

## UNHEALTHY

How scandals at the WHO likely reflect wider UN dysfunction and biases



### JERUSALEM GOES BIG

Inside Israel's complex and potentially unwieldy new emergency government ..... **PAGE 22**

### UNHAPPY RETURNS

The dangerous consequences of a legally-baseless Palestinian "right" ..... **PAGE 32**

### ISRAEL ON ARAB TV

Ramadan viewing reflects the Jewish state's changing image ..... **PAGE 27**

### ARMS FOR IRAN?

The controversy over the scheduled end to a key UN embargo ..... **PAGE 7**



SH.V



TOGA is undertaking all precautionary measures to limit the potential spread of the Covid-19 virus and will continue to monitor guidance from the World Health Organisation, The Australian Department of Health and DFAT.

SH.V  
**SURRY HILLS  
VILLAGE**

# A new Surry Hills Village story

A limited collection of Residences.

DISPLAY GALLERY BY APPOINTMENT ONLY  
[SURRYHILLSVILLAGE.COM.AU](http://SURRYHILLSVILLAGE.COM.AU)  
1800 554 556

 **TOGA**  
ESTABLISHED 1963

**WITH COMPLIMENTS**



**FOR A BETTER WORLD**

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition focuses on how the current scandal surrounding the World Health Organisation's (WHO) early coronavirus advice, which was allegedly politicised to serve the Chinese Government's agenda, appears to reflect serious and widespread problems in the UN system as a whole.

Judy Maynard looks at the WHO's history of politicisation and bias on Israeli-Palestinian issues, while other *AIR* staff writers report on the dubious and destructive politicised behaviour of the UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, UNRWA, UNESCO and, to a lesser extent, UNICEF.

Also featured this month is a detailed analysis by Amotz Asa-El of the make-up and agenda of the complex Israeli "national emergency" government just established, ending more than a year of political stalemate. Plus, Herb Keinon looks at the complex calculations that the new government will be making as it considers extending Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank under the Trump Administration's peace plan.

And don't miss Australian academic Ran Porat on what Ramadan TV programs in the Middle East tell us about Israel's changing image in the region, American academic Asaf Romirowsky on the consequences of the Palestinian devotion to a supposed "right of return", and Jeremy Jones on tackling the racist conspiracy theories circulating about COVID-19.

Let us know what you think about any of it at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au).

Tzvi Fleischer

## CONTENTS

### FEATURE STORIES

#### UN-HEALTHY

BY AIJAC STAFF

The UN's general pattern of exclusion and selective condemnation [of Israel] continues ..... PAGE 12

#### WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

BY JUDY MAYNARD ..... PAGE 12

#### UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

BY ALLON LEE ..... PAGE 15

#### UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

BY SHARON MITTELMAN ..... PAGE 16

#### UNRWA

BY NAOMI LEVIN ..... PAGE 18

#### UNESCO

BY OVED LOBEL ..... PAGE 19

#### UNICEF

BY AHRON SHAPIRO ..... PAGE 20

#### BIG GOVERNMENT, ISRAELI-STYLE

A complex political betrothal in Jerusalem

BY AMOTZ ASA-EL ..... PAGE 22

#### TRUMP'S PEACE PLAN AND JORDAN

BY HERB KEINON ..... PAGE 25

#### LEBANON, HEZBOLLAH AND THE IMF

BY CLIFFORD MAY ..... PAGE 26

#### VIEWING ISRAEL ON ARAB TV

BY RAN PORAT ..... PAGE 27

#### SPOTLIGHT ON RIGHTS ABUSERS

BY NAOMI LEVIN ..... PAGE 30

#### BIBLIO FILE: A RETURN TO SANITY

BY ASAF ROMIROWSKY ..... PAGE 32

### ON THE COVER

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), informs the media about the latest updates regarding the novel coronavirus COVID-19 during a press conference at the WHO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, 9 March 2020. (Photo: Salvatore Di Nolfi/AAP)



### REGULAR COLUMNS

#### FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN ..... PAGE 4

WORD FOR WORD ..... PAGE 5

#### SCRIBBLINGS

TZVI FLEISCHER ..... PAGE 6

#### DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

RICHARD GOLDBERG & MARK DUBOWITZ ..... PAGE 7

#### ASIA WATCH

MICHAEL SHANNON ..... PAGE 8

#### EUROPA EUROPA

DOUGLAS DAVIS ..... PAGE 9

BEHIND THE NEWS ..... PAGE 10

STRANGER THAN FICTION ..... PAGE 11

NOTED AND QUOTED ..... PAGE 35

IN PARLIAMENT ..... PAGE 36


#### MEDIA MICROSCOPE

ALLON LEE ..... PAGE 39

#### THE LAST WORD

JEREMY JONES ..... PAGE 40

### HOW TO USE OUR INTERACTIVE EDITION

- Tap/click  to return to the Contents page
- All listed articles link to their page.
- Best viewed in your desktop browser or the Books (iOS) or equivalent e-book reader app in portrait mode.

**Australia/Israel Review**

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

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

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

**Publishing Manager****MICHAEL SHANNON****Correspondents**ISRAEL: **AMOTZ ASA-EL**EUROPE: **DOUGLAS DAVIS**NEW ZEALAND: **MIRIAM BELL****National Editorial Board**

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

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

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

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

MELBOURNE: **ROSEMARY SANDLER,  
RENA LANGBERG**

SYDNEY: **LOUISE DE MESQUITA****Israel Liaison****PETER ADLER****Founding Chairmen**

ISADOR MAGID AM (OBM)

ROBERT ZABLUD (OBM)

**HEAD OFFICE**

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

**SYDNEY OFFICE**

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

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**

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

**[www.aijac.org.au](http://www.aijac.org.au)**

# FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN

## A VISIT AND AN AGENDA

While all visits from top US officials to Israel are newsworthy and important, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's eight-hour visit to Israel on May 13 was exceptional for the context in which it took place, amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

And of course, the trip came just as Israel was finally about to swear in a new unity government after more than a year of political deadlock, including three elections with no clear winner.

According to US reports, Pompeo's meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and other top officials were focused on three matters: responding to the threats from Iran; Israel's commercial, high-tech and infrastructure dealings with China; and Netanyahu's oft-expressed interest in extending sovereignty, in whole or in part, to Israel's West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley in accordance with the Trump Administration's "Vision for Peace" between Israel and the Palestinians.

The new Israeli Government will be, first and foremost, strongly focused on addressing the coronavirus pandemic, and on helping the Israeli economy recover from its devastating effects on jobs, businesses, and incomes. But the three items on Pompeo's agenda – the Iranian threat, relations with China, and moving forward with the Trump Administration's peace plan – should also be very high on the agenda of the new government in Jerusalem.

When it comes to the threat posed by Iran from its illegal nuclear weapons program and the widespread aggression Iran has shown across the Middle East, the Trump Administration and Israel have been more or less on the same page for some time.

The effort to pressure Iran back to the negotiating table and modify its aggressive regional behaviour requires unwavering coordination between allies and, above all, vigilance.

For example, the 2015 nuclear deal gifted Iran with an end to the conventional arms embargo that has been in place since 2007 as of this coming October. Pompeo has been pushing for the UN Security Council to extend the embargo. Given Iran's ongoing military activity across the region, anyone who cares about stability should want him to succeed.

Meanwhile, Israel has been setting red lines on Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, striking at the bases of Iran and its proxies in Syria and Iraq and threatening large-scale military action should Iran continue with its dangerous efforts to retrofit its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah's massive rocket arsenal with precision guidance systems. Recently, it has also had to address Iranian cyber-aggression.

Given the complexities on the Lebanese, Syrian, and Iraqi fronts, coordinating action against Iran in these theatres alone justified Pompeo's visit.

But the Secretary of State also came to discuss China. Israel, like many countries in the Mediterranean, has been trying to find a balance between the diplomatic and economic dividends of bilateral trade and infrastructure deals with China, and the unacceptable risk of being caught in a Chinese Communist Party honey trap that could threaten both Israel's national security and high priority Western interests.

In recent months, Israel – despite being hamstrung by the political deadlock – has initiated oversight procedures that have changed the previous green light for Chinese infrastructure projects and procurements in Israel to amber.

However, in light of rising global tension with China following its mishandling of the coronavirus outbreak, Pompeo would likely be urging Israel to further strengthen these safeguards. Well-placed Israelis are fortunately now taking this issue very seriously.

PM Netanyahu, Defence Minister Benny Gantz and their new broad national emergency coalition should now be well positioned to respond somewhat more effectively to US concerns about Chinese activity, many of which are also shared by Australia.

On the final point, Netanyahu restated his desire to apply Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank in his inaugural Knesset speech on May 15, but Pompeo's visit was a reminder that, in the view of Washington, the political foundation for any such move is rooted in US President Donald Trump's peace plan, announced in January, that places expectations on Israel as well.

The plan calls for a four-year freeze on Israeli construction in areas of the West Bank envisioned for the creation of a Palestinian state, and willingness on the Israeli side to accept and negotiate the creation of that state.

The new coalition agreement in Israel allows Netanyahu to begin moving forward with applying sovereignty as early as July 1, presumably to leave some time before the US Presidential election in November.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership, as is also the case for Jordan, has spoken out strongly against any extension of Israeli sovereignty, warning of confrontation and conflagration that could destabilise the region.

The details of Pompeo's discussions with Israeli lead-

ers on the subject are a matter of conjecture. However, leaks indicate that Pompeo's visit was a reminder that US support for the extension of Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank is only one element of a vision for peace, and Israel must move cautiously and thoughtfully to ensure

it preserves existing arrangements with regional neighbours and ties with increasingly friendly moderate Arab governments.

To this end, the new Israeli Government's official guidelines wisely omit any mention of the

sovereignty plan. Furthermore, the right-wing Yamina party, which has an uncompromising view on extending sovereignty, has opted to sit in opposition, giving the governing coalition more room to manoeuvre on this complex and unavoidably contentious issue.

The Trump peace plan does create a potential opportunity to short-circuit the stasis caused by decades of Palestinian rejectionism and the refusal since 2014 to even negotiate. It is understandable that Jerusalem would want to use this opportunity to begin to unilaterally build the foundations of a future two-state reality on terms acceptable to Israel. But the risks are real and not to be discounted. On this issue, like so many others, this new, unique Israeli Government will need to demonstrate patience, wisdom and flexibility as it considers how to accomplish these challenging objectives.

AIR

## WORD FOR WORD

"The majority of the public is glad to accept a unity government. The public wants a unity government and that's what the public is getting today."

**Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (NPR, May 18).**

"Peace has been and remains an important part of the Zionist spirit. We will advance the US Government and President Donald Trump's peace plan,"

**New Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz (Jerusalem Post, May 18).**

"We're facing significant regional opportunities, primarily President [Donald] Trump's peace initiative... President Trump presented us with a historic opportunity to shape the future of the State of Israel and its boundaries for decades to come."

**New Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi (Times of Israel, May 18).**

"Israelis deserve better. We'll be here to remind them that it can be different. There is an alternative, a different leadership. Not a leadership that cares only about its own jobs and seats. A leadership committed to values."

**New Israeli Opposition Leader Yair Lapid on the new Israeli Govern-**

**ment (Times of Israel, May 17).**

"When the mapping process is over, when the Israeli government agrees to freeze building in the same parts of Area C that aren't designated for the application of sovereignty and when the Prime Minister agrees to negotiate with the Palestinians on the basis of the Trump plan — and he already agreed to this on the first day — we'll recognise Israel's sovereignty in areas that according to the plan will be a part of it."

**US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman on recognising the application of Israeli sovereignty to areas of the West Bank under the latest US peace plan (Times of Israel, May 6).**

"Thanks to the grace of God we are a superpower today. I say this decisively. America, and even greater powers, will not dare do anything... We will grow stronger every day in every field, because this is what the honourable Leader ordered us to do."

**Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Aerospace Force, after launching a military satellite into space (Times of Israel, April 30).**

"The West Bank must be armed, just as Gaza. The only thing that can reduce the Palestinians' hardships is the hand of power. Otherwise, compromise won't reduce a bit of the cruelty of this usurping, evil, wolf-like entity."

**Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei (Twitter, May 18).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## PA PROMOTES SUICIDE BOMBING ISRAELI CITIES

Hopefully most readers know that there is a serious problem with incitement to violence and antisemitic hatred in the official media of the supposedly moderate Palestinian Authority (PA). However, some may be under the mistaken impression that open support for suicide bombing is an Islamist thing, more associated with Hamas.



A PA-TV dance video that promotes suicide bombing

Palestinian Media Watch has documented that, in recent weeks, official PA TV has repeatedly broadcast a song and dance which is basically an open call to carry out suicide bombing in Israeli

cities. The words of the song include:

“Strap on the explosive belt,  
Detonate the first in Haifa and the second in Atlit (i.e., Israeli cities)...

Strap on the belt, O daughter of my land,  
and detonate it in front of the enemies.  
How sweet is the taste of Martyrdom,  
I have found none like it”

The song goes on to praise Wafa Idris and Ayyat Al-Akhras, two female suicide bombers, saying of them:

“You have lifted our heads to the heavens  
Our public is now following you  
by the thousands”

Meanwhile, for Prisoners’ Day, official PA TV in mid-April broadcast two short clips saluting specific Palestinian prisoners, virtually all of who had murdered Israelis. One clip labelled the prisoners listed as “The Giants of Palestinian History” and then flashed photos of 31 prisoners, at least 30 of whom committed murders. Another similar filler listed “27 leaders have given more than 25 years of their lives in the prisons of injustice”. At least 26 of those “leaders” were murderers.

Further, a story in the official PA daily newspaper, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, published on April 20, profiled and paid tribute to 12 Israeli Arab citizens in Israeli prisons. All of them also were involved in murders, but that is actually not the most troubling part of the story. The story referred to the 12 as “prisoners from the towns and cities of the Interior (i.e., a Palestinian term for pre-1967 Israel) who are still drawing the map of greater Palestine.”

In other words, the story not only held up murderers as Palestinian role models, but took for granted that the Pal-

estinian goal was to replace Israel with a “greater Palestine” incorporating all its territories.

It is generally agreed by those with reason to know that PA President Mahmoud Abbas is not in favour of terrorism, unlike his predecessor Yasser Arafat, viewing it as counterproductive. Yet the authority he heads pays generous salaries and pensions to terrorist prisoners and the families of those killed carrying out terrorism, thus effectively incentivising it. Furthermore, the PA’s official, tightly-controlled media broadcasts open calls for suicide bombings, holds up terrorist murderers as role models, and talks about destroying Israel to create “greater Palestine”.

Is it any wonder that the Trump Administration’s peace plan demands reforms to the PA that include an end to such incitement before a new Palestinian state is formed?

## LACK OF MODERATION

Last month in this column, I noted the Holocaust denial and other general antisemitism which remains pervasive in the Iranian regime – with some of it emanating directly from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Khamenei has recently been at it again, releasing a poster that promotes a “Final Solution” for Palestine – it said “Palestine will be free. The final solution. Resistance until referendum.”

But many seem to shrug off such behaviour by insisting the only way to deal with Iran’s rogue actions is to engage respectfully with Teheran to strengthen the “moderate” elements of the regime against the hardliners.

And the moderate elements of the regime they mean are typically epitomised by current Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

But many experts in Iranian politics note that Rouhani is relatively powerless, that an Iranian President has limited authority and can only do what the Supreme Leader chooses to allow him to do.

It is not only outside experts who say this – so do the most knowledgeable dissidents inside Iran. Top American reporter Dexter Filkins was recently allowed to visit Iran and published a blockbuster report on what is going on there in the *New Yorker*, titled “The Twilight of the Iranian Revolution,” on May 18.

In it, he notes that in 2018, regime figures were openly talking about marginalising Rouhani, and prosecutors linked to the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were launching investigations into many people close to him as a way to control him. According to Masoud Bastani, a dissident Iranian journalist whose reporting has landed him in prison three times, there were plans by the IRGC to strip Rouhani of his power last year, and Filkins reports other sources saying this involved arresting “roughly a hundred people close to the President.”

But it is not clear that, even if Rouhani were much

more powerful in the face of groups like the IRGC than he actually is, it would make any difference. Faezeh Rafsanjani, a dissident former member of parliament and the daughter of the late President and key regime powerbroker Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said this to Filkins about Rouhani; “I had hopes for him, but he’s the same color as the rest of them.” She also said, “Even the people who say they are reformers are not really reformers at all.”

Meanwhile, Rouhani certainly partakes of some of the same paranoid worldview that characterises the rest of the regime. He recently claimed that the current coronavirus pandemic involved a “foreign media’s conspiracy” that “wanted to shut down the country and disrupt its security.” In April, he said that the Ministry of Intelligence has “detailed documents” about a “counter-revolutionary conspiracy” behind the coronavirus crisis. AIR



**Richard Goldberg & Mark Dubowitz**

## EXTEND THE ARMS EMBARGO ON IRAN

In line with a request issued on March 4 by 387 of the 435 members of the US House of Representatives, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is preparing a diplomatic campaign to block one of the most damaging concessions enshrined by the 2015 Iran nuclear deal – namely, the lifting of the international arms embargo on Iran this coming October. Mr Pompeo’s effort merits bipartisan support at home and allied support abroad – not only to counter Iran’s proxy war campaigns, but to stop Russia and China from shifting the balance of power in the Middle East.

