

## A GOVERNMENT LIKE NO OTHER

The prospects and symbolism  
of Israel's unique new  
governing coalition

### THE NETANYAHU PARADOX

How personal flaws brought down Israel's  
longest serving PM ..... **PAGE 20**

### THE PRESIDENT'S MASSACRES

The alleged past human  
rights abuses of newly-  
selected Iranian Presi-  
dent Raisi ..... **PAGE 25**

### THE PLACARD STRATEGY

How not to think about  
the Israeli-Palestinian  
conflict ..... **PAGE 31**

### NOT CHILD'S PLAY

Ugliness invades  
the children's book  
industry ..... **PAGE 40**

# QUALITY APARTMENTS BUILT FOR A LIFETIME



- Meriton Suites
- Apartments for sale
- Apartments for rent

[meriton.com.au](http://meriton.com.au)



Sydney | Gold Coast | Brisbane



**WITH COMPLIMENTS AND BEST WISHES  
FROM GANDEL GROUP**

CHADSTONE SHOPPING CENTRE  
1341 DANDENONG ROAD  
CHADSTONE VIC 3148

TEL: (03) 8564 1222  
FAX: (03) 8564 1333

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition focuses on Israel's unique and highly diverse new eight-party coalition Government.

Amotz Asa-El looks at the way this complicated, ideologically-diverse coalition government has been structured and what it can and cannot aspire to accomplish as a result. In addition, we offer a profile of new Israeli PM Naftali Bennett from BICOM, plus profiles of other key players in the governing coalition penned by Zachary Milewicz and other *AIR* staff. Finally, in the editorial, Colin Rubenstein points out how this diverse and democratic Government debunks the claims of Israel haters.

Also featured this month is American columnist Bret Stephens detailing both the political achievements and the personal flaws of outgoing Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu. Plus, noted Israeli intellectual and former Knesset member Einat Wilf exposes the destructiveness of a growing tendency to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of simplistic slogans.

Finally, don't miss Tzvi Kahn's report on why Iran's new president is likely guilty of crimes against humanity; Alexander Joffe and Asaf Ramirowsky on the latest evidence that Hamas effectively controls UNRWA, the UN aid agency for Palestinians, in Gaza; and Australian academic Dr. Ran Porat's exposé of yet more antisemitism and extremism from Arabic and Muslim media in Australia.

Let us know your views on any part of this edition at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au).

Tzvi Fleischer

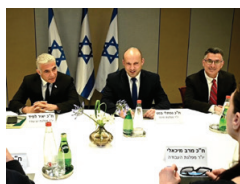
## CONTENTS

### FEATURE STORIES

#### A GOVERNMENT LIKE NO OTHER

AMOTZ ASA-EL

After having invented the idea of rotational government, and then perfected it with the idea of a "parity" coalition... Israel's 13th prime minister is the head of a minuscule Knesset faction that won barely 5% of the vote ..... **PAGE 12**



#### WHO IS NAFTALI BENNETT?

BICOM ..... **PAGE 14**

#### WHO'S WHO IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT

ZACHARY MILEWICZ & AIR STAFF ..... **PAGE 16**

#### THE PARADOX OF BINYAMIN NETANYAHU

The personal and the political  
BRET STEPHENS ..... **PAGE 20**

#### THE IRANIAN REGIME DROPS ALL PRETENCES

EYAL ZISSER ..... **PAGE 24**

#### THE MASSACRES OF EBRAHIM RAISI

TZVI KAHN ..... **PAGE 25**

#### HOW HAMAS TOOK UNRWA HOSTAGE

ALEXANDER JOFFE & ASAF ROMIROWSKY ..... **PAGE 26**

#### MARTYRDOM CALLS AND ANTISEMITISM

RAN PORAT ..... **PAGE 27**

#### BIBLIO FILE: LEARNING TO COUNT

BY COLIN SCHINDLER ..... **PAGE 30**

#### ESSAY: THE PLACARD STRATEGY

How not to think about the conflict  
EINAT WILF ..... **PAGE 31**

### REGULAR COLUMNS

#### FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN ..... **PAGE 4**

WORD FOR WORD ..... **PAGE 5**

#### SCRIBBLINGS

TZVI FLEISCHER ..... **PAGE 6**

#### DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

NOAH ROTHMAN ..... **PAGE 7**

#### ASIA WATCH

MICHAEL SHANNON ..... **PAGE 8**

#### AIR NEW ZEALAND

MIRIAM BELL ..... **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.



### ON THE COVER

Members of Israel's new ministry led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett sit with President Reuven Rivlin in Jerusalem (Source: Israeli Prime Minister's Office/ Flickr)



**Australia/Israel Review**

Published by the Australia/Israel &amp; 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, ZACHARY MILEWICZ****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 AC, 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****Policy and Research Coordinator****Dr TZVI FLEISCHER****Associate Director of Public Affairs & Operations****JOEL BURNIE****Senior Policy Analysts****AHRON SHAPIRO, JAMIE HYAMS, ALLON LEE, NAOMI LEVIN, SHARYN MITTELMAN****Policy Analysts****OVED LOBEL, JUDY MAYNARD****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](mailto:aijac@aijac.org.au)****SYDNEY OFFICE****140 William Street East Sydney, NSW 2011, Australia****Telephone: (02) 9360 5415****Email: [ldemesquita@aijac.org.au](mailto:ldemesquita@aijac.org.au)****SUBSCRIPTIONS****Please send all remittances, changes of address and subscription inquiries to:****Australia/Israel Review Level 1, 22 Albert Road South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia****ISSN No. 1442-3693****Print Post Approved – 100007869****[www.aijac.org.au](http://www.aijac.org.au)****FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN****COLIN RUBENSTEIN**

# A GOVERNMENT THAT LOOKS LIKE ISRAEL

**T**here has always been a large degree of unreality in the distorted way Israel's most unhinged critics have portrayed the Jewish state. Yet this unreality has arguably never been so apparent as it should be to all now, following last month's installation of the new unity Government led by Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid.

In the midst of a Hamas war against Israel in May, US Congresswoman and outspoken member of the progressive caucus Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez shamefully tweeted "Apartheid states aren't democracies", a transparent reference to Human Rights Watch's recent distorted report accusing Israel of practising a form of Apartheid. We've heard similar ugly and ill-informed epithets hurled at Israel in Canberra, on social media, in print and in demonstrations.

Yet Israel's political reality paints a clear and very different picture – a vibrant and healthy liberal democracy that is both representative of a complex and diverse nation and furnished with all the civil and political rights essential to any free society.

Under an unprecedented coalition agreement forged between eight parties across the parliamentary spectrum – including, for the first time, an Arab Islamist party – Prime Minister Naftali Bennett of the Yamina party will exchange positions with Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid of the Yesh Atid party in two years' time.

The composition of the Government is the most diverse in Israel's history, not only politically and ideologically, but also in gender and multi-ethnic terms, in a way that boosts much needed support for Israel's multicultural cohesion. An unprecedented nine of Israel's 27 cabinet ministers are women, including one from the Ethiopian Jewish community. A third are descended from Mizrahi Jews whose ancestors lived in the Middle East. There are Muslim Arab and Druze ministers, observant Orthodox Jewish ministers, an openly gay minister, and a wheelchair-bound minister.

This is a government that looks like, and reflects the many faces of, Israel – not because anyone made quotas and picked people to fill them, but because it genuinely represents a diverse, democratically-elected Knesset.

Given its ideological diversity, the Bennett-Lapid Government's focus will have to be on matters of national consensus. The almost fully-vaccinated country, after initially emerging stronger from the COVID-19 epidemic, is now having to battle a resurgent Delta strain like so many other nations. The new Government will also need to pass the country's first budget in almost three years, address pressing needs in the sectors of housing, education and health, and implement judicial and economic reforms.

No major changes are expected in matters of national security. Hamas-ruled Gaza remains an Iranian-backed time bomb whose terrorist rulers effectively hold two million civilian residents hostage, whose danger constantly increases, yet would be too costly to realistically defuse. The only possible path forward is to deter and seek to disarm Hamas, while also trying to find mechanisms that provide the residents with the goods and services they need without facilitating a Hamas military build-up.

Under Bennett and Lapid, Israel will continue to remain committed to stopping Iran from building nuclear weapons and oppose any dramatic weakening of sanctions against Iran in exchange for a return to the flawed 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal. Indeed, this will likely be a first order issue for Bennett and Lapid since, very disturbingly, reports suggest the US may be on the cusp of rolling over and lifting sanctions without adequate Iranian concessions!

The selection of notorious mass-executioner Ebrahim Raisi – responsible for 4,000 or more summary executions of Iranians – as Iran’s next president only brings into greater focus the fact that Iran’s conventional and nuclear threat endangers the stability and security of the entire free world, not only Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Perhaps his selection – following a completely illegitimate, rigged and widely boycotted election – will cause the international community to reconsider its plans to empower the odious regime he represents through a nuclear deal that would provide it with a huge boost in resources.

Meanwhile, the new Israeli Government promises to address problems that have arisen in Israeli Arab society, including issues of land rights and spiralling violent crime in many towns. The coalition agreement will also see a doubling of government investment in infrastructure in Arab cities, towns and villages that were already at record highs under the Netanyahu Government.

Before the last election, Israel’s new deputy minister in the Prime Minister’s Office Mansour Abbas – leader of Israel’s largest single Arab party Ra’am – broke away from the Joint List coalition of majority Arab parties over their continued refusal to back any realistic Israeli government. Abbas believed that the interests of Israeli Arabs could be best served from inside government in ways that they

never could be from the long-preferred option of sitting in opposition. Should Abbas’ bold experiment succeed, it will positively transform the political role of Israel’s Arab citizens.

There is nothing more Israeli than using your democratic and equal rights, enshrined in Israel’s Declaration of Independence and its Basic Laws, to effect change, as Abbas has demonstrated. His political power and behaviour are

not only inconsistent with the absurd allegations of Israeli Apartheid – it’s about as far removed from Apartheid as you can get.

Yet the purveyors of the Apartheid smear have doubled down on their falsehoods – for example, calling the new Government right-wing, when it clearly is not, or anti-peace, even though all parties in the coalition, including Prime Minister Bennett, have expressed at least an openness to a two-state peace paradigm under the right conditions.

Those who continue to work to delegitimise and demonise Israel employ a narrative that is built on a foundation of reflexive hostile emotion rather than empirical reality.

For them, the words of the late US Senator and intellectual Daniel Patrick Moynihan still ring true: You are entitled to your opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts. Israel’s new Government is living proof of a factual reality they desperately and dishonestly try to obscure and deny.

AIR

## “WORD FOR WORD”

“I am proud of being a defender of human rights and of people’s security and comfort as a prosecutor wherever I was [...] All actions I carried out during my office were always in the direction of defending human rights.”

**New hardline Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who is allegedly responsible for the execution of thousands of Iranians in the 1980s (NPR, June 21).**

“This weekend Iran chose a new President, Ebrahim Raisi. Of all the people that Khamenei could have chosen, he chose the hangman of Tehran, the man infamous among Iranians and across the world for leading the death committees which executed thousands of innocent Iranian citizens... Raisi’s selection is, I would say, the last chance for the world powers to wake up before returning to the nuclear agreement and to understand who they’re doing business with.”

**Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (Twitter, June 20).**

“The very act of our participation in this government and in this political process brings, and I could be wrong, it brings calm to

the region, a feeling of hope, that it’s possible to live together... We have two hats: on the one side we are Arab Palestinians. But we are also Arab citizens of Israel.”

**Ra’am party (United Arab List) leader and deputy minister in the new Israeli government Mansour Abbas (Time, June 11).**

“The lack of progress in clarifying the Agency’s questions concerning the correctness and completeness of Iran’s safeguards declarations seriously affects the ability of the Agency to provide assurance of the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program.”

**International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi testifies to its Board of Governors (IAEA, June 7).**

“It is inconceivable how one can hold the Israeli flag in one hand and shout ‘Death to the Arabs’ at the same time... These people are a disgrace to the people of Israel.”

**Alternate Prime Minister and Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid condemns racism at a flag march in Jerusalem (Times of Israel, June 15).**

“I accept upon myself the heavy responsibility you have placed upon me. I accept the privilege of serving the entire Israeli public.”

**Incoming Israeli President Isaac Herzog (Times of Israel, June 2).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## A VICTORY FOR COMMON SENSE

There are many reasons to be cynical about democratic politics, but occasionally something happens which helps restore one's faith in parliamentary processes and policy-making.

I say this in reaction to the unanimous and bipartisan decision of the federal Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) on June 22 to recommend that Australia consider extending its listing of Hezbollah as a terrorist entity to the full organisation.

Since 2003, Australian governments have listed only Hezbollah's External Security Organisation (ESO) as a terrorist organisation under the Criminal Code. Australia is the only country in the world to proscribe part of the group in this way. All other nations which view the group as a threat either proscribe the whole entity or at least ban its full military wing. Numerous countries – including the UK and Germany – have moved to a complete ban in recent years.

Moreover, as PJCIS Chair Senator James Paterson (Liberal) and Deputy Chair Anthony Byrne (Labor) both said in announcing the Committee's findings, drawing a distinction between the ESO and the rest of Hezbollah is "arbitrary". No such distinction is acknowledged to exist by other governments, international experts, or even the leaders of Hezbollah itself, who have repeatedly insisted it is a unitary organisation under a single command.

So if this decision looks like a no-brainer, why is the decision such a positive example of effective parliamentary government?

Because there appears to have been die-hard resistance to expanding the listing of Hezbollah somewhere in the foreign affairs, national security or law enforcement branches of the federal bureaucracy. The reasons are not really clear, but for more than a decade, successive Australian ministers responsible for making decisions on terrorism listings have relied on classified bureaucratic advice as the basis to continue Australia's anomalous legal approach to Hezbollah.

Both previous Minister for Home Affairs Peter Dutton and current Minister Karen Andrews cited such advice when relisting only Hezbollah's ESO in 2018 and earlier this year, respectively. This was despite a recommendation from the PJCIS in 2018 that Australia's listing of Hezbollah's ESO be extended to the Military Wing.

In 2020, Dutton explained the decision to keep the current ESO-only listing by saying it was based on "facts that aren't publicly available."

But now our parliamentarians have forensically resisted this seemingly stubborn and irrational stance on Hezbollah by elements of the bureaucracy – and they have done so in a completely bipartisan and judicious way, without a hint of either partisan rancour or point-scoring. They have heard and weighed up the arguments of the bureaucrats – presumably including any "facts that aren't publicly available" discussed in the closed hearings – and unanimously agreed that they do not justify Australia's current problematic posture on Hezbollah.

This is exactly the way parliamentary committee hearings are supposed to work.

It's a good thing, too – Australia's limited stance on Hezbollah matters. Hezbollah has been shown to be involved in money laundering and drug trafficking through Australia, Hezbollah flags appear at local demonstrations, and at least one Australian citizen has been convicted of involvement in a Hezbollah terrorist bombing. Yet our problematic legal regime means that fundraising or even working for Hezbollah are arguably allowed in Australia.

Unfortunately, inspiring though it is, the PJCIS finding is still not the end of the story. The Committee can only recommend – only the minister for home affairs acting for the Government can actually institute a change to our terrorism listing for Hezbollah. Hopefully, given the unanimous, well-argued and emphatic recommendation from the PJCIS, it will not be long until the Government decides to do so.

## ANTI-NORMALISATION JABS THE PALESTINIANS AGAIN

As this column has frequently tried to document, a hysterical adherence to "anti-normalisation" – a rejection of any normal relations with Israel and Israelis because they are ostensibly eternal enemies – by Palestinian activists and leaders has repeatedly hurt ordinary Palestinians a great deal. They have suffered economically, educationally, medically, and in terms of hopes for statehood, because anti-normalisation activists sabotaged numerous interactions that would have provided Palestinians with concrete benefits or significant opportunities.

In late June, the on-again, off-again Palestinian Authority (PA) attitude to a COVID vaccine swap deal reached with Israel was yet another example of anti-normalisation hurting Palestinians.

The deal was that Israel would supply the PA health system with more than 1.4 million surplus Pfizer vaccines that were due to expire shortly in exchange for an equal number of vaccines later, to come out of supplies the PA had ordered but were not expected to arrive until at least September. Thus, the PA could vaccinate large numbers of residents immediately, rather than waiting until the vaccines arrive. It was an unambiguous win-win.

The PA claimed it reneged on the agreement because

the initial 90,000 vaccines it was given were expiring at the end of June (the other 1.3 million expire later), but it is crystal clear that this was just an excuse. The PA was told about the expiry dates when the deal was reached, and according to the PA's own claims about how quickly it could vaccinate Palestinian citizens, there was plenty of time to get the vaccines into residents' arms before they expired. Moreover, the PA reportedly had even contacted Pfizer about the expiry dates before the deal went forward and were assured the vaccines were safe. No, PA Health Minister Mai Alkaila actually decided to scrap the deal – and then reverse herself again and seek to renegotiate it – because of an avalanche of anger, largely on social media, led by anti-normalisation activists insisting this was a corrupt arrangement with the enemy to give Palestinians dangerous, expired vaccines.

The hatred and rejectionism long encouraged in Palestinian society by the PA has had self-destructive effects on the welfare of the Palestinian population yet again.

AIR



Noah Rothman

## JOURNALISTS AGAINST TRUTH

*On May 14, an open letter was published calling on the Australian media to “Do Better on Palestine”, and “Consciously and deliberately make space for Palestinian perspectives, prioritising the voices of those most affected by the violence” and “avoid ‘both siderism’.” It was signed by dozens of prominent and less prominent Australian journalists. Similar “open letters” appeared in other countries, including the US. The following article specifically addresses the wording of the US letter, but its overall analysis also applies to the Australian version.*

In recent weeks, a slew of reporters added their names to an open letter calling for an end to their profession.

