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Photo: GPO

Prime Minister Yitzah Rabin, U.S. President Bill Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan

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Israel and Jordan mark 25 years of imperfect peace

Though a strategic partnership that is beneficial to both countries, the peace between Israel and Jordan some say, should have delivered bigger dividends and the promise at its outset has not yet been fulfilled

Associated Press|Published: 10.26.19 , 13:41

The Naharayim park was established 25 years ago as a symbol of the landmark peace agreement between Israel and Jordan.

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Now, as the two countries mark a quarter century of official relations, the park and its “Island of Peace” are being shuttered.

Prime Minister Yitzah Rabin, U.S. President Bill Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan

(Photo: GPO) (Photos: GPO)

Prime Minister Yitzah Rabin, U.S. President Bill Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan

(Photo: GPO)

It is a fitting reflection of the Israeli-Jordanian relationship — one that began with great promise, but which has been plagued by mistrust, disappointment and missed opportunities.

While the peace agreement remains intact, there is a sense on both sides that it should have delivered much bigger dividends.

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“I am not certain that we gave it our full attention,” said retired Supreme Court Justice Elyakim Rubinstein, who was Israel’s chief negotiator for the peace deal.

Speaking on Israeli public radio, Rubinstein said there were things Israel could do “to lend a better atmosphere” and suggested Israel show more “respect” for its eastern neighbor. He declined to elaborate.

It is a far cry from the heady times of the peace agreement, signed at an emotional ceremony on Oct. 26, 1994, attended by Israel’s then-prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, the late King Hussein and President Bill Clinton.

Following up on a historic interim peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians a year earlier, all three leaders delivered moving speeches promising warm relations and a better future.

“This is our gift to our peoples and the generations to come,” said Hussein, who died in 1999. “It will not be simply a piece of paper ratified by those responsible, blessed by the world. It will be real, as we open our hearts and minds to each other.”

Israeli and Jordanian flags at the Naharayim bridge border crossing (Photo: Reuters)
Israeli and Jordanian flags at the Naharayim bridge border crossing (Photo: Reuters)

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Twenty-five years later, the peace agreement remains a vital strategic asset for both countries.

The deal has brought Israel much-needed quiet and a valuable partner along its longest border, while buttressing Jordan’s position as a crucial ally of the West in one of the world’s most volatile areas.

The two countries maintain close, covert security relations.

Israel, a world leader in desalination, provides large quantities of water to Jordan, one of the driest countries on earth, and has agreed to sell natural gas to Jordan as well.

But the warm relations envisioned at that signing ceremony remain elusive, and in Jordan there is little public support for the agreement.

Jordan has a long list of complaints — beginning with the deep freeze in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 Mideast war. Although Jordan has renounced any claims to these territories, which the Palestinians seek as parts of a future state, it retains deep connections.

A majority of Jordan's population is believed to have Palestinian roots, and Jordan's King Abdullah II is a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause. Without progress on the Palestinian front, Abdullah is unable — and unwilling — to warmly embrace Israel.

Israel's policies at Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site — a hilltop compound known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary — have also put pressure on the king.

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Jordan serves as custodian of the site's Muslim shrines.

During Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's term, visits to the compound by right-wing Jewish groups that want to alter its status have increased, igniting clashes with Muslim worshippers and straining relations with Jordan.

Jewish worshippers with police protection on Temple Mount (Photo: AFP)

Jewish worshippers with police protection on Temple Mount (Photo: AFP)

Jordan also remains bitter over a 2017 incident in which an Israeli guard at the Israeli Embassy in Amman shot and killed two Jordanians, saying one had tried to attack him with a screwdriver.

Netanyahu gave the guard a hero's welcome, infuriating the Jordanians. Diplomatic relations were repaired only months later after Israel expressed "deep regret" and replaced its ambassador.

More recently, Netanyahu angered Jordan by vowing to annex the Jordan Valley — a strategic area of the West Bank along the Jordanian border.

"There is no real social and popular peace between Jordan and Israel," said Amer Sabaileh, an independent Jordanian analyst.

He said Jordan needs "more understanding from the Israeli side" and that Israel's approach to various issues has "put Jordan in a very difficult situation."

Speaking at a Tel Aviv conference last month, Israel's ambassador to Jordan, Amir Weissbrod, acknowledged that relations aren't perfect.

