

AFTER SOLEIMANI

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Iran's "Axis of Resistance" and
the wider Middle East

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* focuses on the aftermath and implications of the US killing on Jan. 3 of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Al-Quds force responsible for most of Iran's destabilising activities and terrorism abroad.

We lead with noted American analyst Jonathan Schanzer, who argues that not only did Soleimani's killing impact Iran's capabilities to wage asymmetrical warfare, but also significantly reduced its ability to conceal its activities behind proxy forces. Meanwhile, Seth Frantzman looks at Iran's effort to reconstitute the leadership of its international "Axis of Resistance" without Soleimani, while Ben Cohen explores the courageous growing 'resistance' of the Iranian people themselves to Teheran's international adventurism. Plus, David Pollack looks at the situation in Iraq – which Iran has been seeking to dominate – in the wake of the killing of Soleimani.

Also featured this month are Naomi Levin's analysis of the spread of antisemitic themes beyond mainstream social media into video and music apps, and some thoughts on countering antisemitism, from noted academic expert Deborah Lipstadt.

Finally, don't miss Ran Porat on some more blatant antisemitism in Arabic-language media in Australia and Amotz Asa-El on the latest developments in Israeli politics in the lead up to the election on March 2.

Let us know what you think of any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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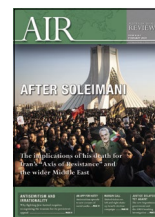
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ON THE COVER

Iranian mourners attend the funeral procession of slain Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi paramilitary chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Teheran,

January 6, 2020. (Photo: AAP/ Ali Shaeigan)

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FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN

OPPORTUNITY ON IRAN

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani boasted on Jan. 16 that his country is now producing enriched uranium at a greater pace than it was before the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal.

This claim only underlines again the sheer inadequacy of that deal. It was never an agreement to limit Iran's ability to make nuclear bombs long-term – while it imposed some very temporary restrictions it actually facilitated a vast expansion of Iran's nuclear capabilities longer term.

While Rouhani's claim cannot be validated until the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) releases its scheduled report next month, Elana DeLozier of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy has calculated that the claim is plausible if Iran uses both its pre-JCPOA inventory of IR-1 centrifuges and its recently activated faster and much higher-output advanced centrifuges.

Iran's phase-in of those advanced centrifuges, perfected post-JCPOA, illustrates the fact that such centrifuge development was allowed by the JCPOA, facilitating massive expansion of future nuclear capabilities by Iran even if the JCPOA was fully adhered to. As even then US President Barack Obama admitted in April 2015, the deal's permissiveness regarding Iran's advanced centrifuge testing and deployment, and silence on ballistic missile development, meant that by the time the deal's sunset clauses on restricted enrichment kicked in around 2025, Iran's "breakout times [to a nuclear weapon] would have shrunk almost down to zero."

Of course, in the wake of the US pullout from the deal in 2018, Iran has committed a litany of open violations of all the key elements of the JCPOA which have only accelerated in recent months. Iran has been exceeding the stockpiles of enriched uranium it's allowed to have under the JCPOA; exceeding the levels of purity of enrichment the JCPOA allows; employing advanced centrifuges to enrich uranium even though this is prohibited by the JCPOA; and injecting uranium into centrifuges at the Fordow facility, which it is not allowed to use for enrichment under the JCPOA.

But, setting aside these violations, it is telling that only four years after the JCPOA came into effect, Iran already has been able to develop advanced enrichment capabilities which, according to former IAEA Deputy Director-General Olli Heinonen, could potentially produce enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb in just two months.

Therefore the Jan. 14 announcement by Britain, France and Germany that they would trigger the dispute mechanism of the JCPOA is very timely and should be embraced as a game changer by the international community.

The move begins a process that, if seen through, would lead to the referral of the matter to the UN Security Council and the re-imposition of UN nuclear sanctions on Iran in as little as three months.

The European move is timely not simply because the Iranian nuclear breakout efforts need to be met with urgent action, but because Iran has also never been more vulnerable to outside pressure.

One of the major failings of the JCPOA was the way it considered the nuclear issue in isolation. It ignored the nature of Iran's oppressive regime, its rogue behaviour as a state sponsor of terrorism, and its destabilising regional expansionism and projection of power through multiple means, including its own forces and bases in Syria, to outright proxies and malleable clients including groups like Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Houthis in Yemen and various Iraqi militias.

Iran's use of proxies has served the regime well over the years in terms of deflecting responsibility and providing deniability for its actions on the international stage, but as Jonathan Schanzer points out in this edition (p. 12), that mask has largely been lifted following the targeted killing of General Qassem Soleimani by a US drone on Jan. 3.

Key players in Iran's proxy network, such as Beirut-based Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, have suddenly become much more open about being Iranian pawns, and no one with any sense today takes seriously Iranian claims that its proxies act independently (see Seth Frantzman, p. 15).

The billions of dollars Teheran has invested in supporting Iran's various foreign interests were supercharged by the financial windfall created by the JCPOA for Iran. Today, even under the weight of US sanctions, Iran continues to prioritise funding its military campaigns and sponsorship of terror groups and proxies over the needs of the Iranian people, but is nonetheless increasingly struggling to find the funds it needs as the Iranian economy sharply contracts.

At grave risk, protesters inside Iran have courageously challenged the regime over policies that are so much at odds with the interests of the Iranian people, especially after the mistaken downing of a Ukrainian passenger airliner by the Iranian military on Jan. 8, which seems to have

aroused outrage and anger among many Iranians.

And abroad, the Iranian empire is under huge pressure from unprecedented popular anger welling up against it in key outposts, like in Iraq and Lebanon.

This unrest, the potential European support for a snap-back of UN nuclear sanctions on Iran, and the cumulative effect of the Trump Administration's "maximum pressure"

sanctions campaign have created a genuine opportunity to coax Iran back to the negotiating table to reformulate a better, stronger nuclear deal that, instead of facilitating Iran becoming

a nuclear weapons power in the longer term, slams the door shut on these nuclear ambitions permanently. Furthermore, any new deal must place such negotiations firmly in the context of the Iranian regime's corrosive behaviour at home and in the region.

While it's crucial the P5+1 countries which negotiated the original JCPOA adopt this paradigm shift, the entire international community has a role to play in bringing it about. This is also true of Australia, which maintains an embassy in Teheran, and would strongly serve its own national interests by further contributing to the current growing international pressure on Iran, encouraging it to cease its dangerous policies of promoting terrorism, destabilisation and proliferation.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

"Martyrdom was the reward for his ceaseless efforts all these years. With him gone, God willing, his work and his path will not be stopped, but severe revenge awaits the criminals who bloodied their foul hands with his blood."

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on the death of Qassem Soleimani (Times of Israel, Jan. 3).

"Iran will continue its nuclear enrichment with no restrictions and based on its technical needs."

Iranian government statement repudiating limits imposed by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal (Reuters, Jan. 6).

"Soleimani made the death of innocent people his sick passion, contributing to terrorist plots as far away as New Delhi and London. Today we remember and honour the victims of Soleimani's many atrocities, and we take comfort in knowing that his reign of terror is over... The future belongs to the people of Iran – those who seek peaceful coexistence and cooperation – not the terrorist warlords who plunder their nation to finance bloodshed abroad."

US President Donald Trump on his decision to target Qassem

Soleimani (White House, Jan. 3).

"We have therefore been left with no choice, given Iran's actions, but to register today our concerns that Iran is not meeting its commitments under the JCPOA and to refer this matter to the Joint Commission under the Dispute Resolution Mechanism, as set out in paragraph 36 of the JCPOA."

France, Germany and the UK announce they are triggering JCPOA dispute resolution mechanisms that could lead to "snapback" sanctions at the UN (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jan. 14).

"Israel is fast becoming an energy superpower, a country that exports energy. The gas pipeline we are going to put forth now, which Minister Steinitz has been working on for many years, is revolutionising Israel's energy."

Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu on the opening of Israel's natural gas exports to Egypt and future pipeline plans with Cyprus and Greece (Ynet.com, Jan. 15).

"May the anniversary of the unspeakable cruelty that humanity learned seventy-five years ago serve as a summons to pause, to be silent and to remember. We need to do this, lest we become indifferent... Even recently, we have witnessed a barbaric resurgence of antisemitism."

Pope Francis speaking to a delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center a week before the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz (Zenit.org, Jan. 20).

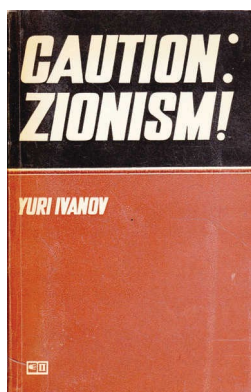


SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

HOW THE SOVIETS PROMOTED OPENLY ANTISEMITIC ANTI-ZIONISM

In this column in January 2017, I discussed some research done on archived KGB documents by noted Israeli investigative journalist and author Ronen Bergman. Basically, Bergman showed that during the Cold War, Soviet efforts to support the Arab war on Israel and spread extreme propaganda demonising Israel and Zionism were not simply cynical efforts to gain Arab support and damage the interests of US allies. The documents suggest KGB leaders were sincere believers in the worst sort of antisemitic conspiracy theories, including believing in the authenticity of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, openly speaking of the “global Jewish conspiracy”, and insisting Zionists were secretly behind anything negative affecting Soviet interests, such as the increase in US-USSR tensions following the election of Ronald Reagan as US President in 1980.



A seminal and widespread Soviet propaganda work

As I also noted, Soviet propaganda lies behind many of the extreme claims about Israel and Zionism found on the international left today – Zionism as a uniquely evil form of imperialism and colonialism; claims that Zionists both collaborated with the Nazis and exhibit behaviour similar to Nazism; beliefs that Zionists and the “Jewish Lobby” control Washington and other capitals, the media, and international finance, etc.

Now the American blogger “Elder of Zion” (a tongue-in-cheek *nom de guerre*) has uncovered some new details about how these Soviet-promoted racist beliefs were disseminated. He notes a recent column in a Jordanian newspaper by anti-Zionist writer Marwan Soudah in which Soudah recalls the importance in Arab intellectual circles in 1970, of a “book written by the martyr of thought and the word, Yuri Ivanov, entitled ‘Beware of Zionism!’ I remember that these books were distributed in Amman for free and on a large scale to the pioneers of the Soviet Cultural Centre . . .”

The Ivanov book in question, called in English *Caution: Zionism!*, was one of the most seminal and widely distributed works of official Soviet anti-Israel propaganda.

And as Elder of Zion demonstrates through extensive quotes, it went beyond spreading the usual claims about Zionism being “a tool and agent of imperialism”; a form of

colonialism and racism deploying “fascist methods” which is also able to censor the international media, and engaging in endless atrocities including “widespread” use of “paid hirelings to organise the ‘elimination’ of people refusing to serve the Zionist interests.”

The book is also very openly antisemitic, blaming the Jews as a whole for the supposed crimes of Zionism because Judaism is an “arch-reactionary” and “racist” faith, as in this quote:

“What lies behind this protracted and deliberately confused uproar? Is it but another example of the open racism of the Zionists . . . ? . . . Partly yes, but the heart of the matter lies elsewhere. The arch-reactionary nature of the Jewish faith has long been no secret – one has only to open the Bible for one’s eyes to fall on numerous racist sentences. Even less of a secret is the racism of the Zionist leaders, for after all that was what they started from.”

In other words, contemporary left-wing anti-Zionism is not only tainted with antisemitism because rejecting self-determination for the Jewish people, alone of all the world’s national groups, is inherently discriminatory. It has also been enmeshed with unequivocally antisemitic beliefs about Jews from its very origins, such as the widely disseminated Soviet propaganda of the sort illustrated by Ivanov’s screed.

A SMOKING GUN

There are still people insisting there is no firm evidence Iran has been trying to make nuclear weapons. They say Iran denies it is doing this, and the International Atomic Energy Agency has never said unequivocally that Iran was seeking nuclear weapons (no, but IAEA inspectors have reported mountains of evidence of Iranian actions that can only be explained by the pursuit of nuclear weapons). They cite US intelligence reports from a few years ago saying Iran had not yet made a decision to build nuclear weapons (Iran was pursuing all the components of a nuclear bomb – what it had not yet decided was the exact timeline to turn those components and capabilities into a deployable weapon).

In truth, there are lots of “smoking guns” proving Iran has been illegally trying to develop nuclear weapons – but one has just been published that should convince anyone who is not absolutely determined to deny any and all evidence of Iran’s nuclear intentions. (And there are people out there who would continue their denials even if Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei came into their living room and physically showed them a nuclear device.)

A document from the Iranian nuclear archive captured by Israel in 2018 was recently shown to a fact-finding mission to Israel led by Canada’s former foreign minister John Baird. While Baird’s mission has not yet published its report, it released the document to Britain’s *Daily Mail* (Jan. 18).

It is, quite simply, a request, dated Nov. 28, 2002, from a senior Iranian nuclear scientist to the head of Iran's nuclear project, asking for detailed parameters for designing a nuclear warhead to be placed on a missile.

There is no ambiguity in the brief document – signed by Muhammed Nasiri, head of the Integration project of the AMAD program, Iran's secret nuclear research program, and addressed to Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the head of AMAD. It talks openly about warheads and it talks about missile trajectories. It does not say “nuclear warhead”, but AMAD did nuclear research, not missile design. The document proves unequivocally that Iran was trying to design nuclear warheads to fit on its missiles.

So can we now please finally drop the ridiculous pretence some people insist on that there is no proof Iran has been seeking nuclear weapons? AIR



DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

Jonathan Tobin

TRUMP'S MIDDLE EAST PEACE PLAN ISN'T IRRELEVANT

Three years in the making and long after most of the world had given up on it being rolled out, US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan may soon see the light of day. In a January interview, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien let drop that the Administration's blueprint for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians may soon be unveiled.

That the effort – the responsibility of senior presidential adviser/son-in-law Jared Kushner and recently retired Middle East peace envoy Jason Greenblatt – hasn't been permanently shelved is news by itself. But it also raises the possibility that the scheme might be announced during the run-up to Israeli elections on March 2.

Some 12 months ago, Trump and Kushner seemed prepared to launch the initiative once Netanyahu was safely re-elected for his fourth consecutive term as Israel's leader in April 2019. Of course, what happened instead was a year of political deadlock in Israel.

As the Trump plan sat on the shelf, the two architects of the Administration's effort have moved on to other things. And the President's attention is focused on the Democrats' efforts to impeach him, as well as issues like the conflict with Iran and concluding trade deals, not to mention the 2020 elections.

Moreover, it's not as if anyone outside of the White House believed that Trump's so-called “deal of the century” had a prayer of success.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) had already made it clear that they would never negotiate on the basis of any

plan put forward by the Trump Administration. PA leader Mahmoud Abbas had repeatedly turned down peace plans and efforts to revive negotiations that were far more generous than the terms he could expect from Trump.

Abbas didn't accept the offer from the Israeli government led by Ehud Olmert in 2008 that had the support of the George W. Bush Administration, which called for an independent Palestinian state in almost all of the West Bank, all of Gaza and a share of Jerusalem. He'd also torpedoed talks championed by the Obama Administration in which the United States could have been counted on to place intolerable pressure on Israel to satisfy Palestinian demands. So there was no chance that he would negotiate seriously now with an American government that had finally ended the legal fiction that Jerusalem was not Israel's capital, and which had demanded that the PA give up paying subsidies to terrorists and their families.

So why should the Trump Administration undertake as futile a gesture as announcing a peace plan that no one wants and can't work?

With only a year left in what will either be Trump's first or only term in office, the scheme is either going to have to be announced soon or forever be consigned to the dustbin of history.

But there's a better reason than that for US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and O'Brien to publish the plan. Despite the fact that it will not lead to negotiations, it's important that a US government go on the record on the issue in a manner consistent with the reality of the Middle East, rather than the fantasies that have been the foundation of all past American efforts.

For decades, the foreign-policy establishment has taken it as a given that the region will be embroiled in conflict unless Israel is made to retreat to the lines of June 1967, and a Palestinian state put in place alongside it. But lately, the Arab world's tacit renunciation of the Palestinian cause, in the face of more important threats from Iran and Islamist terror groups, shows that assumption to be a fallacy.

The same is true for the notion that appeasement of Palestinian territorial demands must be continued, regardless of whether the alleged moderates of Fatah and the Islamists of Hamas are ready to end their century-long war with Zionism.

Whatever you may think of Trump, his foreign policy has recognised that the obstacle to peace has been Palestinian intransigence and not Israeli policies. He has also understood that actions that reinforce Palestinian fantasies about Israel's destruction – like the United States not recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital – make peace impossible.