They don't frame their demands that way, of course, but that would be the practical effect of their recommendations.

The many high-powered journalists who signed on to this petition have demanded that news media embrace and disseminate “a narrative” – an elementarily didactic tale in which “Israel's systematic oppression of Palestinians is overwhelming,” a fact that “must no longer be sanitised.”

Theirs is a romantic fable in which Israel is powerful, the Palestinians are powerless, and journalism's role should be to promote this tale – not just to inform but to get results.

The first problem with this mission statement is that it is predicated on a series of falsehoods. These reporters affirm that it is an indisputable fact that Israel's conduct

constitutes “apartheid, persecution, ethnic supremacy” because these terms are “gaining institutional recognition” – the “many people are saying” standard of veracity.

“Media outlets often refer to forced displacement of Palestinians living there – illegal under international law and potentially a war crime – as ‘evictions.’” They claim that it is a falsehood to contend that this is a mere “dispute” between a landlord and a tenant in the east Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

But that's precisely what this is.

The legal conflict between Jewish owners who claim a chain of documented title over one piece of property going back to 1875 and its Arab occupants who've resided there since Israeli independence in 1948 – when the property, but not the title, was ceded to them by Jordan – has been working its way through Israel's independent judiciary for four decades.

Maintaining the fiction that Jerusalem was seeking to “Judaize primarily Palestinian neighbourhoods,” is crucial to the “narrative.” It inserts the Israeli Government into affairs that it wasn't involved in.

This leads us to yet another ponderous assertion made by these self-described journalists: Western journalism tends “to disproportionately amplify Israeli narratives while suppressing Palestinian ones.”

The very notion that the news media is somehow unable to “accurately reflect the plight of the Palestinians” is so solipsistic that one has to wonder what reality these reporters inhabit.

The Palestinian territories and east Jerusalem are routinely described in the press as “occupied,” though that's oversimplified to the point of being misleading. In Gaza, every Jew was forcibly relocated by the Israeli Government in 2005, and much of the territory presently under “occupation” would be ceded to Israel according to the terms of the many proposed resolutions to this conflict.

We are routinely treated to soft-focus profiles of the long-suffering Palestinian people who languish under oppressive regimes that devote more of their money and energy to making war against Israel than serving their people. And yet, the villain of this rather straightforward story is always the same and almost never the true malefactor.

As *Vox.com* reported, progressives in government and the press have come to view the Palestinian cause as an extension of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. They use BLM's campaign against police violence as a heuristic to navigate a conflict they don't understand and which they don't seem to want to understand. Rather, they want it to comport with a childishly simplistic, Marxist-flavoured narrative about how power dynamics explain the world.

Call that what you will, but you can't call it reporting. What these alleged journalists want isn't journalism. They are on a “sacred” mission to promote “contextualised truth.” Another way to say “contextualised truth” is “lie.” It



even makes for pithier copy, which is what real reporters strive to produce.

AIR

*Noah Rothman is the Associate Editor of Commentary and the author of Unjust: Social Justice and the Unmaking of America. © Commentary (www.commentarymagazine.com) reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

### ANOTHER KINGPIN DOWN

Security forces in Southeast Asia retain an impressive capability to pick-off or jail leaders of jihadist groups, but emptying the well from which they emerge remains a more difficult challenge.

A nephew of the Islamic State (IS) leader in the Philippines and an Abu Sayyaf commander accused of beheadings were among four militants killed by security forces in a dawn raid on June 13 in the southern Sulu islands.

Among those killed was Al-Al Sawadjaan, a suspected bomb maker and the youngest brother of Mundi Sawadjaan, the Philippines military told local media. Both men are nephews of the Abu Sayyaf commander and IS leader in the Philippines Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan.

The Sawadjaans have been blamed for orchestrating bomb attacks in Jolo, Sulu's main city, including a bombing in August 2020 that left 14 dead and an attack by two Indonesian suicide bombers at Jolo's cathedral in January 2019 that killed 23 people.

The prized scalp claimed in the raid was Injam Yadah, an Abu Sayyaf militant notorious for a string of high profile abductions and beheadings. Yadah was accused of being involved in snatching eight Indonesian fishermen in waters off Malaysia in January 2020. Three were immediately released, one was executed in October 2020 and four were rescued by Filipino troops in March 2021. He was also linked to the kidnapping in 2015 of two Canadian tourists who were later beheaded after a ransom payment deadline passed.

The Abu Sayyaf is now believed to number about 200 militants, operating largely out of Sulu and the nearby island of Basilan. Although it is believed to be split into two factions, it remains under the nominal leadership of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, who has not been heard from since last year.

There is speculation that Hatib died in a clash with the military, but his body has never been found, which raises questions about the apparent leadership void of IS-aligned groups in the region.

The killing of five Abu Sayyaf fighters in a shootout in the Malaysian state of Sabah in May points to a group

under pressure – dispersing into small units, even crossing into foreign jurisdictions to evade the Philippines military. The gunfight in Beaufort, a district in western Sabah, occurred more than a week after police arrested eight Abu Sayyaf suspects and 29 others from the same area after a tip-off from Philippine authorities.

The Malaysian police operations illustrate the crucial role that cross-border and inter-agency intelligence sharing play in countering the activities of militant groups. In 2017, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia launched trilateral patrols aimed at preventing acts of piracy and kidnappings at sea along their common maritime boundaries.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian Government's drive to limit the influence of Islamist radicalism risks negative implications for democratic governance, argues a new report from the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC).

The report examines the trajectory of the campaign against extremism from its origins as a reaction to the mass mobilisation in 2016, which brought down the then Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (AKA "Ahok") on spurious blasphemy charges, to the current drive against the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), an Islamist vigilante group.

The downfall of Ahok, a protégé of Indonesian President Joko Widodo, galvanised the President's view that extremist Islamist groups had to be reined in. The banning of FPI and Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, the largest and most visible of such groups, headlined a series of moves to deny "radical", anti-democratic ideologies access to state institutions.

The IPAC report argues that the definition of radical is "overly broad" and could potentially include any government critics, with no appeal mechanism for those identified. The report also questions the involvement of the military in some aspects of the campaign, arguing it could signal a return to a more political role.

The downfall of the FPI has been striking. Once afforded a large measure of police and military protection for its vigilante-style attacks on "vice", its excesses have prompted an increasingly hardline response from the Widodo Government.

Its firebrand Islamic cleric leader, Habib Rizieq, was sentenced in May to eight months in prison for encouraging people to attend mass gatherings in violation of COVID-19 protocols. Rizieq returned to Indonesia in November from self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia, pledging to lead a "moral revolution", with the aim of consolidating hardline Islamic groups against the Widodo Government.

An estimated 50,000 supporters swamped him at Jakarta airport, while two other large gatherings brought things to a head. A clash in December between FPI members and police left six of Rizieq's bodyguards dead, and Rizieq's arrest followed soon after. By February, the FPI had been formally banned and most of the group's top leadership was behind bars.

AIR



Miriam Bell

## A SAFE HAVEN NO MORE

My grandfather, a refugee from Czechoslovakia, used to say that New Zealand is a safe place for Jews, but don't make the mistake of thinking there is no antisemitism around, because there is. Over the years, I've seen examples of that hidden antisemitism come to the surface.

Neo-Nazi skinhead characters were omnipresent in the late 1980s and early '90s.

There have been a series of desecrations of Jewish cemeteries, including one in Wellington in 2004 where 92 graves were damaged and a chapel burnt down. Last year, Temple Sinai (again in Wellington) was graffitied with swastikas and the word "Heil".

And there's always been a particular level, and tone, of vitriol that emerges when the situation between Israel and the Palestinians boils over into military conflict, sometimes spilling over into clear antisemitism.

Yet these hints of antisemitism did not shake my belief that New Zealand was a safe haven, largely insulated from the extremes of anti-Jewish sentiment evident in other countries. But that has changed in the wake of the most recent Israel-Gaza conflict.

There can be no doubt that antisemitism in New Zealand increased. While there have not been the sorts of violent attacks on Jews seen recently in the United States and Europe, a particularly high number of antisemitic incidents were recorded in May, the Jewish Council said.

In 2020, the Council recorded 33 antisemitic incidents, the highest number since records began in 1990. But in May alone it recorded 16 incidents, ranging from targeted antisemitic abuse of Jewish students online to a man giving the Nazi salute outside a synagogue.

NZ Jewish Council spokesperson Juliet Moses said those incidents did not include antisemitic social media posts from New Zealanders, but there was also a major increase in those:

"Not only did the quantity of social media hate increase, but so did the level of vitriol... there have been multiple expressions of support for terrorists as well as repetition of age-old tropes about Jews controlling politics and/or the media."

According to Massey University Professor Paul Spoonley, an expert on far-right extremism, antisemitism on the far-right has been on the rise since around 2016. The recent Israel-Gaza conflict intensified that trend, he said.

But there's an elephant in the room which many New Zealanders appear reluctant to acknowledge. While antisemitism on the right has increased, so too has antisemitism on the left.

During the conflict, this was evident in the social media vitriol. But perhaps the most glaring public example was when Green Party MP Ricardo Menéndez March tweeted "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free", along with photos of himself and two other Green MPs at a pro-Palestine rally.

This is an extremist slogan used by Hamas supporters, well-known as a call for the destruction of Israel and the expulsion of Jews from the region. Moses noted that even if the Green MPs did not know this initially, after it was pointed out to them they still chose to double down and repeat it.

The Green MPs were not alone in their apparent ignorance of, or disregard for, the ongoing complexities of the Israel-Gaza conflict.

For example, in a segment on "The Project", presenter Kanoa Lloyd described the conflict as "a bit like colonisation". This prompted Holocaust and Antisemitism Foundation of Aotearoa New Zealand co-founder Sheree Trotter to write an open letter to Lloyd explaining why it wasn't. She did not receive a response.

Trotter said popular discourse is increasingly viewed through the lens of power relationships, which influenced reporting of the conflict with Gaza: "The Palestinians had less sophisticated weapons and there were more Palestinian victims – therefore Israel was the bad guy."

"In the New Zealand context, it's very tempting to try to superimpose the local history onto Israel: Palestinians are seen as the indigenous people who were colonised and dispossessed by a foreign power."

The fact the backlash seemed more severe following this conflict may be because New Zealand is going through a process of rethinking its own history, Trotter said.

This "anti-Zionist" backlash seems to have continued post-conflict. The most disturbing example occurred at a counter-terrorism *hui* (a Maori word for social gathering or assembly) held in Christchurch in mid-June.

Moses was on a panel at one session and made a statement calling for diversity, tolerance and peace. In the speech, she said that all forms of terrorism should be condemned and referenced a pro-Hezbollah rally held in Auckland in 2018 as part of this call.

This prompted a handful of people to walk out in protest with shouts of "Free Palestine". It was reported as a "mass walkout", although the vast majority of the 300 people in attendance stayed put.

Moses was accused of Islamophobia and racial insensitivity by the usual suspects, including Green MP Golriz Ghahraman, while some questioned why she was allowed to speak at the *hui* at all.

The fact the Jewish community faces threats from both the right and the left is often overlooked. The result is that it certainly doesn't feel quite as safe to be Jewish in New Zealand as it once did.

# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Since a ceasefire was declared on May 21 after the latest Israel-Hamas war, no rockets have been fired from Gaza. However, Hamas carried out incendiary balloon attacks across the border on June 15-17, sparking numerous wildfires and prompting Israeli retaliatory airstrikes against Hamas targets.

A civilian and an IDF soldier were stabbed on May 24 in Jerusalem near the Israeli Police national headquarters. The attacker was killed.

There were numerous stabbing, shooting and car-ramming attacks, and severe rioting across the West Bank, while Israel thwarted attempts to smuggle in weapons from Jordan and Lebanon.

## NEW DETAILS ABOUT PALESTINIANS KILLED DURING GAZA WAR

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported on May 27 that of the 256 Palestinians killed in Gaza in the recent conflict, 128 were civilians, of whom at least 11 were killed by misfired Palestinian rockets that fell inside Gaza.

An investigation by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC) found that at least 112 (48%) of the 234 Palestinian casualties it identified were definitely associated with terrorist groups, while many of the civilians killed were either family members of the terrorists or happened to be in very close proximity to them. Of the civilians, at least 21 died from misfired rockets and five from causes unrelated to the war. As many as 42 were killed when a strike on Hamas' tunnel network accidentally caused two buildings nearby to collapse.

In late May, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) revealed it had found a tunnel built and used by Palestinian militants for their attacks on Israel under one of its schools in Gaza.

## IRAN ENRICHES URANIUM TO 60%

Iran announced on June 17 that it had enriched 108kg of uranium to 20% level and 6.5kg to 60%, very close to 90% weapons grade enrichment. Teheran has accumulated enough fissile material to potentially build three nuclear warheads, and Iran's potential breakout time to produce enough weapons grade fissile material for a bomb is now estimated to be less than three months.

Rafael Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), noted on May 26 that Teheran has yet to provide explanations for evidence the agency had found of forbidden nuclear activities at three undeclared sites in Iran. He also warned that IAEA monitoring in Iran since February, when Iran began limiting IAEA activities at its nuclear sites, is "not ideal".

## IRAN BEHIND SOCIAL MEDIA ANTISEMITISM

New research indicates Iran was behind some of the recent spike in antisemitism on social media.

During the recent Hamas-Israel conflict, Iranian regime-linked Twitter accounts began spreading messages like "hitler was right" and "kill all jews" at a rate of 175 times per minute, according to the Network Contagion Research Institute, an organisation affiliated with Rutgers University and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

Another popular twitter hashtag during the conflict was #COVID1948, promoting the idea that Israel is a dangerous virus worse than COVID-19. A report by Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies showed that this hashtag was coordinated by an Iranian network beginning in April 2020 and was part of an incitement campaign spread through official Iranian media and across social media, including accounts associated with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

## IRANIAN SHIPS TO VENEZUELA?

Western countries are closely monitoring two Iranian ships which set sail in late May towards Teheran's ally Venezuela, likely to supply weapons in breach of international sanctions, including seven fast gunboats of the sort used by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The two vessels were the first Iranian ships to navigate past the Cape of Good Hope.

In mid-June, the two ships seemed to change course and are now heading towards the Mediterranean Sea, possibly toward Syria. The Biden Administration warned Venezuela and other countries in the region not to accept the ships.

Earlier in June, the *Kharg*, Iran's largest military ship, caught fire and sank in the Gulf of Oman. In the past, this fuel and supply vessel had delivered missiles to Syria.

## HAMAS THANKS AL JAZEERA

On June 10, Al Jazeera, the Qatari news network, was honoured by the terrorist organisation Hamas, which presented it with a certificate

of appreciation for its “exemplary coverage” of the recent Israel-Hamas conflict.

Khalil al-Hayya, Hamas deputy chief in Gaza, praised Al Jazeera reporters for “demonstrat[ing] their belonging to the cause of the oppressed Palestinian people.”

Al Jazeera has repeatedly been accused of biased pro-Hamas coverage, in line with the political preferences of the Qatari Government, which is a major backer of the terrorist group.

## IHRA DEFINITION ADOPTED BY SWITZERLAND, TEXAS, QUEBEC

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, introduced in 2016, has continued to be adopted across the world, the latest three governments to do so being those of Switzerland, Texas and Quebec. As well as defining antisemitism, the working definition gives examples of what can constitute antisemitism, including in relation to extreme claims about Israel.

Switzerland is the 36th country to adopt the definition. In a statement, its Federal Council said, “This definition can serve as an additional guide for identifying antisemitic incidents within the framework of the various measures to combat antisemitism in Switzerland.”

## UNHRC CREATES PERMANENT INQUIRY INTO ISRAEL

On May 27 the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed a resolution creating a permanent Commission of Inquiry (COI) to investigate alleged violations of international law during the recent Israel-Hamas conflict, as well as the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is the first time the UNHRC has formed a permanent, or ongoing, commis-

sion into a UN member state. The UNHRC resolution did not refer to Hamas, or acknowledge its rocket and terror attacks on Israeli civilians or oppressive rule in Gaza.

The UNHRC has a long history of very disproportionate focus on Israel, which is the subject of almost half of all country-specific resolutions it has passed, as well as the focus of a permanent separate agenda item raised at all UNHRC meetings.

The new Commission’s mandate enables it to investigate “all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict, including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity.” Its findings could be used as evidence before the International Criminal Court.

Meanwhile, on June 7, Israel was elected to serve as a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the first time.



## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### POST-TERRORIST DEPRESSION

In recent years, there have been many justified complaints about the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) “pay for slay” scheme, whereby Palestinians who have been imprisoned in Israeli jails for terrorist acts against Israelis, and the families of those killed carrying out such acts, receive generous lifetime pensions that far exceed regular welfare payments.

Given their amount is based on the severity of the crime and the length of the sentence, there can be no dispute that the payments are a crude incentive to carry out terrorist acts against Israelis. Israel therefore often rightly complains about these payments, as do other countries. Some, including the US and Australia, have cut direct payments to the PA in response.

However, one set of recent complaints came from an unexpected source – the recipients of the payments. Their

## LATEST ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN COVID-19 NUMBERS

As of early June, Israel had fewer than 200 active coronavirus cases, the lowest total since March 2020. However, in mid-June, there was a spike in cases of the Delta strain imported from India, leading to 606 total active cases on June 23, and renewed restrictions. Between May 25 and June 23, Israel had 24 additional coronavirus-related deaths, and by June 23, had suffered a total of 6,428 deaths and 840,079 cases throughout the pandemic.

In the Palestinian ruled areas of the West Bank, there had been 312,625 cases as of June 21, up from 305,777 a month earlier, and 3,550 deaths, up from 3,470. In Gaza, the total number of cases rose to 113,102, up from 106,994 cases the previous month.

concern was having to wait at a post office to be paid.

