



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

Israel's response to
Oct. 7.

"Israel fought back bravely," he said. The Israelis stood strong and united in the face of an enemy that kidnapped, tortured and slaughtered innocent women

Commentary...

Trump's Call to Resettle Gazans Could End the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Once and For All By Alex Traiman

U.S. President Donald Trump, sitting alongside Israeli Prime Benjamin Netanyahu, issued a geopolitical earthquake on Tuesday, doubling down on calls to resettle "1.7 or 1.8 million" Palestinians outside of the Gaza Strip.

The calls go beyond any concept of "total victory" that Netanyahu has verbalized and possibly even considered at any point during the current war with Hamas in Gaza. A little more than a week ago, the questions on the table were whether Israel could ever return all of its hostages and who would rule Palestinians living in Gaza on the "day after" the war.

Trump—in the way only he could do—has stated what should have been patently obvious to a normal observer but unspeakable for any world leader: Gaza is completely uninhabitable, and its residents will need to be resettled elsewhere.

If Trump's suggestions come to pass, it will not only represent a "total victory" beyond even Netanyahu's wildest imagination but represent the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Migrating nearly 2 million people out of the Gaza Strip will permanently alter the demographic reality between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, removing any parity of numbers between Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

If successful, calls for Israel to permanently cede land for the creation of a Palestinian state within the Jewish biblical homeland will end, and Israel will finally win the conflict. Jews would then be the overwhelming majority and Palestinians a smaller ethnic minority, removing once and for all the phony claims that Israel is an apartheid state.

Trump even hinted that America may support full Israeli sovereignty in Judea and Samaria (commonly known in the international community as the "West Bank"). "We're discussing that ... and people do like the idea. We haven't taken a position on it yet, but we'll be making one probably on that very specific topic over the next four weeks."

If America recognizes Israeli sovereignty in the provinces of Judea and Samaria, then it will permanently slam the door on the failed Oslo Accords and the two-state paradigm that the Palestinians never wanted in the first place.

The president, who worked extremely well with Israel's prime minister during the 45th administration, has previously succeeded in breaking paradigms in the region with the brokering of the historic Abraham Accords agreements in the fall of 2020.

In his remarks in the Oval Office, Trump stated tersely that he will "never win a Nobel Prize" for his groundbreaking role in brokering the unthinkable agreements.

He is now bringing his unconventional thinking back to the region just days into a new term and looking for an end to the conflict that began when Hamas penetrated Israel's border on Oct. 7, 2023, murdering 1,200 men, women and children in the south, and kidnapping to Gaza more than 250 others in the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust.

Trump acknowledged that many "want to deny that Oct. 7 took place, just as many want to deny the Holocaust took place."

In the press briefing after the meeting between the two leaders, Trump called the Oct. 7 assault "an all-out attack on the very existence of a Jewish state in the Jewish homeland." Then he went on to praise

and children. I salute the Israeli people for meeting this trial with courage and determination and unflinching resolve.

That did not sound anything like the "balanced" statements of the outgoing Biden administration, who repeated the mantra that "how Israel conducts its war matters."

Trump stated that the "prime minister and I focused on the future, discussing how we can work together to ensure Hamas is eliminated and ultimately restore peace to a very troubled region."

His out-of-the-box and simultaneously rational thinking was only made possible by Israel's stunning military victory against Hamas in Gaza.

While those left of the remaining terrorist operatives continue to steal humanitarian aid and put on phony displays of survival at hostage-release ceremonies, the truth is that Hamas has been decimated.

For that matter, all of Gaza has been decimated. Trump said that "right now, Gaza is a demolition site. Virtually every building is down. They're living on their fallen concrete that's very dangerous and very precarious."

The reason Gaza is in this situation is because of Hamas's strategy to use the entirety of civilian infrastructure in the coastal enclave as its base of operations. Nearly every residential building, mosque, school and hospital was turned into a weapons storage depot or a tunnel entrance.

To win the war, Israel had no choice but to destroy civilian infrastructure. The IDF methodically moved up and down Gaza, destroying every building being used by Hamas for military purposes.

