



TRUMP VS. BIDEN

The US election and its implications for Israel, the wider Middle East, and the Iranian nuclear problem

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition focuses on the US election on Nov. 3, and the potential Middle East policies of either a Trump or Biden administration over the next four years.

While Colin Rubenstein's editorial and Shmuel Rosner look at the US, Israel and the Palestinians, the cover section focuses specifically on the two candidates and the long-standing crisis over Iran's nuclear program and destabilising rogue activity – in which the US necessarily plays a central role. Lahav Harkov consults top Israeli experts on how US policy on Iran could change and how this might affect Israel and the world, while strategic analyst Yossi Kuperwasser looks more closely at where Iran's potential nuclear breakout efforts now stand. Plus, Jackson Richman reports on the international dispute over whether the UN arms embargo on Iran has now been lifted.

Also featured this month are social media expert Emily Schrader on Facebook's recent change of heart on antisemitic content, and AIJAC's Oved Lobel on the growing threat to Israel from an increasingly powerful and aggressive Turkey.

And don't miss: Khaled Abu Toameh on the Palestinian turn away from the Arab states and toward Iran and Turkey; Tzvi Fleischer on the "settlements killed the two-state solution" lie; and Miriam Bell's analysis of New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern's stunning re-election victory.

As always, please send us your comments on any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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ON THE COVER

US President Donald Trump, left, and Democratic presidential candidate former vice president Joe Biden, right, participate in the first presidential debate with moderator Chris Wallace of Fox News, centre, in Cleveland, Ohio. (Photo: AAP)

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FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN

THE NEXT US ADMINISTRATION

There is a great deal at stake in November's US elections – both for the US and for the wider world. Amidst one of the most acrimonious and polarised campaigns in memory, playing out between President Donald Trump and former vice-president Joe Biden, it is worth remembering that, overall, what unites Americans is still greater than what divides them.

Part of the US consensus is a firm backbone of bipartisan support for Israel and, more broadly, Western interests in the Middle East. That consensus is under greater threat than it has been in many decades, but is nonetheless far from broken.

In the Democratic party, the advances by far-left or progressive candidates hostile to Israel and traditional Western interests in a smattering of congressional primaries, and spearheaded by the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders, are worrying. However, a calm assessment of the larger picture is warranted.

Sanders lost convincingly to a career centrist in Biden.

Progressive victories in congressional primary races have received huge media coverage but have been mostly opportunistic and symbolic and confined to inner urban areas with large Democratic majorities.

The overall picture is perhaps better indicated by last year's non-binding congressional resolution condemning the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel, which passed by a vote of 398 to 17, with five abstentions.

Most voters in swing districts in the US Congress – which are the ones that decide elections – are, by nature, centrist. As *Washington Post* political columnist David Ignatius noted in February: "The left wing of the [Democratic] party... got the attention... But it was the centrist candidates who swung Republican districts into the Democratic column and thus delivered the House for Democrats in 2018." Ignatius offered two examples – Michigan's Elissa Slotkin and Conor Lamb from Pennsylvania. Both attended the pro-Israel AIPAC Policy Conference this year.

Quite simply, anti-Israel posturing is anathema to the vast majority of Americans, including Democrats.

Meanwhile, despite a divisive domestic record, the Trump Administration can point to Middle East policies that have been innovative, led to clear successes and should inform future administrations. Far from setting the Arab street aflame as critics warned, the decisions to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, remove financial incentives for Palestinian intransigence, and promote a vision of two-state peace grounded in current realities led to September's historic and transformative Abraham Accords. These treaties are not only bringing peace and normalisation between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, but transforming the whole Mideast geopolitical landscape, with more Arab and Muslim countries expected to follow.

Trump's 2018 decision to withdraw from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal was an important step that led to applying maximum pressure on Iran, including a possible pathway for a renegotiated agreement. It is essential to close the dangerous loopholes and major gaps in that deal which Iran has been using to both continue its long-term plans to develop nuclear missiles and supercharge destabilising behaviour and support for terrorism in the region.

Differences between Democrats and Republicans over Trump's handling of the Iran

nuclear threat conceal the fact that wariness over Iran is bipartisan, with 88% of Americans currently holding an unfavourable view of the country, according to Gallup.

On Israel, regional Middle Eastern concerns and threats like Iran, the majority of Democrats and Republicans do not disagree greatly on the broader strokes of foreign policy, only on how to best achieve their common goals.

An exception to this was the Obama Administration's Iran deal, a 180-degree turn that never had the support of Congress – or indeed public opinion, according to polls.

Should Biden prevail, he would be wise to reconsider his stated intent to have the US return to the JCPOA, and then seek a renegotiated deal – a sequence which would dangerously weaken US leverage.

Hopefully, potential Biden administration policymakers will reflect on current realities and take new developments since 2015 into account. Iran has violated not only the JCPOA, but the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as well, and had its pretence of seeking a peaceful nuclear program destroyed thanks to the Iranian nuclear archive seized by Israeli intelligence in 2018.

Likewise, in terms of peacemaking between Israel and the Palestinians, a Biden administration would need to adapt to a fundamentally changed landscape. The advent of peace and normalisation between Israel and an increasing number of Arab and Muslim countries has rendered the old paradigm, whereby the Palestinian issue had to be resolved before Israeli-Arab normalisation could occur, obsolete. The opposite today appears much more plausible – Arab-Israel normalisation might be key to initiatives leading to a future peace deal with the Palestinians.

“Despite a divisive domestic record, the Trump Administration can point to Middle East policies that have been innovative, led to clear successes and should inform future administrations”

Biden's unqualified support for the Abraham Accords, much like his announcement that he would keep the US embassy in Jerusalem, indicates this process of accepting current realities is well underway.

Regardless of who the next US president is, there is good reason to hope and believe that the next administration will:

1. Sustain the military and financial pressure on Iran's

regime to curtail its violent, destabilising activities and agree to a new deal which genuinely ends Teheran's quest for nuclear weapons;

2. Support Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait in

their battle against both Iranian threats and transnational Muslim Brotherhood subversion and violence encouraged by Turkey and Qatar;

3. Build on the Abraham Accords, expanding the circle of Arab and Muslim partners with Israel, while recognising the limited and negative role accorded the Palestinian issue by the Arab states.

4. Recognise the reality that Palestinian promotion of hate education and terrorism is an ideologically-driven phenomenon that must be confronted to make peace possible, not a product of despair which must be appeased.

5. Continue to invest in the extraordinary US-Israel relationship, based on both shared values as well as shared interests, which has brought much larger benefits to the United States than costs.

Regardless of who wins on Nov. 3, if the next US administration follows these guidelines, not only the US and its Middle East allies, but most of the world, including of course Australia, will benefit significantly.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

“It was indeed an historic visit, to start opening relations between both countries, to have fruitful bilateral relations in both fields.”

Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif al-Zayani after a signing ceremony in Manama formalising full diplomatic relations with Israel (ABC, Oct. 19).

“We hope Saudi Arabia will consider normalising its relationships as well. We want to thank them for the assistance they've had in the success of the Abraham Accords so far.”

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo after meeting with the Saudi Foreign Minister (Yahoo! News, Oct. 15).

“We will work to end division, achieve reconciliation, and hold

general legislative elections... Know that we are one people.”

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at a meeting of all Palestinian faction heads following Israel's normalisation with the UAE and Bahrain (Times of Israel, Sept. 24).

“No nation that desires a peaceful Middle East should contemplate arms sales with Iran – every weapon the regime buys will be at the disposal of its radical ideology. We are prepared to use domestic authorities to sanction individuals or entities contributing to these arms sales.”

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo after the official expiration of the UN's arms embargo on Iran (Twitter, Oct. 19).

“Jerusalem is our city, a city from us... With this understanding, we will follow both the Palestinian cause, which is the bleeding wound of the global conscience, and the Jerusalem case to the end.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaking at the opening of the Turkish Parliament (Jerusalem Post, Oct. 2).





SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

THE 'SETTLEMENTS KILLED TWO STATES' LIE

It has become a widely proclaimed truism that the growth of Israeli settlements in the West Bank over recent years has destroyed any hopes for a two-state Israeli-Palestinian peace.

A look at the totality of the actual evidence, as opposed to cherry-picked claims about raw settler numbers, shows this is obviously untrue, as AIJAC has repeatedly documented.



Claims about West Bank settlement growth are often either demonstrably wrong or very incomplete

Israeli scholar Shany Mor of the Israel Democracy Institute has done a remarkably clear and comprehensive job of assembling the evidence that demolishes this lie in a newly published essay responding to recent writings by American anti-Zionist Peter Beinart ("Peter Beinart's Grotesque Utopia" *Medium*, Sept. 17). It is worth quoting his key points at some length:

- "Twenty-five years ago, during the Oslo peace process, developed areas of Israeli settlements took up less than 2% of West Bank land. There were at the dawn of Oslo a total of 118 settlements in the West Bank (figures are taken from Peace Now's invaluable settlement database). In 2000, when [Palestinian leader Yasser] Arafat rejected a peace deal that would have created a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, built-up settlement areas were still just under 2% of West Bank land and the total number was 123. Today, the settlements still take up less than 2% of West Bank land, and the total number is somewhere around 127... The geographical distribution of Jews in the West Bank has not materially changed at all in the past 27 years (1993–2020)."

- "Just as the geography didn't change very much in the past three decades, nor did the demography. The Jewish population of the West Bank and East Jerusalem has been

steady at roughly 15% throughout the past three decades ... after a dramatic increase in the previous three (from zero). The place where the demographic balance changed, interestingly, is inside Israel, where the Arab population grew in the same period from 17% to 22%."

- "The number of Israelis settling in the West Bank has dropped rather dramatically in the past generation. In 1996, 6,000 Israelis migrated from Israel into the West Bank; twenty years later in 2016 that number fell to only 2000. Nearly all the growth of Jewish population in the West Bank has been from births, not from 'settling' at all."

- "Looking just at the past fifteen years... nearly all the population growth was concentrated in two ultra-Orthodox settlements with high birth rates, Beitar Ilit and Modiin Ilit... I urge everyone to open up a map and look where those two are. One starts about 600 meters from the old armistice line and the other about 700 metres."

Mor is actually personally quite critical of the settlement enterprise, terming it a "moral and strategic catastrophe for Israel." Yet, as he says:

"If a two-state solution was geographically and demographically possible in 1993, it was still possible in 2000. And if it was possible in 2000, it was still possible in 2008. And if it was possible in 2008, it was still possible in 2014, and it is still possible now. Nothing on the ground has changed in those years to affect the feasibility of partition except for the rapid disentanglement in the 1990's of the Palestinian and Israeli economies... and this ... makes two states

more, not less, feasible."

Those falsely claiming that settlements have destroyed any hope for a two-state peace often follow up with the claim that, because of this reality, there must be a "one-state solution" whereby Israel, the West Bank and Gaza will be replaced by a "state with equal rights for all citizens," which would inevitably have a Palestinian majority. This is, in fact, a sophisticated-sounding new variation on the old disingenuous PLO demand that Israel must be eradicated and replaced by a "secular democratic state in all of Palestine."

Thus, anyone who tells you settlements have destroyed all hopes for a two-state peace likely either has a sinister agenda themselves, or has been grossly misled by someone who does.

MORE PALESTINIAN MONEY MADNESS

Last month in this column I discussed how the Palestinian Authority (PA) was self-destructively refusing to accept Palestinian tax money collected by Israel to supposedly protest Israeli plans to extend sovereignty to parts of the West Bank – even though Israel has suspended any such plans for at least the next few years.

This is not the only way in which the PA is turning

down desperately needed money for strange reasons. The PA is also insisting that Palestinian NGOs reject aid money rather than agree not to give that money to terrorists.

The European Union and its member states, who provide most of the funding for most Palestinian NGOs, have recently been insisting that NGOs that take their money sign a clause saying they will not give that money to EU-recognised terrorist groups. This demand is long overdue – there is ample evidence of aid to Palestinian NGOs ending up with members of internationally-banned terrorist groups, especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) which is highly active in the Palestinian NGO sector.

However, the PA's Civil Society Organisations Commission, headed by Major General Sultan Abu Al-Enein, is threatening Palestinian NGOs not to agree to the European conditions for funding. Speaking to the official PA news agency WAFA on Oct. 12, Al-Enein said if groups accepted such conditional funding, it would be a "national betrayal and a departure from the national ranks, and will not pass without punishment... the competent authorities will work to prosecute these institutions."

The Palestinians have been heavily dependent on international aid of various sorts for a long time – and their sense of entitlement to it seems to have reached dangerous and self-destructive levels.

AIR



Shmuel Rosner

WHY ISRAELIS PREFER TRUMP

A recently released poll from *i24News* told us what we already know: Most Israelis want Donald Trump to remain president. And no, this is not about him being a Republican. In fact, four years ago, when Trump was still relatively unknown (as a politician), a majority of Israelis believed Hillary Clinton was the better candidate for Israel. Now, having seen him in action, having seen what decisions he makes, Israelis see Trump as favourable to their country.

Many Americans, especially Jewish Americans, will look at this fact with a sense of horror. But there is no reason to be horrified. Israelis are merely being well-mannered in reciprocating Trump's amiability towards their country.

But Trump is losing – well, he is probably losing, based on mid-October's polls. And I know that many Americans will hesitate to reach such a conclusion because of Trump's surprise win four years ago. And yet, polls are polls, and evidence is evidence. And those of us who prioritise facts over fears and data over gut feelings know that Trump is unlikely to be re-elected.

Israelis are going to be somewhat disappointed. No matter: Israelis' preferences are of zero importance in an American election. Still, the election holds implications for Israel. President Trump proved that it is within the power of a determined president to change realities. Trump moved the US embassy to Jerusalem; his Democratic challenger Joe Biden clarified that he will not move it back to Tel Aviv. Trump recognised Israeli sovereignty over the Golan; Biden is deciding whether to make this an issue for debate.

There are other policies that Biden is more likely to change. Policy toward Iran is the most important example. A Democratic administration will want to reinstate former president Barack Obama's Iran nuclear deal. But that's not easy.

Time has passed and circumstances have changed: Israel and the Gulf states have become closer and can use their leverage against a weaker Iran. Importantly, if Biden reinstates the Iran deal, it will not be *his* legacy – it will be that of President Obama and former Secretary of State John Kerry. There's an opportunity here for Israel and the Gulf states to argue that a Biden administration has the time and leeway to consider important changes before it rejoins a treaty with Iran.


To push for these changes effectively, Israel must prepare for a new reality and quickly get over its disappointment when Trump loses. Israel must look at Biden not as an obstacle but rather as an opportunity. He can help Israel solidify its relations with the Democratic Party. He can help legitimise Israeli policies in the eyes of suspicious Americans. And he can help Israel prove that Israelis have no political preferences (Republicans over Democrats) – just policy preferences (strong on Iran over weaker on Iran).

Are Israelis ready for this process of necessary adjustment? Their leaders – the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and senior diplomats – are ready. They understand that the game is almost over. They know that while it's important to keep Trump on Israel's side, and even allow him to utilise Israel in his campaign, it is also essential not to alienate the incoming administration. Biden and Netanyahu are both experienced enough to know how such politicking can be done within proper boundaries.

As for the rest of Israel's citizenry, trust in the Biden administration really depends on what Biden will be doing. Will he begin his term using soothing words and a friendly approach, or will he follow Obama's example of putting daylight between the countries? Will he communicate with Teheran without first consulting with Israel's leaders, or follow Trump's example of no mutual surprises?

Israel is worried about a repeat of Obama, and it has the tendency to show defiance at the first sign of difficulty. But regardless of whether Biden repeats Obama's policy of distance or chooses his own path (my guess, he will not be



an Obama repeat), Israel must prepare to engage with him, as a friend. 

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

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

ISIS SNEAKING BACK

Amid the all-consuming distraction of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Islamic extremist militants in Southeast Asia have not been idle. Recent signs point to an uptick in recruitment and a renewed threat of violent attacks, despite security services continuing to apprehend high-value targets.

The Philippine military has been ordered to monitor the operations of Islamic schools nationwide amid intelligence reports that they are being used as a breeding ground for new militants. Military chief Gen. Gilbert Gapay told an online forum with the Foreign Correspondents' Association of the Philippines that the security sector would monitor schools in Sulu and other parts of Mindanao to prevent the possible infiltration of militants linked to the Islamic State (IS). Internet-savvy IS propagandists have been enticing children through social media, he said.

"We have found out that some of those who surrendered and [were] captured – quite a number of them – have been recruited and radicalised through social media," he said.

The General's comments came days after the arrest of Rezky Fantasia Rullie, a young Indonesian woman allegedly plotting a suicide attack in Jolo, the main island in the Sulu chain and a hotbed of Abu Sayyaf activity. Arrested alongside her were Inda Nurhaina and Fatima Sandra Jimlani, both wives of ranking Abu Sayyaf members, officials said. A suicide vest, bombs and improvised explosive device-making components were recovered from the trio.

