

UNCIVIL SOCIETY

When NGOs fund and facilitate
terror

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plague of Holocaust distortionPAGE 20

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PROPERTY INVESTMENT, DEVELOPMENT & ADVISORY

Sherman Centre for Culture and Ideas

The Sherman Centre for Culture and Ideas (SCCI) is a Hub series fashioned as the newest evolution of the re-named Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF, 2008-2017). SCCI launched in April 2018 with its inaugural Fashion and Architecture Hubs. SCCI returns in 2019 with new programming for the Fashion Hub (April) and Architecture Hub (October).

Through bi-annual programmes, SCCI seeks to elevate the conversation around fashion and architecture to prominence alongside other forms of cultural expression. Our programmes explore intersections with these disciplines and the cultural, social, aesthetic and economic life of contemporary Asia Pacific.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR*'s cover story looks at the background to a controversial decision by the Israeli Ministry of Defence to designate six Palestinian NGOs as fronts for the notorious Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terrorist organisation.

NGO expert Dr. Gerald Steinberg details how the angry reaction to the Israeli move has come largely from governments and international NGOs that have built extensive relationships with the Palestinian NGOs in question – now unwilling to admit that money given to these groups was diverted to a terrorist organisation. Meanwhile, terrorism finance expert Dr. Matthew Levitt reviews how the Israeli authorities discovered the evidence that these groups were secretly diverting donor money to the PFLP and what that evidence is.

Also featured this month is Naomi Levin on the growing problem of Holocaust distortion coming out of the anti-vaxxer/anti-lockdown movement, while Oved Lobel examines the developing terrorist threat coming out of Afghanistan from the surging local branch of Islamic State.

Finally, don't miss Amotz Asa-El on the implications of the increasing regional rehabilitation of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, Nazi hunter Efraim Zuroff's account of perhaps the world's last Nazi war crimes trial in Germany, and Israeli strategic expert Yaakov Amidror on why the Iranian regime has suddenly agreed to go back to the nuclear negotiating table.

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

Tzvi Fleischer

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ON THE COVER

Palestinian gunmen from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) fire into the air during a rally in the southern Gaza Strip. (Credit: AAP/ Emilio Morenatti)

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www.aijac.org.au**FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN**
COLIN RUBENSTEIN

A NEW MIDEAST DEFENCE NETWORK

As the US diplomatic effort to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons capability continues to be met with stalling tactics from Teheran, a new regional defensive alignment is coming into focus, with Israel at its epicentre. The new era of cooperation ushered in by last year's Abraham Accords normalisation agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, later joined by Morocco and Sudan, is today increasingly looking like something approaching a genuine defensive alliance.

The realignment is the product of a transformative process that has taken place over the course of many years – discreetly at first, then openly after the Abraham Accords. Moderate Sunni Arab Muslim countries have had to rethink their security arrangements to counter radical Shi'ite Iran's conventional and, potentially, nuclear threats – especially as uncertainty has developed about the US role in the region following troubling and even chaotic troop withdrawals and a sustained trend in Washington toward reducing foreign policy commitments.

Despite past rancour, Israel's reputation as an economically and politically stable, secure and dependable ally, and a world-leading innovator in defence-related technologies, made it an obvious actor to look to for security assistance for worried Arab leaders.

One yardstick of Israel's new role has been the military exercises it has been conducting with other countries. These exercises have reached new heights not only in the frequency and significance of the manoeuvres, but in terms of the array of countries that are lining up to train with the IDF. These include several Arab countries – in a way that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago – as well as traditionally non-aligned countries like India.

Israel's biennial Blue Flag aerial joint exercise, held at the end of October, was the largest since these exercises began in 2013. Participating military aircraft joined from France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, the UK, the US and – unofficially – Jordan. The exercise also included a historic visit from the head of the UAE's air force, as well as the presence of Australian observers.

Meanwhile, in a first, the US, Israel, the UAE and Bahrain held a five-day joint naval exercise in the Red Sea in mid-November. Manoeuvres included boarding and search and seizure tactics with maritime security in mind. For Iran, which has been frequently attacking and seizing ships in recent years, the message could not have been clearer.

Also in November, seven Israeli defence contractors – most of them state-owned – took part in the Dubai Air Show. A photograph circulated by the German *Luftwaffe* on Twitter from the event showed the head of the German air force conversing with his Israeli, UAE and Jordanian counterparts. Such a snapshot would have risked causing the end of numerous careers only a few short years ago.

The ground is shifting even with respect to Israel's near neighbours, Egypt and Jordan, which have long had military ties with Israel's security forces, but had generally sought to keep these ties utterly secret. In the Sinai, Israeli and Egyptian military discussions that had been traditionally kept low-key are today being held publicly. In addition, October saw the first ever direct flights between Cairo and Tel Aviv on Egypt's national carrier Egyptair. Since Egypt made peace with Israel in 1979, such flights had been handled by a subsidiary, in unmarked planes, to minimise public signs of "normalisation" with the Jewish state.

Meanwhile, early this year, the US military announced that dealings between the US and Israeli militaries would be transferred to US Central Command (CENTCOM) – a move

likely to further facilitate the development of regional defence ties. Until recently, the US military's European Command had dealt with Israel in deference to US regional allies that refused to recognise Israel. The correction of this historic anomaly is more than symbolic – it should facilitate real coordination between all US allies in the region, including Israel and the moderate Sunni countries.

The paradigm shift that is occurring in the Middle East strategic alignment has implications for Australian defence policy as well.

For instance, with increasing frequency, the Indian military has been joining the UAE and Bahrain in exercises with Israel. While India's geostrategic positioning has always been complicated, its defence relationship with Israel has never been stronger. Israel is India's third largest arms supplier, but New Delhi is also developing defence cooperation with the Gulf states that have signed on to the Abraham Accords, taking these relationships to a new, multilateral level.

India appears to have committed to this policy in the long-term with its recent announcement of a joint body with Israel empowered to map out new areas of defence cooperation for the next decade.

India is, of course, also an increasingly important strategic partner for Australia as part of the "Quad" strategic

grouping now attempting to preserve stability in South and East Asia in the face of China's increasingly belligerent behaviour.

Here at home, the Australia-Israel Be'er Sheva Dialogue, which brings together analysts from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Israel's International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies and other institutions, as well as government and

military representatives from both countries, has been strengthening Israel-Australia defence and security ties since 2015. This dialogue has been responsible for promoting a number of important

security-related achievements that have paid mutual dividends for both countries, and yet is only in the early stages of realising its full potential.

In the age of the Abraham Accords, Israel's enhanced defence role in the Middle East offers an additional dimension for Australia to engage in multinational defence cooperation with both the Jewish state and its new Arab partners in exciting and unprecedented ways. The opportunities have never been greater for defence dialogue and cooperation, which can assist these increasingly aligned countries to help each other address the strategic issues, threats and challenges they are grappling with, from the Suez Canal to the South China Sea.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

"I have not had any contact with [the Iranian] government... that has been there for more than five months... This is astonishing and I am saying it openly because I'm saying it to them. There's a long list of things we need to discuss."

International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi on Iran's nuclear obstructionism (Times of Israel, Nov. 12).

"The [Zionist] regime that discusses its existence is doomed to termination... If the Zionist regime gives the Islamic Republic an excuse, it will only expedite its termination."

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Aerospace Force commander Amir Ali Hajizadeh (Times of Israel, Nov. 11).

"If the United States is not with Israel and the Iranians begin to take actions that threaten Israel, Israel not only has the right but the duty to defend itself."

Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (J-Wire, Nov. 13).

"A holiday for the State of Israel! After years of chaos, we formed a government. We overcame [the delta coronavirus variant]. And now, God willing, we have brought a budget to Israel."

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on his Government's success in passing Israel's first budget in three years (Washington Post, Nov. 4).

"I thank you, Commander of the Emirati Air Force, for your willingness to come to Israel. This is a historic and important day for cooperation between the air forces."

Israeli Air Force chief Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin welcomes the Commander of the UAE's Air Force Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Nasser Mohammed al-Alawi for a historic visit (Jerusalem Post, Oct. 25).

"The horrific antisemitic incident in Poland reminds every Jew in the world of the strength of hatred that exists in the world. The unequivocal condemnation by Polish officials is important and necessary. I welcome their condemnation and expect the Polish government to act uncompromisingly against those who took part in this shocking display of hate."

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on an antisemitic Polish nationalist rally (Twitter, Nov. 13).

"Today, we remember the former Israeli Prime Minister and IDF Chief of the General Staff, Lt. Gen. (Res.) Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated on this day in 1995. His dedication to the State of Israel will continue to inspire generations to come. May his memory be a blessing."

IDF statement (Twitter, Nov. 4).



SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

THE BIG LIE ABOUT THE IHRA ANTISEMITISM DEFINITION

Critics of the widely-used International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism – which the Australian Federal Government “embraced” in October, and the ALP opposition also supports – overwhelmingly claim that the problem with it is that it supposedly labels as antisemitic, and thus stifles, criticism of Israel.

To make this argument they typically have to ignore the clause in the definition which explicitly states: “criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.” But they also almost always repeat a claim that “seven of the eleven examples in the definition are related to criticism of Israel.”

For example, Paul Heywood-Smith, former head of the Australian Friends of Palestine Association, claimed in an article on johnmenadue.com (Oct. 24), that “Seven of the [IHRA definition’s] examples equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism.” Likewise, Jewish Greens activists David Zyngier and Daniel Coleman wrote in the *Age* (Oct. 21) that “the definition has an appended list of 11 examples of anti-Semitism. Seven are focused on criticism of Israel.”

Even Michael Visontay, editor of the Jewish online publication *Plus61J*, writing in the *Guardian* (Oct. 23), asserted that “The IHRA definition contains 11 examples of antisemitism, seven of which relate specifically to rhetoric against Israel.”

This does sound bad – a majority of the examples are about criticism of Israel?! However, this claim is just completely untrue – as a quick look at the actual text of the definition makes clear.

It is true that seven of the 11 examples mention the word “Israel” – but this does not mean they have anything to do with criticism of Israel.

One is “Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.” This example is about Holocaust denial, and just mentions Israel in passing.

Two others are: “Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel” and “Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their

own nations.” These two are clearly about racist generalities against Jews collectively which invoke Israel, not about criticism of Israel.

A fourth one is about deploying classical antisemitic tropes toward Israel and Israelis: “Using the symbols and images associated with classical antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.” This should also be a no-brainer. If we are against spreading classical antisemitic stereotypes, using them while substituting “Israel” or “Israelis” for the word “Jews” should obviously be viewed as potentially antisemitic.

There are exactly three examples, not seven, that could mark certain extreme rhetoric against Israel as potentially antisemitic (though it’s worth remembering that all the examples are described as things that “could” be examples of antisemitism “taking into account the overall context.” In other words, the examples are actions which raise questions about potential antisemitism, not things which are automatically antisemitic). These are:

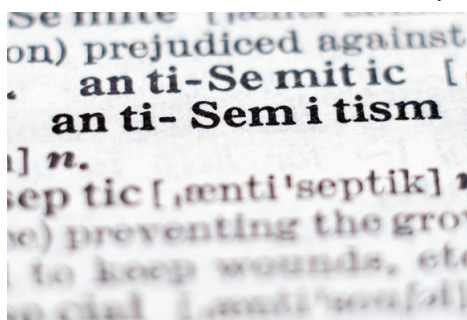
- *Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.*
- *Applying double standards by requiring of it [Israel] a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.*
- *Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.*

Note that two of these clearly apply only to extreme demonisation of Israel, not “criticism” – comparing Israeli policy to the Nazis or claiming that Israel’s very existence (and not its policies) is racist. Anyone who says Israel’s existence is inherently racist, or that Israel is comparable to the Nazis, is not making a “criticism” – they are depicting Israel as an evil that must be destroyed.

Given that dozens of states were created in the aftermath of the Second World War, as Israel was, with virtually no demands that any others of them be destroyed, it is inevitable that saying the one Jewish state in the world must be destroyed raises serious questions about the motive of the person who says it. (And again, that is all the definition’s examples are – actions that raise questions about possible antisemitism.)

In reality, there is exactly one example in the IHRA Working Definition that could be said to apply to “criticism” of Israel: “Applying double standards by requiring of it [Israel] a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.”

But is anyone actually prepared to go out on a limb and say it’s fine to apply double standards to Israel and demand of it behaviour not expected of any other similar country? That’s obviously unfair and discriminatory – and doing




A widely used definition of antisemitism is provoking a campaign of untruths (Credit: Shutterstock)

so rightly should raise questions about motives, just as it would if someone applied double standards and harshly criticised Canada, or Japan, or France or Norway for something lots of similar countries were doing. (Obviously, if a Norwegian harshly criticised Norway for something lots of other countries were doing because they have good reason to care about their own country more, that would be an example of “overall context” which would make the criticism non-discriminatory. The same would apply to Israel.)

So, of the 11 examples, exactly one, not seven, applies to criticism of Israel – unless you want to argue saying Israel is a Nazi state that should be destroyed is “criticism”. (Doubtless some IHRA critics would say this – but this should rightly raise questions about their motives.)

And that one example is pretty inarguable as something that should raise potential red flags.

So if you read someone claiming that “seven of the 11 examples” in the IHRA definition are about criticism of Israel, you should immediately recognise that the author of that claim either has not read it and is grossly ignorant or else is being deliberately disingenuous. 



Mitchell Bard

SHEIKH JARRAH SHOWS WHY PALESTINIANS REMAIN STATELESS

Many critics of Israel have joined Hamas and the Palestinian Authority in denouncing Israel because courts have determined that a group of Palestinian families is illegally living in homes owned by Jews in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

Rather than accept a compromise offered by Israel’s Supreme Court that would have allowed them to stay in their homes, the families turned it down and now face eviction (as of early November, one of the families that did not appeal the eviction order reached a deal with the property owners that will allow them to remain in their homes for at least ten years as long as they pay rent). This is a microcosm of the entire conflict as the Palestinians prefer no loaf to any part of a loaf.

In brief, Jordan sequestered “enemy property” owned by Jews in Sheikh Jarrah after the 1948 War of Independence. Jordan never gave the Palestinians title to the land it seized. When Israel captured the area in 1967, the government released the sequestered properties. In 1972, the Supreme Court validated the Jewish claims to owning the property they had been forced to abandon, but ruled that Arab families living in homes on those lands could not be evicted if they agreed to pay rent to the owners.