A year from now, a new Democratic administration determined to restore Obama's policies may take office. It is important for the current administration to lay down a marker on peace that is rooted in realism, not the kind of

magical thinking that actually fuelled terror and intransigence in the past.

AIR

Jonathan S. Tobin is editor in chief of JNS, the Jewish News Syndicate. © JNS (www.jns.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

STATE OF PLAY

A new decade has brought some familiar problems. Efforts to contain and eliminate Islamist terror in Southeast Asia face the perennial challenge of vast, porous borders and now the prospect of hardened fighters returning home from the Middle East.

The problem is illustrated in common, almost banal, incidents of banditry, such as when six masked gunmen boarded a boat with eight Indonesian men onboard off the coast of Sabah, Malaysia, and headed toward Philippine waters on Jan. 16.

The prime suspects are the Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf, based around Jolo and Basilan islands off the coast of Mindanao, with a long record of kidnappings in which Malaysian and Indonesian sailors and fishermen have been taken hostage in order to extort ransom payments.

A new report by a Singapore-based think tank notes that Mindanao will remain “a desired destination for aspiring foreign fighters from Southeast Asia and beyond,” with eastern Malaysia’s Sabah state used by militants as a transit route to the nearby southern Philippines.

The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) based its new year’s outlook, “Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses,” on trends over the last 12 months in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

The report notes the emergence of a new local IS emir to succeed Isnilon Hapilon who was killed near the end of the Marawi siege in 2017, localised suicide attacks, recruitment of foreign fighters and the use of fake news.

“Islamic groups in Mindanao have a track record of releasing false information as part of opportunistic attempts to gain attention and financing. BIFF [Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters] is known to routinely issue warnings of imminent attacks and bombings... in order to instil fear,” it said.

Some analysts believe that with the lifting of martial law on Jan. 1, terrorism-related violence will plague the newly autonomous Bangsamoro region in Mindanao, created as part of the 2014 peace deal reached between the government and the rebel Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Even before that date, three low-grade explosions hit villages on the island on Dec. 22 on the eve of a visit by President Rodrigo Duterte for the first ceremonial distribution of Bangsamoro land titles to former MILF fighters as part of the peace accord.

Rommel Banlaoi, chairman of the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research, notes that the Abu Sayyaf and BIFF, another ISIS-aligned group, are both known to be recruiting in the region and remain adamantly hostile to the peace deal.

“Doing it on the eve of Duterte’s visit was conveying a message of continuing defiance against his leadership and against the new political entity in Muslim Mindanao,” Banlaoi told *Asia Times*.

Elsewhere, the ICPVTR report warns Malaysia and Indonesia that they face threats from self-radicalised IS-linked militants and from locals returning from Syria and Iraq who could carry out attacks on their home soil.

“Going forward, the threat landscape for Malaysia remains very much linked to Islamist terrorist developments globally,” it said. “Further, the foreign militant influence needs to be addressed holistically, so that Malaysia does not remain a transit point of choice, as it currently is.”

Meanwhile, Indonesia suffered eight terrorist attacks in 2019 while 10 were prevented, compared with 15 attacks and a dozen foiled plots in 2018. “The involvement of family networks, particularly wives, in militant activities continues to be a feature in Indonesia,” the report said.

Jakarta still has not taken a firm decision on whether to repatriate about 30 Indonesian fighters and more than 150 of their family members who have languished in Syrian camps since Islamic State’s last bastion fell, while the total number of foreign terrorist fighters and their families is believed to be around 600.

“[They are] in different countries and we must talk about how to repatriate, or whether doing so would pose a danger,” said Mahfud MD, Indonesia’s Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs on Jan. 10.

In Thailand, the number of attacks targeting civilians in the predominately Malay-Muslim “deep south” declined in 2019. However, attacks outside the region including coordinated bombings in and around Bangkok in August “suggest insurgent groups have retained the capacity to launch attacks beyond the conflict area,” the ICPVTR report said.

The Thai and Indonesian army chiefs have signed an intelligence sharing deal that aims to contain cross-border movements of fugitives and militants, including from Thailand’s deep south.

Some analysts believe the new deal is targeted at Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), the largest and most powerful of the southern Thai rebel groups, a conspicuous absentee from Malaysia-sponsored peace talks and which is believed to have members hiding in Indonesia.

AIR

Douglas Davis

TRADING PLACES

Among the myriad uncertainties confronting Britain in its post-Brexit iteration, one of the brightest lights to shine is its future trade relationship with Israel.

Nothing could be officially concluded as long as Britain remained within the EU, but from the end of January, when that hurdle was scheduled to be cleared, one of the priority items on the agenda was expected to be the announcement of an Anglo-Israel trade deal.

In place of a formal trade deal, the two countries last year signed a “trade continuity” agreement, which had the effect of removing any potential new trade obstacles, such as tariffs or barriers, between the UK and Israel after Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union.

Israel’s Foreign Trade Administration (FTA) said the value of all Israeli exports – including products and services – to all countries in 2019 grew by 4.5% over 2018, with Israeli high-tech exports leading the charge. Israeli services exports grew by 11.7% last year alone.

Israeli firms seeking to establish themselves in Europe have long looked to the UK as the base for doing so, with 300 small to medium-sized Israeli firms now located in Britain. Many list on London’s stock exchanges.

The two countries are not strangers when it comes to trade. According to figures published in January, Israel’s exports to the UK grew by almost 300% over the past decade. The FTA said the country’s overall exports increased by almost 70%, while exports to the UK have grown by a whopping 286% since 2010.

Last year, the British Government put the value of UK-Israel bilateral trade at around A\$14.5 billion a year, with cross-border business particularly strong in such areas as pharmaceuticals, technology and defence.

However, it is not just in the UK that Israeli firms have sought to trade, and Israel’s export markets around the world have grown increasingly varied, with “significant growth” in Asia and Latin America.

The FTA said exports to China had now increased five-fold, while other important markets include Turkey, Brazil, Chile, Taiwan and Japan.

Israeli Minister of Economy and Industry Eli Cohen said: “Export data for the past decade is proof of the good economic situation of Israel’s economy.”

Just how good was demonstrated in a bond sale in London last month. Israel sought to raise US\$3 billion (A\$4.35 billion). In fact, the bonds were massively oversubscribed and demand reached US\$20 billion (A\$29 billion), equivalent to 6.8 times the amount being sought.

Investors included major banks, pension funds, insurance companies and institutional investors which already held long-term Israeli government bonds. The bonds were purchased by 400 investors from 40 countries.

The successful issue of the bonds represented a vote of confidence by the world’s large investors in the Israeli economy, said an Israeli economic official.

Particular interest in Israel’s economic boom has come from Japan, which was traditionally considered to be ultra-cautious on the question of trade with Israel because of its dependence on Arab oil. That inhibition appears to have diminished, with 53 new deals amounting to A\$1.18 billion, according to data released by the Harel-Hertz Investment House. This is the largest number of investments in deal terms since at least 2001, according to the data.

Japanese investments in Israel have totalled over A\$10.44 billion in 233 investment deals since 2000. The level of investments surged after 2015, following visits by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to Japan in May 2014 and by Japanese leader Shinzo Abe to Israel in January 2015. In May, El Al announced that it would operate direct flights to Tokyo from March 2020.

In a related development – and another historic first – Israel began exporting natural gas to Egypt from its offshore gas-processing rig near Caesarea last month. In terms of a landmark agreement between the two countries, Egypt’s Dolphinus Holdings is purchasing 85 billion cubic metres of gas, worth A\$28 billion, from Israel’s Leviathan and Tamar offshore fields in a 15-year deal.

In a joint statement after their meeting in Cairo, Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz and his Egyptian counterpart Tarek el-Molla declared that the beginning of gas exports from Israel to Egypt was an “important development” that would “serve the interests of both sides”. The gas is being exported by an undersea pipeline from Ashkelon to the Sinai peninsula, and Egypt is seeking to re-export some of it to Europe.

That might not be so easy. The move comes as tensions reached a new high in the eastern Mediterranean after the Turkish parliament approved a measure to deploy Turkish troops to Libya in support of the UN-backed government there. The Turkish move came as Israel, Cyprus and Greece inked a massive new pipeline deal to transport natural gas from the eastern Mediterranean to markets in Europe.

Turkey, which has nursed decades of tensions with Greece and Cyprus, and more recently with Israel, strongly opposes the pipeline. It also recently signed an agreement with Libya’s Tripoli-based government setting maritime boundaries that conflict with those envisioned by Israel, Cyprus, Greece and Egypt, and which could block any pipeline route without Turkish approval.

And so the wheel turns.

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Seven rockets were fired into Israel from Gaza between Dec. 18 and Jan. 16. On Jan. 17, a wave of explosive balloons was sent over the border, prompting Israeli strikes against Hamas military targets.

An Israeli civilian was stabbed in Hebron on Jan. 18. Three armed men from Gaza infiltrated Israel on Jan. 21 and attacked soldiers before being killed.

The IDF says there was generally a substantial decrease in attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem in 2019. The Shin Bet says it foiled over 560 “significant terrorist attacks,” including 10 suicide bombings and four kidnappings. Overall, five Israelis were killed in terror attacks in 2019.

On Dec. 27, the Palestinian factions in Gaza announced that, beginning in March, the “Great March of Return” riots along the Israel-Gaza border will only take place once a month and on certain national occasions. Previously, they had occurred every Friday.

HAMAS ANGERS EGYPT

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh reportedly angered Egypt by attending the funeral in Teheran of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, killed in a US airstrike on Jan. 3.

According to high-level Egyptian sources, Cairo had permitted Haniyeh to leave the Gaza Strip via Egypt for a series of international meetings on condition that he not visit Iran, which is regarded as a foe by Egypt. His trip to Teheran embarrassed Egypt, with which Hamas has recently sought to improve ties and which has been acting as a mediator between Hamas and Israel. Egypt reportedly retaliated by closing the Rafah crossing into Gaza

from Sinai for several days and limiting gas imports into Gaza from Egypt.

ISRAELI STRIKES IN GAZA AND SYRIA

According to IDF figures, the Israeli military struck approximately 54 Iranian-affiliated targets in Syria in 2019. The most recent alleged Israeli attack, in which multiple targets were hit at Syria’s T-4 airbase, took place on Jan. 15.

In Gaza, Israel struck approximately 900 targets in 2019 in response to the approximately 1,295 rockets and mortars fired by Palestinian militant groups there.

PALESTINIAN GROUPS REJECT EU AID AFTER TERROR FUNDING BAN

More than 130 Palestinian organisations refused to sign European Union (EU) grant requests which require that Palestinian institutions ensure that no beneficiaries of their projects or programs are affiliated with groups on the EU’s list of terrorist organisations.

According to reports, the Palestinian Non-Government Organisations (PNGO) sent a letter of protest to EU representatives over the funding requirements. The director of one such NGO, Al-Haq, Shawan Jabarin told media, “We demanded to include conditions stipulating that we do not have to recognise the criteria listed regarding terror groups.”

Recent Israeli government reports have identified substantial connections between some Palestinian “human rights organisations” and banned terrorist groups, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Hamas.

IDF INTELLIGENCE: IRAN ONE TO TWO YEARS AWAY FROM THE BOMB

The Israeli Military Intelligence annual assessment released on Jan. 14 warned that if Teheran continues its steps in defiance of the 2015 nuclear deal, it could have enough enriched uranium to produce an atomic bomb by the end of 2020 and could turn this into an atomic warhead on a missile by the end of 2021.

Former deputy head of the International Atomic Energy Agency Olli Heinonen offered an even shorter estimate of Iran’s breakout time, telling a journalist in early January that, using a cascade of the advanced centrifuges it is now deploying, Iran could potentially collect enough enriched uranium to build a nuclear bomb by the end of March.

EUROPEANS INITIATE “SNAPBACK” AGAINST IRAN

The European signatories of the 2015 JCPOA nuclear agreement with Iran – UK, France, and Germany – announced on Jan. 14 that they were initiating the dispute resolution mechanism associated with that agreement. The three states cited Iran’s escalating breaches of the agreement since May of last year, some of which they described as irreversible, as the reason for taking this decision, but said they remained committed to supporting the JCPOA agreement overall.

The JCPOA dispute resolution mechanism now calls for a series of meetings, likely to take 60 days or more, which can then lead to a referral of a serious breach of the agreement to the UN Security Council. Such a referral would cause automatic “snapback” of UN sanctions on Iran unless the Security Council votes to

waive the sanctions.

Reimposing the sanctions would be a further blow to Iran's economy, already struggling under US sanctions imposed after Washington left the JCPOA in May 2018. The Institute of International Finance estimated on Jan. 13 that Iran's economy would contract by 7.2% in the 2020 fiscal year, after contracting 4.6% last year.

FOUR IRANIAN WOMEN TAKE ON THEIR REGIME

Four noted Iranian women have slammed the regime they once represented.



Iranian Olympic medallist turned defector Kimia Alizadeh

Iran's only female Olympic medallist, Kimia Alizadeh, has left the country for an undisclosed location. In a Jan. 12 social media statement, the taekwondo bronze medallist said "this decision is even harder than earning Olympic gold" but that she no longer wanted to be part of the injustice of being "one of the millions of oppressed women in Iran."

In the wake of Iranian regime deceptions about the shooting down of a Ukrainian International Air flight in Teheran on Jan. 8, three female Iranian TV presenters have also quit their jobs in protest against the practices of the theocratic regime. One, Gelare Jabbari, apologised in an Instagram post, writing: "forgive me for the 13 years I told you lies."

ISRAELI BREAKTHROUGH IN LASER INTERCEPT TECHNOLOGY

On Jan. 8, Israel's Defence Ministry announced that it had made a

"technological breakthrough" in its research efforts to develop a laser beam capable of shooting down incoming rockets and small drones, which it plans to test throughout this year. The laser beam system is designed to thwart low altitude and short-range threats, including mortar shells, anti-tank missiles and drones, and will complement the Iron Dome missile defence system once it is ready to be deployed.

Further, on Dec. 26, Israel's security forces announced the deployment of a new laser system called "Light Blade" that reportedly can shoot down airborne incendiary devices, including balloons, kites and drones, launched from Gaza.

SULTAN QABOOS OF OMAN DIES

Oman's ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said died on Jan. 10, aged 79. On his passing, Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said, "I send condolences to the people of Oman, and share in the deep sorrow, on the passing of Sultan Qaboos Bin Said. About half a year ago he invited my wife and I for an important and very moving

visit... He was an outstanding leader who worked tirelessly to advance peace and stability in our region." Sultan Qaboos was the first Gulf leader to host a serving Israeli Prime Minister — Yitzhak Rabin in 1994. Qaboos was succeeded by his cousin, Sultan Haitham Al Said, who has pledged to continue Qaboos' policies.

GAS FLOWS LEAD TO BOTH PEACE AND PROTESTS

It was described as the most important agreement between Israel and Egypt since the 1979 peace treaty, after gas from Israel's Leviathan gas field in the Mediterranean Sea started to flow to Egypt in January.

Some of the gas will be used by Egyptians, but a large portion will be liquefied for export into European markets.

Meanwhile, Israeli gas being exported into Jordan since December has been met with protests. Hundreds of Jordanians, many of whom consider themselves Palestinian, called on their government to cancel a US\$10 billion gas import deal with a US-Israeli consortium.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

BY GEORGE

Native Americans were Muslims, which is why George Washington killed them.

This surprising revelation was aired on Lebanese television channel *Al Mayadeen* on Dec. 26 by Sheikh Salem Salameh, a Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Deputy Head of the Palestine Islamic Scholars Association.

The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) has posted a clip of the interview, in which the Sheikh warned Muslims "of what US President Washington himself warned. [Washington] killed the Indians and the Muslims, because

the Indians and the owners of that land were Muslims. It has been proven that they were Muslims, and that they had mosques. This is why they killed them... The [US] is a murderous state that assists murderers. It helps those who have killed the prophets, the holy men, the women and the innocent children. The [Americans] give [Israel] rulings permitting them to kill the [Palestinians]."

We don't know what the Sheikh's preferred substance is, but he's clearly not going to be passing around his peace pipe anytime soon, especially given that elsewhere in the interview, he stated that "No Muslim on the face of this Earth could ever imagine that there are Muslims who recognise the Zionist entity or normalise relations with it... This is considered a betrayal of God, His religion, and the Muslims."

