

HATE WAVE

Confronting an explosive increase in online and offline antisemitism

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WITH COMPLIMENTS



FOR A BETTER WORLD

EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition looks at the explosion of online antisemitism over recent months, and its apparent spillover into unprecedented anti-Jewish violence and harassment around the world.

Naomi Levin details this wave of online and offline Jew hatred and what is being done to fight back against it, while social media entrepreneur Emily Schrader gives a personal account of what it is like to be a woman caught in the crosshairs of an army of antisemitic “trolls”. Furthermore, Israeli academic Gerald Steinberg explains how what is happening now can be traced back in part to the antisemitic Durban conference of 2001, while US academic Peter Herman exposes how efforts to fight back against antisemitism are being delegitimised.

Also featured this month is Amotz Asa-El on the extraordinary stories of the incoming and outgoing Israeli presidents, Isaac Herzog and Reuven Rivlin, while Jonathan Spyer discusses the demise of Lebanon as a state and how it came about.

Finally, don't miss Zachary Milewicz on an extraordinary opportunity for Australia-Israel cooperation to take advantage of the coming “AgTech revolution”, Dr Ran Porat on evidence that efforts to stop an Iranian nuclear bomb may already be too late, and Amelia Navins on the Hamas summer camps turning kids into terrorists.

Please give us your feedback on any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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A collage of antisemitic social media posts (Credit: Twitter/ Arek Dybel)



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Australia/Israel Review

Published by the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC)

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EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN
COLIN RUBENSTEIN****ANOTHER TOXIC EPIDEMIC**

Like the COVID-19 pandemic that has gripped the globe for the past 18 months, anti-semitism has been experiencing a resurgence in virtually every part of the world.

Organisations that monitor antisemitic incidents in many countries, including Australia, have found a steady and sometimes dramatic rise in assaults, harassment, intimidation and bullying over recent years – reaching a dramatic crescendo during and in the aftermath of the conflict launched by Gaza's Hamas rulers against Israel in May 2021.

In both the US and Britain over recent months, monitoring bodies have recorded the highest levels of antisemitic incidents ever experienced.

Social media is clearly a key part of this explosion of hate.

A European Commission study showed a seven-fold increase in antisemitic content on Twitter, Facebook and Telegram in French, and a more than 13-fold increase in antisemitic content in German between the beginning of 2020 and early 2021.

Antisemites have apparently found social media to be the perfect medium for anti-Jewish bullying, abuse and libel, and for organising and inciting hatred on a global scale.

State sponsorship by antisemitic regimes is an important element of this ugly trend. A recent US study revealed that Iranian regime-linked Twitter accounts began spreading messages like "Hitler was right" and "Kill all Jews" at a rate of 175 times per minute during the recent Israel-Hamas conflict.

Moreover, in Malaysia, government-linked organisations with hundreds of thousands of members not only flooded the internet with virulently anti-Israel and antisemitic propaganda, but made concerted efforts to hack or shut down the accounts of Jews and other supporters of Israel.

Many commentators seem to be in denial about the current unprecedented wave of antisemitism, insisting it is either a response to Israeli policies, or even a concoction of Zionists who want to smear all criticism of Israel as antisemitic.

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, put himself in the former category in a recent tweet, when he wrote: "Antisemitism is always wrong, and it long preceded the creation of Israel, but the surge in UK antisemitic incidents during the recent Gaza conflict gives the lie to those who pretend that the Israeli government's conduct doesn't affect antisemitism." (Roth subsequently removed it without retracting it.)

Meanwhile, antisemites often use the excuse that they are "only criticising Israel" as a cloak to clothe their hatred in a veneer of self-righteous social virtue.

Yet, in addition to its own dubious morality, obsessive, over-the-top and disproportionate criticism of Israel unquestionably helps create the environment in which antisemitic activity has flourished.

As we've witnessed time and time again at pro-Palestinian rallies in Australia, groups that organise these demonstrations provide a safe space for bona fide antisemites to march proudly alongside the well-meaning but ill-informed people who have been taught to see the situation in the Holy Land through a false prism – such as by defining Israelis as white colonisers oppressing dark-skinned Palestinians in a misappropriation of critical race theory.

People like Roth are part of this same environment – effectively legitimating antisemitism by placing the blame on Israel rather than the perpetrators.

Antisemitism does rise when Israel fights back against attacks. But the only moral response to such ugliness, particularly from the standpoint of universal human rights, is that "Nothing justifies hate crimes or harassment against Jews anywhere, regardless of

the Israeli Government's conduct."

One key to confronting this problem is the widely-employed working definition of antisemitism developed in 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), of which Australia is a member.

This definition has been adopted by the governments of 32 countries, supported by the UN Secretary-General and the EU, and is in use by hundreds of public and private institutions.

Recognising that as a Jewish collective, Israel can be either a target of antisemitism or employed as a way to express antisemitism indirectly, the IHRA definition astutely offers some examples where criticism of Israel can cross a line into antisemitism – while rightly insisting that "criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic."

The examples it offers are simply common sense – for example, blaming all Jews for Israel's behaviour; using traditional antisemitic tropes in castigating Israel; accusing Jews of dual loyalty for supporting Israel; rejecting a Jewish right to self-determination, alone of all peoples; or insisting that the expression of that right in the State of Israel is inherently a racist endeavour. Any person of good will should see that doing any of these things at least raises questions about possible antisemitic motives.

The IHRA definition effectively leaves no place for those who espouse antisemitism to hide amidst the broader activities of anti-Israel organisations.

"Antisemites have apparently found social media to be the perfect medium for anti-Jewish bullying, abuse and libel, and for organising and inciting hatred on a global scale"

says should never be considered antisemitic.

This misconceived and unconvincing ploy is particularly damaging because the IHRA definition is so

central to any effort to turn back the current dangerous tide of antisemitism.

Social media companies, in particular, need to adopt the IHRA definition to help recognise and limit the explosion of online hate which has fed and helped incite the parallel explosion of antisemitic attacks, harassment, and intimidation in the offline world. These companies have made some improvements at the margins recently, but have light years left to travel before they will be adequately meeting their responsibilities in this regard.

To convince them to meet these responsibilities, Jews and their non-Jewish allies need to stand together against antisemitism, like all other forms of prejudice and racism, wherever and whenever it arises, and end the unconvincing qualifying, equivocating and prevaricating that has prevailed in confronting the "longest hatred" for far too long.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

"The Iranian Atomic Energy Agency has the ability to enrich uranium to a purity of up to 90 percent (weapons-grade) if necessary."

Iran's outgoing president Hassan Rouhani (Anadolu, July 14).

"I left my beloved homeland to be safe here in America, and now when the regime in Iran is trying to kidnap me, my government here in the US is trying to have a deal with the same regime."

US-based Iranian dissident Masih Alinejad, after four Iranian agents were indicted for trying to kidnap her back to Iran (Times of Israel, July 20).

"We need to verify that all this material at those higher grades [enriched uranium] is going to remain in peaceful uses. The only way to do that is to cooperate with the IAEA. If they don't do it, they are outlaws."

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael

Grossi on Iran's obstruction of IAEA access to its nuclear facilities (Bloomberg, July 20).

"Against the greatest threat – Iran arming itself with a nuclear weapon – we have no choice but to expand our force build-up, to continue to rely on our human capital and to adapt our capabilities and our plans."

Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz at a graduation ceremony for Israel's National Defence College (Times of Israel, July 15).

"It is our hope that the opening of the UAE Embassy in Tel Aviv will mark an important milestone in the growing relationship between our two countries and between the peoples of the UAE and Israel."

UAE Ambassador to Israel Mohamed Al Khaja after opening the UAE's embassy in Tel Aviv (Twitter, July 14).

"We are standing here today because we chose peace over war, cooperation over conflict, the good of our children over the bad memories of the past."

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid in the UAE inaugurating Israel's embassy (Times of Israel, June 29).



SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

DENIAL – A RIVER IN “PALESTINE”

On the ninth day of the July 2000 Camp David Summit between Israel and the Palestinians, hosted by then US President Bill Clinton, PLO head Yasser Arafat did something that appalled his American hosts. He invoked what veteran US mediator Dennis Ross called an “outrageous new mythology” – denying that a Jewish temple had even existed in Jerusalem, suggesting it had been in Nablus instead. Ross said Arafat “was challenging the core of Jewish faith and seeking to deny Israel any claim in the old city” of Jerusalem.

President Clinton was reportedly “stunned” by Arafat’s claim.

Yet since then, other senior Palestinian leaders and negotiators have similarly denied that a Jewish temple ever existed in Jerusalem – including Saeb Erekat, Nabil Sha’ath, Yasser Abed Rabbo and even current Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas.

Palestinian denials of established history continue today. In late June, the PA sponsored a conference at Al-Quds Open University titled “The myth: Zionism between denunciation and dismantling”, held under the patronage of President Abbas. PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh attended, as did numerous other leaders of the ruling Fatah party.

The conference featured several papers insisting all claims of Jewish ties to the region and to Jerusalem are lies.

Moreover, at the conference, both Abbas and Shtayyeh expressed the fundamental belief that underlies the ongoing Palestinian denial of any Jewish history in the area – a central plank of Palestinian nationalism that insists that Israel is really a foreign-imposed “settler-colonialist” entity placed in the region by imperialist powers for nefarious purposes.

In his keynote speech, delivered on video, Abbas said:

“I salute the efforts made to hold this conference that refutes the Zionist narrative that falsifies truth and history... They planned, executed and financed the implantation of Israel as a foreign body in this region in order to break it up and keep it weak. The colonial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries organised the immigration of Jews to Palestine... this conference will have an important impact on clarifying and explaining the truth of the myths and false narratives of this Zionist project, which was created by the countries of the West for purely colonial purposes.”

Shtayyeh said similar things. He emphasised repeatedly that Israel is “a function rather than a state,” presumably meaning it was merely a tool to serve the purposes of colonial powers. Among those he accused of conspiring to

impose this “function” on the area were Oliver Cromwell, Napoleon Bonaparte, “Balfour”, and an unnamed “American consul in Jerusalem.”

In a unique twist, Shtayyeh also insisted “the Jews of today are the Khazar Jews who were Judaised in the sixth century” – invoking an antisemitic myth about the eastern European Khazar kingdom, long disproven by genetic data, which is intended to deny Jews any link to the Middle East.

These claims came from the supposed Palestinian moderates of the PA, not the open antisemites of Hamas.

Needless to say, this sort of zero-sum mythologising effectively renders peace impossible. If your enemy’s very existence is simply a lying plot to harm you – as both Abbas and Shtayyeh basically claimed – how is any coexistence possible?

At Camp David, Arafat’s shocking denial about the Jewish temple helped convince American mediators he was not serious about making a final peace. The continuation of similar Palestinian denial from even supposed moderates should convince everyone what the main obstacles really are that have prevented a two-state peace being reached in the years since then.

WAR, LAW AND TRUTH

In the June edition of this column, I quoted the former head of the US Marine Corps, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Richard Natonski, and former US military lawyer David French. Both said that not only is it untrue that Israel’s actions during the conflict with Hamas in May violated the laws of war, as many had claimed, but that Israel’s efforts to minimise civilian casualties often went “beyond the requirements of the law of war” – in Natonski’s words.

Now this view has been supported by one of the world’s foremost scholars on international humanitarian law and the use of force.

Professor Michael Schmitt is the G. Norman Lieber Distinguished Scholar at the United States Military Academy at West Point, and also has affiliations with Harvard Law School, the University of Texas, University of Reading, and other universities.

He has written a paper on Israel’s strike during the conflict on the Al Jalaa Tower, which housed Al Jazeera and Associated Press offices. Israel alleged that Hamas located an intelligence office within the building that, among other functions, was being used in efforts to jam Israel’s Iron Dome missile defence system.

Schmitt concludes the strike was legal, despite the media offices in the building, arguing, “if the Israeli reports of Hamas using the building are accurate, the entire building constituted a single military objective, damage to which did not have to factor into the IDF’s proportionality calculation.”

More than this, he says the warning Israel gave to evacuate the building before striking “appears to have exceeded that required by the law of armed conflict.”

In an earlier article, Schmitt had reviewed IDF policies on the use of force generally, and similarly concluded, “in many cases, the IDF imposes policy restrictions that go above and beyond the requirements of LOAC [Law of Armed Conflict].”

War is horrible, and sympathy for both Palestinian and Israeli civilian victims of the recent conflict between Hamas and Israel is not only understandable, but essential.

But the analysis of genuine experts like Schmitt makes it clear that efforts to turn that sympathy into claims Israel must somehow have been acting illegally are either slanderous, grossly ignorant or both.

AIR



Ben Dror Yemini

ICE CREAM FOR HATRED

After coming under pressure from anti-Israel activists, the Ben & Jerry's ice cream company announced on July 19 that it will no longer distribute its products in the “Occupied Palestinian Territory,” apparently referring to West Bank settlements, but will make a new “arrangement” so its products would remain available in Israel. Below is a response from Israeli columnist Ben Dror Yemini:

Dear Ben & Jerry's directors,

I do not like boycotts, for they are seldom justified. Nor am I a devout supporter of Israeli rule in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank].

And although your ice cream has been my favourite until now, from this point on I intend to boycott it.

In fact, anyone who opposes racism, lies, incitement and human rights abuses should boycott your ice cream.

For even if you did not have racist or antisemitic intentions, your boycott is another success story for the racist and antisemitic campaign that opposes the very existence of just one state in the whole world: the Jewish state.

This is what you should know about this campaign, which is led by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS).

This campaign has no interest in peace nor in ending the occupation.

Yes, there are pure-hearted and honest people who support a peaceful, violence-free solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and who also support this campaign. But they have been deceived.

They do not know the facts. And in order to know the facts, you should listen to what the creators and leaders of this campaign have to say.

Omar Barghouti openly declared that “no Palestinian will agree to a Jewish state.”

The same is true of Prof. As'ad Abu Khalil, who wrote

that “the real aim of BDS is to bring down the state of Israel” and that this “should be stated as an unambiguous goal.”

In fact, there is not a single key activist in the boycott campaign who supports a fair solution of two states for two peoples.

Is this the struggle you support?

We need peace based on the compromises that have been proposed since the conflict began.

In fact, allow me to give you a brief review of the history:

As early as 1937, the Peel Commission proposed a solution that gave Jews just 4% of the original Palestine. The leader of the Palestinian Arabs at the time was the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini.

He said no. And when a decade later this became the United Nations Partition Plan, the Mufti was there again to lead the refusals.

This refusal led to both the Palestinian Nakba, when 715,000 people became what are today known as Palestinians, and a Jewish Nakba, when 850,000 Jews were forced to leave or be deported from Arab nations where they lived.

There have also been compromise proposals in recent decades. In 2000, then-US President Bill Clinton offered the Palestinians a state on about 96% of the territories, with additional land from Israel to make up the shortfall.

The Palestinians again said no. In 2008 they said no again to a similar proposal by then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

They said no again in 2014 to a proposal by then-US Secretary of State John Kerry and then-US President Barack Obama.

It may have been possible to achieve peace. There were indeed here and there Palestinian leaders who were inclined to compromise. But the leaders of the boycott campaign continue in the path of the Mufti, standing up to oppose any compromise.

The settlements were never the obstacle to peace. Remember the settlements in the Gaza Strip that were all evacuated by the Israeli Government in 2005?

In fact, even today the settlements take up just a tiny percentage of the Palestinian territories.

Anyone who supports a solution of two states for two peoples knows that Arabs will continue to live in Israel, where they comprise 20% of the population, and a small percentage of Jews will be able to keep living in the Palestinian state.

Your boycott decision does not serve human rights or peace or reconciliation or compromise.

Your decision is also contrary to the winds that are blowing today in most Arab countries, where they know all too well that Palestinian refusal is the real problem and not Israel.

According to a survey conducted by the Zogby Institute a few months ago, most residents of Arab countries support normalisation with Israel.

And what about you? To which side do you belong? Are you on the side of those who want peace and normalisation or for those who cultivate boycotts and hatred?

Do you understand that you have chosen the wrong side?

AIR

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ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

TROLL PLAY

It's a mark of our age that all conflicts – whether involving bullets and bombs, or those of a cultural or ideological dimension – have an increasingly powerful digital front. The May hostilities between Israel and Hamas in Gaza brought havoc on the ground, and an online onslaught launched half a world away in Malaysia.

A coordinated campaign by Malaysian online groups targeted Israeli public officials and citizens who were posting pro-Israel messages. The tactics employed included antisemitic and sexually explicit insults and death threats, spamming, the hacking of social media accounts, effectively getting them locked, and the dissemination of private information.