The IDF accomplished this feat with hands tied behind their backs, being forced to move nearly the entirety of Gaza's civilian population out of harm's way and to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid. It has been an incredible military accomplishment that will be studied by militaries around the world for decades to come.

Netanyahu listed off many of the war's accomplishments, including the assassinations of senior terror leaders Ismail Haniyeh, Yahya Sinwar and Hassan Nasrallah. "We devastated Hamas, we decimated Hezbollah. We destroyed [Syrian President Bashar] Assad's remaining armaments, and we crippled Iran's air defenses," he said.

Hamas and Iran chose war. They didn't count on Israel winning it.

Netanyahu credited the Israelis who took to the battlefield, saying the war's accomplishments were met "with the indomitable spirit of our people and the boundless courage of our soldiers."

While at times throughout the war, Israel appeared to be vulnerable and unsure of its ability to win, that victory is now becoming clearer. "Israel has never been stronger and Iranian terrorists have never been weaker," Netanyahu said.

With the adversarial Biden administration now in the rearview mirror and with the prime minister standing next to Trump, it's clear that Israel under Netanyahu's war leadership has won an irreversible victory in Gaza.

Trump is preparing to take that victory to the next level. He floated "the idea of the United States owning that piece of land" after Palestinians are resettled out of Gaza.

The statement of American ownership is confusing, particularly for Israel, which controlled Gaza before its failed withdrawal from the Strip in 2005. Yet such statements may make the concept of

resettlement more palatable to Israel's Arab neighbors.

Now, it will be up to Trump to back up his words and figure out exactly how to incentivize moving the civilian population of Gaza into Egypt, Jordan or elsewhere.

Jordan's King Abdullah II is scheduled to visit Trump next week in the White House. If that takes place, it can provide some indication of how likely neighboring Arab states will be to cooperate with such a plan.

If they refuse to, things may get more complicated before they get simpler. But Netanyahu has proven that he can navigate the most difficult of circumstances. And he has faith in Trump's ability to do what he says, knowing that faith can deliver remarkable results.

"I believe, Mr. President, that your willingness to puncture conventional thinking that has failed time and time again, and today, your willingness to think outside the box with fresh ideas. ... You cut to the chase; you see things others refuse to see. You say things others refuse to say. And then after the jaws drop, people scratch their heads, and they say, 'He said what?' And this is the kind of thinking that enabled us to bring the Abraham Accords."

Netanyahu believes that "this is the kind of thinking that will reshape the Middle East and bring peace."

For Netanyahu and Trump, peace comes through strength.

"Israel will end the war by winning," Netanyahu said. "And Israel's victory will be America's victory. We'll not only win the war working together, we'll win the peace with your leadership, Mr. President, and our partnership. I believe that we will forge a brilliant future for our region and bring our great alliance to even greater heights."

Of course, the U.S.-Israel alliance can only shine if both Israel and America take the moral position to support one another and work together to defeat common enemies.

Trump is working to "Make America Great Again." Netanyahu has a similar mission for the Jewish state.

"The Bible says that the people of Israel shall rise like lions," Netanyahu said. "And boy, did we rise. Today, the roar of the lion of Judah is heard loudly throughout the Middle East." (JNS Feb. 5)

Hezbollah's Soul-Searching Reveals its Defeat

By Raphael G. Bouchnik-Chen

As the Nov. 27, 2024 Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire expires, there are many questions about the next steps in Southern Lebanon. The Lebanese army is delaying its mission to take control of the area south of the Litani River, and Israel has made clear that it will not withdraw its forces from Southern Lebanon as long as Hezbollah outposts remain in the area.

It appears, at least superficially, that Hezbollah's current motivation to resume hostilities against Israel is low. The organization has been undergoing a process of self-examination in light of its defeat in the campaign it initiated against Israel on Oct. 8, 2023, as an act of solidarity with Hamas's barbaric "Al-Aqsa Flood" attack the day before.

The Shi'ite organization is trying to broadcast an image of a glorious victory, but with its mythical leader Hassan Nasrallah eliminated by Israel, along with the lion's share of the organization's command and some 2,500 of its field operatives, the boasting about the great defeat of the "Zionist enemy" rings hollow. It is a facade for domestic consumption, and nothing more.

