

International Briefs

Israeli Temple Mount Visit Sparks Harsh Criticism in Israel and Beyond

The 15-minute walk-around of Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir on Jan. 3 at the compound known as Temple Mount by Jews and Haram al-Sharif by Muslims, has drawn harsh commentary.

David Horowitz, editor-in-chief of *The Times of Israel*, [roasted](#) Ben Gvir as a “provocateur and a pyromaniac” who “has spent decades stirring trouble—from brandishing the hood ornament he stole off of PM Yitzhak Rabin’s Cadillac in 1995 to brandishing his pistol during a confrontation with Arabs in East Jerusalem three months ago, with innumerable acts of rabble-raising, dozens of indictments, and several convictions for incitement and racism-related offenses in the quarter-century in between.”

Nonetheless, Ben Gvir’s latest was enabled by Israel’s current PM Benjamin Netanyahu who has made Ben Gvir “a leading figure in the government, a member of its key decision-making security cabinet, and the minister with unprecedented power over the nation’s police force.” Horowitz writes that Netanyahu could have told Ben Gvir not to go to the Temple Mount, but he didn’t.

British journalist Peter Osborne, [writing](#) in *Middle East Eye*, argues that Ben Gvir’s action shows that Israel is trying to seize total control of Al Aqsa Mosque in the compound, by wrecking the status quo that provides that only Muslims are allowed to pray at Al Aqsa while Jews pray at the Western Wall. The mosque is managed by the Waqf, a joint Jordanian-Palestinian Islamic

trust, while Israeli authorities control security. This arrangement, Osborne says, dates back to 1878 and was reaffirmed by Moshe Dayan after Israel captured East Jerusalem in 1967. It has been under attack, however, since at least PM Ariel Sharon’s “storming” of the courtyard of the Mosque with 1,000 police in 2000.

Patriarch Kirill’s Ceasefire Call: Observed in Russia, Mocked in Ukraine

The morning of Jan. 5, Kirill, Patriarch of Russia’s Orthodox Church, using the church’s official website, called for a ceasefire in Ukraine on Orthodox Christmas, celebrated Jan. 6-7 in both Russia and Ukraine:

“I, Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and of all Rus, appeal to all parties involved in the internecine conflict with a call to cease fire and establish a Christmas truce from 12:00 on Jan. 6, to 00:00 on Jan. 7 so that Orthodox people can attend services on Christmas Eve and on the day of the Nativity of Christ.”

By afternoon, Russian President Vladimir Putin had issued [orders](#) imposing a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine:

“Upon consideration of the address from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, I instruct the Defense Minister of the Russian Federation to introduce a ceasefire along the entire line of contact in Ukraine from 12.00 on January 6, 2023 to 24.00 on January 7, 2023.

“As a large number of Orthodox Christians reside in the area of hostilities, we call on the Ukrainian side to declare a ceasefire to allow them to attend church services on Christmas Eve as well as on Christmas Day.”

The first response from Ukraine came from Mykhailo Podoliak, adviser to the head of the Office of the Ukrainian President, who tweeted that Kirill’s announcement was propaganda and a cynical trap, and that Russia must leave “occupied territories” in Ukraine before any “temporary truce.”

Meanwhile, in recent months, Ukrainian authorities have engaged in a campaign against religious institutions, charging they are linked to Moscow, raiding churches across the country. Despite the fact that the 1,000-year-old Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) declared independence from the Moscow Patriarchate after Russia launched its Special Military Operation in Ukraine, the Kiev government has declared UOC part of the enemy. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), promoted by Kiev to undermine the UOC, announced Jan. 4 that OCU Christmas Day service would be held in the historic Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, UOC’s main monastery.

Ukraine Parliament’s Celebration of Nazi Bandera Backfires

Ukraine’s parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, issued at least two tweets Jan. 1 celebrating the 114th birthday of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, whose birthday the Rada turned into an annual national holiday in 2018. According to *RT*, the tweet quoted Bandera as saying: “The complete and supreme victory of Ukrainian nationalism will be when the Russian Empire ceases to exist.” The Rada said Ukrainian Armed Forces chief, Gen. Valery Zaluzhny, is “well aware” of Bandera’s “instructions.” Zaluzhny was featured in another Tweet, with a

large Bandera portrait in the background, alongside more quotes from Bandera.