The payments were previously made directly into bank accounts, but then Israel passed a law declaring banks handling the payments could face sanctions under anti-terror laws. An alternative arrangement was created by the PA using Palestinian post offices.

The Palestinian paper *Al-Hadath* reported in late May that there was a “wave of rage over the manner of payment, which is considered humiliating and degrading from the prisoners’ perspective.”

In early June, Latifa Abu Hmeid, the proud mother of seven terrorists, told official *PA TV* that “It is the worst thing for the families of the prisoners and martyrs.” After waiting for hours without getting paid, she said, “This is suffering,” adding the situation is “unbearable, unbearable.”

We think “unbearable suffering” might better describe what happened to the victims of her sons’ attacks. Yet perhaps it’s encouraging for those wanting the Palestinians to emerge from the third world that they’ve at least graduated to experiencing first world problems.

## COVER STORY

## LIKE NO OTHER

## ISRAEL'S UNIQUELY DIVERSE NEW GOVERNMENT

by Amotz Asa-El

It's a political specimen even Israel has never seen before. After having invented the idea of rotational government, and then perfected it with the idea of a "parity" coalition – whereby two blocs in the government each have a veto over all decisions – Israel's 13th prime minister is the head of a minuscule Knesset faction that won barely 5% of the vote.

The rotation part means that Naftali Bennett, who heads the *Yamina* ("Rightward") party, has become prime minister while his ally, *Yesh Atid* ("There is a Future") leader Yair Lapid, has taken over as foreign minister. However, in August 2023 the two will swap positions, the way Labor's Shimon Peres and Likud's Yitzhak Shamir did way back in 1986 under Israel's first "rotation" deal.

The parity part of the deal means that Bennett and another right-wing party, Justice Minister Gideon Sa'ar's New Hope, will control half of the Government's 12-person inner cabinet, while the coalition's six other parties will make do with the remaining six seats. This is despite the fact that Bennett and Sa'ar collectively won a mere 13 of the 62 seats gained in the March election by the eight parties making up the governing coalition. Parity means that each of the new Government's two blocs can veto any of its proposed decisions. This is the same consensus-building mechanism that was supposed to guide the outgoing coalition between Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud and Benny Gantz's Blue and White party, under the deal they reached in May 2020.

This already fragile structure has become even more shaky due to defections. Prime Minister Bennett's faction won a mere seven of the Knesset's 120 seats, yet that number shrank even further when one of Yamina's lawmakers announced his opposition to Bennett's move and voted against the new Government.

That left the new coalition with a mere 61 seats, yet this already minimal majority shrank even further when a member of the Ra'am party abstained in the vote establishing the Government. Israel's 36th Government thus won the Knesset's approval with a razor-thin 60:59 majority that technically ended a two-year-long political deadlock, featuring four inconclusive elections, as well as unseated Netanyahu after a 12-year premiership.

One change that the new Government has already contributed is in its style.

In recent years, Netanyahu had increasingly become a political soloist who saw little need to collaborate with or consult colleagues – he even failed to discuss it with any other ministers when he negotiated and finalised peace deals with four Arab governments last year. The new Government is the antithesis of this attitude, a collective of equals in which no one can do anything on their own.

This was demonstrated early on when, two days after the new Government was sworn in, it had to decide whether to allow right-wing activists to march through east Jerusalem at

a time when Hamas threatened to respond to this march with renewed rocket attacks on Israeli cities.

Bennett tackled the situation by consulting Foreign Minister Lapid and the new Internal Security Minister, Labor's Omer Bar-Lev, a threesome that represents, respectively, the Right, the Centre and the Left. The three decided to allow but reroute the march, and more important than the decision itself was the dynamic of teamwork, which will need to be this Government's hallmark if it is to endure.

It was in that same spirit that Bennett announced that the Government's security cabinet will meet every week. This is a departure from Netanyahu's much less frequent

**"The new Government will make do with maintaining the status quo on prickly issues like settlements and peace talks, and instead focus on those things the coalition's collection of political antagonists can do together"**

convening of that forum which, by law, is entrusted with making policy and taking decisions concerning military and diplomatic affairs.

For the 49-year-old Bennett, a hi-tech entrepreneur who became a millionaire at age 33, such consultative managerial norms likely come naturally – but in his difficult political situation they are also an imperative.

Not only does Bennett lack the authority of past prime ministers who headed large parliamentary factions, even the largest party in the new governing coalition, Lapid's Yesh Atid, is only a mid-sized faction of 17 lawmakers, as compared to the Likud's 30. The coalition's other six factions range in size from four to eight lawmakers, meaning it lacks an obvious centre of gravity. The only way it can harmonise will be through daily compromises.

This task would be daunting among any eight political parties, but in this configuration it will be doubly challenging. Its members range from the Islamist Mansour Abbas of the Ra'am party, to Bennett, a former head of the Judea and Samaria Settlement Council, and from the ultra-dovish Nitzan Horowitz of Meretz, who is the new health minister, to Yisrael Beiteinu's ("Israel is Our Home") hawkish populist Avigdor Lieberman, the new finance minister.

Lapid and Bennett thus devised a formula whereby the new Government will make do with maintaining the status quo on prickly issues like settlements and peace talks, and instead focus on those things the coalition's collection of political antagonists can do together.

The eight party leaders – Bennett, Sa'ar and Lieberman from the Right, Lapid and Defence Minister Gantz from the Centre, Labor and Meretz from the Left, along with Arab Islamist Abbas – believe this can actually add up to quite a bit. Together they can build new schools, hospitals and roads, they can reinvent the public transport system, and they can launch programs to fight rampant crime in Arab towns, to mention but a few of the issues that they plan to tackle jointly.

It is a breathtaking undertaking, an experiment in political re-engineering. Like so many things in Israel, it was born as an improvisation, but may yet prove an inspiration, particularly for a society that over the past two years has seen political tensions rise to levels Israel had not seen since the 1980s.

On issues like health and transport, whatever the new Government manages to achieve will likely be agreeable to virtually all Israelis. On other issues, however, it is likely to irk important parts of Israeli society – especially in two realms: religious pluralism and legal reform.

Glaringly missing from the June 14 traditional photo in which the new Government posed with President Reuven Rivlin (who will be succeeded in July by President-Elect Isaac Herzog) were any of Israel's ultra-Orthodox politicians. Having allied themselves fully with Netanyahu, the ultra-Orthodox parties are now firmly in the opposition.



Bennett, seen here with other party leaders, is expected to lead in a more collegial style compared to Netanyahu, who increasingly had come to act as a political soloist (Credit: Facebook)

The Government includes four secularist parties vehemently opposed to religious coercion and the power of ultra-Orthodox rabbis over issues like marriage, conversion and kosher certification – Yesh Atid, Yisrael Beiteinu, Labor and Meretz. In addition, it includes five modern-Orthodox ministers, including Bennett himself, who have their own disagreements with ultra-Orthodoxy. Most symbolically, and for the first time in Israel's history, a rabbi from the Reform

stream of Judaism – Labor's Gilead Kariv – has entered the Knesset, and is the new Law Committee Chairman.

This does not mean there will be an all-out assault on the political power of the ultra-Orthodox, who make up more than one tenth of Israeli society. The new Government will not discontinue budget support for ultra-Orthodox religious seminaries. It will, however, try to change prayer arrangements at the Western Wall in Jerusalem so as to accommodate non-Orthodox and feminist congregations.

The Bennett-Lapid Government is also expected to break the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly on kosher supervision by allowing some more liberal religious organisations to offer alternative supervision. Lastly, prospective converts to Judaism will likely be allowed to choose their own rabbi rather than be shackled to their city's official rabbi, who is often ultra-Orthodox, and thus, in the views of many Israelis, overly rigid.

Similarly, the new Government has decided to appoint a judicial commission of inquiry into the Mount Meron disaster, in which 45 ultra-Orthodox pilgrims died in a stampede at a religious festival on April 30. Ultra-Orthodox politicians have resisted the idea, fearing such a panel would reach damning conclusions about the ultra-Orthodox establishment and its role in the tragedy.

On the legal front, the coalition has agreed to split the current role of the Attorney General in two, so that Israel's chief prosecutor will become a different position from the legal counsel to the government. This seemingly technical change may signal the beginning of a contentious, complex, and slow reform in the delicate relations between Israel's branches of government.

In opposition, meanwhile, Likud has adopted a strategy of delegitimising the new Government, both politically and socially. Politically, led in this by Netanyahu himself, the Opposition says Bennett defrauded his voters by joining what Netanyahu keeps calling "a government of the Left," even though Bennett, and also Justice Minister Sa'ar, are actually probably more hawkish on Palestinian issues than Netanyahu.

Socially, members of Likud say the new Government is dominated by affluent Ashkenazim, meaning Jews of European descent. While this is true of Bennett and Lapid personally, that was also true of Netanyahu and Gantz in the last government.

As for the rest of the new Government, a quarter of its members are of non-European background, including Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton (New Hope), who has a PhD in education and whose father was a bus driver who immigrated from Morocco; Minister of Economy Orna Barbivai (Yesh Atid), a retired IDF major-general

(Manpower Directorate) and one of seven children born to a mother who came from Iraq; and Absorption Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata (Blue and White), who at the age of four was part of the fabled exodus of Jews from Ethiopia to the Jewish state.

There are other interesting elements of this Government, the most eclectic that Israel – and possibly any country – has ever had.

Nine of the new Government's 27 ministers are women, more than any previous government in Israel. Minorities are also represented on an unprecedented scale, with Meretz's Essawi Frej, a Muslim from Kafr Qasim, serving as Minister for Regional Cooperation; Druze lawyer Hamad Amar (Yisrael Beiteinu) serving as a second minister in the Ministry of Finance; and Muslim dentist Mansour Abbas (Ra'am) serving as deputy minister in the Prime Minister's Office.

Lastly, the new Government also includes, for the first time in Israel's 73 years, a wheelchair-bound minister; Energy Minister Karine Elharar (Yesh Atid) is a 43-year-old mother of two who suffers from muscular dystrophy.

Together, the members of this cabinet appear potentially equipped to become a melodious multi-voiced choir – provided the conducting is cautious and unpretentious, the audience is patient, and the singers listen to each other even more than they listen to themselves.

AIR

## WHO IS NAFTALI BENNETT?

### BICOM

On June 13, for the first time in 12 years, a majority of Israeli MKs expressed confidence in a government not headed by Binyamin Netanyahu. Instead, Yamina party leader Naftali Bennett will lead the new Government for the first two years, and then will be replaced by Yesh Atid leader and current Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. Bennett thus became the first kippa (skullcap) wearing, religiously observant prime minister of Israel.

The Bennett-Lapid Government is particularly diverse and includes eight parties across the possible political spectrum – two left-wing parties (Labor and Meretz) two centrist parties (Yesh Atid and Blue and White) and three right-wing parties (Yamina, New Hope and Yisrael Beiteinu). Moreover, in an historic first, an Arab party, the Islamic Ra'am party, joined the coalition, and its leader Mansour Abbas has become a deputy minister.

### HIS BACKGROUND AND POLITICS

Bennett grew up in a liberal and cosmopolitan house-

With Compliments

R L Webb  
Nominees  
Pty. Ltd

Property, investment,  
development & finance

hold, living in the US for long periods as a child and later as a hi-tech entrepreneur. After spending six years in the IDF and serving in the prestigious elite *Sayeret Matkal* commando unit (following his childhood hero Yoni Netanyahu, Binyamin's older brother who was killed during the 1976 rescue operation at Entebbe), he spent three years as a law and business student at Hebrew University. He then made a fortune in his first role as CEO of the cyber-security firm Cyota, which eventually sold for US\$145 million (A\$193 million) in 2005.

Bennett entered politics at the age of 35, as Netanyahu's chief of staff. He eventually found his political home in the national religious Jewish Home Party in 2012, leading the party to win 12 seats in the 2013 election and subsequently forming an electoral pact with Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid to enter Netanyahu's government.

Feeling the religious Jewish Home was too parochial, overly influenced by rabbinic leaders, and unable to appeal to a wider audience, Bennett formed the "New Right" party in December 2018 alongside his long-time political ally, secular right-winger Ayelet Shaked.

His rise to the top of Israel's political establishment has been unexpected, especially given that in the April 2019 Israeli election – the first of four over the last two years – the New Right party failed to pass the electoral threshold of 3.25%, leaving him temporarily out of politics.

However, in the most recent election on March 23, 2021, Yamina ("Rightward"), the successor to New Right, gained just over 5% of the vote and seven seats in the Knesset.

Bennett has historically held hawkish views regarding territorial concessions but understands coalitional and international constraints that oppose such moves. Bennett has promoted annexing Area C – the area of the West Bank still under Israeli civil control – giving the Palestinians living there Israeli citizenship while Palestinians living in Areas A and B – the areas under Palestinian civil control – would govern themselves, a plan he calls "autonomy on steroids". At the same time, the Prime Minister is aware that several members of his diverse coalition oppose such moves, as does the Biden Administration, with which Bennett would like to maintain good relations. Moreover, the Abraham Accords contain a component which postpones any potential Israeli annexationist moves for several years.

Bennett has also consulted with liberal Orthodox thinker Micah Goodman who has set out a plan to "shrink" rather than resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Goodman advocates taking an incremental approach in dealing

with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, given the fact that no permanent status arrangement is likely to be within reach for the foreseeable future, and he urges Israel to take several measures that would scale back the conflict. These ideas were reflected in Bennett's inaugural speech in the Knesset when he said, "The Palestinians must take responsibility for their actions and to understand that violence will be met with a firm response. However, security calm will lead to economic initiatives, which will lead to reducing friction and the conflict." This perspective could

be helpful in aligning the new Government with the Biden Administration.

Bennett is generally liberal on social issues. As leader of the Yesha Council, the main advocacy body for the settlement movement, he attended the 2011 social protests in Tel Aviv, with the aim of broadening the settlers' engagement with other parts of Israeli society (a move

controversial within the Council and which led to him leaving his position). Bennett has consistently expressed openness to engaging with non-Orthodox streams of Judaism and sees them as fully Jewish (unlike more conservative members of the National Religious camp).

He is supportive of LGBTQ rights, telling the community he "loved them very much," and adding that he was "about respecting each individual – live and let live" and "every legal and civil right afforded to a straight person should be equally afforded to those in the LGBTQ community." While a former head of the Yesha Council, Bennett lives with his secular wife in the affluent city of Raanana in central Israel.

## BENNETT AND ISRAEL'S NATIONAL RELIGIOUS CAMP

The national religious camp in Israel is broadly right-wing on the peace process but includes a wide spectrum of opinion on social issues, the relationship between religion and state, and the approach to interacting with other sectors in Israeli society.

Similar to ultra-Orthodox groups, the conservative wing of the national religious camp prefers to minimise interaction with secular Israelis and mobilise to secure their own sectoral interests. They tend to live in religiously homogeneous neighbourhoods and settlements, and vote for religious parties, such as Bezalel Smotrich's Religious Zionist party, that are guided by senior rabbis.

By contrast, those in the more moderate wing of the national religious camp consider secular Israelis as strategic partners with many common interests and adopt a more liberal approach to recognising all strands of Judaism. De-



The Unexpected PM? New Israeli Premier Naftali Bennett  
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

spite strong right-wing credentials on the Palestinian issue, Bennett is part of this group (as are other religious ministers in the new Government Ze'ev Elkin of New Hope, Minister of Housing and Construction and Matan Kahana of Yamina, the Religious Affairs Minister). In 2019, Bennett defined his personal religious practice as "Israeli-Jewish," explaining: "Israeli-Jewish can mean religious, traditional, secular, Haredi-nationalist or Haredi ... Israeli Jews don't judge each other based on how strictly they observe mitzvot. Israeli Jews love and accept every Jew."

AIR

© Britain-Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM [bicom.org.uk](http://bicom.org.uk)), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

## WHO'S WHO IN THE NEW ISRAELI GOVERNMENT

by Zachary Milewicz and AIR staff

On June 13, the 36th Government of Israel was sworn in. The new Government is a diverse coalition comprised of eight parties, and will be led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (see separate article on p. 14) for the next two years, after which Yair Lapid will take over. The new 28-member cabinet features nine women (the most in Israel's history), three observant Jewish men, an Arab Muslim and a Druze. Another Arab Muslim will be a deputy minister. Five ministers are immigrants – born in Ethiopia, Morocco and the former Soviet Union.

Here is some background on a few of the key players in this uniquely Israeli new Government:



**Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister: Yair Lapid (Yesh Atid)**

Yair Lapid, the chairman of the *Yesh Atid* ("There is a Future") party, will take over as PM from Bennett in August 2023 under the coalition agreement creating the new Government. Until then, Lapid will serve as both the Foreign Minister and "Alternate Prime Minister".

He was born in Israel in 1963 and comes from a family with a prominent history within journalism and politics. His father, Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, was an influential Israeli journalist turned politician who headed the secularist Shinui party and served as deputy prime minister and Justice Minister from 2003-2004.

Before beginning his political career, Yair Lapid was one of Israel's best-known television presenters and journalists,

and the author of several books in various genres, as well as song lyrics.

In 2012, he founded *Yesh Atid*, with a secularist and centrist "clean government" platform. In its first election in 2013, it became the second biggest party in Israel's Knesset, winning 19 seats. From 2013 to 2014, *Yesh Atid* joined a coalition government led by the Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu, with Lapid serving as Finance Minister. Netanyahu fired Lapid for alleged disloyalty in December 2014, precipitating new elections in March 2015. *Yesh Atid* declined to 11 seats and went into opposition.

