



AFGHAN AFTERMATH

How the US withdrawal has
affected Israel, the Palestinians
and peace hopes

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR*'s cover story looks at how the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and its rapid reconquest by the Taliban are likely to affect Israel and its strategic environment, including relations with the Palestinians.

Leading Israeli strategic analyst Major Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror predicts growing regional threats from aggressive actors including Iran and Turkey, but also posits an Israeli opportunity to build on its relationships with threatened moderate Arab states. Amotz Asa-El reviews in more detail the historic and regional context of US withdrawal from the Middle East, while Dan Diker and Khaled Abu Toameh explain how the Taliban victory will empower advocates of "resistance" and armed violence such as Hamas on the Palestinian street, while discrediting any talk of diplomatic compromise.

Also featured this month is a factsheet on the emergence of new terrorist kid on the block arising out of Afghanistan, ISIS-K, by counterterrorism expert Thomas Joscelyn. Plus, Salo Aizenberg discusses a growing trend among Israel-bashers to erase from history Israel's repeated offers to establish a Palestinian state.

Finally, don't miss Colin Rubenstein on the astonishing success of the Abraham Accords after one year, Cliff May's review of a dismaying 20 years of Sept. 11 anniversaries, and Ran Porat's revelation of yet another source of pro-Teheran propaganda in Australia.

Please give us your feedback on this *AIR* edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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Paratroopers assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division prepare to board a C-17 cargo plane at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, Aug. 30, 2021. (Credit: Master Sgt. Alexander Burnett/US Army via AAP)



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Editorial Chairman**Dr COLIN RUBENSTEIN AM****Editor-in-Chief****Dr TZVI FLEISCHER****Senior Contributing Editor****JEREMY JONES AM****Staff Writers****ALLON LEE, JAMIE HYAMS, AHRON SHAPIRO, SHARYN MITTELMAN, NAOMI LEVIN, OVED LOBEL, JUDY MAYNARD****Publishing Manager****MICHAEL SHANNON****Correspondents****ISRAEL: AMOTZ ASA-EL****EUROPE: DOUGLAS DAVIS****NEW ZEALAND: MIRIAM BELL****National Editorial Board****KEITH BEVILLE, RABBI RALPH GENENDE OAM, GARY HERZ, MIRIAM LASKY, STEVE LIEBLICH, RABBI JOHN LEVI AC, Hon. HOWARD NATHAN AM, IAN WALLER SC****AIJAC****National Chairman****MARK LEIBLER AC****NSW Chairman****PAUL RUBENSTEIN****Executive Director****Dr COLIN RUBENSTEIN AM****Director of International & Community Affairs****JEREMY JONES AM****Policy and Research Coordinator****Dr TZVI FLEISCHER****Executive Manager****JOEL BURNIE****Senior Policy Analysts****AHRON SHAPIRO, JAMIE HYAMS, ALLON LEE, NAOMI LEVIN, SHARYN MITTELMAN****Policy Analysts****OVED LOBEL, JUDY MAYNARD****Research Associate****RAN PORAT****Multimedia Designer****AREK DYBEL****Events Coordinator****HELEN BRUSTMAN OAM****Administration****MELBOURNE: ROSEMARY SANDLER,****RENA LANGBERG****SYDNEY: LOUISE DE MESQUITA****Israel Liaison****PETER ADLER****Founding Chairmen****ISADOR MAGID AM (OBM)****ROBERT ZABLUD (OBM)****HEAD OFFICE**

Level 1, 22 Albert Road,

South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia

Telephone: (03) 9681 6660

Fax: (03) 9681 6650

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

140 William Street

East Sydney, NSW 2011, Australia

Telephone: (02) 9360 5415

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

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www.aijac.org.au**FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN**
COLIN RUBENSTEIN**TOWARDS AN “ABRAHAM ALLIANCE”**

The past year has proven completely wrong those naysayers who dismissed the Abraham Accords reached 12 months ago between Israel and four Arab states as hollow theatrics orchestrated by naïve Trump Administration advisors amidst a re-election campaign.

US-brokered normalisation agreements between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain were signed at the White House on September 15, 2020, later joined by Sudan in October and Morocco in December.

Significantly, Oman and Saudi Arabia have supported the Accords in word, deed or both, and are widely considered likely to formally join at some point.

The historic agreements have shown themselves to be resilient and enduring, surviving not only changes of government in Washington and Jerusalem, but also the fraught war between Hamas and Israel in May.

More than this, these agreements are already yielding dividends and displaying the potential to economically and culturally transform the whole region.

Signs of flourishing and genuine relationships taking root are everywhere. There are now direct flights between Israel and the UAE, Israel and Bahrain and Israel and Morocco, while Israeli airlines can now fly over Saudi airspace, cutting hours off flight times on numerous routes. Despite COVID, 230,000 Israelis have visited the UAE, and examples of friendly cultural interchange between Israelis and Emiratis are occurring constantly.

Israeli trade with the UAE is expected to reach US\$1 billion this year, and US\$3 billion within three years. A UAE company has just signed an agreement to invest US\$1.1 billion in Israeli natural gas projects. Trade between Israel and countries in the Middle East and North Africa is up a stunning 234% overall in the first seven months of 2021.

The Biden Administration, which for the most part has distanced itself from much of the foreign policy of the Trump Administration, has gradually but wisely embraced the Abraham Accords and now seems committed to working towards expanding the circle of nations that subscribe to them.

Today more than ever, that effort is strongly in America's interests and those of like-minded European and Western powers, including Australia. It provides a potential answer to the new threatening balance of power emerging in this strategic region in the wake of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, amidst a US policy of seeking to withdraw its forces from the Middle East which has been consistent over successive recent administrations.

Former US President Barack Obama had hoped that Iran could be tamed into a regional stabilising force to facilitate a US withdrawal and “pivot to Asia” – which is why he was so determined to achieve a nuclear deal with Iran in 2015, expecting this would trigger a change in Iran's rogue behaviour. Unfortunately, this strategy was always ill-conceived and the US offered so many concessions to entice Iran into the nuclear deal that it became almost a guarantee that Iran would ultimately achieve nuclear weapons capabilities.

Moreover, rather than moderating Iranian behaviour as the Obama Administration had hoped, the agreement simply empowered the Iranians with resources to increase their efforts to destabilise their neighbours through regional terrorist proxy groups.

Now, the regime is more radical than ever under new President Ebrahim Raisi, and is reportedly just weeks away from possessing all the materials needed to build a nuclear weapon.

Subsequently, the Trump Administration legitimised the Taliban out of eagerness to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan, a decision President Joe Biden ultimately carried out in such a chaotic, haphazard and defeatist manner as to almost certainly re-energise and empower the global jihadist movement.

However, despite these serious policy errors by all three recent US administrations, for better or for worse, American political leaders from both sides of the political divide are united in their determination to greatly reduce the US military footprint in the Middle East.

But the US and its allies need to plan for and facilitate such a withdrawal in a way that averts any additional policy debacles – which means without empowering terrorists or other aggressive rogue actors like Iran and Turkey, without providing too many opportunities for aggrandisement by US rivals, particularly China and Russia, and without endangering the stability of the region's vital sea lanes.

There is a strategic model that can achieve all this if the Biden Administration has the vision and courage to put America's full diplomatic weight behind it – the successful model of the Abraham Accords.

As Yaakov Amidror notes in this edition, the US withdrawal will incentivise moderate actors in the region to band together to protect themselves from threats emanating from Iran, Turkey and Islamist extremist groups like

the Taliban. As the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco have already recognised, Israel is an essential member of any such alliance – possessing not only the region's strongest military, but also able to offer economic, technological, ecological and intelligence assistance to regimes seeking to survive in an increasingly dangerous environment.

Such an alliance can even build links that extend beyond the region itself. India has been rapidly upgrading its defence ties with both Israel and the UAE over the last year. This could tie any new "Abraham Alliance" into the Quad – the alliance of India, Japan, Australia and the US – attempting to provide stabil-

ity in South and East Asia.

An "Abraham Alliance" could also extend ties westward into the Mediterranean, where Israel and Egypt have been building close strategic ties with countries like Greece, Cyprus and Italy.

The US may be withdrawing militarily from the Middle East, but it is just common sense to seek to do so without leaving a dangerous vacuum behind in the world's most unstable region. Happily, the last year has proven that it does not have to – the Abraham Accords offer a viable alternative with enormous geostrategic potential in the medium and longer term. What is needed now is a concerted international effort to build on the great achievements of the last year to fully develop and capitalise on that potential.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

"Iran has still not provided the necessary explanations for the presence of the nuclear material particles. The Director General remains deeply concerned that nuclear material has been present at undeclared locations in Iran and that the current locations of this nuclear material are not known to the Agency."

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on Iranian nuclear non-disclosure (Wall Street Journal, Sept. 8).

"The President conveyed his ironclad support for Israel's security and right to self-defense... The leaders discussed the most critical challenges facing the Middle East, including the threat posed by Iran. The President made clear his commitment to ensure Iran never develops a nuclear weapon. The leaders reviewed steps to deter and contain Iran's dangerous regional behavior..."

White House readout of a meeting between US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (White House, Aug. 27).

"We want good relations with all the countries, including the US

with whom we just fought. We have communicated our message to the world."

Taliban chief spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid (Wall Street Journal, Sept. 7).

"Of course, we won't have any relation with Israel. We want to have relations with other countries, Israel is not among these countries."

Taliban spokesman Suheil Shaheen clarifying that "all the countries" does not include Israel (Times of Israel, Sept. 8).

"Islamism, both the ideology and the violence, is a first-order security threat; and, unchecked, it will come to us, even if centred far from us, as 9/11 demonstrated... this is a global challenge which is getting worse."

Former British PM Tony Blair in a speech to mark the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, Sept. 6).

"Haifa is mine, Jaffa is mine (i.e., Israeli cities), Al-Aqsa is mine, Jerusalem is mine, and my land is mine – from my [Jordan] River to my [Mediterranean] Sea."

Poem insisting all of Israel is rightfully Palestinian recited by the host of "Good Morning Jerusalem," a program on official Palestinian Authority TV (Palestinian Media Watch, Sept. 5).





SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

THE BINATIONAL STATE LIE

The latest propaganda line for the anti-Israel brigade is to accuse Israel of being an “Apartheid state” whose racist identity must be “dismantled”. While this is essentially just a new slogan to advocate Israel’s destruction, those promoting this view have a cover story that sounds superficially reasonable to many Westerners: “no, we don’t want to ‘destroy’ Israel, all we really want is a binational state of all its citizens, Jewish and Palestinian, once Israel’s discriminatory Jewish and Zionist identity is removed.” Promoters of this claim not only insist that Jews and Palestinians will live together perfectly harmoniously once evil Zionism is removed from the equation, but frequently imply that it is racist against Palestinians to believe otherwise.

But most Palestinians themselves do not agree that Jews and Palestinians will live in binational harmony once Israel is dismantled. Palestinian public discourse, which routinely paints all Israeli Jews as thieving invaders with no legitimate rights, shows this, and so do polls, as I have repeatedly documented in this column.

A recent poll of West Bank Palestinians conducted by the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) Centre, a Palestinian research firm, and released on Aug. 25, makes this point particularly well. Participants were asked about their hopes for an end to the conflict – 60% supported a unified Palestinian state on historic Palestine, 30% supported a two-state solution, and 8% supported a one-state solution with Palestinians and Israelis living together.

That’s right, only 8% support the sort of vision that anti-Zionists paint – Jews and Palestinians sharing a state. Meanwhile, a clear majority of 60% want something else described as a “unified Palestinian state on historic Palestine.” It is not clear what that entails – but apparently not Palestinians and Israelis living together, which is a different option.

Most of that 60% probably are thinking of what I have described as the “ethnic cleansing solution” – that is, not a two-state solution or a one-state solution, but a “solution” in which Israel’s Jews are largely either killed or forced to leave.

Given those numbers, and the raw hatred often present in Palestinian public discourse, it takes a truly staggering amount of wilful blindness to insist that, if only Israel’s Jews agreed to dismantle Israel, peace and harmony would prevail. Seriously, no Palestinians would seek to kick out the Jews of this new binational state, even though a large number, perhaps even a majority, want to do so today? There would be no terrorist attacks or street violence or efforts to force Jews out through mass demonstrations or property confiscation or legal measures? Law and order would prevail between both communities? Jews would be treated fairly and equally, even though this has not been

their experience as a minority anywhere in the Middle East in the past?

Some people who advocate a “one state solution” don’t care – they are out to destroy Israel, and frankly, whatever Israel’s Jews suffer as a result is fully justified in their eyes. Others are in the grip of intersectional “woke” ideology, which says one must identify the weaker “victim” people –

in this case the Palestinians – and treat everything they do as completely understandable and justifiable responses to oppression. One must never, ever give credence to the attribution of any negative traits to the victim group – which amounts to participating in the “systemic” racism against them. Therefore, it is unthinkable to imagine that Palestinians will not be completely noble and compassionate in dealing with Jews once their just demands are met – only racists could think otherwise.

Perhaps the latter need to know that one of the people they are declaring racist is the late Prof. Edward Said – the most famous Palestinian intellectual and advocate in the Western world. While he absolutely advocated a one-state solution toward the end of his life, he had the decency to note that the fate of Israel’s Jews was highly questionable in such an outcome. In a 2010 interview, he was asked about the fate of the Jewish minority in the Arab majority state he was demanding replace Israel, and said:

“I worry about that. The history of minorities in the Middle East has not been as bad as in Europe, but I wonder what would happen. It worries me a great deal. The question of what is going to be the fate of the Jews is very difficult for me. I really don’t know. It worries me.”

So a majority of Palestinians reject sharing a binational state together with Jews, and the most important international Palestinian intellectual admitted their fate in such a state “worries him a great deal.” Yet if any Jews oppose such an outcome, it’s only because they’re racist.



Palestinians are clear – they want a “unified Palestinian state on historic Palestine,” not a binational state (Credit: Shutterstock)

ANOTHER OLYMPIC WIN

This column is pleased to report that, on Sept. 7, the International Judo Federation announced a ten-year ban on Algerian Judoka Fathi Norine and his coach Ammar Benkhlef, preventing them from participating in any activity or competition for the Federation or any of its affiliates, for violations of the Olympic Charter.

As was reported in this column last month, Nourine withdrew from competition at the Tokyo Olympics immediately after the draw was announced, pitting him against an Israeli in the second round, and openly said he was withdrawing to support the “Palestinian cause”. Benkhlef publicly supported Nourine’s decision.

It’s another sign of progress in ending anti-Israel discrimination in international sport.

AIR



DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

Ben Cohen

ISLAMISM’S BRUTAL FACE ON DISPLAY

Any notion that the worst days of Islamist terrorism are long behind us was brutally shattered at Kabul Airport on Aug. 26, as twin bombs ripped indiscriminately through Afghan civilians and US and other foreign servicemen trying to complete the desperate evacuation of thousands of people for whom Taliban rule represents the most terrible fate.

Gen. H.R. McMaster, a former US national security advisor who served as deputy commander of the international force in Afghanistan, put it succinctly in the hours that followed the bloodshed in Kabul. “Maybe this moment is the time that we can stop our self-delusion that these groups are separate from one another and recognise that they are utterly intertwined and interconnected, and what we are seeing is the establishment of a terrorist, jihadist state in Afghanistan... And all of us will be at much greater risk as a result.”

His underlying argument is that talking up divisions between the Taliban and fellow Islamist fanatics – such as ISIS-K, the Afghan branch of the Da’esh terrorist organisation that carried out the Kabul Airport bombing – elides the point that these groups are united in their fundamental worldview. On the ideological front, the late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden’s promise of a war against “crusaders and Jews” still holds firm, which means terrorism against Western interests and Western targets, most of whom will be defenceless civilians. It also means that ordinary Muslims will continue to be their principal and most numerous victims.

The “intertwined” connections described by McMaster inside Afghanistan can be seen in the region more broadly.

At the same time that the Taliban have conquered Afghanistan, Iran has appointed a new cabinet composed of men with a direct, personal role in terrorism, torture and other systemic violations of human rights, all of whom have extensive connections with Iran’s regional proxies, like Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In the past, many analysts scorned the contention that there could be a strategic connection between the austere Sunni Islam adhered to by the Taliban and the Shi’ite millenarian Islam that defines the Teheran regime. It is also true that the Taliban and the Iranians have come to blows in the distant past.

Even so, what unites them is, in the last analysis, more important than what divides them. Taliban delegations have visited Iran on at least two occasions this year, in January and in July, with the outgoing foreign minister Javad Zarif recently praising their “noble ... jihad against the foreign occupiers.” In part, the Iranians are simply betting on the right horse, correctly deducing that further conflict with the Taliban is unnecessary given that the Taliban are once more the masters of Afghanistan. But more significantly, they share the common goal of banishing the United States and its allies from the region, including the State of Israel.

