



Commentary...

Islamic Jihad Still Brandishing Swords By Eyal Zisser

The destruction of an Islamic Jihad terror tunnel running under the Gaza Strip-Israel border two weeks ago breached the tense calm on the southern front.

Israel hoped that the operation, as well as thwarting a major terrorist attack, would help restore calm to the area. Islamic Jihad sustained a massive blow, losing several operatives when the tunnel collapsed, and learning – like the other terrorist groups in Gaza – that Israel has devised a way to neutralize the tunnel threat, largely considered Hamas' and Islamic Jihad's "doomsday weapon" in any future war in Gaza.

The IDF believes the current calm on the border is deceptive and that Islamic Jihad is biding its time and plans to retaliate in the form of rocket fire or a terrorist attack. Islamic Jihad officials have been ignoring Israel's warnings, and have been publicly declaring that vengeance is forthcoming.

The IDF's warnings sent a clear message to Hamas and Islamic Jihad: Israel is determined to defend its sovereignty and it will not tolerate any attempt to violate it. At the same time, Israel has also clearly signaled that it has no interest in a security escalation and that it wants to maintain the relative peace and quiet along the border.

The problem is that Islamic Jihad is not open to any sort of dialogue or understandings with Israel. This is a radical terrorist group that leans heavily on its military wing, the al-Quds Brigades, and unlike Hamas or Hezbollah, it has no political, economic or social institutions to speak of and is thus free of the need to protect them.

As Islamic Jihad is not backed by the local population, it does not have to consider their welfare or heed their reproaches. After all, should anything happen, the residents of Gaza will turn their anger and complaints to the enclave's rulers, namely Hamas.

Islamic Jihad's headquarters are safely nestled in Damascus, removed and detached from the situation on the ground. But this also means it struggles to impose its authority on its Gaza-based operatives. As a result, Islamic Jihad has – more than any other terrorist group in Gaza – become an Iranian proxy that follows Tehran's instructions and bows to its interests in a way even Hamas refuses to do.

This does not bode well, as one cannot expect a terrorist group of this nature to exercise any type of restraint, moderation or discretion. This leaves the ball squarely in Hamas' court. Despite the slowly progressing rapprochement between the rival Palestinian factions, Hamas remains Gaza's ruler. As such, it may hope Islamic Jihad decides not to follow through on its threats to attack Israel, or it may hope that Israel shows restraint and contains any attack thus preventing a security escalation.

One can only hope that Israel's unequivocal warnings will make Hamas understand that it must rein in Islamic Jihad, as it has done in the past, before its actions spell a catastrophe for Gaza. But even if Islamic Jihad does not attack Israel in the near future, everyone knows the next conflict is just a matter of time. (Israel Hayom Nov 14)

Shaping the Northern Front By Yoav Limor

Three seemingly unrelated incidents over the weekend provided a glimpse into the dramatic struggle currently underway to shape the northern front along the borders with Syria and Lebanon.

The first incident was the downing of a drone, apparently launched by the Syrian army, that approached the Israeli border on Saturday. This was not the first time that Israel intercepted a Syrian drone, but before shooting it down, Israeli forces confirmed that it was not a Russian aircraft, as to avoid an unwanted confrontation with Russia.

The second incident was the revelation that Iran is building a military base south of Damascus. While Israel warned repeatedly in recent months of Iran's plans to build permanent bases – both ground and naval bases – in Syria, this is the first time that hard evidence has emerged, in the form of up-to-date satellite images revealing an established military base.

ISRAEL NEWS

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From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
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The third incident involved allegations by Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, suggesting that Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri was being held against his will in Saudi Arabia after being forced to resign, alleging further that the move was part of Saudi Arabia's war against

Iran – Hezbollah's patron. Various publications have corroborated these claims, asserting that Saudi Arabia indeed orchestrated Hariri's resignation and is holding him under house arrest in a hotel in Riyadh.