The end of the arms embargo is one of the many key international restrictions on Iran scheduled to expire over time – the so-called “sunset clauses” negotiated alongside the nuclear agreement. Yet it makes little sense to lift an arms embargo on a regime that has steadily increased its violent behaviour over the past year, ranging from cruise missile strikes on Saudi oil infrastructure to mine attacks on tankers in the Persian Gulf and rocket attacks on American and British forces in Iraq. Meanwhile, the regime continues to train and equip proxy forces in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Gaza, all of which add to instability and civilian suffering.

Accordingly, the first phase of Pompeo’s plan is to propose a new UN Security Council resolution to extend the arms embargo on Teheran indefinitely. Russia and China are expected to block the proposal, because the end of the embargo will unshackle their efforts to employ arms sales as a means of turning Iran into a client state.

This acceleration of great power competition is the larger story unfolding here. The Pentagon reports that Bei-

jing and Moscow are planning to sell Iran fighter jets, main battle tanks, attack helicopters and modern naval capabilities. Teheran is likely to proliferate some of this advanced weaponry to the likes of Lebanese Hezbollah, Shi’ite militias in Iraq, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen.

Iran is already a customer for Russian nuclear power plants and air defence. China has long been the source of Iran’s most proliferation-sensitive materials and is the last paying customer for Iranian crude oil exports. They have been eagerly awaiting the end of the embargo.

Phase two of Pompeo’s plan circumvents Russian and Chinese obstruction. He intends to use the self-destruct – or “snapback” – mechanism of the nuclear deal to block the sunset of the arms embargo.

This mechanism gave all original parties to the nuclear deal – including the US – the right to snap all UN sanctions and embargoes back into place if the Iranian regime ever breached its nuclear commitments. Such breaches are now indisputable. The International Atomic Energy Agency reported in March that Iran has tripled its production of enriched uranium since November and is denying nuclear inspectors access to suspicious sites.

Even though the Trump Administration withdrew from the nuclear deal, it retains the right to initiate a snapback. Specifically, UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which put the UN imprimatur on the nuclear deal, defines the term “participant State” to include the United States. According to a State Department legal opinion, Resolution 2231 does not contemplate a change in that definition even if America ceases participating in the agreement.

This was not an accident, but a rare case of foresight on the part of the nuclear deal’s negotiators. Indeed, the Obama administration heavily marketed this unconditional snapback prerogative as a key feature of the deal in 2015.

Unsurprisingly, Russia and China object to this interpretation. They are hoping Europe will persuade Washington to relent. London, Paris and Berlin readily acknowledge the flaws of the nuclear deal, especially its sunsets, but they remain wedded to the belief that engagement on any terms can empower purported moderates and divert Teheran from its decades-long quest for nuclear weapons capabilities.

With the first nuclear deal sunset now on the horizon, European leaders face an important choice. They have an opportunity to show that they understand great power competition is becoming the most important dynamic in the Middle East. By supporting snapback, they can deny strategic victories to Russia and China while blocking the Iranian regime’s access to dangerous weapons. AIR

*Richard Goldberg, who served in the Trump National Security Council, is a senior advisor at the Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD), where Mark Dubowitz is chief executive officer.*



The article originally appeared in Newsweek. © FDD (www.FDD.org), reprint by permission, all rights reserved.

# ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

## POLITICAL INTERMISSION

While the COVID-19 pandemic has caught sprawling Indonesia unprepared and even ultra-modern Singapore is dealing with a fresh outbreak, neighbouring Malaysia, which previously had the highest number of cases in South-east Asia, has confounded predictions and turned the viral tide through movement curbs, mass testing and aggressive contract tracing.

With recoveries now beginning to outnumber new infections, Malaysia is moving slowly towards a staged resumption of economic and social activity.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's relative success in containing the coronavirus and his implementation of a generous 260 billion ringgit (A\$94 billion) stimulus package to cushion the pandemic's economic blow has won him a degree of popular support.

"Social media is buzzing with commendation and tributes to the PM and the government," political analyst and academic Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmud told the *Asia Times*. "Generally the people are satisfied with the way the new government is handling the situation."

Yet, Muhyiddin's hold on power is tenuous. His Perikatan Nasional (PN) government is comprised of the country's three largest parties catering exclusively to the Malay Muslim majority: Muhyiddin's Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), the scandal-plagued lynchpin party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), and its hardline Islamist ally, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS). Their numbers are bolstered by Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), and a faction of defectors from Anwar Ibrahim's Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), the previous government's largest component party.

The arithmetic behind the PN coalition is yet to be tested in the parliament due to the coronavirus shutdown, while Muhyiddin's own party remains split between a faction loyal to him, its president, and former PM Mahathir, its chairman, who rejects cooperation with UMNO and has indicated plans to wrest back control of the party to realign it with his previous coalition partners.

Muhyiddin was appointed the country's eighth prime minister by the King on March 1, after he and other defectors from the previous Pakatan Harapan (PH) government joined with the opposition parties.

Meanwhile, just two years after the reformist, multiracial Pakatan Harapan coalition made history by overturning 61 years of Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition rule, its key

protagonists find themselves in opposition and seeking to reverse their humiliating ouster.

Mahathir and Anwar, the newly anointed leader of the opposition, marked the second anniversary of Pakatan's historic victory in the 2018 election by issuing a joint statement. The two said they had put aside their differences in a renewed effort to bring Pakatan back to power.

"We are old, and we do not have much time left," Mahathir and Anwar said, according to the *Straits Times* newspaper. "Yet our fighting spirit still burns bright in the souls of the youth who dream of reforms. It is time for us to rise again and return the people's mandate to the rightful owners."

The duo issued the statement in the lead-up to a planned motion of no-confidence on May 18, the first since the change of government, but PM Muhyiddin acted to ensure the one-off sitting was restricted to a speech by the King, citing public health concerns. The next parliamentary sitting (for 25 days) is scheduled for July 13.

At any rate, it would be a considerable feat to convince the Malaysian public that any Mahathir-Anwar combination is viable while memories are still fresh of their dysfunctional partnership while in government. And since the PH government collapsed – fatally undermined by their rivalry – Mahathir and Anwar have publicly traded barbs.

Mahathir admitted he "has issues" with Anwar, who he recently described as adhering to a "liberal philosophy" and harbouring an "obsession" to be prime minister.

"He has always been campaigning to get me to resign earlier," Mahathir said of Anwar, to whom he publicly committed to hand power on several occasions during his 2018-20 premiership. Analysts, however, interpreted his refusal to set a date for that transition as a sign he intended to thwart Anwar's ascension.

Anwar, who at 72 is the same age as Muhyiddin, has in turn rebuffed claims that he was ever impatient for the premiership. "Who is crazy to continue to be PM at the age of 90 or 95?" he countered in a recent interview.

Mahathir now insists he doesn't want to return to the helm, recently telling the *Australian*, "I am 94 and in two months I turn 95 and I have no ambition to become PM," so if that statement can be taken at face value, attention turns to Mahathir's role in his own party. Control of Bersatu is far from settled, with Muhyiddin serving as PM and Mahathir plotting from the Opposition benches.

The wildcard is Mahathir's son Mukhriz, who, having declined an offer to be Muhyiddin's deputy (an overture to Mahathir), now intends to challenge Muhyiddin for the party's presidency in a bid to regain control of the party and overturn the Perikatan Nasional coalition.



Mahathir and Anwar: Another twist in the saga



**Douglas Davis**

## POISONING THE WELLS

It would be surprising if Palestinian leaders had not seized upon the coronavirus crisis to accuse Israel of fanciful acts against them. That is par for the course.

More surprising is a report by Tel Aviv University which shows that the health crisis is stirring antisemitism around the world, drawing on centuries-old libels that Jews spread infection.

The findings, which were published in the annual report on antisemitism worldwide by the Kantor Centre at Tel Aviv University, showed that even before the pandemic hit, there was an 18% rise in antisemitic incidents in 2019 over the previous year.

This trend has been exacerbated by the global coronavirus outbreak. In the first few months of 2020, far-right politicians in the United States and Europe, as well as ultra-conservative pastors, seized on the health crisis and its resulting economic hardship to foster hatred against Jews, the researchers said.

“Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant rise in accusations that Jews, as individuals and as a collective, are behind the spread of the virus or are directly profiting from it,” said Moshe Kantor, president of the European Jewish Congress. “The language and imagery used clearly identifies a revival of the mediaeval ‘blood libels’ when Jews were accused of spreading disease, poisoning wells or controlling economies.”

He called on world leaders to address the problem of growing extremism “already at our door”.

Meanwhile, severe and violent incidents against Jews rose to 456 worldwide in 2019, from 387 in 2018, and seven Jews were killed in antisemitic attacks last year, the report found. In 2019, Britain suffered 122 major violent antisemitic incidents, followed by 111 in the United States and 41 in France and Germany.

Kantor said there had been a consistent rise in antisemitism over the past few years, especially online, but also in mainstream society, politics and media. The increased use of social media during the health crisis, he added, could facilitate the spread of conspiracy theories, “providing simplistic answers for the growing anxiety among the general public.”

Outrageous as they are, the global conspiracy theories about the mendacity of Jews do not match those of Palestinian officials, including Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh and his spokesman, Ibrahim Milhem. They accused Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers of spitting in public places – particularly on the door-handles

of Palestinian cars – as a means of infecting Palestinians with the deadly virus.

A PA spokesman accused Israel of “racist and inhumane” behaviour, and articles in official PA publications assert that Israel is deliberately spreading the infection and trying to contaminate Palestinian prisoners, using the coronavirus as a biological weapon.

Milhem came out with the latest libel against Israel. He told reporters that “the settlements are incubators for the [coronavirus] epidemic, and also the workplaces in Israel – hotels, buses, petrol stations, and direct mutual contact with Israelis. Israel is having trouble because Israelis are not observing the preventative measures because they love money and want to continue to turn the wheels of production.”

Osama Qawassmeh, a spokesman for the Palestinian ruling Fatah faction added: “Our people are fighting two epidemics: coronavirus and Israeli colonialism.”

The fabrication about Israel deliberately infecting Palestinians with the virus comes at a time of close cooperation, not only between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, but also with Hamas in Gaza, where Israeli medical staff are training their Palestinian counterparts in how to treat victims of the virus.

Meanwhile, Israel has continued to supply essential aid to the people of Gaza, including electricity and water. It facilitates unhindered all international aid deliveries into the Gaza Strip, including testing equipment, protective garments, disinfectant, medical stocks and other humanitarian supplies.

In the West Bank, Israeli and PA health departments meet regularly to coordinate action and share vital information. Troops from the IDF’s Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories have been organising joint training for medical teams. At the same time, Israel provides test kits, laboratory supplies, medicines and personal protective equipment for Palestinian health workers.

In April, Israeli state-owned TV channel *Kan* reported that Israeli teams have trained doctors, nurses and other medical workers in Gaza on treating COVID-19. The television report said a team from Sheba Medical Centre in Ramat Gan, Israel, held a training course for about 20 medical workers from Gaza at the Erez crossing. According to the report, another group of doctors and nurses was later allowed to leave the Gaza Strip for training at the Barzilai Medical Centre in Ashkelon, southern Israel.

But such acts of goodwill are neutralised by the spreading of baseless antisemitism that fuels Palestinian hatred and incites the next spasm of bloody violence.

The international community no doubt understands – and indulges – this nonsense in order to appease the Palestinian rhetoricians. But the danger in such inaction is that Palestinians believe Israel is indeed responsible for the coronavirus “offensive” against them.

# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKETS AND TERROR

A rocket was fired from Gaza into Israel on May 6, prompting Israeli retaliatory fire.

While Gaza has largely been quiet, this is not the case on the West Bank. On May 12, IDF Sergeant First Class Amit Ben Yigal, 21, was killed when a Palestinian threw a concrete block at him during an arrest raid near Jenin.

From late April to mid-May, there were several stabbing and car-ramming attacks against Israeli forces in the West Bank. On May 16, the IDF thwarted an attack involving improvised explosives and Molotov cocktails against a settlement outpost.

Meanwhile Israeli security forces have identified a terrorist network in the West Bank associated with the Marxist terrorist group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Israeli reports suggest the group's terrorist activities have been reinvigorated by the provision of financial and logistical support from Iran.

## ABBAS RENOUNCES AGREEMENTS

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas announced on May 19 that, in light of the new Israeli government's stated intention to annex parts of the West Bank, the PA would be ending "all the agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli governments" and all obligations resulting from them, including security cooperation. However, Palestinian sources said that security coordination was continuing, and while the PA may reduce it, it was too soon to say whether coordination would be completely stopped.

## ISRAEL FORCES PALESTINIAN BANKS TO LIMIT "PAY FOR SLAY"

Under a new Israeli regulation implemented on May 9, banks will be held liable for facilitating the payment of stipends by the Palestinian Authority (PA) to Palestinian prisoners and their families for terrorist crimes. The regulation also enables Israel to confiscate the stipends paid into these accounts.

Following the change, a number of banks in the West Bank closed the accounts of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. In response, Palestinian masked gunmen took to the streets of some Palestinian cities to protest the decision and attacked or vandalised several banks.

Meanwhile, the PA appears to be trying to hide its payments to Palestinian terrorists and their families to avoid scrutiny from international donors. According to Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), the PA's monthly budget performance reports for 2018 and 2019 listed the payments to prisoners as expenditure of the PA Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs. In 2019, the total was NIS 517 million (A\$225 million). However, in the 2020 budget, there was no listing for the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs in the PA budget and PMW suggests prisoner salaries are now being disguised as transfers to "PLO institutions."

## ISRAEL HELPING PA WITH CORONAVIRUS

On May 11, Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed an agreement for Israel to provide NIS 800 million (A\$347 million) in loans to assist the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to fight coronavirus.

The pandemic has seen mutual cooperation reach new heights in other ways too, including in widely



Israeli soldiers and Palestinian volunteers work together to deliver food and medical supplies in east Jerusalem

circulated photos of IDF soldiers working side-by-side with Palestinian volunteers in east Jerusalem to deliver food, medical and other supplies in coordination with the Jerusalem Municipality.

In other COVID-19 related cooperation, reports emerged on May 17 that, two weeks earlier, the United Arab Emirates had, at Israel's request, rescued a group of Israelis stranded in Morocco by flying them back to Israel in a luxurious royal jet.

## IRAN'S COVID-19 CYBER-MISCHIEF

Iranian regime-backed hackers have reportedly been targeting research institutions and international organisations working on coronavirus treatments. In April and May, Iranian-linked hackers were accused of trying to hack the World Health Organisation, US biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences – makers of the antiviral drug Remdesivir – and several UK universities and facilities researching the virus.

Iran was also reportedly behind an attempted cyberattack on water infrastructure controlled by Israel's Water Authority on April 24, although the attack was quickly detected and neutralised.

Subsequently, a May 9 cyber-attack on Iran's Shahid Rajaee seaport resulted in a major disruption to



the port's activity for several days. Sources cited in the US press later attributed the sophisticated attack to Israel, as a retaliatory warning to Teheran following the attempt to disrupt Israel's water infrastructure.

Iran's propaganda networks have also been very active in pushing coronavirus conspiracy theories targeting Israel and the US, and defending China, on social media.

## IRAN AND VENEZUELA FLY TOGETHER

The Iranian airline Mahan Air, which has been sanctioned and banned by several countries for providing "transportation, funds transfers and personnel travel" for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah, has restarted regular flights to Venezuela.

Officially relaunched in April 2019, this flight route – once dubbed 'Aeroterror' because of its use to ferry terrorist and intelligence operatives, drugs and weaponry – has reportedly been used for transporting hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of gold from Venezuela's vaults to Iran, in exchange for Iranian equipment and technicians helping to restore Venezuela's oil refineries, rapidly depleting the country's hard-currency assets.

Aside from terrorism logistics, new reports highlight that covert activities by Mahan Air may have been behind the spread of coronavirus in the Middle East. A BBC investigation has found the airline continued flying to China long after Iran officially banned flights there, and that it also flew to both Iraq and the UAE after those countries banned flights from Iran. Iraq and Lebanon's first cases were Iranian travellers flying Mahan Air.

## US SIGNALS CONCERNS ABOUT ISRAEL-CHINA RELATIONS

Growing links between China and

Israel are increasingly being publicly highlighted as a concern in US-Israel relations, as tensions rise between Washington and Beijing amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Israel has responded to US concerns by delaying approval for construction of a large desalination plant in a decision coinciding with the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Jerusalem on May 13.

In an interview with an Israeli news channel, Secretary Pompeo said, "We do not want the Chinese Communist Party to have access to Israeli infrastructure, Israeli communication systems, all of the things that put Israeli citizens at risk... and... put the capacity for America to work alongside Israel on important projects at risk as well."

Chinese officials responded to Pompeo's remarks by accusing him of raising security risks "without producing any concrete evidence."

## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### END OF THE RAINBOW

The Turkish government has intervened to save the nation's children from a dangerous pastime – drawing rainbows. While some might think the rainbow a beautiful symbol of hope, Turkey's Islamists are not fooled.

