



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

by the JCPOA "will only enable a nuclear and hegemonic Iran. It provides Tehran significant financial, military and geopolitical benefits... in exchange for minimal, reversible and temporary concessions on its nuclear program... the JCPOA puts Iran on track to become as intractable a

Commentary...

Objective: Make Putin Stop Iran By Eyal Zisser

Ever since Russian forces entered Syria two years ago to fight Syrian President Bashar Assad's fight, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Russian President Vladimir Putin have made a habit of meeting every few months to ensure full coordination between the two leaders, as well as between the two countries' military commanders, to prevent any unwanted friction in Syria.

Their success has been resounding, as evidenced by the fact that the Russians did as they pleased in Syria and managed to quell the rebellion against the regime in Damascus, while Israel maintained full operational freedom when action was deemed necessary, for example to strike Iranian weapons convoys bound for Hezbollah.

Israel's problem, however, has never been with Russia's presence in Syria, but rather with the presence of Iran and Hezbollah, Moscow's partners in the campaign to salvage the Assad regime.

At the behest of the Russians, Iran thrust tens of thousands of fighters into the fray -- Iranian troops, Hezbollah guerrillas and Shiite volunteers from across the Middle East. These contingents currently represent a significant fighting force on the Syrian battlefield.

Now though, as the war appears to be ending on a victorious note for Putin, Assad and the Iranians, a new struggle begins in Syria over control and influence. Iran and Hezbollah have the upper hand in this struggle, due to their military presence on the ground in Syria.

Their goal is clear -- to turn Syria into a forward operating base to threaten Israel and perhaps even act against it, which they have already tried doing on numerous occasions along the border in the Golan Heights. According to recent reports from Syria, the Iranians are looking to build military bases there and Tehran is already in the process of building a missile production facility for Hezbollah in the country's northwest.

Clearly, Israel cannot tolerate an Iranian presence on its border, or even deeper inside Syria. The Russians don't seem to understand this position. They are willing to push the Iranians further from the Israeli border but they need the Iranians there to ensure continued stability in Syria. Therefore, the task awaiting Netanyahu in his upcoming meeting with Putin is to make him understand Israel's position. This task is especially important in light of Washington's unwillingness to play any kind of role in shaping Syria's future. (Israel Hayom Aug 23)

Will America Recertify the JCPOA, Abandon its Influence in the Middle East? By Eric R. Mandel

One of US President Donald Trump's most longstanding conservative critics, Bret Stephens of The New York Times, recently challenged pro-Israel conservatives on why they still support the president.

"The president's Jewish supporters are left to wonder why the Iran deal remains in force... Bashar al-Assad is stronger than ever, [and] the Israeli government is outraged by the deals the administration has cut with Russia at Israel's strategic expense."

While America, the media, and the world have completely focused on the presidential melodrama, America has taken its eye off potentially more consequential issues in the Middle East affecting national security interests for years to come. First among the essential decisions coming due is on Iran.

Will Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster and Secretary of Defense James Mattis convince President Trump, for the third time, to recertify Iranian compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in October, despite evidence of serious violations? Only UN Ambassador Nikki Haley seems inclined to oppose recertification, but she is not in the inner circle.

As Ambassador Eric Edelman and Gen. (ret.) Charles Wald, former deputy commander of US European Command, wrote in Politico, abiding

challenge as North Korea is today."

The first two certifications may have been understandable in light of a new administration getting its house in order while seriously evaluating the consequences of a difficult choice between abandoning a campaign promise to end a very bad deal, and the diplomatic and strategic consequences of withdrawal.

The problem now is that the president's political weakness makes any choice, especially decertification, a much higher hill to climb because of its controversial nature, Democrats having been generally supportive, while Republicans on the whole against the deal from the start. It is a political sword of Damocles hanging over an embattled president, no matter the merits. The president's political opponents include a growing number in Congress who would ordinarily back decertification on principle, but may choose to remain on the sidelines due to political expediency, avoiding any association with this administration.

Forcefully standing up to any adversary breaking an agreement is a long-term American diplomatic interest that should be beyond politics. Under normal circumstances transgressing UNSC resolutions on ballistic missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead alone would be more than reasonable grounds for renegotiation or decertification.

But these are not normal times. The impulse of the administration to avoid hard choices in this political climate and their inclination for less American involvement in the region overall may move them to again recertify compliance with the JCPOA, no matter the violations or longterm effect. Three times might well make it a fait accompli to never decertify the deal.