Rullie had reportedly been under surveillance for months due to deep connections with jihadist activity.

Her parents, Rullie Rian Zeke and Ulfah Handayani Saleh, had carried out a twin suicide bombing at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel church on Jolo that killed 23 including themselves in January 2019. Rullie has two siblings – a brother aged 10, and a sister aged 20 – who are reportedly being trained as suicide bombers.

Indonesian officials say Rullie's family tried to join IS in Syria but Turkish authorities had rejected them in early 2017. Then, in 2018, they illegally entered the southern Philippines via Malaysia with the help of Andi Baso, who Rullie later married.

Baso, an Indonesian suicide bomber-in-training, is believed to have been killed by troops on Aug. 29. He was wanted in Indonesia for his alleged involvement in a bomb attack at the Oikumene Church in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, in 2016, and was part of the IS-affiliated Jamaah Ansharut Daulah militant network in Makassar, South Sulawesi.

Rullie and her husband were believed to have been under the wing of Mundi Sawadjaan, a bomb maker who masterminded a twin suicide bomb attack, also on Jolo, that killed 15 people on Aug. 24. Mundi is the nephew of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, the Philippine IS commander and a senior Abu Sayyaf leader.

Meanwhile, authorities announced on Oct. 12 that police and military troops had captured three Abu Sayyaf militants who allegedly acted as "financial conduits" between the IS and Sawadjaan.


One detainee, Abdulman Sarapuddin Tula, is known to be Sawadjaan's procurement and logistics supply person on Jolo, while another, Kadija Sadji, is believed to be the wife of Al Asgar, son of the late Abu Sayyaf founder, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani.

Arrests of key operatives disrupt the command and logistics structures of militant cells and almost certainly save lives by preventing planned attacks, yet analysts harbour no illusions about the ongoing threat.

Mizan Aslam, a counter-terrorism expert at Universiti Perlis Malaysia, told *BenarNews* that Islamic State is trying to regroup after its territorial defeat in Syria. "ISIS never died," he said. "Only we said they died, but they themselves never declared it... With all countries focusing on health security and food security, it has given ISIS room to sneak in."

"Recruitment is through social media and not just Malaysia but in the global community affected by [COVID-19] lockdowns," Aslam added. "People are staying home longer and going through social media non-stop, so the chances of being influenced are there. Islamic State is also seen to have doubled up their effort in dispersing propaganda materials on social media."

Christopher Miller, director of the US National Counterterrorism Centre, says IS "continues to prioritise the expansion and reinforcement of its global enterprise, which now encompasses some 20 branches and networks."

Speaking to a hearing of the US House Homeland Security Committee in September, Miller said the US and its partner countries have successfully targeted prominent IS figures, but the group has proved resilient. "Despite these successes, ISIS has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to rebound from severe losses over the past six years by relying on a dedicated cadre of veteran mid-level commanders, extensive clandestine networks, and downturns in CT [counterterrorism] pressure to persevere." 

Miriam Bell

LABOUR'S LANDSLIDE

It was always going to be a fascinating result. Held in the shadow of COVID-19, the pandemic cast a huge shadow over New Zealand's general election.

And the Labour-led government's largely successful response to COVID played a big part in the polls. It also led to the postponement of the original election date and focused much of the campaign on the COVID recovery.

The polls had consistently shown that Labour was on course to win – and win the party did. A landslide of red handed Labour the first ever outright majority since the country's mixed member proportional representation (MMP) electoral system was introduced in 1996.

Labour won 49.1% of the vote, which translates to at least 64 seats in the 120-seat Parliament. This means Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's party can govern alone, without the support – and demands – of coalition partners.

From 2017 to 2020 Labour governed with the Green Party and New Zealand First as its partners. This time round, things will be different. For a start, New Zealand First, the party of the country's longest-serving MP and outgoing Foreign Minister Winston Peters, failed to achieve the necessary 5% to return to Parliament.

By contrast, the Green Party achieved a good result. It won 7.6% of the vote, earning it 10 parliamentary seats. Additionally, 26-year-old Chloe Swarbrick won the Auckland Central electorate for the Greens. This made her the first Green MP to win an electorate seat since 1999.

Yet, despite the Greens' strong showing, Labour's outright majority means the Greens are likely to have less power than last term.

While Ardern looks likely to come to some sort of arrangement with them, she has emphasised that her government will be governing for all New Zealanders, suggesting that Green policies which have concerned centrist voters (e.g. a wealth tax) are not likely to make much headway.

Little was said about foreign policy during the campaign. There was not much detail in the foreign policy documents the parties released in the lead-up to the election. This means that where the next government will stand on foreign policy is uncertain – although a huge departure from New Zealand's conventional stance on issues seems unlikely.

But what does the new Labour government, and the big swing to the centre-left, mean for the Jewish community?

Well, for a start, it means some MPs who have been supportive of the Jewish community are leaving Parliament. The most obvious of these is Winston Peters.

Peters had earned credit with the Jewish community for being one of the few politicians to publicly criticise New Zealand's co-sponsorship of the anti-Israel UN Security Council Resolution 2334 in 2016. However, he then disappointed as Foreign Minister by failing to ameliorate New Zealand's voting pattern on Israel at the United Nations or condemn Palestinian attacks on Israel.

Peters' departure means there are huge question marks over who might take the influential role of foreign minister. There are no immediately obvious candidates for the role at this stage.

Another longstanding friend of Israel who is now departing Parliament is Alfred Ngaro, who was chairman of the Israeli-NZ Parliamentary Friendship Group. His departure leaves not only the chair of the friendship group vacant but question marks over its future, given Ngaro was the driving force behind its establishment.

Israel Institute co-director David Cumin said it is sad to see some very supportive MPs exit parliament – in particular Alfred Ngaro and Tim Macindoe, "But we look forward to engaging with all the incoming MPs so they better understand issues around Israel."

Going forward, Cumin says the Labour party has been outspoken about its desire to address hate speech. For that reason, the Institute hopes one of its first steps will be to stop Kiwi taxpayer funding of antisemitism and incitement that is taught to children in UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees) schools.

"It would also be consistent for the Labour leaders to condemn the antisemitism of [Labour MP] Dr. Duncan Webb, who has accused Jews of controlling US politics and promoted the discriminatory BDS campaign.

"While James Shaw, co-leader of the Green Party, has done so, we hope the new New Zealand government follows him and other liberal democracies including Germany, Austria, Canada and Spain to counter racism and discrimination with a statement that recognises and condemns the antisemitism inherent in the BDS campaign."

Ardern was strong in designating the Christchurch terrorist as such and the Institute hopes she will, in line with other liberal democracies, take a strong stance on Hezbollah, Hamas and the PFLP, Cumin says. "These groups are not currently recognised as terror entities in New Zealand but are recognised by countries including Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and Paraguay."

The Institute also looks forward to the Labour Government continuing the momentum that was started with the signing of the NZ-ISR innovation agreement between New Zealand and Israel last year, he added.

For the Jewish community in New Zealand, the Labour Government is expected to continue its recent efforts at relationship building. But how the new Government approaches issues to do with Israel is a more complex question and few answers appear available at this stage.

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR

On Oct. 20, the IDF identified a new tunnel leading from southern Gaza into Israel. A rocket was fired into Israel from Gaza the same day, leading to Israeli counter-strikes.

Single rockets were also fired into Israel from Gaza on Oct. 5 and Oct. 16.

On Sept. 30 the IDF apprehended two suspects who crossed into Israel from Gaza and threw an inactive grenade at soldiers.

A stabbing attack was thwarted on Oct. 5 in the West Bank.

A ceasefire deal, coordinated with Qatar, was reportedly reached between Israel and Hamas in early October, with Hamas agreeing to six months of quiet and Qatar transferring US\$100 million into Gaza.

On Oct. 13, the Israeli military announced that its forces had crossed from the Golan Heights into Syria the previous week and destroyed two Syrian military outposts in a response to Syrian troops entering the demilitarised zone between the two countries.

PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS IN QUESTION

The rival Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas reportedly reached an agreement during September to hold elections, the first since 2006, in the Palestinian Authority (PA) within six months. The details have yet to be finalised, even after several rounds of reconciliation deliberations in recent weeks in Turkey and Qatar between senior Fatah officials, headed by Jibril Rajoub, and Hamas representatives. One option discussed was to run a joint list of both groups for the parliament.

Both Palestinians and other informed observers are reportedly

sceptical any elections will eventuate, given repeated similar announcements in the past.

HAMAS CHARGES GAZA PEACE ACTIVISTS

After close to five months of detention in Hamas-controlled Gaza, two of three Palestinian peace activists arrested for holding a Zoom meeting with Israelis and other young people in April were publicly charged on Sept. 26 with “weakening revolutionary spirit”.

Hamas officials have previously accused the activists of participating in a “normalisation activity” and declared any communication with Israel “a crime punishable by law and a betrayal of our people and its sacrifices.”

ISRAEL REVEALS MORE HEZBOLLAH MISSILE SITES

During his Sept. 29 remote speech to the UN General Assembly, Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu exposed a site inside Beirut used by Hezbollah to produce and store missiles. This facility is located amidst civilian dwellings and next to a gas depot. Later, the IDF released information about two additional underground missile sites under residential buildings within the Lebanese capital.

An attempt by Hezbollah to refute Netanyahu’s claims by inviting reporters to tour the site backfired. Images taken by journalists revealed machinery used to manufacture various missile and engine components. The manager of the site interviewed on camera was later identified by the IDF as a Hezbollah operative involved in the precision missile project, who had visited Iran several times.

ANOTHER UNDECLARED IRANIAN NUCLEAR SITE?

On Oct. 16, the Iranian opposition group MEK exposed an alleged undeclared nuclear site in Iran. According to the group, the facility, built in 2012, is located east of Teheran, near a missile compound where an explosion occurred in June 2020.

From 2017 the site has been staffed by personnel from the Ministry of Defence’s Organisation of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND). MEK accused SPND and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of illegal procurement of special Russian seismometers for the site.

Experts suspect that this site was used for geophysical experiments, involving explosion imaging, required for the development of a nuclear bomb trigger.

On Sept. 30, the IAEA announced that it had inspected and taken samples from a suspect Iranian site it had wanted to visit for some months, the second this year.

NEW US SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN

On Oct. 8 the US Trump Administration imposed penalties on 18 Iranian banks in its latest round of sanctions against the regime, aimed at pressuring Iran to return to negotiations to limit its nuclear program and end its support of regional terrorist proxies. The likely effect of the sanctions would be to exclude Iran from the global financial system. The move came shortly before the Oct. 18 expiration of a UN arms embargo, a change the US claims to have reversed by invoking the “snapback” provision at the UN Security Council.

ISRAEL SIGNS AGREEMENTS WITH BAHRAIN AND JORDAN



Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat in Manama, Bahrain

Israel and Bahrain formalised their preliminary normalisation agreement signed in Washington on Sept. 15 at an Oct. 18 ceremony in Bahrain's capital, Manama. Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat and Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani signed eight agreements, including a "Joint Communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic, peaceful, and friendly relations."

The US was represented at the ceremony by Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin.

Israel's airport and civil aviation authorities also signed a historic new aviation agreement in early October with their Jordanian counterparts allowing the two nations to use each other's airspace for the first time.

In a joint statement, the two countries' aviation authorities acknowledged the deal, planned over a number of years, was accelerated by the recent UAE and Bahrain peace agreements, and the recent historic Saudi decision to allow Israeli overflight.

ISRAEL, LEBANON IN DIRECT TALKS

Israeli and Lebanese officials met on Oct. 14 at a border post to begin talks to resolve a maritime border dispute that has been complicated by the discovery of offshore resource deposits.

It is the first time since the 1990s that there have been talks between the countries, which legally remain at war.

Talks were mediated by the United States and United Nations, which said in a joint statement, "the representatives held productive talks and reaffirmed their commitment to continue negotiations later this month."

Despite the positive step, both nations have cautioned that the talks are not a harbinger of broader peace negotiations.

AUSTRALIA HALVES UNRWA FUNDING

In the Federal budget handed down on Oct. 6, Australia's contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was halved from US\$20 million in 2019-2020 to US\$10 million in 2020-2021.

Meanwhile it was reported on Oct. 7 that the European Union has told the PA it would not advance it loans and other financial assistance while the PA refuses to accept tax revenues held on its behalf by Israel.

Since mid-year, the PA has rejected the transfers after announcing it was

ceasing all coordination with Israel to protest promises made by Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu to extend Israeli sovereignty to areas in the West Bank.

However, as part of the recent normalisation agreement between Israel and the UAE, those plans are currently off the table.

CORONAVIRUS IN ISRAEL AND PA

By the week ending Oct. 16, Israel's rate of new coronavirus infections appeared to be trending downward from recent peaks. With the country in lockdown and extra health resources brought in from the IDF to support the country's overwhelmed health system, the seven-day average of new cases dropped to 2123. Deaths too were stabilising, with the total death toll reaching 2127 as of Oct. 16. Israel's lockdown began to be eased on Oct. 18.

On the West Bank and in Gaza, numbers have been lower than in Israel. There the seven-day average of new cases was 403.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

OH, SHOOT!

The Palestinian leadership has a well-known tendency to shoot itself in the foot, metaphorically speaking at least, but now, apparently, sneaky Zionists are conniving to get Palestinians to shoot themselves literally as well. The villainous Israelis have supposedly hit upon the perfect stratagem to harm Palestinians: give 'em guns.

Appearing on the official Palestinian Authority (PA) TV station, PA Security Forces spokesman Adnan Al-Damiri held Israel responsible for the dangerous Palestinian habit of firing guns in the air at weddings and other celebrations, accusing Israel of not only allowing but *encouraging* Israelis to sell rifles to Palestinian weapons dealers.

And why? Well, according to PA Police Spokesman Col. Luay Erziqat, also on

PA TV, this is done to "encourage violence and murder in Palestinian society".

Oddly, those dastardly clever Israelis must be very confident indeed that the weapons they're supposedly supplying will be used by Palestinians only against each other and never against Israeli soldiers or civilians.

In a strikingly similar claim, the official PA news agency Wafa had earlier claimed that Israel "whose goal is to destroy the Palestinian society" was "the main source of the fireworks... [that have] contributed to turning parties and joyful occasions into sad events."

Just when you think the Palestinian habit of blaming Israel for all their woes, including those they inflict on themselves, can't get any more ridiculous, they prove you wrong. If violence and dangerous accidents are increasing in Palestinian society, it must have nothing to do with the Palestinians. Blame those fiendishly clever Israelis – somehow, anyhow!

COVER STORY

FROM WASHINGTON TO TEHERAN

IRAN AND THE US ELECTIONS

by Lahav Harkov

The coming weeks have the potential to be dramatic ones when it comes to Iran. The UN arms embargo on Iran was meant to expire on Sunday, Oct. 18, but in August the US activated “snapback sanctions,” a mechanism in the 2015 Iran deal that would cancel its “sunset clauses” lifting various sanctions on the Islamic Republic. In other words, the US tried to make sure the arms embargo would not expire – and no other country countered that move during the month in which that was possible.

Since the US left the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the deal is known, in 2018, the other parties to the agreement say the US does not have the authority to reinstate sanctions, and they will view the embargo as having been lifted. However, the US argues that sanctions and the snapback are part of UN Security Council Resolution 2331, which lists the US specifically as a party, and not just the JCPOA.

All of this is to say that in upcoming weeks there could be a showdown between Russia and China, which want to sell Iran weapons, and the US, which has been using its economic might to enforce sanctions on the regime for the past two years and announced further measures over the past few months.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani declared in mid-



Donald Trump and Joe Biden: Both are likely to seek a “better deal” with Iran

October that, from Oct. 18, “we can sell our weapons to whomever we want and buy weapons from whomever we want.”

But many experts think that Iran is not going to make a move immediately after the sanctions’ maybe-expiration date.

The Iranian nuclear program and its ongoing violations of the JCPOA are expected to stay in a holding position at least until after the US presidential election on Nov. 3. Before making

their next move, the Iranians want to know whether US President Donald Trump will be re-elected, or whether Democratic nominee Joe Biden will take his place.

Israel is also closely eyeing the US election for a number of reasons, the Iran nuclear threat being a major one. And while Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s enthusiasm for the Trump Administration – which polling shows is matched by most of the Israeli public – is well known, both candidates’ statements on Iran have raised concerns.

Trump’s Iran policy, in many ways, is perfectly in line with what Netanyahu would want. The US left the Iran deal, with the sunset clauses and lack of enforcement that so worried Israel, shortly after Netanyahu revealed the Mossad’s sweeping operation of clearing out Iran’s nuclear archives. The subsequent “maximum pressure” sanctions campaign on Teheran is praised by much of the political

spectrum in Jerusalem.

But in recent months, Trump has been saying again and again, including when Netanyahu was in the Oval Office in September, that he wants to negotiate with Iran.

