



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*

with deterrence implications. We can assume the tunnel was built to test the barrier, probe its capabilities and examine ways to bypass it. The fact that it was detected signals to the other side that it's now facing a formidable challenge, and that vast sums of

Commentary...

Blue and White is Waving Nothing More than a Toy Pistol

By Mati Tuchfeld

The leaders of Blue and White insist on beating their heads against a brick wall. Every few days, the senior members of the party step up their tone against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but he refuses to be moved. By ignoring them, he is driving them crazy. On Monday evening, Benny Gantz and Gabi Ashkenazi threatened openly to take Israel into an election within two weeks if a state budget were not submitted.

Netanyahu's response – crickets. A political crisis that could have made headlines and taken over the agenda was left on the sidelines, mostly because of the prevailing belief that Blue and White is waving nothing more than a toy pistol. Netanyahu can keep ignoring them, and the ultimatum will die on its own.

For months, the Likud and Blue and White have been fighting over every possible issue. But recent polls have shown Netanyahu that the party with which he is sharing power and to which he is supposed to hand over leadership of the country in a little over a year from now is simply not worth his attention. After supporting a bill to put restrictions on protests, Blue and White lost its base, the same base it begged to stay when it fully backed the ills of the legal system, the tricks of the attorney general, and the maneuvers of the State Attorney's Office.

Polls that delve deep indicate that Blue and White effectively no longer exists. It's single-digit projected electoral strength in media polls is mainly the result of inertia and the lack of viable alternatives on the Left, but there is no doubt whatsoever that the situation will be the same at the moment of truth when an election is finally announced. As of now, Netanyahu has no intention of doing what Gantz is demanding and submitting a budget for 2021, and according to his people, the only budget that will be put on the table in December will cover 2020. In March, if the ultimatum dries up and disappears, the prime minister will have another opportunity before the November 2021 rotation to call an election.

Netanyahu prefers to deal with Naftali Bennett and Yamina than Blue and White. The more Gantz and Ashkenazi attack him, the more Netanyahu attacks Bennett. In an election campaign, he might have to embrace the Yamina leader and promise that he will play a major role in his next government, and express his regret that Bennett didn't join the current one. He can then count the votes that will return to the Likud as voters seek to shore up the prime minister against those who oppose him.

Netanyahu also doesn't want to hold an election when the Likud and Yamina are close in their numbers of projected seats. He knows that if he does, it will lead the media to embrace Bennett and cause him major headaches in forming a government. Netanyahu is also doing a better job of handling attacks from the Left than from the Right, which is why Bennett is being pushed into a corner with the message of a new alliance between Yamina and Yesh Atid. It's not impossible that this is why Netanyahu suddenly decided to permit the weekly demonstrations outside the Prime Minister's Residence to continue, which only strengthen him in his own camp. (Israel Hayom Oct 20)

New Terror Tunnel Shows Hamas is Preparing for War

By Yoav Limor

The detection by the Israeli military of a new infiltration tunnel from Gaza into Israel is the first operational success of the subterranean barrier built along the Gaza border.

This tunnel was pinpointed due to sensors in the barrier which detect digging or efforts to damage the barrier itself. From this perspective, this wasn't just a preventative operation, but also an event

money and resources will be required if it wants to breach the barrier and penetrate Israeli territory.

Along with this tactical-operational achievement, however, this event sheds light on two other matters, the first one operative and the second strategic.

Operatively, it appears the terror organizations in Gaza (chief among them Hamas) haven't abandoned the tunnel idea. Despite the barrier—which should be completed in around five months—they believe they can dig into and infiltrate Israel, and are determined to do so at almost any cost. Consequently, we could see efforts to dig deeper, even as deep as the aquifers, or a shift in the focus to the border between Gaza and Egypt, and from there into Israel, in places where the barrier still hasn't been built.

