

A NEW MIDDLE EAST?



How the aftermath of the UAE-
Bahrain-Israel peace deals
could transform the region

THE “SNAPBACK” CRISIS

The dispute over renewed UN sanctions on Iran will have profound international implications **PAGE 22**

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How the Second Intifada, which began 20 years ago, reshaped Israel **PAGE 31**

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An exposé of the ugly rhetoric of Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia **PAGE 27**



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EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition focuses on the potentially transformative effect for the whole Middle East of the decision by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain to sign peace and normalisation agreements with Israel.

Washington Institute scholar David Makovsky looks in detail at what those peace deals actually say, while Amotz Asa-El explores the likelihood that other regional states will soon also normalise their relations with Israel. In addition, American expert Danielle Pletka examines Palestinian options now that their traditional Arab supporters are abandoning their long-standing boycott of Israel, and Khaled Abu Toameh documents how fundamentally Arab media discourse about Israel is changing.

Also featured this month is Israeli commentator Seth Frantzman arguing that the current international standoff over US efforts to “snapback” UN sanctions on Iran may have very significant global effects. Plus, on the 20th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Israeli journalist Herb Keinon looks at how this bloody terror wave indelibly reshaped Israeli society.

And don't miss: Naomi Levin on the impact in Australia of the dangerous US-based QAnon conspiracy theory; academic Ran Porat's exposé on the hateful rhetoric of the Australian branch of the Hizb ut-Tahrir international Islamist group; and Michael Rubin on the political implications of Iran's horrific execution of wrestler Navid Afkari.

As always, we invite your feedback on any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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(L-R) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Donald Trump, Bahrain Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa and UAE Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan at the Abraham Accords signing ceremony at the White House, Sept. 15. (Photo: AAP/Jim Lo Scalzo)



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FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN

THE END OF THE ARAB- ISRAEL CONFLICT?

In the aftermath of the Sept. 15 signing in Washington of the Abraham Accords, the separate peace and normalisation agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Israel and Bahrain, the world may be witnessing the emergence of a “new Middle East”.

However, this is not exactly the starry-eyed vision the late Israeli statesman Shimon Peres set out in his 1993 book titled *The New Middle East*.

In the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, Peres foresaw a regional peace fueled by cooperative economic restructuring and a “a long term process of reciprocal disarmament.” This would only be made possible, he argued, by the resolution of what Peres saw as the core issue between Israel and the Arab world: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Abraham Accords clearly refute such widely-held assumptions about the centrality of resolving the Palestinian issue as a prerequisite for establishing a foundation of peace, prosperity and stability in the Middle East.

It is worth recalling that before anyone ever spoke of an Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there existed an Arab-Israel conflict. And while the Palestinian issue remains far from being resolved, there is today good reason to believe that this older “Arab-Israel conflict” may be coming to an end.

Eight months prior to the publication of Peres’ book, the new chairman of the Likud party, Binyamin Netanyahu – in his own book, *A Place Among the Nations* – discussed his ideas for a new Middle East grounded in realism.

In it, he could have been speaking about the Abraham Accords.

“Peace,” Netanyahu wrote, “requires that our Arab partners educate their people to an era of mutual acceptance... The Arabs must be asked forthrightly and unconditionally to make their peace with Israel’s existence. The Arab regimes must move not only to a state of nonbelligerency but to a complete renunciation of the desire to destroy the Jewish state—a renunciation that will gain credibility only when they establish a formal peace with Israel. This means ending the economic boycott and the explosive arms buildup... The Arab states must resign themselves to something they have opposed for so long: not merely the fact but the right of Israel’s permanent presence among them.”

It is therefore significant indeed that the practical implementation of normalisation and cooperation embedded in the Abraham Accords is anchored in a text that recognises Jews, and by extension their state, Israel, as a member of the family of Abrahamic peoples native to the Middle East.

In addition, something like Peres’ vision of mutually beneficial regional economic cooperation also may soon become a reality as a result of these agreements. All evidence suggests that not only the UAE and Bahrain, but other Persian Gulf states, are interested in pursuing just such a vision.

In contrast, 20 years ago, in late September 2000, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat launched the bloody, game-changing Second Intifada (see pp. 31-33), months after having been offered Palestinian statehood for the first time. He thus revealed that Peres had been mistaken about the sincerity of his Palestinian interlocutors.

Since then, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, civil wars in Syria and Yemen, the rise of Al Qaeda and Islamic State and Iranian aggression and nuclear weapons ambitions have made a mockery of the notion that settling the Palestinian issue would meaningfully contribute to resolving other regional conflicts.

As award-winning commentator and frequent AIJAC visitor Ehud Yaari emphasised in recent remarks to Israel's *Channel 12*, the Abraham Accords, even though signed by only two Arab states, represent a paradigm shift for the Arab world as a whole. They could not have advanced without Saudi approval, and the Arab League effectively endorsed them by rejecting Palestinian demands to condemn them.

"In practice, the Arab Peace Initiative from 2002, which made relations with Israel contingent on the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 lines, [has been] laid to rest," Yaari said. "The Palestinian veto on the Arabs' ability to develop open and public relationships with Israel has been shattered."

Yet perhaps counterintuitively, these latest developments also have the potential to bring the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, as they remind their leaders that the world waits for no one. Palestinian leaders have the agency to take the brave steps necessary to negotiate an end to the conflict, and the establishment of a Palestinian state existing alongside Israel in peace and prosperity.

The Palestinians can now count on Israel's new Arab friends to advocate for the Palestinians' legitimate interests, with Israeli leaders having an incentive to hear them out. These states can also offer, to both sides, support for and participation in creative arrangements to help ame-

liorate the considerable risks involved in any two-state arrangement.

The Abraham Accords ultimately came about because the Middle East has changed. Israel impresses its Arab neighbours as a military power and technological innovator, while common threats – particularly from Iran and Turkey and

their respective allies – amid a US tendency to seek disengagement from the region, are forcing states to rethink how to maintain their essential security.

Yet some Western countries have been slow to recognise these fundamental changes and discard obsolete policies on everything from the fatally flawed 2015 Iranian nuclear deal to outdated attitudes on the centrality of the Palestinian issue.

As veteran peace negotiator Dennis Ross wrote in the *Washington Post*, "Old assumptions are like habits: They are hard to give up. But the Israeli-UAE-Bahrain breakthroughs are a reminder that the political landscape of the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli issue is changing. Time to change with it."

In our foreign policy echelons, think tanks and universities, and in the halls of parliament, Australian leaders also need to be rethinking old dogmas and find creative ways to engage with not only the ongoing challenges but also the emerging – and very promising – "new Middle East", in ways that serve Australia's essential interests. 

WORD FOR WORD

"This is not only a peace between leaders, it's a peace between peoples. Israelis, Emiratis, and Bahrainis are already embracing one another. We are eager to invest in a future of partnership, prosperity, and peace... together, we can find solutions to many of the problems that afflict our region and beyond."

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu at the signing ceremony of the Abraham Accords normalising relations with Bahrain and the UAE (White House, Sept. 15).

"I stand here today to extend a hand of peace and receive a hand of peace. In our faith, we say, 'O God, you are peace and from you is peace'... Today, we are already witnessing a change in the heart of the Middle East, a change that will send hope around the world."

United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan speaking at the signing ceremony (White House, Sept. 15).

"The rulers of Bahrain will from now on be partners to the crimes of the Zionist regime as a constant threat to the security of the region and the world of Islam."

Iranian Foreign Ministry statement on the Abraham Accords (Times

of Israel, Sept. 12).

"The Palestinian leadership see this as a betrayal of the Palestinian issue, of Jerusalem and of the al-Aqsa mosque."

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Israel-UAE-Bahrain normalisation (Axios, Sept. 11).

"The United States expects all UN Member States to fully comply with their obligations to implement these measures. In addition to the arms embargo, this includes restrictions such as the ban on Iran engaging in enrichment and reprocessing-related activities... among others. If UN Member States fail to fulfill their obligations to implement these sanctions, the United States is prepared to use our domestic authorities to impose consequences."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announcing 'snapback' is now in effect, meaning UN sanctions on Iran have been reimposed (CNN, Sept. 20).

"The order of occupation and oppression in Palestine, is the bleeding wound of humanity... The dirty hand that reaches the privacy of Jerusalem, where the sacred places of the three great religions coexist, is constantly increasing its audacity."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attacking Israel at the UN General Assembly (AFP, Sept. 22).



SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

TO SPITE YOUR FACE...?

The Palestinian Authority (PA) was very angry and upset about Israeli Government plans to extend Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank in accordance with the map provided in the Trump Administration's peace plan. Opposition to the plans for "annexation", as the PA labelled it, led the PA to cut off almost all cooperation with Israel. This involved not only things like creating a financial crisis in the PA's budget by rejecting tax transfers from Israel, and making it very hard for sick Palestinians who need medical treatment in Israeli hospitals to get it, but even curtailing security cooperation with Israeli security forces. Security cooperation has been essential in helping the PA control efforts by Hamas and other radical groups to overthrow PA rule in the West Bank.

In other words, these measures clearly hurt Palestinians and the PA much more than they hurt Israel. But perhaps they can be understood as a way to express anger over what the Palestinians argue was an Israeli plan to steal "their" land.

But here's the weird thing – in the wake of the Israel-UAE deal, so-called annexation is now "off the table", at least for the next few years. And yet the PA appears to have cancelled none of its "anti-annexation" measures, with both the PA and ordinary Palestinians suffering as a result, apparently pointlessly.

It is true that Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu said that the plans to extend sovereignty were only "suspended", and not cancelled. This was to salve the blow to key domestic constituencies which very much wanted the sovereignty extension to go ahead, but the US Administration has made it very clear it will not approve such a move anytime soon, and without US approval, it will not happen.

Yet as the *New York Times* reported on Sept. 11, PA President Mahmoud Abbas is still refusing to accept taxes collected by Israel on behalf of the PA, which "account for more than 60 percent of the authority's budget." As a result, "salaries in the territory are not being paid, families are enduring hardships, and the Palestinian Authority is careering toward bankruptcy," the paper reported.

Moreover, the *NY Times* story reported that:

"When the British foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, encouraged Mr. Abbas to take the money in a meeting in Ramallah [in early September], Mr. Abbas responded,

'In return for what?' according to a person familiar with details of the exchange."

To be clear, the PA is rejecting the receipt of more than US\$100 million per month of Palestinian money. This money is taxes paid by Palestinians on imported goods, collected by Israel on the Palestinians' behalf under long-standing agreements.

Diplomats who met with Abbas say he does not want to go back to the previous arrangements with Israel until he gets "some new concessions from Israel with which to

assure the Palestinian public that his rejection of the money, and their summer-long hardship, were not all in vain," according to the story.

Other aspects of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation which benefit Palestinians also remain suspended, such as the arrangements for permits to get Palestinians needed medical treatment.

What makes this doubly irresponsible is that the West Bank, like Israel, is

in the midst of a coronavirus second wave, averaging more than 500 new cases per day by mid-September, so Palestinians urgently need fully functioning government services.

As Danielle Pletka notes in this edition, the Palestinian leadership has a long history of making poor choices. But the apparently pointless refusal to accept money the PA is entitled to and desperately needs seems to go beyond that. It is not just a poor choice but an almost incomprehensible one.

MORE ON THE ISLAMIST PA RESPONSE TO NORMALISATION

Last month in this space, I documented how the supposedly secular Palestinian Authority had been using Islamist arguments to oppose the United Arab Emirates (UAE) plans to normalise relations with Israel – basically arguing that doing so was a violation of Islam, a religious sin.

This has continued. More than this, the PA has also been invoking Islamic religious sources to send antisemitic messages about Jews, not 'just' Israelis or Zionists.

On Sept. 17, the PA Ministry of Religious Affairs issued guidelines for the sermons to be delivered in West Bank mosques on that Friday, Sept. 18. The messages the PA demanded all imams preach to their congregations included (translation by Palestinian Media Watch):

- "There is nothing that harms Palestine and its holy sites more than making an alliance with the Jews, being connected to them, and relying on them."

- "Normalisation with the Zionist entity is high treason against Palestine, Jerusalem, the blood of the Martyrs, and the suffering of the prisoners,"

- Calling on "the Arab and Islamic peoples and the free people of the world to stand with Palestine in or-



The current self-destructive policies of the Palestinian Authority are hard to understand

der to bring down the agreement of humiliation and treason by the UAE and Bahrain [emphasis in original].”

Imams were also to warn against “Obedience to the Jews and being dragged after them.”

Cited as a source for the sermon was a potentially problematic verse from the Quran which has generally been interpreted as a warning to Muslims against trusting Jews and Christians: “And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion [Sura 2:120].”

Needless to say, this message against allying with or trusting “Jews” is not very encouraging for any future Israeli-Palestinian coexistence, especially when framed in religious terms.

AIR



Yossi Klein Halevi

THE PREREQUISITE FOR PEACE IS ISRAELI POWER

The peace treaty signed on Sept. 15 by Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain was a retroactive victory over one of the greatest threats Israel ever faced.

Nearly half a century ago, immediately following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Arab oil producers imposed a boycott on nations considered pro-Israel. In the US, Canada, England, the Netherlands and Japan, long lines formed at the petrol pump. Almost all of Africa severed relations with Israel. Western Europe began its pro-Palestinian tilt not because of a sudden moral awakening but because of the threat of an oil cut-off.

There was no greater strategic threat to Israel than Arab oil, which was effectively turning it into a pariah state. The mood in Israel and throughout the Jewish world was bleak. Elie Wiesel wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* cautioning Jews against despair. Cynthia Ozick wrote an essay for *Esquire* titled, “All the World Wants the Jews Dead.”

The culminating moment of the Arab oil boycott came on Nov. 10, 1975, when the UN General Assembly voted to declare Zionism a form of racism.

Today, Israel has a peace treaty with the UAE, one of the world’s major oil producers, and with oil-rich Bahrain. And the agreement is being quietly blessed by Saudi Arabia. Peace with Israel is being driven by the same forces that once led the campaign against its legitimacy.

Ironically, even as large parts of the Arab world come to terms with a Jewish majority state, the opposite process is happening in the West. The Arab boycott of Israel is over; BDS [the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement] lives.

The peace agreement with the UAE and Bahrain reassures Israelis that they will prevail against BDS too.

The signing is a belated vindication of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement. After the Yom Kippur War, Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat concluded that Israel would never be defeated militarily. After all, Yom Kippur was the Arab world’s best shot at destroying Israel. Yet a two-front surprise attack ended with the IDF within firing range of Cairo and Damascus.

Today’s peace agreement confirms the core message of the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement: The prerequisite for Middle East peace is Israeli power.

Israeli power is driving this peace. In its fear of Iran and Turkey, both of which seek to dominate the Middle East, the Arab world is turning to Israel.

Israel’s economic power is an additional incentive: This is an alliance of countries focused more on the future than the past.

But it is not only Israeli power that made this agreement possible, but Israeli pragmatism. The breakthrough happened when Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu agreed to rescind the threat of unilaterally extending Israeli sovereignty to large parts of the territories. In other words: The leader of the Israeli Right effectively granted an Arab country a say in its internal decision-making. Settler leaders have denounced that decision as a betrayal of Israeli sovereignty. But it is an essential affirmation of the logic of this time: Israeli security is enhanced by regional interdependence.

And the Palestinians? They have lost their veto power over peace, and that too is an Israeli victory. Even as they lose their most powerful allies, Palestinian leaders continue to respond with the failed politics of rejectionism and a culture of hatred.

Only an unequivocal Palestinian offer to confine the “right of return” to a Palestinian state and remove the threat of undermining Israel’s Jewish majority can convince large numbers of Israelis to again consider a two-state solution. The Palestinians must choose between “return” and statehood. Yet no Palestinian leader is willing or able to speak that truth to his own people.

Still, the peace agreement with the Gulf states doesn’t absolve Israel of the need to reach out to the Palestinians.

Especially today, an Israeli leader should appeal to our Palestinian neighbours from the heart, acknowledging their suffering, and offering, together with our new allies in the Arab world, a way out of a century of conflict.

Along with power, then, there is one more prerequisite for ending the conflict: Israeli wisdom and generosity.