But he listed a long line of successes, including the water and energy cooperation, Jordan's use of Israel's Haifa port and an expanding program that allows hundreds of Jordanians to enter Israeli border towns to work.

Describing Jordan as a "strategic partner" and gateway to the broader Arab world, Weissbrod said: "We must try to make the utmost effort to ensure the stability and success of Jordan."

Yet he also said there is more that Jordanian leaders could do, particularly in terms of building support among the Jordanian public.

“They can’t hide the degree of the relationship, and there are achievements to talk about,” he said.

Jordanian officials did not respond to a request for comment.

Against this backdrop, Jordan last year announced that it was ending a special lease agreement under the 1994 treaty that returned two farming areas — Naharayim and Tzofar — to Jordanian sovereignty while allowing Israel continued use of the lands.

Without Jordanian objections, the leases for the areas, known in Arabic as Baqura and Ghamr, would have automatically renewed.

Naharayim, located along the Jordan River in northern Israel, has become a popular tourist site.

It includes a small park and picnic area, the ruins of a historic power station and the “Island of Peace,” where Israelis can briefly enter Jordanian territory without having to show their passports.

Island of Peace at Naharayim (Photo: Assaf Kamar)
Island of Peace at Naharayim (Photo: Assaf Kamar)

“We regard this place as part of a normalization and relationship with our neighbors from the other side of the border,” said Idan Grinbaum, head of the local regional council.

He said he has sent a letter to Abdullah asking the king to reconsider but has not heard back.

The site has a painful history. In 1997, a Jordanian soldier opened fire at an Israeli crowd, killing seven schoolgirls on a class trip.

After the shooting, King Hussein traveled to Israel to ask forgiveness from the girls' families.

Twenty years after his death, Hussein remains a beloved figure in Israel for what was seen as a courageous act.

With the site set to revert to full Jordanian control in early November, Grinbaum said he still hopes that leaders can find a way to preserve Naharayim as a symbol of peace.

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“We still think that joint projects can happen here for both countries, for the benefit of citizens in both countries,” he said. “Unfortunately, in reality things are not that simple.”

IDF chief raps officers over Hezbollah missile strike

Kochavi censures battalion commander and his deputy for allowing medical vehicle carrying five soldiers to drive near the Lebanese border despite threat of Hezbollah missile strike, praises decision to stage troop injuries to reduce chance of further attacks
Yoav Zitun|Published: 10.27.19 , 18:45

IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi on Sunday officially reprimanded two senior officers from the Artillery Corps over an incident last month that saw the Iranian-backed Hezbollah organization fire three anti-tank missiles at IDF forces on the Lebanese border.

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The missile strike came in response to an August attack by the Israel Air Force on several targets near Damascus. The strike killed three Hezbollah operatives, and effectively foiled a drone attack on Israeli targets by Iranian forces.

IDF forces in Avivim (Photo: AFP)

IDF forces in Avivim (Photo: AFP)

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Following the strike in Syria and anticipating a Hezbollah response, the IDF sought to reduce its troops exposure to a cross-border threat and - among other measures - banned military vehicles from traveling along certain roads close to the Lebanese border.

But according to the outcome of an investigation into the incident released Sunday, the commander and deputy commander of a battalion stationed at the border moshav of Avivim failed to comply with instructions and allowed an armored medical vehicle to drive along an open road.

The vehicle was driving on the road as Hezbollah fired three anti-tank missiles at IDF troops, and missed it by a few dozen yards.

According to the findings released Sunday, the deputy commander allowed the fully medical vehicle to drive - fully exposed - close to the Lebanon border, putting the vehicle and its five passengers in danger of attack.

The battalion commander was also censured for certain deficiencies during the evacuation of the Avivim post, such as the abandonment of sensitive materials and the desertion of lookout posts adjacent to the border.

Kochavi described the events as a "severe operational incident" and summoned various officers deployed along the Lebanese border to discuss military shortcomings in the area.

The Avivim base was deserted after the Hezbollah attack
The Avivim base was deserted after the Hezbollah attack

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IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Hadi Zilberman said however that forces' preparations at the end of August to prevent further escalation in the area were seen as successful by Kochavi.

"Chief of Staff Kochavi finds it proper to reprimand commanders for making the wrong decisions," said Zilberman, "but at the same time, he will still back up any acting commander that is out in the field."

