



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*

**Trump is Right:
Settlements don't
Impede Peace** By
Jeff Jacoby

The world's restless fixation with where Jews live has flared up again.

On Monday evening, Israel's parliament passed a law authorizing the government to legalize thousands

of homes built in the West Bank, in many cases on land against which there are claims of prior ownership. The measure allows the homes to remain, while compensating the previous owners with their choice of an alternative parcel of land or a payment equal to 125 percent of the land's value.

The new law, highly controversial in Israel, is sure to be challenged in court. Many experts predict that Israel's aggressively independent judiciary will strike the law down. It wouldn't be the first time Israel's government has lost a litigation battle — and if it comes to that, the country's elected officials will bow to the court's authority. Just days ago, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, following orders from the Supreme Court, sent in security forces to remove hundreds of Jewish residents from Amona, an unauthorized hilltop community in the West Bank.

Stories about Israeli settlements invariably generate breathless international headlines, as though there is something uniquely newsworthy about Jews in the Jewish state building homes and schools to accommodate a growing population. When those homes and schools are constructed in the West Bank and East Jerusalem — land Israel seized from Jordan in the Six Day War 50 years ago — there is inevitably much handwringing about the harm they pose to the prospect of peace with the Palestinians and the "two-state solution" on which an end to the conflict supposedly depends.

Actually, the two-state solution is a chimera. The explicit goal of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas is the elimination of the Jewish state, not the building-up of a Palestinian counterpart. That is why they have rejected multiple offers of statehood, why they insist that Jews cannot live in any territory claimed by Palestinians, and why the Palestinian Authority regards the sale of land to Jews as a capital crime punishable by death. When Israel relinquished all of Gaza to Palestinian control, the new owners used the territory not to develop a constructive and peaceful new State of Palestine, but to launch rockets and terror raids against the state of Israel next door.

It takes a curious derangement to conclude from this that all would be well in the Middle East if only Israel would stop enlarging Jewish neighborhoods. Yet that is the mindset of the UN and much of the international community. It was also the mindset of the Obama administration, which rarely missed an opportunity to condemn Israeli settlements — going so far as to facilitate a Security Council resolution declaring even East Jerusalem, with its storied Jewish Quarter, "occupied Palestinian territory."

To its credit, the Trump administration rejects that paradigm. The Republican platform adopted last summer made no reference to the "two-state" unicorn, and Trump's ambassador to Israel firmly backs the expansion of Jewish communities in the historic Jewish heartland. Last week the White House spokesman, while advising caution toward the construction of new settlements, made a point of emphasizing that the new president and his foreign-policy team "don't believe the existence of settlements is an impediment to peace."

Bizarrely, those words were spun in the media as a sign that Trump had come to embrace Obama's way of thinking about Israel and the Palestinians. That interpretation strikes me as thoroughly wrong-headed — and when Trump warmly welcomes Netanyahu to Washington next week, I expect it to seem more outlandish still.

Anything can change, of course, especially given Trump's volatility and impulsiveness. But on the evidence so far, Obama's frostiness toward Israel is anathema to the new administration. Palestinian rejectionism, not Jewish housing, has always been the insurmountable impediment to ending the Middle East conflict. Obama could never bring himself to acknowledge that fundamental truth. I'm guessing Trump won't have that problem. (Boston Globe Feb 8)

Events...

May 21-28

2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem and to mark this extraordinary year the BAYT Brotherhood is running a second mission — in addition to its annual mission in December — to celebrate Yom Yerushalayim. The BAYT Yom Yerushalayim Mission to Israel will incorporate the World Mizrahi mission, plus add additional touring and Shabbat in Jerusalem. For information email Larry Zeifman at LWZ@Zeifmans.ca

Commentary...

A Historic Day By Haim Shine

The Judea and Samaria Settlement Regulation Law approved by the Knesset on Monday is a major milestone in the history of the repopulation of the land of Israel.

The 1967 Six-Day War that was forced on us led us back to the historic land of our forefathers. As if in a dream and with a heavy price, we returned to ancient Jerusalem, Nablus, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Beit El, which we read about in the Bible. The land on which our ancestors lived, to which we always hoped and prayed to return, became real within a few days. The ancient historic memory was linked to reality. We didn't take someone else's land; we retook ownership of our forefathers' land.

