

THIRD TIME LUCKY?

Political gridlock sends Israel back to the polls yet again

THE EMPIRE BUILDER

Qassem Soleimani, the mastermind behind Iran's regional adventurism **PAGE 19**

LEGAL HEIGHTS

The Golan, international law and the Trump Administration.....**PAGE 30**

JEREMY AND THE JEWS

Why UK Labour's leader strikes fear into a long-established community **PAGE 25**

UNRWA CONUNDRUMS

The ins and outs of Australia's aid to the controversial UN body **PAGE 27**



**WITH COMPLIMENTS AND BEST WISHES
FROM GANDEL GROUP**

CHADSTONE SHOPPING CENTRE
1341 DANDENONG ROAD
CHADSTONE VIC 3148

TEL: (03) 8564 1222
FAX: (03) 8564 1333

WITH COMPLIMENTS



JAGEN

L1 26 BEATTY AVENUE
ARMADALE VIC 3143

TEL: (03) 9661 8250
FAX: (03) 9661 8257

EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* looks at how Israel ended up heading toward its third election in a year on March 2 – and what might finally break the prolonged political stalemate in Jerusalem.

We lead with veteran Israeli journalist Shmuel Rosner's attempt to untangle the various complex circumstances that led to this impasse, while Ahron Shapiro explains the details of the different parties' political demands and promises which meant a unity government could not be formed, as had been widely expected. In addition, Amotz Asa-El looks at the attempt to challenge current PM Binyamin Netanyahu's leadership of the Likud party touched off by longtime rival Gideon Sa'ar.

Also featured this month is a profile by Yaakov Lappin of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the key player in Iran's attempt to build a Middle East empire. Plus, Australian international law scholar Greg Rose looks at some legal myths about the Golan Heights.

Finally, don't miss noted British scholar David Hirsh on the danger posed to the British Jewish community by UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn; Australian academic Ran Porat exploring how Hezbollah managed to defang UNIFIL, the UN force supposed to monitor and disarm it; and Naomi Levin on a key challenge for Australia in formulating our aid to the Palestinians.

Please give us your feedback on any or all aspects of this edition of the *AIR* at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

ON THE COVER

A woman votes at a polling station in Rosh Haayin, Israel, Sept. 17, 2019. (Photo: AAP/ Sebastian Scheiner)



CONTENTS

FEATURE STORIES

ANATOMY OF A STALEMATE

BY SHMUEL ROSNER

The last batch of Israeli polls are depressing. What we see in them is, well, nothing. No sign of change, no sign of hope, no sign of coalition. If elections were held today, the outcome would be much like the ones of last April and September PAGE 12

WHY THE QUEST FOR UNITY FAILED

BY AHRON SHAPIRO PAGE 14

SUCCEEDING BIBI

BY AMOTZ ASA EL PAGE 15

POWER PROJECTOR

The man behind Iran's Middle East empire

BY YAAKOV LAPPIN PAGE 19

THE PERSIAN AUTUMN

BY DAVID ROSENBERG PAGE 21

HOW HEZBOLLAH NEUTRALISED UNIFIL

BY RAN PORAT PAGE 22

ANTISEMITISM OUT OF DOWNING STREET?

BY DAVID HIRSH PAGE 25

AUSTRALIA'S UNRWA CONUNDRUM

BY NAOMI LEVIN PAGE 27

BIBLIO FILE: THE ROAD TO HELL

BY JONATHAN SPYER PAGE 29

ESSAY: LEGAL HEIGHTS

Recognising Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights

BY GREGORY ROSE PAGE 30



REGULAR COLUMNS

FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN PAGE 4

WORD FOR WORD PAGE 5

SCRIBBLINGS

TZVI FLEISCHER PAGE 6

DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

ERIC MANDEL PAGE 7

ASIA WATCH

MICHAEL SHANNON PAGE 8

AIR NEW ZEALAND

MIRIAM BELL PAGE 9

BEHIND THE NEWS PAGE 10

STRANGER THAN FICTION PAGE 11

NOTED AND QUOTED PAGE 35

IN PARLIAMENT PAGE 36

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

ALLON LEE PAGE 39

THE LAST WORD

JEREMY JONES PAGE 40

With Compliments

Reid & Vesely
Lawyers & Solicitors

Suite 201, 35 Spring St, Bondi Junction NSW 2022



Australia/Israel Review

A journal of analysis and opinion
published by the Australia/Israel & Jewish
Affairs Council (AIJAC)

Editorial Chairman**Dr COLIN RUBENSTEIN AM****Editor-in-Chief****Dr TZVI FLEISCHER****Senior Contributing Editor****JEREMY JONES AM****Staff Writers**

**ALLON LEE, JAMIE HYAMS, AHRON
SHAPIRO, SHARYN MITTELMAN, NAOMI
LEVIN, OVED LOBEL, JUDY MAYNARD,
DAVID BROCKWELL**

Publishing Manager**MICHAEL SHANNON****Correspondents**

ISRAEL: **AMOTZ ASA-EL**
EUROPE: **DOUGLAS DAVIS**
NEW ZEALAND: **MIRIAM BELL**

National Editorial Board

**KEITH BEVILLE, RABBI RALPH
GENENDE OAM, GARY HERZ, MIRIAM
LASKY, STEVE LIEBLICH, RABBI JOHN
LEVI AM, Hon. HOWARD NATHAN AM,
IAN WALLER SC**

AIJAC**National Chairman****MARK LEIBLER AC****NSW Chairman****PAUL RUBENSTEIN****Executive Director****Dr COLIN RUBENSTEIN AM****Director of International &
Community Affairs****JEREMY JONES AM****Senior Policy Analysts**

**AHRON SHAPIRO, JAMIE HYAMS,
ALLON LEE, NAOMI LEVIN, SHARYN
MITTELMAN**

Policy Analysts**OVED LOBEL, JUDY MAYNARD****Associate Director of Public Affairs****JOEL BURNIE****National Media & Public Affairs
Officer****ARIEL ZOHAR****Events Coordinator****HELEN BRUSTMAN OAM****Administration**

MELBOURNE: **ROSEMARY SANDLER,
RENA LANGBERG**
SYDNEY: **LOUISE DE MESQUITA**

Israel Liaison**PETER ADLER****Founding Chairmen**

ISADOR MAGID AM (OBM)
ROBERT ZABLUD (OBM)

HEAD OFFICE

Level 1, 22 Albert Road,
South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia
Telephone: (03) 9681 6660
Fax: (03) 9681 6650
Email: aijac@aijac.org.au

SYDNEY OFFICE

140 William Street
East Sydney, NSW 2011, Australia
Telephone: (02) 9360 5415
Email: ldemesquita@aijac.org.au

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please send all remittances, changes of
address and subscription inquiries to:
Australia/Israel Review
Level 1, 22 Albert Road
South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia
ISSN No. 1442-3693
Print Post Approved – 100007869

www.aijac.org.au

FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN

A DEMOCRATIC IMPASSE

For months now, Israeli defence officials have been required to hold meetings with Treasury officials on a daily basis. The purpose of these meetings is, astonishingly, to keep the IDF running for another 24 hours.

Alex Fishman, military affairs reporter for the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, has revealed how Israel's failure to form a government for over a year has created an appalling situation whereby the IDF has been surviving on drip-feed.

"The IDF has no agreed budget for 2020," Fishman wrote. "For every expenditure of more than a million shekels – almost zero in terms of the defence budget – the IDF needs approval of the Treasury.

"In a meeting that takes place every afternoon, defence officials present the Treasury a list of projects in order of priority. The Treasury releases the money sparingly, making short-term decisions aimed at keeping existing projects alive." Meanwhile, new projects cannot be funded at all.

Given the range of threats to Israel's security – from the Iranian nuclear program and Teheran's military build-up in Syria, to the missile and rocket arsenal targeting Israel from Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza – this state of affairs whereby no serious forward planning and preparation can occur is obviously a recipe for potential disaster. But it doesn't stop there.

Key diplomatic posts have been left unfilled in embassies such as those in Moscow, Ottawa and Cairo.

A caretaker government cannot pass a budget, so the ministries simply receive the same funding they received in the last budget. Israeli analysts have estimated that this actually translates to an effective cut of NIS 20 billion (A\$8.44 billion) across the board. This untenable situation has affected a wide range of government services, most alarmingly health care – where money has dried up for subsidised medications, and specialists in emergency rooms – but also transportation infrastructure and education.

The standing of Israel's international economic reputation is also in jeopardy, with the credit rating agency Moody's warning recently that "the failure to form a new government... [would] present a risk to Israel's credit profile."

All these effects are the result of the extended refusal or inability of Israel's party leaders to make the necessary compromises to form unity governments, after inconclusive elections last April and September made it clear broad unity coalitions were the only way forward.

As Shmuel Rosner points out in this edition (p. 12), most party leaders have taken the stances that led to the current impasse with understandable, sensible or even laudable intentions. Yet these intentions do not change the fact that the greater national good demands that some of these stances will have to be compromised.

On Nov. 20, after incumbent PM Binyamin Netanyahu of Likud and chief challenger Benny Gantz of Blue & White had each been given a chance to form government and failed, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin pointed out the real imperative.

He reminded lawmakers that their political fate was no more important than the fate of the "old woman in the hospital, of children in special education, of those killed in violence within Israel's Arab community, of the residents of Israel's south, Jews, Arabs, ultra-Orthodox and secular, those in need of protection, and of women in need of shelter."

Regrettably, Rivlin's words were not heeded, and Israelis are being dragged back to the polls again on March 2 for the third time in under a year. Yet there is no sign that a third election will break the stalemate.

Indeed, Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit's Nov. 21 decision to indict Netanyahu for bribery, fraud and breach of trust, along with Netanyahu's stated resolve to remain in office while fighting the charges, has only sharpened the political divide between the parties who want to continue to cooperate with Netanyahu during the legal proceedings, and those who refuse to do so.

The key to Israel's remarkable success story has not been through strength or determination alone – it also derives from the humility of leaders like Ben Gurion, Eshkol, Meir, Begin, Rabin, Sharon and others, who genuinely saw themselves as servants of the Zionist project and the Jewish people. They ultimately placed country ahead of politics, party and personal gain.

Israel's unprecedented current governmental impasse inevitably must draw observers to proposals, which have long been shelved, for reforms to the Israeli political system. Israel's pure proportional system is laudable in terms of its unadulterated democracy and ability to give a significant political voice to all sectors of society. However, the question must be asked – does that system alone remain workable in providing stable, effective government given the changing nature of democratic societies in the third decade of the 21st century?

“Israel's long political crisis is but one example of increasing discord and even dysfunction in liberal democratic political systems around the world”

For it must be acknowledged that Israel's long political crisis is but one example of increasing discord and even dysfunction in liberal democratic political systems around the world over recent years.

Beyond Israel, an additional manifestation of the democratic malaise has been the British election of Dec. 12. The fact that Britain's venerable Labour party could be, in effect, captured by radical fringe elements like the followers of current leader Jeremy Corbyn is a worrying sign in itself. That Corbyn remained a serious candidate to become prime minister of Britain even after revelation upon revelation about the scandalous institutionalised antisemitism crisis in his party – which he failed to adequately address – must shake one's faith in the long-term robustness of liberal democratic systems across the world.

Democracy will survive because it must – no other political system can offer a similar level of civic engagement and social legitimacy. But leaders across the Western world – in the UK, in Australia, in Europe, in the US, and yes, in Israel – need to really internalise their profound responsibility, not only to their own political program and partisan needs, but to helping consolidate and preserve each of their own democratic systems in this time of escalating tensions and growing expectations.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

“They want to hide the fact that they did everything possible to avoid the establishment of a broad national unity government that would annex the Jordan Valley.”

Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu blames the rival Blue and White party for Israel heading to a third round of elections (*Times of Israel*, Dec. 12).

“It now seems that we will be going into a third election cycle today because of Netanyahu's attempt to obtain immunity.”

Blue and White party head Benny Gantz blames Netanyahu for Israel heading to a third round of elections (*Times of Israel*, Dec. 12).

“This is a hard and sad day. I am bringing an indictment on public corruption against the Prime Minister in three cases. It is sad for me personally and for the country... It is not a matter of left or right or of politics. This is our duty...”

Israeli Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit announcing the indictment of Netanyahu for fraud, bribery and breach of trust (*Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 22).

“As the truth is trickling out of Iran, it appears the regime could have murdered over a thousand Iranian citizens since

the protests began. We cannot be certain because the regime blocks information. Among those murdered are at least a dozen children.”

Brian Hook, Special Representative for Iran and Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, on the Iranian unrest (*US State Department*, Dec. 5).

“We have so far not received an entirely satisfactory reply from them, but the exchanges continue... The timely response to our questions is very important.”

New International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi on the Iranian response to the discovery of uranium particles at the Turq-zabad facility, described by Israeli PM Netanyahu as a “secret atomic warehouse” (*AP*, Dec. 4).

“Good men and women can bring the momentum back in the right direction. Israel's future is being part of the Middle East, the problem is that's never going to happen 100% unless we solve the Palestinian problem.”

King Abdullah II of Jordan in remarks in New York (*Haaretz*, Nov. 23).

“Bibi, shalom from Durres. We're here with your fantastic guys. They are doing a great job in calming the people and telling them how to be resilient.”

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama thanking Israel for sending a team to help with rescue and assessing the damage in the city of Durres following an earthquake there (*Times of Israel*, Dec. 10).



SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

HAMAS INTERFERES FOR CORBYN

AIJAC analyst Oved Lobel recently pointed out on the AIJAC website that Iran, like Russia, has an extensive history of using fake social media accounts spreading fake news to try to influence election outcomes. More than this, it has a specific history of interfering in British politics, and in 2017 Facebook took down a large network of over 600 fake profiles, pages, and accounts linked to Iranian-backed operations to promote Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, as well as the Scottish National Party (SNP). Lobel pointed out the likelihood that Iranian-linked forces might attempt to interfere in the British general election on Dec. 12, presumably to try to benefit the same two parties.

New evidence from Britain shows that Lobel was dead right – with the Iranian-client Hamas linked to a pro-Corbyn activist group called the KhamakarPress, which has a website, a Facebook and twitter presence, and a WhatsApp group.

The British researcher and blogger David Collier has been able to demonstrate that:

- KhamakarPress has many Gaza-based members and its WhatsApp admin is Wafa Aludaini, a propagandist based in Gaza with links to numerous European anti-Israel groups and individuals.
- The “Aithoraya Institute for media and communication” website lists the same Wafa Aludaini as in charge of its media and communication section.
- The Aithoraya Institute for media and communication website says that it is run by Hoda Naem, a Hamas official and a deputy in the Palestinian Legislative Council.
- Many other individuals listed as associated with the Aithoraya Institute, such as Suzan Ziyada and Ibrahim Abu Naja, routinely put out material that appears to be official Hamas propaganda.

In other words, KhamakarPress, seems to be run by someone who is part of what appears to be an official Hamas propaganda outfit, the Aithoraya Institute for media and communication, headed by a known Hamas official.

So what is the KhamakarPress doing that is relevant to the British election? Collier shows it has been actively sending out explicit “missions” to its followers to carry out pro-Corbyn acts on social media. These missions are numbered and labelled “Mission 1”, “Mission 2” etc, and include telling its agents to:

- Vote for Jeremy Corbyn in polling on the winner of the UK election debate.
- Sending out and retweeting articles from the tiny pro-Corbyn Jewish group, Jewish Voice for Labour.

- “Stand with Corbyn against fake charges of antisemitism” – with specific Corbyn critical tweets from pro-Israel British groups listed as the target.

- To target comments at two viral videos which show Corbyn in a bad light on twitter, with five specific suggested phrases agents were to use, but also a warning not to simply cut and paste them. At least 60 users, almost all of whose accounts were created in the last few months, were identified as using versions of the stock phrases recommended.

Meanwhile, in addition to the KhamakarPress findings, there are separate allegations that another Hamas-affiliated Gaza resident, Walid Abu Rouk, was a manager of the influential “We support Jeremy Corbyn” Facebook page, with some 72,000 followers.

So it seems unequivocal that Hamas-linked groups in Gaza are orchestrating pro-Corbyn activities via front social media groups and likely using fake or misrepresented accounts as well. Such Iranian-linked interference in Western elections deserves the same outrage that similar Russian interference has generated in the past.

THE PA COURT OUT

The Palestinian Authority (PA) thought it was onto a great thing at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague – but may now be having second thoughts.

The Court, established by the Rome Statute of 1998, is intended to ensure that perpetrators of the most egregious crimes known to humanity would not go unpunished. However, from the beginning, the ICC has been politicised in various ways – including by being tied to the highly political UN General Assembly, on which it depends for much of its funding.

Israel is not a party to the Court, but the Palestinians were able to use the UN link to try to get it to investigate Israel’s leaders. The PA applied for membership in the ICC as the State of Palestine, despite not meeting the criteria for statehood under relevant international law. This was turned down in 2009 – but the problem was referred to the UN General Assembly which predictably passed resolutions which essentially forced the ICC to accept Palestine as a member in 2015.