COVER STORY

AFTER SOLEIMANI

ENDING IRAN'S PROXY DECEPTION

by Jonathan Schanzer

When the United States killed Qassem Soleimani at the Baghdad airport in the early hours of January 3, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was not the only target. With Soleimani was a handful of other Iranian brass as well as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the leader of the Iraqi Shi'ite militia known as *Kata'eb Hezbollah*. Only days before, that group had fired on a base in Kirkuk and killed an American contractor. The group was also involved in the siege of the US Embassy in Baghdad just days later.

Upending two decades of established US foreign policy, Donald Trump cared little whether the perpetrators of the embassy attack and the missile strike in Kirkuk came from Iran or were surrogates of Iran based in Iraq. Iran was responsible and Iran paid. In one stroke, Trump eliminated the Iranian figure who had been spearheading the bloody proxy war against America, Israel, and a number of Gulf Arab states dating back to the late 1990s.

Soleimani's killing was, without question, the most consequential act of Trump's presidency. It didn't just punish Iran for the action of its proxies. After decades of the US letting the Islamic Republic get away with murder, the Trump Administration made it clear that America would no longer allow the regime to hide behind its militias.

In 2008, a former CIA analyst named John Brennan wrote an article for *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* in which he laid out what he thought was a logical case for not responding to Iran's violent proxies in the Middle East. "While Iranian support to these client groups undoubtedly strengthens their ability to carry out terrorist attacks, it is unclear what role Iranian officials



Soleimani's death made it clear Iran can no longer hide behind its militias

play, if any, in the operational decisions made by these groups," Brennan wrote. "Moreover, while many of these groups' activities are labeled as 'terrorism,' most of the attacks carried out by Iranian Shi'a proxies are paramilitary in nature and are directed against combatant targets, either Israeli soldiers along the Lebanese border or coalition forces in Iraq."

Brennan, who served as director of the CIA under Barack Obama, was not alone. He was one of many intelligence and military officials who viewed with calm dispassion the Islamic Republic's use of proxies to attack Americans or American interests. As a result, Soleimani went unchallenged during his tenure as the leader of Iran's military elite from 1998 to 2020.

Soleimani's most effective and deadliest aggressions against the United States are memorialised in the US Army's comprehensive two-volume study *The US Army in*

the Iraq War. After the end of the first phase of the 2003 Iraq War, Soleimani's IRGC infiltrated the neighbouring country, assassinated former leaders of the Saddam Hussein regime, and established safe houses for future operations. IRGC teams then deployed to organise, train, and equip Iran-backed militias. American personnel were increasingly targeted and killed by the deadly bombs known as explosively formed projectiles (EFPs). The Army report concluded that the "Qods Force and its Iraqi surrogates were the primary instruments employed by the Iranian regime to wage a proxy war against the United States at minimal cost."

As an author of the study later summarised: "When evidence was becoming clearer that Iran was behind a deliberate and systematic series of attacks on Americans, the US reviewed possible responses. The US decided against a more aggressive response primarily out of fear of Iranian escalation."

In fact, when the Israelis actually had Soleimani in their crosshairs in 2008, the Bush Administration asked them to stand down. All in all, the Pentagon assesses that at least 603 US deaths in Iraq "were the result of Iran-backed militants."

Upon ascending to office in 2009, President Barack Obama almost immediately set into motion his plans for withdrawing a majority of US forces from Iraq by 2011. Since the US failed to solve the Iran-backed militia problem before leaving, its withdrawal precipitated a violent sectarian backlash against Iran's Shi'ite proxies from Iraq's Sunnis in the form of a new and brutal jihadist group: the Islamic State.

By 2014, the Obama Administration quietly came to view Iran's proxy groups as partners in the newly formed coalition to fight the Islamic State. When Iraq's military proved feckless, it was the Shi'ite militias that pushed ISIS back, with Iraqi politicians in the capital of Baghdad cheering from the sidelines. Subcontracting the national defence in this way came at a price. The Iraqi state ceded its security to fighters loyal to Iran. Iranian officers embedded with the militias in Iraq. Soleimani himself appeared at some of their encampments, taking selfies and encouraging the fighters to continue the fight.

Among the more prominent groups to fill the security void in Iraq was Kata'eb Hezbollah – the very same group that would target an American base and the US embassy in Baghdad in December. The group's leader, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, already had a reputation for having killed American soldiers during the Iraq war.

Another prominent Iran-backed militia that had fought Americans in Iraq before joining the fight against the Islamic State was Asa'eb Ahl al-Haq. The group claimed more than 6,000 attacks on US troops, including many

with EFPs. Its commander, Qais al-Khazali, was incarcerated by the US military from 2007 to 2009, during which time he informed his interrogators that Iran planned to infiltrate Iraqi society at all levels.

The US decision not to antagonise these Iran-aligned groups was based, in part, on their contribution to Iraqi security and their opposition to the Islamic State. US policy was also calibrated to accommodate the Iranians as it pushed for a nuclear deal from 2013 to 2015.

After the deal was reached, there was no debating the role of these militias or the danger they posed to Iraqi sovereignty.

There was even a veiled attempt to identify these groups as independent, not subservient to Iran. This was fiction. Iraq had become an Iranian satrapy as a result of the

2011 US withdrawal and the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal. To add insult to injury, the militias were now funded, to one extent or another, by the US\$150 billion of frozen funds released by the Obama Administration to Iran through the deal.

Under Soleimani's guidance, Iran's militias also operated well beyond Iraq. In Syria, the Iraqi Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, the Fatemiyoun division of Afghan Shi'ite irregulars, the Zaynabiyoun brigade of Pakistani Shi'ite fighters, and others, have slaughtered untold thousands of Sunnis. Their goal was to defend the Assad regime and, by default, the Islamic Republic's interests in Syria. While the Obama Administration slapped some militias with terrorism designations, it chose not to escalate beyond that. Once again, the American President feared jeopardising the nuclear deal. The Trump Administration did no better. As these groups were part of the effort to defeat ISIS, Trump looked the other way.

The United States has shown similar ambivalence toward Iran's proxy in Yemen. The Houthis militia, also known as Ansar Allah, for years identified itself as an independent group of disaffected Shi'ite Muslims that had nothing to do with Soleimani's project. This was an argument often parroted in prominent publications such as *Foreign Policy*, not to mention the halls of the US Congress. This false narrative ultimately doomed the efforts of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in their ill-fated war to purge the Iranians from Yemen. (Admittedly, errant air strikes that reportedly killed thousands of civilians didn't help either.) But over time, the operational and financial ties between the Houthis and the IRGC have become increasingly clear. This was underscored just days after the Soleimani killing, when an IRGC officer was killed while working with the Houthis in Yemen.

The Islamic Republic's proxy strategy is easy to un-

derstand. Local militias enable Iran to wage war against the United States or others with a measure of deniability. They are also crucial for the regime's strategy to establish control of territory across the Middle East. Indeed, the Iranian strategy is hegemony. For the regime to conquer and control territory, it requires not just proxies but powerful ones.

The gold standard is the Lebanese Hezbollah. It was Iran's first proxy. Today, it's the regime's predominant one. Incubated by the IRGC in Lebanon during the civil war which began there in 1975 and spurred on by the 1982 Israeli invasion, Hezbollah announced itself in the early 1980s with a series of attacks against American and French military installations. The jarring violence perpetrated by this group against America (241 Marines died in a 1983 attack) ultimately prompted President Ronald Reagan to redeploy US troops from Lebanon.

Emboldened by this withdrawal, and urged on by Iran, the group turned its sights on Israel. A sustained guerrilla war ultimately prompted Israel to withdraw its forces from the security zone it had established in southern Lebanon in the year 2000. Twenty years later, Hezbollah continues to wage a low-intensity war against Israel without a *casus belli*.

Iran has armed, funded, and trained Hezbollah so that it could become one of the most formidable military forces in the Middle East. The group's rocket arsenal is estimated at 150,000, including lethal precision munitions that may soon wreak havoc on the region. The group has fought in Syria, trained fighters in Iraq and Yemen, and carried out terrorist attacks at Iran's behest worldwide, from Argentina to Bulgaria, again without paying a price.

With international attention focused on the group's spectacular acts of violence, Iran has staged a slow-motion takeover of Lebanon. Hezbollah has wrested control of the country. Its military is stronger than the Lebanese Armed Forces. Hezbollah has been a part of every government coalition since 2005. It has slowly come to dominate state institutions. While the country's population and politicians continue to assert Lebanon's independence, that notion doesn't hold up under serious scrutiny. But the longer the fiction of Lebanon's independence can be maintained, the

longer Iran will remain unimpeded to deploy its proxies to make or solidify territorial gains and engage in violence against its foes.

It was the denial of Iran's pervasive influence that enabled Hezbollah to grow over the years. The refusal to acknowledge the regime's control over other proxies has had a similar impact elsewhere. American denial of Iranian command and control allowed the regime to pursue a comparable strategy, from Iraq and Syria to Yemen and beyond.

Knowingly or not, with his targeted strike on Qassem Soleimani, Trump upended this dynamic. In holding the terror master responsible for attacks carried out by his Iraqi proxies, the US President torched the thin firewall that long hindered American decisionmakers from holding Iran accountable. And in so doing, he appears to have pushed Iran's proxies to dispense with the fiction as well.

On Jan. 9, the commander of the IRGC's aerospace command, Amir Hajizadeh, gave a press conference in front of the flags of the IRGC, Hezbollah, the Houthis from Yemen, and the Fatemiyoun and Zaynabiyoun militias. The message was clear: Iran commands all of them, and they all form an axis pitted against America in the aftermath of Soleimani's killing.

Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary general, effectively declared war on America after the targeted strike. He warned, "The response to Soleimani's death is not a single operation but a long path that must remove US military presence from the region."

Nasrallah added, "We are speaking about the start of a phase, about a new battle, about a new era in the region."

In a subsequent speech, he credited Soleimani for arming the organisation. Nasrallah even spoke of Hezbollah's new and lethal precision-guided munitions: "This is thanks to Iran, embodied in Soleimani."

The Houthis slammed the killing of Soleimani as a war crime, vowing to respond to his death by expelling the "American occupier" from the region.

An official from Kata'eb Hezbollah released a statement calling for volunteers for suicide bombings against US forces in Iraq and "the opening of the door of registration for the lovers of martyrdom, to conduct martyrdom operations against the foreign Crusader forces."

One by one, Iran's proxies are signalling that the death of Soleimani was a blow to their leadership. In so doing, they are acknowledging the command-and-control structure that Americans refused to concede for years: The militias are indistinguishable from the IRGC.

Trump is still unsure if he wants to leave Iraq. If he does, he'll validate Soleimani's strategy and breathe new life into his shadow armies. If he denies Iran that territory and holds the regime accountable for the ac-

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tions of its proxies, he will have done something that no other president has done since the rise of the Islamic Republic in 1979. He'll have changed the rules of the game.

AIR

Jonathan Schanzer, a former terrorism finance analyst at the US Department of the Treasury, is senior vice president for research at Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD). Reprinted from Commentary magazine. © Commentary (www.commentary-magazine.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

IRAN'S "AXIS OF RESISTANCE" AFTER SOLEIMANI

By Seth J. Frantzman

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has increased his stature in the region following the deaths of Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraq's Kata'eb Hezbollah leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. He is so sure of himself he has begun commenting about the internal affairs of Iraq, whose Iranian-backed groups appear to have a slight power vacuum at the moment.

On Jan. 12 Nasrallah said that in the coming days and weeks the United States must "leave this region." He has threatened the US that its troops must leave either peacefully or in coffins. The "resistance axis" will begin to move against the US.

This "axis" includes the IRGC, Hezbollah and allies in Yemen and Iraq. A key part of that alliance was Kata'eb Hezbollah in Iraq. Led by Muhandis for years, it was linked closely to the IRGC.

Muhandis earned his spurs in the 1980s alongside the IRGC. He had fled Saddam Hussein's Iraq to live in Iran. He was involved in IRGC terrorist operations in Kuwait at the time. During this time he became acquainted with Iran's growing role in the region, including Iran's work with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Fast-forward 30 years, and we got to the point where men like Soleimani, Muhandis and Nasrallah believed they were the up-and-coming leaders of an Iranian-dominated region.

Among their cohorts was also Hadi al-Amiri, the powerful leader of the Badr Organisation in Iraq and a key ally of the IRGC, as well as leader of the second-largest political party in Iraq. Now Amiri and Nasrallah have lost two of their four-member squad. Nasrallah has stepped up, seeking to play a larger role in Iran's leadership in the region.

In his Jan. 12 speech, Nasrallah said that the killing of Soleimani by the US was a crime. It is Iraq that is the first country that should respond, he said. He also said Muhandis was a great Iraqi commander.

Oddly, Nasrallah then turned to attack the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, slamming Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani. He said Barzani should thank Soleimani for aiding the Kurds in the fight against Islamic State in 2014. Nasrallah accused Barzani of "shaking from fear".

Nasrallah now positions himself as leading a resistance against the US in the region, taking the mantle of Muhandis and Soleimani.

He openly says that Hezbollah is accused of being a "proxy" of Iran, but says this is incorrect. Hezbollah is not a tool of Iran, but a friend.

This makes sense. Nasrallah cannot see himself as a tool, but, rather, wants to be a leader beyond Lebanon's borders. He has shown this appetite in the past, not only in Hezbollah's global operations, which span Europe, Africa and America, but also in past comments about Yemen and in work with Iraqi militias.

Hezbollah has been linked to these Iranian-backed groups for decades. Men like Qais Khazali of Asaib Ahl al-Haq in Iraq have close relations to both the IRGC and Hezbollah.

Nasrallah's comments on Iraq are raising eyebrows. The Kurdistan Region has responded

to Nasrallah's criticism of Barzani, condemning it and noting that Nasrallah has been hiding in a bunker for years.

"You forgot that for years you haven't seen the sunlight," the Kurdistan Region spokesman Jutiar Adel said.

But Nasrallah's comments appear to foreshadow a larger plan. He has commented about expelling US troops from Iraq. At the same time, Iraq's Moqtada al-Sadr has spoken about a larger alliance of Iranian-backed groups in the region.

Nasrallah says that the recent rocket attacks in Iraq against US bases are just the "start" of a phase to push the US out.

According to *Middle East Eye*, Iran is now looking to Nasrallah to help lead a "united resistance" against the US. This will include backing Amiri as head of the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) in Iraq.



Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah: Positioning himself as a leader of Iran's "Axis of Resistance"

Muhandis was deputy head of the PMU, a group of mostly Shi'ite militias that includes Kata'eb Hezbollah, Badr and Asaib Ahl al-Haq.

According to *Middle East Eye*, the agreement to put Nasrallah in a larger role was signed in Beirut on Jan. 9. Three days later, Nasrallah gave his major speech on the one-week anniversary of the death of Soleimani.

Media in the region are taking notice of Nasrallah's increased role.

The Lebanese daily *Al-Akhbar* has described his comments this week as representing the "axis of resistance" and Iran's plans.

Hezbollah could play a greater role, as it already has in Syria, together with Iraqi-based militias, as the IRGC decides how to respond. This would make Lebanon less secure and more of a potential battlefield. Already, Iranian bases in Syria have suffered a pounding by Israel over previous years, with more than 1,000 admitted airstrikes. Israel struck more than 50 targets in 2019 and has struck more than 250 overall.

What does this new "resistance" mean?

We know that Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, another Iraqi-based militia that is linked to the IRGC, PMU and Hezbollah, has vowed to begin the resistance. It has already been sanctioned by the US as a terrorist group. Sadr met with Kata'eb Hezbollah and Nujaba on Jan. 13, according to *Al-Mayadeen* media.

This sketches out for us a nexus of potential planning for operations that includes Nujaba, Kata'eb Hezbollah in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

But central figures are missing. Muhandis and Soleimani are dead. The IRGC has a new man to replace Soleimani, but he must get his feet wet. Muhandis had almost 40 years of experience behind him; now Kata'eb Hezbollah is weakened.

Sadr is not in a position to lead a clandestine resistance linked to the IRGC and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Nasrallah doesn't seem capable of traveling outside of Lebanon. How can he lead any sort of resistance stuck in Beirut?

This means the rhetorical flourishes of Nasrallah and his attempt to position himself as commentator on Iraqi politics may not go far.

Iraqis don't care about Nasrallah, and he won't influence votes in Baghdad. He doesn't understand Iraq's politics and isn't on the ground.

Men like Muhandis and Soleimani gained respect through operations at the front during the war on ISIS. Nasrallah hasn't seen a front line in decades. He's not a commander.

That doesn't mean he isn't dangerous, but it means that whatever regional role he is casting for must be carefully staged to meet his actual abilities and those of Hezbollah.