In this region America's allies will perceive it as profound weakness, sending a green light for an Iranian march toward the Syrian-Iraqi border, putting a final nail in the coffin of stopping a land corridor to the Mediterranean, joining Tehran to Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon.

Politico's chief international affairs correspondent Susan Glasser wrote, "Russia won in Syria thanks to President Barack Obama's inaction."

But now President Trump's State Department has handed Russia control of enforcing a cease-fire that directly endangers Israel and Jordan.

If Iran, Hezbollah, or Syria violates the Russian cease-fire, will America respond and impose consequences, or will this administration follow the Obama policy of creating vacuums undermining American national security interests for generations to come?

There is no reason to believe that Russia will do anything to impede its allies when they inevitably move toward the Israeli Golan Heights while continuing their ethnic cleansing of Sunnis in the southwest of Syria.

Israel has sent a high-level national security team to meet with its counterparts in Washington to talk about Israel's fear of a permanent Iranian/Hezbollah/Shi'ite presence mere kilometers from the Israeli Golan.

There is little doubt Iran will have a naval presence in Syrian territory on the Mediterranean, forever changing the region's security balance, but an additional land link to supply Hezbollah and their bases in Syria will put a noose around Israel from the north, creating conditions for a new war.

Iran's next logical step would be to create instability in a fragile Jordan, already home to millions of refugees. Its new relationship with Hamas could be a prelude to destabilization of the Hashemite dynasty, placing an Iranian ally like Hamas as a compliant friend in Jordan.

The threat to Israel from the west would be a war Israel could not avoid, as it is committed to militarily keeping the Hashemite Kingdom in power as a buffer with Iraq.

A tipping point could be reached if Iran coordinates with Hamas from Gaza, and Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Golan, to create three simultaneous fronts against Israel. You can imagine what the West Bank Palestinians would do with this opportunity to bloody a distracted Israel.

How would any of this be good for American national security

interests?

Should Israel trust anyone but itself to enforce the Syrian agreement? History clearly answers with a resounding “no.”

Just a few examples:

1. A unanimous UNSC Resolution 1701 after the Second Lebanon War declared: “[T]he disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon... no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State.” Today Hezbollah effectively controls Lebanon with 125,000 missiles, none ever stopped by the impotent UN Interim Security force.
2. American policy over many administrations, including the Obama administration, until 2013 was unambiguous: no Iranian nuclear weapons capability. The promise was turned into a lie as UNSCR 2231 and the JCPOA guarantee Iran the right to an unlimited nuclear capability in 10-15 years with international approval.
3. On to chemical weapons promises. Remember when secretary of state John Kerry told the world, “We got 100 percent of the chemical weapons out” while national security adviser Susan Rice claimed that president Obama got Syria to “verifiably give up its chemical weapons stockpile forever.”

So much for pieces of paper guaranteeing regional security.

Have Tillerson and Co. learned anything from the broken promises of the last administration, which American allies still point to as one of the fundamental reasons of lost trust for American guarantees? Is this administration interested in repairing American credibility?

While the media was focused on Fayetteville, Reuters reported that diplomats and weapons inspectors now believe that Syrian dictator Assad never gave up his chemical weapons.

Now Israel is supposed to trust an American-sanctioned agreement allowing Russian control of enforcing a cease-fire in Syria, the vital link in the Iranian land corridor. Considering that every negotiated cease-fire in Syrian eventually failed, Israel should be more than alarmed.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s upcoming fourth visit with Russian President Vladimir Putin reveals Israel’s concern and the address of the major power player in the region, Russia, because of the American-created vacuum in the region.

In the Middle East, the only thing worse than overzealous American intervention is American abandonment.

Obama was wrong when he claimed that Syria would become Russia’s Vietnam, as Russia beyond all expectations now has new and upgraded military bases in Syria, including the port in Tartus and air base in Latakia.

The question now in this season of American political turmoil is, can the Trump administration rise to the occasion, reasserting American influence in the region for its own national security interests?

Or will it follow the devastating counterproductive policy of president Obama’s abandonment of the region and its allies that first led to the rise of Islamic State and Russian dominance, and next to the more consequential Iranian dominance of the Levant. (Jerusalem Post Aug 21)

The writer is director of MEPIN™, the Middle East Political and Information Network™. He regularly briefs members of Congress and think tanks on the Middle East.

