

# NEAR EAST REPORT

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I.L. Kenen  
Founder, 1905–1988



## Editorial—Negotiating a Lasting Peace

Frustrated by the Palestinian-Israeli impasse, some nations have renewed calls to impose a solution on the parties. Such efforts are deeply misguided. Peace cannot be imposed from the outside but must be forged by those who will implement it.

Israel has not given up on negotiations, and has offered to renew them without preconditions. However, Palestinian leadership has turned its back on talks and failed to renounce the ongoing wave of terrorism against the Jewish state. Rather than encouraging Palestinian efforts to isolate Israel and seek achievements in New York or Geneva, the international community should press the Palestinian leadership to return to the negotiating table. There, Israelis and Palestinians can speak directly to each other and make the difficult compromises necessary to create peace.

Throughout its history, Israel has demonstrated its commitment to pursuing peace with its neighbors, and has made difficult sacrifices in pursuit of those ends. In 1979, in a historic, unprecedented peace treaty with Egypt, the two parties negotiated Israel's withdrawal of both armed forces and Jewish residents from the Sinai Peninsula. In 1994, it reached a lasting and meaningful peace with its neighbor Jordan, solving long-standing land and water disputes, and paving the way for tourism and trade. And just as it found peace with these neighbors, so too has Israel demonstrated a deep commitment to achieving peace with the Palestinians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly called for direct, bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations without preconditions, making this appeal a critical element of last fall's address to the United Nations General Assembly. However, Palestinians have eschewed negotiations. Instead, they have sought to delegitimize Israel and use the international arena to bypass talks. For example, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas has sought recognition of a Palestinian state at the United Nations (UN) and at UN agencies like UNESCO. Simultaneously, he has launched a campaign to delegitimize Israel in the international arena, including at the International Criminal Court and the United Nations Security Council. These efforts only impede peace, alienate Israel's people, and delay Palestinians discussing the compromises they must make to reach peace with Israel.

The PA knows full well that no agreement can be realized without Israel's support, and that the UN route represents only a distraction from the difficult decisions it must make. It should also know that its failure to end incitement and violence against Israel will inhibit progress toward peace and could


undermine the authority of the Palestinian leadership. Since September 2015, Palestinian terrorism has left dozens of innocent Israelis dead and hundreds more injured. Security cooperation between the IDF and Palestinian forces has endured, but the Palestinians' political leadership continues to incite violence.

**“Rather than encouraging Palestinian efforts to isolate Israel and seek achievements in New York or Geneva, the international community should press the Palestinian leadership to return to the negotiating table.”**

In a Sept. 16, 2015 speech, President 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.” On Sept. 30, 2015, in front of the United Nations General

Assembly, he said he was no longer bound by agreements signed with Israel. Also, he falsely stated that the Israeli government sought to change the status quo on the Temple Mount and used “brutal force to impose its plans to undermine the Islamic and Christian sanctities in Jerusalem.”

Abbas has since toned down some of his rhetoric. But his recent actions—such as meeting with the parents of Palestinian terrorists who murdered Israelis and proclaiming “your sons are martyrs”—only encourage terrorism. Furthermore, the PA establishment and the Palestinian media have further incited violence. For example, in mid-January, the PA’s Ministry of Health issued a statement praising Nashat Milhem—who murdered three Israeli civilians—as “one of the most precious martyrs.” On Jan. 17, a 15-year-old Palestinian murdered a mother of six inside her home; he later told the Shin Bet that he decided to carry out the attack after watching Palestinian television. In a disturbing development, PA security personnel have perpetrated three attacks against Israelis over the past two months. And no high-ranking PA leader has condemned this recent wave of violence

Ultimately, peace must be made directly between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples if it is ever to be realized. To bring this about, the Palestinian leadership must not only work to end violence, but must promote tolerance and reconciliation. Their demonization of Israelis—in schools, in the Palestinian media and throughout Palestinian discourse—makes the possibility of a meaningful peace only more distant. President Abbas must stop the incitement, return to the negotiating table and make peace with Israel if he ever hopes to achieve Palestinian statehood. 

## Analysis—Iranian Elections: Much Ado about Nothing

The fix is already in for this month's Iranian elections. On Feb. 26, Iran will choose a new parliament (Majlis) as well as a new Assembly of Experts (AE)—a clerical body similar to the Vatican's Council of Cardinals that will select any successor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. But the unelected Guardian Council (GC) that is controlled by the supreme leader is responsible for vetting all candidates, and it has already sidelined virtually anyone who might challenge him. The likely result will be a Majlis solidly behind Khamenei's policies of aggressive expansionism in the Middle East, active hostility to the United States and Israel, and unrelenting internal repression. Moreover, Khamenei's acolytes will almost certainly augment their current two-third majority in the new AE, assuring that a hardline cleric allied with the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) eventually succeeds the 76-year-old supreme leader.