In 1993, the owners sought to evict the tenants for failure to pay rent, but it was not until 2001 that the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court agreed with them. The Israeli Supreme Court, however, sought a compromise to allow the Arabs to stay and suggested they could enjoy the status of protected tenants, retain the right to try to prove ownership of the properties, and stay in their homes if they agreed to pay rent that amounted to about A\$86 per month.

The Palestinians rejected the offer, preferring eviction to remaining in their homes – much like the tens of thousands of Palestinians who preferred to flee their homes in 1948 in hopes that the Arab armies would drive out the Jews rather than becoming Israeli citizens.

Not surprisingly, the Palestinian leadership endorsed the families’ decision. The Palestinian Legislative Council issued a press release that said “the Al-Quds and Al-Aqsa Committee in the Legislative Council affirmed that the people of all of Palestine, from its sea to its river, and its armed resistance stand behind the people of Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.” It also said, “Al-Quds and the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, like all of Palestine, are a purely Islamic endowment and sanctuary **in which the Jews have no historical, religious or cultural right**” (emphasis added).


Read those emphasised words again. Where do you see the opportunity for a two-state solution?

If you look at the Palestinians’ views, they are as recalcitrant as they were nearly a century ago. To this day, the Palestinians do not accept the legitimacy of a Jewish state in what they consider Palestine.

The Palestinians refused to compromise in 1937, 1939, 1947, 1979, 1993, 2000, 2001, 2008 and 2020. That’s nine opportunities they missed to achieve independence.

How many people are even aware that except for a brief meeting between Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and then Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, the Palestinians have refused to negotiate with Israel since 2008? They wouldn’t even accept the initiative of the friendly Obama Administration.

Two-state advocates refuse to acknowledge not only this history but the present, which is not just reflected by the Sheikh Jarrah case but also by the broader Palestinian rejection of compromise. According to recent polls, for example, 66% support annulling the Oslo Accords, 54% oppose returning to negotiations, 54% believe a return to an armed intifada is the best way to achieve their goals and, by a 62-36% margin, oppose a two-state solution (and support has been steadily declining).

The Sheikh Jarrah residents’ intransigence may lead to their homelessness, just as their fellow Palestinians’ obstinance has guaranteed their statelessness. 

Dr. Mitchell G. Bard, a veteran US foreign policy expert who specialises in US Middle East policy, is Executive Director of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE). Reprinted from

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ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

THE SOUTHERN QUESTION

As the Philippines heads towards elections in 2022, key political families are once again positioning and repositioning themselves for the contest. But a crucial battleground will be the south, where decades of Muslim secessionist rebellion and general instability remain far from settled.

With President Rodrigo Duterte ineligible under the constitution to run for a second term as president, the period preceding the mid-November nomination deadline has been marked by abrupt shifts in alignment and



Sara and Rodrigo Duterte (Official photo)

targeting by most of the major candidates – hoping to secure a last-minute strategic advantage.

Duterte's daughter Sara has filed papers to run for vice president, ending speculation she would seek the country's highest office, at

the same withdrawing her renomination as mayor of Davao City – a post formerly occupied by her father. She was promptly claimed by former Senator Ferdinand “Bong-bong” Marcos Jr as his running mate in his quest for the presidency, even though they are not from the same party.

In the Philippines, the president and vice president are elected separately, as part of government checks and balances. President Duterte's vice president is Leni Robredo, who beat Marcos for the post in 2016 and is now the main opposition coalition presidential candidate.

Duterte himself filed last-minute papers as a senatorial candidate, reversing course on both his planned retirement from politics, and a brief flirtation with running for the vice presidency until it became apparent his daughter would seek the same role.

While President Duterte's most trusted aide, Senator Christopher “Bong” Go, and senator and former boxing champion Manny Pacquiao are also running for the presidency, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has emerged as the frontrunner to take Malacanang Palace next year, almost 50 years after his father's declaration of martial law in 1972. A “people power” revolt ended his regime in 1986.

After a few years in exile, the Marcos family returned with much of their wealth and influence intact. They supported Rodrigo Duterte to win the presidency in 2016.

Surveys show that Marcos is popular among middle-

and upper-class Filipino voters, as well in the Manila region and the broader northern island of Luzon. But he has consistently struggled in the southern island of Mindanao, where the Dutertes are dominant.

As a southerner himself, President Duterte has presided over the staged implementation of the 2014 peace agreement with the largest Muslim separatist group in the region, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

While he responded with characteristic forcefulness to the siege of the city of Marawi by Islamic State-aligned jihadists in 2017, Duterte has used his plain-speaking ways and gruff humour to win the trust of Muslim leaders and somehow prevent the agreement from unravelling.

Meanwhile, the decommissioning of thousands of fire-arms turned in by former MILF rebels has resumed after the coronavirus pandemic disrupted the process. Former MILF officials currently head a transitional government in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), which came about as a result of the agreement. The deal also stipulated that the group's ex-fighters would surrender their weapons for decommissioning.

The MILF says there are some 40,000 ex-fighters with weapons, although security experts and analysts believe the group has more troops and weapons. In September, a Senate committee heard that only about 12,000 MILF weapons had been handed over so far.

According to the peace deal, the transitional government in BARMM was to be replaced in free elections in 2022 to coincide with the Philippines' presidential election. But President Duterte has agreed to postpone the poll until 2025 at the request of the MILF, which argued that the pandemic had delayed many reform programs and that the decommissioning process had been delayed by the former guerrillas' reluctance to give up their weapons amid ongoing attacks from Islamic State group-linked militants and disgruntled factions that broke away from the MILF when the peace deal was signed.

The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) is the main splinter group of former MILF fighters, with a few hundred members concentrated mainly in central Mindanao. Some BIFF leaders have declared allegiance to Islamic State, which has facilitated additional funding.

In January, BIFF militants carried out two roadside bombings in the south that killed three and injured dozens of people. Two years ago, the group carried out a series of bomb attacks in the south targeting a market and a restaurant, injuring more than 24 people.

However, heavy fighting between government forces and BIFF insurgents in late September resulted in more than a dozen BIFF fighters killed, but the group is continuing its recruiting, even targeting local indigenous tribes in southern Mindanao, according to recent reports. Tribesmen have reportedly been offered a monthly salary to join the cause, funded by foreign sources.

Alex Benjamin

A TERRIBLE ORDINARINESS

I'm just back from Krakow – as part of a delegation to Auschwitz that we at the European Jewish Association organised for 160 ministers of education and parliamentarians across Europe to mark the 83rd anniversary of Kristallnacht.

Why link Kristallnacht with Auschwitz? As I explained to a journalist, it was important to show what started with smashing windows and burning synagogues led to in a few short years.

For many of the participants, it was their first time there. And they were deeply moved. As for me, having been before, I watched their reactions with interest – and, if I'm honest, puzzlement. Because the word that best sums it up to me, the word that makes me sick in the very deepest pit of my stomach, is how "ordinary" it is.

When I was a kid, like most of us, I grew up with the Holocaust. It was like foie gras in my family, rammed down my throat whether I wanted it or not. I sometimes wanted to just put my fingers in my ears. Because I regarded it as an unspeakable horror, and I just couldn't get my head around the "why" of it.

What was so different about me and my family that we could, in the space of living memory, have been so utterly cast aside by society? Utterly destroyed, dehumanised, cast into the fire?

These questions still haunt me, and whenever I'm in this particular part of Poland, they are magnified. This is partly because, when I'm there, I get some understanding of how it happened. And it's tied up in that sense of the "ordinary".

I don't know what the gates of Hell are meant to look like, but if you close your eyes and try to imagine it, I'm guessing you won't picture bucolic countryside surrounding it; a McDonald's drive-thru close by; parents pushing their children up the street in prams; kids loitering around bus stops trying to look cool and old people chatting outside the shops.

The gates of Hell have a parking lot, a pizzeria across the road and students in tight leggings and Uggs boots chewing gum whilst waiting to have a look inside. Our Jewish ground zero, literally the site of our worst nightmare, is an ordinary place. Right beside Auschwitz and Birkenau are houses, shops, a playground, bored dogs

barking at cars, the half-constructed brick barbecue in a front garden that was never quite finished. Ordinary.

Auschwitz is terrifying to me, but not because of what happened inside those gates. As I said, I know the horrors, I was raised on them. No, it's so terrifying because of what happened outside of them, so close, so palpably close. Within eyesight, there is a town where, even during the tough and brutal years of the war, life continued. Could they not smell the bodies burning? Could they not see the trains coming?

This is what I can't reconcile at all. How ordinary life could continue, while our lives were being extinguished.



The gates of Hell are surrounded by kebab shops and clothing stores (Credit: Shutterstock)

I think WH Auden hit on this feeling when he penned "stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone" about a funeral of someone so very close to him:

*"Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a
juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled
drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners
come."*

The Shoah is so visceral. So raw, so utterly painful to confront that I think (and hope) that a lot of Jews feel like Auden does about his dear friend. That life can never go back to normal because of it.

And yet it does.

That scares me. It scares me that people can tuck into their margherita pizza across the road from the Auschwitz Museum after the tour is over.

It scares me too that surrounded by this ordinariness, just as it was all those years ago, Auschwitz-Birkenau and what it represents is not potent enough.

I want it to scream and howl at people. I want it to be desolate. I want it to be frozen in time. I don't want to see an H&M and kebab shop nearby. I want it to be the hell that it was for all those who perished there, and the hell it is for Jews who visit it today.

The ordinariness of Auschwitz-Birkenau – to me anyway – is dangerous. It tells me that antisemitism can keep rising, even as tourists keep on going through those gates having apparently learned nothing – and worse, then get back to the football and order another drink to go with their kebab afterwards.

Would they drop their kebabs for us today if windows started being smashed again? Ordinary life continued then. I fear that it would today as well. The ordinariness of Auschwitz is a testament to this terrifying possibility.

AIR

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

No rockets have been fired from Gaza since Sept. 12 as at Nov. 18. On Nov. 8, Israel's Iron Dome defence system intercepted a Hamas drone heading towards Gaza's maritime zone.

There were numerous attacks and attempted attacks by Palestinians against Israelis during October and November, including stabbings, shootings, car ramming and throwing Molotov cocktails – none fatal.

The Mossad reportedly thwarted Iranian terrorist attacks against Israeli tourists and businessmen in Tanzania, Senegal and Ghana. This comes a month after Israel blamed Iran for thwarted assassination attempts against Israeli businessmen in Cyprus.

Meanwhile, on Nov. 12, Turkey arrested an Israeli couple on suspicion of espionage after they were seen taking photos of a presidential palace. They were released on Nov. 18 after intense Israeli diplomatic efforts.

ISRAEL PASSES BUDGET

Israel's first new budget in three years passed through the Knesset on Nov. 5, ensuring the continuation of Israel's ideologically diverse and numerically shaky coalition Government.

Among its notable measures, the budget establishes three new Bedouin towns in the Negev and upgrades the status of the Druze majority town of Maghar in the Galilee, making it Israel's first Druze majority city. It also allocates nearly US\$10 billion (A\$13.5 billion) over five years to improve services and welfare for Israel's Arab minority.

Other notable budget measures include reforms to *kashrut* (kosher) certification, agriculture, banking and import arrangements, as well as programs to address Israel's soaring

housing prices.

ISRAEL INCREASES PALESTINIAN WORK PERMITS

On Nov. 6, as part of an ongoing effort to improve the Palestinian economy, the Israeli Government authorised a substantial increase in the number of permits for Palestinians to work in Israel and in industrial zones in Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank.

The cabinet approved an increase in the number of blue-collar permits by 11,900 above the current level of 130,000, while a new permit will see hundreds of West Bank Palestinian programmers and other engineers cleared for work in Israeli tech firms.

In October, Israel increased the number of work permits issued to Palestinians from Hamas-ruled Gaza by 43% to 10,000.

ISRAEL INCREASES ATTACKS ON IRANIAN TARGETS IN SYRIA

Israel reportedly stepped up the pace of its airstrikes in Syria in October and November. The attacks focused on Iranian targets, Iranian-affiliated militias, missile factories and arms depots, and weapons convoys carrying Iranian-made air defence systems and drones, some intended for Iran's Lebanese terrorist proxy, Hezbollah.

There has been some speculation in Israel that these attacks may have been coordinated with Russia. Reports also suggest that Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad may be seeking to reduce Iran's influence on his country and the latest Israeli attacks on Iranian targets serve his interests.

SHEIKH JARRAH FAMILIES REJECT ISRAELI COURT OFFER

Under reported political pressure from Palestinian Authority officials, four Palestinian families facing possible eviction for non-payment of rent to the Jewish owners of the land they live on in Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood have turned down a compromise offer from Israel's High Court. The proposed compromise would have given the families the legal status of "protected tenants" and secured their occupancy for at least the next 15 years in return for nominal rent, without prejudice to their ongoing claims of ownership.

The rejection is seen as likely to influence 24 other families in similar circumstances to also rebuff the deal, keeping them on course for possible eviction in a case that has been before the courts for decades.

Similarly, in October, the Israeli newspaper *Makor Rishon* published an interview with the head of the Jaha-lin Bedouin clan in which he said that PA pressure is preventing residents of his unauthorised village of Khan al-Ahmar – which Israeli courts have ordered evacuated – from accepting an Israeli offer to relocate them from the current dangerous and problematic site along the Jerusalem-Dead Sea Highway to a more desirable location.

HEZBOLLAH AND PALESTINIAN TERRORISTS IN VENEZUELA

A hacking group called Team HDP has breached the Venezuelan Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence, exposing the names of alleged Hezbollah operatives and Palestinian terrorist groups running

various criminal enterprises in the country, including arms and drug trafficking and money laundering, under the protection of the Venezuelan Government.

The close ties between the Venezuelan regime and Iran and its allies and proxies, including Palestinian terrorist groups like Hamas, have been well documented for two decades.

IRAQI PM SURVIVES ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

Pro-Iranian militia are suspected of responsibility for a Nov. 7 attempted assassination attempt in which the Baghdad home of Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi was targeted by several explosive drones. Kadhimi was not hurt but seven security personnel were injured.

