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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

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## Hezbollah, Iran-Backed Militias Advance towards Syria’s Border with Israel

by TheTower.org Staff | 12.26.17

Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias advanced closer to Syria’s border with Israel marking “a new expansion of Tehran’s influence” on Israel’s northeastern neighbor.

The Syrian army, supported by Druze militias, and Iran-backed forces, has “pushed deeper into the last rebel-held enclave” approaching the border area with Israel, Reuters reported on Sunday.

According to rebel sources, the Syrian army approached Beit Jinn and surrounded a village that has been controlled by rebels for several years. Beit Jinn is the final rebel stronghold in the area southwest of Damascus, which is also known as Western Ghouta.

The presence of Iran-backed forces and commanders from Hezbollah, the Lebanese terrorist organization, backing the Syrian army was confirmed by a Western intelligence source. The same source said that Iran was seeking to “establish a strategic presence” in Syria Golan Heights, opposite Israel’s border.

Regime forces that have been seeking to defeat the rebels have been relying on “heavy bombing on civilian areas and years of siege tactics,” to force rebels to surrender. The rebels in Beit Jinn are largely locals. Some are Sunni jihadists, others are members of the Free Syrian Army. Both groups are operating under the name of Itihad Quwt Jabal al Sheikh, or “Union of fighters of Jabal al Sheikh.”

An official of one of the rebel groups, Liwa al Furqan, Suhaib al Ruhail, told Reuters, “The Iranian-backed militias are trying to consolidate their sphere of influence all the way from southwest of Damascus to the Israeli border.”

Although it has largely stayed out of Syria’s civil war, Israel has said that it considers the establishment of Iranian military presence in Syria as a red line that it could not accept. Three weeks ago, Israeli jets were reported to have struck an Iranian military base south of Damascus.

Also earlier this month, H. R. McMaster, the National Security Adviser of the United States, said that 80% of pro-Assad forces in Syria are Iranian proxies.

Iran has been seeking to create a land link to the Mediterranean to threaten Israel and extend its influence, through what is called the “Shiite crescent,” across the Middle East.

## Israel Weighs “Digital Shekel,” Its Own National Cryptocurrency

December 27, 2017      Colin Harper

Israeli officials are debating whether or not to create their own cryptocurrency, joining a growing list of governments that have proposed their own state-sponsored digital currencies in 2017.

The Israeli government may create its own “digital shekel,” according to sources close to Israel’s Finance Ministry.

The discussions are part of an effort to curb the black market activity that comprises 22% of Israel’s GDP. Officials hope the digital shekel would reduce the use of cash in the economy, a payment option to which Israel’s underground has taken a liking in order to avoid taxes. Such evasion causes Israel to lose around ILS 50 billion in revenue annually. Ironically, cryptocurrencies are often utilized to pay for services on the dark web and black market, but Israeli lawmakers believe that a state-sponsored crypto could prevent the use of cash in such transactions.

Included in a sweeping bill, the digital shekel is one of numerous solutions proposed to combat tax evasion, including a ban on the use of cash to pay employee salaries. The state-issued cryptocurrency would fall under the watch of Israel’s National Bank.

“For the past few weeks the Bank of Israel has been looking at this matter, which has various aspects to it, including monetary and legal. There are many central banks studying the subject. There is no operative plan at the moment and perhaps there may never be, but it is something the Bank of Israel is studying,” an anonymous source said.

### GOVERNMENTS FLOCK TO CRYPTO

Israel joins the ranks of governments looking to crypto as a viable currency option.

Venezuela was the first nation in the world to announce plans for its own state-sponsored currency, following in the footsteps of Dubai, which became the first city to launch an official, government-backed crypto.

Russia recently jumped on this bandwagon as well, and has since moved forward with legislation to create a digital ruble. Back in September, Sweden’s central bank, the Sveriges Riksbank, revealed that it was looking into creating the e-krona, a digital counterpart to Sweden’s fiat currency.

State adoption of cryptocurrency may make some investors and enthusiasts uneasy, as it seems to spit in the face of Satoshi Nakamoto’s intention for Bitcoin to function as a decentralized method of financial exchange. While these currencies are still in the early stages of development, it’s becoming more probable that we will see national cryptocurrencies come to life in the coming year, and it’s likely that more countries will consider cryptocurrency solutions to solve their domestic financial problems for the foreseeable future.

# Iran Completes Its Land Bridge to the Golan

by Jonathan Spyer      The Jerusalem Post

Abu Kamal is the last link in the Iranian land bridge from the Iraq-Iran border to the Mediterranean.