Israel intercepted the drone, which posed no actual threat, as part of its stated policy of keeping out of the Syrian civil war but still allowing no spillage into Israeli territory. But in practice, there is a little more to it: The message this sends to Syria (and to Iran and Hezbollah, which support Syria) is that Israel is not one to play games.

This message is also applicable to the Iranian military base. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman have both stressed that Israel will not allow Iran to establish a presence in Syria – and it is safe to assume that Israel is already taking steps to implement this policy. A report like the one this weekend about the Iranian military base, by the highly respected BBC and resting on the testimony of "Western intelligence officials," reverberates around the world and embarrasses Tehran while propelling the international community to consider taking measures to stop Iran's expansion.

Meanwhile, the Shiite axis wants to embarrass Saudi Arabia. The accusation that it is holding Hariri under house arrest in Riyadh – and the accompanying claim that this is all in collaboration with Israel – is meant not only to demonstrate that Saudi Arabia interferes in other countries' affairs, but also to absolve Iran of blame, which will obviously now claim that its actions in Syria and Lebanon were meant only as a defense against Saudi aggression.

All these steps are a result of everyone's efforts to shape the future of Syria. The moment the immediate threat to the Assad regime was lifted, the moderates (moderate Sunni countries and Israel) have been fighting the radicals (with an emphasis on the Shiite axis) and the stakes are getting consistently higher. Israel's goal is to influence these struggles in Syria and Lebanon but to avoid getting sucked in. As things stand, however, this seems to be an increasingly difficult task. (Israel Hayom Nov 12)

U.S. Jews and Israel's Right to Be Heard By Evelyn Gordon

The growing divide between Israeli and American Jews was a major topic of conversation at this week's annual meeting of the Jewish Federations of North America. It was also the topic of a lengthy feature in Haaretz, which largely blamed the Israeli government. Inter alia, it quoted former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro as saying, in reference to that majority of American Jews who identify as non-Orthodox and politically liberal, "There is an idea that has some currency in certain circles around the Israeli government that says, 'You know what, we can write off that segment of American Jewry because in a couple of generations their children or grandchildren will assimilate.'"

I agree that the idea of writing off this segment of American Jewry has some currency in Israel. But in most cases, it's due less to fantasies about liberal Jews disappearing than to a belief that Israel will have to do without them whether it wants to or not, because liberal Jews can no longer be depended on for even the most minimal level of support. And by that, I don't mean support for any specific Israeli policy, but for something far more basic: Israel's right to be heard, by both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.

Nothing better illustrates this than recent decisions by two campus Hillels to bar mainstream Israeli speakers from addressing Jewish students. At Princeton, it was Israel's deputy foreign minister, Tzipi Hotovely, and at Stanford, it was a group of Israeli Arab veterans of the Israel Defense Forces. I can understand Hillel refusing to host speakers from the radical fringes. But how are Jewish students supposed to learn anything about Israel if campus Hillels won't even let them hear from representatives of two of the country's most mainstream institutions – its elected government and its army?

Both Hillels later termed their decisions a "mistake" – most likely under pressure from Hillel International, whose CEO, Eric Fingerhut, was the lead author on Princeton Hillel's apology. But that doesn't change the

fact that at two leading universities on opposite sides of the country, the Hillel directors, both non-Orthodox rabbis, initially thought canceling the speeches in response to progressive students' objections was a reasonable decision. Princeton's Julie Roth thought it completely reasonable to deny her students the chance to hear an official Israeli government representative try to explain the government's policies. And Stanford's Jessica Kirschner – backed, incredibly, by the university's "pro-Israel" association – thought it completely reasonable to deny her students the chance to hear from non-Jewish Israelis who don't agree that Israel is an apartheid state.