The best description of the scale and intensity of harassment came from Emily Schrader, an Israeli social media consultant and researcher, who was herself targeted. (For more on Schrader's ordeal, see p. 15.) Writing in *Tablet Magazine*, Schrader recounted:

"I was targeted by Malaysians who tweeted over 100,000 times with personal insults about my appearance and dozens of poor-quality memes ranging from laughably absurd to deeply violent. Of course, I received dozens of Hitler pictures and calls to 'kill the Jews,' but I also had multiple fake accounts made in my name, which were tweeting and tagging people who follow my verified account, saying, 'I'm the real Emily Schrader. I'm a slut.'"

Schrader detailed how one of the leading groups behind the cyberattacks was a Facebook group called the "Malaysian Troll Army", which has more than half a million followers. Throughout the conflict period, the group sent out calls to harass, hack and effectively silence pro-Israel accounts.

Another group which works with the Malaysian Troll Army is the Cinta Syria Malaysia (CSM), with 300,000 followers, and its sister organisation, Cinta Gaza Malaysia, which is run by a Malaysian in Gaza, Nadir al-Nuri. Nadir himself has a Telegram network of more than 256,000 fol-

lowers, which he activated during the operation by providing a list of pro-Israel accounts to hack and shut down.

Research released by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC) in Israel further detailed how the cyberattackers identified accounts that used the most common pro-Israel hashtags in their social media content, such as #IsraelUnderFire or #IsraelUnderAttack, or expressed their support for this content. Notable targets included then-PM Binyamin Netanyahu, IDF Arab media spokesperson Avichay Adraee, Israeli Hollywood actor Gal Gadot, Christians Unite for Israel and the IDF.

A browse through the official Facebook page of the IDF during the conflict showed Malaysian accounts bombarding the comments section of every post with the same pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel/anti-Zionist statements.

The ITIC reported that one of the main hashtags that was used during the attacks was #IsraelKoyak. "Koyak" is a Malay word meaning "torn/ripped", but it is also a slang insult commonly directed at someone who is easily frustrated or having a mental breakdown. This hashtag was mentioned more than 557,000 times on Twitter during the days of the operation in Gaza, with a potential reach of over 251 million, the report said.

While not discounting the possibility that automatic infrastructure, such as bots or pay-per-like/comment services, were also involved in the attacks, the report noted that no actual indications of this had been identified. Rather, the report observed that the network of activists "designed and spread meticulous instructions of how to attack, whom to attack and what content to use."

Weeks after the cessation of hostilities, on July 11, Schrader released a three-minute video titled "Exposing the Malaysian Troll Army", describing the cyberattacks as "[not] just hacktivism. It's a digital war."

Another unfortunate reality of our age is that the troll usually has the last word, so the response on Twitter was entirely predictable.

"Thank you for this documentary. Glad that everyone now knows what happened in Gaza and Palestine throughout that attack. They can search throughout #israelkoyak #IsraelTerrorism and #SavePalestine for more info," said @Zhrrdin.

"This is nothing Emily. Your people attack and murdered Palestinian for real. Good Job Malaysian. Let's make #israelkoyak," said @Bose.

The stream of invective appears set to continue indefinitely, unless action is taken.

"There is no way social media platforms aren't able to track and shut down these groups which are being used on social media platforms for the sole purpose of silencing pro-Israel voices," Schrader told *The Algemeiner*. "The fact that this activity has gone on for months unaddressed by the networks is really a failure of enforcement of their own policies. No group should be abused this way on social media."

AIR

Olga Deutsch

EUROPE'S TERROR-LINKED NGO PROBLEM

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have become an important part of international politics, with their work often seen as complementing governments in shaping and implementing policy.

However, while government officials are subject to a strict set of legal boundaries and are supposed to be held responsible by their constituencies, civil society NGOs operate beyond such confines. The potential for abuse by and of civil society organisations, especially in conflict ridden areas, therefore, poses a significant challenge to NGOs and to their government funders alike, as they become vulnerable to radical and terrorist elements.

One of the most striking examples is that of European-funded Palestinian human rights and humanitarian NGOs, many of which are directly affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) – designated as a terrorist organisation in the US, the EU, Canada, and Israel. Since its founding in 1967, the PFLP has been involved in suicide bombings, hijackings and assassinations, among other terrorist activities targeting civilians.

According to data compiled by NGO Monitor, in 2011-2019 the European Union alone authorised grants of at least €37 million (A\$59.5 million) to NGOs with ties to the PFLP. Although this constitutes a breach of the general conditions applicable to EU-financed grant contracts, and despite many NGO officials and employees having served security-related prison sentences, these organisations continue to receive funding from European governments even after the discovery of evidence of these terror ties.

After over a decade of suspicious but inconclusive evidence of terror affiliation, in late 2019 the Israel Security Agency announced that it had uncovered a 50-person terror network operating in the West Bank on behalf of the PFLP. Among those in the network were individuals arrested for carrying out an Aug. 23, 2019 bombing attack which murdered 17-year-old Rina Shnerb and injured her father and brother. At least five members of this network were employed as senior officials at the Palestinian NGOs Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) and Health Works Committee (HWC).

Samer Arbid, accused of preparing and detonating the explosive device, was employed as UAWC's financial director and "senior staff." In August 2020, the PFLP issued a statement referring to Arbid as a "prisoner and commander," and "one of the heroes of the Bubeen operation" – referring to the bombing. Abdel Razeq Farraj, who reportedly holds a

senior PFLP post and authorised the bombing, was UAWC's finance and administration director. Walid Hanatsheh, the alleged commander and financier of the attack, was employed as HWC's finance and administration manager.

UAWC has received at least €22 million (A\$35.4 million) from the EU since 2011 and an additional €17 million (A\$27.4 million) through Dutch development programs since 2013.

Despite initial insistence that their stringent vetting procedures rendered such activities impossible, in May 2020 the EU announced an internal investigation into potential diversion of its funds to terror. In July 2020, the Netherlands announced a freeze of its funding to UAWC pending an investigation, and in June 2021, Belgium also launched an investigation. In July 2021, Israeli authorities ordered UAWC's Ramallah headquarters closed for six months.

In May 2021, Israeli authorities announced the arrest of four additional HWC officials for terror-related activity, including the diversion of millions in European funds from supposedly humanitarian projects to the PFLP. The HWC arrests were part of an operation that uncovered a large finance network for the PFLP orchestrated by PFLP-affiliated NGOs. The NGOs allegedly used different methods, including reporting fictitious projects and inflated salaries, and forging invoices, to transfer funds to families of PFLP terrorists, pay salaries for militants, and other terror-related activity.

This is not exclusively a European problem. In fact, in 2012, the Australian Government, having provided taxpayer funding to UAWC via the World Vision charity, launched an investigation into UAWC's possible terror ties and concluded that there was "no evidence of any UAWC espousal of violence against Israel." Needless to say, the arrests of UAWC officials highlight the limitations of that Australian investigation.

A few years later, Israeli authorities arrested World Vision's operations manager in Gaza, alleging that he funneled millions of the organisation's Gaza budget to Hamas. Australia suspended its support for World Vision's Gaza operations.

It is clear that much of Palestinian civil society is highly politicised and geared toward promoting a nationalistic, often violent agenda. This places European donor governments in a vulnerable position and increases the need for greater oversight and accountability. While the EU, Dutch and Belgian reviews are important steps towards that, what is truly needed is a genuine and critical debate on how to best engage with civil society to achieve the best possible results for the beneficiaries on the ground, without promoting or facilitating violence.

Olga Deutsch is Vice President of NGO Monitor, and served for five years as Director of its Europe Desk.

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Two rockets were fired from Lebanon into Israel on July 20. One was intercepted by Israeli defences, the other landing in open space. The IDF responded with artillery fire at targets in Lebanon.

No rockets have been fired from Gaza since a ceasefire was announced between Israel and Hamas on May 22, but Palestinian terrorist groups launched incendiary balloons from Gaza into Israel during the first week of July, prompting Israeli retaliatory strikes against Hamas military targets.

Stone throwing, Molotov cocktail and knife attacks, along with rioting, continued throughout the West Bank, including one incident that resulted in the death of a Palestinian after he threw an IED at a soldier.

On July 9, Israeli security forces foiled a weapon smuggling attempt from Lebanon attributed to Hezbollah. It included 43 handguns, magazines, and silencers.

WEST BANK UNREST AFTER KILLING OF DISSIDENT

Thousands of Palestinians demonstrated in the streets for weeks to protest against the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its President Mahmoud Abbas in unrest sparked by the June 24 beating death of PA critic Nizar Banat while in PA custody. Banat was a candidate in the parliamentary elections Abbas called off in April.

The protests were met with brutality from PA security forces, some in plain clothes. Multiple witnesses said the Palestinian police used pepper spray and beat protesters with batons, and targeted women and journalists.

Earlier in June, PA security forces reportedly arrested 49 Palestinians,

and interrogated dozens more, in a crackdown on those suspected of affiliation with ousted former Fatah heavyweight Mohammad Dahlan.

NEW "PAY FOR SLAY" SYSTEM

On July 6, the PA held a ceremony to announce a new system for making regular payments to terrorists imprisoned by Israel, and to the families of terrorists who died in the act, known as "pay for slay". PA Telecommunications Minister Ishaq Sider explained the payments could now be collected at ATMs at postal bank branches using a special card. Previously, the PA had disbursed the payments through banks, but these have refused to continue participating after Israel threatened sanctions. The PA then used post offices, but recipients had complained about long wait times and other problems.

On July 11, Israel's new security cabinet authorised the deduction of NIS 597 million (A\$244 million) from the regular payments Israel makes to the PA of tariffs collected on its behalf. This sum corresponds with the amount of "pay for slay" payments made by the PA in 2020.

POWER AND WATER SHORTAGES LEAD TO UNREST IN IRAN

Amidst a heat wave and drought, Iranians are suffering as the regime is unable to provide basic services such as power and water (see box below), sparking widespread unrest.

Rising food prices and extreme water shortages led workers across several industries to strike following pay cuts, as protests against the regime were held across Iran in early July.

Particularly significant were the extensive anti-regime protests launched by Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority in the country's western Khuzestan Province, starting on July 7. Several protestors were reportedly killed by live fire from regime forces.

CYBER-ATTACK ON IRAN'S RAILWAY SYSTEM

On July 9, Iran's railway network suffered a major disruption, with train cancellations and delays, following a cyber-attack. The hackers posted a message on the electronic boards at some train stations urging Iranians to call a phone number for explanations – that number was for the office of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Earlier, on July 3, a commercial ship *Tyndall*, previously owned by an Israeli company, was attacked in the Indian Ocean. Sources blame Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps for the assault.

Meanwhile, satellite imagery published in July suggests major damage after an alleged drone attack on Iran's Karaj facility on June 23. Equipment in the factory – which manufactures centrifuge parts for Iran's nuclear program – was destroyed beyond repair, according to analysts.

HEZBOLLAH STORING WEAPONS NEXT TO SCHOOL: IDF

The IDF alleged on July 14 that Hezbollah is storing rockets, military-grade explosives and other weapons in a residential building in the southern Lebanese village of Ebba only 25 metres from a school with 300 students. It said an explosion at that warehouse would be half the size of the Beirut port explosion last year that killed at least 211 people.



A 2020 report by the ALMA Research and Education Centre identified at least 28 missile launching and storage sites belonging to Hezboallah in civilian areas of the Lebanese capital of Beirut, including next to high schools, clinics, hospitals, golf clubs, soccer fields and fast-food chains.

UAE EMBASSIES OPEN

On July 14, almost a year after Israel and the United Arab Emirates announced they were normalising ties, the UAE officially opened its embassy in Tel Aviv.

Declaring it a great honour, Ambassador Mohammad Mahmoud Al Khajah added: "This is just the beginning. Both countries are innovative nations and we will harness these new approaches for the prosperity of the countries."

Earlier, on June 29, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid opened the Israeli embassy in Abu Dhabi, and signed an economic and trade agreement with his Emirati counterpart Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

HONDURAS OPENS EMBASSY IN JERUSALEM

On June 24, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett inaugurated Honduras' embassy in Jerusalem. Honduras is the fourth country, after the United States, Guatemala, and Kosovo, to open its embassy in Israel's capital, while Hungary and the Czech Republic have opened diplomatic offices.

ISRAEL-SOUTH KOREA VACCINE SWAP DEAL

Under an agreement signed on July 6, Israel sent South Korea 700,000 doses of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine due to expire at the end of July or August, and will receive the same number from supplies earmarked for South Korea later this year.

Several weeks earlier the PA had signed, but then backed out of, a similar arrangement that would have seen it receive approximately one million doses. The PA claimed the doses were too close to expiry, but the same batches were used to vaccinate Israeli teenagers or sent to Korea.

ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN COVID NUMBERS

A surge in Delta variant COVID

cases in Israel saw spikes of over 1,000 new cases per day on several days in mid-July, and a rise to more than 8,800 active cases as of July 20. However, numbers of serious cases requiring hospitalisation remained low.

As of July 20, Israel had seen 13,399 more cases and 23 deaths since June 23, while 71.34% of Israelis were fully vaccinated and 78.15% had received at least one dose.

In the Palestinian-ruled areas of the West Bank, as of July 20, there had been 9,984 new cases and 39 deaths since June 21, while 10.54% of people had been fully vaccinated and 14.9% had received at least one dose. Gaza saw 2,584 new cases over the same period.

On July 12, Israel's Health Ministry announced healthcare providers could begin giving third vaccine doses to adults with impaired immune systems, making Israel the first country to do so.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

THE NOT SO FINAL COUNTDOWN

As a symbol of the Iranian regime's commitment to the destruction of Israel, there is a clock in Teheran's Palestine Square that counts down the days till that event will supposedly happen in 2040. The timing is based on a prediction made by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in September 2015 that Israel would "cease to exist in the next 25 years."

However, something has happened that Khamenei didn't predict. Little more than four years after it started its countdown at 8,411 days on "Quds Day" on June 23 2017, the clock has stopped working due to the power cuts sweeping Iran.

Amidst an intensive heat wave and drought sweeping the Middle East, multiple power outages have been occurring on a regular basis. Among the reasons are poor infrastructure and ageing equipment, mismanagement and corruption and exceptionally high demand for power due to

cryptocurrency mining. The cryptocurrency mining has been outlawed because of the power it consumes, but continues illegally.

The drought has led to a drop in the generation of hydroelectricity, and international sanctions have prevented investment in Iran's electricity grid, contributing to the lack of infrastructure renewal, while the heatwave has spiked power demands for cooling.

Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon, helpfully tweeted, "Perhaps instead of developing nuclear weapons [Iran] should concentrate on developing renewable energies."

Outgoing Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has apologised for the rolling blackouts, which have affected all aspects of Iranian life, including telecommunications, water pumps and traffic lights.

They have also been one of the motivations for widespread protests against the regime.

There is no word on whether the stoppage means Israel has been granted an extension, but perhaps it's not Israel's survival Iran's rulers should be concerning themselves with.

COVER STORY

HATE WAVE

CONFRONTING AN EXPLOSION OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE ANTISEMITISM

by Naomi Levin

For the world's Jews, the past 18 months have served up a double-whammy of online antisemitism.

First, Jews were blamed for the coronavirus pandemic. Blood libel, Jewish global domination and vile anti-Israel tropes were reheated and served out across social media. Strange bedfellows, from Iranian internet trolls to white supremacists, took to a variety of digital platforms to blame COVID-19 on the Jews.

Then in May this year, social media users launched a new wave of antisemitism at the world's Jewish people, as Israel defended itself against more than 4,000 Hamas rockets.

Action clearly needs to be taken, but what can be done in Australia to combat antisemitism online?

In March 2020, a few weeks into the global COVID-19 pandemic, the *Australia/Israel Review* published an article identifying how Jews were already being blamed for the spread of coronavirus.

By April 2020, the hashtag #covid1948 was born – a reference to the year of the founding of the modern state of Israel. The hashtag was used more than 85,000 times on Twitter over the next two months. A year later, it is still circulating, mostly in Arabic and Farsi-language tweets.

According to a study by Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, the hashtag was started by Palestinian activists, who posted messages like "The virus of 15 May 1948. Israel is a much bigger threat to humanity than Corona #covid1948."

The hashtag was then amplified by Iranian state media and Iranian government sources. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei used the hashtag repeatedly on Instagram.

Similarly in mid-2020, at the height of pandemic panic, white supremacists and other racist extremists published thousands of posts, memes and diatribes positing that COVID-19 vaccinations were a "calculated, long-term Jewish plot to institute 'Global Jew Government', a new iteration of the age-old canard of international Jewish control," according to the US-based non-government organisation the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

The ADL went on to explain: "Some believe Jews will achieve this power by using the vaccine ingredients to sterilise the 'white race'."

