

A photograph of Joe Biden and Naftali Bennett shaking hands. Biden is on the right, wearing a dark suit and a light blue tie. Bennett is on the left, wearing a dark suit and a striped tie. They are standing in front of several American flags.

BIDEN: HIS TIME

A new US administration and its
potential new Middle East policies

ISRAEL “CANCELLED”

How the Jewish state came to be
at the centre of a new intellectual
mythology **PAGE 31**

MULTICULTURALISM UNDER FIRE

Challenges to this
key Australian policy
in 2020 **PAGE 22**

VIEW FROM THE UAE

An Emirati diplomat
explains her country's
vision for regional
peace..... **PAGE 25**

FANNING THE FLAMES

Turkey and Pakistan
the key drivers behind
a new wave of Islamist
outrage **PAGE 26**

SH.V



SH.V
SURRY HILLS
 VILLAGE

A new Surry Hills Village story

A limited collection of Residences.

DISPLAY GALLERY BY APPOINTMENT ONLY
 SURRYHILLSVILLAGE.COM.AU
 1800 554 556

 **TOGA**
 ESTABLISHED 1963

WITH COMPLIMENTS



FOR A BETTER WORLD

EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition looks at the potential foreign policy of the incoming Biden administration in the US – specifically with respect to the Middle East.

It includes a comprehensive guide to the Biden camp's policy statements on Israel, the Palestinians, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Middle East issues compiled by BICOM, and a look at Joe Biden's general relationship with Israel from Amotz Asa-El. In addition, Ahron Shapiro reports positive signs on the health of bipartisan support for Israel in the US, while Israel Kasnett hears from some top experts about how Biden's team might handle the Iran nuclear challenge.

Also featured this month is Naomi Levin on the unique challenges Australian Multiculturalism faced this year as a key government policy. Plus, veteran reporter Matti Friedman looks at how Israel ended up being at the core of the new "cancel culture" rocking campuses and intellectual circles.

And don't miss: Jonathan Spyer on the new leading role of Turkey and Pakistan in stirring up international Islamist outrage, UAE diplomat Hend Al Otaiba giving her country's perspective on regional peace prospects, and Jeremy Jones' thoughts on a strange campaign against the most widely-respected definition of antisemitism.

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

Tzvi Fleischer

CONTENTS

FEATURE STORIES

BIDEN: HIS TIME

BY BICOM

President-elect Joe Biden will confront a much-changed region from the one during his days as Vice President under President Obama PAGE 12

ARE ISRAELI WORRIES ABOUT BIDEN JUSTIFIED?

BY AMOTZ ASA EL PAGE 15

WILL BIDEN FOLLOW OBAMA ON IRAN?

BY ISRAEL KASNETT PAGE 17

BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL A WINNER

BY AHRON SHAPIRO PAGE 19

AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURALISM 2020

Challenges to a key policy in an extraordinary year
BY NAOMI LEVIN PAGE 22

REGIONAL PEACE : VIEW FROM THE UAE

BY HEND AL OTAIBA PAGE 25

TURKEY AND PAKISTAN FANNING THE FLAMES

BY JONATHAN SPYER PAGE 26

CONSPIRACY THEORIES: AN UPDATE

BY RAN PORAT PAGE 28

BIBLIO FILE: FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP

BY JONATHAN SCHANZER PAGE 30

ESSAY: YOU'RE ALL ISRAEL NOW

The Jewish state and "Cancel Culture"
BY MATTI FRIEDMAN PAGE 31



ON THE COVER

Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (L) shakes hands with US Vice President Joe Biden during their meeting at Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem March 9, 2010. IGPO/REUTERS/Ronen Zvulun



REGULAR COLUMNS

FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN PAGE 4

WORD FOR WORD PAGE 5

SCRIBBLINGS

TZVI FLEISCHER PAGE 6

DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

SETH FRANTZMAN PAGE 7

ASIA WATCH

MICHAEL SHANNON PAGE 8

EUROPA EUROPA

DOUGLAS DAVIS PAGE 9

BEHIND THE NEWS PAGE 10

STRANGER THAN FICTION PAGE 11

NOTED AND QUOTED PAGE 35

IN PARLIAMENT PAGE 36


MEDIA MICROSCOPE

ALLON LEE PAGE 39

THE LAST WORD

JEREMY JONES PAGE 40

HOW TO USE OUR INTERACTIVE EDITION

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

Australia/Israel Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Policy Analysts**OVED LOBEL, JUDY MAYNARD****Associate Director of Public Affairs****JOEL BURNIE****National Media & Public Affairs
Officer****ARIEL ZOHAR****Multimedia Designer****AREK DYBEL****Events Coordinator****HELEN BRUSTMAN OAM****Administration**MELBOURNE: **ROSEMARY SANDLER,****RENA LANGBERG**SYDNEY: **LOUISE DE MESQUITA****Israel Liaison****PETER ADLER****Founding Chairmen**

ISADOR MAGID AM (OBM)

ROBERT ZABLUD (OBM)

HEAD OFFICE

Level 1, 22 Albert Road,
South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia

Telephone: (03) 9681 6660

Fax: (03) 9681 6650

Email: aijac@aijac.org.au**SYDNEY OFFICE**

140 William Street
East Sydney, NSW 2011, Australia

Telephone: (02) 9360 5415

Email: ldemesquita@aijac.org.au**SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Please send all remittances, changes of
address and subscription inquiries to:

Australia/Israel Review

Level 1, 22 Albert Road

South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia

ISSN No. 1442-3693

Print Post Approved – 100007869

www.aijac.org.au

FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN

A TIME OF TRANSITION

The time between the Nov. 3 US presidential election and the Jan. 20 inauguration of a new president is, as is well known, the transition period. It is a phase in which outgoing President Donald Trump could spring a number of surprises.

His reluctance so far to concede the election to President-elect Joe Biden has complicated the current transition and unfortunately may diminish the legacy of a number of his Administration's dramatically positive and path-breaking contributions to US foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East.

Especially problematic for his Administration's positive Middle East legacy is his questionable decision to draw down major portions of the US troop presence in both Afghanistan and Iraq before Jan. 20 – which can only embolden dangerous actors such as the Taliban in Afghanistan and the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias in Iraq.

While Trump was the quintessential Washington outsider, and Obama also a relative newcomer, Biden is one of DC's best-connected political insiders, whose career took root in a legislative era that operated with far more comity and bipartisanship than is evident today.

Moreover, as veteran Washington Middle East expert Dennis Ross, who worked alongside Biden in the Obama administration, recently pointed out, Biden has a long history of "figuring out how to manage disagreements and work them out" – of being a broker of compromises.

Biden is a self-professed "Zionist", whose deeply felt support for Israel and knowledge of the Jewish state's security dilemmas is not in doubt. Hopefully, then, he will use his leadership role to help shepherd the US political centre back into the familiar pastures of broad-based, bipartisan, pro-Israel consensus that was the status quo until recent years.

While the Obama administration in which he served certainly contributed to the breaking of that consensus through its conscious policy of seeking "daylight" from the Israeli government, and a stubborn determination to reach an agreement with Iran on almost any terms in the face of Israeli opposition, a return to that negative, clinical and inept approach under Biden seems unlikely.

It is worth recalling that, as Ross says of the Obama years, "vice president Biden was a consistent questioner of those who wanted to put pressure on Israel... He would constantly say, 'it's OK for us to ask Israel to do things, but it can't be that we're asking only Israel to do things.'"

While growing elements of the Democratic party are extremely critical of Israel and of the Israel-US relationship, happily these elements were weakened by a poor electoral showing (see p. 19). Biden should therefore be free to navigate a path consistent with his natural pro-Israel inclinations.

Additionally, realities have changed significantly since the Obama years. Biden has publicly supported the US-brokered normalisation agreements between Israel and Arab countries and promised to continue the momentum. These agreements mean that the Palestinian issue is no longer acting as the roadblock it has long been to progress on various issues across the Middle East, and Israel is today effectively a key part of a tacit regional alliance of moderate Sunni Arab states, united by common fears of aggressive regional actors Iran and Turkey and their respective proxies.

While Biden has said he will renew ties with the Palestinian Authority broken by the Trump Administration, he has also pledged to make US aid to the Palestinian Authority conditional on its ending financial support for convicted terrorists.

Anyone with the long foreign policy experience that Biden has would surely understand that a two-state Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement is not on the cards in the short term. However, a promising route to help achieve it in the longer term is to continue to expand the circle of normalisation between Israel and its Arab neighbours, thus providing a potential Arab framework of support and mediation for a deal down the track, as well as a Palestinian reality check.

Meanwhile, Israelis, their Arab neighbours and many other policy watchers concerned about the Middle East will be observing the Biden administration's potentially more demanding approach to Turkey and particularly its Iran policy with intense interest.

Biden has expressed a desire to have the US re-join the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal with Iran – providing Iran also returns to full compliance. Afterwards, his policy is to seek to assemble multilateral diplomatic pressure on Iran to improve and expand the nuclear deal to address Iran's ballistic missile program, curtail Iran's aggressive subversion and support for terrorism and also extend the JCPOA's sunset provisions that would remove most barriers to Iranian nuclear development within a few years.

The JCPOA's terms, as written, are too fundamentally

“Biden's very different leadership style, and divergent policy emphases, do not mean he can't build on some of the Trump Administration's major achievements”

flawed to ever adequately deal with the Iranian nuclear threat. Nonetheless, the Biden administration's policy of return to compliance, followed by renegotiation and expansion, could be somewhat effective – providing it recognises that the economic pressure on the Iranian regime built up under the Trump Administration is its best asset.

Only a minority of the Trump Administration's extensive suite of sanctions on Teheran are specifically nuclear-related. Thus, Biden can offer to lift all nuclear-related sanctions on Iran for a return to full compliance with the JCPOA, while maintaining strong additional sources of leverage on the regime via the non-nuclear sanctions.

Furthermore, Biden hopes to be more effective than Trump in recruiting European allies to support his new strategy of improving and extending the nuclear deal – which could indeed help increase the pressure on Teheran.

The Trump Administration's Persian Gulf and Middle East regional policies were some of its most successful. Biden's very different leadership style, and divergent policy emphases, do not mean he can't build on some of the Trump Administration's major achievements. On the contrary, Biden may be well placed to do so – providing his administration is prepared to acknowledge the profoundly changed realities in the Middle East since 2016, and adjust US policies accordingly.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

“Congratulations @JoeBiden and @KamalaHarris. Joe, we've had a long & warm personal relationship for nearly 40 years, and I know you as a great friend of Israel. I look forward to working with both of you to further strengthen the special alliance between the US and Israel.”

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu congratulates US president-elect Joe Biden (Twitter, Nov. 8).

“The president-elect thanked the prime minister for his congratulations and reiterated his steadfast support for Israel's security and its future as a Jewish and democratic state... [He] looks forward to working with Israel to build an ever stronger partnership between our two countries.”

Statement from the Biden transition team following phone calls between Biden and Netanyahu and Biden and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin (New York Post, Nov. 18).

“We will take immediate steps to restore economic and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, reopen the US consulate in East

Jerusalem, and work to reopen the PLO mission in Washington.”

US vice president-elect Kamala Harris, speaking prior to the US election (Al-Arabiya, Nov. 3).

“Against the backdrop of the talks [PA President] Mahmoud Abbas held about Israel's commitment to signed agreements with us, and based on official written and oral messages we received, which prove Israel's commitment, the ties with Israel will return to their previous state.”

Palestinian Authority Civil Affairs Minister Hussein al-Sheikh (Times of Israel, Nov. 18).

“Even though some govts started a treacherous, contemptible move toward normalising relations with the Zionists, they're too small to end the matter of #Palestine. No! Palestine will be free, while the fake Zionist regime will perish. There's no doubt about this.”

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Twitter, Nov. 3).

“I'm saddened by the death of Saeb Erekat. Saeb dedicated his life to his people. Reaching peace is my destiny, he used to say. Being sick, he texted me: 'I'm not finished with what I was born to do.' My deepest condolences to the Palestinians and his family.”

Former Israeli Foreign Minister and peace negotiator Tzipi Livni (Times of Israel, Nov. 10).





SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

AL-QAEDA IN IRAN

On Nov. 13 the *New York Times* reported that, according to intelligence officials, on Aug. 7 Israeli operatives working at the behest of the United States had killed Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah in Teheran. Abdullah is better known as Abu Muhammad al-Masri, and was al-Qaeda's second in command, first in line to succeed current al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, himself rumoured to have died a month ago.

Al-Masri has been indicted in the US as the alleged mastermind behind the bombings of the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, which killed 224 people. Israeli sources say he had been planning attacks on Israeli and Jewish Diaspora targets when he was killed.

The information about this assassination in August raises a lot of potential political implications and questions – why was this news leaked now, what does it say about Israel's intelligence capabilities and cooperation with the US, etc.? However, perhaps the most important thing to note about the killing was its location – Teheran.

Al-Masri had actually been living in Iran since 2003, and reports say that, while initially kept under some sort of house arrest, he has been largely free of restrictions since 2015.

Somehow, a lot of supposedly sophisticated analysts seem to be convinced that Shi'ite Iran, the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism, is a useful ally against Sunni terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and Islamic State, on the principle that Sunni jihadists threaten Iran and "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Yet al-Masri was actually part of a major al-Qaeda operational hub in Iran which evidence clearly shows Teheran not only tolerated but aided. This hub also included Osama bin Laden's late son Hamza; Abu Hamza al-Khalidi, al-Qaeda's "Military Commission Chief"; Saif al-Adel, another key lieutenant of Zawahiri; Atiyah Abd al Rahman, al-Qaeda's "Operations Chief" killed in 2011 in Pakistan; and Yasin al-Suri, a senior al-Qaeda facilitator and financier.

Here are just a few examples of the public intelligence available about al-Qaeda's hub in Iran:

- In 2010, General David Petraeus, then commander of the US Central Command, reported that al-Qaeda "continues to use Iran as a key facilitation hub, where facilitators

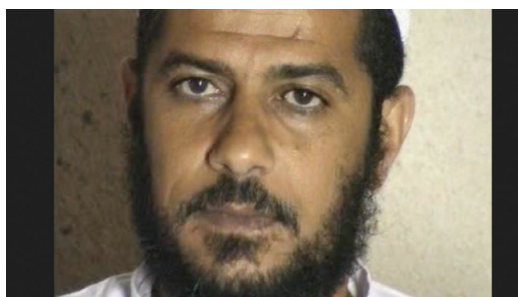
connect al-Qaeda's senior leadership to regional affiliates."

- In 2011, the US State Department's annual country reports on terrorism referred to al-Qaeda's Iranian hub as the terrorist group's "core facilitation pipeline", which allowed the jihadist organisation to shuttle personnel and funds throughout the Middle East and South Asia.

- On Feb. 16, 2012, the US Treasury Department designated the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) as a terrorist organisation for its support of al-Qaeda, as well as other terrorist organisations. According to the Treasury, "MOIS has facilitated the movement of al Qaeda operatives in Iran and provided them with documents, identification cards, and passports. MOIS also provided money and weapons to al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)...

and negotiated prisoner releases of AQI operatives."

- In July 2018, a United Nations panel of experts, called the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, found that, "Al-Qaida leaders in the Islamic Republic of Iran have grown more prominent, working with A[y]man al-Zawahiri and projecting his authority more effectively than he could previously."



Al-Qaeda No. 2 Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, better known as Abu Muhammad al-Masri

But here's perhaps the strongest evidence of all. In 2007, late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden himself wrote a note criticising one of al-Qaeda's constituent groups, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) – which of course later broke away to become the core of Islamic State. In it he admonished the group for threatening Iran, saying:

"I have a few remarks concerning the matter of your threats to Iran... You did not consult with us on that serious issue that affects the general welfare of all of us... for as you are aware, Iran is our main artery for funds, personnel, and communication, as well as the matter of hostages."

Yet despite overwhelming evidence, including testimony from Osama bin Laden himself, many analysts and officials seem to think they know better – and Shi'ite Iran would never cooperate with Sunni jihadist groups. Of course, Teheran has a wary and complex relationship with al-Qaeda – but nonetheless evidence is overwhelming that an alliance of sorts exists. This evidence cannot be wished away, and the al-Masri killing highlights this reality.

STEM-WINDERS

In keeping with this column's tradition of reporting on the good news that has been emerging from Israel in recent years concerning the growing integration and success of Arab Israelis, here is another positive statistic.