This brings me back to Iran’s new cabinet. It is not surprising that the Islamic Republic’s new President, Ebrahim Raisi – a sadist who, as a regime prosecutor in the 1980s, supervised beatings, rapes and mass executions of prisoners – would appoint a bunch of thugs to his cabinet.

Iran’s new Defence Minister is Ahmad Vahidi, returning to the post for the second time in his career, having previously occupied it during the term of the Holocaust-denying former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The Vice President for Economic Development is Mohsen Rezaei, the commander for 17 years of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Both Vahidi and Rezaei are fugitives from justice – specifically, for their roles in the July 1994 Iranian-sponsored bombing of the AMIA Jewish Centre in Buenos Aires, the bloodiest act of antisemitic terrorism in more than half a century, in which 85 people lost their lives.

Across the Middle East and the Islamic world, extremist regimes and terrorist groups are rejoicing in the fact that the US presence and reputation in their region are a shadow of what they were ten years ago.

In that light, there is no reason for the Biden Administration to continue its talks with the Iranians in Vienna over their nuclear program unless it wants to look even more gullible in the eyes of America’s Islamist adversaries. It also needs to review the existing sanctions on Iran and extend these where necessary.

None of these moves can be said to be game-changers. But they speak to the lack of a broader vision for the Middle East on the part of successive US administrations, save for the ambition of getting out as quickly as possible.



As McMaster reminded us, the region won't let us go so easily.

AIR

Ben Cohen is a New York City-based journalist and author. © Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

A WAITING GAME

While the world absorbs the sudden return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, its history as a linchpin for international jihadist terrorism has new relevance for countries like Indonesia.

Dozens of Indonesian extremists who later formed the militant backbone of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) trained with the Afghan mujahideen during the 1980s and 90s, acquiring the skills and commitment that fuelled a spate of terror attacks back home during the 2000s, including the devastating 2002 nightclub bombings in Bali.

The JI operatives who orchestrated the Bali bombings and built the suicide vests and truck bombs were largely trained in Afghanistan. Their introduction of suicide bombing in Indonesia has had such a devastating impact that almost two decades later, Densus 88 (Indonesia's elite counter-terror agency) created a poster to warn against the continuing legacy of the so-called "Afghan veterans".

The obvious concern now is that there may be a return to the safe-haven days of 1996-2001, when the Taliban regime allowed al-Qaeda to maintain its base of operations and seed a generation of committed jihadists.

Few doubt that the Taliban's apparent victory over the United States in Afghanistan will revitalise the morale of militant Islamists. It shapes as a clear propaganda opportunity for Southeast Asian groups, rejoicing in the fact that the Taliban succeeded in outlasting a superpower. After the fall of Kabul, many jihadists were found to be sharing the Taliban's strategy manual across WhatsApp groups; while others uploaded euphoric posts about the recent events.

However, there is no indication that the Taliban's victory will release resources that would increase Indonesian terrorist groups' capacity to conduct jihad in the short term.

It is currently unclear whether the Taliban will allow jihadist organisations to use their territory as a haven to train and regroup. The Taliban's incentive to support international terrorism is low, especially after they lost power for two decades and saw much of their leadership killed.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken appears confident the threat is overblown, and that strategic calculations will

deter the Taliban. "They know what happened the last time they harboured a terrorist group that attacked the United States," he said recently. "It's not in their self-interest to allow a repeat of that."

In the last two years, more than a dozen Indonesians have already attempted to make *hijrah* (migrate) to Afghanistan, some with children in tow – in most cases aided and abetted by Indonesian IS operatives in Syria in the waning days of the Caliphate. According to the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) there were 23 pro-IS Indonesians known to be in Afghanistan as of June 2021, 11 of whom were in prison at the time.

Senior Indonesian members of IS have attempted to coordinate operations in Indonesia while the organisation still controlled territory in Syria and Iraq, but the attacks perpetrated in recent years have tended to fall short of expectations – the majority of victims being the attackers themselves. Moreover, several of these attacks were inspired but not instigated by Islamic State.

This period has coincided with a strengthening of counter-terror operations. Bolstered by updated legislation in 2018, which extended powers of investigation and opened new paths for prosecution, Densus 88 has moved decisively against both JI and Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), Indonesia's largest pro-Islamic State organisation. Between 2018 and mid-2021, Densus 88 captured some 1200 terrorist suspects. In 2021 alone, it has captured 308 suspects, around 37 percent of them JAD personnel and another 37 percent, JI.

But if the fall of Kabul teaches anything to Indonesian jihadists, it is that a successful strategy is one that has a long time-horizon, rather than rash bouts of attacks. For nearly two decades, the Taliban waited and slowly rebuilt upon the mistakes and miscalculations of their enemies.

After meeting with representatives of the Taliban Political Office in Doha, Qatar, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi posted on Twitter, "I conveyed to the Taliban the importance of: an inclusive government in Afghanistan; respecting women's rights; and ensuring Afghanistan does not become a breeding ground for terrorist organisation and activities."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the National Intelligence Agency (BIN) reported that the agency "has taken anticipatory steps to strengthen early detection and early prevention, especially regarding groups that have an ideological resemblance to the Taliban," according to *Benar News*.

Indonesian authorities are also investigating troubling reports that several Indonesian militants were among those released by the Taliban from a prison near Kabul in August.

In the days leading up to the Taliban takeover, Indonesian police caught dozens of suspected members of Jemaah Islamiyah in a nationwide sweep, and on Aug. 20, police announced that JI suspects had been plotting to carry out a terror attack on Aug. 17, Indonesia's Independence Day.

AIR

Alex Benjamin

JANUS IN BRUSSELS

So, how was your 5781?

Jews marked their new year on Sept. 7, and went from year 5781 in the Jewish calendar to 5782.

Most of us spent 5781 under lockdowns, but as we move from the toilet paper hoarding to a new phase, the new year offers a chance to look both backwards and forwards at the same time. There's a Roman God called Janus who does that – more on him a bit later.

So what was it like being a Jew in 5781?

Here in Europe, being Jewish currently presents its own particular set of challenges.

Go grab an atlas. With a pencil draw a line where the border between west and east Europe was. To the right you will find what I refer to as “deep south” antisemitism, that old fecund kind that has been around for millennia.

To the left of the pencil line, in the more “enlightened” west, the antisemitism is much more ‘imported’. It has travelled primarily with migrants from Arab lands and has a much more anti-Zionist tinge.

That's without even touching on the COVID-related antisemitism, a modern incarnation of the old trope of well-poisoning: the claims that the Rothschilds are making a killing from COVID; the yellow stars being worn by anti-vaxxers.

A recent Eurobarometer survey found that 36% of the general public think that antisemitism is increasing, while another found that almost 90% of Jewish respondents have this view.

And the response from the European political leadership? Throw eyewatering amounts of cash at the issue, commission surveys such as the ones above, make statements that antisemitism is a cancer on the European body-politic, pressure social media companies, appoint special envoys to combat antisemitism, improve educational provision and increase security at our Jewish centres, synagogues and schools.

I really cannot find fault in this shared commitment on the part of the political establishment. But the numbers don't lie. How can it be that less than half of the population as a whole feel that antisemitism is growing, but around 90% of Jews here do. Are we naturally pessimistic? Are we overly sensitive? Or is there something else going on entirely?

I'm going to say all three – but especially and particularly the last. It is time to bring Janus back into this story.

Let's take a single country in isolation – Belgium. Ask the Prime Minister, or the regional heads of Wallonia and Flanders, about antisemitism and they will earnestly and full-heartedly tell you that they are intent on wiping it out and that Belgium would not be Belgium without the Jews. Whenever an antisemitic incident takes place, they are first on the scene offering support and words of condolence. It is genuine concern, a genuine statement, a genuine commitment.

The problem is that at both the national and EU institutional level, these people are nowhere to be found when legislation that fundamentally affects Jewish life and practice are introduced. Whether it is bans on kosher slaughter (“shechita”) or bans on circumcision, both fundamental pillars of our faith – and Belgium has forbidden the former and legislation on the latter is being considered – their silence is deafening.

So, it seems the arms around the Jewish community attitude are conditional – or Janus-faced, if you will. On the one hand, when it concerns explicit antisemitism, every and all means are available. On the other, when it comes to protecting our freedom of religion from the animal rights lobby, or the children's rights lobby (both of whom seek to paint us as archaic barbarians taking scimitars to animals and our male infants' genitalia), well, that's politics. We just gotta get with the times.

And this isn't just a Belgian issue. You know that game whack-a-mole? That is the “game” that we at the European Jewish Association are constantly playing in responding to anti-Jewish laws. Whether it be in Poland, Cyprus, Denmark or Iceland, these laws keep popping up. Some are passed, some not.

But make no mistake, if the entire continent gets around to passing laws forbidding shechita and circumcision, the only people laughing will be the antisemitic minority on either side of that pencil line. Because the Jews will be gone. It won't be because of overt antisemitism, but because the same, well-meaning politicians turned a blind eye as our faith was legislated out of existence.

It doesn't get more Janus-faced than that. And that, antipodean friends, is our shared task in 5782. Combatting antisemitism is important – very important. But equally important is getting the politicians to push back against the well-organised lobbies that seek to outlaw our faith, for the sake of “progress” and “modernity”.

If the politicians want to understand the huge discrepancy between 36% and the 90%, they need to look in the mirror, end the two faces, and support our freedom to practise as well as our freedom from direct hate.

Alex Benjamin is the Director of the European Jewish Association, a pro-Jewish, pro-Israel advocacy group based in Brussels: ejas-sociation.eu

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Four rockets in total were fired at Israel from Gaza over the nights of Sept. 10, 11 and 12. Previously, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups had resumed their incendiary and explosive balloon campaign, causing numerous fires inside Israel. Israeli retaliatory airstrikes occurred on Aug. 23, 25 and 28 and Sept. 6, 10, 11 and 12.

Hamas also renewed violent riots along the border between Israel and Gaza on an almost daily basis, especially after Aug. 26 – including the use of firearms, IEDs and homemade stun grenades. Israel Border Police Staff-Sgt. Barel Shmueli was shot in the head by a Hamas operative on Aug. 21 and later died.

Violent riots also continued throughout the West Bank, resulting in the deaths of several Palestinians.

PRISON BREAK RISKS ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN ESCALATION

On Sept. 6, six high-profile terrorist inmates in Gilboa Prison in northern Israel escaped via a tunnel they had dug. These included five Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operatives as well as Fatah commander Zakaria Zubeidi, who oversaw the terrorist Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade during the Second Intifada.

The IDF engaged in a wide-scale manhunt for the missing terrorists, initially believed to have escaped to the Jenin area in the West Bank, and recaptured four of them inside northern Israel on Sept. 11. The PIJ and Fatah reportedly moved fighters to Jenin to attempt to counter IDF efforts. Israel's Prison Service also began transferring security prisoners out of Gilboa to other detention

facilities, leading to riots and unrest in some prisons.

There was considerable concern in Israel that the manhunt and other measures would be used as an excuse by PIJ and Hamas to again begin launching rockets at Israel or provoking other violence. Hamas, PIJ and other Palestinian factions called for a "day of rage" on Sept. 10 over the transfers of prisoners.

ISRAEL EASES RESTRICTIONS

On Sept. 1, Israel announced that restrictions imposed on Gaza since Hamas' rocket attacks in May would be eased. The offshore fishing zone was extended to 15 nautical miles, travel permits for Gazan merchants rose from 2,000 to 7,000, water supplied from Israel was increased, and transfer of some construction materials into the area was permitted.

In addition, following a meeting on Aug. 29 between Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz, the latter announced measures to help shore up moderate forces in the West Bank. These included a loan of NIS 500 million (A\$210.1 million) to the PA, increasing employment permits for Palestinians to work in Israel by 15,000, and granting new building permits for Palestinian homes in Israeli-controlled areas of the West Bank.

HEZBOLLAH'S LAND OF TUNNELS

The Alma Centre, an Israeli think-tank, has released a report exposing a huge network of military tunnels inside Lebanon built by Iran's Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah. The tunnels reportedly extend dozens of kilometres and

connect Hezbollah's headquarters in Beirut to strategic locations in the north and south of Lebanon to assist Hezbollah in case of a future conflict with Israel.

The underground burrows were reportedly built by North Korean companies under the supervision of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

IRAN DOUBLES FORCES ALONG ISRAEL BORDER

According to an August report compiled by the Turkey-based research institute Jusoor for Studies, Iran's military presence in southern Syria near Israel's border has more than doubled in recent years. Jusoor reportedly has close contacts with Syrian forces opposing the Assad regime.

The report claims that between 2018 and 2021, the number of military bases and outposts of pro-Iranian militias and Hezbollah in southern Syria increased from 40 to 88.

IRAN BREAKOUT TIME FALLS FURTHER

On Sept. 8, the Institute for Science and International Security, headed by former nuclear inspector David Albright, published an estimate that, based on the latest International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports, Iran's "breakout time" to produce one nuclear bomb's worth of highly enriched uranium, is "as short as approximately five weeks." This estimate was based on the amounts of uranium enriched to 60% and 20% that Iran has now reportedly amassed.

Previous estimates had placed Iran's breakout time at two to three months.

The UN nuclear watchdog had

also reported on Aug. 16 that Iran had for the first time produced a small amount of enriched uranium metal, a material utilised to construct the core of an atomic bomb.

On Sept. 12, the IAEA reached an agreement with Iran to access and maintain IAEA equipment at Iran's nuclear site, but not to access the monitoring data this equipment has collected over recent months. IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi described the limited deal as "a stop-gap... a measure to allow time for diplomacy."

IRAN-CHINA COOPERATION IN OIL SMUGGLING

On Aug. 24, Dr Eyal Pinko of the consultancy Terra Strategic Solutions reported that, over the previous year, China had purchased more than 700,000 barrels of oil from Iran daily thanks to joint smuggling operations, making Iran China's primary supplier of petroleum.

Following US President Trump's imposition of sanctions on Iranian oil in 2018, Iran has been using the 143 tankers in its tanker fleet to transport petroleum clandestinely to various destinations including China, North Korea and Russia.

The report says China has helped Iran bypass sanctions by assisting its tankers to evade detection. To achieve this, the tankers have been repainted and have had their names and flags changed frequently. They also reportedly transmit incorrect locations via the Automatic Identification Systems required by international shipping laws.

THE TALIBAN'S US WEAPONS WINDELL

As the Afghan security forces collapsed, tens of billions of dollars' worth of US weapons, including Black Hawk helicopters, attack aircraft, more than 3,000 Humvees,

30 or more mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles and vast quantities of small arms, fell into the hands of the Taliban. It is estimated that the US provided Afghan forces with more than 400,000 rifles and machine guns, more than 25,000 grenade launchers, 162,000 pieces of communication equipment, and 16,000 night-vision goggles, most of which are now presumed to be in Taliban hands.

While the aircraft may prove impossible to operate and maintain, the other equipment and vehicles will provide a major boost to the Taliban's arsenal and probably to those of other terror groups.

There were also reports on Iranian social media of military vehicles which had belonged to the Afghan army being transported into Iran.

COVID UPDATE

As the Delta wave of COVID-19

continued to bite across Israel, there were 196,397 new cases between Aug. 16 and Sept. 9 and 626 deaths. As of Sept. 9, 81.92% of the population had received at least one vaccine, while 75.05% had received two.

On Aug. 29, Israel further extended its booster shot program, making a third dose available to all Israelis over 12.

Despite the Delta wave, Israel's schools re-opened on Sept. 1 after the summer break under detailed new protocols, including regular student testing, designed to deal with COVID outbreaks in schools without shutting down in-person learning.

In the PA-controlled areas of the West Bank, there were 43,333 new cases and 155 deaths between Aug. 16 and Sept. 9, with 30.75% of the population having received one vaccine and 12.7% fully vaccinated. Gaza had 23,805 new cases between Aug. 15 and Sept. 8.



STRANGER THAN FICTION

UNSPEAKABLE EMBARRASSMENT

While some countries have fully vaccinated 80% of their eligible populations against COVID-19, fewer than 13% of Iranians have received two doses – no doubt at least partly because Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei banned all vaccines from the two most important suppliers, the US and UK, in January.

In mid-August, the Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Major General Hossein Salami, told a meeting about the COVID situation, "We can't trust the enemy in foreign vaccines imports." He asked, "What guarantee is there that the United States... doesn't give us vaccines that cause paralysis?" Yet Iran had more than one million new cases and 18,000 deaths in the month before Sept. 9.

Meanwhile, Iran's new Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has apparently had a dose of something that

has removed his proficiency in foreign languages. His Wikipedia page states he is "fluent in Arabic and English", and IRGC media often touted his ability in Arabic and English when promoting him for the role over the past three years, while supporters cited his mastery of Arabic during parliamentary confirmation hearings.

