

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*

J Street needs to be honest with Americans. If it opposes Jews living in certain places because they are Jews then why obfuscate on this? If they want to quote an extremist diplomat, J Street should at least name that diplomat and not hide

Commentary...

J Street Uses a Pro-Terrorist EU Bureaucrat to Malign Jewish Neighborhood By Moshe Phillips

J Street, in a mid-November email appeal, quoted an unnamed "top EU diplomat" in its tirade against an Israeli government call for bids for new homes in a nearly 30 year-old Jerusalem neighborhood, Givat Hamatos, where Ethiopian Jewish and Russian immigrants live.

What's worse than J Street's vitriol against the construction of Jewish homes, is that the name of the EU functionary was left off of J Street's rant, probably intentionally, because he is an anti-Israel extremist who earlier this year gave outright support for terrorists. According to Israel's Foreign Ministry, he stated that Palestinian Arabs affiliated with blacklisted groups remain eligible to participate in projects funded by the EU.

J Street is the controversial Washington, D.C., based Jewish pressure group that, judging by its actions, seems to have been created specifically, and almost exclusively, to lobby for an independent Palestinian state. J Street maintains, as a central theme, that Jews do not have a right to live wherever they choose and must be transferred out of their homes and neighborhoods in wide swaths of Judea-Samaria where Israeli citizens have lived for nearly fifty years.

The EU bureaucrat who opposes Jewish homes in Givat Hamatos in southern Jerusalem, and who was quoted by J Street, is a German named Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff.

Von Burgsdorff previously was the head of the EU's delegation to South Sudan and in a May 8, 2020 JTA article, he was identified as heading the "EU mission to the West Bank and Gaza Strip."

The Times of Israel news website reported on May 7, 2020 that an Israeli Foreign Ministry official stated that the letter by "von Burgsdorff, constituted a 'violation of all our agreements with the European Union'."

The Times also reported that explicitly due to von Burgsdorff's letter, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz harshly rebuked the EU saying "we demand that the EU immediately end all support, financial or otherwise, for any entities that support terrorism whether directly or indirectly."

Debra Shushan, J Street's Director of Government Affairs, signed the email that was titled "BREAKING: Outrageous steps by Netanyahu to expand settlements." In the email, J Street made the wild claim that "this week the Netanyahu government announced it will begin the tender process for the major new settlement of Givat Hamatos -- a move which a top EU diplomat branded a "de facto annexation attempt." Construction in Givat Hamatos is part of a deliberate settlement movement strategy to cut off Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem from the West Bank Palestinian city of Bethlehem."

The reason why J Street's Shushan left out von Burgsdorff's name should be clear: he has been widely discredited as a supporter of anti-Israel terrorism.

Another issue with J Street's email that must be confronted is the use of a place named "East Jerusalem" when no such place has ever actually existed in history. The name "East Jerusalem" is an artificial construct that supporters of the Arab cause use in their propaganda in order to make it appear as if that part of the city is an intrinsically Arab area that Jews are illegally entering. In reality, there are Jewish neighborhoods throughout the eastern, western, northern, and southern parts of Jerusalem.

It's a shameful thing when Jewish organizations choose to use such geographically inaccurate, and politically loaded, language. At the time anti-Israel extremists created the name "East Jerusalem" it was for one reason: they sought to rip Israel's capital apart in order to defeat Israel. "East Jerusalem" does not actually exist and what they are really saying is that Jerusalem's Old City and its surrounding neighborhoods are not part of Israel or part of Israeli Jerusalem itself. The original and oldest parts of Jerusalem are what they falsely label "East Jerusalem."

his identity due to the fact that he has been accused of supporting terrorists.

The political climate of the Middle East has changed remarkably in the last several years and J Street doesn't seem to like it at all. The United Arab Emirates has two synagogues and yet if J Street would get their way, synagogues in Judea and Samaria would be dismantled and the Jews in these neighborhoods would be forced from their homes.