"I really believe Iran wants to make a deal," Trump said. "They've had a very tough time. Their GDP is down 27% because of the sanctions and all of the other things. And I don't want that to happen.... After the election, we have to make a better deal. I do say that. We're going to make a better deal than we would have."

"If Biden wins, they'll make a much better deal," Trump said, but then he added: "I'm going to make a deal that's great for Iran. It's going to get them back. We're going to help them in every way possible. And Iran will be very happy."

Trumpp's theory is that the Iranians prefer a Biden victory – and all the experts the *Jerusalem Post* spoke to agree on that part – but if Trump is re-elected, he thinks the Iranians will realise they cannot withstand four more years of maximum sanctions pressure and will enter talks, with the US having the upper hand.

"Maximum pressure" of the kind the Trump Administration is putting on Iran is what brought Iran to the negotiating table last time. As former Israeli National Security Council chairman and senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror said this week: "It was proven in the past, despite what most experts said at the time, the Iranians were willing to discuss their nuclear plan when they had no alternative."

However, Amidror said, "the Americans acted unprofessionally in the negotiations and brought a bad deal."

Amidror was cautious in trying to predict Trump's or Biden's behaviour, saying that the result of the JCPOA "doesn't mean it'll necessarily be a bad deal next time."

But other experts said Trump's mercurial approach to policy, his enthusiasm for "the art of the deal" and the fact that he will be in his second term and no longer need to appeal to his voter base could lead to a disastrous result for Israel.

Col. (ret.) Udi Evental wrote an analysis of the consequences of Trump's and Biden's declared policies on the Iran deal.

In the scenario in which Trump is elected, Evental wrote, the Iranian regime will try to avoid "crawling on all fours" back to the negotiating table in a way that would make it look weak and susceptible to pressure.

As such, he posited, "Iran may expand the amount and the level of its violations [of the JCPOA], to have more cards to play with in the negotiations" and it may "demand compensation for its willingness to return to negotiations."

Former Israeli ambassador to the US Michael Oren expressed concern that the Iranians will find it difficult to negotiate while under sanctions, which is what Trump seeks to lead them to do, and may lash out so the US will provide them with relief.

"They might try to destabilise the region by picking a fight with us. It hasn't worked to pick a fight with Saudi Arabia; it kind of backfired for them. We have to remain vigilant about that," Oren said.

In Trump-led negotiations, Oren said, the results depend on "how much more of an improved JCPOA [Trump] would want to seek in a second term."

Iran taking a harder line could lead to Trump compromising, Evental wrote, because Trump will seek to fulfil his campaign promise to quickly close a deal with Iran that still has elements that endanger Israel, like sunset clauses, centrifuge development and not enough inspections of Iran's nuclear program.

Then, Trump will seek to spin the bad deal as a good one.

Biden laid out his view on the Iran deal in an op-ed for CNN in September.

Biden, like the Trump Administration, vowed to "work closely with Israel to ensure it can defend itself against Iran and its proxies."

He also said the US would continue using "targeted sanctions" in response to Iranian human rights abuses, its sponsorship of terrorism and its ballistic missile program.

As for the Iran deal, Biden wrote that he has an "unshakable commitment to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon."

Biden's plan is to encourage Iran to return to complying with the JCPOA, at which point the US would "rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations."

Biden was also dismissive of the Trump Administration's attempt at snapping back sanctions, indicating that he may not enforce those measures.

In other words, Biden wants to revive the Iran deal, including the sunset clauses, and then improve on it. But he does not specify what those improvements would be.

Evental said Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser when Biden was vice president and current adviser on foreign policy, pointed out that the last two years have proven the US can effectively implement sanctions even when other world powers oppose them, and Iran is aware of that. Evental interpreted these remarks as Sullivan saying these sanctions would be an implicit threat to Iran if it refuses to negotiate a stronger version of the JCPOA.

Amidror said "the JCPOA is a terrible agreement, and even Biden says it's bad, because he says it needs to get better."

"Trump's Iran policy, in many ways, is perfectly in line with what Netanyahu would want"



Former Israeli National Security Council chairman Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror

“The question is, what is better?” he added, saying Biden realises the JCPOA did not block Iran’s path to a bomb.

Iran is “waiting for Biden to save them,” Amidror said. “I hope Biden doesn’t save them

[Iran] and they [the US] can negotiate from a position of strength.”

Evental expressed concern that Biden’s emphasis in the CNN op-ed on cooperation with Europe and a lack of real levers of pressure due to lifted sanctions would end up with an unchanged JCPOA, with the same sunset clauses.

Even if Biden brings Iran back into the JCPOA fold, it has violated the deal in so many ways, including developing advanced centrifuges (and feeding uranium into cascades of such centrifuges), that it does not seem possible for Iran to roll back the knowledge and experience it has gained in that area, Evental said.

Oren said former US President Barack Obama and his team will pressure a Biden administration to renew the agreement, because Obama views it as his greatest – and only – foreign policy achievement. Staying out of it is to admit it’s a flawed agreement.

“I don’t know if the changes to the deal would be cosmetic or real changes,” he said.

Oren thought Biden might try to extend the sunset clauses – meaning that the various levels of sanctions would expire at later dates than in the original JCPOA – and increase inspections, and Iran would probably agree to it.

But the former ambassador also said that if Biden negotiates a deal “that looks a lot like the JCPOA, that’s terrible for Israel and a prescription for war and a nuclear-armed Iran.”

Oren posited that any JCPOA-like agreement would still give Iran a path to a nuclear bomb and allow it to develop advanced centrifuges, along with the legitimacy to do so. Teheran would get tens of billions of dollars

of sanctions relief. In recent years, Iran used that money to surround Israel with missiles with increasingly advanced capabilities.

“In order to stop Iran from getting a bomb, we’d have to go to war.

We can’t live with a nuclear Iran, because these guys are serious. The destruction of Israel is what they’re about. It’s their essence as a regime. We’d have to act, and that means war,” Oren said.

Amidror pointed out that one of the dangers of a path to a nuclear bomb for Iran is that other countries in the Middle East will surely follow. Saudi Arabia is already moving in that direction, and he said Egypt and Turkey have also hinted that they will not agree to Iran being permitted to have nuclear weapons while they can’t.

“To stop the Iranians is so important. If there is a group of countries with nuclear weapons in the Middle East, the unstable situation can end very badly for the entire world,” he warned.



Former Israeli Ambassador to the US Michael Oren

What can Israel do to try to prevent an explosive situation, regardless of who is elected president of the US in November? Make its voice heard.

That is not without its own difficulties. Israel will have difficulty strongly coming out against a Trump-negotiated deal the way it did when Obama entered the JCPOA, especially after Trump moved the US Embassy to Jerusalem, recognised Israeli sovereignty on the Golan and fostered normalisation between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, Evental said.

Evental also thought Biden could also be very sensitive to any public opposition by Israel on this matter, because of Netanyahu’s public campaign against the Obama administration’s position, when Biden was his vice president.

Still, Evental called for Israel to make its position known and reach out to the Trump Administration and the Biden campaign as soon as possible to point out the weaknesses of the JCPOA and make sure Israel is not left to deal with its problems alone, and speak about the matter publicly as well.

“It’s important not to make the mistakes of 2015,” Oren said. “We need to be specific about what would be a good deal. The Obama Administration said no deal is good enough for the Israelis. We can’t do that this time. We have to say a good deal ends Iran’s nuclear program, removes missiles from Lebanon, eliminates advanced centrifuges and the missile program, dismantles nuclear infrastructure.

“We have to publicise this. We have never done it, and we must,” he said.

Amidror said Israel needs to tell whoever is elected

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president that if the deal does not address Israel's existential threats, Israel will have to address them through force.

"A good agreement is one that dismantles Iran's capabilities and doesn't legitimise building nuclear capabilities – no missile tests and no developing next-generation centrifuges. It would make Iran dismantle its nuclear facilities not allow new facilities," Amidror said.

"Our red line is we can't let Iran get close to a nuclear bomb," he added. "A good deal can't give Iran legitimacy for enrichment or long-term nuclear development."

Since both Trump and Biden want to reach an agreement with Iran, and therefore are likely to compromise to some extent, Evental thought Israel may have to back down from its "maximalist and unrealistic" demand of zero enrichment. Instead, he suggested that making Israel's priorities clear and listing ways to improve its strategic balance with Iran would be more likely to influence whoever is in the White House next year.

Oren and Amidror stayed with the Israeli position of recent years, that Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, does not have a right to enrich. Oren said the "good deal" Israel seeks is realistic if the US is willing to keep up its maximum pressure campaign.

Asked whether they think Trump or Biden would be willing to keep the pressure levels high, Oren and Amidror both said they don't know.

"The best thing for Israel would be if the US president, no matter who he is, will reach a good agreement with Iran," Amidror said. "We don't care how it is achieved in the end, whether it's Biden or Trump."

AIR

Lahav Harkov is the Senior Contributing Editor of the Jerusalem Post. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

HAS THE IRANIAN ARMS EMBARGO EXPIRED?

by Jackson Richman

Despite ongoing fears of Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and aggression in the Middle East, the UN arms embargo on Teheran was scheduled to have expired on Oct. 18, allowing the Islamic Republic to purchase missiles and other armaments from other countries.

"Thanks to the nation's resistance and our diplomats' efforts, and despite America's push in the past four years, this unjust embargo is to be lifted," said Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Oct. 14. "As of Sunday, we can purchase or sell arms from and to anyone we desire."

Yet the ostensible expiration came after the United States enacted UN snapback sanctions on the regime in August, a move that included extending the arms embargo indefinitely.

It remains unclear, therefore, if the arms embargo is technically and legally lifted, or if Iran is now able to purchase advanced weapons.

Richard Goldberg, the former director for countering Iran's weapons of mass destruction at the White House National Security Council, told *JNS* that "US policy officially recognises that a snapback of UN sanctions took place and, as such, the arms embargo [did] not expire on October 18th."

Goldberg, now a senior adviser at the Foundation for Defence of Democracies, cited US President Donald Trump's executive order in September that allows the United States to sanction anyone who sells arms to Iran in violation of the arms embargo.



Can Iran now legally buy and sell missiles and other advanced arms? The US and most of the rest of the world disagree on this.

"Americans should join together on a bipartisan basis to support the enforcement of these sanctions to prevent arms transfers in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1929, which America believes is back in force," said Goldberg, citing the 2010 UN embargo on arms to Iran.

The US activated the mechanism in August to enact the snapback sanctions under UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorsed the 2015 JCPOA Iran nuclear deal and lifted six Security Council resolutions sanctioning Iran.

The US withdrew in May 2018 from the nuclear deal, reimposing sanctions lifted under it and enacting new penalties against Iran as part of what the Trump Administration has called a "maximum pressure" campaign.

The move to enact snapback, which took effect last month, came after the UN Security Council failed to pass a resolution in August to indefinitely extend the arms embargo on Iran.

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) had expressed alarm, saying that Oct. 18 would be "a profoundly sad and dangerous day for global security."

"Thanks to UN Security Council inaction, Iran will be free to legally buy and sell conventional weapons without



violating the JCPOA (2015 Iranian nuclear deal) or UN restrictions,” said AJC CEO David Harris in a statement. “No doubt, Iran’s neighbours and countries far beyond the Middle East will suffer the consequences of the Security Council’s abject failure to call out the true nature of the regime in Tehran and contain it.”

“China and Russia now are very happy. These two countries have no hesitation or compunction about openly selling weapons to Iran,” said Harris, adding that “North Korea, Venezuela and Turkey are similarly gleeful.”

“The tragic reality is Iran today, despite major economic challenges, is more dangerous than ever as a regional and global actor,” he continued. “Iran’s tentacles are firmly in Iraq, in Syria, in Lebanon and in Gaza, trying to get into the West Bank, and either directly or through its terrorist proxy, Hezbollah, are very active in Africa, in Europe, in Asia, in Latin America and continually attempting in the United States.”

United Against Nuclear Iran policy director Jason Brodsky told *JNS* that while America considers the arms embargo in effect still, China and Russia will likely look to sell Iran arms.

“The United States argues snapback has already happened, and plans to act as if the arms embargo will remain in effect,” he said.

He said that France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia and China “appear irresponsibly complacent with [the] sunset [clauses in the JCPOA] and refuse to recognise Washington’s snapback. Russia and China want to preserve their ability to sell arms to Iran.”

Brodsky noted that Russia’s ambassador to Iran, Levon Dzhagaryan, “proclaimed that Moscow would consider selling Iran its S-400 [anti-aircraft] missile defence system after Oct. 18,” and that Iranian Defence Minister Amir Hatami “visited Russia this summer, and was briefed on the S-400 during his visit to a military expo.” Therefore, “this is cause for concern.”

Brodsky added that France, Germany and the United Kingdom have “prioritised a nuclear deal, which is already on life support, over pleas from Arabs and Israelis alike to extend the arms embargo on Iran. In doing so, it is endan-

gering international peace and security.”

He noted that the European Union “has its own arms embargo on Iran, which expires in 2023.”

Brodsky said that after Sunday, the United States will have the major “burden of enforcement” of the UN arms embargo. AIR

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IRAN’S “BREAKOUT” POTENTIAL AND THE US ELECTION

by Yossi Kuperwasser

Iran keeps seeking ways to secure the capability to produce a sufficient quantity of enriched uranium (SQ) for two nuclear devices within a short time, in defiance of growing American economic pressure. Today, Iran needs about three months to secure 1SQ, compared to a year that the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was supposed to provide. On the other hand, the Iranians’ guaranteed and “safe” pathway to having the capability to produce a large arsenal of nuclear weapons in 10 years, as detailed in the JCPOA, has been severely disrupted.

The embargo on arms sales to and from Iran that was included in the JCPOA expired on Oct. 18, 2020, in the view of the participants of the Iran deal. The United States disagrees, insisting that all UN sanctions on Iran were reimposed on Sept. 20, 2020, due to its “snapback” application to the UN Security Council. At the same time, the US Administration also introduced unprecedentedly harsh



Damage to the Natanz Nuclear Research Centre after the July 2, 2020 explosion

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economic sanctions on Iran, but the Islamist regime keeps moving forward with its nuclear program and blatantly violates all its commitments under the JCPOA, despite the growing economic hardships and other setbacks it has suffered.

Following the explosion at the advanced centrifuge production and assembly facility at the Natanz nuclear enrichment site on July 2 2020, on Sept. 8 2020 Ali Akbar Salehi, the chairman of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI), announced that Iran had begun constructing a new facility for the same purpose in the mountains near the Natanz enrichment site. However, unlike the Natanz facility that was hit by a mysterious explosion and was built on the surface, the new facility is underground. Meanwhile, the AEOI's spokesman reiterated that Iran had managed to unravel most of the details related to the mysterious explosion.

Following the construction of the new facility, the Iranians might try to expedite the production of the advanced centrifuges.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA's) periodic report published in September 2020 did not include any reference to the explosion at Natanz or to Iran's intention to build a new facility for the production and assembly of advanced centrifuges. As a general rule, Iran is obliged to notify the Agency in advance about the establishment of nuclear facilities and allow the Agency's inspectors access to all enrichment-related facilities at its nuclear sites. Still, by implication, it does not do so when it comes to centrifuge production (this is one of the many holes in the JCPOA).

However, news reports in August 2020 based on a restricted IAEA document extensively describe Iran's

activities in experimenting with and developing advanced centrifuges of various types for uranium enrichment. (A summary of that report was included in the Agency's Sept. 2 2020 periodic report on Iran.)

One news account refers to Iran's intention to install, for the first time, advanced centrifuges that are now operating in the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP) in Natanz, in the underground enrichment Hall B. According to the report, this step was supposed to have been carried out but was postponed at the last minute. In any case, the preparations for assembling cascades of advanced centrifuges at the site are already in progress.

It should be emphasised that such a development would be another significant violation of the nuclear agreement, which allows the Iranians to operate only 5,060 basic centrifuges for enriching uranium at Natanz. It is not clear if the delay is related to the damage to the facility for centrifuge assembly.

At the pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant, Iran is enriching uranium in advanced experimental centrifuges, developing a wide variety of advanced centrifuges, and violating the timetable for R&D that is included in the JCPOA.

The Iranians are also violating their obligations by enriching uranium with 1,044 centrifuges in the deep underground Fordow facility near Qom. Defiantly, Salehi declared on Sept. 13 2020 that his organisation "activated an enrichment wing in the Fordow nuclear facility."

The use of these 1,044 centrifuges at the Fordow plant for enriching uranium was in line with steps to *reduce its commitments* [emphasis added] to the nuclear deal, according to Salehi. "We had promised not to enrich using these 1,044 centrifuges, but according to the reduction of com-



The Natanz enrichment facilities, photographed in September 2019 (Google Earth). Annotations were added by the Institute for Science and International Security on July 3, 2020



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mitments, enrichment will be done as needed, and we will also store the enriched materials.”

It should be pointed out that in the last year Iran has been enriching uranium to the level of 4.5% instead of the 3.67% allowed by the 2015 nuclear agreement. Iran has already accumulated an amount of uranium enriched to that level ten times greater than what it is permitted according to the agreement (about 2,100 kg instead of the 202 kg that is allowed).