Hezbollah acknowledges that the vast arsenal of weapons it had amassed, both defensive and offensive, has been substantially eroded by Israel. This includes substantial damage to its order of battle, and the array of medium- and long-range ballistic missiles that had been cultivated and maintained by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, both as a means of deterrence and as an Iranian front line for maintaining a "second strike" capability against Israel.

Prior to the decimation of Hezbollah's arsenal, the extraordinary

Israeli intelligence operation of Sept. 17, 2024, involving the simultaneous explosion of thousands of pagers used by members of Hezbollah's headquarters and field ranks, was the beginning of the undermining of its status as the main military entity in Lebanon.

The most severe of the many blows Hezbollah suffered was the fall of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024. For many years, the Alawite Syrian regime played a central role in preserving the Shi'ite "axis of evil" in both logistical and ideological terms, with the goal of maintaining Hezbollah as an active arm against Israel. In addition, the dramatic damage Israel inflicted on Iran in the reciprocal attack of Oct. 26, 2024, dramatically accelerated the undermining of Tehran's grip and regional aspirations, particularly in Lebanon.

Lebanese sources have noted that President Bashar Assad's relations with Hezbollah and even with the Iranians had cooled even before Oct. 7, 2023. Assad was interested in reducing the Iranians' scope of action in Syrian territory, as well as in limiting Hezbollah's activity in his country. It is possible that the clock had already begun to tick toward the disintegration of the "axis of evil." The possibility cannot be ruled out that covert Israeli contact with Assad through an internet communication channel, the existence of which was recently made public, was a factor in accelerating the unraveling of the Shi'ite axis.

What is Hezbollah's leadership pondering at this difficult time? They're not thinking about establishing a commission of inquiry, of course. First and foremost, Hezbollah has to analyze why the war had such disastrous results from its perspective. It will have to consider the security breaches that allowed Israel to penetrate its frameworks so deeply, and redesign its strategic approach to continuing the conflict with Israel. This will require tackling dilemmas concerning both the rebuilding of its military force and the training of new fighters. The group will also have to formulate a plan to rebuild the civilian environment in southern Lebanon, where there is a traditional Shi'ite majority.

Hezbollah's top brass cannot ignore growing voices within the organization advocating a new approach that stresses the movement's Lebanese identity. If adopted, such an approach could mean a reduction of the organization's traditional dependence on Iran and more practical and substantial integration into domestic Lebanese politics.

There is no doubt that the election of Joseph Aoun as president after a prolonged governmental vacuum, and the placement of Nawaf Salam as a leading candidate for prime minister, intensify the constraints on Hezbollah's path in Lebanon. They also constitute a ringing slap in the face for Iran.

Iran's current weakness in the Middle East lays the foundation for the promotion of a pragmatic Sunni axis led by Saudi Arabia, with Lebanon potentially the first test case of that geostrategic change.

Although it is too early to eulogize Hezbollah as an influential sub-state organization in Lebanon, it seems that President-elect Aoun's ambitions to implement "one army for one state" and, by implication, disarming Hezbollah with international support give strong signals about the group's future. It can be cautiously estimated that it will never again be what it once was.

The Western powers' involvement, particularly the leading role of the United States in shaping the face of a renewed Lebanon, will likely serve as a barrier to Hezbollah's radical wing, which has not abandoned its aspiration of reestablishing its military power as well as Iranian influence in Lebanon.

Still, for the time being, it is unlikely that Hezbollah will renew fire on Israel. This is undoubtedly a manifestation of the remarkable blow the IDF dealt to the organization, which until recently was considered the most powerful terrorist army in the world.

(Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies Feb 6)

USAID was Rotten, but Trump Needs the ‘Soft Power’ of Foreign Aid Done Right By Mark Dubowitz and Ben Cohen

By abruptly shuttering the US Agency for International Development (USAID) only two weeks after returning to Washington, President Trump is signaling that he will bring accountability and efficiency to foreign aid.

In an ideal world, USAID strengthens US influence through soft power.

At just over \$40 billion, USAID’s annual budget is a small fraction of the Department of Defense’s annual allocation of nearly \$900 billion. This relatively small investment is intended to help save billions more in US hard power, yielding a high return on investment for taxpayers.

