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On Feb. 10, an Israeli F-16 was struck by Syrian anti-aircraft fire during Israel’s response to an Iranian drone that violated Israeli airspace.
Lessons from the Iranian Incursion

Israeli leaders have long warned that Iran’s growing entrenchment in Syria could lead to a military confrontation. On Feb. 10, Iran provocatively carried out perhaps its most brazen incursion ever into Israeli territory: Iranian forces based in Syria launched a military drone into Israeli airspace. An Israeli Air Force (IAF) Apache helicopter intercepted and destroyed the unmanned aerial vehicle.

In direct response to Iran’s provocation, a formation of IAF F-16 fighter jets destroyed the Iranian command-and-control center used to operate the drone. As the fighter jets returned to Israel, Syrian anti-aircraft forces damaged one, leading the pilots to eject over northern Israel. This incident was the first time since 1982 that an Israeli fighter jet was destroyed by enemy action.

Israel retaliated for the loss of its fighter with its most significant engagement in Syria in decades. The IAF destroyed 12 Syrian and Iranian military targets in Syria, including a significant part of Syria’s air defense system. As of this writing, thankfully, there have been no further exchanges of fire.

Iran’s aggressive action follows a dramatic increase in Iranian advanced military hardware and personnel reaching Syria. Iran is attempting to leverage its support for Syria’s brutal regime, amidst the chaos of the Syrian civil war, to establish a second front against Israel. This endeavor augments Iran’s decades-long effort to establish itself along the Israel-Lebanon border via support for its terrorist proxy Hezbollah. Iran’s strategic goal is to exercise control along a direct land bridge from Tehran to Beirut—a direct land bridge from Iran to Lebanon via Iraq and Syria. Israel’s firm response to Iran’s probe demonstrates Israel’s determination to prevent Iran from entrenching itself on its border.

America’s support for Israel will prove critical if Israel—and its Sunni Arab neighbors—are to prevent Iran from dominating the Levant. U.S. statements following the Feb. 10 events have been positive. U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis said: “Israel has an absolute right to defend themselves. They don’t have to wait until their citizens are dying under attack before they actually address that issue.” In a statement, the U.S. Department of State added, “The United States is deeply concerned about today’s escalation of violence over Israel’s border and strongly supports Israel’s sovereign right to defend itself.” Numerous members of Congress also reaffirmed Israel’s inherent right to defend itself and its citizens against such threats.

In addition to its verbal support for Israel’s actions, the United States should support Israel in achieving its minimal objectives vis-à-vis Iran in Syria: (1) ensuring that Iran cannot establish a permanent military presence in Syria; (2) pushing Hezbollah and other Iranian allies at least 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the Israeli border; and (3) limiting arms transfers and the construction of Iranian arms factories for Hezbollah. Washington must also further help ensure that Israel continues to receive the vital security assistance it requires to defend itself by itself against an increasingly assertive Iran bent on regional dominance.
The U.S.-Israel Relationship Must Transcend Partisan Politics

In this increasingly partisan era, building a bipartisan pro-Israel consensus has become more challenging. But given the threats and the opportunities that the United States and Israel share, strong support must come from both sides of the aisle. At this year’s AIPAC Policy Conference, we will join together to demonstrate that the pro-Israel community is a big tent composed of politically, racially, religiously and geographically diverse individuals—and each of us is essential to building the lasting consensus that supports Israel.

For decades, AIPAC has worked to strengthen, protect and promote the U.S.-Israel relationship by encouraging bipartisan support in Congress. This approach ensures success in passing legislation that keeps Israel and America safe, no matter what party is in control. In addition, this approach enables success in the Senate, where bills that are filibustered require the support of three-fifths of its members to pass—a number no party has controlled for the last 40 years.

Today, more than ever, maintaining and strengthening bipartisan support for Israel is a central responsibility of the American pro-Israel community. As partners in pro-Israel activism, AIPAC members recognize and appreciate that our common success is predicated on the political engagement of fellow members with a range of political affiliations—in many cases, affiliations that differ from our own. Together, we ensure that our country’s support for Israel transcends partisan politics.

**SHARED VALUES AND IDEALS**

Today in the United States, advocacy on behalf of a safe and secure Israel is embraced by Americans from all walks of life. Grounded in the core values that both countries strive to uphold, pro-Israel activism is a unifying force for Americans of diverse backgrounds, religions and political affiliations.

As Americans, we stand with Israel because we stand for democracy. We stand with Israel because we stand for equality, for human rights and for the rule of law. Israel’s Declaration of Independence guarantees “complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex.” Accordingly, Israel guarantees freedom of speech, press and religion, and it protects the rights of all of its citizens, including women, minorities and members of the LGBTQ
community.

