

AFGHANISTAN DISASTER



The implications of the Taliban takeover for Israel, the region and the world

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition looks at the likely aftermath of the dramatic and rapid reconquest of Afghanistan by the Taliban in the wake of the US and allied withdrawal.

Israeli strategic expert Col. (res.) Eran Lerman explains the potentially terrible implications, and what both the US and Israel can do about them, while former senior US official Dr. Paul Miller argues that this outcome was not inevitable, despite claims to the contrary. In addition, Seth Frantzman looks at the various actors who will benefit from the Taliban victory, including Russia, China, Iran and Turkey, while Ariel Ben Solomon focuses on Iran's reaction under new ultra-hardline President Ebrahim Raisi. Finally, Oved Lobel explains how to understand the Taliban's role within the global jihadist network.

Also featured this month is Ahron Shapiro on the lessons to be learned from Israel's latest COVID-19 wave, which is worsening despite high vaccination rates – while Kathleen Hayes provides a unique memoir of her decades immersed in the antisemitic far Left.

Finally, don't miss Ran Porat on historical examples relevant to attempts to put the Iranian nuclear genie back in the bottle, Amotz Asa-El on Israel at the Tokyo Olympics, and Jeremy Jones' reflections on the 20-year anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

We invite your feedback on any or all of it at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN****COLIN RUBENSTEIN****PICKING UP THE PIECES**

The collapse of the Afghan security forces like a house of cards, and the chaotic, humanitarian disaster that was left in the wake of the withdrawal of US and allied military forces from Afghanistan, will have effects far beyond the borders of that country. A powerful image has been created of victory for the Islamist fundamentalist Taliban over Western power, culture and values – which inevitably encourages and is likely to lead to explosive growth in Islamist violence, terrorism and extremism over coming years.

After 20 years of military engagement at great human cost and two trillion dollars of investment, Washington's desire to disengage completely from Afghanistan may have been understandable, but the Trump Administration's deal with the Taliban was deeply problematic. Moreover, the haphazard, unduly hasty and perhaps even thoughtless way the US went about the withdrawal is difficult to comprehend or defend. US President Joe Biden's failure to admit his Administration's obvious failings in this regard is also troubling.

The heart-wrenching scenes at Kabul's airport of refugees packing US transport planes and sometimes literally tying themselves to the aircraft, while the US, figuratively hat-in-hand, is asking the Taliban to give it time to leave – these are more than just signs of catastrophic operational failures.

They are powerful recruitment tools for anti-Western jihadists that can and will be used to create a narrative of an America on the run, in decline and lacking resolve. With America's reputation damaged, current US strategic partners will be pushed toward considering realignment with unscrupulous and dangerous actors like Russia, China, Turkey and Iran, with potentially disastrous consequences.

While some pundits unconvincingly argue there may be major differences in behaviour between today's Taliban and the one that was ousted in 2001, there seems little doubt the country's hard-fought advances in human rights ushered in by the US-supported government – including, especially, freedom and education for women and religious freedom – are now history.

The 2021 Taliban is unquestionably more media savvy than its pre-war predecessor, but no amount of spin can obscure the fact that Islamist terror groups everywhere view the Taliban's success as their own, and are looking for ways to both exploit and imitate it. And tellingly, the Taliban are unashamedly pandering to them.

For example, Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh warmly congratulated the Taliban's leader Abdul-Ghani Baradar by phone, saying the end of the US occupation of Afghanistan "is a prelude to the demise of all occupation forces, foremost of which is the Israeli occupation of Palestine." Baradar, in turn, wished Hamas its own "victory" in its efforts to do away with Israel.

That's not to say that, for all the bombast, the Taliban's success has any chance of rubbing off onto Hamas. On the contrary, in realpolitik terms, the ease with which the Taliban pushed aside the US-trained and equipped Afghan army should only increase Israel's worth in the eyes of Americans and their Western allies – a capable and dependable ally that shares Western values, does its own fighting, and country for country, yields by far the best return on every dollar of military aid US taxpayers provide it.

Moreover, this heightened appreciation for Israel is likely to be widely shared across the region. With American credibility damaged, Sunni Islamism empowered by the Taliban victory, and Iran also becoming more aggressive, moderate Sunni Arab states will also potentially be looking to Israel as an ally and source of support in an increasingly precarious region.

While the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan is a fait accompli, the US Administration must immediately look for ways to reverse the narrative of defeat and decline and rehabilitate both its standing with its allies and its reputation and credibility as a superpower that will not capitulate to either terror or the states that sponsor it.

The top priority now for the Biden Administration must be a toughening of its handling of Iran, addressing both its nuclear threat and its destabilising behaviour in the region through its proxies and clients such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and Yemen's Houthis.

A crisis point has been reached on the Iran nuclear file, and time is running out for meaningful action. On Aug. 6, Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz informed a gathering of ambassadors that Iran had amassed enough nuclear material to build a nuclear weapon within ten weeks. Negotiations towards ending Iran's violations of the 2015 nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), look all but dead, with many experts believing the Iranian regime, fronted by new ultra-hardline President Ebrahim Raisi, has already decided it does not want or need a new nuclear deal.

The fall of Kabul gives the US an opportunity it should seize to rethink its approach, and review and renew its

relationships and alliances dedicated to preventing a resurgence of Islamist terror, while also putting the brakes on Iran's conventional and nuclear military ambitions.

Israel too must play its part – making policy decisions that encourage regional states to agree that the Israel/moderate Arab alliance, made concrete by last year's historic Abraham Accords, is now a solid, attractive model to provide security in an increasingly dangerous environment, and much safer than turning to China or Russia.

Over the coming weeks, there will be much soul-searching regarding the 20-year failed nation-building project in Afghanistan

and the decision to pull out the last US troops. Yet what shouldn't be in dispute is the justice behind the initial decision to remove the brutal Taliban regime that sheltered al-Qaeda and its infamous leader Osama bin Laden after the 9/11 attacks.

Despite everything, there is still reason to believe the sacrifices of the thousands of Australian soldiers who contributed to this noble effort, who gave their lives or suffered severe injuries, have not been in vain. But this requires the free world's leadership to soberly reflect on the Afghanistan disaster in a clear-eyed way and act accordingly to restore moral authority, credibility and deterrence.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

"What is happening now could just as easily have happened five years ago or 15 years in the future... Our mission in Afghanistan has taken many missteps over the past two decades. I'm now the fourth American president to preside over war in Afghanistan... I will not pass this responsibility on to a fifth president."

US President Joe Biden defending the US withdrawal from Afghanistan (White House, Aug. 16).

"In implementing this flawed plan, I am disappointed that the Biden Administration clearly did not accurately assess the implications of a rapid US withdrawal. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will continue fulfilling its oversight role... on US policy towards Afghanistan, including the Trump Administration's flawed negotiations with Taliban, and the Biden Administration's flawed execution of the US withdrawal."

US Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Bob Menendez (Yahoo! News, Aug. 18).

"This is the greatest debacle that NATO has seen since its foundation, and it is an epochal change that we are facing."

Armin Laschet, likely successor to outgoing German Chancellor

Angela Merkel, on the Afghanistan collapse (Yahoo! News, Aug. 18).

"The Taliban are victorious today after being accused of backwardness and terrorism... They confronted America and its agents, and refused to compromise with them. They were not deceived by bright headlines about 'democracy' and 'elections'."

Hamas Politburo official Moussa Abu Marzouk (Times of Israel, Aug. 16).

"The military defeat and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan should offer an opportunity to restore life, security and lasting peace in that country."

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (Times of Israel, Aug. 16).

"Today, Poland approved... an antisemitic and unethical law. Tonight, Poland has become an anti-democratic and illiberal country that does not honour the greatest tragedy in human history... Israel and the Jewish people will certainly not remain silent."

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on Poland's passage of a law which restricts restitution for Holocaust victims (Politico, Aug. 15).

"Our ties with Israel are unlike any other ties."

Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita alongside Yair Lapid as the Israeli Foreign minister made a historic visit to Morocco (Reuters, Aug. 12).





SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

OLYMPIAN DISDAIN

On July 30, two judokas squared up for an elimination match at Nippon Budokan arena as part of the women's 78 kg judo competition at the Tokyo Olympics. Athletically, it was not an important match – neither competitor was expected to medal and neither did. Yet the match made headlines around the world and even prompted a glowing media release from the International Judo Federation (IJF). Moreover, it was the loser who garnered most of the attention.

The reason for that attention was that the match pitted Saudi judoka Tahani Alqahtani against Israeli competitor Raz Hershko (who ended up winning). And there is a long tradition in both the Olympics and other international competitions of athletes from Arab and Muslim countries refusing to face off against Israeli opponents – either by throwing a prior round, or by simply forfeiting, sometimes by claiming injury.

Before the match, there had been a lot of speculation whether Alqahtani – the first Saudi woman to represent her country in judo at the Olympics – would or would not agree to face off against Hershko. She did, with the support of her country's Olympic federation, and the two even shook hands afterward.

Following the match, the IJF media release praised Alqahtani and the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee, saying, "Saudi Arabia proves that, through sport, we can go beyond differences and make sport a force to unite the world."

On one level, this high praise seems absurd. Athletes go to the Olympics to compete against other athletes from all countries. Why should Alqahtani be applauded merely for doing what every Olympian is supposed to do?

Yet, on another level, actions like the IJF's statement are actually important and valuable – they are part of a larger push over recent years to break down a long-standing boycott of Israeli sportspeople that is contrary to both the spirit of the Olympics and the letter of athletic competition rules.

After decades of inaction, there has been increasing pressure from international sporting bodies on their member countries to end sports discrimination against Israel. Countries have been threatened with bans on hosting sporting tournaments unless Israelis are allowed to compete equally. In one famous case, the International Paralympic Committee stripped Malaysia of the right to host the 2019 World Para Swimming Championships because Malaysia would not allow Israelis to compete.

Meanwhile, Iran, in particular, has come under heavy scrutiny and pressure for its more or less open practice of forcing its athletes to refuse to compete against Israelis at international tournaments. Judo has been at the epicentre of these controversies

In May 2019, the IJF had hailed a breakthrough with Iran after Iranian sporting officials ostensibly pledged that Iran's athletic federations would fully "respect the Olympic Charter and its non-discrimination principle."

But in September of that same year, Iran was caught blatantly violating that pledge. At the 2019 Judo World Championships in Tokyo, Iran's Saeid Mollaei, the 2018 world champion, was called by Iranian Deputy Sports Minister Mohammad Reza Davarzani and ordered to withdraw from the semi-final rather than risk facing Israeli judoka Sagi Muki in the final. In what appeared to be a clear threat, Mollaei was then called by Iranian Olympic Committee President Reza Salehi Amiri who said security services were at his parents' house.

As a result, the Iranian Judo Federation was given an indefinite ban from all competition by the IJF in 2019 – later converted to a four-year ban by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Mollaei, meanwhile, said he feared for his life and fled to Germany. He later obtained Mongolian citizenship, went to Israel to compete and became fast friends with erstwhile Israeli rival Muki. At the Tokyo Olympics, he won a silver medal and dedicated it to Israel, saying, "Thank you to Israel for the good energy... I hope the Israelis are happy with this win."

However, neither this defection nor the IJF ban appears to have had any effect on the Iranian Government's attitude.

In 2020, the Iranian parliament placed a clause in a proposed anti-Israel bill that would have formally banned all Iranian athletes from competition against Israelis. The clause was eventually removed from the bill after athletes protested that it would likely have led to their being banned from all international competition. However, Ebrahim Azizi, a member of the parliamentary committee that drafted the clause, insisted that even being banned from all international competition would have been "no problem" for Iran, as long as it upheld its supposed ideological principles.

Of course, even without a formal law, the informal Iranian ban on competing with Israelis remains in force.


Nor is Iran the sole problem. At Tokyo, there were at least two cases of apparent refusals to face Israeli opponents, both in judo – highlighting why Alqahtani's decision to show up was notable.

Sudanese judoka Mohamed Abdalrasool simply didn't turn up for his match against an Israeli opponent, while Algerian competitor Fethi Nourine announced his withdrawal immediately after the draw was announced pitting

him against an Israeli in the second round. Nourine said, “We worked a lot to reach the Olympics... But the Palestinian cause is bigger than all of this.”

Nourine and his coach, who supported Nourine’s withdrawal, were both given bans from competition and sent home.

Nonetheless, the boycott of Israeli athletes continues to be encouraged by Palestinian Olympic Committee Chairman Jibril Rajoub, who posted photos of himself with Nourine on social media, and wrote that he appreciates Nourine’s “courageous stance refusing normalisation.”

So the drama over the Alqahtani-Hershko judo match was a symbol of progress, but also evidence of the continued prevalence of ugly discriminatory practices in sport which have been allowed to persist for far too long. 



DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

Gil Troy

A YEAR LATER, THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS ARE WORTH CELEBRATING

On August 13, 2020, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States announced normalisation agreements between the Jewish state and the UAE. A month later, on Sept. 15, representatives of the US, Israel, UAE and Bahrain signed the Abraham Accords at the White House. Anyone who cares about peace should be preparing massive celebrations of this breakthrough – yet the overwhelming reaction to the anniversary has been silence.

Apparently, this pesky peace agreement doesn’t fit the narrative of many activists, boycotters, Israel bashers and Palestinian rejectionists.

Some US Democrats resent the Abraham Accords because the president behind them was Donald Trump, not Joe Biden. New administrations like touting their own policies, and are reluctant to recognise any lingering glory boosting their predecessor. Given current Democratic-Republican hostilities, it is not surprising that President Biden would hesitate to celebrate one of Trump’s achievements. But here is a chance to be gracious – and to transform the Abraham Accords from Trump’s success to America’s, from partisan property to a bipartisan inheritance.

Such grace is harder for many self-styled peace activists, because the Abraham Accords prove that the road to peace is not through Palestinian extremists in Ramallah or Gaza City. For decades, activists called to appease the Palestinians, no matter how outrageous their demands and no matter how violent their tactics. The Abraham Accords bypassed Mahmoud Abbas’ oppressive Palestinian Authority and Hamas’ murderous dictatorship. Instead of giving

Palestinian rejectionists veto power over the Middle East peace process, the accords suggest that true peace will come as Israel joins more and more peace agreements, and Palestinian leaders start compromising.

Boycotters, like the ice cream company Ben & Jerry’s, fear the Abraham Accords because they disprove the pretence that anti-Israel boycotts enhance peace. Boycotts only fuel the Palestinian anti-normalisation efforts by seeking to cut off contact with Israelis. The Abraham Accords flip the conversation around, showing that peace results from encouraging cultural, financial and even recreational ties. The enthusiasm of so many Israelis and Emiratis – and now Moroccans – for new relationships, expressed in song, tourism, business deals and shared start-ups, proves that boycotts are hope-killers, when what the Middle East needs right now are more bridge-builders.


The accords infuriate those who seek to blame Israel for every conflict. Israelis’ giddy bonding with Gulf Arabs showed that Zionists are not “Jewish supremacists” or racists. Israel’s warm relationship with the UAE and Bahrain, its cold peace with Egypt and Jordan and its complex arrangements with Palestinians living in different jurisdictions disprove the one-size-fits-all narratives that paint Israel as a settler-colonial oppressor or apartheid state.

Most of all, Palestinian rejectionists absolutely detest the agreement. It outs them as the biggest obstacles to peace. It showed how much Israelis yearn for acceptance – and that they are willing to stretch, to compromise. In championing “mutual understanding”, “coexistence” and “friendly relations among States,” the Abraham Accords recognised what Palestinian rejectionists, terrorists and textbook authors deny – that Jews belong in the Middle East.

On Sept. 15, Israelis, Arabs and their allies should celebrate that spirit and these accords. They should play songs like “*Ahlan Bik*” – “Hello You”, the YouTube hit that Israeli musician Elkana Marziano sings with the Emirati Walid Aljasim, honouring their peoples’ flourishing friendship. They should seek out forums emphasising Arabs’ and Jews’ common Abrahamic origins and shared cultural ties, bonding over hummus and falafel rather than arguing about who appropriated whose culture.

For decades, Palestinian extremists and enablers have been spreading hatred in the Middle East and beyond, seeking more and more angry allies to demonise Israel. A year ago, that circle of hate shrank considerably, as millions of Arabs joined a circle of affection and acceptance.

We all can try expanding one circle or the other.

We need a new international holiday on Sept. 15 – which this year overlaps with the eve of Yom Kippur, Judaism’s holiest day – not just to celebrate this step toward peace, but to nurture more ties, more goodwill, more Abrahamic accords and fewer Middle East wars. 