Where is the Middle East Headed? By Efraim Inbar

Since the Middle East events of 2011 (mis-labeled “the Arab Spring”), the region has been in turmoil. The inability of the Arab statist structures to overcome domestic cleavages became very clear. Even before 2011, Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, as well as the Palestinian Authority failed to hold together. After 2011, Syria and Yemen descended into a state of civil war. Similarly, Egypt underwent a political crisis, allowing for the emergence of an Islamist regime. It took a year for a military coup to restore the praetorian ancient regime. All Arab republican regimes were under stress. While the monarchies weathered the political storm, their future stability is not guaranteed.

Growing Islamist influence put additional pressure on the Arab states. The quick rise of the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq was the most dramatic expression of this phenomenon that spread beyond the borders of the Middle East. Despite its expected military defeat, the ideology behind the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and variants of radical Islam remain resonant in many Muslim quarters. Therefore, the pockets containing ISIS and al-Qaida followers, as well as the stronger Muslim Brotherhood are likely to continue to challenge peace and stability in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The Sunni-Shiite divide, a constant feature of Middle Eastern politics, has become more dominant as Iran becomes increasingly feared. The 2015 nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) between Iran and world powers has been generally viewed in the Middle East as an Iranian (Shiite, Persian) diplomatic victory. Shiite-dominated Iraq (excluding the Kurdish region) turned into an Iranian satellite as well, while the military involvement of Iran and its proxies on behalf of Syrian President Bashar

Assad in Syria appears to achieve the completion of a Shiite corridor from Iran to the Mediterranean. Iran continues its long-range missile program unabated and makes progress even in the nuclear arena within the limits of the flawed JCPOA. Its proxies rule Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, and Sanaa, signaling increasing Iranian clout.

In contrast, the Sunni powers display weakness. Saudi Arabia (together with Sunni Turkey) failed to dislodge Assad, Iran’s ally, in Syria. Saudi Arabian Crown Prince and Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman pushed Saudi Arabia into a more muscular posture, but failed to win the civil war in Yemen -- its backyard. Moreover, Riyadh has not been successful so far in strong-arming its small neighbor Qatar into dropping its pro-Islamist and pro-Iranian policies.

Egypt is an important Arab Sunni state in the moderate camp. Yet the traditional weight it has carried in the Arab world is lighter nowadays, primarily because of its immense economic troubles. Providing food for the Egyptian people is Cairo’s first priority. At the same time, Cairo is fighting an Islamist insurgency at home. This situation, which leaves little energy for regional endeavors, is hardly going to change any time soon.

Israel is an informal member of the moderate Sunni camp since it shares its main concern -- the Iranian quest for hegemony in the region. While powerful and ready to use force when necessary, Israel, under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is reluctant to interfere beyond its borders. This prudent approach is based on the understanding that Israel, a small state endowed with limited resources, lacks the capacity for political engineering in the Middle East. A growing Iranian presence near Israel’s borders and the reestablishment of an eastern front might become a serious military challenge.

The disengagement of the U.S. from the Middle East, accentuated by the foreign policy of then-President Barack Obama, continues. Under Obama, the attempts to engage Syria and Iran were generally viewed as weakness, perceptions that were reinforced by the signing of the JCPOA with Iran. The obsessive campaign to defeat ISIS, started by Obama and continued by President Donald Trump, primarily helped Iranian schemes. The new Trump administration has failed so far to formulate a coherent approach to the Middle East. Moreover, the gradual erosion in the U.S. capability to project force into the region amplifies the sense that America has lost the ability to play a role in regional politics.

The vacuum created by American feebleness has been filled to some extent by the Russians. The Russian military intervention in the Syrian civil war saved the Assad regime from defeat. It constrained Turkey’s involvement in Syria and helped Iranian encroachment in the region.

We also see growing Chinese interest. The ambitious One Belt One Road infrastructure project tries to tie the Middle East to Chinese economic and political endeavors. China inaugurated its first overseas naval base in Djibouti in July 2017. Located astride a crucial maritime choke point, the military installation is symbolic of its growing confidence as an emerging global power, capable of projecting military force and directly protecting its interests in the Middle East, Africa and the western Indian Ocean.

Yet extra-regional powers can hardly change the political dynamics in the region. The regional forces are usually decisive in determining political outcomes. Moreover, Middle East history provides many examples of external actors being manipulated by regional powers for their own schemes.