According to the Israeli NGO Tzofen, which seeks to facilitate the integration of Israeli Arabs into the hi-tech sector, the number of Israeli Arabs studying STEM subjects

(science, technology, engineering and mathematics) has risen sharply over recent years. Its statistics show that in the 2015/16 academic year, 2,691 Israeli Arab students were studying STEM subjects, but last year this had risen to 4,534. That's an increase of 68% in just four years. Total Arab undergraduates rose only 30% during those same years.

Arab Israeli STEM students have not quite reached parity with their Jewish compatriots – Israeli Arabs are currently 15% of STEM students in Israel, but make up 21% of the population – but they are on track to get there in a few short years if recent trends continue.

STEM education is of course a key basis for Israel's huge success as a hi-tech innovation hub. For a variety of reasons, Israeli Arabs have not always fully benefited from the hi-tech boom in Israel over the past two decades, but they certainly now seem poised to do so.

It's yet another sign that, despite ongoing challenges, Israeli society is evolving to integrate the Jewish majority and Arab minority like never before, with all Israelis gaining a great deal from the process.

AIR



Seth Frantzman

DOES SECULARISM FUEL ISLAMIST TERROR?

A man who beheaded a person in a church in Nice, France was radicalised by a recent controversy over another beheading in France. The chain of events shows that terrorists thrive off rumours of religion being “insulted” to then attack other religions, which would appear contradictory since media reports indicated that French “secularism” was to blame for the attacks. The attacks on French churches are not unique; terrorists have targeted them in the past, killing a priest in 2016.

Several media analyses and commentaries have pointed to France's “extreme form of secularism” as the reason that terrorists are “angry” at France. However, the terror attacks look a lot more like hate crimes against Christians, including the attack on a church in al-Tabqah in Syria, than they do a protest against French “secularism”.

It is worthwhile to unpack the false claim that French “secularism” causes terror attacks. If that was the reason for attacks, then one would think that secular symbols of the French state would be targeted. That's usually how terrorism is supposed to work. Because we are told terrorism is about getting attention through symbolic acts of violence, then the terror group should target the symbol of the state or thing that it is against.

However, there are few examples of these “terrorists”

attacking institutions of the state in France. They don't attack nude statues either. They attack churches. And they don't only do it in France; attackers tend to target churches and Christians worldwide. If the extremists are radicalised by being offended over “blasphemy” and insults to their faith, then why is the response to attack religious buildings and innocent religious people?

In January 2015, after supposedly offensive cartoons were published in France, there were attacks on 45 churches in Niger. The churches had no connection to the cartoons, and *Charlie Hebdo* is not a Christian magazine. In short, the secularism that drives critiques of religion tends to target Christianity and Islam, and yet the extremist response is to kill Christians and bomb churches.

Similarly, the response from Iran, Malaysia and other countries has been to deny the Holocaust. This points to a reaction that is not about being offended over cartoons, but rather a wellspring of hatred against Jews and Christians in many countries and communities by Islamist extremists who seek any excuse to carry out hate crimes against religious minorities.

It is important to understand how this toxic blend of media-driven hype over the “insult to religion” leads to attacks on minorities all over the world under the guise that extremists are “angry at secularism.”

The reality is not that French secularism caused offence, but that religious extremists linked to global Islamist movements have taught generations of young men to hate Christians, Jews, Shi'ites, Kurds, Ahmadis, Yazidis, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and other groups – and that every controversy is used as an excuse to kill these groups, often targeting their houses of worship.

That is why synagogues have been targeted from Tunisia to Morocco, Turkey, Israel and elsewhere. It is why Christians were attacked on Palm Sunday in Egypt in 2017, on Easter in Sri Lanka in 2019 and in Pakistan in 2016. This is why Hindu temples were burned in Bangladesh in 2013, 2016, 2019 and 2020, a Sikh temple was targeted in Afghanistan in March 2020, Ahmadi mosques were targeted in 2010 in Pakistan and Shi'ite mosques were attacked in Afghanistan in 2016, 2018 and 2019.

The flood of increasing attacks on places of worship, almost all carried out by Islamist extremists, illustrates that the real insult to religion has not come from secularism in France but from far-right Islamist extremist groups that target religion worldwide. The French cartoon controversy was merely an excuse to radicalise men to conduct hate crime attacks on other religions, attacks that are part of the radicalisers' ideology.

AIR

Seth Frantzman is a Ginsburg-Milstein Writing Fellow at the Middle East Forum and senior Middle East correspondent at the Jerusalem Post. © Jerusalem Post (jpost.com), all rights reserved, reprinted by permission.



ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

UNWELCOME RETURN

They began to flock towards Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta airport from around 4 am and their number steadily grew to tens of thousands. Many of them parked their cars on the roadsides, worsening the congestion. Others were forced to leave their taxis or ride-sharing vehicles and walk to the airport. Among them were pilots and crew members, resulting in the cancellation of dozens of flights.

Waving banners and placards, the crowd erupted with joy when their idol emerged. Yet, it was not a pop star or sports champion, but Rizieq Shihab, the 55-year-old leader of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). Wearing a white robe, turban, and face mask, he stood up in the sunroof of a car and waved as his motorcade struggled to pass through the throng of followers chanting "Allahu Akbar!" (God is great).

Such was the scene for Rizieq's return from a three-year exile in Saudi Arabia, which clearly shows his presence will be a new factor in Indonesian politics, although opinion is divided as to his likely impact.

Created after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, the FPI declared itself to be a Sharia-inspired "anti-vice" organisation and soon gained notoriety for destroying bars and brothels through "sweeps" carried out by its white-robed members. This extended to verbal and physical attacks against religious minorities.

Rizieq has served a total of two years in jail – in 2003 and again in 2008 – for inciting his followers to carry out violent acts. In 2011, leaked US diplomatic cables claimed the police had been funding the group and using it as an "attack dog" to extort businesses.

Yet, while the FPI is not a political party, it has proved a useful tool in political power plays. It has endorsed candidates and retains the ability to mobilise huge numbers, well in excess of its 200,000 members.

Prabowo Subianto courted the group to support his presidential bids, as well as the infamous campaign to bring about the downfall of popular Jakarta governor Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama on trumped-up blasphemy charges in 2017.

Rizieq left for a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, that same year amid allegations of adultery and violating the 2008 Anti-Pornography Law by exchanging sexually explicit text messages with a woman who was not his wife. He was also facing several legal issues for prior conduct, including defamation and treason concerning his speeches.

Even in exile, Rizieq remained a controversial figure. In late 2018, Saudi authorities briefly detained him for hoisting a flag at his Mecca residence that resembled the black standard of the Islamic State, whose caliphate was then approaching collapse.

Although police dropped the charges against Rizieq in 2019, citing insufficient evidence, he maintained that the accusations against him were politically motivated. Upon his return, he declared: "To all Muslims, the moral revolution begins today. Those who are not devout must now be devout. Do you agree?", to which Rizieq's followers shouted full approval. "Move from bad deeds to good deeds. We will destroy all injustice. We will fight corruption," he said.



Rizieq Shihab and pandemonium at Jakarta airport

Some analysts doubt Rizieq's ability to mobilise the same forces on Jakarta's streets as he did as one of the leaders of the "212 Movement" which brought about Ahok's downfall. President Joko Widodo (often referred to as Jokowi) comfortably won re-election in 2019, warding off an Islamist-backed challenge from Prabowo, who has since become a key minister in the government he once opposed.

President Widodo also moved to crack down upon groups espousing ideology in conflict with the pluralist state ideology of Pancasila, banning outright Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, a smaller group that campaigned for a global caliphate. In an *AP* interview last year, Widodo said he would try to work with Islamist groups, but declared, "If an organisation endangers the nation in its ideology I won't compromise."

Rizieq's return will be a political test for Jokowi, Ujang Komarudin, a political analyst at Jakarta's Al Azhar University, told *BenarNews*. "His return has created an opportunity for major consolidation in the non-parliamentary opposition camp."

South-East Asia analyst Zachary Abuza sees risks for Jokowi. "Jokowi's clear 2019 electoral mandate has been quickly eroded by poor policy choices, the botched COVID-19 response, and a contracting economy. His legitimacy is waning... Sharp economic downturns are always a boon to extremist groups, which seek to scapegoat and provide needed assistance to their in-groups," he wrote in *BenarNews*.

Even during Rizieq's three-year absence, there was an uptick in violence toward religious minorities. Between 2017 and 2019, at least 23 attacks targeted minority houses of worship, including attacks on Ahmadi and Shi'ite mosques as well as Christian churches.

"Rizieq will only seek to escalate such attacks," Abuza predicts, "forcing the government to either acquiesce or come to the defence of non-Muslims, and setting them up for charges of apostasy... Rizieq is set to reassert his influence in politics and upend the political status quo."

Douglas Davis

EASY TARGETS

Last month, Vienna joined a growing list of European cities – Paris, London, Manchester, Brussels, Nice, Berlin – which have been the site of major jihadist terror attacks over the past five years. A gunman took four lives on the streets of Vienna.

The attack came a few weeks after a vicious attack in Paris by an 18-year-old Moscow-born Chechen. A teacher, who had chosen to illustrate a lesson on free expression by displaying cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, was beheaded outside the school gates. The attacker was shot dead by police.

Two weeks later, a Tunisian man stabbed three people to death outside a Catholic cathedral in Nice. The attacker had arrived in Italy by boat a few weeks previously.

Perhaps it is the enormous challenge of coronavirus or simply the bad weather, but French President Emmanuel Macron has abandoned any pretence of soft power or under-the-counter concessions in exchange for peace on the streets of Paris.

He knows that Europe is an easy target for a killer who wants to secure maximum exposure at minimum cost. That is why he has been galloping into battle in defence of what were once regarded as Western values.

Macron described Islamist separatism as a “political and religious” project that advocates “deviations” from the values of the French Republic. This often resulted, he said, in the constitution of a “counter-society,” in which children are taken out of school, and cultural activities are used as a pretext to teach principles that “do not conform” to French law. It is an “indoctrination” that negates French principles, “equality between men and women,” as well as “human dignity”.

“We believe in the Enlightenment and in women having the same rights as men,” he said. “People who think otherwise, let them do it somewhere else, not on French soil.”

Macron noted that Muslim radicals have created their own hermetically sealed eco-systems in European cities, and has sought a law that would give the state greater scrutiny of France’s mosques. He is particularly concerned about the estimated 300 foreign-trained imams in France, about half of whom emanate from Turkey.

Under Macron’s law, they would have to be strictly vetted, while Muslim organisations would have to promise to respect the secular nature of the country. Homeschooling would be curtailed, and state schools would be open for three-year-olds, ensuring that French civic values were inculcated at an early age. Macron’s goal is to fight those

who embrace radical Islam, while protecting the middle-of-the-road worshipper.

Austria’s Chancellor Sebastian Kurz has joined Macron in declaring a common European front in a “war on Islamism” – a civilisational struggle between Western values and a politicised version of an extremist interpretation of the Islamic faith. Kurz intends to build an alliance against Islamist ideology at the next summit of EU leaders, as the Austrian security services investigate the Viennese attacker’s suspected ties to extremists in other countries, including Switzerland.

“I expect an end to the misconceived tolerance and for all the nations of Europe to finally realise how dangerous the ideology of political Islam is for our freedom and the European way of life,” Kurz told the German daily *Die Welt*.

A central pillar of the European Union is likely to be the first victim of the Macron-Kurz approach. The two men agreed to a hastily arranged summit last month to seek a suspension of the Schengen Agreement, which permits frictionless travel throughout Europe.

“We are happy to live without internal borders but we can only do so if we protect our external borders,” said Kurz. “If we don’t protect our external borders, [free movement within EU states] will be threatened on the inside.”

The existing European Border and Coastguard Agency has 1,500 officers, which France says is woefully inadequate to prevent illegal migrants entering via countries such as Greece and Italy. France is pressing it to accelerate a plan to increase the number of officers to 10,000.

Meanwhile, Europe is not alone in facing threats from jihadist ambitions. Islamists have now focused on southern Africa as the site of their next caliphate and dozens of villagers are said to have been massacred in northern Mozambique last month in a three-day rampage by jihadists. Women and children are reported to have been beheaded and their bodies dismembered.

The jihadists, who have pledged allegiance to Islamic State, have already launched attacks on neighbouring Tanzania and threatened violence in South Africa if it attempts to support Mozambique’s beleaguered army.

More than 2,000 people have reportedly been killed since fighting erupted in Mozambique in 2017 and 712,000 more have been left in need of aid. Analysts say an uprising by a few dozen young locals, angry at the neglect of their region by the government in Maputo, has been exploited by Islamic State.

Now, more than 4,000 Islamist fighters have joined forces to battle Mozambique’s military and the foreign mercenaries brought in from Russia and South Africa by the Mozambique regime.

This is perhaps surprising given that only some 18% of Mozambique’s population is Muslim.

Yet jihadist violence continues to pop up in new places and unexpected forms – looking for any easy targets.

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR

Two rockets were fired into Israel pre-dawn on Nov. 15, one landing near Tel Aviv. Both fell in open areas and caused no damage or injuries. Israeli forces struck Hamas military targets in Gaza in response. Hamas claimed the rocket fire was accidental, caused by lightning.

On Oct. 21 and 22, three rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel. The IDF also uncovered a new Hamas attack tunnel into Israeli territory in late October.

On Nov. 17, IDF forces detected and defused explosive devices laid in Israeli territory near the border with Syria. In response, Israeli fighter planes hit a variety of Syrian and Iranian military targets in Syria.

On Nov. 11, the IDF reported shooting down a Hezbollah drone.

PALESTINIANS RESUME SECURITY TIES WITH ISRAEL

On Nov. 17, the Palestinian Authority (PA) announced the immediate renewal of security co-operation with Israel. It had dramatically reduced co-operation with Israel in May in protest against the proposed Israeli extension of sovereignty to parts of the West Bank in accordance with the Trump Administration's peace plan.

Analysts say the PA's decision was likely influenced by Joe Biden's victory in the US presidential elections, as well as Israel's pledge to suspend any plans to extend sovereignty as part of normalisation deals reached with the UAE and Bahrain.

The PA also agreed to accept NIS3 billion (A\$1.216 billion) in tax revenue that Israel had collected on behalf of the PA from taxes on imports and exports. The PA had previously refused all such transfers for several

months. These tax revenues amount to 70% of the PA budget.

Hamas condemned the PA's decision, and the success of recent reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fatah, the main faction controlling the PA, is now in question.

PAY-FOR-SLAY-FOR-HIRE

According to a US State Department report leaked in late October, notwithstanding current severe cash-restraints on the Palestinian economy, the Palestinian Authority (PA) continues to prioritise its "pay for slay" scheme which financially rewards convicted terrorists and their families, in spite of new international aid conditions designed to prevent these payments.

To circumvent these new conditions, the PA decided in early November that approximately 7,000 former prisoners would cease receiving direct payments and instead be transferred to "work" in jobs across Palestinian military, security and civilian institutions, receiving government salaries at least equivalent to their previous payments.

IRAN THREATENS TO LIMIT IAEA INSPECTIONS

On Nov. 2, Iran's Parliament passed a resolution stating that unless Europe restores economic relations with Teheran to satisfactory levels, the Government must increase uranium enrichment levels to 20% from the current 4.5% and install more advanced centrifuges. The resolution also warns that Iran will stop implementing the Additional Protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which allows for extended International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring.

The latest IAEA report on Iran, dated Nov. 11, states that Iran now has 12 times the stockpile of low-enriched uranium permitted by the 2015 nuclear deal, and has enriched some of it up to 4.5% purity, whereas the deal only allows 3.67%. Iran now has enough fissile material to build two nuclear warheads if further enriched, which could be achieved within six months using Iran's existing centrifuges. Teheran has also introduced advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges at the Natanz facility in breach of the JCPOA, the report said.

IRAN'S NEW UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR SITES

Images taken on Oct. 21 show Teheran has started building a new underground plant at the Natanz nuclear site. These seem to confirm an earlier IAEA report that Iran would build an underground facility to assemble advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges. The new plant is a breach of Iran's 2015 JCPOA commitments and is designed to replace a site at Natanz destroyed in a blast in July that some sources have attributed to Israel. Experts estimate that it will take two years or more before the new plant is fully operational.

IRAN CYBER SHENANIGANS

Waves of unsophisticated but damaging ransomware attacks against Israeli companies between mid-October and mid-November have been traced to Iranian hackers, although not directly to the Iranian regime.

Separately, Facebook removed several Iran-based fake accounts and pages encouraging protests against Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu.

In late October, the US seized more than 100 websites used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its proxies in Iraq. Iran had been actively trying to interfere in the recent US Presidential elections, including sending threatening emails to Democrats pretending to be from the far-right group The Proud Boys.