Then came his first international appearance as Foreign Minister, at the Baghdad Conference on Cooperation and Partnership on Aug. 28, together with many Arab heads of state and foreign ministers. He read out a speech in Arabic so poorly that *Iran International*, a London-based Persian language TV station, counted 100 pronunciation and 40 stylistic errors in the one short statement. He was also seen during the conference speaking sub-standard English.

He couldn't even stand in the right place, causing controversy by positioning himself in the front row for the official photo with the heads of state rather than with the other foreign ministers.

Perhaps he has been under the influence of one of Salami's paralysis-causing vaccines?

COVER STORY

AFGHAN AFTERMATH

ISRAEL'S CHANGING STRATEGIC SITUATION

by Yaakov Amidror

Recently, I spoke with a respected American journalist who asked about the impact on Israel of the US withdrawal and fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban. He is not the first person to ask about this, even though Afghanistan is very far from Israel and never was an enemy of Israel on the battlefield. Some expand the question and tie the hurried withdrawal from Afghanistan with the decision to stop fighting in Iraq and leave behind only US troops that will train the Iraqi army.

The first to define the expected process was President Barack Obama, who talked about a pivot to the East, in other words shifting US efforts from the Middle East eastward, alluding to China. President Donald Trump followed suit and decided to withdraw all American forces from Syria and Iraq (although this was not fully acted upon). President Joe Biden continued this process and brought it to a difficult end in Afghanistan, taking another step towards a complete withdrawal from Iraq. In other words, this move is not a personal idiosyncrasy but rather an inevitable historical process reflecting deep-rooted American sentiment.

The question is how the US decision to reduce US military involvement in the Middle East, and the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan, will impact the international and regional order within which Israel operates.

From a global perspective, US nation-building in a country that America took responsibility for in 2001 is a resounding failure, especially considering the lightning speed of collapse of the military and political system in Afghanistan which the US attempted to build.

Will this failure impact America's international standing, primarily the race between the US and China? Most likely, it will impact US standing very little. US competition with China is not related to any one event. China is

driven by its belief and wide-ranging assessment over time of America's decline; that the democratic system has run its course and China has emerged on the world stage to change the world, not to integrate into it, certainly not according to the rules set by the West.

It is not at all certain that China is interested in Afghanistan becoming a terror state – but the situation in Afghanistan is not a major event that will dictate China's actions.

Europe will also not change its cautious position regarding the struggle between China and the US because of America's success or failure in Afghanistan or Iraq. Europe will continue to speak grandiosely about protecting human rights in China and simultaneously expand its trade with China. The Europeans certainly would be happy if the US succeeds in isolating the Taliban, and they even were willing to provide some help during the various stages of the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda – but most Europeans believe that trade is preferable to war, and when the largest trade partner is China, you cannot really fight against it.

The real lesson the world learns from the US failure has to do with the entire Middle East. The failure shows the world that history cannot be replicated, and that what succeeded after World War II in Germany and Japan does not necessarily work in the Middle East. The US failed in changing the local culture in Iraq, and certainly in Afghanistan.

It should therefore be quite clear that the Middle East, between the Atlantic Ocean and India's borders, will not change dramatically anytime soon, just as it did not following the Oslo agreements nor following the mislabelled "Arab Spring". This region is doomed to remain difficult, brutal, violent, repressive, and culturally Islamist.

At the same time, we must take into consideration that after the US partially or completely leaves, there will not

be a void. There is no vacuum in the real world, and the obstacle to the involvement of other powers which the US posed by its very presence will have been removed. This will enable China and Russia to expand their influence in the area. They will take part in rebuilding Syria as well as in the rebuilding of Iraq and Lebanon, and probably Afghanistan too (mainly by China), and they will expand their influence by building military bases in the region and selling arms.

China and Russia will be glad to stake their presence and expand their influence, even symbolically, any place from which the US withdraws – if for no other reason than to signal a change in their favour. Their more prominent presence in the region likely will bring about a change in behaviour of Mideast countries, since it will not be possible to ignore Russian and Chinese interests. The world looks different when there is a Chinese or Russian military base, instead of an American base, nearby.

As for the Middle East itself, countries in the region must recognise that the political and security conditions around them are changing, and that the US umbrella is growing weaker.

For Iran and Turkey, two countries with imperial pasts that dream of restoring their former glory and expanding their influence, this is an opportunity that they will not miss, and therefore they likely will become more aggressive.

For the countries seeking to maintain the status quo and which are concerned about the Shi'ite axis of evil, as well as a re-emergence of the Ottoman Empire driven by a Muslim Brotherhood-like ideology – now is the time to act collectively to protect themselves.

These countries are Arab countries, some rich, some heavily populated, and some with serious economic and social problems. They are dictatorships at some level or another, exerting harsh control over their population and suppressing the opposition. At the same time, they are threatened by extreme Islamic organisations, both internally and externally. Each of them separately will find it very difficult to contend with Turkish or Iranian pressure as well as with the lurking danger of internal enemies from within.

However, if they act together, in mutual assistance regarding economic, intelligence and military matters, they

will be able to contend with the two non-Arab countries that seek to control the Arab world. Each of these countries will be left with difficult internal challenges, but they will also be able to deal with these more easily if the external threat is mitigated.

It is entirely unclear whether the Arab world is ready for such a change. Perhaps the old rivalries between and within these countries will not enable them to cooperate. If this proves to be the case, Iran and Turkey will have an easier time in threatening countries across the Middle East.



Afghanistan is more than 3,000 km from Israel, but the Jewish state will nonetheless find itself more alone in dealing with regional threats after the US withdrawal (Credit: Shutterstock)

At the same time, radical Islamist movements will be encouraged by the Taliban's success and will increase their efforts in these Arab states.

From the Israeli perspective, the weakening of US commitment to, and involvement in, the Mideast poses a problem mainly because Israel will be left bearing the burden of contending with the countries threatening Israel and the entire region.

At the same time, this also presents Israel with a genuine opportunity. After all, Israel is less impacted by US withdrawals than these Arab countries. Israel never built its defence capability on active American partnership, certainly not on the battlefield. Israel has expected the US to provide only the means for Israel's victory – through assistance to purchase US arms, through diplomatic support that enables Israel to use force until achieving victory on the battlefield, and through deterrence of forces that harm or threaten Israel. In these areas, the US has not backed away from its commitment to Israel, and therefore the conditions for conducting future warfare have not fundamentally changed from Israel's perspective.

Nevertheless, it is true that Israel is now more alone in bearing the day-to-day burden of dealing with aggressive forces in the region, both to prevent and win wars. Israel will have to address this additional burden in its military force build-up.

Israel should try to convince the US to assist in this additional effort. But under no circumstances should Israel call on the US to return its soldiers to the region. It is not Israel's business how the US sets its priorities and where it is willing (or unwilling) to sacrifice the lives of its men and women.

Israel must repeatedly emphasise that it will defend itself by itself. Israel is willing to pay for this capability and will be happy to receive US assistance in easing the burden of realising it.

Israel's regional standing may in fact grow stronger in

two areas. Perhaps Mideast countries will come to understand that an open relationship with Israel is vitally important for their ability to defend themselves. In contrast to Iran and Turkey, Israel does not have any pretensions or aspirations to control or influence Arab countries, besides its desire to prevent them from threatening it. Thus, Arab countries can gain significantly from open relations with Israel because Israel can provide knowledge and technology in areas that are important to these countries such as water, agriculture, education, and health. Israel can help them defend themselves by way of intelligence cooperation, as well as overt and covert security assistance.

Israel is not a substitute for the US, but together with Israel these countries will be able to build a regional scheme that will make it easier for them to contend with various threats. If it responds correctly to the US decision, the Arab world can mature and learn to deal with its problems on its own – together with Israel.

From the US perspective, the importance of Israel for securing American interests in the region (and necessarily also of Israel's standing as a component of US national security) will increase. If the US assesses the situation correctly and does not let clamour from the anti-Israeli ideological flank on the far-left margins of the Democratic Party impair its rational and professional thinking, it will understand that Israel is the only country in the region on which the US can count.

The decision of recent American presidents to cut back

on investments in the Middle East (mainly to direct energy and budgets to the Far East) is undoubtedly of historical significance for the entire Middle East. The US shift does not ensure US success in the race against China, but it certainly undercuts the feeling of countries in the Mideast region that there is someone to rely on in case of a crisis, particularly with respect to Iran and Turkey and with regard to the fight against global terror.

Nevertheless, if they act together, Arab countries should be able to defend themselves against Iranian and Turkish aggression. Adding Israel to this undertaking will make it much easier to contend with the regional powers that are not Arab but that aspire to rule the Arab world. AIR

Major General (res.) Yaakov Amidror is the Anne and Greg Ross-handler Senior Fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS). Previously, Gen. Amidror was National Security Advisor to PM Netanyahu and chairman of Israel's National Security Council. He served for 36 years in senior posts in the IDF. ©JISS (www.jiss.org.il), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

THE MIDDLE EAST ADJUSTS TO U.S. RETREAT

by Amotz Asa-El

The military mission is over,” said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken after announcing in the same breath: “We will lead with our diplomacy.”

Following the last American aircraft's departure from Kabul's Hamid Karzai Airport on August 31, diplomats and scholars agree that the retreat represents much more than one great power's one retreat from one arena.

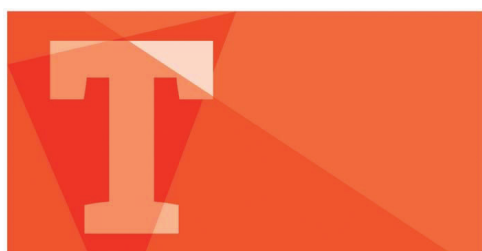
The global spread of the American military was unlike that of any empire's in history.

With some 800 bases in some 150 countries, including 200,000 troops overseas, as well as 11 aircraft carriers sailing the high seas – equal to the rest of the world's total carriers – America spends US\$770 billion (~A\$1.044 trillion) annually on defence, more than the next five military powers combined.

The size and scope of this spending have come into question, not only in terms of affordability, but also in terms of efficiency.

Yes, the end of the Cold War left the US as the world's sole superpower, a role that underpinned, and initially seemed to serve, democracy's sudden spread worldwide. However, since then it has emerged that America and its allies face a new global enemy, Islamist terror, whose threat

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requires a different type of answer than the Soviet military challenge required during the Cold War.

This, in a nutshell, is the meaning of America's Afghan misadventure, and of what transpired since the September 11 attacks which triggered it.

The American retreat began with Barak Obama's pullout from Iraq in 2011, which later had to be partially reversed given the rise of the Islamic State, and included Donald Trump's withdrawal of most American troops from northern Syria in autumn of 2019.

In Trump's case, the retreat was part of isolationist rhetoric that suggested the potential closure of long-standing American bases in countries like Germany, Korea and Japan. That didn't happen, but Trump's "America First" slogan indeed is seemingly being applied in the Middle East.



Regional capitals have been seeing signs of a US trend toward military disengagement from the Mideast since at least 2010 (Source: US Army/Flickr)

America's Arab allies first began suspecting the future of US regional commitment in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring which began in 2010.

US President Barack Obama's demand in 2011 that former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak heed demonstrators' demands and step down was seen by Arab elites throughout the region as a betrayal. Obama's failure to make a similar demand of the leaders of non-Arab Iran when they faced similar protests in 2009 raised further questions about America's long-term reliability as an ally.

In Egypt's case the result was sharp, and quick. When the Islamist regime that succeeded Mubarak was removed by General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi in 2013, the new President's first overseas trip was to Moscow. That alone was a slap in the face to Uncle Sam, following 35 years of a close alliance that included US\$1.5 billion (A\$2.04 billion) in annual aid.

Sisi's flirtation with Moscow then proceeded from diplomacy to arms. He signed a deal to buy Russian anti-aircraft missile systems, the first time in more than 40 years that the Egyptian military had bought Russian (or Soviet) hardware.

That arms deal has led to further cooperation, includ-

ing a Russian promise to build a nuclear reactor in Egypt, an Egyptian purchase of Russian fighter jets, and an agreement to let the Russian air force use Egyptian airbases. These Egyptian moves came despite protests at the time from the Trump Administration.

The Egyptian saga thus demonstrates both the regional perception of American departure, and Russia's quick arrival to attempt to fill the vacuum left behind.

The same dynamic occurred in Syria. Though its military was never an American client, Damascus could not ignore Washington's clout at a time when US local allies dominated the Middle East after the Soviet Union vanished. Damascus therefore tried to get closer to the US.

Russia, however, was still around, and was merely waiting for the right moment to stage an imperial comeback. That moment came in late 2015.

Having witnessed America's failure to deliver on its warning to punish Syria if it used chemical weapons against its people, Russia concluded that Syria was now ripe for Moscow's return.

With incredible speed, Russia built an airbase in western Syria, and immediately filled it with fighter bombers, pilots, and maintenance staff. America did not respond. Russia then used that airbase to intervene in the Syrian civil war and decide the outcome in favour of the Assad regime.

Faced with this combination of American retreat and Russian penetration, the rest of the region's powers have had to reassess their respective strategic situations.

Turkey was slow to recognise Russia's growing role, but came to understand it in 2015, after the Turkish air force downed a Russian jet that entered Turkish air space. The Russian response – sanctions which affected Turkish income from tourism and agricultural exports – led President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Moscow where he humbly apologised to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The pair have since been consistently coordinating and harmonising their efforts in the region, leading pundits to believe that Erdogan serves Putin's grander imperial agenda by weakening his country's place in the West in general and in NATO in particular.

For Turkey, Russian sympathy proved priceless when Ankara invaded northern Syria with tacit Russian approval at the expense of the local Kurds who had been protected by US troops.

Russia's resolve to restore the former Soviet Union's sway across the Middle East became particularly visible at the trilateral meetings Moscow hosted with Turkey and Iran in order to coordinate their activities in Syria, while also exploring a joint redesign of the country following Bashar Assad's victory in its civil war.

Now the Afghan retreat further accelerates America's gathering withdrawal.

Dramatic though this transition has been, from an Israeli viewpoint it has so far been manageable, and will likely remain so.

Israel was quick to grasp, and show its respect for, Russia's new role in the region. In a meeting in the Kremlin in September 2015, then-Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu agreed with President Putin to establish a coordination and deconfliction mechanism between the Russian and Israeli air forces with regard to their respective activities in Syria.

Over the subsequent six years, the two militaries have indeed generally stayed out of each other's way, even while Israeli aircraft repeatedly targeted Iranian installations, including ones reportedly shielded by the Syrian army.

At the same time, the quest to reduce American military spending abroad is not expected to meaningfully affect Israel. American aid to Israel currently rests on a ten-year deal that runs through 2028. The deal is strongly in America's interest, as it commits Israel to use almost all the aid to purchase American weaponry, even when there are comparable Israeli weapons systems available.

In terms of its size, the annual US\$3.8 billion (~A\$5.1 billion) Israel receives from the US is less than 1% of Israel's GDP. Israel would likely be able to afford a reduction or even disappearance of this aid should the gathering American retreat from the Middle East lead to such a decision in Washington.

Moreover, unlike many other American allies, including Australia, Israel is not home to any American military bases, in line with an Israeli military doctrine, formulated by David Ben-Gurion, which says the Jewish state must never rely on foreign troops to defend itself.

On the diplomatic front, it is notable that even when the US was the world's sole superpower, its efforts to deliver peace between Israel and its main Arab enemies, the Palestinians and Syria, failed. By the same token, even as its regional retreat was already well under way, Washington successfully brokered peace and normalisation deals between Israel and four Arab states last year.

It follows that, while the American retreat and the Russian resurgence are two Middle Eastern trends that appear to be here to stay, their consequences are unpredictable. That is particularly true with respect to the region's most explosive actor – Iran.

As Middle Eastern paradoxes go, the Islamic Republic may actually be on the losing side of the "Great Satan's" departure from Afghanistan, since the Sunni jihadist Taliban and the Shi'ite Ayatollahs, who share a 920 km border, are enemies overall – despite some limited cooperation in recent years.

Iran will therefore have to face the new radical Sunni Islamist government to its east in Kabul by itself – at a time when Iran's own oppressed Sunni Muslim minority has been particularly restive. It's almost as if Teheran was now being told by Washington what others in the region think

they have been hearing from the US for the better part of a decade – you're on your own now.

On the other hand, the US retreat from Afghanistan is considered by Islamist terrorists as proof that relentless jihad against the West always eventually emerges victorious and hence is the solution to all problems. Iran's newly installed and fiercely anti-Western leadership in all likelihood concurs.