That won’t likely happen today. Resolving this conflict awaits a new generation of Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Is it possible? If you had told me half a century ago that normalisation with Israel would be driven by Arab oil producers, and that the wealth created by oil would motivate

Arab nations to seek common cause with an economically powerful Israel, I would have smiled and dismissed you as a fool. AIR

Yossi Klein Halevi is a senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute. His latest book, Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor, is a New York Times bestseller. © Times of Israel (www.timesofisrael.com), reprinted by permission, all right reserved.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

TRUE TO FORM

Outside of the Middle East, Malaysia is arguably one of the world's most anti-Israel countries – a country where vanishingly few have ever even met a Jewish person, let alone an Israeli. As it is elsewhere in the Muslim world, conspicuous support for the Palestinians is voiced at the highest levels of the Malaysian government.

Indeed, it's hard to conceive of an event that would shift this paradigm. The unprecedented Abraham Accords between Israel and two Gulf states in the heart of the Arab world elicited predictable responses across the main political groupings, viewing the deal primarily through the prism of Palestinian interests.

Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said Malaysia viewed the normalisation of relations between the UAE and Israel as the sovereign right of the former, but reiterated Malaysia's "long-held position that the creation of an independent Palestine through a two-state solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine as the only viable solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict."

Representing the largest constituent party of the governing coalition, UMNO Deputy President Mohamad Hasan said, "Although it is the sovereign right of a country to recognise the Israeli regime, it is clearly against the solidarity of the Islamic state towards Palestine and its people."

Mohamad also accused Israel of acting treacherously towards Palestinians, Muslims, and the peace process. "The rights and homeland of Palestine are not merely items that can be traded with political recognition of a tyrannical regime," he said.

The conservative Islamist PAS, a fellow ruling coalition partner, made its position known via a resolution unanimously adopted by its general assembly in mid-September, urging all Muslims and Islamic governments to "protest and condemn the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel as well as any form of normalisation of diplomatic relations with Israel to curb the expansion of its political power and occupation of Palestine."

The assembly also condemned "the actions of the Arab

League, UAE and Bahrain which recognised the normalisation of diplomatic relations with Israel, which is a form of violation and hostility towards the Ummah."

Meanwhile, former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad predictably slammed the normalisation agreement concluded between the UAE and Israel, describing it as a "step backward".

In remarks to *This Week in Asia* newspaper, Mahathir said: "The agreement will divide the Islamic world into warring factions where the Israelis would be able to pour fuel on fire in this conflict."

"The agreement will increase the warring parties' ability to fight each other, and there will be no peace even between Islamic countries," he said, arguing that the deal would strengthen the Israeli claim that Palestine is a property of Israel.

The opinion columns are another barometer of political debates, and there was near unanimity about the Abraham Accords.

In the *New Straits Times*, under the plaintive title "How much do we care about Palestine?", former ambassador to the Netherlands and Fiji Dr Fauziah Mohd Taib argued, "It is not for Islamic solidarity that hardcore supporters like Malaysia must hold firmly to the Palestinian cause. It has to do with humanitarian rights of the people who are slowly being forced to abandon their own land to give way to the colonisers."

The *New Straits Times'* own editorial leader, a good indicator of mainstream political opinion in Malaysia, stated that "To sign a treaty with Israel while the Palestinians' land remains occupied, as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain did on Tuesday, is a big mistake."

The *Times* conceded that "the UAE and Bahrain are independent countries and they are free to do what is good for their national interests," but concluded:

"Israel can't strip a people of their land and pray for peace. Neither Israel nor the Middle East will have peace so long as the Palestinians are denied their rights... Ultimately, justice brings peace. The Americans and Israelis may ignore this, but the Arabs mustn't."

However, a balancing argument was published in the *Malay Mail* by Khalid Ghanim Alghaith, the United Arab Emirates' Ambassador to Malaysia, who reminded Malaysians that, "many countries, including Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) members, have developed relations with Israel over the past decades."

"Sadly, we have all come to realise that the boycott of the past years did not fulfil the aspirations of the Arab peoples in general and the Palestinian people in particular," the Ambassador continued. "We, therefore, believe in the necessity of breaking the deadlock in the political process and to promote a two-state solution, where Palestine and Israel live side by side in understanding, peace and prosperity."

Douglas Davis

THE REAL ARAB SPRING

Europe applauded the historic normalisation deals between Israel and two Gulf states last month. But many European nations, still clutching their ancient, dog-eared Arabist script, were clapping with only one hand.

The occasion was as important for the signatories – Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain – as it was for regional stability, said a European Commission spokeswoman, before quickly adding: “Of course, we are committed to a two-state solution and we are ready to work on a resumption of the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians.”



German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas: Peace deal “historic” but...

That was the line of most of the European states who acknowledged the occasion. Among the least cool was German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who hailed the treaty as “historic”, adding: “I have just spoken to

Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi on the telephone and offered him my congratulations on this historic step. The normalisation of relations is an important contribution to achieving peace in the region.”

“It is good that the Israeli Government has agreed to suspend its annexation plans,” he added. “We hope that this agreement will be the starting point for further positive developments in the region and that it can also inject fresh impetus into the Middle East peace process. We continue to maintain that only a negotiated two-state solution can bring lasting peace to the Middle East.”

Some other European states produced similar expressions of limited, heavily qualified satisfaction for the normalisation deals. But when the rubber hit the road, Hungary’s Foreign Minister, Peter Szijjarto, was the only ministerial-level European who made the transatlantic journey to the signing ceremony in Washington.

“Since the White House prepared the agenda for stabilising the region, this has ... proved to be the best peace plan thus far and promises to bring peace in the Middle East at last,” Szijjarto noted on his Facebook page: “The US President thus deserves gratitude,” he noted, adding praise for Israeli, UAE and Bahraini leaders.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, whose hard-line rhetoric, particularly on immigration, has often sparked criticism in the EU, was an early and avid supporter of US President Donald Trump.

The agreement struck between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain was the first such pact with an Arab country in a quarter of a century (Egypt, 1979; Jordan 1994). It was no less historic for that.

While Egypt and Jordan were both front-line states that had been to war against Israel, the peace treaties removed them from the future battlefield. Moreover, the absence of Egypt, the most powerful and populous Arab state, made it impossible for any other Arab state, or coalition of Arab states, to consider military action against Israel without them.

Of course, the Gulf states had never posed a military threat to Israel. Instead, the normalisation agreements not only signalled the end of any lingering trade embargoes against Israel but offered the prospects of partnerships that would enable the oil-rich Gulf states to marry their financial capital with Israel’s world-class technology – including weaponry. The agreements promise economic and technological power for all involved.

Israel and the Gulf states have not looked like enemies for a long time: “Publicly the Gulf states have hosted Israeli ministers and athletes; covertly their business and intelligence dealings have been gaining strength with every year,” noted one regional analyst in London.

More Gulf sheikdoms, along with several notably influential Muslim states in Africa, are anxious not to lose out on the prosperity that normalisation can bring, and they are likely to follow the examples of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain before long. Think Oman, think Morocco, among others.

Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen predicted that additional agreements, both with more Gulf countries and with Muslim countries in Africa, were likely to be on the way. “In my assessment, there is a chance that already in the coming year there will be a peace deal with additional countries in Africa, chief among them Sudan.”

The big prize would be Saudi Arabia, but that might be some time off. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, has acknowledged that formal relations with Israel would be mutually beneficial. He appears envious of Israel’s economic and technological might, but formal ties are probably still a step too far for the Guardian of Mecca and Medina.

The elephant in the room remains the Palestinians. Europe might still plead their case but the caravan is moving on. The Arab states, particularly in the Gulf, are more concerned about the threat posed by Iran and exploiting their pragmatic search for prosperity in partnership with Israel.

The naysaying Palestinians, begging bowl in hand, still mired in corruption, victimhood and a sense of entitlement, will have to wait.

In the meantime, the Arab states of the Gulf are sensing that they are, finally, on the edge of a real Arab Spring.

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Six rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel on Aug. 28, all landing in open areas.

Incendiary balloons and rocket fire ceased for two weeks after Hamas and Israel agreed to calm tensions, in a deal brokered by Qatar, on Aug. 31, but restarted immediately after the Sept. 15 signing ceremony of the Israel-UAE-Bahrain normalisation agreements in Washington.

On Sept. 15 and 16, Gazan factions fired at least 15 rockets at Israel, eight of which were intercepted by Iron Dome. Two Israelis were injured by a rocket that struck Ashdod.

On Aug. 26, a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli civilian to death in the central Israeli city of Petah Tikvah. On Sept. 2, a Palestinian carried out a car ramming and attempted stabbing in the northern West Bank, injuring a soldier and policeman.

On Sept. 14, Jewish terrorist Amiram Ben Uriel was given three life sentences for the firebombing of the Dawabsha family home in the West Bank Palestinian town of Duma, killing three people, in 2015.

ARAB LEAGUE TURNS AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS

At a virtual meeting of the Arab League on Sept. 9, the Palestinian Authority (PA) failed to persuade the League to condemn the normalisation deal between the UAE and Israel, even on the technical basis that it went against the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. That initiative, which the League had formally adopted, said normalisation should not take place before Israeli agreed to establish a Palestinian state on the 1967 lines.

On Sept. 22, PA Foreign Minister



The Arab League: No longer automatically backing the Palestinians

Riyad al-Maliki announced that the PA would not be taking up the six-month chairmanship of the Arab League it was due to assume under the League's leadership rotation system. Al-Maliki said, "There is no honour in seeing Arabs rush towards normalisation during [Palestine's] presidency."

Separately, the Secretary-General of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Saeb Erekat announced on Sept. 8 that most Arab countries had stopped paying their dues towards the PLO budget.

Meanwhile, there were hopes that a meeting between Sudan, the US and the UAE in Abu Dhabi that took place in late September may lead to Sudan normalising relations with Israel shortly, after months of talks.

SAUDI-ISRAEL AIRSPACE AGREEMENT

All flights to and from Israel will soon be permitted to overfly Saudi Arabia, according to senior White House adviser Jared Kushner, speaking on Sept. 8. This is a significant development since in an earlier statement, made on Sept. 2 in the wake of the announcement of the Israel-UAE normalisation deal, Riyadh had only said that it would allow over-flight by flights between Israel and the UAE.

Extending this permission to all eastward travel from Israel avoids the need for Israeli planes to detour along

the Red Sea, saving significant time for many travellers to and from Israel, including from Australia. Saudi Arabia also stands to benefit by using Israeli airspace to cut the flight time needed to reach Europe.

IRAN URANIUM ENRICHMENT ALMOST ENOUGH FOR TWO BOMBS

The periodical report on Iran by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), released on Sept. 4, reveals that Teheran has now enriched approximately two tons of uranium, which is 10 times the amount of low enriched uranium it was allowed to stock under the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA). This means Iran has almost enough fissile material for two atomic warheads, with the breakout time needed to produce enough military grade uranium for a bomb estimated at three to four months.

In mid-September, IAEA inspectors reportedly visited a site in Iran suspected of being part of the clandestine Amad nuclear weapons project, which ceased operations around 2003. The monitors were also scheduled to visit another such site a few weeks later, after their access to both locations had previously been blocked by Teheran.

QATAR ALLEGEDLY FUNDED HEZBOLLAH ARMS

Qatar funded and facilitated a Hezbollah arms shipment from Serbia to Lebanon in an elaborate scheme paid for by Ugandan gold, according to a new report by the Austrian-based think tank Mena-Watch.

According to the Sept. 8 report,

the trade, which took place in 2017, involved high level Qatari officials, including a member of its royal family. Arms, labelled as building materials and badged as local steel goods, were reportedly moved through North Macedonia and Greece, and from there shipped from Thessaloniki to Beirut.

The arms dealers were reportedly paid in Ugandan gold that had been purchased by Qatari-based charities.

NEW EMBASSIES IN JERUSALEM

On Sept. 21, Honduras became the most recent nation to announce it would move its embassy to Jerusalem, joining the US and Guatemala. Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez said he hoped this would happen before the end of the year, pandemic permitting.

On Sept. 5, the President of Malawi, Lazarus Chakwera, declared his country's intention to open an embassy in Jerusalem.

This followed announcements on Sept. 4 by Serbia that it would move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and from Muslim majority Kosovo that it would recognise Israel and also open an embassy in Jerusalem. However, both Serbia and Kosovo came under pressure not to do so by the European Union. European officials warned establishing embassies in Jerusalem could adversely affect Serbia's and Kosovo's EU membership bids.

Further complicating the issue, Serbia is also reportedly unlikely to go ahead with the embassy move if Israel recognises Kosovo.

ICC CLOSES MAVI MARMARA WAR CRIMES INVESTIGATION

On Sept. 16, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced that it had closed for good its investigation into allegations that Israeli security

forces had committed war crimes when, in 2010, they intercepted the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara* as it tried to breach the blockade of Gaza. Nine Turkish citizens were killed in the battle.

This was the third time the ICC's Pretrial Chamber had pushed ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda to proceed with the case, and the third time she had decided to close her probe.

Among the reasons given for her decision was that the matter had been investigated by the IDF legal division, effectively finding that the Israeli investigation met the requirements of the ICC.

Bensouda also noted that the Israeli forces had attempted to use non-military means to take control of the ship, and had swiftly provided medical aid to those injured in the battle, suggesting they had observed international law.

ISRAEL REIMPOSES LOCKDOWN OVER COVID-19 SURGE

The Israeli Government decreed a nationwide lockdown on Sept. 19, its second since the coronavirus pandemic began earlier this year, to combat a dangerous second wave of infections sweeping the country. As of Sept. 23, Israel had 58,402 active cases, with 658 in serious condition. New daily cases reached an all-time high of 6,948 on Sept. 23. On that date, Israel had amassed a total of 200,041 cases of coronavirus since the pandemic began, with a death toll of 1,316.

In the Palestinian Territories, according to reports from Palestinian health officials, 8,683 active cases had been recorded in the West Bank and 1,669 in Gaza as of Sept. 14. Particularly in Gaza, it is thought that the actual number of cases is higher due to low testing rates. The West Bank's coronavirus death toll was 206, and Gaza's 15, as of Sept. 10.



STRANGER THAN FICTION

REVERSE-ENGINEERING ON STEROIDS

The Iranian regime enjoys boasting about its prowess in military technology, frequently unveiling self-produced new weapons with much fanfare. In many cases, the 'new' systems are replicas of arms produced by other countries, locally reverse-engineered by Iran.

A few weeks ago, the Iranians broke new ground with their reverse-engineering capabilities. In early September, the Iranian Ministry of Defence opened an exhibition celebrating Iran's achievements in weapons development. One of the posters in the exhibition featured graphics of a supposed Iranian weapons system.



The Iranian Defence Ministry exhibition with the poster in question

However, the poster was actually just a mirror-image of a graphic taken from the prospectus for Israel's own breakthrough "Arrow" anti-missile system.

Needless to say, Iran has no similar system.

This is not the first time this has happened. In 2019, Iran used a picture released by the IDF spokesperson of an Israeli soldier

using a rifle grenade to advertise an Iranian rifle which was a copy of the Israeli one.

Given the regime's animus for the Jewish state, its security services certainly do seem to have a surprising

fondness for Israeli weapons systems.

Now if only Teheran would seek to replicate the peace agreements between Israel and other countries on the Gulf, this would do far more for regional security than any weapons system Iran could reverse-engineer.

COVER STORY

THE NEW MIDDLE EAST?

THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS LOOK FORWARD, NOT BACK

by David Makovsky

On September 15, US President Donald Trump hosted United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif al-Zayani and Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu as they signed historic new normalisation agreements on the White House lawn. A look at the text of these documents – collectively called the Abraham Accords – indicates where they echo and, more importantly, diverge from Israel's past treaties with Egypt and Jordan.

CONTRASTS WITH PREVIOUS TREATIES

The 1979 Egyptian treaty with Israel and 1994 Jordanian treaty with Israel focused to varying degrees on completing the unfinished business of armed conflict. In the former case, the scope of restricted military zones in the Sinai Peninsula was critical given that Egypt and Israel had fought wars against each other in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973. That last war came just a few short years before Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's electrifying 1977 visit to Jerusalem. Other regional leaders were unable to move past such recent traumas – their opposition to Egypt charting its own course was so great that the Arab League moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis and did not return until a decade later.

