



Rabbinic Recap

The week Ending on November 17, 2017

SYRIA

Israel Won't Allow Iran to Establish Presence in Syria, Defense Minister Says

At the conclusion of a visit to Israel's northern border, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said Wednesday, "We will not allow a Shi'ite and Iranian [presence] to be established in Syria and will not permit all of Syria to be turned into a front-line position against the State of Israel," according to a [Haaretz report](#). "Anyone who doesn't understand this will find it worth his while to understand," the defense minister added. "We retain absolute freedom of action. The only considerations guiding us are considerations regarding the security of the State of Israel." Lieberman's comments came a day after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called the Iranian presence in Syria "legitimate." Russia had not committed itself to the withdrawal of pro-Iranian forces from Syria, the Russian foreign minister said. In response to Lavrov's comments, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office issued a statement Tuesday saying that "Israel would continue to look after its security interests in any case and any situation." The prime minister, his office added, had made this clear to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Netanyahu made similar comments in addressing the Knesset on Monday. In Israel there is concern about the Iranian presence in Syria. Disappointment has been expressed about a trilateral cease-fire agreement signed over the weekend by Russia, the United States and Jordan. The official text of the agreement states that all foreign forces in southern Syria, which include the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Shi'ite militias operating at the direction of Tehran, will be required to leave the country. The agreement does not include a timetable for compliance, however, and at this stage, secret understandings among the parties to the agreement only require that the Iranians and the militias stay a relatively short distance away from Israel's Golan Heights border.

PALESTINIANS

Despite Plan to Open on Wednesday, Rafah Crossing Remains Closed

The [Jerusalem Post](#) noted that despite Palestinian officials saying the Rafah crossing would be permanently opened on Wednesday, the crucial passageway between the Gaza Strip and Egypt remained closed. Top Fatah and Palestinian Authority officials said two weeks ago that Egypt and the PA agreed to permanently open the Rafah crossing on Nov. 15. However, on Wednesday, Fatah Central Committee member Azzam al-Ahmad said the opening of the crossing was postponed due to "special circumstances related to Egypt," without elaborating. Egypt has previously canceled planned openings of the Rafah crossing, citing the unstable security situation in Sinai.

Ahmad added that the Palestinians and Egypt talked about setting a new date to open the crossing, but did not state specifically which date or dates the two parties discussed. "We communicated during the past two days with the Egyptian side to determine another date to open the crossing," Ahmad said in a statement, published on the official PA news site Wafa. "Egypt is very keen on doing everything that is needed to help us alleviate our people's suffering in Gaza." The failure to open the crossing, as announced, came approximately a month after Egypt brokered a deal between Hamas and Fatah to advance reconciliation efforts and restore the PA's governing authority in Gaza.

UNITED STATES CONGRESS

U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee Approves Bill Cutting U.S. Funds to Palestinian Authority

As [Haaretz reported](#), the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee approved on Wednesday the "Taylor Force Act," a bill that would cut U.S. funding to the Palestinian Authority unless it stops paying salaries to convicted terrorists and their family members. The bill passed unanimously in the committee, clearing it for a vote on the floor of the entire House of Representatives. The bill was also approved earlier this year in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and it is expected to pass in both houses of Congress in the coming weeks. The version of the bill passed on Wednesday included three major exemptions for programs that would continue to receive U.S. funding even if the Palestinian Authority doesn't change its policies. One exemption is for hospitals in East Jerusalem; another is for water projects in the West Bank (an issue that the Trump administration has tried to promote in recent months as part of its' renewal of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process); and the third for vaccinations of children. The bill is named after Taylor Force, an American citizen and army veteran who was murdered in a terror attack in Tel Aviv in March 2016. Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA), the chairman of the committee, said after the vote that "with this legislation, we are forcing the PA to choose between U.S. assistance and these morally reprehensible policies, and I am pleased to see the measure move forward with so much support." The committee also passed two bills on Wednesday that target Hamas for its' terror activities and for using Palestinian civilians in Gaza as human shields.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israeli teens' 3D-printed kit motorizes a plain wheelchair

A team of about 30 teenage robotics enthusiasts in Ra'anana recently unveiled a 3D-printed kit that transforms a standard \$500 wheelchair into the equivalent of a \$2,500 electronic wheelchair with enhanced maneuverability and powerful braking, as [reported by Israel21c](#). The add-on doesn't interfere with the chair's folding mechanism and is easily removed, so it can be attached to a rented wheelchair that must be returned in its original condition. The Electric Wheelchair Kit was devised by "Team 1577 Steampunk" from Aviv High School as part of its participation in the regional round of the global FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC). But the kids are not keeping it to themselves...The design, 3D printable programs and software are available for free online "so anyone can build it from scratch" using tools, programs and printers commonly available to FRC teams everywhere, [says] teammate Yuval Dascalu.