The PA then gleefully pressed the ICC to investigate Israel – even though it was not a member – for alleged actions on what it claimed was the sovereign territory of the State of Palestine.

But the Palestinians are apparently so used to getting their way in international forums that they did not consider their own vulnerabilities – such as the extensive Palestinian involvement in terrorism.

Thus the Palestinians were “outraged”, according to the *Associated Press*, by the Dec. 5 ICC report on the “preliminary examination” of the “situation in Palestine” being conducted by ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda.

While the report did raise alleged excessive use of force by Israel against Gaza demonstrators and express “concern” over Israeli PM Netanyahu’s proposal to annex the Jordan Valley, it had a lot to say about Palestinian behaviour as well.

It raised rocket attacks from Gaza, allegations of Gazans being used as human shields, and the alleged torture of civilian detainees by PA security services. But what really got the Palestinian’s goat was Bensouda raising legal concerns about the “pay for slay” program, whereby the PA financially rewards imprisoned terrorists and the families of those killed carrying out terror attacks.

It was this issue that caused the PA Foreign Ministry to denounce the report as relying on “misleading narratives of politicised nature under the cover of false equivalence.”

Sometimes you really do need to be careful what you wish for.

AIR



Eric Mandel

EUROPE SHOULD STAND WITH THE IRANIAN PEOPLE

In Teheran, the mullahs have blamed the recent protests in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon not on their own repressive regimes and proxies, but on foreign and Zionist interference.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, speaking to his Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Basij henchmen, blamed the Iranian people’s protests on foreign interference, thanking the Iranian people for the “hard blow to global arrogance and Zionism, forcing them to retreat.”

How long will the Iranian scapegoating against the West and Zionists work, when their economy is in shambles and the people yearn for freedoms that are anathema to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s revolutionary agenda?

You would think that Europeans, who supposedly learned the lessons of fascism in the 20th century, would be particularly sensitive to a vicious state-controlled secret police – in this case directly controlled by the Iranian mullahs, the IRGC, and the corrupt Iranian government.

Like the Nazis who diverted resources even during militarily challenging times in 1944 when they chose to ramp up their master plan to kill all the Jews of Europe, the Iranian regime today chooses to divert its resources to surround Israel and support its proxies for the destruction of the Jewish state, instead of economically helping their people. You can understand this only if you realise how central a foundational pillar of the Iranian revolution is the destruction of Israel.

Yet Western Europe, including France, Britain, and Germany, which tout their humanitarian records, have supported and treated the Iranian regime as a legitimate government – not as the world’s leading state sponsor of terror – and have even enabled the world’s foremost Jew-haters a path to nuclear weapons.

An additional six EU nations joined the INSTEX bartering system to bypass American sanctions on Iran in early December.

When did it become the policy of European Western democracies to be on the side of suppression, jihadism, and illiberalism, and against the yearning of a people for liberation from their authoritarian suppressors?

Iraqi protesters screaming “Out Iran” burned the Iranian consulate in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq “in an outburst of anger at Iran.”

The best way to support Iranian protesters is not only to support their legitimate protests, but also the protests of the Lebanese and Iraqi people against their governments, who are in large part controlled by Teheran. If the Lebanese and Iraqi people can effectively challenge their Iranian-controlled political parties and governments, then it would encourage the Iranian people to continue to demand a change of their government.

Now is the time to state the obvious – it would be in American and allied interests for the Iranian people to be in charge of their own destiny.

That will not happen until there is a change of regime in Teheran – something that is a dirty word in the international community. But regime change will come not from American boots on the ground, as the critics contend is the real goal, but from the Iranian people themselves, who need and deserve our public and vocal support to take control of their lives both for their benefit and ours.

What will it take for Europe to wake up and realise that no amount of money, accommodation or deference will change the structural DNA of Iran’s leaders, who are bent on the eradication of Israel, and the ascendancy of Shi’ism over Sunnis and minority populations living in the Middle East?

Since the 100,000-plus missiles of Iranian-controlled Hezbollah in Lebanon do not threaten Paris, Berlin or London, they rationalise away the true nature of the regime. It helps that they, too, habitually see Israel in a negative light.

Iran is not a rational state actor in the Western sense. It is, however, an Islamist rational actor with a well-thought-out hegemonic agenda to destroy the Jewish state and dominate the Middle East as in the long-ago days of Persian imperialism.

Once the obvious conclusion is drawn that Iran cannot be changed or turned into a member of the international community in good standing, then strategies to deal with this reality can be created. The Iranian economy is on the

ropes, and if only the Europeans would join the American sanction regime, the Iranian people could possibly take control of their destiny.

AIR

Dr. Eric R. Mandel is the Director of MEPIN, the Middle East Political Information Network. © JNS.org, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

FADING HOPE

The stunning defeat of the ruling UMNO (United Malays National Organisation)-led coalition in Malaysia's 2018 elections was supposed to usher in a new era of political and social reform, after 61 uninterrupted years of increasingly ossified and corrupt rule. But recent events show a Malaysia stuck in a depressingly familiar pattern.

Elected on promises of sweeping, long-overdue reforms, the *Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope) coalition is consumed by internal rivalries, while the "New Malaysia" of greater racial equality and declining racial discrimination feeding into improved education and economic vitality is still little more than a talking point.

In this climate, there are still cases like that of six male Muslims, including three teenagers, being sentenced to a month in jail and fined over RM2,000 (A\$700) for skipping out of Friday prayers last August. They were reportedly busted during a raid by the Terengganu Islamic Religious Affairs Department, which found them picnicking with their families at a waterfall area.

The local Kuala Terengganu MP, Ahmad Amzam of PAS (Malaysian Islamic Party), praised the verdict. "This offence of not performing Friday prayers is becoming more widespread, especially in urban areas and would, without enforcement, become a normalisation process for Muslims in Malaysia," he said.

Hopes of reforming the bloated bureaucracy that polices Islamic practice appear distant indeed. The Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) remains impervious to the funding cuts afflicting other departments and is now looking to centralise sharia court authority, normally the responsibility of the states.

Credible allegations in the *Asia Sentinel* concerning halal certification detail how JAKIM officers routinely solicit bribes. One witness described JAKIM officers requesting a banquet be put on for them at a hotel where they had certified the kitchens.

The article set off a firestorm of protest from JAKIM and other government officials – accusing the author personally of attacking Islam, rather than answering the allegations.

Meanwhile, rather than reform its moribund ideology, the opposition UMNO party is doubling down on the race-based politics of Malay supremacy, accusing the government of selling out the preferential rights of the Malay community and holding back the development of Islam.

"Malays are restless," Lokman Adam, an UMNO supreme council member, recently told *Agence France-Presse*. "We feel the current government is not able to protect Malay rights, Islam, the Malay language and the Malay rulers."

Such language is in the time-honoured tradition of playing to the Malay inferiority complex, speaking of "protection" against imaginary enemies such as the Chinese, Jews, globalism, Christians or *kafirs* (non-Muslims), to promote so-called Malay unity.

Malays and other indigenous peoples make up nearly 70% of population, but still lag overall in educational achievement and income.

UMNO's two ethnic-based coalition partners, the Malaysian Chinese Association and the Malaysian Indian Congress, were almost wiped out in last year's election, consequently most observers thought it only a question of when UMNO would seek an alliance with former rival PAS. A formal marriage is now all but consummated under the name *Muafakat Nasional*.

The Pakatan government was elected with only 30% of Malay support, which UMNO and PAS are clearly determined to win back. Their task is being made much easier by the internecine conflict within the multi-ethnic People's Justice Party (PKR) – the largest component of the ruling coalition – pitting veteran political heavyweight and former political prisoner Anwar Ibrahim against Minister of Economic Affairs Mohamed Azmin Ali in a tussle over who will next assume the nation's leadership.

In a bitterly factionalised party, its December national congress revealed 72-year old Anwar still clearly has the numbers, but 55-year old Azmin has the obvious favour of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, now approaching the two-year point at which he previously declared he would be stepping down.

Even at 94, Mahathir seems to be playing for time. Azmin and his supporters have called for Mahathir to continue as prime minister for a full five-year term rather than make way for Anwar, as well as continuing an "unapologetic" pursuit of the *bumiputera* affirmative action policies favoring ethnic Malays.

Changes to these policies are among the key institutional reforms pledged by Anwar, which he says have been "abused to enrich cronies" and should instead be needs-based.

Meanwhile, the Pakatan has to arrest an alarming series of electoral setbacks, the latest being a landslide by-election defeat in the southern Johor constituency of Tanjong Piai. Ethnic Chinese frustration with the lack of reform is said to have been a major factor.

AIR

Miriam Bell

INNOVATION IN THE AIR

Israel's political deadlock has frozen activities across numerous areas and the effects are even being felt half a world away in New Zealand. An "Innovation Agreement" that the two countries have been working on for several years can't be signed off until a new Israeli government is formed.

High hopes are riding on the agreement, so it's frustrating, acknowledges Israel's Ambassador to New Zealand, Dr Itzhak Gerberg. "But that's the price of democracy. The agreement will go ahead though. We are just waiting on the final sign-off from the Israeli Government. Once it does get that sign-off, I'm very optimistic the level of interaction between New Zealand and Israel will increase."

This would be a good thing as the two countries have much in common and both stand to benefit from working more closely across a range of fields. It would also go some way to further repairing the somewhat troubled relationship New Zealand and Israel have had over recent decades.

Diplomatic relations broke down dramatically back in 2004 when two Israelis, thought to be Mossad agents, were accused of passport fraud. New Zealand received an apology from Israel's Foreign Minister over the incident and Israel re-established an embassy in Wellington in 2010.

Another rough patch concerned New Zealand's co-sponsorship of the controversial United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, under the guidance of former Foreign Minister Murray McCully, in late 2016. Ambassador Gerberg, who had recently arrived in New Zealand to take up his new role, was recalled to Israel for six months following the resolution's passage.

These days the relationship is good but there's room for improvement, Ambassador Gerberg told the *AIR* in a recent interview. "There is so much potential there but we have work to do before we reach a point where we are fully experiencing it."

In his view, building strong bridges between countries isn't just a matter for the politicians. "One of the best ways to improve country relationships is through a wide range of bilateral activities across different fields. It has to be about economic endeavours and culture too."

To that end, the Embassy's work in New Zealand involves engaging, and communicating, with business people, with different Maori *iwi* [tribes], with churches, and with other communities around New Zealand.

Carrying out this work over the last few years has left Ambassador Gerberg with the impression that, overall, the general feeling in New Zealand towards Israel is friendly –

despite what might be presented in the media.

"Most people understand that Israel is in a very problematic area and that when dealing with Israel it's important to understand that context. People also realise that Israel is a sophisticated and advanced country, and there tends to be great admiration for Israel's military and technical achievements."

Building on this feeling is critical to further developing the New Zealand-Israel relationship. And that's why the innovation agreement has the potential to be so important.

The agreement would encourage companies and universities from both countries to share and co-operate on research, information, and development. It is possible that it might also encourage them to join ventures that both governments would help pay for.

Negotiations over the agreement have been underway since 2016 and, despite some opposition by fringe groups in New Zealand, it has seen wide support from New Zealand's business community. The New Zealand Cabinet Economic Development Committee has agreed that New Zealand will sign the agreement.

"The possibilities are broad – there's so much scope to boost innovation and development in both countries. But, once the agreement is signed, it will come down to the business communities in New Zealand and Israel. The governments provide the framework but filling it up with content comes down to private sector companies."

When the innovation agreement is eventually signed, it will sit alongside the film co-production agreement that already exists between New Zealand and Israel, signed in 2016.

Supporting these more formal agreements is the network of relationships that Ambassador Gerberg and his predecessors have worked to develop. Of these, the growing relationship with some Maori groups is particularly interesting.

"Many Maori leaders have expressed interest in collaborating with Israel in terms of knowledge and technology, especially in the agricultural area," Ambassador Gerberg says. "And they love the fact that we have successfully revived Hebrew as a language. That interests them."

"But we don't want to impose ideas on them. It is about their needs. We can then co-operate with them once they have identified their needs... For example, we could send Maori scholars to study in Israel, as we do with scholars from Pacific nations."

Going forward, Ambassador Gerberg is positive about improving the ties that bind New Zealand and Israel. There is, however, one particular dream he'd like to see fulfilled sooner rather than later – the establishment of a New Zealand Embassy in Israel.

"I understand that it is a question of money, budget priorities, and so on. But I think actioning it is important. It would definitely increase the volume of tourism and improve economic relations between the two countries."

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

According to statistics from the Israeli security agency Shin Bet, more than 2,600 rockets and mortars have been fired at Israel from Gaza over the past two years. More than half of these were fired in the past year, including approximately 560 rockets fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad following Israel's assassination of senior commander Baha Abu al-Ata on Nov. 12. The IDF has struck about 1,000 targets in Gaza in the past year in response.

More than two dozen missiles have also been fired at Israel from Syria in 2019, including four on Nov. 19.

During late November and early December, one mortar and six rockets were launched at Israel from Gaza in four separate incidents, causing no damage or casualties. Israel launched retaliatory strikes on multiple Hamas targets in Gaza.

"Great March of Return" protests resumed on the Gaza border on Dec. 6 after a three week pause.

In the West Bank, near-daily violent incidents against soldiers and civilians continue.

ABBAS CALLS FOR PALESTINIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS

Fourteen years into his four-year term as President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mahmoud Abbas announced on Dec. 10 that general elections will be held next year.

The elections were called after a majority of Palestinian factions, including Hamas, agreed to go to the polls next year. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and a small number of other Palestinian terror groups oppose the elections.

The 2020 elections will be held separately for each of the three governmental bodies – the Presidency,

the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestinian National Council. The last presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 2005 and 2006 respectively.

In addition to Palestinians voting in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the PA has submitted an official request to Israel to allow Palestinian residents of east Jerusalem to participate in the elections, as previously agreed to in 1996, 2005 and 2006.

IRAN UNDER ECONOMIC PRESSURE, FINED BY US COURT

According to US financial intelligence, the Iranian government is experiencing a more severe shortfall in foreign-exchange reserves than previously thought, with a 70% fall in oil exports to only 500,000 barrels a day, less than half of the 2013 level.

Iran's trade deficit has reportedly risen to 3% of its gross domestic product (GDP).

Meanwhile, on Nov. 22, the United States District Court of Columbia, ordered Iran to pay close to US \$180 million in damages to *Washington Post* reporter Jason Rezaian for psychological torture and physical abuse he suffered while imprisoned in Iran for 18 months.

IRAN DEVELOPING NUCLEAR-CAPABLE MISSILES

In the leadup to an upcoming UN Security Council meeting on Iran, the European signatories of the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) notified the UN Secretary-General on Dec. 4 that Teheran had violated the UN Security Council resolution which implemented that agreement by developing ballistic missiles capable of carrying a

nuclear payload.

The same day, Russia's national nuclear company, Rosatom, suspended its work at Iran's Fordow plant because uranium enrichment activities conducted there in breach of the agreement have rendered impossible redesigning and repurposing the facility as required by the JCPOA.

On Nov. 27, France's Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, warned that Paris is considering referring Iran's breaches of the JCPOA to the dispute resolution mechanism embedded in the agreement. If unresolved, this process could be escalated to the UN Security Council, which can, within 30 days, reimpose all UN sanctions on Iran that were frozen following the deal.

Despite all this, on Dec. 1, six European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) joined the INSTEX barter-based trade system designed to circumvent US sanctions on Iran.

HEZBOLLAH IN GERMANY

A Nov. 29 report in Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel* claimed Hezbollah is using Germany as its main European hub to recruit members, spread propaganda and raise funds via both legitimate and criminal enterprises, including drug trafficking and money laundering. The money is then sent to Lebanon to fund attacks and for arms procurement. According to intelligence reports, about 30 mosques and cultural centres across Germany have links to Hezbollah, which has approximately 1,050 identified members and supporters in the country.

DUTCH DOUBLE DOWN

Following Australia's lead, the Netherlands Parliament on Nov. 20

voted to stop directly funding the Palestinian Authority (PA).

The Dutch had been in discussions with the PA for 12 months about ending its “pay for slay” program, which sees imprisoned Palestinians terrorists, or their families, receive stipends from the PA for carrying out terror attacks against Israelis.

The Netherlands will now redirect one and a half million euros in aid towards Palestinian projects that strengthen law and human rights in the West Bank and Gaza.

On Nov. 19, the Dutch Parliament voted to express its opposition to a recent European Court of Justice ruling that products manufactured beyond the 1948 armistice lines cannot be labelled “Made in Israel”.

FRENCH PARLIAMENT ADOPTS IHRA DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

The French Parliament passed a resolution on Dec. 3 to adopt the definition of antisemitism issued by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). The resolution, passed by 154 votes to 72 against, was tabled by Sylvain Maillard from President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist La Republique en Marche party. France has the world’s third largest Jewish community, and in 2018 it saw a 74% rise in antisemitic incidents.