On Oct. 20, the al-Tanf US military base in Syria was attacked with Iranian drones and rockets, suffering heavy damage but no casualties. In response, on Oct. 29, the US sanctioned the commander of the military drone unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and individuals and companies connected to Iran's drone program.

LIBYAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES FLAG TIES WITH ISRAEL

Both candidates in Libyan presidential elections – to be held on Dec. 24 – have reportedly flagged the possibility of joining the Abraham Accords and normalising relations with Israel. According to Israeli newspaper reports, officials close to the front-runner, warlord General Khalifa Haftar, who has Saudi and US support, are saying Haftar has stated he will join the Abraham Accords if he prevails. A senior UAE official confirmed this report, and added that the other candidate, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, son of former dictator Muammar Gaddafi, had also indicated to associates that he would join the Accords.

BLUE FLAG EXERCISES

Seven countries – Germany, Italy, the UK, US, France, Greece and India – participated in October's Blue Flag aerial military exercises in Israel.

For the first time, the chief of the United Arab Emirates' air force, Ibrahim Nasser Muhammed Al-Alaw, attended the exercises as an observer, as did representatives of the Australian military. A photo posted online by a German photographer revealed that Jordanian planes also secretly participated.

In other military aviation news, Israeli and Saudi fighter jets both accompanied a US Air Force bomber circumnavigating the Arabian Peninsula on Oct. 30. While the Israeli and Saudi planes did not fly together, it was the first time the two countries had cooperated on a military mission.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Israeli health officials are claiming third doses of the coronavirus vaccine have "saved Israel", with cases of COVID-19 falling dramatically.

In mid-October, Israel was recording up to 10,000 new infections per day, but by mid-November the number of new cases had fallen to just a few hundred per day. Hospitalisations have also halved during this same period.

More than four million Israelis have received a booster shot of the Pfizer vaccine, after Israeli scientists observed the vaccine's efficacy appears to wane after six months.

In the Palestinian Territories, new case numbers have also dropped, from a peak of more than 2,500 new cases per day in September to around 200 cases per day in mid-November. Third vaccine doses have also been made available to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, although only 27% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been fully vaccinated.



STRANGER THAN FICTION

IRAN HEROICALLY CAPTURES ITS OWN OIL

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) navy appears to have hit upon a novel solution to the problem of how to carry out an attack to impress the folks at home without any risk – you attack yourself.

On Oct. 24, the IRGC navy filmed itself carrying out a daring raid on an oil tanker. The tanker, so the story went, had been transporting Iranian oil in the Gulf of Oman when it was pirated by the US Navy. IRGC naval forces heroically slid down ropes onto its decks from helicopters, taking back control of the ship and sailing it away, the US Navy forlornly in pursuit.

The truth was somewhat different. The first hint was that the IRGC heroes were filmed from on board the tanker, the Vietnamese-flagged *MV Southys*, before

they had even landed on it.

Then there was the US Navy's response – they became aware of Iranian forces raiding a civilian ship, so they approached to observe, but did nothing beyond that. It appears that's exactly what the IRGC wanted, conducting the "raid" in a manner the US Navy couldn't help noticing, and then claiming to have triumphed over the US ships observing.

The *Southys* had reportedly been transporting Iranian oil to China in breach of sanctions, but China had refused the oil, so it was transported back to Iran – and then "saved" by the IRGC. Whether the raid was conducted to buttress the IRGC's standing, or to cover the embarrassment of having the oil rejected, it did draw attention to an ongoing problem.

Money reaped from Iran's illegal oil exports to China, reaching almost 800,000 barrels a day, has helped the regime to withstand economic sanctions and remain intransigent in relation to its nuclear program. And there's nothing funny about that.

COVER STORY

UNCIVIL SOCIETY

WHEN NGOS FUND AND FACILITATE TERROR

by Gerald M. Steinberg

To make sense of the furious reaction to the Israeli Government's designation of six Palestinian NGOs (non-governmental organisations) as prohibited terrorist fronts, it is necessary to understand the political and ideological context. Behind the 'non-governmental' label (or ostensibly independent civil society), the network is an integral part of Palestinian strategy, and for at least 20 years, has received core funding from foreign governments (primarily Western European, including the EU) in return for influence and information. Under the cover of civil society, the NGOs cooperate with their European sponsors, promoting soft-power warfare targeting Israel, including the apartheid and war crimes campaigns.

Therefore, the Israeli designation constitutes a major threat for actors invested in the NGOs and their political campaigns. Despite expressions of surprise and claims by American and European officials that they were not informed in advance, the decision should have been expected based on earlier actions and existing public information. (The designation process is specified by law, and is not the result of a spurious individual decision based on political or other personal motives, as sometimes portrayed. The allegations and evidence must be approved by a number of officials, including the attorney general, before it is signed by the minister of defence.)

More than ten years ago, as part of our systematic research, based on open-source material, my colleagues at NGO Monitor and I began to discern a pattern pointing to an organised network linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestinian (PFLP). As the available materials increased, including Facebook posts in Arabic, as well as YouTube videos, many more details emerged. As of Octo-

ber 2021, we identified 74 PFLP officials who simultaneously held and continue to hold significant positions in 13 NGOs. Six of the organisations were named by the Ministry of Defence on Oct. 22, and a seventh – the Health Workers Committees (HWC) – was designated initially in 2015 and again in 2020.

The roles of these NGO officials in the PFLP vary, and in some cases, include leading terror attacks, obtaining (or diverting) funds, recruiting and training.

Two PFLP officials were arrested for involvement in the 2019 terror attack that murdered 17-year-old Rina

Shnerb and wounded her brother and father during a hike. Samer Arbid was indicted on 21 counts, including commanding the cell, and Abdul Razeq Farraj was indicted for authorising the terror attack and for recruiting members of the PFLP. Both held

high-level financial positions in the Union of Agricultural Workers Committees (UAWC), as did Ubai Aboudi, who was sentenced in June 2020 to 12 months imprisonment for recruiting PFLP activists.

Staff and board members linked to the PFLP, including a number with military ranks (i.e. 'commanders') and convictions for terror involvement, are affiliated with the other NGOs named by the Minister of Defence – al-Haq, Defence for Children International – Palestine (DCI-P), Addameer, Bisan and United Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC). Khalida Jarrar, who is Addameer's former vice-chairperson, also reportedly headed the PFLP's operations in the West Bank. She was sentenced to two years in prison and was released in September 2021.

In contrast, the intense efforts to whitewash the NGO terror connections seek to paint the PFLP involvement as

"The Israeli designation constitutes a major threat for actors invested in the NGOs and their political campaigns"

minor or irrelevant. Some claim that the organisation has evolved from the terror group founded by George Habash and a leader in airline hijackings during the 1970s, into a benign Palestinian political organisation. This line ignores the 2019 Shnerb killing as well as other attacks.

Beyond providing a cover for terror operations, the NGO affiliations provide for salaries, while additional amounts are alleged by Israel to have been diverted for terror equipment and operations. Shatha Odeh, Director General of HWC and chair of the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organisations Network, was among a group



The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terror group are hardcore rejectionists opposed to ever recognising Israel

arrested for allegedly diverting aid to the PFLP, including “reporting fictitious projects, presenting false documents, forgery and inflating invoices and receipts ... forging bank documents and bank seals,” and other methods.

In addition, it should be noted that the PFLP opposes any recognition of Israel and the Oslo framework – they are hard-core Palestinian rejectionists (further highlighting the contradictions inherent in the embrace of the NGO network by European governments that claim to support a two-state formula).

Of the seven terror-designated Palestinian NGOs, al-Haq is the oldest, best known and most politically influential. The organisation focuses its considerable resources (provided by European governments – particularly the EU, Norway and Denmark) on demonising Israel in the UN, International Criminal Court, and elsewhere through apartheid and war crimes libels.

Al-Haq is headed by Shawan Jabarin, whose known links to the PFLP include a conviction for recruiting and arranging training. In 2007, Israel’s Supreme Court referred to him as a Jekyll and Hyde – a human rights activist by day and a ‘senior activist’ in the PFLP by night. In more recent Arabic social media posts, Jabarin is identified as a PFLP official, and in May 2018, Visa, Mastercard, and American Express shut down online credit card donations to al-Haq, citing PFLP ties.

Jabarin is on Human Rights Watch’s Middle East board, and Secretary General of the Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH). At the Geneva meetings of the UN Human Rights Council, Al-Haq is a regular presence, conferring with European diplomats and UN officials working on the texts of anti-Israel resolutions and statements.

At least ten staff and board members of DCI-P have been identified as PFLP officials, including Jabarin. A senior DCI-P staff member and simultaneously, a PFLP leader, Hashem Abu Maria, was killed during a violent confrontation with the IDF in 2014. The PFLP’s memorial statement praised his work for DCI-P: “he was in the ranks of the national liberation struggle and the PFLP from an early age.”

A video of a PFLP memorial event featured a speech by DCI-P’s then General Director, Rifat Odeh Kassis. Far from seeking to prevent child abuse in Palestinian society, DCI-P runs propaganda campaigns seeking to impose sanctions on the IDF through inclusion in the UN Secretary General’s list of groups violating the Convention on Children in Armed Conflict. Its funders have included the EU, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and Spain.

Each of the other Palestinian “civil society” organisations designated by the Ministry of Defence as terror fronts, including the Health

Workers Committees, are similarly connected to the PFLP. These are not isolated cases or a few ‘bad apples’, as some diplomats, journalists and NGO activists have tried to claim. (Many of the social media responses from the NGO community ignored or simply denied the terror links.) The systematic connections between the NGO network and PFLP go beyond payment of salaries, and are alleged to extend to diversion of major funding for terror.

For the PFLP leaders, the budgets, activities, alliances and international status of the NGO network provide a number of significant benefits. European governments provide at least €20 million (A\$31.1 million) annually to these organisations, under the facades of support for human rights and economic development. And leveraging the legitimacy conferred by these relationships, a steady stream of joint letters, petitions, press releases, and publications with their Israeli and other NGO allies are mainstreamed via diplomats, academics, and friendly media platforms.

For their European sponsors, the NGO clients are vital sources of information and the means of amplifying otherwise weak influence on Israeli-Palestinian issues. Perhaps for this reason, clear evidence regarding the terror links has been ignored for many years. Whether the European sponsors, UN officials, and journalists were blinded by ideology and dismissed the evidence, or were aware but not concerned by the terror connections, is unclear.

Through a maze of overlapping government frameworks, and through top secret processes, European taxpayer funds are channelled every year to the same favoured Palestinian organisations, thinly disguised through “calls for proposals” and other formalistic procedures.

When confronted with the evidence, including in meetings and correspondence with me and NGO Monitor, as well as parliamentary inquiries, European officials repeat pre-packaged responses that avoid responsibility or engagement (“we don’t fund NGOs, we fund projects”; “we have examined the claims and did not find them substantive”). The extensive links between European patrons and their NGO clients, developed over many years, are strong and not readily frayed.

Recently, however, as more details were presented, investigations were begun by the European Union’s anti-corruption unit (OLAF) and the Dutch Government, while a cursory review by the Belgian minister was designed to end debate and criticism. Nevertheless, many officials repeat the NGO talking points claiming that the “information of terror links is not conclusive.” Without due diligence and clear criteria for designating NGO grantees as terror fronts, they are avoiding the issues.

Given the high stakes for all the players, the Israeli designation of the seven Palestinian NGOs as PFLP fronts, and the implications for the wider NGO industry, has understandably triggered an all-out and often hysterical cam-

paign to keep the terror links buried. The slogans, echoed by their NGO allies and a number of European diplomats and politicians, including the accusation that the Israeli Government (and research institutes like NGO Monitor) are “shrinking the space for civil society,” attempt to shore up the fading facade.

AIR

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THE INVESTIGATION AND THE EVIDENCE

by Matthew Levitt

On Oct. 19, 2021, Israel designated six Palestinian civil society NGOs on charges of supporting the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a US and EU-designated terrorist group. The move sparked severe condemnation by international civil society and human rights groups, many of which have long partnered with these NGOs. Criticisms of the designations, however, focus on the groups’ civil society activities, not the underlying charges of fraud and organised financial support for a designated terrorist group. It is indeed a very sensitive matter when a government designates NGOs that actively criticise its activities through civil society fieldwork, which is why the evidence underscoring the designations warrants careful scrutiny.

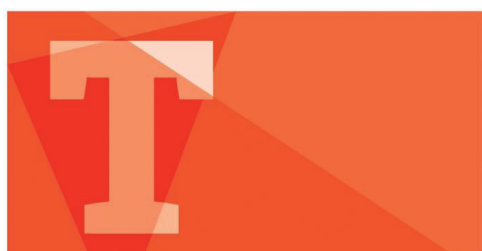
To that end, statements by the United States, Australia, the European Union, and others requesting further information about the basis for these designations is welcome. According to Israeli authorities, the country’s subject matter experts briefed their US counterparts on the underlying investigations within days of the designations, and handed over several binders of evidence as well.

Because the fraud primarily involved European authorities, Israelis had already briefed their counterparts in six different European countries.

BACKGROUND

The Israeli designations targeted six NGOs for serving as PFLP fronts: the Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees (UPWC), Bisan Centre for Research and Development, al-Haq Organisation, Union of Agriculture Work Committees (UAWC), and Defense for Children International–Palestine (DCI-P).

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The six designated NGOs (L to R, top to bottom): the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC); Addameer Prisoner Support Association; Defense for Children International–Palestine (DCI-P); the Union of Agriculture Work Committees (UAWC); the Bisan Centre for Research and Development; al-Haq

According to Israeli authorities, the designations were the result of a joint terrorism financing investigation run by the Israel Security Agency (ISA, aka Shin Bet, Israel's domestic intelligence service) and Israel's National Bureau for Counter Terror Financing.

Origins of the inquiry can be traced earlier to the 2019 murder of 17-year-old Rina Shnerb by PFLP operatives who worked at one of these NGOs.

Several prominent international organisations were quick to condemn Israel's action, led by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, who wrote that the designation amounted to "an attack on human rights defenders, on freedoms of association, opinion and expression and on the right to public participation."

The designated organisations, she continued, "are some of the most reputable human rights and humanitarian groups in the occupied Palestinian territory and for decades have worked closely with the UN."