In the east of Syria, the so-called race to Abu Kamal between the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces and the forces of Iran, the Assad regime and Russia appears to be close to conclusion – in the latter's favor. Regime forces moved into the town last Thursday. They were then expelled by an unexpected Islamic State counterattack this week, and have now retreated to positions about two kilometers outside of Abu Kamal.

The Islamic State move, however, has the flavor of a last roll of the dice. Clearly, the Sunni jihadis will lose the strategic border town in the days ahead.

The US-supported SDF fighters are covering ground rapidly to the north. But the forward units of the mainly Kurdish force remain about 25 kilometers north of Abu Kamal, in the area of the Kishma oil field.

Abu Kamal is the last link in the much-discussed Iranian "land bridge" from the Iraq-Iran border to the Mediterranean Sea and the border with Israel.

Control of the border crossing at al-Qaim/Abu Kamal and of the roads leading west from it will enable the Iran-led regional alliance to transport fighters and weaponry in both directions, according to choice. It will mean that in a future confrontation with Hezbollah, Israel could see its enemies reinforced by supplies and volunteers from among other Iranian clients, in precisely the way that took place with such effect in the Syrian war.

Hezbollah can now be reinforced by Iran's other regional clients in a future conflict with Israel.

Of course, such efforts would not be invulnerable to Israeli attentions from the air, and would not confer an irreversible advantage on the Iranian side. But given the Iranian weakness in aviation, the land bridge would vastly increase the options and abilities of the Iranian side.

It is worth noting in this regard that in recent days Iraqi Shi'a militias crossed the border by land for the first time in the Syrian war, to join the battle against Islamic State in the Abu Kamal area.

The land bridge would convey economic advantages as well as strategic ones. It would allow for the transport of Iraqi oil to regime-controlled Syria, bypassing the area currently controlled by the SDF. This will be important in the reconstruction period ahead, regardless of the precise lines of control within Syria.

The imminent conclusion of conventional operations against the last remnants of Islamic State in eastern Syria will in turn bring with it a moment of crucial decision for the United States. A central facet of events in recent months in Syria has been the absence of a clear US strategy. The de facto relationship between US air power and special forces and the Kurdish YPG has proved to be a successful military partnership. This force, not the Assad/Iran/Russia side, is responsible for the greater part of the victory against Islamic State in Syria. Indeed, the regime side's belated push east came precisely to limit the territorial gains of the US-backed SDF.

But throughout, there has been a clear discrepancy between the military support afforded to the SDF

and the complete absence of recognition by the US or any other Western power of the broader Kurdish-led political project in northern Syria.

The Federation of Northern Syria, declared by the Syrian Kurdish leadership on March 17, 2016, indeed lacks the recognition of any other country.

Officially speaking, the reason for US involvement in eastern Syria has been the war against Islamic State. Neither more nor less. At the same time, there is evidence of extensive US military construction in Kurdish-controlled eastern Syria. Airstrips and bases have been built in Rumeilan, Manbij and Kobani. The powerful Saudi official Thamer al-Sabhan visited SDF-controlled eastern Syria in late October, accompanied by Brett McGurk, US special envoy to the coalition against Islamic State. The purpose of the visit, according to a Reuters report, was to discuss the reconstruction of Raqqa city. All these snippets might suggest that the US has longer-term intentions in eastern Syria and does not mean to merely abandon its erstwhile allies, once the task of destroying the Islamic State "caliphate" is done.

A statement by US Defense Secretary James Mattis this week supported this impression. He noted that the US does not intend to "walk away right now before the Geneva process has traction," and would fight Islamic State "for as long as they want to fight," in order to prevent the emergence of "ISIS 2.0."

If the US does decide to stay in eastern Syria, it will need to consider the logistics of how to supply this area, against the wishes of all neighboring entities. The Assad regime has made clear that once Islamic State is defeated, it intends to reunify the entire area of Syria.

Turkey is opposed to the Syrian Kurdish enclave because of its links to the PKK. And the Abadi government in Baghdad, while happy to receive US weaponry and training, is in fact the ally of Assad and Iran, and as such also opposes the US-aligned Syrian Kurds.

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Up until last month, the pro-US Iraqi Kurds controlled two border crossings to their Syrian brethren. But these were lost to the Iraqis and the Shi'a militias in the military action that followed the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum of September 25.

So, a difficult decision awaits the US. Much will depend on the choice made. But in any event, since the conquest of Abu Kamal by Iran and its allies looks inevitable, even if the US chooses to stick with its current allies in eastern Syria, this will not prevent the Iranian land bridge from coming into being. It is already a fait accompli.

From an Israeli point of view, this is a cause for concern. Israel's focus is not related mainly to the Syria-Iraqi border, of course, but to the southwesternmost part of the corridor – where it is set to nudge up against the Quneitra crossing and the Israeli-controlled part of the Golan Heights.

