the Middle East. In conjunction with Russian forces, Iran has increased support for Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. Hundreds of Iranian troops are now on the ground in Syria and Russian cruise missiles are flying over Iran to strike anti-Assad forces. On Sept. 30, Iran was reportedly caught sponsoring a bomb-making ring in Bahrain and attempting to smuggle weapons to Houthi rebels in Yemen. Despite reaching a nuclear accord with the P5+1, Tehran's actions show that it remains committed to its terroristic ambitions.

[Gen. Campbell: Iran is Arming the Taliban](#)

The Washington Free Beacon – Blake Seitz

Oct. 6, 2015

On Oct. 5, the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, Gen. John Campbell, stated that Iran is supplying the Taliban with weapons and money. "At this level, I can tell you we have some reports that Iran has provided money, weapons—mostly in the west, in the Herat area—to the Taliban to fight Daesh [Islamic State]," Campbell said.

[Assad allies, including Iranians, prepare ground attack in Syria: sources](#)

Reuters – Laila Bassam

Oct. 1, 2015

Hundreds of Iranian troops have arrived in Syria in the last 10 days and will soon join government forces and their Lebanese Hezbollah allies in a major ground offensive backed by Russian air strikes to shore up Bashar Assad's rule, according to Lebanese sources.

[Bahrain says uncovers large bomb-making factory](#)

Reuters

Sept. 30, 2015

Bahraini security forces have discovered a large bomb-making factory and arrested a number of suspects linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, said the Bahraini interior ministry. Bahrain, which houses the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, frequently accuses Iran of fomenting unrest and harboring hegemonic aims over the small nation.

[Weapons bound for Yemen seized on Iranian boat: coalition](#)

Reuters – William Maclean

Sept. 30, 2015

Saudi-led coalition forces announced that they seized an Iranian fishing boat loaded with weapons attempting to supply Houthi fighters in Yemen. The Iranian smuggling attempt represents the latest Iranian violation of the arms embargo imposed on it by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231.

[Iran's president blames U.S. for Middle East violence](#)

The Washington Post – Carol Morello

Sept. 29, 2015

"If not for the U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and its unwarranted support for the inhumane actions of the Zionist regime against the oppressed nation of Palestine, today the terrorists would not have an excuse for the justification of their crimes," said Iran's President Hassan Rouhani while addressing the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 28.

[Russia, Iran Seen Coordinating on Defense of Assad Regime in Syria](#)

The Wall Street Journal – Jay Solomon and Sam Dagher

Sept. 21, 2015

Russia and Iran have stepped up coordination inside Syria as they move to safeguard President Bashar al-Assad's control over his coastal stronghold, according to officials in the U.S. and Middle East.

[Boosted by nuke deal, Iran ups funding to Hezbollah, Hamas](#)

The Times of Israel – Avi Isacharoff

Sept. 21, 2015

Anticipating a massive sanctions relief windfall, Iran has already begun increasing its financial support to terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah, reports the Times of Israel. Al-Rai, a Kuwaiti newspaper, reported that Hezbollah recently purchased advanced weapons previously unaffordable to them.

California Seeks Israel's Guidance to Solve Water Problems

Los Angeles County is teaming up with Israel to help address Southern California's water crisis. On Sept. 1, the two parties signed a deal to bring Israeli expertise and technology to the water-deprived state.

"I'm very pleased that the county will exchange ideas and strategies with Israel on ways we can more effectively conserve, manage and recycle our precious water resources," said Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl.

Together, representatives from both parties will brainstorm and implement the best approaches to conserve water to mitigate one of Southern California's most severe droughts on record.

"The technology Israel has developed and employed to stretch its meager water resources is truly impressive," said Kuehl. "I look forward to working together on ways that Los Angeles County can benefit from their work on technology and research concerning point of reuse, recycling and groundwater recharge."

This is not the first time California sought out Israel's expertise with water resources. In a March 2014 pact with California Gov. Jerry Brown, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to export Israeli desalination and other water technologies to the West Coast state.

"California and Israel will build on their respective strengths in research and technology to confront critical problems we both face, such as water scarcity, cybersecurity and climate change," said Brown following the agreement.

Washington Brief: A Recap of News from Capitol Hill and Beyond

United States Sanctions Hamas and Hezbollah

On Sept. 10, the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on four key Hamas leaders and an al-Agha controlled company used to channel funds to the terrorist organization.

