



Rabbinic Recap

The week of January 5, 2018

IRAN

U.S. officials urge Iran to stop blocking social-media sites as death toll rises in nationwide protests

[The Washington Post reports](#) that the Trump administration accused the Iranian government Tuesday of blocking or suppressing communications used by anti-government protesters and began laying groundwork for new international sanctions targeting alleged human rights abuses. As the protests continued for the sixth day, the Trump administration attempted to grasp whether discontent would spiral into a full-fledged uprising or be smothered in government suppression. The demonstrations began over economic grievances but quickly turned political as people in cities and towns around the nation chanted broadly anti-government slogans. U.S. officials from the White House, the State Department and the United Nations hastened to respond, calling for Tehran to respect its citizens' rights to protest peacefully while suggesting the government could be responsible for a death toll that rose to more than 20. In preparation, the administration began rallying support for an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting that could condemn Iran or consider human rights sanctions on Iranian government officials. "When a nation clamps down on social media or websites or Google or news sites, we ask the question: What are you afraid of?" said State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert, as she called on Iran to restore access to social-media sites used to spread news of protests. "We support the Iranian people, and we support their voices being heard." In an effort to thwart the Iranian government attempts at control, the State Department has urged technology and social media companies "to make sure the free flow of information is not interrupted," a State Department official said.

WEST BANK

Israel exposes alleged Iranian intelligence operation in West Bank

The Shin Bet security service on Wednesday revealed it had uncovered an Iranian military intelligence operation in the West Bank that it said was planning to carry out terror attacks and collect intelligence for the Islamic Republic, as [reported by The Times of Israel](#). The three alleged members of the cell were arrested in November, and indictments were filed against them earlier this week in a military court, the Shin Bet said. According to the security service, the cell had operated in the West Bank, specifically the Hebron area, for over two years. The Shin Bet would not say when its investigation into their activities began. The Shin Bet's announcement about the alleged Iranian spy ring came amid a spate of allegations by Israeli security forces and politicians against Tehran and its support for Palestinian terrorist groups in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The operation to expose the alleged conspiracy was led by the Shin Bet, working in conjunction with the Israel Defense Forces and Israel Police. The operation demonstrates the Iranian involvement in encouraging terror attacks against Israel."

PALESTINIANS

U.S. To Cut UNRWA Funding If Palestinians Don't Return to Negotiations

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley threatened Tuesday to cut funding to UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency) until the Palestinians return to the negotiating table, [The Jerusalem Post reported](#). The president "doesn't want to give additional funding or stop funding until the Palestinians agreeing to come back to the negotiating table," she said. "We're trying to move for a peace process. But if that doesn't happen, the president's not going to continue to fund that situation." Trump then took to Twitter to echo Haley's statement, saying that the U.S. gives the Palestinians "HUNDRED OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS a year and get no appreciation or respect." After declaring Jerusalem as Israel's capital last month, and his intent to move the U.S. embassy in Israel there from Tel Aviv, Trump warned foreign nations against condemning the new U.S. policy through a vote in the U.N. General Assembly. A vote proceeded anyway, with a majority voting against it, which prompted Trump to threaten the international body with a massive aid cut. As of last year, 22% of the U.N.'s annual budget comes from U.S. aid.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israel sets new record with 3.6 million tourists in 2017

Israeli tourism hit an all-time high in 2017, earning ₪20 billion in revenue from incoming tourism alone thanks to new flight routes and marketing efforts led by the Ministry of Tourism, [Israel21c noted](#). A total of 3.6 million tourists were recorded, a 25 percent increase over 2016. "The all-time record number of tourists visiting Israel this year is no accident; it is the result of a clear policy," said Minister of Tourism Yariv Levin. "We have implemented several significant initiatives including reaching out to new and focused markets, building sub-brands and launching new campaigns, collaborations with large online travel agents, giving financial incentives to airline companies that open new routes to Israel and continued marketing throughout the world." As part of these efforts, 18 new air routes to Ben-Gurion International Airport were opened this year including direct flights from Europe, Miami and Iceland via airlines LOT, Ryanair, Wizz Air and WOW. As in previous years, the majority of incoming tourism was from the United States, with 716,000 visitors arriving between January and November 2017, 21% more than the previous year. Russian visitors took second place with 307,000 visitors, and tourism from France was third, with about 284,000 visitors. Germany and the United Kingdom rounded out the top five with 202,000 and 185,000 visitors, respectively. Jerusalem remains the city most visited by incoming tourists (78% of all tourists) followed by Tel Aviv-Jaffa (67%) and the Dead Sea area (49%). The Galilee, including Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee, receives 35% of all tourists. With a new focus on the digital space, the ministry hosted nearly 3,000 opinion leaders, celebrities, bloggers, actors, sports stars, producers and journalists from around the world. Notable celebrity visitors in 2017 included Latin heartthrob William Levy, American fashion model Ashley Graham, and performers Justin Bieber and Mariah Carey. "The additional half million tourists who came to Israel this year are half a million more ambassadors of Israel around the world and our loyal representatives on social media, and this is also a decisive contribution to Israel's image," said Levin.