American Jewish rabbis and lay leaders obviously have the right to disagree with Israeli policies. But how is any relationship possible if one side won't even allow the other to be heard? Gagging and boycotts Israel can get from its enemies; it doesn't need American Jews for that. So if Israel can't even rely on them to enable interested students to be exposed to mainstream Israeli views, what exactly are they contributing to the Israel-Diaspora relationship? And why, under these circumstances, should Israel have any interest in accommodating their concerns about, say, prayer arrangements at the Western Wall?

Moreover, consider who did step in to allow the Princeton and Stanford speeches to take place as planned – the Orthodox Chabad movement, which, on both campuses, volunteered to host the speakers on very short notice. If Orthodox groups are the only ones in America these days even willing to provide a venue for Israelis who deviate from progressive orthodoxy, why wouldn't Israel give greater weight to Orthodox views than non-Orthodox ones?

Nor is this problem limited to college campuses. The most salient example – one worth revisiting precisely because both sides consider it a turning point in the relationship – was the dispute over the Iranian nuclear deal.

Given the almost wall-to-wall Israeli consensus that the deal was dangerous (despite deep disagreements over how best to oppose it), many Israelis felt no less betrayed by American Jewish support for the deal than many American Jews felt when Israel reneged on the Western Wall compromise two years later. As former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren told Haaretz, "We went to American Jews and told them that the Iran deal endangers 6 million Jews in Israel, and that it's not an American political issue, but rather, a matter of Jewish existence, and I don't need to tell you what happened." Indeed, absent that sense of betrayal, I suspect Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu might have been more willing to rebuff ultra-Orthodox pressure over the Western Wall.

But policy disagreements I can accept, even on issues of existential importance. What I found far more troubling was liberal American Jews' reaction to Netanyahu's efforts to lobby against the deal, which Haaretz reporter Judy Maltz accurately described as follows: "Considering that 70 percent of American Jews had voted for Barack Obama, Netanyahu's efforts to lead a revolt against him were seen by many in the Jewish community as unconscionable." Indeed, many prominent American Jews vociferously objected to Netanyahu's speech to Congress against the deal, using terms like "humiliated" and "angered" to describe their feelings. Yet somehow, I haven't heard a word from them against European leaders' efforts today to lobby Congress to defy President Trump and preserve the deal.

In short, many liberal American Jews didn't just oppose the Israeli government's policy, they even objected to the government's efforts to publicly advocate for its chosen policy. Effectively, they declared that Israel had no right to make its views heard in America if doing so discomfited them.

Many liberal Jews remain staunch supporters of Israel. Yet the ranks of the Roths and Kirschners seem to be growing every year. And though Israel and Diaspora Jewry can survive disagreements about policy, if liberal American Jews aren't even willing to hear what Israeli Jews think, and provide a platform for others to hear it, the relationship will be over. I continue to think that would be tragedy. But you cannot have a relationship with people who don't even acknowledge your right to speak – even if those people are your family. (CommentaryMagazine.com Nov 15)

The Red Cross Destroys the Laws of War By Evelyn Gordon

The International Committee of the Red Cross, self-appointed guardian of the laws of war, has embarked on an exciting new online project: destroying the very laws it ostensibly seeks to protect. Of course, the ICRC would put it differently; it would say it's teaching the laws of war. The problem is that the "laws" it teaches aren't the actual laws of war, as codified in international treaties, but a made-up version that effectively denies countries any right of self-defense against enemies that fight from positions inside civilian populations. And it is thereby teaching anyone unwilling to concede the right of self-defense that the laws of war should simply be ignored.

When Israel Hayom reported on the "Don't Be Numb" project last week, it sounded so outrageous that I suspected reporter error. But the

project's website proved even worse.

The website has four sections – "behavior in war," "medical mission," "torture" and cultural property." But the big problem is the first one, which consists of three questions users must answer correctly to receive a "medal of integrity."

Question number one: "You're a military commander. The enemy is hiding in a populated village across the front line. Can you attack?" The correct answer, according to the website, is "no."