The introduction to the resolution included the following statement: “Anti-Zionist acts can sometimes obscure anti-Semitic realities. Criticising the very existence of Israel as a collective composed of Jewish citizens is tantamount to hatred towards the Jewish community as a whole; just like collectively holding Jews accountable for the policies of the Israeli authorities is an expression of antisemitism.” However, the resolution, like the IHRA definition, also notes that “pointing out such abuses in no way prevents otherwise free criticism

of the Israeli government’s policies and positions.”

To date, 18 countries have adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

ARABS AGAINST BOYCOTTING ISRAEL

A ground breaking two-day conference was held in London on Nov. 19 and 20 in which 30 representatives of Arab civil society from 15 countries called for the end of Israel’s isolation in the Arab world. The group called itself the “Arab Council for Regional Integration” and rejects the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movements (BDS), arguing it has caused more harm than good. “Arabs are the boycott’s first – and only – victims,” Egyptian attorney Eglal Gheita reportedly told attendees.

Other prominent participants in the conference included Egyptian MP Mohammed Anwar Sadat, nephew of the late president Anwar Sadat and leader of Egypt’s Reform and

Development Party; former Kuwaiti Minister of Information Sami Abdul-Latif Al-Nisf; Hassen Chalghoumi, a Paris-based Tunisian cleric; Lebanese Imam Saleh Hamed; and Palestinian academic Mohammed Dajani, who famously took a group of his students to visit Auschwitz.

DIRECT TEL AVIV-MELBOURNE FLIGHTS IN 2020

Israel’s national airline, El Al, announced on Dec. 10 that, as a trial, it will operate three direct round-trip flights between Tel Aviv and Melbourne during April and May 2020. The purpose of these flights, using the long-range Boeing 787 Dreamliners, is to examine the viability of opening a regular non-stop service between the two cities. The route would be the longest flown to and from Israel – 16 hours and 15 minutes to Melbourne, with the return flight 90 minutes longer.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

RASH ABOUT NAPPIES

Are babies’ nappies the next big thing in international subversion? They sure are, if you ask senior Iranian lawmaker, Majathba Doo Elnor, the head of the Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee in the Majlis (Iran’s parliament).

During a conference in early December, Elnor warned that Iran’s enemies are working to topple the regime and instil mistrust towards the government among the people of Iran. For that purpose, Iran’s adversaries constantly improve their methods of “soft war” against Teheran – for example, by “sometimes using cotton diapers and produce them in a way that causes infertility in the context of bioterrorism” against Iran.

Elnor’s comments have been ridiculed on social networks under the hashtag “Diapers”. Some Iranian comments online recommended Elnor go see a doc-

tor, while others suggested that senior Iranian officials are competing amongst themselves to see who can make the most stupid statement possible.

Brigadier General Gholamreza Jalali is another Iranian official who can be regarded as a contender to win such a competition. Jalali, the head of Iran’s Passive Defence Organisation, recently accused Israel of assisting in the latest wave of anti-government protests in Iran during November.

The Iranian protesters have used the popular mobile navigation app *Waze*, originally developed in Israel, to communicate and coordinate massive traffic disruptions in big cities as a form of protest. Or have they? Jalali claimed that *Waze* was really at fault, because it was deliberately “working in reverse” to direct the drivers to the crowded freeways and major roads to intentionally create chaos.

Jalali must have forgotten that *Waze* is no longer in Israeli hands, as it was sold to Google in 2013 for nearly US\$1 billion.

COVER STORY

THIRD TIME LUCKY?

ANATOMY OF A STALEMATE

by Shmuel Rosner

On Sept. 18, one day after Israel's second election day of 2019, the numbers came in – and they said nothing new.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Likud didn't have a bloc of 61 Knesset members. Blue and White leader, retired Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, didn't have a bloc of 61 Knesset members. To form a government, either one had to perform a miracle, or they had to join forces.

However, there were no rabbits in their hats, nor any great incentive to hold hands. Like the rest of us average Israelis, they were trapped. On good days, I feel sorry for them. On bad days, I feel sorry for all us Israelis.

In late December 2018, the Knesset decided to hold a new election in April 2019. Since then, there have been manoeuvres and spins, campaigns and faux pas, twists and turns, ups and downs. There was a lot of noise but only a handful of meaningful actions.

Six decisions deadlocked Israel:

1. Gantz and Yair Lapid formed Blue and White, a party that could present itself as an alternative to Likud. Had the centre-left remained fractured, Netanyahu probably could have convinced one party to join his coalition.
2. Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked formed the New Right Party. By coming up a few hundred votes short in the April election – robbing the right of four seats in the Knesset – this party's failure blocked the right-wing-Haredi coalition's path to power. Had the religious right remained united, Netanyahu probably could have formed a 61-62 member coalition back in April.
3. Avigdor Lieberman of the Yisrael Beitenu Party insisted on a unity government and was consistent in his refusal to support any other option for government. Lieberman made the option of a religious-right government go away. Lieberman made the option of a narrow

centre-left coalition supported from the outside by Arab parties go away. Had Lieberman agreed in April or September to join the religious-right bloc, there would have been a coalition.

4. Gantz and other leaders on the centre-left (including Labor's Amir Peretz) decided not to join a coalition headed by Netanyahu if the Prime Minister was indicted. Had Gantz or Peretz agreed to sit under Netanyahu, Netanyahu would have had a government.
5. All religious-right parties, except Lieberman's Yisrael Beitenu, chose to stick with Likud and Netanyahu. This bloc of 55 was Netanyahu's shield against any attempts to create an alternative coalition. Had one or two of these parties decided to dismantle the bloc, Gantz might have had a chance to form a coalition.
6. Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit indicted Netanyahu. Had Netanyahu not been indicted, he might have had a chance to form a coalition with both his bloc and Blue and White.

Each of these six decisions had its own rationale and its own motivation – none of which intended to deadlock Israel the way it did. In fact, all were aimed at creating a better and stronger government. Politicians and parties wanted to advance stability and/or the rule of law, morality, efficiency and democracy.

Bennett merely wanted a party that represented the not-too-religious hard-core right. Lieberman thought it was time to rein in Haredi political power. Gantz wanted Netanyahu gone after more than a decade in power. Netanyahu wanted to keep his government together and keep Israel safe.

If there was ever an example that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, this was it. They resulted in Israel wasting an entire year on nothing.

There was one more thing that made a third election likely: Netanyahu's insistence on keeping his job. Twice, he failed to form a government. Twice, he failed to make Likud victorious. He set the record and is Israel's longest-serving government leader. He already established a precedent by being Israel's first prime minister to be indicted while in office.



Netanyahu's determination to keep his job helped make a third election inevitable

Yet, he still would not let go. Why? There is more than one possible explanation, and the one people tend to choose usually reveals their preference. A negative explanation goes along the lines of, "He doesn't care about the country; all he cares about is going to trial as prime minister (or avoiding trial by getting immunity)." A positive explanation might be, "He is the only one who can navigate Israel through the treacherous waters of a volatile Middle East. And besides, why should he let go? Because his rivals can't beat him at the polls?"

Some interpretations of his actions portray Netanyahu as a villain; others, as a victim. Some portray him as an obstacle to Israel's well-being; others, as Israel's only hope.

He probably is both. The indictments against him raise many questions. They are based on questionable legal precedent and on testimonies of state witnesses who were left without much choice. The total number of people expected to be called to testify was a staggering 333. Netanyahu has good reason to suspect the legal establishment was against him from the day he was first elected. He has good reason to argue the legal establishment makes it impossible for a politician to raise questions and propose necessary reforms in the legal system without being cast as an enemy of democracy and the rule of law.

Yet, there is no way to look at the facts the Attorney-General presented without a sense of unease about Netanyahu's actions.

Is this criminal behaviour? There can be debate about that. Is this exemplary behaviour? With this question, having a debate is more problematic.

Netanyahu acted obsessively with the media, greedily with wealthy friends, and irresponsibly with his staff. Since a decision was made to indict him, he acted dangerously in an attempt to delegitimise the police and the State Attorney, which delegitimises Israel's system of law and order on which we rely.

"Some interpretations of his actions portray Netanyahu as a villain; others, as a victim. Some portray him as an obstacle to Israel's well-being; others, as Israel's only hope"

Be it because of legal considerations or because he believes he is destined to be Israel's leader, Netanyahu decided to fight. His personal drama is at the centre of Israel's political drama, with all other actors paling by comparison. Gantz? A nice guy who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Blue and White number two Yair Lapid? Not as lucky as

Gantz; he wanted to be in Gantz's position and must play, obediently if reluctantly, second in command to a man who has no command. Other Likud leaders? For the past year, most of them disappeared in Netanyahu's shadow. They were (to paraphrase Winston Churchill) the political characters who step out of an empty car.

Is this about to change?

The last batch of Israeli polls are depressing. What we see in them is, well, nothing. No sign of change, no sign of hope, no sign of coalition. If elections were held today, the outcome would be much like the ones of last April and September: no majority for the bloc of the right, no majority for any feasible coalition of the centre-left.

That is, unless someone is willing to undo one of the

six decisions that brought us to where we are. It might be Lieberman deciding to join the religious-right bloc or supporting a narrow coalition that relies on the Arab parties. It could be Gantz, deciding to enter a coalition with Netanyahu. It could be the Haredi parties deciding to abandon

Likud. It could be Likud leaders deciding to throw Netanyahu under the bus.

Most of these scenarios seem like flights of fancy.

Where we did see some movement is within Likud. One Likud leader, Gideon Sa'ar, openly questioned Netanyahu's ability to ever form a coalition. Another Likud leader, Yuli Edelstein (Speaker of the Knesset), reportedly tested the waters to see if he could get 61 supporters and become prime minister.

These are early signs, but they told a big story: Within Likud, the race to succeed Netanyahu had begun. Sa'ar positioned himself as Netanyahu's main rival. Foreign Minister Israel Katz and former Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat chose to be loyal to the end, assuming Likud members are going to punish those who rush to unseat the prime minister.

They are all running — possibly along with Deputy Defence Minister Avi Dichter, Minister Tzachi Hanegbi, Minister Gilad Erdan and others. They call Sa'ar's move "hasty" or "disloyal" as they compete with him for the votes of

Likud members, but his move served them well in putting the succession process into motion. Behind closed doors, they plot and strategise, prepare and manoeuvre. They smell blood in the water – Netanyahu's blood. They look at him and see a dead leader walking. But since they've known him for some time, they also take into account the possibility of sudden resurrection. Sa'ar decided he has nothing to lose because of the existing animosity between the prime minister and himself. Katz and Barkat might hope to get Netanyahu's blessing when the day comes.

The question for many of them is not "if" but rather, "when". Should they announce when a new election is called, only after another failure to win an election, or after another failure to form a government? Will they be able to form the next government or have to lead Likud through tough years in opposition and only then get a chance to occupy the prime minister's office? They must not rush, but they also must not wait too long lest the train of succession leaves the station without them.

What could happen in the coming months?

Options are not many. It could be Netanyahu deciding to step aside, maybe in exchange for a deal that will save him the need to stand trial. It could be Lieberman deciding to go with a right-wing ultra-Orthodox coalition after all, with the Haredi parties giving him some achievement with which to justify a turnabout. It could be Gantz deciding to trust the untrustworthy Netanyahu and serve under him for a few months in exchange for a promise he will become prime minister next summer or next autumn. It could be 61 members of the Knesset deciding to end the madness and support a coalition headed by neither Gantz nor Netanyahu.

If all these ideas sound far-fetched, it's because they probably are. This means the election on March 2 will likely be followed by another attempt to form a coalition with numbers that don't match the prerequisites. This means more months without a functioning government to pass a budget, more months without important decisions being made, more months of bickering and political fatigue.

Might this mean a fourth, fifth or sixth round of elections? You might say, "That's impossible. No one

wants that."

True – but remember that no one in Israel wanted this; yet, somehow, this is where we are. AIR

Shmuel Rosner is senior political editor of the Jewish Journal of Los Angeles (jewishjournal.com) © Shmuel Rosner, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

WHY ISRAEL'S QUEST FOR A UNITY GOVERNMENT FAILED

by Ahron Shapiro

Following the September 17 election in Israel, which left no clear path to a majority coalition for either of the 120-seat Knesset's two largest factions – Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud Party (32 seats) or Benny Gantz's Blue and White (33 seats) – it initially appeared that, for the first time since the 1980s, a unity government was in the offing.

Indeed, with Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu party (eight seats) effectively holding the balance of power and refusing to support any other outcome, it seemed to really be the only option.

The fact that a unity government did not eventuate was a result of a conflicting web of conditions that each major party placed on entering into such a partnership. Like an unsolvable logic exercise, every possible political combination led to a dead end. The only hope was for one or more parties to compromise on their demands. That didn't happen, and that is why Israel is now heading for its unprecedented third round of elections in less than a year.

Immediately following the September election, Netanyahu formed a bloc of all religious parties and most right-wing parties with the exception of Yisrael Beiteinu – including the Likud, Shas (nine seats), United Torah Judaism (seven seats), Jewish Home (four seats) and the New Right (three seats).

While this 55-seat bloc fell significantly short of a Knesset majority, by refusing to join any coalition that would not include all of these other parties, Likud forced Blue and White (B&W) to choose between two bad options: either going second in a leadership rotation within a right-wing-dominated unity government under Netanyahu's unyielding terms, or pursuing narrow left-wing government that would require the outside support of both the predominately Arab Joint List (13 seats) and its nemesis Yisrael Beiteinu.

While either option would have likely spelled political suicide for B&W in the event of future elections, the

AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST APARTMENT DEVELOPER



- Meriton Suites
- Apartments for sale
- Apartments for rent

MERITON

meriton.com.au

Sydney | Brisbane | Gold Coast



President Rivlin's (centre) rotation plan could not bridge the gap between Netanyahu (left) and Gantz (right)

second option was probably never attainable as Yisrael Beitenu and the Joint List loathe each other. While Lieberman initially claimed he was prepared to punish any side that refused to compromise for unity by forming a government with its opponent, it later became clear this was a bluff – he was not prepared to be in any government that was either backed by the Joint List, or included the ultra-Orthodox parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism.

By mid-November, Lieberman was vociferously denouncing the Joint List as a “fifth column” and “enemy from within” that “doesn’t represent the Arabs of Israel.” Meanwhile at least some of the MKs in the Joint List also ruled out supporting any government that included Lieberman, even from the outside.

With Netanyahu holding firm on his demands to keep his bloc together and go first in any leadership rotation agreement, Lieberman also had the option of joining a coalition of right-wing and religious parties similar to the one he left a year ago and rejected after the April 2019 election. Again, while initially hinting he might be open to such a coalition in order to pressure Gantz, Lieberman later ruled out this scenario in the strongest terms on account of his rejection of the policies of the ultra-Orthodox parties, whom he derided as “non-Zionist” and coercive.

Meanwhile, even before the final votes had been counted in the election, President Reuven Rivlin had begun pushing a plan whereby Netanyahu would declare himself incapacitated to serve as PM due to his corruption indictments, but retain the title and trappings of prime minister for the duration of his trial. Meanwhile, Gantz would serve as acting prime minister and become full prime minister after two years under a leadership rotation arrangement.

However, Gantz faced strong resistance from within B&W against accepting any scenario where Netanyahu would be allowed to go first in a prime ministerial rotation regardless of the circumstances – partly out of principle and to fulfill pre-election pledges, but also due to fears of betrayal.

The scope of Netanyahu’s “incapacitation” and the curbs on his powers were also reportedly points of contention with Likud negotiators, with Gantz reportedly telling confidantes in early December that his distrust of Netan-

yahu had only increased over the course of coalition talks.

Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit’s announcement on Nov. 21 that the state had decided to formally indict Netanyahu on various corruption charges across three separate cases only strengthened B&W’s resolve not to serve in any Netanyahu-led government while he was under indictment.

With the understanding that Netanyahu’s criminal cases present the largest impediment to forming a coalition in time to avoid a third election, Israel’s *Channel 12* reported on Dec. 4 that Rivlin had said he would consider pardoning Netanyahu in exchange for the PM admitting wrongdoing and then retiring from politics.

Rivlin would not confirm the report and in any case, there has been no indication that Netanyahu, who has previously angrily dismissed the charges against him as a “legal coup”, would be prepared to accept such an arrangement.

Mid-December party preference polls show virtually no shift in voter allegiances since the Sept. 17 election.

There thus appears to be little hope currently that Israel’s third election in a year will bring the country any closer to breaking the stalemate, as long as the current political actors continue to hold firmly to their incompatible demands.

AIR

SUCCEEDING BIBI?

by Amotz Asa-El

The die is cast. One short, and seemingly technical, statement has launched the struggle for Binyamin Netanyahu’s political estate.