Strategically, the event indicates that efforts are being made in Gaza to prepare for war. In recent months, the broad assessment within the defense establishment is that Hamas is weak and deterred, and does not want an escalation. The terrorist organization's actions on the ground have also been a testament: It didn't join the fighting after the assassination of senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist Baha Abu al-Atta last November and has restrained itself following numerous incidents for which it has retaliated in the past. Hamas has also sought to promote ceasefire talks with Israel in any way possible.

These assessments are still valid. Hamas does not want a war and prefers a resolution that allows it to rehabilitate the Strip and provide calm and prosperity (relatively speaking; it is Gaza after all) to its residents. At the same time, however, Hamas is absolutely unwilling to abandon the idea of makawmeh, or resistance, which is the bedrock of its existence. And despite the lip service it is paying Egyptian mediators, the Qataris and the United Nations, Hamas was and remains a terrorist organization dedicated to the destruction of Israel.

Therefore, when Hamas digs tunnels, it is essentially signaling to its people and the public in Gaza that although it has perhaps altered its tactics, its strategy remains the same—and that even if it takes a while, it will return to its previous path.

To this end, it continues to invest in its rocket arsenal and other systems earmarked for use in a future war with Israel—which could very well erupt in the near term without either side wanting it. After all, Gaza is Gaza, and it is as combustible as ever—perhaps even more so because of the economic situation and the coronavirus outbreak there.

Israeli officials are cognizant of this volatility and are trying to stave off another round of fighting. Parallel to detecting the tunnel, defense officials are working vigorously to advance an array of civilian and humanitarian projects in Gaza to foster long-term peace and quiet. But no one is under any illusions: As per the old cliché, which always applies to the Middle East and was proven true again on Tuesday, he who wants peace (or even quiet) should prepare for war. (Israel Hayom Oct 21)

The Conflict Moves in Mysterious Ways

By Dr. Col. (res.) Moshe Elad

In the first wave of the COVID pandemic, Palestinian Authority senior official Saeb Erekat declared: "The Israelis are spitting on Palestinian cars and Palestinian property in order to spread the virus and fulfill their wild desire to be free of them in some way."

The first wave passed, the second arrived, and Erekat himself contracted the virus. But he, like the rest of his people, urged the "the [Israeli] government and the spitters and the disease spreaders" in Jerusalem to take him in at Hadassah Medical Center, he being a VIP.

I have been studying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for 40 years and many times, I have encountered cases of Israel providing medical treatment to its bitter enemies. Israel has made humanitarian gestures

to the most loathsome of our enemies. Relatives of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders who had cancer or other terminal illnesses were given high-quality treatment in Israeli hospitals. The official reason was that they could not be given life-saving treatment in the "territories." A relatives of Hamas-in-Gaza leader Ismail Haniyeh was treated at Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba, an arrangement made by the Physicians for Human Rights NGO. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas insisted on being treated in Tel Aviv, rather than in Jordan or Turkey.

In other words, Israel is exerting itself to save the lives of relatives of terrorist leaders. In any other place in the world, such gestures would create a human bridge for peace, but not here. It's frustration that no matter how much we try to express values such as "tikkun olam," "recognizing the good in others," "anyone who saves a human life saves an entire universe," the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over land – which over the years has expanded to include enmity, hostility, and even hatred – is never forgiven. Even if we saved all the Arab residents of the territories, they would still see us as Satan, and seek our destruction.

In Lebanon, our neighbor to the North, there has been a debate ever since the catastrophic explosion at the Port of Beirut about whether or not the country should accept aid from Israel. "Scum!" shouted one man who was arguing with the government. "If you at least had a good alternative to the Jews ... but what do you have to offer? Incitement?"

Still, there is one bright spot – the Gulf states. They have realized the benefit they could gain from ties with Israel, and if that message is relayed to other Arab states clearly and honestly, they – who currently think that Israel is "spreading COVID" – might change their minds.