In the elections held in April 2019, September 2019 and March 2020, *Yesh Atid* ran as part of the Blue and White ("*Kahol Lavan*" in Hebrew) coalition of parties, dedicated to replacing Netanyahu, who was by then facing corruption charges, with Lapid agreeing to be second-in-command to former IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz. Blue and White effectively held the Likud to a draw in each of these elections. In May 2020, Gantz reached a deal to create a "national emergency" government with Netanyahu to address the COVID-19 crisis, but Lapid rejected this deal and split Blue and White. Lapid took 17 of Blue and White's 33 Knesset members into opposition and became Opposition Leader.

In the March 2021 election, *Yesh Atid* won 17 seats, again making it the second-largest party in the Knesset. Lapid was given a mandate by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin to try to form government after Netanyahu failed to do so, and was the key player in negotiating the coalition arrangements that brought about the current Government.

**Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister: Benny Gantz (Blue and White)**



Binyamin, or Benny, Gantz was born in Israel in 1959 and had a 38-year career in the IDF, including as the commander of the Paratroopers Brigade, the Judea and Samaria Division, Northern Command, and Ground Forces. He also served as a military attaché to the United States and as the 20th IDF Chief of the General Staff from 2011 to 2015. This period included command of Operation Pillar of Defence (November 2012) and Operation Protective Edge (July 2014) – both conflicts with Hamas-ruled Gaza.

Gantz entered politics in December 2018 when he founded the *Hosen L'Yisrael* ("Resilience for Israel") party, which later joined forces with other parties to form the Blue and White coalition. He led Blue and White through three inconclusive elections in 2019-2020, ending in an effective draw with Likud in each.

In May 2020, he agreed to form a "national emergency government" with Netanyahu to deal with the COVID

crisis – under a deal in which he would serve as “Alternate Prime Minister” as well as Defence Minister, and would have become Prime Minister in November 2021. This split Blue and White. The Government collapsed because of a failure to pass a state budget after bitter disputes between Gantz and Netanyahu and Gantz lost his opportunity to become prime minister.

In the March 2021 election which resulted, Blue and White gained eight seats. Gantz remains Defence Minister in the new Government, a post he has held since May 2020.



**Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Minister: Gideon Sa'ar (New Hope)**

Gideon Sa'ar is leader of the New Hope party. He was born in Tel Aviv in 1966 and received both a BA (in political science) and an LLB from Tel Aviv University. He worked as an aide to the Attorney General as well as

the State Attorney and then became the Secretary of the Cabinet in the first Netanyahu Government in 1999, and again under Ariel Sharon from 2001-02.

In 2003, he became a member of the Knesset for the Likud Party. While in the Knesset, Sa'ar proposed bills to jail employers who fire pregnant women (he chaired the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women) and to ban cosmetics testing on animals.

After repeatedly doing well in Likud party primaries, Sa'ar was appointed Minister of Education in March 2009. He became increasingly mentioned as a possible successor to Netanyahu and in March 2013 he became Minister of the Interior. After a reported falling out with Netanyahu, he left politics to return to private life in November 2014.

In April 2017, Sa'ar announced his return to politics and in December 2019 he lost a Likud leadership primary to Netanyahu. In December 2020 he announced the formation of the New Hope party, which gained six seats in the March 2021 election.

Sa'ar is hawkish on Palestinian issues, and has expressed opposition to a Palestinian state on a number of occasions, but has proposed a Palestinian federation with Jordan as an alternative.



**Finance Minister: Avigdor Lieberman (Yisrael Beiteinu)**

Avigdor Lieberman, founder and leader of the *Yisrael Beiteinu* party, was born in 1958 in Moldova in the former Soviet Union. He immigrated to Israel at age 20, served in the IDF, and

earned a BA in international relations and political science from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Lieberman was the Director-General of the Likud Movement from 1993-1996 and Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office from 1996-1997. After founding and becoming the head of the *Yisrael Beiteinu* Party in 1999, Lieberman was elected to the Knesset.

In 2001, he was appointed Minister of National Infrastructure, then served as Minister of Transportation from 2003-2004 and deputy prime minister and Minister of Strategic Affairs from 2006-2008. In 2009, he was once again appointed deputy prime minister as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs until 2012 and again from 2013-2015.

He also served as Minister of Defence from 2016-2018.

*Yisrael Beiteinu* was originally founded to represent the interests of immigrants from the former Soviet Union to Israel, but in recent years has focused more of its efforts on opposing religious coercion.

The party achieved its best result of 15 seats in 2009, but has since seen a decline in electoral fortunes. It won seven seats in the March 2021 election.

While Lieberman's views are hawkish and populist, he and his party have on a number of occasions expressed a willingness to support a two-state solution under the right conditions.

**Education Minister: Yifat Shasha-Biton (New Hope)**

Yifat Shasha-Biton was born in Israel in 1973 to working-class immigrant parents and received a BA, MA, and PhD in education from the University of Haifa. She has

With Compliments



IVANY  
INVESTMENT GROUP

Level 6, Terrace Tower  
80 William Street  
Sydney NSW 2010  
Tel: (02) 9358 6366  
Fax: (02) 9358 6377



held leadership roles at Ohalo College and Tel-Hai Academic College, and several positions for the city of Kiryat Shmona, on the northern border with Lebanon.

Shasha-Biton was first elected to the Knesset in 2015 with the Kulanu Party. In 2019, she was appointed Minister of Construction and Housing, and was re-elected to the Knesset with the Likud Party, before joining New Hope.



#### **Interior Minister: Ayelet Shaked (Yamina)**

Ayelet Shaked was born in Tel Aviv in 1976. After serving in the IDF, she earned a BSc in electrical engineering and computer science from Tel Aviv University

and worked in a variety of roles at Texas Instruments.

She began her public career in 2006 as the director of Binyamin Netanyahu's office, and in 2013, she was elected to the Knesset with the Jewish Home party. She later represented the New Right and Yamina parties.

From 2015-2019, Shaked was the Minister of Justice, and has made judicial reform a key priority of her political career.



#### **Transportation Minister: Merav Michaeli (Labor)**

Merav Michaeli is the leader of the Labor party. She was elected to the Knesset in 2013.

Before entering politics, she was a television presenter, a journalist, including for *Haaretz*,

and taught university classes focused on media and gender. Michaeli has worked across a variety of sectors, including society and economy, gender equality, religion and state, LGBTQ rights, workers' rights and promotion of the peace process.

Michaeli rejected the agreement of then-Labor party leader Amir Peretz to serve in the Netanyahu-Gantz "emergency government" in May 2020, and sat in opposition. She became leader of the venerable Israeli Labor party in January 2021, and succeeded in reviving its flagging fortunes at the March 2021 election. Labor gained seven seats when the party had widely been expected to fail to gain enough votes to even enter the Knesset a few months previously.



#### **Health Minister: Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz)**

Nitzan Horowitz is a member of the Meretz party. He is also the first openly gay Knesset member to head a major party.

Horowitz was born in Rishon

LeZion in 1965 and after attending Tel Aviv University Law

School, began a career in journalism. He has reported for *Haaretz* and *Channel 10*.

In 2008, Horowitz resigned from *Channel 10* and began his political career with the Meretz party, serving in the Knesset from 2009-2015. He re-entered the Knesset in March 2019 and won a ballot for party leadership in June of that year.

#### **Aliyah and Integration Minister: Pnina Tamano-Shata (Blue and White)**

Pnina Tamano-Shata will remain the Aliyah and Integration Minister, a position she has held since 2020.



Tamano-Shata was born in 1981 in Ethiopia, making her the first Ethiopian-born Israeli minister. Her family arrived in Israel when she was four during the rescue of Ethiopian Jews from Sudan termed Operation Moses. She, her five brothers and her father were among almost 7,000 Ethiopian Jews airlifted out of the country by Israel's Mossad between November 1984 and January 1985. Her mother followed several years later.

She has held a seat in the Knesset since 2013 with the Yesh Atid party.

Before entering politics, Tamano-Shata studied law at Ono Academic College, and worked as a TV reporter. She has also served as the chairperson of the Ethiopian Israeli Student Union and was a co-founder of the Headquarters for the Ethiopian Jews' Struggle for Social Equality.

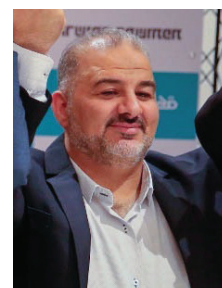
#### **Deputy Minister of Arab Affairs: Mansour Abbas (Ra'am)**

Dr. Mansour Abbas is the head of the Islamic Ra'am ("United Arab List"), a party established in 1996. He has led it since early 2019, when he was first elected to the Knesset.

Abbas was born in the northern Israeli town of Maghar in 1974, and attended the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to study dentistry. While there, he was Chair of the Arab Students Committee from 1997 to 1998. It was also there that he learned from Sheikh Abdullah Nimr Darwish, the founder of the Islamic Movement in Israel. Abbas has said, "Everything I do today I absorbed from the legacy of Sheikh Abdullah Nimr Darwish."

After working as a dentist for a number of years, Abbas became Secretary-General of the United Arab List in 2007.

Abbas will now become Deputy Minister of Arab Affairs in the office of the Prime Minister. He played a vital role in facilitating the establishment of the new Government by breaking with past practice which saw Arab-dominated parties refusing to become part of Israeli governing coalitions.



## Investment and superannuation solutions for a brighter future

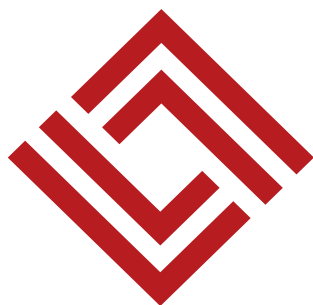
Transform the way your wealth and super is managed with Australia's #1 investment and superannuation platform.\*



See wealth differently

**netwealth**

Disclaimer: This advertisement has been prepared by Netwealth Investments Limited (Netwealth), ABN 85 060 569 109, AFSL 230975 and has been prepared for advisor use only and is of a general nature. Any person considering a financial product from Netwealth should obtain and consider the relevant disclosure document at [www.netwealth.com.au](http://www.netwealth.com.au) and determine its appropriateness to their financial circumstances, objectives and needs and seek professional advice if required. \*Our awards include: Joint winner, award for 'Overall Satisfaction with Platform', Investment Trends 2017 Planner Technology Report; Winner, award for 'Best Platform Overall', Investment Trends 2016 Platform Benchmarking Report; SuperRatings 2016 Gold Rating for Netwealth Super Accelerator Core and Plus for our Super and Standard Income Stream products (for details of SuperRatings' rating criteria visit [www.superratings.com.au](http://www.superratings.com.au)); Winner in the Investment Platform Provider category of SMSFAdviser magazine's 2017 SMSF Awards.



# Lascorp

Investment Group (Aust) Pty Ltd

Specialising in retail and shopping centre investments,  
syndication and management.

29 Claremont Street, South Yarra, VIC 3141

**P** 03 249 0000 **E** [mail@lascorp.com](mailto:mail@lascorp.com)

**[lascorp.com](http://lascorp.com)**



# The Paradoxes of Binyamin Netanyahu

## The personal and the political

by Bret Stephens

Once got an unexpected, unpleasant, and altogether unforgettable phone call from Binyamin Netanyahu. This was in 2004, when Netanyahu was serving as finance minister in Ariel Sharon's Government and I was editor of the *Jerusalem Post*.

At the time, nobody thought of Israel as the dynamic "Start-up Nation" that it would later become, thanks largely to Netanyahu's policies. Instead, it was a country beset not just by waves of Palestinian suicide bombers but also by the stultifying legacies of the country's socialist roots: high taxes, inefficient state-owned companies, excessive welfare subsidies, a bloated public sector.

Netanyahu knew that I was one of the few editors in Israel who fully endorsed his controversial agenda of tax cuts, privatisation, deregulation, and budgetary discipline. He also knew that while the *Post*'s influence in Israel was limited, the paper was widely read by many of the foreign investors, policymakers and financial analysts of the sort he was always keen to cultivate.

But he wasn't interested in talking about his plans. Instead, he lit into me because one of the *Post*'s opinion columnists had mentioned a notorious 1993 episode in which Netanyahu had gone on TV to confess an extramarital relationship while denouncing a blackmail attempt. "My children can now read English, you know!" he said, eliding the fact that his children could just as easily have learned of the affair on the Internet from sources in Hebrew.

It took me a few minutes to realise that the point of his tirade wasn't to complain about unfair or inaccurate coverage. It was a rebuke for failing to provide *compliant* coverage, as if the purpose of the *Post* was to burnish his children's image of their father. Unlike most politicians, he wasn't interested in cultivating me as a friendly media voice. He wanted me as a patsy, and he wasn't subtle about letting me know it.

In itself, this long-ago encounter with the once and future prime minister didn't mean much – although Netanyahu's habit of demanding obsequious reporting would

come to haunt him after he had returned to the prime minister's chair.

Yet the story helps explain the paradox of Binyamin Netanyahu, in perhaps the most paradoxical year of his long political career. To wit, how does a man of such ambition, talent, and undeniable achievements manage so often to be so petty and self-defeating?

And how can a prime minister whose recent triumphs include peace agreements with four Arab states, a series of spectacular blows to Iran's nuclear program, and a world-beating COVID-19 vaccination effort lose to the strangest coalition of political bedfellows ever assembled in Israeli – if not Western – history?

In a word, it's personal.

In 1998, during Netanyahu's turbulent first term as prime minister, his father, Benzion, gave a candid interview about his second son: "He doesn't know how to develop



Binyamin Netanyahu and his unpopular wife Sara: Their personal behaviour helped undermine his political achievements (Credit: Ashernet)

manners that captivate people by praise or grace," he said, adding, "He doesn't always succeed in choosing the most suitable people." About the nicest thing Benzion could say of his boy was, "He may well have been more suited as foreign minister than as head of state. But at this moment I don't see anyone better." One doesn't have to play arm-chair psychoanalysis to observe: some father.

In fact, Binyamin Netanyahu can also be engaging and charming, at least when he's in the public eye. But there was more than a grain of truth to the father's observations. When I first arrived in Israel as editor of the *Post*, I paid a visit to my predecessor as editor, David Bar-Illan, the pianist and polemicist who had gone to work for Netanyahu as his press spokesman before running afoul – like so many who came before and after – of Netanyahu's feared and unpopular wife, Sara. So traumatised was David by the manner in which the Netanyahus had treated him that, after suffering a crippling heart attack, he waved off Netanyahu from a sickbed visit.

Stories like this are remarkably common among those who have known Netanyahu over the years. And they go far to explain how Netanyahu's long reign as prime minister came to an end – not because he was defeated by his ideological opponents, or brought down by a legal case against him, or turned out of office following some policy fiasco. Rather, Netanyahu fell because, through a combination of high-handedness and jealousy, he allowed too many of his onetime allies and ideological fellow-travellers to become permanently embittered ex-friends.

Naftali Bennett, the new prime minister, was a Netanyahu protégé who served as his chief of staff from 2006 to 2008 before an angry falling out. Gideon Sa'ar, the new justice minister, was brought into the Likud by Netanyahu but fell out with him once Netanyahu began to perceive him as a credible rival for party leadership. Benny Gantz, defence minister in the new government and the last, whom Netanyahu had appointed as IDF chief of staff, was double-crossed and politically humiliated last year after he agreed to a power-sharing deal with Netanyahu – a deal Netanyahu had no intention of honouring (and, predictably, didn't). Avigdor Lieberman, the new finance minister, was an ideological soulmate and right-hand man to Netanyahu who came to despise him after he authorised private investigations and an anonymous legal hit on his family (or so Lieberman claims).

These four men command 28 Knesset seats between them. Together with one or both of the ultra-Orthodox parties, they would have easily given Netanyahu and his 30-seat Likud party a robust, right-of-centre mandate in the last election – if only he could have won them over to his side. Yet when it came to the prime minister, the feud was personal. That they preferred to join forces with Yair Lapid's centrist Yesh Atid, Mansour Abbas' Islamist Ra'am, and the left-wingers of Labor and Meretz is a vivid demonstration that Netanyahu's powers of personal repulsion have exceeded those of ideological attraction.

**Y**et if we are to judge Netanyahu by his faults alone, it would be impossible to account for the fact that he is the most dominant figure in Israeli politics since David Ben-Gurion. To his inveterate critics, that's merely a function of his ability to win elections, which they attribute to his being a silver-tongued fearmonger who appeals to Israel's racist side – in effect, a Donald Trump-like figure with a better brain.

The caricature sells Netanyahu and his voters short. It also fails to comprehend the scale of his achievements in his second, 12-year tenure in office. Let's list a few.

**Diplomacy:** The crown jewels in Netanyahu's diplomatic legacy are the Abraham Accords, which effectively represent the end of the Arab–Israeli conflict (even if subsidiary

conflicts, above all with Palestinians, remain). The accords did not happen by accident. They are the result of Arab admiration for Israel's economic success; respect among Arab leaders for Netanyahu's willingness to denounce the Iran nuclear pact (and, by implication, Barack Obama) in the US Congress; and some canny deal-making that involved a threat to annex much of the West Bank, which was then used as a bargaining chip for diplomatic recognition.

But the accords are not Netanyahu's only diplomatic victories. He renewed or strengthened Israel's old ties with

African countries – Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Chad, Nigeria – that are battleground states in the fight against Islamist terror. He developed strong personal bonds with Narendra Modi of India and Shinzo Abe of Japan. He maintained a functional relationship with Vladimir

Putin, which is a vital Israeli interest whatever one thinks of the Russian dictator. He forged strategic ties with Greece, historically one of the more anti-Israel countries in Europe.