This is simply false. The laws of war do not grant immunity to enemy soldiers simply because they choose to hide among civilians, nor do they mandate avoiding any military action that might result in civilian casualties. They merely require that civilians not be deliberately targeted (the principle of distinction), that reasonable efforts be made to minimize civilian casualties, and that any such casualties not be disproportionate to the military benefit of the operation (the principle of proportionality).

The second question was, "What if you know for a fact that many civilians would be killed? Can you attack?" Since the ICRC had already ruled in the first question that attacking populated villages is never permissible, I'm not sure what purpose this question served; it would only make sense if the answer to the first question had been "yes" and this were a follow-up meant to explore the limits of the license to attack populated villages. But let's ignore that incongruity and examine the question on its own merits.

The ICRC's answer, of course, was "no." But the correct answer is "insufficient information." As noted, the laws of war don't prohibit civilian casualties as collateral damage of a legitimate military operation. They do, however, require that such casualties not be disproportionate to the military benefit, and the question doesn't supply the information necessary to determine whether this attack would be proportionate. For instance, how many civilian casualties does "many" actually mean – 10? 100? 1,000? Even more important, what price will your own side pay if it doesn't attack? For instance, how many of your own civilians might be killed if you don't stop the enemy's rocket and mortar fire?

The laws of war were never meant to be a suicide pact; they do not require countries to let their own civilians be slaughtered in order to avoid harming enemy civilians. But in the ICRC's version, they do. Its website teaches users that military action which harms enemy civilians is never permissible, so all an enemy has to do to slaughter the other side's civilians with impunity is set up shop among its own civilian population. By that logic, no action should have been taken to stop, say, the Islamic State's genocide against the Yazidis, because it operated out of populated villages and couldn't be dislodged without civilian casualties. Is that truly what the ICRC wants?

Incidentally, using civilians as human shields is a war crime in itself, but you'd never guess that from the website. The implication of the ICRC's questions is that the laws of war actually encourage using civilians as human shields, because doing so buys you immunity from attack under those very same laws.

Before moving to the third question, the website provides the average scores of respondents from 16 countries on the first two. Unsurprisingly, Israel had the lowest percentage of respondents who gave the "right" answers (followed by America). That's because Israelis, who are regularly attacked by enemies operating from populated villages, understand better than most that the "right" answers would require them to sit with folded hands while their enemies kill them.

This is highly relevant to the website's third and final question: "The Geneva Conventions, the core of the international humanitarian law, are now 70 years old. Warfare today is very different; does it still make sense to impose limits in war?" The ICRC's answer, which I agree with, is "yes." But limits on warfare will gain wide acceptance only if they still allow for the possibility of effective self-defense. If obeying the laws of war requires letting your own civilians be slaughtered with impunity, no country under attack would agree to do so.

That is precisely the danger of the ICRC's position. The real laws of war set a challenging but achievable goal: reducing civilian casualties to the minimum consistent with effective military action. But the ICRC's made-up laws set an impossible goal: avoiding any civilian casualties whatsoever, even if this precludes effective military action. Thus any country that engages in military action would end up violating the ICRC's laws no matter what steps it takes to minimize civilian casualties. And if so, why even bother to take those steps?

Indeed, this very argument has raged in Israel for years now. Despite Israel's great efforts to comply with the real laws of war – it "met and in some respects exceeded the highest standards we set for our own nations' militaries," a group of high-ranking Western military experts wrote in a report on the 2014 Gaza war – it is repeatedly accused by the UN, "human rights" organizations, and world leaders of grossly violating those laws. Hence many Israelis wonder why they should keep making those efforts, which often increase the risk to their own soldiers and civilians, if they get no international credit for doing so.