The QAnon online conspiracy theory movement had already been focussing attention on antisemitic conspiracies prior to the pandemic. But QAnon, which peaked in popularity in 2020 as the Trump presidency ended, ramped up this rhetoric as the pandemic raged.

COVID-19-related antisemitism came to a head in mid-2020. But with 2021 came a new, and possibly even more noxious, wave of antisemitism during the May conflict between Israel and Hamas.

While credible analysts posit that Hamas had been planning for the conflict for months, there were online incidents that inflamed tensions even before full-scale conflict erupted.

One of them was a TikTok video showing an unprovoked assault by Israeli Arabs against an ultra-Orthodox Jewish man in Jerusalem. The short video was circulated widely and it is understood that the assault was carried out as part of a dare to Palestinian TikTok users to film themselves assaulting Orthodox Jews. Unsurprisingly, it inspired copycat video assaults and significantly inflamed societal tensions.

"Facebook posts called for Jews to be massacred and their bodies ground up. Videos circulated accusing all Jews of having hatred and hostility in their hearts"

During the conflict itself, social media platforms were awash with highly emotive videos – the more shocking the content, the more views they attracted.

On the pro-Israel side, videos of the Iron Dome missile defence shield intercepting barrages of Hamas rockets, or Israelis cowering in shelters as sirens blared, got millions of views.

On the Hamas side, videos of young men in balaclavas firing rockets at Israel in quick succession while yelling “Allahu Akbar”, or of Palestinian children crying in front of destroyed buildings, garnered a similar number of views. Many of these videos were amplified by bots and fake accounts originating from places like Malaysia and Iran.

These videos were not moderated by broadcast journalists nor editors, they were dispatched raw to mobile phones around the world via social media platforms. The captions accompanying them were inevitably highly emotive and, in most cases, completely lacked essential context.

The disinformation and antisemitism that resulted was highly destructive and dangerous.

The hashtag #hitlerwasright regained popularity among anti-Israel posters. Facebook posts called for Jews to be massacred and their bodies ground up. Videos circulated accusing all Jews of having hatred and hostility in their hearts.

In social media posts, Israel was demonised at levels never before seen. Accusations that Israel was a colonial terrorist state engaged in ethnic cleansing and genocide became unremarkable due to their frequency. The hashtag #fromtherivertothesea, which denies the right of existence for a Jewish state, and often implies the desire for the ethnic cleansing of Israel’s Jews, trended unceasingly. These lies and expressions of hate leaked from social media onto posters at rallies around the world, which were then beamed out on the nightly TV news.

In fact, commentators increasingly agree that rising antisemitism online led to real world incidents of antisemitism – from graffiti reading “free Palestine” sprayed outside Melbourne Jewish schools, to physical assaults on Jewish people in US and European cities.

Organisations that monitor antisemitic activities in Jewish communities around the world are tallying record numbers of assaults. In Britain, the Community Security Trust recorded more antisemitic incidents in May than in any month since 1984, when it began documenting incidents. Similarly, the ADL logged a more than 100%

increase in antisemitic incidents in May 2021 in the US, compared with May 2020. This left May 2021 the worst month for acts of assault, vandalism, and harassment against US Jews since ADL’s tracking began in 1979.

Yiftah Curiel, director of digital diplomacy at Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told Israeli media that incitement against Israel online during the conflict was “the engine behind at least part of the antisemitic incidents.”

Hollywood star Sacha Baron-Cohen was fed up, posting the message: “The surge in antisemitism on the streets is fuelled by antisemitism on social media. [Twitter founder] Jack [Dorsey], Twitter, why do you allow #hitlerwasright? Those who celebrate the Holocaust aim to perpetuate another.”



Some examples from the wave of antisemitic memes and posts (Sources: Twitter, Facebook)

PLATFORM PROGRESS?

To their credit, in the second half of 2020, some of the biggest platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, acted to remove some conspiracy theory content, including QAnon related accounts and posts, as well as Holocaust denying material. However, as at mid-July 2021, Ayatollah Khamenei’s #covid1948 posts are still easily discoverable on Instagram.

TikTok too has banned many offensive hashtags, such as #hitlerwasright, that violate the platform’s community standards. Others though, including #co-

vid1948, remain.

While Twitter has shown a willingness to remove or limit accounts that breach its guidelines – the most high-profile example being former US president Donald Trump – the social media giant has failed to remove antisemitic content from its platform. During 2020, it acted to remove QAnon content and accounts, but analysis by the ADL after the January riot at the US Capitol found many accounts still active and spreading dangerous QAnon conspiracies. And while Trump was kicked off Twitter, Ayatollah Khamenei, who has called for the destruction of Israel and spread Holocaust denial, is permitted to remain an active tweeter.

More clearly needs to be done. Jewish organisations around the world continue to advocate for social media companies to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism in order to better identify antisemitism on their platforms – and ultimately to ensure all antisemitic material is removed.

In August 2020, 140 NGOs from around the world – including AIJAC – co-wrote a letter to Facebook calling on

the social media giant to devise a plan to combat antisemitism and adopt the IHRA definition. To date, Facebook has not heeded this call.

In recent weeks, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg was on the receiving end of what so many Jewish people on social media have experienced regularly: personal antisemitic attacks. Zuckerberg posted a photo of his dog dressed in a Jewish skullcap (“kippa”) and prayer shawl and was bombarded with thousands of hateful messages in response.

Music journalist Eve Barlow spoke out for Israel on social media during the conflict. In response, she was subjected to what she termed a “social media pogrom”.

Barlow wrote: “The activity that Jews – Zionist Jews in particular – experienced all over the web [during the conflict] was bizarre at best and invalidating, abusive, and dehumanising at worst.”

Maybe after seeing the mob come after him for an innocent photo of his dog, Zuckerberg might again consider heeding the calls of leading global anti-racism campaigners and adopt the IHRA definition for his platform?

Among those calling for Facebook – and other social media giants – to do just that is the Inter-Parliamentary Taskforce to Combat Online Antisemitism, of which Australian MPs Dave Sharma (Liberal) and Josh Burns (ALP) are members. In July, the taskforce, made up of MPs from the US, UK, Canada, Israel and Australia, called for governments and social media platforms to adopt the IHRA

definition because “without first defining a problem, we cannot combat it.”

Among its other recommendations, the taskforce has called on social media platforms to be more transparent about how their algorithms work and to publish regular reports on these issues.

This is particularly topical after the recent conflict, where pro-Israel content was censored and removed from social media platforms with no explanation. AIJAC experienced this first-hand.

Currently, each social media giant has its own algorithm that drives users to spend more time on the platform by showing them content the algorithm predicts will interest them. There is evidence that, in some instances, these algorithms drive users to view more extreme content than they would search out themselves.

The Inter-Parliamentary Taskforce and others have urged social media companies to be transparent about their algorithms and consider redesigning them so they do not promote content that can cause harm.

FIGHTING BACK

Meanwhile, some Jewish social media users are taking a different approach altogether to rising antisemitism on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. It is a grassroots approach that has begun in the US, but is ripe for replication around the world.

This method sees young people openly and proudly flaunting their Jewish and Zionist credentials on social media. It is a brave approach, but one that empowers their hordes of followers to be proud of their traditions, their community and their spiritual homeland.

Music journalist Barlow regularly posts edgy calls to her 40,000 Instagram followers and 33,000 Twitter followers, such as the “Moshiach comes when every Jew stops hiding challenge” (referring to Jewish traditions about the coming of the Messiah after the Jewish people prove themselves ready). There are even younger voices like Blake Flayton, a Jewish university student who helped to start a group called the New Zionist Congress and did a high-profile CNN interview calling out antisemitism. Flayton was joined by Julia Jassey, a fellow American university student, CNN interviewee and founder of Jewish on Campus. Flayton and Jassey both have tens of thousands of social media followers to whom they spread messages of open Zionism and Jewish pride.

In a social media world of darkness, individuals like Barlow, Flayton and Jassey are pinpricks of light showing the world that Jewish people cannot and will not cower in the face of unprecedented online antisemitism.

Together with politicians and anti-racist NGOs, they will advocate, hit back and continue to proudly protect Jewish people from antisemitism on- and off-line in the face of an increasingly hostile global environment.

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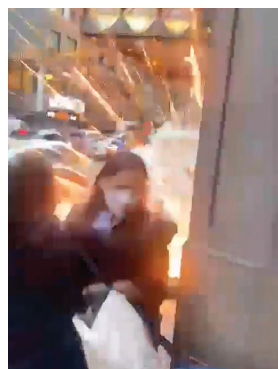
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THE PRICE OF BEING A ZIONIST WOMAN ON TWITTER

by Emily Schrader

In May, while 4,500 rockets from Gaza were flying at Israeli schools, homes, and businesses, another war against the Jews was brewing abroad. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that, in only eight days after the conflict kicked off, antisemitic incidents rose by 75%. In London, anti-Israel activists drove around



Fireworks attack upon Jews in New York (Source: Twitter)

Jewish neighbourhoods screaming from their cars to “rape their daughters”; in Florida, Jews were targeted by pro-Palestinian activists who threw garbage at them while screaming “Free Palestine! ... We’re going to rape your wife”; and in New York, pro-Palestinian protestors threw fireworks at Jews in the Diamond District. The scenes are jarring, but given the rhetoric accompanying them online, they are hardly surprising.

As someone with over a decade of experience in the digital marketing side of Israel advocacy, I can honestly say I’ve never seen an outpouring of explicit antisemitic, not “anti-Zionist”, content across social media platforms as strong as what we witnessed in May. For years, Jews and pro-Israel activists warned that ignoring antisemitism couched as anti-Zionism would lead to violence against Jews. The past few weeks have proven that argument to be sadly true. There is a direct correlation between real-world violence and the level of hate we see online – making it all the more alarming that the rhetoric against Jewish women is even more radically perverse and aggressive.

The immediate response to Israel’s operation in Gaza was a barrage of online antisemitism. Jews were attacked with thousands of “free Palestine” comments, even when not talking about Israel or the conflict. Teens on TikTok were spammed and harassed by anti-Israel activists accusing them of supporting “genocide” and “apartheid.” Instagram became a hostile environment for Jews thanks to influencers such as Bella and Gigi Hadid, who used their collective 100 million followers to spread extremist rhetoric about Israel. Subsequently, the ADL reported that the same week that “Hitler was right” was trending on social media—with over 17,000 mentions—and as mentioned above, there was also a 400% increase in antisemitic activity around the world.

The situation was even more extreme for female activists such as myself. That is not to say that male activists did not receive threats or harassment, but the viciousness of attacks against women on social media was of a different nature entirely. For one, I was targeted by Malaysians who tweeted over 100,000 times with personal insults about my appearance and dozens of poor-quality memes ranging from laughably absurd to deeply violent. Of course, I received dozens of Hitler pictures and calls to “kill the Jews,” but I also had multiple fake accounts made in my name, which were tweeting and tagging people who follow my verified account, saying, “I’m the real Emily Schrader. I’m a slut.”

In addition, my email was leaked, and I received multiple detailed death threats with sexually explicit descriptions of how they would attack me. There was a public call to hack my social media accounts and website. My Instagram and Twitter DMs (direct messages) exploded with hundreds of messages calling me names, threatening rape, and making otherwise sexist and outrageous comments such as, “Go suck Netanyahu’s ball [sic] ... Hey slut I will bomb your house.” Another stated, “Your vagina is so dirty and disgusting, I can assure that it was a rape of an Israeli dog [sic].”



Emily Schrader documenting her ordeal at the hands of trolls in a Youtube video (YouTube screenshot)

I share these vile comments not to give them attention, as some have counselled me not to do, but to draw attention to the larger problem: These comments are not out of the ordinary for a Jewish woman to receive on social media. Today there is no greater social media “crime” than being a Jewish or pro-Israel woman.

In the pro-Israel world, there are few vocal female voices. This, again, is not a coincidence. Personally attacking and threatening women is a method of silencing their voices, online and in real life, and deterring new ones from speaking up. “With women there are no boundaries ... The most common comment I get is *sharmuta* (“whore” in Arabic),” said TikTok influencer Shai Emanuel Yamin. “I saw men also suffering from hate comments, but it’s never about how they look or what they wear.”

Liora Rez, the founder and executive director of Stop Antisemitism, agreed that the online attacks against

women are more personal: “From the most deranged rape threats to the doxxing (publicly revealing private personal information) of my parents’ information, antisemites have no boundaries when it comes to harassing female Jewish activists online.”

To be clear, it’s not just Jewish women being targeted. Yasmine Mohammed, an ex-Muslim and women’s rights activist with over 100,000 Twitter followers, has been the target of gender-based hate comments for years after speaking against antisemitism. In response to the Israeli-Gaza conflict, she tweeted, “I’m normally inundated with death threats, but these past couple of weeks, it’s been more vicious than ever.” In conversation, she told me, “The explosion in the intensity of hate that I receive when I speak up in support of Israel or against antisemitism ... no one can ever get used to that.”

We cannot continue to shrug our shoulders and say “Just ignore it,” because the results, as we’ve already seen for Jews, can very rapidly escalate into real-world violence. Harassing women, launching public smear campaigns, levying threats of sexual violence – these are actions with real consequences that should have no place on social media, and every social media platform should have a zero-tolerance policy toward such virulent abuse.

Yet, despite the myriad risks, as Jewish and pro-Israel female voices, we must not back down in the face of cyberbullying. Instead, we must elevate female voices and encourage new voices to join the conversation and help fight back.

As Rez put it, “Antisemites just failed to realise that their hatred and obscenities do nothing but motivate me to continue and amplify what I’m doing.” It’s draining to be on the receiving end of such abuse, but it also reaffirms that what we are fighting for is worthwhile, and more important than ever before.

AIR

Emily Schrader is the CEO of Social Lite Creative LLC. This article is reprinted from Tablet Magazine, at tabletmag.com, the online magazine of Jewish news, ideas, and culture. © Tablet Magazine, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

FROM DURBAN TO TODAY

by Gerald Steinberg

Twenty years ago, in September 2001, the United Nations Human Rights Commission held a conference ostensibly to mark the end of apartheid in South Africa and to adopt an auspicious plan to eliminate racism and discrimination worldwide. Instead, this mega-event, held

in Durban, South Africa, launched a virulent wave of hate and antisemitism that continues to spread deadly poison.

Durban had three frameworks – diplomatic, youth and NGOs. At the diplomatic conference, when the proposed text – singling out Israel with accusations of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and similar language – was tabled, the American and Israeli delegations walked out. The Europeans and Canadians [*and Australians -Ed.*] stayed and brokered a revised text that greatly reduced but did not eliminate the anti-Israel focus. Whether or not this was the right decision continues to be debated.

But the most damaging aspect of Durban was the NGO Forum, including 1,500 participating organisations, with the primary aim of waging a deadly war of hate against Israel. This part of the event was irresponsibly funded by the UN, EU, Canada, and the Ford Foundation.

There were mass marches through the streets of Durban, and hate material was distributed, including the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and signs with a Star of David alongside a swastika.

NGO representatives led by Human Rights Watch blocked and threatened Jewish speakers who did not toe the anti-Israel line. The UN High Commissioner, former Irish President Mary Robinson, presided over these events, but failed to respond. Afterwards, she meekly declared that there was nothing she could have done.

Plans for hijacking Durban were announced openly at a UN preparatory meeting in Teheran. Based on this script, the NGO Forum’s Final Declaration singled out Israel repeatedly with accusations of war crimes, ethnic cleansing and even genocide, and presented an action plan for “the complete and international isolation of Israel as an apartheid state.” Just as the South African apartheid regime was overturned, Israel – as the nation state of the Jewish people – would be eliminated.

After Durban, the same NGO leaders and their UN allies moved quickly to implement the boycott and lawfare campaigns, proclaiming their myths as “legitimate criticism of Israeli policies.” In addition to discriminatory boycotts, the International Criminal Court was targeted from the beginning as a platform that could be readily manipulated by anti-Israel campaigners through false allegations and propaganda. This fuels the incitement that in turn leads to antisemitic attacks around the world.

In response, some on the front lines recognised the urgent need for confronting this hatred, and launched a process that led to the international consensus working definition of antisemitism, adopted in 2016 by the govern-



A scene from Durban, September 2001 (Source: YouTube screenshot)

mental members of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

As examples of this hatred, all of which are part of the NGO Durban strategy, they included “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor”; applying double standards; and “drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.”