A small group of lovers of the land began the wonderful settlement enterprise. None of the people who made their way from Netanya to the train station in Sebastia near Nablus in 1975, including me, believed that one day half a million Jews would be living in Judea and Samaria. Who would have believed that the day would come when traffic lights would be put up there to regulate the flow of traffic? Anyone who travels through Israel will soon discover that we are living what the prophets of Israel predicted. Homes, vineyards, elderly men and women gazing out at the beauty of our land, and children playing in the streets.

On Monday, the Knesset said loud and clear that the settlers and redeemers of the land are pioneers who are bringing the great Zionist vision to fruition. A clear statement about our basic right to the land of Israel, a right that many nations deny, including an idiotic attempt to argue that we don't even have any ties to Jerusalem. Yesterday's statement was clear enough to echo throughout the world. We are not apologizing for returning to Zion against all the odds. We heard the proposal of the head of the Palestinian village of Silwad, who gave voice to the Palestinian narrative, which holds that we Jews should all go back to Europe. Recall all the remarks by Arab MKs who explained that their main problem was with all the kibbutzim and cities built on land the Arabs fled in 1948. Their message is clear, and our response to it must be blatant.

Without a doubt, the Settlement Regulation Law is problematic. "Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness" (Isaiah 1:27). It is vital to settle the land without hurting the private property of Palestinian landowners. For the sake of future generations of Jews, too, so no one will be able to claim that they stole the land. The state has enough land in Judea and Samaria on which to build large, flourishing communities.

The outpost regulation law will probably be overturned by the High Court of Justice, but without a doubt the law is a catalyst that will eventually lead to a solution for disputed land. Indeed, there is already a solution that the Supreme Court will certainly agree to, since it has been recognized and implemented elsewhere. Patience is essential, and pays off. (Israel Hayom Feb 7)

Room for Cautious Optimism By Dror Eydar

It's natural that part of the media, hostile to the settlements and dreaming of an Islamist terror entity that will look down from the hilltop over central Israel (which is what a "Palestinian state" would mean), will be thrilled at the White House's declaration about construction in the settlements. Since President Donald Trump was elected, certain observers and pundits have been locked into a pathological mood known as "We told you so!" Don't worry! When he was sworn in, I urged everyone to lower their expectations. The new president isn't a messiah -- he's here to work, unlike his predecessor, whose believers messianized him to save humanity and left behind fewer living human beings and fewer functioning states than when he started.

We still don't know what Trump's policy on Israel will look like, although his statements and some of his appointments were reassuring to many who suffered under former President Barack Obama's policy. In any case, we must not cave to the misleading picture that has been created by various reports that Trump has gone back to the U.S.'s traditional anti-settlement policy. Certainly not.

For the first time in a long time, the White House has declared that the settlements are not an obstacle to peace. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that in his first meeting with Obama, he was warned not to "build a single brick" beyond the Green Line, including in Jerusalem. The ruins the Obama administration left behind include UNSC Resolution 2334, which determined that the settlements have "no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution and a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace."

In his last speech as secretary of state, John Kerry didn't talk about the problems in Russia, China, Africa, at the South Pole, or on Mars, but rather stood there like a J Street or Peace Now preacher and spent an hour explaining why the settlements are the root of all the evils of the world.

Both Obama and Kerry said their support for the Security Council resolution was not "anti-Israel." The opposite -- they were thinking of what was best for us, because they wanted to safeguard the "two-state solution." According to them, the thing that was preventing that amazing solution, which no one before them had ever thought of, was that same Jewish settlement in the places the Jews had dreamt of returning to for 2,000 years.

Indeed, Trump, please take note: The settlements are not an obstacle to peace. The declaration that "the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders may not be helpful in achieving that goal" sounds like lip service. Compare that to the fierce, unequivocal condemnations from the previous administration. Moreover, it sounds like construction within existing settlements is totally acceptable. The borders of the settlements are outlined, and they're big enough to accommodate a million additional Jews.