In late March, the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art invited children, unable to go to school due to the COVID-19 restrictions, to draw a rainbow and stick it on their windows to show the "magic of nature." This alarmed the Turkish Education Ministry, which denounced the activity as an "LGBT conspiracy to turn children into gays."

Drawing a rainbow, therefore, is now forbidden in the region where, according to some major religious traditions, the very first one appeared.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Mission to the UK tweeted on May 17, the International Day Against Homophobia,

## IRAN RETREATS FROM ATHLETES BAN

On May 18, Iran's Parliament passed a bill featuring a number of anti-Israel measures, including a ban on any Israeli software, a ban on any cooperation with anyone "affiliated with the Zionist regime," and support for programs "aimed at exposing the Zionist regime's nature and atrocities."

However, an article originally in the bill, which would have banned Iranian athletes from competing against Israelis, was removed from the final version passed into law, reportedly at the behest of Iran's Sports Ministry.

Had that article passed into law, Iran's sporting federations would have faced the likelihood of being expelled from international competition across most sporting codes, as virtually all international sports federations prohibit the avoidance of matches for political reasons.

Biphobia, Interphobia & Transphobia, "In the Middle East LGBTQ are being killed in two entities only: #Israel and Islamic State (ISIS)." It linked to a 2015 article about an Israeli individual stabbing six people at the Jerusalem gay pride march.

Would that be the #Israel that holds annual pride parades; prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation; permits openly LGBTQI people to serve in the military; permits adoption by same-sex couples etc? The #Israel to which gay Palestinians flee to avoid persecution or worse – such as what happened to Mahmoud Ishtawi, executed by Hamas for homosexuality in 2016?

Meanwhile, the "crime" of homosexuality remains a capital offence in many Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia, Iran and Qatar, and in August last year, the PA banned an event by a Palestinian LGBTQI group, with police stating the event would "constitute an affront to the tradition and ... values that Palestinian society has upheld throughout its history." So perhaps the UK Palestinian Mission was just projecting?

## COVER STORY

## UN-HEALTHY

## WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION PROBLEMS REFLECT WIDER UN POLITICISATION AND BIAS

by AIJAC Staff

In recent weeks, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has probably received its greatest public scrutiny since its inception in 1948.

Australia was successful in using the WHO to push for an “impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation” of the origins and handling of the coronavirus pandemic, despite initial strong objections from China.

However, much of the attention on the WHO has taken the form of criticism of its management of the pandemic, including allegedly allowing political deference to the Chinese government to colour its medical advice.

The organisation is clearly feeling embattled as a result and its Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has been hitting back. Calling for unity, he asked critics to “quarantine politicising COVID”. Otherwise, he said, “we will have many body bags in front of us.”

Yet the reality is that, like almost all agencies of the United Nations, the WHO has been politicising its own work in a destructive way, contrary to the spirit of the UN’s founding documents, for decades.

The widespread political bias against Israel that has long pervaded the United Nations and its various agencies has been acknowledged even by successive UN secretaries general.

In December 2016, in his final briefing to the UN Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East, outgoing Secretary General Ban Ki Moon stated: “During the past ten years, I have argued that we must never accept bias against Israel within UN bodies. Decades of political manoeuvrings have created a disproportionate volume of resolutions, reports and conferences criticising Israel.”

Ten years earlier, as he was preparing to farewell the organisation, Kofi Annan told the UN General Assembly “supporters of Israel feel that it is harshly judged, by standards that are not applied to its enemies – and too often this is true, particularly in some UN bodies.”

The current incumbent, Antonio Guterres, told the World Jewish Congress soon after he took office in 2017 that Israel must be treated like any other member state.

Unfortunately, while it is possible to discern some small positive changes in the relationship between the UN and Israel over recent years, the general pattern of exclusion and selective condemnation continues.

The WHO’s problems are essentially one example of these wider discriminatory and destructive tendencies across the UN as an organisation.

This AIR feature story documents this pervasive tendency across the WHO and other UN bodies, including the General Assembly, Human Rights Council, UNRWA, UNESCO and UNICEF, as manifested primarily by long records of discriminatory and factually dubious treatments of Israeli-Palestinian questions.

## THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

by Judy Maynard

The WHO is one of 17 specialised agencies – autonomous international bodies that coordinate their work with the UN – other examples being the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). It was established in 1948, and its objective according to Article 1 of its constitution is “the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has focused international attention on the WHO as never before. Many have been dis-



turbed by the appearance of this supposedly neutral body's one-sided involvement in the politics of China-Taiwan relations, and apparent willingness to blindly follow China's lead in offering incorrect medical and policy advice about the coronavirus, especially in January and February.

However, Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus fended off suggestions the WHO was "China-centric", saying "we are close to every nation, we are colourblind". Another WHO official, Dr Mike Ryan, claimed "the WHO doesn't interact in public debate or criticise our member states in public."

These statements represent a patent disconnect from reality, as leaders and commentators from around the globe have noted.

The fact is that Israel, one of the WHO's 194 members, is criticised each and every year at the World Health Assembly (WHA), the WHO's governing forum. It is the only country to be the subject of an annual agenda item and condemnatory resolution.

Israel has been discriminated against since the WHO's commencement.

With six regional offices, the Eastern Mediterranean region (EMRO) should have been Israel's natural geographical group. However, after decades of effective exclusion by EMRO's Arab members, Israel applied for and was granted membership in the European region in 1985.

Meanwhile EMRO does include the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza.

As Ricki Hollander noted in the May edition of the *AIR*, EMRO reports and documents routinely absolve the Palestinian leadership of all responsibility and blame Israel for all shortcomings in Palestinian healthcare. EMRO effectively acts as a "disseminator of crude anti-Israel propaganda" which is in turn cited by other agencies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, she concluded.

Meanwhile, the WHA convenes once a year in Geneva, during which it always passes a resolution concerning "health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan." Such relentless solicitude for the health of Palestinians is in reality an exercise in Israel-bashing. No other country is ever the subject of any condemnatory WHA resolution. Thus the WHO allows Israel's enemies to exploit an international platform devoted to human health to demonise Israel.

These resolutions play out in a historical context-free zone that is overtly political. For example, the resolution presented at the 65th WHA in 2012, demanded amongst other things "that Israel, the occupying power ... immediately put an end to the closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the closure of the crossing points of

the occupied Gaza Strip that is causing the serious shortage of medicines and medical supplies therein [and] abandon its policies and measures that have led to the prevailing dire health conditions."

It also urged member states, intergovernmental organisations and NGOs "to call upon the international community to exert pressure on the Government of Israel to lift the siege imposed on the occupied Gaza Strip."

A Palestinian Health Ministry annex to the resolution referred to the "enduring stranglehold of the Israeli blockade", and "the apartheid wall that dismembers Pal-



The WHO's annual general assembly in Geneva – which always passes a context-free resolution blaming Israel for Palestinian health problems

estinian territories and isolates them from the rest of the world", which contribute "to making life miserable for all Palestinians."

Historical realities airbrushed out of this picture include the fact that Gaza is not occupied by Israel but governed by Hamas; that essential medical supplies are not subject to the blockade (with some very rare exceptions for dual-use goods); and that the imposition of the blockade and the construction of the separation barrier are responses aimed at preventing terrorist attacks on Israel from the Palestinian territories.

The physical and mental health effects on Israelis from bombardment by tens of thousands of rockets from Gaza appear, in contrast, to be of no concern to the WHO.

For grotesque hypocrisy, however, it is difficult to surpass the submission tendered by the Syrian health ministry, which states: "Oppressed by the Zionist occupation, the population in the occupied Syrian Golan territories is still suffering from many health problems, while preferring the citizenship of their Syrian homeland and rejecting Israeli identity. In addition, the agony experienced by the Arab Syrian population in the occupied Syrian Golan as a result of the practices of the Israeli occupation authorities, cannot be ignored and runs counter to the population's basic

right of access to essential health care.”

This document, similar to other Syrian submissions accepted as annexes by the WHA, is dated April 2012, a year after the commencement of the Syrian Civil War. Bashar al-Assad’s regime’s true concern for the welfare of its people can be gauged by the regime’s willingness to subject them to gross human rights abuses, including chemical weapons attacks, in the course of a war that has cost hundreds of thousands of Syrians their lives, and made refugees of millions more.

Syria’s submissions are blatantly political exercises. Israel’s health ministry countered that the health situation of residents in the Golan, whether Druze or Jewish, was identical to the rest of the country, with full access to hospitals, and that no claims or complaints had been received from the Druze population in this regard. The ministry also pointed out, futilely, that “the Health Assembly is not the forum to discuss the narrative of an ongoing conflict nor the place to decide on political matters.”

The Palestinian annex to the 2016 anti-Israel resolution of the 69<sup>th</sup> WHA repeatedly used such words as “apartheid”, “racist” and “shocking”, and despite multiple mentions of Gaza and “the blockade” somehow failed to include a single reference to Hamas, which actually runs healthcare in Gaza. It noted that “traffic accidents cause numerous deaths and injury-related disabilities in Palestine,” 85% of which are due to human error, but tried to blame Israel for accidents occurring outside Palestinian towns and cities by claiming these were due to “Palestinians’ fear” of Israeli settlers or “occupation forces”.

That same year’s Syrian Health Ministry submission included amongst its fabrications such antisemitic tropes as “The Israeli occupation authorities continue to experiment on Syrian and Arab prisoners with medicines and drugs and to inject them with pathogenic viruses, causing them to develop diseases and medical conditions that are potentially fatal.”

**“Israel, one of the WHO’s 194 members, is criticised each and every year at the World Health Assembly (WHA), the WHO’s governing forum. It is the only country to be the subject of an annual agenda item”**

The reality is of course very different. For over five years, from early 2013 until September 2018 – when Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad regained control of south-western Syria – the IDF had provided humanitarian assistance to Syrian nationals living near the border. The initial aid, allowing injured Syrians to be treated in field hospitals, was ramped up considerably in 2016 with the introduction of “Operation Good Neighbour”. This included setting up a day clinic on the border which treated 7000 people, as well as a program admitting 5,000 Syrians to Israeli hospitals.

Another reality ignored in the WHA’s annual Israel-bashing exercise is that in the years from 1967 until 2000, life

expectancy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip rose from 48 to 72. In the same period infant mortality fell from 60 per 1,000 live births to 15. The WHO’s own documents show that in 2017 life expectancy in “the occupied Palestinian territory” had further improved to 73.8. According to EMRO’s current figures, life expectancy in Syria is 63.8, in Jordan 74.3, in Egypt 70.5, in Yemen 65.3 and in Saudi Arabia 75, showing that life expectancy for Palestinians is comparable to or better than that of others in the region.

At the 70th WHA in 2017, several countries that ultimately voted in favour of that year’s anti-Israel resolution criticised one example of a politicised manoeuvre by WHO management, whereby a positive report on Israel and the Golan was hidden from the public due to pressure from the Assad regime, on the pretext of “time constraints”.

Speaking on behalf of Austria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, and The Netherlands, the German representative welcomed Israel’s constructive approach, saying it was “regrettable” the report was not published which was “clearly due to the Syrian behaviour, which we can only condemn in the strongest terms. This is particularly deplorable in view of the abysmal health situation in other parts of Syria.”

At last year’s 72nd WHA, the representatives of Brazil, Canada, Germany, the UK and the US all spoke out against politicisation of the WHO and voted no to the annual anti-Israel resolution, along with Australia, the Czech Republic, Guatemala, Honduras and Hungary.

Yet with regard to the WHO’s anti-Israel bias, there is clearly still a long way to go despite these small signs of change.

The WHO has a vitally important part to play in advancing good health throughout the world – never more so than during the current COVID-19 global pandemic – and discharges much of its work effectively. Perhaps the con-

## AUSTRALIA’S LARGEST APARTMENT DEVELOPER



- Meriton Suites
- Apartments for sale
- Apartments for rent

**M**  
**MERITON**

meriton.com.au

Sydney | Brisbane | Gold Coast



troversty in which the WHO currently finds itself regarding claims of politicisation with regard to China will sharpen the focus of its members on much-needed reforms that will also affect WHO's politicised behaviour on Israel.

However, it is hard to be too hopeful about such reform as long as it remains part of a UN system where such politicisation and bias are simply endemic.

AIR

## THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

by Allon Lee

Every November/December, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passes approximately 20 one-sided resolutions which blame Israel for the Arab-Israeli conflict's longevity and non-existence of a Palestinian state, or otherwise condemn Israel.

On no other conflict does UNGA lavish anything remotely approaching this amount of attention.

As the NGO UN Watch observed regarding the 2019 UNGA: "Resolutions on Israel: 18. Resolutions on Rest of the World: 7."

The simplest explanation for this grossly biased reality is that there is an automatic majority at the UN that consistently and unquestioningly supports the claims of the Palestinian national movement. This includes the 57 member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the even larger number of countries freed from colonial rule in the 1960s and 1970s which are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause as a kindred "national liberation struggle".

Historically, both Australian Labor and Coalition governments have understood the problematic nature of these UNGA resolutions and opted to abstain or vote no on most of them.

### RESOLUTIONS SUPPORTING UN ANTI-ISRAEL PROPAGANDA

There are four resolutions, which Australia consistently opposes, which are especially critical to perpetuating the anti-Israel activities that permeate everything the UN does. These resolutions set up special bodies devoted to making the Palestinian cause a focus of anything and everything done anywhere in the UN's vast bureaucracy. This would include encouraging bodies like the WHO to include a resolution on the Palestinians at every annual meeting.

These bodies are:

1. "The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories" which produces a yearly report denouncing Israel's security measures as violations of human rights but ignores the terrorism they are responding to.

2. "The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People" which makes pro-Palestinian recommendations to the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretary-General.

3. "The Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat", a permanent bureaucracy within the Secretary-General's Department which is supposed to "organise international meetings and conferences" and "prepare and widely disseminate publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine." It also supports the above committee to organise the "International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People" held every year on

November 29, the date UNGA voted in 1947 to accept the UN Partition Plan. The day is intended as a rebuke over the failure to create a Palestinian state in the seven decades that have elapsed since then.

4. "The Special Information Program on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat", which is intended to work with media and other or-

ganisations to "heighten awareness of and support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people."

### DETACHED FROM REALITY

Many of the annual UNGA resolutions seem to exist in a parallel world where Palestinian terrorism is not a threat and Israeli security measures are only ever punitive, rather than preventive or legitimate.

For example, dozens of resolutions condemn Israel's security fence on the West Bank as breaching international law, rather than a legal method of self-defence that was reluctantly built to respond to the terrorism of the Second Intifada, and which dramatically succeeded in preventing terror attacks, saving lives on both sides.

Resolutions such as "Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues" call for restitution of property and income lost by Palestinians in 1948 but ignore the 900,000 Jews from Middle East countries who often were forced out of their home nations penniless when Arab governments began persecuting them after Israel's creation.

Many of the resolutions contain clauses reflecting a reality that no longer exists, such as "Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities" which fails to take into account the fact that Palestinians have had



The UN General Assembly: Around 20 anti-Israeli resolutions passed every year

their own functioning government on 40% of the West Bank since the mid-90s and practical control over all of Gaza since 2005.

While they are happy to condemn Israel, none of the resolutions take note of the Israeli offers made in 2000, 2001 and 2008 to create a Palestinian state on almost all the disputed land, which the Palestinian Authority rejected.

One of the more pernicious resolutions is “Jerusalem,” which condemns Israel’s control over the city’s eastern half captured in 1967, where the Old City is located. The resolution criticises supposed “changes [to] the status of the holy city of Jerusalem in contravention of international law”, and only refers to the Temple Mount – the holiest site in Judaism – using the Arabic name of “Haram al-Sharif”.

This resolution, and others like it, absurdly say it is illegal for any Israeli Jews to live in the city from which they were ethnically cleansed in 1948 by Jordanian forces, after which the ancient Jewish quarter was demolished, including dozens of synagogues. The resolution falsely suggests that Israel impedes religious freedom in Jerusalem, when in fact Christians and Muslims have administered their own holy sites there since 1967.

## RECOGNISING THE UN’S INHERENT BIAS

The way that Israel is being unfairly treated by UNGA was underlined by a surprising source on Nov. 13, 2013.

As the plenum began rubber stamping nine anti-Israel resolutions, a hot mic incident caught a UNGA interpreter complaining to her colleagues, “I mean, I think when you have five statements, not five, like a total of ten resolutions on Israel and Palestine, there’s gotta be something, *c’est un peu trop, non?* [It’s a bit much, no?] I mean I know... There’s other really bad shit happening, but no one says anything, about the other stuff.”

One of the resolutions in question called for Israel to hand over the Golan Heights to Syria. At the time, civil war in Syria had been raging for two and a half years and more than 120,000 Syrians had been killed in the conflict.

Yet video footage showed UN delegates laughing at the interpreter’s comment, and then voting overwhelmingly in favour of the nine resolutions.

Another example of UNGA’s selective moral outrage was its shameful refusal in 2018 to pass a simple resolution condemning the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, whose commitment to Israel’s destruction contravenes the UN charter’s central goal of “develop[ing] friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.” A resolution was instead passed calling for peace but which, true to form, still contained implied criticism of Israel.

As Nikki Haley, then US Ambassador to the UN, said to the plenum prior to the vote, “The General Assembly has

passed over 700 resolutions condemning Israel. And not one single resolution condemning Hamas. That, more than anything else, is a condemnation of the United Nations itself.”