The statement was made by Likud lawmaker Gideon Sa’ar on Nov. 21. It said that Netanyahu has failed twice this year to form a government, and will surely fail again should another election be called. “I can form a government and unite the people,” the bespectacled former education minister claimed.

Netanyahu’s two failures followed last April’s inconclusive election, after which he failed to reassemble his previous coalition, and the consequent election in September, in which Netanyahu’s parliamentary following shrank further, and Likud itself won fewer votes than its main rival, Blue and White.

After no Israeli party succeeded in forming a government by the legal deadline of Dec. 11, Israel is heading yet again to the polls for a third time on March 2, 2020.





Gideon Sa'ar: His challenge to Netanyahu has launched a succession scramble

The political deadlock stems from the failures of both Likud and Blue and White to collect a majority of the Knesset's 120 members. Two significant Knesset factions – the Israeli-Arab United List's 13 lawmakers, and the eight commanded by Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu – have been declining to join either of the prospective narrow coalition government led by either Likud or Blue and White.

The United List did begin talks with Blue and White leader Benny Gantz, but those were cut off abruptly by Blue and White after United List lawmakers condemned the IDF's killing in Gaza of Islamic Jihad military leader Baha Abu al-Ata on November 12 as designed to serve Netanyahu's personal political needs.

Lieberman, for his part, was courted by both Netanyahu and Gantz, but has rejected each, insisting instead that the two should together form a broad national unity government – with or without his own faction. The hawkish, but militantly secular, Lieberman says that only such a unity government can reboot the secular majority's relations with the ultra-Orthodox public and reform the religious impositions imposed by ultra-Orthodox politicians.

This, then, was the context in which Sa'ar decided to cross the Rubicon and stage the challenge that further complicates an already embattled Netanyahu's political situation.

A 52-year-old lawyer, Sa'ar is not a shoo-in to succeed the man who has led Likud for 21 of the past 27 years, nor is he alone in the contest he has touched off.

Unlike the 70-year-old Netanyahu, who built his public profile as a diplomat, first as deputy ambassador in Washington when he was 33, then as ambassador to the UN, Sa'ar's public career began as a journalist when he was a student at Tel Aviv University. He then proceeded to the judiciary, where he became, at 29, an assistant to the Attorney-General, and later to the State Prosecutor.

The shift to politics came at age 33, when he became

Netanyahu's cabinet secretary in 1999, just a few months before Netanyahu's defeat by Ehud Barak. Sa'ar's transition from his role in the cabinet to private legal practice lasted only two years, because Ariel Sharon's defeat of Barak in the 2001 election resulted in Sa'ar's return as cabinet secretary again.

From there the road to elected office was short. Entering the Knesset in 2003, Sa'ar later served one stint as Netanyahu's education minister and another as interior minister before falling out with him.

Details of that disagreement have never been disclosed, but the bottom line was that in 2014, Sa'ar left politics. He returned only late last year, after teaching political science at a college and

publishing papers with a strategic think-tank.

Sa'ar's divorce from his wife of 22 years when he was education minister, and his subsequent marriage to TV news anchor Geula Even, added a measure of flamboyance to his previous image as a cold and understated lawyer. Sa'ar has four children, two from each wife.

Despite the break he took from politics, Sa'ar kept in close touch with party activists across the country, many of whom rightly assumed his return to the fray was only a matter of time and betting on him as Netanyahu's successor might someday pay off.

Now these old investments of Sa'ar's are being tested. Some have indeed paid dividends with endorsements of his candidacy – including from the mayors of Ofakim, near the Gaza Strip, and Akko, north of Haifa, both working-class Likud bastions.

At the other end of the social spectrum, in glitzy Ramat Gan to Tel Aviv's east, Mayor Carmel Shama-Hacohen has joined Sa'ar's endorsers. This potentially represents the possibility of Sa'ar gaining support from some of Ramat Gan's moneyed elite, as well as bringing some diplomatic credibility to Sa'ar's candidacy, Shama-Hacohen served as Israel's Ambassador to UNESCO earlier this decade.

Sa'ar's support base then expanded further, to the chairman of the Regional Council of Samaria, Yosi Dagan, whose constituency of West Bank settlers is particularly meaningful in the Likud party, which prides itself on having built most of those communities.

Later endorsed by the mayors of Israel's southernmost and northernmost towns, Eilat on the Red Sea and Metula on the Lebanon border, Sa'ar's bid seems more solid than some initially assumed. Even so, his chances of defeating Netanyahu remain slim at best. For now, Sa'ar's accomplishment is limited to having imposed a primary election on the Likud that Netanyahu had hoped to avoid.

Moreover, Sa'ar's bid is itself being challenged by several other contenders for the Likud leadership.

Several candidacies are electoral nonstarters. One ex-

ample is former Jerusalem mayor Nir Barkat, 60, a hi-tech millionaire who has been a lawmaker only since April and has never been a minister, which makes him considerably less experienced than his competitors.

Meanwhile, Internal Security Minister Gilead Erdan, a 49-year-old lawyer, has been a minister for 10 years, but has lost much of his political momentum in his current position, appearing indecisive while repeatedly failing to install a police chief who would both last and be effective.

Other would-be contenders for Likud's leadership are currently stranded outside the party and are therefore in no technical position to join the fray. That includes Defence Minister Naftali Bennett, 47, and former justice minister Ayelet Shaked, 43, both of the New Right faction – both believed to be eager to join Likud and someday vie for its leadership.

Altogether outside the race is Avigdor Lieberman, who earlier this decade might have been a natural candidate, but now is seen among Likud activists as a traitor. Having masterminded September's repeat election, and then arguably caused the current political impasse, the former defence minister has blocked Netanyahu's room to manoeuvre more effectively than anyone in his entire political career.

The most potent rival Sa'ar faces, outside Netanyahu himself, is doubtless Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz.

During a decade as transport minister Katz has earned kudos, even among Likud's rivals, as an efficient administrator who dramatically expanded Israel's network of highways and railways, launched the Tel Aviv subway project, and also reduced air travel prices by opening new international routes and imposing more competition on the airlines.

A lifelong politician, the 64-year-old Katz is also one of the most powerful people in the Likud party apparatus, having served for the past 15 years as chairman of the party's secretariat.

Katz has so far displayed loyalty to Netanyahu, and implies he will sit out the primary election that has been set for Dec. 22. That strategy may work if Sa'ar is trounced by Netanyahu. However, should Katz come to suspect that Sa'ar will emerge with a substantial electoral achievement to his name, even while losing, he might change his mind and decide to run as well.

Finally, there is an improbably but not impossible scenario whereby Netanyahu is replaced not by his party, but by the Knesset – if he agrees to a deal in which he gets a presidential pardon for the three corruption cases currently pending against him in return for his retirement from public life. This would mean that the legislature, not the Likud, must elect a lawmaker to replace him.

In such a case, there is a possibility that Netanyahu will be succeeded by Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, a former minister of immigrant absorption who has little ambition to be prime minister. Edelstein's real goal is to succeed President Reuven Rivlin when his term ends in summer 2021.

Odds of such a scenario eventuating are low, but if it does materialise and Edelstein become PM, the symbolism would be immense, considering that 32 years ago, Edelstein, now 60, was a prisoner in a Soviet gulag, where he spent three years for clandestinely teaching Hebrew while struggling with the KGB to immigrate to Israel.

Edelstein would surely be perceived by all, including himself, as an interim prime minister, while Sa'ar and Katz contest the Likud leadership, and Blue and White contests Likud's right to lead government. Then again, Edelstein's personal profile of a legally spotless record, Zionist sacrifice, and moral inspiration might help cleanse the atmosphere of the political uncertainty and disillusionment that has descended on the Jewish state during the unprecedented political crisis of the past year.

AIR



Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz: Hoping quiet loyalty will get him Netanyahu's nod to succeed him

With Compliments

PEACHTREE CAPITAL

Level 3, 356 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000





Gelatissimo


MADE FRESH IN-STORE



With 47 stores Australia-wide,
find your nearest location at
[gelatissimo.com.au](https://www.gelatissimo.com.au)

 @GelatissimoAU

 @gelatissimo

 @gelatissimogelato

Power Projector

The man behind Iran's Mideast empire

by Yaakov Lappin

Hardly a week goes by without mention of the notorious commander of Iran's overseas elite Quds Force, Major Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Most recently, he has been linked with the brutal and deadly repression of protests in Iraq – demonstrations that have threatened the stability of the pro-Iranian government in Baghdad.

Born in 1957 in a southeastern Iranian village to a poor family, Soleimani initially worked in construction to help his father pay off a debt, according to a profile released by the Tel Aviv-based Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre. He became involved in revolutionary activities against the regime of the Iranian Shah in 1976. Soleimani joined Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in 1979, just as the Corps set up regional command in the city of Kerman, where he had been living.

Despite lacking any military experience, his charismatic personality opened doors, and Soleimani quickly received command roles. His first duties included repressing Kurdish separatists in western Iran. After the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, he was sent to the southern front against Iraq in 1981 and rose through the ranks, becoming a division commander by the end of the war in 1988.

He returned to Kerman as a division commander to repress a local rebellion launched by Sunni Baloch separatists – a mission he accomplished successfully, though with many casualties. In 1998, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed him to lead the Quds Force, replacing Ahmed Vahidi, who played a key role in the 1994 attack on the Jewish community AMIA center in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people and injured more than 300. Vahidi was linked to the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 American soldiers and injured some 500 people, according to the Meir Amit Centre's report.

In subsequent years, the Quds Force – a part of the IRGC – developed dramatically, as its scope of operations across the Middle East grew exponentially. Soleimani's standing grew together with the power of his covert unit.

In the past 16 years, the Quds Force has taken advantage of the collapse of Middle Eastern states, the US

invasion of Iraq, and civil wars that raged in Yemen and Syria to build proxy Iranian forces throughout the entire region. Iran uses these forces to threaten and attack Sunni-Arab states and Israel, and to pursue its goal of becoming a hegemonic power.

In Lebanon, the Quds Force stood up the strongest non-state force in the world: Hezbollah. Hezbollah's arsenal of some 130,000 rockets and missile is pointed directly at Israeli cities and strategic sites. It has more firepower than most NATO armies.

'THE FULL PICTURE COMES TOGETHER'

"Soleimani leads Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East," Doron Itzchakov, an Iran specialist from the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, told JNS. "His status is



Qassem Soleimani: Rose to dominate the Revolutionary Guards despite lacking military training

no less than that of Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif."

Soleimani leads Iranian activity in every location that the regime labels as being important to its "strategic depth," including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, said Itzchakov. "He is certainly beyond being a military leader. His political involvement is very strong."

Because of the unusual structure of the Iranian state (it doesn't resemble any Western governmental structure), Soleimani's role cannot be described using Western terminology, said Itzchakov. "Although he's not the commander of the IRGC, he's stronger than the new IRGC commander, Major General Hossein Salami, even though they both have the same rank."

The Iranian regime first set out to spread its principles and ideology around the region, and later turned this vision into what it dubs "the resistance axis," which includes the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror faction in Gaza. "This then turned into 'strategic depth.' On all of these matters, Soleimani has the upper hand – more than any other person in the Iranian political and military arena," said Itzchakov.

With the Iranian Foreign Ministry responsible for deal-

ing with Europe, Soleimani runs Iran's activities in the Middle East, according to an "unwritten but clear arrangement," he stated.

In the Middle East, Soleimani has been hard at work creating a multi-national army, which Itzhakov described as being his most significant project. Soleimani's army is made up of a network of pro-Iranian, largely Shi'ite militias, such as Ansar Allah in Yemen, the Popular Mobilisation Front in Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon and an assortment of militia forces in Syria.

"He outlines the doctrine of that army. He connects it to the objectives of Iran and the IRGC," said Itzhakov.

Within Iran, the IRGC's objectives do not always match up with those of the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his reformist camp, but that has not stopped the IRGC from having final say on a wide array of issues, including military-security, economic affairs and Iran's role in the Middle East.

While Soleimani is key to Iran's power projection, he draws that power directly from the Supreme Leader, stressed Itzhakov. "This helps shed light on how Iran sees itself in regards to Israel. The Supreme Leader gives the IRGC legitimacy, and they, in turn, act as his supporting pillar. When one sees where the central power of Soleimani comes from – the Supreme Leader – and one analyses Khamenei's statements about destroying Israel, the full picture comes together."

According to this picture, Soleimani draws his status and authority from Khamenei's ideology, which he then translates into steps on the ground. "The overall picture is that Soleimani draws lots of power from the Supreme Leader, who supports his operations outside of Iran's borders."

And those operations only seem to be growing. The Quds Force was formed in 1990 for the stated mission of "exporting" the Iranian revolution abroad, and it has since morphed into Iran's premier terrorism elite force.

A PRESTIGIOUS OVERSEAS TERRORISM FORCE

It has been behind a series of attacks on US assets, Israel and pro-Western Arab states, employing proxy war to

achieve its objectives, in order to cover Iran's tracks and hide its direct involvement.

According to the Meir Amit Centre, the Quds Force includes a series of department headquarters, special command centres and regional administrations divided according to geographic locations.

"The Force receives much prestige within the Iranian leadership, has access to many resources and influences the Iranian security-strategic decision-making, including on sensitive foreign issues that touch on Iran's activities in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip," the Centre said in a report.

In 2007, the US Treasury designated the Quds Force as a terrorist entity. In 2011, Washington sanctioned five Iranians, including Soleimani, from the Quds Force who had been linked to a plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. This year, the United States decided to designate the whole of the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organisation.

"He does indeed receive the support of the Supreme Leader, and in recent years, he has gotten popular support, too," Col. (ret.) Reuven Erlich, head of the Meir Amit Centre, told *JNS*. "He is actually consolidating his power by broadening Iranian influence, conducting subterfuge, terrorism and activating various proxies."

'THE LONG ARM OF THE IRANIAN REGIME FOR SUBTERFUGE'

Erlich described Soleimani as being "highly efficient and active. The scope of his activities stretches from the Lebanese Mediterranean coastline to Yemen. He has a wide sphere of activity, which he navigates well. He is the long arm of the Iranian regime for subterfuge in the Middle East."

At the same time, Soleimani's project is being targeted by the very same states it is designed to attack: Sunni Arab powers and Israel.

"While Soleimani is key to Iran's power projection, he draws that power directly from the Supreme Leader"



WESTERNPORT
MARINA

GREAT BY DAY – MAGIC AT NIGHT
MORNINGTON PENINSULA

PHONE (03) 5979 7400

EMAIL: clientservices@westernportmarina.com.au

In just the past two years, Israel has launched hundreds of strikes on Iranian sites in Syria, including weapons factories, missile shipments and terror squads. This has prevented the Quds Force from achieving most of its vision of building a second Hezbollah in Syria.

“When one conducts war via proxy, and builds outposts in all sorts of areas, it stirs up antibodies,” said Erlich. “We are seeing these antibodies being released by Israel, Saudi Arabia and internal Iranian elements. Soleimani’s project is big, and it has had its successes, but it also absorbed blows from time to time. It’s not a black or white situation.”

While Soleimani is likely satisfied with the results of his dark project thus far, he seeks to go much further, argued Erlich. “He has stood up many proxies that he can now activate,” he added.

Out of all of them, Hezbollah is the most efficient and most widely consolidated.

Said Erlich: “Hezbollah has to be maintained with weapons and money, but not more than that. In other states, Soleimani’s proxies are encountering antibodies that constantly need treatment.”

AIR

Yaakov Lappin is an Israeli military and strategic affairs analyst. He is an associate researcher at the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, and is the Israel correspondent for Jane’s Defense Weekly and the Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org). © Jewish News Syndicate, reprinted by permission, all right reserved.

THE PERSIAN AUTUMN

by David Rosenberg

For a long time it looked like the spread of Iranian influence across the Middle East was unstoppable. Lebanon has long been in Iran’s pocket via Hezbollah. Then the chaos created by the US invasion of Iraq opened an opportunity for Teheran to wield power there too. The Syrian civil war created yet another bridgehead, as did the Hamas takeover of Gaza.

Now, the entire Iran-hegemony enterprise is at risk. Protests have been going on in Iraq and Lebanon for weeks, bringing their economies to a near standstill and forcing their Iran-approved prime ministers to step down. There’s no end in sight to the protests for the very good reason that the Iraqi and Lebanese leaders are powerless to address the protesters’ demands for change without fundamentally altering the system of government that has kept

them, and Iran, in power.

The standoff between the protesters and the authorities is a zero-sum game that the governments may yet win, temporarily. But they will have to fight and fight again until they lose.

Other outposts of Iranian hegemony are also at risk. The civil war in Syria has wound down, but the country is still divided between the government, rebels, the Kurds and a Turkish occupation. The economic distress that has kindled the protests in Iraq and Lebanon could just as easily spread to Syria (though more likely, given the government’s zero tolerance for dissent, public expression of discontent could just lead to renewed fighting).

In Gaza, Israel’s and Egypt’s blockades and Hamas corruption have led to massive poverty and growing anger at those in power.