And, of course, he cultivated Trump. Many consider this a scandal, as if Netanyahu would have done better by sneering at the American president in the manner of, say, Canada's Justin Trudeau. But the payoff for Israelis of Netanyahu's courtship of the 45th president was spectacular: an American Embassy in Jerusalem, US recognition of Israeli sovereignty on the Golan Heights, a severe downgrading of US relations with the Palestinian leadership. The Biden Administration has predictably reversed this last policy but is unlikely to reverse course on the Embassy or the Heights. This achievement, for Israel, is permanent.

**Security:** Despite three traumatic wars with Hamas in Gaza and the harrowing “knife intifada” of 2015, Israelis have enjoyed greater security during Netanyahu's time in office than they had in the 10 years of terror and retreat between his first and second terms. The regional picture for Israel also seems to be relatively better, at least when it comes to the Sunni Arab states. And since regaining office in 2009, Netanyahu never made any irreversible concessions to the Palestinians, even in the face of eight years of heavy Obama Administration pressure to do so.

**“Netanyahu lasted as long as he did in his job because he was, in many ways, very good at it”**

with compliments



**Alceon**  
Investment, corporate finance and capital

---

**Phil Green   Trevor Loewensohn   Morris Symonds**

Sydney • Melbourne • Brisbane • Perth

Tel: 02 8023 4000  
www.alceon.com.au

The reason for the relative calm has much to do with what Israeli generals call “the war between the wars,” but which might also be described as the Netanyahu Doctrine. After being dissuaded in 2010 from a full-scale strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities, Netanyahu settled for a strategy of applying low-grade but continuous military pressure on Israel’s enemies in ways that seldom invite open retaliation or create international controversy. In 2019, the IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot told me, with respect to Syria, that Israel had “struck thousands of targets without claiming responsibility or asking for credit.” Jerusalem has also been instrumental in helping Cairo deal with an Islamist insurgency in Sinai, in ways that go all but unnoticed in the West but have helped solidify its security ties in the Arab world.

Then there is Iran, where Israel has conducted the most extraordinary and long-term covert-ops campaign in modern history. The Mossad’s 2018 acquisition of Iran’s entire nuclear archive caused the US to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal, and further attacks on nuclear installations and scientists continue to set back the Islamic Republic’s nuclear timetable.

**Economy:** Netanyahu was Israel’s first prime minister to have a serious grasp of economics and an appreciation for business. Netanyahu also understood that there was no good reason Israel couldn’t be a wealthy country – and that such wealth was a benefit to Israel’s overall well-being, not a stain on its moral virtue.

When Netanyahu returned to the prime minister’s office in 2009, Israel’s gross domestic product (in current

prices) stood at US\$207 billion. Ten years later, just before the pandemic, it had nearly doubled in size, to about US\$400 billion. By comparison, the UK economy grew by just 17% over the same time period. The average monthly wage in Israel is now nearly 50% higher than it was in 2009.

As in any country, there are arguments to be made about the nature of wealth inequality and distribution, not least along class, ethnic, and religious lines. What should be inarguable is that wealth gives Israel strategic advantages it didn’t previously enjoy. Wealth diminishes dependency. It also makes Israel a more attractive destination to Jews who no longer feel entirely secure in their diasporic homes, or who may simply be seeking opportunity.

**Palestinians:** Most of Netanyahu’s predecessors as prime minister had gotten the Palestinian issue wrong – some by imagining that Palestinians didn’t, or shouldn’t, exist as a separate people; others by believing they were the most important, if not the only, thing that mattered. Both approaches proved disastrous.

Netanyahu understood that Israel can neither separate politically from the Palestinians safely nor coexist with them indefinitely. The right approach was one of long-term tactical management, not grandiose peace plans and “final-status” solutions.

Undergirding that view is the belief that time is, in fact, on Israel’s side, for at least three reasons. First, the demographic picture is hardly as bleak for Jews as is often suggested (an idea that has ample empirical basis, at least if Israeli Jews maintain their robust birth rate while Arab birth rates continue to decline).

Second, the ideological picture also isn’t as dire for Israel as widely believed – squeamish liberals, campus Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns, and rising antisemitism in Europe and the US notwithstanding – because much of the world is moving in a more nationalist direction. That gives Israel new friends in the world, whether they are evangelical Christians in the US or Hindu nationalists in India (as well as some unsavory figures like Hungary’s Viktor Orban). The abiding threat of Islamism also helps Israel, insofar as Israel is broadly seen, and widely admired, for its success in fighting it.

Finally, Arab states are growing tired of the Palestinian cause, at least in its maximalist versions, and are prepared to put the issue on ice in pursuit of the goals they share with the Jewish state. The fact that one barely heard a peep of protest from Cairo, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, or other Arab capitals during the last round of fighting in Gaza suggests there is much to that belief.

Little of this goes noticed outside of Israel, thanks mainly to shoddy media coverage, monomaniacal obsession with Palestinian grievances, and what can only be described as a kind of Bibi Derangement Syndrome among his critics.

## WITH COMPLIMENTS

**baron**  
CORPORATION

T +61 3 9866 3066

F +61 3 9866 2766

Level 14, 10 Queens Road  
(PO Box 7638 St Kilda Road)  
Melbourne Victoria 3004

Netanyahu lasted as long as he did in his job because he was, in many ways, very good at it. After the utopian follies of the peace processers in the 1990s, the trauma of the Second Intifada at the start of the century, and Ehud Olmert's incompetent handling of the 2006 Lebanon War, it's easy to see the appeal (as one of his campaign ads had it) of the "Bibisitter" – the safe pair of hands who'll make sure the kids sleep well at night.

But, again, this isn't quite the whole story.

The usual rap on Netanyahu is that he's a remorseless ideologue whose only goal is "Greater Israel" and who will do whatever it takes to get it, whether it's through sly prevarication or open demagoguery. An alternative view, most often held by Netanyahu's conservative critics, is that he either lacks the courage of his convictions, or just believes in little beyond himself.

"How is he better than Rabin or Peres?" the former Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir railed against Netanyahu after Israel withdrew from parts of the West Bank after the 1998 Wye River agreement during Bibi's first go as prime minister. "He has a desire for power for its own sake."

Naftali Bennett's own break with Netanyahu became definite after the latter's 2009 speech at Bar-Ilan University, in which he accepted the principle of a Palestinian state.

"We go along with this vision that is impractical, and then, we are surprised why the world is angry with us for not fulfilling that vision," Bennett told me in a 2015 interview. "You can't say 'I support a Palestinian state' and then not execute according to that."

That last point strikes me as unfair: It's perfectly consistent to accept the idea of a Palestinian state in principle – the principle being that it should model itself on Costa Rica or the UAE – while rejecting it in practice – the current reality being that it has more in common with Lebanon or Yemen as an unstable terrorist *entrepot* that has no interest in meeting even minimal Israeli demands for peace and security.

But the deeper criticism is that Netanyahu's tenure amounts to little more than a holding action, a bravura performance in kicking cans down the road.

When I interviewed Netanyahu in 2009, just as he was about to return to office and Operation Cast Lead was winding down, he was quick to criticise the outcome. "Notwithstanding the blows to Hamas, it's still in Gaza, it's still ruling Gaza," he said. Netanyahu's "optimal outcome," he claimed, would be regime change for the Strip, but "the minimal outcome would have been to seal Gaza" from being able to acquire lethal munitions. Yet 12 years and three wars later, not much has changed, except that Hamas has gained greater international legitimacy while Israelis have grown used to spending time in their safe rooms periodically.

Something similar might be said of Netanyahu's approach to Teheran. Dazzling as Israel's intelligence and diplomatic coups have been, Iran is now enriching uranium to unprecedented levels of purity even as the Biden Administration manoeuvres to re-enter the nuclear deal. That goes also in the north, where thousands of Israeli air strikes have blunted Iran's power without altering the fact that Bashar al-Assad remains firmly ensconced in power in Damascus while Hezbollah maintains its firm grip in Lebanon.



Despite Netanyahu's reputation as a safe pair of hands on security, Israel's strategic picture has not decisively improved over his 12-year tenure (Credit: Ashernett)

In these respects, the strategic picture has not decisively changed on Netanyahu's watch, and Prime Minister Bennett will face almost exactly the same unenviable choices Netanyahu did in the early days of his tenure. There are circumstances in which buying time amounts to a form of progress, but history hasn't yet provided a verdict as to whether this was one of them.

There have also been hidden costs to this style of leadership. The essence of good policy – containment comes to mind – is that it establishes conditions in which less-than-superb leaders can be entrusted with its execution. Under Netanyahu, by contrast, the man and the policy effectively became one and the same. "Bibi-ism" isn't really a set of principles or concepts that his successors can apply or adapt. It's the view that one man, and one man only, has the wisdom, experience, and instincts to run the country.

The result has been an extraordinary personalisation of Israeli politics. At least a quarter of Israelis – starting with Netanyahu himself – seem to believe that *après Bibi, le déluge*. That has encouraged Netanyahu and his allies to vilify their political opponents in ways that are both hysterical and potentially dangerous. Early in June, Likud lawmaker May Golan compared Bennett and Sa'ar to "suicide bombers," while Aryeh Deri, leader of the Shas party, warned that Bennett would "destroy Shabbat."

Netanyahu's political opponents, by contrast, have come to believe that Bibi is "*le déluge*" and have been intent to do just about anything to destroy him. Among the many paradoxes of the last few years of Israeli politics is that the

legal cases against the Prime Minister did more to encourage him to cling to his office by nearly any means necessary than they did to give him an opportunity for a graceful exit.

That's what happens when the essence of one's political program is to stay in power as long as possible, whether out of a belief in one's own indispensability or a need for legal self-preservation (or, in Netanyahu's case, both). Democracies do best when parties stand for ideas, not personalities, and when political opponents aren't viewed as mortal enemies. They also do better when leaders observe some moral boundaries, like not bidding for the support of the Kahanist party or not seeking a pardon for a soldier who murdered a Palestinian terrorist after he'd been neutralised. But that wasn't Bibi's way.

The paradox of Binyamin Netanyahu is that a man who rose to power on the strength of a certain vision of Israel held on to power at the expense of that vision. It's that a man who did much to strengthen Israel's position in the world through the bullshiness of his personality also did much to damage Israel's politics through the same bullshiness. It's that a man whose thoughts, ambitions, and actions always seemed to have the broadest sweep could become the agent of his own political undoing thanks to a succession of small grievances and petty power plays.

The coalition that succeeds Netanyahu is fractious and thin, held together by little more than its loathing for a singular man. Nobody knows this better than Netanyahu himself, which is why the thought that must surely run through his head, rightly, is, "I'll be back."

AIR

*Bret Stephens is Commentary's contributing editor and a columnist for the New York Times. He was editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem Post between 2002 and 2004 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 2013. © Commentary magazine (www.commentarymagazine.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## IRANIAN REGIME DROPS ALL PRETENCES

by Eyal Zisser

**T**he fake presidential election in Iran on June 18 predictably resulted in a victory for Ebrahim Raisi, the most radical of all the possible candidates. In light of his views, and mainly his murderous track record as someone who sent thousands of political dissidents to their deaths as Teheran's chief prosecutor in the 1980s, the world could end up wishing for any one of his predecessors, even one as detestable as the Holocaust denier



New Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The reason Raisi was elected – and was essentially allowed to run in the first place, unlike the 600 or so other candidates who were disqualified and erased from the candidate list – is his absolute loyalty to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The frail, 82-year-old leader doesn't want any surprises in the final stretch of his life. Raisi is often mentioned as the possible next-in-line to Khamenei, which essentially means that Iran didn't just elect a new president but a successor to the Supreme Leader.

Regardless, the regime in Teheran chose to remove all its masks by eschewing a smiling, affable figurehead to mislead the international community, as it has opted for in the past. Henceforth, Iran will be speaking in one blunt, extremist, clear voice.


The majority of Iranians chose not to partake in the spectacle put on by the regime, an indication of their frustration and distress and mainly their deep lack of trust in the system and their ability to change it in any way. It's incredible to think that just over 40 years ago, throngs of Iranian youths took to the streets in protest against the Shah's regime, in the hope of fostering change and ensuring a better future for their country. Their revolution was hijacked by religious clerics, who have since ruled the country with an iron fist.

Most Iranians are far worse off now than they were under the Shah. The Ayatollah regime, a failed and corrupt entity that has poured the country's resources into its ballistic missile and nuclear programs, has wrought upon Iranians a life of poverty, anguish, and even hunger. Iran's troubles were exacerbated by the pummeling administered by the Trump Administration. While the measures it implemented weren't enough to topple the regime, they undoubtedly shortened its lifespan, similar to Ronald Reagan's measures that led to the eventual collapse of the former Soviet Union.

The choice of Raisi as president, however, is less important than the US Administration's expected choice in

favour of a nuclear deal with Iran. It never ceases to amaze how, when a force of unadulterated, radical evil finds itself on the ropes, someone always comes along to lend it a hand and pick it back up.

The nuclear deal is a lifeline for a drowning regime. Removing sanctions and welcoming Iran back into the family of nations will give it a boost and help it rehabilitate its sputtering economy. We can rest assured that the expected nuclear deal will fail to rein in the regime's support for terror and subversive activities. In fact, it will have the exact opposite effect: it will encourage it to hasten its march toward a nuclear bomb and increase its meddling across the region.

The regime's end will inevitably come; it is simply the way of the world. Unfortunately, the emerging nuclear deal between the US and Iran won't bring us any closer to that day, rather, it will only give the regime more oxygen. 

*Prof. Eyal Zisser is the Vice Rector of Tel Aviv University and the holder of the Yona and Dina Ettinger Chair in Contemporary History of the Middle East at that University. © Israel Hayom (www.israelhayom.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## THE MASSACRES OF EBRAHIM RAISI

by Tzvi Kahn

Even the prison guards were horrified. In the summer of 1988, at the behest of Iran's then-Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the regime executed thousands of political dissidents incarcerated at 32 sites throughout the country.

Saeed Amirkhizi, an inmate at Evin Prison at the time, recalls that even those guards "who had been tormenting

and executing prisoners for years were astonished by this level of cruelty and barbarity."

Now, one of the massacre's perpetrators – and a key architect of Iran's human rights abuses in the subsequent 32 years – is about to become Iran's president.

Ebrahim Raisi – the deputy prosecutor general of Teheran from 1985 to 1988 – facilitated the 1988 slaughter by serving on a four-member panel known as a Death Commission, which decided who would live and who would die. The commission would conduct interviews of prisoners – often just a few minutes long – aimed at determining their loyalty to the Islamic Republic. Questions could include: "What is your political affiliation?" "Do you pray?" "Are you willing to clear minefields for the Islamic Republic?" The wrong answer meant death.

The executions were usually by hanging or by firing squad. They typically took place the same day as the interrogations. The commissions allowed neither lawyers nor appeals. Burials occurred in unmarked mass graves. The regime waited months before notifying the relatives of the victims, refused to tell them the locations of the bodies, and told them not to mourn in public.

Raisi's commission operated at Evin Prison and Gohardasht Prison, two of Iran's most notorious jails. Kamal Afkhami Ardekani, a former Evin official, reported that throughout most of July and August, the prison executed inmates every half hour from 7:30am to 5:00pm. The victims included women and children as young as 13.

Raisi has defended the killings, saying in 2018 that they were "one of the proud achievements of the system."

In 2016, an audio recording from 1988 emerged of a meeting between Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri – a deputy to Khomeini – and Raisi and the other

**"The executions were usually by hanging or by firing squad. They typically took place the same day as the interrogations. The commissions allowed neither lawyers nor appeals"**

With Compliments

  
PEACHTREE CAPITAL

Level 3, 356 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

three members of his Death Commission. In a remarkable rebuke, Montazeri told the panel that its members had inflicted the “greatest crime committed under the Islamic Republic,” and “will in the future be etched in the annals of history as criminals.”

Raisi was elected Iran’s new president on June 18. It was not his first time seeking the job. In 2017, he ran against outgoing president Hassan Rouhani, receiving only 38.5% of the vote compared to the incumbent’s 57%. Of course these elections, like all presidential contests in the Islamic Republic, were hardly free and fair: A 12-member, unelected body known as the Guardian Council selects eligible candidates, ensuring that the resulting government remains loyal to the principles of the Islamic Revolution. Still, the majority of Iranians who opted to vote sought to defeat a candidate with so much blood on his hands.

This time around, they were not really given a choice, with all credible alternatives to Raisi barred from running.

During the 2009 Green Revolution, Raisi served as deputy Chief Justice, making him complicit in the prosecution – and, in some cases, the death sentences – of peaceful protesters who objected to Iran’s fraudulent election. A few years later, as Attorney General, Raisi opposed lifting the regime’s house arrests of the Green Revolution’s leaders.

“Those who have proposed the elections were fraudulent and created doubt in the public’s mind have undoubtedly committed a grave crime and naturally will have to answer for the crime they have committed,” said Raisi in 2009.

The next year, Raisi praised the judiciary’s amputation of a thief’s hand as a punishment for stealing. The gruesome sentence, Raisi said, is “based on the law and divine punishment,” and is “a source of pride for us.”

Since 2019, Raisi has served as the head of the judiciary, making him directly responsible for how it mistreats prisoners of conscience. According to a recent US State Department report, “Commonly reported methods of torture and abuse in prisons included threats of execution or rape, forced tests of virginity and ‘sodomy,’ sleep deprivation, electroshock, including the shocking of genitals, burn-

ings, the use of pressure positions, and severe and repeated beatings.”

Iran’s judiciary also constitutes one of the world’s leading executioners. In 2021, after trials devoid of due process, it has executed more than 100 people to date. In 2020, it claimed the lives of at least 267 people. In 2019, it killed 280 people.

In 2019, the Trump Administration sanctioned Raisi, citing his conduct in the 1988 massacre and the 2009 protests. Now, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has indicated that the Biden Administration may lift some non-nuclear sanctions on Iran in order to persuade Teheran to re-enter the 2015 nuclear deal. The regime, for its part, has pressed America’s negotiators to lift all nuclear and non-nuclear sanctions, which would include a removal of Raisi from the blacklist.