It seems to me that this man, Saeb Erekat, is the living representation of the Palestinians' tragedy. He is intelligent, well-spoken, accepted internationally, but also a politician who is unable to utter the truth. I remember Erekat, the Palestinians' PR man, from the days he was an administrative prisoner in the 1980s, when he was a Fatah operative at An-Najah National University. This is a man who throughout his career has made some of the most delusional claims about Israel. He lied outright and without blinking an eye. During the events in the Jenin refugee camp in 2002, he talked about "5,000 Palestinian casualties" to fan the flames in the territories.

If Saeb Erekat recovers, he will apparently give modest thanks to his doctors, who spared no effort to heal him, but I wouldn't be surprised if when speaking to the international media he makes an accusation: "Why should I thank Israel? They created this situation."

Wishing you a full recovery, Saeb. (Israel Hayom Oct 20)

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Arab-Israeli Politicians Against Peace By Ruthie Blum

An overwhelming majority of Israeli parliamentarians, including those in the opposition, voted on Thursday to ratify the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords. With 80 members of 120-seat Knesset in favor of the treaty with the United Arab Emirates and 27 in absentia, the remaining 13 lawmakers were unable to block the historic peace agreement that was approved unanimously by the Israeli Cabinet on Oct. 12.

Though the quantity of MKs nixing the deal was negligible, their identity is not. All of the more than dozen legislators who reject Israel's peace-making—not only with the UAE, but with Bahrain as well—are Arab citizens of the Jewish state, belonging to the Joint Arab List.

The Joint List is a bloc of disparate communist, socialist, Islamist and Arab-nationalist parties Balad, Hadash, Ta'al and the United Arab List, supported by an increasing number of radical Jews disillusioned with the Zionist left.

It is headed by MK Ayman Odeh, who said last week that Israel's normalization with the Gulf states is based on "twisted logic" that [the Joint List] cannot accept ... either morally or nationally."

He was referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's long-standing view that a lack of peace with the Palestinians is not at the root—or even a blip on the radar screen—of Middle East strife in general or of traditionally regional hostility to Israel in particular. It is this position that the Israeli left, obsessed with the failed "land for

peace" paradigm, cannot tolerate.

The Palestinian Authority and its apologists have had an interest in keeping this false idea alive. The notion has been the basis for inverting culprit and victim where Palestinian intransigence is concerned. It also has served as the perfect fund-raising pitch for Ramallah and the Hamas-run Gaza Strip from deep-pocketed benefactors in Europe.

The administration of former U.S. President George W. Bush made a feeble attempt at placing the onus on the P.A. to undergo internal reform and reach an agreement with Israel. But it wasn't until Donald Trump entered the White House that concrete demands to shape up or lose out on a great opportunity for the Palestinian people were made clear to P.A. chief Mahmoud Abbas.

Abbas realized that Washington meant business. His response was to snub its envoys. For the first time in his career, his behavior was met with an apathetic shrug, rather than another wave of appeasement.

As if that weren't sufficient cause for almost 85-year-old to feel frustrated, the mild reaction on the part of the "Palestinian street" and neighboring Arab leaders to America's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital—and the move of the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv—was too much for him to bear. That this was followed by a host of additional moves aimed at holding the Palestinians accountable for terrorist activities, while furthering other Israeli interests, only made matters worse for the aging despot.

He was slightly encouraged by the Arab League's declaration on Feb. 1 that Trump's "Peace to Prosperity" plan, unveiled at the White House on Jan. 28, "does not meet the minimum rights and aspirations of Palestinian people."

During the emergency meeting of the League, convened at Abbas's behest, members vowed not to cooperate with the U.S. Ironically, the UAE and Bahrain were among the countries making this promise, despite having sent representatives to Trump's joint press conference with Netanyahu three days earlier to reveal the plan.

