



Rabbinic Recap

The week of February 17, 2017

U.S. - ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

Trump, Netanyahu Hold First Summit

On Feb. 15, President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held their first meeting of the Trump presidency. The prime minister is the first Middle East leader to visit the White House during the Trump Administration. In a joint press conference, the two leaders underscored the shared values of their two countries and pledged to work together on matters affecting the U.S.-Israel relationship. They agreed to address the threat posed by Iran's nuclear weapons program; confront one-sided unilateral actions against Israel at the United Nations; and explore ways to promote peace. "The partnership between our two countries, built on our shared values, has advanced the cause of human freedom, dignity and peace," said Trump. He continued: "These are the building blocks of democracy. The State of Israel is a symbol to the world of resilience in the face of oppression. I can think of no other state that's gone through what they've gone, and of survival in the face of genocide. We will never forget what the Jewish people have endured." Netanyahu added: "To me, to the State of Israel, it was so clearly evident in the words you just spoke, Israel has no better ally than the United States. And I want to assure you, the United States has no better ally than Israel. Our alliance has been remarkably strong...and is based on a deep bond of common values and common interest." When discussing Iran, Trump stated, "The security challenges faced by Israel are enormous, including the threat of Iran's nuclear ambitions." "My administration has already imposed new sanctions on Iran, and I will do more to prevent Iran from ever developing—I mean ever—a nuclear weapon. Our security assistance to Israel is currently at an all-time high, ensuring that Israel has the ability to defend itself from threats, of which there are unfortunately many." "You [President Trump] call for confronting Iran's terrorist regime...have said that the United States is committed to preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons," said Netanyahu.

IRAN

Iranian general violates sanctions by visiting Moscow

A shadowy Iranian general responsible for the deaths of nearly 500 Americans traveled to Moscow Wednesday to meet with high-ranking Russian officials -- a trip that violated multiple United Nations resolutions forbidding him from leaving his country, multiple western intelligence officials with direct knowledge of the visit told [Fox News](#). Iranian Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani arrived in Terminal A of Vnukovo airport outside Moscow on Feb. 14 on Mahan Air WD084 at 12:13 p.m. local time and was scheduled to remain in Russia for a few days for meetings, officials said. Soleimani is visiting Moscow to express his displeasure with the Russian government over their relationship with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, mainly regarding weapons deals and strengthening economic ties, sources told Fox News. "These are two countries that want to cause trouble for the United States, and they're talking together which means even more trouble for the United States," House Armed Services Committee Chairman

Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, told Fox News. Former Secretary of State John Kerry said five days after Soleimani's Moscow visit that he would never receive sanctions relief. "Under the United States's initiative, Qassem Soleimani will never be relieved of any sanctions," Kerry said.

VENEZUELA

United States Sanctions Venezuelan Vice President with Reported Ties to Hezbollah and Hamas

On Feb. 13, the U.S. Treasury Department issued new sanctions against Venezuelan Vice President Tareck El Aissami for his significant role in international narcotics trafficking. The U.S. government designated Aissami as well as his primary "frontman," Samark Lopez, as "Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers" pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act. As a result of these sanctions, transactions with 13 companies owned or controlled by El Aissami are blocked and any dealings with El Aissami or Lopez are considered unlawful by the United States. El Aissami oversaw a network exporting thousands of kilograms of cocaine with final destinations of Mexico and the United States. "He facilitated shipments of narcotics from Venezuela, to include control over planes that leave from a Venezuelan air base, as well as control of drug routes through the ports in Venezuela," said the Treasury Department. The Venezuelan vice president is also reported to have provided material support to both Hamas and Hezbollah—although such alleged actions do not form the basis for the sanctions issued on Feb. 13. In 2009, U.S. authorities accused El Aissami of issuing passports to members of Hamas and Hezbollah and recruiting young Venezuelan Arabs to train in Hezbollah camps in southern Lebanon. In 2014, The Wall Street Journal reported that El Aissami's office—he served as interior minister from 2008 to 2012—issued 173 identities to individuals from the Middle East, including Suleiman Ghani Abdul Waken, a key member of Hezbollah. Venezuelan passports permit entry to 134 countries without a visa. Most recently, a bipartisan group of 34 U.S. lawmakers sent a letter to President Donald Trump on Feb. 8 advocating for increased pressure on top Venezuelan officials responsible for corruption, including El Aissami for his purported ties to Hezbollah.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Arab, Jewish Israeli youth leaders to teach Syrian kids in Greece

Educators and counselors from Jewish Israeli youth movement Hashomer Hatzair and the Arab Israeli youth movement Ajyal soon will embark on a joint voluntary mission to set up a community center and school for children who arrived on the Greek island of Lesbos in the current refugee crisis. The first delegation of two from each movement, plus coordinator Yair Leibel from Hashomer Hatzair, expects to leave Israel February 19 and stay for three weeks. The second delegation will be accompanied by Rnin Kahil, the Ajyal coordinator. Members and leaders of the two youth movements have been meeting periodically for almost a decade, usually for informal dialogues. "The problem is that after we sit and talk, we go our separate ways," Leibel tells [Israel21c](#). "In one of our last meetings the Syrian situation arose ... and there was the thought to do something together to help people who are suffering in a nation in our area, even though Syria is considered an enemy country to Israel." Kahil tells [Israel21c](#) that the goal is to establish a community center that will function as a school in the mornings where the volunteers from Israel will teach math, Arabic, English and general subjects, and as a center for informal activities in the afternoons.