### The Myth of Free Elections and Political Parties in Iran

Some apologists for the Iranian regime claim that its theocratic elements—above all, an appointed clerical supreme leader who serves for life—are offset by popular ones, such as free elections of the president, the Majlis, and the AE. In fact, most elections in Iran are technically free, with little blatant vote rigging. But they are not fair: the GC, under the supreme leader's sway, vets all candidates for ideological suitability and loyalty to theocratic rule. Only rarely—most notably in the presidential election of 2009, when the GC inadvertently permitted several popular reformist candidates to run—does the regime resort to wholesale electoral fraud.

Iranian parties likewise differ radically from western ones. They are loose parliamentary factions without significant grass-roots organization that coalesce and dissociate at the whims of a handful of political leaders. All must acknowledge the supremacy of the supreme leader and the inviolability of the "system," as Iranians themselves term it. Leading advocates of incremental change within the system (most notably the reformists in 2009) remain under



***After President Rouhani and his allies complained to the GC about the severity of the vetting the Council permitted about a third (1500) of the disqualified Majlis candidates to run.***

house arrest, leaving today only two loose factions: hardline conservatives unconditionally loyal to the supreme leader who control most state institutions; and slightly more pragmatic conservatives identified with President Hassan Rouhani's push for a marginally more open society and economy.

### **Keeping Everything under Control**

The supreme leader is using the GC to try to pack the next Majlis and AE with loyal hardliners, while permitting the election of a sprinkling of politicians linked to Rouhani, former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, and current Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani. In fact, the GC has wielded its electoral axe more savagely this year than at any time in the Islamic Republic's 37 year history:

- In its initial round of vetting, the GC disqualified over 60% of 12,123 prospective Majlis candidates and almost 75% of 800 would-be AE members. In the last parliamentary elections (2012), the GC only invalidated 34% of prospective Majlis candidates.
- The GC approved only 1% of 3,000 reformist Majlis candidates and appears to have shut out most aspiring Rouhani backers from the next parliament. It has also banned 50 sitting Majlis members who are mostly pro-Rouhani from seeking reelection.
- The GC rejected the candidacies of many prominent leaders suspected of disloyalty to Khamenei or of having an independent political base, including Hassan Khomeini—grandson of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic—and both the son and daughter of former President Rafsanjani.

After Rouhani and his allies complained to the GC about the severity of the vetting the Council permitted about a third (1,500) of the disqualified Majlis candidates to run. It is unclear, however, how many of these are Rouhani supporters with a reasonable prospect of victory. Moreover, even with these 1,500 additions the number of candidates excluded from running remains the highest, both proportionally and in absolute terms, in the Islamic Republic's history. Most importantly, the GC has not reversed its drastic winnowing of aspirants to serve on the AE, which unlike the largely toothless Majlis will play a significant role in choosing the next supreme leader.

## More of the Same

The supreme leader's electoral management fits neatly into his overall strategy of using sanctions relief from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to jump-start the economy while maintaining strict


internal control, perpetuating Tehran's anti-Israel and anti-American foreign policy stances, and keeping "Western infiltration" out of Iranian society and culture. Khamenei likely wants to nip in the bud any notion that Tehran's agreement to put its nuclear program on hold—if only for a few years—portends either internal liberalization or détente with the West. In addition to heavy-handed electoral vetting, Tehran has taken many other retrograde steps since signing the JCPOA:

- Iran has reaffirmed its proxy war against the United States and its regional allies (Israel, but also Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates) by dispatching an elite IRGC unit to defend Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, testing ballistic missiles in defiance of a United Nations Security Council resolution, publicly humiliating U.S. seamen and honoring their captors, and overflying U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf.
- Khamenei has further soured political relations with the West by stepping up public Holocaust denial and scheduling another "Holocaust Cartoon and Caricature" contest.
- A renewed crackdown on foreigners and violators of the regime's moral strictures is sending a chilling message to would-be dissidents: a filmmaker got 6 years in prison and 200 lashes for "ignoring sanctities," two poets were whipped for publicly kissing and shaking hands with members of the opposite sex, and an Iranian-American businessman was imprisoned without charges.