Haven't we had enough of Jews being told where they can and cannot live? What was gained by the Israeli government destroying Jewish homes and synagogues in Gush Katif in Gaza in 2005 to hand over Israeli held land in the name of a "peace" that never came about? The Judean Hills, since the times of antiquity considered to be the heart of the Land of Israel, should, especially, be an area where Jewish families feel secure in the idea that their homes will never be destroyed. (IsraelNationalNews.com Nov 22)

Obama's Simmering Resentment of Benjamin Netanyahu

By Jim Geraghty

The final chapter of Barack Obama's third memoir, *A Promised Land*, begins with an extensive review of the former president's often-testy relationship with his Israeli counterpart, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Claims that Obama was explicitly anti-Israel or anti-Semitic were always hyperbolic, but his assessment of his dealings with Netanyahu reveals the bristling disdain that fueled perceptions he was not a stalwart or reliable ally of the Jewish state.

Obama is a careful writer, and he would never risk something as incendiary as an argument that AIPAC controlled or exercised undue influence over U.S. politics, or that its members had "dual loyalty" toward both Israel and the United States. But in his description of the group and its sway, he doesn't really keep a safe distance from those arguments, either:

Members of both parties worried about crossing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a powerful bipartisan lobbying organization dedicated to ensuring unwavering U.S. support for Israel. AIPAC's clout could be brought to bear on virtually every congressional district in the country, and just about every politician in Washington — including me — counted AIPAC members among their key supporters and donors. In the past, the organization had accommodated a spectrum of views on Middle East peace, insisting mainly that those seeking its endorsement support a continuation of U.S. aid to Israel and oppose efforts to isolate or condemn Israel via the U.N. and other international bodies. But as Israeli politics had moved to the right, so had AIPAC's policy positions. Its staff and leaders increasingly argued that there should be 'no daylight' between the U.S. and Israeli governments, even when Israel took actions that were contrary to U.S. policy. Those who criticized Israeli policy too loudly risked being tagged as 'anti-Israel' (and possibly anti-Semitic) and confronted with a well-funded opponent in the next election.

As he gets down to the specifics of his relationship with Netanyahu, his resentment continues to show:

The noise orchestrated by Netanyahu had the intended effect of gobbling up our time, putting us on the defensive, and reminding me that normal policy differences with an Israeli prime minister — even one who presided over a fragile coalition government — exacted a domestic political cost that simply didn't exist when I dealt with the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, Canada or any of our other closest allies.

Time, and the intervening drama of the Trump administration, have made memories of Obama's worst traits fade somewhat. But in *A Promised Land*, Obama's habit of insisting he's the only adult in the room, the lone voice of reason trapped between two straw-man extremes, returns with a vengeance. He even paints members of his own party as hypocrites and cowards who say they want Middle East

peace but are never willing to stand up to the Israeli government:

One afternoon, Ben [Rhodes] hurried in late for a meeting, looking particularly harried after having spent the better part of an hour on the phone with a highly agitated liberal Democratic congressman.

"I thought he opposes settlements," I said.

"He does," Ben said. "He also opposes us doing anything to actually stop settlements."

In another passage, Obama explains how he believed the peace progress should begin:

We knew that Netanyahu would probably resist the idea of a [settlement] freeze. . . . [Netanyahu] would complain that the good-faith gesture we'd be asking from the Palestinians in return — that Abbas and the Palestinian Authority take concrete steps to end incitements to violence inside the West Bank — was a great deal harder to measure. Given the asymmetry in power between Israel and the Palestinians — there wasn't much, after all, that Abbas could give the Israelis that the Israelis couldn't already take on their own — I thought it was reasonable to ask the stronger party to take a bigger first step in the direction of peace.

Here a reasonable person might argue that Obama's belief that the stronger and more powerful side in diplomatic negotiations is morally obligated to begin by making concrete concessions in exchange for symbolic gestures is in fact the root of the problem. Powerful people and institutions did not become powerful by giving away something for nothing. What's more, the uniquely vulnerable position Israel occupies — the threats it has faced on all sides for its entire existence — and the Palestinian Authority's historical unreliability as a negotiating partner make its wariness of conceding too much in the peace process entirely understandable.