AIR

IRANIANS RESIST TEHERAN'S "RESISTANCE"

by Ben Cohen

Once again, talk of regime change is in the air inside Iran. Not since the crushing of the 2009 student-led protests has the Islamic Republic, as of this year entering the fifth decade of its existence, looked so vulnerable.

The immediate cause of the latest spate of protests was, of course, the shooting down by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of a Ukrainian International Airlines flight from Teheran to Kiev on Jan. 8, killing all 176 passengers on board – more than 50 of whom were Canadian citizens intending to catch a connecting flight to Toronto.

The downing of the Ukrainian jet followed the audacious military operation five days earlier in neighbouring Iraq, in which Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, Iran's best-known and most widely feared commander, was successfully targeted by a US airstrike.



Iranians confront police at a vigil for the victims of the downed Ukrainian International Airlines jet

Critics of that operation, including the Democratic Party leadership in the US Congress, fretted that the assassination of Soleimani would inflame the anger of the Iranian people *against* the United States. One Canadian CEO – grieving for the tragic loss on the downed jet of the wife and children of an Iranian colleague – grabbed headlines with a flurry of tweets excoriating the administration of US President Donald Trump ("a narcissist in Washington"). The passengers were all dead, charged Michael McCain, the boss of Canada's Maple Leaf Foods, because of an "ill-conceived plan [the assassination of Soleimani] to divert focus from political woes." He was referring to the impeachment proceedings against Trump on Capitol Hill.

However, thousands of Iranian citizens regard the same matter in very different terms. In the view of the protesters

Seth J. Frantzman is Opinion Editor and Middle East affairs analyst at the Jerusalem Post. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

now on Iranian streets, it was Soleimani's foreign adventures in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza that were designed to "divert focus from political woes" that were enveloping the Islamist regime at home. Indeed, this has been a key complaint over the last decade whenever protests inside Iran have broken out. In 2018, demonstrators coalesced around the chant "Not for Gaza. Not for Lebanon. I give my life for Iran"; in 2019, as the protests got angrier, some marchers even snarled the words "Death to Palestine" at the lines of riot police ranged in front of them.

As unsettling as "Death to Palestine" might sound to Western ears, the hostility here was not directed at the Palestinian people so much as on the Islamic Republic's ideology, which has invariably portrayed the Palestinian struggle as the most critical test of Muslim "resistance" to Western domineering. Ironically, it is the regime's fixation with the cause of Palestine that has spurred domestic Iranian resistance to the domineering of the mullahs.

In 2015, a few weeks after the United States and five other world powers reached their ill-fated deal with Iran on its nuclear program, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – the Islamic Republic's so-called "Supreme Leader" – published a long book of speeches on the evils of Jews and Zionism titled *Palestine*, which was dutifully promoted by Iran's official media. In one speech – delivered at the shrine of the Islamic Republic's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini – Khamenei declared: "[N]o other international issue is more important than Palestine in the world of Islam."

As Khamenei explained in another speech contained in the same volume, the Islamic revolution would be compromised as long as the Jewish state remained in existence. "Without winning the battle of Palestine, our victory is incomplete," he declared. "Since the first days of his mission and struggle in Iran, our deceased great imam [Khomeini] gave the first priority to the issue of Palestine."

This last observation is certainly true. As the late scholar Professor Robert Wistrich pointed out in *A Lethal Obsession*, his final book on antisemitism, "in Khomeini's eyes, Jews were a major cause of 'Westoxification' in Muslim society, an important obstacle to the recovery of its pristine Islamic identity. He associated them with American materialism, the acquisitive mania that had seized Iran's middle classes during the 1960s, and the Shah's repressive rule which favoured Western interests and Israel."

In a tract he published in 1970, Khomeini articulated these principles even more succinctly. "We must protest and make the people aware that the Jews and their foreign backers are opposed to the very foundations of Islam and wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world," he wrote.

Antisemitism, then, forms an integral part of the Khomeinist political theology that has driven Iran since the 1979 revolution. The thousands of Iranians who have been caught

on camera in recent weeks refusing to trample the US and Israeli flags (another ritual as old as the revolution itself) are not, therefore, simply waving a middle finger at their rulers on their most sacred concern: They are rejecting the basic principles and worldview of the Islamic Republic. And they are proving, yet again, that the people of Iran should not be confused with the Islamic Republic that rules them.

In a famous essay of 1859, John Stuart Mill, one of the foundational thinkers of modern Western liberalism, argued stridently against military interventions in the affairs of other countries, insisting that there were virtually no circumstances that could justify one country invading and overthrowing the regime of another. Even so, Mill continued, discussion of foreign engagement was at least warranted in circumstances where the people of the country in question had shown themselves willing "to brave... danger for their liberation."

During the course of this month, growing numbers of Iranians have shown themselves prepared to do exactly that.

There are no obvious answers to the question of what Western countries should do in Iran, as there are all sorts of good reasons why they should avoid full-scale war. For most of the last 40 years, America has sought to contain the Islamic Republic through economic sanctions and a military presence in the wider Middle East. It has now added to that pressure by confirming that the option of eliminating Iranian leaders is a part of its arsenal.

Compared to five years ago, then, an uprising of Iranians against the regime is taking place in much more favourable international environment, thanks to the radical shift in Iran policy under Trump. Iran's rulers certainly know how vulnerable they are, which is why they want the rest of us to believe that they will take any measures necessary to survive, even as their revolutionary mission dies. AIR

Ben Cohen is a New York-based journalist and author who writes a weekly column on Jewish and international affairs for the Jewish News Syndicate (JNS). © JNS (www.jns.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



PROPERTY INVESTMENT,
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WHY THE US AND IRAQ STILL NEED EACH OTHER

by David Pollock

The assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani has brought the tensions in US-Iraqi relations to a boil, with militia factions strong-arming a parliamentary resolution on American troop withdrawal and various European allies contemplating departures of their own. Before they sign the divorce papers, however, officials in Baghdad and Washington should consider the many reasons why staying together is best for both them and the Middle East.

TO SAVE THE VICTORY AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE

A continued US military presence in Iraq, modest as it may be, is essential to ensure the enduring defeat of the Islamic State. Conversely, if Soleimani's death leads to the withdrawal of US troops involved in local operations against the group, it would constitute a major blow to the fight against terrorism. Even after the Islamic State lost the last vestige of its territorial caliphate in March 2019, it was still able to conduct 867 terrorist operations in Iraq alone during the remainder of the year. The quantity and severity of such attacks would surely rise in the absence of US and allied military pressure. Ongoing operations against the group's equally active vestiges in Syria would be fatally undermined as well. The UN estimates that the Islamic State still has up to US\$300 million in reserves to sustain its terrorist campaign, and Kurdish officials note that the group is now reorganised underground in Iraq with "better techniques and better tactics."

All of this is precisely why ministers at the Nov. 14 meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS pledged to keep supporting the Iraqi Government in order to "secure an enduring defeat of the terrorist organisation." To fulfil that pledge, the United States must remain in Iraq; otherwise it risks repeating the mistakes of 2011, when premature withdrawal led to the rise of the Islamic State in the first place.

TO DENY SOLEIMANI A POSTHUMOUS VICTORY

There is a direct link between Soleimani's death and his longstanding policy priority of forcing America out of Iraq. If the United States withdraws now, he will have achieved in death what he tried in vain to do in life. This would be much more than a symbolic and moral failure; it would be a major political defeat for Washington, and a victory for Iran. Conversely, if US leaders remain steadfast in Iraq, they would underline Soleimani's epic failure, further



Iraq needs the continued presence of US forces if it is to prevent the resurgence of ISIS

eroding Iran's international stature while enhancing Washington's own.

TO KEEP IRAQ FRIENDLY, AND BALANCE IRAN

Iraq suffers greatly from Iran's interference, but the US-Iraq relationship is demonstrably not a lost cause. Evidence for this abounds in the past few weeks alone: President Barham Salih, Speaker of Parliament Mohammed al-Halbousi, and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry publicly denounced Iran's ballistic missile strike on bases housing US forces; fully half of Iraq's parliament boycotted the Jan. 5 vote to oust US troops; President Salih issued a statement noting that "the United States is our ally. Iran is our neighbour"; and leaders of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government recommitted – publicly and privately – to cooperate with the United States.

If US troops stay in Iraq, they would greatly reinforce America's position there and help counter Iran's malign influence throughout the region. But if they leave, Iraq would be at immediate risk of slipping back into the destructive isolation of the Saddam Hussein era, with even less ability to resist Iran's predatory policies. Most Iraqis rightly dread that thought. The hundreds of thousands of anti-Iranian protestors who have taken to Iraq's streets in recent months, especially in Shi'ite areas, drive home this point. They would much prefer an Iraq that is sovereign, peaceful, pluralistic, and fully integrated into the international community. A continuing US diplomatic and military presence would help bolster those prospects. As such, Washington can reasonably expect Iraq's government to offer terms that make this presence useful to both parties.

TO PREVENT IRAN FROM EXPLOITING IRAQI OIL

Beyond its geostrategic and political value, Iraq is now one of the world's top oil exporters, with huge reserves for the long term. If the US presence remains intact, the American, Iraqi, and global economy would share in those benefits. If the United States leaves, however, Iran would effectively gain increasing control of vast energy and finan-

cial resources, diverting them from Iraqi development in order to evade sanctions and greatly assist its own hegemonic ambitions.

TO HELP ENSURE JORDAN'S SECURITY AND STABILITY

A US departure would force Jordan to contend with a new set of security challenges. The kingdom's military and intelligence resources, already stretched thin along the border with Syria, would face the extra onus of protecting the even longer and much more remote border with Iraq.

Jordanian officials have long expressed grave concerns about the presence of Iran and its proxies in both neighbouring countries. And unlike Israel, Amman's ability to push back against that presence is severely limited.

More broadly, withdrawal would reinforce Jordan's concerns about US credibility and staying power, which first emerged in force during the Obama Administration. Security relations with the United States and Israel would continue for lack of any better options, but political ties would fray. Coupled with Jordan's tough economic prospects, such a development would threaten the stability and friendship of a key, long-term US ally sandwiched directly between Israel and Iraq, with adverse effects on all parties.

TO ENABLE BURDEN-SHARING WITH GULF ALLIES

Almost all of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states perceive US forces in Iraq as the foundation for the American military units they host on their own soil, and as vital to their self-defence against Iran.

Beyond just governments or elites, recent public opinion polls in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other GCC countries prove that dislike of Iran, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and Teheran-backed actors, such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, is widely shared across the Gulf. In recent years, GCC support for Iraq has been reluctant and parsimonious despite Washington's arm-twisting. But after the latest decisive US action against Iran in Iraq, there are better prospects of more generous help and more robust diplomatic relations.

Later this year, the GCC is expected to start supplying Iraq with electricity so that it will not be as dependent on Iranian supplies. In time, if the United States stays in the game, Iraq may even switch from threat to partner with other Arab allies in the region.

TO LIMIT ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT

Unlike Iraq's immediate neighbours, Israel is not directly tied to recent events in that country. Nevertheless, US withdrawal would create additional threats to Israeli security. Both Iran and the Islamic State would have a freer hand to operate inside Iraq, likely spreading across the porous border into Syria and ultimately to Israel's own frontiers. American credibility would also suffer a new setback.

As a result, Israel might feel obliged to increase its forays against terrorists and Iranian proxies inside Iraq, which would strain its capabilities, further unsettle the fragile situation in Iraq, and risk greater retaliation.

TO GET MORE SUPPORT FROM EUROPEAN ALLIES

US withdrawal would drastically limit the ability of European forces to continue training Iraq's counterterrorism forces. Germany and Canada, for instance, have already announced they are removing part of their small contingents due to current insecurity, though France is planning to remain.

In contrast, if the United States upped its game in Iraq – not just militarily but also politically and economically – then burden-sharing with allies would likely be enhanced. Moreover, the broader goal of the Western military presence in Iraq is to tackle some of the issues that laid the groundwork for the Islamic State's emergence: namely, insecurity, Sunni marginalisation, and absence of economic development. This helps explain why European capitals have reacted so cautiously to Soleimani's assassination, pointing out his initial responsibility for the escalation while also calling on all parties to de-escalate going forward.

AIR

David Pollock is the Bernstein Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. © Washington Institute, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



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Anti-social media

Antisemitism? There's an app for that.

by Naomi Levin

There is a good chance you haven't spent a lot of time on the social media app TikTok.

Unless you like watching videos of young people lip-synching to pop music or dancing through a shopping centre, it probably isn't for you.

However, its popularity is growing. The Chinese-owned video app has been downloaded more than 1.5 billion times globally, and in 2019, it was downloaded more times than Facebook or Instagram.

TikTok has also joined the ranks of social media apps which are hosting antisemitic content.

Research published in December by *Vice* discovered TikTok posts lauding neo-Nazi groups and recent perpetrators of hate crimes, individuals making Nazi salutes for the camera and accounts that featured offensive caricatures of Jewish people.

Follow up investigations by *HuffPost* found that controversial far-right figures, who had been banned from Facebook and Twitter for posting hateful content, were active on TikTok.

The *Australia/Israel Review* confirmed this and found TikTok videos featuring far-right extremists Alex Jones, Paul Joseph Watson and followers of the hate group Proud Boys, which has a presence in Australia.

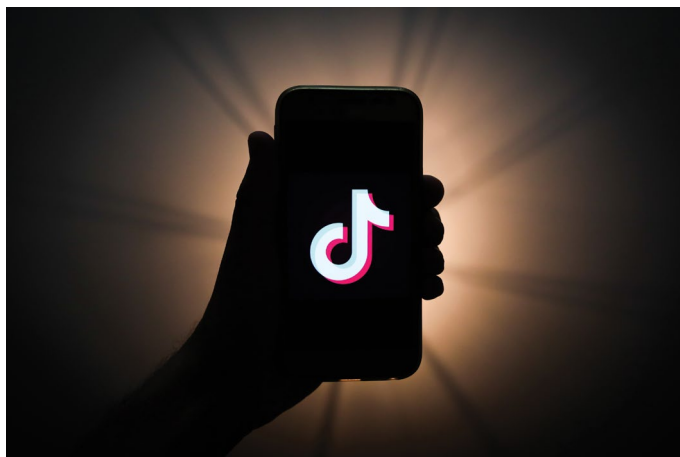
TikTok is not alone in hosting antisemitic and other hateful content.

Music streaming app Spotify – 250 million users globally – was recently caught up in a similar scandal involving user-generated playlists.

While much of the music contained in these playlists was mainstream tunes, users gave the playlists obscene names like “Getting gassed with Anne Frank”, “Auschwitz train singalong” and “Kill the Jews”.

After a report in the *Times of Israel* highlighted this content, which was often accompanied by offensive imagery uploaded by users, the Sweden-based music streaming service announced it would remove playlists with hateful names.

Meanwhile, efforts are continuing to force Facebook, Google and Twitter to delete the accounts of individuals and bots that spread hate daily.



The video sharing app TikTok has become an unwitting host to racist trolls

For young people navigating the world via social media, hate speech seems to be unavoidable. According to Australia's Office of the E-Safety Commissioner, more than 50% of young people have seen or heard hateful comments about a cultural or religious group online.

Combating hate speech on social media has proved an almost insurmountable challenge. Efforts are being made, but as fast as accounts are taken down, new ones emerge.

In response to inquiries about why it hosts hateful

content, TikTok told *HuffPost*: “There is absolutely no place for discrimination, including hate speech, on this platform.”

And in TikTok's defence, the *Australia/Israel Review* believes much of the material that is easiest to find has been removed. A search on TikTok for a range of offensive hashtags or account names associated with antisemitism brings up no results apart from the following message: “This phrase may be associated with hateful behaviour. TikTok is committed to keeping our community safe and working to prevent the spread of hate. For more information, we invite you to review our community guidelines.”

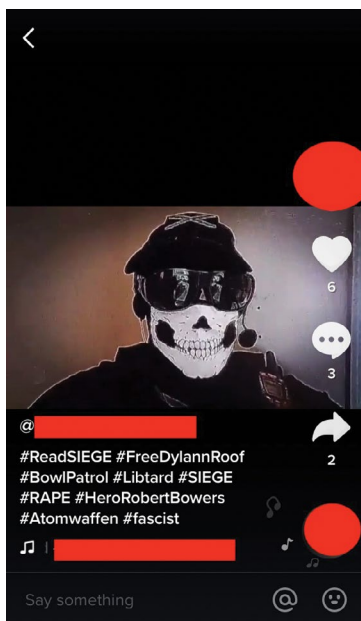
Spotify too has battled with the haters.