Professor Eugene Kontorovich, an expert in international law, said that the White House statements mark "a huge change of policy, in which the U.S. broadly accepts all building within settlements, including those settlements outside of 'blocs.'" Kontorovich added that while the media was trying to portray the announcement as a check on construction, it was actually a "broad, historic green light." By the way, I looked with a fine-tooth comb and couldn't find anyone saying anything about what wasn't mentioned: the Palestinians.

Nevertheless, patience is in order: Donald Trump may be inscribed in large gold letters in the history of our people as one who, at a critical historic moment, aided the return to Zion; however, the future of the settlements doesn't depend on the U.S. or the world, but on us alone -- our determination, our hold on the land, and our strengthened awareness of our simple, natural right to our land. (Israel Hayom Feb 5)

Israel, Settlements, and the Media By John Podhoretz

Two important things happened tonight: Donald Trump reversed Barack Obama's policy toward Israel's settlements, and the New York Times headline on the story about it was "Trump Embraces Pillars of Obama's Foreign Policy." #1 is obviously the matter of the greatest importance. #2 is meaningful because it's part of a pattern of reporting on the Trump administration by the mainstream media that features breathless and hurried assertions of fact on a policy that turn out not to hold water once they are examined.

First, to Trump and Obama and Israel and the settlements. On Thursday night the White House released the following statement: "The American desire for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians has remained unchanged for 50 years. While we don't believe the existence of settlements is an impediment to peace, the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders may not be helpful in achieving that goal. As the President has expressed many times, he hopes to achieve peace throughout the Middle East region. The Trump

administration has not taken an official position on settlement activity and looks forward to continuing discussions, including with Prime Minister Netanyahu when he visits with President Trump later this month." What this letter does, in effect, is return the United States to the status quo ante before the Obama administration—specifically, to the policy outlined in a letter sent from George W. Bush to Ariel Sharon in 2004. In that letter, Bush said, "In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final-status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949."

This language was an acceptance of the reality that the most populous Israeli settlements beyond the pre-1967 borders would certainly remain in Israeli hands at the end of any successful peace negotiation with the Palestinians. And according to the officials who negotiated the matter, primarily Elliott Abrams of the Bush National Security Council (and full disclosure: my brother-in-law), it was understood that the expansion of existing population centers due to natural growth (families getting larger, people moving in) should not be considered a violation of the idea that there should be no new settlements. For if, like New York City, Ariel gets more populous, its land mass does not increase in size, just the number of people living there.

The Obama administration did not like these ideas, and reversed them. Its conception of a "settlement freeze" was that it be a freeze on the number of settlers as well as the number of settlements. Add new apartments to Ariel, and you were "expanding the settlements."

The Trump language puts an end to that idea. It says "the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders may not be helpful." This returns U.S. policy to the notion that the physical acreage holding settlers should not increase but that the number of settlers is not at issue. This is a wholesale shift in America's approach.

Astoundingly, the New York Times completely missed this. Its article states: "In the most startling shift, the White House issued an unexpected statement appealing to the Israeli government not to expand the construction of Jewish settlements beyond their current borders in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Such expansion, it said, 'may not be helpful in achieving' the goal of peace."

This is, at best, shockingly ignorant of existing U.S. policy. Indeed, the Trump statement can be read as a radical break even from Bush: as the international law scholar Eugene Kontorovich pointed out on Twitter, it doesn't even endorse the two-state solution. It merely calls for "peace."

These hurried reports filled with inaccuracies have become standard issue over the past two weeks, driven by breathless and overly fast reporting whose assertions turn out either to be ignorant or wrong. For example, Peter Alexander of NBC News earlier on Thursday tweeted this: "BREAKING: US Treasury Dept easing Obama admin sanctions to allow companies to do transactions with Russia's FSB, successor org to KGB." After 5,800 retweets and assertions that this demonstrated Trump's fealty to Putin's Russia, Alexander tweeted this: "NEW: Source familiar w sanctions says it's a technical fix, planned under Obama, to avoid unintended consequences of cybersanctions."

The number of retweets of this correction: 240.