US TO REWARD ISRAEL FOR NOT OPPOSING F-35 SALES TO UAE

Israel announced on Oct. 23 that it would not oppose the US sale of "certain weapon systems" to the UAE, seemingly referring to the advanced F-35 stealth fighter jets. The announcement followed a meeting between Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz and then-US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper at the Pentagon, where they signed a joint declaration confirming the US commitment to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge (QME) in the region.

According to the *Breaking Defence* website, as part of these assurances the US is likely to grant Israel "direct access to highly classified satellites such as the missile detection birds known as SBIRS and ensure Israel gets critical defence platforms in a very short time by using production slots planned for the US armed forces."

The report also claimed that the US will allow Israel to purchase some "very special" weapon systems that are not manufactured by Israel, and Israel may also obtain "deeper access to the core avionic systems of the F-35" – considered crucial to retaining Israel's advantage as more Arab states purchase F-35s.

UAE/BAHRAIN/SUDAN FIRSTS

The recent agreements of the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan to normalise relations with Israel continue to give rise to numerous firsts. For example:

- On Oct. 19, the first commercial



Etihad Airways plane in Israel

flight from Abu Dhabi to Israel landed in Tel Aviv, returning later that day with an Israeli travel trade mission on board.

- On Oct. 28, the UAE signed a deal to sell Israeli wine from the Golan Heights in Dubai hotels, restaurants and wine stores.

- On Nov. 8, the first flight carrying tourists flew from Tel Aviv to Dubai. It was a charter flight with the Dubai-based carrier flydubai.

- Two Israeli delegations were scheduled to visit Sudan in November and December for discussions on defence, agriculture, trade, aviation and migration.

- In the first official visit by Bahraini ministers to Israel, Foreign

Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani and Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism Zayed Bin Rashid Al Zayani travelled to Israel on Nov. 18 to meet with Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and sign a memorandum of understanding on direct flights between Tel Aviv and Manama.

- The Fresh Market in Dubai's Ras Al Khor area opened the first-ever display of Israeli produce in the UAE on Nov. 14.

LATEST ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN COVID-19 NUMBERS

As of Nov. 16, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, Israel had 324,755 total coronavirus cases, of which 8,377 were still active and had resulted in at least 2,745 deaths. In the West Bank and Gaza there had been a total of 63,867 cases and 572 deaths. There were 8,263 active cases.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

HATE FROM HOME

In the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, Iran was one of the worst affected countries. In a show of solidarity with its ally China, it refused to close its borders to that country, in contrast to many other states. There were also reports of pilgrims continuing the custom of kissing shrines, convinced that the holiness of the sites would protect them from the virus.

Subsequently, hundreds of Iranians tragically died after drinking industrial alcohol, or methanol, in the mistaken belief that this would protect them from the virus.

Now, however, it appears the steps being taken against the pandemic by Iranian authorities have become more orthodox, albeit with a twist typical of Iran's extremist regime.

Authorities in many countries have

sensibly required their citizens to work or study from home if possible, to limit the spread of the virus. Similarly, Iranian students have now been urged to trample and set fire to Israeli, US and French flags from home.

Nov. 3 is the date of Iran's annual Student Day, marking the 1979 seizure of hostages from the US Embassy in Teheran. Traditionally, this auspicious occasion features students marching while trampling on and then setting fire to US and Israeli flags.

However, this year, Motjaba Bastan, the acting head of the Student Basij Organisation, part of a voluntary paramilitary organisation affiliated with the country's hardline Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, urged students to carry out these activities from the safety of their own homes at exactly 9:00 am on Nov. 3.

It is unclear whether at around 9:05 am that day there was an increase in the number of calls to Iranian fire brigades, who, of course, would not have been able to work from home.



COVER STORY

BIDEN: HIS TIME

MID-EAST POLICY CHALLENGES

by BICOM

US policy in the Middle East underwent drastic changes during the Trump Administration. President-elect Joe Biden will thus confront a much-changed region from the one left during his days as Vice President under President Barack Obama. Biden will likely seek to transition away from current US policies left by President Donald Trump toward new ones without alienating allies or causing greater uncertainty in the Middle East.

Trump's most impactful regional policies came in two areas: Iran and Israel.

Regarding Iran, the Trump Administration removed the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement and reimposed unilateral sanctions – as part of its “maximum pressure campaign” – to force the Islamic Republic to renegotiate a more comprehensive agreement over nuclear, regional and ballistic missile issues. Trump also oversaw the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, leader of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, who controlled the plethora of Shi'ite militias that are active in most of the conflicts across the region. Iran has managed to withstand American pressure, although it remains to be seen for how much longer.

In an Israeli-Palestinian context, the Trump Administration was perceived to be one of the most “pro-Israel” administrations in history. It recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital and subsequently moved its embassy there. It recognised Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. It brokered the Abraham Accords between Israel, the UAE and



President-elect Joe Biden confronts a Middle East region much-changed since the Obama administration

Bahrain and helped usher in new relations between Israel and Sudan. It cut off funds to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA. And it released its plan for Israeli-Palestinian peace that greatly aligned with the positions of the Government of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

THE US PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The extent to which Biden's regional policy will constitute a break from Trump or the continuation of at least some of his policies remains to be seen. In general, the Biden administration will have to evaluate two major driving forces behind US foreign policy in the Middle East over the last decade: the retrenchment of US power (under both Obama and Trump) and the ensuing power vacuums this created; and the presumption, primarily held by the Obama administration – of facilitating “power competition” between the major players in the region.

Anthony Blinken, tipped to be a senior foreign policy advisor (even potentially Secretary of State) in the Biden administration, recently told the *Jewish Insider* how the President-elect views American involvement in the region. “Whether we like it or not, the world doesn't organise itself. Until this [Trump] administration, the US played a lead role, doing a lot of that organising – in helping to write the rules, shape the norms, and animate the institutions that govern the way countries relate to each other. And the challenge now is that President Trump has largely abdicated that role and responsibility... putting us in many

places in full retreat from our close allies. And the problem is that when we are not engaged, when we don't lead, then one of two things happen: Either some other country tries to take our place, but probably not in a way that advances our interests or values; or maybe just a bad one does and then you tend to get chaos or a vacuum that is filled by bad things before it's filled by good things."

THE CHALLENGE FROM IRAN

The future of the JCPOA nuclear deal: Biden has emphasised that the JCPOA remains the best tool for preventing a nuclear-armed Iran but, like Trump, he recognises that the deal has its flaws which need renegotiating. However, Biden has called for a vastly different approach to Trump's sanction-based policy in order to secure a better agreement with Iran.

Biden described the Trump Administration's decision to pull out of the agreement as "a self-inflicted disaster". Speaking to *CNN* in September, Biden said: "I will offer Teheran a credible path back to diplomacy. If Iran returns to strict compliance with the nuclear deal, the US would re-join the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations. With our allies, we will work to strengthen and extend the nuclear deal's provisions, while also addressing other issues of concern."

The US is thus likely to return to a US-led multilateral approach toward Iran. Blinken told the *Jewish Insider* that "A much stronger way ... is making sure that you're working in concert with allies and partners to stop and push back against Iranian misbehaviour, and the problem with the [Trump] Administration's having torn up the nuclear deal is that it alienated us from the allies that we need to hold a hard line against Iran."

Such a policy carries with it several uncertainties. Biden has not stated what he would do were Iran to refuse to return to compliance with the JCPOA; nor is it clear whether he would accept Iranian demands of compensation for damages it suffered following Trump's restoration of nuclear-related sanctions, or what commitments he may give to ensure that such violations are not repeated. Iran's presidential elections – which anti-US security hawks are expected to win – take place in mid-2021, and Iranian officials say any substantive talks will have to wait until then.

Iran's ballistic missiles and regional activities: One of the gaps in the JCPOA is considered to be the fact it did not address Iran's aggressive regional policy. Biden told the *New York Times* that his administration would "leverage renewed international consensus around America's Iran policy – and a redoubled commitment to diplomacy – to more effectively push back against Teheran's other malign behaviour in the region."

This would include "targeted sanctions against Iranian support for terrorism and Iran's ballistic missile program; ironclad support for Israel; robust intelligence and security cooperation with regional partners; support for strengthening the capacity of countries like Iraq to resist Iranian influence; and a renewed commitment to diplomacy aimed at ending wars in Yemen and Syria that provide Iran with opportunities to expand."

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN POLITICAL PROCESS

Biden is a strong advocate of Israel and the importance of the US-Israel relationship. At the 67th annual Israeli Independence Day celebration in Jerusalem in April 2015, Biden began his speech: "My name is Joe Biden, and everybody knows I love Israel."

Biden told the annual Saban Forum at the Brookings Institution in December 2014 that "if there weren't an Israel, we would have to invent one." Biden added, "We always talk about Israel from this perspective as if we're doing (it) some favour. We are meeting a moral obligation. But it is so much more than a moral obligation. It is overwhelmingly in the self-interest of the United States of America to have a secure and democratic friend, a strategic partner like Israel. It is no favour. It is an obligation, but also a strategic necessity."



Anthony Blinken: Biden's key foreign policy adviser

According to the Biden campaign website, "Joe Biden believes in the worth and value of every Palestinian and every Israeli. He will work to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis enjoy equal measures of freedom, security, prosperity, and democracy." However, a Biden presidency is likely to change its style, if not substance, from the Trump era in its approach toward Israel. Whilst Biden has said he will not undo Trump's decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, his administration could include policymakers from the Obama era who still begrudge Netanyahu's incursions into US domestic politics over Iran.

Biden has rejected the policies of more left-wing/progressive voices in the party, such as Bernie Sanders' call for conditioning US military aid to Israel. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* on Oct. 31 2019, Biden said: "The idea that we would draw military assistance from Israel, on the condition that they change a specific policy, I find to be absolutely outrageous. No, I would not condition it, and I think it's a gigantic mistake. And I hope some of my candidates who are running with me for the nomination – I hope they misspoke or they were taken out of context."

The two-state solution: The Biden administration will likely bring a more balanced approach to US policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its policies "will be grounded in a commitment to a two-state solution, where

Israel and the future viable state of Palestine will live together in peace, security, and mutual recognition,” according to the Biden campaign’s manifesto. Biden told the *New York Times* in 2019: “I believe a two-state solution remains the only way to ensure Israel’s long-term security while sustaining its Jewish and democratic identity. It is also the only way to ensure Palestinian dignity and their legitimate interest in national self-determination. And it is a necessary condition to take full advantage of the opening that exists for greater cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbours. For all these reasons, encouraging a two-state solution remains in the critical interest of the US.”

Relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas: Biden will restore Washington’s ties with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) that Trump downgraded. This likely includes the reopening of the PLO’s mission to the US and the US Consulate in east Jerusalem, and resume funding Palestinian programs that aid the prospects of peace, such as people-to-people programs, economic development, and humanitarian aid and health care for the Palestinian people, all of which were fully cut by the Trump Administration.

This may come with a caveat to incentivise them to renew security cooperation with Israel.

However, Biden has been critical of Palestinian incitement and said Palestinian leaders “must begin to level with their people about the legitimacy and permanence of Israel as a Jewish state in the historic homeland of the Jewish people.” At a virtual event sponsored by J Street in September, Biden promised to “reengage the Palestinians,” but criticised Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for not stepping up “when given opportunities.”

Speaking at a fundraiser, Biden said he would “fully support the Taylor Force Act,” which withholds US aid to the PA based on payments it makes to terrorists in Israeli jails. Biden has also called for Arab states – who reportedly cut funding to the PA by 85% in 2020 – to “increase their financial and diplomatic support for building Palestinian

institutions ... [and] work to provide more relief to the people of Gaza while working to weaken, and ultimately replace, Hamas.”

Settlements and annexation: Biden, and virtually every Democrat in Congress, has been vocal in opposition to Netanyahu’s now-suspended plans to apply Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank. Biden has vowed to not approve the annexation of West Bank settlements if he were president, and that his administration would not give Israel a “green light” or recognise the move, saying “Israel needs to stop the threats of annexation and stop settlement activity because it will choke off any hope of peace.”

Responding to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s announcement that the Trump Administration does not consider settlements illegal, Biden’s campaign team said: “This decision harms the cause of diplomacy, takes us further away from the hope of a two-state solution, and will only further inflame tensions in the region. It’s not about peace or security. It is not about being pro-Israel. It is about undercutting Israel’s future in service of Trump’s personal politics.”

NORMALISATION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ARAB STATES

Biden has been supportive of the peace agreements between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain. Speaking after the signing of the Abraham Accords, Biden termed the UAE’s decision to recognise Israel as “a welcome, brave, and badly-needed act of statesmanship”, adding, “it is a critical recognition that Israel is a vibrant, integral part of the Middle East that is here to stay. Israel can and will be a valued strategic and economic partner to all who welcome it.”

Despite warnings from the Trump team that a Biden presidency would be harmful to future negotiations between Israel and Arab states, Blinken pledged in his *Jewish Insider* interview that a Biden administration “would certainly try and continue to pursue and advocate for normalisation with any Arab state that is prepared to do that.”

Where a Biden administration might differ from its predecessor is in its willingness to provide carrots to tempt Arab states to normalise relations with Israel. Blinken has suggested that a Biden administration “would have to take a hard look at it to understand exactly what’s involved” in potential deals. Furthermore, the Biden administration’s warmer approach towards the Palestinians may increase the political capital required of other Arab states looking to make peace with Israel, as new peace deals will be unable to ignore the Palestinian issue like under Trump.

Blinken recently said, “The more countries normalise their relationship with Israel, the greater I think Israel’s

**Ensure your pets
are always protected**

Cover their health
with Australia’s #1
rated Pet Insurer

PRODUCT REVIEW
COM.AU 2017 AWARDS
WINNER



**Bow
wow
Meow**
PET INSURANCE

Get a quote at
bowwowinsurance.com.au
Or call 1800 668 502

confidence is in being able to make peace across the board ... and also hopefully to resolve the Palestinian issue to the extent that it makes Israelis feel generally more secure. That may be helpful in creating greater confidence to move forward with the Palestinians, and it may also be that it does send a message to the Palestinians that they have to actually engage, negotiate in a meaningful way.”

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States: America has been a strategic partner and an essential pillar of Gulf security for the past 50 years. Moreover, despite the conventional wisdom that consecutive administrations have been in retreat from the Gulf and the Middle East more broadly, the US will remain a key global power that will shape Gulf security for years to come.

President Trump took a firm interest in strengthening the US-Saudi relationship, as demonstrated with his first foreign visit as President to Saudi Arabia and the signing of a new major arms deal with the Kingdom. However, the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s ill-fated war in Yemen, led the Trump team to embrace the UAE as the regional power most able to protect US interests – through the building of a new alliance with Israel and other moderate Arab states.

Whilst Trump was mainly silent on Saudi Arabia, Biden has committed to reassess US ties with Riyadh. He told the Council on Foreign Relations that he would “end US support for the disastrous Saudi-led war in Yemen and order a reassessment of our relationship with Saudi Arabia. I would want to hear how Saudi Arabia intends to change its approach to work with a more responsible US administration.”

The US Navy continues to participate in the blockade of the Yemeni coast. A Biden administration could suspend this activity as a signal to Riyadh, but such a move would aid the proliferation of Iranian weapons and missiles to the Houthis.

Biden is likely to press much harder on Saudi Arabia and the UAE to end the Gulf Cooperation Council’s (GCC) blockade on Qatar. In a *New York Times* op-ed Blinken criticised Trump for siding with the Saudis after they spearheaded the Qatar blockade.

US-Turkey reconciliation: Turkey has grown more aggressive in the region over the last four years and its actions are increasingly inconsistent with American or transatlantic interests. Turkey’s new adventurism has been aided partly by the ambivalent position adopted by the Trump Administration over US-Turkish ties, explained in part by Trump’s desire to maintain a good rapport with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

During the Biden administration, the rhetorical tenor of US-Turkey relations will likely be different. The former vice president has made several strong statements along the campaign trail on drawing red lines with Turkey, and has fostered warm relations with the American Hellenic

community. “The Trump Administration must press Turkey to refrain from any further provocative actions in the region against Greece, including threats of force, to create the space for diplomacy to succeed,” Biden said in a statement. “I also call on Turkish President Erdogan to reverse his recent decision to convert the Hagia Sophia into a mosque and to return this treasure to its former status as a museum, ensuring equal access for all, including the Orthodox faithful,” he added.

In a video that surfaced in August, Biden expressed his willingness to work with “opposition leadership” in the country to topple Erdogan in Turkey’s 2023 elections.