The Biden Administration should resist such pressure. Regardless of the fate of the nuclear accord, perpetrators of crimes against humanity should not receive pardons. AIR

*Tzvi Kahn is a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a Washington, DC-based, nonpartisan research institute focusing on national security and foreign policy. The article originally appeared in Real Clear Politics. © FDD (www.fdd.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## HOW HAMAS TOOK UNRWA HOSTAGE

by Alexander H. Joffe and Asaf Romirowsky

Truth is a rare commodity when it comes to international organisations, all the more so when it comes to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the internationally funded welfare organisation for Palestinians. For UNRWA employees, truth-telling can be a career killer, or worse.

Consider the case of Matthias Schmale, UNRWA’s Director of Operations for the Gaza Strip, who is now *persona non grata* and forbidden to return to Hamas-ruled Gaza. Schmale’s crime was telling Israel’s *Channel 12* that Israeli attacks on Hamas installations were precise: “I’m not a military expert but I would not dispute that. I also have the impression that there is a huge sophistication in the way the Israeli military struck over the last 11 days” [Ed Note: He also said something similar on ABC Radio National on May 20]. Schmale also denied that there were shortages of food and medical supplies in Gaza.

Despite his also saying that “So yes they did not hit, with some exceptions, civilian targets, but the viciousness



Level 10, 227 Collins Street  
Melbourne Vic 3000

Ph: (03) 9654 1766 [www.wiener.com.au](http://www.wiener.com.au)



The exiled UNRWA head in Gaza Matthias Schmale (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

and ferocity of the strikes was heavily felt,” Schmale’s remarks produced outrage among Palestinian factions, including Hamas, which stated his “comments are a complete distortion in favour of the Zionists including an attempt to exonerate the Occupation of the murder of 254 Palestinians, more than 40% of them children,

women and the elderly.”

Other Palestinian factions quickly argued that Schmale was “a major reason for the suffering of thousands of Palestinian refugees and UNRWA employees in the Gaza Strip.”

Of course, Schmale apologised via Twitter: “Recent remarks I made on Israeli TV have offended & hurt those who had family members & friends killed & injured during the war that has just ended. I truly regret to have caused them pain...”

UNRWA superiors then recalled Schmale and his deputy to Jerusalem for “consultations”. UNRWA’s Deputy Commissioner Leni Stenseth quickly took over as temporary head of operations in Gaza. Her first move was to meet with Hamas, where she “thanked the head of the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Al-Sinwar, for his positivity and desire to continue cooperation.” She also added that Schmale’s comments “cannot be defended.”

**“UNRWA’s role in promulgating the destructive myth of the “right of return” is a way to perpetuate Palestinian grievance and thus its own existence”**

publicly articulate, that the right of return is unlikely to be exercised to the territory of Israel to any significant or meaningful extent.”

UNRWA’s reaction was swift, saying, “UNRWA unequivocally distances itself from the statements made by the director of its office in New York, Andrew Whitley... These statements in no way reflect the policies or positions of the agency and are the personal views of Mr. Whitley.”

UNRWA’s code of silence can be explained in several ways. For one thing, too much money and too many careers are at stake – US\$806 million (A\$1.07 billion) in 2020 and some 30,000 employees. Its leaders, therefore, cannot in any way jeopardise the narrative of UNRWA’s indispensability to perpetual Palestinian “refugees” who are

allegedly faced with unrelenting Israeli violence.

UNRWA’s role in promulgating the destructive myth of the “right of return” is a way to perpetuate Palestinian grievance and thus its own existence.

But at another level, UNRWA, including both its international and Palestinian employees, are simply hostages, partly of their own making. Like other totalitarian governments, the atmosphere of harassment and intimidation created by Hamas is real and palpable. Having seen Hamas throw its political opponents off buildings and drag their bodies through the streets is highly instructive.

For this reason, Western media had little to say when observing Hamas operatives digging up water pipes for conversion into missiles or constructing miles of tunnels under Gaza. Antagonising the hosts with the truth can be self-destructive.

When access is everything, Westerners willingly make themselves hostages. And when the truth slips out, access is lost and apologies flow. Schmale’s accidental candour cost him a job, but fortunately not his life, but Leni Stenseth seems to have smoothed things over with Hamas. With US\$150 million (A\$200 million) of renewed US funding and yet another “emergency appeal” from UNRWA, the stakes are high, but truth seems unlikely to reappear soon.

AIR

*Alexander H. Joffe is a Ginsburg / Milstein Writing Fellow at the Middle East Forum and a senior non-resident fellow at the BESA Centre at Bar Ilan University. Asaf Romirowsky is a fellow at the Middle East Forum, Executive Director of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, and a senior non-resident fellow at the BESA Centre. This piece originally appeared in The National Interest. © Middle East Forum (www.meforum.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## MARTYRDOM CALLS AND ANTISEMITISM IN AUSTRALIA

by Ran Porat

The conflict during May between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, named “Operation Guardian of the Walls” by the IDF, unleashed a tidal wave of antisemitism, demands for Israel’s destruction and violence across the world.

Unfortunately, several Australian Muslim and Arabic media outlets, Australian Muslim social media groups and Australian Muslim preachers participated in this ugly trend. Here are a few examples.



## THE AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM TIMES (AMUST)

The *Australian Muslim Times* (AMUST) dedicated a substantial portion of its June edition to the events in Gaza, and you would expect its coverage to be sympathetic to Palestinian suffering and critical of Israel. However, the paper went well beyond this, introducing antisemitic messages and conspiratorial and extreme claims about Israel.

Managing editor of AMUST Zia Ahmed's "Global outcry against Israel's brutal attacks" argues that "with its strong military might, the government of Israel does not feel accountable for its human rights violations and through its strong lobbying power in Western seats of power, no one can make it accountable."

Daud Batchelor opens his article "Palestinians' moral strength soars in facing Zionist tyranny" by stating: "Israel has become tyrannical, massacring Palestinians and stealing their land, unchallenged by complicit US and Australian governments." He then argues that "Mosaic law imposes an 'eye for an eye' but Israel demands 20 Palestinian eyes for an Israeli eye," repeating the conspiracy theory that, in Jerusalem, Israel "plans to illegally destroy Al-Aqsa in order to build a temple."

Defining Zionism as "supremacism [which] now emerges to benefit some by severe loss of rights of indigenous Arabs," Batchelor falsely claims that "Israel is currently indicted for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in the ICC Court."

In the spirit of classic antisemitic tropes, Batchelor blames Zionism for numerous major world catastrophes: "Zionism is a spreading contagion, root-cause of the 9/11 attacks and invasions-destruction of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Syria. Israel now threatens countries like Iran and Malaysia."

Peace cannot be achieved, concludes Batchelor, "until it [Israel] becomes de-zionised so Muslims, Christians and refugees live peacefully with Jews. This is an elusive future due to Zionist supremacism."

**"According to Bilal Cleland ('The waning of the Israeli narrative'), Israel's history is a 'system of apartheid, of religious bigotry designed as a political weapon to smite the Palestinians.'"**

According to Bilal Cleland ("The waning of the Israeli narrative"), Israel's history is a "system of apartheid, of religious bigotry designed as a political weapon to smite the Palestinians." Moreover, "every few years the ethnic cleansing of the non-Jews advances a step, with illegal Jewish colonial enclaves being set up, under IDF protection, on Palestinian land."

Gary Dargan criticised Australian PM Scott Morrison in "Scotty's tone deaf dog whistle" for his support for Israel.

Dargan's main attack was on the service of a very small number of Australian Jews in the Israeli army: "Every year Australian citizens travel to Israel to serve in the Israeli Defence forces (IDF). There is no compulsion to do this, they are volunteers. At the same time young Australians are actively recruited and trained by the Zionist movement to serve in the IDF. This recruitment and training takes place in Australia." The last point is of course not true.

Dargan then goes on to imply that anyone who serves in the IDF is now effectively a war criminal, "The end result of this is Australian citizens being complicit in well documented war crimes carried out by the Israeli military. Worse than this in some cases they are actually targeting their fellow Australians."

He finishes the article by calling on Canberra to "make it an offence under anti-terror laws for Australian citizens to serve in the IDF or provide financial support to illegal Israeli settlements."

In "Big girl voice in Sydney for Palestine", psychologist Nasreen Hanifi falsely claims that "Israeli nationalists have been working hard to replace the Palestinian population in almost every single city of Palestine." Hanifi proudly describes how she took her six-year-old daughter to a pro-Palestinian rally in Sydney so her child could "see how children as young as her were murdered for crimes that they did not commit. This year, she participated in the role play." Despite her profession, there is no word in her opinion piece invoking any concern about the possible psychological effects of exposing young children to such violent content.

## FARAH NEWS

True to their past record of promoting antisemitism, the editors of *Farah News* – a Sydney based Australian portal in Arabic for news and views from the Arab world – chose to run antisemitic articles and support for terrorist violence during the conflict, as well as calling for the ethnic cleansing of all Jews from Israel.

Brussels-based Mostafa Meneg reverts to the classic antisemitic technique of dehumanisation, likening Israel to a vampire, in "Israel's vampire trembles", published on *Farah News* in May 15.

With Compliments From



Cnr. Taylors Road & Calder Park Drive  
Taylors Hill, VIC.

Meneg praises the Palestinian rockets fired from Gaza, adding that they “are only the beginning of what will come after it (and soon) from southern Lebanon, then from Iran, and then from the Muslim countries of Asia, and the last of which are Arab countries that have long wished, like the clock, to show to Israel that... Islam that has been patient with the Israelis enough.”

Meneg also hails Hamas’ success, in his opinion, “to confront the orgy of Zionists who thought they possessed the world in the Security Council of its United Nations, and the American leadership and most of the countries of its Western world, knowing that they are going towards a certain defeat.”

In “Al-Quds is Arab and will remain Arab” (May 16), regular *Farah News* columnist Zuhair Al-Sebaei discusses the history of “global Zionism”, calling for the expulsion of the Jews from Israel: “Palestine is Arab, which is part of the Levant and the noble Aqsa. The day must come when it will be liberated from his captivity. England or anyone else has no right to settle Jews in Palestine. If Europe, America and Russia are fond of their love for the Jews and feel guilty and want atonement for the genocidal massacres committed by their ancestors on the rights of their Jewish citizens, let them open their countries and receive them [the Jews] with flowers and white rice.”

## SUFYAAN KHALIFA

Algerian-born Perth resident Sufyaan Khalifa is a Muslim preacher who promotes conspiracy theories and anti-semitism online to thousands of followers – and has been calling for the destruction of Israel for several years now.

Responding to growing tensions in Jerusalem a few days prior to escalation in Gaza, Khalifa posted a YouTube video on April 27; “ISRAEL’S END is VERY NEAR... PLAESTINE WILL be FREE” [capital letters and typos in the original text].



Sufyaan Khalifa (YouTube screenshot)



This brother got martyred while protecting Masjid Al-Aqsa from blast and attacks, Look at The smile on his face-describes the blessings of Allah on him, Allah-u-Akbar, 🌸 Mashallah...



Mostafa Meneg (top left), Zuhair Al-Sebaei (top right), post from the Australian Muslim Facebook group (bottom)

In his video, Khalifa labels Israel a “Cancer which has been planted in the Arab world by the Western colonists countries”, with the graphic behind him saying “Zionism = Nazism”.

“The Arabs will never see the dawn, nor see the light, until they get rid of the so-called Israel,” warns Khalifa. “That cancer [Israel] was planted in the Arab world for no reason except to prevent the Arab world and the Muslim world from standing up on its feet” and prevent a reunited Islamic empire.

“One day that state [Israel] will be vanished forever,” promises Khalifa as a banner saying “Israel’s end is very near” is projected on the screen.

Khalifa’s video ends with him stating that Israel’s end is “a decree from Allah.” “Justice will prevail and the occupying forces have to go back to where they came from,” says Khalifa, and on that day believers “from all

denominations, Muslims and non-Muslims will rejoice.”

## THE AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM FACEBOOK GROUP

Some 2,500 people follow the Facebook page of The Australian Muslim.

On May 10, alongside an image of a Palestinian who was supposedly killed in the Al-Aqsa mosque (in fact no Palestinians were killed in or around the Al-Aqsa mosque during the conflict or in the clashes leading up to it.) The Australian Muslim’s post cried “Be jealous people be jealous!”, urging that being ‘martyred’ is something to aspire to.

A second post that day by The Australian Muslim, said: “People are dying in clubs and casinos, while others have the honour of being Martyred in the Holy Mosque of Al-Alqsa, [sic] Allahu Akbar. May Allah honour us with a death of a Martyr. Palestinian people should feel sorry for us, as well as us feeling sorry for ourselves.”

Finally, again on May 10, the headline of the post on the Australian Muslim Facebook page was “Israeli regime or Nazi regime?” Under an anti-Israeli video, the text of the post read: “Is the Israeli regime as bad as the Nazi regime? Watch this and see for yourself! Attacking people praying peacefully inside a place of worship is beyond inhuman.” Dehumanisation is of course a known tactic used to incite hatred and violence.

AIR

*Dr. Ran Porat is an AIJAC Research Associate. He is also a Research Associate at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University, a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya and a Research Associate at the Future Directions International Research Institute, Western Australia.*



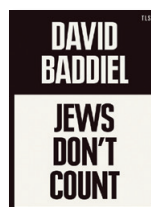
# THE BIBLIO FILE

## Learning to Count

### Jews Don't Count

by David Baddiel, TLS Books, 2021, 131 pp.; \$17.99

by Colin Schindler



David Baddiel is well-known in Britain as a comedian and a writer. He is also unusual – in that he does not shy away from his Jewishness in his stage routine, but actually glories in his identity. The grandson of disenfranchised, well-to-do, Jewish business-people who escaped Nazi Germany in 1939, his Twitter biography is just one word: “Jew.” Yet he occupies the no man’s land between conventional “Jewish” and acculturated “Jew-ish” in the UK arts world.

His short account of his angst, *Jews Don't Count*, is more a stream of consciousness than an ordered analysis, yet it has rudely awoken many non-Jews in Britain from their slumbering perception of Jews.

As the title of this book suggests, Jews don't really count today in the hierarchy of racisms. It is acceptable to interpret the antisemitism of the poet TS Eliot as art and to condemn Charles Dickens's antipathy toward the Indian Mutiny of 1857 as racist.

Baddiel is scathing about many on the Left who regard themselves as being “on the right side of history,” those who express solidarity with Jews fighting the British Union of Fascists in 1936, but are silent when it comes to anti-Jewish comments in 2021.

Jews are often seen, Baddiel argues, as white and wealthy – and therefore Jewish concerns today are

unimportant. The far-left in Britain first submerged antisemitism, then marginalised it to make it invisible, and finally airbrushed it out of existence.

Former UK Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn's initial perception of an anti-semitic mural was that it was anti-capitalist before understanding it was anti-Jewish. Baddiel points out that Corbyn did not realise that it could easily have featured as the cover of an edition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Anti-Jewishness in the UK is also rooted in ignorance about the travails of Jewish history. The media are responsible in part, since they are unable to come to grips with the complexity of Jewishness. It is easier to depict *oy-vey* plastic Jews than the real thing.

Moreover, pandemic lockdowns have helped to proliferate conspiracy theories on social media that allude to all-powerful elites.

Jews do not fit into conventional theory. Hence the very idea that Jews should be included in BAME organisations (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) is perplexing and unnerving. The suggestion that the Jews could be considered a nation in exile is unfathomable.

Yet white nationalists consider Jews to be “Asiatics.” At Charlottesville in 2017, young men led a torch-lit parade, chanting, “Jews will not replace us.” However, anti-Jewish

animus can cross the race barrier. Baddiel quotes Malcom X in the 1960s:

“But let's not forget the Jew. Anybody that gives even a just criticism of the Jew is instantly labelled antisemite. The Jew cries louder than anybody else.”

In 1883, Moses Lilienblum wrote an essay of contrasts:

“The liberals say we are conservative and the conservatives call us liberals. The opponents of nationalism see us as uncompromising nationalists while the nationalists see us as cosmopolitans.”

Lilienblum's assault on the European intelligentsia and his fatalism at confronting antisemitism led him to embrace Zionism. His “can't win” syndrome has not faded even after the tragedies of the previous century.

This is not Baddiel's approach. For him, Israel is a far-off country that is mentioned only in the context of the far-left's shenanigans about British Jews being responsible for Binyamin Netanyahu's policies. His Jewish identity emerges from attending a Jewish primary school but, as he readily admits, it has been reduced today to pickled herring, Seinfeld and Groucho Marx – and the handed-down family memory of the persecuted and the murdered.

In this book, Baddiel acts the part of a literary rodeo star, trying to lasso an unruly steer. It merges with his stand-up routine – a fast talking, blunderbuss attack on antisemitic superficiality. The book has achieved remarkable publicity and succeeded where conventional approaches have fallen flat.

*Jews Don't Count* also provides a hint that Baddiel is on his own journey to understand why things are like they are. This will not be the last time we hear from him.

AIR

Dr. Colin Schindler is an emeritus professor of Israel Studies, SOAS, University of London. © Jerusalem Post ([www.jpost.com](http://www.jpost.com)), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



# The Placard Strategy

## How not to think about the conflict

by Einat Wilf

Over a year ago, pre-COVID, when delegations of students were still coming to Israel on planes, I met with a group to discuss Israel, Zionism and the conflict. During the Q&A session, I was asked by one student to comment on how “colourism” affects the conflict between Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians. While I had often heard this question framed in the context of racism, it was the first time I was asked about the conflict as one of “colourism”. Reflecting on this question, I thought that perhaps it had finally dawned on those studying the conflict that, to the extent race means anything, Jews and Arabs definitely do not constitute two separate “races”, so perhaps someone thought variations of skin tone – “colour” – would make sense of the conflict in a way that Americans could understand.