We now stand 20 years later, and the Durban NGO strategy is being implemented through attacks on different fronts. Poisonous “apartheid weeks,” featuring the same NGOs and their anti-Israel slogans, are annual events on university campuses.

Human Rights Watch and its allies, such as Al Haq, as well as some radical Israeli NGOs generously funded by European governments to act as political sub-contractors, continue to market the “apartheid” slogan, including a recent campaign and report that used the term 200 times, and received widespread media coverage, with no justification.

Now, they have combined under the false banners of intersectionality and solidarity, adding the term “Jewish supremacy” to the poisonous agenda. Antisemitic attacks are at the highest levels since the end of the Holocaust.

And in parallel, the NGO network is pushing a well-funded propaganda campaign to dismantle the IHRA working definition, disguised as an alternative “Jerusalem definition” without the Israel-related examples, precisely because it is the most effective mechanism for defeating the Durban strategy.

As if the current plague of antisemitism is insufficient, the UN Human Rights Council is planning a conference to revive and “celebrate” Durban, to be held in September 2021. In 2009, the major democracies stayed away from Durban 2 in Geneva, and under the leadership of NGO Monitor and like-minded groups, the NGO Forum was cancelled.

Durban 3 in 2011 was also a non-event, but now, the anti-Israel majority of the UN Human Rights Council,

under the leadership of Michelle Bachelet, is trying again. While Israel, the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic have announced a boycott, others, particularly in Europe, have not.

For the Jewish people, the scars of the original Durban events remain very painful, and the powerful UN and NGO network that hijacked the human rights agenda in order to demonise Israel continues to spread its poison.

For world leaders who claim to oppose antisemitism, their complicity and silence in the wake of the virulent targeting of Israel and the Jewish people has already gone too far.

AIR

Professor Gerald Steinberg is founder and president of NGO Monitor and Professor Emeritus at Bar Ilan University. The article first appeared in the Jerusalem Post. © Gerald Steinberg, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

CONDEMNING ANTISEMITISM IS NO LONGER ALLOWED

by Peter C. Herman

It seems you can’t condemn antisemitism anymore. On May 26, the Chancellor and the Provost of Rutgers University in New Jersey issued a statement condemning the precipitous rise in antisemitic incidents in the US: “We are saddened by and greatly concerned about the sharp rise in hostile sentiments and antisemitic violence in the United States. Recent incidents of hate directed toward Jewish members of our community again remind us of what history has to teach us.”

Given the sudden rise in antisemitic rhetoric (the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) tracked more than 17,000



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tweets saying “Hitler was right,” or some variation thereof, between May 7-14) and antisemitic attacks both in the United States and abroad, you would think that the statement would be unexceptional, even welcome – especially since many universities and colleges issues similar statements condemning anti-Black and anti-Asian violence.

But no. A day later, the Chancellor and Provost issued “An Apology,” because “the message failed to communicate support for our Palestinian community members.”

Then, they replaced the original statement with this one: “Neither hatred nor bigotry has a place at Rutgers, nor should they have a place anywhere in the world. At Rutgers, we believe that antisemitism, anti-Hinduism, Islamophobia and all forms of racism, intolerance and xenophobia are unacceptable wherever and whenever they occur.”

Odd. Why does a statement condemning antisemitism need to be broadened to include other forms of racism and bias?

Then it happened again.

On June 10, the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) published its own fervent condemnation of antisemitism: “The SCBWI unequivocally recognizes that the world’s 14.7 million Jewish people (less than 0.018% of the population) have the right to life, safety, and freedom from scapegoating and fear.”

Then things went sour.

First, the Executive Director, Lin Wood, abjectly apologised for the statement on the grounds that saying anti-semitism is bad and that Jews have the right to live in peace hurts Palestinians: “I would like to apologize to everyone in the Palestinian community who felt unrepresented, silenced, or marginalized. SCBWI acknowledges the pain our actions have caused to our Muslim and Palestinian members and hope that we can heal from this moment.”

Then, the person responsible for the original statement, Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer April Powers, who happens to be both black and Jewish, resigned, but not before delivering her own apology for neglecting “to address the rise in Islamophobia, and [I] deeply regret that omission.”

In a subsequent interview, Powers said that her Judaism rendered her “inherently suspect.”

“You’re Jewish,” her critics said, so “you can’t be in a role like this.” Inclusion and equity, it seems, means exclusion and inequity for Jews.

This is just bizarre. How does recognising that Jews have the right to live in peace, that Jews have the right to eat in a restaurant without being attacked, as happened recently in Los Angeles, harm anybody else?

Would anybody say that protesting anti-Black violence neglects the rise in, say, anti-Asian violence? Why is anti-semitism singled out for this sort of treatment?

These two incidents made national news in the US, but this also occurs below the national radar. My institution, San Diego State University, responded to a recent spate of

antisemitic incidents, ranging from swastikas inscribed on buildings to the repeated vandalising of the local Chabad House, by organising a task force to address antisemitism. I’m on this task force.

We soon learned that an outside group of faculty, led by a Palestinian professor, was unhappy with the task force’s membership (predominantly Jews) and focus (exclusively antisemitism). So they asked the university’s president to appoint another member they had chosen: an outspoken opponent of Israel who blamed an earlier attack on Chabad on Israel’s actions against Hamas and claimed that the university’s partnership with the ADL to fight antisemitism signalled indifference toward Arabs.

By now, it’s common knowledge that antisemitism is not taken very seriously on the left. At first, this was blamed on Jews being “white” and therefore privileged. But in the wake of the war between Hamas and Israel, we see a new twist. Now, when there’s an antisemitic incident, Diaspora Jews are blamed, not the person who hates Jews.

We see this perfectly illustrated with my university colleague, who wrote on the College of Arts and Letters listserv that the attack on Chabad House was Israel’s fault because Israel responded to Hamas’ rockets: “It is highly disturbing that the message [condemning the Chabad House vandals] that was just sent out to the whole campus was sent without some contextualization about the current situation in Jerusalem and the 80+ jets that have just bombarded Gaza, killing 20 people, including 9 children, and toppling a 13-story (sic) building that covered a whole block.”

Never mind the 4,000-plus unguided rockets Hamas launched with precise intent and hope that they would kill Israeli civilians.

Antisemitism, in other words, cannot be condemned by itself, as can other forms of bias. Nobody, for example, sought to “contextualise” the recent murders of Asian women in Atlanta by referencing the Chinese Government’s treatment of the Uighurs.

In current woke discourse, you can condemn attacks on Jews only if you condemn attacks on Arabs and Palestinians as well. Not only is Jew-hatred blamed on the victim, but having the temerity to condemn hatred against Jews may cost you your job. And before you leave, you’ll have to write a Maoist self-criticism.

We know where this ends, and it’s not good.

AIR

Peter C. Herman is a Professor of English Literature at San Diego State University. His books include Unspeakable: Literature and Terrorism from the Gunpowder Plot to 9/11, and Critical Contexts: Terrorism and Literature. This piece originally appeared in the Jewish Journal of Los Angeles. © Jewish Journal (www.jewishjournal.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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Presidents without Precedent

From Rivlin to Herzog in Israel

by Amotz Asa-El

Facing Israel's entire legislature and cabinet, as well as millions of television viewers, a characteristically humble President Reuven Rivlin turned to his grandchildren at the end of his farewell address, saying, "I am returning."

As he handed over the presidency of Israel to Isaac Herzog, there was no mistaking the sense of relief with which the 82-year-old former speaker of the Knesset ended not only his seven-year term as Israel's First Citizen, but a 43-year political career.

Rivlin presided over what was by far the most turbulent presidential term in Israel's history.

Constitutionally, as Israel went to elections five times during his presidency, Rivlin was repeatedly tasked with appointing someone to seek a parliamentary majority to become prime minister. Twice he also had to select a second nominee, because the first had failed to form a government.

Eager to help stabilise the system, in April 2020 Rivlin was instrumental in creating the broad unity government that successfully fought the COVID pandemic.

Socially, Rivlin's task was to make Israel's disparate, and often conflicted, sectors feel he was everyone's president, and even more improbably, that they were all members of one society.

Both emotionally and intellectually, he rose to the challenge.

An affable, humorous, and outgoing conversationalist, Rivlin visited more than 900 cities, villages, businesses, schools, and other varied social institutions across the country. He also visited the homes of 190 fallen soldiers and 62 victims of terrorist attacks.

A liberal nationalist who followed in the footsteps of Menachem Begin, Rivlin fought for equality for Israel's Arab citizens, and thus became a champion of the Left despite never compromising his faith in territorial maximalism.

In a widely quoted speech delivered early in his term, he told the annual Herzliya Conference on national security that Israeli society comprises four tribes: the secular, religious, ultra-Orthodox and Arab populations. The task of Israeli leaders, he said, is to make these groups harmonise rather than confront each other.



Known for being sympathetic and affable, Rivlin visited more than 250 bereaved families (Credit: Ashernet)

The speech came to be known as "The Tribes Speech", and it became particularly relevant in the last weeks of Rivlin's term, as Israel faced the worst ethnic violence in its history during the Hamas-Israel war in May. It was a bitter finale for a term of office in which the President stubbornly embodied what united Israelis, while others tried to divide them.

As if the social tension and political acrimony he faced were not enough, in 2020 Rivlin also grappled with personal loss, as his wife of nearly half a century, Nechama, died of lung disease at 73.

In his farewell address, with his voice trembling, Rivlin said that he misses her every day, thus eliciting the genuine sympathy of a strained society which found in its tenth President a national unifier – something that the politicians he dealt with consistently failed to produce.

The 11th President's task will be no less daunting, and maybe more so.

Having just turned 60, Herzog is in his political prime, and eager to make the most of it.

Like Rivlin, whose father was a Hebrew University professor of Muslim civilisation, Herzog has an enviable pedigree. The son of Chaim Herzog, Israel's sixth president, he is a product of Israel's elite establishment.

When the new President was born, his father was a general, head of Military Intelligence. When he was in his teens, his father was ambassador to the United Nations. In the interstices between these roles, Chaim Herzog was a partner in one of Tel Aviv's leading law firms, which the younger Herzog would later join.

Going back further, the grandfather after whom Isaac Herzog is named was Israel's first chief rabbi. Furthermore, Herzog's uncle was Abba Eban, Golda Meir's fabled foreign minister. Eban's wife, Suzie, was the sister of Herzog's mother, Aura.

Such an elite background might have hurt another person's presidential bid. The ultra-Orthodox Shas party,

"Rivlin presided over what was by far the most turbulent presidential term in Israel's history"

for instance, which seeks traditional working class votes, might raise objections to such an aristocratic pedigree. Even more problematic might have been Herzog's leading role in the Labor Party, which he headed while running for the premiership against Binyamin Netanyahu last decade. That history might have made him unacceptable to Likud.

Yet no such opposition manifested itself.

Israeli presidents are elected by the Knesset's 120 members in a secret ballot. Herzog faced Miriam Peretz, an educator and social activist who lost two of her six children while they were fighting in the IDF, one in Gaza, the other in Lebanon. She is widely admired in Israel as a paragon of resilience, compassion and patriotism, yet Herzog defeated Peretz by a vote of 87 to 26, the largest margin ever in an Israeli presidential vote.

While part of this gap was due to Peretz's lack of political experience, Herzog's decisive victory also reflected his reputation as serious and sensible, as well as his record as a tactful politician who, during two decades in public office, made few significant enemies.



New Israeli President Isaac Herzog: Known as serious, sensible and a tactful politician (Credit: Alexandros Michailidis/ Shutterstock)

Herzog entered the political fray in 1999 as Ehud Barak's cabinet secretary, an unelected position, after which he was elected to the Knesset where he served as a lawmaker for 15 years. During those years, he served in the Sharon, Olmert, and Netanyahu governments, as Minister of Housing, Welfare, Tourism and Diaspora Affairs.

Herzog's record in these seemingly boring ministries showed him to be a compassionate man who worked diligently for disadvantaged groups, like Holocaust survivors, abused women and children at risk. These ministerial achievements paved the way for his election as Labor party head, Leader of the Opposition, and later Chairman of the Jewish Agency.

By a curious coincidence, Herzog became President just after Netanyahu's 12-year premiership ended on June 13. Netanyahu was succeeded in that role by Naftali Bennett of the right-wing Yamina ("rightward") party, heading up an

unprecedentedly diverse "government of change".

Whether the new Government will last, and thus herald a new era, remains to be seen, but if it does, Herzog should fit smoothly within the new zeitgeist it is trying to inspire.

Led jointly by Bennett and centrist Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, in contrast to Netanyahu's government by charisma, the pair's experiment in collective leadership and governing via consensus embodies what Herzog's career has been largely about.

As Leader of the Opposition, Herzog harnessed Arab and ultra-Orthodox parties to promote social causes jointly with Labor, thus displaying an inclination and ability to build coalitions.

A similar pattern surfaced when Herzog won the Jewish Agency's chairmanship, enjoying the support of its board of governors despite representing the opposition. This was the first time since 1948 that this time-honoured organisation installed a chairperson who was not identified with Israel's ruling party.

Herzog can thus be expected to work well with the new Government, whose key figures are all his personal friends. Then again, his presidency's big test may involve not the coalition, but the opposition. Once Netanyahu's ongoing corruption trial concludes, a constitutional crisis, accompanied by social division, may follow.

If Netanyahu is convicted, Herzog will have to combine his political inventiveness and his lawyerly skills – possibly devising some kind of mechanism involving a pardon in return for a departure from public office.

In less dramatic times, Herzog will likely be very active in the international arena, a role for which he has prepared since his high-school days as an ambassador's son in New York. He has begun playing this role already, holding a long phone conversation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on July 12.

These, then, are the tasks awaiting Herzog – who, unlike his predecessor, may potentially want to use his presidential term as a springboard for another shot at the premiership.

Whether that will be realistic will depend on the events

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of the coming seven years. Until then, the 11th President and his wife Michal, a lawyer he met when they served in the same IDF intelligence unit, will try to make the most of life in the handsome presidential house in the upmarket Talbiya neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

Getting together on weekends with their three sons, aged 22 to 31, they will likely recall with nostalgia past Shabbat meals in the same house back in their twenties – when Isaac's father Chaim lived there as president.

AIR

THE SLOW DEATH OF LEBANON

by Jonathan Spyer

Lebanon is currently in the grip of the worst economic crisis in its history. There are daily shortages of fuel and electricity, a chronic lack of medical supplies, and an absence of essential medicines in hospitals. Some 77% of Lebanese households are unable to purchase sufficient food. The Lebanese pound has lost 90% of its value over the last two years. Lebanese citizens, meanwhile, are prevented from withdrawing more than US\$100 per week, as foreign currency reserves grow thin. The situation is



Lebanon today: A failed and collapsing state (Credit: Karim Naamani/Shutterstock)

reaching a point of no return, with the real possibility of widespread hunger. Lebanon is, today, by all measures a failed and collapsing state.

How has the country reached this point? Less than two decades ago, Lebanon was revamping its image as a centre of commerce and tourism on the Mediterranean coast. The "March 14" Movement, named after the popular mobilisation which forced a Syrian withdrawal in 2005, was riding high. It was presented as one of the few successes of what was then the US Administration's strategy of regional democratisation. I visited the country in that period, in 2007. A palpable longing for normality could then be discerned among younger Lebanese. The civil war was already a receding memory. What remained of it, among Sunnis and Christians at least, was a kind of dread of the possibility that political violence might return. The Israeli occupation in the south had ended in May 2000. Normality seemed within reach.

What went wrong? What went wrong was discernible also back then. It was evident that there were two powers in Lebanon. The first, as represented by the March 14 Movement, was ostensibly forward-looking, oriented toward the West, toward commerce and toward normality. The other power was that of Iran, via its oldest franchise, the Lebanese Hezbollah movement. This interest had its own military power that outmatched that of the state and dwarfed the other irregular military presences in the country. It had its own economy, too, its own sources of income, its own smuggling routes.

The project of the Iranian element was that the two Lebanons should continue to exist indefinitely. The former was to provide a convenient carapace of normality and legitimacy beneath which the latter could continue its allotted tasks in Teheran's long war against Israel.


Supporters of the March 14 project had a tendency to avoid the discussion of hard-power issues. This in retrospect was to prove fatal.

Any chance that the Lebanon of March 14 might mount a defence in arms of its vision of the country ended in the events of May and June 2008. In a brief conflict on the



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streets of Beirut, the forces of Amal (a militia allied with Hezbollah) and Hezbollah contemptuously brushed aside the haphazard military mobilisations of the pro-March 14 Sunni and Druze forces.

From this point on, the die was cast. It was clear that there would be no further attempt at real resistance to the Iranian project in Lebanon. What there would be instead would be obfuscation and denial. The Iranian approach fitted perfectly the desire of the Lebanese to ignore reality.