But the strategic challenges posed by Ankara remain the same, and it remains to be seen whether Biden can re-establish American leverage over Turkey after the Trump years.

AIR

© Britain-Israel Communication and Research Centre (BICOM),
reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ARE ISRAELI WORRIES ABOUT BIDEN JUSTIFIED?

by Amotz Asa-El

“I was elected President of the US with the help of your people; what can I do in return?” asked the recently elected John F. Kennedy at the end of his meeting with then Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in New York in 1961.

Irritated by the insinuation that he controlled the Jewish Diaspora, Ben-Gurion replied: “Try to be a great president of the United States.”

Kennedy eventually began selling missiles to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), thus ending Republican Dwight

With Compliments

gleneagle
securities

Level 27, 25 Bligh Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

www.gleneagle.com.au



Eisenhower's de facto embargo on arms sales to the Jewish state. It was the beginning of a beautiful relationship between Israel and the Democratic Party in the US, later bolstered by Lyndon Johnson, who sold Israel Patton tanks and Skyhawk fighter jets and thus laid the foundations for the US to eventually supplant France as Israel's main arms supplier.

That was last century. This century the picture has appeared inverted. The last Democratic administration, Barack Obama's, is recalled in Israel as less friendly and more inclined to confrontation with Jerusalem than either its Republican predecessor or successor.

Now, with President-elect Joe Biden preparing to succeed Donald Trump, some suspect a retreat from a presidency that was exceptionally beneficial for Israel on a number of fronts, into a version of the tensions of the Obama years.

The fears are likely unfounded.

Controversial though the Trump years were in so many other ways, in the Middle East they brought long-term impacts that most Israelis consider both beneficial and in fact historic.

The most important of these are the normalisation agreements that the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Bahrain signed with Israel in September in Washington, and the subsequent announcement by the White House of a similar deal between Israel and Sudan.

Though these relations were evolving for years before Trump's arrival, their maturation during his term signals a new legitimisation of Israel in the broader Arab world. Moreover, the emerging trade relations with the Gulf states seem set to become diverse and warm. By contrast, relations with Israel's previous peace partners, Egypt and Jordan, have been cold, formal, and economically limited.

Before these developments, Trump's transfer of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was welcomed by most Israelis as a long-overdue correction of an injustice to the Jewish people and its heritage.

Trump's recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights was appreciated by most Israelis as a mes-



Biden and Netanyahu have a relationship that goes back more than 30 years

sage to the Syrian regime that the war it has waged on its people deprived it of any chance to reclaim the area Syria lost by waging war on Israel.

Understandably then, many now wonder how much of this will be left intact, or how much reversed, by Joe Biden.

Yet in all likelihood, nothing of what Trump did will be reversed.

Speaking during an online fundraiser in April, Biden said he would not move the American Embassy back to Tel Aviv. While Biden said nothing similar about the Golan Heights, there is no logic for him taking any initiative on this issue at a time when the Syrian regime is up to its neck in the rubble left from the civil war, and also kept at arm's length by most of the Arab world.

Concerning Israel's warming relations with the Gulf states, Biden will surely pick up where Trump left off, helping cultivate what has already been accomplished, and encouraging its expansion elsewhere.

The big question in this regard is what will happen with Saudi Arabia.

Riyadh was reportedly ready to sign a normalisation agreement with Israel, after having publicly backed – and before that green-lighted – its two Gulf neighbours in their



WESTERNPORT
MARINA

GREAT BY DAY – MAGIC AT NIGHT
MORNINGTON PENINSULA

PHONE (03) 5979 7400

EMAIL: clientservices@westernportmarina.com.au

deals with Jerusalem. Now the assessment in Jerusalem is that the desert kingdom will wait for Biden to settle in before making any move.

Riyadh's major concern is what will happen between Washington and Teheran.

As vice president, Biden was there when Obama masterminded the controversial 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) deal that slowed Iran's nuclear program in turn for partially-lifted sanctions. Riyadh's fear of Teheran has only grown since then, especially after the Iranian drone and missile attack in September 2019 on oil installations east of the Saudi capital.

While campaigning, Biden would not disown the nuclear deal that Obama created and Trump undid. However, while claiming Trump's militancy made Iran accelerate its nuclear activity, Biden added he would resume talks with Iran only after Teheran restores its compliance with the original deal's provisions.

Riyadh, along with the rest of the Gulf states as well as Israel, will demand that, if talks with Iran indeed resume, Washington add other items to the agenda alongside nuclear enrichment – including Teheran's ballistic missile program and its meddling in multiple conflicts throughout the Middle East.

In Israel, pundits doubt Biden will actually get around to focusing on these issues anytime soon.

Maj-Gen (res) Amos Yadlin, who now heads the Tel Aviv University Institute for National Security Studies and was previously head of IDF Military Intelligence, told Israeli radio that Biden will initially be bogged down with the pandemic and the economic crisis it has spawned. When Biden does turn to foreign affairs, China and North Korea will be much higher on his agenda than Israel, Yadlin added.

This of course does not mean the new administration will not be involved, sooner or later, in issues relating to Israel, nor that its attitude might not pose a challenge to Israel, especially as long as Binyamin Netanyahu is prime minister, given his past rocky relations with the Obama administration.

Biden represents the Democratic establishment that was committed to the Oslo Accords, and there is no indication that he has lost faith in the two-state solution. Chances are, therefore, that he will expect the restoration of talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which the latter suspended in 2014.

Then again, the two-state principle was also espoused by Trump, and in fact was part of his "Vision for Peace" plan released in early 2020, which advocated territorial trade-offs between Israel and a prospective Palestinian state, even while offering that state less territory than proposed in previous plans.

Moreover, gaps on the personal side are also not as deep as some might assume. Yes, Netanyahu and Trump

personally got along very well, and in this regard, the past four years were the inversion of the Obama years.

Back then, Netanyahu was in deep disagreement with the American president concerning the Middle East in general and Iran in particular. Netanyahu's address to the US Congress in 2015, in which he challenged the American president's policy in his own capital in front of his own legislature, was seen by some in Obama's administration as particularly brazen.

But then again, Biden and Netanyahu have known each other since the latter's days as ambassador to the UN. Their acquaintance is as warm as it is long-standing.

Biden is also not close to his party's left wing, where some are virulently anti-Israel. Biden is also not known to have been consulted before Obama's famous Cairo Speech in June 2009, which Israelis from right to left found dangerously naïve, not only for Israel, but for the entire region.

In any case, whatever Biden thought of Obama's speech at the time, subsequent events in the Middle East have rendered the vision Obama articulated obsolete. The popular uprisings, Islamist violence, and multiple civil wars that have unsettled the Middle East since 2011 have made every sensible American, including Biden, recognise that the Middle East's transformation is less imminent and more complex than Obama presumed.

Beyond the past decade's events and their lessons, Biden will enter the White House more experienced than any president before him.

With eight years as vice president and 36 as a senator, including eight years as chair of the Senate Judicial Committee and two as chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Biden has been around, and he knows how things work, both at home and abroad. This is a notable contrast with both his recent predecessors.

As such, he knows all too well, and recalls all too vividly, the evolution of Israel's alliance with the US, and also with the Democratic Party. In all likelihood, he will uphold both.

AIR

WILL BIDEN FOLLOW OBAMA ON IRAN?

by Israel Kasnett

One of the top foreign-policy issues President-elect Joe Biden will be forced to address upon taking office in January will be the Iranian threat.

On the campaign trail, in what was seen as a dig at US President Donald Trump's efforts to apply maximum pressure on Iran through sanctions, Biden said he would handle



Iran “the smart way” and would give Iran “a credible path back to diplomacy.” Biden has also said that the United States could re-join the deal “as a starting point for follow-on negotiations” if Iran commits to full compliance.

But Israel’s security establishment is worried that another Obama-esque approach to Iran will fail a second time and will once again result in a triumphant Iran flush with billions of dollars in cash.

Asaf Romirowsky, Executive Director of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East and a senior non-resident fellow at Bar-Ilan University’s Begin-Sadat Centre, said that Biden will “have a hard time disregarding the renewed sanctions on Teheran and their effects.”

“As a veteran politician, Biden has a greater appreciation of the US-Israeli alliance and will not compromise Israeli security,” said Romirowsky. “Moreover, his history with Israel will contribute to his attitude that would presumably be less acrimonious [than] during the Obama years.”

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, quoted by the state-run IRNA news agency, said the next US administration must “compensate for past mistakes” and “return to the path of complying with international agreements through respect of international norms.”

According to the latest report by UN inspectors, Iran has 2,440 kilograms of enriched uranium stockpiles, which far exceeds the 300 kilograms allowed under the 2015 nuclear deal known as the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). Experts say that is enough material to make at least two nuclear weapons. The report said that Iran is also enriching uranium to as much as 4.5% purity, which is also higher than the limits in the deal (3.67%). Additionally, Iran has completed the transfer of a cascade of advanced centrifuges from a plant above ground to an underground site, which can protect the plant from aerial attacks.

What has Israeli experts worried is Iran’s blatant non-compliance with the deal and clear interest in pursuing nuclear weapons. It continues to install advanced centrifuges and is developing its intercontinental ballistic missile program.

Iran’s lies and deceptions with regard to its intent for its nuclear program, which it says is for peaceful purposes only, have been handily proven by Israel in a number of instances. But each time Israel requested that the international community investigate, it was met with a slow response.

Uzi Rabi, director of the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University, said he is concerned that Israel will soon find itself “at the eleventh hour” with regard to Iran’s nuclear weapons program.

He noted Biden’s intentions to negotiate with Iran, as

well as Teheran’s eagerness to reach an agreement due in part to its poor economic situation.

“The question is what sort of agreement Biden has in mind,” said Rabi. “Will it have modifications with regard to Iran’s ballistic-missile program, Iran’s aggression in the region and bringing in more monitoring? That would be great.”

The JCPOA ignored or mismanaged all three of these issues.

Rabi said he hopes that the Americans have “learned a lesson from what happened before” regarding Iran’s disingenuous approach to negotiating. He also said the Americans “cannot get to the negotiating table and play it by ear. They must have a clear end game.”

He explained that the important elements that were left out of the deal, such as Iran’s ballistic missile program, its hostile behaviour in the Middle East, and improved inspections, should be

included in any new agreement.

“One should hope that Biden and his team [are] coming up with a fresh approach about how to deal with Iran,” he said.

Rabi said that behind the scenes, Gulf state leaders fear that Biden will follow Obama’s appeasement approach and will want to lift sanctions and reduce pressure on Iran.

This mistaken approach could have a negative “snowball effect,” he warned. “Biden should bear this in mind and internalise what has happened in the Middle East.”

Ultimately, said Rabi, this is Biden’s “litmus test”.

“If Biden performs in a successful way when it comes to the Iran file, that will make life easier for everyone in the Middle East, including the United States. If the opposite happens, you can definitely expect a negative snowball effect,” he stated.

Rabi suggested that Israel needs a joint agreement with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates by which they can influence some changes to any new Iran deal if and when it happens.

Romirowsky added that “Iran and its proxies are still the largest destabilising factors to the region.”

As such, he said, “a Biden administration will contend with a more unified Middle East – a Sunni Crescent that includes Israel. This will require an understanding of Israeli deterrence bolstered by an Israeli Qualitative Military Edge.”

According to Romirowsky, moving forward, Biden will need to “convince Israelis that he will have their best interests in mind when it comes to Iran.”

AIR

“If Biden performs in a successful way when it comes to the Iran file, that will make life easier for everyone in the Middle East, including the United States...”

© Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL A WINNER

by Ahron Shapiro

With the last of US mail-in votes in the process of being counted at press time and – despite unprecedented counting delays spanning weeks in some districts – results determined in all but a handful of US House of Representatives and two US Senate races, a clear winner has already emerged in this month’s US election: bipartisan support for Israel.

Halie Soifer, Executive Director of the Jewish Democratic Council of America, told the Jewish-angled US political news website *Jewish Insider* that, even with some setbacks, Israel was in a strong position in the Democratic caucus. “There’s overwhelming support of Israel,” she said, “starting with our leadership on down, including many freshman members who were just re-elected.”

Meanwhile, in the same article, Joel Rubin, Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress and former director of Jewish outreach for Sen. Bernie Sanders’ 2020 presidential campaign, said bipartisanship – implicitly including support for Israel – resonated in districts where moderate Democrats held on. “Clearly it worked for a number of them and they actually did well in the numbers,” he said.

In the days before the election, when most polls indicated that Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden would beat Republican incumbent Donald Trump by a wide margin, members of the far-left or progressive faction of the Democratic Party had high hopes of expanding their influence significantly by beating Republicans. In the end, despite Biden’s win, the Democrats lost seats overall in the House, with far left “progressives” faring particularly poorly.

This faction, spearheaded by Sanders and a group of four core congresswomen known as the “Squad” – Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan – are broadly the most vocal critics of the Jewish state in Congress (though Pressley is something of an exception on Israel). Most, though not all, politicians identified with the Democratic left either believe in making US support for Israel conditional on concessions to the Palestinians or oppose US support of Israel outright. A few even support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel.

On Nov. 3, an article in the left-wing commentary and news website *The Intercept* identified 13 different races where progressive Democrats hoped to unseat Republicans in California, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, Texas and

Virginia. The article also discussed two congressional gains in New York from the 2018 midterms they had hoped to keep. In these 15 races, the Democrats have definitely lost 13, and look very likely to lose another, NY-22 – the Democrat candidate was behind by 6,823 votes as of Nov. 17. Meanwhile, in the final race, CA-25 – where the Republican is currently leading by just 422 votes with thousands left to tally as counting continues at a snail’s pace – the progressive-backed Democrat candidate opposes placing conditions on US support for Israel.

Democratic centrists, including Virginian lawmaker Abigail Spanberger, blamed the progressive faction for the party’s disappointing results in races for the House of Representatives in a conference call following the election. This followed an incident earlier in the year, when Spanberger and a number of Democratic lawmakers from her conservative-leaning state criticised Sanders for urging Democrats to boycott the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), America’s largest pro-Israel lobby group. At that time, the Virginia Democrats warned party leaders that any erosion of the Democratic support for Israel would lead to a loss of support for the party in cen-



Virginia Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger: Progressives to blame for disappointing Democratic results

With Compliments



Ivany
Investment Group

Level 6, Terrace Tower
80 William Street
Sydney NSW 2010
Tel: (02) 9358 6366
ivanyinvest.com.au



trist districts across America. They can now make a good case that they were right.

‘THE SQUAD’ GROWS SLIGHTLY

Not all of the election news for progressives was bad. At least five progressive candidates achieved success in primaries to secure spots in safe Democratic seats, some at the expense of moderate Democrats. Their biggest victory saw Jamaal Bowman (NY-16), who endorses placing conditions on US support for Israel, beat Eliot Engel, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and one of the Democratic Party’s strongest supporters of Israel.

However, as far as continued overall Congressional support for the Jewish state is concerned, the impact of Engel’s departure will probably be minimal. Committee chairs are traditionally chosen based on seniority, which would make Engel’s fellow pro-Israel Democratic stalwart Brad Sherman (CA-30) his probable replacement, though the decision will ultimately be made by the House Democrats’ Steering and Policy Committee, controlled by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Other progressive critics of Israel set to enter Congress for the first time are Cori Bush (MO-1), a veteran activist for Black Lives Matter and supporter of BDS (although she quietly removed any reference to this from her campaign website) and Marie Newman (IL-3), who used to support BDS, but later softened that position to merely supporting the right of others to boycott Israel.



Ritchie Torres: A pro-Israel progressive freshman from New York

Like members of the Squad elected before them, Bowman, Bush and Newman’s campaigns were supported by the progressive PAC (Political Action Committee) Justice Democrats, which pushes anti-Israel positions.

On the other hand, two other progressive winners – Ritchie Torres (NY-15) and Mondaire Jones (NY-17), were at pains to distance themselves from criticism of Israel during their campaigns.

“I am from the Bronx, I’m Afro-Latino, I’m Puerto Rican, I’m a millennial – but I’m also pro-Israel,” Torres told *Jewish Insider* in a December 2019 interview. “The notion that you cannot be both progressive and pro-Israel is a vicious lie, because I am the embodiment of a pro-Israel progressive.”

“One thing I want Jewish people to know is that I will be a friend to Israel,” Jones told the *JTA* in July. “We know that progressives disagree on any number of issues... there’s great diversity within the progressive movement and the topic of Israel tends to be something that divides progressives... it does disappoint me when I see some people suggest without evidence that somehow I’m going

to be non-friendly to Israel. It’s just not true.”