To explain this seeming contradiction, an anonymous Arab diplomat told the left-wing Israeli daily, Haaretz, that the Gulf states had been misled by Washington with a document stating that Trump's plan included the establishment of a Palestinian state—with Jerusalem as its capital—as the basis for peace negotiations.

This was nonsense, of course. The only bone thrown to the UAE and Bahrain on behalf of the Palestinians was Washington's request that Netanyahu agree to put on hold his government's plan to extend Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley, and Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria.

The Palestinians weren't interested, however. Nor did their temporary sense that the Arab League still had their back last for long. Months later, in August, when the UAE and Bahrain announced that they would be normalizing ties with Israel, Ramallah's attempt to dissuade them from doing so—and to persuade the rest of the Arab League to condemn them—was unsuccessful.

In a typical huff, the Palestinians quit its slated six-month chairmanship of the Arab League council of foreign ministers. Lo and behold, nobody cared. The Arab League, like Netanyahu, has been focused on the threat from Tehran and on entering a coalition of nations that share a fear of a nuclear Iran.

This brings us to the Knesset representatives of Israel's Arabs. Odeh not only voted against the Abraham Accords, but told the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese TV station al-Mayadeen that they are based on a "flawed assumption" about Iran's being the "fundamental issue."

Pooh-poohing the Iranian threat—to a network whose sponsors are Iranian proxies—he said, "The Israeli occupation is the fundamental problem."

Al-Mayadeen is used to and regularly promotes Israel-bashing. Having help from an Arab Knesset member who isn't even as radical as some of the others on his list must have been especially welcome.

Speaking of which, Joint List M.K. Abbas Mansour, chairman of the United Arab List Party, explained to Israel's Kan Radio on Monday why he couldn't unequivocally condemn the beheading of a history teacher by a Chechen Islamist in a suburb of Paris on Friday.

Mansour said that the teacher should not have shown his students caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, even in the context of a lesson on freedom of expression, since such depictions are offensive to

Muslims. Try as they might, the interviewers did not manage to get him to concede that in this case, the cartoons were part of an educational exercise or that democracy involves free speech.

Instead, he ranted about the pluralism of Islam and its respect for all people and religions to prove his point that causing offense to Muslims goes against such values. In his eyes, apparently, decapitation does not.

Given the Palestinian honchos' unwillingness to coexist with Israelis at the expense of their own people's well-being, it is logical for the likes of Odeh and Mansour to be on their side against the Abraham Accords. What makes no sense at all, however, is that the Joint List—the third-largest faction in the Knesset—is more hostile to Zionists than the sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Manama. (JNS Oct 20)

Is a 'New Right' Ascending in Israel? By Alex Triman

A constant stream of political polls gives clues to the stability of Israel's current unity government anchored by Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party and challenger Benny Gantz's Blue and White Party. The two opposing parties united in April to put an end to a bitter three-election campaign cycle and deal with the coronavirus crisis.

While Israel has had low mortality rates as compared to the United States, Europe and elsewhere, many Israelis are expressing a lack of satisfaction in the government's management of the crisis.

The unity government is glued together by a rotation arrangement between the coalition's central parties, in which Gantz is scheduled to take over as prime minister in November 2021. Yet the likelihood that Netanyahu will gracefully part the premiership is slim. In the six months since the government was formed, Blue and White has served as an opposition within the coalition. Defense Minister Gantz, and Blue and White No. 2 Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, have been relegated to the sidelines by Netanyahu. And an ongoing budget crisis may automatically topple the government and trigger new elections in the coming weeks, without the premiership being handed to Gantz.

Netanyahu may attempt to jettison Blue and White, and retool his coalition with other parties, or push towards a fresh national election prior to next November.

A new election is likely to bring about a political realignment. Based on current polls, Israelis no longer see Gantz as the most viable alternative to Netanyahu. Nor do they view current opposition leader Yair Lapid as prime ministerial material.