It is clear that Iran is determined to continue rapidly expanding its capacity to produce nuclear weapons in a short period. The amount of enriched uranium in its possession and its current enrichment capacity would already allow it, if it wished, to enrich the uranium to a military level and produce fissile material for two nuclear explosive devices.

While an amount sufficient for the first nuclear explosive device could be produced in a little more than three months, within a further two months Iran could have the quantity required to produce a second explosive device. Installing the advanced centrifuges at the enrichment site could shorten by a few weeks the time required for military-level enrichment. (Under the JCPOA agreement, Iran was supposed to be a year away from obtaining sufficient fissile material for one explosive device.)

All this is happening as Iran continues to develop long-range missiles that will allow it to launch nuclear weapons not only against Israel but also against targets in Europe. At the same time, Europe, China and Russia ignore US attempts to renew international sanctions against Iran. They are determined to allow the Iranian regime to continue violating the nuclear deal.

It is, therefore, no wonder that as the US Election Day approaches, tensions between Washington and Teheran increase, with implications for Israel's security.

THREE WORRISOME STATEMENTS

Three recent expressions regarding Iran's nuclear program deserve clarification and context:

First, Rafael Grossi, the Director-General of the IAEA, declared in an interview with the Austrian newspaper *Die Presse* that Iran does not presently have the quantity of enriched uranium needed to produce a nuclear bomb. This is true and untrue at the same time. The truth is that it is about three months away from having this amount if it decides to produce it. Grossi admitted that Iran is accumulating uranium enriched to a higher level than what it committed to but avoided the question of the time required for having 1SQ by claiming the IAEA does not deal with breakout scenarios.

Second, Brigadier General Dror Shalom, the outgoing head of the IDF Military Intelligence Directorate's Research Division, said in an interview with *Yediot Ahronot* that Iran needs about two years to produce a nuclear bomb from the day it decides to do so. This may be a bit misleading as the critical part of this period is the enrichment of the low-enriched uranium into high-enriched uranium, and, as noted above, this requires about three months. Since Iran has already acquired considerable know-how to weaponise enriched uranium (as seen in the captured Iran nuclear archives) and has already made significant progress in producing delivery systems, it is hard to assess how long the other stages are going to take.

Third, Shalom and others also refer to the post-American election possibilities and claim that there is not much difference between the two presidential candidates as both are interested in reaching an agreement with Iran regarding its nuclear program. In fact, there is a considerable difference.

Republican Trump seeks a deal based on Iran's readiness to accept his demands to give up the nuclear project and its regional hegemony aspirations, whereas Democrat Biden looks for a formula that will bring Iran back to a slightly improved version of the JCPOA and enable it to keep promoting its regional policy.

By now, the entire context in which the struggle over the future of the Iran nuclear program is conducted has changed.

The JCPOA has put the focus on the questions of whether Iran is going to have a big arsenal of nuclear weapons by 2030 and whether the parties to the JCPOA are comfortable in the way the acquisition of this arsenal is going to come about. After the withdrawal of the United States from the deal, the question became again, as it was until 2015, whether Iran will have enough fissile material for one or two nuclear devices, and how it is going to overcome the threshold that separates it from reaching this goal under economic pressure and military threats.

This has been the case since President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA. Iran and everybody else, including Israel, are waiting anxiously to see what the US elections portend.

AIR

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser is Director of the Project on Regional Middle East Developments at the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (JCPA). He was formerly Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs and head of the Research Division of IDF Military Intelligence. © JCPA (www.jcpa.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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Social Problems

Facebook's new antisemitism policies

by Emily Schrader

Facebook, Twitter and Google have all been facing immense pressure in recent months to update their hate speech policies to adequately deal with antisemitism. At a time when antisemitism has skyrocketed around the world, it makes sense that Jewish leaders, groups and activists are calling on major social media networks to raise their standards; after all, they are a key factor in shaping public opinion, and people's actions, in today's world. While the new policy updates regarding Holocaust denial on Facebook and Twitter are a hard-fought step in the right direction, they do not go far enough in educating the public about antisemitism. Fortunately, there's a better alternative these platforms can use.

Advocates and even members of Israel's Knesset have called on social media companies to incorporate the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism into their procedures and decision-making. Big Tech platforms are right to ban Holocaust denial, but they are still avoiding a critical component of how antisemitism manifests today: anti-Zionism – or as many call it, modern antisemitism.

Facebook, in particular, was recently the target of a large social media campaign, #AdoptIHRA, which called on Facebook to integrate the IHRA definition into its community standards. The campaign was signed by more than 130 organisations, Jewish and non-Jewish, as well as community leaders and activists. It was met with an immediate response from Facebook that the company would consider all options, and indeed, Facebook subsequently announced a complete reversal of its previous policy, which had considered Holocaust distortion and denial offensive, but also deemed it “free speech” which should not be flagged or censored.

Yet instead of adopting IHRA as a starting point for identifying all antisemitic content and speech, Facebook has been tiptoeing around the issue and selectively picking and choosing which pieces of antisemitism it has a problem with. This will only complicate the issue in the long term, and extend Facebook's long and rich tradition of waiting until it's too late to take action against dangerous content.

Whether it's white supremacists, Palestinian terrorists, election meddling, or conspiracy theories, Facebook doesn't exactly have a good track record of pre-emptively dealing with hate speech.

Twitter is arguably even worse when it comes to battling antisemitism. For example, it was only after I myself asked Twitter's policy representative in hearings at Israel's Knesset if Holocaust denial was permitted on its platform that it was forced to publicly admit that it permits Holocaust denial. After much criticism, it has now reversed that policy.

Why does it take a public shaming for these organisations to deal with virulent, dangerous hate speech on

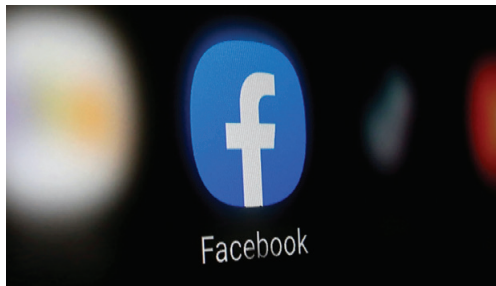
their platforms? Incredibly, even after the uproar over Holocaust denial, Twitter is still insisting that Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's repeated and public calls to genocide of the Jewish state are perfectly acceptable, yet calls to violence against any other nationality are removed. These double standards are unacceptable.

Ironically, the IHRA definition

does not call on any group, state, or platform to “ban” antisemitic speech at all, but rather to stigmatise it and call an (antisemitic) spade an (antisemitic) spade. For this reason, the consensus of the global Jewish community is to continue to push for the adoption of IHRA by social media networks, even after the positive moves to ban Holocaust denial.

Antisemitism, particularly online, manifests today in the two forms: classic antisemitism, which most social media networks are fairly good at policing; and modern antisemitism. The latter refers to libellous smears against Jews, “Zionists” or the state of Israel, as well as the demonisation of Jews, the Jewish state, or replacement of the word “Jews” with “Zionists,” a popular substitution used by contemporary antisemites in an attempt to present their racist views in socially acceptable terms.

The IHRA definition rightly identifies these forms of speech as antisemitic. It does not, however, deem criticism of Israeli policy or Israelis as antisemitic. This is a critical distinction because free speech is a (supposed) core value of social media platforms. The Jewish community isn't demanding censorship of those criticising Israel, we are demanding education on what antisemitism is today – in all its forms. We are demanding that Jews be treated equally,



Facebook has moved against Holocaust denial after refusing to do so for several years

“The consensus of the global Jewish community is to continue to push for the adoption of IHRA by social media networks, even after the positive moves to ban Holocaust denial”

like all other groups on social media, instead of the double standards with which we have been faced for years.

The refusal of Facebook and Twitter to adopt the IHRA definition even after a major push from international Jewish communal organisations reaffirms a sense which so many Jews like myself have felt for decades having worked in this field: Jewish lives don't matter to these social media networks. More than this, what we define and identify as antisemitism, and which we can demonstrate with evidence leads to real-world violence against our communities, isn't important enough to these companies for them

to incorporate these issues into their practices and rules. Taking a stand against Holocaust denial is a start, but it shouldn't come at the expense of holding social media companies accountable for dealing with modern antisemitism. All social media networks should adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism in full today.

AIR

Emily Schrader is the CEO of Social Lite Creative LLC and an expert in social media campaigns and activism for social causes. She is also a research fellow at the Tel Aviv Institute where she focuses on women's rights and online hate speech.

FACEBOOK HEEDS HOLOCAUST MESSAGE

Naomi Levin

After significant global campaigns led by the World Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee and joined by dozens of key Jewish community organisations, including AIJAC, Facebook has agreed to crack down on Holocaust denial on its social media platforms.

In a statement on Oct. 12, Vice President of Content Policy Monika Bickert said Facebook would ban any content that “denies or distorts the Holocaust”. She added that, starting later this year, anyone who searches for terms associated with Holocaust or Holocaust denial will be directed to “credible information off Facebook”.

Facebook's move against Holocaust denial followed its step earlier this year to prohibit users from using the ubiquitous digital platform to spread antisemitic stereotypes.

Content that accuses Jews of running the world or controlling the media is no longer permitted to be published on Facebook. This ban came after Jewish organisations consulted with Facebook in order to implore the social media giant to share some of the responsibility for growing global antisemitic sentiment.

In response to the Holocaust denial ban, Greg Schneider, president of the Claims Conference, whose mission is to provide a measure of justice to Holocaust survivors, welcomed the changes.

“You cannot deny the atrocities Holocaust survivors suffered; we applaud these first steps. Holocaust survivors bravely came forward to ensure that their voices were heard. We now urge Facebook to take immediate action to implement its new policy,” Schneider said.

However, Anti-Defamation League (ADL) CEO Jason Greenblatt accused Facebook of acting too late.

“In reality, we believe Facebook is acting now because of external pressure coming from a variety of sources: the Stop Hate for Profit campaign led by ADL and other civil rights organisa-

tions; the #NoDenyingIt effort led by the Claims Conference; alarming new polling on Holocaust awareness among young people; regulatory pressure in Europe and America; the recent congressional hearings in Washington DC and a hard-hitting letter from 20 state attorneys general,” Greenblatt said.

There was an obvious shift of emphasis by Facebook in October from unfettered free speech towards a more nuanced approach. This was reflected in the tech giant's decision to remove content associated with increasingly popular conspiracy theory QAnon.

YouTube, owned by Google, announced it too would tighten the rules on QAnon-related content, which led to the removal of some popular, but dangerous, videos. However, although

YouTube stopped short of an outright ban, analysts have noted that the majority of the most popular QAnon Facebook pages and groups became inaccessible quite quickly. Experts have warned, however, that QAnon is already morphing to evade capture, and some users are spilling over into less popular – and less regulated – alternative social media

platforms.

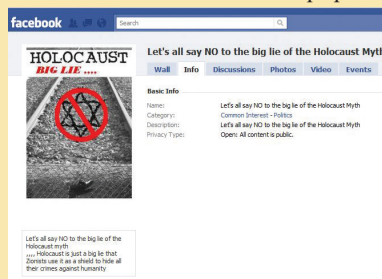
QAnon – which originated in the US and is based on the crazy notion that Democrats and Hollywood elites are paedophilic child traffickers and that Donald Trump is working to #savethechildren – has spread beyond American shores and capitalised on the pandemic to pick up thousands of followers around the world.

QAnon has been associated with antisemitism, with researchers recently finding dozens of graphically violent death threats from QAnon supporters towards Jewish financier and philanthropist George Soros, many references to Rothschild banking conspiracies, and connections being drawn between the supposed child trafficking ring and the antisemitic canard of blood libel.

American researcher Gregory Stanton put it most succinctly: “QAnon's conspiracy theory is a rebranded version of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.”

With social media the new printing press, tech giants stepping up to the plate to remove hateful content seems central to restraining the spread of racist extremism – and the violence it can spawn.

AIR



THE PALESTINIAN SPLIT WITH THE ARABS

by Khaled Abu Toameh

Shortly after Mahmoud Abbas was elected president of the Palestinian Authority in January 2005, Egypt's then President Hosni Mubarak was asked what advice he would give Palestinian leaders.

Mubarak, in an interview with the *Al-Arabiya* television network, replied:

"There has to be a new thinking about the Palestinian issue. Otherwise, we [Arabs] will continue to say no. We have been saying no for the past 50 years, and that is why we missed many opportunities. We said no to the [UN's 1947] Partition Plan, and in 1967 we said no to recognising Israel in return for a withdrawal [to the 1949 armistice lines]. At the time, we said that what was taken by force can only be restored by force.

"They have rejected everything. Now we are in a swamp. The Palestinian people are suffering due to the economic crisis. In my view, the Palestinian leadership now needs to give peace a chance. They need to sit at the negotiating table. This will send a message to the people that there is hope for peace."

Fifteen years later, it is evident that Abbas and the Palestinian leadership never took Mubarak's advice seriously. On the contrary, the Palestinian leaders are continuing to act not only against the advice of Mubarak and other Arabs, but also against the interests of their own people.

For the past three years, Abbas has cut off all ties with the US Administration to protest President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Since the beginning of this year, Abbas has rejected Trump's vision for peace in the Middle East, known as "Peace to Prosperity," and suspended all ties with Israel, including security coordination.

What Abbas has done is to reject peace with Israel and prosperity for Palestinians to appease Hamas, Turkey and Qatar.

Abbas and the Palestinian leadership have, in the past few weeks, strongly come out against the peace deals signed between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain. This position has placed the Palestinians on a collision course with several Arab countries, especially the Gulf states. Many Arabs are reportedly furious with the Palestinian leadership for accusing the UAE and Bahrain of "betraying the Palestinian issue, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem."

Instead of talking to the Americans, the Israelis and Arabs who support the idea of making peace with Israel, Abbas is now talking to Hamas, Turkey and Qatar. In early October, he sent a senior delegation of his ruling Fatah faction to Istanbul to discuss with Hamas leaders the possibility of holding long overdue elections for the PA presidency and Palestinian parliament, the Palestine Legislative Council.

The two parties said they have agreed to hold new elections within six months. Previous agreements between Fatah and Hamas, however, were never implemented as the



A worrying embrace: PA President Mahmoud Abbas with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

two sides continue to engage in a struggle over money and power.

The latest Fatah-Hamas discussions were held under the auspices of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is also opposed to the peace accords between Israel and the two Gulf states. After the meeting, the Fatah delegation, headed by Jibril Rajoub, flew to Qatar in a bid to win its backing for any agreement reached with Hamas. The Qataris have long been leading supporters of Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood organisation.

Erdogan has also fully embraced Hamas, whose charter openly calls for the annihilation of Israel. In September, Erdogan met with a large delegation from Hamas, including Ismail Haniyeh and Saleh Arouri, both of whom have been designated by the US State Department as Specially Designated Global Terrorists because of their involvement in terrorist attacks against citizens of Israel and the US.

In mid-October, Abbas talked on the telephone with Erdogan and Haniyeh about the prospects of achieving Palestinian "national unity" and foiling US and Israeli "conspiracies" against the Palestinians.

Mubarak advised Abbas and the Palestinian leadership to give peace a chance, to stop saying no to all peace plans and initiatives and to return to the negotiating table with Israel. By associating himself with Erdogan and Hamas, however, Abbas is demonstrating that he would rather give Muslim extremists a chance, evidently to advance their

anti-Israel and anti-Western goals and ambitions.

Pointedly, a report in a Palestinian media outlet belonging to Abbas' arch-rival, Mohammed Dahlan, alleged that the Fatah delegation in Istanbul in early October met with officials from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as Turkish and Qatari intelligence officers.

According to the report, sources in Abbas' office revealed that, during his call with Erdogan, the Palestinian leader bad-mouthed Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz. The report added that "analysts specializing in the Palestinian issue commented that Qatar and Turkey will use Abbas to harm the interests of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Sudan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia."

The report also alleged that Qatar recently gave Abbas and some of his aides "more than \$50 million for their personal bank accounts inside banks in Israel and the Palestinian Authority areas."

Some Arabs are now trying to advise the Palestinian leadership in the same way that, already 15 years ago, Mubarak did. The voices of these Arabs, nonetheless, do not seem to be making any more of an impression on Abbas or anyone in the top echelon of the Palestinian leadership than Mubarak's did.

Palestinian leaders continue to say no to the constructive voices in the Arab world, while saying yes to terrorist-promoting Turkey, Qatar and Hamas. That stance may explain why so many Arabs are frustrated with the Palestinian leadership.

"The Palestinian leadership has lost its symbolism, even among the Palestinians," remarked Abdullah Al-Ghathami, a respected professor of criticism and theory at King Saud University.