Adopting such a perspective on outsiders, and in view of the deep crisis in the Arab world, it stands to reason that the relations between Iran and Turkey will be a key factor in designing the future trends in the region. They are the two largest powers and they are both ambitious and capable enough to play a serious role. Despite the historical rivalry and the dividing Shiite-Sunni religious identity that could lead to competition, it seems that they are cooperating. Turkey and Iran have discussed possible joint military action against Kurdish militant groups. Both are siding with Qatar. Both are using Islamic motifs and anti-Israel positions to win hearts in the Arab world. We may well see an Iranian-Turkish duumvirate in the Middle East, but the statist interests and the different interpretation of Islam could push the two former empires into an adversarial relationship. (Israel Hayom Aug 24)

The Never-Ending Peace Process Farce By Isi Leibler

Unless the U.S. is willing to bite the bullet and finally confront Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, the forthcoming mission to the region by U.S. representatives Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt to “restart the peace process” on behalf of President Donald Trump may prove to be highly counterproductive.

Abbas is coming to the end of his reign. A brutal and corrupt dictator, he is determined that his legacy be that of an embattled “freedom fighter” committed to reversal of the Nakba, his ultimate objective being the restoration of Arab hegemony from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean

Sea. His means to achieve this necessitate the dismemberment of the Jewish state in stages through terrorism and international pressure.

Until now, he has basically ignored Trump's requests and demands. Incitement and calls for "resistance" via the media and imams urging Palestinians to kill Israelis and become shahids (martyrs) have reached a record high. Abbas himself whipped up religious hysteria based on the false cry that Jews were taking over and desecrating Al-Aqsa mosque, thus triggering the recent riots and encouraging further terror attacks. Children are brainwashed into regarding Jews as subhuman descendants of apes and pigs, propaganda reminiscent of and frequently replicated from Nazi sources.

The PA and its leaders continue honoring mass murders as freedom fighters, dedicating mosques, city squares, schools and other institutions in their names to commemorate their murderous acts.

Despite personal demands from Trump, Abbas has vowed that he will never close the Palestine National Fund, which provides generous pensions and massive financial awards for imprisoned or killed terrorists and their families, the amounts proportionate to the success of the terrorist act. Incarcerated murderers top the list with monthly payments of 11,000 shekels (more than \$3,000), which is augmented with \$25,000 if they are released from jail. This year, the fund has distributed \$345 million, comprising half of the \$693 million the PA receives in foreign aid. Thus the U.S. and European countries have effectively been providing funds to incentivize Palestinians to murder Israelis.

The U.S. Congress has now passed legislation to deduct an equivalent of these funds from aid provided to the Palestinians. The Europeans have taken no action, although Germany, the U.K. and Norway are "reviewing" the situation.

Abbas has responded by vowing to maintain the payouts, which he describes as "social welfare" and in recent weeks has even increased the payments.

His recent proclamation that security arrangements with the Israelis had been terminated was never effectively implemented. The reality is that the Abbas regime would be undermined if it annulled the security coordination whereby police constrain the enormous popular resentment by the people against the regime. While the security arrangements did reduce pressure on the IDF, the party with the most to lose if it were terminated would be the corrupt PA—which would then probably collapse or be taken over by Hamas.

Abbas has now condemned the U.S. as being biased and unfit to act as an intermediary.

The Israelis, on the other hand, appreciate that with the Trump administration in disarray, mixed messages have emerged in relation to the peace process. Trump repeatedly reaffirms that he stands by Israel, but he has yet to fulfill his promise to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley has been exceptionally forthright; the recent flow of statements from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and his departmental releases, however, are highly disconcerting and ominously reminiscent of the Obama era.

Tillerson informed the Senate that the Palestinians were moving forward positively in the peace process and had undertaken to bring an end to "martyr" payments. This was promptly denied. In July, the State Department released a report commending Abbas for having "significantly" addressed incitement. The report also stated that Palestinian terror was prompted "by a lack of hope in achieving Palestinian statehood, Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank, settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, the perception that the Israeli government was changing the status quo on the Temple Mount and IDF tactics that the Palestinians considered overly aggressive." Such observations could match those issued two years ago, at the height of then-U.S. President Barack Obama's diplomatic campaign against Israel.