In all these places, the governments are de facto part of the Iranian empire. From Iraq to Lebanon to Syria and Gaza, the local politicians are loyal to Teheran. In Iraq and Lebanon, the governments are teetering, and in Syria and Gaza, it’s ripe to teeter.

Thus it just could be that unemployed Iraqis and Lebanese struggling to get through the month succeed where Israeli sorties over Syria and US President Donald Trump’s campaign of “maximum pressure” on Teheran have so far failed. They could bring down Iran’s imperial ambitions for the Middle East.

Iran also saw the same kind of mass protests, and its economy is in trouble, but at home Teheran is directly in control and has been able to largely quell the disturbances with a carefully constructed strategy of violence and in-



Iran’s hegemonic empire is at risk because it has no ability to address the real needs of Iraqis and Lebanese

ternet blackouts. For its partner countries, it’s a different story. That is because the empire that Iran has built is an empire of anarchy.

Iran doesn’t have anything near the economic might to create relationships based on trade, investment or technology. It doesn’t even have the conventional military power to influence, much less occupy, neighbouring countries. It does have the soft power of Shi’ism, which it has leveraged in places where there are big Shi’ite populations. But even

that strategy has its limits: In Iraq today, it's Shi'ites who are leading the protests.

Iran's principal resource in empire building is chaos. It establishes itself in places where the government is weak (Lebanon and Iraq), desperate (Syria) or friendless and without resources (Gaza). It enroots itself by, among other things, sponsoring local militia groups as proxies, creating a web of money and patronage with local politicians, and by exploiting ethno-sectarian divisions.

It's an effective system for a weak country, like Iran, that wants to act like a great power. But it's not a sustainable one.

All of Iran's Middle East outposts are suffering from severe economic distress. Lebanon's woes have been so thoroughly reported on there's no reason to repeat them all here. Iraq's economy is similarly dysfunctional. Its petroleum industry – the only one of any real value – is thriving, but the profits accrue to a tiny elite of politicians and militia leaders. What's left percolates down to a massive public sector workforce of bored, underemployed civil servants. Poverty and unemployment are rampant. Syria and Gaza are in such bad shape that their economies are barely functioning at all.

Certainly in the case of Lebanon and Iraq, their troubles are principally of their own making, with a dollop of help from Teheran. Lebanon was once a Middle East entrepot and banking centre. Even today it has a talented and educated population, even if many have left for lack of opportunity. Iraq has the world's fourth-largest oil reserves and has exported no less than US\$1 trillion of the stuff since 2005. Yet Lebanon and Iraq have both failed because the system of weak government that serves Teheran so well has failed the people they are supposed to be serving.

Something was going to have to give, and it seems it finally has. The weak governments cannot engage in serious economic policy and are starting to fall apart. The unemployed and the poor are starting to pour out into the street.

Teheran's problem is that it doesn't have the expertise or money to help its ailing allies fix their economies in the way the US, the Gulf states or international institutions might, and the governments of Iran's clients are too weak and corrupt to do anything on their own.

It's tempting to see the protests as a new "Arab Spring" – another stab at bringing down the corrupt, self-serving autocracies of the region after the first try ended so miserably. In fact, they are about that on one level, but on a more important level, what's really happening should be called the "Persian Autumn": the gradual collapse of Iranian aspirations.

AIR

David Rosenberg is economics editor and a columnist at Haaretz. © Haaretz (www.haaretz.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

HOW HEZBOLLAH NEUTRALISED UNIFIL

by Ran Porat

In a report issued on Nov. 26, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that "The Lebanese government must take the necessary steps to disarm Hezbollah and other groups in southern Lebanon". Referring to an attack by Hezbollah, the Iranian-funded Lebanese terrorist organisation, on Israeli forces on the border with Lebanon on September 2, Guterres warned that the incident "reflects the growing danger presented by armed groups operating outside of the Lebanese government's control" in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

The danger Guterres is worried about concerns the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the multinational peacekeeping force originally created in 1978 and later tasked with implementing 1701. Yet a new report by Gen. Assaf Orion of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy highlights how effectively and systematically Hezbollah has neutralised and defanged UNIFIL, rendering Guterres' demands completely unrealistic at the present time.

Following the Second Lebanon war in 2006 UNIFIL was re-deployed and expanded – its forces now number 15,000 people with a US\$500m budget – and its mandate redefined and enlarged: "[To] assist the Lebanese armed forces in taking steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line [the border with Israel] and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL deployed in this area".

Thirteen years later it is clear that UNIFIL has failed miserably in fulfilling this mission. Today, Hezbollah is a powerful, well trained and heavily armed force, with more than 130,000 rockets and missiles and large stockpiles of other types of weapons. In south Lebanon, the area under UNIFIL supervision, Hezbollah has extensive control over the Shi'ite population residing there and massive weapons caches.

General Gadi Eisenkot, the Israeli army Chief of Staff at the time, revealed in 2017 that Hezbollah has a military presence in 240 villages in southern Lebanon, including forces and weapons in "almost every third or fourth house" inside civilian population centres.

Over the past decade, several rockets and improvised explosive device attacks on Israel have been launched from

"UNIFIL endured various types of terror, violence, stone throwing, gun shots and much more. Six peacekeepers have died"



Hezbollah has created “red lines” which effectively control where UNIFIL patrols can go and what they can see

that area. UNIFIL also did not detect any of the six attack tunnels Hezbollah dug from south Lebanon into Israeli territory (which have been destroyed by Israel over the last 18 months).

Moreover, Hezbollah’s presence in south Lebanon was recently boosted after many of its members, including the Radwan elite commando force, returned from fighting in Syria and deployed into villages in the region. Israeli army officials have confirmed in Dec. 2019 that the Lebanese terrorist organisation has increased its deployment along the border with Israel. The net result of these developments is improved preparedness by Hezbollah for an attack on Israel.

UNIFIL’s lacklustre professional military conduct is a major contributor to Hezbollah’s ability to expand its powers without being hampered, or even called out for its behaviour in violation of the UN Security Council resolutions UNIFIL was created to enforce.

Yet UNIFIL’s impotence, Orion’s study reveals, is also the result of successful Hezbollah tactics, employed systematically since 2006, to deter and harass UNIFIL in order to strip the UN force of any meaningful monitoring abilities. Orion is a veteran Israeli army general with rich experience interacting with foreign bodies and governments and was in charge of the IDF’s interaction with UNIFIL and the Lebanese army for a number of years. Now a researcher at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, his new report is titled: “Hiding in plain sight: Hezbollah’s campaign against UNIFIL.”

Orion lists the methods used by Hezbollah operatives in at least 150 incidents of confrontation with UNIFIL since 2006. During these events, UNIFIL endured various types of terror, violence, stone throwing, gun shots and much more. Six peacekeepers have died and at least 41 have been injured as a result. The real number of these attacks is most likely higher due to under-reporting by the UN – another feature of UNIFIL’s unwillingness to face up to Hezbollah’s aggression.

The main aim of the Hezbollah-initiated assaults is to

intimidate UNIFIL into abiding by what Orion terms “the Southern Lebanon rules dictated by Hezbollah”. These rules include significantly limiting UNIFIL’s freedom of movement (“Stay away”) and greatly reducing its ability to collect evidence of Hezbollah’s belligerent and illegal activities (“See no evil”).

To achieve these goals, Hezbollah operatives in southern Lebanon, dressed either in civilian clothes or in uniform, stop UNIFIL patrols with vehicles or barriers blocking the road, making sure the UN force stays on main roads, and deny them any approach to alleged “private properties” where weapons or other equipment are concealed.

In dozens of cases, “locals” attempted to seize or did seize UN equipment, including cameras, recording, navigation and communication gear, maps and documents. Hezbollah was also able to use threats to quash a French initiative to have its UNIFIL troops use drones for intelligence gathering. Together with the other aforementioned actions, it has thus effectively transformed southern Lebanon into a “no photography zone.”

One notorious Hezbollah-linked attack on UNIFIL forces occurred on Aug. 4, 2018 in the village of Majdal Zoun, seven km north of the border with Israel, and was filmed and then broadcast in the international media. As a media account summarises the footage:

“The video shows groups of men block off the [UNIFIL]

WITH COMPLIMENTS

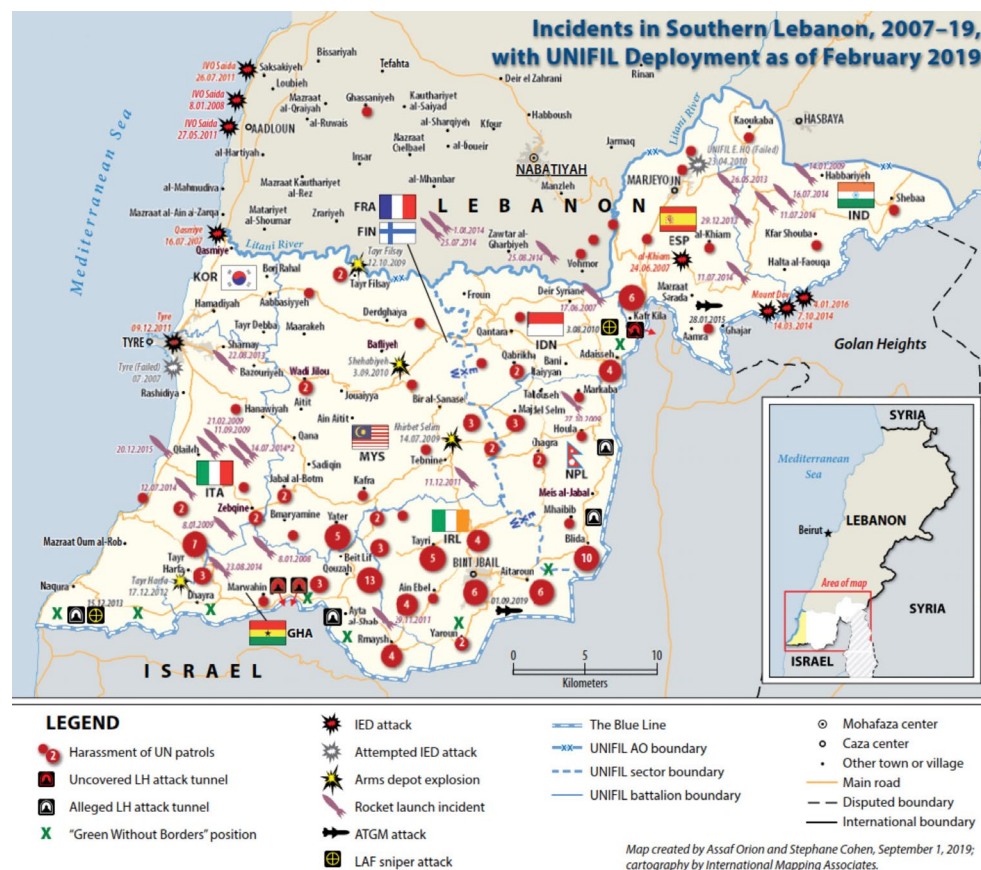
baron
CORPORATION

T +61 3 9866 3066

F +61 3 9866 2766

Level 14, 10 Queens Road
(PO Box 7638 St Kilda Road)
Melbourne Victoria 3004





convoy with their cars. Once blocked off several men set upon the vehicles, trying to break in through the windows with hammers and stones. At one stage, gasoline is poured over the second UN armored vehicle and then lit on fire. As it burns one peacekeeper leaves the vehicle while being accosted by the men. Another peacekeeper comes running out from behind the lead armored vehicle with his gun drawn, only to retreat. Another peacekeeper leaves the APV, surrendering his weapon to the terrorists. Men carrying automatic weapons can be seen during the melee.”

Hezbollah makes use of a fake non-governmental organisation, “Green Without Borders”, whose personnel are stationed on towers along the border with Israel, to provide intelligence on UNIFIL (and Israeli) movements. It is also aided by official Lebanese entities such as local municipal officials and policemen.

Worst of all, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have betrayed their duty to assist UNIFIL. Instead, LAF soldiers stand by, cover up or even assist Hezbollah, for example, by blocking UNIFIL patrols themselves or by mutual coordination of activities along the border. Information passed from UNIFIL to LAF, a former UNIFIL officer has revealed, is immediately shared with Hezbollah.

Expecting the LAF to disarm Hezbollah, as called for in Resolution 1701, seems unrealistic to say the least. Following elections in early 2019, and despite recent unrest in Lebanon, Hezbollah is still politically the power to be reckoned with in Lebanon. The LAF “operates within the consensus of rival political forces and sectarian communities, avoiding actions that would challenge the interests of

any particular community”, as US-based political scientist Waleed Hazbun explained in 2016. LAF would not and could not confront the Shi’ite Hezbollah because of the latter’s political influence and the LAF’s need to maintain its legitimacy by not rocking the complicated boat of different ethnicities which make up Lebanon.

UNIFIL commanders have internalised Hezbollah’s red lines about what is allowed and what not. A former French UNIFIL soldier interviewed following the Majdal Zoun incident lamented what he called “UNIFIL’s attitude [...] when decisions and orders are taken with the aim of avoiding issues with Hezbollah.” These orders, for example, prohibit UNIFIL from patrolling and taking photos in Hezbollah-controlled villages, he testified.

“In light of Hezbollah’s orchestrated campaign to cripple and blind UNIFIL,” explains Orion, “the UN’s first line of defense is denial and self-reassurance, watering down the hard reality. Many aggressive and threatening actions are described as merely ‘unfriendly’ or downplayed as isolated and negligible in scale against the general picture.” The result is reporting which is neither credible nor comprehensive – belittling Hezbollah’s belligerence and leaving critical gaps in mapping its violations of Resolution 1701. In Orion’s words: “The UN speaks softly, and the locals carry big sticks.”

To be fair, international peacekeeping missions are not always successful, especially when facing complicated realities in conflict zones. Yet the failure in the Lebanese case, a flammable country in an explosive region, is especially alarming. Immediate action is needed to restore UNIFIL’s capabilities and self-confidence vis-à-vis Hezbollah, at least enough to ensure it is able to offer credible reporting on Hezbollah’s activities in violation of UNSC resolutions. To expect UNIFIL to actually undertake the disarmament of Hezbollah those resolutions demand is probably unrealistic. However, without more credible UNIFIL monitoring, the relative peace maintained in the area is destined to collapse sooner rather than later.

AIR

Dr. Ran Porat is a research associate at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University, a research fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya, Israel and a research associate at the Future Directions International Research Institute, Western Australia.

ANTISEMITISM OUT OF NO. 10 DOWNING STREET?

by David Hirsh

The below is excerpted from answers provided by UK sociologist and antisemitism expert David Hirsh about Labour antisemitism in the UK, in response to questions posed to him by French journalist Paul Sugy. The exchange was subsequently used as the basis of a French language article in Le Figaro on Nov. 29.

PAUL ZUGY: Do you agree with [UK Chief Rabbi] Ephraim Mirvis saying [in his article in the Times on Nov. 25] Jews are justifiably anxious about the prospect of Labour forming the next government?

DAVID HIRSH: Yes, Jews are anxious. Yes, their anxiety is justifiable.

Where does this antisemitism come from?

Left antisemitism has a long history, going back to people like Bruno Bauer, critiqued by Marx, who argued that Jews should not be emancipated in the state until they had emancipated themselves from their religion. August Bebel had to oppose the “socialism of fools” – conspiracy fantasy which pictures the oppressors as Jewish. Much of the left at the time of [the Dreyfus Affair] was ambivalent, thinking this was a fight within “the elite”. The Stalinists made use of Jew-hatred, identifying Jews with capitalism and imperialism and they pushed hard this story that Israel is an imperialist and apartheid state.

Today’s left antisemitism begins as furious and focused hostility to Israel, it supports the exclusion of Israelis from the life of humanity, it defines its own identity in relation to the Israeli enemy and it tolerates all kinds of antisemitic discourse and bullying which it attracts.

We saw the huge swirl of hostility not around Israel but around the Chief Rabbi, who is accused first of trying dishonestly to help Israel with his fake accusation of antisemitism and then is quickly also accused of being right-wing and supporting the rich in trying to prevent a Labour government.

[Labour leader Jeremy] Corbyn himself, and the faction which raised him to power, and swept into the Labour Party to support him, has a long history of jumping to the defence of antisemites against Jews.

Is Jeremy Corbyn's defence convincing? Did the party take appropriate measures to fight antisemitism in its ranks?

Corbyn lies. First, he says that he is doing everything he can to rid the party of antisemitism, but this has been shown to be false. The Chief Rabbi called it “mendacious speech”. The truth is the opposite. As demonstrated by John Ware in his “Panorama” [TV] documentary, Corbyn, his office, and his supporters have deliberately slowed the disciplinary system, have helped out their allies.

Corbyn also lies when he says he would like to meet the Chief Rabbi and find out why he’s so upset. The



UK Labour's Jeremy Corbyn makes Britain's Jews anxious

truth is that Corbyn and his people have had a number of meetings with the leadership of the Jewish community – Jewish Leadership Council, [Community Security Trust, Board of Deputies]... he doesn’t listen and he doesn’t reassure.