"The Palestinian leadership has lost its credibility in the eyes of the new Arab generation, which is a generation of technology. Once, for us the homeland was the whole Arab world. We were all an army of freedom fighters for the Palestinians. We used to accept their mistakes, even their insults because the Palestinian issue was Number 1 for us. Today the new generation thinks differently. The Palestinian leadership is irrelevant. Palestinians needs [sic] a young leadership that would be able to address the young Arab generation."

Echoing the same sense of disillusionment with the Palestinian leadership in the Arab world, a Syrian journalist based in the UAE, who calls herself Shukran, posted the following advice to the Palestinians:

"This is a message directed to the Palestinians who are focusing their efforts on offending the UAE. I just want to say a few words, my dear Palestinians: Your real enemy

is in front of you; it is the corrupt Palestinian Authority. Open the files of the corrupt Palestinian Authority. Check where did the sons of the leaders of the Palestinian Authority study? What kind of life are they living? How did they get their education? They live in peace, stability, prosperity and luxury. Take a look at your own children. Your children who are instilled with hatred. What has the Palestinian Authority given you? We are no longer the generation of revolution and rage; we are a generation that aspires to achieve peace and love. We want to live and raise our children in peace and security. We tried wars, now we want to try peace."

Abdullah Al-Hakeem, a Saudi political analyst and former director of the Middle East Centre for Strategic and Legal Studies, concurred:

"The real enemy of the Palestinians is the corrupt Palestinian Authority. When I visited Israel, I attended an event for a member of the Palestinian Authority, and I saw people queuing up to enter to eat. How much I suffered watching this scene. One of the members of the Palestinian Authority asked me why I left the event. I answered him that we must make peace with Israel to create a better reality for the Palestinians. He got angry with me and stopped talking to me."

Al-Hakeem was apparently referring to poor people who had come to the event to beg for food.

Dr. Khaled Al-Qasimi wrote in a Yemeni website that the uproar Abbas and the PLO caused over the UAE normalisation accord with Israel is unacceptable. Palestinian

leaders, Al-Qasimi said, "do not want to solve the Palestinian issue because resolving the issue means losing their personal benefits."

"There is no doubt that the wealth that the Palestinian leaders have accumulated during more than half a century is more important [to them] than the Palestinian people and their issue. Wars that have brought us nothing but destruction..."

Noura Al-Moteari, an Emirati author and political re-

"Palestinian leaders continue to say no to the constructive voices in the Arab world, while saying yes to terrorist-promoting Turkey, Qatar and Hamas"



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searcher, advised the Palestinians:

“The only solution available to the Palestinian people is to move immediately to remove the dilapidated Palestinian leaders. Palestinians need to nominate a transitional council, as in Sudan, and to work hard to find a Palestinian leadership that can take advantage of peace processes.”

As in the past, the Palestinian leadership are continuing to ignore the advice of their Arab brothers to try peace and replace their corrupt and incompetent leaders. This refusal seems to be the main reason many Arabs today feel that the Palestinian issue is no longer central to all Arabs and Muslims.

AIR

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

PROLIFERATION REVELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

by Ran Porat

Two and a half years ago, I wrote an analysis (“Coming soon – a Nuclear Middle East”, *AIR* March 2018) of the implications for Israel of the advancing nuclear capabilities of various Middle Eastern countries. Recent major developments on this front – involving various nations, but especially new revelations about Saudi Arabia – require an update and a renewed look at Israel’s security dilemmas in dealing with the regional proliferation threat.

UAE, JORDAN, EGYPT AND IRAQ

With regards to nuclear power reactors, the United

Arab Emirates (UAE) is the most advanced nation in the Arab world. Abu Dhabi successfully started up its Barakah Nuclear Plant in August 2020. The reactor is closely monitored by the UN’s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and is consistent with the US-UAE 123 Agreement, which denies the UAE the key capabilities needed to develop an atomic weapon: uranium enrichment and plutonium processing.

With the full peace and normalisation between Israel and the UAE, the Barakah reactor is not considered a proliferation threat, although there are normal security concerns, such as the potential theft of nuclear technology or materials by terrorists or other rogue actors.

The push towards atomic energy in other countries in the region remains at earlier stages, and existing nuclear infrastructure appears limited and fully monitored. Jordan has moved forward with its plan to build a nuclear power plant by 2030, signing an agreement with US company X-energy in November 2019. Egypt is expected to issue permits to construct the Dabaa Nuclear Power Station in the second half of 2021. Politically, as long as the governments of both these countries remain aligned with the West, their nuclear efforts pose little danger of creating a risk to international stability.

In September 2020, Iraqi PM Mustafa Al-Kadhimi formed a committee to initiate steps towards building a nuclear research reactor. This appears potentially problematic given the volatile political situation in Iraq and the fluctuating, but substantial, influence in Baghdad from neighbouring Iran, leader of the region’s radical camp, and its armed loyal militias within Iraq. Hence, although Iraq’s nuclear program is in the earliest stages, it is likely that it is being observed closely by the relevant parties.

TURKEY

In September 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned that he does not accept the prohibition on Turkey possessing nuclear arms while other countries are allowed to do so. This stands in direct contrast with Turkey’s ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1980.

Erdogan specifically mentioned Israel, considered an unofficial member of the club of atomic nations: “They scare [other nations] by possessing these. No one can touch them,” said Erdogan of Israel.

So far there is little indication that Turkey is matching Erdogan’s words with actions. Turkey was once a transit station in the illicit nuclear proliferation network of Pakistani scientist, Abd Al-Qadir Khan. Today, however, it does not seem to have the ability to divert its monitored civilian nuclear infrastructure – a research reactor, TR-2, and three power plants being built with assistance from Russia, Japan and the US respectively – to military aims.

As a NATO member, Turkey hosts around 50 American

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The UAE's new Barakah nuclear power plant, the first to come online in the Arab world

nuclear warheads at the Incirlik Air Base. Erdogan's threat may have been directed at the US following reports that Washington has been considering moving these weapons out of the country.

THE NPT VS. THE "BEGIN DOCTRINE"

The basis for Erdogan's complaint is the centrally important 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). According to the NPT, countries with nuclear weapons at the time (the US, UK, Soviet Union/Russia, France and China) remained the only ones allowed such an arsenal in exchange for a commitment to supply nuclear technology for peaceful use to all other nations. Since then, however, additional countries have sought – some successfully – to acquire atomic bombs outside the NPT framework, including India, Pakistan and, allegedly, Israel (though some reports say Israel's nuclear capabilities predate the NPT's signing). Meanwhile, some signatory states have used their NPT-sponsored nuclear infrastructure to manufacture nuclear weapons despite its strictures – North Korea being the obvious case.

Several Middle Eastern states have been caught with their hands deep in the nuclear cookie jar in violation of the NPT – including Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Syria, Libya under Muammar Ghaddafi and Iran. To tackle this threat, Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin is credited with devising the "Begin Doctrine", which says that Israel has a right and an obligation to make sure its enemies cannot achieve nuclear weapons capabilities.

Since then, Israel has acted directly against emerging nuclear threats, bombing reactors in Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007). Jerusalem is also deeply involved with the US and others in the multifaceted effort against the ambitious Iranian nuclear weapons project that has endured for two decades now. The dismantling of Libya's atomic bomb ven-

ture in 2004 may have been an exception, as Israel reportedly failed to detect that program in advance.

From an Israeli perspective, the dilemmas created by the Begin Doctrine have intensified recently. Ironically, this has happened because of the positive change in relationships between Jerusalem and several countries in the region. Instead of a zero-sum game – Arab countries are either friendly or belligerent – Israel now faces a Middle East which is a web of alliances on a continuum ranging from overtly friendly, to under-the-table friendly, to non-friendly yet potential future allies, to enemies, and everything in between.

This seismic shift is forcing Israeli policy makers to rethink their policy towards advanced nuclear capabilities in Arab hands. And nowhere is this issue more acute than in the case of Saudi Arabia.

ISRAEL'S SAUDI DILEMMA

Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman famously threatened in March 2018 that "without a doubt, if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible."

Technically, Saudi Arabia is years away from possessing an ability to produce its own bomb. The kingdom's current nuclear infrastructure is "embryonic", focused on civilian energy (plans are in place to build 16 reactors by 2040), and is lacking in key elements to produce a bomb.

Instead, Riyadh has put its trust in its strong alliance with the US and a Pakistani "nuclear umbrella". The Saudis have invested considerable sums in Pakistan's atomic weapons program over the years, allegedly with the expectation that Islamabad would use its nuclear assets to protect Saudi Arabia in a

time of need.

In August, the media exposed an undeclared Saudi nuclear site southwest of Riyadh, built with Chinese assistance. This facility, located at the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), can process uranium ore into "yellowcake" – uranium concentrate powder used in the process of uranium enrichment.

Riyadh's failure to disclose this facility to the IAEA is a worrying breach of its NPT obligations, with Beijing as an accomplice to this problematic behaviour. China's role is especially concerning given its close relations with Saudi Arabia's arch-nemesis, Iran. China has been a major customer for Iranian oil, circumventing US sanctions, protecting Iran and the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) at the UN Security Council, and more.

Furthermore, Saudi atomic activities are currently not supervised under the maximum safeguard measures. Riyadh refuses to sign either the aforementioned US 123

"Several Middle Eastern states have been caught with their hands deep in the nuclear cookie jar in violation of the NPT – including Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Syria, Libya under Muammar Ghaddafi and Iran"

agreement or the IAEA's "Additional Protocol" for extended monitoring agreement. It is also reportedly declining to promise it would not pursue nuclear fuel production abilities.

Jerusalem is facing a dilemma deciding how to respond to Saudi atomic aspirations. Israel does not want to see a nuclear arms race triggered in the Middle East if a nuclear weapon is introduced to the region by Saudi Arabia (or anyone else). At the same time, Riyadh may soon go public with its informal secret cooperation with Israel, cemented in the shadow of the Iranian menace. And in the Middle East there are always worries about future internal political stability. Egypt, for example, flipped from foe, under Gamal Abd Al-Nasser, to friend, under Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, then turned hostile again under the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammad Morsi, but again became an ally under current President Abd Al-Fatah Al-Sissi.

Thus, instead of choosing to fully pursue the "Begin Doctrine" in this case, Israel has been following in the footsteps of another Israeli PM, Yitzhak Shamir. Just like Shamir quietly communicated to the US a willingness to exercise restraint in exchange for American protection after Israel was attacked by Iraq in the First Gulf War (1991), so too Israel seems prepared to put its trust in Washington, privately relaying its concerns about Saudi Arabia's nuclear ambitions. Such a policy solves, for now, its Saudi dilemma, but it may resurface in the not-so-distant future. AIR

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

WORLD OF WEBINARS

by **Jamie Hyams**

Since the last wrap of AIJAC's webinars, in the July edition of the *AIR*, there have been 16 more *AIJAC Live Online* sessions, each of them informative and fascinating.

Joan Ryan and David Hirsh – June 20

Former British Labour MP Ryan, who grew up with no Jewish links, and academic Hirsh, a former party member, both left due to the party's antisemitism and spoke on "Antisemitism in the British Left". Ryan explained, "I doubt that the Labour Party will ever be able to be united and get over this problem until it tackles this obsessional obsessive hatred that seems to be part of the Labour Party – hatred for Israel." She added that "You can't fight antisemitism

unless you also fight anti-Zionism." Hirsh expressed his concern about the mainstreaming in the left of antisemitism and undemocratic values in general.

Jonathan Spyer – July 7

Middle East analyst Spyer's topic was "The Middle East: Meltdowns and Mayhem." He said there is a war currently being fought over the ruins of a chaotic Middle East between four forces – Iran and its allies, Turkey and its allies, the Salafists/Jihadists such as ISIS, and a loose grouping of status quo states including Israel and moderate Sunni states. Potential flashpoints include Libya, where Egypt and its allies are concerned at Turkey's interference, and Syria. The Iranian bloc is the most cohesive, but is constrained by its economic weakness, he explained, including in Syria and Lebanon, while Turkey's "very very aggressive and ambitious...foreign policy" requires more attention and concern than it receives.

Danielle Pletka – July 14

Senior Fellow in Foreign and Defence Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute Danielle Pletka discussed "Trump vs Biden: The Future of US Foreign Policy." She noted that the Trump Administration had strongly supported Israel and had also managed, against expectations, to not only tear up the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), but to reinstitute a sanctions regime "that has bitten on the Iranians like nothing they've ever seen in their 40 plus year reign." She warned that Democratic candidate Joe Biden's policies might take a worrying direction, given the hostility to Israel and extreme foreign policy views in part of his party.

Simon Henderson – July 21

Washington Institute Gulf and energy policy expert Henderson, whose topic was "Power Struggles: Energy Wars in the Middle East", explained there are two areas of potential conflict over energy: the Persian Gulf and the eastern Mediterranean. There is the potential for a vicious succession battle in Saudi Arabia when King Salman dies, he warned. The trouble in the eastern Mediterranean is caused by Turkey, which is disputing the offshore gas and oil exploration zones of other countries, and has claimed Cyprus' zone for itself.

Professor Gerald Steinberg – July 27

Professor Steinberg is the founder and President of NGO Monitor. In his webinar, "The Campaign to Delegitimise Israel within International Institutions," he explained there was no hope that the institutionally anti-Israel United Nations Human Rights Council would reform. Two thirds of its members are always totalitarian states and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation has a majority in three of the five regions which elect members. High Commissioner Michele Bachelet and the secretariat



AIJAC webinar guests (left to right, top to bottom): Mark Regev, Herb Keinon, Michael Doran, Jonathan Spyer, Amb. Abdulla Al Sabousi, David Rosen, Danielle Pletka, Matthew Levitt, Khaled Abu Toameh

are very sympathetic to its views, and Michael Lynk, its Special Rapporteur for the West Bank and Gaza, has a long history of anti-Zionism, and has said many things that would contravene the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism. Steinberg also revealed that many NGOs are closely connected to Palestinian terror groups, while others use anti-Israel activists to compile their supposedly objective reports on Israel and the Palestinians.

Michael Doran – August 6

Doran, a former senior director in the US National Security Council and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence in the George W. Bush Administration, spoke on "China and the Middle East: Ongoing challenges for the next US Administration." He argued that China is in a tacit alliance with Russia and Iran in the Middle East, and is trying to supplant the US with a Sino-centric international order. It won't yet challenge the US directly, so it uses Russia and Iran as stalking horses, supporting them economically, militarily and diplomatically, and swoops in when terror activities make a US presence difficult.

Yuval Rotem – August 16

Rotem is the recently retired Director-General of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a former Ambassador to Australia. Speaking on "Israel's Foreign Policy – An Insider's Perspective", he explained that the main dangers in the region are now seen as Iran and Turkey, and some Arab states have been relaxing their previous hostility towards Israel, mostly under the table. He described the agreement with the UAE as the natural evolution of this process, but said we must remember it's a historic event. It removed the Palestinian veto on Israeli/Arab relations and disproved claims that moving of the US embassy to Jerusalem would undermine Israel's position in the Middle East.

Dr Matthew Levitt – August 19

In his webinar "Mapping Hezbollah's Worldwide Activities", Dr Levitt, a former US government senior intelli-

gence and counterterrorism official, and now Director of the Washington Institute's program on counterterrorism and intelligence, was adamant the whole of Hezbollah must be banned. He described trying to fight Hezbollah when only part of the group is designated a terror organisation as "trying to play cricket without a bat." He set out the startling breadth of Hezbollah's criminal and terror activities worldwide, which can be examined with the user-friendly map and database he has compiled over a few years, available on the Washington Institute website.

Khaled Abu Toameh – August 24

In his webinar, *Jerusalem Post* Palestinian Affairs correspondent Khaled Abu Toameh addressed the question, "The Israel-UAE Peace: What do the Palestinians Want?" He answered that "The impression among Palestinians is that both the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza are actually interested in maintaining the status quo. The Palestinian Authority's main goal is to remain in power... and Hamas also wants to remain in power in Gaza. That's actually the only strategy they have." He noted that they were caught by surprise and felt betrayed, and worried "about the indifference in the Arab world towards the agreement."

Clifford May – August 28

May, the veteran journalist who founded Washington-

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based think tank, the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies (FDD), spoke on “US Presidential Elections and the Middle East”. He said the Israel policies of a Biden administration would depend on whom he appointed to important posts, and may or may not reflect the left of the party, but Biden’s support for Obama’s policies is known. He listed Trump Administration pro-Israel policies, including moving the embassy to Jerusalem, recognising Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights, the proposed peace plan with the Palestinians, facilitating normalisation with Arab states and withdrawing from the JCPOA nuclear deal with Iran and imposing subsequent sanctions.

“In an historic event, His Excellency Abdulla Al Subousi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Arab Emirates to Australia, spoke on ‘Bridging the Gulf’”

Rabbi David Rosen – September 8

Rabbi Rosen is the American Jewish Committee’s Director of International Interreligious Affairs, and addressed “Jewish-Muslim Relations and Arab-Israeli Peace”. He noted that horror over the September 11 attacks and the threat from Al-Qaeda had motivated a new era of interfaith engagement in the Arab world. While the softening of attitudes to Israel which led to the normalisation deal was initially due to shared strategic threats, most notably from Iran, “Interfaith relations provides... the soft avenue in which you can engage without necessarily having to pay any price.” He described how the UAE was particularly active in interfaith activity.