Spotify said it would remove the identified content reported above, adding, “The user-generated content in question violates

our policy and is in the process of being removed. Spotify prohibits any user content that is offensive, abusive, defamatory, pornographic, threatening or obscene.”

Yet they clearly hadn't got it all. The *Australia/Israel Review* came across playlists titled “Zionist Occupied Government” and “Killuminati: Music to conspire to anti-NWO/Rothschild Zionist”. Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG) and NWO, or New World Order, are both common antisemitic conspiracy theories.

Spotify's policy is to remove hate content from its



A White Supremacist meme since removed from TikTok

platform, but it seemingly relies on the public to alert the company to its presence, rather than proactively taking down such content. This is, unfortunately, the case with many social media companies.

“2019 will unfortunately be remembered as the year terrorists live streamed themselves conducting hideous massacres”

One thing is for sure though, as quickly as the tech companies behind social media offerings remove hate content, it pops up again in different accounts, often with coded and convoluted messages designed to evade automatic filters.

Meanwhile, the “legacy” social media companies – Facebook, Twitter and Google, which also owns YouTube – are improving their approach towards halting the distribution of hateful content, but there is a very long way to go.

2019 will unfortunately be remembered as the year terrorists live streamed themselves conducting hideous massacres. The most infamous perpetrator was Brenton Tarrant, who is charged with committing the Christchurch mosque massacre in March. Tarrant’s broadcast was emulated by the synagogue shooters in both Halle, Germany and California, USA.

Facebook removed 1.5 million copies of Tarrant’s video of the Christchurch mosque massacres. A further 4.4 million pieces of content related to the terrorist attack were removed from the platform in the following four months. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur synagogue shooting in Halle, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which counts Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and YouTube as its members, swiftly acted to remove related video that appeared on any of their platforms.

However, a recent report by the Online Hate Prevention Institute (OHPI) found that Google failed to completely remove material related to the 2019 terrorist incidents, even after comprehensive requests to do so. It also found that material from these massacres continues to circulate on other, more fringe, social media sites such as Twitch, 8Chan and Gab.

Following the Christchurch massacre, the Australian Government legislated to provide the Office of the E-Safety Commissioner with the power to issue takedown notices to tech companies that host material showing a murder or attempted murder, a terrorist act, a torture, rape or kidnapping. These notices have been used a number of times since the legislation passed, according to the OHPI.

In a related process, the E-Safety Commissioner also referred the Christchurch manifesto and video to the Australian Classification Board, which subsequently banned it from distribution.

In the United States, where many of the biggest tech companies are based, Jewish representatives are continuing to push for necessary and ongoing reform.

A quick Twitter search brings up inflammatory content blaming the “Zionist occupied government” for all sorts of evils, from communism to the watering down of US gun laws. Another tweet calls for the Holocaust to “go on” with the hashtag #holohoax, and others spread rubbish about the “real death toll” from the Holocaust.

Meanwhile, Facebook and YouTube continue to broadcast the “TruNews” channel.

TruNews videos claim that the impeachment of US President Donald Trump is a “Jew coup” to install a “Jewish cabal”. Among a list of antisemitic garbage too long to mention, it also accuses the “synagogue of Satan” of decimating American culture through things like TV shows, homosexuality and hip hop music.

During January, the US Jewish community took its fight to Congress. Jonathan Greenblatt, the chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), told a Congressional hearing that government needs to step in. While progress has been made toward removing hate speech, the companies themselves have not gone far enough.



ADL head Jonathan Greenblatt testifies on social media hate speech to US Congress

“It’s long overdue for the social media companies to step up and shut down the neo-Nazis on their platforms,” Greenblatt told Congress. “Companies like Twitter and Facebook need to apply the same energy to protecting vulnerable users that they apply to protecting their corporate profits.”

Speaking at the same hearing, Nathan Diament from the US Orthodox Union called for artificial intelligence technology to be used to remove antisemitic and other hateful content.

Online hate is a Pandora’s box where the ugliness seems endless. As quickly as one hateful post or account is deleted, a dozen seem to pop up in their place. Legislators, regulators, research and advocacy organisations and concerned individuals will have to leave their game in 2020 if the fight to limit the spread and perniciousness of online hate is to make any significant progress.

THE HATE GOES ON

by Ran Porat

Despite being exposed several times as a platform publishing extremism and antisemitism, *Farah News*, the Arabic-language Australian website, shows no signs of changing its ways. On the contrary, the disturbing trend of featuring such content has continued in full force over recent months.

As I documented in the September 2019 edition of the *AIR*, *Farah News Online* (www.farah.net.au) is a Sydney-based news portal in Arabic and English featuring almost exclusively non-original content previously published in Middle Eastern media. According to external analytic platforms, thousands of people visit the website monthly while its Facebook page had more than 17,000 followers as of November 2019.

Events in the Middle East are subject to widely disseminated conspiracy theories in the Arabic media there, and *Farah News* provides an Australian podium for such stories, including many with an antisemitic flavour. For example, which article was chosen to discuss the killing on January 3 of Iranian arch-terrorist Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force? An "analysis" by Syrian commentator Dr. Mouaffaq Mustafa Alsibai', the author of several antisemitic texts published on *Farah News*, portraying the Jews as evil, corrupt and seeking world domination.

Alsibai' writes that Soleimani was "an American agent par excellence", while "[t]he relationship between America and Iran is intimate, organic, and has all serenity and endless friendliness !!!" The aim of both countries, he says, is "To eliminate Islam and Muslims and preserve the Israeli entity in Palestine [...by] looking forward to the battle of Armageddon, and the descent of the Antichrist, in order to eliminate the Muslims and [so] the Jews and

their helpers win !!!"

Abdel Rahman: The Jews are Turkish Khazars seeking world domination

Egyptian writer Amr Abdel Rahman is a regular columnist published on *Farah News*. As noted in my previous report, he is an admirer of conspiracy theories and does not shy away from overt antisemitism. Abdel Rahman claimed, for example, that Iran and Israel are conspiring together to control the Middle East, that Israel created and operates ISIS, and that the Jewish Rothschild banking family controls the world.

The same themes reappeared with a vengeance in two of his latest masterpieces. The first appeared on *Farah News* on Sept. 20 and was titled "How does America manage to ignite a mock war between the cousins [Iranians and Israelis] over the body of the Arabs!?" The second, republished on *Farah News* on Nov. 16, dealt with the killing of ISIS chief Abu Bakr al Baghdadi by US forces in late October.

In these texts, Abdel Rahman creates an imaginary world full of antisemitic fables. At the core of his stories is an expansion of the controversial 1976 book *The Thirteenth Tribe* by Arthur Koestler, which falsely suggested that European Jews (known as Ashkenazi Jews) originated from the Turkish Khazar people, and thus have no connection with the Jews of ancient and biblical history. The fact that this theory has been refuted many times over with numerous different forms of evidence

does not stop Abdel Rahman from enthusiastically adopting it, plus attributing to the Ashkenazi Jews/Khazars supernatural evil powers and vast influence over world history.

"The pagan [Khazar] elite infiltrated north into Europe, penetrated its thrones, controlled its church with its money and invented the Zionist Protestant doctrine, destroying the original Catholic faith of Europe in this era. The Khazars blended the doctrine of the originally corrupted Bani Zion [Jews] in one melting pot with the Hindu Vedic [religion] and added to it the rituals of pagan human



Amr Abdel Rahman



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sacrifices, to bring out [into] the world the mystical religion of the Khazar Jews.” The Talmud was used to create the “false” basis for Zionism, a movement which is “enemy of humanity and religion,” he adds. Even the Ottoman Turks were actually Khazar Jews, he claims.

According to Abdel Rahman’s delusionary scheme, Israel today uses its power in collusion with the US, UK, Iran and the Gulf states to impose their control on the Muslim world. This is done by evoking “artificial conflicts” between Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims, and by initiating the “Hebrew Spring”- the mass popular uprisings in the Arab world which started in 2011, otherwise generally referred to as the “Arab Spring”.

Both the Iranians and the Jews, argues Abdel Rahman vehemently, are “Aryan” cousin nations and this is why Teheran “open[ed] the doors of Iraq to Zionist and American colonisation.” The Iranian attack on Saudi oil installations on Sept. 14 was actually “secretly coordinated between the Pentagon and the US intelligence and Tel Aviv and Teheran,” Abdel Rahman insists.

Abdel Rahman’s doomsday fantasy does not stop there: the terrorist organisations ISIS and al-Qaeda are also pawns in this conspiratorial game, he says. The late ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was really a Mossad agent named “Shimon Elliot”, and he was not really killed in the US raid because Israel does not kill its own people. The reported new ISIS leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, is also part of the same ploy, he insists.

Similarly, al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden is not really dead, since he was really working for the US government. NATO is also involved in the ploy, while leading Western media platforms are controlled by UK and US foreign intelligence agencies “to promote the scenario of lies and Zionist media terrorism to distort Islam and all the messages of heaven,” in Abdel Rahman’s telling.

Al-Dola: Holocaust denial and “racist Zionism”

Another Egyptian featured as a *Farah News* contributor is Muhammad Saif al-Dola – an Islamist with extreme anti-Israeli views. He is the founder of the movement “Egyptians against Zionism” and has ties to the Islamic Labour Party, which in the past was connected to the now-outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Dola held a senior advisory position under Muhammad Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood leader who was briefly Egypt’s President in 2012-2013. The titles of his publications and lectures include: “Oh my son, this is our Zionist enemy” and “We will not recognise Israel.”

Farah News chose to provide its readers with al-Dola’s series of articles titled: “Palestine and the Israeli lies” (Sept. 1 and 9), originally published in the Egyptian *Al-Shaab* (“The People”) newspaper, affiliated with the Islamic Labour Party.

The aim of the articles, explains al-Dola, is to review

the “enormous arsenal of myths, myths and lies that the Zionist movement unleashed to mislead world public opinion. These are false myths that are unmatched in their falsity, incompetence and misinformation.” His “research” is based on what al-Dola labels “a few elite Western thinkers,” listing Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy, anti-Zionist British Marxist John Rose, author of *Myths of Zionism and Israel: The Hijack State*, as well as the extreme anti-Zionist Israeli-born academic, Ilan Pappé.

The articles list assumptions, ideas and theories related to Zionism and Judaism which al-Dola then attempts to refute. For example, “the racist myth about [Jews being] God’s chosen people. Its incitement to the ethnic cleansing of non-Jews, [on] which contemporary Zionist rabbis base all their Fatwas [rulings] legitimising killing and liquidating Palestinians.” Antisemitism, he argues, “was nationalised and monopolised by the Zionist movement in its favour and considered that the Jews are the only persecuted race in the world – it is a very racist position.”

From there, al-Dola rapidly slides down the ugly and slippery road of Holocaust denial. He talks about “the myth of the Holocaust” and “the lie of hostility between Zionism and Nazism”, insisting there was “cooperation between Hitler and the leaders of the Zionist movement.” Finally, the number of Jewish victims in the Holocaust was “exaggerated and overblown.”

In his view, “the Hebrews” of the bible were a tribe that historically assimilated into other nations, and they are not related to “European Zionists who settle Palestine today.” The origins of the latter? You guessed it: the Khazars. “But despite all these hard facts”, insists al-Dola, “the Zionist movement and Western colonialism invoked the name of one of these extinct groups of history and fabricated false stories, history and myths around them to justify their colonial settlement project to usurp Palestine.”

The theme repeats itself when al-Dola discusses (in his second article) the Israeli Law of Return (which awards immigration rights to Israel to all Jews). The basis for this law, says al-Dola, is “the strangest and most trivial allegations. All that they say about the Babylonian exile and the so-called diaspora are nothing but myths.”



Muhammad Saif al-Dola

“Al-Dola rapidly slides down the ugly and slippery road of Holocaust denial. He talks about ‘the myth of the Holocaust’ and ‘the lie of hostility between Zionism and Nazism’”

Part two of the series is focused on “modern Israel lies”, which are “a series of myths and lies that surrounded Palestine and its cause, promoted the occupation and justified or colluded with it.” In the “analysis” that follows, al-Dola simply repeats well-known anti-Israeli fabrications such as that Israel is “merely an advanced strategic military base for the West led by the Americans” and “the largest and most dangerous terrorist entity in the region.”

Al-Dola is especially aggressive in his attack on Israeli democracy. “The lie of the ‘oasis of Israeli democracy’ testifies to its lie of hundreds of massacres, war crimes, genocide, murder and assassination that the Zionist forces have not stopped committing against the Arabs in Palestine and abroad since before the 1948 war to this day.” While Israeli Arabs suffer “utmost racism”, the relations of Jewish citizens of Israel and the state “are governed by the laws of pirates and thieves, which stipulate the legitimacy of killing and looting others, while applying the rules of fair distribution of spoils among themselves,” he insists.

The reality of blatant and open antisemitism being disseminated over a long period by this Australian website in Arabic is beyond dispute. In response to the work exposing their dangerous editorial policy, *Farah News*’ editors have recently elected to personally attack me for accurately documenting what they are unequivocally doing, instead of taking responsibility for their own actions and following the laws and minimum standards expected of an Australian media outlet. This is yet another reason why Australian authorities should be investigating *Farah News*. AIR

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THE MERGING MARGINS OF ISRAELI POLITICS

by Amotz Asa-Ei

Israel was searching its soul and licking its wounds in the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War when the late Labor Party firebrand Shulamit Aloni (1927-2014) split away from her political home and established her own party to run in the December 1973 election. She won three Knesset seats.

Assertive, defiant, and eloquent, the Polish-born anti-clerical crusader challenged the ruling party’s long-standing alliance with religious parties, demanding civil

marriages be introduced, as well as the establishment of a Palestinian state and the expansion of social spending.

Her party, then called by the acronym Ratz (“Running”) and later Meretz (“Energy”), became the emblem of the ideological left and a fixture in the Knesset, peaking in 1992 with 12 of its 120 seats.

That achievement made Meretz a major partner in the Labor-led Rabin Government that produced the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Meretz took pride in its impact, and claimed, convincingly, that the ruling Labor party had adopted its smaller sibling’s point of view, and thus was now rewriting the history of Israel and the Middle East.

Twenty-seven years on, the two siblings, Labor and Meretz – now both threatened with electoral extinction – have returned to each other’s arms. This election they are running under a joint ticket called Emet (Truth), with brave hopes to restore the political relevance of the Israeli left.



Israel’s new left-wing alliance: Labor’s Amir Peretz and Meretz’s Nitzan Horowitz

Between them, the two leaders of this new formation bring to the table pretty much everything one could hope for in a left-liberal political ticket.

Labor’s Amir Peretz, 67, is a former chairman of the Histadrut labour federation, a position in which he earned respect, even among the corporate tycoons he confronted daily, as an authentic and effective representative of the working class.

Meretz’s Nitzan Horowitz, 54, is an environmental activist and LGBT rights crusader who is himself openly gay. He has been well-known and popular since the 1980s due to his journalistic career, particularly during his long years as foreign editor on *Channel 10* TV news.

Their social backgrounds also complement one another. The Moroccan-born Peretz arrived in Israel with his parents as a child, and is a resident – and former mayor – of Sderot, the working class city facing the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip that has borne much of the brunt of the repeated violence emanating from there. Peretz, therefore, represents both the social and geographic periphery.

Horowitz, by contrast, is a native of affluent Rishon Lezion south of Tel Aviv, a trained lawyer and media celebrity who, in his thirties, was the Washington correspondent for the broadsheet *Haaretz*. He is therefore seen as a representative of Israel's urban, secular, liberal elites.

In addition, the joint Labor-Meretz ticket also includes Maj-Gen (res) Yair Golan, until recently the IDF's deputy chief of staff, and lawyer Orly Levy-Abekasis, a popular social activist and prolific lawmaker who is also the daughter of former foreign minister David Levy. The elder Levy, now 82, was once a major leader of the centre-right Likud party and symbol of its working class and peripheral support base.

These names and the rest of Emet's roster should be very electorally promising – if not for the crisis of its left-wing ideology, both internationally and locally.

Internationally, left-leaning parties are under threat throughout the West, as seen most recently in Britain's general election, where Labour was trounced, and before that in Australia, Germany and France. The global quest for "compassionate capitalism" in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial meltdown seems to have produced a populist resurgence rather than a socialist renaissance.

The Israeli left's effort in recent years to seize the political agenda and woo mainstream voters has focused on a vigorous campaign criticising the government's handling of Israel's major new offshore gas finds. But this has not succeeded.

This campaign claimed that the offshore gas fields would be undertaxed, and outsourced to a monopoly that will rob the public of what should be a possession of the Israeli people as a whole.