AIR

## THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

by Sharyn Mittelman

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was established with the intention that it would be the UN body responsible for promoting and protecting human rights around the world. Based in Geneva, it is comprised of 47 UN Member States elected by the UN General Assembly based on geographical distribution (African States: 13 seats, Asia Pacific States: 13 seats, Latin American and Caribbean states: eight seats, Western European and other States: seven seats, Eastern European States: six seats).



The UN Human Rights Council has a permanent agenda item which specifies that Israel must be debated, and presumably condemned, at every single meeting

The UNHRC has a number of functions: through the Universal Periodic Review it is supposed to review the human rights records of all UN members; the “Advisory Committee” serves as the Council’s think tank; a complaints procedure enables individuals and organisations to raise alleged human rights violations; and it also has “UN Special Procedures” which include special rapporteurs, special representatives, independent experts and working groups that report on issues or human rights situations in specific countries.

The UNHRC was established in 2006 to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights, which was criticised for allowing countries who were human rights violators to dominate proceedings and establish a culture of impunity for many rights violators based on political considerations.

Yet ironically, the UNHRC seems to have suffered the same fate. Despite the UN website stating that with “membership on the Council comes a responsibility to uphold high human rights standards”, its current membership

includes numerous states with poor human rights records including Qatar, Venezuela, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Sudan and Bahrain. Meanwhile, member states seeking election to the UNHRC this year include leading human rights offenders Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Like its predecessor, the UNHRC has been accused of being used as a political tool which prioritises the interests of member states ahead of any genuine commitment towards improving human rights around the world.

This was exemplified on March 12, when the UNHRC adopted a report on its five-year review of Iran's human rights record, in which the vast majority of UN member-states who commented – 95 out of 111

– praised Iran's human rights record. Iran's record was applauded despite the fact the Teheran is refusing to allow the UN's Special Rapporteur on Iran, Javād Rehmān, to visit the country to investigate its human rights conditions.

This is the same Iranian regime whose security forces last November killed around 1,500 Iranians protesting against the regime, which persecutes women for refusing to wear a veil, which executes child offenders, which discriminates blatantly against minorities such as the Bahai, and which has imprisoned foreigners on false charges to be used as hostages to further Teheran's foreign policy, such as Australian-British Melbourne University academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert.

The UNHRC praise of Iran stands in contrast with reports from human rights watchdogs like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch which have documented serial and pervasive abuses of human rights in Iran.

The praise for Iran is not particularly unusual in UNHRC human rights review processes – for instance, in Qatar's review in May 2019, 97 out of 104 countries, or 93%, expressed praise for that country's dubious human rights record.

**T**he politicisation of the UNHRC is most evident from its systemic bias against Israel and overwhelmingly disproportionate focus on the Jewish state, which appears to effectively shield other countries from having their own human rights problems subjected to serious scrutiny.

The Council is notorious for its Agenda Item 7, the only permanent agenda item that targets a single state: Israel. All other human rights allegations against all other UN member states are debated under Agenda Item 4. Item 7 demands that alleged Israeli human rights abuses must be debated at each and every meeting of the UNHRC, regardless of what is happening on the ground in Israel or anywhere else. This agenda item typically results in several resolutions condemning Israel at each of the thrice yearly sessions of the UNHRC – often more resolutions than

those targeting the rest of the world's countries combined.

In February, the UNHCR published an unprecedented “blacklist” of 112 businesses operating in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, pursuant to a resolution the Council passed in 2016. The UNHRC has never released similar lists of companies operating in occupied territories, such as Turkish-occupied Cyprus or the occupied Ukrainian territories, and the Council itself offered no argument that what these overwhelmingly Israeli companies were doing

was either illegal under international law or involved any form of human rights abuse. The obvious goal of the list was to harm the companies on it by encouraging boycotts, thus assisting the goals of the anti-Israel

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

In June 2018, the US announced that it would leave the UNHRC, with then US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley condemning the “hypocrisy” of the UNHRC and its “unrelenting bias” against Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu welcomed the move, referring to the Council as “a biased, hostile, anti-Israel organisation that has betrayed its mission of protecting human rights.”

Australia is currently a member of the UNHRC (from 2018 to 2020) and it has taken a different approach. Instead of boycotting the UNHRC, it has consistently called out bias against Israel from within the Council. For example, Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne told the

**“The UNHRC is likely to continue to suffer from severe hypocrisy, as membership is largely based on geographic blocs rather than the commitment to human rights of the member-states”**



*Your opportunity to  
earn 10%+ target returns  
in partnership with one  
of Australia's most  
successful families*





Council on Feb. 29, 2019: “As has been our longstanding position since the inception of the Human Rights Council in 2006, for over 12 years, Australia opposes in principle the existence of Item 7 of the Agenda of the Council.” She added, “It is our firm view that a separate agenda item focusing on a single country situation – in this case Israel – is inappropriate. It does not occur in any other context, for any other country.”

Yet the UNHRC is likely to continue to suffer from severe hypocrisy, as membership is largely based on geographic blocs rather than the commitment to human rights of the member-states elected to the Council. Thus, even though more and more Western democracies like Australia are today voting against all resolutions introduced under Agenda Item 7, they are almost always outvoted.

The UNHRC could be an important institution for calling out human rights abuses if reforms were made and democracies were able to hold human rights violators to account. But at the moment, who is condemned and who is praised by the Council are often politicised decisions, based on the interests of the member-state governments involved, many of which are themselves serial abusers, and has very little to do with objective human rights records.

AIR

## UNRWA

by Naomi Levin

In April this year, a brief media release revealed a significant but largely ignored situation: military equipment had been found in a United Nations-owned building in Gaza.

Given the Israeli military has not maintained a presence in Gaza since 2005, the only forces this equipment could belong to are those of Gaza-based terrorist groups, such as Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

The building was a vacant school administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). The reason it was largely ignored was because this was nothing new.

In the scheme of UNRWA scandals, this one ranked fairly low – *only* one hand grenade and one military vest were uncovered.

UNRWA was established by the UN General Assembly in 1949 to assist Palestinians displaced in the 1948 War of Independence. Its mandate is regularly updated by the General Assembly, most recently in late 2019. What is fascinating about UNRWA is that when it began operating in 1950, it assisted 750,000 people. Today, it provides services to 5.6 million people.

Herein lies the first major problem with UNRWA. Unlike the United Nations’ only other long-term refugee agency – the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) – UNRWA does not seek to resettle Palestinians. It continues to treat Palestinians who live in Gaza, Bethlehem, Ramallah, that is, Palestinian territories governed largely by Palestinian leadership, as refugees. Uniquely among all the refugee populations in the world, UNRWA also grants refugee status to the descendants of the original 750,000 Arabs who became refugees after 1948 regardless of whether they were born in, live in or carry the passport of another country.

To give just one example, 2.2 million Jordanian citizens – many of whom were born in Jordan, travel on Jordanian passports and own property in Jordan – are classified as Palestinian refugees by UNRWA and can access UNRWA services, such as medical clinics and financial support. This model has been described by the current US Administration as “simply unsustainable”.



An UNRWA facility in Gaza: UNRWA brings destructive support for a “right of return” with its welfare services

What does UNRWA intend to do with those 5.6 million Palestinian refugees? Support their wishes to resettle in sovereign Israeli territory under the so-called Palestinian “right of return” by maintaining them as refugees until this becomes possible. Given Israel has a current total population of around nine million, approximately three-quarters of whom are Jewish, implementing this “right” would erase Israel’s status as a Jewish state.

Supporters of a Palestinian “right of return” argue that this “right” is guaranteed by UN resolutions. This is not correct. The non-binding resolution to which they refer (UN General Assembly Resolution 194), does not specify that Palestinians, *as well as* their descendants, be granted the right to return to their pre-1949 homes. In fact, this resolution maintains that refugees “wishing to ... live at peace with their neighbours” should be permitted to return, or be provided with compensation, “at the earliest practicable date”.

UNRWA’s operations support a “right of return” which

is far more comprehensive and categorical than anything the language of that resolution supports.

In their recently published book *The War of Return: How Western Indulgence of the Palestinian Dream has Obstructed the Path to Peace*, Einat Wilf and Adi Schwartz write that the Palestinian demand for a right of return reflects a belief about the Palestinian relationship with the land and a deeply held unwillingness among many Palestinians to share any part of the land with Jewish inhabitants. They write, “the UN structural support and Western financial support for these Palestinian beliefs has led to the creation of a permanent and ever-growing population of Palestinian refugees, and what is by now a nearly insurmountable obstacle to peace.”

Wilf and Schwartz specifically point the finger at UNRWA and argue that, given its focus on a Palestinian right of return, and given the incompatibility of a Palestinian right of return and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, UNRWA should be dismantled.

**R**eturning to the discovery of weapons in a disused UNRWA facility, this find was a reminder of a long history of incidents and activities pointing to a lack of neutrality and complete politicisation by the UN agency. UNRWA has taught anti-Israel and antisemitic lessons and glorified violent jihad in its schools; it has failed to prevent UNRWA facilities from being used by terrorists to store – and even fire – weapons, and it has employed numerous members of Hamas, a group which does not recognise Israel’s right to exist.

Australia, the UK, the EU and other countries that donate to UNRWA have politely encouraged UNRWA to clean up its act. However this encouragement has not been coupled with threats of penalties for non-compliance, so egregious examples of UNRWA’s bias and destructive activities against Israel continue.

As mentioned earlier, UNRWA’s mandate was recently renewed and the “temporary” agency will continue operation until at least 2023. Israel and the United States were the only countries that voted against UNRWA’s continuation. However, there is growing pressure on some donor governments – particularly Western governments – to reconsider their financial support for UNRWA, or to at least make that support conditional.

Some, like Wilf and Schwartz, would like to see UNRWA disbanded completely. They write: “Officially, Western states are committed to advancing an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement based on a two-state solution: a Jewish state of Israel and an Arab state of Palestine. But by supporting UNRWA, they are simultaneously nurturing the Palestinians’ demand to return to Israel in complete contravention of this stated policy.”

They do not see dismantling UNRWA as an excuse to cease all services to vulnerable Palestinians. Instead, this

should involve transferring care for those in crisis situations in Syria, in particular, but also Lebanon, to local agencies, or even the UNHCR; ceasing assistance to “refugees” who are also full Jordanian citizens; handing over UNRWA service delivery in West Bank and Gaza cities and towns to the Palestinian Authority; and ending support for the legally-baseless Palestinian “right of return” to sovereign Israeli territory.

Wilf and Schwartz – and others – argue that a first step towards dismantling UNRWA is for major funders, including Australia, to use their leverage to demand change. With the US no longer providing funds to UNRWA, the EU, Canada, Australia and Japan are UNRWA’s key international supporters.

Like so many other UN agencies, politicised anti-Israel biases pervade UNRWA – but in a way particularly inimical to any realistic hopes of a two-state Israeli-Palestinian peace resolution. Unlike other agencies though, these challenges probably cannot be resolved through political or leadership change to return the agency to its original function and purpose. With UNRWA, these problems have become existential, and go to the heart of the organisation itself.

AIR

## UNESCO

by Oved Lobel

**T**he United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is involved in many vital projects around the world. It is run largely by a 58-member Executive Board which, like the UNHRC, is divided up and chosen by regional groups.

Unfortunately, like almost all UN bodies, it is so fundamentally anti-Israel that it ignores its own advisory bodies and even its own Director-General to pass anti-Israel resolutions, of which it has adopted dozens since 2009. Israel’s storied history with UNESCO predates the accession of the “State of Palestine” as a member state in 2011, although that controversial act led to the cut-off of US funding. The organisation’s ongoing biases and financial mismanagement ultimately led to the withdrawal of both the US and Israel from it in 2017.

According to UN Watch, “Between 2009-2014, UNESCO adopted 46 resolutions against Israel; 1 on Syria; and none on Iran, Sudan, North Korea, or any other country in the world.”

It even elected the murderous Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad to its human rights committees in 2011, and despite a campaign to undo the farce, including a statement by then Director-General Irina Bokova that she “does not





Between 2009 and 2014, UNESCO adopted 46 resolutions critical of Israel; one on Syria; and none on any other country

see how Syria can contribute to the work of the committees,” it was not immediately revoked. Iran and Sudan were also elected to leading positions in UNESCO bodies in 2015.

In July 2012, UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee secretly voted to place the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on its list of endangered heritage sites, with its location noted as “Palestine.” The PA’s petition to use emergency measures to have the site classified as endangered was not only rejected by Israel, but by all three of the Christian custodians of the church and both of the two UNESCO specialist committees which examined the proposal.

Despite the almost universal rejection of the Palestinian request, members still voted to accept it and the site was only removed from the endangered list in July 2019, demonstrating the comprehensive politicisation of UNESCO.

But perhaps the final straw in UNESCO’s ongoing campaign to delegitimise Israel came in 2016, when UNESCO passed the “Occupied Palestine Resolution” that not only denied any Jewish connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall – referring to them only by their Islamic names – but also accused Israel of planting fake Jewish graves in Muslim cemeteries in Jerusalem, among other ridiculous slanders. Even UNESCO Director-General Bokova repudiated her own organisation’s resolution, saying, “I am concerned about the way physical violence is being associated with symbolic violence, as well as the will to erase history and instrumentalise culture.”

AIR

## UNICEF

by Ahron Shapiro

UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, like so many other UN departments, is disproportionately invested in projects in Palestinian-ruled areas. These projects often promote, directly or indirectly, the Palestinian narrative.

However UNICEF is considered to be one of the few

UN bodies that also has helped Israeli children, both historically and in recent years, including those affected by Palestinian violence.

In 2008, the Anti-Defamation League defended UNICEF in a briefing as “not ‘anti-Israel’”, noting that before 1965, when it became a UNICEF donor country, Israel had been a UNICEF aid recipient and was on excellent terms with the organisation on all levels.

“Since that time, UNICEF has provided assistance and aid to Israeli children in emergency situations”, the 2008 briefing continued. “For example, in 2006, during the Second Lebanon War, the Canadian and the US Committees for UNICEF donated \$200,000 to a program created to assist children deal with the psychological trauma they endured from the war... UNICEF has a program to help children in Sderot deal with their psychological suffering due to the barrage of rocket attacks on that town.”

Over the past decade, UNICEF has singled out Israel for criticism over its treatment of Palestinian minors arrested by Israeli security forces, but has also been castigated by Palestinian political advocates for its willingness to work closely with the IDF in the interests of improving conditions facing Palestinian teenagers in military detention.

AIR

## CONCLUSION

*It can be argued that mistakes made by the WHO as the result of its politicised decisions to defer to Chinese claims and interests in the early days of the coronavirus crisis cost lives. Poorly informed, delayed and politicised WHO pronouncements and decisions potentially meant the pandemic spread more quickly and widely than would have been the case if the WHO had taken stronger steps to warn nations earlier, and urged nations to quarantine contact with travellers from Wuhan or other affected parts of China before the virus had spread around the globe so extensively.*

*But these errors were not simply a matter of problems with the decision-making or governance at the top of the WHO. These were arguably all but inevitable because the WHO is part of the UN system, where, as this feature has shown by using the example of Israel, politicisation and political biases are so widespread across virtually all agencies and bodies as to be essentially baked into the whole sprawling network of UN organisations.*

*The UN was created to fulfill humankind’s highest ideals, and while it has always fallen far short of those ideals, it still does much valuable work. Inquiries into the errors of the WHO in handling the coronavirus crisis should be an occasion not only to reform that important organisation, but to look at the serious problems with the whole UN system of which it is a part. There is so much more that the UN system can do to live up to its founding ideals if the curse of endemic politicisation and bias which currently afflicts virtually all its activities can be lifted, or, at the very least, ameliorated.*



Abe and Marlene Zelwer



**Mental health care leaders in  
our community for 50 years.**

300 Warrigal Road, Glen Iris  
Phone: 03 9805 7333  
[www.delmonthospital.com.au](http://www.delmonthospital.com.au)



*'Your Care in Mind'*

WITH COMPLIMENTS



L1 26 BEATTY AVENUE  
ARMADALE VIC 3143

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



# Big government – Israeli-style

## A complex political betrothal in Jerusalem

by Amotz Asa-Ei

**T**he sense of finality was a relief, and the timing could hardly have been more symbolic.

With schools scheduled to fully reopen the following Sunday, and thus end the education system's lockdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the Knesset assembled on Thursday, May 14 in order to swear in Israel's 35th Government, following three inconclusive elections and 500 days of political deadlock.

Instead, the odd and convoluted political structure Binyamin Netanyahu produced en route to his fifth premiership refused to rise to its feet, thus exposing its most glaring weakness – an obesity problem.

Realising it would split the ruling Likud's main competitor, Blue and White, and thus restore the stability Israeli politics had lost, in late March, Netanyahu offered his rival Lt. Gen. (ret.) Benny Gantz a national unity deal whereby they would each be able to appoint the same number of ministers and rotate the premiership between them. Moreover, the deal could go forward even if Gantz failed to bring his entire faction to this political betrothal.