This should not be interpreted as an indication that the U.S. has abandoned Israel. It merely reflects the divisions inside the administration, which were unlikely to have emerged had Trump not been diverted by the chaos in other areas. Fortunately, Tillerson has largely been excluded from direct engagement in peace negotiations and Trump has now authorized Kushner and Greenblatt "to restart the peace process." They will visit the region in the next few days.

To further complicate matters, both the Palestinians and Israelis are entangled in domestic turmoil. Abbas, the duplicitous rogue with the forked tongue, rules as a dictator and has created a culture of death. However, he is aged and his people realize that his time in office is limited. He has never been willing to make any meaningful concessions to Israelis, who were desperate to separate themselves from the Palestinians, and is now unlikely to make any moves in that direction. On the contrary, he has been actively strengthening relations with the Iranians and the Turks who now support him as well as Hamas. But the people are restless and there is already jockeying among those seeking to replace him.

Israelis are also facing domestic problems with the endless campaigns

to demonize Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and indict him on charges of corruption. Fortunately, he is unlikely to face major political pressures in relation to the peace process because the opposition would become a laughingstock if it sought to pressure him to make concessions to the PA.

In this context—setting aside the problem of Hamas in Gaza—it is impossible to envisage Trump's representatives making any progress. Kushner has even recently conceded that he feared that a realistic solution to the impasse at present could well be impossible.

The question is, how will the American representatives respond when, as is likely, Abbas gives them the thumbs up. Will they once again engage in the farce of an ongoing "peace process" that fails to bring Abbas to account? Or will they urge Trump to realize that it is time to state openly that the protective cover for the aggressive Palestinian leaders is over, and call on the world to cease providing them with the power to continue their incitement and terrorism against Israel?

They should outline an economic program, which Israel will certainly endorse, focused on building institutions and creating infrastructure that will enhance the living standards of Palestinians, few of whom have benefited from the huge amounts of foreign aid that their corrupt leaders siphoned off into their own bank accounts. They should also encourage the moderate Arab states to press for a new leadership that would be willing to make peace with Israel.

However, should they decide, yet again, to paper over reality and continue "pursuing peace," the visit will actually prove to be counterproductive and Israel by itself will be compelled, as was the case hitherto, to look after its own interests. (Jerusalem Post Aug 24)

Warning Signs for US Jews By Amnon Lord

New York is home to the Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect, whose director, Steve Goldstein, finds it appropriate to "make the voice heard" of the Jewish teen killed in the Holocaust on the most controversial matters in U.S. politics. Goldstein has turned Anne Frank into a political voice, as if she were expressing an opinion on current events.

For Goldstein, Frank is first and foremost an up-to-date, political radical in the Huffington Post mold. The main picture on the center's website shows a portrait of Frank surrounded by Syrian refugees. She even has her own Twitter account, #saveeveryanne. In recent days, the center's website has functioned as the official center for re-starting the Left's protests against the extremist Right. Frank even shows more sympathy for the "responsible" conduct of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un than she does for U.S. President Donald Trump.

Despite the growing protests against him, Goldstein is an authentic representative of a prominent sector whose collective personality is seen in vengeful rage against Trump, obsequiousness to the Left and to Muslims, and fear.

Because America is entering, and in fact for the past few years has already been in, an era of intolerance. Characteristically, educated American Jews are very confused, and unable to balance between Right and Left. Because flags with swastikas are not good for Anne Frank -- that is, for college graduates -- they are raising an outcry about the "extreme Right" at every turn. We still have not heard how Anne Frank "behaved" at Smith College or at Berkeley or at Columbia -- did she try to hide her Judaism? Did she dress up as Amy Schumer and dye her hair yellow-purple? We don't know. Goldstein hasn't filled us in.

Since swastikas in the streets of America are horrific, they go to the other extreme, which includes Black Lives Matter, BDS groups, and Linda Sarsour, the director of the underground resistance to Trump who also rejects Zionists and other Jewish states. When former President Barack Obama was in office, left-wing organizations and the media confronted American Jews with a choice: Either they were for Obama, or they were for Israel. The clear choice was Obama.

Given the threat to U.S. stability and democracy, American Jews will find themselves in the same situation as European Jews, particularly those in France and Britain. In most EU nations, those noted for their liberalism -- in contrast to the barbarians from Poland and the Danube -- Jews cannot walk around freely. They have to hide any outward sign that could identify them as Jews. American Jews did not raise a fuss in recent years when the air ran out for the Jews of France and they started fleeing. Their president denied time after time that there was a ghost of anti-Semitism in the slaughter at the Hyper-Cacher supermarket in Paris two years ago, and his spokespeople insisted it was just a coincidence that the victims were Jewish.