In the years subsequent to 2008, events followed a downward spiral. The Syrian civil war brought some 1.8 million refugees to Lebanon, further straining the country's fragile infrastructure. The war dealt a crippling blow to the tourism sector, which had accounted for around 7.5% of Lebanon's GDP. Growing Saudi and US discontent at the reality of Iranian power in the country came to a head in 2015-2016. In early 2016, Riyadh announced the withdrawal of its deposits from the Central Bank of Lebanon. This followed the cancellation of US\$4 billion of aid to the Lebanese armed and security forces.

The US "Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act" of 2015 hit hard at the financial services sector, another key element in the Lebanese economy. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates issued advisories against travel to Lebanon at that time. This ended the country's traditional role as a permissive playground for visitors seeking a congenial respite from Gulf restrictions.

At this stage, Lebanon was seeking to manage a public debt of US\$69 billion, totalling 150% of GDP. But as the official economy foundered, the parallel Iran/Hezbollah shadow economy prospered. Not, however, in such a way that the average citizen benefited.

The porous or Hezbollah-supervised borders between Lebanon and Syria allowed for smuggling of oil imports and their resale in Syria, to the benefit of Hezbollah. Captagon amphetamine pills, manufactured in Syria, and cannabis were smuggled the other way, finding their destination in European cities or in the Gulf via Hezbollah-supervised routes. Needless to say, none of the profits from this burgeoning sector went to service the national debt, or to benefit the crumbling public infrastructure.

In March 2020, against the background of countrywide, multi-sectarian protests against corruption, poor public service, youth unemployment and mismanagement, Lebanon defaulted for the first time on its debt payments. A reform plan was approved by the International Monetary Fund, but following the Government's resignation after the Beirut Port explosion in August 2020, negotiations became stalled. The Lebanese economy contracted by 20% in 2020.

This is the background to the current grave crisis in Lebanon. All the elements – US sanctions, Saudi and international withdrawal of aid and investment, subsequent debt default and loss of confidence, resulting currency

devaluation, a shadow economy benefiting only itself, and a paralysed political system – are all directly traceable to the distorting effect that the presence of the pervasive Iranian project on Lebanese soil has brought.

From this point of view, the current situation stands as a stark warning to all countries faced with infiltration by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its various militia franchises. These are good at building paramilitary muscle and converting it into political power. They have no knowledge of or interest in economics. As a result, the net outcome of their taking of de facto power in a country will be that country's eventual ruin and impoverishment. Lebanon is now the case study for this process.

From Israel's point of view, there is little to be done but to continue to guard the borders. There is no reason to suppose that the current chaos in Lebanon will incline the Iranians and their proxies toward military adventures in the south.

Regarding any international response, international aid should be made contingent on the disarming of the Iranian proxy, and the thorough reform of the political system. Any other remedy runs the danger of offering support to Lebanon's current Iran-created dysfunctionality.

The key point: Lebanon was the first Arab state to undergo internal collapse, and consequently the first to receive the intentions of the IRGC's brand of political-military takeover. With allowance for local variations, similar Iranian efforts are now underway in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

The significance of the current events extends far beyond Lebanon's borders. Iran is responsible for the slow death of Lebanon.

AIR

Jonathan Spyer is a Ginsburg/Milstein Writing Fellow at the Middle East Forum and director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis. This article first appeared in the Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com). © Jonathan Spyer, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

THE PERILS OF THE "PALESTINIAN SPRING"

by Mark Lavie

Anti-government demonstrations sweep through the cities. The regime responds with violence, beating protesters, arresting hundreds. Those actions trigger more protests and more arrests.

We're talking about the West Bank in 2021 – but on a larger scale, it could have been Egypt in 2011. That's why some observers are calling the current wave of demonstrations in the West Bank the "Palestinian Spring."

Palestinians better hope they're wrong. Israel, too.

I watched in Cairo as Egypt's Arab Spring unfolded and then unravelled. For their efforts, the young protesters got, first, a Muslim Brotherhood government, and then a new, repressive military regime in the space of two short years.

That's all it took for the situation in Egypt to return to square one – from one military-backed dictator, Hosni Mubarak, to another, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

It took me a whole book to explain what went wrong (*Broken Spring*, Gefen, 2014), but the parallels with the Palestinians are striking. So are the contrasts.

Like Mubarak, who ruled Egypt for nearly 30 years through a string of rigged elections, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is now in the 17th year of his four-year term. He has repeatedly cancelled elections, fearing, probably rightly, that his main rival Hamas would sweep into power. He most recently called off elections set for May, causing considerable unrest.

The Palestinian uprising, if that's what it turns out to be, started with the brutal murder of activist Nizar Banat, who openly criticised the Abbas regime for its abuses and corruption. He was killed in a late-night raid near Hebron in the southern West Bank on June 23. Reliable reports say about 20 Palestinian Authority police stormed his home and beat him to death.

Protests erupted over the arrest and summary execution of the activist. Clearly, though, this was just the trigger.

The popularity of Abbas and his regime has been dropping steadily for years, as his corruption-riven presidential term drags on and on with little to show in improving the lives of his people, neither making peace with Israel nor, alternatively, defeating Israel.

Here is the most significant similarity with Egypt of 2011: The only well-organised alternative to Abbas and his reeling Fatah movement is Hamas.

In Egypt, the revolutionaries split into more than a dozen political parties after Mubarak was overthrown, continuing their demonstrations in downtown Cairo against the temporary military regime that replaced him.

Meanwhile the Muslim Brotherhood took to the streets more effectively, mobilising its supporters in advance of the presidential and parliamentary elections that were to follow. They won both.

In the West Bank, the ruling Fatah movement led by Abbas is breaking into factions, squabbling about candidates and personal fiefdoms, and losing the support of the



Palestinian protesters with signs paying tribute to slain dissident Nizar Banat (Credit: Anas-Mohammed/ Shutterstock)

people because of its excesses and abuses. Much the same way, Mubarak's regime lost the backing of Egyptians because of its heavy-handed repression and overt corruption.

It is a coincidence that Hamas is an arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian territories, but it is no coincidence that Hamas is organised in the same way as the Brotherhood.

Hamas presents itself as a corruption-free, efficient, caring alternative to the high-handed, callous Abbas regime. Fourteen years of brutal Hamas rule in Gaza should have put a spike in that image, but polls indicate that Hamas has considerable support among West Bank Palestinians and, just as Abbas fears, Hamas would probably win elections for president and parliament.

Now the stories begin to diverge.

In Egypt, remnants of the Mubarak regime in the courts and civil service stymied the Brotherhood Government every step of the way.

A year of chaos spurred the people out into the streets again for a second revolution, deposing the elected Brotherhood Government. So, they got the military back, led by "retired" chief of staff Sisi. He is still in power.

In stark contrast, if Hamas takes over the West Bank it will be there to stay. There will be no military to "save the day."

Hamas will eliminate Fatah and its forces in the West Bank as it did when it overran Gaza in 2007, throwing Fatah operatives off the roofs of high-rise buildings for starters.

If the demonstrators think they have earned the right to continue to criticise the regime, they will find themselves behind bars or worse, just as they did in Egypt.

And of course, as in Gaza, Hamas will divert resources and supplies away from the people to support its own platform, which contains only one plank – fighting Israel.

That policy would not upset too many Palestinians, as Fatah has made a science of blaming Israel for everything that's wrong in its own backyard. After more than two decades of this, many Palestinians believe it.

They will cheer as Hamas fires rockets into Israel from the West Bank, and cry miserably for the cameras when Israel retaliates, trained as they are to wallow in their suffering in order to pluck at the heartstrings of their supporters around the world.

That will leave Israel with several choices, none of them good:

- Absorb the attacks with limited retaliation, as it does with Gaza
- Hunt down and kill the Hamas leaders responsible for the attacks
- Launch an invasion to recapture control of the West Bank, and deal daily with bloody attacks and “resistance” – and international condemnation

Those would be the results of a successful “Palestinian Spring” uprising that overthrows Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah.

As the adage goes – be careful what you wish for. 

Mark Lavie worked as an Associated Press correspondent in the Middle East for 15 years, concluding in 2014. © Ynet.com, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

GAZA’S TERROR CAMPS FOR KIDS

by Amelia Navins

As this year’s summer camp season begins in the northern hemisphere, children around the world find themselves playing games, doing arts and crafts, participating in sporting matches and swimming in pools and lakes. For children in the Gaza Strip, however, summer camp looks very different.

Some 50,000 children in Gaza participate in camps run by armed groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which aim to instil radical Islamic values and provide military training. Promotional videos and advertisements entice young children into registering for such camps, culminating in the conscription of children into terrorist armed forces.

On June 26, 2021, the Vanguard of Liberation camp was officially launched with a press conference given by camp spokesman Abu Bilal, who designated this year’s camps the “Sword of Jerusalem,” the name given by Hamas to the 11 days of fighting with Israel in May. Emphasising this point, Bilal proclaimed, “It is a generation that carries this sword to strike the enemy and liberate Jerusalem.”

In place of traditional camp T-shirts, participants wear Hamas uniforms, and rather than learning camp songs, they are taught drills to prepare them for armed conflict with Israel.

These exercises include methods of kidnapping Israeli soldiers, how to assemble, load and fire weapons, and other physical training. This year, new technology was added for the campers’ stimulation: Participants use computer simulators to practise shooting Israeli soldiers and police officers at the Temple Mount and al-Aqsa Mosque.

Other simulations include firing anti-tank missiles at Israeli targets.

The goal of these camps is clear: indoctrinate young, vulnerable children with Hamas’ values to encourage them to join Hamas’ military forces and sacrifice their lives for Hamas’ cause.

In an interview with *Al-Monitor*, Hamas spokesman Hazen Qassem emphasised that the camps are intended to inculcate national values in the youth and enhance principles such as courage, hope, pride and belonging to Jerusalem. Qassem underscored the fact that these camps demonstrate how Hamas is constantly preparing for the battle of liberation.

As a result of the recent escalation, the Vanguard of Liberation camps experienced a heavy turnout this season, evidence of the growing influence of Hamas’ rhetoric in the area, especially among children.

As Hamas has struggled to compete with the military capabilities of Israel, it recognises the need for military expansion. Thus, it has turned to the most vulnerable population to fulfill this need: children.

To entice them into participating in these camps, Hamas masks military training as a “summer camp experience,” though these children will experience something far from a traditional camp experience. The intent to recruit young children into Hamas and encourage them to martyr themselves is evidenced by personal testimonies of camp participants, such as Mohammed, 14. He told *Al-Monitor* that he joined the camp to “defend my land against Israeli attacks and subsequently to join the ranks of al-Qassam Brigades [Hamas’ armed wing].”

The financial consequences of the May war for Hamas have not gotten in the way of the opening and operation of these camps. All of the trainers at the camps are Hamas volunteers, and the exercises take place at the military bases of the al-Qassam Brigades.

Hamas’ indoctrination of children is cruel and inhumane, stripping them of their childhood and naïveté. Moreover, it violates international humanitarian law.

The 2007 Paris “Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups” define a

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“child soldier” as any person below the age of 18 who has been recruited or used by an armed group in any capacity, not just a child who has taken direct action in hostilities.

By this internationally accepted definition, Palestinian children in Hamas’ summer camps, and those brainwashed by armed groups through other media, all fit into the category of “child soldiers.”

Both the use of child soldiers and the indoctrination of youth by Hamas violate international human rights laws.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court stipulates:

- Article 8(b)(xxvi) considers the conscription or enlisting of children into the armed forces a war crime.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child includes:

- Articles 28 and 29, which refer to the right of the child to an education.
- Article 36, which protects the child against all forms of exploitation.
- Article 38(2), which prohibits children under the age of 15 from directly engaging in hostilities.

The 2000 Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict “exists to strive for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.”

- Article 1 prohibits the conscription of children under 18 into the armed forces.

Various international campaigns, such as UNICEF’s “Children, Not Soldiers” and the “Coalition to Save Palestinian Child Soldiers”, were created to campaign against the use of child soldiers in conflict.

From a young age, Palestinian children are indoctrinated by their leadership. Young children are impressionable; their exposure to violence and military campaigns at a young age leaves many children fighting for a cause that they fail to understand. Hamas views its civilians as disposable. This clearly extends to Palestinian children.

Child soldiers are not only the perpetrators of acts of terror against the State of Israel but are victims of serious human-rights violations committed by Hamas.

AIR

Amelia Navins is a student at the Ford School of Public Policy at

the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. © Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (www.jcpa.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ISRAEL’S HOPES FOR INDONESIA

by Giora Eliraz

The story of Israel-Indonesia relations is an ongoing saga. For decades, Indonesia has adhered strictly to a position that stipulates establishing diplomatic relation with Israel is dependent on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict via a two-state solution along the pre-1967 borders with east Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian independent state. In other words, Palestinian state first, diplomatic relations with Israel second. Indonesia has even framed this position into a formative national commitment to oppose “colonialism” that is embodied in the preamble to the national constitution. This government position seems to have support from across society, underlined by strong sentiments of Islamic solidarity within the dominant Muslim majority, who generally see the Palestinian struggle as a pan-Islamic issue.

Soon after his election in 1999, the late Abdurrahman Wahid, the first democratically-elected president of Indonesia, tried to substantially change Jakarta’s policy towards Israel, planning to move towards official diplomatic relations by first establishing direct trade ties. However Wahid’s plan met with robust opposition within Indonesia and his government was forced to abandon it. Since then the relations between Israel and Indonesia have continued to languish. Yet there have been some complexities that raise questions about the possibility of future change.

Indonesia still regularly denies having any interactions with Israel that might be interpreted as official contact. In addition, in the global arena, Indonesia demonstrates a constant and strong commitment to the Palestinian cause and plays a consistent leading role in diverse international forums in promoting and defending that cause.

Yet, despite this, Israel has never become discouraged; its officials have repeatedly expressed a strong interest in having diplomatic relations with Indonesia, while stressing the potential benefits for Indonesia,

Two decades after Wahid’s unsuccessful efforts to advance Indonesia-Israel relations, the subject made headlines again for a short while last year. It was largely triggered by the American initiative in the final year of Donald Trump’s presidency to attempt to achieve normalised relations between Israel and Sunni Arab states, which led to normalisa-

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tion agreements with four such states, the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco.

Probably based mainly on conjecture and wishful thinking, the name of Indonesia was raised as possibly being part of this normalisation trend. Indonesia is, after all, a significant Sunni Muslim majority, non-Arab country that shares with United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco a deep interest in promoting moderate Islamic values to counter religious extremists, so this sounded superficially plausible.

Media reports on alleged diplomatic efforts by the Trump Administration to persuade Indonesia to recognise Israel and establish ties fed expectations of a change in Indonesian policy. However, Jakarta quickly denied any such plans, and reaffirmed its traditional emphasis on the need for the Palestinian people to gain independence under a two-state solution. The Indonesian Government was explicit that it would avoid taking any steps to normalise relations with Israel until a permanent and comprehensive peace between the Palestinians and the Israel is achieved. It was also argued, as usual, that its position is consistent with the preamble to the Indonesian Constitution.

Furthermore, in response to the escalation in May 2021 in east Jerusalem and the fighting between Israel and Hamas, the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, the three Muslim-majority Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members, issued a statement on “the Escalation of Violence by Israelis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.” In the statement, issued following an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) convened by Saudi Arabia, the three leaders strongly condemned among other things alleged “repeated blatant violations and aggressions, carried out by the Israelis, targeting civilians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory...” The three leaders also requested the United Nations General Assembly convene an emergency session for putting an end “to the atrocities carried out against the Palestinian people.”

Yet despite this, a few weeks later, in June, the Israeli Ambassador to Singapore, Sagi Karni, whose embassy also handles developments related to Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, expressed Israel’s hope to work towards establishing ties with these three Muslim majority nations. At the same time he strongly rejected the accusations against Israel, stressing that the criticism from the three nations’ leaders was “not honest” and ignored the true nature of the conflict, which was not between Israel and the Palestinian people but between Israel and Hamas, an antisemitic organisation. He noted that Hamas had been

intentionally launching weapons from civilian areas in Gaza and aiming them at Israeli civilians, whereas Israeli forces sought to avoid “collateral damage” by warning occupants to vacate Gaza buildings that were being targeted. He urged that the only way for any party to have meaningful influence over what happens in the Middle East is by establishing relations with Israel: “We are willing to talk, we are willing to meet, and the door is open as far as we are concerned. I don’t think it’s so difficult to find us.”