Behnam Ben Taleblu – September 15

FDD Iran expert Taleblu urged stronger action against Iran both to attempt to have Australian-British academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert freed from Iranian jail and in response to the regime’s execution of champion wrestler Navid Afkari. On his topic, “The Iranian Nuclear Crisis and the US Election”, he recommended that the US continues the Trump maximum pressure campaign against Iran, to pressure it to return to negotiations about its nuclear weapons and rogue state activities. He argued that “the clawing back of this [JCPOA] accord” would not help international security, just the Iranian regime.

Michal Cotler-Wunsh – September 24

Israeli Knesset member Cotler-Wunsh heads the Knesset’s Committee on Israeli-Diaspora relations. Speaking on “Israel, World Jewry and the Fight Against Antisemitism” she urged the use of an algorithm based upon accepted standards – the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition – to combat antisemitism in social media posts. She stressed that efforts to remove references to Israel from the IHRA’s working definition of antisemitism would render it inadequate “because the new antisemitism that we see on and offline actually uses that ability to... redub the Jew as the ‘Zionist’.”

Herb Keinon – September 29

Speaking about “20 years on from the Second Intifada,” *Jerusalem Post* senior contributing editor and analyst Herb Keinon described the Intifada as a watershed event in Israeli history that shaped a generation, and will shape the next generation. He explained, “To understand Israel today, to understand so much of what the country does, to understand its political turn to the right, why it has voted time and time again for Benjamin Netanyahu, why it has no confidence right now in the Palestinians... is to understand the strain and the pressure that everyone in this country encountered or laboured under during that period of the Intifada...”

His Excellency Abdulla Al Subousi – October 7

In an historic event, His Excellency Abdulla Al Subousi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Arab Emirates to Australia, spoke on “Bridging the Gulf”. He stated, “There is no doubt that the peace deal [between the UAE and Israel] will fundamentally change both the UAE and Israel relations, as well as the entire Middle East for the better, I’m sure. It brings a new day where old and outdated antagonisms are swept aside in favour of peace and friendship. The deal will lead to a new era of educational, cultural and personal ties, such as these ones, that will deeply enrich our peoples and lives.” He explained that the UAE was built on religious tolerance, and expressed concern about the activities of Turkey and Iran in the region.

Mark Regev – October 13

Australian-born Regev, the Israeli PM’s international media spokesperson, spoke on the topic, “A New Era for Israeli Foreign Policy”. Noting that until now, Israel’s main international relationships were with Western countries, while its own region has been hostile, he said, “for Israel now to be expanding our relations so energetically with Arab countries, with Muslim countries, is very, very exciting. It’s the dawn of a new era.” He noted that, with the “economic clout” of the Gulf States, “this is a sort of peace agreement that everyone in Israel can feel because it can enhance national prosperity.” He added that the difficult position Palestinians are now in could make peace more likely, as it may lead them to re-examine their positions.

To find out what else each of our speakers said, see the recordings, video excerpts and reports of the webinars on the AIJAC website, YouTube channel and Facebook page. The webinar program is ongoing, so look out for upcoming events.



Ankara Away

Assessing the Turkish challenge to Israel

by Oved Lobel

“Iranian power is fragile, but the real threat is from Turkey,” Mossad chief Yossi Cohen reportedly told the spy chiefs of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE a couple of years ago.

Israel’s military intelligence allegedly classified Turkey as a “challenge” to Israeli interests for the first time in 2020, tying this challenge directly to the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his support for political Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood.

Israel’s Defence Minister Benny Gantz, in a recent Zoom briefing organised by the Arab Council for Regional Integration following the Israeli normalisation with the UAE and Bahrain, accused Turkey of promoting instability, declaring that “we must take all the options that we have in our hands and try to influence [Turkey] through international pressure to make sure that they are pulling their hands [away] from direct terrorism.”

While Erdogan is extremely hostile to Israel – though perhaps not as hostile as Turkey’s secular opposition, which accuses Erdogan of being too soft and all talk – Turkey is not currently a comparable threat to Iran.

Turkey does not have a revolutionary ideology centred on the destruction of Israel; it does not stockpile explosives throughout the world or proliferate sophisticated weaponry and missiles to proxies for the



Given his background, the hostility of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Israel is no surprise

sole purpose of threatening Israel; and it retains, despite the rhetoric and multiple strategic differences, a healthy trade relationship with Israel, although official diplomatic ties have been on ice since 2018. Furthermore, despite the vitriol, Turkey’s official position is still to support a two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The challenge of Turkey is that of an aggressive rising power disrupting the status quo in its perceived favour. As its military power has grown, particularly its mastery of drone warfare since 2018, so too have its aggressive attempts to rewrite the regional order and circumvent international law, which it views as constraining its interests and ambitions, using hard power.

All of this is taking place in a strategic vacuum as the US increasingly disengages from the region.

Chief among Turkey’s goals in this regard is the pursuit of a regional

condominium with Russia – and to a lesser extent Iran – and the reduction of US and Western presence and influence. While Turkey and Russia are strategic competitors, both view the US as the main hindrance to their interests and wish to bilaterally horse-trade spheres of influence in their multiple conflicts.

This trend certainly presents overlapping but generally distinct challenges to Israel’s interests, which include a US-backed regional order. Although Turkey seeks to assert itself in multiple areas, Israel should be able to compartmentalise these challenges and deal with them individually while maintaining some sort of relationship, however dysfunctional, with Turkey.

TURKEY, HAMAS AND THE PALESTINIANS

Erdogan’s hostility towards Israel is no surprise. His AKP party is the political offspring of Turkey’s older Islamist Welfare Party, whose political platform pinned all of Turkey’s problems on “world imperialism and Zionism, as well as Israel and a handful of champagne-drinking collaborators in the holding companies that feed it.”

There is little doubt Erdogan was looking for an excuse to destroy Turkey’s previous strategic relationship with Israel, and he found it in Operation Cast Lead, Israel’s first major offensive against Hamas rocket attacks and attack tunnels in Gaza in 2008–9. Erdogan used the opportunity to block Israeli participation in NATO exercise “Anatolian Eagle,” leading to its cancellation. He then organised the infamous Gaza Freedom Flotilla in 2010, a direct provocation meant to resonate politically at home and justify his attempts to downgrade the relationship.

Erdogan’s sympathy with and support for Hamas is also no surprise, as his own roots, like Hamas’, are very much in the Muslim Brotherhood movement. He has always supported the group, and embraced Hamas’ electoral victory in 2006. This sup-

port escalated substantially as part of the 2010 provocation, with Turkey beginning to host senior Hamas leaders around 2010-2011 and even allegedly funding their terrorist operations directly. In 2018, Israel's Shin Bet security agency revealed that Hamas' military activities were being funded and run out of an office in Istanbul overseen by Hamas' military commander of terrorist activities in the West Bank, Saleh al-Arouri.

As part of the investigation, the Shin Bet fingered Zaher Jabarin as the terrorist recruiter and arrested Daram Jabarin as a financier. In 2019, the US sanctioned Turkey-based Zaher Jabarin, the head of Hamas' Finance Office, for using several companies in Turkey to raise funds for Hamas activities. The US asserts that Jabarin and his companies in Turkey are also Hamas' primary points of contact for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the group's primary backer.

More concerning is the Shin Bet's allegation that Turkey provides direct military assistance to Hamas via SADAT, an ostensibly private Turkish security company that seeks "Defensive Collaboration and Defensive Industrial Cooperation among Islamic Countries to help the Islamic World."

Further revelations about the group's Turkey operations came from Suheib Yousef, a son of Hamas co-founder Sheikh Hassan Yousef, who left the group. Yousef alleges that Hamas also runs signals intelligence stations in Turkey using "advanced equipment and computer programs" to spy on Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Arab States, and then sells that information to the IRGC in exchange for financial aid.

During a May 2019 flareup in Gaza, Israel bombed a building it claimed was being used as a command centre by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a building that not coincidentally housed Turkey's state-run news agency Anadolu. In August this year, Israel revealed that

Turkey had given passports to about a dozen senior Hamas operatives based in Istanbul. Meanwhile, Turkey has joined Russia in its attempts to unify the major Palestinian groups, Fatah and Hamas, in the wake of Israel's normalisation with Bahrain and the UAE.

Turkey's soft power push in Jerusalem is also of concern to Israel, especially efforts by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). This agency reportedly bankrolls a substantial portion of civil society activity in east Jerusalem, gives cash and food handouts to Palestinians in the city and allegedly collaborates with the controversial Turkish Islamist charity IHH.

Another Turkish aid organisation, the International Kanadil Institute for Humanitarian Aid and Development, was banned in Israel in late 2016 for allegedly funding Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood-linked projects in Jerusalem. There are reports that Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs formulated a specific program in 2019 to counter Turkish influence in Jerusalem.

Turkey's expansive soft power role in east Jerusalem is all the more concerning given Erdogan's statement to party colleagues on Oct. 1 that "Jerusalem is our city."

TURKEY, IRAN AND HEZBOLLAH

Long before the rise of the political Islamists, Turkey had an ambivalent relationship with the revolutionary theocracy in Iran, refusing to support US sanctions since 1979. Prioritising relations with the Muslim Middle East has been an enduring idea in Turkey since the 1970s, an idea that Erdogan's mentor Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the Islamic Welfare Party, attempted to implement during his abortive year as Prime Minister. Erbakan proclaimed that Turkey "will set up an Islamic United Nations, an Islamic NATO and an Islamic version of the European Union." The lynchpin of this plan was establishing closer

relations with Iran, Turkey's "Muslim Brother" and paragon of "resistance" to the West. Erbakan flew to Iran to sign a US\$23 billion gas deal in direct defiance of US efforts.

Erdogan has picked up where Erbakan left off, massively expanding trade with Iran after the rise to power of his AKP party in 2002 and attempting another gas deal in 2007. Erdogan viewed his role as protecting Iran's nuclear program from sanctions, and he has consistently tried to deepen economic ties with Tehran. Moreover, once sanctions were imposed, the Turkish government allegedly oversaw the "gas-for-gold" scheme and other activities to help Iran circumvent US pressure. About radical Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Erdogan said "There is no doubt he is our friend," and he went out of his way to amplify Iranian propaganda regarding its nuclear program.

A recent report alleges that the director of Turkey's English-language State Broadcaster TRT World, Fatih Er, is being investigated by Turkey's judiciary for his role in the IRGC's network in Turkey, as was the current Minister of Industry and Technology Mustafa Varank and Erdogan advisor Sefer Turan.

Erdogan has not only financially facilitated Iranian expansion, but has also allowed the IRGC and its proxies free rein when it comes to Israel. Erdogan and his intelligence chief Hakan Fidan allegedly began passing on intelligence from the US and Israel to Iran and even reportedly blew the cover of an Israeli spy network inside Iran.

He has also allegedly helped Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese proxy, transport weapons and missiles into Lebanon. According to reports, this began during the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel and continued at least through 2009 despite multiple Israeli diplomatic protests. After a meeting with Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in 2010, Erdogan reportedly defended Hezbollah

lah over accusations that it had killed former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and dozens of others in 2005, proclaiming “Hezbollah says it’s the spirit of resistance in Lebanon and even uses the expression ‘Hariri’s shahid.’ [martyr] No one can suspect it of being involved in this.” In fact, the UN-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon legally implicated Hezbollah in Hariri’s murder in August 2020.

Turkey does have many strategic differences with Iran, most notably its attempts to topple the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, the fulcrum of Iran’s “axis of resistance” against Israel. Turkey also supported the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen against Iran’s local proxy Ansar

Allah, also known as the Houthis, offering logistical support and declaring that “Iran and the terrorist groups must withdraw.”

However, as it does with Russia, Turkey would much prefer to divide the region with Iran and manage the conflicts bilaterally and occasionally trilaterally with Russian participation. Erdogan and the AKP have an ideological sympathy for a fellow Muslim state under pressure from the US.

At the 6th Turkey-Iran High-Level Cooperation Council meeting in September, co-chaired by Erdogan and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, the two leaders agreed to continue developing the economic relationship and to cooperate in the fight against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

TURKEY AND POLITICAL ISLAM

The events of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 produced two diametrically opposed regional blocs. On the one hand, Turkey and Qatar threw their weight behind the Muslim Brotherhood, which for a brief moment seemed politically ascendant

across the region, especially after the Brotherhood gained control of Egypt under President Mohamed Morsi in 2012-13. On the other side, the UAE and Saudi Arabia reacted with horror at US disengagement, encouragement of the Brotherhood and the collapse of autocratic allies and client states like Egypt. Thus began a Cold War across the Middle East and Africa, as a conservative alliance led by the UAE

“In the Middle East, Turkey has become the primary bastion and safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been thoroughly crushed as a political force in Egypt and across the region”

sought to reimpose or prop up military dictatorships in Libya, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere and re-establish the status quo ante, while Turkey and Qatar promoted Islamist groups, often under the guise of at least superficial political pluralism.

Like his mentor Erdogan, Erdogan is very intent on setting up an Islamic order with Turkey as a key leader. Certain initiatives, such as the Islamist Kuala Lumpur Summit in Malaysia in 2019, are intended to supplant the Saudi-led Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and Turkey has even seemingly succeeded in poaching Pakistan, an erstwhile Saudi client state, from Saudi Arabia by involving itself rhetorically in the Kashmir conflict and defending Pakistan from blacklisting by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for terrorism funding.

In the Middle East, Turkey has become the primary bastion and safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been thoroughly crushed as a political force in Egypt and across the region. Jordan, aligned with the UAE camp, dissolved the local Brotherhood branch in July, while the UAE, like Saudi Arabia, declared it a terrorist organisation in 2014.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has allegedly spawned terrorist offshoots, like the Hasm movement, which Egypt claims is controlled by senior Muslim Brotherhood figures

in Turkey. Like Qatar, Turkey has become a base for Muslim Brotherhood-aligned broadcasts into countries like Egypt.

While none of this is directly threatening to Israel, the stability of its Arab allies is obviously of tremendous concern. Moreover, the 2017 Arab blockade of Qatar, directly related to the latter’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood, undermined the ostensible united front against Iran and exacerbated the already tense relations of most Arab states with Turkey.

This Cold War also directly impacts Israel’s attempts to win official diplomatic recognition from other Muslim states aside from the UAE and Bahrain – which may only be possible if UAE-aligned factions in places like Libya and Sudan are victorious over their Turkish-backed political and military opponents.

TURKEY, LIBYA AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

There are several interconnected issues, each aggravating the other, that make up the conflict in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey on the one hand and almost every other country there on the other.

Foremost among these is the issue of the Exclusive Economic Zones

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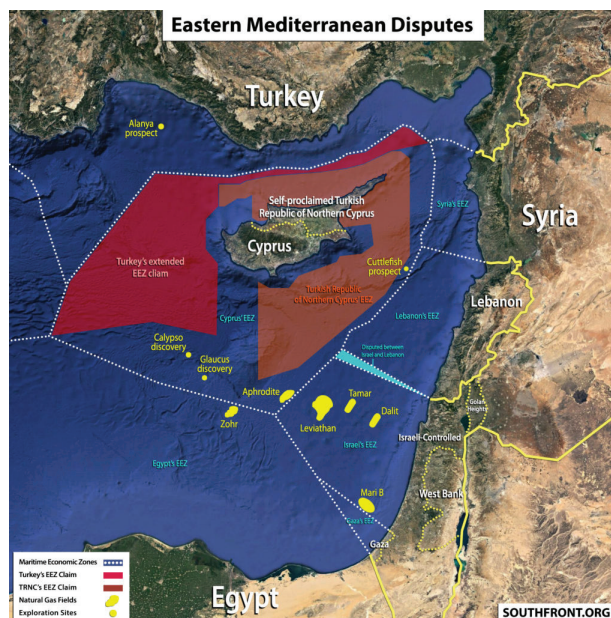
(EEZs), especially those of a myriad tiny Greek Islands off Turkey's coast, which have essentially confined Turkey's maritime zone to a small corner of the Mediterranean Sea. This is why Turkey has refused to sign up to the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which it is trying to circumvent, arguing islands cannot generate EEZs.

The second related problem revolves around the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), an internationally unrecognised entity Turkey established in the 1970s during a conflict with the then Greek junta over Cyprus. The island is still divided today despite decades of talks on reunification. Turkey has used its occupation to challenge Cyprus' EEZ by claiming one for the TRNC, while seeking to undermine more broadly Cyprus' claims to recently-discovered gas reserves and its cooperation with Greece, Israel, Egypt and others in the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF).

These gas discoveries have given impetus to an already-coalescing alliance between Israel, Egypt, Cyprus and Greece – encouraged by the US – that Turkey views as an attempt to cut it out of regional gas supply and contain it, particularly via the proposed EastMed pipeline that would bypass Turkey and carry gas to Europe.