Dr. Gil Troy is professor and distinguished scholar of North

American History at McGill University. His latest book is Never Alone: Prison, Politics and My People, co-authored with Nathan Sharansky. Reprinted from Newsweek. © Gil Troy, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

SHUFFLING THE CHAIRS

Malaysia's political quagmire continues to deepen, as COVID-19 cases surge once again despite strict lockdown measures that have remained in force since June. The flimsy coalition backing Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin finally dissolved some two weeks after the expiration of a seven-month national emergency decree on August 1.

After meeting the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (King) on Aug. 16, Muhyiddin was retained as caretaker Prime Minister until a successor – unknown at the time of writing – is appointed. What happens next is far from clear, as no grouping has a clear majority in Parliament.

The country faces a new phase of political uncertainty in which shifting alliances and score-settling take precedence over effective governance and policy reform, at least until elections can be held. The palace has stated that a fresh general election is not the best option given the severe COVID-19 crisis.

Having borrowed time for almost its entire 17-month lifespan, Muhyiddin's Perikatan Nasional coalition had promised to test its numbers in the reconvened legislature on Sept. 7. But in an about-face on Aug. 13, Muhyiddin acknowledged he had lost majority support in Parliament and sought the backing of opposition parties to keep his government from collapsing, offering political reforms that the opposition had pushed for, but the olive branch was swiftly rejected.

Muhyiddin's tenuous grip on power was fatally undermined when 11 politicians from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the largest party in the ruling coalition, withdrew support for his administration on Aug. 3. In his resignation address, Muhyiddin fired a parting shot at his UMNO opponents, claiming he was "threatened politically" for refusing to intervene in court cases involving leading UMNO politicians.

"I could have taken the easy way out by sacrificing my principles to stay as prime minister. I chose otherwise. I will never cooperate with the kleptocrats, who are waiting to be freed by the courts," Muhyiddin said, without naming the senior leaders facing corruption charges.

UMNO, Malaysia's dominant political party for 70 years until its rule collapsed under the stench of corrup-

tion in the May 2018 general election, is split at every level, from the grassroots to the executive and parliamentary caucus.

The election aftermath brought talk of reform, but momentum in that direction was blunted by the retention of Ahmad Zahid Hamidi as president in a party ballot. The UMNO stalwart faces 87 corruption charges but is vigorously campaigning while facing trial. So too is former Prime Minister Najib Razak, who has dominated by-election campaigns despite facing charges of massive corruption. UMNO appears stuck with its so-called "court cluster" of indicted leaders, with Najib actually still very popular with the grassroots and portrayed as a victim of political persecution by former PM Mahathir Mohamad.

While some of UMNO's senior parliamentary leaders have taken a pragmatic line towards political alliances, it is clear that the bulk of UMNO party cadres do not believe that the path back to power requires broadening its appeal to other constituencies. Rather, a doubling down on *Ketuanan Melayu* – a Malay-centric agenda, is seen as the proven formula.

UMNO's default position is to maintain special privileges for Malays, who make up about 60% of the population. It's also a proven recipe for entrenching mediocrity and rent-seeking across public education, the government, the Muslim hierarchy, the politically-owned press, the courts, the police and the business community.

Key to that agenda has been asserting the primacy of Islam. Although the process of gradual Islamisation dates back to Mahathir's first term – a bid to head off the conservative Islamic populism of PAS (Parti Islam seMalaysia) – the past decade has seen increased power for Sharia courts in PAS-controlled states and a dramatic increase in funding for Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), a powerful agency linked to apparently unassailable and increasingly intrusive religious rulings.

Keeping faith with Malay sensibilities, playing to its anxieties, is so entrenched that neither Muhyiddin, Najib, nor Mahathir – let alone PAS – has moved to break with it. The first-past-the-post electoral system and single-member constituencies also ensure that candidates need only appeal to the sectional interests of the dominant group.

Anwar Ibrahim is still held up as the only Malay leader who professes multiculturalism and inclusiveness, but his critics argue that he too has used Islam and pandered to Malay anxieties to further his political ambitions. The Pakatan Harapan coalition government he put together with Mahathir included such disparate partners that it was brought undone by its contradictions. True multicultural reforms were set aside indefinitely.

Whatever political formation emerges from the collapse of the Perikatan Nasional Government, it will have to deal with a country struggling to function amidst a virus that has killed more than 10,700 people and infected at least 1.26 million.



Miriam Bell

DIPLOMACY IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

It's not easy doing diplomatic business during a global pandemic, and that has made for some challenges for Israel's new Ambassador to New Zealand, Ran Yaakoby.

While New Zealand's relative success in dealing with COVID-19 means that life in the country has mostly continued as normal, the Ambassador noted that closed borders and quarantine requirements had put a halt to visitors as well as business and trade delegations, "And that's not helpful to the bridge-building process."

Yaakoby, Israel's fourth ambassador to New Zealand since Israel reopened its embassy in Wellington in 2010, has been forced to look for other ways to encourage and facilitate engagement.

One of Yaakoby's first actions on taking up his new post at the start of this year was to reach out to New Zealand's Government to offer to share information and experiences regarding the pandemic.

Israel did not do well with managing COVID last year, but worked hard on the vaccination front and succeeded in leading the world in vaccination rates, he noted. "In contrast, New Zealand has lagged a bit in its vaccine rollout. So we approached New Zealand officials and supplied data and information on the many lessons learned in our rollout."

One lesson he cited is the need to take cultural differences into the equation. In Israel, Bedouin Israelis did not want to come into the centres to be vaccinated, so vaccinators had to go to them with the necessary technology. It is a lesson relevant for New Zealand as Maori, particularly in rural areas, also suffer from low vaccination rates.

Sharing this information was an example of how the two countries, which have much more in common than most people realise, could work together in the future, Yaakoby said.

"New Zealand and Israel are members of the same club. They are both small but advanced economies, which value higher education. And, as such, one thing I hope to do is get more collaboration going on research as we have interests in similar areas, like agtech, maptech, AI and cyber-security."

Israel is particularly strong on linking the lab to the market, while there is a greater focus on pure research in New Zealand, Yaakoby said. "Our emphasis on usability,

what we can yield from the research and how the money that goes into the research finds its way back to the public is something New Zealand can learn from."

But, in turn, Israel could learn from the way New Zealand invests in its students and the greater work-life balance Kiwis tend to have, he said.

Further down the COVID-19 track, he hopes there could be a travel bubble which allows countries who are of a similar status with regards to the virus to travel freely. That would allow for proper diplomatic missions and also the exchange of international students and workers.

"Ultimately, it's all about trying to understand where there is room for relationships and collaboration, and then finding ways to best work together. It needs to be a two-way street though: we have an embassy here, so it would be great if New Zealand was to have an embassy in Israel too."

Yaakoby said he would love to see this happen as, traditionally, New Zealand had been a supporter of Israel and continues to deploy personnel to peacekeeping operations in the Golan Heights and Lebanon.

However, during the conflict between Israel and Gaza earlier this year, he realised that New Zealand not only had a very vocal anti-Israel brigade, but that a lot

of Kiwis did not know much about Israel and its history.

"Often people need to be vocal if they don't have the whole truth. They need to scream out loud to get their view across. That's not usually the Kiwi way, yet, when it comes to Israel and the Palestinians, it seems to be acceptable."

But while there is a vocal minority out there, it was necessary to ask what the majority thinks, he said. "Importantly, when I meet Kiwis, be they business people or Maori or from another community, there is an understanding and, if not, a willingness to learn."

Yaakoby said it would be great if more of the majority was willing to stand up for Israel, but he wanted to thank the organisers and attendees of the demonstrations in support of Israel that took place during the conflict. "The people involved weren't just Jewish, there were Kurds, Iranians, Maori, and many others. It was encouraging to see."

Looking to the future, he emphasised that an innovation agreement between Israel and New Zealand has already been agreed on by both governments and would help boost the relationship. "While it needs to get a final sign off from the Israeli Government, which has proved difficult due to election turbulence, it has the green light. It's there in words, we just need to be able to act on the ground."



New Israeli Ambassador to New Zealand Ran Yaakoby
(Credit: Israel Foreign Ministry)



BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR

On Aug. 16, two rockets were fired at Israel from Gaza, the first since the Israel-Hamas conflict in May. One was intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defence system. Earlier, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) had sworn it would avenge the deaths of four Palestinians killed in a shootout during the attempted arrest by Israeli forces of a Hamas operative in Jenin.

On Aug. 12, a Hamas drone flew into Israel from Gaza and was shot down.

On July 25-26 and Aug. 6, incendiary balloons were launched into Israel from Gaza, prompting Israeli retaliatory strikes on Hamas military infrastructure.

On July 22, a PIJ arms cache blew up near a busy Gaza market, killing one and injuring 14.

In the West Bank, Palestinian riots and attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians using stones and Molotov cocktails continued, especially during Israeli attempts to arrest terrorist operatives, resulting in the deaths of several Palestinians.

LEBANESE BORDER TENSIONS

Three rockets were launched from Lebanon into Israel on Aug. 4. Israel retaliated with air strikes and shelling. On Aug. 6, Hezbollah launched 19 rockets into Israel, ten of which were intercepted by Iron Dome. Israel launched a series of airstrikes in Lebanon as a response. There were no casualties on either side.

On Aug. 12, a Hezbollah drone crossed into Israeli airspace and was shot down.

Following the Aug. 6 attack, furious Druze villagers in Lebanon detained four Hezbollah operatives and

their rocket-launching truck for using their town as “human shields” to fire at Israel. The operatives were arrested and their rocket-launching truck impounded by the Lebanese Army, but both were quickly released.

JERUSALEM PROPERTY DISPUTE FREEZES

On Aug. 2, Israel’s Supreme Court delayed any final decision regarding the decades-long dispute over four properties in the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

The court proposed a compromise whereby the Palestinian families living in the homes would be “protected tenants” in exchange for an annual payment of NIS 1,500 (A\$630) to the Jewish-owned Nahalat Shimon Company that has been found to own the properties and is seeking to evict them. Both sides rejected the proposed compromise.

In May, Hamas had used tensions arising from the Sheikh Jarrah dispute as a pretext for launching missiles from Gaza into Israel, sparking 11 days of war.

On Aug. 9, the Jerusalem Court for Local Affairs froze demolition orders until February 2022 on dozens of homes in the Silwan neighbourhood of Jerusalem that had allegedly been built illegally on public land. However, the court order would allow demolition of 16 of the buildings to proceed.

QATARI MONEY TO GAZA

An agreement reportedly brokered in early August between Qatar and the Palestinian Authority (PA) to transfer Qatari aid money to some 100,000 needy families in Gaza has reportedly run into difficulties.

In the past, Qatar had made regular US\$30 million (A\$40 million) cash payments to Gaza to pay needy families, the salaries of Hamas officials, and for fuel for the power plant – without PA participation. But following the Gaza war, Israeli PM Naftali Bennett prohibited Qatari money from being delivered to the enclave in “suitcases of cash” – much of which is alleged to have ended up in Hamas hands – insisting on an alternative.

The PA is opposed to transferring funds to anyone affiliated with Hamas.

Hamas has threatened to resume violence unless the funding is resumed. Discussions are reportedly under way for the UN to facilitate the transfers.

HAMAS PROTECTS TUNNELS UNDER GAZA SCHOOLS

Hamas has blocked UN experts from entering two United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools in Gaza because of terror tunnels dug by Hamas under the schools.

Experts from the UN Mine Action Services (UNMAS) arrived during early August at an UNRWA school in Gaza’s Zeitoun neighbourhood, following claims unexploded IDF munitions remained there after the May conflict. UNMAS personnel were surprised to find a Hamas military tunnel dug under the school. Learning of this development, Hamas promptly dispatched police, who demanded the UN team leave.

In response, the UN cancelled scheduled checks of another UNRWA Gaza school in Rafah, where a tunnel was also suspected to exist. UNRWA also announced that these two schools, where 4,000 students study, cannot open unless UN teams are allowed to inspect them.

IRAN ATTACKS TANKERS IN THE GULF

A British and a Romanian crew member were killed on July 29 in an Iranian drone attack on the oil tanker *MT Mercer Street* off the coast of Oman. The tanker is managed by Zodiac Maritime, a London company headed by a UK-based Israeli businessman, Eyal Ofer.

On Aug. 3, a group of armed Iranians seized the *MV Asphalt Princess* in the same area, demanding the tanker sail to Iran. The hijackers left the ship a few hours later, as US warships approached.

Speaking to ambassadors of the countries on the UN Security Council on Aug. 4, Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz named two Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officers – Amir Ali Hajizadeh, Commander of the IRGC Air Force, and Saeed Ara Jani, the Head of the IRGC's UAV Command – as responsible for dozens of aerial terror attacks in the Middle East, including the attack on the *Mercer Street*.

WATER-RELATED UNREST IN IRAN CONTINUES

Protests that began in Iran's Khuzestan province on July 15 over a severe lack of water have widened to include demonstrations against the Iranian regime throughout the country – reaching Teheran by July 26.

Protestors were recorded shouting "Death to the dictator," together with slogans objecting to Iran's resources going toward involvement in regional conflicts.

The regime reacted by blocking the internet in Khuzestan and using live fire against demonstrators, killing several. The water shortage is caused by a drought, but also by government mismanagement of water resources.

ISRAEL-UAETRADE SET TO BOOM

On the first anniversary of the Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, trade between Israel and the UAE has reportedly reached US\$570 million (A\$785 million). Trade between the nations could reach US\$1 billion for the whole of 2021, and may exceed US\$3 billion (A\$4.1 billion) within three years, according to the UAE-Israel Business Council.

Meanwhile, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid travelled to Morocco on Aug. 11 to inaugurate the Israeli Liaison Office in Rabat. His two-day visit to Morocco was the first by an Israeli foreign minister since 2003.

Direct flights between Israel and Morocco were also launched in July.

COVID UPDATE

Israel's fourth COVID-19 wave,

caused by the Delta variant, reached a new peak with 7,177 new infections recorded on Aug. 16 alone. The number of active cases rose to 53,169, including 881 in hospital. In the month from July 18, there were 104,587 new cases, and 255 deaths. As of Aug. 17, 79.62% of the population had received at least one vaccine, while 73.72% were fully vaccinated.

Israel has now extended its booster vaccine program, adding those over 50 to the immunity-impaired people and over 60s already eligible. As of Aug. 16, 1,048,767 Israelis had received a third dose – over half of those eligible.

In the PA-controlled areas of the West Bank, there had been 3,956 new cases and 38 deaths, with 17.06% of the population having received one vaccine and 11.31% fully vaccinated. Gaza had 3,317 new cases between July 18 and Aug. 15.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

JOURNALISTS AGAINST OPENNESS

The Palestinian Authority frequently conducts its relations with its supposed Israeli peace partner in ways that aren't exactly conducive to peace. Rather than negotiate, it financially incentivises terrorism against Israelis, demonises Israel throughout the international community, and pushes for boycotts of all types against the Jewish state.

It also routinely opposes and punishes "normalisation" – ordinary human relations – between Palestinians and Israelis.

However, it would make sense, if one side feels the other is oppressing it, as the PA says Israel is doing, to try to change views inside that society, especially if one's enemy is known to be a vibrant democracy with a wide range of views, as Israel is.

And indeed the PLO, which claims to represent all Palestinians, sensibly has a body called the Committee for Communication with the Israeli Society whose

job is to convince Israelis of the Palestinian point of view. This Committee hosted a group of Israeli journalists in Ramallah on Aug. 4 to try to show them the Palestinian view of the realities of life under occupation.

You might think this would be applauded by anyone seeking to improve conditions for Palestinians – yet it was condemned as a "sin" by, of all people, Palestinian journalists.

The Palestinian Press Syndicate said in a statement, "Holding such meetings at the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, while the occupation authorities continue to commit grave crimes and violations against journalists, prevent their entry into Jerusalem and the occupied territories... is a great sin that cannot be tolerated."

The journalists apparently considered the meeting to be a form of "normalisation". So much for Palestinian journalists wanting the Palestinian story to be told. Some things are obviously more important – like maintaining a dehumanising stance of unmitigated enmity against all Israelis.

COVER STORY

AFGHANISTAN DISASTER

THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER THE FALL OF KABUL

by Eran Lerman

A tragic event of great symbolic importance is now upon us. Despite a deliberate press blackout, the US Biden Administration could not avoid the long, sad shadow of “the last helicopter from Saigon” which now also exemplifies the fate of Afghanistan.