Despite such statements, none of the NGOs' defenders has addressed Israel's accusations or the underlying evidence head-on. Further still, statements such as Bachelet's fail to address the possibility that while these international organisations partner with groups that publicly defend the human rights of some people, they support acts of terrorism and murder targeting others. Indeed, the terrorist designations of these six NGOs did not come out of the blue, but rather are the result of a decade's worth of events. More recently, public Israeli actions – from the release of official reports to arrests and prosecutions – point to a concerted effort to collect the kind of information necessary to underpin these designations.

Phase 1: From the Gilad Shalit Swap to the Murder of Rina Shnerb

As part of the 2011 prisoner swap that secured the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit from Hamas custody, Israel freed some 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, including some 50 PFLP operatives. Several of these operatives

soon resumed activities on behalf of the PFLP, according to Israeli officials who acknowledge not being sufficiently aware of this trend at the time, when the country's security agencies were much more focused on Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

NGOs targeted in the recent Israeli designations hired some of these operatives, such as Salah Hamouri, who was employed at Addameer despite the public nature of his affiliation with the PFLP and his prior conviction for plotting to assassinate former Israeli Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Upon Hamouri's prison release in 2011, the PFLP website pictured him waving the organisation's flag and quoted him as saying, "There is no option for the Palestinian people except resistance, because it is the only way for us to achieve our people's rights, our freedom, and our self-determination."

Following the Shalit deal, the tempo of PFLP operational activities increased, including a plot to kidnap an Israeli soldier near Hizma, northeast of Jerusalem, in May 2012, a Kornet anti-tank missile launched across the Gaza border in November 2012, and another kidnapping plot foiled in December 2012.

Israeli security authorities soon underscored for the public "the high motivation of terrorist organizations to carry out a kidnapping, with a special emphasis on the PFLP, whose members have been involved in a number of plots in the past year." Over the next few years, among other plots, PFLP operatives carried out a shooting attack targeting tourists near the Wadi Qelt canyon in the West Bank; murdered five Jews, including three American citizens, praying at a Jerusalem synagogue; planned an attack in east Jerusalem; killed an Israeli driver in southern Jerusalem; and attempted to assassinate then Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat and other Israeli political figures.

The PFLP even began cooperating with Hezbollah, sending operatives to Lebanon for training so that they could conduct still more sophisticated attacks in Israel. In July 2018, a Belgian-Palestinian dual national trained by Hezbollah in Lebanon was arrested on suspicion of terrorist activity as he attempted to cross from Jordan into Israel.

From time to time, Israeli authorities arrested employees of the now designated NGOs – not for their civil society or human rights work, but for acting on behalf of the PFLP. Salah Hamouri, the earlier-noted Addameer field researcher, was arrested in 2017. Ayman Nasser, Addameer's legal unit coordinator, was arrested in 2018. Abdul-



Israeli authorities began to focus on PFLP activities after some 50 PFLP operatives were released as part of the 2011 prisoner swap deal for kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit (pictured here with then PM Netanyahu)

latif Ghaith, chair of Addameer's board of directors and a co-founder of the organisation, was placed on a travel ban in 2019. And Khalida Jarrar, deputy director of Addameer's board of directors and the organisation's former director, was arrested in 2019 and ultimately pleaded guilty to being a member of a terrorist group (PFLP).

In February 2019, Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs issued an English-language report, *Terrorists in Suits*, outlining Hamas and PFLP use of human rights organisations as fronts. According to the report,

Hamas and PFLP operatives have infiltrated and adopted seemingly benign NGOs in the Palestinian Authority, Europe, North America and South Africa, for the purpose of advancing their ideological goal: the elimination of the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Moreover, it appears that terrorist organizations view NGOs in the West as a convenient means for raising funds which they could not otherwise obtain.

Addameer, al-Haq, and DCI-P, three of the recently designated organisations, are included in the report, along with several other NGOs accused of having ties to the PFLP.

Then, on Aug. 23, 2019, PFLP operatives planned and detonated a bomb at a popular West Bank hiking spot, killing 17-year-old Rina Shnerb and wounding her father and brother. Two of the PFLP terrorists involved in this attack – including Samer Arbid, charged with recruiting cell members and personally detonating the explosive – were employed by the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, one of the recently designated NGOs.

The murder of a teenage girl drove Israeli authorities to conduct a full-blown investigation into PFLP activities in the West Bank, resulting in the arrest of some 50 PFLP members over four months and foiling additional plots. The crackdown also netted a significant arsenal of weapons and related apparatus, including assault rifles and other guns, silencers, scopes, ammunition, radios, and large quantities of bomb-making equipment such as fertiliser, metal ball bearings, and fuses.

Among the arrested PFLP operatives was Walid Muhammad Hanatsheh, a finance and administration manager for the Union of Health Work Committees (UHCW), another PFLP-affiliated NGO.

These arrests were announced in December 2019 and within two months, in February 2020, Belgium rescinded an invitation to a DCI-P senior advisor to address the UN Security Council. Belgium held the rotating Security Council presidency that month, but withdrew the invitation after receiving information from Israel linking DCI-P to the PFLP.

The arrests also led to a political scandal in the Netherlands, and in July 2020 the Dutch Government suspended its aid to the UAWC based on evidence that the NGO used Dutch subsidies to continue paying salaries for the two men already on trial for Shnerb's murder.

Phase 2: Investigating PFLP Funding Streams

Once the investigation into the Shnerb murder was completed, and the network of PFLP operatives plotting further attacks arrested, Israeli authorities initiated the second phase of their investigation focused on the PFLP's financial support networks. Pulling at the threads of the two NGOs directly tied to PFLP operatives involved in Shnerb's murder, the UAWC and UHCW, Israeli authorities began mapping out what they ultimately determined was a network of front organisations providing funds for the PFLP, day jobs and legitimacy for its operatives, and space for secure meetings.

Israeli authorities officially declared the UHCW an illegal association on Jan. 22, 2020, although it continued functioning. Then, in March 2021, Israeli authorities raided the UHCW headquarters in al-Bireh, searched the premises, and seized files and computers, while also detaining three office employees. In early May 2021, Israel arrested four people affiliated with the UHCW, including Juani Rashmawi (a European fundraiser), Tisir Abu Sharbak (a senior accountant), Saeed Abdat (a former accountant), and Amro

Hamuda (a former purchasing department manager). The defendants were charged with activity in a proscribed organisation, conducting illicit money transfers, and fraud, and accused of defrauding European donors by manipulating records to cover funds "in the eight figures" diverted from the NGO to the PFLP. Together, investigators said, the four "duped European donors using financial records doctored to hide cash diversions" to the PFLP.

The investigation, however, did not end with the UHCW. Instead, it led Israeli officials to conclude that a network of seven NGOs – the UHCW and the six just designated – "act under PFLP leadership and in accordance with the organization's directives, as a cover for promoting the PFLP's activities and funding."

As the inquiry progressed, UHCW director Shatha Odeh was arrested in July 2021 on multiple charges, including working for an unlawful association, use of fraudulent documents, and receiving funds through fraud. That same month, Israeli security forces raided the DCI-P headquarters office in al-Bireh, seizing computers and files as part of their investigation. According to an Israeli official, authorities also seized evidence from the offices of the UAWC. The raids, an Israeli official stated, were "part

"The underlying connections between these NGOs and the PFLP are well documented. Senior officials at the NGOs are themselves tied to the PFLP, and the NGOs routinely hire known PFLP operatives, including those convicted of terrorist plots"

of the battle against terror financing, on the basis of established and up-to-date intelligence.”

By August 2021, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) had reportedly launched an investigation into EU support for NGOs tied to the PFLP. Israel has shared evidence with authorities in multiple European countries and now also the United States. Meanwhile, following the designations of these six NGOs, Israeli authorities arrested PFLP political bureau member Bashir al-Khairi in Ramallah. Khairi had reportedly served both on Addameer’s board and as president of the UAWC.

THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

According to Israeli officials, the information underpinning the designations of these six NGOs comes from a variety of sources, including classified intelligence, seized materials and other court evidence, and the statements made by arrested NGO employees to investigators. The intelligence is unlikely to be made public, which is typical for the evidentiary documents used to support designations in the United States and elsewhere. But much of the evidence has or will come out in court as those proceedings advance, and significant portions have been shared with American and European counterparts.

The underlying connections between these NGOs and the PFLP are well documented. Senior officials at the NGOs are themselves tied to the PFLP, and the NGOs routinely hire known PFLP operatives, including those convicted of terrorist plots and of being PFLP operatives. But the roles these NGOs play as a networked PFLP financing mechanism were only discovered in the wake of Rina Shnerb’s murder.

For example, in a statement to Israeli police, one of the arrested UHWC employees explained that “the PFLP-affiliated institutions are inter-connected and serve as the organisation’s lifeline financially and organisationally, i.e., money laundering and financing PFLP activity.”

This comment was made with specific reference to Addameer, the Bisan Center, al-Haq, DCI-P, the UAWC, and the UPWC. In the arrangement, one NGO would learn how to conduct various types of fraud and money



A 2019 video from the Palestinian Wattan Media Network of an official PFLP event that featured leading PFLP figures, and which included representatives of the now-banned NGOs, including Khaleeda Jarrar and Abdullatif Ghaith of Addameer, Shawan Jabarin of al-Haq, Gebril Muhammad of Bisan, and Ahmad Saadat of the UPWC (Screenshot)

laundering, then pass this knowledge on to the others. For example, as Saeed Abdat at the UHWC mastered the means of defrauding European donors, Israeli officials say, he relayed that knowledge to senior officials at the UPWC and the Bisan Centre.

According to investigators, the funds raised by these NGOs were ultimately disbursed through a PFLP committee system dedicated for this purpose. In another statement, defendants described an “internal committee” made up of PFLP operatives working for these NGOs – specifically, Walid Hanatsheh, Itiraf Rimawi, Khitam Saafin, and Abdul Razeq Faraj – responsible for managing money transfers. This group oversees a separate “high-level external committee,” which in turn reports directly to the PFLP’s central committee. The central committee then determines how to distribute incoming funds among the PFLP’s military, political, and social service activities. One reason this is so significant: Hanatsheh, Rimawi, and Faraj were all directly involved in the decision to carry out the bombing that killed Rina Shnerb.

According to the Israeli indictment of Tisir Abu Sharbak, one of the four UHWC employees arrested in May 2021, the NGOs in question employed a variety of money laundering schemes to obfuscate their role as PFLP fronts.

With compliments from



First, they forged documents and receipts to significantly inflate the cost of a given project as presented to donors. The difference from these inflated invoices would go to the PFLP. To facilitate this fraud, the NGOs negotiated deals with local businesses, which provided realistic-looking invoices the NGOs could use to pad their numbers. The NGOs would add 16% tax to these invoices, which they would pass on to the businesses for participating in the scheme. The NGOs also presented foreign donors forged invoices for purchases that were either never made at all or made for a fraction of the stated cost. In the words of one defendant, “There is real procurement and fictitious procurement in each project. Everyone knows what is real and what is fictitious with the aim of receiving the money from those who provide the funding.”

For example, according to Israeli authorities, evidence shows that in 2014–2016, the “UHCW forged receipts indicating that a Spanish-funded project to supply medicines in east Jerusalem would cost 2.5 million NIS [Israeli shekels].” But the actual project cost only 100,000 shekels, and the remaining funds were redirected to the PFLP. In another case, Israeli authorities say evidence documents how the UHCW told donors a project to vaccinate Palestinian children would cost 245,000 euros, when the actual cost was a mere 2,500 shekels (less than 700 euros) and most of the money was siphoned off for the PFLP.

The Abu Sharbak indictment also charges that the NGOs doctored employees’ pay records as presented to foreign donors. Employees were sometimes listed under two different salary systems, once as an employee of the project they were working on, and again as an employee of the NGO. In actual practice, one of these salaries went to the employee, while the second went to benefit the PFLP.

Finally, Israeli authorities charge that the NGOs operating in the health sector, specifically, sometimes listed altogether fictitious projects for donors. “UHCW forged receipts for medical equipment which was funded by donors but never purchased,” according to Israeli authorities.

From 2012 to 2020, prosecutors estimate some 18–72 million shekels (A\$8.09 – 32.36 million) were raised through such fraud and transferred to the PFLP instead of going to advance public health. Israeli officials attest to have the evidence – real and fake invoices, forged bank statements, and more – and are presenting this in court.

Israeli authorities also state that the offices of several of the designated NGOs – the UPWC, the UAWC, Addameer, and the Bisan Center – were used by PFLP operatives and leaders for meetings unrelated to the groups’ stated purposes.

CONCLUSION

According to a January 2008 report in *Jane’s World Insurgency and Terrorism*, the PFLP boasts 800 core members, “but the PFLP’s influence within the resistance movement is far

greater than the number of its members.” This is partly a factor of the group’s political standing, but over the past decade it has also resulted from the PFLP’s ability to build front organisations that simultaneously provide financial support and a veneer of legitimacy. The NGOs discussed in this paper clearly do engage in civil society work and have partnered with the United Nations and human rights organisations for such work. But the Israeli charges have not come out of thin air. Between findings from intelligence surveillance, seized documents and computers, and detainee interrogations, Israeli authorities appear to have compiled compelling evidence to underpin these designations.

If even parts of the evidence are as strong as the Israelis suggest, then something far more troubling than just financial fraud is at hand – this would strike at the very heart of what it is to work in the field of human rights. In 2007, when Israel’s Supreme Court ruled to uphold a travel ban issued against Shawan Jabarin, general director of al-Haq, the presiding judge described him as a “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” He continued:

Some of his time is spent conducting a human rights organisation, and some as an operative in an organisation which has no qualms regarding murder and attempted murder, which have no relation whatsoever to rights.

Quite the opposite, they reject the most basic right of all, without which there are no other rights, the right to life.

In its statement following the six designations, Human Rights Watch (HRW) took a firm stance: “This appalling and unjust decision is an attack by the Israeli government on the international human rights movement.”

Yet in the past, HRW itself has noted that unlike other groups, “the PFLP has not claimed any separation between its military wing and its political leaders.” As a result, HRW concluded that the persons who carry out suicide and other attacks are criminally responsible for them, but “PFLP leaders are also liable both directly and under the doctrine of command responsibility.”

At a minimum, governments, civil society organisations, and human rights groups need to address the evidence underlying the Israeli allegations to determine if the organisations with which they have been partnering to further human rights employ the same people who are criminally responsible for PFLP attacks. To date, they have not.