The portrait of Netanyahu that Obama paints — he writes that the prime minister's "philosophy neatly aligned him with the most hawkish members of AIPAC, as well as Republican officials and wealthy American right-wingers" — is a particularly unflattering one, and he closes on a dark note, suggesting that Netanyahu and other leaders in the Middle East never seriously intended to seek a lasting peace:

I couldn't help feeling a vague sense of disquiet. The speeches, the small talk, the easy familiarity — it all felt too comfortable, almost ritualized, a performance that the four leaders had probably participated in dozens of times before, designed to placate the latest U.S. president who thought things could change. . . . In the months to come, I'd think back often to my dinner with Abbas and Netanyahu, Mubarak and King Abdullah, the pantomime of it, their lack of resolve.

There's just one glaring complication to Obama's cynical interpretation, and that's that Netanyahu is still leading Israel, and in just the past few months his government has signed major diplomatic agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan. This would suggest that he is more than willing to sign treaties, as long as he feels certain that they won't harm Israel's security interests. Obama's failure to facilitate diplomatic breakthroughs between Israel and Arab or Muslim states was not, it turns out, the fault of Netanyahu's intransigence; it was the fault of his own unworkable approach to the problem. No wonder he's still grumbling about it. (National Review Nov 20)

Anti-Semites Combating Anti-Semitism: An Orwellian Farce

By Ruthie Blum

If George Orwell is spinning in his grave these days, he's likely rolling so hard with laughter that it's bringing him and the rest of us to tears. An upcoming webinar on Jew-hatred is but one of many recent examples of phenomena that even the prescient social critic, whose essays and novels predicted with chilling accuracy the world that has unfolded since World War II, couldn't have anticipated.

The Dec. 15 event—called "Dismantling Antisemitism, Winning Justice"—is being hosted by the left-wing, anti-Israel NGO Jewish Voice for Peace, and moderated by JVP and JVP Action deputy director Rabbi Alissa Wise.

Its equally radical co-sponsors are JVP Action, If Not Now, United Against Hate, Jewish Currents, Foundation for Middle East Peace, Arab American Institute, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, the Jewish Vote, and the People's Collective for Justice and Liberation.

According to JVP, anti-Semitism "is used to manufacture division and fear, [and] while anyone can fuel it, [it] always benefits the

politicians who rely on division and fear for their power."

The group didn't have to specify which "politicians" it has in mind, but it's obvious that they are in the camp of U.S. President Donald Trump. The stated aim of the online happening is to "explore how to fight back against anti-Semitism and against those that seek to wield charges of antisemitism to undermine progressive movements for justice."

Again, the reference is clear: Trump's team and voters are simultaneously guilty of anti-Semitism and of hurling false allegations of anti-Semitism at innocent progressives, whose only wrongdoing is to seek peace and justice.

To engage in this "discussion," whose purpose is to reach a foregone conclusion—namely, that anti-Semitism is spread by the Republican right—the sponsors of the conference enlisted four apt anti-Israel panelists: Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.), columnist Peter Beinart, Temple University professor Marc Lamont Hill and University of Illinois at Chicago academic Barbara Ransby.

Each of these participants protests against being labeled anti-Semitic, while steadfastly singling out Israel for condemnation—a key component of the "working definition of anti-Semitism" formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, of which the United States is a member.

In addition, all the sponsors and panelists, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, engage in "intersectional" activism that involves supporting the BDS movement and siding with the worst elements of Palestinian society. The irony of their shunning of a democratic Jewish state on behalf of an entity with an appalling human-rights record that includes the abuse of women and gays doesn't seem to register with, let alone bother, any of them.

In general, and through this anti-Semitism conference in particular, these paragons of "peace and justice" embody and purvey Orwell's "doublethink" and "newspeak"—terms he invented for the dystopian and totalitarian universe he so deftly portrayed in his 1949 novel, 1984—are alive, well and kicking with a vengeance.