The ICRC is not only encouraging terrorists to operate from among civilian populations by granting them immunity; it is also discouraging efforts to comply with the civilian protection measures mandated by the real laws of war. In other words, it's actually making civilian casualties more likely on two counts – and thereby betraying its own humanitarian mission. (CommentaryMagazine.com Nov 14)

A Marshall Plan for Gaza is a Bad Idea By Efraim Inbar

Dear Mr. Netanyahu, As you know, voices inside and outside the IDF are advocating for a “Marshall Plan” – a massive international mobilization – for the improvement of Gaza’s living conditions. They believe that an improved Gaza economy will reduce anti-Israel violence, whereas further economic deterioration in Gaza will accelerate the radicalization process resulting in elements more extreme than Hamas taking control.

This rationale is faulty on many counts:

1. The belief that poverty leads to terrorism is an unsubstantiated liberal myth. There has been no proven connection between one’s standard of living and political violence and terrorism. Poor countries, such as India, produce little terrorism. When the Second Intifada began in the year 2000, the Palestinian economic situation was on the rise.

2. The belief that greater affluence for Gazan civilians will bring moderation to the Hamas military leadership is naïve. Radical ideology and religious fervor are unlikely to be influenced by the wealth of unarmed civilians. In a dictatorship, it is the guys with the guns who call the shots. Middle East dictators are not afraid to kill their opponents.

3. Massive economic aid for Gaza is synonymous with supporting Israel’s bitter enemy, one which seeks Israel’s destruction. Did the West ever consider granting economic aid to Islamic State (ISIS) for fear of greater radicalization? We need not be concerned with the demise of Hamas rule. Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Radical Islam will only be defeated when enough Muslims realize that radicalism leads to suffering, not deliverance.

4. A weakened Hamas is in Israel’s interest. This is also the desire of Egypt and the Palestinian Authority (PA). A weak Hamas presents a weaker threat to Israel as well as to the PA. And a weakened Hamas will be also more susceptible to Egyptian pressure for curtailing assistance to Islamist insurgents in Sinai.

5. On the other hand, any strengthening of Hamas will come at the expense of the PA. Although neither are “real” partners for peace for Israel, the PA is nevertheless a less belligerent and more convenient partner for tense coexistence.

6. Israel’s struggle against the Iranian quest for hegemony in the Middle East will be undermined by an Israeli policy that preserves the Hamas regime.

After all, Hamas is in close cooperation with Tehran.

Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Sunni moderate camp detest the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.

These countries fear Iranian encroachment. Better relations with these countries will not be served by a campaign to help Gaza. In short, aid to Hamas only strengthens the position of radical Islam throughout the Middle East.

Mr. Prime Minister, the Marshall Plan concept is misguided and counterproductive. Israel should adhere to its longstanding approach of using sticks and carrots in the Palestinian arena; a policy that has scored impressive successes over the years, although the balance is always delicate and fraught with uncertainty. While Israel is not interested in a humanitarian disaster in Gaza, the suggestion to importune for a Marshall Plan clearly undercuts the advantageous equilibrium between punishment and incentive. (Jerusalem Post Nov 15)

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Ein Al Hilweh and Umm Jamal: Facts on the Ground

By Meir Deutsch

Recently, various media outlets published news and editorial pieces about the Civil Administration’s intention to enforce “delimitation orders” on two Palestinian Beduin encampments in the Jordan Valley. Under the blazing headline “Stop the Evictions,” an editorial in Haaretz unleashed a full-scale attack, notifying readers in Israel and around the world that the State of Israel is planning to evict hundreds of unfortunate Palestinian Beduin, victims of recurring “illegal, unjustified and dangerous” Israeli actions, from two villages in Israel’s Jordan Valley – Ein al Hilweh and Umm Jamal.

Zehava Gal-On, who tweeted about it yesterday, told her readers that these villages “have been there for decades” and that they “are situated on private, Arab-owned land.” Yesterday, The Jerusalem Post’s Tova Lazaroff addressed the issue, as well.

Although Lazaroff’s article correctly described the “Palestinian Beduin

villages” of Umm Jamal and Ein al Hilweh as illegal, that’s more or less where the factuality ends. Quoting attorney Tawfiq Jabareen, who represents these illegal encampments, Lazaroff repeated his patently false statement that “some of the families came 30 years ago from the South Hebron Hills and others were here before 1967.”