AIR

THE TALIBAN, THE PALESTINIANS, AND PEACE HOPES

by Dan Diker and Khaled Abu Toameh

The Taliban's reconquest of Afghanistan, followed by the ISIS-K August 26 bombing that killed 13 US military personnel and scores of civilians, underscores the far-reaching implications of the US withdrawal from the country. The mujahideen's takeover of Kabul, following a 20-year US counter-terror campaign against al-Qaeda and other jihadi groups in Afghanistan, has re-energised the global jihad's slow and determined war against the West.

In the Middle East, where symbolism and imagery define reality, the American evacuation represents one of the most significant defeats of what Osama bin Laden referred to as "the Zionist-Crusader alliance" since al-Qaeda's mass terror attack on Sept. 11, 2001.

The implementation of the American withdrawal reflects an ongoing Western cultural misunderstanding of its fundamentalist foes. In the eyes of Islamists, the Taliban's seizure of Afghanistan mirrors the collapse of the world's leading superpower to the forces of the Koran's "true believers" – the jihadis. In this way, the pullout has emboldened extremists across Asia, the Middle East and beyond.

The Taliban moment has deep historical roots: The fall of the Shah of Iran – the *shahanshah*, the "king of kings" – in 1979 to Iran's Islamic revolution inspired Islamist revolutions and militancy elsewhere, including the emergence of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the late 1980s and early 1990s, respectively. In turn, the Taliban's past and current successes have inspired other regional Islamist and extremist movements, including those of the Palestinians.

The Biden Administration has stated that it wishes to bring "peace, security and prosperity" to Israelis and Palestinians. To do so in the post-Afghanistan context, it is critical to understand the implications of recent PLO and Hamas statements of sympathy for the Taliban, as well as the historical context of Palestinian partnership with Islamist movements.

HAMAS AS THE PALESTINIAN TALIBAN

Hamas has taken credit for inspiring the Taliban, just as it did for Israel's unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005. In early 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in the West Bank and Gaza, running on a ticket of "change and reform".

While the US pullout from Afghanistan was good news for extremists, it was bad news for moderate Arabs amenable to the West. Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and their supporters have been vindicated in their longstanding ideological claims that negotiations with Israel are futile. Their conclusion is that patience pays off and that only *mukawama*, or "resistance," can defeat the American-led Western alliance and dismantle the State of Israel.

It therefore comes as little surprise that Hamas was the first Islamist group to congratulate the Taliban publicly on their takeover of Afghanistan, saying:

"We congratulate the Muslim Afghan people for the defeat of the American occupation... and... the Taliban movement and its brave leadership in this victory, which culminated its long struggle over the past 20 years... [T]he demise of the American occupation and its allies prove that the resistance of the peoples, foremost of which is our struggling Palestinian people, will achieve victory."

On Aug. 17, 2021, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh told the Taliban's leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, that "the demise of the US occupation of Afghanistan is a prelude to the demise of the Israeli occupation of the land of Palestine."

Musa Abu Marzouk, a member of Hamas' political bureau, tweeted: "Today, Taliban has... faced America and

its agents, refusing half-solutions with them. The Taliban was not deceived by the slogans of democracy and elections and fake promises. This is a lesson for all oppressed people."

Abu Marzouk and Haniyeh emphasise the contradiction between democracy and the vision of an Islamic state shared by both Hamas and the Taliban. Palestinian support for the Islamist rejection of the West in general and Israel

in particular extends beyond Hamas. Palestinian public support for bin Laden and al-Qaeda was on display in the Palestinian street celebrations in Gaza and the West Bank immediately following the 9/11 terror attacks.

Following the August 2021 Taliban takeover, the Palestinian Authority also issued a statement that compared the US withdrawal to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: "Israel must absorb the

lesson — external protection does not bring security and peace to any country. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land will not last and will end."

ARAFAT'S 'TALIBAN' STRATEGY

The PA statement rests on historical precedent. PLO founder Yasser Arafat launched the "al-Aqsa intifada" in summer 2000, following Israel's overnight withdrawal from southern Lebanon four months earlier under pressure from Iran-backed Hezbollah. Hezbollah's reaction, voiced by its Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, that "Israel... is feeble than a spider's web," inspired the "secular" Sunni Arafat to ignite a jihad using the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem as a pretext, making it indistinguishable from other Islamist campaigns.

Similarly, PLO and PA leader Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala) took note of the Hezbollah response in 2000: "Every Pales-



Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar (left) with Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh in Doha, Qatar (Source: Facebook/info.Hamas.ps)



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tinian viewed the withdrawal as a strategic defeat of Israel,” which would be interpreted, in his words, as “kill Israelis, get territory.” Qurei emphasised that “if that is how Hezbollah got Israel to quit Lebanon, sooner or later it would result in Palestinian violence against Israel.”

The recent statements by Hamas and the PA in support of the Taliban should be understood in the context of the fundamentalist groups’ ideological rejection of America and Israel as infidels seeking to control the lands of Islam. Just as the Taliban routed America from Afghanistan, the PLO, the PA and Hamas aspire to expel Israel from all of “Arab Muslim Palestine”. In short, Palestinian-Taliban affinity is anchored in ideological rejection, not territorial conflict.

The Taliban, after a 20-year absence of control, has re-emerged as the government of the pre-9/11 Islamic emirate. Hamas, as the ruling government and military power in “Hamastan,” sees itself similarly. In 2007, after Hamas’s violent overthrow of the Western-backed PA, Khaled Mashaal, head of the Hamas politburo, declared:

“We shall never give up an inch of the fatherland, nor any of our rights, nor any part of our land.... We shall go the way of resistance, which is not a straight line, but means blows, clashes, one round after another, attacks and withdrawals. The course is to Palestine, to cleanse Jerusalem and al-Aqsa. This is our way against the occupation. Hamas was and always will be strong in jihad [holy war] and *istishhad* [suicide bombings].”

BIN LADEN’S PALESTINIAN PROFESSOR

The Palestinian-Taliban-al-Qaeda connection extends back decades. Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian scholar and cleric from a village near Jenin, is widely considered the “father of the global jihad,” having served as a mentor to Osama bin Laden. Azzam laid the groundwork for the establishment of al-Qaeda and the Pakistani jihadist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which carried out the deadly attack in Mumbai, India, in 2008, killing 175 people. Azzam influenced some of the world’s most prominent terrorist leaders, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of

al-Qaeda in Iraq, and Anwar al-Awlaki, the US-born operations commander of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Azzam had travelled to Pakistan, Afghanistan and even the United States in the 1980s to recruit and train Arabs and other Muslims from around the world, including many Palestinians, to fight the “global jihad” – first against the Soviet Union and subsequently, the United States. These global jihad fighters would come to be known as the “Afghan alumni”.

Sheikh Azzam is also considered to be an ideological father to Hamas. CIA and Middle East analyst Bruce Reidel has noted that Azzam helped draft Hamas’ 1987 founding charter.

“Inadvertently, the US Administration has tied the hands of the PA, since the Taliban’s takeover and the US withdrawal have legitimised and empowered Hamas as the new standard for ‘resistance’”

DIFFERENCES EMERGE

However, over the years, Hamas and al-Qaeda have maintained an uneasy relationship, reflecting various ideological, strategic and operational differences.

In the years following the Sept. 11 attacks and parallel to the PLO-Hamas Al-Aqsa terror war, bin Laden continued to identify Israel as part of what he called the “Zionist-Crusader alliance.” While Palestinian leaders expressed a certain dissatisfaction that Azzam had dedicated himself to global jihad at the expense of the Palestinian armed struggle, Israel remained the third objective of al-Qaeda’s global jihad, the other two being the American presence in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden said, “We will continue, God permitting, the fight against the Israelis and their allies... and will not give up a single inch of Palestine as long as there is one true Muslim on Earth.”

Palestinian support for bin Laden continued until his death in 2011. Hamas president Ismail Haniyeh condemned his killing by US forces, declaring the operation “the continuation of the American oppression and shedding of blood of Muslims and Arabs,” referring to bin Laden as “an Arab holy warrior.”

THE PALESTINIAN LEGAL ASSAULT ON US OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

While Hamas’ ideological affinity with the Taliban reflects Islamic teachings, international, PLO-affiliated “human rights” organisations have used other means over the years to undermine the American mission in Afghanistan.

For example, Palestinian operatives, disguising their affiliations via various non-governmental organisations, appealed to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in a strategic effort to undermine the US military’s fight against the Taliban and their al-Qaeda affiliates.

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Beginning in April 2017, Palestinian activists – executive members of two international NGOs: the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Centre for Constitutional Rights (CCR) – submitted complaints to the ICC charging US military forces in Afghanistan and the CIA with “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity”.

This was part of a strategic, political and legal warfare initiative by FIDH and CCR. These “human rights activists” were also found to be members of several PLO terror-affiliated NGOs – al-Haq, al-Dameer, al-Mazan and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights – that launched simultaneous legal assaults against the United States and Israel. By November 2017, the ICC prosecutor had requested the opening of an investigation against US military forces.

The Palestinian submissions were made by several front organisations, whose executives included Shawan Jabarin, director of the PFLP terror group affiliate al-Haq. Jabarin was referred to as “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” by Israel’s Supreme Court, in line with his past terror and political warfare activities. Jabarin serves as Secretary-General of the anti-American FIDH, which submitted the complaint against the United States to the ICC.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Palestinian sympathy and support for the Taliban have far-reaching implications for the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The Islamists, according to their own understanding, have humiliated the Americans, making it impossible for the PA to agree to any US peace proposal that would require any Palestinian concessions.

If the PLO’s ruling Fatah faction were to align with moderate Arab regimes that oppose Hamas and Taliban-style Islamism and that have signed peace agreements with Israel, they would be perceived by the Palestinian public as weak, pro-Zionist and pro-American. In contrast, Hamas takes credit and garners Palestinian public support for emulating the Taliban in fighting to shake off its Western occupier.

Hamas’ support for the Taliban also renders the PA’s relative silence on the issue noteworthy. The PA cannot publicly oppose the Taliban Islamists, since Hamas has become a more popular competitor for Palestinian public support in Gaza and the West Bank and has proven to be a more successful alternative as a “liberation movement”. The PLO-PA has also branded itself as an organisation that supports *mukawama* – “resistance,” which precludes it from negotiating with Israel.

Inadvertently, the US Administration has tied the hands of the PA, since the Taliban’s takeover and the US withdrawal have legitimised and empowered Hamas as the new standard for “resistance” against Israel’s existence as a democratic, Jewish-majority state in any borders.

LESSONS FROM THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

There are important lessons from the US experience in Afghanistan that can be applied to the Palestinian issue. As analyst Lee Smith notes, in 2013, then-US Secretary of State John Kerry invited then-Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on a secret visit to Afghanistan to show him that the “model the United States employed for Afghanistan would work for the Palestinians, too.” Smith writes that “Netanyahu declined the invitation and correctly surmised that as soon as the United States withdrew forces, Afghanistan would come under the control of the Taliban. And the West Bank would also fall to an Islamist regime if Washington imposed the Afghanistan model there, too.”

Netanyahu’s prognosis notwithstanding, Kerry’s assessment provides a teachable moment. But it is one that proves the opposite of what he had intended. Afghanistan under the Taliban serves as an excellent model for the Palestinian cause. Hamas’ model of armed “resistance,” now re-energised by the Taliban’s re-emergence and success, has placed a concrete barrier across the path of local legitimacy and international negotiations for the Fatah-ruled Palestinian Authority.

AIR

Dan Diker is a foreign policy fellow at the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs and a research fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at IDC Herzliya. Khaled Abu Toameh is an award-winning journalist who has been covering Palestinian affairs for nearly three decades. © Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (www.jcpa.org) reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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The Rise of ISIS-K

What we know – and don't know

by Thomas Joscelyn

A suicide bombing outside the airport in Kabul on August 26 saw at least 13 US servicemembers killed, while more than a dozen others were wounded. Estimates say more than 170 Afghans perished.

The Islamic State-Khorasan Province (often referred to as ISIS-K by the US Government) quickly claimed responsibility for the heinous attack. No one was surprised. In the days leading up to the bombing, American officials, including US President Joe Biden, repeatedly warned that ISIS-K could strike at any time.

And so it did.

Here are answers to some of the basic questions that are being asked about ISIS-K.

Who is the leader of the Islamic State-Khorasan Province?

President Biden vowed following the attack to retaliate against those responsible for the bombings. One of America's likely targets is the ISIS-K leader, a terrorist known as Shahab al-Muhajir.

The Islamic State's senior leadership appointed al-Muhajir as its *wali* (or governor) for the region in June 2020, after a string of his predecessors were killed or captured in counterterrorism operations. Al-Muhajir is an effective operator. As a team of experts working for the UN Security Council reported this past June, al-Muhajir "served as [the Islamic State's] chief planner for high-profile attacks in Kabul and other urban areas."

Al-Muhajir's men are prolific terrorists. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented 77 attacks that were either claimed by ISIS-K or attributed to it in the first four months of 2021 alone. Some of these were carried out in Kabul, where al-Muhajir's network has regularly targeted civilians, as well as the now deposed Afghan government.

How many men does the Islamic State have in Afghanistan?

No one really knows. All estimates are fraught with problems. Terrorist organisations don't publish their rosters, meaning a lot of guesswork is involved in coming up

with figures. US estimates of the manpower for the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban have been flawed for years.

According to the UN Security Council, ISIS-K was thought to have somewhere between 1,500 and 2,200 members in eastern Afghanistan earlier this year. But there are reasons to suspect that the group has hundreds of other members elsewhere throughout the country as well, including inside the Afghan capital. The Taliban's jailbreaks have reportedly freed hundreds of additional ISIS-K loyalists, too.

Why is ISIS-K opposed to the Taliban?

When the Islamic State declared its caliphate in Iraq and Syria in June 2014, its leaders immediately rejected the legitimacy of all other Muslim and jihadist authorities – including the Taliban. According to the Islamic State's

scheme, once its men set foot on the soil of any country or region, all Muslims in the vicinity owe their allegiance to its caliph. The first Islamic State caliph was Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. And when the first iteration of ISIS-K was formed in 2014, the group immediately demanded that all Muslims in Afghanistan bend the knee.

The Taliban weren't and aren't having it. The Taliban's leadership has consistently

rejected the Islamic State's attempts to usurp its authority, including during the reign of Baghdadi's successor, a terrorist known as Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi.

The Taliban and al-Qaeda fought for nearly 20 years to resurrect the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – the authoritarian regime that was toppled during the 2001 US-led invasion. ISIS-K rejects the Islamic Emirate's legitimacy outright.

The Taliban and ISIS-K have repeatedly fought one another. Al-Qaeda has, naturally, fought on the Taliban's side. And ISIS-K usually has the losing hand in this intra-jihadist conflict.

Their battles aren't just about which one is the rightful ruler of Afghans. ISIS-K's initial leadership was made up of defectors from the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban, as well as other affiliated groups. These defectors likely had their own personal agendas, in addition to ideological objections to the Taliban's rule.

This dynamic will continue to be a thorn in the Taliban's side, as ISIS-K provides an outlet for any disaffected leaders or fighters. ISIS-K has its own indigenous recruiting networks as well.



New kids on the terrorist block – an ISIS-K propaganda video

Does ISIS-K pose a threat outside of Afghanistan?

Yes. The UN Security Council's expert staff has identified a body known as the Al-Sadiq office as a regional node in the Islamic State's global network. Al-Sadiq is both "co-located" with ISIS-K in Afghanistan and "pursuing a regional agenda in Central and South Asia on behalf of the" Islamic State's global leadership. In other words, ISIS-K isn't a standalone unit – it is working with other parts of the Islamic State's network to export terror outside of Afghanistan.

ISIS-K has recruited fighters from throughout the Central Asian states, with the goal of exporting jihad to them. The Islamic State views these countries as new ground for expanding its caliphate project. Thus far, however, the group has demonstrated only a small operational presence in these countries. In July 2018, for instance, a team of Islamic State terrorists ran over American and European cyclists in Tajikistan, killing four people.

South of Afghanistan, in Pakistan, ISIS-K has a more developed operational capability. The group has conducted a string of operations inside Pakistan over the past several years.

ISIS-K poses some degree of threat outside of Central and South Asia as well. In the summer of 2016, three men allegedly conspired to carry out terrorist attacks in New York City on behalf of the Islamic State. American investigators discovered that the trio had at least some contact with ISIS-K's jihadists.

In April 2020, German authorities broke up a cell of four Tajik nationals who were allegedly preparing to attack US and NATO military facilities. Earlier this year, the *CTC Sentinel* published a report by Nodirbek Soliev, who expertly summarised the ties between this cell and Islamic State figures in Afghanistan and Syria.

To be clear: The overwhelming majority of ISIS-K's operations are conducted within Central and South Asia. But American officials will have to try to keep tabs on the group after all US military personnel were withdrawn, because no one can rule out the possibility that the outfit may try something in the West.

Is there any evidence showing that the Taliban and ISIS-K collude with one another, despite their obvious differences?