Israel is still reportedly involved in talks with Turkey over gas, as it has been since 2017. Moreover, the viability of the EastMed Pipeline is questionable and remains theoretical for the time being. Turkey continues to carry out provocative drilling in Cyprus' EEZ, but there are no proven gas reserves in the area where it's drilling. The conflict, then, is less about gas per se and more about Turkey demonstrating it won't be excluded or contained.

Israel has also been increasing its trilateral military alliance with



Turkey has been aggressively trying to enforce expansive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) for both itself and the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” in the Mediterranean, including by drilling in internationally-recognised Cypriot waters

Cyprus and Greece, and the UAE, which has been partaking in exercises in Greece alongside Israel for several years, hosted a summit for Cyprus and Greece in late 2019. The US has also been increasing its military presence and deepening its alliance with Greece and Cyprus, even partially lifting the 1970s arms embargo on the latter as it reimposed an unofficial arms embargo on Turkey. A separate anti-Turkey alliance involving Egypt, the UAE, Greece, Cyprus and France was announced in 2020.

In Libya, Turkey and its proxy, the “Government of National Accord (GNA),” are locked in a temporarily-paused war with warlord Khalifa Haftar and his “Libyan National Army,” which has been attempting to take full control of the country for several years with the backing of the UAE, Egypt, Russia, France and others. As part of Turkey's intervention to halt Haftar's advance, it signed a farcical deal with the GNA delineating maritime borders that essentially gave Turkey full control of the eastern Mediterranean. This was obviously rejected by the international community and was followed by an equally far-fetched deal between Greece and Egypt on EEZs.

It is still unclear whether these activities are simply an opening gambit by Turkey intended to be bargained down during talks or whether Ankara actually intends to maintain these claims. With Turkey's growing military power, however, the provocations in the eastern Mediterranean against Greece and Cyprus are likely to become far worse and will inevitably implicate Israel.

TURKEY, SYRIA, IRAQ AND THE KURDS

Turkey's extensive occupation of areas of Iraq and Syria is often portrayed as part of an expansionist “neo-Ottoman” imperial policy, but it is in fact largely a function of its on-and-off war with the PKK and the massive refugee influxes from Syria since 2011 due to the depopulation campaigns by the Assad regime and its supporters. Turkey initially had a very proactive policy in Syria to overthrow the Assad regime by backing primarily Islamist rebel groups and encouraging a Muslim Brotherhood dominated opposition movement. The rise of the PKK in Syria, encouraged by the Assad regime and then supercharged by the alliance of its Syrian branch, the PYD, with the US against the Islamic State, appears to have changed Turkey's priorities. 2015 saw a PKK attempt to take over areas of Turkey. Since then, Turkey has focused primarily on limited invasions of territory controlled by PKK-affiliated groups to clear militants from its borders and forcibly return some of the approximately 4 million refugees it hosts.

In Iraq, Turkey has an extensive network of bases and tens of thousands of troops hunting the PKK in its primary base in Qandil and the north of the country, using its new-found drone capabilities to aggressively pursue the group.

Israel's current relationship with the PKK and associated groups is

unclear, although Israel is allegedly providing mainly humanitarian aid to Syrian Kurdish groups linked to the PKK. According to then-Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Tzipi Hotovely, Israel has also forcefully advocated on behalf of the Syrian Kurds to the US. “The possible collapse of the Kurdish hold in north Syria is a negative and dangerous scenario as far as Israel is concerned,” she said.

Israel was the only country to have publicly supported an independent Kurdish State in Iraq following a referendum there in 2017, a position which infuriated Erdogan and led him to accuse the Mossad of being involved in the independence referendum there. Israel’s natural and historical sympathy for Kurdish independence is unlikely to change regardless of the relationship with Turkey.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA

Israel and Turkey are both allies of Azerbaijan, and when the historical dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region flared into all-out conflict with Armenia recently, sophisticated Israeli drones that had been sold to Azerbaijan were front and centre. Israel is Azerbaijan’s largest arms supplier, and an “air train” has reportedly been established over the past few weeks for Azerbaijani Ministry of Defence cargo planes to fly to Israeli military bases.

Armenia, on the other hand, has had a historically close relationship with Iran, which has allegedly been shipping it arms. Iran is officially neutral in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and, like Russia, has presented itself as a mediator rather than participant. Officially, Iran, like Russia, recognises Nagorno-Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory.

On the other hand, some of the most serious IRGC and Hezbollah terrorist plots have been directed at Israeli assets and individuals in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has helped foil these, severely straining its rela-

tions with Iran. Furthermore, Iran’s penetration of Armenia’s economy is extensive, and Armenia has reportedly supplied weapons to the IRGC. The US even sanctioned Armenia-based companies for facilitating Mahan Air, a private Iranian airline which allegedly acts as the IRGC’s transport and logistics service.

It is Turkey that has apparently driven the most recent escalation, dispatching its Syrian mercenaries and drones to assist Azerbaijan. While there may be tacit coordination between Israel and Turkey in support of Azerbaijan, it is far more likely that Turkey is trying to edge out Israel. Azerbaijan is a crucial oil supplier for Israel, and became Turkey’s most important gas supplier in 2020, and Turkey may believe it can outbid Israel’s influence and use gas and oil supplies as a pressure point.

Ultimately, Turkey’s likely goal is to supplant the international group responsible for mediating the Armenia/Azerbaijan conflict since the 1990s, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group – co-chaired by the US, France, and Russia. It would like to replace it with a trilateral arrangement with Russia and Iran, similar to the “Astana” partnership between the three countries in Syria.

Turkey is likely to become more aggressive as it becomes more

powerful, and its hostility to Israel will remain a feature of its politics for the foreseeable future. In spite of this, outright Israeli conflict with Turkey is unlikely, and even Erdogan has shown cynical pragmatism in his relations with Israel and compartmentalised various elements of the relationship, such as trade and tourism. Yet judging from recent events, the more powerful Turkey becomes, the more this pragmatism will recede. Where necessary, Israel is capable of pushing back, directly or indirectly, and drawing its own red lines for Turkey’s brinkmanship across the region.

In terms of conventional military power, Turkey is much stronger than Iran, and could represent an existential challenge to Israel if it had the same genocidal, revolutionary intent that drives Iran. Thankfully, Erdogan’s actions to date do not match his venomous rhetoric. The challenge Turkey presents to Israel is that of a rising power ruled by an erratic dictator seeking to overturn a regional order of which Israel is a key element, not a revolutionary power like Iran which has made destroying Israel a key element of its *raison d’être*. As both Turkey and Israel have demonstrated, regardless of the rhetoric and ideological conflict, it should still be possible to maintain some sort of relationship and avoid direct clashes.

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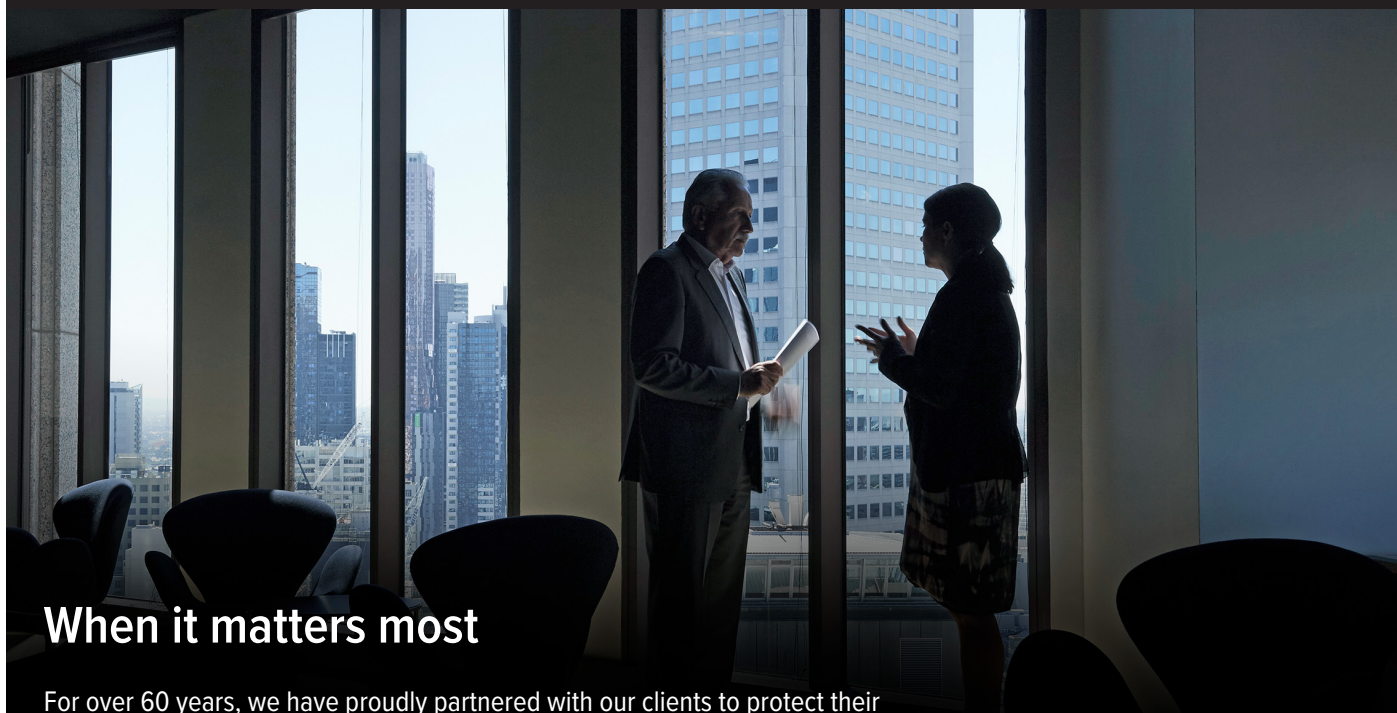
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THE MONTH IN MEDIA

A DAY OFF

The 20th anniversary of the start of the Palestinian campaign of terror against Israel known as the “Second Intifada” was marked by the *Daily Telegraph*’s “On this Day” column (Sept. 28) which stated:

“2000 – Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon visits the al-Aqsa mosque site in Jerusalem, known as Temple Mount, affronting Palestinians and causing a revolt in which more than 6500 die.”

Even allowing for the brevity of the section, this is grossly simplistic and biased.

Many Palestinian leaders have admitted that after rejecting an Israeli offer at the Camp David peace summit in July 2000 to establish a Palestinian state, then-Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat issued orders to prepare for a campaign of terror and incitement. Sharon’s visit was an excuse. And what followed was not a “revolt” but a campaign of terrorism supported by the elected Palestinian Authority government.

NOT SO SWEET RECONCILIATION

The *Australian*’s report (Sept. 26) on Hamas and Fatah announcing an agreement to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in the next six months offered clues as to why the Israel-Palestinian conflict endures.

The *AFP*-sourced report noted that the last Palestinian parliamentary poll in 2006 “resulted in a brief unity government, but it soon collapsed and in 2007 bloody clashes erupted in the Gaza Strip between the two principal Palestinian factions. Hamas has since ruled Gaza, while Fatah has run the Palestinian Authority based in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Numerous attempts at reconciliation, including a prisoner exchange agreement in 2012 and a short-lived coalition government two years later, have failed to close the rift. Including PLO elections, the agreement paves the way for Hamas to join the organisation, which unites various Palestinian factions under Fatah.”

Senior Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi was quoted saying new elections were a “long overdue” move to “revitalise and unify Palestinian ranks” whilst Saleh al-Arouri, a top Hamas official, said, “Divisions have damaged our national cause and we are working to end that.”

It is obvious that political divisions have rendered a single Palestinian position for peace talks with Israel impossible, so the question of what might follow any election process, if it actually eventuates, is unclear.

MIXED MESSAGES

SBS TV “World News” reporter Omar Dehen’s story (Sept. 25) on the Fatah-Hamas election announcement included Fatah senior official Jibril Rajoub saying, “restoring our national unity is a strategic end. Dialogue is the only course to take.”

Rajoub – who infamously said he would drop a nuclear bomb on Israel if given the chance – was clearly not referencing trying to end the conflict by talking to Israelis at the negotiating table.

Dehen said, “the rivals have united in their opposition to Israel’s plans to annex parts of the West Bank, and its deals with Arab states Bahrain and the UAE to normalise relations.”

Although Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu has insisted that plans to extend Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank have only been suspended,

it is widely understood that they are very unlikely to happen anytime soon, if at all.

STOP CATERING TO THE PALESTINIANS

In the *Australian* (Oct. 12), Menzies Research Centre executive director Nick Cater highlighted the need to stop funding the Palestinian leadership which refuses to end the conflict with Israel.

Increasing the number of Arab countries that make peace with Israel “ill suits” the Palestinian leadership, “which has turned a historical grievance into a successful business model. Their vested interest in perpetuating resentment has been one of the largest obstacles to peace. Now it finds itself out in the cold.”

He highlighted media reports that “financial aid [to the Palestinians] from Arab Gulf states has dried up since March,” whilst “Ramallah’s total revenues are said to have fallen about 70 per cent this year to \$US255m from \$US500m.”

In contrast, left-leaning Western political parties “are loath to recognise the significance of Trump’s initiative... unless an incoming Democrat administration... adopts” Trump’s approach, Cater argued.

A GULF APART

An *SBS TV* “World News” report (Sept. 23) on the annual world leaders’ speeches to the UN General Assembly focused on the ongoing conflict over the 2015 Iran nuclear deal which the US left in 2018.

After featuring critical comments at the UN by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and French President Emmanuel Macron directed at the US

stance, SBS reporter Matt Connellan pointed out that, “the UN General Assembly has long been a forum for taking a pot shot at the US.”

On Sept. 25, an *Australian* report noted Saudi Arabia’s King Salman’s comments to the UN, citing Iranian attacks on its oilfields in 2019, whilst the “kingdom’s hands were extended to Iran in peace with a positive and open attitude over the past decades, but to no avail.”

A BIT OF AN IMPOSITION

On Sept. 27, the *Daily Telegraph* reported on Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas’ speech to

the United Nations General Assembly in which he called on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to convene an international conference in 2021 that will “have full authority to launch a genuine peace process based on international law.”

For a decade, Abbas has attempted to internationalise the conflict in the hope an imposed solution – preferably involving the automatic pro-Palestinian majority at the UN – will force Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank without the need for the Palestinians to actually make peace.

COMING UPTRUMPS

A number of media commentators argued US President Donald Trump has not been given the credit he deserves for his foreign policy achievements.

In News Corp papers (Oct. 1), columnist Andrew Bolt wrote that, “List some of his achievements and you’d swear they were of some peacenik president — a Jimmy Carter, but with talent... Trump is the first president since Carter not to send US troops to a new war, and has pulled them out of Syria. He’s helped to negotiate many more peace deals than most other presidents — between Israel and the United Arab Emirates,



AND OUT OF IN PARLIAMENT

Minister for Foreign Affairs **Marise Payne** (Lib., NSW) in a media release – Oct. 4 – “Today I announce the appointment of Mr Paul Griffiths as Australia’s next Ambassador to Israel.

“Australia and Israel have a close relationship underpinned by strong historical connections and significant people-to-people links. Australia’s vibrant and active Jewish community has made an enduring contribution to the warmth of the bilateral relationship. Australia established diplomatic relations with the newly-formed State of Israel in 1949... Australia and Israel have developed substantial cooperation since then, with recently increased engagement on innovation and technology, and enhanced defence and security links. We also have a growing trade and investment relationship, driven by Australia’s innovation Landing Pad in Tel Aviv and our Trade and Defence Office in Jerusalem... I thank outgoing Ambassador Chris Cannan for his contributions to advancing Australia’s interests in Israel since 2017.”

Senator **Kimberley Kitching** (ALP, VIC) giving the keynote address to a United Nations Roundtable on implementing standards and norms for peace and security looking forward to the UN’s 100th anniversary – Sept. 24 – “The only country that is regularly condemned by the UNHRC [United Nations Human Rights Council] for alleged human rights abuses is Israel, which is the only country subject to a standing agenda item... “Israel is the only country in the Middle East with free elections, free media, free trade unions, free civil society, freedom for all religions, and freedom for women and for LGBTI people. Yet it is regularly condemned by a Council dominated by countries which have none of these things and which demand a far higher moral standard by other states than they do of themselves.”

Senator **Janet Rice** (Greens, VIC) at the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee hearing into Australia’s

Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2020 and Australia’s Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Bill 2020 – Oct. 13 – “I’m particularly interested in the NTEU’s [National Tertiary Education Union] thoughts... on what the impact of this legislation would be, potentially, on academic freedom, particularly on issues... where civil society may not agree with the foreign policy positions of our government. I’m thinking, particularly, of our US policy or our policy on the relationship with Israel and Palestine.”