There are multiple examples of this pattern, too many to recount here. At a time when the country needs the most accurate and exact reporting on the issues at hand out of Washington due to the hyper-partisan moment we're living through and the administration's rather tenuous connection to fact, institutions that would never have made such basic mistakes 30 years ago—because they would have taken the time to talk to several sources before going into print or on TV many, many hours later—are now hurrying things onto the Internet when they don't really know what is going on. Rather than clarifying things, the media are muddying them and making them worse. (CommentaryMagazine.com Feb 2)

The Jewish State Debate By Dror Eydar

The Judea and Samaria Settlement Regulation Law is the result of a compromise, a reaction to the actions of left-wing organizations that serve as the long arm of the EU and regional Arab nations in a bid to deny Jews the normal life they deserve in the most natural place for them to live.

The fact that the status of these lands has not been regulated over the past 50 years has created a vacuum into which the High Court of Justice entered, defining the area as "territories under belligerent occupation." A 2012 report authored by former Supreme Court Justice Edmond Levy recommended Israel legalize the majority of outposts, but its findings have yet to be implemented.

This law, therefore, was drafted after the fact, in order to deal with an impossible reality in which some of what has been built may face demolition.

The law stipulates that plaintiffs claiming ownership of the land can be made to accept compensation. This is an important stipulation because the Palestinian Authority has made selling land to Jews an offense punishable by death or a life sentence in prison.

The law allows Palestinian land owners to "blame" Israel for making them receive monetary compensation. For this reason, this law does not facilitate "land theft," as compensation settlements for construction invading private land are common the world over.

Contrary to prevalent disinformation, the law does not speak of the future. It does not legalize outposts, nor does it change the legal status of any community, or annex any land. It retroactively deals with construction inside existing settlements. That's the least that can be done at this point.

As expected, the enemies of the settlement enterprise went into their usual doomsday frenzy.

The U.N. Security Council worked to undermine the settlement enterprise even before the law was passed -- it needs no incentive to target Israel. The International Criminal Court in The Hague already sees the Jewish existence in Judea and Samaria as a crime, as its legal perception is different and it has "a different order of discussion," as former Chief Justice Aharon Barak once said.

Those opposing the return to Zion do not need excuses, as they hold a principled contrary position. Theirs are not the words we live by.

"Everyone" seems to agree that the High Court will strike the Settlement Regulation Law down. This overwhelming consensus is based on the sad acceptance of the fact that the legislative and executive branches have lost their ability to govern.

The public votes in elections with aim of deciding the political debate. The justices at the High Court then step forward and place their worldviews and values above the public's legitimate ideas and values.

It is clear to all that those petitioning the High Court are not concerned with the property rights of the Arabs in Samaria, but rather their desire to decide the political debate. Why must the High Court intervene in these issues? How does it contribute to bolstering its public standing?

At the end of the day, this is not about legal or land disputes. This is about the future of the heart of Israel, which waits to be subjected to the sovereignty of the Jewish state. This debate also touches on a deeper issue - that of our identity as a people returning to its ancient homeland with the desire to settle it: Who are we?

Still, admittedly, a clear decision is not always beneficial. Sometimes you have to let processes run their course slowly. Little by little. Will we know how to be patient? (Israel Hayom Feb 8)

Necessary and Constitutional By Yossi Fuchs

The new Judea and Samaria Settlement Regulation Law is necessary because large areas of the territories were never properly registered in land registries. Moreover, the properties listed in the Jordanian land registry were not properly surveyed, resulting in thousands of buildings being built on privately owned land.

Under Israeli law, if a person builds on someone else's land unintentionally and in good faith, he or she may stay on the property as long as the landowner is properly compensated.

The new law has a similar provision because, under Palestinian law, selling land to Israelis is punishable by death, making it all but impossible to buy the rights to contested plots. The law is constitutional and is in line with Israeli values. It is as valid as the other property laws passed by the Knesset because Israel does not consider itself to be an occupying power in Judea and Samaria and it believes that giving Israelis the same rights as Palestinians advances the state's vision.