Rather, a growing number of Israelis have been expressing newfound favor for longtime right-wing national camp leader Naftali Bennett. Bennett, who served briefly as defense minister prior to the formation of the unity government, opted to take his small six-seat Yamina Party into the opposition, rather than accept a demotion and serve in a Likud-Blue and White government as a junior coalition partner.

While defense minister, Bennett had lobbied to personally lead the national effort to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet he was consistently rebuffed by Netanyahu, who was not intending to keep Bennett in the senior defense post. Since heading to the opposition, Bennett has relentlessly and pointedly attacked the government's handling of the pandemic.

The strategy has made Bennett appear as one of the few responsible politicians interested in seriously addressing Israel's most serious problem. Meanwhile, Netanyahu's other opponents—both from within the coalition as well as the opposition—continuously bicker over tactical political maneuvers and the prime minister's fitness to hold office while on trial for questionable corruption charges.

Bennett's positioning has been particularly popular among two key constituencies: Israelis who are eager to replace Netanyahu at any cost; and staunch nationalists who don't see Netanyahu as an authentic right-winger. According to the recent opinion polls, Bennett's Yamina Party could be on track to leapfrog up from six seats to 23 mandates, second only to Likud, which appears to be trending downward from its current 36 seats to just 26 mandates.

Netanyahu addressed the polls this week in a Likud faction meeting without expressing much concern, stating, "I never succeed in the polls, only in the elections."

Bennett's jump is particularly noteworthy considering his 'New Right' faction failed to cross the electoral threshold during the second

election last year, essentially costing Netanyahu the ability to form a right-wing government and forcing a third election.

For voters whose singular issue is to replace Netanyahu at any cost, Bennett may simply represent the next in line of politicians attempting to ouster Israel's longest-serving prime minister. Yet the fact that the most likely political candidate now comes from the right side of Israel's political spectrum may represent the beginnings of a more important paradigm shift.

For the past 11 years, the political left-wing has proven incapable of unseating Netanyahu. Israel's once large and proud Labor Party—the longtime major left-wing political force in Israel—is virtually non-existent today. Similarly, Netanyahu succeeded to break the center-left Blue and White Party in half prior to Gantz's joining a Likud-led government, with Lapid taking his faction of the party into the opposition.

Israel's political left-wing will attempt yet another realignment should Israel head once again to the polls. However, in throwing early support towards Bennett, opposition votes are seemingly moving even further to the right of Netanyahu.

In the most recent polls, right-wing and religious parties would receive a large majority of 70 mandates out of 120. The Joint List of Arab parties—self-proclaimed anti-Zionists, and the only Knesset members to oppose Israel's peace treaties with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain—polls at 15 seats. This leaves only 35 pro-Israel mandates to the left of Likud.

The political shift represents the slow and painful crushing of Israel's left. Since the formation of the current unity government, the left has led large protests against Netanyahu often with upwards of 20,000 protesters. Yet despite the wishes of the protest organizers, the movement has failed to become mainstream.

Photos and videos of the protesters clearly identify them as the left fringe of Israeli society. And protesters' insistence on gathering in the thousands as most Israelis attempt to avoid crowds and maintain social distance due to the pandemic has done little to ingratiate the movement with Israelis overall.

In the past, Netanyahu detractors would have been unwilling to consider placing their faith in a right-wing candidate. For decades, right-wing politicians have focused their political energy on hawkish defense positions, the building of settlements and strengthening Zionist education. Bennett's shift toward dealing with a nationwide concern outside the realm of security has made the right-wing appear less extreme and more in touch with the will of the mainstream.

Prior to the coronavirus, Bennett has long suggested that Israel formally annex all of "Area C"—areas under Israeli administrative and security control according to the Oslo Accords—generally considered to be a hawkish position. Perhaps in a bid to win right-wing votes, Netanyahu promised to declare sovereignty in 30 percent of "Area C" in the last elections. He then was forced to place the sovereignty bid on hold, with the signing of the Abraham Accords with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, after losing the Trump administration's present support for the initiative. A Biden administration would be even less enthusiastic about Israeli declarations of sovereignty in the disputed territories.