[Note: I have since been told that there was in fact only one formal meeting of this kind. But the point holds I think. Corbyn has had every opportunity to understand the grievances and the Party has had every opportunity to engage with various institutions and individuals in the Jewish community. – DH]

Corbyn himself has a long history of supporting antisemitism against Jews: he has said Hamas and Hezbollah are dedicated to fighting for peace and justice; he has presented English language propaganda for [Iranian regime outlet] *Press TV*; he said an antisemitic mural should not be taken down; he defended Stephen Sizer [an anti-Zionist former Anglican vicar accused of spreading antisemitic conspiracy theories] saying he was a good critic of Israel etc. etc.

There are thousands of examples, carefully documented, of Labour antisemitism. LAAS [Labour Against Antisemitism], CAA [The Campaign Against Antisemitism], JLM [The Jewish Labour Movement] have submitted them to the EHRC [The Equality and Human Rights

Commission, which is currently conducting an inquiry into antisemitism in the British Labour party].

There is political antisemitism at the top; it creates institutional antisemitism; that licenses people to bully and harass.

Do you observe such a phenomenon in other left parties in Europe or in the USA?

Yes. But it has not yet tainted the whole party in other democratic countries.

To what extent does clientelism of the Labour Party towards Muslims threaten English Jews?

I don't think the issue of Labour antisemitism is, in the first place, anything at all to do with Muslims. I think that Corbyn's kind of antisemitism is a traditional left antisemitism, with a specific Stalinist "anti-imperialist" and "anti-Zionist" heritage, and today mixing and swirling with a more traditional English antisemitism.

It is true that there is some shared political narrative, and some history of joint political work, between Corbyn's faction and various kinds of Islamist politics. Corbyn has "celebrated" the anniversaries of the Iranian revolution and he has been hosted by Hamas and Hezbollah; he thinks that it is imperialism that is responsible for ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

"The result of an antisemite in No.10 would be the rise of an antisemitic movement. Corbyn will fail and when he does, his people will blame Zionists and Jews"

But I wouldn't want to blame the current crisis on Muslims, and not even, primarily on Islamism.

Why and how does antisemitism threaten Jews?

Well, we just don't know the answer.

We know that many Jews feel threatened by the prospect of an antisemite in No. 10 [Downing Street, the home of the British PM]. We know that there are many conversa-

tions about leaving Britain, most of it only conversations. I don't think people are planning to leave Britain in any significant numbers but I do think that people are making sure that that option is open to them – they're getting foreign passports, thinking about what kind of work they could do abroad, etc.

Are they justified? I don't know.

There are a number of specific and concrete threats: the use of the British chair in the UN Security Council; funding for security at Jewish schools and synagogues; possible moves against dual nationals or against people who have fought in the Israeli army; a rise in BDS, sanctioned and legitimised by the government.


I think that if kids are bullied at school, for example, by being called "murdering Zionists" it will be difficult for teachers to know how to protect them – well, even the PM thinks it's true.

We can think of many concrete things. But I'm more worried about the other things.

Both Corbyn's faction and also Brexit are conspiracy fantasies. They are populist – they divide the world into 'the people' and 'enemies of the people'.

So Labour didn't engage with the truth of what the Chief Rabbi had said, it merely smeared him as a Tory and a Zionist – as an "enemy of the people".

The result of an antisemite in No.10 would be the rise of an antisemitic movement. Corbyn will fail and when he does, his people will blame Zionists and Jews. Alternatively, Brexit will fail, and when it does, people will blame cosmopolitans, finance capital, globalists, the metropolitan elite.

The danger is the rise of an antisemitic movement. 

Dr. David Hirsh is a senior lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London and author of Contemporary Left Anti-semitism (Routledge, 2017). He was a veteran member of the Labour party until resigning in April 2019, saying he "had enough of being humiliated by antisemitism in the Labour movement" and "I do not want Jeremy Corbyn to be the next Prime Minister; he is so wedded to antisemitic politics that he has been quite unable to address the antisemitic culture which he imported into the Labour mainstream." © David Hirsh, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

With Compliments

**R L Webb
Nominees
Pty. Ltd**

Property, investment,
development & finance

AUSTRALIA'S UNRWA CONUNDRUM

by Naomi Levin

In 2020, Australia's \$80 million "strategic partnership" with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) will expire.

The future of Australia's decades-long commitment to UNRWA, a highly problematic UN-run agency, is currently being considered by the Federal Government. Given



Is Australia's "strategic partnership" with UNRWA the best use of our aid to the Palestinians?

this, now is the time to consider how best to use Australia's foreign aid to progress peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and serve Palestinian humanitarian needs.

The situation at UNRWA is less than rosy. In November, Director-General Pierre Krähenbühl resigned after an internal UN investigation found serious management issues at UNRWA.

In the wake of these allegations – and of Krähenbühl's departure – the Australian Government publicly adopted a "wait and see" approach. This stands in contrast to some European donor nations, who suspended their funding until the investigation is completed.

The latest misconduct findings also come on top of UNRWA's other well-known and long-standing, but still unresolved, issues.

There is UNRWA's problematic habit of insisting all Palestinians in its care are "refugees" – including, incongruously, those living in Gaza and the West Bank, which will be part of a future Palestinian state, and those who are fully-fledged citizens of Jordan. It also means that people of Palestinian descent, who were born in and have lived their whole lives in neighbouring countries, receive no UN

support to permanently resettle.

Moreover, unlike the UN agencies that deal with other refugees, UNRWA treats Palestinian refugee status as inheritable – so all descendants of a refugee are also refugees, with no limits. Thus, some of the "refugees" on UNRWA's books today are third and fourth generation descendants of people displaced by the 1948 war.

As a US State Department spokesperson said, UNRWA's model creates an "exponentially expanding community of entitled beneficiaries."

Also problematic is UNRWA's promotion of a Palestinian "right of return" for all of the 5.5 million Palestinians in its remit. The issue of refugees is a final status issue, to be resolved by the Israelis and Palestinians. It should not be pushed by UNRWA. The so-called Palestinian "right of return" is based on a misreading of UN General Assembly Resolution 194. This resolution does not specify a right to "return" for all descendants of those Palestinian Arabs who left after the 1948 war, regardless of what UNRWA promotes today; moreover, it is anyway a non-binding General Assembly UN recommendation which cannot create international law.

UNRWA has also been repeatedly accused of lacking neutrality. These issues have been widely canvassed in previous editions of *The Australia/Israel Review*, including UNRWA's employment of Hamas leaders. In addition, UNRWA schools have been used to store weapons to be used against Israel and have repeatedly distributed textbooks that incite hatred of and violence towards Israel.

For these reasons, as Australia considers its future foreign aid contribution to the Palestinian territories, it would be wise to be both bold and creative.

So just what are the options?

Some opponents would like UNRWA defunded completely. This, however, neglects to acknowledge the politics – that UNRWA retains overwhelming international sup-

With Compliments



r&mpersand.

Investing in the next generation of Australian startups

www.rampersand.com



port. It also ignores the reality – that there are Palestinians in need because their own leadership does not provide adequate services.

There are emerging indications that Israel may like to see UNRWA dissolved and replaced by a humanitarian organisation. Under this proposal, the needy would receive support, but not as refugees. This proposal also sees the Palestinian leadership given support to better provide direct services – such as healthcare, education, welfare and business assistance – currently supplied by UNRWA.

Positively, this scenario both acknowledges that there are many Palestinians who need basic support and rejects the assumption that no progress can be made until there is a full two-state peace.

However, at this point in time, this proposal remains an aspiration. In late 2019, the UN extended UNRWA's mandate for four more years. Australia supported this action; only Israel and the United States did not.

In addition, while a number of countries have expressed concerns with the way UNRWA operates – especially around the issue of neutrality – none, apart from the US and Israel, have defunded UNRWA or called for its replacement. This shows a commitment by global donors to continue supporting the Palestinian people, albeit in a ham-fisted and often counter-productive way in terms of encouraging renewed peace talks.

Another option for reform is to encourage donor states to make funding of UNRWA conditional on changes to the agency's operations. This would ensure support continues to be provided to those in need, while simultaneously sending a strong signal that reform is essential.

One immediate funding condition should be a commitment to reform UNRWA management.

Virtually every year, the UNRWA leadership declares a budget crisis. Management travels the globe – including to Australia in 2015 – asking donors for additional funds to meet this crisis. However, the scant detail leaked from the current investigation indicates that funds and personnel are being mismanaged.

Moreover, commentators have noted the duplication in agency services. In mid-2019, UNRWA touted the opening of a large, brand new health centre in Jordan for refugees living there. This was surprising given that almost all of the approximately two million Palestinians living in Jordan have access to the same health care as Jordanians. For the record, the Jordanian Government reports that the country has such high-quality healthcare that it is attracting an increasing number of medical tourists.

Additionally, a recent audit of UNRWA's funds revealed the organisation had a surplus of nearly 10% of

its total contributions in 2018. An organisation beset by waste and mismanagement should be looking at its own operations before going cap-in-hand to generous donors yet again.

A second suggested funding condition is a gradual modification of UNRWA's operations. This modification would see UNRWA continue to support genuine refugees – that is, those who were displaced after the creation of Israel in 1948 – but work to transfer its many other responsibilities to other parties in the shortest possible time period. Eventually, Palestinians living in the West Bank must be supported by the Palestinian Authority; those living in Jerusalem should receive services from Jerusalem municipal authorities; the Jordanian Government can provide for Palestinians settled in Jordan; the UNHCR may need to

assist Palestinians in Syria and Lebanon; and other humanitarian agencies, such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, will step in for residents of Gaza.

If moves are made to adopt this condition, donors, including Australia, could offer to redirect funding, as required, to support the service providers who take over these responsibilities.

In order to progress the reform of UNRWA, donors should also condition their support on UNRWA abandoning its quest for the “right of return” for 5.5 million Palestinians to Israel. This would enhance the prospects of a two-state outcome. It has long been clear that if a Palestinian “right of return” were somehow to eventuate, Israel could not exist as a homeland for the Jewish people.

The final condition for future UNRWA funding would be a shift toward genuine political neutrality by the agency, including a commitment to distribute non-political, non-inflammatory schoolbooks and to audit staff to prevent members of terrorist groups infiltrating the agency.

While UNRWA ostensibly has neutrality policies and runs staff neutrality training, recent research by UN Watch found UNRWA staff had been posting social media comments lauding Hitler, calling for the killing of Jews and glorifying Palestinian terrorists who had killed dozens of Israelis. UNRWA's stated commitment to neutrality is clearly not working.

When it comes to schoolbooks, UNRWA has said it uses books provided by the Palestinian Authority. This is a fig leaf that cannot be accepted – donors have a responsibility to ensure Palestinian children are not taught hatred and violence against their neighbours.

There are myriad suggestions for ways to better support the Palestinian people – while also better supporting a future two-state peace. As the Australian Government ponders its future foreign aid to the region, it would pay to keep these suggestions in mind.

“As Australia considers its future foreign aid contribution to the Palestinian territories, it would be wise to be both bold and creative”



The Road to Hell

Road Warriors: Foreign Fighters in the Armies of Jihad

by Daniel Byman

Oxford University Press, 2019. 392 pp. \$45.95

by Jonathan Spyer

The phenomenon of foreign fighters serving with (mainly Sunni) jihadist, Islamist militias is well known to researchers. Its most famous manifestations, until the last decade, were the “Afghan Arabs,” citizens of Arab countries – including Osama bin Laden – who took part in the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Interest intensified when large numbers of Islamists from Arab and Western countries joined with the Islamic State (ISIS) after it declared its “caliphate” in June 2014. But much media coverage


of ISIS volunteers has been sensational and superficial: Daniel Byman provides a comprehensive history of the foreign-fighter issue and grapples with the important question of how Western countries can combat and eliminate it.

His book *Road Warriors* provides a concise and ordered survey of the foreign fighter phenomenon, noting that Sunni Islamism was not the first or only political movement to use foreign volunteer combatants. Byman surveys the Afghan experience and notes the crucial role of Abdullah

Azzam, a Palestinian pioneer of Salafi jihadist military activity, in laying the ideational and organisational foundations for what eventually became al-Qaeda.

The author looks also at the foreign fighters’ role in the Chechen war, in Africa, and in the context of the Sunni insurgency against the US-led occupation of Iraq. The book then turns to the recent Syrian and Iraqi experiences.

Byman’s research is most valuable as the first attempt by a serious researcher to deal in detail with the particular appeal of ISIS for foreign jihadists. As he notes, more foreign fighters travelled to Syria and Iraq than to all previous jihads combined – about 40,000 fighters. Byman discusses the role of social media and notes that, while ISIS has now declined, the movement has “nurtured the flame of jihad around the world.” Other movements will seek to “harvest what Islamic State planted.” He concludes by offering tentative advice for Western policymakers, concluding that as the rise in the appeal of jihad was not predicted, it is also impossible to trace a timeline for its eclipse and decline.

Road Warriors is a comprehensive, readable, and informative addition to the literature. Hopefully, it will lead to further focus by researchers on the lessons to be learned from the astonishing, rapid success (and equally rapid eclipse) of the Islamic State. 

Dr. Jonathan Spyer is director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis, and is a research fellow at the Middle East Forum and at the Jerusalem Institute for Security and Strategy. He is the author of *Days of the Fall: A Reporter’s Journey in the Syria and Iraq Wars* (Routledge, 2018) and *The Transforming Fire: The Rise of the Israel-Islamist Conflict* (Continuum, 2010). Reprinted from Middle East Quarterly (www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly). © Middle East Forum, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



ISIS took the foreign fighter phenomenon to a whole new level



ESSAY

Legal Heights

International law and recognising Israeli sovereignty over the Golan

by Gregory Rose

On March 25, 2019, the USA formally recognised Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Was this action sound under international law and, if so, should other countries do likewise?

United States Recognition of Israeli Sovereignty and the Responses

The White House recognised the Golan Heights as under Israeli sovereign territory when US President Donald Trump issued an executive directive on March 25, 2019. The proclamation was consistent with a US policy stance that has existed for almost a half century. In 1975, the Ford Administration wrote a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stating that “a peace agreement must assure Israel’s security from attack from the Golan Heights” and that the USA “will give great weight to Israel’s position that any peace agreement with Syria must be predicated on Israel remaining on the Golan Heights.” Letters of assurance confirming this policy were written during the HW Bush and Clinton Administrations.

The formal recognition by the White House of Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights was condemned, however, by European Union countries, Russia, Iran and Syria. Russia

and Iran are Syrian military allies with shared interests in the Syrian civil war, and the objections of the European Union member countries appear driven by foreign policy doctrine. In contrast to fierce condemnation in December 2017 of the White House recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, there were no condemnatory resolutions passed in the United Nations.

Historic and Geographic Background

Geographically, the Golan Heights is mostly a volcanic basalt plateau, where the peak of Mt Hermon rises to 2,814m. Its area is 1,800 km², of which Israel controls the western two thirds, i.e. 1,200 km². Its precipitation is higher than the regional average, and includes snow that supplies much of the Jordan River watershed and the Sea of Galilee, which provides 30% of Israel’s fresh water. Thus, the Golan Heights is strategically important as a regional source of fresh water.

Syria controlled the Golan Heights as sovereign from 1946 (when French colonial troops left) until 1967, i.e. for 21 years. Israel has since 1967 controlled the Golan

Heights as occupying power, i.e. for 52 years.

Currently, the population of the Israeli-controlled western Golan Heights is predominantly Druze, numbering 27,000, who share the Golan Heights with 22,000 Jewish citizens of Israel. About 10% of the Golan Druze have chosen Israeli citizenship, while the others have Israeli residence, social security and travel rights. The younger generation inclines more toward their fellow Druze in Israel and loyalty to Israel.

Military/Strategic Significance

The military strategic importance of the Golan Heights is fundamental. It overlooks Israeli villages southward and westward, providing dominating vantage points for surveillance and fortified positions for launching rockets and artillery into Israel below. A line of volcanic hills provides a defence against attacks from Damascus.

In the 1948 war against the establishment of Israel, Syria made use of the strategic advantages of the Golan Heights. Early in the war, Syria advanced into and occupied two pockets of the former British Mandate territory and fortified the

Golan region with networks of bunkers, tunnels and artillery positions that provided launching positions for thousands of artillery attacks and terrorist raids into Israel from 1949 to 1967.

On June 5, the first day of the 1967 Six Day War, intense Syrian shelling of Israeli villages and military positions on the Galilee below the Golan commenced, together with bombing by Syrian aircraft. On June 9, Israeli airplanes and ground forces advanced on the Golan Heights, taking control of them in a clearly defensive response.