As for the Jordanian treaty, King Hussein and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sought to defuse any potential for renewed conflict through novel territorial solutions (e.g., Israel leasing border land for 25 years) and last-minute understandings on water rights. At the time, water issues were an acute source of conflict in the Middle East;

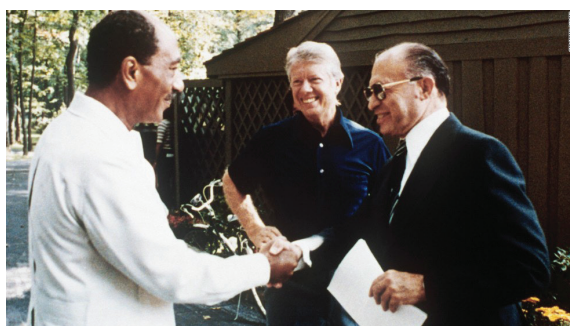
they are somewhat less so today given advances in desalination.

In short, both treaties were agreements between governments seeking to close the book on military conflict with Israel, even as the Palestinian issue remained unresolved and normalisation between their societies remained uncertain.

By contrast, the agreements signed this year were largely free of the baggage of the past.

For one thing, the UAE and Bahrain do not border Israel and never fought against it on the battlefield, so there is no sense of public trauma on either side. Although the Gulf states have formally participated in Arab boycotts of Israel since 1948, they have forged semi-covert ties

of varying degrees with the Jewish state in recent years. Tellingly, when Palestinian officials urged the Arab League to condemn the new Emirati agreement, the organisation instead noted that individual Arab states are entitled to make their own sovereign decisions on such matters – a far cry from the League's dramatic opposition to the Camp



The Egyptian and Jordanian peace agreements focused upon defusing the legacies of past armed conflicts



The Sept. 15 White House signing ceremony involved documents that had some notable differences from past Israeli peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan

David Accords in 1979.

The Abraham Accords are about charting a new course for the region, one based on closer Arab-Israeli alignment regarding strategic issues and economic opportunities. The agreements also have significant potential to encourage peace between peoples, including tourism, trade and investment links, rather than just between governments.

NOTEWORTHY TEXTUAL POINTS

What's in a name? The Emirati-Israeli text is longer than the Bahraini accord because the two governments had time for a round of bilateral working groups in the weeks leading up to the signing ceremony – they covered issues such as civil aviation and investment, though there are of course more technicalities to iron out in the coming months.

Israeli officials wanted the UAE agreement to be called a “treaty of peace” in order to put it on par with previous treaties—they pointed to comparable examples in modern history where countries not in direct conflict characterised their agreements as “peace treaties.” Ultimately, the document was titled “Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations, and Full Normalisation Between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel.”

By contrast, the Bahraini breakthrough was announced on Sept. 11, just a few days before the ceremony. The resulting document is therefore quite brief: its title is “Abraham Accords: Declaration of Peace, Cooperation, and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations.”

Israel's place in the region. The UAE agreement

“The Abraham Accords are about charting a new course for the region, one based on closer Arab-Israeli alignment regarding strategic issues and economic opportunities”

includes a passage on how Arabs and Jews “stem from the same ancestor, Abraham” and are both indigenous to the Middle East. Such phrasing is important because it clearly refutes longstanding allegations in the Arab world that Zionism is alien to the region.

Cultural peace. Israeli officials intimately involved in the UAE deal privately say that the Emiratis were emphatic about focusing on interfaith understanding and religious tolerance.

As the treaty itself notes, “The Parties undertake to foster mutual understanding, respect, co-existence, and a culture of peace between their societies in the spirit of their common

ancestor, Abraham, and the new era of peace and friendly relations ushered in by this Treaty, including by cultivating people-to-people programs, interfaith dialogue, and cultural, academic, youth, scientific, and other exchanges between their peoples.”

Indeed, the agreement holds substantial promise precisely because both parties recognise the need to reach out on a societal level, not just a governmental level.

To be sure, Israel's treaties with Egypt and Jordan mentioned many of the same normalisation issues laid out in the UAE treaty. Yet these issues were largely relegated to annexes and were never fulfilled in practice.

Focus on the bilateral. Bahrain, Israel and the UAE did not want to be accused of either trying to negotiate for the Palestinians or usurping Jordan's role as custodian of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem.

Therefore, the accords do not call for any changes in access to that city's holy sites. Instead, their focus is strictly on bilateral issues such as aviation, trade, and taxation. The Emirati treaty could also serve as a template for fuller Israeli agreements with Bahrain and other potential Arab partners.

For now, a third document signed on Sept. 15 – the shorter, more generalised “Abraham Accords Declaration”—is designed to encourage common regional aspirations for peace, according to officials.

Regional security architecture? The seventh paragraph of the Emirati agreement reads: “The Parties stand ready to join with the United States to develop and launch a ‘Strategic Agenda for the Middle East’ in order

to expand regional diplomatic, trade, stability, and other cooperation. They are committed to work together, and with the United States and others, as appropriate, in order to advance the cause of peace, stability, and prosperity in the relations between them and for the Middle East as a whole, including by seeking to advance regional security and stability.”

In theory, the reference to “regional security and stability” could be seen as a rubric for wider security cooperation. Yet the treaty does not call for a mutual defence alliance, so it cannot be reasonably interpreted as pointing at Iran – in fact, Emirati officials wanted to avoid any such impression entirely. Even so, some observers may argue that paragraph seven will unite those governments in the region who are uncomfortable with political Islam, perhaps encouraging them to form an axis against states who ardently favour it (e.g., Iran, Turkey, Qatar).

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the test of whether a treaty becomes a dead letter or a source of action is the political resolve of the parties involved. For Israel and the UAE, the rationale behind the accord stems from their strong alignment on two fronts: 1. marginalising the region’s most destabilising forces amid concerns about gradual American pullback; and 2. removing barriers between two of the most globalised and technologically focused countries in the Middle East.

This same logic led Emirati Minister of State Anwar Gargash to publicly state that he foresees a “warm peace,” and Israel is certainly eager to continue dissolving its regional isolation. Yet if either party’s political determination flags, for whatever reason, even the best text will be unable to advance their peace any further.

AIR

David Makovsky is the Ziegler Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and co-author with Dennis Ross of the book Be Strong and of Good Courage: How Israel’s Most Important Leaders Shaped Its Destiny. © Washington Institute (www.washingtoninstitute.org). reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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THE MOMENTUM OF PEACE

by Amotz Asa-El

Jericho had not been so stunned since Joshua’s trumpeters felled its walls.

Speaking in a Palestinian refugee camp outside the biblical oasis city, Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba called on the Arab world to recognise Israel because “the policy of all or nothing only led to defeat.”

It was 1965, and the speech was met with hostility throughout the Arab world. The Six Day War, which broke out two years later, made the Arab League further harden its position, when it adopted, in Khartoum, its “Three Noes” resolution, which said no to peace, recognition or negotiations with Israel.

Bourguiba’s unorthodoxy was thus relegated to a historical anecdote, and remained such until then Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s visit to Israel in 1977. Now, 55 years and three historical turning points after his Jericho speech, the day when most Arabs are prepared to follow Bourguiba’s advice suddenly seems to be drawing near.

The three turning points that followed the 1965 speech were Egypt’s peace with Israel in 1979, the agreements struck between Israel and the Palestinians in 1993-1995 and Israel’s treaty with Jordan in 1994. Now the accords that the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed with Israel on Sept. 15 at the White House mark a new historic turning point, one notably different from the past three both in terms of the motivations of the Arab leaders involved, and in terms of the deals’ potential domino effects.

In terms of motivation, there is no equivalent today to the economic constraints that led Egypt and Jordan to make peace with Israel, after each had spent billions they didn’t have on wars they didn’t win. The UAE and Bahrain are both rich, and they have never actively fought against Israel. Neither faces anything like the demographic problems that overpopulated Egypt had when the decision was taken to make peace with Israel.

Instead, the UAE made its move because it sees in Israel a strategic counterweight to nearby Iran, and a worthy trade partner for the Arab world’s most developed economy. Bahrain then followed its example.

This mercantile attitude is unprecedented in Arab-Israeli relations, which until now have overwhelmingly been low key. Jordan and Egypt, while signing big energy deals with Israel and allowing some Israeli investment in textile



Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba called for normalisation in 1965

production, mostly shunned direct Israeli investments, agricultural cooperation and cultural ties.

The imminent launch of direct flights between Tel Aviv and Dubai is expected to attract an influx of Israeli tourists to the Emirates, whom the Emirati people seem eager to greet. But if tourism is likely to connect middle class Israelis to the UAE, the country's financial sector, defence establishment and free trade zones are expected to attract Israeli big business.

Bahrain, an island kingdom of 1.6 million people 200 km north of the UAE, is not as economically vibrant as its neighbour, but the significance of that monarchy's move lies in its very decision to follow its neighbour's lead and establish full recognition of the Jewish state. It is a choice that others may soon follow.

Both Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump have flagged that more Arab countries are set to sign peace deals with Israel. The most significant of all the potential candidates is Saudi Arabia.

It has long been an open secret that Jerusalem and Riyadh have been sharing intelligence, and that assorted Israeli technologies have been sold to the desert kingdom. Moreover, it is clear the Emirati and Bahraini moves would not have been made without full Saudi approval.

Pundits in Israel believe the US is pressuring the Saudi Kingdom to make a move, but Riyadh is waiting to see what happens in November's presidential election in the US. If Trump is re-elected, chances are high the Kingdom will recognise Israel. If Biden wins, the Saudis might prefer to wait and see where his administration heads and how they get along.

Another natural candidate to make peace with Israel is Oman, the sultanate abutting the UAE's south and east.

Unlike Saudi Arabia, Oman has openly hosted a series of Israeli leaders over the years – Yitzhak Rabin in 1994, Shimon Peres in 1996 and Netanyahu in 2018. Oman had a secret relationship with Israel even before the Oslo Accords, and in the 1990s exchanged trade representatives

with Israel, before severing those ties in 2000 in the wake of the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

At the same time, Oman maintains good ties with Teheran, striving to play mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This inclination might convince Muscat to wait for Riyadh to move first, a prospect that will presumably make the Iranians understand that Omani diplomacy can only maintain a limited distance from that of Saudi Arabia.

The two remaining Gulf countries – Qatar and Kuwait – are more complex.



Will other Persian Gulf states follow the UAE/Bahrain example? Saudi Arabia's King Salman and Crown Prince Muhammed Bin Salman (top); Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (bottom)

Qatar, a peninsula wedged between the Emirates and Bahrain, admitted an Israeli trade representative in 1996 and later held many public meetings with Israeli leaders. However, the Israeli envoy was asked to leave Doha in January 2009 in the wake of the IDF's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza.

Even so, trade relations between the two countries persisted, and media reports claim there is also a vibrant defence relationship. Then again, relations with Qatar are obstructed by its vehement disagreements with Saudi Arabia and Egypt over issues that have nothing to do with Israel, such as the civil war in Libya.

Qatar joins Turkey in siding in that conflict with the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) under Prime Minister Fayeza al-Sarraj, while Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE back

the forces of Gen. Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA). Qatar also hosts a Turkish military base, in an affront to Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi. His enmity with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is open and intense, due to the latter's support of Sisi's Islamist opposition.

Further context is the fact that Qatar supplies Gaza's Islamist Hamas government with cash, which plays a role in the Strip's dealings with Israel.

Considering all this, Qatari leaders might feel that making peace with Israel at this time might compromise the image they are trying to cultivate of an independent country that fits into the orbit of no other Arab government.

Kuwait's reluctance, by contrast, stems not from any diplomatic pretension, but from geography.

Wedge between Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf, Kuwait shares a maritime border with Iran, and, by land, is hardly 40 km. from Iranian soil. In addition, there are the memories of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait 30 years ago, a trauma that dilutes Kuwait's taste for diplomatic adventure.

Then again, if its Gulf neighbours all make the move, Kuwait may be in no position to stay behind, especially given its military dependence on, and diplomatic indebtedness to, the US.

Lastly on the Arabian Peninsula is Yemen, whose bloody civil war, along with Iran's meddling in it, preclude it launching any diplomatic move, least of all one as ambitious as reaching an accommodation with the Jewish state.

However, beyond the Red Sea to Yemen's west sprawls Sudan, whose own civil wars have abated. Khartoum's military government is considering joining the Emirati-led move and has already conceded that it is secretly engaged in a dialogue with Israel.

Further west still is Chad, which isn't a member of the Arab League, but has Arabic as its main language. Chad has already announced its intention to establish full diplomatic ties with Israel, and last year hosted Netanyahu on an official visit.

Chad appears for now to mark the westernmost extent of the unfolding Arab-Israeli rapprochement, as the Maghreb countries to Chad's north-west for now seem either unavailable, such as war-torn Libya, or uninterested in full peace with Israel, as Morocco and Algeria say they are.

The same goes also for Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, all of which are under Iranian influence, albeit in different ways.

Still, if what happened in Washington in September expands to the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as Sudan and Chad, the impact will indeed be profound.

For one thing, it will make other Muslim-majority countries consider following their example. Most notable among these candidates would be Indonesia, which covertly trades with Israel and also hosted a visit by Rabin in 1993, but has never admitted an Israeli diplomatic mission. Neighbouring Malaysia's long-standing anti-Israeli virulence might not change even if Saudi Arabia strikes a peace with Israel, but Indonesia's might.

More importantly, a Saudi-led rapprochement would mean that the traditional Arab diplomatic dictum, that peace with the Palestinians must precede wider Arab peace with Israel, is obsolete. Furthermore, if diplomatic relations with Israel expand as far as Jerusalem hopes they will, this would mean that, 20 years after Bourguiba's death in 2000, countries representing nearly half the Arab world's 420 million citizens will have followed his advice and recognised the Jewish state.

WHERE DO THE PALESTINIANS GO FROM HERE?

by Danielle Pletka

Israel made peace last month with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, the most dramatic development in the Arab-Israeli conflict since Jordan and Israel ended their war in 1988. Remarkable in and of itself, the agreement was perhaps even more notable for what it omitted. Nowhere in the short text of the so-called Abraham Accords declaration was the word "Palestine" mentioned, a sad but in some ways fitting coda to the era of Palestinian primacy in the Middle East.

The shifts that ultimately led both the Emirates and Bahrain toward Israel have been long in coming, and the gallons of ink spilled on the occasion of the rapprochement credited the realignment to Iran. To be sure, the Islamic Republic has loomed large in the region for some time, and Teheran's escalating aggression against its neighbours and domination of powerful proxy armies in both the Gulf and the Levant have only pushed Iran's common enemies in the Sunni and Jewish worlds together. But Iran alone did not force this radical rethink of nearly a century of Arab policy. The Palestinians themselves bear much of the responsibility.

It has become clichéd to echo the late Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban (though he was referring to the Arabs in general) on the Palestinians' solid track record of "never missing an opportunity to miss an opportunity." The misquote well conveys the gist of the problem: In 1947, the Palestinians turned their backs on the historic United Nations partition plan that might have created two states side by side, distinct Jewish and Palestinian homelands (as indeed, the Arabs had rejected previous such recommendations made to the government of the United Kingdom, the mandatory power in what was then Palestine).

In the period between the Arab League's failed war to prevent the creation of Israel and Israel's conquest of east Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967, Palestinian refugees outside "Palestine" proper and those living on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip under Jordanian and Egyptian sovereignty respectively, never reconsidered their opposition to a two-state solution. Neither the Hashemite King-

"Perhaps, as some observers suggest, the new Sunni-Jewish axis in the Middle East will serve as a much-needed wake up call to the Palestinian people and their bankrupt leadership"



The Palestinian struggle has been hampered by poor choices which led to their cause becoming synonymous with terrorism

dom nor Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser considered offering the Palestinian territories they nominally "occupied" to create a Palestinian homeland. The whole loaf was always the focus, and for too many years, terrorism was the preferred tool to achieve it.

Lost to all but the victims are the Palestinian terrorist organisations that mushroomed over the years; not simply the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), but the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the PFLP-General Command, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas and other more fleeting flirtations with politically motivated murder. Much as the combatants in Libya and Syria are now backed by competing Arab powers and Iran, these groups too were typically more focused on being sustained by their patrons than on making any actual progress towards a state, unitary or otherwise. Together, however, they made the Palestinian cause synonymous with terror.

Meanwhile, actual Palestinian refugees continue to live by diktat in squalid refugee camps – to resettle would have scattered them to the diaspora, and the PLO in particular preferred its subjects to live in misery, for maximum political effect. But life in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan held no promise for the Palestinian people – particularly after the events of Black September in which the PLO tried (twice) to assassinate the King of Jordan in 1970. In Lebanon, Palestinians were denied equal rights in the national constitution and, over the years, the most capable made their way to more welcoming nations, where they were able to prosper and support what family they were forced to leave behind.