Israel stands alone as a beacon of stability, freedom and justice in a Middle East rife with authoritarianism, oppression and instability. The United States has a moral obligation to stand with Israel in its pursuit of the values and ideals that America, too, has strived to embody since its founding.

**COMMON THREATS, COMMON GOALS**

The United States and Israel also share common challenges, both in the Middle East and beyond, including combatting terrorism, WMD proliferation, money laundering, instability, water scarcity, energy insecurity and cyberwarfare. The U.S.-Israel strategic relationship is a key pillar of America’s Middle East security framework, and this partnership is constantly growing and expanding into new areas.

Israeli advancements and innovations improve and preserve lives in America and around the world. Israelis have brought cutting-edge water technology to drought-stricken Africa and California, administered natural disaster relief to Nepal and Houston, and supplied life-saving technologies used by U.S. service members serving overseas.

Groundbreaking legislation passed in 2014, the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act (SPA), redoubled the ability of both countries to further their common interests. Stating in law that Israel is a “major strategic partner” of the United States, the bill expanded bilateral cooperation to address a wide array of issues facing both nations, including defense, intelligence, homeland security, cybersecurity, energy, water, agriculture and alternative fuel technologies. America and Israel are both strengthened by confronting these challenges together.

Bipartisan support for the U.S.-Israel relationship is the linchpin that has brought these and other critical achievements to fruition—bipartisan support for security assistance to Israel, for SPA and for standing with Israel as she defends her citizens. The continued adoption of critical, bipartisan pro-Israel legislation sends a resounding message that the United States supports its ally Israel.

**THE WAY FORWARD**

It is incumbent upon the American pro-Israel community to cultivate strong, bipartisan support for Israel. We must remind our elected representatives that Israel is not a Republican issue or a Democratic issue; it is an American issue. The U.S.-Israel partnership is beneficial to all Americans, regardless of their party affiliation. Despite their differences on many other issues, both parties can find common ground in their support for Israel.

From serving as a force for good in the world to remaining a beacon of democracy and stability in a rapidly destabilizing Middle East, Israel promotes U.S. values that are cherished by all Americans, regardless of their party affiliation. By prioritizing the U.S.-Israel relationship over party politics—as hundreds of America’s lawmakers from both parties will do by attending next month’s AIPAC Policy Conference—the United States and Israel will be safer, stronger and more secure.
Interview with Dr. Robert Satloff on Jerusalem, U.S.-Israel Relations and More

The United States officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel on Dec. 6, 2017, and announced its intention to move the U.S. embassy there. For more than two decades, bipartisan majorities of Congress have repeatedly called for such action. This important decision corrected a historic wrong, allowing Israel to be treated like every other country with which the United States has diplomatic relations.

Nevertheless, some argue that this step was unwise. The Near East Report sat down with Robert Satloff, the executive director of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, to gain his perspectives.

Q: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE ADMINISTRATION’S RECENT DECISION TO RECOGNIZE JERUSALEM AS ISRAEL’S CAPITAL AND TO MOVE THE U.S. EMBASSY THERE?

As someone who has been urging various administrations over the years to take this step, I cannot but welcome the administration’s decision.

For me, this is about repairing a historical injustice. Harry Truman did remarkable things on behalf of the creation of Israel. But one of his mistakes was to not recognize Jerusalem—the part of the city held by Israel at that time—as its capital. Instead, he let the State Department take the lead on the issue, and once decisions like this are made, they are not easily undone. The force of inertia in the foreign policy decision making process took over, and decades later we were still stuck with a wrongheaded policy on where America’s embassy should be and what we should recognize as Israel’s capital.

I regret it took nearly 70 years, but this was the right thing to have done. I also think that the statement President Trump issued when he formally recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital provided important context that too many people have overlooked. For example, he noted that recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital is essentially a recognition of fact; it is not some leap of faith or injecting some odd American view into the complicated diplomacy of the region. He also stated that this recognition does not necessarily imply American recognition of any particular municipal boundaries of the city, that the recognition does not alter America’s view that it is an appropriate topic for the agenda of peace negotiations between the parties and that America looks forward to an amicable resolution of the Jerusalem issue based on those negotiations. He also noted that the recognition has no impact on the religious status quo in the city, including Jordan’s “special role” vis-à-vis Muslim holy sites.

These are all the right things to have said. Personally, I think it is regrettable that many in the region ignored what the president said when he issued the declaration—since the declaration didn’t negate any particular party’s claims in the city, aspirations for the city, or the possibility of a diplomatic understanding over the future of
the city.

By the same token, it is also regrettable that the president later posted some tweets which seemed to contradict the well-thought-out declaration. I don’t really know what those statements mean, but they appear to run counter to the thrust of the core declaration about the recognition not prejudging the outcome of negotiations over the city. So, I prefer to think of the core declaration as the dominant document, not the off-the-cuff tweets.