AIR

Dr. Matthew Levitt is the Fromer-Wexler Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and director of its Jeanette and Eli Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence. From 2005 to early 2007, he served as deputy assistant secretary for intelligence and analysis at the US Department of the Treasury, and prior to that, he served as a counterterrorism intelligence analyst at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). © Washington Institute (www.washingtoninstitute.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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A Pandemic of Holocaust Distortion

COVID policies and Nazi claims

by Naomi Levin

Holocaust denial is well understood as a form of Antisemitism. Holocaust deniers, writes Deborah Lipstadt in her seminal book *Antisemitism: Here and Now*, “are, pure and simple, antisemites, and their agenda is to reinforce and spread the very antisemitism that produced the Holocaust.”

But today we are seeing the rise of a different, but equally concerning, phenomenon: Holocaust distortion. Unfortunately, Holocaust distortion is becoming increasingly visible in Australia, particularly among those who oppose mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations and lockdown measures.

 **Bernie Finn MP**
Yesterday at 10:07 pm · 🌐

The Despot tells us we'll be free - then rushes into Parliament a Bill giving himself total control over almost everything. Victorians' freedom has not been under this sort of threat since World War II. It's time for us all to fight again!



Portraying political leaders such as Victorian Premier Dan Andrews as Nazis is itself reaching epidemic proportions

As a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), there is an argument that the Australian Government could be doing more to combat growing Holocaust distortion in Australia and being spread by Australians online.

In Melbourne, demonstrators opposed to vaccination mandates and new pandemic-related laws have displayed signs depicting Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews as

Adolf Hitler and calling Andrews' Labor Party the “Nazi party” with increasing frequency.

In November, when Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk announced restrictions for Queenslanders who had not received a COVID-19 vaccination, her Government was also branded as “Nazis” by social media users.

In Sydney, an anti-vaxxer took to TikTok to rage against a Toyota dealer in Brookvale because it was “enforcing Nazi regulations” which prevented him entering.

Victorian Liberal MP Bernie Finn, who has been a vocal – and often controversial – critic of Andrews, was

rightly slammed for posting an image of Andrews as Hitler. Finn removed the image after being roundly condemned, including by members of his own party.

In mid-October, Country Liberal Party Senator Sam McMahon compared vaccine mandates in the Northern Territory to Nazi Germany, saying “you could be forgiven for thinking we’re living in Nazi Germany, not the Northern Territory.”

This followed a July Facebook post from Queensland Senator Malcolm Roberts of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party, who wrote to his 110,000 Facebook followers: “There are eerie parallels between NAZI Germany and what is happening in our country today. While Germans are wonderful people, it did not take long for the German govt to stop basic freedoms and then have Germans murdering their fellow Germans.”

One of Senator Roberts’ followers heartily replied, “Yes, they are planning a genocide...”. Another wrote a slightly garbled message, but the meaning was clear: “absolute truth and thank god that someone is reminded of the history of the Nazis that is really happening again before our eyes only in other gloves.”

“The trend toward Holocaust distortion is not new, but it is evolving. Its contemporary origins seem to lie among Israel haters”

Yellow Stars of David, which Jews were infamously forced to wear by the Nazis, have also been appropriated by this ragtag group. Most prominently, media reported on NSW Central Coast-based Sarah Mills, a popular social media influencer, who published photos of herself and her three children wearing yellow stars and instead of “Jude” (German for Jew), she had printed “no vax” on them.

To borrow a cliché, these examples are the absolute tip of the iceberg when it comes to comparisons between COVID-19 regulations and the Holocaust. They also represent a global phenomenon.

In early November, Italians wore striped pyjamas similar to those worn by prisoners in Nazi concentration camps to protest against the introduction of a “green pass” that allows vaccinated Italians access to work and public venues. In Lithuania, Germany and the Czech Republic, protesters have worn similar garb. In the United States, legislators compared COVID-19 vaccines to the work of barbaric Nazi medical experimenter Josef Mengele.

The trend toward Holocaust distortion is not new, but it is evolving. Its contemporary origins seem to lie among Israel haters. To return to Lipstadt’s book, she writes about “genocide inversion”, where Israelis – and sometimes all Jews – are equated with Nazis, especially in times of struggle with the Palestinians. These accusations against Israelis, she writes, “hearken back to medieval an-

tisemitism accusations – murdering non-Jews to achieve world domination.”

Lipstadt continues, “Some observers posit that these comparisons are used precisely because by upsetting people – Jews in particular – they draw immediate attention. In other words, they constitute a kind of ‘Jew baiting’.”

But the trend has expanded beyond Israel comparisons, and has become so widespread that earlier this year, the IHRA and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), jointly published a guide called “Recognising and Countering Holocaust Distortion”. The guide is intended to provide expert advice to policymakers and community leaders to help fight Holocaust distortion.

Since 2013, the IHRA has had a definition of Holocaust distortion. This definition has now been updated to specify that “The use of imagery and language associated with the Holocaust for political, ideological, or commercial purposes unrelated to this history” is one form of Holocaust distortion.

Apart from the obvious distress that Holocaust distortion causes to all right-minded people and the fact that it diminishes the memory of the Holocaust, there are other dangers.

In an IHRA video presentation published in November, Hungarian Holocaust expert Andrea Szonyi, director of the Zachor Foundation for Social Remembrance, explained: “Holocaust distortion is a threat to society because we will totally lose historical accuracy, we will not be able to build on the facts, we cannot learn from them and we can fall into the trap of forgetting and repeating.”

Holocaust distortion is being used by pandemic protesters because they are ignorant of the facts of the Holocaust and because, as the ultimate evil, comparisons to the Holocaust are seen as a useful way of pushing their agenda. The main vehicle for pushing Holocaust distortion is, unsurprisingly, social media, particularly online forums where conspiracy theorists lurk. It is one more dangerous and distressing trait of these dangerous, distressing and seemingly growing communities of conspiracists.

Speaking at the US Anti-Defamation League’s recent conference “Never is Now”, Imran Ahmed, CEO of the Centre for Countering Digital Hate, explained that there has been a recent proliferation of conspiracy theories.

“We see these [conspiracies] recur over time, but the speed with which they can build audiences, and what

always underpins these theories, is it was the Jews that were behind it and that’s why we’ve got to get them,” Ahmed explained.

Conspiracy theories are being effectively spread via social media, which has a business model of amplifying controversial, emotional or contentious messaging while diminishing the exposure of analytical, balanced and reasoned reporting.

“Social media permits the production of fake evidence points, things that simulate news sites, for example, but are in fact misinformation,” Ahmed said. “The algorithms that underpin a major way that 4.5 billion people world-

wide now communicate, social media, actually elevate misinformation, hate, contentious information above good information because, frankly, hate, controversy, chewy stuff that people start debating whether they are for or against, is more interesting than agreement and tolerance.”

In “Recognising and Countering Holocaust Dis-

ortion”, the IHRA advocated for a variety of approaches to be used to respond to Holocaust distortion. Recommended approaches included disseminating fact-based counter-narratives and education campaigns to highlight the unique nature of the Holocaust. The report also urges IHRA members – of which Australia is one – to identify and track Holocaust distortion and develop ways to counter its spread online.

The report describes Holocaust distortion as “in many ways a more pernicious threat” than Holocaust denial and a development made more acute by the “rise of post-truth politics and proliferation of online hate.” It is important that Australia acts – both as part of its responsibilities as a member of the IHRA and because of the importance to our own society of preserving and handing down an accurate memory of the Holocaust.



Another dangerous Holocaust-distorting trope increasingly common among anti-vaxxers – the use of yellow Stars of David (Source: Instagram)

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THE ROAD BACK TO DAMASCUS

by Amotz Asa-El

“Stop the killing machine!” demanded Saudi King Abdullah of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, as Riyadh withdrew its ambassador from Damascus.

It was August 2011 and the Syrian civil war was hardly six months old, but with the Assad regime’s attacks on its own citizens well underway, the richest Arab country launched a pan-Arab effort to remove Assad, explaining that his war against what appeared to be most Syrians had “nothing to do with religion, or values, or ethics.”

The campaign’s rationale was clear, both in terms of its aim and in terms of its prospects. The previous months’ upheaval in multiple Arab capitals could easily spread further, and possibly threaten regimes like Saudi Arabia’s. At the same time, with the leaders of Egypt and Tunisia already ousted, and the downfall of their Libyan and Yemeni counterparts imminent, adding a fifth name to that list was not unrealistic.

The Saudi move was soon followed by Bahrain and Kuwait, then by the rest of the Gulf’s monarchies, and then by the Arab League as a whole, which suspended Syria’s membership and imposed sanctions on the Assad regime in November 2011.

Eighteen Arab countries backed that resolution, with only Syria and Lebanon opposing it, and Iraq abstaining. A diplomatic exodus then ensued, as 18 Arab embassies in Damascus were shuttered, scores of Syrian diplomats were returned home, and the Syrian economy, already crippled by the war and by American and European sanctions, was boycotted by most of the Arab world, as well.

It was part of a broad international campaign, led by the US and France and joined by all Western countries as well as Turkey. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly called Assad a “butcher,” as did then British PM David Cameron and then French President François Hollande.

Assad survived this pressure, and indeed, in the cases of Cameron, Hollande and US President Barack Obama, has not only outlasted all these leaders, but their successors as well.

Now, a decade after Syria’s suspension from the Arab League, signs are mounting that Arab leaders are increasingly accepting Assad’s survival and re-legitimising his rule – a policy shift that is sending tremors across the region, from Ankara to Teheran.

The first glimmer of retreat from Syria’s excommunication began in December 2018, when then-Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir landed in Damascus.

Though Bashir was himself a pariah in much of the world, having been indicted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes in his own country’s civil war, his visit clearly happened with Riyadh’s blessing, the Saudis having previously mended fences with him.

Shortly before Bashir’s visit, Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa publicly shook hands with then-Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mualem – a

gesture that could not have happened without Riyadh’s acquiescence.

The Saudi strategic decision to re-engage with Damascus really became clear several days after Bashir’s visit, when the United Arab Emirates, another close Saudi ally, reopened its embassy in Damascus.

Subsequent events amounted to a thoroughgoing retreat from the Arab world’s diplomatic and com-

mercial boycott of Syria after 2011.

In January 2019, Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita called for “Arab coordination concerning Syria’s return to the Arab League.” In May 2020, Arab media reports claimed the Saudi chief of intelligence Khalid al-Humaidan secretly visited Damascus and met with Assad. This past September, Jordan reopened a border crossing south of Daraa, the Syrian town where the civil war began, and in October, Jordan’s King Hussein took a phone call from Assad. In early November, Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed visited the Syrian President at his palace, amid Arab media reports that Riyadh has decided to restore full diplomatic ties with Damascus.

What, then, is driving this evolving thaw?

The first factor underpinning the Arab rehabilitation of the Assad regime is political. Last decade’s uprisings in multiple Arab capitals traumatised political elites across the Mideast. No issue is more urgent from their point of view than the threat Islamist fundamentalism poses to their own survival.

Yes, having bombarded and gassed thousands while presiding over a war that took more than half-a-million lives, Bashar Assad is effectively responsible for the killing



Reason to smile: Despite his crimes, Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad is now being welcomed back into the Arab fold (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

of more Arabs than anyone else in recent history. And yes, his secret services tortured and executed many others, while his air force levelled neighbourhoods, hospitals, and schools. And yes, the displacement of more than 10 million Syrians that Assad's forces and allies caused constitutes the century's worst refugee crisis.

Yet the hard reality is that religiously moderate Syrian opposition groups failed to unite, and certainly failed to win, thus leaving the fundamentalists as the only viable alternative to Assad. And the prospect of Syria falling into Islamist fundamentalist hands is, from the viewpoint of Arab governments, the worst-case scenario.

That is what Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi meant when he said, back in 2016, that Cairo's policy is to "support national armies," whether in Libya, Iraq, or Syria, thus listing Arab countries whose armies are challenged by assorted militias.

Beyond this domestic consideration lurk two geopolitical concerns – one regarding outside global powers, the second, regional powers.

The role of the global superpowers in the Middle East has transformed dramatically since the civil war's outbreak. Back then, Russia was on the region's margins, where it had been since Egypt's defection from Moscow's orbit to Washington's in the 1970s.

This configuration ended in 2015, when Russia opened the Khmeimim airbase in western Syria and thrust its air force into the thick of the Syrian civil war – and soon determined that war's outcome.

The Obama Administration's failure to oppose the Russian move, even verbally, alongside Obama's failure to follow through on his threat to punish Assad for launching chemical weapons attacks on his own people, led Arab leaders to conclude that Washington's strategic domination of the Middle East was being seriously challenged, and possibly eclipsed, by Moscow. Russia's agenda therefore won new respect, and the first item on that agenda was the

preservation of the Assad dynasty – which has been loyal to Moscow since its establishment in 1971, and provided Russia with a Mediterranean naval base at Tartus, a precious asset from the Russian point of view.

At the same time, Arab governments are also being pushed back toward Assad's presidential palace by two regional players, Turkey and Iran.

Turkey initially hoped to see Assad fall and be replaced by a Sunni fundamentalist regime that would be a satellite for Ankara. Like the rest of the world, when Turkey realised that Assad was likely to survive the war, it changed its attitude.

Diplomatically, following the Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war, Turkish President Erdogan reversed course and said that Assad could play a role in forging Syria's future.

Militarily, Ankara shifted its focus from reshaping Syria to stifling the Kurdish autonomy that the war had produced along the Turkish-Syrian border. Turkey has thus invaded northern Syria in several offensives since 2016, and its troops now occupy more than 8,000 square kilometres on the Syrian side of the 900km Turkish-Syrian border.

To Arab leaders, this Turkish occupation brings to mind memories of the Ottoman Empire's 400-year rule over the Arab world. Seen through this prism, Assad's struggle appears to be part of a greater Arab cause.

That cannot be said of the other regional power at play in the Syrian-Arab rapprochement: Iran.

Iran, from Assad's viewpoint, is not an intruder, but a true ally. Throughout the civil war, the Islamic Republic stood by Syria through thick and thin, supplying it with Shi'ite militia troops from Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan that fought – and got killed – in large numbers for Assad, as well as with sorely needed oil and cash.