In the territories newly occupied by Israel after 1967, the fortunes of Palestinians began to change for the better, ironically. The West Bank and Gaza economies skyrocketed – becoming the fourth-fastest growing economy in the world according to the World Bank – improving even as Israel's economy stagnated in the 1970s. Life expectancy

increased by a full decade. Children began to go to school in unprecedented numbers. This improvement was driven by Palestinian work in Israel and rapid integration with the Jewish state, growing remittances from the Gulf and – it must be said – an improvement in Palestinian lives under Israeli occupation. But that was all to end in 1987 with the first Intifada, the Palestinian revolt against Israel.

Was the Intifada a poor choice? Certainly, in terms of economic progress and prosperity. But money and education and longer life are not everything; freedom matters. And then in 1990, another poor choice: The Palestinians en masse, along with their "leaders" in the PLO, supported the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Palestinian workers in the small Gulf nation were unceremoniously tossed out, resulting in another loss of income remittances, and most of all, the beginning of the end of the Arab romance with Palestine.

Even after the Oslo Accords in 1993, there were more poor choices: The importation of the bankrupt exiled Tunis leadership of the PLO to run "Palestine," replete with all the corruption that is the hallmark of too much Arab governance. The inability to come to peaceful terms with Israel, certainly not the fault of Palestinians alone. The rising

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kleptocracy of the Ramallah government that ushered in a brief romance with Iranian-financed Hamas, which, though no longer loved, still governs Gaza. The celebration of the 9/11 attacks. The decision to side with Saddam Hussein in the 1991 Iraq War. The subcontracting to Iran of Palestinian “resistance.” The continued monopoly over rule by the aged and venal Mahmoud Abbas, now in the 15th year of his four-year “democratic” term as Palestinian president.

At the end of the day, the problem is that the Palestinians appear resolutely mired in the 20th century, and those parts of the Arab world that aren’t torn by conflict or ruled by Iran have decided that the “Palestine first” credo no longer serves their own interests or that of the Palestinians.

Perhaps, as some observers suggest, the new Sunni-Jewish axis in the Middle East will serve as a much-needed wake up call to the Palestinian people and their bankrupt leadership, and give Arab states new leverage over Israel to finally solidify a two-state solution.

Certainly, they were able to point to a delayed decision by Israel to extend sovereignty over parts of the West Bank as a small victory. But there is little evidence that the fate of Palestine is high on the priority list for any of Israel’s new friends, pious protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Nor is it clear that, even were the Palestinians to gain something that looked like a state, their fortunes would be any better than they are under partial Israeli occupation.

What will it take to finally see a two-state solution? The answer lies partly with Iran, but mostly with the Palestinians themselves. For as long as the Islamic Republic continues to exploit the Palestinian cause in order to perpetuate its own effective occupation of Lebanon and Syria, there will be domestic and external Palestinian groups that will continue the fight that underscores the problem of a peaceless “peace process.” The Palestinian people and their leaders must repudiate Iran’s utterly fruitless support. More importantly, they must revisit their path forward. Rejectionism has failed. Terrorism has failed. Extortion has failed. Perhaps the time has come to try good governance, in order to build a Palestine capable of being a partner for peace with Israel. AIR

Danielle Pletka is a senior fellow in foreign and defence policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where she focuses on US foreign policy generally and the Middle East specifically. Reprinted from The Dispatch (www.thedispatch.com). © The Dispatch, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ARABS: ISRAEL IS NOT OUR ENEMY

by Khaled Abu Toameh

Agrowing number of Arabs, particularly those living in the Persian Gulf, say they finally understand that Israel is not the enemy of Muslims and Arabs. This change of heart manifested even before the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed peace agreements with Israel on Sept. 15. It is the direct result of the expansionist ambitions of Iran and Turkey in the Arab world and the feeling among Arabs that those two states pose the real threat to their national security.

Until recently, it was unimaginable to see Arabs openly admitting that they had been mistaken in their belief that Israel was the enemy of Muslims and Arabs. Now, Arabs seem to have no problem saying that they were wrong all these years in their attitude toward Israel.

Until recently, most Arab writers, journalists and political activists avoided any form of criticism of the Palestinians. Such criticism was considered taboo in the Arab world. Now, however, one can find in Arab media outlets more criticism of the Palestinians and their leadership than in Western, or even Israeli, media.

Until recently, for most Arabs, the terms “peace” and “normalisation” (with Israel) were associated with extremely negative connotations: humiliation, submission, defeat and shame. No longer. Many Arabs are openly

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talking about their desire for peace with Israel. These Arabs are saying that they are looking forward to reaping the fruits of peace with Israel and that it is time that Arab countries prioritise their own interests.

Of course, none of this means that the entire Arab world has changed course and is ready to recognise Israel. The voices of the Arabs and Muslims who reject any peace treaty with Israel remain vocal and representative of the sentiments of the majority of the people in Arab and Islamic countries, especially those that have not educated their public for peace.

Yet, it is remarkable to see how an increasing number of Arabs are airing their views regarding Israel and the Palestinians in the public sphere.

Importantly, Arabs of the Gulf are openly admitting that it is Iran, and not Israel, that poses a major threat to peace and stability in the Middle East. The Gulf Arabs are saying that Iran and its Palestinian and Lebanese proxies – such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah – are destroying Arab countries and dragging them toward more bloodshed, violence and chaos.

As Saudi writer Mohammed al-Sheikh recently noted:

“For us in the Gulf, Israel is no longer the No. 1 enemy, as it was before the Persian mullahs seized control of Iran in 1979 and began exporting their revolution, or before Erdogan assumed the presidency in Turkey and worked to restore the Ottoman occupation of the Arab world.”

Al-Sheikh said that the Gulf Arabs are the only ones entitled to assess the dangers and threats surrounding them:

“It is we, not other Arabs, who assess the dangers surrounding us and arrange our priorities. The problem is that most Arabs, including the Palestinians, insist on playing the role of guardians over us and on defining for us our priorities. They continue to argue that the mullahs of Iran and Erdogan’s Turkey do not pose a threat to us as much as Israel does.”

Praising the prospect of peace and normalisation with Israel, the Saudi writer pointed out that:

“Israel is an advanced and superior country in all fields, and by creating a space for peaceful cooperation with it, we believe that we will benefit from its progress and superiority.”

Arabs who are opposed to peace with Israel, al-Sheikh added, “do not care about development and modernisation, and that is why they are at the bottom of countries in terms of modernity and development.”

Ahmad al Garni, editor of the Saudi newspaper *Sada al Hijaz*, said that the days when Arabs used Israel to scare



Longstanding taboos against urging peaceful relations with Israel have been well and truly broken, at least in the Persian Gulf

other Arabs are finally gone. “Scaring us with Israel has become a thing of the past,” al-Garni wrote:

“We are not afraid of Israel. We are not cowards. Dealing with Israel does not mean that we love it. It’s one thing to love Israel, and another thing to have commercial, economic and political relations with it.”

Expressing growing disillusionment in the Arab countries with the Palestinians, Saudi writer Amal Abdel Aziz al-Hazany said that the Palestinians who are now condemning the UAE and Bahrain for making peace with Israel were among the first Arabs to normalise their relations with Israel when they signed the 1993 Oslo Accords.

Al-Hazany pointed out that Iranian meddling in the internal affairs of the Palestinians has resulted in the separation of the West Bank from the Gaza Strip and triggered a power struggle between the two main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, that continues to this day.

She said that despite Iran’s endorsement of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the Arabs continue to support the Palestinian cause in international forums and remind the international community on every occasion that the Palestinian issue is the Arabs’ first concern. Al-Hazany also noted that funds continued to flow to the Palestinians, especially from the Gulf states:

“The Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia, have provided everything possible in favour of the Palestinian issue, and millions of dollars have not stopped flowing to the PLO, without accountability, but with the hope that they would spend this money to provide a decent life for the Palestinians... Can the Arab countries be blamed today for looking after their interests by establishing open relations with Israel? Times change, everything has changed, except for the Palestinian mood that rejects anything and everything.” Emirati political analyst Issa bin Arabi Albuflasah



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expressed outrage and disgust over the Palestinian leadership's recurring insults and attacks on the Gulf states for daring to seek peace with Israel.

"Palestinian leaders are the main cause of the suffering of their people," Albuflasah remarked. "They have achieved nothing for the Palestinians. They only care about power and achieving personal and partisan gains at the expense of the Palestinian issue."

Accusing the Palestinians of being ungrateful, the Emirati analyst said:

"The UAE and the rest of the Gulf states opened their doors and institutions to the Palestinians, where they lived as brothers, enjoying everything that the citizen enjoys, and receiving care and attention. The Palestinians are now responding by insulting us and aligning themselves with Iran, Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood."

Saudi writer Mohammed al-Saed also lashed out at the Palestinians and accused them of living in "a miserable film."

Noting that Palestinians have a long history of rejecting peace offers with Israel, he said that the Palestinians did not bother to inform their Arab brothers of their intention to sign the Oslo Accords:

"It was excessive selfishness from [former PLO leader Yasser] Arafat and his unfortunate negotiating delegation who participated in Oslo. Over 50 years, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and many Arab countries paid a heavy price and fought several wars on behalf of the Palestinians. Yet Arafat did not let them know about the negotiations that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords."

Explaining why Arabs are now moving closer to Israel, Saudi writer Fahd al Degaither commented:

"Geopolitically speaking, new enemies of the Arabs have appeared in the region, with new and very dangerous ambitions that are declared and different from those of Israel. We were told that Israel's slogan was [to expand] 'From the Euphrates to the Nile.' Iran, however, does not hide its expansionist ideological trend, which it is already practicing through its militias in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. Turkey, on the other hand, is seeking to seize new sources of energy in Libya and has sights on Africa along the Red Sea. These developments prompted the moderate Arabs to start reconsidering their previous political positions." Saudi writer Osama Yamani concurred:

"Our enemy today is Iran and Turkey, who occupy Arab lands in the name of the Palestinian issue. As for the enemy of the Palestinians at home, they are the corrupt leaders and traitors who rest in the bosom of Iran. For us, the real issue now is development, peace and justice that were stolen from the Arab world and forgotten by

the Arab peoples. The Palestinian issue concerns the Arab peoples who want a solution, but the leaders benefit from the status quo. These leaders benefit from the problems and suffering of their people. There is no solution under corrupt leaderships. The Palestinian leadership is in the hands of traitors and beneficiaries."

Saudi writer Saeed al-Farha al-Ghamdi, in an article published in the Saudi newspaper *al-Madina* on Sept. 4, says he can't understand why the Palestinians fail to read reality.

"The Palestinian issue is in retreat and Palestinian leaders are moving in the opposite direction, as if their minds have been frozen. The Palestinians have become lost and without a leadership that looks after their interests," al-Ghamdi said, urging the Palestinians to keep a distance

from Iran, Turkey and Qatar, "which have agendas that seek to exploit the [Palestinian] issue."

Saudi writer and researcher Fahd al-Shkiran advised the Palestinians to "catch up" with the normalisation agreements between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain.

"The historic agreement will change the face of the region," al-Shkiran wrote. "It is tantamount to turning the

tables on the axis of resistance and its terrorist militias. It is not reasonable for the Palestinian Authority to remain in its negative attitude regarding the changes that are sweeping the world."

Al-Shkiran also advised the Palestinians to hold their leaders accountable on two levels:

"The first is political accountability: The reasons and causes of the continued rejection of all realistic deals that were offered to them since the beginning of the problem until today. Second: Opening the files of corruption. The Palestinian has the right to ask about the billions of dollars paid by the Gulf states for the Palestinian cause. All that money has disappeared."

Judging from the comments of many Gulf Arabs, it is evident that a growing number of Arabs realise that they have been misled about Israel for decades – brainwashed to believe that Israel was the true enemy of all Arabs. It is refreshing to see that many Arabs have become aware of the misconceptions and lies they were fed all that time.

The Palestinians, however, are unlikely to see similar changes as long as their leaders continue to inform them, in no uncertain terms, that normalisation and peace with Israel constitute the crime of treason.

AIR

Khaled Abu Toameh, an award-winning Palestinian Affairs journalist based in Jerusalem, is a Shillman Journalism Fellow at Gatestone Institute. Reprinted from Gatestone Institute (www.gatestoneinstitute.org). © Khaled Abu Toameh, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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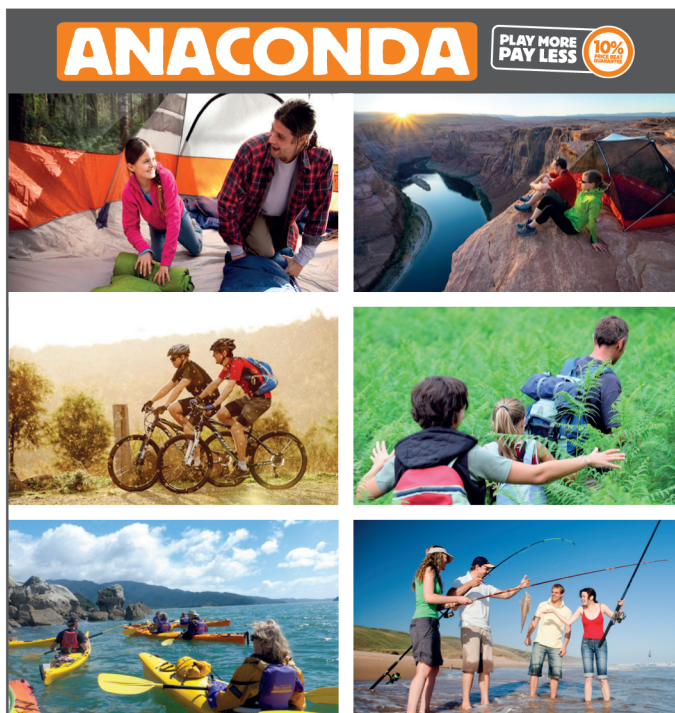


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The “Snapback” Crisis

Why the stakes extend beyond Iran

by Seth Frantzman

The Trump Administration has sought to re-impose snapback sanctions on Iran under UN Security Council Resolution 2231. The decision was announced by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the first hours of Sept. 20. It marks a month since the US informed the UN Security Council of Iran’s non-compliance with provisions of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, most countries appear to oppose the US “snapback” and Iran is already manoeuvring to exploit this to undermine the US role in the Middle East.

Russia, Turkey, China and others will also seek to use this to their benefit as they also want to reduce the US role in the region and globally. This is a unique moment in world history and Iran believes it will be a symbolic end to US hegemony, marking an end of 30 years of the US role that began with the Gulf conflict in 1990.

Pompeo says that soon the US will announce a range of additional measures to strengthen the enforcement of UN sanctions on Iran. This is part of the multi-year “maximum pressure” campaign the US began in 2018. The US sought to reduce Iran oil exports to almost zero. Iran has shipped gasoline to Venezuela and Syria nonetheless. The US also sought to keep an arms embargo on Iran. That embargo also appears likely to expire.

While there is hope by Trump Administration supporters that the US decision to move forward on snapback will work, the consensus in Europe, Russia, Iran and elsewhere appears to be that it will not. Iran’s media has been quick to seize on reports of European disagreement with the US to showcase that it will defeat the US on the issue of sanctions.

Iran’s *Press TV* says that Josep Borrell, the top EU foreign policy bureaucrat, disagrees with the US. France, Germany and the UK also appear to disagree with the US. Iran’s UN mission has sent a letter slamming the US decision as well. Iran argues that the UN Security Council does not agree with the US position and that Washington has not been a party to the Iran deal since 2018 because the US walked away from the JCPOA that May. Iran says the US

view is “null and void” and the US has no legal standing to enforce snapback.

This all sets up a complex battle not only between the US and Iran but also between the US and Russia and China and between the US and Europe. Washington appears prepared to use secondary sanctions against countries that violate its understanding of snapback. It has made similar threats about those that violate the arms embargo that the US wanted imposed.

From Iran’s point of view, as well as that of Russia and China, the US has walked into a trap. They want to call its bluff on this and prove that they can do as they please despite US threats, setting up a crisis in which the US will lose because the US will be shown not to have the international diplomatic or economic clout it once had. In a sense they want to push this issue, waving a red flag in front of the Trump Administration, and hoping that it charges. They are gambling on the US stumbling as it tries to take on too many crises at once.

They also know the US has an election in November. The message from Moscow and other states has already become clear: The era of US global hegemony is over and we live in a multi-polar world now.

Pompeo has said the US will do what is necessary to enforce the arms embargo on Iran. The US wants UN member states to comply.