**Q: IS THIS DECISION A SETBACK TO THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS?**

I do not think that the decision is necessarily a setback to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. It certainly doesn’t have to be. It is not necessarily anything other than a recognition of existing facts: Israel’s capital is in the city of Jerusalem, and the United States recognizes that and will operate on that basis. It is really quite incredulous to think that the location of the American embassy in Israel—whether it is in a building on the Mediterranean coast or on a hilltop in Jerusalem—is really a factor that would affect the fate of the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, especially given the lengthy history between them.

I regret the fact that [Palestinian Authority President] Mahmoud Abbas had the reaction that he did. As a matter of fact, I could have imagined a totally different and much more clever reaction, which actually would have put the Israelis in a bind. I could imagine a wiser Mahmoud Abbas issuing a statement the very next day that said: “You see? Even Israel’s best friend doesn’t recognize Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem. If Israel’s best friend doesn’t recognize it, I demand that we start negotiations directly with Israel tomorrow, and I insist that we begin with Jerusalem, not end with Jerusalem.”

That would have been a very interesting response and would have put the Israelis in a different position than they are now. Instead, he decided to do everything but address issues on the negotiation’s agenda—traveling to this foreign capital and that foreign capital, trying to avoid negotiations and drum up U.N., EU, whatever external pressure. I think it’s sad, because if I were a Palestinian, I would want my leadership to do everything they can—24/7—to advance my objectives to get the best deal and the most tangible outcome from the Israelis. The Israelis have the asset the Palestinians claim they want: land. They can’t get this from anybody other than Israel. So, avoiding direct negotiations is certainly not a sign of leadership.

I was encouraged by the fact that many in the Middle East took a much more mature view toward the American declaration. While many other capitals certainly didn’t celebrate the idea that America recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, they understood it in the proper...
context and the proper magnitude, and went on with their business. That appeared to be the case with the Saudis, the Egyptians and with others. I understand the deeply felt views of say, the Jordanians, who have a more organic relationship with the Palestinian issue than any other Arab country. But I think they’ve also come around with a mature view, which is that America remains the principal address as the peace mediator, and to achieve any results, one has to engage in negotiations. So, ironically, Abbas himself is the outlier, when you look at most Arab reactions to this.

It seems that the prophecies about an avalanche of violence being triggered by this declaration have certainly not come to pass—and some of us went out on a limb and said that wasn’t likely to happen. I think the reason for this is the vast majority of Palestinians are more realistic than their leaders: They understand that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital. They live that reality. So I am not surprised that the declaration itself did not trigger an outburst of violence. I think most Palestinians appear to have reached the conclusion that risking life and limb to protest something that is as much of a reality as the sun rising in the east does not make much sense.

Q: SOME CRITICS OF THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP ARGUE THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS BECOME TOO CLOSE TO ISRAEL, AND THAT THIS CLOSENESS MAY NEGATIVELY AFFECT U.S. INTERESTS AND OUR ABILITY TO HELP THE PARTIES NEGOTIATE AN AGREEMENT. WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE TO THIS ARGUMENT?

This is an odd argument. First of all, I think most people in the Middle East view the United States as Israel’s partner and ally—that the U.S.-Israel relationship is so close that they would be surprised to see any areas of daylight anyway. This is the conventional view around the world. If anything, one would have to explain the moments of conflict, not explain the depth of partnership. I don’t buy the idea that the United States is so close to Israel that it somehow loses the ability to be an effective, engaged partner in peace negotiations.

What many people fail to understand is that the American role as honest broker in peace talks is because of the closeness of the U.S.-Israel relationship, not in spite of the closeness of the U.S.-Israel relationship. When the United States is successful, it is not because we are some impartial third party. We are not the United Nations. We are not Norway in the Oslo Agreement, where we could host the parties, set up some nice buffet on the table, offer some ideas and let the parties work it out. That’s not what we do.

The American role is essential because of the fundamental imbalance in the negotiations. Namely, the Israelis are being asked, quite legitimately, to trade something tangible for something intangible. They’re being asked to give up the tangible assets of land and things that go with it for the intangibles of acceptance, recognition and a commitment to peace. What the Americans do is compensate for giving up the tangibles, and they help provide alternative means of security and confidence by reducing the risks of giving up tangible assets. This doesn’t mean that America can’t also have strong mutually-satisfying, mutually-beneficial relations with others in the negotiations, including the Palestinians. If this entire process were based on a zero sum, then it would be far more problematic. But we know that is not the case. Indeed, you just have to look at the Egypt-Israel and Jordan-Israel peace treaties to know
that. So when you add it all up, I don’t find that this argument holds much water.

Q: THE MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE RECENTLY SENT A PUBLIC LETTER COMMEMORATING HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY. WHAT IS THE MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE AND WHY WAS THIS LETTER SO SIGNIFICANT?