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The mock evacuation of wounded troops to Haifa's Rambam Hospital after the attack on Avivim (Gil Nechushten)

The mock evacuation of wounded troops to Haifa's Rambam Hospital after the attack on Avivim (Gil Nechushten)

When Hezbollah fired its anti-tank missiles, the IDF staged a emergency evacuation from the site in order to persuade the Shiite organization that it had caused serious injuries among Israeli troops, thereby averting further cross-border attacks.

The "wounded" soldiers were airlifted to Rambam Hospital in Haifa, and when tensions subsided on the northern front, were released back to their base.

Photo: Elad Malka

Netanyahu and Gantz

Photo: Elad Malka

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Netanyahu, Gantz government talks bear no fruit

PM hopefuls meet for first time since Gantz received government task from President Rivlin; negotiations lead to no new developments, but parties are set to meet again

Moran Azoulay and Yuval Karni|Published: 10.27.19 , 23:11

Blue and White leader MK Benny Gantz and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met in Tel Aviv Sunday to negotiate terms for the establishment of a unity government in a round of talks that did not lead to any new developments besides a promise to meet again for further negotiations.

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"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White leader MK Benny Gantz discussed the available political options during the meeting," said a shared statement by both parties. "It was agreed that both parties' negotiation teams will continue to be in contact".

Netanyahu and Gantz (Photo: Elad Malka)

Netanyahu and Gantz (Photo: Elad Malka)

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Gantz said after the meeting with Netanyahu that he will do everything in his power to prevent another round of elections.

Blue and White and Likud negotiation teams also met earlier Sunday in Ramat Gan to try and negotiate a solution for the political stalemate between the parties.

Blue and White's negotiation team described the meeting as being "in good spirits", adding that Likud's team asked for further meetings in the next few days, centered around the understanding that since Gantz currently holds the mandate to form a government, he is the destined prime minister.

Blue and White officials cited Likud's insistence on including the entire right-wing bloc, which features far right and ultra-Orthodox parties, in any possible unity government as one of the main points of disagreement between the two parties.

Meeting between Blue and White and Likud negotiation teams
Meeting between Blue and White and Likud negotiation teams

"Throughout the meeting, Likud kept on insisting that they represent the 'immunity bloc', the 55 MKs supporting Netanyahu's immunity despite the criminal charges held against him and his possible indictment," said the officials.

Likud then released a statement shifting the blame on Blue and White for refusing to accept a government outline proposed by President Reuven Rivlin last week.

"Blue and White refused the outline given by President Reuven Rivlin, which is the only path to a broad national unity government," said the statement.

President Rivlin's government outline states that Gantz and Netanyahu will receive the premiership on a basis of a rotation government.

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Netanyahu will serve as prime minister first and Gantz will step in after two years or alternatively, in case Netanyahu is indicted in one of several corruption cases standing against him.

U.S. will ramp up pressure on Iran, says Mnuchin during Israel visit
Netanyahu reiterates the Treasury Secretary's statements during a special press conference, urging America to increase pressure on the Islamic Republic 'more, more and more'

Reuters|Published: 10.28.19 , 14:14

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Monday the United States would increase economic pressure on Iran over its nuclear programme, making the pledge during a Middle East trip that includes visits to U.S. allies Israel and Saudi Arabia.

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Sanctions reimposed on Tehran by President Donald Trump after he withdrew the United States from world powers' 2015 nuclear pact with Tehran have dried up Iranian oil revenues and cut Iranian banks ties to the financial world.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin deliver joint statements during their meeting in Jerusalem, Monday, Oct. 28, 2019
Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin deliver joint statements during their meeting in Jerusalem, Monday, Oct. 28, 2019
Mnuchin, speaking in Jerusalem to reporters alongside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who urged him to crank up pressure on Iran, offered no details on what new moves were in store.

"We have executed on a maximum pressure campaign for sanctions. They have worked, they are working, they are cutting off the money," Mnuchin said.

He told Netanyahu: "We will continue to ramp up, more, more, more ... I just came from a very productive working lunch with your team. They gave us a bunch of very specific ideas that we will be following up."