Blue and White indeed broke up, and Netanyahu thus seemed to end up with the best of both worlds. On the one hand, he was the head of a very broad government, while, on the other hand, he had a humbled and weakened coalition partner whose faction of 33 lawmakers had shrunk to only 17, because the rest would not serve under the indicted Netanyahu.

However, the deal's parity principle meant that Netanyahu would have fewer cabinet positions to distribute among Likud's 36 lawmakers. Though he foresaw this, and expanded the government from 22 to an unprecedented 35 ministers, it still left him with hardly a dozen cabinet positions to distribute among his own people, as the rest of his allotment was reserved for Likud's ultra-Orthodox satellite parties.

The result was an unsolvable puzzle and a gathering revolt.

With the Knesset vote hours away, two of Netanyahu's most able and loyal followers, outgoing Agriculture Minister Tzahi Hanegbi and outgoing deputy Defence Minister Avi Dichter, a former head of Shin Bet, said they would not show up for the vote, after having heard nothing concerning their appointments.

Until that moment, Netanyahu seemed on top of the complex situation he created, benefitting from a mixture of political improvisation and creative manoeuvring.

The improvisation was about creating new positions, and the manoeuvring was about vacating old ones.

The most innovative move involved Gilad Erdan, the outgoing Internal Security Minister, who was offered ambassadorships to both the United States and the United Nations, simultaneously. The 49-year-old lawyer, who has



Israel's new 35 minister cabinet meeting for the first time while social distancing

been a minister for the past 11 years, agreed, thus clearing one senior cabinet seat.

Another solution was to slice slivers from existing ministries, and also create new ones, a formula that generated six new ministerial openings, including the bizarre combined Higher Education and Water Affairs portfolio, which went to outgoing Environment Minister Ze'ev Elkin.

Even more inventively, Netanyahu created a Ministry for Settlements and handed it to outgoing Minister for Diaspora Affairs Tzipi Hotoveli, with the caveat that she will become Ambassador to the United Kingdom in three months' time, and then hand over this new ministry to outgoing Agriculture Minister Tzahi Hanegbi. In the meantime, Hanegbi will be a minister without portfolio.

A similarly complex deal was struck with outgoing Culture Minister Miri Regev, who will be Transport Minister for 18 months, and then, when Gantz replaces Netanyahu as prime minister as per their agreement, she has been promised the job of foreign minister.

Such were the ministerial inventions.

Another apparent political ploy was to push overboard outgoing Defence Minister Naftali Bennett and his Yamina faction, by making them an offer they could not accept.

The party that held the Defence, Education and Transport ministries in the last government was asked to make do with Education, a junior ministry, and a deputy minister. Yamina refused and is going into opposition.

But then again, Netanyahu struck a separate deal with the outgoing Education Minister, Rafi Peretz, whereby the former chief rabbi of the IDF will split from Yamina and join the new Government as Minister for Jerusalem Affairs.

Yet this meant one less cabinet seat for Likud's politicians – as did the deal Netanyahu struck with MK Orly Levi-Abekasis, the 46-year-old lawyer who defected to Likud's fold from the Labor-Meretz alliance, and for whom Netanyahu created a Ministry for Strengthening and Advancing Community.

Added up, these developments created a feeling within Likud that Netanyahu was neglecting or cutting out his loyalists. Most notable among them is former Jerusalem mayor Nir Barkat, whom Netanyahu publicly presented during the election campaign as his prospective candidate for finance minister. Instead, the popular Barkat was offered assorted junior ministries, all of which he rejected, and will be a backbencher.

Avi Dichter will also observe the large cabinet from the outside, as will former Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar, in what the media has portrayed as punishment for challenging Netanyahu in a primary election for Likud's leadership last December.

A Sa'ar loyalist, Sharren Haskel was offered the position of Ambassador to Australia. She however decided to refuse.

Likud's leaders must have been particularly frustrated to see what was happening with the coalition's other major bloc, where 16 cabinet seats were being distributed among 19 lawmakers from Blue and White and Labor.

This inflationary inversion of Likud's predicament resulted in another oddity of government, the installation of a second minister in the Defence Ministry. Social activist Michael Biton, a former mayor of the southern town of Yeroham, will be in charge of civilian affairs at the ministry.

All the turmoil within Likud resulted in the postponement of the Knesset's swearing-in vote from Thursday, May 14 to the following Sunday, May 17.

The new government was still approved by a vote of 73 to 46, the kind of handsome majority that the complex coalition deal was engineered to create. However, the new coalition's imbalances and internal stresses were laid bare even before its birth, thus denting its public image, and raising doubts concerning its longevity.

All this is on top of the daunting issues it will have to tackle. The most urgent challenge will naturally be the coronavirus pandemic.

The Health Ministry, which was headed by United Torah Judaism's controversial Yaakov Litzman, will pass to Likud's Yuli Edelstein, the former Speaker of the Knesset. Litzman decided to leave that ministry of his own volition after having controlled it for the better part of a decade, and will now be Minister of Housing.

However, his departure from health likely reflects the fact that the 71-year-old ultra-Orthodox rabbi's effectiveness during the crisis was widely criticised. Among other issues, during the current pandemic, he seemed to have vanished into the shadow of Netanyahu, who personally assumed leadership of Israel's response to the crisis, appearing nightly on TV with instructions for the public.



Yaakov Litzman

Litzman is also the subject of a police investigation over alleged interference with efforts to extradite accused child sex offender Malka Leifer to Australia to face trial.

For the 61-year-old Edelstein, this will be the moment of truth for his 24-year political career. After two ministerial stints and seven years as Knesset Speaker, the former Soviet Zionist activist, who endured KGB interrogations and Soviet gulags, will now be at the heart of a national struggle. This will test his policy chops and political leadership on a daily basis, even as his name is being touted as one of Netanyahu's potential successors.

The pandemic's other side, the economy, will become the task of outgoing Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz, in his new role as Finance Minister – after Netanyahu reneged on his pre-election promise to Barkat.

The 64-year-old Katz's main challenge will be to tackle the urgent employment crisis that the pandemic has caused. Unemployment soared almost overnight from a negligible 3.6% to over 25%, as more than a million Israelis lost their jobs under the coronavirus lockdown.

Katz is a key party boss within the Likud and his ap-

**C | F | S | G**  
CONCEPT FINANCIAL SERVICES GROUP

**MERGER & ACQUISITIONS**  
**CAPITAL RAISINGS**  
**DIRECT INVESTMENT**

For more information visit [cfsg.com.au](http://cfsg.com.au)  
or contact Marcus H. Rose, Executive Chairman,  
on **03 8676 0581** or [info@cfsg.com.au](mailto:info@cfsg.com.au)  
Level 3, 365 Little Collins Street, Melbourne Australia





pointment is a vote of confidence on Netanyahu's part, which further enhances Katz's position as the man currently best placed to become the Likud's next leader. Yet failure in his new portfolio could easily undo his frontrunner status.

Also in the thick of the pandemic commotion will be new Education Minister Maj-Gen (res) Yoav Galant, 61, the outgoing Immigration and Absorption Minister.

The task of tackling the pandemic will be coordinated through a special "coronavirus cabinet" in which Edelstein, Katz and Galant will be joined by Netanyahu and Gantz.

Gantz himself, as Defence Minister, will be tasked with preserving the IDF's resources as the Government greatly expands civilian spending in the wake of the pandemic on two separate fronts: by enlarging the health budget, and through stimulating businesses and compensating the lockdown's economic victims.

Internationally, the challenge ahead for the new Government will be the Trump Administration's Middle East peace plan, released in January, and its suggestion that Israel could apply sovereignty to parts of the West Bank.

Netanyahu has repeatedly vowed to go ahead with applying sovereignty, but whatever he does on this prickly front will have to be done in concert with Gantz, as his Defence Minister, and with Gantz's second in command, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Gabi Ashkenazi, the new Foreign Minister.

Both former IDF chiefs agree in principle with the idea of annexing the sparsely settled Jordan Valley area, which a majority of Israelis consider strategically vital. However, they will be more attentive to European and Arab hostility to any prospective change in the legal status quo there, especially from strategic ally Jordan, who is already voicing strong opposition to any such move. Coupled with the pair's reported lack of appetite for annexing Israeli settlements west of the Jordan Valley, this issue might strongly test the new coalition's integrity.

A third challenge will be the judiciary, as the Justice Ministry passes from Likud to Blue and White's Avi Nissenkorn, whose first task will be to appoint a new State Attorney.

An employment lawyer and former chairman of the Histadrut labour federation, the 53-year-old Nissenkorn's task, as his party sees it, will be to protect the judiciary from any potential manipulation by Likud during Netanyahu's upcoming trial for alleged bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, which is scheduled to open on May 24.

Outgoing Likud Justice Minister Amir Ohana, a 44-year-old lawyer, will be the new Internal Security Minister, a role in which he will have to immediately nominate a new commissioner of the Israel Police Force.

Netanyahu's opponents see Ohana as a proxy for the PM, installed to serve his boss's interests in the judiciary. He will be scrutinised in his new position in that same spirit, only now that suspicion will be harboured, not only by the Opposition and the media, but also by the Blue and White ministers Ohana will find sitting across from him at the cabinet table.

Also on the judicial front, Blue and White will resist prospective efforts by Likud to pass legislation that would weaken Israel's Supreme Court by allowing a supermajority in the legislature to override court rulings.

If Likud chooses to resume these efforts as promoted by some of its legislators in the past, it will likely be able to count on sympathetic assistance from new Knesset Speaker Yariv Levin – a 50-year-old outspoken lawyer, the outgoing Tourism Minister, and one of Netanyahu's closest confidantes.

One of the less discussed appointments is Immigration and Absorption Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata, a 38-year-old Ethiopian-born lawyer who arrived in Israel at age three in Operation



Pnina Tamano-Shata

Moses. This was a famous 1984 mission that secretly brought much of the Ethiopian Jewish community to Israel.

Tamano-Shata was a TV presenter before joining the Yesh Atid party that later became part of Blue and White.

When her party leader, Yair Lapid, decided to part with Gantz after the latter's decision to accept Netanyahu's unity deal, Tamano-Shata sided with Gantz, saying she was heeding the public's urge for a broad government in the wake of the pandemic.

A mother of two and a lawmaker for the past five years, Tamano-Shata is the first Ethiopian immigrant to become a minister.

Another new first is Diaspora Affairs Minister Omer Yankelevich, also of Blue and White – a lawyer, mother of five and the first ultra-Orthodox woman to hold a cabinet portfolio in Israel.

Both are happy precedents in any event, but doubly so in the aftermath of the most excruciating and perplexing 500 days in the history of Israeli politics.

## With Compliments



# CAN ISRAEL IMPLEMENT TRUMP'S PLAN WHILE APPEASING JORDAN?

by Herb Keinon

Israel-watchers abroad looking for cues as to whether the new Netanyahu-Gantz government will extend Israeli sovereignty over large swathes of the West Bank got little clarity from new Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi's maiden speech on the world stage on Monday, May 18.

Ashkenazi, in a changing of the guard ceremony at the Foreign Ministry with outgoing minister Israel Katz, sent mixed messages.

On the one hand, he praised US President Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century," which green-lighted Israeli annexation of 30% of Judea and Samaria under certain conditions.

"We stand before significant regional opportunities, foremost of which is President Trump's peace initiative," Ashkenazi said. "I see the plan as a significant milestone."

Trump's plan, he continued, "presents us with a historic opportunity to shape Israel's future and its borders for the coming decades."

The plan only presents Israel with a historic opportunity to shape its borders if Israel intends on changing its borders. That was one of Ashkenazi's messages.

Yet on the other hand, in the very next breath, he said the plan will be moved forward while preserving Israel's "peace treaties" with Jordan and Egypt. He said these treaties were a "strategic asset" that Israel needed to carefully guard, and that he sees great importance in strengthening the "strategic ties" with those countries.

That was another of Ashkenazi's messages, one that must be seen in the context of Jordan's King Abdullah hinting broadly in recent weeks that he would annul the peace treaty if Israel annexed the Jordan Valley.

On the surface, therefore, Ashkenazi's first speech is shot through with contradictions. On the one hand, Trump's plan allows Israel an opportunity to set its borders; on the other hand, if Israel does so through extending sovereignty – as envisioned by the plan – it will cause difficulty with Egypt and Jordan.

So how does one square that circle?

One possible way is by extending Israel's sovereignty to some of the land the US will allow Israel to annex, but not to all of it – especially not to the Jordan Valley, which is what Abdullah seems to be most concerned about.

Under the Trump plan, Israel can – in coordination with the US and as part of a willingness to negotiate a demilitarised state with the Palestinians – extend sovereignty to 30% of the territory. But who says this is an all-or-nothing proposition?

In order to take advantage of the unique opportunity provided by the Trump Administration, but at the same time prevent a total breakdown of the relationship with the Jordanians and keep a door open to Washington in the event that Joe Biden – who is opposed to annexation – wins the US presidential election in November, Israel could conceivably only extend sovereignty to the least contentious part of the 30%.

For instance, it could extend its sovereignty to areas that under all the previous peace negotiations were destined to stay part of Israel: Gush Etzion, Ma'aleh Adumim and settlements like Oranit in western Samaria that run close to the Green Line, but not extend sovereignty over the Jordan Valley.

Although this, too, would not please Abdullah, he could probably be convinced by the US – his biggest ally in the world – not to overreact if all that Israel is incorporating are areas that "everyone knows" will be a part of Israel in any eventual agreement.

The composition of PM Benjamin Netanyahu's new Government, moreover, lends itself to this type of "compromise." While this is the fifth government that Netanyahu is

heading, it is the first one where the Likud is the party the furthest to the right inside the government.

In Netanyahu's first government, from 1996-1999, Likud was outflanked on the right by the now-defunct National Religious Party and Tzomet. And in each of the three previous governments from 2009, Netanyahu looked over his right shoulder at Naftali Bennett's Habayit Yehudi ("Jewish Home") party (or a later configuration of it) and Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beytenu ("Israel our Home") party.

Politically, this was a comfortable position for Netanyahu to be in, especially when he was dealing with intense pressure to freeze settlements under the Obama administration. With two parties on his right very much opposed to any settlement restrictions, he was able to tell Washington when it pressed hard on this issue, that he could only go so far regarding restriction on settlement construction



New Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi (top) will have to reckon with the strong opposition to any Israeli legal change in the West Bank from Jordan's King Abdullah (bottom)

or risk losing his government.

This time the Likud is the right flank of the government. There is no other party to Netanyahu's right to give him cover. And apparently he is comfortable with that, for if he wanted a party on his right for cover he easily could have roped in Yamina with a better offer.

But unlike the past when it was politically convenient for him to have parties pulling him from the right inside the government, now it may be politically convenient for him to have parties on his left. Because if Netanyahu does not think it wise to risk a rupture with Jordan over the annexation issue, he can always now say that Blue and White is tying his hands.

Yet, judging from Ashkenazi's comments – comments surely in line with what was agreed during the coalition negotiations – Blue and White will tie Netanyahu's hands on this matter to a certain degree, but not all the way. AIR

*Herb Keinon is diplomatic correspondent at the Jerusalem Post. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## LEBANON, HEZBOLLAH, AND THE IMF

by Clifford D. May

**H**ezbollah is a terrorist organisation. In late April, Germany found the courage to say so.

"Interior Minister Horst Seehofer has banned the operations of the Shiite terrorist organisation Hezbollah (Party of God) in Germany," the government forthrightly announced. Among the operations no longer permitted in Germany: Recruiting fighters to defend the blood-soaked, Teheran-supported dictatorship in Syria.

Just prior to the announcement, German police raided several "mosque associations" suspected of belonging to Hezbollah. "The activities of Hezbollah violate

criminal law, and the organisation opposes the concept of international understanding, whether in its political, social or military structures," the government statement added.

Germany joins a growing list of countries that have officially recognised Hezbollah for what it is, and prohibited it from advancing its goals, and those of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its father and master, on their soil.

Among them: Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, Argentina, Colombia, Honduras and Kosovo. Also, Israel and the 22-member Arab League.

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain issued statements welcoming the German decision.

You'll note that France is not on this list, and while the European Union in 2013 imposed a ban on Hezbollah's "military wing," it gave a pass to the group's "political wing."

This is a fictional distinction. "Hezbollah is a single, large organisation," spokesman Ibrahim Mousawi said in 2012, just after Hezbollah terrorists blew up a tour bus in Bulgaria, killing five Israelis and a Muslim bus driver. "We have no wings that are separate from one another."

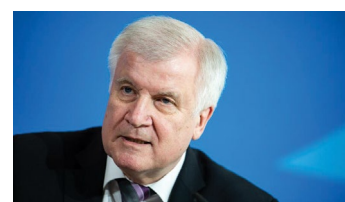
In response to Germany's announcement, Iran's rulers, the world's leading sponsors of terrorism as judged by the State Department in Democratic and Republican administrations alike, issued what sounded like a threat: "The German government must face the negative consequences of its decision."

It strikes me that an opportunity has opened. In Lebanon, Hezbollah's militia is so powerful that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) refrain from challenging it in any meaningful way. Not just incidentally, Hezbollah and its political allies effectively control the Lebanese Government.

In late April, Hezbollah graciously announced that it would not stand in the way of that government accepting billions of dollars from the International Monetary Fund – so long as the IMF asks only for "reasonable conditions."