The Taliban has marched into Kabul, and while it wisely let the Americans leave safely, it is bound to slaughter those left behind who stood against it; once again enslave women and deny all education to girls; and re-institute the horrors of its pre-2001 regime, in the name of its interpretation of Shari’ah law.

If the perception of an Islamist ascendancy takes hold, the implications for the region, and for the world, are liable to be profound.

Twenty years ago, the “Global War on Terror” seemed to get off to a promising start. Taliban rule in Afghanistan was quickly overthrown at what was at the time a minimal cost: the Americans, their allies, and the Afghans of the Northern Alliance seemed to be welcomed as liberators.

But Afghanistan, which had frustrated the British conquerors in the 19th century and did much to undo Soviet power in the 20th, turned out to be easier to conquer than to reform. Tribalism, corruption, poor governance, abject poverty, virulent variations of Islamist extremism — all added up to a toxic mix that no amount of American firepower, creative energy, and piles of public money (the full cost of the “longest war” is estimated at US\$2,000,000,000,000) could fix. President Joe Biden’s decision to pull out is thus understandable. But this does not lessen the anticipated consequences of the fall of Kabul.

The direct strategic impact of what happens in Afghanistan, landlocked between Pakistan, central Asia, and Iran,



The Taliban victory is likely to create a perception of Islamist ascendancy across the Middle East and beyond

may be limited. It is safe to assume that the Taliban would at first be wary, for a while, about hosting global terror networks such as al-Qaeda — the cost to it in 2001 had been too high. But over time, Afghanistan may yet again become a hub of terror.

Meanwhile, at the level of symbolism, namely the sense that “the arc of history” now bends towards Islamist victories, the imprint of the scenes from Kabul may be devastating. The consequence for regional stability could be severe; and vulnerable regimes may feel the need to cast their lot with the winners, or even look to Iran for shelter.

WHAT CAN WASHINGTON DO?

This damage in the world of perceptions will not be easily undone.

The scope of the brutal acts that would follow the Taliban’s victorious entry into Kabul were painfully predictable. As former US allies are executed in a public way, and

women are relegated back to servitude, the message to the rest of the Muslim world, and beyond it, could be quite dangerous. Has the West, and specifically the US, become what the prophet Isaiah called “a broken reed”?

To counter this impact as much as possible, it would be vital for the US to demonstrate – elsewhere, since the Afghan case is clearly beyond salvation – that it is not a spent force. It would also be of decisive significance to reassure traditional US allies, including Israel and other like-minded forces of stability in the region. This would require not only proactive diplomacy at the highest level, but also actions which would reassert the American commitment to their security and survival.

Central to any such demonstration, given what we witnessed in Afghanistan, would be the way the US (assisted by its key allies, Britain and France) deals with Iran’s defiant conduct. Provocations at sea; rocket fire by proxy into Saudi Arabia and Israel; regional subversion; and a rapidly advancing military nuclear project – all these require a robust response, not abject surrender at the nuclear deal negotiating table in Vienna.

True, the Afghan debacle on one hand, and the Iranian challenge on the other, are different in nature and only marginally related to each other. But the timing in which both may come together makes it even more important for the US to use this opportunity to reverse the image of decline.

THE NEED FOR REGIONAL COHESION

One of the keys to the survival of the pro-Western forces in southeast Asia, after the fall of Saigon in 1975, had been their ability to come together – despite deep historical differences and grievances – in the form of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It was created in 1967 but was given its present form and functions only by the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 1976. It was only during the mid-1990s, after the Soviet collapse, that Communist former enemies, including Vietnam, queued up to join it.

To some extent, despite the obvious differences, this can serve as a general template for those Middle East nations who fear the consequences of American retreat. The Abraham Accords already reflect, in many of their overt and underlying aspects, this need to “hang together”.

In addition to the highly proactive UAE (and the quietly persuasive work of the King of Jordan), it would be Saudi Arabia and Egypt who must take the lead in organising the response. This would be a good point in time for Riyadh to cross the threshold into open relationship with Israel – and to collect its reward for it in Washington.

As for Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, his pow-

erful message to the scholars of *al-Azhar* Islamic University on Jan. 1 2015 (which they have yet to respond to in a coherent way) remains the most lucid clarion call against the scourge of Islamist totalitarian radicalism which has swept the Muslim world. His position should be propagated and upheld by other like-minded nations (it is bound

to be reviled and rejected, however, by Recep Tayip Erdogan’s Turkey and its ally, Qatar).

As external anchors of such a regional response – given the doubts about America’s role, which will not fade away soon even if the Biden Administration does take firm action – work should be done to bring in

both France and India. Both have taken firm stands against Islamist radicalism; both have a vested interest in the outcome; and both already have strong bilateral and multilateral associations with players in the region.

ISRAEL’S ROLE

Obviously, Israel cannot be the arbiter in intra-Muslim conflicts: but nor is it a bystander. Israel has a vested interest in stemming the tide of both Sunni and Shi’ite radicalism; and in proving its utility to partners across the region, from the UAE to Morocco. Israeli diplomacy should place the cementing of these bonds near the top of its priorities, alongside the Iranian question. Military actions in the context of the “Campaign between the Wars” (a term for Israeli attacks on Iranian forces and proxies, especially in Syria) are also part of the equation, both in terms of their impact on the adversary and of their message to Israel’s friends.


The same is true for the way in which Israel will deal with Hamas rule in Gaza – which until Kabul fell was the only area in the region under the uncontested rule of a Sunni Islamist regime. Practical solutions to the humanitarian problems in the Strip, and a tough negotiation to retrieve the hostages and the bodies of Israel’s soldiers, are one thing. A political licence for Hamas to appear as the victor in the ideological struggle with the non-Islamist variant of Palestinian nationalism – i.e., the Palestinian Authority – is another matter. In close coordination with Egypt, this kind of outcome must be avoided even if Israel may seem to run the risk of resumed hostilities.

Ultimately, it may be in Lebanon – and in action against Iran – that Israel’s ability to turn the tide will be tested.

These will be decisions driven by other considerations, ultimately determined by the rate of progress of Iran’s military nuclear project. But at the same time, in other aspects of Israeli policy, the possible impact of the dark days that lie ahead should be considered.

First and foremost, intensive intelligence sharing with like-minded forces, and informational cooperation in

“At the level of symbolism, namely the sense that ‘the arc of history’ now bends towards Islamist victories, the imprint of the scenes from Kabul may be devastating”

stemming the spread of the Islamist creed, should be a key element of the joint regional and international response. The stakes are high, and the time to prepare is now. 

Colonel (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman is Vice President of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS). Previously, he served as Deputy Director for Foreign Policy and International Affairs at the National Security Council in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office. © JISS (www.jiss.org.il), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

AFGHANISTAN'S WINNERS

by Seth J. Frantzman

The victors in Kabul will be those who benefit from the Taliban taking power. They will also be those who benefit or cheer as the US appears humiliated.

Among those “winners” are Qatar, Russia, China, Pakistan, Turkey and Iran. This can be seen in various ways. Most of these countries hosted the Taliban or tacitly backed them. Others, such as Turkey, have sought to have a role in post-American Afghanistan.



Numerous countries helped the Taliban achieve their victory, including Pakistan, Qatar and, to some extent, Iran (Source: Twitter)

Iran's media is full of stories arguing that the Taliban won't export extremism or threaten anyone and that Iran has always helped the Afghan people. Iranian official Ali Shamkhani, for instance, has put out positive statements about Iran's role in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Qatar's Al Jazeera was on hand to showcase the Taliban taking the presidential palace in Kabul. It appears Qatar had advance knowledge of the Taliban's plans because Doha has been hosting the Taliban for years.

Qatar has a large US military base but has always backed religious extremists, including Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, and has given red-carpet treatment to the Taliban. This is a big win for Qatar, and it will use it for leverage across the Middle East.

While Qatar and Turkey benefit because of their links to Islamist groups and general backing for Islamist movements, Iran benefits from seeing the US leave its doorstep. Iran also wants the US out of Iraq and will use the Afghan chaos to push it to leave Iraq as well.

Turkey will be working with Russia and Iran in Syria to try to get the US to leave. All these countries agree that they want America gone from the region.

Russia and China have both hosted Taliban delegations in recent years and months. They want to have open channels to the Taliban and consider recognising them as the new government.

This is important at the United Nations Security Council. With backing from Russia and China, the Taliban can get the international clout they need and eventually obtain wider recognition.

The meetings between Taliban officials and Russian envoys in mid-August which have been reported are important.

“Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan Dmitry Zhirnov will meet on [Aug. 17] with the coordinator of the leadership of the Taliban movement [outlawed in Russia] to discuss ensuring the security of the Russian Embassy, Russian Presidential envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov said in an interview,” Russia's TASS news agency reported.

This means that Russia may consider recognising the Taliban at a future date. Russia could help put the wind in the sails of the Taliban.

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But Russia has its own background in Afghanistan. It has noted that the US-backed Afghan government has fallen quickly. Russia wants to secure Central Asia as well, including its southern flank.

That means the chaos of Afghanistan must not spread. Russia will want to work with China, Pakistan, Turkey and Iran to make sure that the Taliban are contained and come to power in a stable way.

All these countries have common interests. They want the US gone from the region. They want America humiliated. They also want to share energy and mineral resources that may flow through Afghanistan. This is their invitation to help make the decline of the US and the West more rapid.

These countries have different ideological agendas. Turkey, Pakistan and Qatar have an Islamist worldview. They have wanted to work with Malaysia and even Iran on new concepts regarding an Islamic system of trade or television programs to confront “Islamophobia”.

Turkey and Qatar form an axis that backs the Muslim Brotherhood, and as such, there has been cheering in Syria and the Gaza Strip regarding the Taliban takeover. China and Russia have other ideas about how this may benefit them on the world stage.

For now, the Afghanistan debacle is a major setback for the US globally in terms of image and the perception that US-backed systems tend to be as weak and temporary as the grass that greens with the spring and withers in the fall. 

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

IRAN CELEBRATES US AFGHANISTAN DISASTER

by Ariel Ben Solomon

Newly installed Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi celebrated the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the failure of the United States to leave smoothly after 20 years entrenched in the country – marking the beginning of what’s likely to be a more aggressive stance there and on other fronts in the Middle East.

American leaders have accused Iran of backing the Taliban in the fight against its military forces in Afghanistan.

“America’s military defeat and its withdrawal must become an opportunity to restore life, security and durable

peace in Afghanistan,” Raisi pronounced on Aug. 16, according to Iran’s state TV.

Iran has had a complicated relationship with Afghanistan and the Taliban. The Shi’ite Muslim country shares a 900 km border with mainly Sunni Muslim Afghanistan and hosts some 3.5 million Afghan refugees. In the late 1990s, Iran almost went to war with the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan after several Iranian diplomats were killed, and the Islamic Republic had cooperated with the United States early on in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 with intelligence support, before relations deteriorated during the Bush Administration.

Nevertheless, the embarrassment of the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan and the swift Taliban victory over the Western-backed government represent an opportunity for Iran to take a more defiant posture against an America on the retreat from the Middle East.



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi: Seeking to exploit the US defeat in Afghanistan to aggressively advance Iran’s regional goals (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

“The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that the reign of the will of the wronged people of Afghanistan has always created security and stability,” said Raisi. “While consciously monitoring developments in the country, Iran is committed to neighbourly relations.”

Iran proxies Hamas and Hezbollah have come out praising the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. They see it as a model for defeating the United States and Israel in the Middle East.

RAISI’S HARDLINE CABINET

Raisi presented a cabinet of hardliners on Aug. 12, including Gen. Ahmad Vahidi as interior minister. He is a former defence minister wanted by Interpol for his alleged role in the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish cultural centre in Buenos Aires that killed 85 and injured hundreds.

Meir Javedanfar, a lecturer on Iranian politics at IDC Herzliya in Israel, told JNS that the new Iranian Government and its composition is a message to the international community that Iran will not be so forthcoming and as during the previous term of President Hassan Rouhani.

“The latter was at least more accommodating rhetorically. But those days are over,” he said.

Javedanfar sees Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as being the impetus behind the new Government.

In terms of what actions can be expected from the new Government, Javedanfar predicted that “you could almost call it the Khamenei Government; the people now in charge can be assumed to have been appointed directly from the leader himself.”

As per the ongoing negotiations to revive the 2015 nuclear deal, he said it’s too soon to speculate if this new Government signals the end of the talks. “I do think the composition of the new Government means Iran is sending a tougher message to the US negotiators, but an agreement might still be possible,” said Javedanfar.

The International Atomic Energy Agency stated in a report presented to member states on Aug. 16 that Iran is advancing its work with uranium metal.

“On 14 August 2021, the Agency verified... that Iran had used 257 g[rams] of uranium enriched up to 20 percent U-235 in the form of UF₄ (uranium tetrafluoride) to produce 200 g[rams] of uranium metal enriched up to 20 percent U-235,” said the UN nuclear watchdog.

Such work is not going to help advance talks that are already at an impasse.

IRAN’S AGGRESSIVE POLICIES ‘LIKELY TO CONTINUE’

Ali Alfoneh, a senior fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told *JNS* that “the Iranian president does not necessarily represent a belligerent line, but lessons learned by the Iranian state in the past decade are likely to lead to a more confrontational approach.”

He wrote in a recent article that this aggressive approach is likely to continue due to four main lessons learned by officials in Teheran.

First, proxy wars secured military victories in Syria and Yemen. Second, Iran survived the Trump Administration’s nearly four-year “maximum pressure” campaign. Third, no military retaliation came for attacks against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. And fourth, the coronavirus pandemic has led to more government control of the country, rather than less.

Add Afghanistan to this list of countries where Iran is likely to push to increase its influence drastically after the US military withdrawal.

The collapse of the Afghan military could serve as further motivation for Iran to aggressively target American-allied Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as countries like Jordan.

AIR

THE TALIBAN AND THE JIHADIST NETWORK

by Oved Lobel

It took the Taliban less than ten days to manoeuvre their way into Kabul and reconquer Afghanistan, undoing two decades of hard-fought political, security, and humanitarian gains made by the US and its allies.

With al-Qaeda and the Taliban poised to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks victoriously in Kabul, it is important to understand that the consequence of US President Joe Biden’s withdrawal from Afghanistan was not simply a local humanitarian catastrophe, though it is definitely that, as anyone who has watched the footage can see.

In “The Graveyard of Empires: The Causes and Consequences of American Withdrawal from Afghanistan,” a recent report I penned for *European Eye on Radicalization*, I tried to explore the historical and contemporary players in the conflict, their relationship to one another and the likely consequences of American withdrawal. While some of its speculation has been overtaken by events, the overarching picture remains that withdrawal will unleash three related transnational jihadist movements – Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and the Islamic State (IS), which had hitherto been partially kept in check by a small and indefinitely sustainable Western military footprint.

It would not be an exaggeration to say Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution in 1979 catalysed the war that has been raging for the past four decades. While Pakistan had instrumentalised the Muslim Brotherhood to try to conquer Afghanistan since the early 1970s, it was the 1979 mutiny of Captain Ismail Khan, a secret member of Islamist party Jamiat-e-Islami (Jamiat) in the Communist Afghan military, that presented the first existential threat to Kabul.

Jamiat’s leader Burhanuddin Rabbani viewed the revolution in Afghanistan as an extension of that in Iran, and Pakistan’s own Islamists were also inspired by Khomeini’s revolution.

Pakistan’s goal had always been to establish a “Pure Islamic State” in Afghanistan, and its ISI cooperated and competed with the IRGC to build occasionally overlapping Islamist networks to conquer the country in the 1980s. The final evolution of these networks was the development of the so-called Northern Alliance umbrella group for Iran and the Taliban for Pakistan in the 1990s.

Although the Taliban are technically a hierarchical and unitary bureaucracy, they are not an independent organisation as such, but one front of several in an integrated jihad-

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ist network revolving around the ISI that shifts personnel and resources to various regional and global fronts using a dizzying array of aliases. This network includes al-Qaeda, which is an essentially indistinguishable component of the Taliban and functionally their foreign operations arm, as well as several other terrorist groups.

Understanding this is essential – despite popular mythology, the Taliban are not an indigenous, nationalist Afghan movement, but a component of the global jihad. It is no more appropriate to describe the Taliban as Afghan than it is to describe Hezbollah as Lebanese – they are both internationalist movements. Like all Islamist movements, nationalism and ethnicity are not concepts with which they identify.