Israel has good reasons to keep trying to develop ties with Indonesia (Credit: Shutterstock)

Yet the reality remains that national ideology and history, foreign policy calculations and domestic considerations, in particular a deep, strong commitment to the Palestinian cause rooted in Islamic solidarity, prevail within the dominant Muslim majority in all three countries. It thus remains hard to see a near-term change in the rigid Indonesian stance on establishing diplomatic relations with Israel,

especially since concrete political initiatives towards solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on a two-state solution currently look unlikely.

Yet Israel has good reason to keep trying. From its earliest years of statehood, the small Jewish state has sought to mitigate the effects of the hostile regional neighbours it faced by looking for diplomatic inroads and friendly relations beyond the Arab world, including by finding ways into the Muslim world via countries such as Turkey and pre-revolutionary Iran.

Indonesia, as the world’s largest Muslim-majority state, has a particular significance, and also shares much in common with Israel nowadays – as a country that highly aspires to rapid economic growth, development and technological modernisation, and a democratic polity with a strong commitment to the struggle against terrorism and religious extremism.

In 1979, Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt, which for decades it had regarded as its greatest enemy. Since then, several other significant moderate Sunni Arab nations followed this historical breakthrough, beginning with Jordan in 1994 and followed by the four Abraham Accords nations last year. Given this achievement and the historical trendline it represents, there remains every reason for Israel to continue to hope and work towards an eventual breakthrough in its relations with Sunni Muslim majority countries in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia.

AIR

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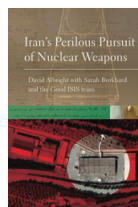
THE BIBLIO FILE

Too late on Iran nukes?

Iran's Perilous Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons

by **David Albright and Sarah Burkhard**

Institute for Science and International Security Press, 2021, 502 pp., \$93.90/\$7.99 e-book



by **Ran Porat**

This new book by experts David Albright – a former senior weapons inspector in Iraq – and Sarah Burkhard from the Institute for Science and International Security, is an important eye-opener.

Albright and Burkhard were granted unprecedented access to documents from Iran's secret nuclear archive, seized by Israel from Teheran in early 2018. They also talked to Israeli officials and others familiar with the archive.

This book is a collection of reports published on their Institute's website, with added necessary context and conclusions. It is not an easy read, loaded with technical terms and details – but the result is astounding. Several important facts stand out after reading it:

Fact one: Khomeini gave the order

The regime in Teheran fears internal dissent and seeks immunity from external threats. These fears are not irrational, based on the trauma of past foreign interventions from Russia, the US and UK (such as the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953) and the war with Iraq (1980-88).

The decision to “reactivate the nuclear program” was taken by the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Supreme Leader Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi

Khomeini in April 1984. Quoting an internal IAEA report, Albright and Burkhard reveal that, following Khomeini's decision, then President of Iran Ali Khamenei (who is now the Supreme Leader), told the regime's top echelon that acquiring atomic bombs was:

“The only way to secure the very essence of the Islamic Revolution from the schemes of its enemies... A nuclear arsenal would serve Iran as a deterrent in the hands of God's soldiers”

Khamenei's words rebut Iranian claims that a never-published *fatwa* (religious decree) by Khamenei has forbidden building nuclear weapons as un-Islamic, supposedly proving the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program.

Fact two: Iran knows how to produce a home-made bomb

From the late 1990s Iran launched a massive effort to acquire the bomb in its Amad supra-organisational plan – a multi-agency government-sanctioned project to produce at least five atomic bombs by 2003.

The amount of resources devoted to this plan, to keep it going and secret, was staggering. This includes assistance from foreign experts including Russians, Pakistan's nuclear proliferator AQ Khan and others, materials and equipment procured

abroad, and participation of various government bodies and ministries – from defence to intelligence and customs.

Factories were constructed across Iran for producing fissile materials. The Al-Ghadir plant was built in the early 2000s to enrich enough uranium to military grade for one or two nuclear weapons per year. Testing, research and development of key elements of the project were conducted in other locations, such as Parchin, where high explosives for the warhead were tested.

Eventually, Albright and Burkhard note, Teheran developed “in house capability to understand and design a miniaturized nuclear warhead”, and to analyse and test it. By 2003, the Iranian warhead prototype design was small enough to fit the nose cone of the re-entry vehicle of Iran's Shahab-3 ballistic missiles.

Fact three: The “peaceful” civilian nuclear program IS the weapons program, rebranded

Teheran had to change its strategy after being caught in 2002, when opposition groups exposed the secret uranium enrichment plant at Natanz.

Archive documents show that Amad was not dismantled in 2003, but instead rebranded. The already existing weapons-related sites were put under the authority of the ‘civilian’ Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI), and the whole program marketed as a ‘peaceful’ one for energy and scientific purposes. The regime cynically claimed that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was bluntly violated by the Amad plan, gave Iran an “undisputed” right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

For instance, after the Al-Ghadir plant was uncovered in September 2009, it was renamed Fordow and is now run by the AEOI.

Part of the price of making its nuclear program public, explain Albright and Burkhard, was that “sites would be subjected to International Atomic

Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring or inspections to defuse international condemnation.” A whole culture of fraud regarding this monitoring followed. The archive contains carefully organised files on methods for deceiving IAEA inspectors, with records up until 2006.

It should be noted that Iran’s nuclear program is not viable as a ‘civilian’ one. The “commercial centrifuge program is a failure; any other country would have cancelled it by now if it were judged solely on economic, civilian grounds”, explain Albright and Burkhard.

Fact four: The JCPOA enabled Amad to continue

To address the Iranian threat, then-US President Barack Obama chose engagement. Together with the EU, China and Russia he devised the 2015 nuclear deal, termed the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” (JCPOA). The agreement was a trade-off: Iran’s nuclear program was given a stamp of approval in exchange for temporary limitations on fissile material production capabilities, as well as invasive monitoring.

The aim of the JCPOA was to appease Supreme Leader Khamenei so he would be convinced not to order a breakout towards the bomb, at least in the short term. This was a sweet deal for the ayatollahs – they received increased regime sustainability through an easing of sanctions which released billions of dollars into Teheran’s coffers. That money was quickly funnelled to Iran’s terrorist proxies across the region, oppression of the Iranian people, corruption, and criminal activities. A special sweetener within the JCPOA was the sunset clauses, which gradually remove almost all limitations on Iran’s nuclear enrichment activities beginning in 2025.

Another carrot was effectively forcing the IAEA to stop investigating “Possible Military Dimensions” (PMD) of Iran’s program after an inconclusive and unconvincing “final” report on PMD in early 2016. This meant Teheran enjoyed impunity for past sins and was effectively able to continue concealed warhead development activities without scrutiny.

Teheran nonetheless violated the JCPOA from day one. Keeping the archive which documented Amad – the recipe book for cooking up an atomic bomb – without revealing it to the IAEA was the gravest breach.

Meanwhile, work on refining a nuclear warhead also continued after 2003, clandestinely and under academic cover. Former Amad project head Mohsen Fakhrazadeh was in charge of this effort until he was killed in late 2020.

In addition, Teheran continued its development of the means to deploy weapons of mass destruction on ballistic

missiles. The JCPOA ignored this aspect of Amad and implicitly accepted Teheran’s narrative that these missiles were part of country’s legitimate defence strategy. However, Iran is the only nation in history to develop a 2,000 km-plus range missile without first developing a declared nuclear weapons capability – exposing the real aim of Teheran’s missile program.

Conclusion: Engagement failed

Findings from the archive seized by Israel were an important factor leading to then-US President Donald Trump’s decision to leave the JCPOA in May 2018.

Trump then initiated a “maximum pressure” policy on Teheran by reinstating pre-JCPOA sanctions and imposing new ones. The impact was dramatic – Iran’s economy shrank considerably

and its foreign exchange reserves fell from US\$122 billion in 2018 to a mere US\$4 billion by the end of 2020.

Teheran responded by gradually and carefully escalating its JCPOA breaches, slowly restarting the fissile materials arm of Amad. It did not however ‘race’ for the bomb, deterred by the possibility that Trump would be re-elected in 2020 and the pressure on Iran would increase.

When Joe Biden was elected President in 2020, he fulfilled a campaign promise and quickly launched (indirect) negotiations on a US re-entry to the JCPOA.

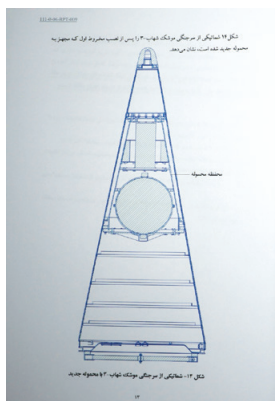
The ayatollahs repaid Biden for his eagerness to engage with a vastly accelerated rate of JCPOA breaches.

Armed with a renewed sense of confidence after surviving Trump’s campaign, the regime has now effectively abandoned any pretence that it seeks civilian nuclear capabilities. Instead, many Iranian steps can only be explained in connection with bomb-making, such as the production of enriched uranium metal, usable only for the core of a nuclear weapon, and enriching uranium to 60% – almost military grade. Teheran also aggressively undermined supervision of its program by increasing harassment of IAEA inspectors and removing electronic monitoring devices from sites.

Today, Iran is only a whisker away from achieving the strategically crucial status of nuclear threshold state. The archive documents, as analysed by Albright and Burkhard, tell the story of how Teheran got there, and how the international community fumbled its efforts to stop one of the world’s most dangerous regimes.

AIR

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From Iran's Nuclear Archive: Schematics of a nuclear warhead in a Shahab-3 re-entry vehicle, May 17, 2019 (Source: ISIS report)



ESSAY

Feeding the Future

Australia, Israel and the AgTech revolution

by Zachary Milewicz

The global population is expected to reach nearly ten billion by 2050, up from its current total of approximately 7.8 billion. With this rise comes a growing demand to produce more food – a task easier said than done. Meeting this demand requires an increase in agricultural output and productivity, while maintaining sustainability.

Fortunately, there is hope this can be achieved. At the forefront of this global food challenge is an up and coming industry essential to the future of agriculture: AgTech (also referred to as agricultural technology, agrotechnology and agritech among other variations).

AgTech is defined as “the use of technology in agriculture, horticulture, and aquaculture with the aim of improving yield, efficiency and profitability for farm managers and growers.” It encompasses several sectors, using technology ranging from advanced machinery (e.g. drones, robots) and internet of things data-collecting sensors to intelligent software analysis (for plants and soils) and water management systems.

Many of these capabilities were not around 30 years ago, but in the next 30, they will become increasingly indispensable. The global AgTech market is estimated at A\$681 billion and is expected to grow to A\$995 billion in the next three years; an annual growth rate of 8%, according to one recent estimate.

The promising future of AgTech is also reflected in the global attention and funding it has received in the investment world. In 2012, AgTech received investments of A\$205m; by 2018, this had grown exponentially to A\$7.1bn.

Australia and Israel are both countries with the potential to play major roles in the coming AgTech revolution. This is all the more true if the two countries cooperate – especially via a proposed free trade agreement between Australia and Israel currently being seriously contemplated in Canberra.

ISRAEL

Israel is a global leader in the AgTech industry. This is no surprise, given the country is known by many for inventing drip irrigation and extended-life cherry tomatoes, as well as “making the desert bloom.” From 1948 through 2010, Israeli farmland increased from 165,000 hectares to 435,000 hectares, while agricultural production increased sixteenfold.

In the country’s early days, faced with conditions not naturally favourable to farming and scarce water resources, Israelis had little choice but to innovate. Similar stories apply across Israeli industries and the country is today the world leader in number of start-ups per capita.

According to “Start-Up Nation Central”, a nonprofit focused on

building bridges to Israeli innovation, the ‘Start-Up Nation’ is home to 390 companies within the AgriFood-Tech industry, 29 of which it categorises as “established” and nine as “public.” Israel is also home to a number of multinational corporations with R&D operations in Israel such as Bayer – one of the largest pharmaceutical and life sciences companies in the world.

Israel’s AgTech success has been encouraged through its supportive ecosystem, comprised of academic institutions, incubators and accelerators, venture capital firms, and government support. For example, the Israeli Innovation Authority (IAA) is a publicly-funded agency that works with incubators to provide grants to startups, including AgTech pilots.

One of the best known Israeli AgTech companies is Netafim, a manufacturer of irrigation equipment. This world leader in drip irrigation was valued at US\$1.9 billion (A\$2.46b) several years ago, but Netafim is far from the only success story.

Taranis, a precision agriculture intelligence platform, was founded in 2015 and has raised over US\$60 million in funding. The company helps growers and crop consultants by using drones to capture high-resolution images of fields (at “leaf-level precision”) and artificial intelligence (AI) to detect a variety of risks (including diseases, insects, weeds, and nutrient deficiencies). It has expanded to the US, Brazil, Russia, Bulgaria, Australia, New Zealand, and Indonesia.

Also founded in 2015, CropX “sells cloud-based software which aims to boost crop yields by focusing on saving water and energy.” Its self-installable sensors are placed in soil and, using real-time data, its AI-based analytics provide actionable insights, resulting in 30% water savings and 10% crop-yield enhancement. It has expanded its market to include the US, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates.

AUSTRALIA

Agriculture is a vital part of Australia – not just to its economy but to its national identity (research conducted in 2012 found 69% of Aussies believe agriculture “plays a significant role in what it means to be Australian”).

Agriculture accounts for 55% of Australian land use and contributes 3% to GDP – but taking into account value adding such as processing and retail, that contribution rises to 12%.

Australia exports over two-thirds of its agricultural production and ranks as the world’s 12th largest exporter of agricultural products. The industry has an expected value of A\$71.2 billion this year. However, many have higher aspirations for the industry’s future. The National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) has set an agricultural production goal of A\$100 billion by 2030, and much work has gone into making this objective a reality, particularly by the NFF and the Australian Government. This year’s estimate is up from the A\$59 billion in 2017, but there is still a long way to go.

The Department of Agriculture noted in a recent report that achieving this goal “will require a significant increase in productivity, increased market access and diversification.”

The key to all this? AgTech. It has the potential to “boost the value of [Australian] production by \$20.3 billion” according to analysis by the Australian Farm Institute.

As previously noted, AgTech is undergoing significant growth across the world, but, as the Australian AgriTech Association put it, “Sadly, Australia has not yet managed to attract a significant proportion of this investment” – only US\$29 million of the US\$16.9 billion invested globally in 2018. This statistic is unfortunate given how well-positioned the country appears to be at the forefront of AgTech.

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) breaks down “Why Australia?” into several

key factors, including: “Research excellence,” “Strong government support,” and “An ideal test market.”

In terms of research, Australia is home to 43 universities, six of which are among the top 100 universities in the world and 24 of which are rated world-class and above for agriculture. These universities are producing cutting-edge agricultural research, but commercialisation often falls short.

Australia is home to six different climatic growing conditions and a diversity of soil, making it an ideal test market. Austrade states, “The nation’s high-quality raw materials and ingredients, infrastructure and multicultural population allow organisations to trial and develop solutions relevant to multiple markets.”

As outlined in a report on “re-aliasing the potential of AgTech for Australia” produced by StartupAUS, KPMG, the Queensland Government, and the Commonwealth Bank, boosting AgTech would create significant opportunities for Australia, including in terms of: more sustainable use of resources, new exports, improved productivity, new investments, increased revenue, and jobs created.

But Australia does not need to do this alone. Collaborating with other countries, such as Israel, can potentially speed up this essential transformation.

COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

A joint effort involving Australia and Israel could elevate the two as AgTech powerhouses, each offering unique benefits – Australia as an agricultural production hotbed and Israel as a hi-tech “Startup Nation.”

As mentioned, Australia is an ideal test market. For Israel, this means the

country is the perfect place to pilot its innovations while preparing for a global launch. Several companies have done exactly that.

Edete is an Israeli startup that offers artificial pollination solutions; its technology collects, stores, and distributes pollen, helping increase production yields – a particularly pressing issue given 75% of crops rely on pollination even as bee populations are declining.

Edete’s technology has been applied to almonds, and its insect-

pollination methodology can be used across other plants too, ranging from apples and cherries to pears and plums. So far, the company has developed pollen banks in Israel and Australia, and it is also expanding

into the US. Unfortunately, due to COVID, it has had delays in Australia; however, when it resumes efforts – hopefully next year – its technology could well be especially impactful.

The almond market, estimated at US\$7 billion, suffers the most from the pollination problem. Australia is one of the world’s top almond growers. For this reason, Edete has chosen to focus its initial efforts there, according to Keren Mimran, Edete co-founder and Vice President for Business Development and Marketing.

Edete is also in the midst of securing funding for its Series A round. It has already attracted the backing of major investment companies in both Israel and the US, and Mimran says it’s also in discussions with Australian companies.