As such, Bennett's right-wing views on sovereignty are currently held in check by external forces.

In the recent election cycles, many right-wing voters cast their ballots for Netanyahu out of fear that a Netanyahu loss would usher in a left-wing government. Yet today, many longtime Likud voters are taking issue with extended lockdowns that are causing irreparable damage to many small businesses. Many have evaporated their savings and gone into large debt to keep their businesses afloat, while many others have been forced to shut businesses down for good.

Bennett has repeatedly insisted that better management could have averted the latest lockdown. The message has resonated with many who have watched the governments' ugly political arguments over constantly changing coronavirus regulations.

He may be successfully positioning himself as the heir apparent to Netanyahu. Members of the opposition would gladly offer a king's ransom to enter a Bennett-led government that would end Netanyahu's reign.

At the same time, an alignment of the two largest parties both being on the right of the political spectrum may further strengthen Netanyahu for additional years at the helm.

A strong right-wing government could impact Israeli policy in a host of diplomatic and security issues, including a future conflict with Iran or its proxies in the region and potential negotiations with Palestinians, as well as socio-religious issues, including whether or not greater numbers of religious men will be drafted into the army.

In this period of great unknowns, whether Israel will plunge into another round of elections in the coming months remains to be seen, as does the longevity of Bennett's current popularity. Yet the apparent strengthening of Israel's right-wing at the expense of the left has the potential to alter the face of Israeli politics for years to come. (JNS Oct 19)

The Abraham Accords: The Role of 'Smart' vs. 'Small' States

By Spyridon N. Litsas

What does "small" mean in the vast theoretical framework of international relations (IR)? IR theory clearly advocates in favor of comparing state actors to classify their power relative to one another. Each state's power capacity can only truly be assessed through comparison. For example, while it is a theoretical fallacy to argue that the U.S. is a strong state, it is correct to say that the U.S. is stronger than all other states in the international arena.

Comparison is a useful tool that enables us to comprehend the qualitative rather than the quantitative characteristics of each and every state. This is important because quality, unlike quantity, never gives a false indication of either power or weakness.

The same applies to the word "small." If the word is used to refer to a state's size, then it does not adequately support IR theory, as the size of a state does not always determine its relative might in the international arena.

There are several cases in which size clearly did not correlate with might. Great Britain was never a physical giant, but it nevertheless managed to establish a global empire on which "the sun never set" through effective diplomacy, efficient private economic institutions (e.g., the East-India Company) and a fearsome navy.

At the other end of the spectrum is China, a geographical and demographic giant that has experienced 100 years of continuous humiliation; and the former Soviet Union, a territorial giant with economic glass legs that was defeated by the physically smaller but economically and technologically much more advanced United States.

From a theoretical point of view, therefore, a quantitative approach cannot offer satisfactory answers to the pressing questions of the 21st century. Globalization and cosmopolitanism are not just ideological trends, but undeniable facts deriving from the impressive technological advancements humanity has achieved over recent decades.

In particular, artificial intelligence (AI), which has entered the defense industry, thoroughly changes the normative quantitative approaches of the past. AI opens a new qualitative list of variables to indicate whether a state will succeed or suffer existential failure. This new dichotomy can be labeled as smart states vs. foolish states.

A smart state is a rational actor in the international arena. It rejects IR revisionism and every other fundamental systemic change that might produce total war.

It pays close attention to its own technological advancement and reinforcement. Its state economy gives the private sector room to breathe but controls natural resources such as water. It allows public schools and universities to compete with private schools to produce a balanced societal educational outline and encourages social mobility.

A smart state develops its homeland-security policy on a qualitative and not a quantitative basis. It invests heavily in AI, as the technology—which defies the logic of pure numbers—opens a new chapter in war theory and grand strategy. For example, a hypothetical army of 20 well-equipped robots with high-tech guns might prove more efficient than an army of 10,000 ill-equipped militiamen.