The Muslim World League was established by Saudi Arabia decades ago to propagate the Saudi version of Islam around the world and to be Saudi Arabia’s link to Muslim communities from the bottom up—at the mosque level, at the school level and at the community level. It is the link of the Saudi religious hierarchy to Islamic religious institutions in countries on virtually every continent. Over the decades, the Muslim World League has earned a reputation for funding and supporting an intolerant, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, hateful version of Islam—not necessarily every place, but certainly that was the dominant approach.

Flash forward to the current period, and there has clearly been a decision at the highest levels in Saudi Arabia to clean up its act and to get out of the extremism business—certainly to get out of the business of projecting the image of extremism, and hopefully to get out of the business of exporting extremism altogether. The current Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia has publicly committed his country to embrace a vision of what he calls “moderate Islam,” a term that many Muslims are shocked at, because Islam doesn’t come in a range of varieties to many Muslims—it’s either the faithful way or the unfaithful way of implementing the faith.

So it was quite a remarkable statement for the Crown Prince to have said, “No, we need to embrace a moderate form of Islam.” And one of the ways of implementing that is a change in the operations of the Muslim World League—how Saudi Arabia projects Islam to Muslim communities around the world and how it projects it more broadly.

In mid-2016, new leadership was brought into the Muslim World League—someone evidently appointed with a mandate from the Saudi monarchy to transform the organization. The new head is Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa, a former Saudi justice minister. I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Al-Issa in Riyadh in early December with a delegation of Washington Institute trustees, and we’ve corresponded ever since. In that correspondence, I asked if he would be willing to make a statement on behalf of the Muslim World League on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day. At most, I expected a rather short, brief, sterile statement; imagine my amazement when he came back very quickly with a 600-plus-word statement that was nothing short of remarkable: Embracing Holocaust memory as an important part of recent human history, as an important element in our shared humanity, rejecting Holocaust denial in the most absolute terms.

It was in many respects a path-breaking statement, significant for several reasons. It is significant because of who issued the statement. It’s significant because of the content of the statement. It’s significant because it has since been reprinted in Arabic, in numerous Saudi media, as well as in Arabic on the website of the Muslim World League. If you go to the front page of their website, you will find it there. Once these things are done, and done in Arabic, and done by official state media in Saudi Arabia, they are very difficult to undo. And they reflect an important direction of change. It is not the end of the story by any means in terms
of the sorts of reforms that need to happen in Saudi Arabia at the religious, cultural and political levels. But it is not one easily denied or easily retracted and should be recognized for what it is, which is, I think, quite a remarkable step forward.

The idea that the New York Times, in its [Jan. 29] editorial critiquing Poland for its law curtailing public discussion of the Holocaust, would actually cite Saudi Arabia as an example of a country that is moving in the right direction in terms of public discourse on the Holocaust, it makes your jaw drop—Poland, a democratic member of the European Union and NATO, and Saudi Arabia, a country that for decades embraced the most virulent form of Holocaust denial and vile anti-Semitic statements from its leaders. Something is clearly changing in Saudi Arabia, in a positive direction, and while its success is by no means assured, I believe we have an interest in supporting it as much as possible.

Robert Satloff has served since 1993 as executive director of The Washington Institute and its Howard P. Berkowitz Chair in U.S. Middle East Policy. An expert on Arab and Islamic politics as well as U.S. Middle East policy, Dr. Satloff has written and spoken widely on the Arab-Israeli peace process, the challenge of Political Islam, and the need to revamp U.S. public diplomacy in the Middle East. Dr. Satloff’s views on Middle East issues appear frequently in major newspapers such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and Los Angeles Times. A frequent commentator on major television network news programs, talk shows and National Public Radio, he has testified on numerous occasions to Senate and House committees concerned with U.S. Middle East policy. Among his nine books and monographs is “Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab Lands,” which was made into a PBS documentary and broadcast nationally on Yom Ha’Shoah.

Jordan’s Relations with Israel: A Strategic Imperative with Political Constraints

In January, Jordanian-Israeli relations returned to the spotlight. This time, the news was positive: The Israeli Embassy in Amman returned to full activity following the resolution of a crisis that erupted last summer after a shooting incident involving an Israeli Embassy guard. The Jordan-Israel relationship is a critical component of regional stability; its origins extend back decades.

1948-1967: TURMOIL, THEN RESPITE

Even before Israel’s establishment in May 1948, King Abdullah I of Jordan (then called The Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan) understood the benefits to his kingdom of cooperation with the emerging Jewish state. Accordingly, he entered into secret negotiations with the Jewish political leadership. But following the failure of talks, Abdullah’s Arab Legion joined the armies
of four other Arab states (Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon) in the invasion of what had been the British Mandate for Palestine.

