

The week ending February 20, 2015

U.S. - ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

American Ambassador Praises U.S.-Israel Relationship at INSS Annual Conference

The U.S. ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro discussed the unwavering alliance between America and Israel at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) Eighth Annual Conference in Tel Aviv. "During President Obama's last visit here in Israel, he pledged that America will always stand by Israel, he declared that Israelis will never be alone," said Shapiro. "As the United States Ambassador to Israel, I am confident and comforted that in this challenging and sometimes unforgiving part of the world, neither is America alone." His Feb. 17 remarks highlighted three cornerstone principles that sustain the countries' robust friendship: shared values, mutual interests and pursuit of common prosperity. "First and foremost, we share a mutual commitment to democracy, liberty, equality, and justice for all of our citizens," said Shapiro. "In a world where freedom still struggles to take hold, Israel and America lead in safeguarding the rights of our own citizens to speak, associate, and worship freely in an open and tolerant society." Shapiro also commended the INSS for its work in both countries' national security communities. "The U.S. Embassy in Israel has maintained a strong connection with this institution (INSS) from its founding nearly four decades ago. In the United States, our 'ideas industry,' as it is often called, plays a vital role in our national security community," said Shapiro. "We believe it is a model fit for export and emulation and we are proud to maintain such close ties with Israel's ideas industry. Our engagement comes from American philanthropy, from partnerships between Israeli institutions and peer institutions in the United States, and through interactions with our government."

IRAN

Newly Appointed U.S. Secretary of Defense Warns of Nuclear Iran Dangers

On Feb. 12, Ashton Carter was confirmed by the full Senate to be the next U.S. Secretary of Defense by a 93-5 vote. At his confirmation hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier that month, Carter warned that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an "exceptionally grave" threat to the U.S. and Israel. "They (Iran) have the ambition to wipe off the map other states in the region, namely Israel," said Carter. "They have a long history of behaving in a disruptive way, of supporting terrorism, of trying to undermine other governments (and) of operating around the world. I think they give abundance evidence that they're not the kind of people you want to have having nuclear weapons." He also warned that an Iranian nuclear threat will likely stimulate others in the region to acquire a similar capability. "I think it tends to reinforce what we were just saying, namely the prospect of Iran having a nuclear weapon's a pretty fearful matter, and you don't have to be just an American or an Israeli to get that idea," said Carter. When Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) posed a questions regarding the possibility of military force during the P5+1 negotiations, Carter also responded "absolutely."

EUROPE

Norwegian Muslims volunteer to protect synagogue

In the wake of a deadly shooting attack at a synagogue in Denmark last week, a group of Norwegian Muslims intends to hold an anti-violence demonstration at an Oslo synagogue this coming weekend by forming a “peace ring” around the building. According to [The Times of Israel](#), one of the event organizers, 17-year-old Hajrad Arshad, explained that the intention was to make a clear statement that Muslims don’t support anti-Semitism. “We think that after the terrorist attacks in Copenhagen, it is the perfect time for us Muslims to distance ourselves from the harassment of Jews that is happening,” Arshad told the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation NRK in an interview cited by The Local News website on Tuesday. Ervin Kohn, a leader of Oslo’s Jewish community, said the synagogue had agreed to allow the event on the condition that at least 30 people turn up to help form a ring around the building, which is located on Bergstien Street in the Norwegian capital. “I’ve said that it only comes to 30, it won’t be good, it may seem counter-productive,” he said. “But if you fill Bergstien, it will be very good.” Arshad promoted the initiative as an event on Facebook, and by Wednesday morning over 630 people had indicated that they would attend. “Islam is about protecting our brothers and sisters, regardless of which religion they belong to,” the event page explains. “Islam is about rising above hate and never sinking to the same level as the haters. Islam is about defending each other.” Another of the activists behind the drive wrote in an English-language comment on the event’s page that “if anyone wants to commit violence in the name of Islam you will have to go through us Muslims first.” The unity demonstration comes after a shooting attack Saturday that saw Omar El-Hussein, a 22-year-old Dane of Palestinian extraction, shoot dead a filmmaker in Copenhagen before killing Dan Uzan, a Jewish man who volunteered as a guard at the city’s main synagogue.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israeli Maternity Hotels Pamper New Moms

In the dining room of the Ein Kerem Hotel in Jerusalem, overlooking a magnificent panorama of the Judean Hills, guests approach the bountiful Israeli breakfast laid out elegantly in chafing dishes. The scene seems no different than any other boutique hotel in Israel, except that some of the women at the buffet are wheeling newborns around in bassinets. All 28 rooms on the fourth floor of Ein Kerem Hotel are devoted to Hadassah Baby, one of Israel’s four maternity hotels on the premises of medical centers. Virtually unknown outside of Asia, maternity hotels provide postpartum moms the luxuries of a hotel combined with 24-hour medical care, as well as optional classes on baby care, sleeping and feeding. It was in the nursery of Hadassah Baby that [ISRAEL21c](#) met Miri Hillel, whose yet-unnamed daughter was asleep in a bassinet alongside a dozen other infants including a set of twins. She’d booked two nights here when her son was born 20 months earlier. “I heard a lot of good things about the hotel from my friends and family, and it seems very natural to come right after being in the hospital, to get to know the baby a little better away from home and the usual routine, in a very relaxed environment,” Hillel says. COO Hagit Yekutieli tells ISRAEL21c that because Hadassah Baby maintains a high standard of kashrut, it is especially popular with religious women but she is actively marketing the maternity hotel across the board.