Jamie Parker (Greens, Balmain) in NSW Parliament – Sept. 17 – “We need to stand against antisemitism and the scourge of Islamophobia where just last month an Australian terrorist—that is right, an Australian; it is an issue that we need to face... was sentenced to life in prison for murdering 51 Muslims in attacks in Christchurch. Speaking out is especially important when it comes to incitement to violence by white supremacists and extremists like Jim Saleam [chairman of the Australia First Party] or Ismail al-Wahwah [leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia].”

Natalie Ward MLC (Lib., Northern Province) in NSW Parliament – Sept. 15 – “In 2017 Ismail al-Wahwah, the leader of the radical fringe Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir, spouted a number of statements... targeted at the Jewish community... They talked about knives, infidels and beheading... On 29 July this year Ismail al-Wahwah emerged from the dark cave of hatred in which he resides to repost his vile hate speech from 2017 on a YouTube channel... I call out this hateful, violent, offensive behaviour. No matter your religion, your faith or what you believe in, there is never an excuse to incite violence against anyone in our community, particularly based on their faith.”

Defence Minister Senator **Linda Reynolds** (Lib., WA) on Twitter – Oct. 16 – “Shalom! Earlier this week I had a productive bilateral meeting with Israeli Defence Minister [Benny Gantz]. We explored opportunities to enhance our dynamic bilateral relationship – including advancing opportunities for both our defence industries.”

between Israel and Bahrain, and between Afghanistan and the Taliban.

“He’s also just brokered a deal between Serbia and Kosovo, which fought each other in a savage ethnic war just 21 years ago. How could the left not applaud this? No wonder Trump now has three nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize, which he won’t get, of course, because he’s well, Trump.”

Elsewhere, in the *Australian Financial Review* (Oct. 2), Lowy non-resident fellow Thomas Wright said, “Trump’s re-election would initially be broadly welcomed in Israel and the Arab world, where leaders accept his maximum pressure campaign on Iran, his indifference towards democracy and human rights, and his transactional nature. However, Trump has made it clear that he hopes to strike a deal with Iran on its nuclear program and that he has little commitment to supporting the regional order.”

TRUMP WINS RELIGIOUS VOTE

Australian Foreign Editor Greg Sheridan noted (Oct. 17) the paradox that the “vast majority of churchgoing Christians, Protestant and Catholic, and the overwhelming majority of Orthodox Jews, will vote for Donald Trump on November 3, just as they did four years ago,” despite the “ethical case against Trump” being “substantial”.

Sheridan said, “most surveys suggest Trump will win the votes of nearly 90 per cent of Orthodox Jews, though he will lose among Jews overall.”

Leftist opposition to the Supreme Court nomination for Judge Amy Coney Barrett, a practising Catholic, is an example of why Trump has the backing of these different religious groups despite his ethical shortcomings, Sheridan said.

Barrett, he said, is “an immensely distinguished legal academic” and “a legal conservative” whose “approach is

to interpret the constitution, and the law, as it is written” and more likely to respect the principle of religious freedom, rather than to “discover secret, hidden, implied new rights in the Constitution which accord with contemporary left-liberal ideology and compel people and institutions to abide by that ideology.”

IDA KNOWS

In the *Spectator Australia* (Oct. 10), Ida Lichter detailed how the EU, China and Russia have refused to hold Iran accountable for its “egregious” human rights abuses, arming foreign proxies and the breaches of the 2015 nuclear deal.

Lichter said Iran’s development of missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead has accelerated since the 2015 deal, with the signatories “averse to penalising Iran or renegotiating a tighter agreement.”

Recently, she said, “the UK, France and Germany (E3) abstained [on voting at the UN Security Council to extend the conventional arms embargo on Iran], despite being targets of Hezbollah terrorism and depots for the militia’s weapons and ammonium nitrate explosives.”

These stances have contributed to a “prudent alliance against Iran... formed between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain,” she wrote.

SANCTION JUNCTION

On Sept. 23, the *Australian’s* report on US moves to impose secondary sanctions on companies that sell dual use equipment to Iran “that has civilian applications but that might be used for military purposes” quoted US special representative for Iran and Venezuela and past AIJAC guest Elliott Abrams warning countries “to think twice, the penalties are right around the corner.”

An Oct. 10 *Australian* report noted further sanctions on Iran’s banking industry and US Secretary of State

Mike Pompeo’s statement that Iran’s COVID-19 response will not be hampered because the new measures do not affect humanitarian aid.

CHEWIN’ THE FATWA

On *ABC Radio National* “Religion and Ethics Report” (Sept. 23), Monash University lecturer Dr. Ali Alizadeh expressed doubt that increased US sanctions on Iran will make it easier for hardliners to portray President Hassan Rouhani’s tenure as ending in failure.

“I don’t know how much resonance it would have with the average Iranian voter, because many of them would have never expected for any regime in Iran to be able to normalise relations with the US or, in fact, for any regime in the US to be favourable to Iran,” Alizadeh said.

Host Andrew West asked if it was naïve to believe in a *fatwa* Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei allegedly issued on acquiring nuclear weapons.

Dr. Alizadeh said, “if the nuclear weapons exist, they exist to be used not in order to bomb people, but to intimidate people... that’s why all sorts of people from all sorts of religious backgrounds have developed nuclear weapons because it can be used to pressurise and coerce one’s regional rivals, especially in economic and trade matters. And the regime feels that if they become a nuclear power, then their position domestically will be stabilised and that regionally also they will be able to further intimidate the regional rivals. First and foremost, the Saudis.”

The truth is that the assertion that Khamenei issued a *fatwa* against nuclear weapons is unsupported by any solid evidence – it is nowhere in his official list of *fatwas* – and is an Iranian propaganda claim pushed by those wanting to pretend Iran is not seeking nuclear weapons despite truly overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

POLITICAL SAIKAL

On *ABC Radio National* “Drive” (Oct. 12), academic Amin Saikal suggested that a recent order by Iran for Iraqi Shi’ite militias to “lay low” was meant to deny President Trump an excuse to confront Iran for political gain ahead of the Presidential elections.

According to Saikal, “I wouldn’t be surprised if Iran has instructed its affiliated Shia militias in Iraq to lay low and don’t cause major obstructions, which could possibly result in a confrontation between Iran and the United States. And of course, this would be at a time when the United States or the Trump Administration may well seek some sort of confrontation with Iran given the forthcoming elections in the United States.”

In fact, the record shows that Trump has spent his whole term of office studiously avoiding any direct, large scale military confrontations with Iran, preferring economic sanctions and small targeted actions such as the hit on Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad early this year.

THE WING THING

In the *Australian* (Oct. 12), Swinburne academic Jason Thomas called on Australia to follow the UK and proscribe Hezbollah in its entirety, saying “it’s a pipe dream to believe there is a difference between the political and military wing.”

Just as AIJAC has done for many years, Thomas quoted Hezbollah leaders to support this point, including the head of its parliamentary bloc Mohammad Raad, who said in 2013, “the Hezbollah military wing is a lie invented by the Europeans because they feel a need to communicate with us” and Hezbollah’s second-in-command, Naim Qassem’ statement that “The same leadership that directs the parliamentary and government work also leads jihad actions in the struggle against Israel.”

Possessing an “arsenal” that would be the “envy of any small nation”, Hezbollah is responsible for attacks on Jews, Israelis and Americans and “for years the group has been making plans and stockpiling weapons for attacks across the globe, including in Africa, Asia, Europe and North and South America,” he wrote.

Meanwhile, the *Australian*’s report (Oct. 16) that Israel and Lebanon held unprecedented negotiations to demarcate the countries’ maritime borders noted that “Hezbollah and Amal issued a statement... bemoaning the presence of civilians in the Lebanese negotiating team.”

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

ABC Radio National “Breakfast” (Oct. 19) asked Stockholm International Peace Research Institute senior researcher Pieter Wezeman about the significance of the arms embargo on Iran ending.

Wezeman said even before the COVID-19 crisis, Iran’s economy was in bad shape, so there is little prospect for large spending.

Iran would most likely continue to develop its native arms industry, particularly missiles which “don’t have to be hi-tech to be effective if you want to threaten your neighbours,” he explained.

RAH! RAH! UNRWA!

An online *Guardian Australia* story (Oct. 12) claiming people in Gaza are so desperate for food they have taken to rummaging through garbage was a puff piece spruiking the controversial United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) – which has provided free aid, medical assistance, education and employment to Palestinians since 1949, but has also become a major obstacle to peace.

According to the report, UNRWA is facing a myriad of challenges, including, “seemingly permanent threat of financial ruin...[a] breakdown

in the relationship with its former largest donor, the US... the threat of coronavirus ripping through refugee camps... home to many of the 5.6 million Palestinians supported by UNRWA.”

The reality is that, since 1949, instead of fulfilling its original mandate to resettle Palestinian Arabs displaced in the 1948 war, UNRWA has let millions of their descendants inherit refugee status, even when they have citizenship in countries such as Jordan or live under Palestinian Authority rule. It also shamelessly promotes the legally baseless and politically impossible Palestinian “right of return” to Israel, thus becoming a major obstacle to a two-state peace, and has a history of facilitating terrorism and incitement via its institutions.

JUST CAPITAL

The ABC has confirmed it does not consider Tel Aviv to be Israel’s capital, after AIJAC pointed out to the national broadcaster cases where the national broadcaster said it was.

Writing to the ABC, AIJAC pointed out two instances.

A newsreader on the *ABC TV* 6pm news bulletin (Oct. 4) covering anti-government protests in Israel had claimed “the biggest demonstrations have been held in the capital, Tel Aviv.” In addition, a similar claim had been on the ABC website since December 2018 when Australia recognised west Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

AIJAC’s letter pointed out that, “Tel Aviv is not Israel’s capital and no Israeli government has ever designated the city as the country’s capital,” adding that, “Although the overwhelming majority of countries keep their embassies in Tel Aviv, none of them classify the city as Israel’s capital either.”

The ABC apologised and said the incorrect references were removed from the online version of the Oct. 4 TV news bulletin and the 2018 webpage.

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM

Media shockwaves from the historic Abraham Accords signed by Bahrain and the UAE with Israel on Sept. 15 continued to ripple out well into October.

On *ABC Radio National* “Saturday Extra” (Sept. 26), former Palestinian Authority legal adviser Diana Bhuttu said the accords are “not peace agreements...because there was no state of war,” adding, “you can’t normalise with a country that isn’t normal.”

Bhuttu dismissed host Geraldine Doogue’s question about Palestinian rejection of Israeli offers to create a Palestinian state, accusing Israel of never having attempted to “decolonise”, i.e. unilaterally uprooting settlements and withdrawing its army.

Except, it tried that in Gaza in 2005, but Hamas quickly usurped control and turned the territory into a terrorist base.

Bhuttu claimed Israel rejected the March 2002 Saudi peace plan which offered Israel peace and normalisation with all Arab countries in exchange for an ending “their military rule and... colonisation.”

The Saudi plan – issued on a take it or leave it basis at the height of the Second Intifada – was actually similar in many ways to Israeli offers the Palestinian Authority rejected, except it included language insisting on the legally baseless Palestinian “right of return” incompatible with a genuine two-state peace.

Bhuttu also absurdly claimed that Palestinians and Arabs have never “denied... Jewish attachment to the land.”

Following Bhuttu, US academic Rashid Khalidi was less bombastic but equally maximalist in his ideological positions.

Dismissing the UAE and Bahrain as “regimes”, he suggested normalisation with Israel was dishonourable, and lamented the PLO’s signing of the Oslo Accords which “cemented occupation”.

Apparently referring to the late King Hussein of Jordan and President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, he said “this is not the first time that unpopular or undemocratic, in many cases hated Arab regimes, have entered into agreements with Israel.”

On *ABC Radio National* “Saturday Extra” (Oct. 3), Kuwait University’s Bader Mousa Al-Saif told Doogue that Kuwait will be “the last Arab country to normalise” because there is “huge pro-Palestinian support... so trying to change that will not come as easily as... in other Gulf capitals.”

Doogue noted that the Palestinians “were suspected of

“Alex Ryvchin said the Accords have shattered the ‘idea that normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab states was inseparable from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process’”

supporting” Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and “many Palestinians living in Kuwait fled during and immediately after the Gulf War.”

Al-Saif said not all Palestinians supported the invasion but “reducing the presence of Palestinians after liberation” and engagement at the official level whilst maintaining humanitarian aid “speaks to the farsightedness of Kuwaiti policymaking.”

Kuwait’s rulers were so “farsighted” that today there are only 80,000 Palestinians living in Kuwait, down from 400,000 in 1990.

On the same program, Lowy Institute analyst Rodger Shanahan said the UAE signing was “certainly significant...perhaps less so Bahrain” and predicted “a couple of other more fringe countries” might follow but not “Kuwait or Saudi Arabia.”

An informative and balanced *ABC Radio National* “Rear Vision” program on Oct. 4 explored the evolving attitudes of Arab countries towards Israel from 1948 till 2020.

In the *Spectator Australia* (Oct. 17), Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-CEO Alex Ryvchin said the Accords have shattered the “idea that normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab states was inseparable from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process” and undermined foreign policy experts, such as Obama-era US Secretary of State John Kerry, who insisted in 2016: “There will be no separate peace between Israel and the Arab world. I want to make that very clear to all of you... Everybody needs to understand that.”

Ryvchin said, “The possibility that the Arab world might be fatigued with the Palestinian issue was not one Kerry was willing to entertain. To do so would upend conventional wisdom in the Washington and European foreign policy establishments.”

Reports about the official Israeli delegation which travelled to Bahrain to sign a communique establishing formal diplomatic ties between the two countries ran only on the ABC website (Oct. 19) and in the *Canberra Times* (Oct. 20).

SBS’s website reported on the Trump Administration’s push to convince Sudan to make peace with Israel by using the “leverage” of removing it from the US State Sponsor of Terrorism list. The story noted that “Sudan’s top general, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, in February held a landmark meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Uganda.”

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

EX CATHEDRA

Some years ago, well before interfaith dialogue was commonplace, a group of senior Jewish and Christian leaders met in Sydney.

There had been a number of reports of preaching which featured antisemitic stereotypes and the circulation of material in churches which could inflame not just contempt but hatred.

Out of goodwill, the churchmen (they were all male) suggested that it would be worthwhile discussing how we could work together to break down stereotypes and sow the seeds for cooperation on a wider agenda.

We did not come together to agree on theology, to endorse social policy platforms or seek to alter political opinions, but to address an evil we all saw as a problem which needed to be confronted.

All was going well until one of the Jewish participants noted that in some of the anti-Israel propaganda circulating at the time was a claim that, just as Jews poisoned the wells of Christians in the Middle Ages and spread the Black Death, Jews were today poisoning the water sources of Arabs.

One of the church leaders, who was a figure of some national prominence, said that this was not antisemitism as it was plausible and, when pressed, argued that it was well-known Jews had poisoned Christians throughout history.

His colleagues then temporarily adjourned the meeting, before returning and letting us know their now-unanimous view that this was, indeed, an antisemitic slur.

Fast forward to another meeting between Jewish and Christian leaders a decade later, where the subject of discussion was a document one Australian church had circulated which contained demonstrable untruths and thinly-veiled antisemitic caricatures when talking about Israelis.

In the context of a constructive attempt to find ways to not just set things right in terms of the false information, but to also develop a relationship which would limit

the prospects of this recurring, the author of the document explained his actions in a way which the Jewish (and some

Christian) participants found shocking, even morally repugnant.

The document's compiler said that he was acting in the appropriate manner for a person who adopted the "solidarity model" of advocacy. In this template, he explained, you identify the oppressed and the oppressor. You then do everything you can to support the oppressed against the oppressor.

"Even lie?", I asked. Yes, you can say anything to support the oppressed, including play fast and loose with the truth, he informed us. The looks on the faces in the room told me that the majority had no idea they had a colleague who thought truth was expendable in a church publication.

I should mention that the people central to the above incidents were both among those who would be regarded as progressive. Meanwhile, many analyses of the prob-

lem of antisemitism in churches have observed the acceptance of antisemitic conspiracy theories and the regurgitation of anti-Jewish tropes is a rapidly growing problem in the most extreme right-wing groups on the Christian spectrum.

A common theme running through much of the antisemitism of the progressive and reactionary Christians is

the idea that some incredibly powerful force, labelled "International Zionism," but with no relationship to Zionism as it is rationally understood, is an existential enemy of all which is good.

The idea that Judaism was superseded when Christianity emerged – often with the associated concept that Jews are theologically destined to forever wander the world and suffer a variety of indignities as a result of rejecting "the Truth" – is a staple for a spectrum of antisemitic Christians.

Within the very broad church which is contemporary Christianity, the battles between those who have neutral or positive views of Jews and those who see Jews as enemies are being fought on many levels, in many different ways.

These issues will be contested within the churches, among those with the same broad beliefs and philosophical and cultural understandings.

The outcomes will reveal much about the integrity and moral foundations of those who identify as Christians.



Claims of Jewish culpability in the Black Death find echoes in modern accusations against Israel



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