The answer to this one is tricky. According to the UN Security Council's experts, some countries claim that there is evidence showing that the infamous Haqqani Network has used ISIS-K cells in Kabul as a cutout for operations the Taliban don't want to claim, including bombings that kill a large number of civilians. The Haqqani Network is an integral part of the Taliban, and also closely allied with al-Qaeda. It is notorious, in part, because the Haqqanis have conducted some of the biggest terrorist attacks in Kabul's history – to date.

The UN team has cited intercepts allegedly showing that Haqqani commanders had foreknowledge of ISIS-K attacks. But is this evidence that the Haqqanis were flying false flags? Or had these Haqqani commanders simply defected to ISIS-K? Shahab al-Muhajir, the leader of ISIS-K, may be a former Haqqani operative himself – though that hasn't been proven.

In the end, the Haqqani-ISIS-K cutout theory is just that – a theory. We should be careful about running too far with it, especially absent solid evidence. On Aug. 26, President Biden said there is no evidence showing that the Taliban had cooperated with ISIS-K in the bombing outside Kabul's airport. I don't know how the President could have already known that just hours after the fact, especially given that the Taliban were manning "security" checkpoints nearby.

Still, ISIS-K has its own agency and its own incentives for killing Americans, Afghans, and others at the Kabul airport. The Taliban and al-Qaeda won the war, so ISIS-K had every reason to steal their thunder. The bombings outside the airport will undoubtedly help with the Islamic State's global recruitment efforts.

ISIS-K's claim of responsibility took direct aim at the Taliban, pointing to the fact that the Taliban had cooperated with the US in the evacuation of Americans and others. This argument is intended to undermine the Taliban's jihadist credentials – and their legitimacy as a government. And as the UN team has noted, the cutout theory is a controversial topic among member states – some of which dismiss it out-of-hand.

"ISIS-K has its own agency and its own incentives for killing Americans, Afghans, and others at the Kabul airport. The Taliban and al-Qaeda won the war, so ISIS-K had every reason to steal their thunder"

Can the Taliban be America's counterterrorism partner, as some have argued?

No. Sometimes the enemy of my enemy is just my enemy – not my friend. Such is the case with the Taliban, which remain intertwined with al-Qaeda. Thus far, the

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Taliban and al-Qaeda have been content to watch America retreat in humiliation. They wanted US forces gone, so they can get down to the business of restoring their Islamic Emirate. This has been their main religious and political goal all along.

Al-Qaeda is banking on the benefits of jihadist rule in Afghanistan, as it will be able to freely recruit, train and plot.

Most importantly, no one should ever trust the Taliban. In late August, the group's spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, told *NBC News* there is "no proof" that Osama bin Laden was responsible for the 9/11 hijackings. The Taliban have repeated this lie many times since 9/11 – even as al-Qaeda repeatedly advertised its responsibility for the deadliest terrorist attack in history.

It says much about the Taliban, and their true agenda, that they can't be honest about 9/11 after all these years.

The bottom line: ISIS-K remains a threat – both in Kabul, and elsewhere. But that doesn't mean the Taliban are our partner.

AIR

Thomas Joscelyn is a Senior Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and the Senior Editor for FDD's Long War Journal. The article originally appeared in The Dispatch (The Dispatch.com) © FDD (www.FDD.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

A POST-AFGHANISTAN POLICY FOR IRAN

by Behnam Ben Taleblu and Andrea Stricker

It's always hard to admit when you're wrong – this is true for the Biden Administration's disastrous exit from Afghanistan as well as its flawed approach to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Starting in April, Washington participated in six rounds of indirect negotiations to restore the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, to no avail. The election of ultra-hardliner Ebrahim Raisi as President in Teheran means either that the clerical regime is focused on exploiting Washington's propensity for appeasement, or that it is utterly disinterested in diplomacy.

"This process cannot go on indefinitely," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in July, a view apparently shared by America's European allies. The Secretary, at least on this point, is correct.

As Iran prods for more concessions, the Biden Administration should signal that there are costs for continuing a path of intransigence and escalation. Doing so will require a renewed US pressure track against Teheran: robust economic penalties backed by a credible military deterrent.

Shifting course to a better Iran policy is more critical than ever in the wake of Biden's botched Afghanistan withdrawal, as Teheran and other adversaries will exploit the US power vacuum.

The Administration has already made numerous direct and indirect concessions to Iran. These include dealing separately with Iran's nuclear and regional threats, removing Yemeni rebels that Iran materially supports from the US Foreign Terrorist Organisations list, failing to promptly respond to Iran-backed escalation in Iraq, not enforcing oil penalties as China imports record-high volumes of Iranian crude, not holding Iran accountable at the United Nations nuclear watchdog for safeguards infractions, and issuing waivers to permit Iran to pay debts to Japanese and South Korean companies using Teheran's frozen funds. Iran has pocketed every concession without a hint of reciprocity or moderation.

Recently, the regime stepped up provocations, attempting to hijack a vessel in the Persian Gulf and attacking an Israeli-owned tanker with drones, killing two Europeans.

To stem such behaviour and drive a better bargain, Washington must course-correct.

First, US officials must disabuse themselves of the notion that they need to regain Iran's "trust." As former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear accord in 2017, "the deal is based on lack of trust, no part of this deal is built on confidence." Mistrust of America and the West are deep-seated in Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. The outsized factor getting Teheran to negotiate in the past was the prospect of sanctions relief, not faith in America.

Second, the United States should amend the "go-it-alone approach" of the Trump Administration and multilateralise the pressure campaign it inherited. Despite being unable to curtail the reach of restored American sanctions on Iran after Trump's exit from the JCPOA in 2018, Europe's commitment to the nuclear deal meant that, in practice, allies like France, Germany and the UK were politically on the side of adversaries like Iran, Russia and China, waiting out the Trump policies.

To get Europe involved, Washington must inform France, Germany, and the UK it is jettisoning the notion of reviving the expiring JCPOA. Sustained US diplomacy should instead unite the allies behind a coordinated campaign to counter Iran's escalatory measures: acts of maritime harassment, cyberattacks, human rights abuses, the nuclear and missile programs, support for terrorism, and fomenting of regional instability.

On the nuclear front, Biden must rebuild the transatlantic consensus on stopping Iran's atomic program that existed before the JCPOA, which resulted in several rounds of UN Security Council sanctions resolutions. In



so doing, the Administration can build on past attempts to create supplementary terms for an improved accord as a baseline from which to draft the contours of a better deal.

One venue in which to present a united diplomatic front is the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is investigating Teheran's safeguards breaches and attempting to restore lapsed monitoring over Iran's nuclear program.

As of May, Iran had amassed enough enriched uranium to produce three nuclear weapons, and reduced the time required to make weapons-grade uranium to around two months. In April 2021, Iran also began producing 60% enriched uranium, a short step from 90%, the ideal purity for nuclear weapons. In February, Teheran also began making uranium metal, a material used in the core of nuclear weapons, and significantly reduced IAEA monitoring.

Washington and its partners should spearhead a new IAEA resolution censuring Iran. [Ed. Note: The IAEA Board of Governors was scheduled to hold a session the week beginning Sept. 13, after this *AIR* edition went to print]. If this approach does not bear fruit, America and Europe must elevate Iran's nuclear file back to the UN Security Council. Even if Russia and China refuse to censure Iran, the US and its allies can invoke the UN snap-back mechanism to restore all prior sanctions resolutions against the Islamic Republic.

Third, if Washington is going to get serious about countering Iran, it needs to have a regional policy that understands Teheran's centre of gravity is its web of partners and proxies, which the regime terms the "Axis of Resistance". Rolling back the gains of this network through sanctions, interdictions, denying terrain, political pressure, and even military strikes will be key to winning on the battlefields that Teheran has invested in so heavily.

There are countless other areas that require greater American attention, such as the regime's hostage diplomacy, assassination of dissidents, and foreign kidnapping plots. America must also not miss the opportunity to support the Iranian population when it takes to the streets.

Despite more than six months of Washington turning the other cheek, Teheran remains defiant and in violation of its nuclear obligations, and continues to arm and equip terror and proxy groups. Teheran is unlikely to ditch its penchant for escalation and extortion so long as it yields results. It's time the Administration admits that its Iran policy is not working – but it can still be salvaged. AIR

Behnam Ben Taleblu is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), where Andrea Stricker is a research fellow. Reprinted from the Dispatch (www.thedispatch.org) © FDD (www.FDD.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

9/11 ANNIVERSARIES TELL A TALE

by Clifford D. May

On the first anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, I wrote a column about a BBC radio program. I had been a guest along with "activist" Bianca Jagger and Anglican Church envoy Terry Waite. Neither evinced sympathy for what Americans had suffered at the hands of al-Qaeda and its enabler, the Taliban. On the contrary, Ms. Jagger accused the Bush Administration of killing "thousands" of innocent Afghans.

A year later, I wrote an anniversary column praising Sen. John Kerry, then a presidential candidate, for calling the attacks "our generation's Pearl Harbor." But I questioned whether he grasped the implication: Had our enemies awakened a "sleeping giant" and filled him "with a terrible resolve" (as Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto is reputed to have said)?

My 2004 anniversary column noted with chagrin that editors at *Reuters* had begun asserting that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter."

Two years later, it seemed to me that "we have begun to understand that we have enemies, that they pose a serious threat, and that we must fight them." I referenced the Bush Administration's National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, which declared that the US would "kill or capture the terrorists; deny them safe haven and control of any nation; prevent them from gaining access to WMD."

My 2007 anniversary column observed that Gen. David Petraeus had taken "command of the 28,000 reinforcements he needed in order to change course in Iraq" targeting al-Qaeda in Iraq, which had been "suicide-bombing mosques and markets in an attempt to foment a civil war..." He also began to challenge the Iranian-backed Shia militias that had gained power by responding to the AQI attacks."



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On Sept. 10, 2009, I expressed support for President Obama's decision to surge 21,000 additional troops into Afghanistan. Still, I criticised him for appearing ambivalent about the mission at a time when too many, on both the left and the right, were "arguing for retreat".

I added: "Any time infidels flee, declaring 'This is a war that can't be won!' or even 'This is a war that can't be won militarily!' the jihadis gain."

The next year, I focused on President Obama's contention that "open-ended war" does not "serve" American interests. If he wasn't going to commit the resources necessary to defeat America's enemies but didn't want to accept defeat at the hands of those enemies, the only option remaining was the one he was rhetorically rejecting: a long war, a "low-intensity war," to prevent our enemies from triumphing. That war would have to be fought, I wrote, "on a variety of fronts. Afghanistan is one of them."

On the 11th anniversary of the attacks, Ansar al-Sharia terrorists killed four Americans at the diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya. My column lamented that, nevertheless, on "television and in the editorial pages of newspapers, there was almost no discussion of who our enemies are, what they believe, what goals they seek to achieve, and what strategies they are pursuing."

Two years ago, I wrote that "despite his misgivings, Mr. Trump has maintained a small contingent of American troops in Syria whose main mission is to enable Kurdish and Arab partners to continue to diminish the Islamic State, which emerged following Mr Obama's withdrawal from Iraq in 2011."

But I expressed concern about Mr. Trump's dialogue with the Taliban – especially his plan to meet with Taliban leaders at Camp David. "Can you think of a better way to send a message of legitimacy and encouragement not just to the Taliban but to all jihadi groups and regimes in the Middle East and beyond?" I asked.

Though Mr. Trump cancelled the meeting, talks continued, culminating in a bad deal that the Taliban soon violated but which President Biden now claims he couldn't reject.

Last year's anniversary column drew from Congressional testimony by Thomas Joscelyn, making clear that al-Qaeda branches, and those of its offshoot, the Islamic State, have been "waging insurgencies" and setting up "terrorist networks" in a growing list of countries on several continents.

"These groups have not launched a catastrophic terrorist attack in the West in recent years, but that's not because they wouldn't like to," I posited. "It's in large measure because the US and some allies have taken the fight to them."

At that point, there were fewer than 10,000 US troops in Afghanistan – down from more than 100,000 at the end of President Bush's second term. With only that small



After 20 years, is the US back to Sept. 10, 2001 in terms of understanding the terrorism threat? (Credit: Shutterstock)

contingent supporting Afghan forces, wrote Gen. Petraeus, al-Qaeda was being prevented from re-establishing the infrastructure it had "under the Taliban prior to its ouster from power."

"Rather than a safe haven for extremists to plot devastating strikes," he added, "Afghanistan over the last two decades became an outpost from which the United States and its allies could project power against the terrorists."

But, as he and others feared, President Trump's bad deal, implemented with stunning incompetence by President Biden, has squandered those gains. We're back to Sept. 10, 2001, except that both our enemies and our allies are now watching the sleeping giant return to his slumbers. Expect serious repercussions to follow.

AIR

Clifford D. May is founder and president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) and a columnist for the Washington Times. © FDD (www.fdd.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

PRO-IRAN PROPAGANDA ON 5 NEWS

by Ran Porat

Sydney based 5 News (5news.com.au) is a news and views online platform in English and Urdu managed by Star Media, which bills itself as the "Multicultural News Network of Australia." The Facebook page of the website had close to 9,000 followers as of August 2021. The Urdu version of the website is edited by Alamdar Hussain Tabassum.

A handful of public figures and politicians have appeared on 5 News, apparently viewing it as a legitimate media platform. NSW Labor MP for Lakemba Jihad Dib had an election ad video that aired on 5 News. He was also



interviewed on June by *5 News* reporter Sofiana Rose about his work for Lakemba. In April 2021, Rose also hosted NSW Labor MP Julia Finn at the *5 News* studios to speak about her experience of sexual assault. In November 2020, former Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon was interviewed regarding her activism on Kashmir.



Hanif Bismi (YouTube Screenshot)

HANIF BISMI

One concerning aspect of *5 News* is the executive producer of *5 News* English, Hanif Bismi, who also hosts his own program on the channel. According to his bio, Bismi was born in India and migrated to Australia in 1988. He is a graduate in accounting and finance and works for the Australian government. He also holds a post-graduate degree in Middle Eastern religion and history from Charles Sturt University, and a university certificate in Iran studies from University of Sydney and is a research student at Western Sydney University.

In 2016 he was elected as one of the Vice Presidents of the Multicultural Eid Festival & Fair (MEFF). He says he is an advisor to the not-for-profit Australian Relief Organisation. In 2018 Bismi was featured in an Affinity Intercultural Foundation event as the Director of the Australian Institute of Islamic Affairs. However, as of 2021, there was no record of such a body in the Australian Business Register, nor does there appear to be any online presence for this organisation.

Bismi is a member of the media group of the Indian Crescent Society of Australia for Muslim residents of Australia of Indian origin. This group is coordinated by Zia Ahmad, Editor of the *Australian Muslim Times (AMUST)* – a news outlet that publishes Bismi’s writing on a regular basis. In a July 2019 ceremony, Dib awarded Bismi the *AMUST* writers’ award.

In his talk show on *5 News*, Bismi hosts distinguished guests such as Auburn Police Commander Superintendent Adam Johnson, community activists and more. Bismi has also forged a connection with Rabbi Zalman Kastel AM, National Director of the interfaith organisation Together for Humanity. The latter took Bismi on a tour of Sydney’s Emanuel Synagogue, a visit which was aired on Bismi’s show in October 2020.

ADMIRER OF RAISI AND IRAN’S “DEMOCRACY”

Bismi is an enthusiastic supporter of the regime in Teheran and a favourite commentator for the Iranian embassy in Canberra, which regularly recommends followers read his material. Covering the 2018 annual Sydney event celebrating the anniversary of Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution, Bismi

proudly posed for a photo with Iran’s Ambassador to Australia, Abdul Hussein Vahaji.

On his Facebook page, Bismi republishes posts by Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. In June he congratulated Iran for electing as President Ebrahim Raisi, widely known as the “Butcher of Teheran”, who is responsible for the summary execu-

tion of thousands of Iranians. In another post, Bismi argued that a “large majority of the people [of]... Iran elected current President [Raisi].” In fact, fewer than half of Iranian voters participated in the elections this year, the lowest rate since the 1979 revolution. Raisi received only 30% (18 million out of 59 million) support from eligible voters, while 3 million votes were disqualified as “informal” protest votes.

For his show on *5 News* in June, Bismi chose to interview Dr. Yahya Jahangiri, Raisi’s election campaign manager. Bismi hailed the “democratic elections” of Raisi as “a great achievement”. He neglected to mention that Raisi’s election was pre-arranged by the regime, which disqualified anyone who could seriously challenge Raisi from running. Bismi also ‘forgot’ to ask Jahangiri about Iran’s nuclear weapons program or its support for and export of terrorism. Jahangiri claimed that Raisi was a human rights “activist” whose image was being tarnished by the Western media. Bismi was quick to agree, stating that “of course, I understand that [the] media are [casting] a dark shade on [the regime] since the Islamic republic was established.”