The Government, however, has raised the level of royalties from the gas field, divided the fields among competing developers, allied with Cyprus and Greece to pipe gas to Europe, and struck multi-billion-dollar export deals with

Egypt and Jordan, both of which began receiving Israeli gas in January.

The public seems largely content with this, and unconvinced by the economic left's contention that they are being robbed of their rightful dividends from the gas bonanza.

Israel's gas saga is a microcosm of the economic left's failure almost everywhere to convince middle class voters that it has the solutions for the current crises of employment, taxation, opportunity, and equality.

Yet the Israeli left's woes have been compounded by the uniquely Israeli context of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Oslo Accords that Labor and Meretz delivered last century are seen today by most Israelis as a failure – including by many who voted in 1992 for Yitzhak Rabin, who signed them, and those who voted in 1999 for Ehud Barak, who went on to lead the failed peace negotiations with Yasser Arafat in 2000-2001.

Labor has not only failed to win an election since 1999, it has steadily shrunk from 44 Knesset seats in 1992 to a mere six in last September's election, only one seat more than its historic satellite, Meretz, whose following has also been more than halved over the same period.

Pundits agree the crisis experienced by both parties reflects the Israeli mainstream's shift toward the centre-right, now represented by the Knesset's largest faction, the new Blue and White party led by former IDF chief of staff Benny Gantz.

Efforts by Labor leaders in recent years to downplay any expectation of a comprehensive deal with the Palestinians in the foreseeable future have failed to impress voters. Oslo is perceived as a failure and trauma that spawned much violence – and as Labor's responsibility.

Peretz's career is an embodiment of Labor's predicament.

Originally a peace enthusiast and a member of the late Shimon Peres's inner circle, Peretz has been identified for decades with Labor's left flank not only on social and economic issues, but also in terms of advocacy of a sweeping peace deal with the Palestinians.

Subsequent events, however, including a stint as defence minister that ended after the inconclusive Second Lebanon War of 2006, made Peretz conclude that Labor must move to the centre, and thus avoid an alliance with

"With polls suggesting that both Labor and Meretz were in danger of not passing the electoral threshold of 3.25% in the upcoming poll on March 2, pressure mounted in both parties to run together"



Amir Peretz previously served as a minister in Ehud Olmert's government

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Meretz. Circumstances, however, ultimately militated against his stance.

With polls suggesting that both Labor and Meretz were in danger of not passing the electoral threshold of 3.25% in the upcoming poll on March 2, pressure mounted in both parties to run together. Most effective was an emphatic public call for a joint run from Avraham Shochat, now 83, a respected party veteran who served as finance minister in the governments of Rabin, Peres and Barak.

The joint ticket guarantees the Emet party will be comfortably above the electoral threshold, but a scenario whereby it becomes a major player in the aftermath of the March 2 election is still difficult to imagine.

Polls suggest it will garner perhaps 10 seats, and coalition arithmetic suggests it can at best hope to become a third wheel in a Blue and White-led coalition that will also have to include conservative parties like former defence minister Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beitenu, or Interior Minister Aryeh Deri's Shas.

In the more likely scenario whereby it will be relegated to the opposition, Labor and Meretz will have to spend the upcoming years attempting to modernise and reformulate their plans for delivering prosperity to the working class, dignity to the downtrodden, and peace in our time.

Yet one ray of light supporters of the Emet alliance can point to is the mutual respect between Labor's Peretz and Meretz's Horowitz.

In a curious inversion of these dynamics, the Israeli political parties at the opposite end of the spectrum have also merged, but the outcome looks more like a bag of angry cats than a harmonious whole.

The story began when Education Minister Rafi Peretz (no relation to Labor's leader), leader of Orthodox-nationalist Bayit Yehudi ("Jewish Home"), coopted Otzma Yehudit ("Jewish Power"), an extreme-right party linked with disciples of the late racial demagogue Rabbi Meir Kahane. Before being shot dead in 1990 by an Egyptian-American in New York, Kahane's platform was found to be racist by the Knesset and then the Israeli Supreme Court, thus barring him from running for re-election.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu pushed hard for a merger between Peretz's expanded party and Defence Minister Naftali Bennett's New Right, a combination of secular and religious nationalists who advocate the West Bank be fully integrated into Israel. Netanyahu feared that one or more of the parties to the right of Likud could fail to pass the electoral threshold, thus wasting votes crucial to any hope he has of forming a stable coalition government.

Bennett however refused to play by Netanyahu's script and said he would join Peretz only if he undid his alliance with Otzma and its leader, maverick lawyer Itamar Ben-



Naftali Bennett and Rafi Peretz: Main players in the new right-wing Yemina alliance

Gvir. As Bennett publicly noted, Ben-Gvir notoriously has a photo hanging on the wall of his living room of Baruch Goldstein, the extremist physician who in 1994 massacred 29 innocent Muslim worshippers in a Hebron mosque before himself being killed.

Asking rhetorically "how illogical can this get," Bennett compared running alongside Ben-Gvir to tolerating an American congressman having a photo in his living room of a man who massacred Jews in a synagogue. Ridiculing the situation, Ben-Gvir said in a prime-time TV interview that he was willing to remove the photo from his living room wall for the sake of the nation's future.

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In the end, Rabbi Peretz, facing Netanyahu's pressure from one side and Bennett's firm resistance from the other, ultimately surrendered to Bennett. Their two parties, Jewish Home and New Right, along with Transport Minister Bezalel Smotrich's National Union party, will therefore run on a joint ticket called Yemina ("Rightward") without Otzma. Relations between its three leaders – Bennett, Peretz and Smotrich – are frosty at best.

Forecast to garner up to 10 seats, this formation, too, is expected to be an auxiliary to someone else's main act – in their case, Netanyahu's and his Likud party.

These automatic affiliations are reflected in the responses of the two new alliances to Netanyahu's request that the outgoing Knesset grant him immunity from facing a trial on corruption charges in three cases until he leaves office.

Labor-Meretz is fully on side with Blue and White's efforts to get the current Knesset to take up, and then reject, Netanyahu's request. Yemina is fully in sync with Netanyahu's immunity demand specifically, with his plans to delay the process of considering his request until after the March 2 election, and with his quest to remain in power generally.

In a nutshell, these entrenched attitudes on the opposite sides of the rearranged political spectrum represent what many Israelis feel their third election in 11 months is all about.

AIR

AMIA AND THE NEW ARGENTINIAN GOVERNMENT

by Ariel Hefetz

Latin America, and particularly, Argentina, has not missed out on the emerging trend of populism in the politics of various regions around the world. In the 2019 presidential and congressional elections, the populist Peronist Party managed to regain power after four years of governance by the Centre Coalition, "Juntos por el Cambio", which was widely regarded as unsuccessful.

Now, the Argentinian Jewish community, and indeed the wider Jewish world, is grappling with the implications of this new Government for the long-stalled investigation into the murderous mass-terror attack on the Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) Jewish community building in 1994. There is ample evidence that this attack, which killed 85 people, was executed by Iran and its Lebanese terror proxy, Hezbollah, yet no one has ever been brought to justice for this atrocity after numerous investigations.

THE DUAL HEAD-OF-STATE SYSTEM

The rule of Peronism is not a new phenomenon in Argentina, but its return to political centre stage is slightly different this time around.

Despite its lack of success, the Centre Coalition led the first non-Peronist government since the fall of the military regime in 1983 which managed to complete its four-year term. The Peronists had either early elections or an early government transition date in all previous such governments, largely by orchestrating unrest on the streets through Peronist union leaders.

In the new Peronist Government, for the first time ever, the strongest political figure in power is not the President, Alberto Fernandez, but rather the Vice President, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, Argentina's former president (2007-2015). Kirchner personally picked Fernandez to be the heir to her throne as the leader of the party (as she herself publicly announced in May 2019).

Fernandez was chosen after Kirchner realised that her controversial candidacy for re-election as President was unlikely to succeed, and instead a person presenting (at least apparently) more moderate views was required in order to secure an election victory.

It should be noted that President Fernandez is not Kirchner's puppet.

Fernandez was the chief of staff in the President's office for six years and angrily left government following intense disagreements over policy with Kirchner and her late husband, Nestor Kirchner (who was also president from

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One Government, two power-bases: President Alberto Fernandez and Vice President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner

2003 to 2007). Moreover, while in private life, Fernandez bluntly criticised the behaviour of Kirchner and her government using sometimes colourful language.

Since taking office early in December 2019, Fernandez has broadcast messages of reconciliation and moderation, in stark contrast with the hard-line, in-your-face partisan style of Kirchner. But the situation is complex.

In order to gradually create an independent political base for himself, Fernandez presents a somewhat more centrist line, distancing himself – but only at times – from the ideologically “leftist” extremist policies advocated

“A difficult relationship between the Jewish community and the new Government, complicated by the disparate elements within it, looks very likely”

by the more vocal part of Kirchner’s camp. Following the same reasoning, Fernandez has been taking pragmatic steps – reforming pension funds, for example – to improve Argentina’s financial status ahead of upcoming negotiations about the country’s foreign debts.

At the same time, Fernandez is sharing the “spoils” that come with the office of president, handing jobs to Kirchner’s allies and close associates, particularly within law-related institutions that can influence the legal fate of the Vice President and her children.

Kirchner – and in some cases, her two children – is facing a long list of law suits which could translate into damages worth billions of dollars. Among the scandals and alleged felonies tied to Kirchner are corruption, bribery, money laundering, breach of trust and heading a crime syndicate actively abusing public money. However, she is not expected to be arrested as long as she enjoys parliamentary immunity. It is no wonder that the new Government has placed her loyal-

ists in key positions within the Ministries of Justice and of Internal Security and in the Argentinian Central Intelligence Agency (which is focused more on political intrigue than national intelligence).

AMIA

This *modus vivendi* being forged between Fernandez and Kirchner has important implications for both the AMIA investigation and for the investigation into the 2015 violent death of the Special Prosecutor in the AMIA case, Alberto Nisman.

In 2004, 20 years after the terrorist attack, and under the Presidency of Nestor Kirchner, Nisman was appointed to examine the AMIA attack. In 2006, he formally accused the government of Iran of directing the AMIA bombing, and Hezbollah of carrying it out.

However, his efforts increasingly clashed with the priorities of the Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner government, especially after the government signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran in 2013 to jointly investigate the AMIA bombing.

In January 2015, Nisman was shot dead only a few hours before a scheduled appearance before the Argentinian Congress. In his never to be heard testimony, Nisman was expected to substantiate an indictment he was filing against Kirchner for her alleged agreement with Iran to discontinue the AMIA investigation in exchange for a renewal of full-fledged economic and political relations between the two countries. Nisman was found dead in his apartment with a bullet wound to the head, after the security team assigned to protect him around the clock had ceased all contact with him 24 hours earlier.

The crime scene was then allegedly tampered with by the same officials who were supposed to be investigating it.

It appears that a process of disrupting any chance of exposing the truth with regards to Nisman’s assassination may have resumed under the new (old) government, and will presumably escalate as time goes by.



Special Prosecutor Alberto Nisman: Shot dead in 2015

A negative sign is the appointment of Sabina Frederic, one of Kirchner's closest allies, as Internal Security Minister. Even before officially taking office, Frederic – perhaps knowing the position of the incoming President – harshly criticised the decision of the previous Macri Government in July 2019 to include Hezbollah in Argentina's list of restricted terrorist groups, depicting it as “buying a problem which is not our own but rather a NATO problem.”



Internal Security Minister Sabina Frederic: A controversial appointment

This argument is particularly strange considering the fact Argentina suffered two Iran-related terror attacks with more than one hundred innocent deaths (AMIA and the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires). In both cases, there is ample evidence Hezbollah was involved. Following pressure from Israel and the United States, Frederic retracted her words, claiming she was quoted out of context. Hezbollah remains on Argentina's terror list, at least for now.

Frederic is also allegedly involved in a more direct attempt to interfere in the investigation into the real circumstances of Nisman's demise.

Once again, based on receiving approval from President Fernandez, she formally announced her intention to “procedurally” review the investigation conducted by experts of the criminology lab of the Border Patrol Force. That investigation had determined that Nisman was indeed murdered, contradicting a report by a Supreme Court-appointed expert which said it would be impossible to ever conclude with certainty what circumstances led to the Special Prosecutor's death. In Argentina, the Supreme Court is notorious for its tendency to toe the current government's line.

More recently, Buenos Aires has not responded to the elimination of Iran's Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani a few weeks ago. The latter was directly engaged in the exporting of the “Islamic Revolution” and responsible in recent years for the creation and coordination between Teheran and multiple Iranian-sponsored terror organisations world-wide, including Hezbollah.

This silence is likely evidence of the delicate balance struck between the two people currently in power in Argentina. However, as the country struggles to reposition

itself on the international stage, internal political struggles related to the AMIA terror attack may resurface and even accelerate.

THE POSITION OF THE ARGENTINIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

The leadership of the Argentinian Jewish community, like many Jewish communities around the world, is forced to walk a fine line in search of an equilibrium between contradictory demands.

Jewish leaders must attend to the Jewish social sphere, supply economic welfare to families of lesser means, while maintaining Jewish identity. At the same time, Argentinian Jews both want and need to belong to the wider society in their country, even as they are fending off antisemitic accusations against them, for example, of “dual loyalty” (to Israel and/or the Jewish people).

Within these pressing constraints, the Jewish community has kept completely silent about the killing of Soleimani, despite the latter's direct affiliation with terrorist attacks similar to the ones committed in Argentina in the 1990s against AMIA and the Israeli embassy.

On the other hand, the heads of the community have launched a coordinated effort to convince the new Argentinian Government to keep Hezbollah on the country's list of terrorist organisations (despite what Frederic had previously urged).

In addition, they have responded to some statements by public figures with an antisemitic flavour.

One example is a statement issued on Dec. 30 by Vice President Kirchner in memory of the late Foreign Minister, Hector Timerman, who was Jewish. Kirchner was the president and Timerman the foreign minister when the alleged agreement with Iran to keep silent about AMIA was being forged. In 2017, Timerman was detained and placed under house arrest for allegedly helping cover up Iran's role in the bombing.

In her statement, Kirchner described Timerman as someone who “put above all [the fact] that he was an Argentinian citizen and his love for the homeland.”

Another more glaring example was the Twitter post by Leopoldo Moreau, a member of Congress, representing the governing party, arguing that the claim that Special Prosecutor Nisman was murdered was actually “a well-planned global marketing action, initiated by the State of Israel, the American right, and the big creditors of Argentina and their local accomplices.”

A difficult relationship between the Jewish community and the new Government, complicated by the disparate elements within it, looks very likely – with the long struggle over justice for both AMIA and Nisman at its centre. AIR

Ariel Hefetz is a former IDF senior intelligence analyst who was born in Argentina.



Antisemitism and Irrationality

Fighting Jew-hatred requires recognising its persistent appeal

by Deborah E. Lipstadt

Recently a well-educated, accomplished man, the CEO of a Fortune 500 company – one of America’s most successful corporate entities – attended a seminar I gave on antisemitism. After my presentation, he raised his hand and, with a perplexed tone in his voice, observed: “Jews are so smart, so accomplished... How is it that they have not been able to solve this problem of antisemitism?”

I told him that his question, sincere as it certainly was, was aimed in the wrong direction. He should not be asking the victim of racial prejudice to solve that problem. He should be asking the perpetrator.

On Jan. 5, at the rally and march against antisemitism held in New York, I found myself walking next to a woman who carried a sign: “This Catholic Hates Antisemitism.” When I thanked her for being there, she responded: “It’s more our problem than yours.”

The purveyors of this hate and hostility should be the ones who bear the onus of having to resolve the issue. It is the rapist and not the person who has been raped who should have to supply the solution. Suffice it to say, antisemitism is a problem for all of us.

There is no easy solution to prejudice because it is an irrational senti-

ment. Prejudice: the etymology of the word itself is testimony to its irrationality: to *pre*-judge, to decide what a person’s qualities are long before meeting the person him or herself.

To put it more colloquially, the purveyor of prejudice encounters the stereotype even when the actual person is still 500 metres away. In other words, stereotypes exist independently of an individual’s actions.

That does not mean that a member of the group in question is immune from possessing the negative characteristics ascribed to the entire group. But when an individual’s wrongdoings are seen as characteristic of “the”

entire group, because “that is how *they* are,” we have entered the realm of prejudice.

If a person with blond hair were to do you wrong and you, as a result, condemned all people with blond hair, everyone would no doubt think it absurd. Why then, if a Jew or a person of colour does you wrong, do we not think antisemitism or racism absurd?