IMF assistance is under consideration because Lebanon is in the midst of the most severe economic crisis in its modern history. Its currency has lost more than 60% of its value in recent weeks, and it has defaulted on its sovereign debt for the first time ever. Unemployment is skyrocketing.

"The Lebanese economy is in free fall," reads the opening line of a five-year recovery plan the Lebanese government endorsed shortly after Hezbollah gave its limited blessing to an IMF bailout. "An international financial rescue package is urgently needed to backstop the recession and create the conditions for a rebound."



German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, who announced the new Hezbollah ban

With Compliments

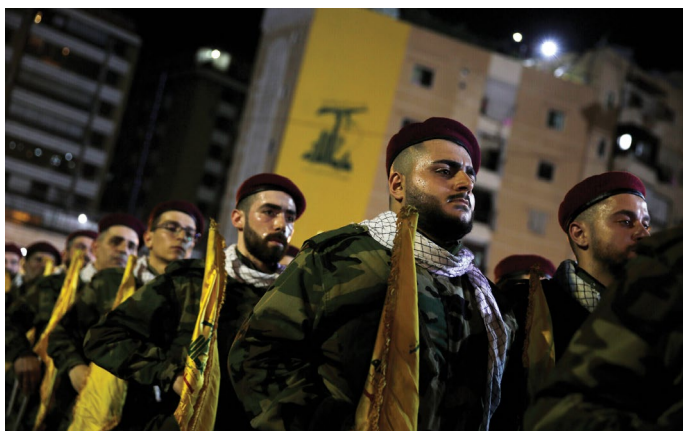
**Martell Pty. Ltd.**



The plan, not yet made public, will no doubt include restructuring the decrepit banking sector, along with various measures intended to combat widespread corruption.

That should not be enough. The United States, Germany and other major contributors to the IMF ought to demand that before any checks are written, Hezbollah disarms – that, from now on, it seeks power based on the ballots it can garner rather than the bullets it can fire.

I know what you're thinking: Hezbollah will never agree, and the LAF, despite the assistance it receives from the US and Europe, is too weak to force the terrorists to lay down their arms. In that case, the "international community" should tell the Lebanese government: "Perhaps Hezbollah's patrons in Teheran can offer a better deal."



Any bailout of the Lebanese Government must challenge Hezbollah's effective control over it

OK, if you think that's unrealistic, here's a fallback: Hezbollah merely removes the estimated 150,000 missiles it has aimed at Israel – as was promised by the UN Security Council resolution that halted the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006.

The purpose of making that demand would not be to demonstrate that UN Security Council resolutions aren't worthless, nor out of consideration for Israeli lives, but because it would be foolish to invest billions of dollars in a country that Hezbollah, at Teheran's behest, might drag into a devastating war at any moment.

If even that seems too big a lift, I'll suggest a further fallback. Iran's rulers have been giving Hezbollah precision-guided munitions (PGMs), as well as kits that enable Iranian-trained Hezbollah technicians to transform dumb rockets into smart missiles. Because these weapons have the potential to defeat Israeli missile-defence systems, especially if fired in sufficient numbers, it's likely only a matter of time before the Israelis decide their least-bad option is to remove them by military means.

Hezbollah has installed many if not most of these missiles in mosques, schools, hospitals and homes. That's a blatant violation of international laws prohibiting the use of human shields, and it guarantees high numbers of civilian casualties.

Rather than waiting for that tragedy to unfold, would it not make sense for the United States, Germany, France and other civilised countries to couple diplomacy with economic incentives so as to diminish the threat that Hezbollah's weapons pose?

The alternative is for the West to shore up a terrorist organisation that answers to terrorist sponsors in Teheran, and holds the Lebanese people hostage. To do that would not be courageous. To do that would be irresponsible and downright stupid.

AIR

*Clifford D. May is founder and president of the Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD) and a columnist for the Washington Times. Originally published in the Washington Times. © FDD (www.fdd.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## VIEWING ISRAEL ON ARAB TV

by Ran Porat

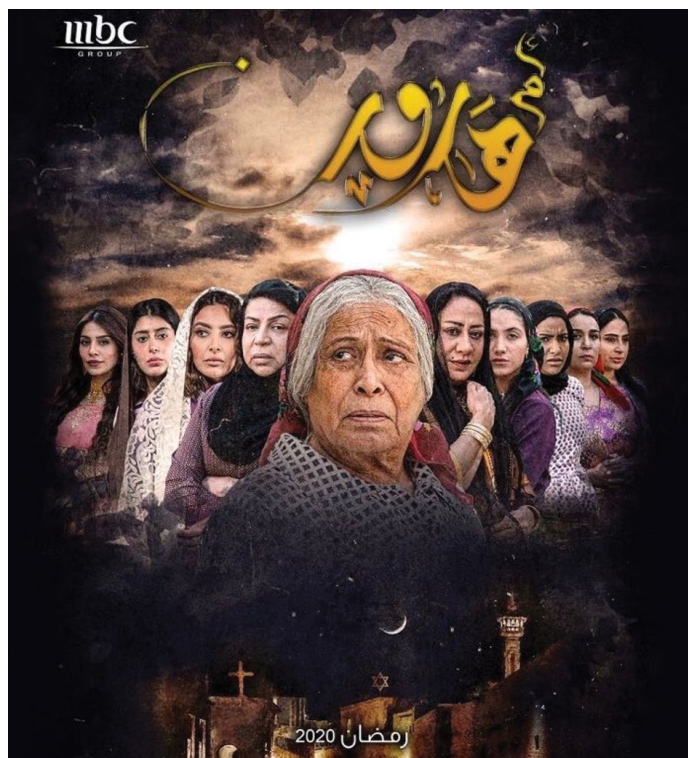
**D**uring Islam's holiest month of Ramadan (April 23 - May 23 in 2020) billions of Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset and then break the fast with a traditional Iftar dinner. Observing Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, and believers use the month to pray in mosques, reflect on their lives and engage with their communities.

Arab TV stations prepare special Ramadan drama series to broadcast every night after the fast ends. These programs receive very high ratings (30% higher than normal), and this year viewership is most likely even higher, given the lockdowns across the Arab world as states deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

Ramadan TV series often stir controversy when engaging with contemporary issues, such as selfies, women's rights or ethnic tensions. Renowned Arab actors line up to participate in these shows, with scripts that may present new versions of historical stories, Hollywood movies or famous plays, and which are often saturated with soap-opera style plot convolutions.

However, Ramadan TV series are not purely for entertainment. In many respects, they reflect the issues and messages that the authoritarian regimes in the Arab world want to convey to the public. The scripts for these shows are subject to intense government scrutiny and heavily censored.

Some of this year's Ramadan TV series exploded into controversy because they dared to touch on one of the most sensitive topics in Arab politics – normalisation of ties, open and hidden, with Israel.



“Um Haron” – official poster for the series

## “UM HARON”

“Um Haron” (Aaron’s mother) is the most talked about 2020 Ramadan series. It is a joint production of several Gulf states, shot in the UAE and in Kuwait and broadcast on MBC, a Saudi TV satellite channel.

It tells the story of a Jewish family in Kuwait in the 1940s and is based on a real person, Bahraini Jewish nurse Um John. The matriarch and Jewish midwife Um Haron (portrayed by Kuwaiti superstar Khayat al-Fahed) and her children face discrimination, which turns into persecution after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

**“Um Haron’ revived the story of the forced exodus of approximately one million Jews from Arab states during the 1940s, 50s and 60s”**

The proclamation of Israel as a state takes place in a scene of a marriage between a Jewish woman Rahil and Muslim man Mohammad (this is permitted in Islam but forbidden if the woman is Muslim and the man is Jewish). Later, one of the Jews is murdered and

the family flees to Israel.

“Um Haron” immediately drew criticism. Critics picked up on historical inaccuracies in the script, as well as some gross mistakes in the spoken Hebrew used (grammatical mistakes, words in English instead of Hebrew), and also in written Hebrew words written from left to right, instead of right to left, depicted on props used in the show.

“Um Haron” revived the story of the forced exodus of approximately one million Jews from Arab states during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. This topic was considered taboo in the Arab world until recently, and was largely erased

from public records and schoolbooks. Arab states did not want to be seen to be supporting Israel’s existence by allowing knowledge about these Jewish refugees to serve as a counter-narrative to the Palestinian “Right of Return”, or Nakba story, which centres around the suffering of refugees created by the “Zionist entity” during the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. Arab leaders also would have wanted to avoid any comparison between the relative success of Israel in absorbing Jewish refugees from Arab states, and the perpetual refugee status, and the accompanying poverty and discrimination, experienced by Palestinians in Arab states.

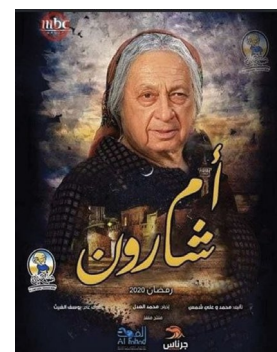
To Western eyes, the series also portrays the Gulf states as religiously tolerant, in contrast to perceptions of Muslim extremism. Actors and creators of “Um Haron” emphasised that the focus of the series is tolerance towards minorities, not Zionism.

Underpinning the heated debate surrounding “Um Haron” are the increasing covert and open ties between Gulf states, headed by Saudi Arabia, and Israel, in light of their shared enemy, Iran and its proxies. Opponents of the series are arguing it is yet another stage in the process of preparing the Arab public opinion for normalisation of relations with Israel.

Arab columnists in the anti-Saudi camp, mostly from Lebanon, Syria and Hamas in Gaza, used the series to attack Riyadh for what they see as a systematic marginalisation of the Palestinian issue, starting from the Saudi peace initiative of 2002, and leading up to Saudi willingness to engage with the US Trump Administration’s Israeli-Palestinian peace deal presented earlier this year.

Several Kuwaiti parliamentarians demanded that an official commission of inquiry be set up to investigate why the series was allowed to be filmed and broadcast. Despite this, MBC refused to stop broadcasting the series, and attacked other networks (a dig directed largely at the Qatari channel *Al-Jazeera*) for hosting Israeli officials on their programs.

Meanwhile, social media has been boiling over with insults and verbal combat between Palestinians and Saudis over the series. Palestinians circulated their own satirical version of a poster for the series, with the face of former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon replacing the face of the main character and changing the name of the series to “Um Sharon”. They accuse the Saudis and other Gulf states of using “Um Haron” as “a mobilised form of art” aimed at



One poster dubbed the series “Um Sharon”, while another (bottom) says “Art cannot rob us of the truth”



maximising profits from their connections in Washington and legitimising closer ties with the Jewish state.

After being ridiculed as “primitive camel people from the desert” by Palestinians, and with pro-Hamas twitter feeds calling normalisation “the real corona”, online Saudis fired back, accusing the Palestinians of being “traitors and ingrates”, usurping billions of Saudi dollars given to them over the years.

This is not the first time Jewish persecution in Arab states was at the centre of a Ramadan series. The 2015 Egyptian series “Kharat al-Yahud” (“The Jewish quarter”) followed a similar storyline and also caused backlash. It described the flourishing Jewish community in Egypt and included a romance between a Muslim policeman and a Jewish girl. Again, with the creation of the State of Israel everything goes pear shaped and the Jews are forced to flee. The plot was groundbreaking because it acknowledged for the first time the deportation of Egyptian Jews. The Islamists in Egypt warned that “Kharat al-Yahud” was a mechanism by the relatively new government of pro-Western President Abdel-Fateh el-Sissi to justify peace with Israel and present the damage Muslim Brotherhood terrorists inflict on Egypt.

### “MAKHRAJ 7” (EXIT 7)

The satirical Saudi show “Makhraj 7” (“Exit 7”) also aired on MBC. It was written by liberal journalist Khalal al-Kharbi and stars the famous actor, Nasser Al-Qasbi. Mostly focused on internal Saudi affairs, in one episode a Saudi family is rocked by the discovery that one of their children is connecting with an Israeli child during an online gaming session.

In one of the scenes, a person who has business ties with Israel – played by Rashed Al-Shamrani – states that “the enemy is [not Israel, but rather] the side who does not value the fact that you stand with him, cursing you day and night more than the Israelis.” He then adds: “We have engaged in wars for Palestine. We cut off the oil for Palestine. When Palestine came to the rank of authority, we started to pay salaries when they needed them. As for the Palestin-



Ramadan viewing (from top): “Exit 7”; “The End”; “Guardian of Jerusalem”

ians, they do not hesitate to attack Saudi Arabia whenever they have the opportunity.”

In other segments of the scene, characters say: “Like it or not, Israel exists”; “Israelis are human beings like you” and even, “the Arabs have only lost the Palestinian cause over the years. So many words for nothing!”

Facing heated criticism, the creators of the show were quick to clarify that they oppose normalisation with Israel. Yet some Saudis online praised the words put in Al-Shamrani’s mouth as “truths finally coming out” and supported ties with Israel. Many believe that there is an undercurrent in the Gulf states of those who are frustrated over what they see as Palestinian ingratitude despite decades of financial and diplomatic backing by the Gulf states.

### ON THE OTHER SIDE – “THE END”, “THE GUARDIAN OF JERUSALEM” AND

#### “THE INK OF FIRE”

Egypt is considered the capital of Ramadan TV series productions. This year’s sci-fi drama “El-Nehaya” (“The End”) broadcast on the private ONTV network, is a dystopia about a world governed by technology.

In a scene in the opening episode that has caught the attention of viewers, the main character explains to young students from a class in the distant future what supposedly happens a century from now – Arab countries take advantage of the fall of the United States, which has split into separate states, and launch “The free Al-Quds [Jerusalem]” war against Israel. The Arabs win and destroy Israel, and most Israelis emigrate to Europe.

This scene went viral on Arab social media and received positive reactions, including from media outlets affiliated with the Egyptian Government. Israel’s Foreign Ministry issued a statement protesting the “regrettable and unacceptable” content of the series.

Later in the series, the “achievement” of conquering Jerusalem becomes a liability, as technology takes over from humans. Some commentators saw this plot twist as a message to Arabs that removing Israel will not solve all their problems.



The anti-Western camp in the Arab world has also produced Ramadan TV series. Syrian state TV and Hezbollah's *Al-Mayadeen* channel screened "The Guardian of Jerusalem", about the life of Syrian titular Archbishop of Caesarea in the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, Hilarion Capucci, who also served in Jerusalem. He was arrested by Israel in 1974 for aiding Palestinian Liberation Organisation terror attacks and was released in 1978 under a deal struck between Israel and the Vatican.

*Hamas TV* is airing "The Ink of Fire" series which hails armed struggle against "cruel" Israel.

Meanwhile, a song in Hebrew briefly played in the background during a disco scene in the first episode of Syrian Ramadan series "The Magician" led Damascus to order the TV channel not to show that segment again.

Ramadan television this year reflects the deep rift between the belligerent camps in the Arab world. These drama shows provide both hope for changing regional attitudes and signs the old guard is not about to surrender its cultural dominance meekly. AIR

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

## PARLIAMENT PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON RIGHTS ABUSERS

by Naomi Levin

**T**he Australian Parliament's inquiry into whether Australia needs to strengthen its laws against human rights abusers received a significant glamour boost on May 15, when Amal Clooney, highly respected international human rights lawyer, but also the wife of Hollywood star George, gave evidence via video link.

The inquiry she fronted is currently considering whether Australia needs to introduce new laws, or amend existing laws, to better sanction individuals who are committing genocide, extra-judicial killings, or torture.

Clooney was followed by former Canadian attorney-general Professor Irwin Cotler, then Bill Browder, the founder of a global movement that has advocated tougher sanctions against human rights abusers.

With Browder's impetus, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and some European countries have introduced what are called "Magnitsky-style laws," named

after a 2009 case involving the mysterious death of Russian lawyer and tax fraud whistle-blower Sergei Magnitsky. These laws allow governments to impose hefty sanctions, such as travel bans or asset freezes, on human rights abusers, regardless of where their offence was committed.

The Global Magnitsky Act was introduced in the United States in 2017. Since then it has been used to sanction human rights abusers and corrupt officials from Nicaragua to Iran.

There has been active support from some Australian MPs for Australia to adopt similar measures, most notably Labor's Michael Danby, who introduced a private member's bill before his retirement in 2019. Danby's bill did not progress through the Parliament, but did raise the profile of the issue.

The spotlight has not dimmed thanks to the ongoing work of Danby's Labor colleague Senator Kimberley Kitching, with strong support from Liberal Senator James Paterson. And in December last year, Foreign Minister Marise Payne tasked the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Human Rights Subcommittee with holding an inquiry into such a legislative regime.

So is Australia likely to follow the US, UK, Canada and others and introduce additional sanctions on human rights abusers?

The answer is not yet known, but there are indications Australia is considering a shift.

Prior to the establishment of the current inquiry, the Australian Government argued that Australia's existing autonomous sanctions regime covered the same ground as suggested Magnitsky-style laws.



A video link hearing with human rights lawyer and celebrity Amal Clooney on May 15

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) chief legal officer – and former Australian ambassador to Israel – James Larsen said in 2018, "If you look at how our autonomous sanctions regime operates, individuals can be identified who are subject to sanctions."

To an extent, he is correct. Australia currently places sanctions on human rights abusers in Syria, Zimbabwe and Myanmar under its existing laws.

