The week of November 4, 2016

IRAN

Iranians mark anniversary of U.S. Embassy takeover in Tehran

Thousands of Iranians have burned the American flag and chanted anti-U.S. slogans as they marked the anniversary of the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by militant students 37 years ago. According to The Washington Post, such protests take place every year outside the compound that once housed the embassy on the anniversary of the 1979 takeover that followed the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Iranians at the rally outside the former embassy building on Thursday chanted "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" and burned the U.S. and Israeli flags. On Nov. 4, 1979, Iranian militant students stormed the U.S. Embassy, taking 52 Americans hostage for 444 days after Washington refused to hand over Iran's toppled shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, for trial in Iran. The two countries have had no diplomatic relations since then.

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Hamas looks to join PLO, marking major unification step

Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal made a rare plea on Wednesday for uniting his popular Palestinian Islamist movement with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), bringing it, for the first time, into the umbrella group recognized internationally and by Israel as the representative of the Palestinians. A senior PLO member told The Times of Israel that the group wants to bring Hamas under its framework, while an expert on Palestinian politics said the move was likely to take place. The call by Hamas—considered a terror group by Israel, the U.S. and most of the international community—for inclusion in the PLO comes amid concerted efforts by the Palestinians to challenge the 1917 British Balfour Declaration, which promised the Jewish people a "homeland" in Palestine, and to establish an independent Palestinian state as soon as possible. In Fatah-Hamas unity deals in 2011 and 2014, the Islamist group agreed to join the PLO, but the agreements fell through. There was also a failed bid for Hamas to join the PLO in 2005. The PLO, which has been the largest Palestinian umbrella organization since 1964, is headed by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and dominated by Abbas's Fatah party. Shaul Mishal, head of the Middle East program at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, said it was likely that Hamas would merge into the PLO. "Both sides are looking to find a common denominator. They realize that to unite is the only effective way to be on the regional map, considering the harsh current events in the region," he said. "They [the Palestinians] cannot continue working on the bilateral approach with Israel," which has languished in the past several years.

Hamas calls for more attacks by PA security personnel

Hamas "welcomed" an attack by a Palestinian police officer on Monday that injured three Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint near Ramallah, and called on Palestinian security personnel to carry out more attacks. "We welcome the heroic operation carried out by the martyr officer Muhammad Turkman," the terror group said it a statement. "We consider [the attack] a strong message in the face of Israeli crimes." While Hamas usually praises attacks against Israelis—whether civilians or soldiers—the terror group went a step further on Monday by specifically calling for more members of the Palestinian security forces to "join the Palestinian intifada." The gunman was named as Muhammad Turkman, a police officer from Qabatiya, by both the official Palestinian Authority news outlet al-Hayat al-Jadida and Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, the Defense Ministry's coordinator of government activities in the territories. According to The Times of Israel, the three soldiers—all approximately 20 years old—sustained gunshot wounds to the extremities, according to the Magen David Adom ambulance service.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israeli scientists see breakthrough in AIDS cure

HIV and AIDS patients may find new hope in a drug developed at Hebrew University in Jerusalem which is currently being tested at the Kaplan Medical Center in Rehovot. The drug was inserted into test tubes containing the blood of ten AIDS patients currently being treated at the hospital, and was found to decrease the HIV virus count in the blood samples by as much as 97 percent in just eight days, The Times of Israel reported. The active ingredient in the drug is a peptide, or smaller version of a protein, that was developed by Abraham Loyter and Assaf Friedler at Hebrew University. The peptide causes several copies of the virus's DNA to enter the infected cell, instead of just one copy, causing the cell to self-destruct. HIV is currently treated with a cocktail of drugs that slow the progression of the infection in the body but never rid the patient of the virus entirely. These drugs have allowed doctors to treat AIDS as a chronic illness as opposed to a fatal one.

Israel assures ample safe water for a thirsty world

When 15 students in the Engineers without Borders (EwB) chapter at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology found out that more than 600 Ethiopian schoolchildren in rural Meskele Cristos had no reliable source of water for drinking and handwashing, they volunteered to design a safe drinking-water system for the school. Built by the Israeli students and local residents over the course of two years, the system collects rainwater from the rooftop during the rainy season and stores it in a stone reservoir constructed as part of the project. The water is cleaned and treated before reaching the school's holding tank. According to Israel21c, ten students from the Tel Aviv University chapter of EwB planned, designed, and built a rain-collection and purification system, and a solar-panel grid, in the village Minjingu in north Tanzania, where the drinking water was saturated with dangerously high amounts of fluoride.