This principle also applies to the ISI itself, which views the actual state of Pakistan in the same way it views Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the rest of the world – merely one front in a global Islamist jihad. Contrary to President Joe Biden's constant assertions since 2008, there is no possibility of compartmentalising counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda as separate from the war against the Taliban. With the easing of sustained US counterterrorism pressure, al-Qaeda will quickly rebuild its capabilities under the auspices of the Taliban and in league with other elements of the network in Pakistan and Afghanistan like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP or "Pakistani Taliban").

Because of the US withdrawal, which directly precipitated the collapse of the Afghan security forces and resultant capture of their sophisticated weapons and vehicles, the world faces the prospect of a transnational jihadi army on the march the likes of which hasn't been seen since IS captured massive amounts of US military equipment in Iraq shortly after the latter's withdrawal in 2011. This ISI-led army will exponentially increase the threat to the Pakistani state itself – and its nuclear weapons – even as it brings India under pressure in the wake of Pakistan's Afghanistan triumph.

As if this weren't alarming enough, IS's presence in Afghanistan remains extremely potent, particularly after the Taliban reportedly freed hundreds and perhaps thousands of IS prisoners from detention facilities in and near Kabul. This "Khorasan Province of IS" (ISKP) was by 2019 widely considered IS's most dangerous regional emirate and was responsible for some of the most horrific terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, particularly against its Hazara Shi'ite minority. Even after the trilateral cooperation between the Afghan government, the Taliban, and the US – including

the US acting as the Taliban's air force in its battles with the group – ISKP retained the capability to conduct major attacks in the country and has been linked to several regional and international attacks as well.

With the end of the Afghan security forces and their joint counterterrorism operations with the US, and with the Taliban distracted over the past several months conquering the country, ISKP has likely reconstituted itself and is poised to re-emerge in an even more dangerous fashion.



The Afghanistan-based Khorasan Province of IS (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

ISKP has also reportedly significantly infiltrated the ISI's network. It is unclear which network will come out on top in this intra-jihadi competition, but regardless, this battle will further threaten Pakistan's existence. Moreover, their competition will stop neither al-Qaeda nor ISKP from launching major attacks against the region

and the West at the earliest opportunity. Without any US intelligence assets remaining in the country, the capacity to prevent these attacks has been severely diminished.

Finally, there is the IRGC, which has maintained close ties with every side of the Afghan conflict since the 1980s,

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including significant operational ties to the Taliban. Teheran has armed, trained and protected the Taliban since at least 2001 in the name of the pan-Islamic jihad. Teheran even reportedly recruited Sunni Afghan refugees in Iran for the Taliban's ranks and embedded Iranian intelligence officers in its assaults.

Furthermore, as part of its competitive cooperation with the ISI network, Iran has been a primary headquarters for al-Qaeda alongside Pakistan for decades. Al-Qaeda's number two leader, Abu Muhammad al-Masri, was assassinated in Iran, reportedly by Israel's Mossad, in 2020.

For decades, the IRGC has been throwing foreign legions of Afghan Shi'ite jihadists into conflicts from Iraq to Syria. Many of these are recruited from the Afghan Hazara refugee population in Iran. The new refugee crisis in the wake of the Taliban conquest will provide the IRGC with a mass of fresh Hazara recruits to press-gang into its jihad across the Middle East.

The IRGC-affiliated Northern Alliance, the Afghan factional militia enthroned by the US as Afghanistan's new government in 2001 after several years of losing ground to the Taliban, was built around a core of Shi'ite jihadists known as Hizb-e-Wahdat (Wahdat). While for now the IRGC doesn't seem to be contesting the Taliban takeover, this could change at any moment. Nearly all the warlords who comprise the Northern Alliance are still alive, and while they have currently fled or come to agreements with the Taliban, this is meaningless in the long term – the situation was identical in the 1990s.

It may seem paradoxical that the IRGC supports all sides against one another, but its primary pursuit is the chaos and instability that allows it to gain influence over all sides and export and entrench its Islamic revolution.

Iran, Pakistan, and now Afghanistan under the Taliban – which for the first time ever now rules the entire country – form a triangle of competing, but also frequently cooperative, global jihad.

The reverberations of the Taliban's victory will likely extend far beyond the region. Like the Soviet withdrawal in the 1980s, the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005, and the American withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, the perception among jihadists that they have defeated a major power yet again will supercharge both regional and transnational terrorist groups, and vastly increase the terror threat to virtually every nation on the globe.

With the end of both the Western counter-terrorism operations and intelligence presence in the region, it is only a matter of time before the security consequences of the Afghanistan withdrawal manifest themselves in a deadly fashion. Regardless of which jihadi network comes out on top in the struggle, the battle will almost certainly not stay local for long.

AFGHANISTAN DIDN'T HAVE TO END THIS WAY

by Paul Miller

As Afghanistan collapsed, there was no shortage of explanations, justifications and outright myths taking root, some encouraged by the Biden Administration. Among the most common: This was inevitable; the US presence was unsustainable; the Administration was boxed in by the 2020 peace deal with the Taliban; if the US had repudiated the deal, the Taliban would have gone on the offensive and resumed killing US troops.

And for what? The US and its allies gave it their best for 20 years, they say, proving that the mission was effectively impossible. The rapid collapse only demonstrates that we were never going to succeed no matter how long we stayed. We achieved the most important thing: Osama bin Laden is dead. The Afghans have to run their own country. We cannot stay there forever, and we can keep an eye on al-Qaeda from afar to make sure they do not threaten us.

On the surface, these explanations make a compelling case. It is also a comforting case, because it washes our hands of responsibility for what is about to happen. As Afghan women fall back under the Taliban's uniquely cruel tyranny, as the Hazara and Shi'ites flee the Taliban's near-genocidal oppression of religious dissidents – we can tell ourselves, "There's nothing we could have done."

Of course, none of that is true. The myths are just that: myths. The US presence in Afghanistan the last few years was tiny – just 2,500 troops before the start of the final withdrawal. It was indefinitely sustainable. There was no significant anti-war movement to speak of, there was no domestic political pressure to withdraw, and no election will hinge on US policy toward Afghanistan.

US and allied troops faced low risks in Afghanistan, and the low casualty rate was not a function of the 2020 peace deal. Just 66 US personnel have been killed in action since 2014, less than one per month for nearly seven years. That is not to make light of the loss of individual soldiers, but it is to recognise, in historical perspective, that the conflict in Afghanistan is very small and US ground troops have not been involved in direct combat in large numbers for years.

The coalition's mission in Afghanistan accomplished some important successes. There have been no large-scale international terrorist attacks emanating from Afghanistan or Pakistan since 2001. The Afghan people broadly supported the country's new constitution. The Afghan economy showed consistent growth. By virtually every metric of human development, Afghans are better off today than they were 20 years ago – except that many of these successes are likely to unravel with the Afghan army's collapse.

The rapid collapse of the Afghan army was not inevitable and is not a sign that the mission was always doomed, nor that we never would have succeeded. We had been making slow, fitful progress building a new Afghan security force from scratch. In 2021, it was better than it had been in 2001 – because in 2001 it did not exist. It was better than it had been in 2006 – because the Germans, British, and the UN, which had assumed responsibility for training the new army and police, wasted five years doing essentially nothing.



The US-trained Afghan army was improving, but everyone knew it was not yet ready to operate without international assistance (Source: Flickr)

The US took over and cobbled together a fighting force by 2010, one that has lost tens of thousands of soldiers keeping the Taliban at bay for the past decade. The Afghan army was again better this year than previously, but the US Department of Defense truthfully reported year after year that it was not ready for fully independent operations yet.

Historians will give us the full story decades from now, but surely President Biden's announcement of a full withdrawal – when everyone, including the US Department of Defense, knew the Afghan army wasn't yet ready to stand independent of international assistance – had a crippling effect on the morale of Afghan troops.

Some are now sneering at the Afghan troops' supposed lack of willpower, patriotism, or grit – but consider, if you know that your army is simply not equipped to win the battle that's coming, why fight? It is an individually rational decision to save your life by not fighting, a decision that, when multiplied, loses a war.

It is easy to envision the counterfactual: If the United States had maintained a small presence (perhaps marginally larger than what Trump left behind), it could have kept the Afghan army in the field indefinitely, giving time and space for the political situation in Kabul to sort itself out, for a fresh round of negotiations with better leverage against the Taliban, and for reconstruction and development to continue.

Critics may complain that “we can't stay forever.” Perhaps, but the US could have stayed long enough for the military presence to evolve, very gradually, into a near-peace-time deployment. Again, the military presence was small, low-risk, and relatively low-cost.

And we should have stayed because the mission is not over. While bin Laden is dead, al-Qaeda is not and, along with the Islamic State and a murderers' row of copycat jihadists, is almost certain to regain safe haven in Afghanistan and Pakistan following the collapse of our allies. Our presence for the past 20 years kept jihadists on the run, in hiding, and focused on avoiding our air strikes and special forces. They now will have room to breathe, which means room to plan, recruit, train, and fundraise.

The myths about Afghanistan's collapse – that we were actually powerless and the mission was always inevitably doomed – denies the reality of the United States' agency. Our policymakers made specific strategic missteps that caused direct, avoidable harm, including Bush's light footprint, Obama's withdrawal timetable, Trump's peace deal, and Biden's inexplicable withdrawal, each of which made a bad situation worse.

That is why Biden's claim that the Afghans just have to start taking responsibility for their own country was so mendacious. He was telling a drowning man to take responsibility for swimming while reeling in the life preserver the man had been clinging to. He overestimated the Afghans' ability to fight on their own while minimising American responsibility for the crisis in the midst of which we are abandoning them – all while preaching a soothing myth that there was nothing we could have done. Many will be eager to believe him because it is much easier, emotionally and cognitively, to believe in the myth of our powerlessness than in the reality of our own stupidity and moral cowardice.

AIR

Paul D. Miller is a professor of the practice of international affairs at Georgetown University. He served as Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan on the National Security Council for Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. He is a veteran of the war in Afghanistan. Reprinted from The Dispatch (thedispatch.com). © The Dispatch, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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Virus versus Vaccines

Lessons from Israel's fourth COVID-19 wave

by Ahron Shapiro

In the fight against COVID-19, Israel was the first country to mass vaccinate its population, beginning in December 2020, inoculating 80% of adult Israelis by early August 2021. By early June 2021, it became the first to nearly eliminate the spread of the virus through the use of those vaccines.

Today, it's the first vaccinated country to wrestle with a major resurgence of cases spurred on by spread of the Delta variant of the virus, with over 8,000 new cases a day by mid-August. It's also the first country to take the gamble to fight the Delta flood through a lightning rollout of booster shots for the middle-aged, elderly, and more vulnerable populations, even before medical studies have weighed in on the effectiveness of such a move. By Aug. 16, over a million Israelis had received a Pfizer booster shot.

While hounded at times by setbacks, Israel's gritty and determined path through the pandemic has given the world much to observe and learn from across a variety of aspects of the COVID-19 battle. These include its early adoption of a national vaccination strategy; the efficiency and shortcomings of its vaccine rollout; the country's readiness to share medical data about the effectiveness and side effects of vaccines; and Israel's emerging biotech solutions for the prevention, detection and treatment of COVID-19 globally.

Israel's successful pitch to trial Pfizer's mRNA vaccine on a national scale is a story that is already widely known. "[Pfizer] guaranteed enough supplies to vaccinate [Israel's] entire population in exchange for clinical data on how the jab fared in the real world," wrote the *Financial Times'* David Crow this month. "Israel has since become a lodestar, not just for Pfizer but for public health officials across the world."

Indeed, Australia's selection of Pfizer as perhaps our most trusted vaccine has added additional value to Israel's data sharing on our shores.

Israel endured three lockdowns over the course of the pandemic, costing the country's economy an estimated 200 billion shekels (\$85 billion), the last ending in February of this year. A lockdown has been avoided since Prime Minister Naftali Bennett succeeded Binyamin Netanyahu in June, despite a major outbreak of new Delta strain cases.

In opposition, Bennett had been an outspoken critic of



Israel has pioneered third dose "boosters" for its most vulnerable citizens – a policy now being taken up by other Western nations (Source: Flickr)

lockdowns, and he remains unequivocal about his preference to steer Israel through the current Delta wave without having to resort to another one.

"The Delta wave is sweeping the whole world right now, and also the State of Israel," Prime Minister Bennett said on Aug. 15. "The State of Israel is facing the peak of morbidity in the coming weeks. We can defeat the [COVID-19] plague with two main tools: masks and vaccines. Whoever gets vaccinated saves another business, whoever gets vaccinated prevents another child from sitting for a year in front of Zoom, therefore, go out and get vaccinated and wear masks."

"The previous government tried all the restrictions – three closures and spent NIS 200 billion," Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz told Israel's *Reshet Bet* radio station on Aug. 15. "We're sizing up the [latest] outbreak and fighting with mass vaccinations, in a large and powerful operation. We are also increasing restrictions and hope these measures will help us prevent closure."

Those restrictions include the reinstatement of Israel's Green Pass system which bars unvaccinated, untested or unrecovered Israelis from attending large gatherings. The country has also tightly regulated international travel again and required quarantine for incoming travellers from all but 10 countries.

The Director General of Israel's Ministry of Health, Prof. Nachman Ash, told Israeli media that the effects of the booster campaign will be closely monitored as the country moves closer to the start of the school year in early September and the month-long Jewish High Holiday season beginning on Sept. 5. If the infection rate does not slow sufficiently, he said, a lockdown will become unavoidable and the start of the school year may be delayed.

With respect to the school year, Israel is planning an innovative five-step plan to avoid abandoning on-site learning even if new COVID cases continue to spread: rapid antigen testing before the first day of class; serological tests for antibodies to identify students who have already had the virus and may have better immunity; special protocols

for containing an infection from spreading throughout a school without necessarily closing down classes for the uninfected, behavioural modifications; and, of course, vaccinations.

A FOCUS ON THE UNVACCINATED AND UNDER-VACCINATED

Besides providing booster shots to older and vulnerable Israelis, and imposing new restrictions and border controls, Israeli health authorities are focusing their attention on the approximately 1.1 million eligible Israelis who are still unvaccinated.

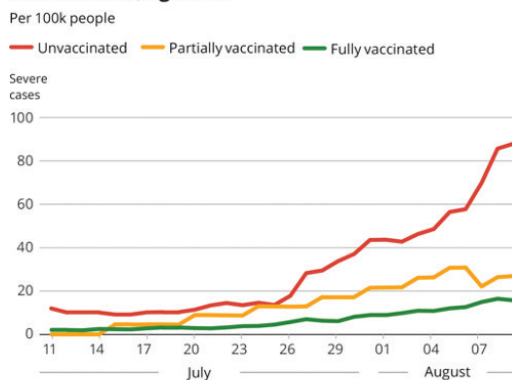
As Prof. Ran Balicer, head of a committee of experts advising the Health Ministry on the pandemic, told *Ha'aretz* on July 26, "What is clear is that the chances of vaccinated people getting infected is lower than those who are not vaccinated, and that if they do get infected, their chances of serious illness are lower."

In the current wave, unvaccinated Israelis have been shown to be up to six times more likely to contract serious illness from COVID than their vaccinated counterparts. As of Aug. 10, Israeli Health Ministry data showed that among Israelis aged 60-plus, there were 16.6 people per 100,000 in serious condition. For the unvaccinated, the number was 98.5 out of 100,000.

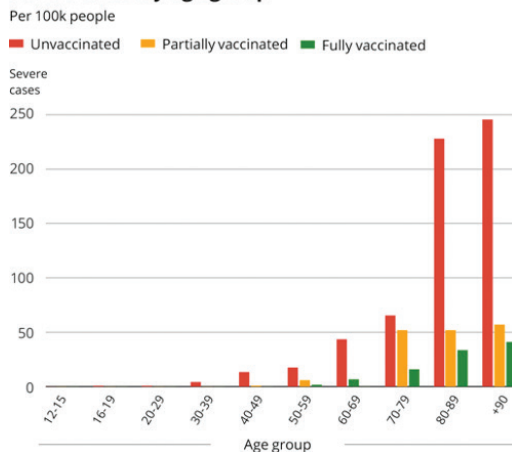
Health Ministry officials identified three groups of Israelis that were lagging in vaccinations in comparison with the rest of the country: Israeli Arabs, ultra-Orthodox Jews, and younger Israelis in their teens and twenties.

Prof. Bishara Bisharath, chairman of the Society for the Advancement of Health in Arab Society, placed part of the blame on fatalism endemic to Arab culture, telling *Israel's*

Severe cases, ages 60+



Severe cases by age group



Source: Ha'aretz

Channel 12: "In the Arab sector there is a belief in fate – 'everything is written' [pre-determined by fate] and therefore there is hesitation to go get vaccinated," he said.