Unlike the four other Arab armies, Abdullah’s Arab Legion avoided entering the area assigned to the Jewish state under the 1947 United Nations (U.N.) Partition Resolution. The Legion confined its military campaign to the area earmarked for the Arab state and to Jerusalem, which, under the U.N.’s plan, was to become an international city.

The 1949 Armistice Agreement, which reflected the positions on the ground of the two militaries at the end of the war, left the West Bank and East Jerusalem—including the Old City—under Jordanian control; a year later, Abdullah annexed these areas to Transjordan, which he renamed The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, more than doubling its population. With the addition of Palestinian refugees from what had become Israel, Jordan now became a Palestinian-majority country, with momentous repercussions to this day.

Turmoil reigned in Jordan during its early years. A Palestinian nationalist assassinated King Abdullah in 1951 after revelations of the content of secret peace talks with Israel. His eldest son and successor, King Talal, was forced to abdicate for medical reasons a year later. Talal’s younger brother Hussein was enthroned in 1953 upon reaching the age of 18. He remained the King of Jordan until his death in 1999.

Like his late father, Hussein understood the importance of positive relations with Israel. He too engaged in secret talks with the Israelis, and he too was the target of assassination plots and attempts; they all failed.

From 1956 to 1967, Israel and Jordan faced a powerful common enemy: Under Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, radical Arab nationalism swept the Arab world, targeting both the Jewish state and the pro-Western Hashemite Kingdom. In early 1958, when Syria joined Egypt under Nasser’s leadership to form the United Arab Republic (UAR), both Israel and Jordan felt deeply threatened. King Hussein soon discovered that Israel’s support was essential to his kingdom’s very survival.

After Hussein’s cousin and King of Iraq Faisal II was assassinated in a brutal, Nasser-inspired coup in July 1958, Jordan teetered on the brink of collapse. The United States and Britain sought to fly in troops to save the kingdom, but all of Jordan’s Arab neighbors denied the use of their airspace for the rescue operation. By contrast, Israel opened its airspace to enable the American and British overflights which helped save Jordan.

Following the collapse of the UAR in 1961 and Egypt’s losing military intervention in a disastrous civil war in Yemen from 1962 to 1967, Nasser’s role as leader of the seemingly unstoppable Arab national movement diminished. As a result, radical Arab nationalism lost much of its energy. Jordan and Israel enjoyed a relative respite.

1967: FATEFUL TURNING POINT

In 1967, King Hussein committed several strategic mistakes that ended up costing him a military defeat and the permanent loss of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

On May 15, Nasser sent large military formations with much fanfare and dire threats against Israel into the Sinai Peninsula, which had been effectively demilitarized since 1956.
To taunt Nasser, Hussein declared that the Egyptian leader was “hiding behind the skirts” of the U.N. forces stationed between Egypt and Israel. Nasser immediately ordered the removal of the U.N. troops, starting a chain reaction that led to the outbreak of the Six-Day War on June 5.

During the three weeks preceding the war, great excitement swept the Arab world—particularly among the Palestinians in Jordan. Nasser’s hitherto unchallenged and growing threats and provocations against Israel, along with the massing of hundreds of thousands of troops from six Arab countries close to Israel’s boundaries, made it appear to the Arabs that Israel was on the verge of defeat and destruction. Fearing for his political and physical survival, King Hussein signed a military pact with Egypt and placed his army under the command of an Egyptian general.

At the outset of the Six-Day War on June 5, Israeli jets destroyed the Egyptian air force in a three-hour preemptive strike. Later that morning, Israel sent a message to King Hussein that it would avoid striking Jordan if its armed forces refrained from attacking Israel. However, the Egyptian general commanding the Jordanian army ordered an attack on Israel to relieve the Israeli pressure on his country.

Over the next three days, the Israeli army counterattacked and captured the entire West Bank and East Jerusalem. By the sixth day of the war, Israel had also taken the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria. The joint Arab military defeat was complete. In effect, Nasser’s radical Arab nationalist agenda had demonstrated complete failure.

1967-1970: CONFLICT WITH THE PLO

Bitterly disappointed in the performance of the Arab armies, the Palestinians decided to take matters into their own hands. Yasser Arafat’s faction Fatah took over the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), initiating a terror campaign against Israel while simultaneously encroaching on Jordan’s sovereignty. By 1970, the PLO controlled so much Jordanian territory that King Hussein was derisively called by his enemies “Mayor of Amman,” and groups within the PLO openly called for overthrowing the monarchy. The PLO’s growing dominance close to Israel’s long border with Jordan threatened the security of both countries.