The law serves a worthy purpose and protects the rights of those who built a home in good faith or with the state's encouragement. It also serves a worthy purpose because it allows the residents to stay on the land if it lies near or in an already built community, rather than just theoretically allowing Palestinians to reclaim it.

The law strikes the right balance because it only allows the state to temporarily expropriate land and does not change the status of the landowners. In fact, thanks to the law, landowners who were previously unable to exercise rights on the land will now be eligible for compensation that exceeds the value of their property.

Is the law compatible with international law? I believe it is. Israel has never applied the Geneva Conventions to Judea and Samaria, and rightly so, because Israel cannot be an occupying power in land that the League of Nations designated for a Jewish national home. Moreover, Israel liberated the land from illegal Jordanian occupation.

Israel has upheld international humanitarian law in Judea and Samaria according to the Geneva Conventions and has even gone beyond what it is required to do. Thus, the Israelis who live there and are considered part of the local population should not be treated any differently from the

Palestinian population.

It is time to end the discrimination against Israelis there when it comes to property law. International law allows residents to stay on land where they settled so long as this was done in good faith and that proper compensation is paid. That is why the provisions in the new law are not a form of confiscation that violate Article 46 of the Hague Convention.

The claim that the law allows the state to seize land even when this is not done for security reasons and in violation of the international norms Israel has accepted is not true. The legal definition of confiscation implies permanent confiscation, but the law speaks of temporary measures only. The issue of confiscation is only relevant when someone who has been using the land is suddenly denied access to it. Temporarily taking property from a Palestinian who has never had any hold on the land and has no way of exercising his rights on it cannot be considered confiscation.

On a side note, this is not the first time that the Knesset has passed legislation that applies to Judea and Samaria. Exercising Israeli law passes constitutional muster and is permitted under international law.

The writer is an attorney and the chairman of the Legal Forum for the Land of Israel. (Israel Hayom Feb 8)

The Right of Annexation By Nadav Shragai

A powerful wind is now shaking the settlement enterprise and bringing with it new possibilities and new calculations. The new administration in Washington is still learning and "consolidating," but the settlements are surely no longer a thorn in its side: The radical Left succeeded in forcing the national "right-wing" government, though the High Court of Justice, to evacuate a 20-year-old settlement, and it is now investing its efforts in additional "Amonas."

And there is also the Judea and Samaria Regulation Law, which is not really a milestone, but a byroad. The High Court of Justice will probably close it to traffic soon.

Byroads of this kind, of craftiness and chicanery, which have been used for decades to establish the settlement project as the most correct and the most Zionist in the heart of the land of Israel, have exhausted themselves. The time has come to get back on track, to raise the bar with the United States, to try to achieve more.

In 1949, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel, saying that even though the decision would receive only one vote of support at the United Nations -- Israel's -- this was the deciding vote. In 1981, Prime Minister Menachem Begin applied sovereignty to the Golan Heights. Now it is Judea and Samaria's turn.

In my opinion, the "Palestinian state minus" paradigm to which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred was from the outset nothing more than a maneuver that bought us time, a type of smoke screen. The world never bought it, and rightly so. It also brought a building freeze in the settlements and in Jerusalem upon us, and mainly an unrealistic expectation on the part of much of the world that the idea would be realized.

Netanyahu was once the best at providing arguments against the 1993 Oslo Accords. His writings then, including "A Place Among the Nations," remain convincing today. But now the world asks us: How can you promise the Palestinians a state while at the same time building and expanding Jewish communities in the "occupied" territories that are seemingly meant to be handed over when it is established? How would that work out?

I don't believe it does.

On Feb. 15 at the White House, we must tell President Donald Trump and the world that we are returning to our basic truth: our right to the land of Israel. We are not the conquerors of our own land. The opposite is true: We have emancipated it from the occupation of others. Trump needs to hear that our interest in Judea and Samaria is first and foremost of a historical-religious-nationalist-conscious nature, and that security is a tool for realizing that right, and not the opposite. The Palestinians stick to their truth and speak in the language of rights. We should also go back to that.

The "settlement bloc" paradigm created by former Prime Ministers Ehud Olmert and Ehud Barak, the aim of which is the implementation of the Palestinian state paradigm, should also be taken off the agenda. Its real aim is to return to the 1967 borders, with a few moderations. It was born in sin on the Left. It would be best if that is where it remains.