While antisemitism is a prejudice and, therefore, shares many of the characteristics of prejudice in general, it has certain unique characteristics that set it apart from these other hatreds.

First of all, it is a conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theorists find “culprits” to blame for something they oppose or find threatening. Those who subscribe to these theories tend to rely on familiar “enemies” – e.g. Jews – to give events that may seem inexplicable an intentional explanation. By picking a familiar or common enemy, their claims seem rational to the person who has heard these charges before.

Conspiracy theorists reflexively reject facts that contradict their narrative. Logic falls by the wayside and exaggerations, suspicions, and stereotypes predominate. Therefore, the committed antisemite will not be dissuaded by a demonstration that



Marching against antisemitism in New York on Jan. 5

they are subscribing to something irrational.

Secondly, antisemitism has another distinctive characteristic. Unlike other prejudices it comes from the right and from the left. Both rely on the same set of prejudices. It is the one place those on the left and those on the right meet in perfect harmony.

Thirdly, when one contrasts antisemitism to the prejudice of racism, yet another distinction emerges. The racism punches down, claiming that the person of colour is “lesser than,” “not as smart as,” or “not as industrious as” the person who is not of colour. Were they to move into “our” neighbourhoods or attend “our” schools, they will lessen the quality of the school or the neighbourhood. They will bring us down.

In contrast, the antisemite punches up. The Jew is “smarter than,” “more powerful than,” or “craftier than” the non-Jew. Therefore, the Jew is to be, not just opposed, but feared because of what they might do to the non-Jew.

Antisemitism makes people stupid. It is delusional, ascribing to Jews contradictory qualities. For example, according to antisemites, Jews are both capitalists and communists. Antisemites accuse Jews of being clannish and sticking together and, at the same time, charge them with being pushy and wanting to be accepted in circles that have no desire to accept them.

It is impossible to simultaneously be a communist *and* a capitalist, pushy *and* clannish. But that is logic. And prejudice defies logic.

Antisemitism is not something random. It is not disliking a Jew. It is disliking someone *because* they are a Jew. It is persistent and has a structure and a template.

Antisemitism began as anti-Judaism, as Christianity sought to differentiate itself from Judaism. It soon grew into a contempt, not just for the religion, but for the people who adhered to that religion. Jews were, not just marginalised, but seen as wilfully blind to the truth of the new faith.

By the Middle Ages Judaism had been rendered, no longer just a competing religion, but a font of evil and a danger to Christians. Christian anti-Judaism of the medieval period added a litany of additional accusations. Jews were charged with committing ritual murder, poisoning the wells to spread the Black Plague, profaning the “host”, engaging in sorcery and magic, and an array of other evil acts, all of which had the objective of harming non-Jews.

The striking aspect of antisemitism is the way it migrated out of the confines of the Church and was adopted and adapted by those who, not only were not affiliated with the Church, but were opposed to it. In the 18th century, Voltaire, an arch opponent of the church, said of the Jews, “You have surpassed all nations in impertinent fables, in bad conduct and in barbarism. You deserve to be punished, for this is your destiny.”

Karl Marx, a virulent critic of all religions, echoed those same accusations. Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists propagated the same hatred. The source of the hatred may have changed but the nature of the charges remained the same.

One of the most enduring and widely circulated antisemitic classics is *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This publication has been greatly responsible for reinforcing the notion of a Jewish conspiracy. Purporting to be the record of late 19th century deliberations of an unnamed group of Jewish “elders”, the *Protocols* “document” their intentions to control the world, its economies and political systems.

First published in its current form early in the 20th century by a supporter of the Russian Tsar, it, in fact, began life in the mid-19th century

as a tract having nothing to do with Jews. Jews were nowhere to be found in it.

When Tsarist supporter Sergei Nilus published the first version early in the 20th century (he subsequently reissued many other editions), the central characters were now Jews who, not only were determined to dominate non-Jews, but to corrupt their morals as well.

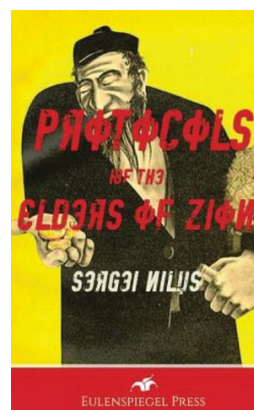
Car magnate Henry Ford published a half million copies in English and distributed them widely. (In the 1960s while on a visit to the home of Jordanian diplomats in Amman, I found a copy of the English version on his bookshelf. It was signed by Henry Ford and had been given to the diplomat’s father.)

Despite the fact that in 1921 the *Times* of London exposed the Protocols as a forgery concocted well before the time in which it was set, the publication continued and continues to have a life of its own.

Over the course of the 20th century, this forgery has been republished in German, French, Arabic and an array of other languages. It was used by Nazis to justify their antisemitic campaign. Teachers in the Third Reich used it as an historical document.

Today, in addition to becoming an element in anti-Israel attacks, it is broadly available throughout the world, including on Amazon. It reinforces all the conspiracy theories that have been the fulcrum upon which antisemitic hatred pivots.

A more recent iteration of antisemitism is Holocaust denial. Though deniers have no evidence, no witnesses, no narrative and no facts to support their claims, they assert that Jews were able to plant evidence, doctor documents, arrange for “survivors” to give false testimony and convince the Allies to hold war crimes trials that falsely charged defendants



The notorious *Protocols*:
Still widely available

with having committed genocide.

Think about it, for deniers to be right who would have to be wrong? Victims, bystanders who saw what was happening, thousands of historians, and, of course, the perpetrators.

According to the deniers' scenario, Jews used their power to compel Germany to accept responsibility for this massive crime and to pay billions in reparations to these "non-existent" victims. In addition, they have compelled the world to give them a state.

In this "explanation" of why the Jews have created this myth, one, once again, encounters the antisemitic template: money (reparations), power (forcing the world to give them a state), and nefarious intellect (being able to pull off such a massive hoax).

Today we see antisemitism emerging from both the right and the left. For some people on the progressive left, those who possess power cannot possibly be victims. Their view of prejudice is refracted through a prism that has two facets: class and race.

Someone who is wealthy or from a group that is considered wealthy and someone who is white or from a group that is considered white cannot be a victim. When Jews claim to be victims, these progressives dismiss their claims as invalid and as a means of subterfuge designed to deflect attention from other issues, e.g. Israel. Once again Jews have engaged in their devious ways using trickery and false accusations to accomplish their goals.

On the right, antisemitism comes from extremists and populists who, in contrast to those on the progressive left that I have described above, do not consider Jews to be white. These white supremacists believe that they are being subjected to a genocide of white Christians. Refugees, people of colour and others who are less talented and accomplished are pushing them out of their jobs and their positions.

The only rational way they have of explaining this development is that someone is engineering their "re-

placement." They find that culprit in "the" Jew, who, as per usual, acts in subterfuge, pulling the strings behind the scenes.

This is what the marchers in Charlottesville meant when they chanted, "Jews will not replace us." It is why the shooter in Pittsburgh, even after he was subdued by the SWAT team, told officers that he wanted all Jews to die because they were committing genocide against his (white) people.

It also comes from Islamist extremist and, sadly, increasingly from some segments – certainly not all – of Muslim communities who, while they do not engage in terror or even violence, are inculcated with a hatred of Jews. We see this in Europe in particular, often among new arrivals. I stress that this is symptomatic of *segments* of that community. Certainly not all.

Irrespective of whether these charges come from the right or the left, Christians, Muslims or atheists, they always rely on the same themes that we have repeatedly seen: the nefarious Jew, unscrupulously manipulating matters behind the scene, acting to his own advantage and to the detriment of the non-Jew, particularly the white Christian.

Ultimately, the hatred that is antisemitism can best be compared to a herpes virus, a disease that cannot be

cured. Just like this virus, it mutates and presents in different ways and in different parts of the body. Medication may ease the symptoms.

However, in its essence, it remains the same, always lurking beneath the surface ready to emerge at a time of stress. So too with antisemitism. It has taken vastly different forms. And it persists.

What then can we do about it? If it is irrational must we simply throw up our hands in defeat? I think not.

We must expose its conspiratorial, irrational, and delusional nature. We must challenge those who engage in it. We must familiarise ourselves with its history and understand the terrible consequences of ignoring it. There are no easy correctives, no magic pills, and no silver bullets. This fight might be one that can never result in total victory.

The roots of this hatred may be too deeply embedded to ever be fully eradicated. However, we must act as if we will be able to achieve that victory. The costs of not doing so are too great.

AIR

Deborah E. Lipstadt is Dorot Professor of Holocaust History at Emory University and the author of Antisemitism: Here And Now. The above is an edited version of testimony delivered by her before the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom on Jan. 8, 2020.

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THE MONTH IN MEDIA

2020 BEGINS ON A DOWNER

A surprising inclusion in the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* (Jan. 2) was the coverage given, as part of the release of Cabinet papers under the 20-year rule, to revelations that former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer in 1998 “feared Australia was seen as ‘overly supportive’ of Israel while it was isolated ‘in poor company’ supporting the Middle East nation in international forums.”

The *Canberra Times* (Jan. 1) also ran a report on the 1998 cabinet papers and included Downer telling his colleagues that Palestinian President Yasser “Arafat and the moderates around him remained the best bet for long-term peace, although terrorist groups such as Hamas [and] the Islamic Jihad were gaining support.”

Downer was not asked to comment for these stories, but it is clear as events in the Middle East played out, his views evolved.

Indeed, in a September 2003 interview with ABC Radio, Downer said “since, particularly, the Intifada has erupted, post the attempts by [US] President Clinton to deliver a Middle East peace agreement, Yasser Arafat has not played a constructive role. Yasser Arafat has failed to bring under control Hamas, he’s failed to stop the suicide homicide bombings into Israel and I think that’s tremendously disappointing.”

ED SPACE

On Jan. 15, the *Canberra Times* editorial made the interesting observation that “Taiwan shares with Israel and South Korea the distinction of being one of the few countries on earth which have lived with an existential threat from powerful, and sometimes

unpredictable, neighbours for many decades.”

On Jan. 1, *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* world editor Patrick Elligett’s list of potential areas of prospective flareup in the Middle East for 2020 sensibly excluded the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

OUT OF FRAME

SBS’s website (Jan. 15) ran a 56-second video story called “Journalist honoured” showing the completion of a mural in Gaza memorialising Italian photographer Simone Camilli and his colleague, who died during the 2014 war between Hamas and Israel.

An online caption said the mural marks the “site of the 2014 explosion that killed them during the Gaza-Israel war.”

Italian activist Layla Setabua explained Camilli “was hoping in [sic] a better future for Palestinian people... In fact for us it’s important to be in Gaza because for us is an act of solidarity with the Palestinian [sic].”

Neither the video nor the website included context to explain what happened.

Camilli tragically died whilst filming Gazan bomb disposal officers trying to defuse an unexploded bomb.

Most viewers would have drawn the incorrect conclusion that Camilli had died heroically during fighting or was targeted by Israel.

TALL TALES

Earlier, SBS’s website (Dec. 12) ran a short video report that was essentially a free promotion of the controversial United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the legally non-existent Palestinian right of return to Israel it promotes

The report focused on George Salameh who lives in Bethlehem, but whose family was originally from Jaffa – which became part of Israel during the 1948 war.

An on-screen graphic said, “His family and many others were made refugees following the Palestine war. His membership to UNRWA, the UN’s agency for Palestinian refugees guarantees his right to return to his family home of Jaffa.”

The exact details of the Salamehs’ departure from the mixed Jewish-Arab city of Jaffa are unknown, but the vast majority of its Arab population left voluntarily in the period after the UN Partition Plan was passed in November 1947 when Arab militias began attacking Jews, and before Israel’s independence was declared in May 1948.

In the video, Salameh said “UNRWA is our life insurance. It is an integral part of the rights of the Palestinian refugee. We are clinging to it because it is our sustenance, it is for protecting our rights. That is it.”

An onscreen graphic stated, “But Israel still refuses the right to return, fearing a loss in its Jewish majority.”

A *Reuters* news report elsewhere shows that Salameh was born in 1960, presumably in Bethlehem, long after the 1948 war – when the West Bank was under Jordanian rule. Since 1994, Bethlehem has been under Palestinian self-rule.

Why then is Salameh on UNRWA’s registry as a refugee? Because UNRWA lets Palestinians inherit refugee status from their parents, even if they hold citizenship in other countries. Even Palestinians residing in an area that is de facto under Palestinian rule, as Salameh does in Bethlehem, can be considered refugees.

This has led to the accusation that UNRWA, whose original mandate

was to resettle refugees from 1948, is perpetuating and expanding, rather than solving, the so-called Palestinian refugee problem.

Moreover, there is no legal right of return. UN General Assembly Resolution 194, passed in 1948, is sometimes cited as its legal basis – but was actually a recommended plan for a peace agreement, with absolutely no binding legal force. Among its provisions, it said, “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date.” The words “right of return” are not included and return was conditional on both willingness to live in peace and practicality – still a pipe dream after 70 years.

HIDDEN CHILD ABUSE

Itamar Marcus, director of the Israeli NGO Palestinian Media Watch, warned in the *Australian* (Jan. 9) that Palestinian children are taught from an early age to hate Israel and Jews and encouraged to embrace terror as a solution to the conflict, which he called a form of “child abuse.”

One of the examples Marcus cited was a video that appeared on the website of Fatah, the political group of Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas.

The video features “a little boy excitedly await[ing] a gift that his mother promised him for finishing his food. However, his mother shocks him: instead of handing him a toy she hands him a rifle. These are the appalling words that follow: ‘He shouted

loudly: ‘O Mummy! Mummy! What is this? Is this the gift?’”

“The mother picks him up, hugs him, and says, ‘My son, we were not created for happiness... They are cursed. Jerusalem is ours, our weapon is our Islam, and our ammunition is our children. And you, O my son, are meant for martyrdom.’”

The PA, Marcus wrote, “has been brainwashing Palestinian children to aspire to martyrdom for more than 20 years. In the past month alone, official PA television has had several children recite poems lauding violence and martyrdom on programs for kids.”

HALF THE STORY

A story from ABC Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek on Aus-



OUT OF PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** (Lib. Cook) – Jan. 8 – asked by a journalist about the US killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani: “Well, the United States have taken the action that they have to address what’s been intelligence that they say they received which was putting their interests at risk and under threat and they have been clear about that. I should also stress that the Australian Government has said following that attack that the individual we’re talking about here as well as more broadly, there have been concerns about their operations in the region for some time.”

Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** – Jan. 9 – asked by a journalist about US President Donald Trump’s call for other signatories to the JCPOA nuclear deal to “step up in dealing with Iran” and take its threats seriously, and whether Australia would have a role to play in easing tensions:

“I think President Trump has summarised well the status of the JCPOA. Australia is very committed to nuclear nonproliferation, and particularly when it can get to the position of being weaponised to the extent that it appears that they have been seeking to achieve. And so it’s important that we counter that threat and we’ll play whatever constructive role we can do to achieve that. And there are mechanisms within that arrangement for those parties that remain in it, that I know that they are seeking to pursue, particularly United Kingdom and France. But from where we’re sitting, my own view is I think the President has summed up where it sits for now quite well.”

Foreign Minister Senator **Marise Payne** (Lib. NSW) – Jan.

9 – asked on *ABC Radio*, “This dramatic escalation began with President Trump’s decision to kill the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani. Does Australia endorse that decision?” replied:

“I think what the Prime Minister and other ministers, including myself, have observed is that the United States has the right to defend its national security interests and its personnel abroad, and Australia along with a number of other countries... has long been concerned by the destabilising behaviour that Iran has displayed on a number of occasions in the Middle East ...”

Opposition Leader **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – Jan. 8 – asked on *5AA* about the strike on Soleimani, “Any response to Trump’s handling of this situation? Did he overreach here do you think?” replied: “Look, I think certainly when people act unilaterally, there’s usually a response. I think that the Iranians have responded, as well, in a dangerous way. I think that all parties need to exercise restraint. I have no truck with the Iranian regime. America is an important ally of Australia. But I do note that Scott Morrison has said that Australia wasn’t consulted on this. And this is an action that potentially has ramifications for the entire world.”

Greens leader Senator **Richard Di Natale** (Greens, VIC.) – Jan. 3 – said in two tweets:

“The US assassination of Iranian General Suleimani in Baghdad is a dangerous and extreme move which seriously risks provoking war with Iran. This aggressive act is certainly a breach of international law, and possibly US domestic law as well.”