**"In fact, most elections in Iran are technically free, with little blatant vote rigging. But they are not fair: the GC, under the supreme leader's sway, vets all candidates for ideological sustainability and loyalty to theocratic rule."**

Iran's electoral system is not quite as tightly run as those of Assad's Syria or Saddam Hussein's Iraq; there is a slim chance that reversals by the GC of disqualified candidates may allow more pro-Rouhani candidates for parliament to win, enabling the president to maintain or slightly improve his legislative support. But even this would not put the so-called "moderates" in the driving seat: the powers of Iran's



supreme leader are so extensive, and those of the Majlis and presidency so weak, that even following the Majlis elections of 2000—in which then-reformist President Mohammad Khatami won a solid parliamentary majority—Khamenei skillfully manipulated the judiciary and security services quashing Khatami’s reforms and eroding his authority. In the Iran of the Ayatollahs, the more things change, the more they remain the same. 

## U.S. College Campuses Forge Close Ties with Israel

When the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement was first launched on American campuses more than a decade ago, Israel’s opponents hoped to drive a wedge between U.S. and Israeli academic institutions. Their goal was—and remains—to delegitimize the Jewish State. Despite vitriolic attacks and attempts to obscure this agenda, which precludes even the possibility of peace through direct negotiations (let alone coexistence between Arabs and Jews), a remarkable result has emerged: Not one American campus has come close to divesting from Israel.

A simple inventory of the tangible, contractual and mutually beneficial ties between the two nations would suggest that, in fact, the exact opposite of BDS has taken place. Simply put, there is more cooperation between American and Israeli colleges and universities than ever before in history. And such ties continue to blossom. Out of hundreds of examples, here are a few illustrations of this phenomenon:

**Cornell University:** In 2011, Cornell University and The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, announced a new partnership to create a world-class applied science and engineering campus in New York City.

“By joining forces in this groundbreaking venture, our two great universities will employ our demonstrated expertise, experience and track record of transforming new ideas into solutions to create the global avenues of economic opportunity and tech leadership,” said Cornell President David Skorton.

Today, the Jacobs Institute builds on the shared strengths of the two institutions in research, entrepreneurialism, intellectual rigor and drive. Joint activities include dual master’s degree programs and faculty, graduate student and industry interactions.

**University of Chicago:** In 2013, the University of Chicago and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev signed an agreement to begin exploring a research partnership that would create new water

production and purification technologies for deployment in regions of the globe where fresh water resources are scarce.

“BGU has been at the forefront of advanced basic and applied water-related research for more than four decades and has developed a number of innovative technologies in the field,” said Ben-Gurion President Rivka Carmi. “The collaboration with UChicago will result in the development of new technologies for the benefit of people all over the world.”

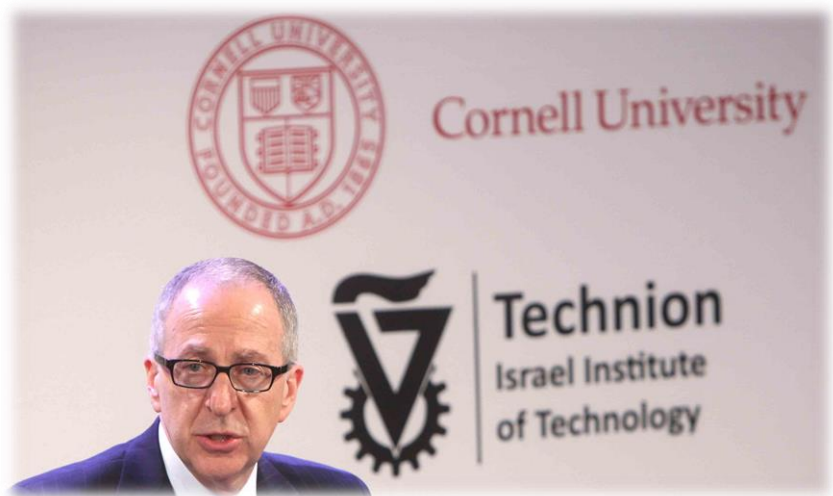
“Such large-scale problems must be met by solutions developed from a comprehensive and integrated science and technology base of the type we will establish between the University of Chicago and Ben-Gurion University,” said University of Chicago President Robert J. Zimmer.

Among a range of activities, today Ben-Gurion’s Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research benefits from researchers from both institutions who carry out interdisciplinary, cutting-edge research in hydrology and water engineering.

**University of California, Irvine:** In 2013, UC Irvine strengthened ties with Israel through agreements of collaboration with some of Israel’s most prestigious universities. Memoranda of understanding or agreement were signed with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology and Tel Aviv University.