In principle, the agency’s efforts to advance democracy and prevent wars are laudable. Developing countries benefit from agricultural technologies, inoculation against disease, and educational development.

But, as is so often the case with social development projects, fringe political ideologies were imposed on USAID’s work by the government employees and consultants.

The agency’s funding was corrupted, with grants going to radical causes and organizations.

Perhaps the best illustration of how USAID has misused its funding is found in the Middle East.

In 2024, as the region reeled from the aftermath of the bestial atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel the previous year, the United States significantly boosted its financial support for projects in Gaza and the West Bank, spending more than \$200 million of American taxpayers’ money in territories already rife with terrorist incitement and activity.

The respected Israeli research organization NGO Monitor pointed out that as the US government “dramatically increased funding” for these various projects, it “drastically decreased transparency.”

These grants were made to what USAID called “miscellaneous foreign awardees.” You wouldn’t know from the opaque accounting process that beneficiaries included local partners who praised the October 7 onslaught.

A “flash appeal” issued by the United Nations for assistance in Gaza attracted \$114 million from Washington, feathering the nests of local non-governmental organizations like Al Awda, a “health and community center” with close ties to the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, designated as a terrorist organization, and the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, whose president described the massacres in Israel as “a glorious day for the Palestinian resistance and people.”

Indeed, the rot had set in before 2023.

Among the 20 Palestinian NGOs that received USAID funding in 2022 was the Community Development and Continuing Education Institute, whose chairman crowed over the escape of “six of our prisoner heroes” from an Israeli jail in 2021, all of whom were later recaptured.

One of those six was Zakaria Zubeidi, a former leader of the notorious Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades who was responsible for several terrorist outrages in Israel, among them the 2002 bombing of a polling station in the Israeli town of Beit Shean in which six people were murdered.

Late last month, Zubeidi was included among the Palestinian terrorists released by Israel in exchange for Israeli hostages abducted to Gaza by Hamas on October 7.

None of this was remotely worrying for USAID’s governing bureaucracy.

Instead of heeding the August 2024 warning from its own Office of Inspector General that due diligence standards had fallen woefully short, the agency stoked false Palestinian claims that Israel was engineering a famine in Gaza, ignoring Israel’s efforts to ensure that hundreds of trucks carrying humanitarian aid crossed every day into the coastal enclave from its main Kerem Shalom crossing.

USAID has routinely parroted the talking points of terrorist organizations and bestowed America’s largesse on so-called “humanitarian” initiatives that did much the same.

It’s no wonder that the agency’s reputation became tarnished — and as far as Trump is concerned, beyond redemption.

The goal now must be to rebuild USAID so that the good work the agency has done in countries from Ukraine to the Democratic Republic of Congo can continue without the stain of associations with terror apologists and Islamist radicals in the Middle East.

Sen. Jim Risch (R-Ind.), chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is right to support USAID’s incorporation into the State Department, which, he says, would “reform and restructure the agency in a way that better serves US national security interests.”

With Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the helm, the United States now has to ensure that funds continue to flow to projects and organizations engaged in humanitarian development without compromising our national interests, and without allowing hostile nations like Russia and China to exploit the temporary vacuum left by USAID’s dismantling.

Returning the agency to its primary mission will support this administration’s goal of ending wars and maintaining peace. (NY Post Feb 4)

After the Cease-Fire Deal: The Palestinians Experienced a Nakba, But Feel Victorious Dr. Michael Milshtein

The Iron Swords War joins a series of conflicts in the history of the Israeli-Arab conflict that end in the rather complex situation of Israel reaping military successes and strategic achievements coupled with a sense of failure and bitterness. The Arab side, on the other hand, has taken severe blows and has come out the loser in military terms, but regards the war as a historic achievement – primarily since Israel was damaged and taken by surprise at its start, and that by its end Israel has not achieved a decisive victory.

This was the case in the 1956 Sinai Campaign when, like in the current war, Israel was pressured by the United States to withdraw from conquered territories and bring the conflict to an end. The same applies to the Yom Kippur War, the second intifada, Second Lebanon War and the 2014 Operation Protective Edge.