Notably, neither Torres’ nor Jones’ campaigns sought backing from the Justice Democrats, and it’s just as well, given the bitter experience of San Diego progressive candidate Georgette Gómez (CA-53), who saw the PAC pull its funding from her campaign after she published an op-ed and interview condemning BDS and expressing her desire to visit Israel, according to *Jewish Insider*. She ended up losing in the general election to a better-funded Democrat.

In any event, the modest gains by anti-Israel progressives in this election cycle must be seen in the context of a Democratic party that elected 235 members to the last Congress, and will seat up to ten fewer in the new one, in a chamber with 435 voting members.

A BIPARTISAN PLEDGE FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

Israel’s bedrock of bipartisan support in the House and Senate stands to further benefit from the election of Joe Biden as president – a Democratic centrist who distinguished himself as one of the Senate’s greatest champions of pro-Israel bipartisanship over the course of his 47-year career.

“We can’t let Israel become another issue that divides Republicans and Democrats in the major parties,” Biden implored AIPAC in a taped message from the campaign trail played at its annual conference in March 2020. “We can’t let anything undermine the partnership that has grown and flourished from the moment of Israel’s founding.”

According to the Biden’s campaign website, among his campaign promises are to “ensure that support for the US-Israel alliance remains bipartisan,” while also to “reject the BDS movement – which singles out Israel and too often veers into anti-Semitism – and fight other efforts to delegitimise Israel on the global stage” and support implementation of the Taylor Force Act, which conditions US aid for the Palestinian Authority on its ending its practice of rewarding terrorists or their families.

In other words, Biden committed to do his part to protect bipartisan support for Israel by standing up to the far-left elements within his own party who would jettison the US-Israel alliance.

Former Middle East peace negotiator Aaron David Miller, who served under both Democratic and Republican presidents, wrote in the *Washington Post* on Nov. 12 that Biden’s record shows he is likely to plot a course for US policy with Israel that will aim for support from both sides of the aisle.

“The strength of the US-Israel alliance depends on a political consensus, between America’s two main parties, that the broadest conception of the American national interest means robust support for Israel,” Miller wrote.

“[Biden’s] penchant for bipartisanship, in general, will likely return the US-Israel relationship to the normal balance that has characterised it for decades.”



R.Iconic Melbourne

R.Corporation's latest project re-defining inner city living.

Construction commenced.

Display Showroom | 367 Collins Street
www.rcorporation.com.au

R.Corporation
 Everything considered



**PROPERTY INVESTMENT,
 DEVELOPMENT & ADVISORY**



Australian Multiculturalism in 2020

Challenges to a key policy in an extraordinary year

by Naomi Levin

There are few government policies that have survived, despite numerous challenges, for 40 years. Australian multiculturalism is, fortunately, one of them.

A speech delivered in August by Acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multiculturalism Alan Tudge, was a solid restatement of Australia's long-term commitment to multiculturalism.

This commitment promotes the same values that have held multiculturalism strong under both Coalition and Labor governments, including the insistence that all Australians uphold responsibilities to the state and society, such as respect for the rule of law and mutual tolerance. These commitments are coupled with the rights of individuals to maintain ties to their faith, language or national group. Australian multiculturalism also focuses on spreading core values of democratic participation, free speech and free association, and gender equality, as well as a commitment to learning the English language. This combination has seen Australia described by many as “the most successful multicultural country in the world.”

“Our social cohesion is particularly remarkable given the size and diversity of our migrant intake. There are people from every single country on earth living here,” Tudge emphasised during his National Press Club address.

Nonetheless, as Tudge acknowledged, it is also true that Australia's multiculturalism has been facing significant challenges. Some of those challenges have been overcome, others are being addressed, still others are emerging.

What has been common to all these challenges so far is a willingness by government, not-for-profit groups, academics and community leaders to recommit to multiculturalism, while working towards its improvement. This willingness must continue.

Tudge outlined four significant contemporary challenges to Australian multiculturalism: coronavirus, foreign interference, lower levels of English language adoption by some migrants, and technology.

For some commentators, these challenges are too significant to overcome. Some have charged that Victoria, in particular, is crumbling under “toxic multiculturalism” and that this has somehow caused the spread of coronavirus.

This can lead to charges that Australia should be trying harder to assimilate migrants. But the idea of assimilation, where, as Tudge said in 2018, “we must abandon our cultural and religious heritage and all become the same,” is illiberal and impinges on people's freedom to express their identity. Australian multiculturalism has always favoured an approach based on integration – whereby Australians are encouraged to maintain cultural and religious traditions associated with their heritage, if they wish, but also expected to adapt to and seek to be a part of mainstream Australian economic, social and occupational life.

Other critics argue multiculturalism has not gone far enough. Despite being official policy for so many decades, multicultural Australia is not yet reflected in the media and leadership positions, they argue. For example, all of Australia's prime ministers have been of Western Euro-

pean, Christian background. These critics sometimes advocate affirmative action or similar policies.

While there are certainly challenges, Australian multiculturalism has absorbed the impacts of significant global challenges. It has previously dealt with foreign interference, albeit on a smaller scale, while the challenges of migrants learning English and participating in the economy are long term ones. Technology is a modern minefield,

but can provide solutions as well as challenges.



Multiculturalism Minister Alan Tudge:
Four new challenges to Australian
Multiculturalism

CORONAVIRUS

As a result of coronavirus, lockdown measures have restricted participation in important community rituals – such as collective religious worship or meetings of volunteer groups. The economic hit caused by coronavirus and its effect on employment have also affected Australia's social fabric. As Tudge said, “we know that when unemployment rises, sentiment towards migrants can deteriorate.”

But this is not the first global event to impact Australia's robust multiculturalism. Take the 9/11 terror attacks and the world they created once many populations realised they were a target of fanatical Islamists.

In the 2000s and into the 2010s, Australians worried about the likelihood of a large-scale terrorist attack in Australia. This was felt acutely by many groups, including Australian Muslims.

Research conducted by Anne Aly (then an academic and now a Member of Parliament) and Mark Balnaves in 2007 showed Muslim Australians had even higher levels of anxiety than other Australians about the impact of terrorism. The researchers wrote “Muslim participants expressed that

they felt they were being targeted by the media and by politicians and that the media frequently identified them as terrorists.”

Fast forward to 2020, and the origins of COVID-19 in the Chinese city of Wuhan led to reports of racism and threats against people of Chinese origin in Australia and elsewhere. A report by Human Rights Watch in May noted that there was a rise in both racist rhetoric and racist attacks against Asian people.

In the months and years following the September 11 attacks, in Australia at least, the Government focussed on protecting the entire community from terrorism, Australian Muslims included. Civil society responded with many attempts at interfaith outreach in Australia.

During 2020, the Government has responded promptly to challenges to multiculturalism brought on by coronavirus. Tudge publicly condemned anti-Chinese racism, saying “racist attacks have no place in Australia. It is not the Australian way.”

His opposition counterpart Andrew Giles called for an anti-racism campaign and Tudge and Giles then co-sponsored a motion in the House of Representatives condemning attacks on Chinese Australians.

“Racism threatens this and it undermines our social cohesion,” Giles told Parliament. “It was the Chinese-Australian community that first felt the waves of this coronavirus crisis. They felt it affecting their communities before it affected the wider community. The leadership that they have shown is something that I am deeply appreciative of, and I’m sure all members who represent Chinese-Australian communities would share that sentiment.”

The Government also responded with an advertising campaign, in Tudge’s words, “to call out racism, to reinforce the Government’s support to the Chinese and indeed the Asian Australian community.”

While none of these measures address the potential weakening of community cohesion that has taken place due to the necessary closure of places of worship, communal institutions and meeting rooms, there have been serious attempts by Australian leaders to address challenges to multiculturalism during the coronavirus pandemic.

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Foreign interference is not a new phenomenon in Australia – in fact Australia’s intelligence agency, ASIO, was founded in 1949 in response to Soviet espionage activities.



Australian multiculturalism’s success is built on integrating, not assimilating, Australia’s diverse population

The idea that foreign interference is a potential threat to Australian multiculturalism is, however, a contemporary development, as is the source of interference. Informed commentators accuse China of significant interference, with Russia and Iran also reported to have infiltrated Australian institutions, public and private.

Once again drawing on the post-September

11 comparison, Lowy Institute non-resident fellow Anthony Bubalo wrote, “In the same way that al-Qaeda wants Muslims to doubt they will ever be accepted by non-Muslims, the CCP [Chinese Community Party] wants the Chinese diaspora to owe its first loyalty to Beijing.”

Bubalo reported that some Australians of Chinese origin believed that the Government’s focus on Chinese foreign interference felt menacing. In response, he suggested the Government might focus on taking lessons from the post-September 11 experience in managing social cohesion; using “precise language” to differentiate between Chinese people and the CCP; and for leaders to attempt to “define the boundaries of acceptable debate.”

The Government’s approach to dealing with this challenge has been a practical one. Under previous prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, foreign interference legislation was passed and a foreign influence register introduced.

While expressing sympathy to those in diaspora communities who have been exploited, threatened or intimidated by the government or loyalists of their former homeland, Tudge linked more free English language tuition to the challenge of foreign interference.

“Malign information or propaganda can be spread through multicultural media, including foreign language media controlled or funded by state players. This can be

With Compliments from

NETTEX AUSTRALIA
Pty Limited

69 Bourke Road, Alexandria 2015
Sydney, Australia
Tel: (02) 9693 8888 Fax: (02) 9693 8899

particularly influential if local residents' English is poor and hence they are more reliant on foreign language sources,"Tudge said.

Whether this dual approach, of more English tuition on one side and enhanced law enforcement on the other, is sufficient to tackle the CCP's reach into diaspora communities in Sydney and Melbourne, or to prevent intervention from other state-based actors, very much remains to be seen.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The centrality of the English language in ensuring the success of Australian multiculturalism has been stressed from the beginning.

There have been no recent attempts by any official body or major opinion-leader to discourage Australians using their mother tongue – a stroll through any one of Australia's multicultural suburbs will indicate that. In fact, the bilingualism of so many Australians is a key economic advantage and according to Australia's most recent multicultural statement, "our multilingual workforce is broadening business horizons and boosting Australia's competitive edge in an increasingly globalised economy." However, the primacy of learning the English language has always been emphasised in Australian multiculturalism.

Knowledge of the English language helps new Australians navigate education, employment and essential services. All Australians should be able to respond to a local job advertisement, report a crime to police, or respond to public health messages. Without knowledge of English, these simple tasks can become insurmountable challenges.

The extension of more English language classes to migrants who need additional help is a positive move by the Morrison Government and one which should strengthen multiculturalism. But in a move that attracted some criticism, the Morrison Government went one step further,

"The origins of COVID-19 in the Chinese city of Wuhan led to reports of racism and threats against people of Chinese origin in Australia and elsewhere"

TECHNOLOGY

In his speech to the National Press Club, Tudge quoted former chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth Lord Jonathan Sacks – who passed away in November – on the influence of technology in spreading

what would have previously been local tensions far beyond local shores.

The challenge to multiculturalism posed by Australians playing out historic enmities in their new home is not new – consider the ethnic-based fan violence at Australian soccer matches in past decades. However, technology – including, but not confined to, social media – has supercharged this effect.

The most extreme example of this is the role technology is playing in the recruitment of terrorist sympathisers, and even terrorists themselves. These terrorists and their supporters – whether they are Islamist or from the far-right – are a threat not just to national security, but to multiculturalism.

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton said that since the Christchurch attack, when an Australian man apparently radicalised online committed and broadcast a massacre at two mosques in New Zealand, "the Australian Government has taken a number of steps to limit Australians' and our exposure to terrorist and extreme violent material online."

At the less violent, but still dangerous, end of the spectrum, technology is fragmenting media audiences. Where once the broadcast news on the radio or TV was the main source of mass communication, now a University of Canberra report indicates that one in five Australians prefer news that confirms their own worldview. This type of content is readily found on social media, the preferred source of news for 52% of Australians, according to the *Digital News Report: 2020*.

Why is this a problem? There is no gatekeeper for the publication of news on the internet: no editorial guidelines, no Press Council guidelines, no Australian Com-

Kindly sponsored by

Alexander Friedman Pty. Ltd.

munication and Media Authority oversight. People can – and do – publish what they want online and those with low levels of media literacy may not be able to distinguish between real and fake news. In addition, social media algorithms tend to reward scandalous or controversial content – often allowing it to reach more people, than fact-based, considered reporting.

Viewing only news that is consistent with one's own worldview and being effectively led by social media platforms to consume salacious news content ahead of fact-based reporting create an ongoing threat to multiculturalism. These phenomena deny us the chance to learn about those different from ourselves in a positive way. They prioritise dominant stories over the marginalised, and can create enmity toward disfavoured groups by presenting news about them in a distorted and unbalanced way. And they may relegate fact-based reporting to the history books.

There is no easy fix. However, there are important things everyone can do. First, pressure social media organisations to review their algorithms to promote credible sources over “fake news”. Second, lobby these same companies to remove content that incites hate or violence. Finally, choose reporting by organisations that are bound by an editorial code of conduct or oversight authorities, such as the Press Council or Australian Communications and Media Authority in Australia.

CONCLUSION

These four fundamental challenges to multiculturalism are currently being addressed in Australia. It will be some years before we can judge the success of the relevant strategies.

There are certainly signs of stress on Australian multiculturalism. The 2019 Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion study found that there has been a decline by about 10% in the number of Australians who feel a “sense of belonging” over the past 10 years. That same study reported that more than one in four Muslim and Hindu Australians reported they had been discriminated against because of their skin colour over the previous 12 months. On the whole though, the Scanlon Foundation research found evidence of stability in Australia's social cohesion.

With a Government and Opposition committed to the value and integrity of Australian multiculturalism, and with support from the community, the multicultural values that have set Australians on a largely successful path over the past 40 years can continue.

The size and scope of these challenges should not be underestimated. Work will need to continue at all levels – from the suburban multicultural food festival that helps us get to know our neighbours, to stronger nationwide cybersecurity defences.

AIR

REGIONAL PEACE – VIEW FROM THE UAE

by Hend Al Otaiba

The Sept. 15 signing of the Abraham Accords between the United Arab Emirates and Israel is a huge step forward, not only for the two countries, but the entire region. Israel and the UAE had been moving toward greater, low-profile cooperation in various fields over the past few years, but the dramatic nature and timing of the Accords has introduced much-needed optimism into a region in turmoil. The Abraham Accords owe much to the changing attitudes of younger people, and their legacy will flow from their success in advancing the needs and aspirations of the region's youth.



Israel and the UAE: Better together

Last year, Zogby Research Services, a respected polling firm in Washington DC known for its work tracking regional public opinion on a variety of political and social issues, started to see some marked shifts in Arab and Israeli attitudes – things that had not appeared in any of their previous polls.

This was particularly notable in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which for decades has dominated the Arab political landscape. Arabs – and many Palestinians – seemed, for the first time, to be signalling that they were favourable to Arab normalisation with Israel, if it resulted in tangible improvements to the lives of Palestinians.

Reflecting the demographic changes in the region, respondents said they were less concerned about political orthodoxies, and wanted to see real, practical change in the lives of Palestinians and a change in the stagnant regional status quo.

The other notable finding was on the Israeli side: The conventional wisdom in the Arab world is that Israelis are not concerned with Arab opinion, and thus what Arabs think about the annexation of the Jordan Valley is more or less irrelevant. But when our Ambassador to the United States, Yousef Al Otaiba, addressed the Israeli public directly for the first time in an op-ed in an Israeli newspaper last June, warning that annexation would have dire consequences for Israel's relations with its neighbours, Israeli public opinion shifted 12 points against annexation. This strongly suggested that Israelis do indeed care about their relations with the Arab world and are unwilling to risk damaging the prospects of future relations by proceeding with annexation.



All these developments were in play as the Abraham Accords were coming together. We were certain that Israeli annexation would kill the two-state solution once and for all, so we acted fast, offering normalisation of ties, in exchange for a stop to annexation.

People under the age of 35 make up more than 65% of the population of the Middle East. They are the ones whose futures are directly impacted by the actions and choices the region's leaders take now. And they realise this. It is the youth who are signalling to older generations that their views and attitudes need to change; that they need to adapt to new realities if younger generations are to have a chance at prosperous, fulfilling lives.

For the UAE and Israel, the benefits of the Accords are straightforward. The two countries have never been in a state of active hostility, so there is none of the baggage that attends other Arab-Israeli interactions. We expect to see substantial mutual gains quickly, in a number of areas, from health care to AgriTech and tourism.