Since analysing the conflict in terms of skin tones made about as much sense as race, and since the talk took place in a hotel meeting room in Jaffa, I simply challenged the young student to go out into the city, where the population is a mix of Arabs and Jews, and, upon her return, tell me whether she could tell Jews apart from Arabs based only on their “colour.” Even without going outside, she admitted she was not likely to be able to do so. Marshalling all my

patience gained from years of having to address false parallels and analogies, I explained that Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians are engaged in a century-old conflict that rests on issues of nation, religion, theology, tribes, receding empires, carved-out



Understanding of a complex conflict is being reduced to three word slogans like “Zionism is Racism” to fulfill the emotional needs of people unaffected by it (Credit: Shutterstock)

states, history, and geography – all great and relevant lenses from which to analyse it. Race and colour are not.

Normally, we expect people to try to understand things that are foreign to them by placing them in familiar frameworks and by drawing parallels with their own situations. Having discussed the conflict over the years with groups from India, China, Japan, Europe, Africa, and Latin America,

I was always struck by the parallels they found between, on one hand, the history of the Jews, Zionism and the conflict and, on the other, their own countries’ and peoples’ histories. Those were always interesting for me to hear, and I considered them an honest effort by people to grapple with a place and a people that were not their own.

But unlike these earnest attempts to understand a foreign place and people, some parallels are more ill-intentioned, drawn for the express purpose of intervening in the conflict on behalf of one side, or for reasons that are more about the domestic issues of the people drawing the comparisons than about the conflict itself.

Drawing parallels to cast one side in the conflict as evil and the other as good might have the effect of marshalling support and resources for the side that one favours, but such a

strategy is counterproductive, and even just plain stupid, if the goal is actually to engage with the real issues at hand, to solve the conflict and attain peace. “Evil” must always be fought and defeated – so to cast the conflict as a fight between good and evil is effectively to argue that no compromise can be made until the other side disappears or signs an unconditional surrender.



For decades, critics have cast Jews, Israel and Zionism as the evil side in the conflict through their consistent and persistent employment of the “Placard Strategy”: utilising simple equations such as those that might appear on a placard in an anti-Israel demonstration. On one side of the equation are Israel, Zionism, and images such as the Star of David. The evil *du jour* is the other side, whether it is Imperialism, Colonialism, Racism, Apartheid or – for the truly determined – Genocide and Nazism. Most recently, White Supremacy was added to the list.

The Placard Strategy is so effective that it is employed everywhere and anywhere, from the UN (Zionism = Racism), to the International Criminal Court (Israel = Crimes Against Humanity), to various media and social media, where anti-Israel speakers invariably manage to respond to any question regarding Israel with the words “Apartheid,” “Racist,” and “Colonialist,” regardless of the question or topic discussed.

**T**he Placard Strategy has never been about actual facts and policies. If there was ever a time when it was at least used for purposes that had to do with the conflict itself, that time has passed. Nowadays, the equations and parallels reflect more on the domestic concerns of the protesters than they illuminate any real issues in Israel and the Middle East.

I first saw this phenomenon when visiting Ireland and Northern Ireland several years ago. As I travelled around and met with officials, the analogy emerged: Israel = Protestants/Northern Irish/Britain, and the Palestinians = Irish Catholics. As I visited sites throughout Belfast, the Protestant areas were flying Israeli flags, and the Catholic areas had Palestinian flags, creating an eerie feeling that the Northern Irish conflict, supposedly ended by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, was still simmering.

It wasn’t just the flags: Catholics and Protestants alike described

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with intense emotion, usually coupled with remarkable ignorance. One Sinn Féin Member of Parliament even went so far as to accuse Israel of committing genocide – which is when I realised that these emotions had nothing to do with our conflict and everything to do with their own. It was as if, with their struggle officially resolved, the Catholics and Protestants couldn’t let go – they needed a new way to channel, experience and display the full range of intense emotions that had fuelled them during their own struggle.

But this time, of course, they bore none of the consequences of these feelings and opinions. My colleague Igal Ram once termed this a “Disneyland of Hate”: For those outside the actual Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it was a safe – Disneyland – way of experiencing a roller-coaster of intense emotions missing from their dull post-peace lives. In a world that is actually more peaceful than ever, and where negative, violence-related emotions, such as hatred – and especially hatred of groups and collectives – are less legitimate than ever, the continuing acceptance of hatred for Israel endures. Couching it in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enabled some Irish Catholics a rare and safe outlet for the open expression of the least legitimate emotion of all, hate.

A visit to South Africa provided me with a similar experience. Especially after the 2010 World Cup, South Africa had successfully re-branded itself as the post-apartheid Rainbow Nation. But the situation on the ground was one where apartheid and its effects continued to exist in practice, if not in name. Challenges of rampant poverty, inequality, illiteracy, and corruption plagued the country. Yet, many of the young people I

met seemed possessed by what they viewed as the urgent need to fight “Apartheid Israel”.

Noticing once again the intensity of their emotions, I realised that they, too, had bought a ticket to this “Disneyland of Hate.” Their parents and grandparents had actually fought

**“Anti-Israel speakers invariably manage to respond to any question regarding Israel with the words ‘Apartheid,’ ‘Racist,’ and ‘Colonialist,’ regardless”**

Apartheid in South Africa, paying a hard price but also experiencing the glory not only of common struggle, but of victory. Life for their children was not so dramatic – their job, instead, was the dull and exhausting work of

solving the deep-seated problems that Apartheid had created. Continuing the glorious battle – just transposing it onto a faraway land with no regard for the actual situation there – meant they could tap into the glory without experiencing any of the pain.

In the United States, the discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict increasingly resembles this “Disneyland of Hate.” If American discussions of the conflict were once focused on the conflict itself and on specific policy proposals designed to advance its resolution, this is clearly no longer the case. Like in Ireland and South Africa, the conflict has become a stand-in for American positions, where self-styled social justice warriors substitute the hard and tedious work of addressing domestic challenges with the vicarious heroism of fighting for the grand ideal of “Palestinian Rights”.

America is increasingly removed from its years of glorious global victories and celebrated domestic battles. The last war it won was cold, and its recent “hot” wars have been a string of sorry messes. The grand battles for civil rights and liberation have attained so much that the current battles for equity and equality now require a consistent focus on far more tedious issues like infrastructure, health and education. In the absence

of these exciting opportunities to defeat real Nazis in actual wars, or to attain decisive gains for civil rights, those who claim to promote social justice have latched on to the conflict in Israel in a desperate effort to appear, if only to their own in-group, as heroic warriors for “justice.” It is as if the conflict serves as a hallucinatory drug for those seeking to escape a dull reality and tedious long-term challenges, allowing them to imagine themselves engaged in a heroic struggle between good and evil, where victories are swift and definitive – to be Captain America and save the day.

And so, in an act of blatant neo-colonialism, the American story is viewed as the universal prism through which all societies should be understood and analysed. Blithely ignorant of the specificity of their own experience, the neo-colonialists fit the square peg of the conflict into the round hole of American history. Jews are bizarrely cast as “white,” and Zionism as a movement of “white supremacy,” while Arabs, who look exactly like Jews, are cast as “people of colour”. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is cast as a mirror of race relations in America, but without the relevant local context of slavery, Jim Crow, or any of the specificities of Jewish, Arab or Middle Eastern history.

Since these analogies have nothing to do with Israel and everything to do with projections of domestic issues and animosities, the best response is simply to refuse to give them the respect of treating them as honest arguments and dismiss the pretension that these issues have anything to do with Israel or Zionism.

The irony is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict doesn’t provide much in the way of heroism anymore either. It is one of the least violent conflicts in the world, leading to far fewer violent deaths than most American cities experience each year. The contours of the slow separation between the State of Israel and an emerging Palestinian


state are becoming more defined, and Israelis and Palestinians continue their close security cooperation. The growing normalisation between Israel and many Arab states points to a regional exhaustion with “the conflict” and a sense that Israel is part and parcel of the Middle East. A dull grey envelops a region that once seemed to promise grand battles between good and evil, black and white, Armageddon and salvation.

Yet, in a world where so much is coloured in dull grey, the market for black and white is as strong as ever. If actual, real-life Israelis, Arabs, and Palestinians are not going to supply the grand battle for right and wrong, then those who are addicted to this hallucinatory drug will have to invent it.

Yes, there are serious, complicated, and appropriate ways to understand the conflict between Israel, its Arab neighbours, and the Palestinians. None of them includes a grand battle between good and evil. But I can testify that when I sit with audiences and talk about the history of Ottoman decline, or the rise of nation-states to replace receding empires, or the interplay of various imperial and Cold War interests with those of various ethnic and religious groups, the eyes of most people glaze over. They want to know: Who are the good guys? Who are the bad? Which side should I

root for – who is my team?

But Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, are not sports teams. They are not stand-ins for good and evil, symbols for the struggles in one’s own group much closer to home – they are not a drug for generating intense feelings in a dull reality. Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, are real people. They are struggling to resolve centuries-long conflicts, which they are slowly doing.

That is a far better use of their time than serving as props and collateral damage in the domestic morality tales of other countries, giving an outlet for people to channel negative emotions with which they should be dealing on their own. Which is why, increasingly, Israelis and even Palestinians watch the intense debates taking place halfway across the world in their name and are left wondering: What does all of this have to do with us? 

*Dr. Einat Wilf is a leading Israeli intellectual and the co-author of The War of Return: How Western Indulgence of the Palestinian Dream Has Obstructed the Path to Peace (Macmillan, 2020). She is a former member of the Israeli Knesset on behalf of the Labor Party. Reprinted from Sapir: A Journal of Jewish Conversations. © Sapir (www.sapirjournal.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*



With Compliments

**Minnie Smorgon and Family**

On behalf of

**GBM Group**  
10 Queens Road  
Melbourne VIC 3004  
Tel: +61 3 9869 1333





**DELMONT**  
PRIVATE HOSPITAL

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

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



**GERSH**

**Gersh Investment Partners Ltd**

Level 2, 650 Chapel Street  
South Yarra, Victoria 3141  
Tel: 03 9823 3400 Fax: 03 9823 3433

[www.gersh.com.au](http://www.gersh.com.au)



# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### HORS DE COMBAT

*Daily Telegraph* columnist Piers Akerman (May 23) skewered the “taxpayer funded ABC and SBS” for portraying Israel as the “aggressor” during the May conflict, by “not giv[ing] their audience the basic facts about the conflict.”

He said “left-leaning commentators like to compare the [imbalance in the] death toll... but that ignores the reality that Hamas and Islamic Jihad have no regard for death while the Israelis regard all life as sacred.”

“Proportionality”, he said, is “be-loved” by “the ABC and SBS commensariat” but “is meaningless unless both combatants observe the rules of war which Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah in Lebanon do not,” he argued.

Whilst the *AIR* endorses Akerman’s criticism of the ABC, we think he was a tad unfair to SBS, which has been generally more balanced than the ABC when reporting on Israel. Moreover, some commercial TV reporting, particularly *Channel Nine*’s, left a lot to be desired, such as its May 19 bulletin which claimed, without a hint of irony, that Hamas was “threatening more rocket strikes on Tel Aviv if [Israel’s] bombing of residential areas did not stop.”

### Q&A – QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

*ABC TV* “Q&A’s” adherence to its statutory obligation to be fair and balanced was brought into question with the May 27 episode covering the Israeli-Palestinian issue which included high profile Palestinian advocate Randa Abdel-Fattah but no equivalent mainstream pro-Israel Jewish panelist.

Joining Abdel-Fattah on the pro-Palestinian side of the ledger were lawyer Jennifer Robinson, who has

represented the Palestinian Authority at the International Criminal Court, Labor MP Ed Husic and Indigenous musician Mitch Tambo, who admitted he didn’t know much about the issue but was critical of Israel.

The only voice willing and able to speak truth to Palestinian propaganda was former Australian Ambassador to Israel and current federal Liberal Member for Wentworth Dave Sharma.

Abdel-Fattah’s bluster included calling a “lie” Sharma’s comment that Hamas was responsible for the recent conflict and disparaging his claim that Hamas remains committed to terrorism and Israel’s destruction.

Unsurprisingly, she attacked Israel’s enforcement of the Gaza blockade and not Hamas, which has spent the last 14 years stealing international aid to build a militarised tunnel system instead of bomb shelters that might protect civilians in Gaza during the four self-destructive wars it has initiated with Israel.

Robinson claimed Israel deliberately targets journalists to stop scrutiny of its actions in Gaza, which is ironic given reporters in Gaza know that they risk harassment or worse if they actually report on what Hamas does.

On the previous week’s episode (May 20), Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce said of the Israel-Hamas conflict that he did not want to see problems “on the other side of the world” being imported into Australia. Labor MP Tony Burke praised the recent ALP national conference resolution calling on a future Labor government to recognise a Palestinian state but didn’t explain how any responsible government could recognise such a state while Hamas rules in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Labor foreign affairs spokesperson Penny Wong pushed back against the party’s Queensland branch

after it passed a motion accusing Israel of ethnic cleansing and being responsible for the 11 days of fighting. The *Australian*’s June 9 report said, “Senator Wong said viewing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from one perspective ‘will not advance the cause of peace’.”

### BLOCKADE BLACKOUT

An *SBS TV* “World News” (June 5) report by Claudia Farhat on delivering aid to Gaza claimed that “Egypt has pledged \$640 million to help rebuild Gaza, and is urging Israel to lift its blockade.”

Given Egypt enforces the blockade too, this would be a bizarre statement if correct.

The error appears to be Farhat misattributing the comments of senior Hamas official Khalil al-Haya, who called for an end to the blockade immediately after meeting with Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel in Gaza.

Meanwhile, on June 8, *SBS* updated an article by Farhat to correctly note Egypt also participates in blocking Gaza.

### PEDESTRIAN’S HIT AND RUN

A worrying trend during the recent conflict was the large number of reports billed as factual “explainers” turning out to be crude exercises in Israel bashing.

On May 13, on youth-oriented website and social media content provider *Pedestrian.tv* – which is owned by *Channel Nine*’s parent company – staff writer Zac Crellin’s “explainer” was ostensibly meant to assist readers gain an “understanding” of the issues, yet appeared designed to do the opposite.

Portraying Israel as an aggressor and the Palestinians as innocent,



Crellin said the conflict began in 1948 when the UN split Mandatory Palestine into two states “so that Jewish people in Europe could create a homeland through violent colonisation. There are plenty of parallels with how British people invaded what we know as Australia.”

Crellin also downplayed Hamas’ genocidal, anti-peace agenda and omitted to mention that it was Hamas’ firing of hundreds of rockets at Israeli cities, including Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, from Gaza on May 10 that prompted an Israeli response and started the war. He also described Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli cities

as merely targeting “Israeli airspace”.

*Pedestrian* also failed to tell readers that Crellin is a signatory to the “dobetteronpalestine” petition (see p. 7) which demands that journalists privilege Palestinian voices and avoid “both siderism”.

A second piece by Crellin (May 18) incorrectly claimed that “over 200 Palestinian civilians” were killed, and insisted the slogan “From the river to the sea [sic], Palestine will be free... is not about throwing Jews into the sea. It’s talking about the contested borders of Israel and Palestine, stretching from the River Jordan in the West Bank to the Mediterranean Sea.”

## HANDY PROPAGANDA

Despite Hamas bestowing an award on Al Jazeera for its coverage during the recent conflict, no alarm bells went off at *SBS TV* “World News” (June 6), which unquestioningly reported the claims made by Al Jazeera’s Palestinian correspondent Givara Budeiri that Israeli police broke her hand and hurt her back and leg when they arrested her during a demonstration at Sheikh Jarrah.

But on his *Sky News* program (June 8), Andrew Bolt showed footage of Budeiri after being released by Israeli



## IN PARLIAMENT

The following speeches were made on June 2 to a motion about the recent Israel-Hamas conflict:

**Tim Wilson** (Lib., Goldstein) – “...the foundations of this conflict [come] as a result of the failure of the Palestinian cause to respect a two-state solution and a pathway that recognises the right of the Jewish people in Israel as a foundational pillar for peace in the region... Sadly... there have been tragic deaths on both sides of the conflict. That’s a direct consequence of the attempted aggression and of Israel’s right to defend itself.”

**Chris Hayes** (ALP, Fowler) – “Israel has a right to defend itself and its people. However, when I saw the unwarranted and excessive force against the Palestinian protesters — innocent worshippers... — I was shocked and revolted. The disproportionate use of force saw 222 Palestinians killed, 1,700 injured and 74,000 Palestinians in Gaza displaced... the issue of settlements must be addressed, as this alone continues to frustrate any efforts towards a peace process.”

**Ged Kearney** (ALP, Cooper) – “... The active resistance in Israel to the land-for-peace process has been a driving factor of the radicalisation of a new generation of Palestinians frustrated that the Oslo accords have never been implemented... Remember, the genesis of the most recent conflict was the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan evictions within East Jerusalem and the ongoing government campaign to expand settlements in the occupied territories.”

**Maria Vamvakinou** (ALP, Calwell) – “... This motion speaks to [the memory of those killed] and adds voice to the calls of the many Australians across this country who are rightly outraged... calling on the Australian government to support security, human rights and justice for the Palestinian people.”

**Ken O’Dowd** (Nat, Flynn) – “It’s been a terrible time for Palestine for a very long time... it goes back to 1948. However, what we saw last month in Palestine was horrific... Israel needs to be

held accountable. They have the power to solve the problem... The apartheid culture that exists has no future.”

**Josh Burns** (ALP, Macnamara) – “it is unacceptable to take out your anger and frustration about this conflict against Jewish people around the world.”