Despite decades of brutal human rights violations by the regime, Bismi claimed in August on *5 News* that “Western media has always portrayed Iran as an example of a nation with the worst record of human rights. But Iran proved this narrative to be false propaganda and how it did this is an eye opener for the rest of the world.”



In February 2018 in Sydney, Abdul Hussein Vahaji, Ambassador of Iran, with Hanif Bismi (right) at an annual gathering celebrating the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution (Source: *AMUST*)

BISMI AND THE AL-TAJAMU NETWORK

Bismi's activities are in line with the messages coming out from the Australian branch of Al-Tajamu, one of Iran's international propaganda organisations. Moreover, Bismi has also participated in events associated with Al-Tajamu Australia's network.

For example, in June, Bismi was one of the speakers in the webinar "American Human Rights from Australian analysts' point of view". Other speakers included disgraced pro-Iranian academic Tim Anderson and Iranians Yahya Jahangiri, Raisi's campaign manager, and Ebrahim Azizi, a former spokesperson for the regime's powerful committee of hardliners, the Guardian Council, and currently the Vice-Chairman of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission.

One of Al-Tajamu's central events where Bismi is a regular attendee is the annual February Sydney celebration of the anniversary of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khamenei's 1979 revolution. The full video of the February 2020 event was uploaded to 5 News, while in 2015 and again in 2018 Bismi reported about the event for *AMUST*.

In the 2021 event, also covered by 5 News, Bismi lectured about the "democratic process of elections" in Iran and heaped praise on Iran's Supreme Leader, saying that "no other nation can have a leader like Khamenei."

Hanif Bismi's son, Talib Bismi, provided the coverage for 5 News of a January 2020 event in Sydney to mourn the killing by the US of arch-terrorist Qassim Soleimani, commander of Iran's al-Quds force, and Shi'ite militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Talib's coverage praised the event and amplified the message of the speakers.

Talib Bismi interviewed speakers and audience members at the event. Hussein Dirani, the head of Al-Tajamu Australia, told Talib that the blood of the two killed by the US "will remove the American tyrant from the Middle East." Prominent Al-Tajamu member Jay Tharappel was also interviewed in that report. Another interviewee declared that "The American Zionists [sic] empires are on their knees and are on their way out of the Middle East."

Hanif Bismi himself was interviewed by Talib as a participant in the event (though he is not identified in the video), telling him that by killing Soleimani and al-Muhandis "America attacked humanity" and calling the US a "war criminal".

Bismi reacted to the killing of the head of Iran's secret nuclear weapons program, Mohsen Fakhrazadeh (Novem-



A webinar featuring Bismi speaking together with disgraced academic Tim Anderson and key Iranian regime figures

ber 2020) in an article published on 5 News in April 2021. In the article titled "Assassination of most senior nuclear scientist will not break Iran's willpower", Bismi praised Iran as a country which "stood against American hegemony and inspired many nations in the region to do the same," while saying "America used 9/11 as an excuse to invade and to destroy Muslim counties [sic]."

The article also justified Iran developing nuclear weapons. Facing "provocative action" from Israel and because "Iran is encircled by US military bases in the region," argued Bismi, "it's reasonable to presume... Iran does utilize every [sic] deterrent including developing its nuclear technology."

In next month's *AIR*, I will review

Bismi's *Australian Muslim Times* stories and the conspiracy theories he advances in support of Teheran's agenda in Australia.

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.

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THE BIBLIO FILE

Death becomes them

People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present

by **Dara Horn**

W.W. Norton & Company, Sept. 2021, 272 pp., A\$47.25



by **Elliott Abrams**

How can a book filled with anger, a book about antisemitism and titled *People Love Dead Jews*, be delectable at the same time? The novelist Dara Horn has done it, combining previously published pieces in a work that is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Horn's target is a world obsessed with dead Jews, whether found in Holocaust memorials, the rebuilding of old and abandoned synagogues and cemeteries, or in assigning students the reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Jews, she writes, are "part of a ridiculously small minority that nonetheless played a behemoth role in other people's imaginations."

As Horn observes of some high-school girls she met in Nashville when she was 17: "Like most people in the world, they had only encountered dead Jews: people whose sole attribute was that they had been murdered, and whose murders served a clear purpose, which was to teach us something. Jews were a people who, for moral and educational purposes, were supposed to be dead."

The centre of this book is Horn's absolute rejection of all that ostensibly heartfelt, morally significant,

admirable concern about dead Jews. "I had mistaken the enormous public interest in past Jewish suffering for a sign of respect for living Jews," she writes, but it is not so. She concludes that "even in its most apparently benign and civic-minded forms," it is "a profound affront to human dignity."

People Love Dead Jews explains why, and does so in colloquial, even conversational language with sparkling insights about Jewish life. At root, Horn says that this obsession with

dead Jews distorts not only Christian but also, and perhaps more painfully, Jewish understanding of Jewish reality.

Her take on the rebuilding of abandoned synagogues and houses and rubbished cemeteries in places where Jews no longer live gives the sense of her argument: "There is a tourist industry concept, popular in places devoid of Jews, called 'Jewish Heritage Sites.' It is a much better name than 'Property Seized from Dead or Expelled Jews.'" And using the tourist

industry's "Heritage" lingo absolves us from asking "why these 'sites' exist to begin with." What happened to the Jews?

All such activities, Horn says, are an effort to convert dead Jews into a nice lesson about redemption while forgetting the vicious persecution, just as so many Holocaust books are about the minute number of rescues and rescuers rather than the reality of the Holocaust. Thus was Anne Frank's diary censored and her story made into one not of suffering and death but of a prelude to the famous line: "In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart." Horn reminds us that "Three weeks after writing those words, she met people who weren't."

As Horn writes, bestselling Holocaust novels are usually "uplifting," and very many "involve non-Jewish rescuers who risk and sacrifice their own lives to save hapless Jews, thus inspiring us all." It happened, occasionally, but making it central to the story serves the function of obscuring

"I had mistaken the enormous public interest in past Jewish suffering for a sign of respect for living Jews," she writes, but it is not so."

real accounts of what happened to the Jews — and who exterminated them. The rescuer stories are "statistically insignificant happy endings" that appear in English. But not in Yiddish — where instead there was a reckoning with truth: "In Holocaust literature writ-

ten in Yiddish... one finds the overwhelming reality of the unavenged murder of innocents, along with cries of anguish, rage, and, yes, vengeance."

Horn goes to an exhibit about the Holocaust at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, where, "at the end of the show, on-screen survivors talk in a loop about how people need to love one another." But she says this concept never appears once in the survivor literature she has read in Yiddish, "the language of 80 percent of victims." As she notes acidly, "love

rarely comes up; why would it?" She is furious at "being lectured by this exhibition about love – as if the murder of millions of people was actually a morality play, a bumper sticker, a metaphor."



Anne Frank: Her diary has been censored and turned into an uplifting story, rather than recalling her suffering and death (Source: Wikipedia)

Horn never loses her ability to see in new and fascinating ways what so many others have worked over for decades. Her discussion of Anne Frank is a good example, for what Horn does is write Frank's obituary – had she not been betrayed, and then murdered by the Nazis. It begins: "Anne Frank, noted Dutch novelist and essayist, died this past Wednesday at her home in Amsterdam. She was 92." On it goes, discussing the un-murdered Frank's novels and her journalism, her reporting on Soviet oppression, the Arab-Israeli wars, and the Israeli capture of Adolf Eichmann. This is the kind of insight only a novelist can bring, transforming the comforting lessons of the usual Anne Frank story into a searing expression of a life extinguished – 6 million times.

Horn insists that Jews today very often accept, knowingly or not, all the wrong lessons about hatred of Jews – from Anne Frank to Shakespeare. In a wonderfully comic chapter called "Commuting with Shylock," she recounts what

happens when her 10-year-old son comes across *The Merchant of Venice*. As they listen to it in the car, she finds herself defending the play – of course. It's *Shakespeare*. It is only as they hear it line by line, and her 10-year-old keeps saying "pause it," and she has to explain every scene, that she finally sees it all through him. Hearing the "Hath not a Jew eyes" soliloquy, she suggests to her son that that's the good part, where Shakespeare humanises Shylock. He listens carefully, she hits pause, and he says: "That was pathetic. That's *it*! That totally sucked!" A rueful Horn writes, "I have a doctorate in literature. I am aware that Shakespeare's plays contain many layers and mean many things. But the degrading hideousness of this character is obvious even to a ten-year-old... Why, I wondered, should I feel obligated to excuse this blindingly obvious fact, like some abused wife explaining why her darling husband beat her up?"

Horn writes a long and fascinating chapter on Varian Fry, who saved scores of Jewish lives in 1940-41 as the representative in France of the "Emergency Rescue Committee" formed by American intellectuals and artists. Here again, Horn derives a very different lesson from the usual simple accolades – a lesson, again, on how Jews have come to think about their history. Fry's



Varian Fry: Rescuer of Jewish intellectuals and artists (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

mission was to rescue what he called "the culture of Europe." And in a way he did: In addition to then-famous and now little-known writers such as Lion Feuchtwanger and Franz Werfel, he helped save Hannah Arendt, Max Ernst, and Marc Chagall. Horn offers a fascinating look at the psychological interaction between rescued and rescuer, but that is not her point. It is rather that Jews, like Christians, accept at once that this was a noble mission – that such artists, writers, and intellectuals were the "culture of

Europe" and therefore worth saving while others died.

But what about the culture of Hasidism, she asks, "with its devotion to ordinary, everyday holiness – or *Misnagdim*... whose energy in the years before the war was channelled into the rigorous study of *musar*, or ethics"? What about those whose lives were dedicated to righteousness, not art and culture? "For them, there were no Varian Frys." She concludes, "I could not help wishing that instead of an emergency rescue committee saving Europe's greatest artists... perhaps what should have been saved was not more of the culture of Europe, but more people like Varian Fry."

What ties these chapters together is Horn's insistence that Jews have drawn so many wrong lessons about themselves and the societies in which they live – or more sharply put, *from* the societies in which they live.

In the end, for Horn, there is one clear way to understand the past, and it is Judaism: the source of far truer lessons. The many pop-culture books on the Holocaust come to false happy endings; here, Horn's own happy ending is quite different. She joins in *Daf Yomi*, studying a page of Talmud each day along with tens of thousands of other Jews around the world. Here, memory of the past never fades. Here, as each generation seeks to understand righteousness and holiness, "I turn the page and return, carried by fellow readers living and dead, all turning the pages with me."

At turns caustic and comic, at others filled with outrage, *People Love Dead Jews* will also have readers turning the pages with her.

AIR

Elliott Abrams, who served in senior foreign-policy positions in the Reagan, George W. Bush, and Trump Administrations, is senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the incoming chairman of the Tikvah Fund. Reprinted from Commentary magazine. © Commentary (www.commentarymagazine.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



ESSAY

Critical Omissions

The erasure of Israel's Palestinian statehood offers

by Salo Aizenberg

Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past' is the slogan of the fictional English Socialist Party led by Big Brother in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*. Orwell understood that the erasure of history is a useful tool to control the present narrative and to influence the future. There are Orwellian parallels in how anti-Israel organisations and thought leaders now treat some of the key historical elements of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

This is clearly evident in relation to the multiple offers of statehood made by Israel to the Palestinians in the 2000 to 2008 period (the "Statehood offers"). These events do not fit the fictional narrative of those who portray Israel as a colonial-settler enterprise that seeks to dominate the Palestinians in an endless occupation that has been characterised by some as "apartheid".

A central element of this viewpoint asserts that Israel's control of the West Bank has always been designed to be *permanent*. (It also considers Gaza to be occupied, despite not a single Israeli being present in the area.) Thus, the notion that the West Bank and Gaza are semi-autonomous entities that may eventually become a sovereign Palestinian state is a fallacy and the whole region between "the

river and the sea" must be considered one entity under two systems that by design discriminates against Palestinians.

The concept of 'permanent occupation' as Israeli policy is demolished once we undertake a full and honest accounting of the Statehood offers.

Over this period Israel, with the assistance of the Americans who

"This erasure of Israeli attempts to achieve peace and grant Palestinians full statehood on nearly 100% of the West Bank and Gaza is now standard practice in the anti-Zionist narrative"

facilitated negotiations in 2000 and 2001, offered the Palestinians a full independent state that according to most Western observers contained all the elements of what a final-status deal should look like. The Clinton Parameters were a set of core positions provided to the Israelis and Palestinians in December 2000 as a vast improvement over the statehood offer in Camp David during July and August of 2000. The key elements of the parameters were:

- Creation of an independent Palestinian state with contiguity on nearly 100% of the West Bank with land swaps, 100% of Gaza and a dedicated link between the two areas.
- Jerusalem as the capital of Pales-

tine divided under the principle that existing Arab areas would be Palestinian and Jewish ones Israeli. This would also apply to the Old City, which would also be divided.

- Palestinian control of the Temple Mount/Haram and Israeli control of the Western Wall.
- The "Right of Return" for Palestinians would be allowed into the new Palestinian state.
- End of conflict agreement that would end all claims and satisfy all relevant U.N. resolutions.

There is agreement among experts that Ehud Barak accepted the Clinton Parameters while Yasser Arafat said no. Over the years many observers have made endless excuses for Arafat on why his rejection was justified, such as that he was under too much "pressure" or that the negotiations went forward even though Arafat did not want them, but the fact of his rejection is not disputed.

Some anti-Israel commentators still peddle falsehoods such as that the offers only provided for non-contiguous "Bantustans" or a capital in Abu-Dis, despite clear evidence to the contrary. In October 2020 *Al Arabiya* television released a

groundbreaking interview with Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia who recounted the last hours of Arafat's rejection of Clinton's final offer for statehood. Bandar placed all the blame on Arafat and has called the rejection a "crime" and a "tragedy".

On Sept. 16, 2008, Ehud Olmert made a similar offer to Mahmoud Abbas in a presentation made to the Palestinian leader and his negotiating team at Olmert's Jerusalem residence:

- Creation of an independent Palestinian state with contiguity on nearly 100% of the West Bank with land swaps (6.3% to Israel for the major Israeli settlements exchanged for 5.8% of Israeli territory plus a dedicated link



To make anti-Israel charges stick, activists have to erase the fact that a Palestinian state could today be more than a decade old if successive Palestinian leaders had not said no to Israeli peace offers (Credit: Shutterstock/ Roman Yanushevsky)

between West Bank and Gaza) and 100% of Gaza.

- Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine with Arab neighbourhoods of east Jerusalem transferred to Palestinian control.
- Placement of the Old City, including the holy sites, under international control by a committee comprised of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, Israel and the US, which meant that Israel ceded control of the Temple Mount.
- The “Right of Return” for Palestinians would be allowed into the new Palestinian state with a modest form of symbolic return into Israel proper.

This offer for statehood was rejected by Abbas who skipped a follow up meeting with Olmert the next day, claiming that he “had forgotten” that he had to go to Amman. Abbas did not bother to reschedule or negotiate further and the Olmert statehood offer was officially dead.

Years later Olmert said that, “From that time, I am still waiting for Abbas’ telephone call.”

American and Palestinian leaders have not disputed these events. Abbas claimed that he said no because he was not allowed to properly study Olmert’s map and chief Palestinian

negotiator Saeb Erekat admitted that he was not willing to give up a ‘single inch’ of the June 1967 lines. In 2011 Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State in 2008, revealed in her memoir that the Americans continued to work with the parties behind the scenes to revive the peace plan. She recounted that President Bush met with Abbas in the Oval Office at the end of 2008 asking him to reconsider Olmert’s offer. Rice concluded that “The Palestinian stood firm, and the idea died.”

This erasure of Israeli attempts to achieve peace and grant Palestinians full statehood on nearly 100% of the West Bank and Gaza is now standard practice in the anti-Zionist narrative, which has evolved to libel Israel as an apartheid state.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

A lengthy April 2021 report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) titled *A Threshold Crossed* charged Israel with the crime of Apartheid. Central to the claim is the contention that Israel, the West Bank and Gaza are in reality *one* combined entity with two separate sets of laws, one for Jews and one for Palestinians. By treating the region as one political entity, HRW dismisses the fact that Israel is a democracy with Arabs active in all areas of society,

recently highlighted with the entry of an Arab party into the governing coalition. Critical to HRW’s thesis is its assessment that Israel’s control of the West Bank and Gaza has always been intended to be perpetual in nature, indicated on the first page of the report:

“Several widely held assumptions, including that the occupation is temporary, that the ‘peace process’ will soon bring an end to Israeli abuses, that Palestinians have meaningful control over their lives in the West Bank and Gaza, and that Israel is an egalitarian democracy inside its borders, have obscured the reality of Israel’s entrenched discriminatory rule over Palestinians... a number of Israeli officials have stated clearly their intent to maintain this control in perpetuity and backed it up through their actions, including continued settlement expansion over the course of the decades-long ‘peace process’.”