Mimran also commented on the potential for another type of Australia-Israel collaboration beyond testing and funding: research. Edete was recently approached by a leading researcher in Australia studying artificial pollination and while nothing



Artificial pollinators from Israeli AgTech company Edete: Coming to Australia’s almond orchards next year (Photo courtesy of Edete)

is under way yet due to COVID, there is a strong possibility of joint research efforts in the near future.

Another Israeli AgTech company following a similar trajectory to Edete is the previously described CropX – focused on soil analytics using sensors. CropX also views Australia as an attractive market.

Matan Rahav, Director of Business Development at CropX, commented exhaustively on the reasons for Australia's attractiveness for Israel AgTech companies: it being an "an agricultural country," recent technological advances that go hand in hand with local receptiveness, seasons opposite to the US, English-speaking and culturally approachable for business, and an established need for careful irrigation management.

Collaboration opportunities go the other way too. Israel's innovation success offers policy strategies that could be adopted in Australia to help grow the local AgTech scene.

Ben van Delden is a partner at KPMG Australia and its head of AgTech. In 2017, van Delden took part in an Australian Agri-Food Trade Mission to Israel run by the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce, and observed first-hand the Israeli approach to agricultural innovation.

Since then, he's been at the forefront of helping Australia adapt some of these lessons. One of many things van Delden emphasises is a need for commercialisation of research. He says of the more than \$3 billion Australia invests into research, "too much of that just stays in the local lab. As I discovered, that doesn't translate into the hands of industry for application and commercialising." Meanwhile, universities in Israel prioritise commercialisation, have extensive technology transfer offices, and retain entrepreneurs as professors. One of van Delden's recommendations is more such cooperation and collaboration between Australia and Israel, including research exchanges between the top universities in each country.

One prominent example of such increased cooperation and collaboration came about recently through the efforts of the Blue River Group, an Australian impact investment services firm. Blue River Group established BridgeHub three years ago as an Agri-food Tech innovation centre. Its work has included operating an Australian 'Landing Pad,' which, in the words of co-CEO and co-founder Craig Shapiro, helps with "bringing technologies from overseas to trial and testbed to build their exposure and opportunities in Australia."

Much of this technology originates from Israel, where BridgeHub established its first global office.

Shapiro also commented on the opportunities offered by Israel's innovation ecosystem: to collaborate but also to learn from and replicate elements of what Israel does.

Like van Delden, Shapiro draws attention to the fact that Australia has been poor at "converting really good research" into commercial products – an area in which Israel has excelled. He further notes "that was the beginning of our process of trying to look for a way to build that connectivity between Australian and Israel but also the whole globe, because we need to – here in Australia – be more globally connected."

One of BridgeHub's primary goals is to "try and commercialise research from Australia and take it global" – what it calls "launchpad activities."

One Australian startup that has benefitted from the efforts of BridgeHub is FarmLab – which produces "agronomy and project management software", and offers a "platform to help agronomists, consultants and farmers better map, sample and analyse soil using the latest in soil science and digital soil mapping techniques."

In 2019, through the evokeAG Pitch Tent competition, FarmLab won the Austrade Bridge Hub Special Prize. This included a 10-day trip to Israel for FarmLab founder and CEO Sam Duncan.

Duncan says this trip opened his eyes. Before it, he says, "I'd heard about Israel on the periphery, and I knew a little bit about it." Now, he comments extremely positively about

what he observed, and notes one cultural challenge perhaps standing in Australia's way: "tall poppy syndrome".

Overcoming this attitude could greatly benefit Australian AgTech startups, FarmLab included, he says.

Duncan has stayed in touch with connections he formed in Israel, particularly entrepreneurs focused on analytics and databases. With these

"potential partners over there," Duncan notes, there is major scaling potential for FarmLab to enter the US market through this "combined effort."

But besides challenges to collaboration such as the cultural one pointed to by Duncan, there are also logistical hurdles. The two countries are at near opposite ends of the globe, and with this, comes lengthy flights. Moreover, other travel restrictions also make things more difficult. Even with the possibility of direct flights in the future as we emerge from COVID, as Shapiro put it, "flights are one thing, but ...if you can't have free-flowing movement because of visa restrictions, then they're not really worth too much in a business sense."

This is one of several impediments to collaboration that a proposed Australia-Israel FTA could directly resolve.

Another opportunity for collaboration exists around carbon emissions, Van Delden says of Australia. One product offered by FarmLab is

"A joint effort involving Australia and Israel could elevate the two as AgTech powerhouses, each offering unique benefits – Australia as an agricultural production hotbed and Israel as a hi-tech 'Startup Nation.'"

a soil carbon offset report. Given its huge landmass and relatively small population, Duncan believes Australia has “not just an opportunity, but a... duty to provide carbon offsets” – projects that remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere in order to compensate for emissions made elsewhere.

He refers to the trade in carbon offsets as a “big opportunity... over the next five, ten years.” While it’s still being developed, he calls attention to the benefit that some sort of trade agreement could have related to this area. Early collaboration could have huge benefits on climate change globally, he says.

Opening more doors between the countries has the potential to get more Israeli companies (like Edete) testing and expanding in Australia, more Australia entrepreneurs (like Sam Duncan) excited about forging ties, and more ways to sustainably move into the future. But all of this hinges on removing as many barriers as possible to doing business.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Since February of this year, Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been conducting a feasibility study on strengthening trade and investment with Israel, with a view to possibly seeking an Australia-Israel free trade agreement (FTA).

This potential FTA is not the first attempt to strengthen trade ties between the two countries. In 2017, they signed a Technological Innovation Cooperation Agreement, and in 2019, a Double Taxation Agreement. That same year, the Australian Government also opened an Australian Trade and Defence Office in Jerusalem, and a few years prior – in 2016 – Austrade established the Australian Landing Pad in Tel Aviv.

But there’s still room for further encouragement of bilateral trade and investment – and an FTA would enable exactly that.

While traditionally defined as “An agreement between two or more

countries under which they grant each other preferential market access,” these days, FTAs often encompass more than just tax and tariff agreements. Modern FTAs go as far as including stipulations regarding visas and intellectual property protection, two areas that could play an important role in strengthening future AgTech ties between the two countries.

As stated by DFAT, Australia’s FTAs provide: “better Australian access to important markets, an improved competitive position for Australian exports, more prospects for increased two-way investment, reduced import costs for Australian businesses and consumers alike, new or better access to markets for services exports, guarantees of existing services access in some areas, reduced regulatory barriers in different service sectors, improving mobility for business travel, and enhanced protections and certainty for investors.”

This possible FTA is very much in its early stages; negotiations are yet to begin, and once they do, they could take a long time.

For its feasibility study, DFAT received 28 non-confidential submissions from businesses, groups and individuals, which are published online – including one by AIJAC. Numerous submissions pointed to an agreement’s tremendous potential benefits, spanning numerous different industries.

An FTA would further open doors to the collaboration opportunities previously described – particularly related to development, commercialisation, and scaling – and thus help promote the future growth of AgTech more broadly.

Australia has already seen the value of such agreements, demonstrated by the 15 it currently has in place with 26 countries.

AgTech’s counterpart, agriculture, is likely to be the most complicated sector to negotiate, as is often the case. FTAs carry a great deal of importance in that industry, especially in Australia where the majority of agricultural production is exported.

The NFF notes that “More than 80% of Australia’s farm exports go to countries which have signed FTAs with Australia.”

In Israel, in contrast to most imports, high tariffs are imposed on a range of agricultural goods coming into the country. If this can be alleviated, there is a significant opportunity for Australia. As noted in an article published by the Australian freight company TGL (“Australia Exploring the Benefits of Free Trade Agreement with Israel”, May 4), “without a free trade agreement between the two countries, Australia’s export of agricultural goods has little chance of competing in the [Israeli] market due to Israel’s established agreements with USA, Canada and the EU.”

There is less opportunity for Israeli agricultural exports to Australia to grow, given that over 90% of the food consumed in Australia is produced here.

Yet regardless of how the agriculture clauses pans out in any FTA, AgTech’s benefits from an FTA are clear and strong. Given how important this industry sector is likely to be in the future, and the opportunities it will almost certainly create, the benefits to AgTech alone make a strong case for an Australia-Israel FTA.

AIR



With Compliments

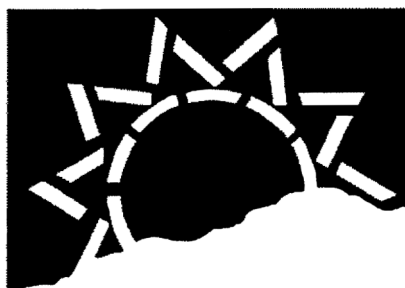
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NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

SHARP ALBO

Federal Labor leader Anthony Albanese's repudiation of former Labor foreign minister Bob Carr's push for the ALP to embrace a boycott of Israel won praise from Nine newspapers' foreign affairs and national security correspondent Anthony Galloway (July 16).

Galloway wrote Albanese "has a long history of standing up against the more extreme elements of his party's Left, including campaigning against the former Marrickville council's boycott of Israel over a decade ago."

He wrote Albanese's acknowledgment of the prevalence of antisemitism on the extreme Left was important and that he had "avoided the trap of adopting false equivalency."

Albanese, he wrote, had called out "wrongdoing on both sides," citing his criticism of the "indiscriminate" firing of rockets by Hamas and other militant groups into Israel as "counterproductive" but was careful to add that Israel should be criticised for "responding aggressively".

Actually, that was an example of false equivalence.

Israel does not arbitrarily "respond aggressively". It carries out military operations against valid military targets when Hamas and other Islamist groups based in Gaza fire rockets at its cities – as any country would. Moreover, a failure to do so only emboldens Hamas to continue instigating violence that clearly violates the laws of war.

WILD WEST

On July 19, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a response to Galloway from pro-Palestinian activist Jennine Khalik who warned that Anthony Albanese risks "electoral

damage" from "Australian-Palestinians and their supporters" in western Sydney who would refuse to help out during election campaigns unless he was more anti-Israel.

The article made a clumsy attempt to shame Albanese into smearing Israel as an apartheid state, using the interesting tactic of asking why the Labor leader thinks he knows better than South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Khalik couldn't enlist South African leader Nelson Mandela, the foremost expert on apartheid, to her cause because he refused to ever make the comparison. In fact, Mandela held a number of positions that would likely enrage Khalik, such as supporting a two-state peace and saying during a 1999 visit to Israel that "I cannot conceive of Israel withdrawing (from the territories) if Arab states do not recognise Israel within secure borders."

Khalik also condemned Israel for charging Palestinian Khalida Jarrar with "encouraging terrorism and being a member of an illegal organisation."

The "illegal organisation" of which Khalida Jarrar is a senior official is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) – proscribed as a terror group by the United States, Japan, Canada and the European Union. Her most recent arrest followed a PFLP terror attack in the West Bank in 2019 which killed a 17-year old girl.

Much of the article was couched in the "woke" language favoured by progressives. The irony is that Khalik and so many others like her are progressive on everything but Palestine, refusing to condemn Hamas and Fatah for their lack of democracy and appalling human rights records, including deaths in custody, calls for

genocide, racism, antisemitism, and persecution of Palestinians who identify as LGBTQI.

BARNES-STORMING

In the Hobart *Mercury* (July 19) columnist Greg Barns also slammed Anthony Albanese for his opposition to boycotts against Israel and refusal to label Israel an apartheid state.

To justify his criticism, Barns pointed to a Human Rights Watch report from earlier this year that he said "detailed an impeccably correct legal analysis" proving that Israel's "policies and practices... towards Palestinians in the occupied territories" is apartheid.

A published response in the *Mercury* (July 21) by AIJAC's Jamie Hyams debunked many of Barns' criticisms.

Hyams noted that "all Israeli citizens have equal rights, regardless of ethnicity, origin or religion. Israel's Arab community is well represented in the parliament, the army, the judiciary and all professions. Now, there's an Arab party in Israel's broad governing coalition, there are two Arab cabinet ministers as well as a deputy minister, and a member of the Arabic-speaking Druze community heads the country's coronavirus response."

As for the Palestinians, Hyams said, "all Palestinians in Gaza and the vast majority in the West Bank have their day to day lives governed by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority respectively, under their own laws, in accordance with the 1994-5 Oslo Accords."

Noting that the Palestinian Authority had rejected offers of a state in 2000, 2001 and 2008 and had boycotted peace talks since 2014, Hyams said, "If Barns and others really want Palestinian justice, they should urge

the Palestinian leadership to genuinely engage with Israel and work for a two-state peace that would benefit all Palestinians and Israelis,” instead of pushing for boycotts that only encourage Palestinian intransigence.

SQUADRONS OF HATRED

Australian Foreign Editor Greg Sheridan condemned the “lack of reaction” from the left as Iran installed “mass murderer and extreme hardliner, Ebrahim Raisi, as its new president” (June 26).

Sheridan said, “those campaigners around the world, but especially the so-called Squad of congressional represen-

tatives in the US, who claim to be most passionately concerned with human rights, have nothing to say about Raisi” who “oversaw the execution of thousands of innocent Iranians in 1988.”

In contrast to the silence on Iran is their hate for Israel, which “often morphs into anti-Semitism,” he said.

Echoing Sheridan, commentator Frank Furedi said what was “disturbing” about the rise in antisemitism was that “a significant section of society, particularly the woke left, appears to pretend it is not happening or seem indifferent to manifestations of anti-Jewish hatred.”

He suggested this “is because the prevailing culture of identity politics associates Jewish identity with

negative connotations... In an age in which white privilege is depicted as a cultural crime, Jews are often represented as a unique, hyper-white community who have far more privileges to check than others. Often this reaction against ‘Jewish privilege’ meshes with hostility to Israel to produce a unique 21st-century species of anti-Semitism,” *Australian* (July 10).

BUTCHERED

On June 30, ABC TV and radio news programs were broadcasting many different iterations of a report by acting Middle East correspondent Nick Dole about Israeli authorities



IN PARLIAMENT

Kevin Andrews (Lib., Menzies) – June 24 – “I was delighted this week, as the chair of the Australia-UAE Parliamentary Friendship Group, along with the chair of the Australia-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group, Senator Abetz, to attend an MOU signing ceremony between Israel and the UAE. This arises from the Abraham Accords... That has led to, and is leading to, greater trade and travel between those countries. This is a manifestation of those international accords being played out here in Australia, so it was a great pleasure to be there.”

Senator **Eric Abetz** (Lib., Tas.) – June 23 – “Palestinian activist, Sara Saleh, joined the board of GetUp... Saleh had endorsed many of the racist Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions actions against Israel... At a speech to an Australians for Palestine symposium... Saleh proclaimed, ‘We must force Israel into a perennial state of existential anxiety.’ Really? This is truly unacceptable, horrible, racist... Israel is the only true democratic country in the Middle East. She has stood with us. We have stood with her. Against all the odds, Israel recently celebrated its 73rd anniversary of independence.”

The following speakers are members of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, addressing the Committee’s recently released “Report on the review of the relisting of Hizballah’s External Security Organisation as a terrorist organisation under the Criminal Code:”

Committee Chair Senator **James Paterson** (Lib., Vic.) – June 22 – “We recommend that the government consider listing Hizballah in its entirety as a terrorist organisation. We do so based on the expert evidence received by the committee that the distinction that we currently draw between Hizballah ESO and the rest of Hizballah is arbitrary.

“Dr Matthew Levitt, a world-renowned expert on Hizballah,

told the committee that there is no plausible intellectual case to distinguish between the ESO and the rest of Hizballah, who he described as a ‘singular, unitary organisation’. As he noted, it is a distinction that Hizballah itself explicitly rejects... Twenty-two countries and two regional organisations list them in their entirety...”

Shadow Minister for Home Affairs Senator **Kristina Keneally** (ALP, NSW) – June 22 – “...it’s appropriate that the Senate and the public take note that the report that is being tabled today is bipartisan and unanimously supported by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security.”

Shadow Attorney-General **Mark Dreyfus** (ALP, Isaacs) – June 23 – “Let’s be clear about who and what Hizballah is. I have visited the Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina, a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires. In 1994 a van loaded with explosives was driven into the building by a suicide bomber, killing 85 people and injuring hundreds more. All of the evidence points to Iran and Hizballah... I find it difficult to understand why it should matter what part of Hizballah carried out this devastating attack...”

