

Letter Nr. 28

The eyes of the world have been focused on the protests in Iran and on developments involving the Trump administration in the US, including the killing of a US citizen in Minneapolis, the invasion of Venezuela and the capture of dictator Nicolas Maduro and President Trump's desire to take over Greenland. In Israel, the protest movement in Iran has elicited some indifference, since it's unlikely that if the old regime falls, the new one will be any more pro-Israel.

Israel became the first UN member country to recognize Somaliland, probably seeing it as a potential base of operations against the Houthis. Israel supported the American attack on Maduro, seeing it as a blow to the Iranian axis and ignoring the violations of international and US law it entailed. Prime Minister Netanyahu's close relationship with President Trump may have proven to be at least as much of an international liability as an asset.

Internally, the right-wing attacks (for the time being, mainly verbal) on the Attorney-General and the Supreme Court justices have continued. Scandalously, it is becoming increasingly clear that key advisers to the Prime Minister also served as advisers to the government of Qatar.

A dozen European countries (including Germany), plus Japan and Canada condemned Israel's decision to approve 19 new Jewish settlements in the West Bank. There has been a decline in Palestinian terrorism on the West Bank but a rise in settler attacks on Palestinians. In early January, in a town on the West Bank, some settlers burned a Palestinian's car, which led to several Palestinians injured and at least one dead. The Israeli television news has deemed these attacks "Jewish terror," encouraged by Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who controls the police. PM Netanyahu does not recognize Jewish terror as a category, preferring to call it a marginal phenomenon, perpetrated by "marginalized kids from broken homes." We seem to be seeing de facto annexation of the West Bank.

It seems that we have still not yet moved into Phase Two of the Trump-brokered ceasefire in Gaza. First, Gazans are still being killed on a daily basis. Second, there is still one Israeli hostage whose body is in captivity. Trump has begun to set up a "Peace Board," and has invited Netanyahu to join. The latter expressed dissatisfaction with his not having been consulted on the make-up of the Gaza Rehabilitation Commission.

This region has been beset recently with unusually severe rainstorms and very low temperatures. If people who live in permanent homes and have central heating (like me) are feeling discomfort, what about Gazans, living in tents, without electricity?

But we will end on a happier note, with a few positive developments: January 12th marked the first time since October 7th 2023 that Israel allowed Gazans to travel to the West Bank for medical treatment. A week later, it was announced officially that there

has been a decline in the incidence of Palestinian terror on the West Bank, probably due to the increased cooperation between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian Authority.

On the Israeli side, it is becoming clear that new elections will take place within the next few months. How this will affect Israeli policies and actions remains questionable. But perhaps there will be less corruption and a higher level of ministers in the cabinet.

Finally, we have entered the new Hebrew month of Shevat, which is usually a sign of renewal in nature and a harbinger of the coming spring. In the middle of the month, Jews celebrate Arbor Day, sometimes known as the New Year of the Trees. We can only pray that the renewal in the natural world will lead to renewal of human life and hope.