For most other Arab governments, led by Saudi Arabia, Iran is the strategic arch-enemy. Analysts therefore believe that hopes of driving a wedge between Damascus and Teheran are a major motivation for the Arab return to Syria.

“Arab governments are also being pushed back toward Assad's presidential palace by two regional players, Turkey and Iran”

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A recent unconfirmed report by *Al Arabiya* news agency has claimed that Assad intends to fire the commander of the Iranian forces in Syria, Javad Ghaffari. Whatever this report's accuracy, Israeli analysts believe Assad is growing impatient with Iran's extensive military activity and bases in his country and the repeated attacks they draw from the Israel Air Force.

This impatience is believed to be shared by Russia as well, a sentiment that may explain Vladimir Putin's decision to stretch out his first meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in Sochi in October from three to more than five hours.

Whatever was discussed there, three days later Israeli jets struck Iranian-backed units in southwestern Syria, opposite Israel's Golan Heights border, and this has been followed by weeks of increased Israeli attacks on Iranian targets in Syria. It seems Russia had to have been in the know.

The anti-Iranian dynamic became glaring the following month, when Emirati and Bahraini warships joined Israeli and US vessels in a multilateral naval exercise in the Red Sea.

This was an Arab-Israeli show of military harmony that until recently was unthinkable – as unthinkable as a renewed pan-Arab embrace of Bashar Assad and his regime.

AIR

WHY IS IRAN RETURNING TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE?

by Yaakov Amidror

After several months in which Iran perplexed American negotiators, it has announced it will return to nuclear talks in late November.

This is an unconditional return, contrary to the position previously expressed by Iran, which demanded an easing

of the sanctions imposed on it before any talks could take place.

Thus, the Iranian concession is an apparent American success. Still, it is unclear whether this indeed will be the case since Iranian stubbornness in the negotiations could drag talks out again, and things could end back at square one.

Moreover, Iran now openly threatens that the talks will fail unless the US offers guarantees that would bind future administrations' behaviour. However, any such attempt to enshrine the agreement as a formal treaty would require ratification by the Senate; the necessary two-thirds majority is nowhere in sight.



Amidror: Iran has an interest in returning to the 2015 nuclear deal because it will actually aid Teheran's quest for nuclear weapons capabilities (Credit: Shutterstock)

The Iranian tactic to delay the return to talks was possibly designed to make the Americans so enthusiastic about the mere resumption of negotiations that they would agree to the Iranian demand and ease the sanctions for the duration of the talks.

The answer to why Iran is returning to the talks is thus simple: the present leadership in Teheran has a clear interest in returning to the 2015 nuclear agreement known as the JCPOA because it is a good agreement for the Iranians – who seek to develop nuclear weapons. The Iranians understood that the nuclear deal was good for them, and now, even more so, in light of their rapid progress in their enrichment program.

Moreover, they delayed the resumption of talks because they realised that a military option did not exist, neither in the current Administration nor the previous one. The absence of a military option was the main weakness the Iranians sensed when the previous US Administration withdrew from the nuclear deal.

It was a significant mistake to withdraw from the deal without charting a viable military option and demonstrating the determination to use it if necessary. The Iranians realised that no matter what they did, except for the assembly of a nuclear bomb detected by the Americans or other intelligence services, the US did not want to use military force to stop the nuclear project.



A I T O P P E R

EST 1954

THE HARROWING OF MUSTAFA KADHIMI

by Michael Knights

The Iranian perception that there is no military option on the table will also be their basic assumption in future negotiations.

Therefore, the Iranians know that the United States has no alternative but to return to the agreement, so they will not rush to fold – and may first try to remove sanctions and gain other economic benefits.

The Iranians also observed that, after they launched drone attacks against an American base in al-Tanf in eastern Syria last month, the United States failed to respond in any serious manner. Even though there were no casualties, this event demonstrated Iran's determination and reading of American behaviour.

This lack of an American response signalled that the US wants to return to negotiations at almost any cost. But, unfortunately, it also might lead Iran to conclude that it can continue its aggressive behaviour in the Middle East as long as there are prospects for further talks.


Further, the perceived American weakness will motivate the Iranians to run out the clock through negotiations. The American hope for the resumption of the talks, and the talks themselves, give the Iranians more freedom of action. They restrict US activity in response to provocations, including even elementary acts of force protection, and thus harm deterrence.

The United States emphasises that the return to the nuclear agreement is only a first step, after which it intends to enter into talks aimed at a better and longer deal. However, the chances of reaching such an agreement are nil – because the United States will have no leverage over Iran.

Israel cannot and should not interfere with the American talks with Iran. Still, Israel must obtain from the US a commitment to complete the negotiations in a short time and not let the Iranians procrastinate for months.

Israel must learn what the US response will be if it turns out that there is no chance of reaching an agreement and what may be the timetable for attempting to reach a longer and stronger deal.

Either way, Israel must prepare for the possibility of defending itself – because a nuclear Iran is not an option that Israel can accept. As it was declared and agreed by a few American presidents, Israel should be able to defend itself by itself.

An effort to prevent Iran from going nuclear will not be simple and perhaps even be dangerous, but is necessary. 

IDF Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror is the Anne and Greg Ross-handler Senior Fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS). He was chairman of Israel's National Security Council (April 2011-November 2013) and served for 36 years in senior IDF posts (1966-2002). © JISS (www.jiss.org.il), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

In Old English, the word “harrowing” suggests a test of fortitude, of suffering through a trial, of being tempted and tormented. In Christianity, Christ goes through a harrowing after his death as he walks through Hell on his way to resurrection.

Iraq's premier Mustafa al-Kadhimi certainly makes no pretensions to be anything more than a man trying his best, but he too is being harrowed as Iraq passes through its customary trial of elections, horse-trading, and government formation. In the latest twist of this long and winding tale, bombs dropped by drones struck Kadhimi's house in the early hours of Nov. 7, likely meant to intimidate politicians of all stripes, though thankfully leaving the premier himself unharmed.

This is not the first time that militias have targeted Kadhimi and those close to him. Kadhimi's first physical confrontation with Iran-backed militias came during the previous government formation process in April 2020, when nearly 100 armed militiamen from the Iran-supported terrorist group Kataib Hezbollah (KH) surrounded Kadhimi and his security detail at the Prime Minister's Guesthouse, a kind of hotel for government officials and visitors. At the time, Kadhimi's position was head of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS).

Though well-protected, his men were no match for 100 militiamen, some carrying rocket-propelled grenades designed to blow up armoured vehicles and bunkers. There had been an altercation between Kadhimi's guards and KH fighters some days earlier. Then, KH took the opportunity to seize a bodyguard, rough him up, and throw him in jail – sending a message to the man who many expected would become the next Prime Minister. The intimidation did not work: Kadhimi did become premier, even after KH's Hossein Moanes (Abu Ali al-Askari) warned that his appointment would be considered an act of war and would “burn what remained of the stability of Iraq.”

Fast forward to June 2020, with Kadhimi ensconced as prime minister but still living in the same villa by the Tigris River, owned by a famous writer and friend of Kadhimi's. When Kadhimi ordered the arrest of a KH terrorist, the militia sent another convoy of armed trucks to his house. They parked a twin-barrelled anti-aircraft gun outside as they “negotiated” for the prisoner's release. Unknown to most Iraqis, Kadhimi still did not release the KH member after this effort at intimidation. Instead, the militiaman was set free only months later, released by a cowed judiciary. Just weeks into his premiership, receiving shaky signals

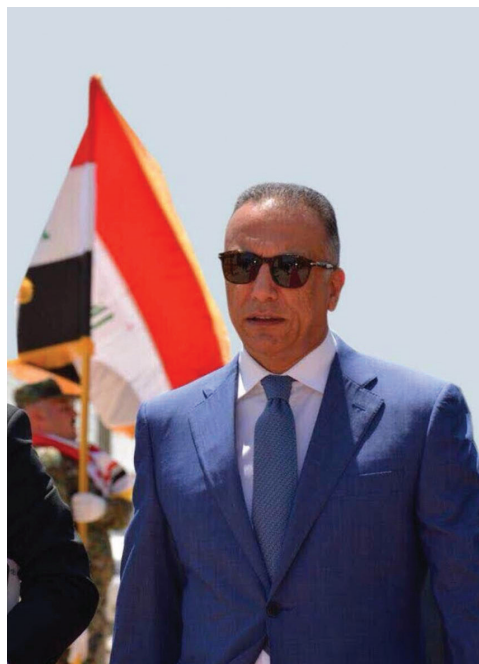
from his own military commanders, Kadhimī was not ready to risk full-scale war with the militias.

Kadhimī is now better protected than he was then. His security measures and international backup are designed precisely to deter or defeat the small army of militia forces available to attack him. This is why the militias sent drones against his house instead. Many people have expressed shock over the drone attack, but it is not even the first time that Kadhimī's house has been attacked by drones. On March 4, 2021, militias correctly sensed the beginning of pre-electoral negotiations to sideline them after the upcoming Oct. 10 elections. They responded by flying unarmed drones at the houses of key political leaders, Kadhimī included. A quadcopter struck his house, a forewarning of the Nov. 7 attack.

As the earlier attacks on Kadhimī's security detail in April 2020 showed, militias are as interested in hurting Kadhimī's friends and colleagues as they are in hurting the Prime Minister himself. The Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) is Iraq's premier intelligence agency, responsible for countless arrests of Islamic State terrorists and other criminals. Yet the Iran-backed militias hunt it for sport in an effort to undermine Kadhimī and the system he has established to protect journalists, protestors, and citizens from militia attacks.

Civilians close to Kadhimī have been kidnapped, tortured, and sometimes killed. His network is included in the broad swath of Iraqi people targeted by militias. Kadhimī's affiliates are on the front lines of these attacks, and live with this daily fear.

Kadhimī's step-by-step pushback against the militias is a frustratingly slow-burn strategy: one replacement of



Iraqi PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi has been a repeated target of attacks by Iranian-sponsored militias – and has become even more of a target in the wake of Iraq's elections on Oct. 10 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

a compromised officer, one terrorism arrest, and one anti-corruption case at a time. But the arrests are building up, and the court cases are bearing fruit.

Such work takes time, and Iraqis are rightfully impatient. Yet while any Iraqi prime minister can easily become a dictator and a death squad commander, Kadhimī does not want rivers of blood in Baghdad if steadily chipping away can reduce the risk to ordinary people. This is why Iraq's security forces arrest militiamen instead of summarily executing them, even though they may later be released due to corruption and intimidation. Rule of law does still matter to some in Iraq, and they continue to believe they can win through it rather than by going beyond it. Kadhimī is one of the Iraqis who continues to advocate for the rule of law, and the

international community should recognise how rare it is to find a leader who chooses not to unleash brutality when he is under intense pressure to do so.

It is also quite fitting that this time, the Iran-backed militias bombed the front steps of Kadhimī's modest house by the Tigris. It was on those exact steps that Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, stood to offer Kadhimī the premiership in 2018, were he to agree to bend the knee to Teheran and serve as its premier in Iraq. When he declined, it chose Adel Abdulmahdi instead, with his ruinous era of premiership lasting just two years. Kadhimī did become premier afterwards, but not by Iran's hand, and despite the death threats of Iran and its militias.

Now, as Iraq forms a new government after the recent elections, the same militias have laid down a red line that the next premier can be anyone except Kadhimī. That should tell us something.

As Iraqi writers Hamzeh Hadad and Muhammad Al-Waeli noted in a 2018 piece, Iraq needs a leader with vision if the country is to recover. But I would argue it also needs a quietly brave leader with a conscience and a sense of responsibility. Watching Iraq nose-dive under Abdulmahdi and begin to recover under Kadhimī has driven home the importance of the identity and character of Iraq's prime minister. In such a centralised system, a good premier is necessary, though not sufficient, to keep Iraq on the right path.

Appointing such a leader is the vital first step that makes positive change possible. Whether Kadhimī becomes Prime Minister again or not, the militia's efforts to tempt

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and torment him, and to drive him off his course, suggest he has done something right in these last two years, and that his example of staying the course against the militias should be emulated by future premiers, and supported by Iraq's friends. AIR

Michael Knights is the Boston-based Jill and Jay Bernstein Fellow of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, specialising in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf states. © Washington Institute, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

THE RISE AND RISE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE'S KHORASAN PROVINCE

by Oved Lobel

Thomas West, US Special Representative for Afghanistan, recently stated, "We're worried about the uptick in [Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)] attacks, and we want the Taliban to be successful against them."

To hear many in the Taliban tell it, ISKP poses no issue at all. Taliban intelligence chief in Nangarhar, Dr. Bashir, denied ISKP even existed, referring to it as a "small group of traitors" and telling the BBC that "just as we defeated a coalition of 52 countries on the battlefield... they will be defeated too... it is easy for us prevent a guerrilla war."

Taliban deputy spokesperson Bilal Karimi asserted to the *Washington Post* that ISKP "is not a serious threat to the Islamic Emirate. We don't see it as a major challenge, so we don't need any outside support to tackle this issue."

Mawlawi Zubair, a senior Taliban commander in Kabul, went even further, telling the *Wall Street Journal*, "We are not faced with a threat nor are we worried about them. There is no need, not even a tiny need, for us to seek assistance from anyone against ISIS... If we get rid of all our economic and administrative problems, ISIS will disappear in 15 days in all of Afghanistan."

The reality is starkly different. In Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar where Dr. Bashir insists the Taliban have the situation under control, there have been near-daily shootings, bombings and assassinations targeting the Taliban.

The city has seen endless unclaimed tit-for-tat killings and beheadings, with bodies dumped on the street and at least 1,500 detained by the Taliban, according to Charlie Winter, Director of Research at the counter-terrorism consultancy ExTrac.

Despite this ruthless Taliban campaign and some success in ferreting out ISKP members and cells, the constant ambushes have continued, apparently unaffected, in Nangarhar, and operations continue elsewhere, including Kunar and reportedly as far away as Herat. Worse, ISKP has conducted several mass casualty attacks, most recently a complex attack on the Sardar Dawood Khan military hospital in Kabul involving multiple operatives. That attack killed senior Taliban official Hamdullah Mokhlis, head of Kabul security and commander of the Taliban's Badri special forces unit, and caused scores of additional casualties.