Julian Leeser (Lib., Berowra) – June 23 – “The effect of only partially listing Hizballah is that if the defence pleads that a terror suspect is involved with other parts of the organisation but not the listed part, it may hamper the authorities in protecting the broader community from acts of terrorism... a compartmentalised Hizballah is a fiction... Australia is now the only country which lists only the Hizballah External Security Organisation... ASIO... Director-General of Security, Mike Burgess... observed, ‘I agree with your view on how unhelpful the partial listing is for law enforcement.’”

Anthony Byrne (ALP, Holt) – June 23 – “I think it’s very important... to note that we were the only Five Eyes partner that didn’t list the military wing of Hizballah in its entirety in terms of a terrorist organisation, and I don’t think that occurring benefited Australia or Australia’s national interest.”

demolishing a Palestinian butcher's shop in Jerusalem's Silwan neighbourhood that had been built without a planning permit.

Dole said human rights groups claim Israel "uses planning laws to expand its presence in east Jerusalem which Palestinians hope to make their future capital."

On the ABC radio program "AM", Dole's report included Human Rights Watch spokesperson Omar Shakir saying Israel seeks to evict Palestinians and transfer the properties to Jewish Israelis which "reflects the Israeli Government's policy of apartheid against Palestinians." (Never mind that in this Silwan case there is no Jewish ownership claim involved – the land in question has been set aside to be a park).

In one of the TV reports, Dole implied the ongoing lack of peace was due to Israeli actions, saying that "with more demolitions likely, peace and cooperation will be harder to achieve."

None of the reports included any Israeli spokespeople, only Dole saying Israel rejects the claims.

NO ISRAELI JEWS, NO NEWS?

Despite the ABC's Nick Dole finding time to file multiple stories about a single shop's demolition as the result of construction without a planning permit on land the occupant didn't own, as far as *AIR* can tell, none of the ABC's flagship TV and radio programs covered the massive Palestinian protests that erupted that same week in the West Bank.

The protests were triggered by accusations that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' security forces beat high-profile Palestinian Authority (PA) critic Nizar Banat to death, and were serious enough to potentially threaten Abbas' rule.

In contrast to the ABC, *SBS TV* "World News" broadcast two reports.

A June 26 story noted that

"mourners chanted 'overthrow the regime,' as they marched [Banat's] body through the streets of Hebron," and said that before his death, Banat had called on the West to stop giving aid to the corrupt Abbas. The report also noted that Abbas has ruled by fiat since 2009 and cancelled elections earlier this year that he was almost certain to lose. A follow-up story appeared on June 28.

Apparently, if news doesn't fit the narrative of Israelis as bullies and Palestinians as victims, then the ABC doesn't feel the need to cover it.

PALESTINIAN ANTI-VAXXERS

ABC viewers also missed out on important nuances in reports that South Korea had accepted 700,000 COVID-19 vaccines from Israel out of a supply of one million that had initially been earmarked for Palestinians but which the PA subsequently rejected.

On July 7, the introduction to an *ABC TV* "7pm News" report in Victoria stated that "in the world's first vaccine swap, Israel has sent 700,000 Pfizer doses to South Korea that's facing a fourth wave of the pandemic. Seoul will have to send the same number of shots back to Israel later in the year."

Seoul correspondent Carrington Clarke's report spoke of "the arrival of very precious cargo in South Korea. 700,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine from Israel. They were supposed to be traded with the Palestinian Authority but the deal fell through because some of the doses were too close to the expiration date."

In fact, out of the one million doses, only about 90,000 fell into the category of "about to expire" and even then, with a two-week grace period, they were still viable. They were clearly rejected because of a Palestinian anti-normalisation backlash, with the expiration dates given as an excuse.

MISSING THE SHOT

An earlier online ABC article (July 4) by Nick Dole and Phil Hemingway, published before the South Korea deal, looked at the high vaccination levels in Israel and the low rates for Palestinians living in the PA ruled areas.

The PA's decision to reject one million vaccines from Israel was discussed and the piece included some factually challenged claims by Palestinian officials, including that the expiration dates for the doses were "days only", that Israel's offer was more about extending the life of its own vaccine supply and that Israelis only "do what's good for their health." The only rebuttal was an Israeli official saying the Palestinians knew the expiration dates when they agreed to the deal.

The article did correctly note Israel's position that, under the Oslo Accords, the PA is legally responsible for providing health care – including, explicitly, vaccines – to Palestinians under its jurisdiction.

However, it also included the claim that "human rights groups argue that under the Geneva Conventions, as an occupying force, Israel still has an obligation to ensure Palestinians get equitable access to vaccines."

In fact, the Geneva Convention states that "the Occupying Power" should work to control epidemics "with the cooperation of national and local authorities' health services."

In 1958, the International Committee of the Red Cross said this means "that there can be no question of making the Occupying Power alone responsible for the whole burden of organizing hospitals and health services and taking measures to control epidemics. The task is above all one for the competent services of the occupied country itself."

Throughout the pandemic, Israel has indeed offered its expertise and facilitated the transfer of aid and medical equipment to Hamas-run

Gaza and the PA on the West Bank, as required by the Convention.

EXPLOSIVE HEADLINES

A headline on an AP-sourced report run on the ABC's website (June 17) misleadingly claimed "Israeli air strikes target Gaza, Palestinians respond with fire-carrying balloons as unrest continues."

In fact, Israeli air strikes were launched after, not before, incendiary balloons were sent across from Gaza, and in response to them.

Headlines used by the BBC ("Israel strikes in Gaza after fire balloons launched") and *Reuters* ("Israel strikes Hamas sites over fire balloons, challenging truce") both reported the sequence of events in the right order.

Moreover, the ABC report's introduction stated that "Israel says its military struck militant sites in the Gaza Strip early on Wednesday (local time), with Palestinians responding by sending a series of fire-carrying balloons back across the border for a second straight day," which only heightened the misdirection in the headline to heavily suggest Israel broke the ceasefire first and Hamas responded.

The ABC did subsequently change the headline to read "Israeli air strikes target Gaza, Palestinians respond with more fire-carrying balloons as unrest continues."

KARVELAS GOES IN REVERSE

On June 16, *Radio National* "Drive" also muddled the sequence of events.

Host Patricia Karvelas' interview with journalist Sarah Coates about the rockets was prefaced with the sound of explosions, followed by Karvelas stating, "that's the latest airstrike over Gaza. An attack that saw the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas broken after less than a month. Israeli military have said its aircraft struck Hamas military compounds after flammable balloons were launched from the Gaza Strip overnight."

Again, it was the launching of the incendiary balloons from Gaza into Israel that broke the ceasefire, not the Israeli airstrikes.

ACCURACY IS ACADEMIC

On July 17, *ABC Radio National* "Saturday Extra" promoted a biased "essay" on the ABC website looking at Israel's fourth prime minister, Golda Meir. It was written by Melbourne University historian and anti-Zionist activist Dr Jordana Silverstein, who was a signatory to the Orwellian "dobetteronpalestine" petition in May that called on the media to prioritise the Palestinian narrative.

Silverstein's article was simultaneously published on "The Conversation" website.

While the Conversation's home-page motto is "Academic rigour, journalistic flair", neither virtue was evident in the article, and Silverstein's role in anti-Israel organisations was not disclosed.

Many of the very sources that Dr Silverstein purportedly relied on actually undermined the claims she made about Meir, while the links provided on the ABC version of the article were often totally off topic.

According to Dr Silverstein, in April 1971, Meir met with leaders from Israel's Black Panther movement that sought to improve the opportunities for Jews who came to Israel from Middle Eastern countries, and then "famously told the press the Black Panthers were 'not nice' people."

In fact, according to the link provided on the version run by the Conversation, the comment was made "one month later" after "6,000 Black Panthers and their supporters held a massive demonstration in Jerusalem." Following the clash between demonstrators and police, Meir was quoted as saying the Panthers "are not nice people."

In other words, Meir wasn't talking about the leaders she met in her office in April but the behaviour of unruly demonstrators weeks later.

Whilst calling Meir "remarkable" for becoming Israel's first female prime minister, nonetheless Dr Silverstein absurdly said she is "perhaps best known for her attempts to project responsibility for Israeli violence onto Palestinians" and saw "Palestinians simply as an enemy to be defeated."

In another stunning example of mischaracterising primary sources to further a political agenda, Dr Silverstein cherry picked from a lengthy article Meir penned in 1973 for *Foreign Affairs*.

According to Dr Silverstein, in the article, "Meir rehearsed common settler-colonial false claims of an empty land – or *terra nullius*, to use language familiar to Australians" settled by Jews who had transformed "a barren and denuded land into fertile fields, flourishing settlements and new patterns of society."

In fact, anyone who reads Meir's full article will know that she said the exact opposite to what Dr Silverstein alleged and there is no claim in it that even approximates *terra nullius*.

Meir wrote that "When I came to Palestine in 1921 my pioneer generation was neither morally obtuse nor uninformed. We knew there were Arabs in Palestine, just as we knew from our own experience that our labor in malaria-ridden kibbutzim transformed uninhabitable swamps into habitable soil. Far from ignoring the local population, we were sustained by the sincere conviction that our toil created more and better living space for both Arab and Jew. In this belief we were proven right."

And far from proving that Meir wanted to "defeat" the Palestinians, Meir wrote, "Is the conflict then irreconcilable?... Between the Mediterranean and Iraq – the original area of Mandatory Palestine – there is room for both a Jewish and an Arab state. The name of the Arab state and its internal constitution and order are its responsibility and concern."

Meir explained that peace can only arise in a framework where Israel's right to exist was not in question, which is still as relevant today as it was in 1973.

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

CAN'T COMPLAIN

An AIJAC press release calling for the ABC to adopt a genuinely independent complaints system resonated across the media after *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* media page editor Zoe Samios picked it up for the newspapers' July 5 edition.

The ABC has a complaints system, which the public broadcaster boasts is independent, but in reality is simply part of the ABC's corporate structure. This has been a perennial focus for AIJAC, and indeed many other organisations and individuals in the wider community who have lodged reasonable complaints seeking corrections and acknowledgement of errors, only to see them rejected on dubious grounds.

On July 13, the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* ran AIJAC's Jamie Hyams' opinion piece explaining that, while the ABC "Audience and Consumer Affairs" unit (A&CA) which deals with complaints, may be "a separate unit, it is still very much part of the ABC."

He recounted some of AIJAC's experiences, which included what appears to be a system whereby often "A&CA... simply cites the response from the content producer" and "if the ABC employee responsible for the report is happy with their work, so... is A&CA."

Hyams explained the background to AIJAC's media release, which was A&CA's dismissal of a complaint lodged against *ABC TV* talk show "Q&A" that it had failed in its obligation to include a diversity of opinions by inviting two pro-Palestinian activists onto its panel to talk about the recent Israel-Hamas war, while allowing pro-Israel Jewish speakers to participate only as audience members.

His article recounted an AIJAC complaint in 2015 regarding a two-part *ABC Radio National* program that had been produced by a veteran anti-Israel activist who was an ABC employee. He noted that "A&CA dismissed complaints about demonstrably false claims by saying they were 'opinion rather than a statement of fact capable of independent verification.'"

In the longer online version, Hyams noted A&CA's inconsistency, such as agreeing that Gaza is not occupied when upholding an AIJAC complaint in 2016, but adopting the opposite position in 2021 when this same erroneous claim about Gaza was repeatedly made on ABC Radio. Hyams said the solution is a complaints system not run by the ABC.

"An AIJAC press release calling for the ABC to adopt a genuinely independent complaints system resonated across the media"

The next day, former ABC editorial director Alan Sunderland defended the ABC system in the two papers, saying there is an independent body run by the Australian Communications and Media Authority where aggrieved complainants can appeal A&CA's findings.

But as Hyams had pointed out, "in 2019-20 [ACMA] finalised only two investigations into ABC complaints."

On *Sky News* "The Bolt Report" (July 6), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein spoke to Andrew Bolt about the "Q&A" episode

and the complaints system. He said AIJAC filed a complaint because the panel was 4-1 against Israel. The one voice defending Israel, he said, was Dave Sharma, former Australian Ambassador to Israel and current federal Liberal MP, who is neither Jewish nor a pro-Israel advocate.

On July 9, commentator Gerard Henderson's "Media Watch Dog" column pointed out that "ABC Audience and Consumer Affairs dismisses over 95 per cent of the complaints it considers." He bagged A&CA's response to the complaints it had received over "Q&A", asking why Israeli Ambassador Jonathan Peled, who had been invited on to the program, "would... agree to sit in a Q&A audience and ask a question, without a right of reply, to a panel stacked with critics of the Israeli government?"

Later that day, on *Sky News* "The Media Show", *Sky News* Digital Editor Jack Houghton editorialised on the episode.

He pointed out that during the episode, *ABC Radio National* host Patricia Karvelas had tweeted about Palestinian victims, which he called "activism, not journalism". Houghton said the "Q&A" episode indicated that a recent petition signed by hundreds of Australian media professionals calling for Palestinian perspectives to be prioritised and to avoid "both-siderism" might have been adopted by the ABC.

Former *Australian* commentator Nick Cater told Houghton the ABC had already been avoiding reporting both sides for years and has a "completely one-eyed view" on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. He attributed this culture to a failure of ABC journalists to do the "hard yards" and read "deeply" into the history of that part of the world. Instead, he said, they "just go in with this post-colonialist victimhood mentality and... make a hash of it."

Gemma Tognini said a journalist's responsibility is to report every story without fear or favour.

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

CARNIVAL OF THE HYPOCRITES

It should have surprised no one to see the Executive Director of an international “human rights” non-governmental organisation (NGO) recently tweet that Jews, not antisemites, are effectively responsible for antisemitism, with no apparent consequences.

Of course, if he had tweeted the equally ludicrous and morally offensive claim that women are responsible for rape, it is unlikely he would still be in office.

When the Pakistani Foreign Minister was called out by his interviewer on CNN for the antisemitic slur of claiming Jewish financial power runs US foreign policy, he was right to feel secure he could get away with it. Even in Australia, an academic would come to his defence.

Despite the comment not being directed at Israeli policies and the slur being a classic piece of anti-Jewish bigotry, the university teacher felt no compunction in writing that “If criticism of Israeli policies anti-Semitic (sic), then a criticism of Pakistani Foreign Minister would be Islamophobia. I hope you would agree that both are incorrect assertions...” She has since stood by this defence.

When Facebook’s CEO Mark Zuckerberg posted a photo of his pet dog wearing a skullcap and a Jewish prayer shawl, the trolling came thick and fast, mixing anti-semitism and anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian sloganeering and graphics (although the post had nothing to do with Israel).

On AIJAC’s own social media accounts and elsewhere, the posting of Israel-related attacks on a photo with exclusively Jewish content was not just defended – those who took exception to such attacks were harangued.

It was 20 years ago this month that the United Nations convened the “World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance” in Durban, South Africa.

The motivation for convening the conference had been admirable – an alarming growth in racism in Europe, including antisemitism, after the fall of the Soviet Union; South Africa throwing off apartheid; and other geopolitical

factors, had pushed racism and xenophobia to the forefront of public debate.

Yet what actually transpired

demonstrated the hypocrisy, double standards and moral turpitude of a great many self-proclaimed anti-racists.

At the NGO forum preceding the main event, blatantly anti-Jewish material was distributed, including literature alleging international Jewish conspiracies and cartoons with extreme anti-Jewish caricatures.

Delegates from Jewish organisations (I was registered by the World Jewish Congress) endured verbal abuse and physical threats, both outside and inside the meeting tents.

A session I was due to address, on comparative legal and political responses to Holocaust denial, was cancelled – because the police could not guarantee the security of the presenters!

The session devoted to global antisemitism, at which I

was able to present, was subject to a pre-meditated disruption, by a collection of far-leftists, Islamists and factotums of authoritarian regimes such as Syria.

The fundamental dishonesty of the organisers came to the surface with the treatment meted out to the Jewish delegates when the Conference Declaration was being compiled.

It had been agreed that members of groups subjected to racism were the ones

to authentically and uniquely articulate and define it. But when it came to the victims of antisemitism framing our definition, a different formula was arrived upon which misrepresented the thoughtful and heartfelt submission from our group.

When the NGO forum submitted its deeply problematic report to the inter-governmental Conference, the expected unanimous acceptance did not happen – because one country’s delegation had the courage to record an objection to the disgusting behaviour of the NGO forum – Australia.

At the government forum, once again the rules – and any sense of integrity – were thrown out the window when it came to Jews and Israel. There was pushback and there was compromise, but the end result was a conference which will go down in the annals of infamy.

The UN, true to its form, has planned a celebration of the 20th anniversary this September. Australia and numerous other democracies are staying away. No country with any self-respect should even consider participation.



Even Mark Zuckerberg’s “Jewish” dog drew a torrent of online abuse and trolling (Source: Facebook)



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