For the charge of apartheid to “stick”, even within the already heavily manipulated definition of the word, HRW focuses on this concept of permanent control of the territories, there being no intention on Israel’s part to create two independent states. Kenneth Roth, CEO of HRW, recently tweeted that “the no-end-in-sight 30-year ‘peace process’” does not absolve Israel of the crime of apartheid, adding that the peace process was a sham meant to mask Israel’s intent of permanent domination.

Eric Goldstein, acting executive director of HRW’s Middle East and North Africa division, confirmed that this concept is absolutely central to the apartheid thesis, writing that the peace process obscured the “clear intention of Israeli authorities to perpetuate a system of ... domination and intends to maintain this system.”

The reality of the Statehood offers sharply contradicts this key HRW assumption, which is why the report *completely avoids* a discussion of these events. The only allusion to

the Statehood offers in the report is the following line: “The parties did not reach a final status agreement by 2000 and have not in the two decades since, despite off and on negotiations primarily mediated by the US.”

The report further dismisses the negotiations as merely a tactic to “oppose efforts for rights-based international action or accountability, and as cover for Israel’s entrenched discriminatory rule over Palestinians in the [Occupied Territories].”

Without any supporting evidence, HRW goes one step further than previous revisionist viewpoints in dismissing Barak and Olmert’s efforts as nothing more than a ruse by Israel to solidify Israeli domination over Palestinians and all the territory.

The egregious disingenuousness of the HRW report is further demonstrated by its cherry-picking of quotes from Israeli officials. The report notes that “Statements by Israeli prime ministers and other senior officials highlight the extent to which the intent to maintain demographic control has guided policymaking.”

The report quotes Netanyahu from 2003 and 2019, Ariel Sharon from 2002 and Shimon Peres from 2012. It cites Ehud Olmert, but only from 2003, three years before he became prime minister, with a statement that purports to show his intent to preserve a “Jewish majority”. To further prove that Israel has always sought to ensure “Jewish control over the land” and demographic “domination” to “confine Palestinians to dense population centres,” HRW cites snippets from a range of other Israeli figures, both well-known and obscure: Ben Gurion from 1948, Jacob Edery, Minister for the Development of the Negev and Galilee, from 2007, a leaked document from Yisrael Koenig, northern district commissioner of the Interior Ministry, from 1976, Ariel Atias, Israel’s Housing Minister, from 2009, Israel Kimhi, director of planning policy at the Interior Ministry, from 1975, Teddy Kollek, Mayor of

Jerusalem, from 1982, Labour Minister Yigal Allon from 1976 and Member of Knesset Yariv Levin from 2014.

But the 200-page report, which HRW and others have touted as comprehensive and well researched, conveniently and incredibly skips over the entire history of the Statehood offers. HRW’s tactic is to pretend that these events never happened and assume that no one will notice or care.

NATHAN THRALL

Another notable example of the erasure of the Statehood offers is a recent article by frequent *New York Times* contributor Nathan Thrall titled “A Day in the Life of Abed Salama” (*New York Review of Books*, March 19, 2021). The article has been hailed as an extraordinary piece that breaks new ground, but the 20,000-word document is nothing more than a long-form anti-Zionist essay which for all intents and purposes is the same as the HRW report.

Like the HRW report, Thrall covers a wide swath of history with liberal use of quote snippets ranging from Theodor Herzl in 1895, Yehuda Blum in 1977 and modern leaders, all to show that for more than a century the true goal of Zionism was ethnic cleansing and permanent domination of Arabs by Jews. Also, like the HRW report, Thrall omits the Statehood offers. He mentions Rabin’s plan for a Palestinian entity as ‘less than a state’ and Netanyahu’s ‘state minus’ but conveniently missing are the names Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert. Thrall’s only reference to the Clinton Parameters is to assert that they allowed Israel to annex certain settlements, again positioning Israel’s actions for peace as sinister. Thrall parrots the proven falsehood that Palestinians were only offered ‘Bantustans,’ a charge which chief US negotiator

Dennis Ross called a canard since the well documented plan put forth by President Clinton was for nearly 100% of the West Bank with no possibility for cantons or Bantustans.

PETER BEINART

Peter Beinart, who has recently distinguished himself as perhaps the most prominent anti-Zionist Jew in the US, wrote a notable article in *Jewish Currents* in July 2020 calling for a one-state solution. Beinart explains: “The painful truth is that the project to which liberal Zionists like myself

“Even well-intentioned pro-Israel Zionists who desire to see themselves as ‘honest media-tors’ do not want to accept the simplest and depressing answer to why the two-state solution has failed”

have devoted ourselves for decades — a state for Palestinians separated from a state for Jews — has failed. The traditional two-state solution no longer offers a compelling alternative to Israel’s current path.” Beinart further informs the reader that, “Understanding why the classic two-state solution is dead requires understanding how its current incarnation was born.”

standing how its current incarnation was born.”

Astonishingly, his explanation for how the two-state solution evolved and then failed does not include the words Clinton, Arafat or Olmert. A full and honest recounting of the Statehood offers would totally undermine the fabricated narrative Beinart weaves.

THE CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

In April 2021, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace issued a report titled *Breaking the Israel-Palestine Status Quo*. The paper purports to offer an analysis of how to shift US policy after “decades of on-and-off negotiations and failed peace initiatives” but totally fails by not mentioning the names Clinton, Arafat, Barak, or Olmert even once and not assessing the Statehood offers. The authors assert: “The growing dominance in Israel of a leadership that

openly embraces permanent control of the occupied Palestinian territories and the steady decline of Palestinian democratic governance have been trends for decades.” Really? Only 13 years ago Olmert offered Abbas a full state that was arguably more generous than that offered under the Clinton Parameters in 2000.

ISRAEL POLICY FORUM

The downplaying of the Statehood offers is also a phenomenon of pro-Israel, Zionist organisations such as the Israel Policy Forum. The forum’s core value is to support the ‘realisation of a viable two-state solution’. In February 2021, the organisation published a report titled *In Search of a Viable Option, Evaluating Outcomes to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, but this document also erases the Statehood offers.

It seems that the authors’ desire to appear ‘fair and balanced’ led to the clear avoidance of the elephant in the room: the two-state solution failed in 2000, 2001 and 2008 due to Palestinian rejectionism and refusal to budge from maximalist demands that, if met, would one way or another end Israel as a sovereign Jewish state.

The study’s cover page asks, “Is the two-state solution still possible?” and the first lines of the report note that “The two-state solution has been widely criticised from the right and the left as an idea whose time has passed and been overtaken by facts on the ground. As a result, many other models for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been advanced.”

Incredibly, in a paper that is specifically devoted to analysing the two-state solution and its alternatives, there is absolutely no analysis of why the two-state solution failed in the 2000 to 2008 period. There is no assessment of the Palestinian negotiating stance at the time, no discussion of why Barak and Olmert said yes while Arafat and Abbas said no, and no review of why these two-state offers were not sufficient for the Palestinians. Clinton is mentioned only twice

in the 120-page document and Arafat not at all.

The study concludes that “Even though the two-state outcome is the best approach, or the one assessed to be least flawed, it has serious challenges mostly pertaining to acceptance by the current Israeli government, some of whose leaders are working tirelessly to kill it.”

Somehow, to the Israeli Policy Forum, *none* of the fault lies with the Palestinians. The authors do not see “serious challenges” related to the Palestinian’s prior rejections of two-state offers and do not even deem it necessary to review the Statehood offers to draw lessons on why Arafat and Abbas said no.

JOHN KERRY

Then-Secretary of State John Kerry’s speech in December 2016 addressed the Obama Administration’s relationship with Israel and the reason behind his decision to abstain from a UN Security Council vote to criticise Israel’s settlements in the West Bank and its presence in east Jerusalem.

In a 70-minute speech which recounted many historical aspects of the conflict, Kerry devoted exactly one vague sentence to the Camp David era: “President Clinton deserves great credit for laying out extensive parameters designed to bridge gaps in advanced final-status negotiations 16 years ago.”

Ignoring this important milestone in the history of the conflict allowed Kerry to simply blame the settlements as the key obstacle to peace – not Palestinian rejectionism in any way.

AT LEAST PRESIDENT BIDEN GETS IT

It seems that even well-intentioned pro-Israel Zionists who desire to see themselves as ‘honest mediators’ do not want to accept the simplest and depressing answer to why the two-state solution has failed since first proposed in the 1930s: the absolute rejection by most Arabs and Palestinians of Jewish statehood on any borders and its corollary demand of the literal “Right of Return”.

One only has to listen to President Biden who seemingly ‘gets it’ better than most experts when he said on May 21: “Let’s get something straight here, until the region says unequivocally they acknowledge the right of Israel to exist as an independent Jewish state, there will be no peace.”

AIR

Salo Aizenberg is the author of Hatemail: Anti-Semitism on Picture Postcards which was named a finalist in the Jewish National Book Awards in 2013, and Postcards from the Holy Land: A Pictorial History of the Ottoman Era, 1880-1918. © Fathom Magazine (www.fathomjournal.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

WRONG DIRECTION

An *SBS TV* “World News” Aug. 22 bulletin noted that an Israeli soldier was shot in the head and a 13-year-old Palestinian in the neck during violent protests by Palestinians along the Gaza-Israel border and that “live fire was reportedly used by both sides.”

Later that night, *ABC TV* “7pm News” (Vic.) reported that “Israeli troops say they opened fire when Palestinian protesters threw explosives at them and tried to scale the border wall.”

A one-sided *Daily Telegraph* report (Aug. 25) said Israel has “once again bombed Palestinians in Gaza after incendiary balloons launched” started fires in Israel’s south, adding that “Gaza... has been under a strict Israeli blockade since 2007.” A shorter version appeared in the *Herald Sun*.

SBS TV “World News” reported Gaza protests on Aug. 26, saying Palestinians were “calling on Israel to ease its blockade,” adding that “ Hamas is said to have kept the crowds back from the border at the request of Egypt, which has been trying to broker a long-term cease-fire.”

ABC TV “The World” (Sept. 3) reported that “hundreds of Palestinians took part in the protest with the Israeli military reporting the protesters were setting fire to tyres... to voice anger at an Israeli-led blockade of the territory.”

On Sept. 4, the *Daily Telegraph* said the “demonstrations” are in “protest against Israel’s almost 15-year-long blockade of the coastal enclave.”

All the reports mentioning the blockade failed to note that Egypt enforces it too. This raises the question, why aren’t Palestinians also protesting along the 15km stretch of border that Gaza shares with Egypt?

BITTER TREATS

On Sept. 7, *ABC TV* “The World” reported that Israeli “war planes” had targeted “a Hamas manufacturing workshop and military compound” in response to “activists linked to Gaza’s ruling Hamas group” who had “launched... balloons carrying explosive devices” in support of six Palestinian terrorists who escaped from an Israeli prison.

An earlier report on the same incident by *SBS TV* “World News” (Sept. 7), noted the celebrations of the prison escape in the West Bank and that “members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group” had distributed sweets on the streets.

FURIOUSLY FOOLISH

United States Studies Centre research fellow Susannah Patton opined in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sept. 1) that “Australia’s ties with south-east Asia... are a good news story... missed in the fury of policy debate centred on China...”

However, Patton claimed PM Scott Morrison’s “mooted moving [of] Australia’s embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, in an echo of Donald Trump’s policies” left Indonesia and Malaysia “furious”.

This is a gross exaggeration.

Indonesia’s media barely covered the issue and political opposition was confined to a vocal minority. Moreover, the virulently antisemitic perpetual Australia critic Mahathir Mohamad was Malaysia’s PM in 2018 when the Jerusalem issue was discussed.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

It appears to have taken two months, but the ABC finally noted the widespread Palestinian protests in the

West Bank directed against their own leaders, following the beating death of high-profile Palestinian Authority (PA) critic Nizar Banat in June.

The welcome and informative Sept. 2 report on *ABC Radio National* “Religion & Ethics Report” – technically not part of the ABC’s news and current affairs department – was not produced in-house, but was the work of former Australian-based journalist Iris Makler who now lives in Israel.

Makler’s report cited veteran Arab Israeli journalist Khaled Abu Toameh, who said he believes that “Palestinian leaders are more worried about reactions in the US and Europe than on the Palestinian street and that [it]... boils down to money.”

Abu Toameh added, “these are the largest funders of the Palestinian Authority. Money buys you loyalty... keeps you in power and for President Abbas... in his 16th year of a four-year term in office... the name of the game is survival... as long as [the US and Europe] are happy with him and satisfied with him, the Palestinian people can just wait.”

Abu Toameh was also quoted saying that despite the PA Justice Minister submitting a report into Banat’s death, no one knows “the findings... Who’s guilty? Who ordered the arrest? Who are the people who participated...? There are many question marks.”

Banat’s colleague Diala Ayash was quoted saying Palestinians “need transparency, justice, lack of corruption and we want the Palestinian Authority to allow resistance, we want to protest, we want to fight.” This presumably means “fight” against Israel, which suggests Banat was not quite the peacenik some have suggested.



CROSS WORDS

AIR has previously reported on the habit of *Age/Sydney Morning Herald* crosswords attributing to “Palestine” events, people and places that are indelibly rooted in Jewish history. This unfortunate habit has again resurfaced.

A quick crossword on Aug. 18 asked for a seven-letter word for “Biblical city of Palestine” with the answer “Jericho”. On Sept. 1, the nine-letter answer to the clues “The Holy Land (Biblical: Canaan)” was “Palestine”.

The word “Palestine” does not appear in either the Jewish or Christian Bible and it is misleading and historically inaccurate to call the area in biblical times by the name “Palestine”.

In 2019, the *Sydney Morning Herald* apologised over a previous crossword that made that error and explained crosswords are supplied by an outside contractor. The paper said it would look into it but it seems the problem has not been fixed.

MAHER OR LESS

Age features editor Maher Mughrabi broke the famous rule that journalists should never become the story.

On Aug. 23, the *Australian’s* Diary column asked if Mughrabi is a “journalist or activist?” Diary said the lobby group Australia Palestine Advocacy Network was offering a course on writing “great letters to the

editor – by (a) Palestinian journalist” – Mughrabi.

Diary quoted *Age* editor Gay Alcorn defending Mughrabi saying, “There is nothing at all wrong with Maher or anyone else providing tips on writing letters to the editor.”

Diary returned to the subject of Mughrabi on Aug. 30.

It claimed Mughrabi had used the *Age* “internal staff electronic messaging site” to attack a comment piece written by his Nine newspapers colleague Anthony Galloway which said Labor leader Anthony Albanese opposed the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel and deemed “anti-Semitism... a scourge he will not stand for.”

According to Diary, Mughrabi



IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** (Lib., Cook) – Sept. 3 – In his Jewish New Year message: “I extend my warmest greetings to all who are marking Rosh Hashanah ...

“In keeping with this ancient festival – one of the high holy days of your faith – you honour the past and prepare for the future through reflection and repentance. By your actions and prayer, each of you keep alive a sacred tradition that holds both memory and hope for Jewish people across the world...

“Though some challenges still lie ahead, I hope you can begin this New Year in a renewed spirit of hope and faith. May you draw deeply on the same wells of solace and resilience in these difficult times that have sustained the Jewish people through generations. *L’shanah tovah tikatev v’taihatem.*”

Opposition Leader **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – Sept. 3 – In his Jewish New Year message: “On behalf of the Australian Labor Party, I wish the Australian Jewish community a Shana Tova U’Metukah – a sweet and happy new year...

“I am deeply grateful to the Australian Jewish community for your long and remarkable history of contribution. Quite simply, this country is unimaginable without you. Just as you have helped make Australia the nation it is today, you will help shape Australia as we emerge from this crisis.

“May this new year of 5782 bring you and your family naches and simchas, and may the Shofar be granted extra decibels as it ushers in what we all hope will be a year of joy and success, recovery and renewal.”

Dave Sharma (Lib., Wentworth) – Aug. 8 – “I want to wish the Jewish community a particularly sweet and happy new year, shana tovah u’metukah, for the year that’s coming up, wish them

well for the time ahead and let them know, importantly, what a valued and appreciated part of the Australian community they are. The amount that they’ve given in terms of their contribution to Australia is well recognised and highly appreciated. Shana tovah u’metukah.”

The following statements are from Sept. 2 media releases on forthcoming legislation to strengthen anti-hate protections in Victoria, including banning displays of the Nazi swastika:

Victorian Attorney-General **Jaclyn Symes** (ALP, Northern Victoria) – “All forms of hate are unacceptable and have no place in Victoria – expanding our anti-vilification laws to protect more Victorians sends a clear message that this vile behaviour will not be tolerated... we will make sure we consult widely with the community and impacted groups to get the settings right before making legislative changes.”