Last weekend, a poll was published in the U.K. which shows that 40% of the country's Jews feel unwanted there, and that one out of every three British Jews is considering leaving. A decade ago, the city of Malmo in the south of Sweden was emptied of the few thousand Jews who lived there because of Islamist-leftist pressure that won the backing of the

mayor.

In America, the liberal-left combo will lead to the Jews being punished -- not in European terms, but in American terms. This combination tends toward totalitarianism and is linked with the black and Muslim communities. Even now, under pressure, the Jews are starting to break into three groups: the "good" Jews, the "bad" Jews, and the ones who hide their identity or emigrate to Israel -- Jews or liberals of "Jewish descent." The good Jews are asked to attack Israel and Zionist racism, lest they be boycotted and attacked, as Jews had to do in the former Soviet Union. The bad Jews are asked to support Israel through thick and thin. They have self-respect and respect for themselves as a nation. This is an interesting group. Will this group grow, as we saw in France and Britain, and will its members veer right, or will the Trump confusion thin its ranks? One thing is certain: They won't bring the Democratic Party back to the center. (Israel Hayom Aug 21)

The Future of Spanish Jewry By Caroline Glick

Should Jews leave Spain? Following last Thursday's jihadist attack in Barcelona, Barcelona's chief rabbi, Meir Bar-Hen, told a reporter that he is urging his community members to flee Spain for Israel.

"It tell my congregants: Don't think we're here for good, and I encourage them to buy property in Israel," he said.

"This place is lost," he warns, adding, "Don't repeat the mistakes of Algerian Jews, of Venezuelan Jews. Better [get out] early than late. Europe is lost."

The Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain rejected Bar-Hen's warning. It issued a statement last Thursday saying its member have "full confidence in the security forces who work daily to prevent fanatics and radical Muslims from inflicting pain and chaos on our cities."

Bar-Hen's warnings and the Federation's statement of faith in Spain's security services are not mutually exclusive. Spain's security forces probably are doing their best to protect the people of Spain from Islamist terrorists. And the future of the Jews in Spain may very well be doomed.

The data certainly back up both claims. Bar-Hen called Spain "a hub of Islamist terror for all of Europe." And he is right.

Soren Kern, an expert on jihad operations in Europe at the Gatestone Institute, noted in a 2015 report that Spanish security forces arrested nearly 600 jihadists in the decade that followed the March 2004 al-Qaida train bombings in Madrid. But the pool of potential recruits to jihadist cells keeps growing as a result of mass immigration from the Middle East and North Africa. Since 2007, the Muslim community in Spain doubled in size. With two million Muslims in Spain, the community now constitutes 4% of the overall population.

Those numbers can be expected to continue to skyrocket. With Italy and Greece working to block mass flows of illegal immigrants to their shores, the number of migrants seeking to enter Europe through Spain is growing.

According to Kern, in the first seven months of 2017, the number of migrants illegally entering Spain from the sea is triple what it was in all of 2016. The number of migrants attempting to enter through Spain's heavily fortified land border with Morocco is similarly growing steadily, and violently.

This month the situation along Spain's border with Morocco has become particularly fraught. Kern reports that on August 7, more than 300 mostly- sub-Saharan Africans ambushed Spanish and Moroccan security forces and stormed the border crossing at El Tarajal; 186 migrants made it onto Spanish territory.

The next day, "more than a thousand migrants armed with spears and rocks attempted to breach the same crossing."

But it isn't only Muslims from the Middle East and North Africa that are pushing their way into Spain.

Radical Muslims from France moved to Spain in significant numbers following the French government crackdown in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo massacre in 2015. According to Spanish security officials, they came to Spain because the security services' attitude toward radical Islam is more accommodating.

From the perspective of Islamic State (ISIS) recruiters, native Spanish converts to Islam are even more attractive targets of jihadist recruiters than Muslim-born radicals. According to official figures cited by Kern, there are more than 50,000 converts to Islam in Spain.

One such convert, Antonia Saez Martinez, also known as "Ali the barber" because he worked as a hairdresser, converted to Islam in July 2012. By October 2012, he was already writing in his diary of his desire to join the forces of jihad against non-Muslims.