Once the Accords were signed, we started working with our Israeli counterparts to meet the enthusiastic demand by young people to see what life is like "on the other side."

There has been a lot of interest on the part of Israeli and Emirati students and academics in studying and teaching in the other country. One initiative that is coming together now is a UAE-Israel Youth Circle, bringing young professionals together in the arts, literature, diplomacy and science, to share ideas and make connections.

Israel and the UAE have so many complementary interests and strengths, that the possibilities for action and innovation really are endless, and exciting. We expect these connections to grow and evolve quickly, in step with the number of people traveling to the other country for business and tourism. This will be made infinitely easier by 28 weekly direct flights between Tel Aviv and Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

We are looking into other ideas, including the construction of platforms for collaborative action, where Arabs and Jews (and others) can meet and share ideas, and start new initiatives and businesses. We want the youth of the entire region to imagine how this widening diplomatic space can open doors for them.

It is essential that the Palestinians see the concrete benefits from the Accords. While the task of peacemaking is up to the Israelis and Palestinians, we in the United Arab Emirates will continue to do what we can to support the process. We have seen proposals already from various groups and individuals with ideas about how to bring Israelis and Palestinians closer together through creative logistics solutions, virtual education, and collaborative opportunities for Palestinian and Israeli women in tech, and more.

Last but certainly not least, we believe there is a place for the Jewish and Arab diasporas in this process. These

are dynamic populations with world-class skills who care about the future of the region, and have influence in their own countries.

AIR

Hend Al Otaiba is Director of Strategic Communications in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UAE. This article is reprinted from Tablet Magazine, at tabletmag.com, the online magazine of Jewish news, ideas, and culture. © Tablet Magazine, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

TURKEY AND PAKISTAN ARE FANNING THE ISLAMIST FLAMES

by Jonathan Spyer

French President Emmanuel Macron's expressions of condemnation of political Islam following the decapitation of teacher Samuel Paty on Oct. 16 have led to furious demonstrations in parts of the Islamic world. A number of violent incidents of Islamist terror have followed, including the murder of three people in a church in Nice by a recent Tunisian immigrant to France. It seems likely, though it cannot yet be confirmed, that the terror attack in Vienna on Nov. 2, in which four people died, was also related to the mood of fury among sections of European and global Islamic opinion related to the depiction of images of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam.

Outbursts of murderous fury of this kind, often not directed or organised by Islamist terror networks, form a tragic by-product of the arrival in recent years in the European heartland of significant numbers of people with Islamist sympathies. This outlook brings with it a desire to ensure – by whatever means deemed necessary – an elevated level of respect for Muslim religious sensitivities, over and above those of any other religion or creed. This latter situation is a state of affairs which exists in most Islamic countries. Some European commentators have concluded that such acts are intended to bring about the enforcement of Islamic blasphemy laws in non-Islamic countries.

So far, so familiar. But the current moment differs from previous episodes of Islamist political violence in Western countries in two significant ways.

Firstly, these latest attacks come at a time when the actual organised networks of Salafi jihadi terror are weaker than at any time over the last two decades. The al-Qaeda network is ageing, and closely observed by Western security services. The Islamic State, meanwhile, has yet

to recover from the loss of its last territorial holdings in Iraq and Syria in March 2019 and the killing of its former leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, by the US in October 2019.

The murders of Paty and the three other French citizens in Nice were not, it appears, the result of a direct decision by an Islamist terror network. It is too soon to draw any conclusions on this subject regarding the Vienna attack. ISIS has now claimed responsibility for it. But it is possible that ISIS sympathisers chose to act with no specific order from a chain of command.

Secondly, and most significantly, the atmosphere of fury and desire for retribution is no longer being stirred up only by Islamist preachers and jihadi organisations. Rather, the incitement, the steady drum beat of accusations and the threats are coming now from the leaders and the official mouthpieces of a number of Muslim states. This is a new situation. It is one of profound importance. The states in question are: most importantly, Turkey, and also Pakistan.

The Turkish and Pakistani efforts in this regard appear designed to generate a sort of “soft power” for the governments of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Imran Khan among Muslim populations in Western countries. They thus include within them a dismissal of the notion of legitimate sovereignty, according to which the internal affairs of other states are those states’ business alone.

Erdogan, following Macron’s comments, declared that the French President needed “mental treatment”, urged the boycott of French goods, and asserted that Muslims in Europe faced a “lynch campaign similar to that against Jews before World War II.” France subsequently recalled its ambassador from Ankara.

The Turkish President has form in this regard. In 2017, following a ban by Germany on Turkish officials campaigning in Germany in favour of support for Erdogan in a referendum to increase his powers, the Turkish President warned that “If you go on behaving like that, tomorrow nowhere in the world, none of the Europeans, Westerners will be able to walk in the streets in peace, safely.”

He also threatened at that time to send a new wave of migrants from Turkish shores across the Mediterranean to Europe.

Subsequently, the Turkish President added to his exhortations against the French Government, saying, “If there is persecution in France, let’s protect Muslims together.” He claimed in a speech to the AKP parliamentary group that “disrespect for the Prophet is spreading like cancer, especially among leaders in Europe.”

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, meanwhile, said that the French President had “attacked Islam,” and accused Macron of “deliberately provoking Muslims.” He summoned the French Ambassador to Islamabad for a reprimand.

A statement from the Pakistani Foreign Office followed, asserting that “Pakistan condemns the systematic Islamophobic campaign under the garb of freedom of expression.”

These statements were made against the background of furious demonstrations in Turkey, Pakistan and further afield – including in the Gaza Strip and Iraq.

The efforts by powerful leaders of Muslim countries to inflame the sentiments of Muslims in Europe and beyond it are a relatively new phenomenon. At the height of al-Qaeda’s insurgency a decade or so ago, political Islam was a powerful but oppositional presence in majority Muslim countries (with the exception of Iran, whose Shi’ite identity makes it less relevant in this regard).

Today, it is Erdogan, above all, with Khan as his understudy, who is leading the way with the incitement.

It should go without saying that Erdogan and Khan’s calls for religious tolerance have no reflection

in their own policies at home. Erdogan recently converted the ancient Hagia Sophia Church into a mosque and is set to do the same with the Church of St. Saviour in Chora, Istanbul. Khan rules over a country where Ahmadi and Shi’ite Muslims and Christians are regularly convicted on blasphemy charges, and where Hindus have been forcibly converted to Islam.

This, however, is precisely the point. These leaders, as is crystal clear to their supporters, are asserting a notion of elevated honour to be afforded the symbols of Islam, not arguing for parity.

When the atmosphere of incitement erupts into vio-



Turkish President Erdogan with Pakistani PM Imran Khan at a meeting in early February

With Compliments

Mount Silver P/L.

Consultants & Advisers



lence, as it inevitably must, Erdogan and co. will be on hand to express regret. Erdogan, after all, only supplied the matches and the kindling. Someone else entirely lit the fire.

This approach makes policy sense for the Turkish leader and his allies. Through it, Ankara seeks to acquire a ready-made instrument to impose pressure on Western countries. France is an emerging strategic rival to Turkey, above all in the eastern Mediterranean. Having an ability to foment public disorder within it is a useful weapon.

The Syrian Salafi strategist Abu Musab Al Suri famously came up with the idea of an ‘individualised’ jihad, in which organisations would issue only general directives, leaving individual jihadis to take violent action at their own initiative. This formed the backdrop to the so-called “stabbing intifada” in Israel in 2015. It is strange to see that another version of it appears to be now an element of the policy of a powerful, still officially Western-aligned, state.

AIR

Dr. Jonathan Spyer is a research fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies (JISS), a fellow at the Middle East Forum and a freelance security analyst and correspondent at IHS Janes. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES IN AUSTRALIA – AN UPDATE

by Ran Porat

Several leading voices in the Muslim and Arabic-speaking communities in Australia have been continuing to publish antisemitic tropes, anti-Israel fake news and conspiracy theories. What follows is a brief review of some of these extreme voices over the past few months.

El-Telegraph

The Sydney based *El-Telegraph* Arabic-language newspaper, an outlet with a problematic history of disseminating antisemitic conspiracy theories, has been publishing articles insisting Israel must have been responsible for the blast at the Beirut port on Aug 4.

In his column on Oct. 26, *El-Telegraph* editor Antoine Kazzi OAM tied the Beirut blast to the Abraham Accords peace deals between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain. Inspired by reports that Dubai’s state-owned company DP World is considering purchasing the Haifa port jointly with an Israeli firm, Kazzi mused that “Perhaps the destruction of the Beirut port was required to enable a smooth and legitimate Gulf recovery of the port of Haifa.”

Similarly, *El-Telegraph* chose to republish an article by Wajih Rafi, a retired Brigadier General of the Lebanese Army, and a former military attaché at the Lebanese Embassy in Washington. In “The harbour explosion. And the painful truth” (originally posted on a Lebanese website), Rafi stated that “Some intelligence circles are still insisting on accusing Israel of the operation [the Beirut explosion], by using smart, qualitative and modern weapons, which are not visible to the naked eye, [as Israel] is the world leader in weapons and missile technology.”

Israel perpetrated the attack, wrote Rafi, because the Beirut port, “is a major economic artery on the eastern Mediterranean basin, constituting a serious competitor to Haifa port, as Israel is trying to convert it [the Haifa Port] to the main port in the region.”

Farah News

Farah News is an Arabic-language Australian news and commentary portal, operating from Sydney, that also has a documented record of spreading antisemitism and conspiracies.

In September, *Farah News* ran “The United Nations Abrahamic scheme in the Middle East” by Zuhair Al-Sebaei, a regular contributor to the website. In this article, Al-Sebaei contended that the Abraham Accords were part of the “Abrahamic United Nations” grand scheme originating from Washington to control the Middle East by setting up an Israeli imperial state over large tracts of the region.

The Abraham Accords are but one stage of the plan, he preposterously claimed, that incorporates areas “from Iraq, through Turkey and Syria, to Jerusalem”, while “Israel announced that its promised state would be within this path, meaning from the Euphrates to the Nile, and [that] we [Israel] will throw the Arabs into the sea.”

Another Al-Sebaei article, published by *Farah News* a few days later, “Will normalisation with Israel save the Syrian regime?”, again claimed that Israel is a puppet used by Western powers to take over the Middle East: “[T]he Jews were planted and settled in Palestine in order to tear and fragment the Arab world and to secure the interests of the Western countries that colonised the region and are still colonising it through their proxies,” he wrote.

“Whatever the Arab rulers do,” concluded Al-Sebaei, “the Arab peoples will not accept the existence of the Israeli cancer that gnaws and eats their flesh.”

Australian Muslim Times (AMUST)

Editors of the established *Australian Muslim Times* (AMUST) published an opinion piece by Dr Aslam Abdullah titled “Macron played makar (deception) and God has his plans” commenting critically on the tension between French President Emmanuel Macron and many Muslims,



Zuhair Al-Sebaei

both in France and abroad, prompted by Macron's reaction to terrorist killings in response to a teacher showing his students cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad.

The article contained baseless slander against Jews, Israel and Zionism, even though these have nothing to do with the current tension over the policies of the French Government. Abdullah claimed that "In Australia and the USA, the tri alliance of Christian evangelists, Zionists, and Hindutva has joined hands to attack Islam and Muslims and project them as unfit to be part of Western civilisation." Similarly, he argues that "The roots of Islamophobia are in the literature found in Christian, Jewish, secular and Hindu literature" and "Christians and Jews use their scriptures to capture Palestine and persecute Palestinians."

Covering Joe Biden's victory in the US presidential elections for *AMUST*, Zia Ahmad chose to quote extensively from an article by American antisemite and Holocaust denier Philip Giraldi. Among the excerpts from Giraldi's article, titled 'Israel wins US Elections', quoted by Ahmed is this:

"The United States has become Israel's bitch and there is hardly a politician or journalist who has the courage to say so. Congress and the media have been so corrupted by money emanating from the Israeli lobby that they cannot do enough to satisfy America's rulers in Jerusalem. And for those who do not succumb to the money there is always intimidation, career-ending weaponised accusations of holocaust-denial and anti-Semitism. It is all designed to produce one result: whoever wins in American elections doesn't matter as long as Israel gets what it wants."

Sufyaan Khalifa

Algerian-born Perth-based Sunni preacher Sufyaan

Khalifa is one of Australia's most active conspiracy theory fans and promoters, his efforts including the inevitable use of antisemitic tropes. Posting dozens of videos online, he aggressively pushes wild coronavirus conspiracies to a loyal base of followers among opponents of the COVID-19 lockdown in Melbourne. Many of his coronavirus fables include an antisemitic component, for example, labelling as "Zionist" policy makers in Victoria, such as Premier Daniel Andrews and Victoria Police, that promulgate and enforce lockdown rules he does not approve of.

In mid-September, Khalifa blamed "global Zionism" and Israel for creating coronavirus, the 9/11 terror attacks and other calamities: "The 9/11 events, COVID-19, ISIS, Boko Haram [African Jihadist terror organisation] and other bad events ravaging in the world – they are the results of the leaders of one element – global Zionism that controls the world and their many friends, that are igniting conflicts in several areas across the world," he said.



Sunni preacher and internet conspiracy theory promoter Sufyaan Khalifa (YouTube screenshot)

He also unsurprisingly claimed that Israel caused the Beirut blast by attacking the port with a sea-to-land Gabriel missile and a Delilah "nuclear missile" fired from an F-16 jet.

Portraying Israel in satanic terms as a country seeking to expand as part of an evil global scheme to control the Middle East is one of Khalifa's main themes. In May, Khalifa warned Muslims about the coming of a supposed "Big Israel", in which Israel will control Lebanon, Syria, parts of Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, and that most Arabs who live there will be killed.



Khalifa's YouTube video – Israel is behind 9/11 and COVID-19 (screenshot)

In "Al-Quds [belongs] to us" Khalifa cursed the "criminal Zionists", the "lying conqueror oppressor" Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu, and called US President, Donald Trump and Netanyahu "wild friends from the monkeys and pigs", and "murderers".

"I will not forget you Palestine", another of his online videos, contains a warning by Khalifa that "Palestine is not for sale" because it belongs to "her sons, and to the families of Muslims, Christians and other denominations" displaced from it by "the Zionist occupiers". He then calls on Arabs to teach their children the highly controversial Sahih Muslim Islamic *Hadith* (a story or saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammed and/or his companions) – which prophesises that Muslims will kill all the Jews on Judgment Day.

On his social media, Khalifa also promotes antisemitic and conspiratorial materials. In October, he shared *The Fall of the Cabal* fake 'documentary', since removed by YouTube, promoting the QAnon conspiracy theory, known to incorporate antisemitic tropes. This video touts slurs about evil Ashkenazi "Khazar" Jews taking over the world.

It is easy to underestimate these people and dismiss the toxic lies they spread as marginal. But that would be a mistake. History teaches us the painful lesson that such words find their way to others who then act on them with hate and violence. For that reason, Australian society should be made aware of, and be vigilant to reject, confront and further marginalise, such voices.

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

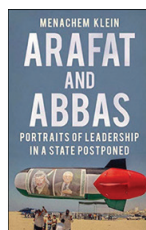


THE BIBLIO FILE

A Failure of Leadership

Arafat and Abbas: Portraits of Leadership in a State Postponed

by Menachem Klein, Oxford University Press, 2019. 225 pp. US\$39.95.



by Jonathan Schanzer

Bar-Ilan University professor Menachem Klein had a front row seat for the collapse of the Oslo process, having advised the Israeli Government when talks with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) imploded in 2000 and taking part in the failed 2003 Geneva Initiative.

Accordingly, Klein should have keen insights about Palestinian leaders Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas. He does acknowledge that Arafat subjected his people to a “dysfunctional, chaotic and informal” style of “one-man rule” that lacked “strategic planning” and ultimately yielded little. Klein writes that under Abbas, “authoritarianism has increased,” noting that the current Palestinian leader “has refused to



Abbas and Arafat have left a legacy of authoritarianism and corruption

resign” despite losing public support and “stubbornly refuses to appoint a successor.”

Yet, Klein’s portrayals of the two are strangely forgiving. Arafat was a “humble leader who listened to and took care of his people’s troubles.” Despite clear evidence that Arafat initiated the disastrous Second Intifada,

Klein doubts that he was “the mastermind of evil orchestrating” it.

As for Abbas, Klein declares that he “maintains a sharp distinction between his home and office,” ignoring how grotesquely Abbas’ family has prospered during his years at the top. Klein also asserts that “Abbas cannot be charged with doubletalk” though he talks peace but bankrolls convicted terrorists. Klein even clears Abbas of antisemitism, despite a PhD dissertation charging Jews with collusion with Nazis.