Arab collective memory regards these events as achievements resulting from sacrifice and the ability to absorb severe blows, exhibit steadfastness, (“sumud”), and make it impossible for Israel to declare decisive victory. This phenomenon shouldn’t lead Israel to conclude it has been defeated but must be understood so as to formulate sober goals and courses of action in dealing with enemies in the region.

There’s a sense of accomplishment in the Palestinian arena regarding signing the current Israel-Hamas agreement, centered around Hamas’ efforts to establish a narrative whereby, “On October 7, Netanyahu declared his goal of destroying Hamas, but after 15 months was forced to sign an agreement with it.” In other words, de facto recognizing Hamas as the dominant force in Gaza, for which no alternative exists. A similar sentiment is prevalent too among many Gazans who, despite unprecedented suffering caused by the ideological adventures afflicted by Sinwar, nonetheless, view the agreement, like October 7, as a national achievement.

There’s next to no soul-searching on the Palestinian side for the current war - or at all. Here and there, you might hear a voice critical of Hamas, primarily from Palestinian Authority officials but, like during the second intifada, focusing on the damage caused or the ill-judged policy, but not regarding the massacre carried out against Israelis. This lack of soul-searching is particularly striking when it comes to October 7: Most Palestinians believe the contention that it was an attack on military targets, not accompanied by war crimes. No prominent Palestinian intellectual, political leader or political analyst speaks of regret, shame or responsibility for the massacre.

For now, there are no signs of soul-searching concerning the price of the war. Responsibility for the carnage and destruction,

described as a Nakba greater than that of 1948, is laid at Israel's doorstep. This reflects a long-standing fundamental Palestinian flaw: a "bipolarity" with, on the one hand, fighting spirit and praise for the ability to harm Israel and, on the other, victimhood from the results of the war the Palestinians themselves started.

For decades, this pattern has been repeated by a defeated aggressor demanding compassion while, at the same time, refusing to show mercy. Many Palestinians cleave to the dichotomy of being "natives" who are always right, and are therefore permitted to resort to violence against a "colonial power" that is always satanic, opting for fantasy, slogans and "historical justice" over feasible solutions; insisting on turning back the wheels of history and, above all, evading self-criticism or the ability to demonstrate empathy toward Israelis, including civilians, invariably defined collectively as "settlers," thereby constituting legitimate targets.

Understanding how Palestinians perceive the end of the war is essential for formulating sensible plans for the future. On October 7, the "conception" – supported by both the left and right – that radical elements, particularly those who have become sovereign, could be "tamed," wasn't the only thing to collapse. The notion that occupation lies at the root of the conflict, and that the solution is a Palestinian state, collapsed too.

The brutality and demonization exposed on October 7 stemmed from neither political repression nor economic deprivation, but rather from a religious and cultural animosity burning for years. The Palestinians refuse, or don't want, to admit this. It's important, however, that at least Israelis should recognize the grim truth. We should liberate ourselves from ideas championed by high-ranking Israeli officials about striving to "deradicalize the Palestinians, like in Germany and Japan" – a process possible only via soul searching, rather than external coercion.

A further insight that must be learned from October 7 - by Palestinians, but more importantly by Israelis - is that Hamas is not a traffic accident in Palestinian history borne of the lack of political negotiation or general distress. Hamas men aren't "aliens," estranged from the society in which they operate (like ISIS), but are rather an integral part of it, fused into it. They influence it, representing large parts of it, and reflect deep-seated trends within it. Such a body can't be "erased," as many have declared since October 7. Conversely, it must also be understood that there is no clear dichotomous divide between Hamas and the general public – an image that Hamas itself tries to manipulate the market. (Ynet Feb 4)

Trump Challenges Years of Anti-Israel Bias on the World Stage

By Fiamma Nirenstein

The recent developments in U.S.-Israel relations mark not just a strategic shift but a historic moment that dismantles long-standing diplomatic illusions and paves the way for a radically transformed Middle East. This shift became evident when former U.S. President Donald Trump openly declared his support for Israel, saying it has fought heroically. And that the nation has been strong and united in the face of an enemy that has kidnapped, tortured and slaughtered innocent women and children.