In fact, aerial photos taken as recently as 2004 show that there was no village – Beduin, Palestinian, or any other kind – in this area; aerial photos going back to 1999 debunk Jabareen’s claims altogether. At most, in certain seasons there were tents in the area, constructed for temporary shelter by the nomadic shepherds who passed through with their flocks. This hardly constitutes ownership, settlement, or historic claims to land.

Even worse, Lazaroff’s article fails to convey the absurdity of the situation on the ground in the Jordan Valley. The location of the “villages” of Ein al Hilweh and Umm Jamal endangers everyone who utilizes the roads and interchanges these illegal settlements are currently obstructing – including Jewish residents of Maskiot, Arab residents of Tubas, and the Beduin themselves. The Umm Jamal squatters’ camp has begun to encroach upon an IDF firing zone – putting the Beduin squatters themselves in grave danger. Why, we might well ask, would the United Nations Office for Coordination of Human Rights Affairs want the Civil Administration to permit their continued residence in a firing zone?

The government of Israel has repeatedly offered legal, organized alternative housing solutions to the Beduin currently squatting illegally on state and private land throughout Area C – solutions that the Palestinian Authority has consistently rejected. The Beduin of Umm Jamal, Ein al Hilweh and other illegal Beduin “settlements” have become pawns in the PA’s bid to establish a de facto Palestinian state in Area C – a systematic, calculated policy of illegal activity officially named “The Fayyad Plan.”

What’s worse, the UN and the EU have taken an active supporting role in carrying out this plan. Their continued construction of illegal buildings – homes, schools and community centers – in flagrant violation of Israeli and international law, Civil Administration procedures and High Court orders – is one of the strongest weapon in their anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian arsenal.

Perhaps the time has finally come for the strict standards applied to Jewish settlements – and the draconian measures taken by the state when the High Court orders their demolition and/or relocation – to be applied to Beduin squatters, as well. We welcome the new, even-handed approach of the Civil Administration: For nearly 15 years, the use of similar delimitation orders has been applied only in the case of Jewish settlements – which constitute a minute fraction of illegal construction in Area C. This discriminatory, even racist policy was finally amended in 2015, and it’s taken the Civil Administration more than two years to make use of the legitimate legal tools at its disposal to end the travesty of Beduin encroachment on and abuse of Israel’s greatest resource – land.

Israeli law is more than merely a battering ram to be used against Jewish settlers by leftist NGOs. It is intended to create and preserve livable conditions throughout the country. We at Regavim will continue to demand that Israel’s laws are universally and equally applied and upheld by all sectors and segments of society – for our mutual benefit. (Jerusalem Post Nov 15)

The author is director of policy and government relations at Regavim.

Bannon and the Anti-Israel Establishment By Caroline B. Glick

Speaking at the Zionist Organization of America’s annual dinner, Steven Bannon, US President Donald Trump’s former chief strategist and current CEO of the Breitbart news website, said the US political establishment has “lowered the bar on what [pro-Israel] is supposed to be.”

Bannon invited the pro-Israel activists to join what he referred to as the “insurgency movement against the Republican establishment and against the permanent political class in Washington, DC.”

Bannon argued that it is because of the Republican establishment that then president Barack Obama was able to implement the nuclear deal with Iran.

Bannon is correct. Had a non-establishment senator such as Ted Cruz chaired the Senate Foreign Affairs committee in 2014 and 2015 instead of Senator Bob Corker, in accordance with the US constitution, Obama’s radical nuclear deal would have been treated like a treaty. It would have required the approval of two-thirds of the Senate and it would have gone down in flames.

Instead, Corker stood the Constitution on its head, co-sponsoring the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, which required two-thirds of the Senate to reject the deal in order to block its implementation.