Australian Greens Leader **Adam Bandt** (Greens, Melbourne) – May 27 – “We are making the conflict worse by a muted response to Benjamin Netanyahu’s blatant disregard for the rule of law and by our military contracts with his government. We must... resolve the underlying issues, not just watch while a just peace is undermined by the next round of evictions, demolitions, settlements and violence. We must push to end the occupation and recognise Palestine...”

Senator **David Fawcett** (Lib., SA) at Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee Estimates hearing – June 4 – “It’s commonly understood that, in order to build these tunnels, Hamas commandeers construction material brought into Gaza for civilian use. What guarantee do... Australian taxpayers have... that Australian funds going to UNOPS won’t inadvertently be used to purchase goods that end up being used in military installations or building these tunnels?”

Senator **Janet Rice** (Greens, Vic.) at Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee Estimates hearing – June 3 – “[A recent Human Rights Watch report is] a very significant major international human rights organisation concluding that the Israeli government is committing the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution. You don’t think that would be an appropriate thing for the [Foreign] minister to be briefed about?”

Senator **Alex Antic** (Lib., SA) questioning the ABC at the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee Estimates hearings – May 26 – “The errors, though, unequivocally do swing to the favour of terrorist organisations like Hamas... These articles are consistently anti-Israel.”

Senator **Eric Abetz** (Lib., Tas.) also questioning the ABC in Estimates – May 26 – “But [lack of balance] is in every story that emanates in relation to Israel.”

police walking unimpeded, freely employing her “injured” hand, and picking up two of her children at once.

On June 15, Bolt also criticised a series of so-called satirical headlines on the Chaser team’s website, including one that said former Israeli PM Netanyahu will now have more time to “murder children”, and another associating Israeli actress Gal Gadot with encouraging “baby-slaughter”.

## EXPLAIN THIS!

Meanwhile, news.com.au ran three pieces (May 16, 18 and 23) by freelance writer Jamie Seidel on the Israeli-Hamas conflict which included literally dozens of factual errors – about the sequence of events in the recent conflict, about the 1947 UN partition plan, about the status of the West Bank, and numerous other points. Astoundingly, across the three pieces Seidel contradicted himself when describing the same event! Despite Seidel penning an article in 2019 about First Temple era archaeological finds in Israel, on May 16 he seemed to deny the First Temple in Jerusalem ever existed.

With respect to a different “explainer”, following complaints by the Zionist Federation of Australia and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the ABC made significant changes to an error-riddled article on May 14 called “An attempt to explain why explosions are again filling the skies over Israel and Gaza” by Emily Clark.

Several erroneous claims were excised, most of which appeared to support the Palestinian narrative that Palestinians are indigenous while Jews are foreign colonialist invaders. These include the statements, “Arab people have lived there throughout” (they in fact only arrived in the 7th century CE), and “Arab people of different faiths and Israeli Jewish people date their claims to the land back thousands of years, but it was in the early 20th century that the brutal displacement of the Palestinians began.”

## CRYSTAL CLEAR

An avalanche of anti-Israel material on the *Guardian Australia* website only crystallised “Noted and Quoted’s” question in the May edition – does the paper still back a two-state peace and the ongoing existence of the State of Israel?

On May 7, a *Guardian UK*-sourced piece said one of the paper’s “worst errors” of the last 200 years was its support in 1917 for the Balfour Declaration which committed Britain to the goal of establishing a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. The editorial said, “Israel today is not the country the *Guardian* foresaw or would have wanted.”

A long essay on May 19 from US Jewish writer Peter Beinart called for Palestinians who were “expelled” or “fled” during the 1948 war and their descendants to have the right to settle in areas that became Israel. This of course means the end of the two-states for two-peoples formula for peace.

So too did a piece from Palestinian author Ghada Karmi on June 11, which blamed Zionism for the plight of the Palestinians, and not Arab leaders who refused to accept that Jews have a right to self-determination in a small part of the 7,207,575 km<sup>2</sup> that makes up what is called the Arab Middle East.

June 4 brought radical Israeli human rights lawyer Michael Sfard’s piece comparing Israel to Apartheid South Africa.

Omar Barghouti, a co-founder of the BDS movement, had a go on May 20 calling for West Bank and Gaza Palestinians to be given citizenship and full equal rights inside Israel, as did *Guardian* writer Kenan Malik on May 24. This is the latest formula used by Palestinian activists to attempt to replace Israel with a single Palestinian-majority state.

Despite the near complete absence of any voices on the *Guardian Australia* arguing for the two-state model for

peace, much less putting a mainstream Israeli perspective, *Guardian Australia* editor Lenore Taylor was quoted in an *Australian* report (May 17) on the “dobetteronpalestine” petition saying her paper’s coverage of the conflict was “comprehensive, fair and balanced, which is what our readers have a right to expect.” Perhaps – but only if you use the “dobetteronpalestine” standard which says fair and balanced actually means completely supporting the Palestinian narrative and demonising Israel.

## APPALLED BY PROGRESSIVES

On May 27, AIJAC NSW chairman Paul Rubenstein expressed dismay in the *Sydney Morning Herald* at the fact that it is not only “acceptable” for progressives to “support... the destruction of Israel and the creation of a Jew-free zone within its current borders...but... almost... a necessary credential for many on the progressive side of politics.”

The next day, the paper ran a letter from veteran anti-Israel activists Stuart Rees, former director of the oxymoronically named Sydney Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, and writer Antony Loewenstein, who characterised Hamas’ leaders as prospective peacemakers who have “shown [a] pragmatism and willingness to compromise” but whose “offers of dialogue with Israel are regularly rejected.”

Despite *Sky News Australia* interviewing Loewenstein twice in May, he clearly doesn’t watch the channel, otherwise he might have seen Hamas leader Fethi Hamad on the “Bolt Report” (May 13) inciting Palestinians “to cut off the heads of the Jews with knives” and even pointing to his own throat to indicate just where to stab: “Cut their artery from here. A knife costs five shekels. Buy a knife, sharpen it, put it here and just cut off (their heads)”, adding that “the Jews have spread corruption and have acted

with arrogance, and their moment of reckoning has come.”

In the *Canberra Times* (June 4), academic Clive Williams said “politicians in both Israel and Gaza seem unprepared to make the concessions necessary to create a pathway to a permanent solution,” which is a ridiculous false equivalence, equating Israel with Hamas’ genocidal plans for Jews and nihilistic governance that has seen it trigger four devastating wars in 12 years.

## DRUM BEAT

There was no pushback on *ABC TV* “The Drum”, when a panellist absurdly implied Australian support for Israel is why the Federal Government has not adopted stronger anti-slavery laws that might persuade the Chinese government to stop persecuting Muslim Uyghurs.

Panellist Yun Jiang from ANU’s Australian Centre on China in the World, said Australia is “afraid to open the can of worms on human rights around the world. So, for example, most recently, Israel raided – basically raided Al-Aqsa Mosque which is the third most holy site in Islam and also it has been pushing out Palestinian residents from Sheikh Jarrah, and the Human Rights Watch has labelled it, Israeli policy, as Apartheid. But Australia has been a consistent supporter of Israel. So if we, Australia, was to do more on human rights on China, in Xinjiang, it could expose itself into more criticism about why it is not doing more in other places around the world.”

No panellists responded to Jiang’s statement when host Kathryn Robinson asked them to comment.

## ON FOREIGN SHORES

An *ABC TV* “Foreign Correspondent” (June 10) report ostensibly investigating the long-term viability of the Dead Sea became a vehicle to attack Israel’s occupation of the West Bank.

Until the 13-minute mark, former Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek’s dispatch was entirely factual, explaining how decades of diverting water from the Sea of Galilee reduced the flows that feed into the Jordan River and maintain the water level of the Dead Sea.

But then the report segued into political activism by accusing Israel of a racist policy whereby settlers receive more water than Palestinians, who are the rightful owners of the water to begin with.

Zeyad Fuqaha, described as a “Palestinian government worker”, took Tlozek to his “home village of Kardala” in the Jordan Valley.

Tlozek said Kardala is “under the full control of the Israeli military” with Fuqaha claiming it receives less than 50% of the water it needs, while “Israelis in their settlements... are filling up their swimming pools” with Palestinian water.

Tlozek claimed “Israel controls all the water in the Jordan Valley under a temporary agreement that was meant to expire by the end of the 1990s” and Fuqaha lamented that Israel blocks Kardala from erecting buildings or even repairing roads, because Israel is “pushing them to leave their land.”

The Israeli perspective was provided by David Elhayani, who heads the organisation representing settlers.

Tlozek said “some [settlers] believe God gave them this land”, implying that Elhayani is one of them, despite the fact that he is totally secular.

Clearly Kardala was picked to represent the lived experience of all Palestinian villages under Israeli occupation. Yet Tlozek failed to tell viewers that Zeyad Fuqaha, the “Palestinian government worker”, is in fact a senior official with the Palestinian Water Authority.

If Tlozek was serious about seeking answers to the allegations raised, he would have contacted COGAT, the Israeli authority that deals with these matters in Kardala [i.e. Area C, not the entire West Bank], or Mekorot,

the Israeli company that oversees water infrastructure, not a settler spokesperson.

Furthermore, Tlozek was just wrong about the agreement the PLO signed with Israel in the mid-1990s – it had no expiration date.

Numerous independent reports have shown that Palestinians suffer from significant water loss because the PA refuses to maintain or replace the water infrastructure that was transferred to its jurisdiction by the Oslo Accords.

And as a 2018 World Bank report noted, Oslo gave the PA the option to independently extract water from the natural aquifers on the West Bank but it chose not to, preferring to buy water from Israel – which has increased the amount of water it supplies to considerably more than that required by the Accords.

As for the claim that Israeli settlements are basically stealing Palestinian water, like the rest of Israel, most settlements use recycled wastewater or desalinated water, not river or aquifer water.

## IRAN THE WHOLE SHOW

In the *Canberra Times* (June 4), AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein blamed Iran for “indirectly” actioning the 11 days of fighting in May by supplying terror groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad with the ability to manufacture missile arsenals that have greater accuracy in reaching targets in Israel.

Dr Rubenstein cited missiles expert Fabian Hinz’s claim that “Iran has actually begun designing and testing simple, customised rocket variants optimised for local production by its various proxies” which include Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen.

He predicted an increase in Iran’s “destructive and dangerous” regional “proliferation” should the Biden Administration return to the Iran nuclear deal as negotiated in 2015.

# MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

## BYE-BYE BIBI

The end of Binyamin Netanyahu's 12-year reign as Israeli prime minister – at the hands of an unprecedented power sharing coalition of eight parties representing the full complement of Israeli political views – was a magnet for the media, especially the ABC.

On *ABC News Radio* (June 3), AIJAC research associate and academic Dr. Ran Porat said the new Government – which includes the Islamic Ra'am party led by Mansour Abbas in a breakthrough for Israeli Arab political participation – was “a true revolution”, especially given “all the riots and tension between Arabs and Jews, just a few weeks earlier.”

Likewise, in the *Canberra Times* (June 7), US columnist Trudy Rubin said, “coming on the heels of the latest Israeli-Hamas war, which sparked serious clashes between Arab and Israeli citizens of Israel, Abbas' pivotal role is all the more vital.”

In the *Guardian Australia* (June 7), Israeli analyst Daniella Peled said the “disparate” coalition was motivated by “the burning desire” to remove Netanyahu but added snarkily that its leaders are “unite[d]” by the “consensus that... the conflict with the Palestinians can be managed in perpetuity.”

On *ABC Radio National* “Religion & Ethics Report” (June 16), *Haaretz* writer Noa Landau explained that it's not only the inclusion of an Arab Islamist party that makes the new Government special, but the inclusion of women, migrants from the former USSR and Ethiopia and “a minister with disabilities” as well.

ABC Middle East correspondent Tom Joyner's online analysis (June 4) played down the role of Alternate PM Yair Lapid – who commands 17 seats to new Israeli PM Naftali Bennett's six in the new coalition and did most of the hard yards in negotiating it. Joyner name-checked Lapid only twice but Bennett 21 times, giving the latter the lion's share of credit for assembling the coalition.

In contrast, left-wing Israeli commentator Akiva Eldar questioned Bennett's popularity, noting on *ABC Radio* “PM” (June 14), that he secured only “6% of the vote.”

An *Australian* editorial (June 15) said Bennett “is on the hard right of Israeli politics” and he “explicitly rejects a two-state solution,” but stressed that the new coalition Government “shows how wrongheaded assertions are that Israel is an apartheid state.”

But on *ABC News Radio* (May 31), AIJAC's Ahron Sha-

piro qualified Bennett's reputation, explaining that, since last year, he agrees “in principle... Palestinians should be able to have a state, but” Bennett has conditions regarding “what kind of state that will be.”

ABC reporter Matt Bevan's June 14 backgrounder on *Radio National*'s “Breakfast” used clips from a 2013 interview with Bennett and said he has a “vision and mission [that] absolutely does not include a Palestinian state.”

However, when shown evidence Bennett had denied a controversial quote attributed to him, Bevan added a correction on the ABC

website.

Assessments of Netanyahu's legacy were mixed.

Bar Ilan University Professor Gerald Steinberg told *ABC Radio National* “Breakfast” (June 4) that “Netanyahu gets a lot of credit” for Israel's economic success based on its hi-tech industries, but noted he presided over an increase in economic inequality.

The *Age* editorialised (June 4) that “for those who support a tough line against the Palestinians, he has certainly delivered, backing the expansion of Israeli settlements into the West Bank and slowwalking any progress on a two-state solution.” On June 15, the *Age* ran Bloomberg's Timothy O'Brien who compared Netanyahu to former US President Donald Trump and claimed Netanyahu's removal “offers an example of how to fight authoritarians run amok.”

Speaking to *ABC Radio* “PM” (June 14), New Israel Fund Australia's Liam Getreu said “there's no way that I think we could call Netanyahu's 12 years of premiership [a] success.”

The *Australian*'s foreign editor Greg Sheridan offered a more nuanced analysis (June 5), questioning Netanyahu's hardline reputation. He praised Netanyahu's “pioneering” success in strengthening relations with Asian nations and using shared concern over Iran to negotiate “four new peace treaties with Muslim nations: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.”

On *ABC TV* “Mornings” (June 14), academic Mark Baker predicted that US President Joe Biden is going to find it difficult to “re-engage... with the peace process because Netanyahu effectively... killed the Oslo peace process along with Hamas and others.” This is grossly unfair, given the strides Netanyahu made in the US-mediated 2013-14 negotiations that were ultimately spiked by PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

# THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

## FICTION AND LIES

It is an understatement to write that passions were inflamed during the recent hostilities between Hamas and Israel.

In lockstep with Hamas shooting rockets from populated areas in attempts to murder Israeli citizens, anti-Israel activists launched a barrage of attacks across a broad landscape.

While Iron Dome limited the damage the Hamas rockets caused, there was no equivalent to protect Jews from antisemitism, to defend Israel from demonisation or to prevent many of our institutions from having their moral and intellectual foundations shaken.

The tragedy of the loss of life inflicted on residents of Gaza and Israel by Hamas rockets, and the deaths, injuries and further suffering which came as Israel sought to stop Hamas' cynical and immoral activities, was very real. It is not just appropriate but praiseworthy when genuine sympathy for the victims is expressed with emotion.

But passion does not excuse the deliberate lying, group defamation and promotion of hatred which was present in the activities of Australian shills for Hamas and their fellow travellers across academia, the media and other sectors.

Amongst the most pernicious examples of the propaganda campaign was the "Open Letter from Members of the Children's Book Industry", widely circulated in Australia.

I will declare my interest – I have a number of friends who write, illustrate, commission and distribute children's literature – none of whom would seriously consider signing on to the mendacious misinformation contained in the open letter.

But hundreds of people signed on to a letter which cast the very existence of Israel, since 1948, as "violent colonisation", and declared it is indisputable that Israel is an "apartheid state".

Each of the signatories claimed they were witnessing "ethnic cleansing", had seen Israel "massacre entire families", had observed "Israelis lynching Palestinians with the protection

and participation of Israeli police," and proclaimed they were witnessing children "targeted, murdered, orphaned, incarcerated, dispossessed and traumatized" by Israel.

These individuals, claiming to be acting out of their self-description as members of an industry which "professes to nurture and enrich the experience of childhood," concluded that "what we are witnessing is called genocide."

It is worth reiterating: the signatories to this ahistorical and immoral slander claimed to be motivated by concern for children!

Some of the signatories may be completely ignorant of the situation on the ground, devoid of historical knowledge, bereft of research skills, but not lacking in the special form of arrogance which grows from cultivated ignorance.

Others may be filled with hate, anger or feelings of self-righteousness, and are possibly in self-denial as to their own bigotry and dishonesty.

I suspect the majority simply trusted colleagues or associates to produce something of unimpeachable moral goodness.


The open letter does not suggest that the genocidal programme of Hamas or Israel's other existential enemies are worthy of critique, or express a view on hate filled textbooks and media which shape opinions of children under the rule of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

It does not mention Hamas' well-documented criminal recruitment of child soldiers.

It makes no suggestion as to how to promote a better future for the children of Israel, Gaza or the region.

It also does not reflect a commitment to ethical behaviour, kindness, compassion or any other values I feel most parents (and others) would hope would be concerns of the "Children's Book Industry" community.

If the aim of the signatories was to ostracise people who genuinely care about the children of the Middle East and elsewhere, they should be congratulated on their (hopefully temporary) success.

At the same time, they should be informed that by spreading hate and slander, they are contributing to a poisonous atmosphere for children today and in the future. 



Laudable concerns for Gaza's children has been turned into the toxic promotion of hate (Credit: Abed Rahim/ Shutterstock)



9 771442 369017 >

Australia \$7.95 (inc GST)