The joint statement by President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin released on November 10 fails, in Jerusalem's view, to adequately address the issue of Iranian and Iran-supported forces close to Israel's border. The statement issues no timetable for the withdrawal of these forces. And Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was quoted on Tuesday as dismissing any notion that Russia had promised the withdrawal of Iranian groups from Syria.

It is unlikely, in any case, that Russia could bring about the unilateral withdrawal of its Iranian ally from

its hard-won corridor. Iran is not dependent on Russia and pursues its own agenda in Syria.

Israel has stated clearly that it will continue to act to ensure its security.

What this means, in practice, is that as the Iranians continue to solidify and extend their gains in Syria, so the likelihood of direct friction between this project and Israel's enforcement of redlines will grow.

Tehran is presently pressing forward. The key issue of the extent to which the US will continue to be a player in this arena is set to be resolved in the weeks ahead. But whatever the US decision, the taking of the dusty, al-Qaim/Abu Kamal crossing is set to turn Iran's land bridge, from Tehran to Quneitra, from an objective into an established fact.

## Israel Unveils Its Weapons Of The Future



Those interested in weapons of the future need look no further than the latest release by Israel's Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure (MAFAT for its name in Hebrew).

Israel has been in the vanguard of military drone technology, urban combat and cyber-warfare, a fact highlighted by several of the recent weapons platforms shown to the public.

Now facing increasing threats from enemies intent on fighting asymmetric and urban battles, the current theme is for greater armored agility and militarized autonomy on the field of battle.

"Brigadier General Dr. Danny Gold spoke to reporters at the Kirya army headquarters in Tel Aviv, explaining that "MAFAT is trying to predict the future battlefield, both in terms of threat and technologically." So often a military is prepared for the last foe they faced, not the next.

It is MAFAT's mission, and that of its thousands military and civilian researchers, that Israel is absolutely prepared for the next threat. "What do we need to have in order to be ahead of our enemy?"

It's very complicated to think ahead of time how each solution will fit everything," he went on to say. He emphasized the need for flexibility and the ability to stand up to the harsh conditions of battle as key aspects of any new military technology in order to adapt to new threats.

MAFAT, which operates a bit like a venture capital firm, has an estimated 1,500 projects in various stages of development at any one time.

Here are a few of the projects close to hitting the battlefield soon.

The Merkava main battle tank is one of the world's tops fighting vehicles, but its size and crew

requirements are a hindrance in close, urban combat. Enter the Carmel armored vehicle.

Able to be crewed by two soldiers rather than four, the Carmel is powered by a hybrid power system that allows it to run more quietly, efficiently and with greater power in short sprints. It is being developed in several variations ranging from armored personal carrier to main battle tank and even to mine clearing.

The Carmel will have similar defensive capabilities to the Merkava in its ability to shoot down incoming rockets but will also employ a new form of active optical camouflage. Its lighter size will allow it better to engage targets in dense urban environments than the Merkava and there is even an autonomous version in development. It is expected to enter service in three years.

Two unmanned submarines were also presented, the larger Caesaron and a smaller craft dedicated to undersea searching and mapping. Intended for intelligence gathering, both subs will be equipped with a host of advanced sensors and allow the Israeli navies to guard against undersea threats such as mines and enemy attack subs. Developed in conjunction with Bar Ilan university, the nimble subs are expected to cost just a third of what similarly classed subs cost.

Aerial drones are another focus for the MAFAT with two new classes of drones being unveiled this year. The first is a light cargo drone capable of carrying a cargo of 150 liters and weighing between 60 kilograms in one model and 180 kilograms and flying up to 8 km at a speed in excess of 90 miles per hour.

Two models were presented for this role that can be expected to support troops in difficult to reach combat zones by air dropping supplies when intense fighting would make approaches by larger craft impossible.

The other class of drone is unique in that it is equipped with an assault rifle that it is capable of aiming and firing towards the ground in support of infantry operations.

Unlike high-flying military drones that use laser guided bombs, the TIKAD will hover several meters above the enemy's head and direct small arms fire at them from close range, hovering and swooping between buildings, providing extremely close infantry support.

This unique drone will allow IDF infantry soldiers to remain safely behind cover while engaging enemy forces.

The third class of weaponry continues the trend of automation with robotically controlled trucks, D-9 bulldozers and front-end loaders. Allowing these vehicles to be operated remotely protects more soldiers from direct attack and frees up more manpower for other roles.

Israel is increasingly facing threats not only from large nation states such as Iran, but their extremely well-armed proxy armies, such as Hezbollah.