That was too much for even Ukraine's ally, Poland. Bandera's Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), after all, was responsible for the extermination of minimally 200,000 Poles during World War II. Poland's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lukasz Jasina, as reported by Polish Radio, said, "Our attitude to the crimes committed by the OUN remains unchanged. We hope that the rapprochement of the Polish and Ukrainian nations will lead to a better understanding of our common history."

Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki, Jan. 2: "There cannot be any nuancing here, especially when the Verkhovna Rada recalls that figure who was an ideologist during those criminal times, the times of World War II. Those appalling Ukrainian crimes happened under German occupation, but one must not allow the slightest tolerance for those who do not want to admit that terrible genocide was something unimaginable."

As [reported](#) by the *Voice of Sokal*, Mayor of Lviv Andriy Sadovyi, representatives of regional authorities, and the public laid flowers at the monument to Stepan Bandera. Afterwards, there was a prayer for Ukraine. Antoni Sadovyi, Sadovyi's son, honored the memory of Bandera: "This is already traditional on Jan. 1 in our family." *Voice of Sokal* continues: "On the example of Bandera, a new generation grew up, which went into battle with the new Moscow horde. A generation of winners."

Any protests in the U.S. were not well publicized. But in Israel, *Ha'aretz* ran this headline and blurb: "Victory To Come When Russian Empire 'Ceases To Exist': Ukraine Parliament Quotes Nazi Collaborator. Verkhovna Rada tweet references Stepan Bandera, a Ukrainian ultra-nationalist and anti-Semite whose

followers engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Jews and Poles during World War II." The text begins: "Quoting Ukrainian ultra-nationalist and anti-Semite Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian parliament on Monday declared that 'the complete and supreme victory of Ukrainian nationalism will be when the Russian Empire ceases to exist'."

BRI Competitor 'Global Gateway' Does Not Exist, European Union Admits

From the start, EU's Global Gateway Initiative (GGI) was an empty shell, aimed at competing with China's Belt and Road. Now, the GGI is exposed as a failure even from inside the European Commission.

On Nov. 30, 2022, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament held hearings on the GGI and the Indo-Pacific Region, where lawmakers learned from EU officials that very little of the €300 billion for the GGI was spent, and what was spent was not "new" money.

As [reported](#) in the Dec. 31 *South China Morning Post*, "Hildegard Bentele, a German Member, said she had been trying to find German companies who are 'part of this adventure,' but had failed to locate any. 'If I talk to journalists, journalists are asking me what are these Global Gateway projects? If I go on the website of the European Commission, I do not find it—this is really difficult'."

Again, the *SCMP*: EU spokesperson Ana Pisonera "said there is no list of projects available.... 'We do not have a list of predefined Global Gateway projects and investments worth €300 billion at this stage'."

Even China-haters expose the failure of the GGI. Francesca Ghiretti, a Brussels-based analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies told the newspaper: "I think it was a mistake to

begin with, trying to compete with Belt and Road, because BRI was launched under completely different circumstances, by a completely different country which, at the time, sort of filled a vacuum, proposed a new model, and had capital."

Potential customers do not want to be told what to do with the money. Indonesian President Joko Widodo: "If we want to build a better partnership, the partnership must be based on equality. There must not be one who dictates to the other, and says our standards are better than yours."

The *SCMP* closed by quoting former Public Works Minister of Liberia, W. Gyude Moore, now a senior policy fellow at the Centre for Global Development: "It was sold as a viable alternative to China's BRI—an alternative that was driven by values like transparency and sustainability. It has not gone beyond just words."

Kazakhstan, Pakistan Leaders Confer on Trans-Afghan Railway

Kazakhstan is now considering participation in the Trans-Afghan railway. First proposed in 2018, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed in February 2021 on a roadmap for construction of a 600 km Trans-Afghan railway to link Central Asia to the Arabian Sea and transform Afghanistan economically. In November 2022 an Uzbek delegation was in Europe, seeking funding and backing. In late December 2022, Serik Zhumangarin, Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade and Integration, met with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif over Kazakhstan's possible participation. It could provide construction materials. As [reported](#) Dec. 26 by the *Silk Road Briefing* of Dezan Shira & Associates, Sharif welcomed landlocked Kazakhstan to use Pakistan's ports.