“There can be no justification for assassinating foreign officials, and the timing of this violent act looks suspiciously designed to deflect attentions from President Trump’s domestic impeachment woes. I urge the Government and the Labor Party to join us in condemning this reckless action, which endangers lives, including the lives of Australians, in the Middle East.”

tralian woman Jean Calder who runs a school in Gaza once again omitted some basic points about the blockade of the territory.

According to Tlozek, “Israel maintains a military blockade on the territory because of its ongoing conflict with the Islamist group Hamas, which governs Gaza.” He also mentioned Calder’s difficulties getting in and out of Gaza.

As *AIR* has noted many times over the years, the blockade of Gaza is enforced by Egypt too.

AIR has previously called out Tlozek’s glaring omissions on this point, including in December 2019, over his appearance on *ABC Radio National* “Correspondents Report” (Nov. 17) when he suggested Israeli political intransigence and its blockade are the primary causes of suffering in Gaza, *ABC TV* “7.30” (Jan. 13).

COURTING DISASTER

University of Wollongong law professor Greg Rose called on “the Australian Government... to withdraw from the International Criminal Court” (ICC), arguing that the ICC’s pursuit of Israel shows its activities are guided by political and not judicial considerations.

According to Prof. Rose, “the decision on Friday, December 20, at 4pm to investigate Israel for war crimes and crimes against humanity... threatens its credibility as an impartial judicial body”.

He noted that “the prosecutor refuses to investigate the legal situations in disputed territories, such as by Turkish settlers in northern Cyprus or by Russians in Ukrainian Crimea. However, Jews in disputed territory are supposedly criminal. In another example, the ICC pre-trial chamber decided that the prosecutor should charge Israelis with war crimes, though the alleged incidents lacked gravity, according to the prosecutor herself. In contrast, the chamber decided against charging NATO

members with more grave war crimes because it is ‘not in the interests of justice’. This is pure politics.”

Rose explained how the ICC charter has become compromised, writing, “All UN members have one equal vote but they vote in blocs. The sole Jewish State lacks a supporting bloc of UN votes. UN institutional bias against the Jewish State has been critiqued even by the UN’s highest level officials, including consecutive secretaries-general. The ICC treats UN General Assembly resolutions as legally authoritative. General Assembly members allocate institutional budgets and senior appointments in UN judicial bodies. The courts repay them with subordinate deference.”

This, he said, leads to “political bias” becoming “reformulated as international legal principle,” causing the UN court system to fall “into disrepute,” *West Australian* (Dec. 31).

NAIVETE SCENE

Controversial artist Banksy’s latest pro-Palestinian stunt, unveiled in Bethlehem in time for Christmas, hit the media sweet spot.

The diorama called “Scar of Bethlehem” depicts the nativity scene, placing the infant Jesus and his parents in front of a concrete section of Israel’s security barrier carrying the words “love and peace” and an outline of the Star of Bethlehem marred by a bullet hole.

An *AFP* report in the *Herald Sun* (Dec. 23) said, “the work is installed at Banksy’s Walled-Off Hotel, where all rooms overlook a concrete section of the barrier built by Israel to cut off the occupied West Bank from Israeli territory.”

The story said hotel manager Wissam Salsaa said the wall “should induce ‘shame in anyone who supported’ its construction. Israel began building the separation barrier in 2002 during the Palestinian intifada.”

The wall was built to prevent terrorists, including suicide bombers, entering Israel from Palestinian-ruled

areas of the West Bank, who intended neither love nor peace.

Some critics have also noted that Banksy’s anti-Israel propaganda ignores the harassment experienced by Christians in the Muslim majority city, which has seen their numbers drop from around 40% of Bethlehem’s population when the Palestinian Authority was formed in 1994, down to only 10% today.

A report in the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that “Israel says the barrier that cuts through the West Bank is a bulwark against Palestinian suicide bombers. Palestinians see it as a symbol of oppression in Israeli occupied land they want for a state.”

The story said, “Christians make up about 1 per cent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem” but did not explain their precarious position in Palestinian society.

It also stated that “Israel tightly restricts movements out of the Gaza Strip, territory controlled by Hamas, an Islamist group that it considers a terrorist organisation.”

In fact, there are lots of countries that consider Hamas or parts of Hamas as a terrorist organisation, including the US, UK, Japan, the EU and Australia.

THE HOUSE OF USHER

A misleading *BBC* report on *SBS TV* “World News” (Dec. 25) alluded to the difficulties faced by Palestinian Christians, but did not offer any detail, leaving the distinct impression it was Israel’s ongoing occupation that has affected a “community decimated by waves of emigration.”

Veteran Middle East reporter Barbara Plett Usher said, “it has been a difficult year for Palestinians, but Christmas is a time of hope” and that Bethlehem is “enjoying its busiest tourist season in decades” which is a “bright spot despite dark times for the Palestinian economy.”

In fact, millions of tourists visit

Bethlehem every year – three million in 2018 – and both the city and the Palestinian economy on the West Bank in general are doing well.

Plett Usher talked of the arrival from Jerusalem of Christian dignitaries who had to pass through the “concrete barrier that separates the two cities” but avoided giving any context.

Plett Usher has faced accusations of anti-Israel bias in the past – admitting in 2004 she cried when terminally ill PLO chairman Yasser Arafat was airlifted from Ramallah for medical treatment abroad.

WISSE WORDS

The despicable antisemitic attacks on Orthodox Jews in New York in December, including a machete attack during Hanukkah on a synagogue in Monsey by an African American man, was covered by Australian media outlets.

In the *Australian* (Dec. 24), American commentator Ruth Wisse praised US President Donald Trump as “the first president to confront anti-Semitism by recognising Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and by extending civil-rights protection to Jewish college students in the US. Yet some Jews and Jewish organisations condemn him as an anti-Semite and denounce his initiatives.”

Wisse said the Left needs to acknowledge the antisemitism emanating on its side of the ideological spectrum and from Arab and Muslim circles, which masquerades as anti-Zionism.

She said, “Liberals who also want to combat anti-Semitism might understandably have wished for a different champion. But the Democratic Party’s descent into anti-Zionism leaves no choice but to support this aspect of the administration’s policy... Confusion becomes mendacity when Trump’s accusers try to deflect attention from the real sources of Jew-baiting by calling the President an anti-Semite – using his defects to conceal the real and present danger from their side of the aisle.”

ANTISEMITISM IS COLOUR BLIND

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (Dec. 31) ran a column by writer C.J. Werleman who blamed Donald Trump for “record high levels” of antisemitic attacks since he became US President in 2017.

Werleman admitted “violent assaults on Jews tend to occur along the length of the political spectrum, with ancient and long-standing anti-Semitic tropes and conspiracies shared freely and easily by groups and individuals belonging to all political persuasions,” but asserted “far-right ideologies are responsible for the lion’s share of anti-Semitism that is again ravaging the Western world thanks to the kind of racism and xenophobia that has been weaponised by Trump and other right-wing populists.”

He quoted from an analysis by Batya Ungar-Sargon, an editor at the left-wing US Jewish online newspaper *The Forward*, where she said, “The bad days are back. Orthodox Jews are living through a new age of pogroms.”

Yet what Ungar-Sargon’s piece actually said, but Werleman did not quote, cast strong doubts on his claims.

According to Ungar-Sargon, “the majority of the perpetrators of the Brooklyn attacks, and the suspects in Jersey City... and now Monsey, were not white, leaving many at a loss about how to explain it or even talk about it. There is little evidence that these attacks are ideologically motivated, at least in terms of the ideologies of hate we are most familiar with.

“And therein lies the trouble with talking about the violent attacks against Orthodox Jews: At a time when ideology seems to reign supreme in the chattering and political classes, the return of pogroms to Jewish life on American soil transcends ideology. In the fight against anti-Semitism, you don’t get to easily blame your traditional enemies – which, in

the age of Trump, is a non-starter for most people.” Including, apparently, Werleman.

FORCED TO ARM?

A report on *SBS TV* “World News” by Rena Sarumpaet (Dec. 31) on the Monsey, New York, synagogue terror attack noted the alleged perpetrator’s membership of the Black Hebrew Israelite movement.

On *ABC TV* “7pm News” (Jan. 5), ABC North America correspondent David Lipson reported on the reluctant but necessary debate in Orthodox Jewish communities in America over the need to adopt security measures, including gun ownership.

In contrast to C. J. Werleman, Lipson noted that hate crimes against Jews in the US have surged from “800 to 1900 a year” since 2013, which, although he didn’t say it, suggests it is a phenomenon that predates Trump becoming president.

MARK ANTONY’S CLAIMS

Anti-Zionist writer/activist Antony Loewenstein, reviewing fellow left-wing writer Jeff Sparrow’s new book called *Fascists Among Us*, would not accept there was any significant problem on his side of the political spectrum.

Loewenstein said, “far-right extremists pose the greatest threat to our way of life in the last decade, far exceeding Islamists and left-wing radicals. Ignore [those] who argue that left-wing anti-Semitism is just as dangerous as right-wing hate because many on the left push for Palestinian rights, oppose Israeli occupation policies or are anti-Zionist. The facts simply don’t support this thesis.”

Clearly, Loewenstein discounts the plethora of successful and thwarted Islamist terror attacks in Australia, America and Europe, not to mention Syria and Iraq over the last decade! Then there are the terror attacks against the Jews of Israel, *Weekend Australian* (Dec. 28).

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

HITS AND MISSES

Australian media's focus on the bushfire crisis did not prevent far-reaching coverage of the US drone strike that killed Iranian terror mastermind General Qassem Soleimani at Baghdad airport on January 3, after weeks of escalating tensions between the US and Iran.

On *ABC TV* "The World" (Jan. 3), Middle East correspondent Adam Harvey explained US President Donald Trump's alleged motives for the killing, saying "there was nothing to be gained by appeasing Iran any more, there was no prospect of getting Iran back to the negotiating table... The US embassy was under attack, has been this week, so the security situation has really deteriorated inside Iraq. There was clearly a view that the United States has nothing left to lose."

In the *Australian* (Jan. 7), Professor Alan Dershowitz wrote Soleimani's killing was "an act of prevention" given he "was planning to continue his killing spree against Americans."

Soleimani's demise, the *Daily Telegraph* said (Jan. 6), will be "likely in the long run to advance the cause of peace. [US President] Obama attempted to appease and buy off Iran. Yet it continued to harass shipping, attack neighbours, and the regime's militants in Iraq killed hundreds of US troops."

The *Canberra Times* (Jan. 8) questioned the prudence of the act, saying, "this is a part of the world that has never produced 'winners'."

The *Australian* (Jan. 9) backed the hit, warned of the need to stop Iran "turning Iraq into a satellite" and condemned European and Sunni Arab countries that have "remain[ed] largely mute since Soleimani's demise."

In the same edition, Foreign Editor Greg Sheridan argued that in "targeting the Iranian leadership," US credibility was restored following Trump's refusal to retaliate against previous escalating Iranian "destabilisation, terrorism, proxy arms build-ups and international political interference."

In the *Age/Sydney Morning Herald* (Jan. 13), Tony Walker suggested a link between Soleimani's killing and Trump being impeached. Meanwhile, Alison Broinowski in the *Sun Herald* (Jan. 12), with scant evidence, declaimed that "Australian surveillance and refuelling planes are still based in the Gulf – presumably to service US, Israeli and Saudi Arabian jets in Syria."

SBS TV "World News" (Jan. 13) showed Iranian stu-

dents protesting against the regime by refusing to walk on US and Israeli flags painted on the ground at a Tehran university.

However, a timorous *Sydney Morning Herald* (Jan. 16) cautioned against "Western allies... cheer[ing] on the street protests in Tehran... yes, the regime may eventually fall but it is impossible to predict the fallout... worse could arise."

"Soleimani's demise, the *Daily Telegraph* said (Jan. 6), will be 'likely in the long run to advance the cause of peace.'"

Former Australian ambassador to Israel and current federal Liberal MP Dave Sharma contextualised the killing, writing, "[Iran's] attack on the US Embassy [in Iraq] hit a raw nerve in Washington, with its echoes of the 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran and the hostage crisis that followed," *Australian Financial Review* (Jan. 16). Earlier the same paper (Jan. 6), reprinted Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*, who said the US had done Iran a favour, calling Soleimani "the most overrated strategist in the Middle East" who had angered the region's Sunni and Shi'ite Arabs, Israel and his own people.

AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein wrote the killing was "militarily and morally justified" and would "increase pressure on Iran to reconsider its destabilising regional policies," (*Age/Sydney Morning Herald*, Jan. 10).

In the same editions, AIJAC's Ahron Shapiro detailed Iran's growing list of infractions of the 2015 nuclear deal, noting, "[it] was profoundly flawed because the inspections regime wasn't watertight, it enabled Iran to continue to develop ballistic missiles, enrich uranium and work on advanced centrifuges. Moreover, it always appeared very likely that Iran would be able to build nuclear weapons once the 10-year sunset clauses in the deal expired – which is now only a few years away."

The two papers ran analyst Mark Almond (Jan. 14) who said, "Now that Donald Trump's direct confrontation with Iran seems to have ended, Western leaders are falling over themselves to say they want to negotiate... For a long time, many in the West have persisted in seeing the Iranian regime as a clash between 'good' moderates and 'bad' hardliners. That was never true. They always had more in common with each other than with the West."

On *ABC Radio "AM"* (Jan. 13), veteran Israeli analyst and frequent AIJAC guest Ehud Yaari predicted the Iranian regime would find it difficult to fulfil its pledge to force the US out of the region.

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

PRECIOUS LEGACIES

“Was this arson? Were Jews involved?”

“No, the police haven’t said it was arson. And there is no Jewish connection as far as I know”

“Then why did you call a fire in a factory ‘Jewish lightning’?”

“It is common usage.”

“Well, stop saying it and it won’t be!”

The caller to the top-rating radio programme was Rabbi Brian Fox, and, after this exchange, the popular host not only stopped using racist language but subsequently became involved in fighting against demeaning stereotyping.

Rabbi Fox was one of three unique Sydney Jewish figures who passed away in late 2019 and early 2020, the others being Professor Colin Tatz and Professor Graham de Vahl Davis.

I had the opportunity to be able to work with, and learn from, each of them.

They were not afraid of expressing unpopular or minority opinions and were each known to have marched to the beat of their own drums.

My last interaction with Professor Tatz was when I was privileged to be invited to the launch of one of his many essential books, *Black Pearls*, which catalogued the lives of many exceptional Indigenous sportswomen and men.

The book is jam-packed with original research, brings to light aspects of Australian history discussed too rarely, demonstrates great attention to detail and, like the author, exhibits both passion and compassion.

Professor Tatz was not just a scholar but an advocate, a thinker and an achiever.

As one colleague put it, he was anti-racist when it was not popular.

He also liked to challenge complacency and force anyone who would listen to rethink their assumptions, be it with his establishment of a Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies, or the challenges he offered to received wisdom regarding Australian history.

Australia was enriched by both his many contributions to public debate and his commitment to the education of educators.

Professor de Vahl Davis had a background in Australian Jewish leadership and a passion for mentoring and guiding colleagues, as well as students and emerging leaders.

He was an outstanding media performer, armed with expansive knowledge, a quick wit and an almost pitch-perfect voice for radio.

Although he didn’t seek the spotlight, he had a brief moment as an international superstar in 1987 as a direct result of what can only be described as sheer chutzpah.

I recall being in New York and seeing his photo in the international media.

As the label on the Getty image sent around the world put it, “Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Shevardnadze was confronted by Mr. Graham de Vahl Davis (in Dark Sunglasses and a jew) [sic] who had stood in a line of Diplomats at Fairbairn Airforce base in Canberra and had shown his drivers license to get through security.”

The “confrontation” consisted of the “jew” asking why the leadership of the Soviet Union was denying its Jewish population options for either living as Jews or else being allowed to leave to go to places they could enjoy basic human rights.

It would not have been in the Foreign Minister’s interest to try to defend his position given that Professor de Vahl Davis was, amongst other things, a fearsome debater who knew he had right on his side.

My interactions with Rabbi Fox were primarily in the field of interfaith work, where it is safe to say he was a person who always made an impression.

He was boisterous and seemed to genuinely like just about everyone he met.

At times he was like a fish out of water in the hurly burly of internal Jewish community machinations, but didn’t seem to allow individual defeats or setbacks to hold him back for long.

The dialogue with which I opened this piece was an example of his willingness to act impulsively but effectively, to challenge and change views through a combination of drive and good humour.

Each of these unique individuals bequeathed, through their lifetimes of activity, notable legacies to the Jewish world and to Australia.



The recently departed Professor Colin Tatz, Rabbi Brian Fox and Graham de Vahl Davis



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