Let's start with Tlaib, a member of the notorious "Squad" of young female Democratic congresswomen. The progressive from Michigan, a socialist of Palestinian descent—there's an oxymoron for you—has many claims to fame. Among these is a T-shirt she proudly sported with a drawing of a map of "Palestine" completely covering the entire state of Israel. It's an unmistakable message: that the Jews don't belong anywhere in the Jewish state within any borders. In other words, Zionism in her eyes is illegitimate at its core.

Then there's Beinart, author of *The Crisis of Zionism*. A self-described "proud Jew" who was recently hired by *The New York Times* as a contributing opinion writer to further the paper's anti-Israel agenda, he recently went so far as to bash the Muslim-majority countries who signed the Abraham Accords. Yes, the symbol and darling of the anti-Israel left, who has renounced the Zionism he never possessed, penned a lengthy piece in *Jewish Currents* about the normalization deals, which he titled "Israel's Repressive Diplomacy."

Hill—author of *We Still Here: Pandemic, Policing, Protest, and Possibility*—told TMZ earlier this month that anyone who voted for Trump is a racist. The scholar and TV analyst was fired two years ago from CNN, of all places, after he delivered a speech at the United Nations in which he called on the international community to boycott and divest from Israel.

"We have an opportunity to not just offer solidarity in words, but to commit to political action, grass-roots action, local action and international action that will give us what justice requires and that is a free Palestine from the river to the sea," Hill said, during the U.N.'s "International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People."

Like Tlaib's map-of-Palestine T-shirt, Hill's use of the phrase "from the [Jordan] River to the [Mediterranean] Sea," is code for the elimination of the Jewish state.

As for Ransby, well, her anti-Israel credentials are just as impressive as those of her fellow panelists. An open champion of BDS, she has called Israel a "project of apartheid and ethnic cleansing," and praised terrorists who slaughtered Jews.

For this collection of haters to hold and take part in a panel on combating anti-Semitism is, as U.N. Watch director Hillel Neuer tweeted on Sunday, "like asking Nicolás Maduro to discuss how to fight narco-tyranny."

Neuer, whose monitoring of the United Nations stands him in great stead to see and point out the ludicrousness of this kind of endeavor, is absolutely correct. Orwell's summation of the

phenomenon, however, explains how such unflinching audacity is made possible in the first place.

In the words of 1984 protagonist Winston Smith, the process of doublethink is: "To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it..."

Comfort can be taken in the far-reaching ridicule that the ad for the anti-Semitism panel elicited on social media, and the extensive coverage of its peculiar makeup in the mainstream press. By the time that the Zoom conference actually occurs, it will have been talked about ad nauseam, rendering it even more predictable and pointless than it was certain to be.

Orwell would be pleased to know that not everybody has succumbed to what his main character referred to as the "act of hypnosis," whereby "war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength and $2 + 2 = 5$."

"Anti-Israel!" may be the new "pro-Israel," but proponents of the bait-and-switch don't seem to be camouflaging their Jew-hatred as well as they'd hoped. (JNS Nov 24)

Pompeo Made History in Psagot By Dan Diker

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's recent visit to Israel's Psagot winery, his condemnation of boycott, divestment and sanctions movement as anti-Semitic and recognition of products made in Jewish communities east of 1967 lines as "made in Israel" were not "Trump's gifts" to Israel as The New York Times reported on Nov. 21. Nor was Pompeo acting as an "extremist leader of the Yesha Council of Settlements instead of the foreign minister of the superpower," as Haaretz wrote in its Nov. 20 editorial. Rather, Pompeo's recognition of Jewish communities in Area C of Judea and Samaria and his condemnation of anti-Semitic product labeling and BDS warfare were the U.S. administration's affirmations of human rights, in this case, Jewish human rights. They were also expressions of much needed moral clarity.

Regrettably, political propagandists and various epistemological authorities in Israel and abroad have for years politicized Israel's fundamental legal and historical rights in service of political positions that have today undermined and delegitimized Israel's right to exist as the democratic nation state of the Jewish people.