A smart state has the agility to develop both soft power that can positively influence public opinion in other states and a "softer" form of hard power not easily traced by the intelligence services of non-friendly states. This could include psychological operations with the intent to undermine adversaries' bureaucratic structures.

A smart state is one that invests in flexible diplomacy, comprehends fluctuations in the international environment, and acts to secure its national interests by elevating its status in the structural scale of power to maximize its prospects for survival.

And last but not least, a smart state does not try to read the future by remaining stubbornly stuck in its own past.

On Sept. 15, the UAE and Israel signed the Abraham Accords, normalizing relations between the states. This move highlighted the already well-defined characterization of these states as "smart" due to the choices they have made over the past decades. The UAE is a global educational hub and Israel is the "Start-Up Nation." Both favor the preservation of the existing status quo and oppose revisionism by state or non-state actors.

Israel and the UAE have constructed two of the most technologically advanced hard power capacities in the international system, while their soft power capabilities are based on cultural and religious resilience. The Abraham Accords also reveal the continued capacity of the United States to act as a global stabilizer and formidable Western power—one that is still capable of generating international progress despite unprecedented frictions at home.

The Abraham Accords exceed their dimensions as a mere step in the strengthening of the already durable state structures of two nations. They have the potential to operate as a new cornerstone of a collective response to state and non-state threats in the wider region.

The world is still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, but this will eventually pass and international life will return roughly to normal. Dismal economic conditions in Iran and fallout from the August blast at the Beirut Port, which exposed Hezbollah to public anger, will force the Tehran regime to play hardball to ensure its survival. The post-pandemic international reality may bring to the surface Iran's efforts to obtain nuclear capability. A regional front against Tehran's profound revisionism could prove a strengthening factor to protect the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

At the moment, the global jihadist movement is in retreat. Both ISIS and Al-Qaeda have been considerably weakened, mainly as a result of the War on Terror. However, global jihadism is not dead: It is going through an ideological and organizational restructuring. Al-Qaeda, for example, is facing an existential dilemma: whether to follow ISIS's example and organize a broader social base via a new ideological narrative that can be easily followed by the masses, or continue in its secluded operational circle. As reports from around the world indicate, it is awaiting an opportunity to spread death and misery once again. In addition, jihadism does not operate within national boundaries. This means that strong Al-Qaeda cells in sub-Saharan Africa are still capable of operating around the world.

The Abraham Accords may function as a decisive mechanism with which to crush terrorism, as both Israel and the UAE have thorough knowledge and experience in dealing with it. Such knowledge put to use in concert could prove exponentially more effective.

Also, since February the Eastern Mediterranean has witnessed an increase of Turkish maximalism in the Aegean, around Cyprus, in Libya and in the Gaza Strip. This is not just a sporadic manifestation of Turkey's behavioral issues but a disclosure of Ankara's hegemonic intentions, both as a major naval player in the region and as the purported champion of the Sunni world. Israel and the UAE, together with Greece, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, have the capacity not only to blockade these revisionist moves but to deter Turkey from spurring a violent confrontation between NATO members.

Turkey's problematic behavior has undoubtedly been spurred on by Washington's decision to cozy up to Ankara to some extent rather than definitively discourage Turkish aggression. A strong front against Turkey's conduct will foster peace and prosperity in the wider area of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, offering more geostrategic confidence to the other states of the region.

Since the dated quantitative approach does not allow for a thorough examination of the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean and its prospects after the Abraham Accords, a "smart state" theory should be shaped in its place according to which states defy their size and build their own futures. Israel and the UAE are the first in a circle of smart states in the region. Now that they have acted, the other rational actors of the wider Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East can follow. An excellent path has been paved, and more states are sure to emulate the smart example of the UAE and Israel.

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