This marks a turning point, akin to the 1917 Balfour Declaration that recognized the Jewish right to a homeland and Israel's 1948 War of Independence, in which the fledgling state triumphed against a united Arab assault. Trump went further, drawing parallels between the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks and Holocaust denial, saying there are people that "like to pretend it didn't happen like the Holocaust didn't happen, same mindset."

This rhetoric challenges decades of political narratives that sought to downplay the persistent threat of Palestinian terrorism. For years, efforts at appeasement and humanitarian concessions have diluted Israel's right to self-defense, even as Hamas has turned children's bedrooms into armories and hospitals into missile launch sites. The criticism of Israel's defensive war—combined with former President

Joe Biden's repeated ceasefire demands and the misdirection of humanitarian aid into Hamas's hands—has now been laid bare. What Israel faces is not merely a military confrontation but a fundamental struggle for survival.

The alignment between Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has led to a groundbreaking agreement between the two nations. At its core are two key objectives: securing the release of Israeli hostages and ensuring the complete eradication of Hamas. This consensus was previously thought impossible, as any diplomatic negotiation appeared at odds with Hamas's total defeat.

Yet Trump, as the disruptive factor in global politics, has made this scenario plausible. The reality on the ground is stark; Gaza lies in ruins and will require years of reconstruction. With Hamas eliminated, a new vision for the region would emerge. Trump's strategy involves cooperation with Saudi Arabia and other moderate Arab nations to redesign the Middle East, one in which terrorism is decisively expelled.

Of course, obstacles remain.

Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt shot back at Trump's plan, particularly regarding the relocation of Gaza's population during reconstruction. Hamas could certainly use its remaining arsenal to disrupt the process. However, Trump has issued a direct warning saying there will be a more violent response if hostages do not return. This shifts the burden onto regional actors like Jordan, Egypt, Qatar and Turkey—nations that may struggle to resist American pressure, which comes with both diplomatic bargaining and implicit threats.

Now, however, a previously unthinkable idea has now entered serious consideration: direct U.S. oversight of Gaza's reconstruction phase. Trump's history suggests he is not one for empty threats, and Iran's immediate reaction to his latest remarks reinforces the seriousness of the situation. When Trump, alongside Netanyahu, reaffirmed that Iran would never obtain nuclear weapons, his administration swiftly imposed new sanctions on the Iranian regime. In response, Iran signaled a willingness to negotiate, an acknowledgment of Trump's unpredictable yet formidable approach.

For decades, the Palestinian leadership has rejected the concept of two states for two peoples. Now, with Trump advocating for the relocation of some Palestinians from Gaza, a major roadblock to peace has been removed. Fatah's role in this new landscape remains uncertain, but Israel will not tolerate a Palestinian state being built with the intention of undermining its own. However, there is potential for cooperation with a reformed Palestinian Authority—one free from Hamas's violent influence and P.A. head Mahmoud Abbas's tacit support for terrorism.

Interestingly, Saudi Arabia has not explicitly demanded the creation of a Palestinian state in recent discussions. Trump himself has pointed out Israel's vulnerability calling it a small nation facing a vast and hostile Middle East. This perspective has led him to request two months to deliberate on the issue of Israeli annexations in Judea and Samaria, breaking away from the traditional narrative that equates Israeli settlers with criminal activity—an anti-Israel stance reinforced by an Obama-era U.N. resolution.

Trump's departure from the U.N. Human Rights Council, where Iran chaired the African-Asian bloc, signals a broader rejection of international bodies that systematically demonize Israel. His administration's stance is clear: Israel's defensive war is justified, its soldiers are courageous, and the hostages must be returned. Above all, Hamas must be eliminated. At the heart of this policy shift lies a fundamental truth: Israel is the Jewish homeland, and the American leadership recognizes it.

As Trump and Netanyahu push forward, they aim to dismantle the long-standing falsehoods that have shaped global perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The days of sanitizing Palestinian terrorism with diplomatic euphemisms may be coming to an end. Instead, a new geopolitical reality is taking shape—one in which Israel's right to exist and defend itself is no longer up for debate.

(JNS Feb 5)