This intensifying and increasingly mainstreamed "cancel culture" that has targeted Israel for moral and ideological annihilation has negated collective Jewish collective liberty and sovereignty that were uniquely affirmed twice last century, by both the League and Nations and its successor, the United Nations, via its founding charter. That formal international legal recognition of Jewish historical rights formally noted "close settlement of the land" West of the Jordan River would anchor Israel's Declaration of Independence.

The regrettable reflexive response by some journalists at home and many more abroad to the U.S. administration's unprecedented recognition of the legality of Israel's presence beyond the 1949 armistice lines overlooks, ignores and frequently defies these internationally sanctioned Jewish historical, legal and collective human rights. In so doing, misinformed and misguided denunciations of Secretary Pompeo's embrace of Israel misrepresent the historical record at best, and disfigure it at worst. These errors also falsify the complex reality of the current legal and diplomatic rights of Israel and its Palestinian neighbors.

Pompeo's visit to Psagot also reflected the agreed legal and diplomatic framework of the 1995 Oslo Accords that were internationally witnessed and guaranteed by the United States, Russia, Egypt, Jordan, Norway and the European Union. The accords affirmed in no uncertain terms that Israeli and Palestinian Authority construction and building rights in areas under their respective jurisdictions would continue until the final-status negotiated disposition of the territories. That was the legal and diplomatic backdrop for Pompeo's declaration of a U.S. policy of "reality-based diplomacy."

It is regrettable that some uninformed and other willfully blind journalist commentators took the liberty of recasting Psagot and other Jewish communities east of the 1949 armistice lines as "illegal." And in the tradition of Orwellian doublespeak, these same media experts have legitimized as "freedom of political protest and speech" BDS's

"cancellation warfare" and support for Nazi-era labeling of Jewish products. Its worth remembering that in May 2019, the German parliament cited product labeling as being central to Germany's legal determination that BDS is anti-Semitic.

Instead, Pompeo's visit and his statements were correctives to these errors of judgment in reporting and commentary. Facts still matter. Pompeo's visit reminds the international community of a truth that every Israeli government since 1967 has attempted to convey to the world, unsuccessfully: Psagot and Petach Tikvah share the same legitimacy. The secretary's visit marks the first time that a United States administration has formally recognized the equality of Jewish sovereignty.

This U.S. recognition of collective Jewish human rights parallels the principle of secure Jewish collective life that every Israeli government has recognized since the Jewish people's reestablishment of sovereignty in 1948. The international community formally recognized those same rights to Jewish sovereignty in 1920 at the international San Remo Conference. The principal powers of the League of Nations formalized San Remo's declarative recognition in 1922 of the right of the Jewish People to "reconstitute their National Home in Palestine."

The League of Nations further called for "close (Jewish) settlement," establishing and unanimously approving the Mandate for Palestine, that anchored the Jewish collective human right to collective freedom and sovereignty and ultimately led to Israel's Declaration of Independence and policy, under every Israeli government since 1967, sanctioning rights to Jewish community building on both sides of the 1949 armistice lines on state land.

The United States' top diplomat apparently did his legal and diplomatic homework. Apparently, he and his advisers studied the above-mentioned international legal documents. His visit to Israel's Psagot Winery and his accompany condemnations of BDS and anti-Semitic product labeling reminiscent of the World War II era break the "glass ceiling" regarding formal U.S. recognition of Israel's legal rights to sovereignty.

The United States' and Israel's alignment on Israel's rights to sovereignty safeguards the most fundamental Jewish collective human right today. Unfortunately, the cynical discrediting of Secretary Pompeo's alignment with the policy of all Israeli governments since 1967 reflects the lack of understanding of its critics rather than the well-reasoned positions of the current U.S. State Department. (Israel Hayom Nov 24)

The Iran Nuclear Deal is Dead. Let it Stay that Way

By Jeff Jacoby

Americans always had their doubts about the Iran nuclear deal.

From the start, Iran breached its commitments under the nuclear deal.