However, Bisharath noted, Arabs were more likely to follow the advice of doctors than politicians or government officials.

"The impact of the medical staff treating them directly can have an impact. We encourage physicians to be health leaders, enlisting all of their leadership talents is the way to succeed," he said. "We tried it in east Jerusalem. We talked to doctors and we told them it was our responsibility [to persuade patients to vaccinate]. Within a month, there was a huge change."

Vaccination rates are particularly low among Bedouins in the Negev Desert, partly because of distrust of authorities, but also because of lack of access to vaccination hubs near their far-flung communities.

Predominantly ultra-Orthodox towns and cities also figure prominently on the list of under-vaccinated cities. According to the Health Ministry, in places like Modi'in Illit, Elad, Ganei Modi'in and Beit Shemesh only about 30% of the population had even the first dose of vaccine – although officials said the situation may not be as grave as it appears since many ultra-Orthodox have already had COVID-19 in the past and could fare a bit better than those who have never been exposed to the virus.

As mentioned before, younger Israelis are lagging in vaccinations, generally by choice, as the *Times of Israel* reported on Aug. 10:

"Nationally, some 90.2% of Israelis age 90-plus are vaccinated with at least two shots, and for the 80-89 age group the figure is 91.5%. It is even higher, 93.1%, for people in their 70s. But the rates decline among younger age groups: 87.2% for people in their 60s; 84.6 for people in their 50s and 81.2% for people in their 40s.

"For Israelis in their 30s and 20s, the rates are 77.8% and 72.4% respectively. The 16-19 age group is only 68% vaccinated, and only 26.2% of 12- to 15-year-olds are fully vaccinated."

A MORAL DILEMMA

Israel's booster shot program is not without controversy. The World Health Organisation's position is for countries to avoid revaccinating while there are other



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countries (Australia among them, but especially third-world countries) that have not completed their initial vaccination drives and are short of supply.

Deputy Director of Shaare Zedek Medical Centre Prof. Dan Turner is among the prominent Israelis who have refused a booster on these grounds. And yet Turner stresses that this is simply a personal choice that every Israeli must make on their own.

And yet, here again, Israel – which saw its surplus vaccines rejected by the Palestinians in June only to have South Korea gratefully accept them – is only going through the moral dilemmas that other mostly-vaccinated countries like the United States and Canada are themselves soon approaching as the efficacy of initial vaccine doses may begin to wane. Both of those countries approved booster shots for their most vulnerable little more than a month after Israel did so.

FORWARD THINKING

The most promising future – not only for Israel, but the world – may lie in Israeli biotech innovations that are giving the world better tools to prevent infection and fight off the deadliest complications of COVID-19 for those who contract it.

While an entire article could be devoted to this topic alone, here are just a few examples:

- Israeli-developed Enovid Nitric Oxide Nasal Spray (NONS), which has just come on the market, targets the nasal cavity, where infection usually takes place, creating an environment where the virus has no chance to infect the body.

- The Israeli company Redhill has been working on an oral antiviral treatment Opaganib, designed to supercharge the body's defences against the virus and prevent its initial spread. Phase three trials have been completed and the company is expecting to release a report on them in the coming weeks.

- In terms of treatment for COVID-19 patients, researchers at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have reportedly identified 18 drugs that may reduce the deadliest symptoms of COVID.

- Israeli labs have also been working on their own vaccines, like the government-funded Israel Institute for Biological research's BriLife vaccine, which is being designed to be more resilient against COVID-19 mutations, present and future.

But arguably the most ambitious and revolutionary Israeli vaccine in development may be Oramed's Oravax oral COVID vaccine, currently in its first clinical trial.

The capsule is not only designed to be stored at room temperature making it ideal for rollout in third-world regions, but it is also designed to target multiple parts of the virus, potentially making it more effective against new variants.

"[A] vaccine comes to you in the mail, you take it, you're done," Oramed CEO Nadav Kidron told *AFP* in an interview on Aug. 1, "Imagine."

AIR

LEBANON: BEYOND HOPE?

by Alberto M. Fernandez

How long do you keep investing in failure? How much effort does one put into reviving a corpse? The late Sudanese rebel leader John Garang used to say that the regime in Sudan was "too deformed to be reformed."

In a region full of rotten, dysfunctional regimes, tiny Lebanon has become a cautionary tale of world-class implosion and corruption. The World Bank described it as "likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top 3, most severe crisis episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century."



Lebanon, once a world-class tourist mecca, has become a cautionary tale of world-class implosion and corruption (Credit: Hiba Al Kallas/Shutterstock)

And this situation has been unravelling before our eyes for almost two years, unbearably for the Lebanese, suffering from so much cruelty and privation.

And while the international community – really France and the United States – has tried to cajole the Lebanese ruling elite, the same people that caused this crisis in the first place, into taking urgent steps to allow the West to help, that elite is resistant. They have other priorities, such as remaining in power, dividing up the dwindling spoils and manoeuvring for future positions.

With its distinctive history and mix of sects, Lebanon is, of course, unique. The disaster is also unique. Many states have had imploded economies, corruption and rotten elites, but in Lebanon, these are all happening with the context of the country being ruled indirectly by an Iranian terrorist group through that rotten elite and its institutions.

Hezbollah is technically a Lebanese organisation, its

members are Lebanese citizens, but in any real sense, it functions as an extension of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). It is an occupation force whose occupiers are local citizens, akin to the old days when imperial powers would raise local subaltern forces to police their colonies for them.

Despite the seemingly insurmountable odds against systemic change in Lebanon, there are dreamers who articulate a different path. Civil society and good governance groups associated with the 2019 *thawra* ("uprising" or "revolution"), battered and weakened, still survive.

Lebanon's Maronite Catholic Patriarch has pushed the idea that Lebanon should be neutral and disentangle itself from regional conflicts (war with Israel is the reason for Hezbollah existing as an armed force, of course).

Some of these dreamers have gone even further, questioning the nature of the state itself and calling for a federal Lebanon divided into four geographical "cantons" built around the country's four main religious sects – Sunni, Shi'ite, Christian and Druze.

The concept that writer Iyad Boustany has described – embodying qualities such as "subsidiarity, self-rule and localism" – is particularly attractive, not just for Lebanon but elsewhere.

Boustany sees a federal system as the last, best hope for Lebanon's embattled and dwindling Christian population. He recently wrote that without radical change, "Lebanon's Christians will soon be no more... Not in a highly publicised massacre, not in a heroic last stand... Slowly drained [and] exhausted by time and demography and wrapped in the shame of a corrupt system, like watching a train wreck in slow motion, our civilisation will soon exit history."

A federated Lebanon seems to be one of those reformist, hypothetical ideas that will never get very far because those in power – particularly Hezbollah, but also its enablers, including Lebanese Christian ones – will never willingly give up any bit of the power, current or potential, that they hold. Where such an idea moves from the fantastical to the merely improbable is if Lebanon's decline continues with what remains of a rickety state collapsing and armed men putting up barricades to protect

their districts and neighbourhoods from looters.

Lebanon's predicament is relatively unique, although Iran is working to repeat the Hezbollah model elsewhere, chiefly in Iraq, where it attempts to rule indirectly through corrupt parties and empowered and embedded local death squads.

Lebanon seems more broken than ever and with even less chance for a realistic positive outcome a year after the Beirut Port explosion.

At this desolate point, one can only hope that one day the Lebanese dreamers – federalists, proponents of neutrality, those students winning university elections against the ruling parties, brave journalists – have a realistic chance of coming up with something better, more human and dignified.

And that in its clumsiness and lack of vision, a superficial and extremely distracted West does not just empower the latest glib and facile iteration of the entrenched status quo in Lebanon.

AIR

Amb. Alberto M. Fernandez is vice president of the Middle East Media Research Institute and a former US diplomat. © Jewish News Syndicate (www.JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

CAN IRAN BE DENUCLEARISED?

by Ran Porat

While negotiations in Vienna between the US and Iran on Iran's nuclear program appear to be heading nowhere, Teheran keeps edging ever closer to achieving nuclear weapons.

In recent history there are a few examples of countries that were denuclearised, either because they decided to do so or were forced to. What can we learn from these past cases about the chances of denuclearising Iran today?

Is there a way for the international community to force the rogue yet sovereign government in Teheran to abandon what it sees as its nuclear strategic asset – viewed by the regime as an insurance policy safeguarding its survival?

EXTERNAL THREATS A PRIMARY MOTIVATOR

Except for the first atomic bombs in history, dropped by the US on Japan in 1945 to force its surrender, countries have sought or acquired nuclear weapons mostly to deter external threats. During the Cold War, the US, UK and France feared the Soviets and China, and vice versa, and all ended up with nuclear weapons. In the 1970s, India and



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gherz@mdlaw.com.au

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Pakistan obtained nuclear weapons to neutralise each other. North Korea (2000s) developed nuclear weapons to counter US power in east Asia. In the late 1970s, South Africa chose to obtain a clandestine nuclear capability after the country's Apartheid-era white leadership felt isolated and anxious because of developments in neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia and Mozambique.

The rise of Israel as an alleged nuclear power since the late 1960s – a decision also driven by a strong sense of external threat – was one important factor driving some Arab countries to seek nuclear capabilities. Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein explained in 1978 that he was building a reactor so “[the Arabs] should have the atom [bomb] ... When ... they [Israel tells] us, ‘We will hit you with the atom,’ we will say, ‘We will hit you with the atom too.’” Libyan tyrant Muammar Gaddafi also reportedly sought various weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, from the early 1970s onward in response to Israel's capabilities.

DENUCLEARISATION SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

International sanctions contributed to, but were not the dominant factor, in South Africa's choice to relinquish atomic weapons in the early 1990s. That choice was part of an internal process of regime change which concluded with the abolition of Apartheid. Critical to the decision to denuclearise was a diminished external regional threat after a US-brokered settlement of the Angolan War, and Namibian independence.

Libya endured similar sanctions for years yet held firmly to its weapons of mass destruction. Change came only in response to the invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition in 2003, and the toppling of Saddam Hussein. Fearing a similar fate, Gaddafi renounced and later dismantled his nuclear program. Unfortunately for him, Libya quickly spiralled into civil war and he was removed from power and killed.

Sanctions and negotiations over decades with North Korea, including multiple agreements with Pyongyang, ended in total failure. The Kim family regime used the ongoing negotiations to buy time while progressing with its nuclear and ballistic missile projects. Today this dangerously unpredictable and isolated country is thought to possess several dozen atomic bombs and the means to deliver them as far as the US west coast.

IRAN'S RELIGIOUSLY INSPIRED DRIVE

We now know that in April 1984, the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, gave the

order to initiate the Iranian regime's nuclear weapons project. The reason was again external threats, especially the then ongoing war with Iraq, which saw many international players providing assistance of various sorts to Baghdad. Then Iranian Prime Minister and current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei explained at the time that the bomb was needed “to secure the very essence of the Islamic Revolution from the schemes of its enemies, especially the United States and Israel.”

Khamenei also added that Iran requires nuclear weapons to “prepare it for the emergence of the Imam Mahdi [Islam's Messiah]”. His words reveal the uniqueness of Teheran's drive to the bomb – religious beliefs. The regime believes that the bomb will facilitate the export of the revolution and eventually lead to a Shi'ite revival as Islam's leading force, as believed to be promised by God.

Diplomacy in the form of sanctions, negotiations and agreements was the main strategy applied by the international community to tackle the Iranian challenge, including especially its nuclear aspect. The 2015 nuclear deal (the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” or JCPOA) was the crown jewel in a long series of agreements with Iran, in which Teheran agreed to decelerate parts of its open nuclear program and facilitate tougher inspection of it in exchange for the easing of sanctions.

Why did the combined diplomatic approach fail to curb Iran, now potentially only a few months from becoming a nuclear threshold state?

The fundamentalist Iranian elite view engagement by the West as a sign of weakness, discouraging Teheran from making meaningful concessions to infidel countries that they are convinced are implacable enemies. The ayatollahs choose instead to employ both defiance and deceit. They breached all nuclear agreements, pushing forward at varying pace towards their goal, while misleading and undermining UN monitoring of their activities.

Responding to sanctions, Teheran's strategy is attempting to construct a “resistance economy” to maintain self-sufficiency without foreign trade or aid. This strategy of course does not apply to the regime's corrupt elite, which enjoys riches at the expense of the Iranian people, who suffer increasing distress from the impact of sanctions.

THREATS TO THE REGIME REMAIN HIGH

The Libyan and South African cases teach us that governments opt to relinquish their nuclear option only when one of two preconditions exist: either the leadership believes the threat to its existence is significantly diminished;



A nuclear Iran looks very likely unless there is either regime change, or Teheran's rulers feels they are threatened with imminent regime change (Credit: Shutterstock)

or international pressure looks likely to lead to imminent regime change.

In 2021, the level of external threat to the Iranian regime remains high – or at least so it must appear from Teheran. The US, along with Iran’s arch-enemies Israel and Saudi Arabia, lead a camp of Middle Eastern allies working together against Iran and its proxies. Teheran is fuelling these tensions, with attacks and proliferation of terror and radical ideologies directly or via proxies (Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, and various Shi’ite militias for example). Furthermore, internal discontent in Iran has been increasing as the people suffer under oppression, an ailing economy, water and food shortages, corruption and mismanagement.

The rigged election of Ebrahim Raisi, executioner of his own people, as president has completed the transformation of Iran’s regime into an extremist government controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. With even the pretence of competitive democracy now largely dispensed with, these elements must maintain a focus on external threats as the only justification for their cruel grip on power. Their lesson from the toppling of Saddam and Gaddafi after they gave up their nuclear weapons efforts is that the Iranian regime must avoid such a move lest it face a similar fate.

Israel, with the help of the US (and others?) has sought an alternative to diplomacy by embarking on an unprecedented sabotage campaign to derail Iran’s nuclear program. Mysterious explosions, cyber-attacks, killing of scientists and leading figures in the project were employed to hopefully slow down Iran’s progress toward bombmaking. These efforts appear to have at least helped ensure that even after four decades, the Iranians have yet to build a functioning nuclear warhead. This campaign, however, is perceived in Teheran as yet another strategic threat.

Israel is the only country to have successfully defused emerging nuclear threats by deploying military force – destroying Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor in June 1981, and Syria’s secret Al Kibar reactor in September 2007. But the military option in Iran’s case is much more complex, making the efficacy of any potential attack questionable. The Iranian weapons project is very advanced, facilities are spread across the country, often dug in deep underground, and well protected. Moreover, the relevant nuclear knowledge accumulated by Iran’s scientists cannot be erased militarily. Teheran’s response to any such operation is expected to be fierce, causing major damage to Israel and possibly other Middle Eastern countries.

A US-led attack on the nuclear program might have greater prospects of success, but this looks extremely unlikely any time soon.

“The fundamentalist Iranian elite view engagement by the West as a sign of weakness, discouraging Teheran from making meaningful concessions to infidel countries that they are convinced are implacable enemies”

The dire conclusion must be that without regime change, or at least the serious threat of regime change, in Teheran – both also appearing unlikely – the world can soon expect to witness the emergence of Iran as the newest addition to the club of nuclear powers (or at least a threshold nuclear state).

This conclusion requires a shift in the discourse among international policy makers. Unless they are prepared to discuss coercive measures so fierce that Iran’s ruling clerics are forced to concede that they must make major nuclear concessions to preserve the regime’s existence, the world will have to stop thinking about “how to stop Iran from going nuclear” and focus instead on “how to contain and deal with nuclear Iran.”

AIR

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

OLYMPIAN HEIGHTS

by Amotz Asa-Ei

The Israeli cabinet was in the middle of its weekly session when Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, cellphone in hand, addressed Artem Dolgopyat, a previously anonymous citizen who had just become a national hero.

“Artem,” said Bennett, “you made history and brought us huge pride,” referring to the muscular, bearded and soft-spoken gymnast who had just won a gold medal in the floor exercises in artistic gymnastics at the Tokyo Olympics. The two dozen ministers seated around the cabinet table burst into applause.

So did the rest of Israel, whose athletes were at that point barely halfway through what would soon prove to be the most successful of Israel’s 18 Olympic Games appearances.

Historically, Israel’s relationship with the Olympics started off on the wrong foot. Israel’s two-member delega-



An Olympic victory interrupted even the serious business of the Israeli cabinet (Source: Flickr)

tion to the 1948 London Games was barred from participating by British officials, who said the Israel Olympic Committee could not replace its predecessor the Palestine National Olympic Committee (which was itself created and dominated by Jewish groups), whose participation had been approved.