Hussein’s patience came to an end in 1970, when a PLO-affiliated group hijacked three civilian airliners to Jordan, held their passengers hostage, and blew up the planes. Hussein ordered his army to attack, inflicting heavy casualties on the Palestinians. Large Syrian forces accompanied by hundreds of tanks then invaded Jordan in support of the PLO. At the request of the United States, Israel threatened the Syrian invaders by massing troops on the Golan and sending jet fighters to streak above the Syrian forces. The Syrians got the message. Their troops withdrew. The PLO moved most of its forces from Jordan to Lebanon.


Following the Six-Day War, King Hussein permitted Palestinian residents of the West Bank to retain Jordanian citizenship. He feared both the emergence of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, or, alternatively, its annexation by Israel. Consecutive Israeli governments shared these concerns. Israel opposed the creation of
a Palestinian state and refrained from annexing the West Bank. King Hussein maintained a clandestine dialogue with Israel. He refrained from a direct attack on Israel during the Yom Kippur War of 1973—instead sending a token auxiliary force to the Syrian front.

The process of Jordanian disengagement from the West Bank unofficially began as early as 1974, when Jordan responded to domestic and Arab pressures and accepted the Arab League’s decision to recognize the PLO as “the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.” At least in theory, Hussein thus conceded that the Palestinian population of the West Bank was no longer represented by Jordan but by his nemesis, the PLO.

Nonetheless, Hussein continued to nurture the hope of eventual reunification of Jordan with the West Bank. As late as 1987, he concluded an agreement with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to lay the groundwork for Jordanian-Israeli peace based on Jordan returning to parts of the West Bank. The agreement was canceled by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

Ultimately, Hussein gave up on the West Bank. In 1988, he formally lifted Jordan’s legal and administrative ties to the area.

1988-1994: MOVING TOWARD PEACE WITH ISRAEL

Jordan’s formal disengagement from the West Bank helped lay the groundwork for Jordanian-Israeli peace. King Hussein formally agreed to peace talks with Israel after the PLO recognized Israel and signed the Oslo Accords in 1993. In 1994, he concluded an agreement with Israel ending the formal state of war that had been in effect since 1948; three months later, he signed a peace treaty with Israel, complete with full diplomatic relations.

1994-2011: PEACE WITHOUT FULL NORMALIZATION

At the governmental level, the Jordan-Israel peace treaty led to extensive cooperation, especially on security and intelligence-sharing. That cooperation continued after King Hussein’s death in 1999 and the ascension to the throne of his son, Abdullah II. Both governments realized that they had a vital stake in each other’s survival. Israeli officials recognized that Jordan provided a security buffer against threats from further east and that Jordan’s border with Iraq was, in effect, Israel’s eastern security border. The Jordanian government understood that Israel, strongly backed by the United States, would do what it could to help Jordan overcome threats to its existence.

Yet the Jordanian population, influenced by the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood and Palestinian nationalists, has generally been reluctant to take meaningful steps toward normalization with
Israel. Any individual or company engaging in overt cooperation with Israel risked ostracism.

2011-PRESENT: THE “ARAB SPRING” INTENSIFIES PREVIOUS TRENDS

The “Arab Spring” and its aftermath has greatly exacerbated Jordan’s and Israel’s security problems. Jordan has been flooded with Syrian refugees and attacked by terrorists. It is gravely concerned by the fighting in neighboring Syria, the surge of refugees, and the presence of hostile forces close to its borders. Israel has similar concerns, particularly regarding Iran’s and Hezbollah’s presence in Syria. Most recently, Israel attacked Iranian facilities in Syria after an Iranian drone penetrated Israeli airspace.

These common threats have elevated Jordanian-Israeli security cooperation to ever higher levels. Jordanian military officers maintain constant close contact with their Israeli counterparts. In an unprecedented move, Jordanian fighter pilots in 2015 trained with their Israeli counterparts in a U.S.-hosted air force exercise.

Yet Jordan’s population continues to resist normalization with Israel. The cold peace between the Jordanian and Israeli publics has been further exacerbated by disputes over Israeli activities in Jerusalem’s holy places, where Jordan has a special status under the 1994 peace treaty and to which the Jordanian population is particularly sensitive. The most recent crisis in the relationship was sparked in July 2017 by an Israeli Embassy guard shooting a Jordanian attacker and an innocent bystander, which was widely viewed by the Jordanian public as murder. But even during that crisis, Jordan and Israel continued their close security cooperation. Jordanian and Israeli national interests are both served by the close coordination between them, and by their strong relationships with the United States. So is the American national interest.

Washington Brief: A Recap of News From the Hill and Beyond

WHITE HOUSE RELEASES FY19 BUDGET—FULLY FUNDS AID TO ISRAEL

On Feb. 12, the White House released its Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget proposal including full funding for aid to Israel. The budget provides $3.3 billion in security assistance to Israel and $500 million in funding for joint U.S.-Israel missile defense programs. These funding levels are in line with the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding on security assistance signed between the two countries. The total funding request represents a record level of U.S. assistance to the Jewish state.