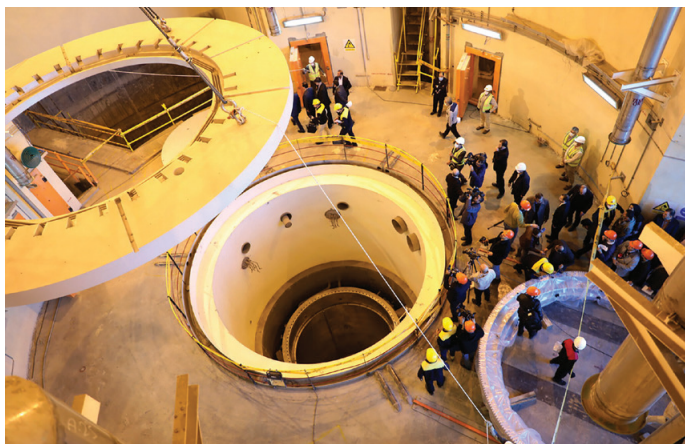
This would also supposedly target Iranian enrichment of nuclear material, which has increased. Iran has already violated various promises on levels of enrichment and stockpiles. But the UN is reticent to do anything, with the excuse that there is too much “uncertainty.”

In reality the whole crisis has shown how weak the JCPOA was in the first place. It virtually guaranteed Iran an end to an arms embargo and sanctions relief and enabled it to eventually do whatever it wants. This is because most of the countries that wanted the deal wanted a legal way to let Iran do what it wanted and to create a complex structure such that it would be difficult to go back to sanctions. Iran has called that bluff as well by simply announcing it was breaking limits on enrichment, with no consequences. The deal in the end basically gave Iran a right to develop material to the point of nuclear weapons capability even while ostensibly keeping it from doing so.

Elliott Abrams, the US Special Representative for Iran, has indicated that the new American pressure mechanisms will target enrichment, the development of new missiles and transfer of missile technology. However, it’s unclear how the US will prevent this if it comes from Russia or via



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announces new “snapback”-related sanctions



Iran is deliberately and defiantly showing off its new enrichment and missile activities in order to test the new US approach, according to Frantzman

Turkey and other states.

Iran, however, is showing off its new enrichment and missile activity. It continues to announce new ranges and precision for drones and missiles. It sent a military satellite into orbit. It said on Sept. 14 that it has 1,000 centrifuges at its Fordow facility carrying out enrichment. The only setback for Iran appears to be a July explosion at its Natanz facility, which it thinks was foreign sabotage.

Iran wants to test the US approach. The US says Iran is in breach of the deal. The US has also walked away from the deal. Iran is gambling that the UN will stand with Teheran and that in its dispute with Washington it will get Russia, China, Turkey, Europe and other states on its side, historically isolating the US.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has indicated Russia will no longer obey Western international rules.

Iran wants to accelerate this isolation, and China likely wants the same. China has been testing missiles and conducting more aggressive flights to challenge the US in the Pacific. Russia has also been challenging US B-52 flights from Alaska to the Black Sea. Recently, US F-22s intercepted Russian airplanes near Alaska. Meanwhile, Russian supersonic bombers broke a world record in mid-September, flying some 20,000 kilometres in 25 hours.

The message is clear. This isn't just about the Iran deal or the snapback. This is about a re-ordering of the world. Iranian defiance of the US sanctions, with outside support, is meant to be symbolic of a process that has taken place over the last ten years.

The significance of the Iran crisis is that the US "new world order," put in place after the Gulf War 30 years ago by US President George H. W. Bush, has now eroded to the extent that it may be over. Iran hopes that the US gamble on snapback will be the final throw, the denouement that ends the US role in the Middle East.

AIR

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

A WRESTLER'S DEATH AND A REGIME'S FUTURE

by Michael Rubin

Early on the morning of Sept. 12, 2020, Iranian authorities in Shiraz hanged Navid Afkari, a 27-year-old wrestling champion whom a security court had sentenced to death for allegedly stabbing a man during unrest two years ago. Few believe there was merit to his conviction. Security forces detained and tortured Afkari, his brothers and hundreds of others for participating in the 2018 anti-government protests. Exculpatory evidence existed.

While his captors broadcast a forced confession, Afkari was able to smuggle out a recording professing his innocence. Ordinary Iranians are outraged not only by the brutality of Afkari's execution, but by its speed. Iranian authorities killed Afkari before his family could visit him to say goodbye.



Executed wrestler Navid Afkari

Over the course of its 41-year existence, the Islamic Republic has executed tens of thousands of prisoners and dissidents. The late Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri revealed in memoirs smuggled out of the country by his son that, in 1988 alone, his regime executed several thousand prisoners. Amnesty International recorded the names of at least 2,000 victims, but Iranian dissidents say that when peripheral provinces are counted, the number could be an order of magnitude higher.

While some diplomats and politicians counselling outreach to Iran may place hope in the Islamic Republic's so-called reformers, a sad irony of Iranian political culture is that execution rates are higher under reformist or moderate administrations than under the so-called hardliners. While security agencies (rather than elected leaders) govern death squads and the penal system, Western officials tend to let their guard down and relieve pressure when trying to engage with their Iranian counterparts. Many of those killed have just become statistics given the sheer scale of Iranian human rights abuse, but Afkari's murder may haunt the regime more than most.

The two most popular sports in Iran are wrestling and soccer. Both are widely followed across society but a class difference exists: Soccer is favoured by the educated and the elite, while wrestling is embraced more by the working

class. Like all reactionary revolutionary regimes, the Islamic Republic dismisses those with a more internationalist outlook but bases its claims to legitimacy on the support of the poor and the working class.

Indeed, from the Islamic Revolution to the present day, Iran's revolutionary authorities have infused their rhetoric with calls for social justice and addressing the have-nots and working class within society. Afkari's execution suggests, however, that the regime has abandoned the effort to win the hearts and minds of its core constituency, and instead believes it must rely on brute force.

On an international level, Afkari's death will also have ramifications: International anti-Israel animus may have undercut past pressure on the International Olympic Committee and other sporting bodies to investigate or punish Iran for ordering its sportsmen to forfeit matches against athletes from the Jewish state. But executing a star athlete on such flimsy grounds is harder to ignore and may lead to Iran's ban from international forums once the coronavirus pause is over.

Many diplomats, dignitaries and athletes also had asked Iran to put aside its death sentence, only to be ignored. Here, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's disdain for these entreaties is reminiscent of the case of Farzad Bazoft.

Bazoft was a 31-year-old Iranian-British journalist whose work had appeared on the BBC and in London's *Observer*. Arrested in September 1989 at a time when many Western diplomats continued to court Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as a moderate, Iraqi authorities subjected Bazoft to a show trial and sentenced him to death.

Pleas poured into Baghdad to spare Bazoft, but Saddam ignored them all. The Iraqi leader refused to even take phone calls from British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. On March 15, 1990, Iraqi authorities executed Bazoft. To add insult to injury, the Iraqi government shipped Bazoft's body back to Heathrow Airport with a terse statement, "Mrs. Thatcher wanted him. We've sent him in a box." It was only then that the media, which had generally treated the Iraqi regime with kid gloves, definitively turned. *U.S. News and World Report*, for example, branded Saddam "The Most Dangerous Man in the World."

Within Europe and the United States, on college campuses and in newsrooms and foreign ministries, academics, journalists and diplomats have embraced the idea that its critics fundamentally misunderstood Iran. They believed that reformers were both sincere and able to effect change. Afkari's execution should put that notion to rest.

The regime response to the 2018 protests showed its fear of reform and accountability. Its execution of Afkari, meanwhile, shows it fears the Iranian people and any living heroes around which they might rally.

As Khamenei ages and transition looms, the Iranian regime rightly assumes that the next generation of Iranian leaders may arise from Iran's prisons, much as they once did when transitions came to Chile, Czechoslovakia, India and South Africa. Khamenei may believe killing Afkari will intimidate those willing to take to the streets, but it instead shows just how weak, fearful, detached and dismissive Iran's leaders have become.

Afkari may be gone, but historians may look at his execution as the day Khamenei ended the Iranian and Western hope for internal reform and instead signed the death warrant for the Islamic Republic. AIR

Dr. Michael Rubin is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, where he specialises in Iran, Turkey, and the broader Middle East. Reprinted from the National Interest online (www.nationalinterest.org). © National Interest, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

US CONSPIRACY NETWORK COMES DOWN UNDER

by Naomi Levin

You could be forgiven for thinking the recent anti-lockdown protests in Australia were organised and attended by a tiny group of disparate individuals – mostly cranks – who brazenly ignore official health advice.

In part, you would be right. But you might not be aware that those instrumental in leading Melbourne's demonstrations are, in some cases, tied up with the US-based conspiracy movement QAnon, as a dive into the darker recesses of social media has shown.

QAnon is an online movement that surfaced in the United States in 2017, but has since infiltrated other countries, including Australia. It is based on cryptic messages distributed by an anonymous source who is apparently a senior US official – known as Q – on the fringe social

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A QAnon presence at a Trump campaign rally in the US

media platform 8kun (previously known as 8chan). It is ostensibly a far-right movement, but attracts anti-establishment types on the far-left as well. It also has a strong vein of antisemitism.

QAnon followers are united by a scepticism of the “deep state”, which they see as a corrupt cabal of global elites who run the world. Those “elites”, according to QAnon followers, include Microsoft founder Bill Gates; financier and philanthropist George Soros; and Hollywood celebrities ranging from disgraced, now deceased, producer Jeffrey Epstein to talk show host Ellen Degeneres. In addition to the allegations about having undue control over world affairs, QAnon followers also accuse many of the same people of involvement in a global paedophilia ring. According to QAnon, US President Donald Trump will bring this global elitist cabal to justice.

While this is the central theme of QAnon, there are thousands of threads tying it to other conspiracy theories, from opposition to immunisation, to convoluted ideas about the “real reasons” behind coronavirus lockdown measures – or the “plandemic”, as QAnon followers call it.

It is the pandemic that has really boosted the popularity of QAnon in Australia. Australians who are unhappy with lockdown measures are using social media to discuss and debate the “clues” dropped by Q in an attempt to discover the “truth”.

QAnon is not a membership movement so it is impossible to know how many followers it has. While it is predominantly US-based, Canadian academic Marc-Andre Argentino has estimated Australia is in the top five countries for QAnon activity. But how has QAnon – a conspiracy theory movement so embedded in American politics – gained traction in Australia?

“It is the pandemic that has really boosted the popularity of QAnon in Australia”

Researcher Dr. Kaz Ross from the University of Tasmania has found that One Nation politicians have raised conspiracy theories that may have led Australians down the QAnon “rabbit hole” – the common term used to describe those who start believing QAnon-spread nonsense. AIJAC is not suggesting that the One Nations senators are themselves involved in or supporters of QAnon.

Dr Ross, a humanities lecturer, has pointed to One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts’ repeated support in Parliament for the baseless Agenda 21 conspiracy theory, starting from his Sept. 2016 first speech, as one factor that has pushed his Australian supporters down the QAnon rabbit hole.

Agenda 21 was a non-binding sustainability plan adopted by UN members in 1992, but Dr. Ross explains that: “The belief that ‘Agenda 21’ is a blueprint for corrupt global governance has become a core tenet of QAnon in Australia.”

One Nation leader Pauline Hanson, in attempting to move an “All Lives Matter” motion in the Senate earlier this year, also may have succeeded in dragging Australians into the QAnon net, according to Dr Ross.

The “All Lives Matter” slogan – used in opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement – has been co-opted by far-right movements as a rallying cry and mantra of racists.

“It sickened me to see people holding up signs saying ‘Black Lives Matter’ in memory of this American criminal [George Floyd]. I’m sorry but all lives matter,” Senator Hanson told the Senate in June. She went on to proclaim that more white people die in police custody in Australia than black people, while neglecting to mention that only 3.3% of Australia’s population is Aboriginal, and that the Aboriginal population is significantly over-represented in deaths in custody figures.

Deakin University academics Joshua Roose and Lydia Khalil agree that anger over restrictions put in place in response to the coronavirus has driven some Australians towards extremist movements. They write that “the pandemic has also given rise a prolonged period of collective stress and trauma which has made more people susceptible to disinformation, conspiracies, and extremist narratives.”

Public trust in traditional institutions – like government, organised religion and mainstream media – was already low before the pandemic, and this created space for alternate messages to be amplified, they noted.

ASIO, Australia’s internal intelligence agency, also says that far-right extremist movements have blossomed locally

during the pandemic.

“COVID-19 restrictions are being exploited by extreme right-wing narratives that paint the state as oppressive, and globalisation and democracy as flawed and failing,” a media statement from ASIO said.

“We assess the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced an extreme right-wing belief in the inevitability of societal collapse and a ‘race war’.”

The ASIO statement explained that the risk of violence associated with Islamist terrorism remains a bigger threat in Australia, but said that “extreme right-wing groups and individuals represent a serious, increasing and evolving threat to [Australia’s] security.”

The ideas raised by the One Nation senators – Agenda 21 and All Lives Matter – are not only fringe, but they both have racist links or connotations. In the case of Agenda 21, explicit antisemitism has often been a key part of those connotations.

There has been much research done on the links between coronavirus conspiracy theories and antisemitism.

As Dr Ross wrote of Senator Roberts’ Agenda 21 Senate speeches: “Any talk of ‘global bankers and cabals’ directly taps into longstanding anti-semitic conspiracies about supposed Jewish world domination often centred on the figure of billionaire George Soros. The pandemic and QAnon have also proven to be fertile ground for neo-Nazis in Australia.”

Canadian researcher Argentino also observed a “fair amount of antisemitism” on Australian QAnon notice boards.

In the United States, antisemitic QAnon supporters have allegedly made online death threats against Jewish California State Senator Scott Wiener, a Democrat. In August, Wiener told media that at least a quarter of the social media hate mail he received was antisemitic in nature. He attributed much of this to QAnon supporters.

“It’s very disheartening that this is what the country has come to, that we have this cult, QAnon, that is gradually taking over the Republican Party,” he said.

The abuse has not come from Republican party figures, Wiener told JTA, but “their party is unfortunately being more and more influenced by QAnon.”

Marjorie Taylor Greene, a US House of Representatives candidate for the November election in the 14th district of Georgia, is the first Republican candidate to openly sup-

port QAnon. She has published videos calling Q “a patriot” and “something worth listening to and paying attention to.” US President Trump has spruiked Greene’s candidacy, calling her a future Republican star who is “strong on everything”.

American media reports suggest that other Republican candidates have expressed an openness to QAnon theories. However, there are also Republicans who have

denounced QAnon, including former Florida governor Jeb Bush, the brother of former Republican president George W Bush, and Liz Cheney, high ranking Republican Representative for Wyoming and daughter of former Republican vice president Dick Cheney.

While the clues dropped by Q – the supposed messenger of the QAnon movement – do not espouse violence, the FBI has identified QAnon as “very likely” to “motivate some domestic extremists, wholly or in part, to commit criminal and sometimes violent activity.”

A 2019 FBI intelligence bulletin said: “The FBI further assesses in some cases these conspiracy theories very likely encourage the targeting of specific people, places

and organisations, thereby increasing the likelihood of violence against these targets.”

A number of prominent US terrorism incidents have already been linked to extreme-right movements, QAnon included. Amongst the most well-known was the deadly shooting at the Chabad of Poway synagogue in California in 2018.

In Australia, there are currently no far-right groups on the Commonwealth Government’s terrorist list. Shadow Home Affairs Minister Senator Kristina Kenneally has called for a review of the criteria by which Australia proscribes terrorist groups, to allow the country to better sanction far-right groups.

“The Australian government and all federal parliamentarians must now take the terrorist threat of right-wing extremism seriously and respond,” Senator Kenneally said. “The Morrison government could begin this work by referring Australia’s terrorist listing criteria to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security for review.”

According to media reports, the Australian Government has not accepted Senator Kenneally’s request at this stage.

Another front from which to contain extremist move-



One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts bringing up the “Agenda 21” conspiracy theory in his first speech in 2016 (top); QAnon-linked US Republican candidate Marjorie Taylor Greene (bottom)

ments like QAnon is social media. QAnon followers congregate on social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, but also less popular platforms.

In August, Facebook announced it had removed 790 groups and 100 pages from its platform, blocked 300 QAnon-related hashtags, and suspended more than 10,000 Instagram accounts. Twitter also suspended 150,000 QAnon-related accounts that violated the platform's policies. This is just the tip of the iceberg though. AIJAC had no difficulty in finding QAnon material still available on all social media platforms.