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (Photo: AFP)
Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (Photo: AFP)

Since leaving the nuclear deal last year, Washington has been trying to strangle Iran's oil exports, the mainstay of its economy. The sanctions have dismantled part of former U.S. president Barack Obama's legacy and upset U.S. allies who were party to the 2015 deal, which was designed to restrict Tehran's pathway to a nuclear bomb in exchange for sanctions relief.

The Islamic Republic denies it is seeking nuclear weapons.

Netanyahu, who strongly opposed the 2015 nuclear deal, said Iran's ability to develop weaponry that could threaten any country in the Middle East could be diminished by tightening sanctions.

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"So I want to thank you for what you've been doing and encourage you, Steve, to do more - more, a lot more," he said.

Netanyahu: Iran's precision missiles in Yemen meant to attack Israel

Ynet security analyst notes Iran already has the capability to hit Israel from within its borders but now Israel must be prepared along its Southern flank for missiles from Yemen which means more preparation

Itamar Eichner|Published: 10.28.19 , 17:54

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Monday that Iran is deploying precision missiles in Yemen in order to attack Israel.

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In his meeting with U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Netanyahu said Iran hopes to be able to use such missile capability, targeting anywhere in the Mideast.

Iranian Fateh-110 ballistic missiles

Iranian Fateh-110 ballistic missiles

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Netanyahu noted these efforts by Iran have been ongoing but the introduction of missiles to Yemen is for the purpose of targeting Israel.

According to the prime minister Iran intends to deploy precision missiles in Syria and Iraq as well as upgrading the 130,000 missiles arsenal in Lebanon.

Ynet security analyst Ron Ben Yishai says Iranian missiles fired from inside Iran are also capable of hitting targets in Israel but the deployment of such weapons around the Middle east including now Yemen requires a more extensive use of missile detection technology on the part of Israel including on its south.

"We regard Iran as the biggest threat to peace stability and security".

"They have attacked Saudi Arabia, disrupted international maritime routes and over the past decade, have attacked and killed Americans in Afghanistan and elsewhere."

aftermath of attack on Saudi oil instillation attributed to Iran (Photo: AFP) (Photo: AFP)
aftermath of attack on Saudi oil instillation attributed to Iran (Photo: AFP)
Meeting in his office, the prime minister told Mnuchin relations between the two countries has never been stronger.

He congratulated U.S. President Donald Trump on the success of the mission to eliminate ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

"This man got what he deserved," he told visiting Treasury Secretary Mnuchin "we are still in the midst of the war against terror – not only against extreme Sunnis led by ISIS but also against extreme Shiites led by Iran and its Mideast proxies."

Steven Mnuchin told his host the administration plans to continue to ramp up efforts to curtail Iran's aggressive ambitions.

"We have executed on a maximum pressure campaign for sanctions. They have worked, they are working, they are cutting off the money," Mnuchin said.

Earlier the prime minister met with US Special Representative Jared Kushner.

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Also attending the meeting were US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook, US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, Deputy Assistant to the US President Avi Berkowitz, National Security Council Director Meir Ben-Shabbat and Israeli Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer.

Trump: Islamic State leader 'died like a dog' in Syria raid

In special statement from White House, president says Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi killed himself and three of his children when he set off his explosives vest; U.S. troops removed sensitive information from compound in Idlib

Ynet, News Agencies|Published: 10.27.19 , 15:44

U.S. President Donald Trump confirmed Sunday that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead after a U.S. military operation in Syria targeted the Islamic State group leader.

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Trump said in a statement to the nation from the White House's Diplomatic Room that "al-Baghdadi is dead" -- fulfilling the top national security priority of his administration.

Donald Trump announces the death of Abu Bakr a-Baghdadi (Photo: Reuters)

Donald Trump announces the death of Abu Bakr a-Baghdadi (Photo: Reuters)

He said Baghdadi "died like a dog" and "like a coward," when he detonated an explosives vest he was wearing, killing three of his children as well. A large number of Baaghdadi's companions were also killed in the operation, he said.

No U.S. personnel were lost in the mission, the president said.

He said that the U.S. forces were in the compound in Idlib Province in northwestern Syria for about two hours and removed sensitive information from the site.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Trump thanked Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iraq for their support in the operation. Iraqi and Turkish officials said earlier Sunday that their respective countries had played a role in the operation.