HOUSE PASSES THE HAMAS HUMAN SHIELDS PREVENTION ACT

On Feb. 14, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed the Hamas Human Shields Prevention Act (H.R. 3542).

Authored by Reps. Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Seth Moulton (D-MA), this bill condemns Hamas’ use of human shields and imposes sanctions on those engaging in the practice. The bill notes that the use of human shields is both a violation of human rights and of international humanitarian law.
The bill also highlights the extensive efforts the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) undertake to avoid civilian casualties. The IDF routinely drops leaflets, makes announcements over radio, places phone calls, and sends text messages warning of a military strike prior to the targeting of terrorists operating in civilian areas.

“For far too long, Hamas has taken shelter and launched offenses against Israel from civilian areas,” Rep. Wilson stated on the House floor. “I believe this legislation will promote working to ensure that lives of innocent civilians of the citizens of Gaza are spared.”

U.S. SENATORS URGE TOUGHER SANCTIONS FOR IRAN’S BALLISTIC MISSILE PROGRAM

On Feb. 6, a group of 14 U.S. senators urged President Donald Trump to expand sanctions on Iran, in response to the regime’s illicit ballistic missile program.

In their letter—which was spearheaded by Sens. Todd Young (R-IL) and Marco Rubio (R-FL)—the senators noted that “Iran has actively pursued a ballistic missile program that threatens our forward deployed troops, our allies, and our interests.” The letter also addressed the growing threat of Iranian intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), which could be capable of reaching the United States, as well as the dangerous relationship between Iran and North Korea.

While the senators commended the administration’s decision on Jan. 4 “to impose sanctions against five Iranian entities that support its ballistic missile program,” they argued that more robust sanctions are still needed. “[W]e call on the administration to work with Congress to impose sanctions on any sector of the Iranian economy that is directly or indirectly associated with the development or transfer of ballistic missile parts, components, or technology.”

The 12 other senators who signed on to the letter included Sens. Tom Cotton (R-AR), John Cornyn (R-TX), Ted Cruz (R-TX), James Inhofe (R-OK), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Steve Daines (R-MT), John Barrasso (R-WY), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Dean Heller (R-NV), David Perdue (R-GA), Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and James Risch (R-ID).

“As many serious and urgent threats compete for attention, we believe it is important to remain focused on the growing threat that Iran’s ballistic missile program represents,” the senators wrote. “We are eager to work with the administration to take additional steps to better protect the United States and our allies against this threat.”

TREASURY DEPARTMENT PLACES NEW SANCTIONS ON HIZBALLAH

On Feb. 2, the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned six individuals and seven businesses connected to the Iranian-backed terrorist organization Hizballah (also known as Hezbollah).

The six individuals, including four Lebanese and two Iraqis, were sanctioned for their ties to Hizballah member and financier Adham Tabaja or his company, Al-Inmaa Engineering and Contracting. Tabaja and his company were designated as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) in 2015.

The seven businesses—based in Ghana, Lebanon, Liberia and Sierra Leone—are owned or controlled by Ali Muhammad Qansu, one of the six newly-sanctioned individuals, who has
extensive ties to Tabaja and other Hizballah members and affiliates.

“Hizballah is a terrorist organization responsible for the death of hundreds of Americans. It is also Iran’s primary proxy used to undermine legitimate Arab governments across the Middle East. The Administration is determined to expose and disrupt Hizballah’s networks, including those across the Middle East and West Africa, used to fund their illicit operations,” said U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. “The Treasury Department will continue to sever Hizballah from the international financial system, and we will be relentless in identifying, exposing, and dismantling Hizballah’s financial support networks globally.”

SENS. CARDIN AND PORTMAN, REP. ROSKAM CONDEMN ANTI-ISRAEL U.N. REPORT

On Feb. 1, U.S. Sens. Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Rob Portman (R-OH) issued a joint statement denouncing a recent U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner report that targeted companies that conduct business with Israel, but deferred listing any of them by name.

The anti-Israel report includes detailed steps on its investigation of more than 200 companies, including 22 American companies, laying the groundwork to release a blacklist to boycott such companies in the future.

“We strongly oppose the ongoing efforts to compile a blacklist of companies that do business in Israeli-controlled territories,” the senators wrote. “The preliminary list released yesterday by [the U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner] underscores the urgent need for swift action to modernize existing anti-boycott laws.”

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley also denounced the report, stating: “the fact that the report was issued at all is yet another reminder of the Council’s anti-Israel obsession. The more the Human Rights Council does this, the less effective it becomes as an advocate against the world’s human rights abusers.”