So what can be done about QAnon's encroachment into Australia? Given many researchers see much of QAnon's local success as tied to the pandemic, as lockdowns ease and governments establish "COVID normal" practices in their communities, the natural attraction of QAnon and similar movements may diminish.

However, Roose and Khalil suggest that leaders, including religious leaders, need to speak out against the growth of belief in extremist narratives like that of QAnon: "If the acceleration of violent extremism is not addressed during these times of crisis, it will allow extremism and the distrust of government and mainstream religion to incubate and spread. This will make recovering and maintaining political legitimacy and trust in institutions in the long term all the more difficult."

AIR

THE HATEFUL RHETORIC OF HIZB UT-TAHRIR AUSTRALIA

by Ran Porat

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT, Arabic for "the party for liberation") is a pan-Islamic fundamentalist movement with branches in different countries, including a few hundred followers in Australia. Mostly banned in the Middle East, the movement calls for the re-establishment of a global Muslim Caliphate based on Islamic religious law (Sharia), while rejecting the integration of Muslims into non-Muslim societies.

Ismail Al-Wahwah (aka Abu Anas) is the leader of HT Australia. He is a Palestinian born in the West Bank in 1957, and (according to his own testimony) was forbidden to go back to his hometown after moving to Jordan in 1975 and later to Germany. Al-Wahwah was arrested in the UK a few years ago and was later incarcerated for several years in Jordan for subversive activities.

In the past, Al-Wahwah has refused to condemn the terrorist Islamic State organisation.



Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia leader Ismail Al-Wahwah

HT Australia actively spreads conspiracy theories popular in the Arab world to its Australian followers via social media. Many of these theories are anti-Israel and antisemitic. Al-Wahwah told his followers, for example, that Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, killed by the US in January, was really an American agent. As reported by Ahron Shapiro (*AIR*, September 2020), Al-Wahwah was quick to insist that the possibility that Israel was behind the Beirut port explosion was "a strong one".

Al-Wahwah is notorious for openly calling for Israel's destruction and championing antisemitic tropes, including Holocaust denial. In January of this year he said the Jews "exaggerate, blow out of proportion, lie about, and milk [the West] over [the Holocaust] in order to accomplish their goals" and spoke of how the "occupying Jews... exploit this issue [the Holocaust] in order to humiliate human beings."

In Dec 2017, following the decision by the US to move its Israeli embassy to Jerusalem, Al-Wahwah threatened: "The very knife with which you [US president Donald Trump and Israel] cut Palestine is a criminal, infidel, hypocritical knife, and it will be turned against you and will cut your bodies and behead you. This knife will sever your heads from your bodies, just like you severed East Jerusalem from West Jerusalem ... the day will come when you [the Jews] will cry blood."

He also insisted that Palestine will only be won back

through jihad and war against the “Zionist entity”.

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies have referred his speech to NSW police for investigation under that state’s racial incitement laws.

In response, HT Australia issued a statement in September proudly proclaiming that the movement “exists at the forefront of efforts to rid Palestine and all Islamic lands from the scourge of foreign occupation ... The Jewish entity is an occupying force, and the Ummah [nation of Islam] will not rest until every part of the occupation is reversed from the Islamic holy lands.”

Al-Wahwah himself gave an impassioned speech in which he called Israel (not for the first time) “a cancer” and “an evil rapist occupation.”

ISRAEL IS A “CANCER” THAT WILL BE ELIMINATED WITHIN DAYS

The peace deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, announced in mid-August, triggered Al-Wahwah to unleash more conspiracy theories and extremism.

He discussed the topic in a video titled “The UAE-‘Israel’ deal – Betrayal of occupied Palestine”, posted on social media on Aug 19.

Al-Wahwah started his speech with a harsh attack on the Gulf states forging ties with “the evil state of Israel”.

“Al-Wahwah reveals what he really thinks of Jews: ‘The Jews, you know, they tried to be very rude. They are very rude.’”

He presented a warped and antisemitic version of history that is typical of Middle Eastern radicals, claiming that Israel was maliciously planted in the heart of the Muslim world by foreign powers: “Strategically, when the West – France, Britain – has established the Jewish

entity after WWI, they knew from day one – this entity cannot survive, stay in the region, unless people in the region can accept it. The people in the region are Muslims, we are Muslims. Naturally, we have rejected, we are rejecting, and we will keep rejecting the existence of the Jewish entity. There is no Muslim in Earth, a true Muslim, who will accept the existence of this entity. It clashes ... with your *din* [religion], with your belief, with your Qur’an, your history. It clashes with everything!”

Al-Wahwah has no doubt that the conflict will end with the destruction of the “cancer” which is the Jewish state: “The story of the struggle over Filastin [Palestine] has one answer – it is ours or theirs. It cannot be between us and them.... compromise or... two state solution – that’s all lying.”

“The Jewish entity, wa-Allah [by God, even] if the whole world gives them acceptance, and support them, they will never be able to stay in the region. It’s a cancer, the Jewish

entity is cancer. And cancer, you have to get rid of it! As long as there is cancer in the body, there is a big problem. And Ummat al-Islam [the Islamic nation] will never accept this cancer.”

Al-Wahwah then fancifully describes what would happen when Israel is wiped off the map – all the Jews there will ethnically cleanse themselves from the land and go back to their “real” home countries: “And this state [Israel], they call it state, by God it is so weak that every one of them has his second passport... And they are waiting for the Ummah to stand up, and carry the war, carry the Jihad against them – [then] they will all run away, they will all go back to where they came from, from Paris, London, Warsaw, Moscow – everywhere.”

The victory over Israel, predicts Al-Wahwah, will be swift and decisive: “The Ummah is thinking how can we bring Salah al-Din [the Muslim leader who conquered Jerusalem in the 12th century] back, how can we free the land, how can we carry the Jihad... By God, it will not take us one week, two weeks, if sincere people come out from Syria, from Egypt, from Jordan, from Turkey, from Iraq – Wallahi [by God] it will not take us two weeks to free the land of Filastin [Palestine]! So easy!”

Al-Wahwah concludes his poisonous vision with another denial of the right of the Jewish state to exist, claiming that Israel “is not even a true state... From the bread until the airplane [and] the rockets, they take it from the West. They are not a true land, not a true state. They try to tell us – we are strong. What can you do with your weapons if millions of the Ummah moves towards Filastin [Palestine]? What can you do with your weapons? How can that help you? Zero!”

JEWIS ARE LIARS AND RUDE

Arab rulers that forge closer ties with Israel are “slaves” to the US, according to Al-Wahwah, and their fate will be bleak: “we will put all of them in the same basket as the Jewish entity, the occupier ... and the Ummah will deal with them [in a] similar [way] and the Ummah will get rid of all of them!”

Al-Wahwah’s antisemitic views resurfaced when he said that the 1993-1995 Oslo peace agreements promised the Palestinians statehood in five years and they still did not have it 20 years later, and “if the Jews speak about 20 years, it would be maybe 200 years! ... That’s the Jewish attitude.”

Talking about the alleged commitment made by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to the UAE leaders to freeze plans to extend sovereignty to parts of the West Bank, Al-Wahwah reveals what he really thinks of Jews: “The Jews, you know, they tried to be very rude. They are very rude.”

Almost a decade ago, AIJAC was among the first to call on the Australian Government to examine whether Hizb

ut-Tahrir merits legal prohibition in Australia, given the group's engagement in violence and terrorism overseas, and continued incitement to political violence everywhere.

The long string of antisemitic statements and incitement by the leaders of this movement's Australian branch should now trigger additional scrutiny by local law enforcement agencies and, hopefully, action against this dangerous organisation.

AIR

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INDONESIA'S CAREFUL RESPONSE TO THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

by Giora Eliraz

On Sept. 15, Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed a peace treaty at a White House ceremony, after announcing an agreement to normalise relations about a month earlier. At the same ceremony, Israel also signed a peace declaration with Bahrain, which had chosen to follow in the UAE's footsteps. This diplomatic breakthrough, brokered by the US, was viewed as a considerable blow by the Palestinian leadership, eroding the pan-Arab position that stipulated normalising relations between Israel and Arab countries would only follow Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Thus, the Palestinian leadership strongly denounced the agreements between Israel and the two Arab Gulf states, dubbing them a "stab in the back" and a "betrayal".

Therefore, one may wonder why Indonesia, which usually clearly expresses its objections when it perceives there is damage being done to the Palestinian cause, in this case appears to have waited some time before issuing any response – and then only a highly cautious one.

On Sept. 18, a spokesperson for Indonesia's Foreign Ministry, Teuku Faizasyah, told reporters: "We understand the intention of the UAE and Bahrain to provide space for the relevant parties to negotiate and change the approach to solving the Palestinian issue through this agreement. However, the effectiveness of the agreement depends to a large extent on Israel's commitment to respect it." At the same time he made it clear that these agreements would

not change Indonesia's support for the Palestinians and that for Jakarta, "the settlement of the Palestinian issue needs to respect the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters, including a two-state solution."

Indonesia's economic ties to the UAE appear to offer intriguing food for thought when understanding Indonesia's hesitancy; less can be said about its economic relations with Bahrain. In recent years, Indonesia's ties with the UAE have expanded significantly.

In January 2020, Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) visited Abu Dhabi. During his visit, both coun-



Indonesian President Joko Widodo with UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed during a visit to the UAE in January

tries signed business deals worth a reported US\$23 billion involving considerable investment in the energy sector and infrastructure projects. These were described in media reports as an important achievement for both the UAE, which is pursuing its "Look East" policy to increase its share in global trade, and for the Jokowi Administration, which is looking to boost Indonesia's economic growth.

Moreover, the UAE has also joined other international players in helping to fund the flagship project of Jokowi's Administration, a plan to relocate the capital city from Jakarta to a yet-to-be-built city in the province of East Kalimantan on the island of Borneo. The construction of this multi-billion dollar project is planned to start next year, with 2024 set as the target date for beginning the process of moving to this new capital. Indeed, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ), Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince and the UAE's de facto leader, has even agreed to lead the new capital's steering committee.

Moreover, UAE investments have assumed even greater importance during the coronavirus crisis.

In addition, both countries, as well as Bahrain, share common interests in promoting moderate Islamic values in order to counter the growth of religious extremism, which is viewed as a threat by all three countries. What's more, the Indonesian president and MbZ have reportedly forged a firm friendship.

Nevertheless, the dilemmas Jakarta faces regarding the agreements between Israel and the two Arab Gulf states

appear to be acute. Though located far away from the Middle East, Indonesia has, for many years, displayed a strong commitment to the Palestinian cause in the international arena.

Furthermore, the Palestinian cause and claims about “occupied Palestinian territory” strongly touch some “collective nerves” in Indonesia, on both national and Islamic levels.

Indonesian support for the Palestinian people is strongly tied to long-standing national commitments to decolonisation and anti-colonialist sentiments, which can be traced back to both the Indonesian War of Independence against the Dutch (1945–1949), and Jakarta’s role in the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1950s. The spirit of anti-colonialism is even mentioned in the preamble to the constitution.

Thus, for example, Indonesian opposition to Israeli plans to extend sovereignty to parts of the West Bank (now shelved) have been framed in terms of ideological opposition to any form of colonialism.

Indonesian support of the Palestinians is thus commonly phrased in terms such as justice, legitimate rights and freedom.

In addition, the struggle of the Palestinians strongly touches feelings of Islamic solidarity within the huge Muslim population in Indonesia. In fact, the Palestinian struggle is largely perceived as an Islamic one. Perceptions and feelings within the Muslim majority have a strong impact on Indonesian foreign policy, which has always been significantly determined by domestic political considerations.

And there is another significant issue – Indonesia’s ability, as a democracy, to revisit the state’s decades-old position on the Palestinian issue is potentially very politically fraught, since any such change is likely to invoke deep emotions within the Muslim majority.

Indonesia of the post-1998 democratic era no longer has the severe restrictions on freedom of expression that were enforced during the previous authoritarian era. This means the Government does not control public opinion; rather, it has to attempt to navigate carefully through it. Therefore, any move that might be interpreted publicly as an erosion in the state commitment to the Palestinian cause is likely to meet an immediate backlash from opposition political actors, and more seriously, by radical Islamic groups which have already proven their ability to incite mass unrest on the street.

Certainly, the stormy events in Jakarta of late 2016 and early 2017 are deeply burned in the collective memory. That is the period in which zealous Islamist groups led massive protests, with marked religious and sectarian overtones, to topple a very strong political ally of President Jokowi at the time, the ethnic Chinese Christian Governor

of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), accusing him of insulting Islam.

Presumably, the authorities in Jakarta are currently very attentive to a certain scathing criticism of the announcement of the agreement between the UAE and Israel in some Indonesian circles, and the denunciation of the deal by the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), the country’s top clerical authority. Certainly a warning from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia’s largest Muslim organisation and a key civil society partner of the Government, that this agreement could trigger terror attacks, would have been listened to carefully by the Jokowi Administration.

Yet there are other voices urging caution and discretion.

A recent editorial in the *Jakarta Post* ends by saying: “Diplomacy has always been about finding the right balance among competing interests and the challenge now for Indonesia is how to balance its interest in finding partners to help it create growth and prosperity while at the same time fighting for basic human rights for the Palestinian people.”

Likewise, senior Indonesia academic and international law scholar Professor Hikmahanto Juwana was cited soon after the signing ceremony in Washington saying, among other things, “it would be better for Indonesia not to take a position...on the normalising relations between these three countries because it is still unclear whether this is the will of the people”. And another scholar,

Yon Machmudi, argued that it was becoming increasingly difficult for Indonesia to support the Palestinian cause, on account of its good relations with the UAE, Bahrain and other Gulf countries, while adding: “Of course, there’s a commitment not to interfere in the affairs of other countries that have normalized [ties with Israel], but Indonesia will still gently remind them not to forget the plight of the Palestinians.”

Jakarta’s delayed and careful response to the UAE normalisation – designed to hopefully upset no one – suggests that such messages and views have also not been ignored in the corridors of power in Jakarta. The statement appears to have been driven by a need to carefully balance between domestic political considerations relating to political stability, decades-old commitments to the Palestinian cause and sustaining strong interest in cooperation with the Arab Gulf countries as part of a national vision for economic growth.

AIR

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No Indonesian government can ignore the strong pro-Palestinian sentiment amongst the Indonesian public or the possibility of street protests

Terror Wave that Reshaped the Nation

20 years since the Second Intifada

by Herb Keinon

The place names still send shivers up and down the spine.

The police station in Ramallah; Jerusalem's Gilo neighbourhood; the Dolphinarium discotheque in Tel Aviv; the Sbarro Pizzeria and Cafe Moment in the capital; the Park Hotel in Netanya; Maxim Restaurant in Haifa. The names bring to mind some of the bloodiest atrocities committed by Palestinian terrorists during the Second Intifada that began 20 years ago, on Sept. 28, 2000.

Each of Israel's wars have had their memorable battles. There was Operation Nachshon in the War of Independence; the Battle for Sharm e-Sheikh in the Sinai Campaign; Ammunition Hill in the Six Day War; Chinese Farm during the Yom Kippur War; the Battle of Jezzine in the First Lebanon War.

But while during the Second Intifada the Battle of Jenin during Operation Defensive Shield, the intifada's turning point, has been seared into the country's memory, for the most part it is the names of eateries, road junctions or markets – Mike's Place, Megiddo Junction, the Carmel Market – that are associated with this period. Because it was the restaurants, bars, buses and road junctions in the heart of the country that constituted

the main front in that war.

More Israelis were killed during the Second Intifada – 1,053, according to Foreign Ministry figures – than



The Intifada saw 130 suicide bombings, including dozens of bloody attacks on buses

were killed in the 1956 Sinai Campaign (231), the 1967 Six Day War (776) or the 2006 Second Lebanon War (164). More civilians, about 70% of the total fatalities, were killed in the Second Intifada than in any campaign with the exception of the War of Independence.

The Second Intifada, which for the average citizen felt very much like a war in everything but name, was a defining event in Israel's history, akin to the War of Independence and the Six Day and Yom Kippur wars.

This harrowing period fundamentally altered Israeli society because it impacted everyone. No one, regardless of their political opinions, level of

religious observance or ethnicity, was left unaffected.

Mind-numbing terrorism made it scary to ride a bus, nerve-wracking to send kids to school, a psychological effort to take the family downtown for a falafel.

And the trauma of that period remains.