However, in its recent submission to the current in-



Magnitsky-law advocates Bill Browder (top) and Irwin Cotler (bottom)

quiry, DFAT changed its tune slightly. It noted a preference for amendments to Australia's Autonomous Sanctions Regulations 2011, to better capture human rights abusers, instead of an entirely new human rights-based sanctions regime.

While Clooney's testimony grabbed media headlines, it was Prof. Cotler who advocated the Australian Government

should adopt Magnitsky-style laws to, among other things, help sanction Iran's gravest human rights violators.

Prof. Cotler told the committee that the United Nations has largely failed to deal with gross human rights abusers and that countries like Australia needed to step in. He cited Saudi Arabia's nomination for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council as one of the most obvious examples of this.

"You have a situation where the arsonists are supposed to put out the fire," he told the committee.

We are living in a "world where we have an erosion of a rules-based multilateral order, we have a resurgence of global authoritarianism, we have a retreat of global democracies."

The introduction of Magnitsky-style laws in places like Canada also shows the victims of human rights abuses in Iran – as well as other places – "that they are not alone" and that "we will undertake our international responsibility in the pursuit of justice, in securing accountability and in combatting the cultures of criminality and corruption and the impunity that underpins them," he said.

Prof. Cotler told the committee his organisation, the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, has advised Canada to use its own Magnitsky-style laws to sanction Iranian human rights violators, but Justin Trudeau's Government has yet to do so. Canada recently felt the weight of the Iranian regime's aggression particularly bluntly, losing nearly 60 Canadians when Iranian forces shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet in January.

Cotler said it was particularly egregious to Canadians that the man placed in charge of the inquiry into the shot-down plane is himself a grave human rights violator allegedly involved in the deaths of thousands of Iranian dissidents in 1988.

Joining Prof. Cotler in supporting the introduction of these types of law in Australia was a group called Australian Supporters of Democracy in Iran. They were

among the 120 public submissions to the Parliamentary Committee, along with input from the Uyghur Association of Victoria, a representative body for the ethnic-Muslim group currently so deeply repressed in the Xinjiang region of China, groups supporting Hong Kong democracy, and large international NGOs like Human Rights Watch.

While he is no longer in Parliament, Danby's words from a 2018 speech, imploring the Australian Government to introduce Magnitsky-style laws, still hold power in explaining what such laws can accomplish:

"The more countries that adopt such laws, the more jurisdictions can potentially be made out of bounds to individuals involved in the shooting down of planes over Ukraine; murdering journalists inside embassies; intern-ing and abusing millions of Uyghurs in concentration camps; expelling or killing Rohingyas; starving, incarcerating, torturing and executing 300,000 citizens in concentration camps in North Korea; or ethnic cleansing of people in places like Darfur, Rwanda and Srebrenica – and so on and so on."

The process has a long way to run, with the committee still to report and the Foreign Minister to consider the report before any possible amendment or legislation is introduced. In the meantime, Australian parliamentarians have shown they are serious about efforts to impose real consequences for global human rights abusers.

AIR

With Compliments

R L Webb  
Nominees  
Pty. Ltd

Property, investment,  
development & finance



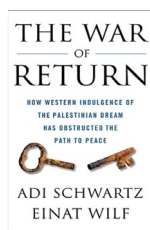


# THE BIBLIO FILE

## A Return to Sanity

### The War of Return: How Western Indulgence of the Palestinian Dream Has Obstructed the Path to Peace

Adi Schwartz and Einat Wilf, Pan Macmillan, 2020, 304 pp., A\$44.99



by Asaf Romirowsky

Palestinian identity is rooted in three basic ingredients: the “right of return” to Israel for all Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war and their descendants; permanent, sanctified struggle with Israel; and permanent recognition of their status as refugees, dispossessed at the hand of Israel with the participation of the international community. A corollary demand is that the international community must sustain all Palestinian “refugees” through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) until the Palestinians themselves, somehow, declare the “refugee crisis” resolved.

This fundamental element of the Arab-Israeli conflict has eluded both many Western observers and Israelis, who have focused on the territorial aspect of the conflict. In fact, it is the right of return that fundamentally powers the conflict, while UNRWA serves as captain of the ship.

Both Adi Schwartz and Einat Wilf, authors of *The War of Return: How Western Indulgence of the Palestinian Dream Has Obstructed the Path to Peace*, have a liberal Israeli background and are supporters of the two-state solution. Wilf is a former Israeli politician who served as a member of Knesset for

the Independence and Labor parties, while Schwartz is a former staff writer for the left-leaning Israeli daily *Haaretz* turned academic.

To Wilf’s credit, she was one of the few Israeli politicians to take on the UNRWA issue when she was in office; she launched an international parliamentary campaign to restructure UNRWA and “combat the inflation of the numbers of refugees” in order to make a two-state solution possible.

Historically, there has been more criticism of UNRWA emanating from North America (including the author of this review) than from elected Israeli officials. There has been an understanding among Israeli decision-makers that while UNRWA is indeed problematic, it does something useful in providing services to Palestinians. When Wilf entered the scene, she challenged this Israeli zeitgeist, calling attention to UNRWA’s administrative decisions to extend refugee status to additional generations of Palestinians, creating more “refugees” and thus extending its own mandate. She also correctly noted that UNRWA’s endorsement of the Palestinian “right of return” lies at the root of the Arab-Israeli conflict and, not coincidentally, also ensures UNRWA’s continued existence.

Getting people to understand the centrality of the Palestinian right of return and UNRWA’s role in it has not been easy. Yet since the US Trump Administration cut funding to UNRWA last year – reducing the US contribution to zero – the agency’s fortunes have plummeted and there has been renewed interest in the topic, which adds to the timeliness of the book.

To the authors’ credit, they raise a lesser known story which relates to US foreign policy towards Arab-Palestinian refugees – Israel’s reaction to the Economic Survey Mission (ESM) in the winter of 1949. The ESM’s mission was to assess what could be done regarding these refugees. It was anticipated that this US-led regional development program would help raise the overall economic level of the region and thereby facilitate resettlement of Palestine Arab refugees, something the authors show the Israelis favoured.

The orientation of the commission, particularly under former Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) chairman Gordon Clapp, signalled to all parties that Washington would back large-scale regional development that could benefit both the major states and the refugees.

The mission’s primary task – to investigate and make recommendations for regional economic development – had also raised the prospect of large-scale resettlement. Though the mission used the same “repatriation, resettlement, and economic and social rehabilitation” formula which is part of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 – the 1948 resolution generally cited as the legal source of the claimed Palestinian “right of return” – the implicit resettlement implications of regional economic development plans were clear.

These appeared to divide both the members of the Clapp mission and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), who were engaged in refugee relief operations.

For the Israeli team, led by then-foreign minister Moshe Sharett and



then-finance minister Eliezer Kaplan, the solution was clear and rested only within the framework of resettlement; repatriation was not part of the equation. Even today the Israeli perspective has been consistent: that UNRWA has prolonged and exacerbated the problem rather than working towards real solutions that would have resettled the Arab-Palestinian population.



Palestinian refugees need services, but UNRWA is promoting an ideology making a two-state peace impossible

The ESM rarely gets exposure in Israeli literature and Schwartz and Wilf unpack some of this key story. It would have been useful to also include reviews of other early relief programs, such as the one conducted in Gaza by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and its relationship with Israel, in order to highlight the layers of early relief initiatives.

In 1948, the AFSC was at the height of its international prominence. Further, the AFSC's 18 month-operation in the Gaza Strip was exemplary. The organisation provided food, set up schools and clinics, and faced down the Egyptian military. Unlike any other relief organisation, at the time or since, the AFSC conducted an accurate census and reduced its rolls of Palestinian refugees. Moreover, the AFSC understood that even if the refugees did accept resettlement, no Arab state would accept them. The only possible solution would be political, not economic. And such a solution did not seem likely in the near future.

To its credit, the AFSC could not countenance participating in an

open-ended relief program, which it believed would intensify the "moral degeneration" of the refugees and the degradation of their skills, self-reliance, and self-respect.

As a result, the AFSC withdrew from Gaza in early 1950, turning its responsibilities over to the United Nations organisation UNRWA. By the 1960s, the AFSC began to take a more explicit and fervent pro-Palestinian stance, embracing the growing radicalism and developing a willingness to accommodate the use of violence in the Middle East conflict.

Schwartz and Wilf's book is a welcome addition to the corpus of writings on the Arab-Palestinian refugee problem, opening a door to the Israeli decision-making processes which at times have avoided tackling the problem, allowing it to grow. However, understanding the relationship between Israel and other religious and non-religious NGOs is especially important.

Schwartz and Wilf are also right to end their book with a chapter devoted to what to do with UNRWA.

If the goal is to create a Palestinian state, the refugee ideology and structures such as UNRWA make this almost impossible. The agency should therefore be dismantled if possible, or otherwise defunded by Western donors. Resources and responsibilities should be transferred to the Palestinian Authority, both within its own territories and in neighbouring countries. Oversight mechanisms must be dramatically enhanced to prevent financial corruption and to ensure above all that UNRWA's educational

curriculum promotes peace instead of hatred and the "right of return", as it does now.

Local resettlement of Palestinians must be encouraged. Pressure must be exerted, in particular on Lebanon, to permit Palestinians to own property and work in their professions. Similar measures must be taken for Syrian Palestinians as an integral part of the negotiations that end the civil war in that country. West Bank Palestinians whose health and welfare is provided for by UNRWA must become the full responsibility of the Palestinian Authority.

But until the Palestinian leadership gives up, however reluctantly, the "right of return," by declaring their struggle against Israel at an end, and by declaring that an independent Palestine means no Palestinian is a refugee, there will be no peace.

At the end of the day, as there are more books in support of the Palestinian "right of return" and of UNRWA at large, this book is a welcome contribution to counterbalancing the fallacies and myths about this so-called "right". It is especially useful for students of the Arab-Israeli conflict and Israeli decision-makers who seek to understand the larger goals and objectives of what has become a canonical axiom in Arab Palestinian identity.

AIR

*Dr. Asaf Romirowsky is executive director of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME), a senior non-resident fellow at the BESA Centre for Strategic Studies at Bar Ilan University, and a Fellow at the Middle East Forum. Romirowsky is co-author of the book Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).*



With Compliments

**SOUTHERN**  
**STEEL GROUP Pty Limited**

Telephone: (02) 9792 2099  
www.southernsteelgroup.com.au



With Compliments from

# Pacific Group of Companies

**P O BOX 400  
SOUTH MELBOURNE, 3205, AUSTRALIA**

**TELEPHONE: (03) 9695 8700**

With Compliments

## ABAKUS AIRCRAFT & AVIATION SPECIALISTS

Suite 2, Level 3, 5 Knox Street  
Double Bay, NSW 2028  
Tel: 02 9356 2333

# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### CORONAVIRUS WATCH

A world leaders' video conference on responding to the coronavirus pandemic featuring Australian PM Scott Morrison and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu received wide media coverage, including on *ABC TV* "7pm News" and *SBS TV* "World News" (May 7).

An ABC website report (May 9) said, "Morrison asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to take him through the country's quarantined 'red zones'. That policy saw the army sent in to control virus clusters and restrict movement, a policy that has been criticised as heavy-handed."

That criticism came mostly from Israeli politicians. Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion was unhappy that the Ramot neighbourhood was included given its 60,000 residents had only 140 infections, and ultra-Orthodox Shas party leader Aryeh Deri grumbled that most of the red zones in Jerusalem covered ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods.

This is unsurprising – reports say 75% of COVID-19 cases in Jerusalem occurred in ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods.

### TLOZEK BY THE NUMBERS

Anecdotal and empirical data suggest that Israel has largely succeeded in dealing with the threat of the coronavirus pandemic with relatively few deaths, and its cooperation with Hamas and the Palestinian Authority helped protect Palestinians too.

Veteran Israeli journalist Ehud Yaari – never one to pull his punches – said as much to *ABC TV* "The World" host Bev O'Connor on April 21.

According to Yaari, "The general sense here is that Israel was able to contain the worst of it. We have

altogether 18,000 people infected, about 180 dead, most of them, almost all of them above 80 and 90 years old with background health issues. There is good cooperation, a bit surprising, but it's occurring with the Palestinian Authority. So there is no outburst from across the '67 border'."

O'Connor seemed to be of that opinion too during a live cross with ABC Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek on May 7 when she said, "Israel is among a number of countries, that includes Australia, that are considered to have got ahead of the outbreak in their own nations. What does it feel like there?"

But Tlozek appeared to disagree, saying, "There is a number of officials in Israel who are, especially Benjamin Netanyahu, who are saying what a great job Israel has done, but look at the numbers... it has 16,000 cases, less than half the population of Australia, 16,000 cases and 235 deaths. So those are the numbers. It had big outbreaks in sections of the population that didn't follow the social distancing rules, like the ultra-Orthodox Jews and the Israeli Arab areas and Palestinian areas of east Jerusalem where there were big outbreaks and very difficult to contain."

Israel's fatality rate for coronavirus cases is 1.66% which is comparable to Australia's fatality rate of 1.44%. In contrast Belgium, France, Italy and the UK have double digit fatality rates. Like Australia, Israel also has succeeded in "flattening the curve" much more successfully than most Western states.

### ERIC LOOKS OVER JORDAN

Earlier that day, ABC online featured an article co-written by Tlozek

and Jordanian journalist Ranya Kadri on Jordan's success in limiting the coronavirus "to under 500 total cases for a population of nearly 10 million."

Despite hosting "millions of refugees" and having "a fragile economy", Jordan "has only recorded nine coronavirus deaths. It is an outlier in the Middle East."

Jordan achieved this through a "harsh lockdown" and "people nearly starved in the process and there were fears of social unrest."

The article said, "initially, Jordan banned anyone but essential workers from leaving home for any reason, until hungry people stormed food delivery trucks... Then, the Government allowed people to go out in the day, on foot, to local shops for food. Vehicular travel and gatherings were banned. Police and the army set up hundreds of checkpoints, impounding more than 1,000 cars and imprisoning 2,000 people for breaking the curfew. All international arrivals – an estimated 5,800 of them – were forcibly quarantined in Dead Sea hotels."

But Jordan didn't stop there, with the Government not willing to "tolerate much criticism of its response, with monitoring group Human Rights Watch reporting that journalists, editors and activists were arrested for airing concerns about the restrictions."

Aside from the economic challenge of dealing with 1.6 million Syrian refugees, the article claimed Jordan "is also home to millions of Palestinians displaced by the conflict with Israel."

Millions of Palestinians were not displaced by the conflict and certainly not into Jordan.

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, during the 1948 war with





Israel, 100,000 Palestinians went to Jordan and 276,000 Palestinians moved from their homes in what became Israel to the West Bank.

After the conclusion of the war, Jordan annexed the West Bank and granted citizenship to Palestinians.

When Jordan lost control over the West Bank in 1967, 250,000 Palestinians from the West Bank crossed over into Jordan.

Even under the most liberal counting, nowhere near one million Palestinians ended up “displaced” into Jordan. One can only make that claim by insisting that, despite the fact most

Palestinians in Jordan were born and raised there and have citizenship, they are not really Jordanian.

## BARNES AGAIN

Lawyer and former Liberal Party member turned anti-Israel activist Greg Barnes didn’t need to read the Tlozek/Kadri piece to see a truly draconian response to the coronavirus in action, because according to Barnes it is happening in Australia.

In the *Age* (April 5), Barnes warned, “By simply declaring an emergency, governments could once again issue

laws by edicts, without parliamentary scrutiny, that ban individuals from being in particular areas... None of these examples is farfetched. We live in an age when fundamental rights such as freedom of movement, freedom of association and presumption of innocence are eroded... the rule of law and liberal democracy is being hit by another wave of grabs for power by the executive government.”

On May 14, the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* ran Barnes’ warning that under the cover of the coronavirus pandemic the Federal Government has proposed legisla-



## IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** (Lib., Cook) – April 27 – Yom Ha’atzmaut (Israeli independence day) message: “Yom Ha’atzmaut is usually a time of celebration and reflection — a moment to recall the promise of freedom, the strength of hope, and the emergence of a proud and potent nation... I wish the Australian Jewish community all the best for the year ahead, and thank you for all you give to Australia.”

Opposition Leader **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – April 27 – Yom Ha’atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) message: “It is with great pleasure I wish the State of Israel and members of our Australian Jewish community a hearty Mazel Tov on the occasion of Yom Ha’atzmaut... Israel at 72 years is a remarkable tale of triumph over adversity — a world-leading source of innovation in the fields of technology, medicine, science and the environment. We all have much to learn from Israel and we value not just our friendship with Israel but our strong economic ties.”

Greens Senate Leader, Senator **Larissa Waters** (Greens, Qld) – May 13 – moved “That the Senate...”

(b) notes with deep concern that Palestinian dispossession continues to this day;

(c) further notes with deep concern that: (i) US President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu are actively undermining the prospects of a two-state solution that could deliver peace and security to the Israeli and Palestinian peoples,... (iii) Netanyahu’s plans include the annexation of large swathes of the West Bank and constitute a serious violation of international law;...and

(e) calls on the Federal Government to: (i) make it clear that there will be serious diplomatic consequences for Israel if Netanyahu’s new Coalition Government goes ahead with its threat to annex Palestinian territory..., and (ii) recognise the State of Palestine.”