Further, Klein calls the Israeli government an “ethnic regime” and a “colonialist power.” These and other characterisations of Israel are wildly off the mark.

The author redeems himself in the second half of this book, delving more deeply into the expansion of authoritarianism and corruption under Abbas and his obstinate refusal to prepare for his own succession after extending his four-year term to 15 years. But other accounts of Abbas’ sins are far more compelling.

AIR

Dr. Jonathan Schanzer is Senior Vice President for Research at Foundation for Defence of Democracies. He is author of State of Failure: Yasser Arafat, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Unmaking of the Palestinian State (Palgrave Macmillan 2013) and Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine (Palgrave Macmillan 2008). Reprinted from Middle East Quarterly. © Middle East Forum (www.meforum.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

With Compliments

PASAT PROPERTIES



You're all Israel now

The Jewish state and “Cancel Culture”

by Matti Friedman

This year many people have discovered that liberal life and institutions in the West are in the grip of something resembling a new religion. Anyone following the goings on of the past few months won't need a recap of the attempted “cancellations” of scholars and scientists for heresies, the purge of editors for running the wrong op-ed, or the excommunication of J.K. Rowling.

Adherents of the thought system vaguely described as “woke” believe themselves to be fighting evil in the name of justice. They share a hierarchy of good, a lingo, purity tests, and a stark division of the world into friend and foe, all of which borrow heavily from religious modes of thought. But one of the most obvious signs that religion is in play, and not merely empirical observation or political criticism, is the way this ideology has focused and amplified the condemnation of Jews.

All of this has made me think differently about my experience as a reporter in Israel a decade ago, and particularly about an essay I wrote in 2014 for *Tablet*, which was one of the first publications to pick up on these trends. That essay, “An Insider's Guide to the Most Important Story on Earth,” and a second one that appeared in *The Atlantic*, described the replacement of journalism here by

activism, the subjugation of objective description to higher ideological truth, and the manufacture of politically driven morality plays in the guise of news. I took this to be a problem related to, and perhaps limited to, perceptions of Jewish people and of Israel.



The international media know how to construct a predetermined narrative when reporting on Israel

From the vantage point of 2020, that understanding was far too narrow.

To pull a metaphor from this strange moment: I thought I'd seen the outbreak, when I was really just hanging out in the wet market. The Israel story was just a formative stage in the evolution of a more ambitious set of ideas. Israel was an early target for adherents of the movement for social justice, but it wasn't just that. It

was a place to manufacture a mobilising mythology.

Upon gaining admission to the tribe of Western journalists in Jerusalem in 2006, I found that it wasn't enough – or necessary, or sometimes even desirable – to be knowledgeable about the region or to speak its languages. The important thing was adopting a creed, one which seemed strange to me then but is widely familiar now.

This outlook included a dim view of America; sympathy for all international organisations; an aversion to fervent Christianity and a healthy respect for fervent Islam; a considerate attitude toward despotic regimes from China to Iran, which are not “the problem”; the idea that the moral high ground has something to do with skin colour; the belief that while groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood might sometimes go too far, they do have a point; and the idea that the world would probably

be improved if Jewish sovereignty could somehow be reduced to zero percent from the current high of 0.01 percent.

The key credo, however, was that recognising complexity was desirable only within the tenets of the belief system. Outside of those tenets, complexity was not just unwelcome but wrong. That is, you could discuss how evil the Israelis are, or Republicans, or “nationalists” from India or France,

or oil companies, or anyone on the approved list of wrongdoers – but not suggest they might be right, or their opponents mistaken. The rigours of reporting, in other words, were abandoned for the simple pleasures of the sermon.

I'm lucky enough to have grown up with traditional religion, and I've experienced religious behaviour from moderate to extreme. What I was seeing in the mainstream press was a move from rational observation into a kind of moral judgment that I knew from other parts of my life. The guiding idea was no longer to understand what was going on; there was nothing to understand. We knew who was right and who was wrong, and it remained only to anathematise the bad guys so far into disrepute that even the act of trying to understand them would be a kind of sin.

To achieve this effect, the news narrative in Israel was constructed, without undue difficulty, with tricks of storytelling and framing: pretending the conflict is one between Israelis and Palestinians and not a much broader Middle Eastern war; pretending the Palestinian national movement merely wants a state beside Israel; dismissing Israeli attempts to solve the conflict on reasonable terms; erasing

the actions of Israel's opponents so Israel's own actions and fears seem irrational or duplicitous; and suggesting the Jewish instinct for self-preservation in the Middle East is "right wing" while the Islamist war against Jews or the Iranian drive for regional hegemony are somehow about "human rights."

"The key credo, however, was that recognising complexity was desirable only within the tenets of the belief system. Outside of those tenets, complexity was not just unwelcome but wrong"

The ideology not only puts forward its own explanation for things but rules out any other explanation. If you point out that none of this is true, you're whitewashing oppression and will be tarred as a racist, as I eventually was, joining a list that was less illustrious at the time than it is now.

Today all of this seems almost wearily familiar from "cancel culture." But it wasn't widely familiar a decade ago, because in many ways Israel was patient zero. The successful creation and promotion of the Israel story transformed a real country into something so dangerous and disruptive to the desired order that it had to be cancelled – an aspiration

that has actually become a staple of politics on the left, and is now aired in the press as if it were completely rational.

It's the same thinking behind the idea that an op-ed by a right-wing senator is too dangerous to be published in a newspaper of record, or that it's necessary to pulp books in which a human being of one ethnic background imagines how the world might appear to a human being from another. The creation of the malevolent "Israel" of the news, and the subsequent push to render an entire country beyond the pale, created a pattern that has been replicated against targets ranging from nonconforming biologists to the author of books about teenage wizards. Of course the list of heretics is growing, as such lists always do.

Western ideologies generally include a parable about villainous Jews. Because this is a set of ideas that sees itself as a political critique, the parable doesn't come, as past versions have, from Scripture (in the case of Christianity), or from economic theory (as it did in Marxism), or pseudo-scientific racial doctrines (National Socialism). It comes from the news – specifically, from the mythology that I saw being constructed as a reporter a decade ago.

A strange antagonism to something called "Israel" came up if you went to a Women's March against Donald Trump in New York, or protested violence against African Americans in Ferguson, Missouri, or joined the Dyke March in Chicago, or presented an academic paper at the American Studies Association. It appears in the platform of Black Lives Matter from 2016, in left-wing politics in Britain and France, and in gender studies courses at California colleges.

These diverse applications are unique, if not entirely unprecedented, for a news story. But they make sense



www.noahsjuice.com.au
www.facebook.com/NoahsCreativeJuices



Dyke March organisers object to the display of Jewish Pride flags, Washington DC, 2019

if we understand the Israel story as a kind of sacred template that can be used to explain many different situations. A good example became visible this spring in the wake of the protests that followed the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis: the myth that Israel trains American police officers in the same methods of brutality that killed Floyd, and which are deployed more generally against people of colour. This conspiracy theory has been promoted as factual by (among many others) senior journalists, members of the British Labour Party, and, in early July, by the biggest Lutheran denomination in America.

That last detail supports the idea that new religions are never completely removed from the old ones. Indeed, the unique power of the Israel story is the way it takes the central preoccupation of the new thought system – the inequality of white Western power versus non-white Third World innocence – and projects it onto a setting already loaded with religious resonance. If you're looking for a parable about human inequality, places called Jerusalem or Bethlehem are potent in ways that can't be rivalled by Xinjiang or Laayoune, or Minneapolis.

A good illustration of this merger came in the form of a speech given to a convention of the Episcopal church in 2018 by a Massachusetts bishop who described atrocities she claimed to have personally witnessed in Israel. She described the murder of an innocent 15-year-old Palestinian by Jewish soldiers – “they shot him in the back four times, he fell on the ground and they shot him another six” – and the aggressive handcuffing by soldiers of a three-year-old Palestinian boy whose ball rolled off the Temple Mount.

It later turned out that the bishop hadn't seen any such thing, and she apologised profusely. But in a

religious mindset, the question isn't whether a story happened. The question is whether a story can mobilise believers to achieve good. If the answer is yes, the story is “true”.

This kind of thinking has now bled into newsrooms and university departments, precisely the bodies that are supposed to be engaged in observation and reasoned debate. If important parts of the press and the academy are beginning to sound like ministries, it's happening at a time when religion and quasi-religion are on the rise everywhere – not just on the progressive left but also on the right, and not only in the West. Some of these trends are evident in Israel, too. As if to symbolise the moment, the Hagia Sophia is being changed from a public museum back into a mosque – though in Istanbul, at least, the conversion is being done in the open.

AIR

Matti Friedman is the author of three books including, most recently, Spies of No Country: Secret Lives at the Birth of Israel, and is a New York Times op-ed contributor. Between 2006 and the end of 2011, Friedman was a reporter and editor in the Jerusalem bureau of the Associated Press (AP) news agency. He also worked as a reporter in Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Moscow and Washington, D.C. This article is reprinted from Tablet Magazine, at tabletmag.com, the online magazine of Jewish news, ideas, and culture. © Tablet Magazine, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

With Compliments

Danny & Danielle Taibel

CHARLESTON'S FINE ART AUCTIONS

P O Box 2117
Rose Bay North, NSW 2030

Tel: (02) 9318 2680
info@charlestons.com.au



With Compliments



r&mpersand.

Investing in the next generation of Australian startups

www.rampersand.com

With Compliments

ABAKUS AIRCRAFT & AVIATION SPECIALISTS

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



NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

INTENTS MISREPORTING

The ABC website (Nov. 5) featured a one-sided, unprofessional and propagandistic *Reuters* story on Israel's removal of a group of Bedouin, who had essentially been illegally squatting in tents and shanties for the past few years on public West Bank land that has been a restricted Israeli military live-fire training ground since 1972.

The so-called "village" of Khirbet Humsah – which aerial photos from as recently as 2016 show was almost non-existent at that time – lies within Area C of the West Bank.

The encampment had received EU funding in a decidedly political act. According to the Oslo Accords, Israel has full jurisdictional control in Area C, the Bedouins in question never sought planning permits for their structures, and Israeli courts confirmed the Bedouins had no property rights to the land in question or right to build there and ordered them removed. The EU was aware of all this, yet funded the construction anyway. The report omitted these key facts.

The report said Israel had destroyed the Bedouins' tents which resulted in the "displacing" of "73 Palestinians".

Yet, a couple of paragraphs later it stated that "the residents had already moved back to the site, using tents donated by Palestinian aid groups." In other words, they were not actually displaced, and the claims are exaggerated.

The report included Israeli claims that it only removed 15 structures — seven tents and eight animal pens — and UN spokesperson Yvonne Helle claiming 76 demolished structures, which she said was "more than in any other single demolition in the past decade."

BURYING THE TRUTH

Although it is customary to not speak ill of the dead, that doesn't entitle the media to abandon professional objectivity as happened with some coverage of the death of veteran senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat from coronavirus.

An *AP/Reuters* story on the ABC website correctly said Erekat was "well known in foreign ministries across the world and regularly featured in the media, he was on the second tier of Palestinian politics and diplomacy."

But it was on shaky ground in claiming that "He tirelessly argued for a negotiated two-state solution to the decades-old conflict, defended the Palestinian leadership and blamed Israel — particularly hard-line leader Benjamin Netanyahu — for the failure to reach an agreement... Israel and the Palestinians have not held substantive talks since Mr Netanyahu — a hard-liner who opposes concessions to the Palestinians — took office in 2009."

This is unfair to Netanyahu and inflates Erekat's reputation as a man of peace.

Erekat may have argued in the media for a "negotiated two-state solution" but thanks to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas he had little opportunity to actually pursue one.

Abbas put the peace process into deep freeze before Netanyahu was elected prime minister when he effectively rejected Israeli PM Ehud Olmert's offer in 2008 to create a Palestinian state by refusing to respond to or meet with him again.

Soon after returning to the prime ministership in 2009, Netanyahu

committed his government to the two-state formula for peace. He also made a goodwill gesture to President Abbas to return to unconditional peace talks by implementing a building freeze in settlements for ten months.

In 2013, in another effort to restart talks, Netanyahu agreed to release 104 Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Israel, which led to US-mediated indirect talks. These faltered in 2014 after Abbas refused to engage with substantive issues and entered into a unity agreement with the rejectionists of Hamas that ultimately was never implemented. American mediators have made it clear that Netanyahu offered substantial concessions to the Palestinians as part of those talks.

Since 2014, Abbas has refused to return to peace talks.

BOY OH BOY

An *AFP* report in the *Australian* (Nov. 11) said Erekat "dedicated much of his life to seeking a resolution to the crisis... He took part in the failed Camp David summit in July 2000, and the September 2010 talks in Washington, which stopped in a row over Israel's settlement building."

The report said of the "Palestine Papers" scandal in 2011 — when a trove of Palestinian transcripts and documents purporting to cover peace talks with Israel over the years was leaked to *Al Jazeera* and the *Guardian* — that they "showed Palestinian negotiators prepared to offer significant concessions without securing Israeli guarantees on key issues such as east Jerusalem and the fate of refugees."

Except that, as a leak from the Palestinian negotiating team, the "Palestine Papers" could not possibly

speaking about the extent of concessions being prepared on the Israeli side. In September 2008, then-Israeli PM Ehud Olmert offered to create a Palestinian state, which included most of east Jerusalem, and to resolve the refugee issue too. But Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected the offer “out of hand”, in his own words.

PASSING JUDGEMENTS

ABC Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek used Erekat’s passing to frame Palestinians as helpless victims with limited options to improve their situation.

On *ABC TV*’s “The World” (Nov. 10), Tlozek said Erekat had told him and other journalists how “very difficult” the past “four years under the Trump Administration” have been for Palestinians and that “he never felt it more difficult to appear before Palestinian people and tell them to trust the peace process than he did during the Trump Administration.”

Given the Palestinian Authority put the peace process into deep freeze in March 2014, with years remaining of the Obama administration, this stretches credulity. What peace process was Erekat referring to?

Tlozek listed the challenges the

Palestinians allegedly had to contend with during the Trump Administration, which included, “mov[ing] the US Embassy to Jerusalem, he closed the Palestinian mission in Washington DC. He cut aid to the Palestinian refugees around the region.”

On *ABC Radio* “PM” (Nov. 11), a follow up on Erekat’s death from Tlozek included one Israeli perspective, that of commentator Menachem Klein (whose main claim to fame is his minor role as one of many Israeli advisers involved in peace negotiations more than 20 years ago). Klein was quoted praising Erekat for “heroically” standing up to Israel and the US.



IN PARLIAMENT

Dave Sharma (Lib., Wentworth) – Nov. 9 – “I move: That this House: (1) notes that: (a) 4 November 2020 marks 25 years since Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated ... (2) affirms Australia’s ongoing commitment to Mr Rabin’s vision of a peaceful two-state solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, mutually negotiated and agreed by the Israelis and the Palestinians.

“Rabin’s career was a remarkable and continuous career of public service and sacrifice dedicated to building the state of Israel. And the Israel of today - modern, successful, secure and vibrant - is built upon the foundations that Rabin and others like him put in place.”

Josh Burns (ALP, Macnamara) – Nov. 9 – “Sadly, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks passed away on Saturday morning. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge a giant not just of the rabbinical world but of Britain, the UK and the wider world... In this place I mark Australia’s thanks for all of his work and his dedication to a better and more peaceful world.”

Burns went on to also say, “Rabin was a giant. He fought and stood against not just those who opposed him but those who were on his side. May his memory be a blessing.”

Julian Leeser (Lib., Berowra) – Nov. 9 – “‘Yitzhak Rabin’s story is the story of Israel.’ That was a comment made to me by Ron Weiser, the former President of the Zionist Federation of Australia, recently, and the truth of that statement is absolute. Rabin’s life had been about making peace for Israel, first as a general and then as a statesman... He showed courage in seeking to find peace no matter how unsavoury the partner or how great the challenge.”

Shadow Attorney-General **Mark Dreyfus** (ALP, Isaacs) – Nov.

9 – “I am proud that support for the State of Israel as a vibrant and democratic nation and for Rabin’s vision of a just and enduring peace with the Palestinians remain areas of bipartisanship in Australia’s often bitterly divided parliament.”

Senator **Janet Rice** (Greens, Vic.) in the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee estimates hearings – Oct. 28 – “Can you also confirm then that it’s the Australian government’s view that the Israeli government’s settlement building is in breach of international law?” (On being answered, “The government would not prejudge the outcomes of those negotiations, and it wouldn’t be appropriate to provide a legal view to the committee on that issue.”) “I think that’s also very disappointing...”