Fears that Britain's real reason for this denial was Arab lobbying, and that such pressure would prevent Israeli participation in future games, were dispelled in the 1952 Games, where a 26-member delegation garnered applause marching behind the blue-and-white flag at a packed stadium in Helsinki.

Athletically, however, Israel won no medals, and thus launched a frustrating 40-year history of disappointment and defeat.

Politics, meanwhile, returned to cloud Israel's Olympic appearances. The 1956 Melbourne games coincided with the second Arab-Israeli war, the Sinai Campaign, and Israel sent only a symbolic, three-person delegation, as most athletes had been drafted. Despite this delegation's token nature, Egypt and two other Arab countries boycotted the games in protest at Israel's participation.

The Middle East conflict's presence at the games became traumatic and overwhelming in 1972, when 11 Israeli athletes and officials were slain by Palestinian terrorists.

In sporting terms, that ordeal coincided with, and derailed, Israel's most promising athletic appearance until then. Sprinter Esther Roth-Shahanorov, rather than participating in the 100m hurdles in which she was a medal contender, ended up following her coach Amitzur Shapira's coffin.

Efforts to hold some commemoration of the murder of the 11 Munich victims were made prior to all subsequent Olympics, before finally being properly acknowledged at the Tokyo games' opening ceremony.

Yet overall, the conflict and its dramas were the exception at most Olympic games. The rule was that Israeli athletes competed, and lost. Some appearances were respectable, but none came close to winning medals.

The breakthrough came in the 1992 Barcelona games, when judokas Yael Arad and Oren Smadja won, respectively, silver and bronze medals. Israelis then went on to win an aggregate nine medals in judo, windsurfing, sailing and kayaking in six Olympics through to 2016 – topped by a lone gold medal to windsurfer Gal Friedman in the



Israel's latest heroes – gold medal gymnasts Artem Dolgopyat (top) and Linoy Ashram (bottom) (Source: Twitter)

Athens games of 2004.

Yet none of those performances was nearly as successful as the Israeli delegation in Tokyo's, which brought home two gold and two bronze medals. The sense of achievement for Israelis was amplified not only by the quantity and colour of the medals, but by the fields in which they were won.

Dolgopyat's field, the floor exercise in artistic gymnastics, is considered one of the most prestigious Olympic competitions, almost on par with the marathon and 100-metre dash. Nearly as well-known is the women's all-around rhythmic gymnastics, in which Linoy Ashram won gold a week after Dolgopyat's victory, becoming the first Israeli woman

to win an Olympic gold medal.

The importance of Ashram's victory was underscored by the Russian response to its representative's defeat in a field that has been historically dominated by Russian women. The Russian Olympic Committee protested that gold-medal favourite Dina Averina was the victim of unfair refereeing – a claim dismissed by the international press as simply a bad case of being sore losers.

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Meanwhile, the 22-year-old Ashram's performance was hailed by the *New York Times* as a "stunning victory" which it counted among the games' "seven moments worth revisiting."

Israel's other medals came in the martial arts, in which Israelis had excelled for decades, but here too there was further improvement. Firstly, previous success in judo now expanded to taekwondo, in which 19-year-old Avishag Semberg won a bronze. Secondly, Israel's mixed judo team gained a bronze medal by defeating powerhouse Russia 4-1 – an inspiring effort involving eight male and three female judokas.

As with so many other things in Israel, success in the Tokyo games has had social and political dimensions that are larger than the protagonists and their dramas in the arena. The first of these is the role of immigrants in Israel's recent sporting achievements.

Dolgopyat, who arrived in Israel at age 12 from Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, is but one of hundreds of immigrants from the former Soviet Union whose arrival in Israel has transformed Israeli sports over the past three decades.

Notable among these were pole vaulter Alex Averbuch, who won silver in the World Athletics Championships in 2001, high jumper Constantine Matusevich, who won fifth place in the Sydney games, rower Michael Kolganov, who won bronze in the Sydney games in 500m kayaking, and triple jumper Hanna Knyazyeva-Minenko, a three-time Olympic finalist, including sixth place in Tokyo.

Even more significantly, the Russian-speaking immigration brought trainers who introduced new techniques and attitudes that transformed Israel's athletic education.

Odessa-born swimming coach Lyudmila Zlitchonok raised a generation of Israeli swimmers, including 18-year-old Anastasia Gorbenko who last year became European gold medalist in the 200m medley, and is herself the daughter of immigrants from Ukraine.

Similarly, Dolgopyat's trainer, Alex Shatilov, arrived in Israel from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and was himself a European champion and Olympic finalist. Meanwhile, women's gymnastics in Israel have been revolutionised by Ira Vidorchik, who arrived from Moscow in 1979 and became controversial in Israel for the strict, Soviet-style discipline she imposed on her trainees.

What the Russian-speaking immigration did for Israeli gymnastics, track, and swimming, African immigration has done for long-distance running.

Led by Ethiopian-born trainers Yosef Gizachew, who arrived in Israel in 1991 at age 16, and Zohar Zimro, who arrived in 1987 at age 10, Israel fielded marathoners Marhu Teferi, Girmaw Amare, and Haimro Alame at Tokyo. All are Ethiopian-born graduates of Israeli high schools who also served in the IDF. Teferi finished 13th in Tokyo.

With personal records under two hours and 10 minutes, the three are among the world's top marathoners.

Israel's long-distance running excellence born out of Africa is topped off by Kenyan-born marathoner Lonah Chemtai-Salpetier. In Tokyo, the 32-year-old was among the leading four for 37 kilometres, until abdominal cramps forced her to slip back and finish a heartbreaking 66th. However, the European 10,000-metre champion for 2018 remains the sixth best female marathoner in the world, with a personal best time of 2:17:45.

Dolgopyat highlighted the role of immigrants in Israel's new sporting success in a different and less positive way. As was reported both in Israel and internationally, he is in an administrative predicament as the child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother.

According to Israel's Law of Return, Dolgopyat's family was eligible for citizenship, but according to Israel's marital laws, he can't marry his non-Jewish girlfriend, a translator from Belarus, in Israel unless one of them converts to another religion. Israel has no civil marriages, and the ultra-Orthodox establishment which runs all Jewish marriages will only marry two people whose status as Jews is proven and unambiguous.

Asked about this by journalists, Dolgopyat refused to make a fuss, saying instead "this is a personal matter." The humility of this response only made veteran Israelis adore their new darling even more, while also helping them appreciate the hardships immigrants must go through en route to the social acceptance any new citizen craves.

Having said all this, ten of the 12 Olympic medals Israelis have won individually since 1992 were taken by native Israelis.

Indeed, the immigrant contribution notwithstanding, the maturation of competitive sport in Israel is part of the Jewish state's own maturation.

In terms of size, with 9.3 million inhabitants, Israel's population is now larger than those of half the countries in the world, and five times what it was during the 1956 Melbourne games. In terms of investment, Israel's new affluence has bred modern sports facilities, recreational parks, and professional training programs that took long decades to emerge.

Lastly, the military burden that once disturbed and disrupted the development of talented athletes has been eased. The IDF now offers promising talents special programs that allow athletic development and professional competition even while serving in the army.

Of course, Israel's new ratio of one Olympic medal per 2.32 million citizens at Tokyo is still a far cry from Australia's very impressive ratio of one medal per 0.56 million Aussies. Even so, it is vastly closer to that standard than it was back when the Melbourne games saw a three-person Israeli delegation make a purely symbolic effort to uphold the Olympic spirit amidst a Middle East war.



From State-building to Statecraft

Israeli Foreign Policy: A People Shall Not Dwell Alone

by Uri Bialer

Indiana University Press, 2020, 356 pp. A\$74.09.

by Efraim Inbar

Uri Bialer, an expert on Israel's foreign policy, particularly its first decades, offers an account of Israel's foreign affairs in terms of the state's political, economic, and social life.

He starts by reviewing diplomacy in the pre-state era and during the 1948 War of Independence, when diplomacy was critical to facilitate immigration – the *raison d'être* of the Jewish state. The Zionist movement understood this and developed sophisticated diplomatic skills. This formative period emphasised ingenuity and audacity, and according to Bialer, a “great deal of tactical pragmatism” accompanied by a determination not to give in to international pressures on important issues: Jerusalem, refugees, and borders.

Discussing Israel's efforts to procure energy resources, Bialer relates the successful attempts to get around a market dominated by Arab oil producers, with Iran eventually becoming the Jewish state's main supplier. He, however, fails to mention that an Iranian guarantee to substitute for the loss of the Sinai oilfields was key to Israel signing the 1975 Sinai Disengagement Agreement, which eventually led to the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. Israel's oil rela-

tions during the 1980s with Mexico are also not mentioned, despite the fact that these preoccupied Israel's decision-makers at the time.

In other chapters, Bialer examines Israel's efforts to bring Jews to Israel from Eastern Europe while delicately manoeuvring *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union. He writes that Jerusalem also understood that the United Nations was a “problem and even a potential threat” as it took no action to implement its own partition plan but adopted positions reversing Israel's battlefield successes, contributing to the entrenchment of Israeli *Realpolitik*. He also explores in great detail Israel's tactical manoeuvring in defying US preferences on the nuclear issue.

Bialer's discussion of peace with Egypt is particularly instructive as he deftly describes the Egyptian state-imposed barriers to normalisation with the Jewish state; despite a four-

decades-old peace treaty and significant strategic ties, Cairo remains unwilling to allow people-to-people interactions with Israel.

Israel's exit from isolation cannot be explained as simply a function of a start-up nation with knowledge valuable to other countries. Bialer ignores other systemic factors: a unipolar system where Israel allies itself with the hegemonic power; the changes in the international energy market negatively affecting the power of the Arab bloc; and the rise of revolutionary Islamist Iran.

Bialer lacks a clear cut-off date for his account and more recent years are sketchy. For example, he focuses on the Oslo process, which collapsed in 2000, but disregards the 1991 Madrid Conference, which brought many Arab countries to the negotiating table with Israel.

Despite this, *Israeli Foreign Policy* provides a wealth of information and sophisticated analysis by an author with masterful command of the literature. It is highly recommended for anyone interested in how Israel has met tremendous international challenges.



Prof. Efraim Inbar is President of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security. Previously, Prof. Inbar was the founding director of the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, a position he held for 23 years (1993-2016), and a professor of political studies at Bar-Ilan University. He has authored five books and edited 14 collections of scholarly articles on issues related to Israeli strategic doctrine and national security issues. Reprinted from Middle East Quarterly. © Middle East Forum, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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ESSAY

Inside the Antisemitic Left

A memoir

by Kathleen Hayes

The beliefs that give our lives meaning are passed down to us by people we cherish. For those on the Left, these men and women are often dearer than family: comrades with whom we have worked and fought; shared jokes, drinks and beds; endured a third round of brain-numbing discussion on a glorious summer day while other people thoughtlessly picnic in the park. Our evolving sense of what is true is inextricably entwined with our respect and, most of all, our love for the person who teaches it to us. We think that the things they say and write and the ideas in the books they recommend must be true – because we know them to be honourable, intelligent people and we love them.

I was a devoted Trotskyist for 25 years. My initiation took place at a protest against former Soviet refusenik leader Natan Sharansky. It was 1987. I was a callow 19-year-old Berkeley University student and an anti-apartheid activist; my soon-to-be comrades were the smartest, funniest, most good-hearted yet irreverent people I had ever known. There was, predictably, a guy in the picture – my genial bespectacled boyfriend who had introduced me to the party – and the uneasy suggestion that my sudden conversion to Marxism wasn't a

purely intellectual epiphany.

I had almost certainly never heard of Sharansky (or Shcharansky, as he was at the time), but when an older comrade I particularly admired asked me, a glint of mischief in her eyes, whether I'd like to come to a 'bright red demo' against an anti-communist traitor who had spied on the Soviet workers state, I'd heard

"Eve Garrard's brilliant essay 'The pleasures of antisemitism' notes that antisemitism is less about thoughts than feelings: the transgressive pleasure of hate"

almost everything I needed. I joined their small picket line in front of the San Francisco hotel where Sharansky was speaking; and when it was over, I soaked up my new comrades' attention and praise like a parched little flower after a long drought.

'I never saw any antisemitism,' we so often hear today. And so I didn't, or seldom did, in the decades of leftist political activity that followed. It was embedded in the fabric, a thread that ran unseen throughout an avowedly emancipating worldview and was inextricable from it. It stitched together a legacy that included Marx's sometimes-troubling writings about Jews; subterranean beliefs about an association between Jews, trade and capitalism; longstanding hostility to

Jewish "particularism"; a Marxist heritage that could claim some principled opponents of antisemitism in its ranks but also many who were ambivalent or complacent about it, sometimes with deadly consequences, some outright antisemites, and every shade between.

I suspected none of this the day I joined that picket line: quite the contrary, despite all the fulminating against Zionism and the Anti-Defamation League. A prominent sign carried that day – "20 million Soviet citizens died smashing Third Reich!" – established beyond all doubt that the party was firmly on the side of good against evil. And, of course, staunchly against antisemitism.

So it takes hold. A certain way of thinking and feeling begins to flourish, in which you are on the side of progress and good, with people and a cause you grow to love more than life itself; while on the other side of that divide are "the Jews" – or, at least, the vast majority of Jews who do not unambiguously renounce Israel to the Left's satisfaction.

In this essay I will not be tracing the history of antisemitism in the Marxist movement, or its extension to the left more broadly. Many historians and sociologists have done that already (e.g., Robert Wistrich, David Hirsh, Dave Rich, Robert Fine and Philip Spencer). What I will try to do is describe how unrecognised antisemitism gained a hold over me; the purpose I think it served; and how I came to, at least consciously, recognise and reject it.

I'm not placing myself at the centre of this account because I'm fond of self-exposure. In fact, this is the most difficult thing I've ever written.

It's not only hard because I'm admitting I held some horrible views and was maybe simply an idiot; but because despite everything, part of me cringes at the thought I'm betraying people and a cause that provided meaning to my every breath for many years.



For much of the far Left, the Palestinian struggle has filled the vacuum left by the Soviet Union's collapse (Source: Twitter)

It's probably not coincidence that as I have been writing this, I keep dreaming of my former comrades. I often have nightmares involving them (oh God I have to sell that newspaper again), but these past nights my comrades are laughing or embracing me. Despite the affection they show, I know they have appeared to tell me they do not want me to write, that they hate what I am writing and the person I have become, and this knowledge makes every word an act of will. I'm writing anyway, in the hope that some good may yet come from my experience – first, that it might provide a different, or at least fuller, perspective to those committed to studying and fighting antisemitism; and second, that it might help others who thought as I once did to at least question their views.

A SEDUCTION

I joined the party, beginning with its youth organisation, because I wanted to fight for a better world and had become convinced Marxism was key to that. This is what I told myself and others countless times over the years that followed – and indeed, I remember my moment of decision as a conscious, reasoned act, one mark-

ing me as someone willing to swim against the stream. But it wasn't that simple; truly life-altering decisions never are. I can recount the arguments that convinced me, but what really made my conversion all but inevitable was my respect and, most of all, my love for the people who argued them. Some might call my decision a leap of faith, but although there's much truth to that, I prefer to compare it to a seduction. My sun-dappled Southern California childhood had given me everything except a sense of belonging and purpose, and I was ripe to give myself. I discovered the dubious euphoria of surrender to the party.

It came at a price. Wine-fuelled parties, jokes and selfless dedication to rid the world of all oppression: that was one side of party life. The other was brutal. It takes hold inexorably like an abusive relationship; by the

time you start to think of leaving, as you inevitably must, your soul is so fully theirs that life outside is viewed as no better than death. So you immerse yourself ever more deeply into the party. You lie to your parents and any non-party friends you might have, both because your membership is a secret and because they wouldn't understand.

Your world shrinks to a succession of meeting rooms in which your dear, witty, intelligent comrades periodically accuse each other – and sometimes, devastatingly, you – of capitulating to the bourgeoisie. You survive your victimisation, barely, and await vengeance by becoming one of the accusers. It is quite sick. Yet the beating heart of this toxic cycle is the most fervent and loving dedication to humanity found this side of sainthood.

This is the authoritarian organisation, in which a hunger for meaning, community and fulfilment is alternately fed and starved. My party proclaimed itself committed to total equality, while an invisible nexus of sex, power and what I experienced as love served to entrench and sanction hierarchy and oppression.

At the pinnacle stood the Great Leader, whose every pronouncement was regarded with reverence. No one acknowledged or even saw how power ineluctably determined decisions "freely" made, or how it enabled the toleration of certain behaviours which can only be deemed abuse.