As Kern notes, Martinez's journal confessions were entered into court documents in 2016 after Martinez was arrested the previous year. He was charged for leading a jihadist terrorist cell.

The Martinez cell intended to carry out multiple kidnappings of random

civilians, dress them in orange jumpsuits and behead them in front of video cameras. They also intended to blow up a Jewish bookstore in Barcelona.

Another Muslim convert, Gonzalo Cabezas, was also a member of Martinez's group. Cabezas was arrested after he was seen taking pictures of tourist sites in Barcelona.

The fact that the Martinez cell picked specifically intended to attack Jewish institutions is notable. It shows that like jihadists from Mumbai, Paris and across the world, Islamic terrorists in Spain target Jews specifically.

And this brings us to Bar-Hen's foreboding about the future that awaits Spanish Jewry.

The problem for Spain's Jews is that to a large degree, the general public shares the radical Islamists' hatred for Jews. A 2014 survey of European antisemitism by the Anti-Defamation League found that Spain is the third most anti-Semitic country in Europe, behind Greece and France.

A Spanish Foreign Ministry-commissioned survey from the same period found that 58.4% of Spaniards believe "Jews are powerful because they control the economy and the mass media."

The number rose to 62.2% among university students and 70.5% among those who are "interested in politics."

The data also showed that levels of Jew-hatred rose with education levels and that Spaniards who identify themselves as leftists are more anti-Semitic than Spaniards who identify themselves with the Right.

The survey findings revealed that hostility toward Israel was not a major cause of Jew hatred. Most of Spain's self-described anti-Semites cited the Jewish religion or customs or no reason at all for their hatred of Jews. Only 17% said they hate Jews because of Israel.

For its part, the Spanish government is doing everything it can to make its Muslim community feel at home. This is particularly the case in the separatist regions of Catalonia, the Basque region and Andalusia, where the largest concentration of Salafist Muslims is located.

For instance, in June The Wall Street Journal published an article titled, "The Spanish Left dreams of a deconquista." The article chronicled the efforts of leftists in Andalusia to transform the Cordoba Cathedral into a mosque, out of respect for its Muslim roots.

The article notes that after being built by the Visigoths in the 5th century, with the 8th century Moorish conquest the cathedral was transformed into a mosque. Following the "Reconquista" of Catalonia from the Moors by King Ferdinand III in 1236, the mosque was reconsecrated as a church and has served as a cathedral ever since.

Efforts to seize the cathedral from the Catholic diocese have gathered force since 2013, as the leftists, who control the Andalusian regional government, have worked with Muslim groups to have the local government seize the cathedral from the Catholic Church.

According to the Wall Street Journal report, "In March the city council issued a report arguing that the diocese does not legally own the cathedral. 'Religious consecration is not the way to acquire property,' it said. The site's true owners 'are each and every citizen of the world from whatever epoch and regardless of people, nation, culture or race.'"

These efforts by Spain's leftists, and in particular separatists in the Basque, Catalanian and Andalusian regions, to embrace Spain's Islamic past, have gone hand in hand with ever increasing efforts to demonize Israel through both anti-Semitic characterizations of Israel and lavish funding of anti-Israel NGOs, including groups directly associated with terrorist organizations. In other words, hostility toward Israel is not merely a staple of Spain's foreign policy, but has become a salient issue in its domestic and local politics as well. And much of this vitriol merges with an underlying, deeply held hatred of Jews.

In that vein, last month NGO Monitor released a startling report on Spanish funding of radical anti-Israel NGOs. In 2015, Spain provided 5.1 million euros to such groups, including groups associated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine terrorist organization.

But whereas 26% of the funds came from Spain's central government, 29% came from the Andalusian regional government. And 10% came from local city councils. Barcelona's city council provided more than 5% of the total.

This brings us back to Rabbi Bar-Hen's warning to his fellow Spanish Jews. It is true that today, Jewish life continues on in Spain. Barcelona's Jewish quarter, across from the site of last week's terrorist rampage, is filled with tourists and community members. The two kosher restaurants across from where the terrorist in the van mowed down pedestrians were left unscathed.

But the trajectory of Spanish demography, culture and politics all point to a far different future. And it is hard, if not as a practical matter impossible, to think of what Spain's 40,000 Jews can do to change anything that is happening. (Jerusalem Post Aug 22)