Victorian Minister for Multicultural Affairs **Ros Spence** (ALP, Yuroke) – “Nazi symbols glorify one of the most hateful ideologies in human history. We must confront hate, prevent it, and give it no space to grow.”

Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, **Neil Angus** (Lib., Forest Hill) – “The Victorian Liberal Nationals welcome today’s commitment to ban the Nazi swastika. This reform [is] an important step to ensuring a safer, more [tolerant] community and demonstrating that intolerance has no place in Victoria.”

Shadow Minister for Police & Crime Prevention, **David Southwick** (Lib., Caulfield) – “Today is an important step forward for all those who have been victims of the ultimate symbol of hate – the Nazi Swastika.

“For too long, frontline police and local communities have been powerless to stop the Nazi swastika being used as a tool to spread hate. More recently we have seen a rise [in] extremist nationalist and racist individuals and groups and this ban will go a long way to take away the symbol that they hide behind.”

complained Galloway didn't include a Palestinian voice and insisted that BDS is not antisemitic. Galloway's article was removed from the *Age's* website and did not run in the following day's print edition, Diary said, adding that the *Sydney Morning Herald* did not follow suit.

Diary said *SMH/Age* deputy federal political editor Stephanie Peatling had defended Galloway, posting that: "It's a story about Labor politics – not an argument about whether or not BDS is antisemitic. We haven't quoted any Jewish groups either."

Mughrabi responded that it was "disingenuous" to say the issue was merely about "Labor politics", complained he had been "labelled an antisemite in my own workplace", and concluded by arguing: "The Israel-Palestinian issue is not an inhouse matter for white people."

The next day, *Sky News* TV's "The Bolt Report" noted that Mughrabi's mother was English and pointed out that earlier this year he had signed the #dobetteronpalestine petition demanding journalists not be neutral in covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

News that Sirhan Sirhan, who was convicted of assassinating Democratic presidential aspirant Bobby Kennedy in 1968, might receive parole was widely reported.

Most stories correctly said he was a Palestinian Christian from Jordan who had moved to the US.

But a *Reuters/AP* report (Aug. 28) on the ABC website called Sirhan a "Palestinian refugee" and failed to note his Jordanian citizenship.

Sirhan was four years old during the 1948 war that led to Israel's creation. After Jordan annexed the West Bank, he received Jordanian citizenship but moved with his family to the US when he was 12, although he never became a US citizen. Most people would not consider someone

who has citizenship, with the political and legal benefits that brings, to be a refugee.

On *ABC TV* "The World" (Sept. 2), counter-terrorism expert Professor Arie Perliger also said Sirhan "was a Palestinian refugee, his family moved to Jordan and eventually he moved to the US."

TURNING DEFEAT INTO VICTORY

The Taliban's swift takeover in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US-led coalition forces saw AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein argue in the *West Australian* (Sept. 2) for the Biden Administration to "reverse the narrative of defeat and decline" or risk it becoming an Islamist recruitment tool.

Confronting Iran on "its nuclear threat; its human rights violations; and its destabilising behaviour and state-sponsored terror in the region through its proxies and clients" would be an important place to start, he wrote.

He said the Biden Administration should push for an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution "calling on Iran to cease blocking... IAEA inspections"; "demand" Iran stop its "numerous threatening nuclear steps in clear violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty" as well as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal; and work to "restore the UN Security Council sanctions resolutions that were lifted by the 2015 nuclear deal."

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Reflecting on the lessons Australia should "draw from the Afghanistan disaster", the *Australian's* foreign editor Greg Sheridan (Sept. 4) said, "The Afghans collapsed in part because their leadership never came to grips with the idea that they might have to cope without the Americans."

Sheridan warned that "almost all" US allies "have based everything on the idea that America will solve

all their military problems and they therefore do not take responsibility for themselves."

He qualified this by adding a caveat – "with the full exception of Israel and the partial exception of Britain."

Writing on Afghanistan and the upcoming 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks (Sept. 5), *Daily Telegraph* columnist Piers Akerman argued that the "Five Eyes (US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) intelligence-sharing arrangement would also benefit from the addition of Israel."

An *Australian* editorial (Aug. 19) on the dismal prospects for women under renewed Taliban rule, noted that the group's spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid was trying to present a moderate face to the world but had spent years "under the tutelage of Qatar's immensely wealthy ruling family, which also supports the Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists attacking Israel."

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Video footage went viral in mid-August of dozens of members of Melbourne's Orthodox Jewish community not wearing masks and flouting COVID-19 restrictions by attending an engagement party at a private home.

The *Herald Sun* (Aug. 16) splashed the story on its front cover.

Although the engagement party was not per se a Jewish religious function, the *Herald Sun* story called it a "Jewish engagement party".

The *Herald Sun* report quoted Jewish Community Council of Victoria President Daniel Aghion saying he was "strongly disappointed" by the party and that the Jewish community was "angry".

In contrast, the *Age's* report on Aug. 17 did not call it a "Jewish engagement party" but did note that "the event sparked outrage within the broader Jewish community."

UGLY HANGOVER

The party-goers' visible Jewish identity led to a spike in antisemitic hate, which was widely reported and swiftly condemned.

The *Herald Sun* (Aug. 17) editorialised that "neither cultural nor religious beliefs ought to have any bearing in judging such poor behaviour" and noted that "Jewish leaders have united in condemning the gathering, from which footage depicts guests making light of lockdown restrictions."

On Aug. 18, the *Herald Sun* reported a Royal Melbourne Hospital staff member was fired for posting "abhorrent and disgraceful" antisemitic comments on social media. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews was quoted condemning the outbreak of antisemitism, calling it "unacceptable and evil... we have a zero tolerance approach to that in our state... The event we spoke about... was not a function of being Jewish... We called out some bad behaviour. We didn't call out a community... It was a stupid function. It was an illegal function (but) it was not an act of faith or culture."

Also receiving wide media coverage were the comments and subsequent apology from Victorian COVID-19 response commander Jeroen Weimar who had said of COVID rule breakers, "We have accountants, we have architects, we have a sex worker, we have members of the Orthodox Jewish community, and we have a pizza guy who worked in a pizza shop in Glen Eira."

Victorian MP David Southwick posted his frustration at *Channel 7's* Aug. 18 news bulletin which ran an infographic representing the professions and "Jewish community members" as identified in Weimar's comments.

Earlier that day, Julie Szego's weekly *Age* column, said, "anti-Semites, Islamophobes, bigots of all stripes are always looking for a pretext to unleash their hatred. It should depress everyone and surprise no one that Jew-haters are spewing vile prejudice and death threats... The actions of

some Jews should not shame all Jews any more than last year's expansive Ramadan gatherings in breach of coronavirus restrictions should shame all Muslims, or walkabout 'Karen from Brighton' should shame all Brightonians."

DÉJÀ JEW

As the dust settled from the fallout of the engagement party, a second major breach of COVID-19 restrictions was publicised that this time was directly linked to Jewish religious observance.

Footage of a confrontation between Victoria Police and members of a Ripponlea ultra-Orthodox Jewish congregation breaking restrictions by illegally attending services on Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), as well as a report of a media cameraman being assaulted at the scene, guaranteed maximum interest.

In a statement published in the *Age* (Sept. 11), the Adass Israel Synagogue, the main ultra-Orthodox synagogue in Ripponlea, made it clear that the worshippers found breaking COVID rules on Rosh Hashana had not been affiliated with the Adass Israel congregation – which had been fully complying with COVID restrictions – but were an independent group which had met in a separate building.

AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein's op-ed in the *Herald Sun* (Sept. 9) explained that "For more than 2000 years, Jewish teachings have incorporated the rule that 'the law of the land is the law' for you. This means that obedience to the law of the country in which any community of Jews lives is a religiously mandated obligation for them and disobedience a transgression against Jewish and civil law. It is hard to fathom why the individuals in Ripponlea would violate core Jewish law concepts – breaking both Australian law and risking people's lives, not only their own."

In the *Age* (Sept. 9), former *Australian Jewish News* editor Deborah Stone

said of the sect responsible for the illegal service, "The group... make... up 2 per cent of the 55,000-strong Melbourne Jewish community. They are to Jews what the Amish are to Christians: a closed community who live separately from the rest of society."

Stone added that "there is a palpable fear in our community" because of the "long history of [Jews] being victimised when times are hard."

THE PRESENT TENSE

A major expose by Nine Newspapers and "60 Minutes" into the activities of the neo-Nazi movement in Australia was a stark reminder that the risk of persecution of Jews remains ever present.

In a letter published in the *Age* (Aug. 28), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein praised the reports and included a holistic view of the threat.

Dr Rubenstein said, "sadly, anti-Semitism is at the heart of many of their abhorrent beliefs. Even when they rail against immigration and attack various ethnic minorities, they allege their real enemies are Jews, with conspiracy theories complaining that our immigration policies are a Jewish plot to destroy the 'white race'. The links to some of those demonstrating against COVID-19 restrictions are also concerning. Some demonstrators left behind stickers which showed a Jewish Star of David with '9/11' inside it, next to a QR code linking to a video which made the ludicrous claim that 'the Jews' were responsible for al-Qaeda's September 11, 2001 attacks."

Meanwhile, there was wide media coverage on Sept. 3 of the Victorian Government's intention to expand racial hatred legislation – including plans to introduce a ban on public displays of Nazi symbols. On Sept. 4, the *Herald Sun* reported that "less than 24 hours after" the Government's announcement, "a giant swastika... [was]... painted on a Mornington Peninsula road."

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

THE PRISON DOCTOR?

If more proof were needed that the time has long since passed for Australia to ban Hezbollah in its entirety, it came with the news that a Hezbollah-backed military court in Lebanon had sentenced prominent Sydney GP Dr Jamal Rifi to ten years' hard labour, in absentia, for the "crime" of visiting Israel while working with the Australian charity Project Rozana.

Speaking to *ABC Radio "PM"* (Aug. 24), Dr Rifi, who has lived in Australia for nearly 40 years, said the sentencing "without any doubt, without any doubt" was linked to his work for Project Rozana. The charity was set up by Australian Jewish businessman Ron Finkel and provides medical training to Palestinian doctors and transports sick Palestinians to Israeli hospitals for treatment.

Dr Rifi explained his brother had phoned him from Lebanon to tell him he had been found guilty of being a "collaborator and a traitor with the enemy [Israel]."

Dr Rifi said his prosecution was intended to smear his brother, who is "one of the loudest voices [in Lebanon] against Hezbollah [which] does everything that their master Iran" tells them to do. He said no one likes to be called a traitor and it is a distraction from his work giving COVID-19 vaccines to thousands of people in Sydney.

In the *Australian* (Aug. 28), Dr Rifi outlined further Project Rozana's activities for Palestinians, writing how in 2020, "as Covid-19 swept through the Middle East" and at the behest of the "Palestinian Authority ... our charity raised \$500,000 to buy 35 ventilators that were sent over to the region." In December, Rozana "worked with the Australian government to secure \$1m to give to the World Health Organisation to spend on sick Palestinians in Gaza."

Project Rozana, Dr Rifi wrote, is "an Australian success story" that "I represent as a proud Australian-Lebanese Muslim with an abiding love for the Palestinian cause" and has been supported by Izzat Abdulhadi, the Palestinian Authority representative to Australia, since it was established in 2013.

Dr Rifi expressed his amazement that this has happened "while Lebanon ... is failing. There's no power. Money is locked in the banks. My medical colleagues worry about how they'll keep the ventilators working on critically ill

Covid-19 patients ... The Lebanese elite – and the Iranian-funded militia group Hezbollah, which effectively controls the government – has failed to hold anyone to account for the port blast in Beirut last year."

An SBS online report (Aug. 27) said Dr Rifi was considering raising his case with the UN Commission on Human Rights. The report quoted Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne praising Rifi's contributions to

Australia and stating that she would be "seeking urgent clarification of reports he has been convicted by a Lebanese military tribunal."

In the *Daily Telegraph* (Aug. 29), columnist Piers Akerman noted "that most victims of Islamist hate have been Muslims."

He said, "Hezbollah and Hamas, which run their terrorist organisations in Gaza and the West Bank, are violently opposed to such charitable work because it enables ordinary Palestinians to see that Israelis are not the demons that the terrorists claim they are. A suicide bomber may have second thoughts about murdering a person who saved the life of a family member. Movements like BDS, supported by fanatics on some Australian campuses, are opposed to any normalisation of relations between Israelis and Palestinians."

News of Dr Rifi's predicament was picked up by veteran Israeli Arab journalist Khaled Abu Toameh. Writing for the Gatestone Institute (Aug. 30), Abu Toameh contrasted Hezbollah's message of hate with Israeli Member of the Knesset Moshe Arbel's demand that Israel provide medical assistance to Lebanon on the basis that "Israeli society cannot remain silent and stand idly by when a humanitarian catastrophe is occurring just a few minutes from the northern border."

Abu Toameh added, that "If an Arab doctor who provided medical services to Arabs is sentenced to 10 years in prison, one can only imagine what would have happened to the doctor had he been found guilty of providing services to Israeli Jews."

Abu Toameh's article also quoted support for Dr Rifi from Australian Arab groups, including the Australian-Lebanese Christian Congregation's Wali Wahba, who said the Lebanese judiciary "has become a vehicle for political targets," and Abdel Qader Qaranouh, head of the Palestinian Fatah faction in Australia, who said, "it is certainly an unjust and illogical ruling."

"If an Arab doctor who provided medical services to Arabs is sentenced to 10 years in prison, one can only imagine what would have happened to the doctor had he been found guilty of providing services to Israeli Jews."

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

LANDSCAPE OF TERROR

With so much attention paid to the 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA, it is instructive to look at the situation in Australia and the Jewish world in the preceding months.

Few may remember that, in December 2000, the long established “Chanukah in the Park” opposite Sydney’s Great Synagogue was cancelled on the grounds that it was “too difficult to secure.”

In the six months between Oct. 1, 2000, and March 31, 2001, 228 acts of violence against Jews were reported to Australian communal organisations, to that point the most intense period of assault, fire bombing and physical intimidation ever recorded. (By contrast, a total of 280 incidents had been reported in the entire 12 months ending in September 1999).

The attacks came from a number of sources, including far-right wing thugs, individuals claiming that they were threatening Jews as part of their advocacy for Palestinians and some assailants who newspapers reported called out “Allahu Akbar” after throwing fire bombs.

An incendiary device was thrown into a synagogue which was hosting a large group of people at the time, and private homes were targeted along with communal institutions.

Parallel with this was a resurgence in activity by a range of antisemitic organisations promoting a farrago of conspiracy theories.

The global concern with the activities of neo-Nazi organisations inspired the convening of the Stockholm International Forums, where governments came together to both assess the situation regarding racism and look at best-practice methods for doing something about it.

The first Forum, in 2000, concentrated on Holocaust Education and Remembrance, leading to the formation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

The second, in 2001, “International Forum: Combatting Intolerance”, brought 450 representatives from close to 50 countries and many international organisations together. It featured a series of informed and passionate

presentations from the Swedish Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Austrian Parliament, Canadian international law expert and

tireless human rights campaigner Irwin Cotler and many other global figures.

I was given the honour of presenting on “Combating Holocaust Denial Through Law” in one of many sessions focussing on assessing the effectiveness of responses to extremism.

The Forum Declaration concluded, “In the name of justice, humanity and respect for human dignity we pledge to continue combatting all forms of intolerance and to do all we can to bring about a world of inclusive societies speedily in our day.”

Immediately after 9/11, the peak Australian Jewish, Muslim and Christian organisations issued a media statement which mourned the victims and grieved with those who lost loved ones, and also considered what was necessary to do in the face of terrorism motivated by an ideology based on the division of society into those worthy of life and those condemned to death.

In part, this letter, of which I was a signatory, read, “Our compassion for the victims and our horror at the inhumane deeds must not become an excuse for hatred or bigotry or be exploited by those who seek to divide us on the basis of religion or ethnic origin.

“Together we call upon our people to respond to the evil by uniting, as Australians and as human beings, in reaffirming respect for life, for human rights, for peace and for justice.”

In 2021, a few days before the 20th anniversary, the NSW Counter Terrorism Police revealed they were tracking more than 1,000 “people of interest”, with about 20% of the force’s workload being devoted to the extreme right, and the overwhelming bulk of the remainder dealing with radicals using Islam as their rationale and justification.

Violent extremists, very often having obsessive hatred of Jews as a central part of their philosophy, were present and active before September 2001 and continue to be so today.

The challenge we face as a society and as individuals is to make sure we do everything to protect their potential targets while protecting the freedoms and respect for each other which the extremists despise so much.



Violent extremism was in the air in the leadup to Sept. 11, 2001 – and is again today (Credit: Shutterstock/ Roman Yanushevsky)



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