To understand Israel today – to understand its political turn to the Right, why Israelis have voted time and time again for Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, its complete lack of confidence in the Palestinians, its indifference to the lack of a diplomatic process with the Palestinians – is to understand the strain and pressure that everyone in the country laboured under during the four years and five months of that intifada.

Israelis were well acquainted with

security challenges before September 2000. But for the most part there was a strong sense of personal security in the cities up until then. Sure, you didn't want to walk along the borders or traipse around in the West Bank cities or even part of east Jerusalem, but there was a sense of being safe at home, in the streets, in the cinema, at restaurants.

The Second Intifada changed all that. Then no place

seemed safe: riding the bus felt like a dice roll, coffee shops a potential deathtrap.

A reservist wearing a flak jacket and carrying an M16 serving in a small outpost just across the Syrian border fence on the Golan Heights in March 2002 – the deadliest month of the Intifada – felt more secure in his well-guarded base ringed by tanks than his elementary school children felt riding public buses to school in Jerusalem.

And everyone, literally everyone, knew someone either killed or injured during the violence – a relative, friend, co-worker, schoolmate, client, business partner.

This reality of intense insecurity seeped into everyone's lives and left an indelible impact.

One of the ways to gauge that impact is to look at the country's political map. Israel goes to elections quite a bit. Since 1999, the year before the Second Intifada, it has held 10 elections, including an election just for the prime minister – not the Knesset – in 2001.

The results: The Left won one election, Ehud Barak in 1999. The Centre won one, 2006 with Kadima headed by Ehud Olmert, and tied another, Blue and White's showing in September 2019. The Right won six times, and battled to a draw in one (March 2020).

Why? Did the country all of a sudden grow callous? Did it give up on a dream of peace? No, coming out of the Oslo euphoria of the 1990s, Israel was simply mugged by the reality of the Second Intifada.

"The voting patterns show that the right wing not only now has a majority, but has even gotten stronger, and this is a result of the scope and intensity of the Intifada," said Meir Elran, a researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv who has written extensively on Israeli national resilience during and after the Intifada. "This was mainly terror against civilians. And unlike the First Intifada, which took place mainly in the territories, this took place for the most part inside the Green Line – it was extremely traumatic."

One of the reasons it was so traumatic, said Elran, who was deputy director of Military Intelligence during the beginning of the First Intifada that began in 1987, was its intensity and duration.

Elran dates the Second Intifada from Sept. 28, 2000, when opposition leader Ariel Sharon went to the



Meir Elran: The Intifada "left emotional and cognitive scars"

Temple Mount and the Palestinians responded with riots that swiftly spread, to September 2004, when the number of terrorist attacks began to decline. Others, however, extend the Intifada's duration another five months until February 2005, after Yasser Arafat's death, when Sharon – then prime minister – met new Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at a summit at Sharm el-Sheikh.

Regardless, this was a long war. Not only was it long, it was harsh – with more than 130 suicide bombings.

"It is an event that left emotional and cognitive scars," Elran said.

The Intifada, Elran said, disabused many Israelis of a belief in being able to reach any agreement with the Palestinians and created a sense in the minds of millions that there was simply no one on the other side to talk to.

Tamar Hermann, director of the Guttman Centre for Public Opinion and Policy Research at the Israel Democracy Institute and a political science professor at the Open University, agrees with Elran and said the now deeply held belief among many Israelis that there is simply no partner on the other side is one of the most significant lasting impacts.

"It is quite obvious that the Second Intifada made even those Jewish Israelis most supportive of the peace process rethink not their perspective on the desirability of peace, but rather on its feasibility," she said.

Paradoxically, Hermann added, it was Ehud Barak who pumped up the notion of there being no Palestinian

partner when he came back from the failed Camp David summit in July 2000 and said the refusal of the Palestinians to accept his generous offer was proof there was no one to talk to on the other side.

"Israelis still support the idea of peace – we all allegedly support peace – but they don't see it as a feasible political goal anymore, and put most of the blame on the other side," she said.

Elran took this even further and said that not only do Israelis not believe there is a partner on the other side, but because of the Intifada "the Israeli public doesn't want to hear about the Palestinians."

"The violence led Israelis to place an 'X' on the Palestinians," he said. "And there are two factors now reinforcing that 'X' – one is the behaviour of Hamas in Gaza, which always reminds Israelis of what they are dealing with, and the second is the leadership in Ramallah, whose behaviour only reinforces the feeling that there is no one to talk to."

Hermann said that another significant element of the Intifada is that the Israeli public credits Israel's security apparatus for ending it.

"It appears that the Israeli Jews, when they think about the Second Intifada, think that the Israeli security agencies are responsible – in a positive way – for the sharp decline in the terrorism, and that they acted very effectively against it. They do not attribute the decline of the Intifada to any decision by the other side to stop using terror, or to minimise the use of terror."

Former national security adviser Yaakov Amidror contrasted the lesson Israel learned from the First Intifada, which led to some 177 Israelis being killed, and the Second Intifada.

"The First Intifada did one thing clearly: it made clear to the Israelis that there are no free lunches, and that there is a price to holding on to the territories," he said.

"Coming out of the Oslo euphoria of the 1990s, Israel was simply mugged by the reality of the Second Intifada"

And the main lesson for Israelis from the Second Intifada, he said, “is that if you do not control the territory, you can’t fight terrorism.” The intensity and lethal nature of the Second Intifada could only happen, he argued, “because we did not control the territory.”

Another key lesson the public took away from the rampaging violence, said Amidror, today a fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, is that it “is impossible to trust the Palestinians.”



Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror: “If you do not control the territory, you can’t fight terrorism.”

Amidror noted that the Intifada broke out “after we had an agreement with Arafat. This wasn’t the First Intifada, where there was nothing between us and the Palestinians beforehand. We were after the Oslo Accords when we let them back into the territory. This led to a dramatic loss of confidence in them.”

Amidror, who stressed that he is not a psychologist, said that what remains in the minds of Israelis two decades after the eruption of the Second Intifada is “the sense that in the final analysis our security has to be in our own hands,” and that this “cannot be compromised in any way.”

Asked if this was not something obvious to most Israelis even beforehand, he replied: “We had illusions. Oslo was built on the premise that we could work with the Palestinians.”

Amidror argued that this premise was embraced by the politicians who negotiated the Oslo Accords, but was never accepted by the security establishment or “professional echelon,” of which he was a part at the time in his role as head of Military Intelligence’s

research division.

“We said this won’t work, and the reality turned out to be even more difficult than we imagined.”

As to the Intifada’s long-term impact on the Palestinians, Amidror said they realise now that if they initiate violence against civilians, they will “pay a much heavier price than we will.”

“I think they now understand that if they use violence we will respond in a much stronger way because our capabilities are so much greater, and that if they pass a certain line we will respond with great strength,” he said.

Amidror said the Palestinian Authority now also understands that the only guarantor keeping Hamas from taking over all the territories is Israel.

Those two lessons, in addition to an Israeli policy aimed at improving the economic and security situation for the Palestinians in the West Bank, is preventing another Intifada-type explosion, he maintained.

“If you take an average Palestinian in Nablus, and ask him where it is better to live today – in Cairo, Amman, Damascus or Baghdad, without occupation, or in Nablus with all the limitations of Israeli occupation, what do you think his answer will be? He has to be stupid not to think that life is better in Nablus.”

And finally, Amidror said, the Second Intifada also left its mark on Israel’s neighbours. He drew a direct line from the way Israel withdrew from Lebanon in May 2000 – he used the expression “ran away” – to the

outbreak of the Intifada, saying this created a perception that Israel was not as strong as it appeared.

This Intifada was the result of a decision taken by Arafat, not a spontaneous combustion, he stressed, adding that Arafat’s decision was made within the context of the Lebanon withdrawal.

“There is no doubt that the Intifada came against the background of a perception in the Arab world of Israeli weakness following the retreat from Lebanon,” he said.

But, Amidror continued, the manner in which Israel dealt with and eventually put down the Intifada “made clear to the neighbourhood, that if Israel is cornered, it will respond with great might. I think the Arab states saw that there is a line which, when passed, Israel will respond forcefully. You can push a long time – it took a long time before Sharon gave the order to move back into Judea Samaria [March 2002] – but when you cross a certain point... Israel will respond with great power and might.”

It was that power and might that eventually did put an end to the nightmare of the Second Intifada, but its memory more than just lingers 20 years after its start – it continues to impact strongly on how the country acts, votes and views solutions to the Palestinian issue.

AIR

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

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NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

HISTORIC COVERAGE

The momentous signing of peace agreements between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain on Sept. 15 at the White House made every local TV station's evening news bulletins the next day.

The lead story on *SBS TV* "World News", Omar Dehen's report said the deal covers issues such as education, health, security and trade but doesn't "mention...the decades long conflict between Israel and the Palestinians." The report noted that "Palestinian militants" fired two rockets at Israel from Gaza.

Palestinian activist Noura Erakat was shown saying, "these deals have nothing to do with peace...this is about the United States expanding its fear and influence throughout the Middle East."

CNN reporter Oren Liebermann also appeared in the story – he said the countries' "covert relations" moving out "into the open is a big step". "Palestinians are in a very difficult spot," he added, their objections ignored, while "a door has been opened by the Emiratis" with more Arab states likely "stepping through that door."

MOVING WITH THE TIMES

During the fourth item on *ABC TV* "7pm News" on Sept. 15, US correspondent David Lipson noted how decades of peace process efforts under former US presidents "Clinton, Bush and Obama" failed to achieve a "two state solution" but "this most unconventional President has delivered a breakthrough by sidelining the Palestinian people entirely."

The Trump Administration had given the Palestinians a chance to participate in formulating its peace

plan, which includes a US\$50 billion economic fund, but the Palestinians boycotted all discussions.

Lipson said, "it is not the deal of the century that the President promised but it is a very good start" which will "cement ties" and present a united front against a "common enemy" in Iran. (By the way, Trump never used the term "deal of the century" for this peace plan).

PALESTINIAN INDIFFERENCE?

In a live TV cross, *ABC* Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek said Palestinians have responded with "indifference" and "despondency" to the agreements, and "very few Palestinians [are] answering a call to protest." He called rocket fire from Gaza "largely a symbolic statement" but said Palestinians "know...they need new leaders and a new approach and...quickly because the region is moving on without them."

Speaking later that night on *ABC TV* "The World", Tlozek said the normalisation deals show "countries are lining up to form a kind of regional bloc against Iran, and that the Palestinian issue has...been on the sidelines for a long time, but now that fact is out in the open."

He again said rocket fire from Gaza was "largely symbolic" but qualified this, saying "in the context of the last couple of years, they are nothing compared to some of the recent escalations between Hamas and Israel, and the other factions in Gaza."

Tlozek also said, "the military occupation by Israel – the world's longest – is ongoing and in three years the US says it [will] endorse Israel's annexation of large parts of the West Bank."

This is incorrect. The US Administration guaranteed the UAE that the extension of Israeli sovereignty is off the agenda until 2024, but made no promises it would approve it at that time.

As for the definition of "longest military occupation", it is completely arbitrary. China has occupied Tibet since 1950 and Russia has been occupying territories it has no legal right to since 1945.

SHORT AND SWEET

The commercial TV stations devoted significantly less airtime to the signings.

Channel 7 said the accords would "bolster...an anti-Iran coalition" but "Palestinians see the deal as a betrayal."

Channel 9's US correspondent Amelia Adams said the deal had "garnered US President Donald Trump a Nobel Peace Prize nomination" and noted that rockets were fired into Israel from Gaza during the ceremony. *Channel 9* also showed footage of Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat at the White House in 1993 and said the peace deal signed between "Israel and the Palestinian leader... eventually failed."

Channel 10's Hugh Riminton's report said it is "not a peace deal, the signatories were not at war. But it is a diplomatic breakthrough." Noting the rocket fire from Gaza, Riminton claimed Palestinians are "walled in and increasingly forgotten" and "they say they have no option but to fight."

This comment attributed to the Palestinians is, of course, incorrect. Palestinian leaders are refusing to negotiate.

WELL, WELL, WELL

An *Age* feature (Sept. 5) from its former reporter Andra Jackson included a deluge of anti-Israel smears handed to her by a Palestinian activist from the Jordan Valley who she apparently met on a Palestinian propaganda tour of the West Bank.

Relying almost solely on information from activist Rashed Khudairi from the Palestinian town of Bardala, the report claimed there had been 320,000 Palestinians in the Valley before Israel captured the West Bank in 1967 but now there are 65,000.

A 1967 Israeli census counted 661,700 Palestinians in all the West Bank, and only a few tens of thousands in the Jordan Valley. And this was only a relatively minor drop in Palestinian numbers in the Valley

compared to a 1961 Jordanian census.

Jackson said Israel's water policies favour settlements and deny Palestinians sufficient water, causing "the flight of many Palestinians" and preventing Palestinian farmers from prospering.

Bardala's Mayor Ziyad Sawafa said "every time they [Israeli soldiers] destroyed [our] wells, we reopened them."

While Israel does destroy illegal wells in areas under its control in the mountainous aquifer region, it mostly ignores them in the Jordan Valley.

Moreover, Bardala is in Area B, under Palestinian Authority administrative control, and it is Palestinian water mismanagement that causes most of the water problems blamed on Israel.

Jackson's piece suggested the 1993 Oslo Accords were supposed to have expired after five years but instead the Palestinians were left in a legal straitjacket, including unfair water allocation levels. Meanwhile, she suggested settlements have faced no such limitations and are being allocated most of the Jordan Valley's water.

In fact, the Palestinians receive more water than agreed to in the Oslo Accords, while Israeli farming settlements in the Valley rely heavily on recycled water, and take little or no water from the regional aquifer.

While the Oslo Accords did envision final status talks to decide the fate of the disputed territories after five years, these agreements did not say the deal's provisions would expire



AND OUT OF

IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** (Lib., Cook) in his annual Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) message – Sept. 16 – "I send my best wishes to all Jewish Australians who are celebrating Rosh Hashana. Each year, the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah calls us to think about the year that has passed and to commit to a future of care, compassion and tolerance... This year, many Jewish Australians will not be able to gather together to mark the start of the High Holy Days as they usually do. But faith teaches us that we can be together in spirit, even if we are physically apart."

Opposition leader **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) in his Rosh Hashana message – Sept. 16 – "On behalf of the Australian Labor Party, I wish all members of the Australian Jewish community a Shana Tova U'Metukah – a sweet and happy new year... I am deeply grateful to the Australian Jewish community for the contribution you have made to the success of our multicultural society... May this new year of 5781 bring you and your family naches and simchas, and may the Shofar sound extra loudly to usher in a year that will bring not only joy and success, but also recovery and renewal."

Foreign Minister Senator **Marise Payne** (Lib., NSW) on Twitter – Sept. 12 – "Australia welcomes the historic announcement of the normalisation of relations between Israel and Bahrain. It is a courageous step forward for peace and security in the Middle East."

Shadow Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) on Twitter – Sept. 13 – "Labor welcomes the normalisation of relations between Bahrain and Israel, in addition to the UAE and Israel, in the hope it will bring new opportunities for stability and peace in the region, & meaningful progress to achieve a just

and durable two-state solution."

Dave Sharma (Lib., Wentworth) – Sept. 3 – on the Israeli Supreme Court finding Malka Leifer fit to stand trial: "I cannot overstate what a victory this is. It's a victory for justice, it's a victory for the victims of child sexual abuse everywhere and it's a victory for those brave victims who have been so courageous in leading this campaign: Dassi Erlich, Nicole Meyer and Elly Sapper." Also welcoming the subsequent Leifer ruling outcome were **Josh Burns** (ALP, Macnamara) on Facebook – Sept. 21 – and **Mark Dreyfus** (ALP, Isaacs) on Twitter – Sept. 21.

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts **Paul Fletcher** (Lib., Bradfield) – Aug. 31 – Answering a question from Dave Sharma: "I thank the member for Wentworth, who has very distinctive expertise when it comes to the digital economy, including from his time as Australia's Ambassador to Israel, a country with remarkable achievements when it comes to the digital economy, a country from which we can learn much but a country against which we can in many ways compare very favourably as well."