ISKP suicide bombers have also continued to target the Shi'ites of Afghanistan, with a massive suicide bombing at a mosque in Kunduz and another at a mosque in Kandahar, attacks which killed and wounded hundreds. They have also targeted public transport in Shi'ite neighbourhoods, causing scores of casualties. Earlier in October, ISKP bombed the Eidgah mosque, where a funeral ceremony was being held for the mother of Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid, killing and wounding several Taliban.



Despite claims to the contrary, the Taliban seems fundamentally incapable of containing, much less eliminating, ISKP (Source: Twitter)

The simple fact is that despite US attempts to pass intelligence to the Taliban as well as backing from Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran, the Taliban seem fundamentally incapable of containing, much less eliminating, ISKP. Colin Kahl, US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, warning that ISKP could generate the capability to launch attacks outside Afghanistan within six to 12 months, said that the "Taliban is highly motivated to go after [ISKP]. Their ability to do so, I think, is to be determined."

ISKP has gone from a brief period of dormancy to becoming among the most active and dangerous of the

Islamic State's global branches on a consistent basis, occasionally topping the list in either number of attacks, number of casualties inflicted or both. And these trends are only getting worse.

With total economic collapse and impending drought, there are also serious shortages of food and money throughout Afghanistan, a situation ripe for ISKP recruitment across the country. The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that former members of the US-trained Afghan intelligence services and special forces, who are themselves penniless and starving, were joining ISKP, albeit in relatively small numbers, bringing with them additional capabilities and reach in exchange for large cash payments.

The Taliban's actions since they conquered Afghanistan in August have also provided fertile ground for ISKP propaganda, including the fact that they're allowing Shi'ite religious festivals to take place and protecting the Shi'ite population overall, even as they ethnically cleanse them from certain areas. ISKP also accuses the Taliban of being a US partner and a Pakistani proxy.

Additionally, ISKP has capitalised on the very public and very close relationship between the Taliban and China, despite the latter's genocidal campaign against Uyghur Muslims next door. ISKP has made sure to emphasise this betrayal in an explosive fashion, utilising a Uyghur suicide bomber against a Shi'ite mosque in Kunduz. There is a sizeable Uyghur contingent fighting under the auspices of the Taliban and al-Qaeda – known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP). This anti-China rhetoric and activity could see ISKP poach portions of the group.

There is also the issue of the Salafi sect of Sunni Islam in Afghanistan, some of whose followers the Taliban have been attempting to win over even as they shut down Salafi mosques and institutions and kill community leaders, several of whom are in hiding. Abdul Sayed, an expert on ISKP and the Taliban, recently wrote on this issue for the Jamestown Foundation's *Terrorism Monitor*:

"If the Taliban does not prevent its anti-Salafist segments from repressing Salafists and does not accommodate the

Salafists in the Taliban Salafist-dominated provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar and elsewhere in northern Afghanistan, their grievances will strengthen the ISKP's recruitment and pose a threat to the Taliban."

In addition to the abundant recruitment potential created by economic, ideological and sectarian factors, there is boredom. The Taliban have never really been a governing entity; their *raison d'être* was always jihad and martyrdom. Interview after interview with Taliban rank-and-file since their victory in August has exposed complete listlessness and lack of discipline, with many lamenting the transition to civilian life and their failure to get themselves killed. As

there's no work, no money, no food and most importantly nobody left to fight, there is a substantial risk of Taliban fighters joining ISKP just to have a chance to continue waging jihad.

All of these developments were sadly predictable. In May, I wrote for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute that a Taliban takeover was inevitable and that ISKP was simply waiting for

them to free all prisoners from jail, while its myriad cells in Jalalabad, Kabul and elsewhere regrouped for an insurgency. This came to pass three months later, with thousands of ISKP operatives released by the Taliban.

ISKP has genuine grassroots support across Afghanistan, but it is also comprised of cadres that have defected from the Taliban and their associated jihadist groups since 2015, rendering it nearly impossible for the Taliban to know how thoroughly they've been infiltrated. ISKP's ability to assassinate Taliban officials across Afghanistan and blow up the mosques frequented by the Taliban leadership, including its Emir Hibatullah Akhundzada, in Pakistan suggests quite extensive penetration – something about which Akhundzada himself recently warned.

Even under combined pressure from the US Air Force, Afghan special forces and the Taliban, all of whom occasionally cooperated against ISKP prior to the Taliban takeover, the group retained the capability to conduct mass casualty attacks and assassinations at will. Without the former two, ISKP is now operating and recruiting in an extremely permissive environment and is likely to remain and expand throughout the country.

Although it is unlikely to be an existential threat to overall Taliban control, ISKP could plausibly begin to contest certain districts and even cities in Afghanistan. There are already unverified reports of the Islamic State banner being flown in Deh Rawood district in Uruzgan province, where it is allegedly recruiting openly. As the Taliban have yet to show much capability to protect even themselves, much less the Afghan population, from ISKP, they appear quite unlikely to be able to protect the US and its allies from future ISKP external operations.

"With total economic collapse and impending drought, there are also serious shortages of food and money throughout Afghanistan, a situation ripe for ISKP recruitment across the country"

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MORE ARABIC ANTISEMITISM AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES IN AUSTRALIA

by Ran Porat

As part of the *AIR*'s ongoing coverage of antisemitism, extremist anti-Israel content and conspiracy theories being circulated to Arabic speakers and followers by Australian-based organisations and individual preachers, here are some examples from the last few months.

THE ISLAMIC SHIA COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

In a recently discovered 2017 video of a public event in Melbourne, Aqeel Al-Sharif, the President of the Islamic Shia Council of Victoria, called for all forces in Iraq to fight the Islamic State terrorist organisation because it is controlled by Israel.

Al-Sharif referred to "Daesh [ISIS] which is a part of the Israeli army." He also claimed that "the real power behind those terrorist armies [in Iraq] are the security service units and the Israeli intelligence. ISIS is short for Israeli Intelligence Security."

Citing a popular conspiracy theory that ISIS leaders were really Mossad agents, Al-Sharif told his audience that "if you search on Google about the truth about [then ISIS leader] Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi [you will find that] he is Jewish! And his name is Simon Elliot."

HIZB UT-TAHRIR AUSTRALIA

The hateful and antisemitic rhetoric of Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia has been documented many times in the *AIR*. The Australian branch of this international pan-Islamic fundamentalist movement, which calls for the re-establishment of a global Islamic caliphate, is led by Palestinian-Australian activist Ismai'l Al-Wahwah (Abu Anas).

On social media in recent months, Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia:

- Called "for [Arab] Armies to Move in response to the Occupation's [Israel's] Decision to Allow Jews to Perform their Prayers in the Blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque." The leaders of Hizb ut-Tahrir said the post, "stressed that the Al-Aqsa Mosque is exposed to a serious attempt and a severe and malicious attack by the Jewish entity to impose their biblical rituals in Al-Aqsa Mosque in preparation for the establishment of their alleged temple on the entire area of the Al-Aqsa Mosque." (Oct. 12)

- A few days later, Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia repeated this claim by reposting a message from the Palestinian

branch of the movement. This post falsely claimed that "the Jewish entity approves a law that opens the door wide to convert Al-Aqsa Mosque into a Jewish synagogue in which they perform their rituals and prayers," a move that it labelled as "the humiliation of Allah's creation." This alleged development, argued the post, is "a declaration of war against you, and it is a dangerous move to take control of Al-Aqsa Mosque." (Oct. 25)

- Responding to a meeting between the Vice-Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the investment bank Rothschild & Co, Baron Eric de Rothschild, and the Uzbekistan Government in early October, Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia shared an antisemitic post from the Uzbekistan branch of the movement. It was headlined "Greedy Corporations Created by #Capitalism like the Rothschilds, only Bring Poverty to Our Country." (Oct. 21)

According to the post, "The Rothschilds are considered one of the richest families in the world. This family is of Jewish origin and one of the most prominent representatives of the cruel capitalist system. We must sound the alarm when such a Jewish family business arrives in our country, which holds nothing sacred but its own interests."

The text then calls on Muslims to react against this supposed Jewish plot: "We Muslims must take such visits seriously... these agreements and partnerships only serve the interests of the capitalist firms; because even if they provide some kind of humanitarian assistance, there is a certain interest behind it, especially the Jews who are ahead of everyone else in this regard. Just as they hate #Muslims in #Palestine, they also hate us in the same way. There is no difference in that."

SUFYAAN KHALIFA



Perth resident Sufyaan Khalifa is an Algerian-born Sunni preacher and internet conspiracy theory promoter. AIJAC has documented Khalifa's long history of promoting antisemitism in his videos in English and Arabic. An anti-vaxxer and COVID-19 conspiracy theory fan, Khalifa has continued preaching hate and spreading misinformation in recent months.

- In August, he attacked "cursed" US President Joe Biden, who is "Zionist to the root," for his part in the

“international game” of the “lies upon lies” about CO-VID-19, after Biden called on the media to criticise anti-vaxxers.

- Marking 20 years since the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the US, Khalifa published a video “Who is behind Sep 11? An evil world government setting up a new world order”. In it, he claimed that the group that masterminded 9/11 “control the world” and is headed by the “cursed Dajjal (devil) and his companions the evil devils.” They are, in his view, those who “have the money and the [ability to] decide for the world, leading the world towards one option: a new world order because they want to control all the people on the face of earth – to rule over all nations and anyone who might oppose them or stand against them.” These people all produced the coronavirus in “one kitchen”, he said.

- In another video, Khalifa attacked normalisation between Arab and Muslim states and Israel, describing Israel as “the rapist Zionist entity” and a “foreign item in the body” of the Arab nations. Normalisation, he said, is forbidden and “an unforgiven crime” because “the existence of this cancer, the Zionist entity, within the Arab nations [causes] division among the Arabs, making it impossible for the [Arabs] to connect and become one, unify.” The leaders who sign normalisation agreements with Israel, says Khalifa, will be thrown into the “garbage bin of history” for eternity because Israel is sure to “disappear today or tomorrow.” (Oct. 3)

- In his video “SQUID GAME: Kill to live, kill to earn” (also translated by MEMRI), Khalifa starts out by ‘analysing’ the popularity of the children’s song “Baby Shark”. He says the rhythm of the music “represents the new culture in the minds of our sons,” and leaves “a psy-



Squid Game: “Who is behind it? Beware of the mason game...beware of the culture of killing for money and profit!”

chological residue on our sons and daughters.” (Oct. 12)

Similarly, he condemned the Korean pop group BTS because “it promotes homosexuality, sodomy, and a culture that erases the human nature of Man, through the kind of songs that they sing. These freaks became stars in the eyes of many of our youth, I am sad to say.”

Finally, Khalifa attacked the Korean hit Netflix series “Squid Game” as actually part of an evil globalist plot. “This evil game – this evil series – is meant to promote a culture of ‘kill so that you can live,’ and a culture of ‘kill in order to profit,’ and the idea that the best way to achieve this is by gambling, even if this leads to killing everybody on Earth.” The series contains, according to Khalifa, a hidden satanic message: “The winner [of the game] takes the entire sum of 45.6 [billion won, the Korean currency], 4-5-6. This number – 4-5-6 – is a code, or a certain signal, because this movie in itself is a huge signal for global Freemasonry.”



The image used by Khalifa to graphically represent malevolent Freemasonry was made up of a coalition of various dark forces (666 for example is the antichrist in modern popular culture) including Judaism, represented by a Star of David symbol.

Khalifa warned that “Squid Game” is actually “covert propaganda for the New World Order, propaganda that is supposed to pave the way for the new world that they want to establish by 2030 – promoting the culture of killing [...] This is the dangerous idea that is promoted by global Freemasonry. A sadistic gang is behind this idea.




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They do not mind killing everybody just so they can live. They even enjoy this.” He concluded with a stern pronouncement: “Be warned! Global Freemasonry is behind the promotion of such films, and the accursed Antichrist is the main instigator of such ideas.” 

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.

INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY ENCOUNTERS SOME HARSH REALITIES

by Giora Eliraz

The recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has received massive media coverage. However, largely left unnoticed was Indonesia’s role in the country, even though in recent years Jakarta had been extensively involved in the Afghan theatre in efforts to promote political reconciliation and a negotiated peace between Afghan factions.

Since 2017, Indonesia has been involved in mediating between the now-deposed Afghan government and the Taliban, responding to a request from the then Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani, to act as a peace facilitator. The mission was assigned to Yusuf Kalla, who was still Indonesian Vice-President at the time, but left office in October 2019.

Indonesia’s mainstream Islamic organisations have been associated with these efforts, including the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), the country’s top assembly of Muslim clerics, and the government’s two mass membership civil society partner organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. Jakarta even facilitated a dialogue between Taliban representatives and Indonesian clerics.

Indonesia also made some efforts at the grassroots level, including by attempting to empower Afghan women as peace agents. Today, Indonesia has ample reason to be concerned about their fate, watching the dramatic political changes in Afghanistan that have brought back the gloomy days of the ruling “Taliban model” of governing a majority Muslim society, which stands sharply opposed to the Indonesian one.

Closer to home, a few months earlier in Myanmar, a feeble process of democratic reforms was stopped when

the military took power through a coup d’état, bringing the country close to a civil war. As in Afghanistan, Indonesia has not been watching these developments as a mere spectator.

After surmounting severe difficulties during earlier years of transition to democracy in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Indonesia has gained confidence in its new democratic model of governance. This confidence has manifested in an aspirational foreign policy that includes an ambition to promote democracy and support conflict resolution and peace building, which is the background to Jakarta’s Afghan intervention.

Thus, since 2003, Indonesia has sought to promote an agenda of democracy and human rights into the core values of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); Indonesia is the powerhouse of this ten-nation association. Consequently, in 2007, a new ASEAN Charter was signed which also obliges its members to strengthen democracy; enhance good governance and the rule of law; and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Since then, Indonesia has marked Myanmar as a primary target for instigating and encouraging political reforms, given that the atrocious human rights record of Myanmar’s ruling junta often embarrassed ASEAN in the international arena. In 2008 Indonesia established, in cooperation with Australia and with US blessing, the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF) – an intergovernmental forum for the development of democracy in the Asia-Pacific region through sharing its experience. In addition, the Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD) was established to implement the efforts of the BDF.

Indonesia’s interest in supporting political reforms in Myanmar became more evident after the junta officially dissolved itself in 2011, largely due to international pressure, and a seven-step road map for democratic reforms was announced. The IPD started working with Burmese counterpart organisations to share Indonesia’s experience with democratisation.