This about-face should be accompanied by expansive construction and the historical step of annexation -- the application of Israeli law over the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria, as we did in Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. This is necessary to make it clear to ourselves and to the world that we will not be confused again. (Israel Hayom Feb 7)

Restoring American Deterrence By Ephraim Kam

U.S. President Donald Trump's warning that all options are on the table in response to Iran's ballistic missile test last week reintroduces the possibility that the U.S. may take military action against Iran. Although the warning pertains to Iran's missile program, similar warnings were issued by past administrations, specifically with regard to the nuclear program and the possibility that Iran will get a nuclear weapon.

During President Barack Obama's administration, the U.S.'s approach to military action in Iran changed: As long as no real progress on a peace deal was made, the administration said it would not rule out the military option. Similar to Israel's position on the issue, the Americans warned that all options were on the table. The two administrations were the only ones to use such rhetoric, as other countries were concerned about the risks involved.

Even before the nuclear deal was signed in July 2015, the differences in the U.S.'s and Israel's approaches became clear. The Americans claimed that even if the military option was on the table, conditions were not yet ready for its execution: First, military action would not stop the nuclear program, only delay it for a few years; second, Iran would respond by attacking the U.S. and its allies, further destabilizing the Middle East; and third, military action would push Iran to accelerate its nuclear program and give it a reason to obtain a nuclear weapon. For these reasons, the administration also opposed an Israeli strike, fearing it would drag the U.S. into the fray. On the other hand, Israel did not oppose striking Iran, and criticized the American administration for undermining the credibility of a military threat by stressing the time to carry it out has yet to come.

In talks leading up to the nuclear deal, the Obama administration made little mention of the military option out of fear it would spoil the mood. As the agreement took shape, and especially after it was reached, the administration explained that military action against Iran would be inefficient, and even warned Israel against such an act. Only for a brief period did officials in the American defense establishment claim that the deal actually justifies military action when necessary.

The fact that the Obama administration took the military option off the table hurt its credibility on the Iranian issue, as Tehran realized that as long as the agreement is in force, the U.S. would not strike it. The deal also undercut a credible military threat by Israel, as it was clear that as long as the agreement was valid, Israel would be unable to mount a military strike, as such a move would harm its relations with the U.S. and Europe. Such a scenario would have left Israel to face Iran by itself, without American support.

Trump's rhetoric that his administration will not be as "nice" to Iran as his predecessor's was, that Iran is "on notice," and that all options are on the table, was meant to first and foremost to restore American deterrence, which has been grossly eroded. Still, it is reasonable to assume that Trump will not be quick to order an attack, for several reasons: Iran has yet to violate the nuclear deal; the other world powers that are partners to the deal will oppose an attack; and for now, the agreement's advantages outweigh its disadvantages.

But the rules of the game have changed. Iran does not know what Trump is planning, and it will therefore have to be careful and understand that as long as an unpredictable leader sits in the White House, the likelihood of an American strike on nuclear sites -- possibly even missile facilities -- if it violates the deal is bigger than it was in the past. It is also possible that Trump would not oppose a potential Israeli strike as fiercely as his predecessor did, as a means of bolstering deterrence further.

The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies. (Israel Hayom Feb 6)

Why Trump has Fans in Israel By Efraim Inbar

Israel is a very pro-American country, maybe the most pro-American in the world. As in the past, Israelis followed the U.S. presidential election with extreme interest, amazed that the American political system did not produce more palatable presidential candidates.

In a poll taken following Donald Trump's victory, 83% of Israelis said they consider Trump a pro-Israel leader; by contrast, another poll showed that 63% view Barack Obama as the "worst" U.S. president with regard to Israel in the last 30 years. Indeed, after eight years of tense relations with the Obama administration, most Israelis are relieved to see a friend in the White House. Moreover, on issues that are important to Israel -- Iran and the Palestinians -- there seems to be a greater convergence of views than before.