The 1973 October War was launched by Syria and Egypt. Israel

“Recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights is both legally sound and opportune”



Israeli soldiers look out towards southern Syria from the strategic Golan Heights plateau

gained further territory in the north-eastern Golan Heights than in 1967, but drew back from those positions, and from the Golan area around Quneitra occupied in 1967, in favour of the establishment there of a demilitarised zone under UN supervision.

Since 2018, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its proxy militia Hezbollah have reportedly established bases in the eastern Golan Heights region under Syrian control. Their presence, given Iran's stated purpose of "erasing Israel from the map," currently involves a large-scale military build-up and occasional rocket strikes on Israel, and Israeli bombing of their munitions bases.

International Law and United Nations Resolutions

The 1949 Israel-Syria ceasefire agreement emphasised, in accordance with Syrian demands, that

"the following arrangements for the Armistice Demarcation Line

between Israeli and Syrian armed forces are not to be interpreted as having any relation whatsoever to ultimate territorial arrangements affecting the two Parties to this Agreement."

No sovereign border was set and the demarcation line was abrogated by Syrian resumption of hostilities in 1967 and 1973.

Israel is a party to the *Fourth Geneva Convention on Protection of Civilians* 1949. It provides that "penal laws of the occupied territory shall remain in force" (Article 64). Thus, Israel is legally bound to maintain Syrian penal and civil law in the Golan Heights, until such time as it withdraws from the area or formally annexes it as sovereign territory.

Israel has not formally annexed the western Golan Heights, but in 1981 passed a law tantamount to annexation. In response to the Israeli *Golan Heights Law*, passed on December 14, 1981, the UN Security Council (UNSC) promptly met on Dec.

17, 1981 and unanimously adopted Resolution 497 under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which empowers the Security Council to adopt recommendations not entailing coercive measures. It states that

"the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction, and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights is null and void and without international legal effect."

The Security Council reconvened four weeks later to consider sanctions under Chapter VII of the Charter. A draft resolution called for complete suspension of relations by all countries with Israel. The USA vetoed the proposed Security Council sanctions. It considered that the *Golan Heights Law* was a breach of the *Fourth Geneva Convention*, but also that the Golan Heights had not formally been annexed.

In response, on Jan. 29, 1982, a UN General Assembly (UNGA) emergency special session adopted Resolution 37/123A, which deplored

the United States veto and called upon all states and international agencies to boycott Israel, as discussed below.

Syria demands the full return to Syria of the Golan Heights as a precondition to any discussion of recognition of or peace with Israel. Fresh Israeli overtures for peace negotiations with Syria occurred in 1992, 1995, 2000 and 2008 but were unsuccessful. In contrast, peace treaties were agreed with Israel by Egypt in 1979 and by Jordan in 1994.

Evaluation of the Legal Implications

Eleven observations evaluating legal implications follow from the above summary of Israeli law, the international treaty law and the UN resolutions.

1. At the time of the *Golan Heights Law* in 1981, the Israeli government maintained that it was not in itself formal, *de jure*, annexation. Subsequently, Israel initiated negotiations to hand the Golan Heights to Syria in consideration of a peace treaty and security guarantees in 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2008. Thus, annexation has not clearly occurred and the formal legal situation remains ambiguous.
2. The Golan Heights were annexed in a *de facto* manner by the application of Israeli domestic law in 1981. In early 2016, the Israeli Government declared, again informally and in light of Syrian instability and history of hostility, that the Golan Heights will remain part of Israel.
3. The Israeli 1981 *Golan Heights Law* is implemented in breach of the international laws of occupation, specifically Article 64 of the *Fourth Geneva Convention on Protection of Civilians* and Section 3 of the *Hague Convention IV 1907 Regulations, Annex*. However, that breach is not one considered a grave breach under international laws of armed conflict; i.e. it is not speci-



fied in the *Fourth Geneva Convention on Protection of Civilians* as one to which sanctions apply, nor as one of a criminal nature under the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*.

4. The international laws of armed conflict continue to apply in the Golan Heights. Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights was self-defence in response to wars initiated by Syria and it continues as a legitimate ongoing occupation in the absence of peace.
5. Syrian sovereignty has been superseded across half a century. Legal philosophers suggest that changing circumstances on the ground cause a shift in applicable ethical factors. The interests of the 22,000 Jews now living in the Golan Heights, and of increasing numbers of the Druze population there who are against transfer to Syria, must be considered.
6. None of the relevant UNSC resolutions explicitly requires return of the Golan Heights to Syria. Rather, they are premised on the notion of negotiation of territories for peace. In the wake of the June 1967 war, Resolution 242 of November 22, 1967 refers in its preamble (which is not an

operative provision) to “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” – but that must be read consistently with international law as meaning acquisition by aggression rather than self-defence (see point 10 below).

7. The relevant UNSC resolutions are recommendations without inherent coercive effect. Resolutions 242 and 497 do not follow the common practice of Chapter VII resolutions by stating explicitly that they are adopted under it. In fact they are adopted under Chapter VI of the UN Charter and are therefore merely recommendations. According to the International Court of Justice (*Namibia Advisory Opinion*), a legal consequence might flow from a declaration of illegality only if the resolution was coercive.
8. UN General Assembly resolutions on matters of international peace and security, such as Resolution 37/123A, are recommendations that lack power under the Charter to create obligations that are legally binding for member states.
9. UNGA resolutions by themselves do not form international law, as declared in the *Libya v Texaco* arbitration. Additionally, principles of law are by nature of general application and cannot be particular to Israel or exclusive to the Golan Heights.
10. International law has not, in the past, rewarded perpetrators of wars of aggression. States that failed in their wars of aggression in World Wars I and II suffered territorial losses. The International Law Commission in 1950 endorsed the legality of conquest of territory, unless by aggression or in violation of the UN Charter. This was the law still in 1967 when Israel took the Golan Heights in a defensive war. An inviolate Syrian right to the Golan Heights, despite three aggressive

wars and repeated lesser assaults on Israel, would grant an aggressor reward for illegal acts and is plainly wrong – legally, politically and morally.

11. The UN International Law Commission has recognised lawful “situations of necessity” that legitimate actions that might otherwise be considered unlawful. By implication, Israeli control of the Golan Heights, at least of the slopes looking south and west into Israel, is a military necessity, due to the vulnerability to hostility from Syria of Israeli lowlands.

In conclusion, an Israeli *de jure* annexation of the Golan Heights would be lawful in the cumulative circumstances described above. It would cure the illegality under the laws of military occupation of the *Golan Heights Law*, as the military occupation would formally terminate upon annexation transferring sovereignty over the Golan Heights to civil government in Israel.

Wider Recognition of Israeli Sovereignty over the Golan Heights

Should other countries follow the USA to recognise Israel’s *de jure* sovereignty over the Golan Heights? Principles of international law set out notionally universal rules applicable to all countries. Security, economic and ethical considerations might vary for every country according to the unique situation of each.

Considering security, would continuing Israeli control of the Golan Heights increase or decrease the likelihood of war with Syria? The history shows that Syria initiated war with Israel twice during the 21 years it controlled the Golan Heights and has since been embroiled in a decade of civil war, and that there has been no war there during the last 47 years under Israeli control.

On evaluation of international relations ethics, Syria has a weak case. It launched aggressive wars, allegedly commits war crimes against its

own citizens, is a politically unstable military dictatorship propped up by foreign hegemony (Iran and Russia), and dominated internally by extremist militias. Syria resists negotiations to make peace and facilitates the entrenchment of foreign militias for future assaults on Israel.

In relation to political risk, the lack of significant Arab protest against the recognition of Israeli sovereignty by the Trump White House suggests that the risk is small. Syria is aligned with Persian and Shi’ite Iran against the Sunni Arab population and is currently suspended from the Arab League. An argument against recognition is that the political status quo has been satisfactory for a half century: it forestalls regional war, maintains Israeli control, and avoids potential retaliation. Yet, ambiguity around the legality of Israeli control is impossible to maintain indefinitely. A forward-looking political analysis is that non-recognition contributes to instability and in the longer term is a source of danger.

Recognition of Israeli sovereignty might carry risks of economic and trade boycotts. Yet Syria is a minor economy and its Iranian and Russian allies provide little foreign

development aid. Trade and aid from the European Union to developing countries are unlikely to be affected because recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights is not a central concern in European bilateral relationships. In contrast, renewed Syrian armed attacks on Israel from the Golan Heights could trigger rippling regional wars, leading to trade destabilisation and energy price inflation.

Conclusion

The legal case for recognising the legality of Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights is strong. In deciding whether to recognise Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, the security, ethical and legal considerations are essentially common for all countries. Economic or political retaliation risks are particular to each country’s situation, and might be points of vulnerability. However, the risks of economic or political retaliation are negligible. Recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights is both legally sound and opportune. 

Dr Gregory Rose is Professor in the School of Law at the University of Wollongong, where he specialises in international law.

With Compliments



www.tigcorp.com.au

With Compliments



LASCORP

DEVELOPMENT GROUP (AUST.) PTY. LTD.

Specialising in retail and shopping centre developments,
syndication and management

29 Claremont Street
South Yarra VIC 3141
Tel: (03) 9249 0000 Fax: (03) 9249 0099
Email: mail@lascorp.com
Web: www.lascorp.com



DELMONT

PRIVATE HOSPITAL

Mental health care leaders in our community for 50 years.

300 Warrigal Road, Glen Iris
Phone: 03 9805 7333
www.delmonthospital.com.au



'Your Care in Mind'

NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

CORBYN BLIMEY

Britain's Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis' public expression of concern at the prospect of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn winning the December 12 UK general elections was big news in Australia.

The *Australian* (Nov. 28) ran Rabbi Mirvis' op-ed, which said the legacy of Corbyn's four years as leader was that "the Jewish community has watched with incredulity as supporters of the Labour leadership have hounded parliamentarians, members and even staff out of the party for challenging anti-Jewish racism. Even as they received threats, the response of the Labour leadership was utterly inadequate. We have endured quibbling and prevarication over whether the party should adopt the most widely accepted definition of antisemitism."

In the same edition, Foreign Editor Greg Sheridan wrote, "Anti-Semitism is the hatred of Jews. It is the most ancient, toxic, malign hatred humanity has come up with... there is now in the world a kind of perfect storm of anti-Semitism that is fed from at least four distinct, powerful sources. These are: left-wing anti-Semitism of the type Corbyn exhibits; Islamist anti-Semitism, which is found all over the Arab and Islamic world; extreme right, white supremacist anti-Semitism of the type that motivated the Pittsburgh synagogue massacre last year; and there is the still lingering effect of traditional Christian anti-Semitism... But the two most vigorous sources of contemporary anti-Semitism are the left and Islamists."

AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein told Peta Credlin on *SkyNews* (Nov. 27) "it doesn't get much worse" than the UK Human Rights and Equality Commission investigating Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party for "institutionalised an-

tisemitism" over allegations that 150 complaints of antisemitism have been ignored. Rubenstein also discussed the potential ramifications for the Five Eyes intelligence alliance of Corbyn as British PM – whom he said "is extremely anti-Israel. There is hardly an [anti-Israel] terrorist group that he doesn't seem to like and regard as his friends – Hamas or Hezbollah – [as well as] his role with Iran."

WHITLAMESQUE?

Australian columnist Henry Ergas (Nov. 29) argued Corbyn and the UK Labour Party recalled Australian PM Gough Whitlam's policies and attitudes in the 1970s, which greatly worried the Jewish community.

Ergas said Whitlam accused the Australian Jewish community of "crude blackmail" and "told VP Suslov, a senior official in the Soviet foreign ministry, that he looked forward to the time when 'the gradual increase in the size of the Arab population in Australia' would 'balance' those pressures away." Ergas recalled Whitlam had also appealed for a \$1 million loan from Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein by arguing it would help to rebuff the "Jewish pressures' against the 'democratic forces'."

FROM ABC TO BBC

ABC TV's "The World" (Nov. 27) asked British politics expert Alan Wager to discuss Jeremy Corbyn's refusal to apologise to the British Jewish community after being asked four times to do so in a one-on-one interview with veteran BBC compere Andrew Neil.

Wager called it "an own goal" by Corbyn, who "would have known it would come up in this election

campaign and on a basic question of campaign tactics and political strategy, he looked unprepared and unready for the questions that were almost inevitably going to come up."

BETHLEHEM BLUES

ABC Radio National "Religion and Ethics Report" listeners (Nov. 20) received an early anti-Israel Christmas gift when host Andrew West failed to challenge Palestinian propagandist Ramzy Baroud's claims that Israeli policies are preventing Christians in Gaza and the West Bank from practising their faith and are to blame for their fall in numbers in the "Holy Land".

Baroud has form – in May 2018, he ridiculously and falsely told *ABC TV* viewers that "no humanitarian aid is allowed in[to]" Gaza by Israel.

This time he said that when Israel was created in 1948, "the estimated population of Christians in Palestine was up to 20 percent" but "now we are looking at about 1 percent of the overall Palestinian population in the West Bank Jerusalem and Gaza." He said, "A city like the city of Bethlehem, which at one point was almost entirely Christian, now is barely 12% Christian."

In fact, since the Palestinian Authority (PA) took control over the city in 1995, the Christian percentage of the city's population has plummeted from 40% to 12%. Since Hamas' rule in Gaza began in 2007, the Christian population has fallen by two-thirds. In contrast, Israel is the only country in the Middle East whose Christian population has been consistently increasing.

Baroud dismissed any suggestion of Muslim-Christian tension, saying "in Palestine the religious question between Muslims and Christians almost doesn't exist."

This is incorrect and there are numerous brave Palestinian Christians who have said as much.

Baroud claimed Christians in Gaza who had wanted to visit Jerusalem for Easter 2019 “were granted a limited number of permits [by Israel] but on the condition that they do not go to Jerusalem. So what would be the point of them going there in the first place. And the strange thing is that they were allowed to actually cross to Jordan hoping perhaps that they would never come back.”

West incorrectly put the number of permits at “only 200”.

In fact, according to Arab news service *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Israel issued “500 Palestinian Christians permits to

leave, 300 of them to the West Bank and Jerusalem and 200 to Jordan.”

Asharq Al-Awsat also stated that, “according to a report issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in February 2018, 1,138 Christian Palestinians live in Gaza.”

This means that almost half of the Christian population in Gaza was granted permits by Israel.

West and Baroud misrepresented the situation in Bethlehem, the West Bank town where Christians believe Jesus was born.

West suggested that Christians in Bethlehem struggle because the city “is surrounded by Israel’s wall”.

Baroud expanded on West’s claim, saying, “the apartheid wall... aims

at isolating Bethlehem entirely from Jerusalem and in the process from the rest of the West Bank. So with time Bethlehem is becoming almost like a prison for its own population.”

Israel’s security fence was built reluctantly and entirely as a response to the terrorism of the Second Intifada.

The fence absolutely does not encircle the whole city, as West and Baroud implied, and residents of Bethlehem can travel relatively freely throughout the PA-controlled West Bank.

ECONOMICAL WITH THE TRUTH

In the *Australian* (Dec. 6), economist Djavad Salehi-Isfahani claimed



IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** (Lib., Cook) – Nov. 21 – made the following remarks on being awarded the Jerusalem Prize from the Zionist Federation of Australia, the Zionist Council of NSW and the World Zionist Organisation, in Sydney:

“Friendships have ebbs and flows but the friendship between Australia and Israel has not had ebbs and flows, it’s been a steady course of endearment. We became the first country to cast a vote in support of the partition plan, we are proud of what we did then, and we remain so proud today. We stood up when it mattered, then and now, Israel can always depend on Australia. We believe in the nation of Israel. We believe in its right to exist in peace within secure internationally recognised borders and we will say so for as long as we have breath... I visited Israel long before I entered into parliament... You cannot walk on that land without it seeping into you. You can’t. Israel has a place in my heart, a place that deserves peace and prosperity, worthy of the faiths and cultures that have grown out of our Holy Land... In standing true with Israel, I just see it as doing my job as an Australian Prime Minister... We are a steadfast friend, since its modern creation, to Israel, and our commitment remains as firm today as it was 70 years ago, if not even stronger.”

Senator **Stirling Griff** (Centre Alliance, SA) – Nov. 27 – moved the following motion, co-sponsored by Senator **Deborah O’Neill** (ALP, NSW): regarding antisemitism in Australia:

“That the Senate— (a) acknowledges that antisemitic attacks involving face-to-face interactions surged 30% in the year to September, according to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry’s annual report on antisemitism; (b) notes that incidents involving direct verbal antisemitic abuse, harassment and

intimidation increased from 88 to 114, and graffiti attacks more than doubled from 46 to 95; (c) further notes that, according to the report, antisemitic attacks have included physical assaults to abuse, harassment, vandalism and graffiti, threats via emails, letters, phone calls, posters, stickers and leaflets; (d) repudiates all antisemitic attacks in Australia; and (e) calls for increased Holocaust education in all Australian schools.” The motion passed on the voices.