In July 2015, the United States, Britain, China, France, Germany, Russian, and the European Union agreed to lift economic sanctions in exchange for a rollback of Iran's nuclear weapons program. The deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, was a centerpiece of President Barack Obama's foreign policy. The deal would be a boon "for the United States, for our allies in the region, and for world peace," Obama argued. It would prevent Iran from getting the bomb and ensure that its nuclear activities were "exclusively peaceful."

The public didn't share his enthusiasm. In a Pew Research poll that fall, just 21 percent of Americans supported the JCPOA, only 1 in 5 were confident that Iran would live up to the deal's terms, and a mere 18 percent thought it would lead to improved relations between Iran and the United States.

They were right to be skeptical.

Far from leading Iran to, in Obama's words, "get right with the world," sanctions relief and the unfreezing of Iranian assets encouraged Tehran's regime to redouble its belligerence. It entered Syria's civil war in support of Bashar Assad, aiding in the murder of tens of thousands of civilians. It armed Houthi rebels in Yemen and subsidized Hezbollah terror operations in Lebanon and Europe. It seized US Navy vessels, blindfolding the American sailors and ransacking their boats. It violated Security Council bans on arms trafficking and ballistic missile activity. And it repeatedly called for Israel's annihilation.

From the start, Iran breached its commitments under the nuclear

deal. It amassed stockpiles of enriched uranium beyond the permitted limits, deceived and stonewalled international inspectors, and illicitly transferred advanced centrifuges to underground bunkers. Even before President Trump's 2018 decision to pull the United States out of the JCPOA, Iran's promises had proved to be worthless. It has since declared openly that it will not comply with the deal's terms, but its cheating began well before Obama left the White House. Now it is Trump who is leaving the White House, and President-elect Joe Biden has a decision to make.

On the campaign trail, Biden condemned Trump's "reckless" withdrawal from the JCPOA. But he has also said he would rejoin the deal only "if Iran returns to strict compliance" with its terms. That isn't going to happen.

For more than 40 years, the theocrats who rule Iran have broken diplomatic agreements, Security Council mandates, and international law. It was folly to imagine that the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism, one of the bloodiest, most destabilizing forces on the planet, would become a responsible member of the world community if only America and its allies would agree to shower it with tens of billions of dollars in cash and relieve the pressure of sanctions. It would be even greater folly to return to the JCPOA and expect anything to change.

Iran has dramatically increased its stockpile of enriched uranium, a brazen violation of the nuclear limits it agreed to. Above: Iranian president Hassan Rouhani tours a nuclear facility in April 2019.

Much of Trump's foreign policy was indeed reckless and harmful, but his legacy in the Middle East proved to be remarkably successful. Abandoning the nuclear deal and re-imposing sanctions starved Tehran of resources that might otherwise have fueled its terror and ballistic missile operations. It helped restore US credibility in the region, and incubated a strategic coalition uniting Israel and the Sunni Arab states in the Gulf, for whom resisting Iranian aggression is an existential priority. That coalition blossomed spectacularly with the signing of the Abraham Accords, the peace agreements between Israel, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, and with the normalization agreement between Israel and Sudan, the third-largest Arab nation.

Obama had insisted that war was the only alternative to the Iran deal. But jettisoning the deal didn't lead to more war. It led to more peace.

The JCPOA was misbegotten from the outset; it did nothing to make the world safer or Iran less dangerous. Biden's Democratic allies may want him to reverse Trump's withdrawal, but America's allies in the Middle East are imploring him not to.

Good advice. To all intents and purposes, the Iran nuclear deal is dead. Biden's best bet, and the world's, is to leave it that way. (Boston Globe Nov 25)

The Major Significance of Netanyahu's 'Secret' Saudi Trip

By Fiamma Nirenstein

Despite the purposeful fog surrounding it, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's meeting on Sunday night with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the seaside town of Neom shines with historical brightness.

Though another of the many Saudi princes, Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, denied in a tweet denied the existence of the meeting, everyone now knows that it took place. Everyone also takes it to indicate that the Saudis are on the verge of joining the coalition of Muslim-majority countries—Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and also Sudan—that have reached peace agreements with Israel. The meeting also signified Riyadh's most urgent order of business: to urge the incoming administration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden not to reenter the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran from which U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew in 2018.