Minister for Families and Social Services Senator **Anne Ruston** (Lib., SA) – May 14 – “Successive Australian governments have recognised that a future Palestinian state is a final status issue to be negotiated directly between Israel and the Palestinians. We remain a supporter of a two-state solution where a Palestinian state exists alongside Israel in peace and harmony, within internationally recognised borders. Successive Australian governments have called on all parties to the conflict... to refrain from provocative actions that raise tensions or undermine the prospects of peace.”

Shadow Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) – May 14 – “Unilateral annexation of the West Bank would weaken the viability of any future Palestinian state and risk destabilising Israel’s neighbours — a risk the world cannot afford. Labor continues to support a just and durable two-state solution to the conflict and encourages both parties to pursue direct negotiations to that end. We continue to call on both sides to refrain from any actions that hamper peaceful outcomes for both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples.”

Senator **Amanda Stoker** (Lib., Qld) – May 13 – “Since [Israel declared independence], we have seen this beacon of democracy flourish in the Middle East. It is a bastion for democracy and human rights, where freedom of speech, liberty and intellectual freedom has been abundant and revered. Israel is an important ally to Australia in many ways, and our bilateral cooperation, especially in innovation, security and defence, is of benefit to both of our nations...”

Greens Leader **Adam Bandt** (Greens, Melbourne) – May 13 – “I want to acknowledge that last month people around the world celebrated Yom Ha’atzmaut, the creation of the state of Israel; however, this week Palestinians and their friends commemorate the Nakba, when, in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced and lost their homes, and many were killed. Since 1948, we’ve continued to see pervasive human rights abuses committed against Palestinian people.”

tive amendments that will give ASIO powers more commonly associated with “authoritarian states.” Barns is entitled to oppose these new powers, but it seems there has never been any counter-terrorism legislation in Australia that has met his approval.

## BOOK REVIEW SHOWS SOME SPINE

*We Can't Say We Didn't Know*, former ABC Middle East correspondent Sophie McNeill's memoir of her time in that role, received a rare substantive evaluation, with Kurt Johnson recognising that the book provides evidence of one of the major gripes against McNeill's style of journalism.

Johnson writes, “McNeill demands we bear witness but in doing so she sometimes loses restraint and her prose bloats with adverbs... Indeed, when pressed, McNeill will dispense with professional dispassion and throw herself into the action,” *Age/Sydney Morning Herald* (May 15).

## SPINELESS

T.J. Collins' review in the *Canberra Times* (May 2) of Colum McCann's semi-fictional novel about an Israeli and a Palestinian father who lost children because of the conflict, criticised the author for not favouring the Palestinian side in a book whose title — *Apeirogon* — means an object with an infinite number of sides!

Collins disparages the advice in the book that the conflict “will not be over until we talk” as “bumper sticker bullshit” but, in fact, there hasn't been nearly enough of it.

For the greater part of a century, Palestinian Arab leaders have made it taboo to talk to Jews. Instead, they have boycotted, incited and carried out terrorism against Jews, on the basis that Jews have no real connection to Palestine, let alone a right to self-determination there.

Collins seems to share this perspective.

According to Collins, the book “falter[s]... in its treatment of the Palestinian question... one gets the distinct impression that he's not an entirely ‘honest broker’, to borrow a phrase from what used to be known as the ‘peace process’. At best, there's a moral equivalence at play in *Apeirogon*. At worst, well, something decidedly worse.”

The Israeli protagonist, Rami, saying he is a “seventh-generation Jerusalemite” and his father-in-law is a general's daughter, is criticised by Collins.

This means, Collins says, that Rami is “a member of a very tiny minority in a country full of immigrants. It also means that Rami's ancestors would have lived harmoniously with the ‘old’ Palestinian families, families from which the late Edward Said, and his intellectual successor, Rashid Khalidi, for example, both descend” and “it will not be over until ‘both sides’ find a way to return to the relative harmony that existed before a hegemonic colonial project was unleashed on an underserving people.”

It is also ironic that Collins cites Said to back his utopian fantasy of Jews and Christians living in harmony before Israel was established.

Even Said, a high profile one-state solution advocate, was not at all optimistic about such “harmony” in the future, admitting in 2000, “the question of what is going to be the fate of the Jews [after Israel is replaced with a Palestinian majority state] is very difficult for me. I really don't know. It worries me.” Further, contrary to Said's claims to have been raised in Jerusalem, there is overwhelming evidence that, like PLO chairman Yasser Arafat, most of his upbringing took place in Egypt.

## WOULD JEW BELIEVE IT?

AIJAC registered a formal complaint with the ABC following the airing of an antisemitic slur by a radio

talkback caller on the May 3 edition of “Australia All Over with Ian McNamara”.

Whilst talking about the decline in Australian manufacturing, the caller from Victoria's Latrobe Valley said, “Over 30 years ago, I managed the Exacto Factory that was specially built in Churchill... Now, Exacto was part of the Bradmill Industries and they had jeans, they even made the fabric for jeans, windcheaters, T-shirts we made... And when I was working they were worried sick that this big Jew was gonna buy it out, buy us out. And blow me down eventually he did and he broke, and he sold all our machinery and everything went over to, he sold it to over China.”

Program host Ian McNamara simply ignored the caller's derogatory comment as though it was unexceptional.

AIJAC pointed out in the complaint that the caller “invoked an antisemitic trope of a rapacious and heartless Jewish businessman who rides roughshod over the lives of ordinary, hardworking people in an insatiable quest to make money... By allowing [the] comment to go through to the keeper, Mr McNamara, whose reputation is of a trusted figure of authority given his many years on radio, ran the risk of inadvertently seeming to legitimise antisemitism and casual racism to his audience.”

## COLONEL OF TRUTH?

On *Sky News* “Outsiders” (April 26), co-host James Morrow asked retired senior British Army officer Colonel Richard Kemp to comment on conspiracy theories that Jews and Israel are responsible for the spread of the coronavirus.

Kemp said, “Unfortunately Israel and the Jews have traditionally become the object of hate and disinformation. You just have to go back to the Great Plague in Europe. The Jews were blamed for that... equally they are blaming the Jews for this... if you

look at Israel itself, Israel has put a huge amount of effort, as you would expect, as any decent moral country would into helping the Arabs in the Middle East and not just in Israel itself but in the West Bank and in Gaza which is actually fighting a war against Israel on a permanent basis... and what do they say in response? They say actually the Israelis are responsible for causing it, spreading it and doing whatever they can to stop the Arabs from defending themselves against it. This is not a new story. Any situation in the world, people, particularly the Middle East but not only the Middle East will exploit that situation to attack Israel and to attack Jews."

### THE WORST OF BRITISH

Earlier on the same program, British writer Brendan O'Neill called the British Labour Party a "complete disgrace", when commenting on the party's justice spokesperson denying in a recent BBC interview he had said "Zionism is the enemy of peace" in 2016, despite video footage clearly showing he did so.

O'Neill said, "We know over the past few years when Jeremy Corbyn was leader it had a serious problem with antisemitism... this obsessive hatred of Israel, this obsessive hatred of Zionism, completely out of proportion and driven by a complete double standard. Israel was always judged by a different standard to every other nation on earth, which in itself is [an] antisemitic outlook."

### AUSTRALIA ON GUARD

The *Guardian Australia* reported (May 10) on the International Criminal Court (ICC) rejecting a petition from a group of countries, including Australia, that argued the ICC should not accept a Palestinian request to investigate Israel for alleged war crimes against Palestinians because Palestine is not a country under international law.

The *Guardian* noted that the ICC had dismissed the petition because it had yet to determine whether the court had territorial jurisdiction over Gaza, east Jerusalem and the West Bank.

AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein was quoted explaining, "[Australia's] submission not only outlines strong legal arguments preventing the Court having jurisdiction to consider the 'Situation in Palestine' – as the so-called 'State of Palestine' does not meet the necessary legal requirements for statehood under international law – but also makes the case that the court risks undermining any prospects of a negotiated peace."

The article also quoted Rawan Arraf, the director of the Australian Centre for International Justice, saying, "Why is Australia going out of its way to hold back an investigation into Palestine? Australia has always been a strong supporter of accountability and the fight to end impunity. It should not stop now and it should withdraw its request."

Maybe because Israel itself investigates and acts on allegations of misconduct involving its military and therefore the ICC doesn't have to, and because the ICC plans seem themselves to be inconsistent with international law principles?

### UPTO SPEED ON IRAN

An *SBS TV* "World News" (April 24) report that the Australian Border Force had arrested two men attempting to smuggle \$80 million worth of illegal amphetamines hidden in water bottles into NSW from Iran included some interesting observations about Australia's relations with the Iranian regime.

SBS reporter Adrian Arciuli said the Australian Federal Police (AFP) force "admits it's difficult to forge a relationship with Iranian authorities but says it is improving."

AFP Detective Superintendent Ben McQuillan said, "a lot of the

time police-led diplomacy is actually more effective than normal diplomatic channels, so we do deal with the Iranian authorities when we can and they have referred matters to us previously."

Although there is no evidence in this case of the involvement of Iranian regime agencies, drug smuggling is a highly lucrative source of income for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and for Iranian proxy groups like Hezbollah. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* report on the arrests also noted McQuillan's comments.

### INSIDE HEZBOLLAH-STAN

On *ABC TV* "Foreign Correspondent" (May 5), the ABC's Beirut-based correspondent Adam Harvey's report on Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis and mass protests included some frank discussion about Hezbollah's power there.

Harvey said, "the real power in Lebanon lies in crowded South Beirut, with the Shia movement Hezbollah. A state within a state. With its own formidable militia, trained and funded by Iran."

Former World Bank presidential candidate Ziad Alexandre Hayek said, "Hezbollah, being the most powerful Shi'ite party in Lebanon, and being the only party that is armed, has significant power and is practically in a position to dictate to the country nowadays what it wants happening in politics. Hezbollah... feared that if the current system – where they have the most power among the parties and they can control the government – ... changes, they will be in uncertain territory, and this unknown territory scares them."

Elsewhere, the *Australian* (May 2) was one of the few Australian media outlets to note the German Government's decision to widen its ban on Hezbollah to now cover the entire organisation, not just the military wing.



# MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

## SOVEREIGN RISK

The reality that any move by the new Israeli government to extend Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank will be coordinated with the Trump Administration as part of the peace plan it released earlier this year seemed to have been understood by most of the Australian media.

The *Australian's* April 29 report stated that "The US says it is ready to recognise Israel's annexation of much of the West Bank but wants the new unity government to negotiate with the Palestinians."

It noted that if the Palestinians accept the US plan, they "would be granted a sovereign but demilitarised state, along with promises of major investment. The Palestinian state's capital would be on the outskirts of Jerusalem, the contested holy city which would remain fully under Israeli sovereignty."

The *Daily Telegraph* (April 29) correctly reported that "the US is ready to recognise Israel's annexation of much of the West Bank but asked the new unity government to negotiate with Palestine" on his "Middle East 'vision'".

Except, of course, if the Palestinian leadership refuses to negotiate, US President Donald Trump will not hand them a veto over the plan moving forward.

But a May 15 report in the same paper tendentiously said annexation "would crush already faint Palestinian hopes of establishing a viable state alongside Israel, on lands Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war."

On *SBS TV* "World News" (May 18) Gareth Boreham said that the new Israeli government "will proceed with the annexation of parts of the West Bank." Boreham reported that Izzat Abdulhadi, Head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, called annexation "immoral and illegal" and predicted "it will completely undermine a legitimate process to the two-state solution... In addition to catastrophic impact on the peace and stability in the Middle East region."

Yet Abdulhadi's employers in the Palestinian Authority have refused repeated Israeli offers to create a Palestinian state since 2000 – which is the real catastrophe undermining "peace and stability".

The *Age*/*Sydney Morning Herald*, *Herald Sun* and the *West Australian* (May 19) news reports all opened with fact that Israeli PM Netanyahu has said Israel will annex West Bank settlements "pending US approval".

**"In the Hobart Mercury (May 11), Greg Barns fulminated that Israel applying sovereignty in the West Bank would be a 'new nightmare'"**

On *ABC TV* "The World" (May 18), ABC Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek said, with some hyperbole, "The key part of the deal for this government, the deal that broke 17 months of political deadlock here in Israel, is an agreement to move forward with the annexation of parts of the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank. The United States says it will

recognise Israeli annexation of areas designated under the Trump peace plan which was released earlier this year, but major European nations are warning the move would be a grievous breach of interna-

tional law."

In the *Hobart Mercury* (May 11), Greg Barns fulminated that Israel applying sovereignty in the West Bank would be a "new nightmare" and Australians who are focused on the coronavirus should "consider the plight of a people whose lives and destiny are immeasurably worse than ours will ever be in this land."

Barns called the Trump Administration "a hardline Zionist machine rubber-stamping every outrage committed by the Netanyahu Government" and quoted Palestinian Fawaz Turki, who said any annexation would end the Palestinian "dream of ever becoming... independent... in their own state," dooming "them to perpetual subjugation [in] an apartheid state."

Responding to Barns in a published piece in the *Mercury* (May 21), AIJAC's Allon Lee cautioned that "the extent" of any Israeli move to apply sovereignty and whether it even "actually happens, remains unclear."

Any such move, Lee noted, would happen "in the context of the Trump Administration's 'Peace to Prosperity' proposal, setting out a path for an independent Palestinian state. That state would include 70 per cent of the West Bank, as well as the Gaza Strip whose borders would be enlarged with land Israel will cede to it."

He pointed out that the Palestinians rule 40% of the West Bank and all of Gaza and there is an opportunity for a Palestinian state to be created but, as with all previous offers of a state, "the Palestinian Authority (PA) rejected it."

He also noted that "the Jewish people's right to settle in the West Bank was recognised by the UN and predecessor the League of Nations. With no legitimate sovereign power succeeding British rule in 1948, it can be argued this right remains legally valid."

# THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

## SANITISE THE HIDDEN HANDS

In August 1997, the Sydney Arabic language newspaper *El Telegraph* published an unusual but important article on its front page.

It was a forceful repudiation of the notorious anti-semitic forgery, the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. Headed “The Protocols: we were wrong,” it warned that there were many “partisan writers and propagandists in the Middle East who deliberately invoke the protocols to encourage racial hatred of the Israeli State and the Jewish religion.”

The publication of that article was one result of a conciliation hearing by the Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, considering a complaint I had lodged following a piece published in an earlier edition of that paper.

In that earlier piece, a popular Lebanese writer had tried to explain complex Middle East geostrategic matters by proffering a mind-blowingly ridiculous conspiracy theory, which not only explained absolutely nothing but promoted racist hatred.

Today, as the impact of COVID-19 and Government efforts to restrict infection has stretched into its third month in Australia, politicians and health officials have found it necessary to address the public on the dangers of accepting some of the wild claims circulating – regarding the virus, communication towers, ethnic groups and randomly selected celebrities.

Often one can only wonder at the gross stupidity and ignorance of individuals who will vandalise communication towers or concoct fantastic networks of disparate political, economic, religious and mystical collaborators. Yet it is not so easy to dismiss those who promote conspiracy theories targeting identifiable racial or religious targets.

Sadly, the same newspaper which published the *Protocols* extracts in the 1990s seems to be a happy home for conspiracy theories in 2020.

A prominent, reliable source of unreliable information has been *El Telegraph* columnist Pierre Sema'an, who does not cut and paste overseas material but draws on a wide variety of generally unnamed authorities to invoke the idea

of an insidious hidden hand confusing and controlling the Australian population.

Sema'an asked, “So has the world been placed under the command of military rule, whereby public freedoms, personal, religious and ethnic, are transformed from the practices of ancient times?”

He provides his own answer; “I remember what Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte said in his memoirs ‘It is stupid not to believe that world politics is determined and prepared by hidden organisations.’”

As Monash University academic Dr Ran Porat has documented, Sema'an has often told readers that Jews/Israel are at the heart of this purported conspiracy to enslave humanity.

Another source of regular offensive material relishing the opportunity provided by the coronavirus to publish hateful material is the Australian online news service *Farah.net.au*.

In a recent article, Mowaffaq Al-Siba'i mixed religious and political motifs to place Jews at the centre of a series of alleged historical crimes over the past 2,000 years or so.

Without a sense that this could even be contentious, the author writes of “Jewish bankers” who “control the US Federal Reserve and all European banks”, about Jews conspiring with the Freemasons and Turkish political parties, and about the Mossad

performing almost super human feats.

In another article, Dr Mustafa Youssef Al-Lidawi told *Farah* readers that the United States Government “is a Zionist administration par excellence” which is “only concerned with Zionist and Jewish interests”, while presenting the Western World as a malevolent force, guided by Jews and/or representatives of what he calls “the Zionist entity”, directed at causing harm to “Palestinians and Arabs.”

This is poisonous – not only misinforming and misdirecting, but also encouraging fear and hatred.

Around the world there are many scientists and researchers working tirelessly on a vaccine which will give us some level of protection against COVID-19.

It is a sad reality that enormous efforts also need to be made to inoculate society from infections of racist conspiracy theories.



The pandemic has also triggered viral misinformation



9 771442 369017 >

Australia \$7.95 (inc GST)

AIR