The Israeli universities were referred to by Chancellor Michael Drake as “natural partners” with UC Irvine because of cultural and demographic similarities, and their well-respected science programs.

“Chancellor Michael Drake took his first trip to Israel two years ago and he saw some opportunities for relationships,” said Shlomo Elcott, president and CEO of the Jewish Federation & Family Services. “And over the last two years of cooperation with the Israeli Consulate in Los Angeles, the Israel



***Cornell President David Skorton (pictured) said partnering with The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology would lead to “...new ideas into solutions to create the global avenues of economic opportunity and tech leadership.”***



Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rose Leadership, they ... found very specific relationships with Israeli universities of the highest level.”

**Texas A & M University:** In 2013, Texas A & M reached an agreement with the Israeli government for the creation of a satellite campus known as ‘Texas A & M University at Nazareth – Peace Campus.’ The signed agreement called for a campus that enrolls a mixture of Jewish, Arab and international students. The announcement was made at the residence of then-President of Israel, Shimon Peres, along with Texas Gov. Rick Perry and Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp.

Not only do these ties benefit the students and professors involved, but they result in cutting-edge research. In a recent study commissioned by the Israel on Campus Coalition, the Samuel Neaman Institute for National Policy Research determined that “the number of joint U.S.-Israel publications, where at least one collaborating researcher is affiliated with an Israeli institute, has increased by over 40% in the past decade.”

American universities leading the way in academic publications co-authored with Israeli scholars include: University of California, Berkeley with 1432, Columbia University with 1238, Stanford University with 1117, and University of Wisconsin, Madison with 936. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, Yale University, California Institute of Technology and the University of Pennsylvania are also in the top ten.

While some attempt to attack Israel under the BDS banner, this movement has made limited inroads on only a handful of U.S. campuses. Instead, America’s most prominent colleges and universities are actively choosing to align themselves with Israeli academic institutions. [AIPAC](#)

## Washington Brief: A Recap of News from the Hill and Beyond

### **DEA, International Authorities Expose Major Hezbollah Drug and Money Laundering Ring**

On Feb. 1, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) uncovered a massive Hezbollah drug trafficking and money laundering ring.



The DEA, in coordination with numerous international law enforcement agencies in seven other countries, arrested members of the terrorist organization's External Security Organization Business Affairs Component. They were found utilizing drug trafficking money to purchase weapons in support of terrorist activities in Syria.

The ongoing investigation is part of the DEA's Project Cassandra, an initiative focused on the international Hezbollah network responsible for moving large quantities of cocaine in the United States and Europe. The network has established ties to South American drug cartels. The investigation originated from a previous inquiry that had been conducted into the Lebanese-Canadian Bank.

"These drug trafficking and money laundering schemes utilized by the Business Affairs Component provide a revenue and weapons stream for an international terrorist organization responsible for devastating terror attacks around the world," said DEA Acting Deputy Administrator Jack Riley. "DEA and our international partners are relentless in our commitment to disrupt any attempt by terrorists and terrorist organizations to leverage the drug trade against our nations. DEA and our partners will continue to dismantle networks who exploit the nexus between drugs and terror using all available law enforcement mechanisms."

Click [here](#) to read the DEA's full statement.

### **Department of Treasury Sanctions Key Hezbollah Financial Support Network**

On Jan. 28, the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned two key Hezbollah-affiliated money launderers, Mohamad Nouredine and Hamdi Zaher El Dine, and a company affiliated with Nouredine.

Nouredine directly used funds from Hezbollah to back his company, Trade Point International S.A.R.L. He also transferred significant amounts of money to support the terrorist organization's commercial investment activity in Lebanon and Iraq, and lent his financial services to Hezbollah members across Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the United States.

El Dine, an employee of Trade Point International S.A.R.L., assisted Nouredine in transferring money to U.S.-designated Hezbollah member Adham Tabaja and his company Al-Inmaa Engineering.

“Hezbollah needs individuals like Mohamad Nouredine and Hamdi Zaher El Dine to launder criminal proceeds for use in terrorism and political destabilization,” said Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Adam Szubin. “We will continue to target this vulnerability, and expose and disrupt such enablers of terrorism wherever we find them.”

Hezbollah was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States in 1997.

Click [here](#) to read the press statement from the Treasury Department.

### **President Submits Fiscal Year 2017 Budget with Key Pro-Israel Provisions**

On Feb. 9, President Barack Obama released his plans for the fiscal year 2017 budget, including \$3.1 billion in security assistance to Israel.