We all, myself included, performed mental acrobatics when necessary to defend the Great Leader's integrity and that of the party. We learned not only to lie, but – since we simultaneously believed in our abso-

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lute scrupulousness – to believe the lies. The reward was a renewed sense of unity against our enemies, whose rendition of truth was wrong because it was against the party.

COMRADES AND ENEMIES

This is the context in which antisemitism took root. The party needed enemies as a way of cohering itself, and had them in abundance. The capitalist ruling class was one obvious if distant target, but far more venom was spewed against other leftists, some of whom I learned to hate with the fervour of a Maoist Red Guard. Then there were the ‘bourgeois feministssssss’ (uttered with a hiss), against whom the party’s fulminations sometimes reached such borderline-obscene fury it bore a distinct whiff of misogyny.

But most of all there were the reactionary, preternaturally sinister ‘Zionistssssss’. And I was no more capable of questioning my beloved party’s attitude towards Zionism and Israel than I was of challenging the belief that the Earth is round.

The pattern was repeated with regard to the Soviet Union: authoritarianism writ large. Lenin was the paradigmatic Great Leader, and the October Revolution the battle line between the righteous and their many enemies. The dispiriting realities of America in the late 20th century could be forgotten by immersing ourselves in a history populated by Bolshevik heroes and counter-revolutionary villains – much as those in a less secular age drew solace from *The Lives of the Saints*.

The injunction to hail the October Revolution made it completely impossible to consider, even in the hidden depths of one’s mind, whether the ‘bureaucratic abuses’ attributed to Stalinism might have begun earlier, with the Great Leader himself; and it meant that no matter how harshly we denounced Stalinism as Trotskyists, we had to suppress a sometimes-troubling legacy of our own. The binary

view of October as something one is either for or against inevitably cast Jews – beginning with but not limited to Zionists – as enemies.

Historians have documented how a deluge of antisemitic Stalinist propaganda took root in the Left during and after the Six-Day War, resulting in an increasingly foam-flecked anti-Zionism. My party was undoubtedly one to respond in this way: although its newspaper articles continued to assert Israel’s right to exist, those diligent formulations were effectively negated through vitriolic anti-Zionism. But there is another consequence of the 1967 war that has received less attention: how afterwards increasing numbers of Soviet Jews attempted to emigrate to Israel or the West; were refused by Soviet authorities; and were declared enemies of the Soviet workers state in echoes of the notorious antisemitic Stalinist show trials.

The Cold War in the 1970s and ‘80s was to some extent fought over the bodies of Soviet Jews, ‘refusenik’ dissidents like Sharansky. Pro-Sovietism and antisemitism went hand in hand.

The Palestinian struggle filled the vacuum left by the Soviet Union’s collapse. Communism is dead, but the Intifada lives. Burgeoning anti-Israel protests and pro-Palestinian campus activism provided a sense of solidarity that warmed a cold and lonely world. Very rarely, my party objected to some display of antisemitism by our fellow defenders of the Palestinians, but it had to be extreme and crude: blood libels, Rothschild references. Swastikas were obviously antisemitic outrages – unless they were twinned with the Star of David, in which case they denoted justified outrage at the Zionist jackboot. It didn’t occur to me there was anything wrong with this, or with the party’s frequent use of terms associated with Nazism – “*untermenschen*”, “master race” and of course “Holocaust” – to describe Zionism’s ideology and goals. I swam in a sea

of antisemitism for years and didn’t notice the water was filthy.

There’s one related issue that deserves note: the role of the Jewish anti-Zionist leftist. My party, like so many others, contained many Jewish members, some of whom were central to developing the party’s line on Israel. They gave it a legitimacy that would have been impossible otherwise. The party’s “Near East expert” – a scholarly, mild-mannered Jewish guy prone to exclaiming ‘*Oy gevalt!*’ – could not be an antisemite. Or so I thought. I also assumed I couldn’t be an antisemite because of my own family background: although my name is Irish, on my mother’s side I am Dutch-Jewish. Of all I’m ashamed of, near top of the list is how I invoked my great-grandfather, murdered in Auschwitz, to prove (to myself, if no one else) my innocence of antisemitism.

Yet for all my shame, I don’t think anything is gained by declaring myself an antisemite. There needs to be a better way of looking at this, one that rejects the dichotomy between antisemites and non-antisemites. What exist, rather, are myriad shades of grey, which shift over time according to unrecognised need. And which, sometimes, put us at war with our own identities.

AFTER THE PARTY: HANGOVER AND SOBRIETY

Fast-forward to 2016. I’d been living and doing political work with the party in London for several years. I quit the party that year for a combination of political and personal reasons I won’t go into, except to say it shook my faith in my comrades as compassionate beings. A more devastating personal experience soon after I quit left me reeling. I felt incredibly alone and betrayed. I’d thought my comrades were more than family and more than friends. It transpired they were neither; that transcendent love had been all in my head.

Only these painful personal shocks made it possible for me first to question, then to see what had been hiding in plain sight all along: first the party's streak of misogyny and the Great Leader's direct role in it; then the disturbing brutal side of the October Revolution and the Bolsheviks I'd revered. My former beliefs shattered, one after another, in the loneliest, most disorienting time of my life.



Left-wing figures in the British Labour party, such as Jeremy Corbyn and Ken Livingstone, reflect the anti-Jewish worldview that Hayes experienced in her Trotskyite party (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

But I couldn't stop: I had to know what I believed out of the party. I'd joined Labour, like so many far-left enthusiasts of Jeremy Corbyn, the moment I quit; and like so many others, I'd insisted the antisemitism charges simply reflected right-wing attempts to smear him and socialism.

But after watching the "Panorama" documentary 'Is Labour Anti-Semitic?' twice, I decided to do some fact-checking. My first assignment was clear-cut: investigating the truth behind Ken Livingstone's claims that the Zionists had collaborated with the Nazis which, I'm ashamed to say, I believed completely. My former party swore by the same book by Lenni Brenner that Livingstone cited. Only because my faith in them had been shaken, if not quite destroyed, could I even think to question it. My search soon brought me to a *Fathom* article by Paul Bogdanor, which I found devastating. I kept

reading. And finally, sickened, realised that the people and beliefs I'd loved with all my heart – and I – had been horribly, shockingly wrong.


So I kept reading *Fathom*. Yet even well after I'd accepted much of what *Fathom* had to say about antisemitism, I was confounded when I considered that I was reading and agreeing with – my God – *Zionists*. I thought perhaps I'd lost my mind. It took a long time, and many books and articles, before I could ask the question that never occurred to me all those years I was an anti-Zionist – 'What is Zionism, actually?' – and wonder how and why self-determination for the Jewish people came to be seen as the epitome of evil. I had to be painfully stripped of my most precious possession – the love of my comrades – before I could even pose that question and start looking for answers.

SONGS OF LOVE AND HATE

Eve Garrard's brilliant essay 'The pleasures of antisemitism' notes that antisemitism is less about thoughts than feelings: the transgressive pleasure of hate. To this I would only add that the hate has a corollary, love. For the left, love for one's comrades, party, the Soviet Union (once), or even socialism demands someone to hate – someone against whom hate (or a vaguer hostility) is sanctioned

by those who have authority over us. Jews, often in the form of Zionists, are the hate-object that makes possible the leftist's most transcendent love. This is what makes it so intractable: its inextricable association with all the leftist finds righteous and dear.

Ours is an increasingly fragmented world, and each of us seeks meaning and comradeship where we can. We choose our tribe, with cherished people and beliefs, and cling to them as if our lives depend on it, which in a sense they do. I get this, the fervour of Jeremy Corbyn's supporters. It's the Great Leader thing all over again. They love him and need to believe in the hope he seems to offer; as a result they perceive criticism of him as almost an existential assault. In this febrile climate, it may seem futile to try to convince anyone she might be wrong about something as ugly as antisemitism.

Yet successes are possible, minds changed here and there: count me as one. So thank you, *Fathom*. As Karl Kautsky wrote Jean Jaurès in 1899, saluting him for taking up the fight for Dreyfus and against antisemitism: "I wish your noble work full success and shake your hand with friendship." 

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NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

STRIKING OUT

Rocket strikes on Israel by Palestinian and Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon fell victim to the media's bad habit of making Israel's military response the focus of headlines and stories.

Balanced reports in the *Advertiser* and the *Courier Mail* (Aug. 7) were undermined by the misleading headline, "Israeli jets hit Lebanon". Reports the next day were more accurately headlined – "Israel in strike back at Hezbollah" and "Israel hits back at Hezbollah" respectively.

The *Herald Sun*'s first report covering the incidents was on Aug. 8 with an item misleadingly headlined, "Rocket reply to Israeli attacks."

On the *Age/Sydney Morning Herald* websites (Aug. 5) a *Reuters/AP* report was accurately titled, "Israel launches air strikes at Lebanon day after rockets strike north."

HEZBOLLAH LOSES POPULARITY CONTEST

On *SBS TV* "World News" (Aug. 5), newsreader Janice Peters introduced an interview with CNN correspondent Ben Wedeman by saying, "Israel's launched air strikes on southern Lebanon where rockets were fired from earlier in the day."

Wedeman said, "it was the first Israeli air strike on Lebanon since 2006", adding that Israel was hit by rockets from Lebanon during the May conflict.

On *SBS TV* "World News" (Aug. 7), reporter Richelle Harrison said Hezbollah fired 19 rockets at Israel, part of "a tit-for-tat move in the wake of Israeli airstrikes a day earlier."

The report included an older Lebanese man saying, "we lived in a similar period in the 1970s when

Palestinian fighters were carrying out guerilla attacks against Israel. We are now at the same status and this is causing tension."

The report elaborated on the "tension" – showing footage of angry Lebanese villagers attacking a Hezbollah fighter suspected of firing rockets at Israel, which Harrison said was "a rare challenge to Hezbollah."

FATHER EBRAHIM

In the *West Australian* (Aug. 5), AIJAC's Oved Lobel said Iran's "ageing" Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei "arrang[ed] for all viable competitors to be barred from even running" in recent presidential elections, to ensure Ebrahim Raisi, a "brutal revolutionary from the 1980s in [Khamenei's] mould", who would keep the "system intact", won.

"Raisi", he wrote, "cut his teeth during the 1980s as a brutal enforcer of Ayatollah Khomeini's system of clerical rule" and "oversaw the mass summary execution of thousands of political prisoners over several months in 1988, something of which he remains proud and for which he has been sanctioned by the US. Since then, Raisi has gone from strength to strength as a torturer and butcher, crushing all opposition and protests in his various judicial capacities, including the 2009 Green Movement."

The *Australian*'s Aug. 7 editorial noted Raisi's "forceful" advocacy "of Iran's missile-building and drone technology." This includes "kamikaze drones carrying missiles with a range of more than 1,600km that put Israel and other countries across the Middle East within target distance. Tehran has supplied them to Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah terrorists attacking Israel, and Houthi rebels in Yemen

fighting Saudi Arabia." The paper warned that Iranian attacks on tankers in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes show the "shortsightedness" of "appeasing Iran with a new agreement that eases sanctions."

LANDSLIDE HITS SBS

An *SBS TV* "World News" report (Aug. 6) on Raisi's inauguration naively said he won in a "landslide". In fact, so disillusioned were they by the lack of genuine choice, only 48% of eligible Iranians bothered to vote – the lowest ever turnout.

Writing in the *Australian* (Aug. 11), US commentator Walter Russell Mead argued that "by ruthlessly engineering the election of a hardliner's hardliner to the presidency, Khamenei has slammed the door on normalisation and nailed it shut," ending the hopes of optimists who saw a nuclear deal as the means "to reduce the influence of the hardliners."

DEATH BY PROXY

On the *Australian* website (Aug. 14), commentator Jonathan Spyer highlighted Iran's use of proxies in Iraq and Syria to attack US assets.

Spyer warned, "a complete US pullout would leave Iraq and part of Syria under the effective domination of Iran, with severe consequences for the balance of power in the neighbourhood. The militias are escalating in an effort to persuade the US to carry out an Afghanistan-style retreat."

NUCLEAR SPIN CYCLE

On *ABC News Radio* "Saturday Extra" (Aug. 14), Deakin academic Shahram Akbarzadeh said, "the [Iran] nuclear deal came with a very strict

and stringent inspection regime which is way over and above any other inspection regime that is imposed in any nuclear agreement.”

In fact, the deal’s many loopholes enabled Iran to avoid genuine scrutiny of anything beyond routine uranium enrichment at declared sites. This included needing to give Iran 30 days advance notice for many inspections. Moreover, as the Iran nuclear archive stolen from Teheran by Israel revealed, there remains a trove of undeclared Iranian nuclear technology whose whereabouts are unknown even today, despite the supposedly “stringent” inspections.

Asked about Iran-Israel tensions, Akbarzadeh accurately said, “Saudi

Arabia and Israel... have been pushing for a much more expansive agreement with Iran because they criticise Iran’s... foreign policies... connections with Hezbollah, with various militia... in the region... So, Israel, Saudi Arabia and many others have been very, very critical.”

On Aug. 12, University of Denver Professor Nader Hashemi absurdly told *ABC Radio* “PM” that “Iran and Israel... don’t recognise each other’s sort of right to exist in many ways.”

Before the Islamists usurped the 1979 Iranian revolution, Israel and Iran had full diplomatic ties. Since then, Iran’s mullahs have made wiping Israel off the map a religious and political imperative. By contrast, Israel has stressed

it has no quarrel with Iran if it would only stop seeking Israel’s destruction and arming groups attacking Israel.

ON THE DOLE

Acting ABC Middle East correspondent Nick Dole’s *ABC TV* “The World” report (July 7) concerning an Israeli law branded “racist” because it prevents Palestinians who marry Israelis from automatically receiving citizenship was marred by a lack of context and balance.

Dole explained that the law – which actually was not renewed, so is no longer in effect – was passed in 2003 after “a string of Palestinian terror attacks targeted Israeli civilians...”



IN PARLIAMENT

Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator **Marise Payne** (Lib., NSW) – Aug. 10 – “Iran’s continuing shadow war against the state of Israel breaches every foundational principle of the international community of nations and the key obligations of all member states of the United Nations. It is appropriate for the United Nations to address misconduct and its impact on regional stability and the disruption of peace...”

“The Australian government calls on Iran to work in good faith with the parties, including to the joint comprehensive plan of action, to return to compliance with the NPT, to allow complete IAEA verification of its peaceful intentions for nuclear technology and to reverse its steps towards weapons-grade nuclear material...”

“Hezbollah chose to launch a number of rocket attacks into Israel. Israel made proportionate responses. Hezbollah’s use of villages as human shields is against international law, and in this regard the courageous actions of Lebanese civilians to stop one of the Hezbollah mobile rocket launchers from escaping is worthy of public recognition. This action resulted in the arrest of the terrorists.

“Iran’s well-documented supply of funds and weapons to terror organisations like the Hamas brigades, Islamic Jihad and others fuels instability and violence, and Australia joins international calls for Iran to also cease the abuses of human rights inside Iran, particularly the persecution of religious minorities, including the Baha’i, Sunni Muslims, Christians and Zoroastrians, amongst others.”

Katie Allen (Lib., Higgins) – Aug. 5 – “Australians look to their leaders to ensure all Australians are safe. We believe in a country where those from different faiths feel supported and protected. Now is the time for leaders across the political spec-

trum to condemn the despicable and antisemitic behaviour that is alive and thriving in the depths of their parties.”

Senator **David Van** (Lib., Vic.) – Aug. 4 – “I rise to condemn the utterly odorous statements made last week by Mr Julian Burnside where he compared the treatment of Palestinians to the German treatment of the Jews during the Second World War. This vile attempt to equate the people of Israel with modern history’s most disgusting acts is atrocious... antisemitism has no place in Australia...”

Senator **Sarah Henderson** (Lib., Vic.) – Aug. 9 – “Antisemitism is racist hate speech at its very worst. It comes in many guises, from calling for Jews to be killed through to comparing contemporary Israeli policy to the horrific enslavement and genocide committed by the Nazis. In his letter to me, [WA Bar Association President] Mr Cuerden admonished me for my decision to call out Mr Burnside’s indefensible and offensive tweet which compared Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians with the German treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust... I will continue to stand up every single day for what is right and just and to call out antisemitism for the ugliness that it is.”