As for US financing of Palestinian terrorism, the blame lies mainly at the feet of the permanent political class – particularly the denizens of the State Department.

With the support of Democratic and establishment Republican lawmakers, for more than 20 years the State Department has successfully

watered down or canceled legislative initiatives to end US support for the terrorism-supporting, PLO -led Palestinian Authority. State Department officials have similarly led every effort to water down or cancel Congressional initiatives that strengthen the US alliance with Israel.

For instance, it was the State Department that fought tooth and nail to overturn the 2002 law that permitted US citizens born in Jerusalem to list their place of birth as Israel. It was the State Department that insisted the 1996 law requiring the transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem include a presidential waiver.

The power of the State Department and its colleagues in the permanent bureaucracy to maintain US policies that are substantively anti-Israel and pro-PLO is being exerted today in the lead up to the publication of Trump's "peace plan" for Israel and the Palestinians.

According to a report published in The New York Times last weekend, sourced to White House officials, Trump intends to announce his "peace plan" in January.

Later reports disputed that claim, saying the plan would be announced in March.

Whatever the case, according to the Times' story, Trump's "peace plan" will look similar to – and be substantively indistinguishable from – "peace plans" adopted by the last three presidents.

Like Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama, according to the Times' account, Trump's plan will be based on the assumption that for peace to be concluded between Israel and the PLO, a Palestinian state must be established on land now controlled by Israel.

Trump's plan will reportedly also discuss the partition of Jerusalem and address the Palestinian claim that the 450,000 Israelis living beyond the 1949 armistice lines in Judea and Samaria must be expelled from their homes and communities for peace to be achieved.

In a manner similar to Bush's "Roadmap to Peace," analysts told the Times that Trump's plan will include two stages. In the first stage, Israel will be required to block construction of homes for Jews in united Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria; to transfer control over land in Area C to the PA; and to restate its commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

This account was disputed by White House officials.

But, despite the denials, there are indications that the Times' account is accurate. For instance, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has justified all his recent moves to curtail construction for Jews in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, to provide funding to the PA and to suspend initiatives to expand Jerusalem's municipal borders as necessary to prevent a fissure in US-Israel relations.

Trump's team is led by his senior adviser and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and run by his chief negotiator, Jason Greenblatt. Members of Greenblatt's team include deputy national security adviser Dina Powell and US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman.

According to the Times, Greenblatt and his team "are consulting with Donald Blome, the consul general in Jerusalem, and others from the State Department and the National Security Council."

And this is where the problem begins.

Ahead of Trump's visit to Israel in May, Channel 2 reported that Blome lobbied heavily for Trump to cancel his plans to visit the Western Wall. While Trump did visit the Wall, Blome – supported by National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster – blocked Netanyahu from accompanying Trump on his visit.

In a press briefing, McMaster refused to say that the Western Wall is located in Israel.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson referred to Tel Aviv as the "home of Judaism" on the plane ride to Israel.

Secretary of Defense James Mattis said at his Senate confirmation hearing that Tel Aviv is Israel's capital.

In other words, Blome, Tillerson, McMaster and Mattis have all embraced the view that the US should not treat Israel with the same respect it treats other countries – let alone other allies. Instead of deserving respect, Israel, in their view, deserves unique reproach to the point where even acknowledging its capital city and basic geographic facts is considered unacceptable.

This then brings us back to the "peace plan" that Greenblatt and Kushner are putting together in consultation with Blome, the State Department and McMaster's National Security Council.

If Greenblatt and Kushner compose a "peace plan" that satisfies the State Department and its governmental counterparts, and if Trump adopts it as his official position, they will guarantee that he will fail to advance the cause of peace; will harm Israel; will empower the PLO; and diminish the US's standing as a power in the Middle East.

This is the guaranteed outcome of any plan that is supported by the State Department because any plan that the State Department and its allies support will be based upon the core assumption regarding the Arab-Israel conflict that the State Department embraced in 1993.