Chris Hayes (ALP, Fowler) – Aug. 27 – "...Mr El Halabi is the former director of World Vision Australia operating in Gaza and the West Bank. He was arrested ... by the Israeli authorities on allegations of funnelling \$50 million of World Vision money into the terrorist group Hamas. ... It has now been more than four years since his arrest, with the Israeli prosecutors yet to prove the allegations made against him or order his release. According to reports, Mr El Halabi has been subjected to physical and psychological torture, has restricted medical care and limited visitation rights... His lawyer argues that this is a very clear case of political bias, stating, 'Mohammed is a scapegoat for a misinformation campaign to intimidate international humanitarian organisations working in Gaza.'"

if those talks did not succeed. Final status talks did take place in 2000 and Israel offered to create a Palestinian state in Gaza and 95% of the West Bank, including all of the Jordan Valley. The offer was rejected.

Absurdly, Jackson suggested it was oppressive to expect Palestinians to apply for building permits on land they own in Area C, which is under full Israeli jurisdiction. If they did not need such permits, this would be a situation unique under town planning rules almost anywhere in the world.

The article accused Israeli soldiers and settlers of deliberately destroying Palestinian olive groves.

Yet in 2019, West Bank Palestinians produced a record amount of olive products from 10 million olive trees. Even if every Palestinian claim of vandalism against olive trees were verifiably accurate – which is unlikely – it would still mean that fewer than one-tenth of one percent of all Palestinian olive trees had been affected.

INDIGESTIBLE

David Rowe's Sept. 17 *Australian Financial Review* cartoon featured a dining table with an empty chair labelled Palestine, and US President Donald Trump and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu with the UAE and Bahrain foreign ministers ready to carve up a dove of peace.

This was in bad taste.

The Palestinians deliberately chose to vacate the table in early 2014, with almost three years left of then US President Obama's term, when Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas abandoned US mediated peace talks, vowing never to return.

Notwithstanding that, Trump has backed creating a Palestinian state and a US\$50 billion fund to turbocharge the Palestinian economy.

Moreover, the UAE convinced Netanyahu to suspend plans to apply Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank, which the Palestinians had

vehemently condemned as ending the two-state solution.

STATISTICAL HIGHS AND LOWS

Print and electronic reports noted Israel had the unenviable distinction of being the first country to return to full lockdown as coronavirus cases skyrocketed.

But better news was had in *Australian* foreign editor Greg Sheridan's review (Sept. 19) of Ross Douthat's book *The Decadent Society*, in which he noted that Israel's birthrate is the highest of any Western country.

Sheridan wrote, "The decline in the Western birthrate is staggering... The only Western nation that still has a replacement level or above birthrate is Israel" because it "is the one Western nation that... is still fired by a nation-building and people-building project and strives mightily to make the impossible not only possible but real."

HOSTAGE TO MISSED FORTUNE

Academic Clive Williams speculated in the *Australian* (Sept. 18) that Iran imprisoned Australian academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert on trumped up spying charges as a bargaining chip to pressure Britain, not Australia.

Williams noted that Moore-Gilbert has a British passport too, which, he claimed, might have attracted the attention of Iran as part of its campaign to pressure the UK to "release...substantial funds owed to Tehran from an uncompleted 1970s arms deal. (Detained British dual national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was allegedly told by her interrogators that her detention was linked to the arms deal.)"

But the UK "is probably dragging its feet over release of the money owed to Iran due to ongoing pressure not to do so from the Trump administration, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and

Israel – all of whom want to contain Iran's influence in the Middle East," he wrote.

Williams insisted the Iranian regime is friendly to Australians.

Meanwhile, in the *Canberra Times* (Aug. 25) AIJAC's Naomi Levin quoted US analyst Michael Rubin's advice on how to free Moore-Gilbert, saying, "quiet diplomacy is... what the Iranians want" because it "allow[s] things to be swept under the rug...when you make this front and centre of every single diplomatic [and commercial] relation with Iran... that's when the... government listens."

Levin suggested Australia's Ambassador to Iran should 'suspend' her official activities in Iran "until Moore-Gilbert is freed."

EXPLOSIVE CLAIMS

The Nine newspapers (Sept. 19) reported on US State Department Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Nathan Sales' comments to an American Jewish Committee online forum pointing out that Hezbollah is believed to have been transporting ammonium nitrate across Europe in ice packs since 2012. Ammonium nitrate is the explosives precursor responsible for the Beirut port explosion in August.

Sales was quoted saying, "Why would Hezbollah stockpile ammonium nitrate on European soil?...The answer is clear...so it could conduct major terrorist attacks whenever it or its masters in Tehran deemed necessary."

NUCLEAR SPIN CYCLE

On *SBS TV* "World News" (Aug. 21), Abby Denham's report on US intentions to reimpose sanctions on Iran correctly stated that this was because the UN Security Council rejected a move to extend an arms embargo on Iran set to expire this October under the 2015 nuclear deal.

The segment included US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo saying the US policy was to try to prevent the “world’s largest state sponsor of terror” from being free to “buy and sell planes, tanks and missiles and other conventional weapons.”

On *SBS TV* “World News” (Sept. 20), Omar Dehen’s report on the US announcement that it was triggering “snapback” of UN sanctions, said “countless incidents [under Trump]... have destroyed any goodwill the countries seemed to generate with the nuclear deal five years ago.”

In fact, even under former US President Barack Obama, when the deal was agreed in 2015, Iran’s rhetoric was viscerally hostile towards reconciliation with the US.

Australian academic Amin Saikal, quoted in the report, insisted renewed sanctions were a Trump re-election ploy.

On Sept. 21, *SBS TV* “World News”, Abbie O’Brien’s report said US sanctions will apply to organisations and individuals linked with Iran’s nuclear industry and its missile development program. O’Brien also reported US claims that Iran will have enough material for a nuclear weapon by year’s end and accusations that Teheran has resumed long-range missile cooperation with North Korea.

DISS IS NOT REPORTING

Reporting on Bahrain’s bombshell announcement that it would sign a peace deal with Israel, ABC North America correspondent Kathryn Diss told *ABC TV* “News at Noon Week-ends” (Sept. 12), that “Arab nations are drawing closer to Israel, at the expense, or at the isolation of the Palestinians... the reason why we’re seeing these Arab nations form allegiances in the region is to try and counter the strength and growing influence of Iran. But that is coming at the expense of the Palestinians.”

Palestinian isolation is entirely

self-imposed. Many Arab states are tired of Hamas and Fatah’s rejectionist stance and refuse to continue providing financial aid, or to hold their own interests hostage to seemingly insatiable Palestinian demands.

HITTING A WALL

SBS TV “World News” (Aug. 31) reported on the “historic” first commercial El Al flight from Israel to the UAE and that US envoy Jared Kushner was on board after visiting the Western Wall “which is Judaism’s holiest site.” It is not. The holiest site is the Temple Mount.

On *SBS Radio* (Aug. 31), Stephanie Corsetti’s report correctly said the Western Wall “is the holiest place where Jews can pray” and included Israeli PM Netanyahu saying the UAE deal was possible because of “the Trump plan and US support for Arab states willing... to advance peace without a Palestinian veto.”

Nine Newspapers ignored the El Al flight, instead reporting on Hamas and Israel renewing a truce (Sept. 2).

BARN’S LOBBY HOBBY

Greg Barns’ many anti-Israel media statements over the years have snared him regular critical appearances in the *AIR*. Yet he continues to be published freely.

But Barns doesn’t seem to see it that way, grumbling in the *Mercury* (Aug. 31) “it is... legitimate to question the vice-like grip that the Israel lobby has on the Australian media and its political class.”

Surely, his continued ability to write whatever he likes about Israel and its supporters disproves the very accusation he is making?

FINE PRINT, TERRIBLE REPORT

ABC Radio National “Religion and Ethics Report” (Sept. 16) host Andrew West seemed to push a ri-

diculous conspiracy theory based on non-existent fine print buried in the UAE-Israel peace treaty that supposedly would let non-Muslims pray openly on the Temple Mount.

Sydney-based Israeli expat academic Eyal Mayroz, a signatory to ‘Sydney Staff 4 BDS,’ was asked by West, “you have been reading the fine print of this proposed deal; what does the fine print suggest about the status of Haram al-Sharif, which is the compound that the Israelis know as the Temple Mount?”

Mayroz replied, “I have read the statement issued earlier and there’s an interesting passage there... which has been pointed to as potentially a change in the status quo which forbids all other faiths to pray on Temple Mount... if the limitation on prayers are no longer covering the whole of the Temple Mount, then this is potentially a major change.”

This “earlier statement” was a White House statement on Aug. 13 announcing the historic breakthrough.

That statement said, “all Muslims who come in peace may visit and pray at the Al Aqsa Mosque, and Jerusalem’s other holy sites should remain open for peaceful worshippers of all faiths.”

The fact that the statement said “Al Aqsa Mosque”, and not “Haram al-Sharif” – the Muslim name for the whole Temple Mount plaza – was touted as evidence Israel was about to change the status quo that has been in place since 1967.

In fact, the treaties signed on Sept. 15 made no mention of Jerusalem, which West should have known and told his listeners.

West also wrongly claimed there are two mosques on the Temple Mount. The Dome of the Rock is a shrine, not a mosque.

Mayroz insisted the treaties signed were not peace treaties, saying, “They said it’s short of a peace agreement.” Who is they? The word “peace” appears in the title and throughout the documents signed.

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

ARGUING WITH PEACE?

It's hard to argue against peace - which is probably why regular critics of Israel mostly fell silent regarding the historic peace agreements between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain.

The *Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Canberra Times* made no editorial comment.

The *Herald Sun* (Sept. 17) editorialised that the agreements "recogni[se that] the status quo from the West Bank and Gaza is no longer supported."

The *Australian* (Sept. 17) editorial said, "Arab nations have paid a high price for their self-inflicted isolation from Israel's economy, which is the most dynamic in the region... The accord shows the extent to which the mood in the Middle East is changing. Even the 22-nation Arab League, often a hotbed of anti-Israel ferment, did not support a Palestinian demand to condemn the UAE's diplomatic ties with Jerusalem."

In the same edition, *Wall Street Journal* columnist and recent AIJAC guest Walter Russell Mead said Israel hasn't enjoyed a "diplomatic month like this since" May 1948, when the US and the USSR recognised the Jewish State.

In the same paper, *Australian* foreign editor Greg Sheridan said, "If this had happened under anyone but Trump it would be hailed as a magnificent triumph of American statecraft and the relevant president would be on their way to a Nobel Peace Prize... Obama won... yet... his only big agreement [was] the disastrous deal that legitimised Iran's nuclear program in exchange for a temporary promise not to produce nuclear weapons."

New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman waxed lyrical in the *Australian Financial Review* (Sept. 17), saying, "I pray each night that Trump is defeated in November, but if he and [administration special envoy Jared] Kushner helped to nurture this deal on their way out the door, good for them."

On Sept. 21, the same paper ran former Australian foreign minister Alexander Downer's observation that "no answer" is the response Palestinian leaders give whenever asked what they want, and the failure of past peace efforts meant "the smart thing to do is to change the conversation."

Speaking to *ABC NewsRadio* (Sept. 16), AIJAC's Ahron Shapiro said Palestinian leaders "should be listening to... their Arab friends... telling them, please talk, let's talk about a state that you are prepared to accept."

Veteran Israeli commentator Ehud Yaari told *ABC Radio National* "Saturday Extra" (Sept. 19) that "Israel... will be

"The Nine newspapers ran Age senior writer Maher Mughrabi who said the deals were not historic breakthroughs but agreements between 'despots' and 'rich men'"

much more careful... when it comes to dealing with the West Bank and the Palestinians in order not to endanger the newly established relations with the Arab world... Palestinian[s]... realise... they are going nowhere, that they are losing or already have lost the Arab world, and... have to recalculate their course."

The *Guardian Australia*'s ran an op-ed from Palestinian

writer Raja Shehadeh (Sept. 18) that defied the historical record with a claim that since June 1967 Israel has been "unwilling to recognise the Palestinian nation or cede control of...

Palestinian territory... in order to make peace."

On Sept. 1, the paper's Rosie Scammell wrote, "Abu Dhabi claimed its deal stopped Israel from annexing parts of the occupied West Bank, although the unilateral step touted by Netanyahu was widely seen as already off the agenda."

But AIJAC's Sharyn Mittelman pointed out in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sept. 15), "In June, the UAE's Ambassador to the USYousef Al Otaiba wrote an unprecedented op-ed for Israel's largest Hebrew-language newspaper *Yediot Ahronot* titled, 'It's Either Annexation or Normalisation.'"

In the *Canberra Times* (Sept. 16), the Zionist Federation of Australia's Bren Carlill opined that "Obama's nuclear deal... resulted in increased regional Iranian malfeasance, help[ing] pave the way to wider Arab-Israeli peace."

The paper ran Palestinian lobbyist George Browning's response (Sept. 18), arguing that Palestinian "representatives are absent from the process," so it doesn't constitute genuine peace.

In the *Melbourne Age* (Sept. 15), AIJAC's Dr. Colin Rubenstein argued, "The UAE and Bahrain normalisation deals with Israel are... the tip of a much wider regional iceberg of changing strategic thinking that signals a far-reaching re-alignment."

On Sept. 17, the Nine newspapers ran *Age* senior writer Maher Mughrabi who said the deals were not historic breakthroughs but agreements between "despots" and "rich men".

Academic Ghassan Hage (*Age*, Sept. 18) argued that a "US-Israeli-Saudi alliance... has sought to redirect regional focus on the 'Iranian threat', rather than the Palestinian question. This, however, is bound to increase the already large gap... in the Arab world between... the ruling elite and... the majority of the people."

And yet, large-scale popular demonstrations against the deals have been absent in the Arab world.

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

PARADIGM SHIFTS

The photograph dominated the wall behind the desk at which our host was sitting.

Three representatives from across the Jewish world had been invited to meet an influential minister in the government of an Arab State, one of a series of interactions with officials of countries which had no relations with Israel but wanted open channels with world Jewry.

The picture was of our host shaking hands with Yasser Arafat.

The minister followed our line of sight and said, "The only thing that man [Arafat] was ever any good at was having his picture taken with people more important than he was."

This was not what we had expected him to say, and what followed was even more unexpected.

In 25 minutes, he gave an exposition of history, recent events and the contemporary geopolitical landscape – it was one of the most erudite presentations of Israel's case one would ever be likely to hear.

He spoke of Ottoman and pre-Ottoman history, the legality of Israel's existence and the immoral posturing of not just the Palestinian leadership but of international and global organisations, particularly those associated with the United Nations.

His attitude to the Palestinian leadership was that they were dishonest, corrupt, self-serving and the primary reason that no self-generated Palestinian political entity had come into being.

When we asked him why, given what he said, his country always voted against Israel in the United Nations, why his country's media was so blatantly misleading its audience and similar questions, his answers also surprised us.

He said Israel was secure, and the only people who believed the anti-Israel propaganda were politically-irrelevant and ill-informed Westerners. Threats to the lives of any Arab figure who challenged the Palestinian leaders' campaigns and the zeitgeist in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference also featured in his government's thinking.

He inferred that the time would come when the Muslim-majority countries would have had enough of the Palestinian

political leadership's behaviour, and, at that time, Israelis, Palestinians and the Middle East in general would be beneficiaries.

Some years before this, I had been at an annual Liberation Festival at the Glebe Town Hall in Sydney, where genuine human rights groups and anti-US Cold War warriors gathered.

The PLO had a booth serving as a hub for those who wanted to cheer on terrorism as essentially an end in itself.

In the main hall they were almost rock stars, having gained notoriety and attention for their heroes' terrorism, but in the corridors it was a different story. Quite a few of the representatives of the human rights groups found the antisemitism in some of the anti-Israel propaganda to be not just distasteful but undermining of anti-racism activism.

Others saw the PLO activities in UN agencies – resulting in most human rights abusers escaping criticism, let alone censure, as the PLO's agenda didn't extend to general principles (or any principles at all) – as weakening a body on which they depended.

I heard many idealists who were serious about building a better world express contempt for the self-centredness, political narcissism and blatant dishonesty of the PLO and other Palestinian organisations.

But they simultaneously raised their hands and sometimes their voices in support of organisations and strategies they knew were wrong and destructive, because that was the way of the world in the self-defined human rights community.

It was put to me that they meant no harm, and that a time would come when they would be free to act on their consciences and not be bullied into betraying what they knew to be true.

With the recent developments in Israel's relations with some Arab countries, with similarly fascinating developments with the Muslim world, with challenges to the way the identikit "left" has betrayed the progressive side of politics, there is reason for optimism.

The process may be painfully slow or stunningly swift, but there is a good basis for believing that a new zeitgeist is arriving.



PLO leader Yasser Arafat: No longer a popular figure in Arab capitals



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