If authorized, the funding would fulfill the ninth year of a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Israel.

The budget proposal also requests authorization for \$145.8 million in U.S.-Israel Cooperative Missile Defense programs, including funding for missile interceptors Iron Dome, David’s Sling and Arrow 2 and 3.

Click [here](#) to see the president’s full 2017 budget request.

### **Congress Adopts Anti-BDS Provision in Customs Bill**

On Feb. 11, Congress approved a provision in the Trade Facilitation and Enforcement Act, also known as the Customs bill, to combat harmful anti-Israel trade and commercial practices.

The provision puts the U.S. firmly on record opposing BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) and supporting enhanced commercial ties between the United States and Israel. It further establishes new requirements for administration reporting on an array of global BDS activities, including the participation of foreign companies in political boycotts of Israel. Additionally, the measure provides important legal protections for American companies operating in Israel.

This pro-Israel provision builds upon an anti-BDS amendment in the "Fast Track" Trade Promotion Authority bill that targets harmful trade and commercial practices against Israel. Authored by Sens. Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Rob Portman (R-OH) in the Senate and Reps. Peter Roskam (R-IL) and

Juan Vargas (D-CA) in the House, the amendment was passed into law last June and addresses efforts by foreign governments to boycott, divest from and sanction Israel.

Click [here](#) to read AIPAC's press release on the anti-BDS measure.

## **House Committee Holds Hearing on Victims of Palestinian Terrorism in Israel**

On Feb. 2, the House Oversight Subcommittee on National Security held a [hearing](#) focused on seeking justice for U.S. victims of Palestinian terrorism in Israel.

The panel featured Sarri Singer, founder and director of Strength to Strength, as well as a victim of Palestinian terrorism; Peter Schwartz, the uncle of Ezra Schwartz, who was murdered by Palestinian terrorists in November 2015; Arnold Roth, whose daughter was killed by Hamas in 2001; and Brad Wiegmann, Deputy Assistant Attorney General for the National Security Division at the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The DOJ "has not been able to cite one example for this committee of even a single terrorist who has been prosecuted in the U.S. for any of the 64 attacks against Americans in Israel," said Chairman Ron DeSantis (R-FL) in his opening statement. "Indeed, many of these terrorists roam free as the result of prisoner exchanges or evasion."

"This is not what Congress intended when it [created](#) the DOJ's Office of Justice for Victims of Overseas Terrorism (OVT) in 2005", DeSantis added. "This is not what the American people want, and this does not provide justice to the victims' families that have been so tragically elusive."

"The mission of the OVT remains critical in the face of relentless terrorism plots and attacks prepared by the Islamic State, Hamas, Al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other terrorist organizations worldwide," said the subcommittee's Ranking Member Stephen Lynch (D-MA).

"While I cannot discuss these investigations today or the facts of specific cases, it's important to note the absence of public charges associated with a particular overseas attack does not mean that there are no charges, or that no such charges will be brought," Wiegmann told the committee.

Schwartz highlighted the "many unanswered questions" about the attack that claimed his nephew's life and the lack of U.S. action to investigate the case.

Singer, who was injured in a 2003 Palestinian terror attack on a bus in Jerusalem, said that “the government’s track record in extraditing or even seeking extradition of Palestinian terrorists who have murdered American citizens is nonexistent. I grew up believing that my country would be there for me and protect me no matter where I was in the world. These last years have left me feeling let down.”

### **Director of U.S. Missile Defense Agency Calls for Closer Cooperation with Israel**

On Jan. 19, Vice Adm. James Syring, director of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency (MDA), called for increased missile defense cooperation between the United States and Israel.

Speaking at a *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)* event, Syring praised Israel’s missile defense strategy and predicted a co-production agreement for the David’s Sling Weapon System would be reached between the two countries.

“We’re obviously tied very closely to Israel and what they’ve done with Iron Dome in terms of funding. And I mean the Congress in this case,” said Syring.

“I think you’ll see us work closely with them on a similar co-production agreement [for David’s Sling] that we have with Iron Dome. So that’s good for them and it’s good for the United States... So I think that in particular the Israeli example is a great example,” he added.

David’s Sling is designed to provide Israel and America with effective and affordable protection against long-range artillery rockets, short to medium-range ballistic missiles, aircraft and low-flying cruise missiles. Since 2006, the United States has provided \$1.1 billion in research and development funding for David’s Sling. On Dec. 21, 2015, David’s Sling passed its final series of tests, putting it on track for deployment in 2016. 