Senator **Jonathon Duniam** (Lib., Tasmania) made the following statement in support of the motion:

“The government joins this motion to acknowledge the antisemitic abuse and violence and to repudiate all antisemitic attacks in Australia. Holocaust education is a crucially important part of combating antisemitism, and the government has a strong track record in this area. In April of this year, for example, the government committed to provide \$10 million to Melbourne’s Jewish Holocaust Centre to help increase its educational activities...”

Treasurer **Josh Frydenberg** (Lib., Kooyong) – Dec. 6 – announced that the new tax treaty between Australia and Israel had entered into force, in a joint media release with Minister for Housing & Assistant Treasurer **Michael Sukkar** (Lib., Deakin):

“Today, the Morrison Government ratified an historic new tax treaty between Australia and Israel, representing an important milestone in removing tax barriers and facilitating trade and investment between Australia and Israel. Australia and Israel share a close friendship with strong ties. The new tax treaty between Australia and Israel will ensure the economic, trade and commercial relationship between our two countries is strengthened. The new treaty will enhance the bilateral economic relationship between Australia and Israel by reducing taxation barriers that could impede economic activity between the two countries, providing greater certainty for taxpayers in both countries and improving the integrity of the tax system.”

“Iran did not deserve punitive sanctions” imposed on it by the Trump Administration “because it had not violated the terms of the nuclear deal.”

Salehi-Isfahani warned that “Ham-fisted sanctions regimes may cause Iran severe distress, but there are clear limits to their effectiveness. Moreover, they strengthen the position of Iran’s hardliners, and undermine its moderate reformists – a dynamic that compounds the risks that sanctions are supposed to mitigate.”

Rather, “the international community should take a more nuanced approach, guiding Iran toward greater openness rather than attempting to beat it into submission.”

There is little proof the 2015 deal strengthened the moderates and plenty of evidence to show the regime violated its spirit and substance, including by failing to declare clandestine nuclear assets.

Nor was the cause for peace enhanced. Even before Donald Trump was elected US President, Iran was still at the top of the US list of terrorist supporting countries and its human rights record remained abysmal, plus its support of regional terrorist groups had increased substantially thanks to the funds freed up by the nuclear deal.

Indeed, six months before the US left the deal in May 2018, Iranians protested in neighbourhoods not normally associated with anti-regime sentiment. One of their complaints was the regime’s support for military proxies in Iraq, Syria, Gaza and Yemen at the expense of Iranians.

Earlier, British commentator Melanie Phillips had given a more accurate picture of the regime in the same paper (Nov. 27). She noted that “the only person who matters is the implacable religious fanatic who controls Iran, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.” She accused European governments and Britain of refusing to “accept that Iran poses the threat that it does” because “the most immediate threat posed by Iran is to Israel.”

TOM ON TEHERAN

Unlike Salehi-Isfahani, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman was unequivocal in describing Iran as a major destabilising force.

Reflecting on the recent eruption of widespread protests in Lebanon and Iraq, Friedman wrote, “Iran’s clerical regime has emerged as arguably the biggest enemy of pluralistic democracy in the region today. There are plenty of Arab dictators keeping their own people down, but Iran is doing it at home and in three other countries at once,” *Australian Financial Review* (Dec. 6).

CHEWIN’ DFAT

Columnist Rebecca Weisser questioned the apparent failure of Australia to adjust its position on Iran’s ongoing breaches of the nuclear deal, its attacks on oil tankers and killing of protesters.

Weisser noted that “Iran loved the JCPOA which removed the embargo on Iranian oil exports and dropped sanctions on Iran’s banking and financial system, releasing US\$ 100 billion frozen in Iranian accounts. Iran did not have to renounce state-sponsored terrorism, it continued to test ballistic missiles, nor even have to allow effective monitoring of compliance, surely desirable given Iran’s track record of cheating. Best of all for Iran, it would merely delay its acquisition of sufficient fissile material to create nuclear weapons.”

“But why,” she asked, “in the face of the existential threats facing Israel, is Australia absurdly pretending the JCPOA is achieving non-proliferation objectives, as a DFAT official told Senate Estimates in November?” *Spectator Australia* (Nov. 30).

UNHERALDED REFUGEE PROBLEM

Nine newspapers’ the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* (Dec. 5) reported

on Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon’s speech calling for recognition of the 850,000 Jews forced out of Middle Eastern countries after Israel’s creation.

The report quoted Danon saying, “We don’t hear the international community speak of them when they discuss the refugees of the conflict, perhaps because it doesn’t serve the Palestinian narrative.”

The report said the Palestinian Authority observer to the UN Riyad Mansour claimed that the General Assembly’s “long history of resolutions on the conflict don’t amount to prejudice against Israel.”

Given the General Assembly annually passes more resolutions condemning Israel than all the rest of the world combined, what other word might one use?

NAZI BUSINESS

The growing number of instances of Holocaust minimisation and resurgence in Australia and abroad in the use of Nazi related symbols was scattered throughout the media.

Michael Koziol of the Nine newspapers quoted Jewish Community Council of Victoria President Jennifer Huppert warning of the increasing “lack of understanding” about the impact of Nazi memorabilia, costumes and symbols in a report on four people dressed in full Nazi uniform, including swastika armbands, entering a Coles supermarket in Woodend, Victoria in late October. Peter Wertheim, co-Chief Executive of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, was quoted saying it was “truly bizarre that some people are so ignorant of history.”

The story noted that in the same month “eight swastikas were painted on the Nylex building in Melbourne’s south-east, alongside other white supremacist graffiti” and a “group of four men were reportedly ejected from Oktoberfest celebrations in the Yarra Valley for dressing up as Nazi soldiers.” Koziol reported that Austra-

lian PM Scott Morrison had warned of increasing antisemitism, saying, “We can’t pretend it isn’t happening here – it is,” *Age* (Nov. 24).

On Nov. 30, the *Herald Sun* reported about a man wearing a swastika armband in Melbourne’s Southland shopping centre and on Nov. 22, the paper reported on Roger Hallam, British climate change activist and Extinction Rebellion co-founder, dismissing the Holocaust as “just another fuckery in human history.”

SCHOOLED IN HATE

In the *Spectator Australia* (Nov. 16), academic and *AIR* contributor Ran Porat suggested antisemitic stereotypes in Arabic media may contribute to the occurrence of events like the recently reported racist incidents against Jewish school students in Melbourne.

Dr. Porat said articles in “the Australian media in Arabic regularly include voices spreading overt antisemitism, alongside a dosage of the modern form of antisemitism – anti-Israel fabrications. Despite this being an open secret, it seems that no effective action has been taken so far to remove this offensive content.”

The reports follow a “pattern... of re-hashing classic antisemitic tropes about Jews possessing mythical powers and endless wealth and deviously manipulating or controlling governments behind the scenes (as they demonically conspire to achieve world domination, of course).”

TRAVEL BROADENS THE MIND

Australian-based Indonesian journalist Erwin Renaldi’s report on his recent visit to Israel and the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa compound in Jerusalem’s Old City included some under-reported facts.

Renaldi, who is a Muslim, said he was nervous about visiting.

He noted that while Israel and Indonesia do not have diplomatic rela-

tions, passport holders can visit each other’s country.

Successfully passing Israel’s methodical border control process, Renaldi said, “after it was all over, it didn’t seem like such a big deal outside of my head, and I was on my way.”

Renaldi largely avoided over-simplifying the situation, succinctly capturing Israeli rule in east Jerusalem, writing, “the Old City of Jerusalem is wholly under Israeli control, the Al-Aqsa Compound remains under the administration of a Jordanian and Palestinian-led religious trust while Israeli forces secure its perimeters, with various restrictions on who can enter the complex often put in place by Israeli authorities for security reasons.”

Elaborating, he explained, “So despite its significance in Islam, not all Muslims are free to enter the compound as they please. Muslim travelers from overseas – like us group of Indonesians – are usually fine, but for many Palestinian Muslims in the West Bank, various restrictions have been in place for years; for example, when I went, women of all ages can enter, but only men over the age of 50 are permitted, while some need special permission from Israeli authorities.”

In other words, Israeli policy is shaped by security and not anti-Muslim attitudes.

He went on, “Since a security crackdown by the Israeli Government in 2017, Muslims living in the Old City are only able to enter or pray at the mosque on Fridays and Islamic holidays.” He did not explain that these restrictions followed the murder of two Israeli border guards on the Temple Mount by three terrorists who tried to flee by entering Islam’s third holiest site.

Renaldi stated that “restrictions are also in place for non-Muslims, who are only allowed to enter the compound during certain times of the day determined by the Israeli Government.”

He said “there were no metal detectors or barriers in sight, and we pretty much walked straight in

no questions asked” but “felt a little uncomfortable by the fact that an Indonesian Muslim could waltz right in and take a photo... while people that lived down the road for years could not.”

By the by, Renaldi did not seem perturbed in his 2018 article that reported on his pilgrimage to Mecca, the holiest site in Islam – and a city that is completely off-limits to non-Muslims, ABC Religion & Ethics website (Dec. 8).

A RARE SIGHTING ON SBS

Whether deliberately or inadvertently, *SBS TV* “World News” (Dec. 5) shone a rare spotlight on the fact that the 12-year blockade of Gaza has always been enforced by Egypt as well as Israel.

The report focused on a visit to Egypt by 29-year-old Gaza-based journalist Amjad Yaghi to see his mother, whom he had last met with in 1999.

According to the SBS report, Yaghi was “prevented from seeing his ill mother because of strict blockades between Gaza and Egypt.”

Yaghi’s mother had travelled to Egypt for surgery, but had never returned to Gaza.

The story said, “Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005. When the militant group Hamas took over the territory two years later, a virtual blockade was imposed. Because of severe restrictions on entering Israel, the Rafah border-crossing into Egypt is the sole exit point for Gazans and while it has opened periodically, it only allows certain people through.”

In reality, unlike Israel which has always given passage through its territory for medicine, aid, and sick people from Gaza seeking treatment, not only has Egypt often truly imposed a “virtual blockade” on Gaza, NGOs and UN agencies rarely if ever demand that it be censured for doing so.

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

MIKE DROPS

Coverage of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement that the Trump Administration does not consider Israeli civilian settlements on the West Bank as "per se inconsistent with international law" was a mix of the good, the bad and the ugly.

Age and *Sydney Morning Herald* readers (Nov. 20) benefited from Isabel Kershner's report which said, "Israel argues that a Jewish presence has existed on the West Bank for thousands of years and was recognised by the League of Nations in 1922.

Jordan's rule over the territory, from 1948 to 1967, was never recognised by most of the world, so Israel also argues there was no legal sovereign power in the area and therefore the prohibition on transferring people from one state to the occupied territory of another does not apply... most blueprints for a peace agreement envisage a land swap – Israel retains the main settlement blocs, where a majority of the settlers live, and hands over other territory to the Palestinians."

An *AP* "analysis" in the *Australian* (Nov. 20), stated that "while Jewish settlers can freely enter Israel and vote in Israeli elections, West Bank Palestinians are subject to Israeli military law, require permits to enter Israel and do not have the right to vote in Israeli elections."

Maybe that's because since 1994 more than 90% of Palestinians in the West Bank live in the Palestinian Authority, essentially a *de facto* Palestinian state running their own affairs, totally separate from the State of Israel and voting in Palestinian elections (when their leaders bother to hold them).

An *Economist* editorial reprinted in the *Australian* (Nov. 21) also ignored the everyday reality in the West Bank, saying "annexation of the West Bank would present its own set of problems. If the Palestinians are made Israeli citizens, they will soon come to outnumber the country's Jewish population. If they are not given the same rights, Israel would resemble an apartheid state." That's moot since it assumes the 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza – which has been totally free from Israeli rule since 2005 – would be annexed too.

The *Canberra Times* (Nov. 20) report included Pompeo citing US President Ronald Reagan's view that civilian settlements aren't inherently illegal.

"Tlozek insisted settlements are 'illegal under international law and remain...illegal under international law, despite whatever the US says'"

SBS TV "World News" reporter Rena Sarumpaet's balanced story (Nov. 19) noted that US Administrations "have taken differing positions," and included Pompeo citing President Reagan's position and saying the move does not prejudice the West Bank's status.

On *ABC Radio* "AM" (Nov. 19), North America correspondent James Glenday also explained the diversity of positions adopted by US administrations. He noted Pompeo had contextualised the announcement as a reaction to then President Obama's refusal in 2016 to veto controversial UN Security Council Resolution 2334 and that Pompeo had stated "the overall status of the West Bank is for Israel and the Palestinians to negotiate but as a matter of law, after a judicial review, he doesn't think the settlements are illegal."

In a cross to the studio on *ABC TV* "The World" (Nov. 19), Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek incorrectly claimed that Trump moved the US embassy to Jerusalem "in defiance of a UN Security Council decision" – it was a General Assembly resolution. Tlozek insisted settlements are "illegal under international law and remain...illegal under international law, despite whatever the US says." He is apparently such a distinguished expert in international law that he didn't feel the need to cite a source or any contrary views, or to report Pompeo's qualifying remarks.

On *ABC TV* "Q&A" (Nov. 25), visiting far-left Israeli politician Tamar Zandberg had generous airtime to criticise Pompeo and say settlements are "one of the main reasons" why there is no peace agreement. Fellow panellist, *Australian* foreign editor Greg Sheridan, tried to provide nuance – discussing the settlements' legal status and that settlement blocs would remain part of Israel under any peace deal, but host Tony Jones cut him off.

In the *Canberra Times* (Nov. 30), columnist Crispin Hull said Palestinians should stop supporting the two-state formula for peace because it "has only ever been a cruel hoax and delaying tactic."

The Dec. 9 *Canberra Times* ran a response to Hull from AIJAC's Allon Lee which quoted Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat's admission that, in 2008, then Israeli PM Ehud Olmert offered to create a Palestinian state on land equivalent to 100% of the West Bank, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's acknowledgement that he rejected the offer "out of hand".

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

MINORITY REPORTS

It goes without saying that even one act of antisemitic violence, vandalism, intimidation or harassment is one act too many.

It also should go without saying that there is no place for anti-Jewish activity (or any other form of bigotry) in contemporary Australia.

However, it is a reality that, out of the many hundreds of millions of interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish Australians each year, some of them involve behaviour which is abhorrent and despicable.

The most infamous of these, during the year in review, involved bullying of school children and toddlers.



Antisemitic posters and graffiti saw a big jump in 2019

This year the Executive Council of Australian Jewry released its 30th annual analysis of reports of antisemitic violence, vandalism, harassment and intimidation in Australia.

The methodology employed by the two individuals who have maintained the database over the three decades has been as consistent as possible, which means we now have the possibility of making sensible and considered overall assessments of this activity.

The total number of reports qualifying for the database this year was 368, up from 366 last year and well up on the 190 from 2015. The figure is, nevertheless, lower than the average since 1990, of 384. It is also well below the highest annual number of reports logged, 962 ten years ago.

When incidents are divided into direct face-to-face harassment and violence and property damage, as opposed to threats conveyed through email, telephone, the post etc., the direct attacks came to the second highest level ever reported – 60% above average. On the other hand, threats were recorded at a level of only 60% of the previous average.

Breaking the statistics down further, incidents involving actual property damage or assault were at 64% of the previous average, while graffiti was at the highest level ever recorded and face-to-face harassment was 40% above average.

Australians were most likely to encounter antisemitism in the form of graffiti, which was documented at high levels during the federal election campaign.

It should be noted that incidents of assault can vary greatly in their level of seriousness and impact and the same email received by a different person may have quite a different effect on the recipient's well-being. Graffiti making a direct threat or the daubing of a symbol of hatred will all be offensive, but can vary greatly in terms of impact.

It was interesting that, in 2019, a study of reports of anti-Muslim activity in Australia was released shortly before the publication of the antisemitism report.

Based on demographics and the content of each report, a Jewish person in Australia is eight times more likely than a Muslim to report being the victim of an assault or threat.

It is also implied that Muslim women suffer the highest level of face-to-face invective or violence, followed by Jewish men. The common factor appears to be visibility, due to head coverings.

An attack on a Muslim Australian appears most likely to be opportunistic, based on proximity of victim and aggressor, while attacks on Jewish individuals and institutions seem to involve more forethought.

I hesitate to draw too many conclusions, however, as all we can really say with certainty is that the Jewish community and Muslim researchers both received a large number of reports of offensive, abhorrent, un-Australian behaviour and it is reasonable to assume that there were other incidents not reported.

Both reports prompted strong and unambiguous condemnations from across the political spectrum.

Refreshingly, some of the victim blaming which has taken place in past years was not as obvious.

While egregious assaults and attacks on both Muslims and Jews have received a fair degree of media attention, less coverage has been given to some of the strong statements from people in positions of political or other forms of leadership.

Experience over many years would indicate that, if we are to successfully push back against bigotry and stop racism becoming entrenched, there are few measures as important as vocal and principled condemnations of these ills from our political leaders.

AIR



9 771442 369017 >

Australia \$7.95 (inc GST)