In 1993, Israel and the PLO concluded a peace deal in Oslo based on

the European assumption that Israel is to blame for the Arab-Israel conflict.

According to the European narrative, the Arab conflict with Israel – and indeed, all the pathologies of the Arab world – are rooted in the Palestinian conflict with Israel.

The Palestinian conflict, in turn, owes to the absence of a Palestinian state. And there is no Palestinian state because Israel refuses to surrender sufficient land to the PLO to appease it.

Until 1993, this was not the US's position.

From 1967 through 1993, the US position was that the Palestinian conflict with Israel was a function of the Arab conflict with Israel. The Arab conflict was rooted in the Arab world's rejection of Israel's right to exist in secure and recognized borders – or really, in any borders. So long as this remained the position of the Arab world, there would be no peace between Israel and its neighbors.

Israel's peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan are based on this pre-Oslo process assumption.

But when it assumed leadership of the Oslo process, the US also embraced the European narrative it was predicated on: Everything is Israel's fault.

The US's continued funding of the PA, despite its support for terrorism, owes to the State Department's adherence to the European narrative. The US's refusal to treat Israel with the respect due an ally by, among other things, locating its embassy in its capital, owes to the State Department's power to dictate US policy.

We saw that power brought to bear in 2003 with the drafting of the Roadmap.

In 2002, Bush said he would not support Palestinian statehood unless new Palestinian leaders who didn't support terrorism took over the PA from Yasser Arafat.

Rather than take Bush's position seriously, the State Department emptied it of all meaning.

US officials crowned Arafat's deputy of 40 years, Mahmoud Abbas, as a reformer and peacemaker, despite the utter absence of any evidence pointing to this conclusion.

Having done so, the State Department declared that reform had been achieved. In support of that reform, they expanded US support for the PA and intensified US pressure on Israel.

Bush's State Department was able to subvert Bush's position because neither then secretary of state Colin Powell nor then national security adviser Condoleezza Rice supported it. Both were more than happy to pretend that the US policy toward Israel and the Palestinians had shifted toward Israel, when the opposite was the case.

We see a similar situation unfolding today with Trump.

While Trump has not called for new leadership, he has called for an end to Palestinian financing of terrorism. This demand will clearly not be met now that the PLO has reached a power-sharing agreement with the Hamas terrorist regime in Gaza. Every cent transferred to Gaza is a cent that supports terrorism.

And yet, according to the Times account, and judging by Netanyahu's behavior, the Trump administration is preparing a "peace plan" that will bring no peace but will harm Israel and empower the PLO.

The thing of it is that it is hard to imagine that Trump is engaged sufficiently in discussions of the issue to be aware of what is likely taking place. Bush certainly was not aware that his positions were being undermined by his advisers.

This brings us to Greenblatt and Kushner.

Whereas Rice and Powell were consummate Washington insiders whose careers were made in the bosom of the foreign-policy establishment, Greenblatt, Kushner and Friedman are all consummate outsiders. They owe the establishment nothing. Dina Powell is the only member of Trump's team who is an establishment figure.

Trump brought in his team of outsiders to run his Middle East policy because he understood – and repeatedly remarked on the fact – that Washington's foreign policy establishment has failed for decades to develop successful Middle East policies.

If we are to believe the Times story and heed the signals Netanyahu has sent, Kushner and Greenblatt have surrendered to the establishment and are poised to conclude a peace plan that will be substantively identical to those of the past three administrations.

And, as a consequence, it will fail just as badly as the policies of the past three administrations.

Bannon is right that pro-Israel forces should fight to diminish the power of the Washington foreign-policy establishment – first and foremost the State Department – to empty the term pro-Israel of substance. The question is whether that fight needs to be directed at the White House or whether Trump's team of outsiders is willing and able to stand up to that establishment and adopt a policy not based on hostility toward Israel and support for Palestinian terrorists and, therefore, not guaranteed to fail. (Jerusalem Post Nov 16)