Victorian Premier **Daniel Andrews** (ALP, Mulgrave) – Aug. 17 – at a press conference, addressing antisemitism that followed revelations of a Jewish engagement party that breached COVID restrictions: “Antisemitism is unacceptable and evil, and we have a zero tolerance approach to that in our state. The event that we spoke about... was not a function of being Jewish... them breaking the rules was not a reflection on the Jewish community more broadly... it was not something that anyone should use to reflect upon a broader group of people... We have a proud Jewish community, a significant Jewish community, and it is simply unacceptable and evil for anyone to be trading in... the antisemitic behaviour and comments that we’ve seen recently... there is never, ever a place in Victoria for antisemitic behaviour or language. It’s simply evil...”

It was meant to be temporary but it has been renewed every year since, affecting tens of thousands of families.”

Israeli Arab MP Sami Abu Shehadeh was quoted saying, “I don’t know that there is such a similar racist law anywhere else in the world.”

The law is not racist. The law affects both Arabs and Jews who might marry Palestinians who live in the terrorism-exporting West Bank and Gaza. No country in the world grants automatic citizenship to foreigners who marry a local resident, especially if they are enemy aliens.

Moreover, between the start of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and the law’s passage in 2003, at least 130,000 Palestinians received Israeli citizenship or residency through marriage. It is estimated that 48 Palestinians who obtained Israeli residency in this way perpetrated terror attacks inside Israel.

READING THE RIOT ACT

Age reporter Cloe Read’s article (July 24) on *Medecins Sans Frontieres’* Jerusalem based medical coordinator Dr Natalie Thurtle was riddled with errors, lacked sufficient balance and made vague claims with no efforts to supply context.

Thurtle expressed disgust that a Palestinian woman was “hit by rubber bullets fired by Israeli forces” and then “disrespected” by being “sprayed with ‘skunk water’, a yellow fluid that leaves a foul-smelling odour similar to rot or sewage that lasts for days.”

Presumably she was involved in anti-Israel riots – but the article didn’t bother looking at any such context.

Read said violence “surged” in May “following...an Israeli Supreme Court decision to evict several Palestinian families in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.”

This is simply wrong. To this day, the Supreme Court has made no such eviction ruling.

Read wrote that “an 11-day Israeli attack with more than 1500 air strikes

destroyed thousands of housing units, killed hundreds of Palestinians and left more than 100,000 civilians displaced. Israel says it is protecting itself from Palestinian violence, its bombing campaign a retaliation to rocket attacks by Hamas militants in Gaza.”

It’s incontrovertible that the war started on May 10 after Hamas deliberately began firing rockets at Israeli civilian areas, including at Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and continued to do so on every subsequent day of the war, more than 4,000 in all.

Read’s grasp of geography was also askew, stating that “staff at clinics across Hebron, Nablus, Bethlehem and Ramallah in the West Bank continue to help the Palestinian Ministry of Health as the bombardment continues.”

The conflict involved Gaza. Those are West Bank cities, where there was no “bombardment.”

Thurtle was quoted grumbling at the low COVID vaccination rates of Palestinians, which she attributed to “hoarding of vaccines by rich countries,” adding that “the whole pandemic has been politicised in lots of ways, in lots of places, and therefore it’s really hard for people to trust the information that they receive.”

The Palestinian Authority’s wilful rejection of one million COVID vaccinations offered to it by Israel in June went unmentioned by Thurtle or Read.

POLITICAL SPIN DOCTOR

On ABC *Radio National* “Breakfast” (Aug. 5) Thurtle proved herself adept at finding ways to avoid criticising decisions made by Palestinian leaders that might account for some of their people’s suffering.

Host Fran Kelly asked if the Palestinian Authority rejecting “1.1 million doses” Israel offered because “they were too close to expiry” was “an acceptable decision on health grounds” or “was that a political decision.”

Thurtle evaded the question, “I can’t really comment on the ins and outs of that. I wasn’t a party to that

information... [it] probably wouldn’t be appropriate in this context.”

Instead, Thurtle blamed everyone else, saying, “it’s not just about Israel and their responsibility to provide vaccination to the population of Palestine,” before repeating the vaccine hoarding claim.

Of course, there is no such responsibility – under the legally binding Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority is explicitly responsible for vaccinating Palestinians.

Yet, even when Israel does try to give perfectly good vaccines to the Palestinians and they are spuriously rejected, somehow Israel is still at fault.

THE SAMAH OLD STORY

In the *Age* (Aug 1), Palestinian activist and writer Samah Sabawi tried a new approach to tell the same old anti-Israel story.

According to Sabawi, Israel is to blame for the Palestinian Authority’s brutal response in June to angry Palestinians who protested in their thousands on the West Bank against President Mahmoud Abbas after his security forces beat to death Palestinian dissident Nizar Banat.

Sabawi wrote, “anyone who thinks that [the] sole responsibility for this decline into authoritarianism rests with the Palestinian Authority’s president, Mahmoud Abbas, is delusional. The real issue is the existence of such an authority under a settler-colonialist Israeli occupation and a security apparatus subservient to that occupation.”

The PA, she said, exists only to “polic[e]...the occupation” and has failed to stop Israeli settlement building.

According to Sabawi, the PA “lacks control over basic life, its democratically elected legislative council cannot hold meetings, address labour rights or make decisions over its budget and infrastructure because all of these fall under Israeli control.”

This is nonsense. Since 1994, the PA has exercised control over

all these functions on 40 percent of the West Bank, containing almost all the Palestinian population, and from 2005, in all of Gaza – before Hamas took it over in 2007. The legislature does not meet because Abbas won't allow it to since Hamas won the elections in 2006, and no elections have been held since then.

Sabawi called for an end to the PA and Israel's "occupation", insisting this could be achieved through "the power of Palestinians inside and outside the homeland" who "sparked an outpouring of support worldwide. In May, we saw 200,000 people march for Palestinian rights in London, tens of thousands across the US, and even here in Australia at the other end of the world, 15,000 marched in Melbourne on May 22."

Sabawi's prophesy of people power establishing Palestine has little to justify it.

The reality is that Palestinians don't have their freedom and an independent state because the two political groups that claim to represent the Palestinian people have spent the past 15 years running competing mini-dictatorships, after the Palestinian leadership stubbornly refused repeated Israeli offers to create a state and thereby end the conflict.

THE ABC'S ACTIVISTS

In the *Australian* (July 26), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein said the ABC's statutory duty to ensure "news and information is accurate and impartial" is being compromised by the "overt activism" of some staff and the lack of an "effective independent mechanism to scrutinise the ABC."

He noted that former ABC Middle East correspondent, Sophie McNeill, who had "a record of pro-Palestinian reporting," left to become the Australian researcher for Human Rights Watch, "which engages in anti-Israel campaigning."

He said ABC employees acted like activists during the May conflict,

including current Middle East correspondent Tom Joyner, who "tweeted his intention to desist from using the word 'clashes' after pro-Palestinian activists suggested he should. They argued 'clashes' implies false equality between the sides."

Other ABC staff, Rubenstein wrote, had "signed a letter calling for the rejection of 'both siderism' and prioritising Palestinian perspectives in coverage", while some reports were characterised by "misstated details", incorrect timelines on "which side initiated aggression," and false claims.

This included reporting Israel "fired on or 'raided' Palestinian worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque" and falsely asserting that Israel had already attempted to evict Palestinians from homes in Sheikh Jarrah, he wrote.

Dr Rubenstein emphasised the need for a genuine ABC complaints process, after the inhouse unit rejected AIJAC's complaint about *ABC TV's* "Q&A" May 27 episode focusing on the recent violence.

In "derogation of ABC obligations", the show had stacked the panel, including two pro-Palestinian activists, he said, resulting in a 4-1 anti-Israel pile on.

Although rejected complainants can appeal "to the Australian Communications and Media Authority, in reality this is little help. ACMA lacks resources, so few decisions are reviewed, and it has no power to require change," he wrote.

WATCH THIS

On Aug. 5, the ABC substantially amended an online article covering Human Rights Watch's (HRW) latest anti-Israel report, which focused on three alleged Israeli airstrikes on Gaza (one was in fact almost certainly a Hamas rocket that fell short) during the latest Hamas-initiated war. The article included false claims about international law and seemed to make

that shoddy report appear more balanced than it deserved.

The original July 27 article essentially avoided any reference to the Israeli side of what happened in the three incidents, even though the HRW report did include this information.

It also incorrectly claimed that "under international humanitarian law, warring parties can target only military objectives and must take precautions to minimise harm to civilians, including by providing warning of a planned attack."

In fact, international law does not require warning of a planned attack in all cases, but rather, only when practicable.

While the ABC article elaborated on two of the three incidents in the HRW report, it omitted summaries of Israel's explanations of what happened in these incidents.

This included Israel insisting that the May 10 incident in the report was caused by an errant rocket fired by a group in Gaza falling onto the al-Masri family home, not Israeli action, and that a strike on the Al-Shati refugee camp on May 15 followed reports that "a number of Hamas terror organization senior officials [were] in an apartment used as terror infrastructure" at that site.

After a complaint by the US-based pro-Israel media organisation CAMERA to the ABC, significant changes were made to the article, including adding Israeli explanations for the alleged incidents and correcting the incorrect claims made about international law.

Apart from the controversial online ABC story, Australian media coverage of HRW's report was minimal, extending only to the *Canberra Times* (July 29) and Channel Nine's website (July 28). Interestingly, HRW's follow-up report released Aug. 12, designed to provide a fig leaf of balance by criticising Hamas' conduct during the conflict, appears to have received zero mainstream local media coverage.

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

YOU ARE WHAT YOU TWEET

High profile barrister and former Greens candidate Julian Burnside's July 28 tweet claiming Israel's "treatment of the Palestinians looks horribly like the German treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust" quickly led to widespread condemnation. He deleted it and made an apology, kickstarting two weeks of media coverage and commentary.

The *Australian* (July 29) reported Burnside's commitment to Holocaust survivor Moshe Fizman in 2018 that he would not make comparisons with Nazi Germany after he had reposted an image of then-Minister for Home Affairs Peter Dutton superimposed on a Nazi officer. The report quoted Anti-Defamation Commission chairman Dvir Abramovich saying, "Burnside knows very well that there is no Israeli policy, plan or ideology to... expel or annihilate the Palestinian population."

The next day, the *Australian* reported Greens leader Adam Bandt's statement that "the Holocaust is one of the darkest moments in human history and is without modern comparison... The treatment of the Palestinian people can be condemned on its own facts," along with Abramovich's criticism that Bandt failed to "directly condemn the cynical exploitation of the Holocaust by Julian Burnside."

On July 31, the *Australian* reported Burnside had apologised, quoting him saying, "apart from the numbers being radically different, the Israeli-Palestinian struggle is about land; the Holocaust was about genocide." The story noted Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg – whose Hungarian-born mother is a Holocaust survivor – had sent "Burnside a copy of Eddie Jaku's *The Happiest Man on Earth*, a story by a 101-year-old Holocaust survivor."

Burnside's partner, Kate Durham, drew heat too, after tweeting that Burnside knew more about the Holocaust than Frydenberg, whom she said was "just a Hungarian, just a Liberal. #Fraudenberg." Burnside ran against Frydenberg in the 2019 election.

The *Australian* reported (Aug. 2), that Durham deleted and apologised for the tweet, and said her "opinion of Mr Frydenberg had been coloured by his role, as a child of refugees, in presiding over other refugees' torment."

On July 31, Gerard Henderson interrogated Burnside's tweet in his *Australian* column, revealing that Burnside told him, "Israelis kill a lot of Palestinians: certainly the numbers are nowhere near the number of Jews killed during the Holocaust, but the reasons are substantially the same."

"Julian Burnside's tweet claiming Israel's 'treatment of the Palestinians looks horribly like the German treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust' quickly led to widespread condemnation"

In the *Australian* (Aug. 12), Zionist Federation of Australia President Jeremy Leibler wrote, "any suggestion that Israel treats Palestinians like Hitler treated the Jews is deeply offensive and blatantly incorrect... the Holocaust was an exercise in extermination, the Palestinian population continues to grow. In Israel, Palestinian citizens are diplomats, judges, government ministers, members of parliament, journalists, doctors and teachers."

For Education Minister Alan Tudge, Burnside's tweet held a different significance, warning in the *Australian* (Aug. 5) against the "Corbynisation" and acceptance of antisemitism in "our major left-leaning political parties."

Victorian Liberal Senator Sarah Henderson's call for the Victorian Bar Council to investigate Burnside for bringing the legal profession into disrepute gave the saga a second wind.

On *Sky News*' "Credlin" (July 30), Henderson said the tweet was "probably... the most... contemptible statement ever made by a senior member of the Victorian bar."

Senator Henderson's call was denounced by WA Bar Association head Martin Cuerden in a public letter. On *Sky News*' "Kenny Report" (Aug. 10), Henderson said Cuerden "really... missed the mark... he did not in any way raise any concern... about Burnside's [tweet]. He was only concerned about Mr Burnside's free speech."

The *West Australian* reported on Aug. 12 that Cuerden had apologised and quoted Senator Henderson thanking AIJAC's Mark Leibler for issuing a public letter condemning Cuerden's statements.

Later that night, Henderson appeared on "Credlin" lambasting, together with host Peta Credlin, Shadow Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones' tweet defending Burnside's right to free speech.

Yet Hobart *Mercury* columnist Greg Barns SC's praise of Burnside's tweet managed to escape scrutiny. In a repost, Barns had said "good to see a member of the legal profession revealing Israel for what it really is – a depraved rogue state which oppresses and murders Palestinians daily."

Meanwhile, the *Age* (July 30) reported on Burnside's initial tweet, Bandt's statement and Australia Palestine Advocacy Network vice president Nasser Mashni's condemnation of the tweet, but Burnside's subsequent apology went unreported.

And what of ABC coverage? There does not appear to have been any on any major news program.

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

THE DARKEST DAYS

Most of us remember where we were. I was on my way home after addressing a Jewish community meeting about my firsthand experiences of the now infamous Durban United Nations World Conference Against Racism, which had concluded a few days earlier.

I had stopped to refuel my car and was in a queue to pay, watching news on a small television screen, when I saw footage of a tower at New York's World Trade Center being hit by a plane.

A few minutes later, I was home and saw on television, in real time, the second plane strike.

In the days after September 11, 2001, I heard stories of escape and survival and of devastating loss. I saw people in Sydney keep their children at home as they feared sending them to Jewish day schools, given the way terrorists had demonstrated their geographic reach and demonic capabilities.

A Member of Parliament told me that the absence from streets and markets in his neighbourhood of women who were visibly Muslim was what made him aware of the fear of some Australians that they could be victims of misdirected revenge for the actions of people who had purported to act in the name of Islam. Sikh friends told me that there were also numerous attacks on their community members by individuals who thought their turbans were Osama bin Laden's headwear.

There was some demand on my time from media, who stumbled on the fact that I was one of a handful of people who had ever mentioned bin Laden in writing in English prior to the attack – as well as being someone whose views were sought on terrorism and reactions within the Jewish community.

With a Christian and a Muslim friend, who had previously been meeting with me to plan ongoing dialogue, a public meeting for all faiths and backgrounds was organised in central Sydney. The three of us then commenced a round of media where we pushed the themes of mutual support, soli-

darity and opposition to extremism in religious communities and against religious communities.

In one interview discussing the attack, it was suggested that I would have been psychologically and philosophically prepared for the event, having just been through the intense anti-Jewish hatefest in Durban.

My response was no matter how much one had studied terrorism or extremist ideology, it was hard not to be horrified that there were people who had made the taking of human life on a mass scale some sort of value. I did not

know of any person who was not in complete shock at the devastation wreaked on the lives of so many people who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In the context of the conference in Durban, it was true I had recently seen the United Nations and literally hundreds of self-ascribed "human rights" NGOs facilitate, tolerate, participate in, ignore, or promote vile racism. Another link between the two events was that an email

account I had established for the sole purpose of Durban started receiving emails applauding the terrorists and laughing at the suffering of Americans. I was informed about how to "celebrate" and where, including in my own city of Sydney.

As I remember the victims of the terrorism of 20 years ago, I observe that the world is plagued by numerous extremists, many of whom subscribe to conspiratorial anti-Jewish world views, operate transnationally and strike when they can.

If anything, the state-sponsored international terrorist networks backed by Iran and the resurgence of extreme right-wing racist groups are, objectively, more of a threat today.

While many governments have advanced understandings of the threat, too often short-term political considerations supersede the actions which are most needed.

It is incumbent on not just governments, but all who want to preserve and extend human rights, communal harmony and broad freedoms, to both strengthen our abilities to defend them and to try to understand the challenges presented by terrorists, now and in the future.



"Most of us remember where we were that day": Sept. 11, 2001 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)



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