Sanctioned were Hamas political bureau member Salih al-Aruri, senior Hamas financial officer Mahir Jawad Yunis Salah, Abu Ubaydah Khayri Hafiz al-Agha, Mohammed Reda Mohammed Anwar Awad, and the Asyaf International Holding Group for Trading and Investment (Asyaf).

All assets of the four Hamas members and the company located on U.S. soil or under the control of American citizens were frozen immediately upon the sanctions announcement. U.S. citizens and companies will be prohibited from maintaining economic or commercial ties with them.

"Treasury is committed to exposing and weakening Hamas, its supporters, and its terrorist agenda," said Adam Szubin, acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, on Sept. 10.

"Today's action targets key players in Hamas' international fundraising and operational network," he added.

In addition to the sanctions by Treasury, the U.S. State Department designated Hamas operatives Yahya Sinwar and Rawhi Mushtaha, Hamas military commander Muhammed Deif, and Hezbollah member Samir Kuntar as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs).

The U.S. government designated Hamas and Hezbollah as Foreign Terrorist Organizations in 1997.

Royce Urges Strong Human Rights Sanctions on Iran

On Sept. 28, Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, sent a letter to President Obama urging that senior Iranian officials be sanctioned for "serious human rights abuses against the people of Iran."

"Human rights abuse has been a consistent policy of the Iranian regime since it took control. This longstanding brutality has been carried out by some officials who still hold power. For example, Iran's current Justice Minister is widely accused of playing a key role in the continuing suppression of dissidents today, as well as the mass executions of the late 1980s," wrote Royce in the letter to the president.

"Designating and sanctioning Iranian officials—including senior members of the Rouhani administration—for their role in human rights abuses will remind the Iranian people that the American people are on their side, not the side of the brutal Iranian regime."

According to the State Department's [2014 country report](#) on human rights practices in Iran, "The most significant human rights problems were severe restrictions on civil liberties, including the freedoms of assembly, speech, religion, and press; limitations on the citizens' ability to change the government peacefully through free and fair elections; and disregard for the physical integrity of persons, whom authorities arbitrarily and unlawfully detained, tortured, or killed."

Since 2013, only one Iranian official and two other entities have been sanctioned for human rights violations.

Click [here](#) to read the full text of the letter.

Department of Transportation: Kuwait Airways Discriminated Against Israelis

On Sept. 30, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a statement that Kuwait Airways unlawfully discriminated against Israelis by declining to sell them tickets for travel from America.

In 2013, Eldad Gatt filed a complaint with DOT that he was prevented from purchasing a Kuwait Airways ticket from New York to London because he held an Israeli passport.

In a [letter](#) to Kuwait Airways, DOT stated that by choosing to operate a route from the United States to the United Kingdom, the air carrier is bound by U.S. law and cannot discriminate against a passenger based on their nationality.

"It is our duty to ensure that the transportation system is free of discrimination. Period. Protections against discrimination is imperative, and Department [of Transportation] will stand firmly against it. Today, we are saying 'no' to discrimination against Israeli citizens on flights between JFK and London Heathrow," said U.S. Transportation Sec. Anthony Foxx. "Any airline that wishes to operate in the U.S. should know that we will not tolerate discrimination of any kind in our skies."

In May, Sens., Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Edward Markey (D-MA.), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Charles E. Schumer (D-NY), and Chris Murphy (D-CT) sent a [letter](#) to Sec. Foxx and Department of Commerce Sec. Penny Pritzker urging them to investigate reports that several Middle Eastern airlines are discriminating against passengers based on their country of birth or sexual orientation.

"We are pleased that the DOT has looked into and is taking action against the discriminatory practices of Kuwait Airways," said Sens. Blumenthal, Markey, Schatz, and Murphy in a joint statement following the Sept. 30 announcement by DOT. "As we wrote in May, it is troubling and unacceptable that airlines could be allowed to profit from serving U.S. customers and benefit from infrastructure paid for by U.S. taxpayers, while simultaneously infringing on the rights of passengers. DOT must enforce strong penalties to ensure Kuwait Airways immediately and permanently stops these unacceptable practices, as well as to deter other airlines from adopting similar discriminatory behavior."