Armed with rockets and guerrilla tactics, the old weapons of war and tactics need to evolve to combat such terrorist forces. Agility, connection and automation are the watchwords of the day and the MAFAT advances will give the IDF the edge in the wars to come.

Mare's Hypocrisy Watch tells us that Bethel pastor Kris Vallotton first denounced these "Christian" prophetic (Tarot) cards as occultic publicly, and then he backtracked and took down his posts for whatever reason, probably because the people who were promoting them were part of Bethel. He finally said that people were posting "fake news" about the event. Doing the denial dance...but at the end of the day, Bethel is an NAR cult and we know them by their fruit! – MD

## Calif. Megachurch Accused of Practicing Occult in Use of 'Destiny Cards'



Bethel Church, a controversial megachurch in Redding, California, is now under fire in Christian circles for allegedly promoting New Age occultism in the use of "Destiny Cards," which critics have likened to tarot cards.

Leaders of the 9,000-member congregation have been accused of working with a Melbourne, Australia-based group known as Christ Alignment, a group that claims to have worked with many churches in that country to do readings.

**Photo: The Christ Alignment team at work**

Christ Alignment staff describe themselves as "trained spiritual consultants," and say on their website that they "draw from the same divine energy of the Christ spirit."

"We practice a form of supernatural healing that flows from the universal presence of the Christ. We draw from the same divine energy of the Christ spirit, as ancient followers did and operate only out of the third heaven realm to gain insight and revelation," they say.

Marsha West of the *Christian Research Network* argues that the Destiny Cards are just another name for tarot cards which Christ Alignment uses to "practice the prophetic."

"Tarot cards are used to tell one's future. Fortune telling is an occult practice. Occultists believe they are endowed with magical or supernatural powers. These folks are into witchcraft, satanism, and other forms of psychic discernment (tarot cards, astrology, séances, Runes, palm reading, teacup reading, etc.). So it is clear that the Christ in Christ alignment is the New Age Christ, not the Christ of Holy Scripture, as God's people are not to participate in occult practices such as Destiny Card reading. (Deut. 18:10)," CRN wrote.

Bethel staff **initially** denied any association with Christ Alignment and condemned the use of Destiny Cards, according to Church Watch Central.

"Someone told me there is an article stating that some Christians are now using 'Christian Tarot Cards' (apparently called 'Destiny Cards'), and that some people associated with Bethel were doing so," wrote Kris Vallotton, senior associate leader at Bethel Church and co-founder at Bethel School of



Supernatural Ministry, in a deleted response on Facebook.

"This is insane! First of all, whoever is doing this needs to repent and stop the craziness in the 'name of reaching people for Christ.' Secondly, Bethel has graduated 10,000 students, has 9,000 people in their congregation and a couple million followers. For some reason when some 'Christian' does something crazy, the media often want to blame the church they go to or the podcast they listen to etc., guilt by association. Believers are called to love the broken so we are privileged to have them named among us. But broken people often act broken. Assigning their broken condition to the people loving on them is like blaming doctors for their patients' sickness!" he continued.

The post was reportedly deleted after Ken and Jenny Hodge of Christ Alignment publicly wrote about the group's connection to the megachurch and their school while challenging allegations that they are a cult.

"We are not a cult, we hate tarot with a passion, we have not joined 'the world,' we fully support everything Bethel believes in and we do not have to repent as our ministry has nothing to repent off. Jesus celebrates it. ... We have had many Bethel students over the years come out on teams with us — some of your finest. They can attest to you that we have done nothing wrong, rather something right.

"We have developed a method of reaching new agers that is unique and enables us to pluck them out of darkness. We actually teach this method to churches in Australia and indeed shared it to some of your students when we were visiting Bethel," the Hodges wrote. "It is ridiculous that Christians have judged us based on photos where cards appear, yet not one person has asked, 'what exactly are those cards?'"

On Tuesday, Theresa Dedmon, pastoral staff member at Bethel who oversees the Creative Arts Department for the church and the School of Supernatural Ministry, denied in a blog post that the Destiny Cards are tarot cards, and explained what they are and defended their use in ministry.

"First, 'Destiny Cards' are not tarot cards. They do, however, have a similar look that attracts people who are searching for a 'reading.' What they get from Christ Alignment staff is a prophetic word about their destiny, which is to have a personal relationship with Father God through Jesus Christ, and encountered through the Holy Spirit," she said. "Destiny Cards are simply images that help to communicate the message of the Good News to those who are searching for a hope and a future."

She further went on to cite why they were biblically acceptable.

The Christian Post reached out to Bethel for further comment on Friday but was told Dedmon would not be able to respond until January 2018.