On Feb. 2, Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL) issued a statement calling the report a “blatant example of the pervasive anti-Israel bias” plaguing the United Nations. “The United States has firmly opposed international efforts to stigmatize, isolate and delegitimize Israel, and we must continue to do so,” he added.

In 2017, Sens. Cardin and Portman, along with Reps. Roskam and Juan Vargas (D-CA), spearheaded the Israel Anti-Boycott Act (S. 720 and H.R. 1697). This bipartisan legislation would combat the boycott of Israel in the international arena by expanding existing U.S. anti-boycott laws to international governmental organizations like the United Nations and the European Union. The bill was introduced in response to an anti-Israel U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution calling for the creation of a database of companies operating or investing beyond the “Green Line,” including, among other areas, East Jerusalem and the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

U.S. DESIGNATES HAMAS LEADER A GLOBAL TERRORIST

On Jan. 31, the U.S. State Department designated Hamas’ senior political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT), along with three terrorist groups.

“Haniyeh has close links with Hamas’ military wing and has been a proponent of armed
struggle, including against civilians,” the State Department said in a statement. “Hamas has been responsible for an estimated 17 American lives killed in terrorist attacks.”

The three newly-designated terrorist groups include Harakat al-Sabireen, Liwa al Thawra and Harakat Sawa’d Misr (HASM). Harakat al-Sabireen is an Iranian-backed terrorist group that operates primarily in the West Bank and Gaza. The group “has carried out terrorist activities targeting Israel, pursues an anti-American agenda, and has attracted members and supporters of [Palestine Islamic Jihad],” a previously-designated terrorist group. The other two groups, Liwa al Thawra and HASM, operate in Egypt and have also claimed responsibility for numerous terror attacks.

“[T]hese designations target key terrorist groups and leaders – including two sponsored and directed by Iran – who are threatening the stability of the Middle East, undermining the peace process, and attacking our allies Egypt and Israel,” Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in announcing these new designations. “Today’s actions are an important step in denying them the resources they need to plan and carry out their terrorist activities.”

CHAIRMAN ROYCE: PROTECT INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL SYSTEM FROM IRAN

On Jan. 25, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-CA) urged the Trump administration to press a key international financial watchdog to keep Iran on its blacklist and reinstate countermeasures on the Iranian regime.

Chairman Royce penned the letter to U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin in an effort to protect the international financial system from Iran’s money laundering and terrorist financing.

“Ensuring the Financial Action Task Force [FATF] maintains its designation of Iran as a ‘high-risk and non-cooperative jurisdiction’ and re-imposes counter-measures will help protect the national security of the United States and the integrity of the international financial system,” wrote Chairman Royce.

“It will also send a powerful message to the brave Iranians who took to the streets earlier this month,” he continued. “Money laundering is a key element of the endemic corruption that the regime uses to enrich itself and support terrorism abroad. These abuses were at the heart of the protests. This is an opportunity to stand with the Iranian people against a regime that steals the wealth of a great nation to oppress its people and sow instability across the Middle East and beyond.”

FATF is the international organization responsible for legal and regulatory guidelines on anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing. Until June 2016, Iran had been on a FATF blacklist—and subject to countermeasures—due to its terrorist financing and deficiencies in combatting money laundering. FATF suspended these countermeasures when Iran submitted an action plan designed to address some of these issues. FATF is set to make a decision on Iran at its Plenary session in early February.

AMBASSADOR HALEY: PEACE REQUIRES COURAGEOUS LEADERS

On Jan. 25, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley criticized Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in remarks at the

“The United States remains deeply committed to helping the Israelis and Palestinians reach a historic peace agreement,” she said during the Security Council’s open debate on the Middle East. “But we will not chase after a Palestinian leadership that lacks what is needed to achieve peace. To get historic results, we need courageous leaders.”

Haley cited former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat as such a leader, for his bold rhetoric and actions that helped catalyze the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. She compared Sadat’s courageous declaration to the Knesset that “we accept to live with you in permanent peace,” to Abbas’ recent speech in which he “declared the Oslo Peace Accords dead,” “rejected any American role in peace talks” and “called for suspending recognition of Israel.”

Haley continued, “A speech that indulges in outrageous and discredited conspiracy theories is not the speech of a person with the courage and the will to seek peace.” She added: “The indispensable element is leaders who have the will to do what’s needed to achieve peace. Real peace requires leaders who are willing to step forward, acknowledge hard truths, and make compromises.”

Despite Abbas’ rhetoric, Haley reaffirmed the United States’ commitment to fostering peace between Israelis and Palestinians and argued that a peace agreement could still be possible if Abbas were to demonstrate courageous leadership and not close the doors to bilateral negotiations.

“We remain committed to the possibility and potential of two states, if agreed to by the parties,” she said. “If President Abbas

...demonstrates he can be that type of leader, we would welcome it. His recent actions demonstrate the total opposite.”

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