In the same hearing, Rice also asked, “Does the Australian government have any training agreements or memoranda of understanding with any Israeli military or police bodies?”

Foreign Minister Senator **Marise Payne** (Lib., NSW) in the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee estimates hearings – Oct. 28 – having been asked by Senator **Eric Abetz** (Lib. Tas.) about Agenda Item 7 of the UN Human Rights Council, which focusses solely on Israel: “It is the only country-specific item, and we have made significant strides in drawing the attention of the international community to that singling out of Israel over the time that we have been a member I think it’s fair to say – I’m happy to be corrected by officials – considerable strides in raising that issue and pointing out its unreasonableness.”

Senator **Eric Abetz** (Lib., Tas.) in the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee estimates hearings – Oct. 21 – “Why weren’t some of these [antisemitic] comments [on the ABC Facebook page] deleted more quickly? Some were retained there for days. Does this meet your expectation on content moderation... does the ABC currently use or have plans to use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of anti-Semitism to assist in content moderation?”

FLAGGING ATTENTION

The *Daily Telegraph* (Oct. 25) reported on the startling fact that no less than 31 instances of Nazi flags being flown on residential properties were reported in NSW over the past two years, yet not a single charge was laid.

Although it is not directly illegal to fly Nazi flags in NSW, police can prosecute under “Section 93Z of the Crimes Act, which was introduced in August 2018, [making] it... an offence to publicly threaten or incite violence towards a person or group on the basis of race, religion... with a maximum penalty of three years’ jail.”

NSW Labor MP Walt Secord was quoted accusing the NSW Government of inaction, saying, “It is extraordinary and damning that there has not been a single person charged under the laws introduced in 2018. The Nazi flag is an emblem of genocide and racism. The decision to fly a Nazi flag is an expression of hatred.”

NSW Attorney General Mark Speakman defended the Government’s inaction, saying it was “awaiting recommendations from Victoria[’s]... inquiry into anti-vilification protections.”

HEARTLESS

The *Herald Sun* (Nov 7) reported on an email sent by a “leading Melbourne cardiologist” who replied to his sister’s request for advice on what she should do about a tenant asking for a rent reduction during the coronavirus pandemic, saying that she should tell him to “pack his Jew bags and f--- off.”

Unfortunately for the cardiologist, he accidentally sent his email response to the tenant’s representative – Susannah Swiatlo.

Ms. Swiatlo, whose “father lost family during the Holocaust... burst into tears when she read” the email,

according to the media report.

The report said she subsequently accepted the cardiologist’s apology, in which he said he had “misused a term to a family member that has been conceived as racism, which was in absolutely no way my intention. I am truly sorry ... There is not a single fibre of my being that is racist.”

The doctor and the tenants have since met to discuss the incident, with the doctor issuing an apology in person.

HATEFUL YOUTH

On Nov. 14, the *Herald Sun* reported on the findings of a long-awaited Victorian Department of Education probe into antisemitic bullying at Brighton Secondary College.

According to the Department, alleged incidents included Jewish students being called names like “Jew-boy” and told to “get in my oven”, swastikas graffitied on campus and students shouting out “Heil Hitler” and giving Nazi salutes in class.

The *Herald Sun* said the report, which has not been publicly released, exonerates the school staff, some of whom were accused of insensitivity and protecting the offenders, including the principal who made a “controversial speech” to the student body that was interpreted as potentially antisemitic.

The report made 18 recommendations for Brighton Secondary College, all of which were accepted, and the Department will develop a plan to better understand and address antisemitism.

MUSEUM PIECE

A Holocaust museum to be built in Brisbane with Queensland and Federal Government funding, saw the *Courier-Mail*’s Jessica Marszalek write (Oct. 11) about visiting the Auschwitz death camp with her grandfather, who was a Holocaust survivor.

Marszalek said, “it’s hard to

describe the magnitude of the experience of entering the gates of this infamous place and visiting its museum... the piles of shoes that belonged to the victims, valued higher than the lives of the people wearing them... the hair, piled in mounds taller than a person – remnants of the mass murder of at least 1.1 million people here... [the] photo [of] – two children, waiting outside a building for their parents who would never come back... Visiting Poland and those Holocaust museums taught me more than history books ever could – about the horrors of genocide.”

Across October and November, the Adelaide *Advertiser* ran stories on the opening of a dedicated Holocaust museum and testimonies from Holocaust survivors Andrew Steiner and Eva Temple.

Meanwhile, in the *Daily Telegraph* (Oct. 19), AIJAC’s Naomi Levin warned of the need to take seriously the “nonsensical ramblings” of the QAnon movement, which has attracted followers from across the political spectrum and “has a strong vein of antisemitism”.

PEACE APACE

Another month and the announcement of another historic peace deal, this time between Sudan and Israel, was still novel enough to receive fairly comprehensive media coverage.

Television news bulletins covering the breakthrough included *SBS*, *Sky News*, and Channels 10, 9 and 7.

On *SBS TV* “World News” (Oct. 24) RMIT University Professor Joseph Siracusa said the Sudan deal was more significant than the UAE/Bahrain accords because “prior to this normalisation” the “Sudanese [were] technically at war” with Israel.

On Oct. 26, the *Australian* editorialised that the Sudan deal “is a massive strategic blow to the misguided presumption that there could never be any normalisation of relations with Israel before the establishment of an

independent Palestinian state.”

In the same edition, the newspaper’s foreign editor Greg Sheridan echoed Prof Siracusa, writing, “But in some ways the agreement with Sudan is even more important. Unlike Bahrain and UAE, Sudan is a big nation, with a population of 41 million and a long history of military conflict with Israel. It sent troops to the 1948 war when the Arab world tried to kill the fledgling Jewish state at birth. It also sent troops to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Khartoum hosted the 1967 Arab League summit, which issued its famous ‘three Nos’ — no peace, recognition or negotiations with Israel. After Sudan took an Islamist turn in the late 1980s it became a regular ally of Iran and helped smuggle weapons into Gaza. As a result, Israel repeatedly struck military targets in Sudan.”

On *ABC TV* “Q&A” (Nov. 2), Lowy Institute analyst Lydia Khalil said the recent accords signed with Israel “weren’t peace treaties. They weren’t in conflict,” prompting Sheridan, who was also on the program, to reply that “they had had conflict with Sudan.”

Despite US President Donald Trump announcing the Sudan deal from the Oval Office in a live telephone hook up with Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu primed for maximum election publicity, it appears to have been unreported on any of the ABC’s radio or TV flagship programs. It also didn’t make the hard copy editions of the *Age* or *Sydney Morning Herald*.

IGNOBLE

SBS online (Nov. 15) ran a silly piece from the *New York Times*’ Rick

Gladstone looking at past winners of the Nobel Peace Prize “whose actions and behaviour — either before or after the honour was given — have been viewed as unworthy or in some cases even absurd.”

Gladstone’s list of reprobates included Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin who were awarded the gong in 1994 for signing the Oslo Accords which heralded the possibility of a two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and created the Palestinian Authority which now governs most Palestinians in the West Bank.

According to Gladstone, “Rabin, then prime minister, was assassinated in 1995 by an Israeli fanatic who opposed a peace agreement. And efforts since then to resolve the conflict have repeatedly faltered, punctuated by bouts of violence and bitter recriminations. Doubts about a proposed two-state solution have only intensified in recent years, amid threats by Israel to annex territory in the occupied West Bank.”

Questioning Rabin and Peres’ right to their Nobel Peace Prizes is preposterous.

Rabin was murdered, as Gladstone said, by “an Israeli fanatic who opposed a peace agreement”, which is the very definition of someone who gives their life in the cause of peace.

Peres succeeded Rabin and shortly thereafter called elections, campaigning on a promise to keep implementing the Oslo Accords.

But a series of deadly Hamas suicide bombings that killed Israelis over the course of the election campaign saw Peres’ double-digit lead evapo-

rate and his rival Binyamin Netanyahu become prime minister.

As for Arafat, from the moment he signed the Oslo Accords, he repudiated them.

When speaking in Arabic to his own people he talked about liberating Jerusalem through blood and fire and, alluding to Koranic references, he told Palestinians the Accords were temporary. Arafat also made a big show of arresting suspected Palestinian terrorists, only to have them released from prison shortly thereafter.

In September 1996, Arafat cynically fomented violence that led to scores of dead on both sides by accusing Israel of threatening the Muslim holy sites on the Temple Mount, after Israel opened an exit in an archaeological tunnel near the mount.

Four years later, almost to the day, Arafat repeated the tactic, when then-Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount. Arafat’s credibility was at a low point, after foolishly rejecting then Israeli PM Ehud Barak’s historic offer of the creation of a Palestinian state on 95% of the West Bank and all of Gaza, with control over most of Jerusalem’s Old City.

Unlike in 1996, the Second Intifada resulted, which lasted years and led to the violent deaths of 1050 Israelis and thousands more Palestinians.

Yet, according to Gladstone, Arafat, Rabin and Peres should all be stripped of their Nobel Peace Prizes.

Elsewhere, the *Australian* (Nov. 5) reported on a new exhibition organised for Sydney’s B’nai B’rith in conjunction with Rabin’s family to celebrate his life on the 25th anniversary of his murder. It quoted curator Alexandra Hillman saying, “He made history by achieving peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt, and he made official visits to traditionally Muslim countries like Indonesia [which does not officially recognise Israel].”

With Compliments



MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

A CUPPA JOE

It was inevitable that Donald Trump's failure to win a second term would see the commentariat hypothesising about what a Biden presidency might mean for the Middle East.

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Oct. 29), academic Timothy Lynch opined that "Trump has not given priority to the Palestinian cause. But Obama did that and achieved zilch. Trump's Abraham accords, on the other hand, have left Israel more secure with more of its neighbours than since 1948. Even Sudan, one of the world's most anti-Semitic regimes, has now recognised Israel as per Trump's latest deal. Remarkable."

On the ABC website (Nov. 5), the ABC's international affairs analyst Stan Grant recalled that Biden was vice president during the Obama administration whose foreign policies "exacerbated an already dangerous world... Obama underestimated the rise of Islamic State and failed to enforce his own red lines in Syria after Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons against his own people."

On *ABC TV* "The World" (Nov. 5), Riyadh-based academic Joseph Kechichian said the prospect of a revived Iran nuclear deal is creating "a lot of tension in the region especially... the Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and others [who] are very much concerned about what Iran might be doing in the region... in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Syria, in Yemen and elsewhere."

Kechichian also said, with considerable exaggeration, that vice president-elect Kamala Harris' "insiste[nce] that the Palestinians will be given their due" breaks with "every" previous administration which have "been very pro-Israel and has seldom wavered from this kind of line."

Agreeing with host Beverley O'Connor's suggestion that Harris' stance could "potentially... bring the region closer to peace than necessarily the Trump approach", Kechichian said, "there is a real hunger" in the region to make peace with Israel because "people are tired after almost 100 years of warfare" but "we will have to wait and see whether or not the maturity process in the West, especially in the United States, will translate into effective results on the ground."

A *Reuters* report on the ABC website (Nov. 8) speculated that "Biden's pledge to restore US involvement in the Iran nuclear deal and a likely opposition by the White House to Israeli settlement of occupied land where Pales-

tinians seek statehood" may see a return to the "acrimonious" relationship of the Obama years.

On *ABC TV* "The World" (Nov. 10), ABC Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek predicted "things are not suddenly expected to reverse under the new administration, but around the diplomatic mission, things are expected to change. No one expects President Biden would suddenly move the US Embassy back to Tel Aviv... the hope... within the Palestinian leadership is that this may lead to greater cooperation with the US... possibly a new peace process and the rejection of the Trump so-called deal of the century..."

that would have seen Israel take around a third of the territory in the West Bank."

Trump's plan was a reflection of the lack of input from Palestinian leaders who boycotted the process. Moreover, the Trump Administration made it clear that the Palestinians would be invited to negotiate about the details on territory and other issues if they returned to the negotiating table.

A brief in *News Corp* papers (Nov. 14) said Biden is "a past critic of settlements who has pledged to put more diplomatic effort into creating a Palestinian state."

More "effort"? Since 1991 every US Administration, including Trump's, has invested considerable time and energy in trying to create a Palestinian state. Nor is this a fair reflection of anything Biden has said.

In *Nine Newspapers* (Nov. 15), *Age* features editor Maher Mughrabi said reviving the Iran nuclear deal "risks alienating Saudi Arabia and Israel" and Biden will need to reassure all sides that "their interests will be protected". He noted VP-elect Harris' commitment to "resume economic assistance to the Palestinians" but added "whether Biden is really willing to advance the cause of Palestinian freedom in the face of Israeli and domestic opposition remains to be seen."

The only factor impeding "Palestinian freedom" is the refusal of Palestinian leaders to accept repeated offers to create two states for two peoples, or even return to negotiations toward this end.

The *Guardian* (Nov. 17) editorialised its concern that Trump may use his remaining time as President to "pursue a scorched-earth policy – perhaps upping the pressure on Tehran so that it hits back, making it far harder to salvage the nuclear deal."

"The ABC's international affairs analyst Stan Grant recalled that Biden was vice president during the Obama administration whose foreign policies 'exacerbated an already dangerous world'"

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

JUSTIFYING ANTISEMITISM

When the foreign minister of an Arab state told the UN that Jews murdered non-Jewish children to use their blood for religious purposes, the pretext was a discussion of contemporary Israel.

When Iranian leaders deny that the Nazis waged a genocidal war against Jews, their motivation is to explain how bad they think modern Israel is.

When an Australian newspaper told readers that the key to understanding the politics of the eastern Mediterranean was to accept as fact the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, it came from a perception of Israel steeped in ancient anti-Jewish stereotypes.

When a Sydney radio station was facing an investigation into racism committed by some of its presenters, the station management was shocked and outraged when confronted with records of broadcasts claiming that the Jews who survived the attempted murder of them by Nazis had now become worse than Nazis. The management, as most fair-minded people would, saw this as antisemitism.

A serial distributor of anti-Jewish material in Tasmania was found to be in breach of Australia's federal anti-racism legislation due to the distribution of material which located Jews or Judaism as the source of any social ill.

Whether it was a matter of Australian social policy or Middle East geopolitics, the template was the same – the Jews are to blame.

When various governmental institutions, including law enforcement agencies, came to recognise the importance of dealing with antisemitism the way other forms of racism were being addressed, they sought guidance for understanding what was or was not antisemitic, including in discussions of the Middle East.

In the 25 years in which I compiled and published data about antisemitism in Australia, a strict principle was adopted – you could say that Israel was terribly wrong and even that you thought it was the worst country on the

planet, but if you said this was because of the Jewish nature of that country or because your caricatures of Jews were being

transferred to stereotypes of Israelis, you crossed the line.

A group of international experts, from the field of anti-racism and human rights, spent years working on and finessing the definition eventually adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA): “Anti-semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical

manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

This Working Definition would not seem to be particularly contentious, although of course those who wish to be antisemitic may object to being called such.

Attached to the Definition was a list of examples of where and when antisemitism may occur, which again should not be contentious.

The Definition states unambiguously that “Criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”

For anyone to claim that the IHRA Definition “equates criticism of Israel with antisemitism” is to grossly misrepresent the Definition.

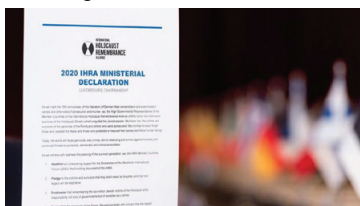
To claim that it is an attempt to silence legitimate voices in debate is both untrue and slanders those who have drafted and subsequently adopted the Definition.

Yet when a prominent Australian political commentator tweeted this dishonest claim, he received backing from a cackling chorus of individuals seemingly shameless enough to align themselves with the principle that it is legitimate to promote racism, bigotry and hatred if it furthers your efforts to bring Israel into disrepute.

The most intellectually dishonest amongst them went so far as to suggest that attempts by Australians from a number of different backgrounds to provide resource material to assist the ABC in combatting racism were an example of criminal “foreign interference”.

There is, of course, a legitimate and healthy discussion to be had as to when, how and where it is appropriate to use the Definition and additional resource material. But it is neither legitimate nor excusable to spread dishonest misrepresentations of the Definition, or to not just rationalise but justify the infusion of antisemitism into public discourse.

AIR



Why is this widely used definition of antisemitism, developed by international anti-racism experts, becoming contentious?



9 771442 369017 >

Australia \$7.95 (inc GST)