Trump's stance on Iran is particularly important now, as Iran recently held a military exercise to test its missile and radar systems after the Trump administration imposed sanctions on Tehran for a recent ballistic missile test. When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Trump in Washington, D.C. next week, it's worth following what the leaders will say

about the Iran nuclear deal and what kind of role the U.S. will play in Israel going forward.

Netanyahu fought tooth and nail against the nuclear agreement that the Obama administration negotiated with Iran. Trump slammed it as "one of the dumbest deals ever." Senior members of his administration share this view and are apprehensive of Iranian intentions.

Obama gave a high priority to negotiating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and was obsessed with Jewish settlements in the West Bank. He estranged Israelis by not distinguishing between Israeli building in Jerusalem and the West Bank. He often dished out "tough love" -- as he called it in addressing a Jewish synagogue in Washington. Trump and his advisers, by contrast, seem more relaxed on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, understanding correctly that it is hardly the most important problem in the chaotic Middle East. Even the White House criticism of the Israeli announcement of new settlement building plans -- calling them not helpful to the peace process, but adding that they are not impediments to peace -- is a positive change in Israeli eyes.

Furthermore, Trump's promise to move the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem seems more sincere than such promises by previous presidential candidates. Throughout his campaign and short presidency, Trump has shown that he follows through on what he says he is going to do, and is more concerned with fulfilling his promises than flattering the electorate. Israelis cannot understand why other countries refuse to accept their choice of Jerusalem as their capital and place their embassies in west Jerusalem -- which is not disputed land. Picking David Friedman -- an Orthodox pro-settlement Jewish American who owns an apartment in Jerusalem -- as ambassador to Israel lends credence to Trump's promise.

Trump's positions on certain issues that draw tremendous criticism at home and abroad are less problematic for Israelis. For example, the idea of building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border to stop illegal immigration is viewed in Israel as the sovereign right of a nation to prevent undesirable elements entering its territory. Israel has built walls and fences to stop the infiltration of terrorists and illegal immigrants from neighboring countries and the Palestinian territories.

Trump's diatribes against Muslims are unseemly, but Israelis can understand where he is coming from, since they have been subject to Muslim terrorism and Arab state aggression for 100 years. The political correctness of Obama's years -- where he refused to even acknowledge radical Islam as the source of most of the terrorism in the world -- infuriated Israelis.

Thus, Trump's courage to speak his mind is appreciated in Israel, even if some of his statements border on vulgarity. It is refreshing to the Israeli ear to hear an American presidential candidate not beating around the bush, but rather addressing issues without the constraints of liberal political correctness. This quality has earned Trump some popularity in Israel.

Israelis know that part of the Washington bureaucracy, especially in the State Department, and some of the media and academic elites are not friendly to Israel. They welcome a president who dislikes this bureaucracy and is critical of these elites.

We should not forget that since the late 1960s, Israelis have preferred Republican presidents. Yitzhak Rabin, who served as Israel's ambassador to Washington from 1968 to 1973, openly supported the Republican presidential candidate, Richard Nixon. Similarly, Israeli preferences for Mitt Romney over Obama were abundantly clear. In comparison to Europeans and many current American Democrats, Israelis are largely nationalist and conservative. The conservative Israeli Likud party has won more elections than any other party since 1977.

Israelis have followed the decline of American international fortunes during the Obama years with alarm. It frightens them to see America so weakened. Thus, a Trump that wants to make his country great again by increasing defense spending and standing tall against America's enemies abroad (especially Iran) strikes a responsive chord with Israelis.

Finally, Trump's family biography endears him to Israelis. His daughter converted to Judaism and belongs to an Orthodox community. Trump has Jewish grandchildren that he is proud of. His Jewish son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is an important adviser. Living in New York may have sensitized him to the sensibilities of the Jewish community. Moreover, he has always expressed strong support for the Jewish state.

After eight years of the distant Obama in the White House -- who used his last days in office to lash out at Israel at the United Nations -- we should not be surprised that Israelis are, with some trepidation but even more hope, looking forward to working with the new American president. While the euphoria displayed by some right-wing circles in Israel is not warranted, an improvement in bilateral relations is a realistic expectation. (Israel Hayom Feb 9)