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Under Iraqi-born Baghdad's rule, Islamic State -- which at one point controlled swathes of Syria and Iraq - has been responsible for gruesome attacks against religious minorities and attacks on five continents in the name of a form of ultra-fanatical Islam.

He presided over IS's global jihad and became arguably the world's most wanted man.

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The announcement came after Trump had been on the receiving end of bipartisan criticism in Washington following the recent pullback of U.S. troops from northeastern Syria, essentially abandoning the Kurdish fighters who had partnered with the U.S. to battle Islamic State.

Critics feared that move would allow the militant group to regain strength after it had lost vast stretches of territory it had once controlled.

John Kelly just said something very, very damning about Donald Trump

Chris Cillizza

Analysis by Chris Cillizza, CNN Editor-at-large

Updated 1:28 PM ET, Mon October 28, 2019

Hear how John Kelly was recruited to work for Trump

Now Playing Hear how John Kelly was...

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SANTA CLARITA, CA - NOVEMBER 06: Democratic Congressional candidate Katie Hill speaks to supporters at her election night party in California's 25th Congressional district on November 6, 2018 in Santa Clarita, California. Republican incumbent U.S. Rep. Steve Knight is competing against Hill for his seat in the district in a very close race. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

Katie Hill announces resignation from Congress
President Donald Trump is introduced during the third inning of Game 5 of the baseball World Series between the Houston Astros and the Washington Nationals Sunday, Oct. 27, 2019, in Washington. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

Washington crowd boos President Trump at World Series
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Coons: Trump disrespected Pelosi by not informing her of raid
(CNN)On Saturday, former White House chief of staff John Kelly told a conservative audience about this piece of advice he gave President Donald Trump before leaving his job:

"I said, whatever you do -- and we were still in the process of trying to find someone to take my place -- I said whatever you do, don't hire a 'yes man,' someone who won't tell you the truth -- don't do that. Because if you do, I believe you will be impeached."

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Kelly's comments drew a decent amount of attention right after he made them -- at a conference in Sea Island, Georgia sponsored by the Washington Examiner -- but got lost the second Trump tweeted "something very big has just happened!" just before 9:30 p.m. ET Saturday night. That tweet -- and Trump's subsequent Sunday morning announcement that ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was dead -- overwhelmed all other news.

But we shouldn't let the constant churn of covering Trump roll right over what Kelly said and why it's both telling and damning about this President. (Worth noting: Trump denied that Kelly had told him any such thing; "If he would have said that I would have thrown him out of the office," Trump said in a statement. "He just wants to come back into the action like everybody else does.")

Consider carefully exactly what Kelly is saying here: If the President of the United States is allowed to do what he wants, he will act in ways that will lead to his impeachment. Which is remarkable! And terrifying! And potentially accurate!

Following Kelly's departure, Trump named a loyalist -- Mick Mulvaney -- to the chief of staff post. Mulvaney, by his own admission, allowed Trump to be Trump -- with all the good and bad that comes with it. That includes Trump's coordinated pressure campaign against the Ukrainians -- run by his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani -- to force that government to look into debunked allegations regarding Joe Biden and his son, Hunter. House Democrats are currently conducting an impeachment investigation to determine whether the President abused his office for personal, political gain.

Yes, Kelly's comments are incredibly self-serving. He is essentially saying "I told you so!" when it comes to Trump's behavior and what would come from it. But ask yourself

this: why would Kelly lie about his observations about the President? He's no Democrat and, unlike scorned former Trumpers like Michael Cohen and Anthony Scaramucci, hasn't spent his time after falling out of favor with the White House savaging the President.

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Kelly is a highly decorated Marine with a distinguished record of serving the country for the bulk of his adult life. Would he really risk all of that by making up lies about his conversations with the President? Seems unlikely. Especially when you consider that Trump, who is saying Kelly never said anything like this, has said more than 12,000 false or misleading things since coming into office in 2017.

What's more important to consider is that someone who spent lots and lots of time with Trump -- and who has, throughout his life, interacted with leaders of all stripes -- believed that if left to his own devices, the President would commit an impeachable act. There's nothing more damning than a judgment like this one coming from someone who knows Trump well and has seen how the President goes about the day-to-day elements of the job. In short: When someone who has lived the life -- and done the jobs -- Kelly has, we would all do well to listen to him when he offers an opinion on the character of this President.

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