According to the official version of the visit, the Saudis only met Pompeo. But Israeli media reported that Netanyahu flew to Saudi Arabia on a Gulfstream IV private jet owned by Israeli businessman Udi Angel—a plane that the prime minister had used for previous secret trips abroad.

Netanyahu took off at about 6 p.m. on Sunday from Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion International Airport, and flew south along the eastern coast of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula before heading to Saudi Arabia's northwestern Red Sea coast. He was accompanied by Mossad director Yossi Cohen.

One can surmise that Netanyahu, with the assistance of Pompeo,

discussed the terms of a forthcoming normalization agreement with a country that has been the historical-ideological leader of Islamic fundamentalism—the land of Osama bin Laden, the Hajj and the Casbah—the place where every Muslim is obliged to make a pilgrimage in his lifetime to purify his soul.

Nothing could be more revolutionary. Saudi Arabia is the leading Sunni state in the Middle East, along with Egypt. It is also home to those who previously engaged in the worst bans against and delegitimization of the Jewish state, but then, with its peace plans of 2002 and 2007, opened the door to peace under certain conditions.

Israel spotted and tried to take advantage of this slightly open door.

Today, the real question is whether or not the preconditions for a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have expired, as they have on the part of the other Muslim countries that recently signed normalization agreements with Israel—through the abandonment of the burden of a "two states for two people" prerequisite.

The peace put in motion through the Trump-brokered Abraham Accords was made possible as a result of the mutual self-interest of Israel and many Arab nations—to create a bloc against a nuclearizing Iran (and imperial Ottoman designs of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan), while advancing and flourishing technologically, to enable them to be the vanguard of the world's 1.8 billion Muslims. It is a vision that Pompeo and Netanyahu are confident cannot be stopped by the new American administration in name of the old Palestinian paradigm.

Netanyahu has been pursuing this kind of regional peace over the course of many years, openly and behind the scenes. It's remarkable how he determined he has been about what seemed like just as an impossible dream as his ultimately having won the battle to undo the JCPOA, which former U.S. President Barack Obama signed and in which he placed faith.

The revelation of Netanyahu's trip to Saudi Arabia irritated Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz—his "unity government" coalition partner slated to rotate with him as premier—who reportedly was kept in the dark about the whole thing. Gantz referred to Netanyahu's having engaged in such a meeting without informing the Cabinet or defense establishment as "irresponsible."

Gantz, meanwhile, decided to appoint a state commission of inquiry into the \$2 billion deal for Israel's purchase of submarines from Germany, after allegations that Netanyahu may have profited from it. Netanyahu—who has been interviewed as a witness, but not a suspect, in the case—on Monday called Gantz's move a political attempt to remove him from power.

There is no Israeli politician who doesn't view these intersecting events as a pretext for early elections.

Despite accusations on the part of his rivals to the contrary, however, Netanyahu has been concentrating with incredible determination on two main issues. One is COVID-19, the rate of which is decreasing, even as children return to school. And despite the many and varied policy arguments within the so-called "Coronavirus Cabinet," Israel has reverted to its previous place in the world as a country handling the pandemic relatively well. This has enabled Israelis to wait for the imminent vaccines with a measure of tranquility.

The second is regional peace, which Pompeo's visit to Israel—as part of his 10-day, seven-nation tour to Europe and the Middle East—has strengthened. Indeed, even as many viewed it as a kind of final trip after Trump's defeat in the Nov. 3 election, the secretary of state reiterated his administration's dedication to the "peace to prosperity" vision.

This vision is not only strategic, but contains an apt ideological element, which can be seen in the choice of the name "Abraham" for the peace accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, as well as between Israel and Bahrain.

Abraham is the father of the three monotheistic religions. If Israel is accepted by the Islamic "ummah" as part of its original heritage—if the three religions are going to stand together against the dogmas of Islamist warfare—then Trump, Pompeo and, of course, Netanyahu can say that they have given a genuine and durable gift to humanity. (JNS Nov 25)