In practice, Indonesia has faced considerable difficulties in getting the very heterogeneous ASEAN community to significantly commit to this mission of encouraging democratisation and political reform. ASEAN’s ten member states are governed by a variety of different political systems and only a minority are democracies, with Indonesia itself the most stable, substantive democracy in the group. Furthermore, ASEAN is guided by the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its members, which are highly protective of their national interests and

“Since 2017, Indonesia has been involved in mediating between the now-deposed Afghan government and the Taliban”



Despite Indonesia's hopes for ASEAN action on Myanmar, other members have been reluctant to commit (Source: ASEAN)

autonomy. In addition, the organisation has adopted a consensus-based decision-making mechanism. Obviously, this makes collective action very difficult.

Despite this, ASEAN, informally led by Indonesia, seeks to be a significant actor, attempting to peacefully stabilise Myanmar and to bring the country back to the path of political reform.

It took a few months until ASEAN achieved a consensus in late April on a Five-Point Consensus plan for resolving the Myanmar crisis, including: cessation of violence; “constructive dialogue” between the various parties; the appointment of an ASEAN special envoy to mediate this dialogue; providing humanitarian assistance; and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy and delegation to meet with all parties concerned.

Though some ASEAN members apparently disapprove of an assertive approach towards Myanmar’s junta in pushing the ASEAN plan, the organisation recently made the unprecedented decision to invite neither the Myanmar junta’s leader, nor any representative of the Myanmar opposition shadow National Unity Government for talks. Instead, Myanmar was invited to dispatch a “non-political representative”.

This decision is reportedly the result of the growing frustration in ASEAN at the junta’s evasion of any meaningful progress toward implementing the Five-Point Consensus. Indonesian President Joko Widodo argued that this exclusion of Myanmar’s military chief from the summit was a difficult but necessary decision as a result of the reluctance of the military regime to accept ASEAN’s “helping hand” in resolving its lasting political crisis.

Finally, far from Southeast Asia, in Tunisia, the single surviving democratic achievement of the so-called “Arab Spring” has become a much more doubtful example of democracy since late July. That’s when Tunisian President Kais Saied dismissed the Prime Minister, suspended the

parliament and gave himself both legislative and executive powers.

Actually, Tunisia’s transition to democracy has constantly faced major obstacles, such as political instability and a deep economic crisis that has only been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Once again, Jakarta is not merely a passive observer in the Tunisian case but rather an “invested” actor watching its foreign policy achievements and hopes potentially fade away and being forced to rethink its policies. Post-*reformasi* Indonesia, with its foreign policy agenda of promoting democracy, had sought to be a supportive partner for Tunisia as it took steps on the democratic path – steps now potentially being reversed. Back in 2011, soon after the outbreak of the Arab Spring, both Egypt and

Tunisia had asked far-away Indonesia to assist them in transitioning to democracy. The IPD was soon involved in organising workshops as a platform for Egyptian-Indonesian dialogue. In early 2012 Tunisian delegates joined this Egyptian-Indonesian dialogue.

Since 2013, such post-Arab Spring cooperation on democracy-building between Indonesia and Middle Eastern countries has been limited to Tunisia, involving public officials and civil society actors and reflecting a shared interest in demonstrating that Islam and democracy are compatible. Notably, the two significant competing political forces in Tunisia, the secularists and the Islamists, seemed to share a commitment to political reforms. Today, Indonesia can do little but sit back and hope Tunisia makes a return to democracy and may yet fulfill Jakarta’s post-Arab Spring hopes.

At first glance, Myanmar, Tunisia and Afghanistan do not seem to have much in common. But the one factor uniting all three cases is that, this year, each has sustained a blow to processes of democratising political reform into which Indonesia had invested considerable efforts and hopes.

Indeed, these three cases also demonstrate the great difficulty of making and sustaining a successful transition to full-fledged democracy from authoritarianism. But at the same time, these cases also offer some perspective to appreciate the considerable distance Indonesia has come in its own democratising journey over slightly more than two decades, even if there is still more left to do before it becomes a completely mature democracy.

AIR

Dr. Giora Eliraz is an Associate Fellow at the Truman Institute at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) at the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya, as well as at the Forum for Regional Thinking (FORTH).



A War Revisited

Gaza Conflict 2021: Hamas, Israel, and the Eleven Days War

Jonathan Schanzer

FDD Press, 2021, 284 pp., A\$46.20 hardcover, A\$25.53 ebook

by Omri Nahmias

When Jonathan Schanzer, senior vice president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, watched “Operation Guardian of the Walls”, the May 2021 war between Hamas and other Gaza-based militias and the IDF, unfolding on TV, he decided to write a book about it.

“I watched the war in May, and for the first time since the Second Intifada, when I lived in Israel, I was able to watch almost the entire war in Hebrew,” Schanzer said in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post*. “I also watched it in Arabic, and, of course, I watched it in English.”

“It almost felt like the US media and the Israeli media were covering two different wars,” he said. “The gap was so big, in terms of what both sides chose to cover, that I felt like it was time to write a book.”

Gaza Conflict 2021: Hamas, Israel, and the Eleven Days War was published in-house by FDD Press.

“When the war was over, I took a few days off, and then I wrote the first draft in eight days,” Schanzer said, adding that he then travelled to Israel to interview Israeli officials, lawmakers and IDF officers, including the Officer Commanding Southern Command Maj.-Gen. Eliezer Toledano.

“I initially wrote the book in

chronological order, but in the end, I decided to jump back and forth between the recent war and the history of Hamas dating back to the 1980s,” Schanzer said. “The goal was to help the reader see how the present and past are inextricably linked.”



Looking back on the Gaza conflict last May allows readers to see some aspects of it that were largely obscured at the time (Credit: Shutterstock)

“The American media focused almost entirely on Sheikh Jarrah [Ed: a property dispute in a Jerusalem neighbourhood] being the cause of the war, and remarkably to me, there was no coverage at all of the cancelled Palestinian elections and the fact that this was something that made Hamas furious, and they were looking to make themselves part of the political conversation again,” he said. “I would say that that has as much, if not more, to do with the outbreak of the conflict than Sheikh

Jarrah, which, by the way, is still going on today and clearly is not the cause of additional wars.

“As I note in the book, at the end of the day, when you point to a single cause of the conflict, you’re usually going to be wrong.

“Instead of looking at a real-estate dispute in Sheikh Jarrah, maybe we [should] look at a few other things that also contributed to it, which were not part of the discussion,” such as the role of Iran in backing Hamas, he said.

The last war was different from previous conflicts, Schanzer noted.

“It’s a different conflict now,” he said. “It’s less Arab-Israeli; it’s even less Palestinian-Israeli. This is a Gaza-Israeli conflict or Iran-Israeli conflict, and the nuance there, I thought, was important for me as I watched. I just felt like there were things that went unsaid here in the US that may have been more obvious to others watching abroad.”

The situation might escalate again, according to Schanzer.

“The Israeli officials I spoke to in June suggested that war could easily break out again soon,” he said. “Between balloon bombs and occasional rockets, another conflagration is entirely possible. I think the determining factor here is Israel, which usually doesn’t respond to provocations until there is a significant ‘target bank’ collected.”

Schanzer’s interview with the *Jerusalem Post* took place the week Egypt’s foreign minister was in Washington to meet Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

“Egypt is likely to continue to play the role of mediator in the short and medium term,” Schanzer said, “but its success will depend on the support that it gets from the United States, and the progressive Left [in the US] continues to put Egypt in a corner. I am concerned about this.”

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THE MONTH IN MEDIA

FISKY BUSINESS

On *ABC Radio National* "Late Night Live" (Nov. 2) Lara Marlowe promoted a memoir of her marriage to the late Middle East commentator Robert Fisk using the sort of tendentious account of events for which Fisk was renowned.

Marlowe said when Fisk was ten-years-old, his father took him to visit the battlefields of the First World War.

According to Marlowe, "He tells actually in the *Great War for Civilization* how those battlefields which he visited with his father would determine the whole shape of the modern Middle East because it was in the big carve up after the First World War that all the seeds of the future conflicts were sown... especially the Balfour Declaration which created, eventually created, the State of Israel which promised to protect Arabs and Jews and failed to do that." It seems a bizarre *non sequitur* to go from the battlefields of France and Belgium – which is what Fisk said he visited as a child in the *Great War for Civilization* – to a denunciation of the Balfour Declaration as the root of all future conflict.

Yet host Phillip Adams attempted to reinforce Marlowe's claim, saying, "well, that's the whole story isn't it – the imposition of colonial maps on everywhere from Africa to the Middle East in a sense absolutely making future conflicts unavoidable."

A WINDOW ON LEBANON

On *ABC Radio National* "Religion & Ethics" (Nov. 3), Lebanese American writer Kim Ghattas talked about Lebanon's political, social and economic crisis.

Ghattas said Lebanon's troubles stem from corruption and the "en-

trenched" political "system" put in place by Syria which "continues to serve them and their allies... Hezbollah and Iran."

Claiming that most Shi'ites in Lebanon do not support Hezbollah, she said that the Iranian-backed terror group maintains its control through "coercion. With arms. With assassinations. It's very difficult to undo that grip and in other communities it's not as pronounced but it exists as well."

She added that, although it may appear that Hezbollah is "pretty much in control of this country" and Iran is "on the ascent... it's also facing a lot of pushback in Lebanon and Iraq. There are dynamics between... other countries in the region and Israel," citing the Abraham Accords.

Ghattas' knowledgeable comments underscored the absurdity of some other Australian media reporting on Lebanon. For instance, on Oct. 31, News Corp papers reported that Saudi Arabia had recalled its ambassador from Beirut and slapped a ban on imports from Lebanon after a Lebanese minister criticised its involvement in the Yemen war. With ridiculous understatement, the report stated that the Saudi move "may drive Lebanon further into the sphere of Iran, which backs Hezbollah, already a major player in Lebanese life and politics."

IRAQ AND RUIN

Echoing Ghattas' comments on pushback in Iraq against Iran's meddling, the *Australian* (Nov. 9) noted that the failed drone strike on the home of Iraqi PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi had Iran's "thumbprints" on it.

Referring to the major election loss by Iranian-aligned political parties which preceded the strike, the edito-

rial said "the setback was a significant blow to the long-held ambition of Iran's ayatollahs, as part of their drive for regional Shia hegemony, to turn Iraq into an Iranian province and conduit for Iranian military personnel and weapons sent to support the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria and Tehran's anti-Israel Hezbollah proxies in Lebanon."

The paper urged that Iran's "unrelenting acts of state terror" against Israel and Iraq must be "central to any negotiations" when nuclear talks resume.

HIPPOCRATICAL OAFS

Writing in the *Guardian Australia* (Nov. 1), Lebanon-born Australian Dr Jamal Rifi blasted the Lebanese military tribunal that recently sentenced him in absentia to ten years in prison for his involvement with the Australian charity Project Rozana – which raises money so Israeli hospitals can train Palestinian doctors and treat sick Palestinians.

Dr Rifi wrote he had "accepted without hesitation, the role of deputy chair of Project Rozana" which is a "charitable, humanitarian, non-government organisation... committed to a long-term strategy that will encourage the Palestinian health system to operate independently of Israel and emerge as its equal."

He attacked "Lebanon and Hezbollah, whose sinister hand is choking life out of the Lebanese people" for having the "audacity" to deny to Palestinians "the future you failed to deliver for Lebanese children including your own children and grandchildren."

FRENCH CONNECTION

On the *Australian* website (Nov. 3),

former AIJAC policy analyst Ted Lapkin dismissed French President Emmanuel Macron's "sputtering indignation" and accusations of "treachery" over the Morrison Government ditching a \$90 billion contract with France to supply Australia with diesel-electric submarines, in favour of British or US nuclear powered models.

As a relevant historical precedent, Lapkin pointed to French President Charles de Gaulle's "arbitrary cancellation" of a contract to hand over to Israel six fast missile boats that it had already paid for in 1967.

He wrote, "This arms purchase was intended to counter the threat to

Israel's sea lanes posed by a fleet of Soviet missile boats supplied to Syria and Egypt. But then, just before the outbreak of Israel's defensive Six-Day War in 1967, president Charles de Gaulle decided to realign French foreign policy toward the Arab world.

He declared an arms embargo on Israel and cancelled the sale of those missile boats, despite the fact they were paid for and almost completed."

On Christmas Eve 1969, Israel "took possession of what was rightly theirs", Lapkin wrote, "orchestrating a snatch operation in which Israeli naval personnel sailed the missile boats... under the inebriated noses of French

authorities. Four years later, those missile boats played a major role in the Israeli navy's decisive victory during the Yom Kippur War in which 10 Syrian and Egyptian naval vessels were destroyed for no Israeli loss."

COALITION UNITED

The decision by Israel to designate six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organisations for allegedly working for and funnelling money to the Marxist terrorist group the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was accorded considerable media coverage – in part thanks to the predictable



IN PARLIAMENT

Chris Hayes (ALP, Fowler) – Oct. 25 – "I move: That this House: (1) notes that 29 November 2021 is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People as declared by the United Nations in 1977; (2) recognises the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self determination and a future built on peace, dignity, justice and security; (3) acknowledges the obstacles to the ongoing peace process, particularly the need for urgent action on issues such as settlements, Jerusalem, the Gaza blockade and the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories;...

"I...reaffirm our commitment to the Palestinian people and stand united in their struggle for self-determination... Access to necessities such as water is an inalienable human right and, unfortunately, these rights are not being realised due to military occupation. Clearly this is inhumane and unjust. We must work towards affording self-determination to the Palestinian people, including a future that's based on peace, dignity, justice and security... I believe it falls to countries like Australia, who believe in the dignity of all people, to become more engaged in addressing the need for a tangible process towards the creation of the Palestinian state while ensuring respect and security for a Jewish homeland."

Dave Sharma (Lib., Wentworth) – Oct. 25 – "My enduring lesson from my time as the Australian Ambassador to Israel is that there are two things that need to happen, effectively, for peace to come about. Firstly, Israel will only make the necessary territorial concessions that are needed for peace once its security is assured. Secondly, Palestinians will only make the necessary identity concessions once the Palestinians are reconciled to Israel's existence. Both of those elements are missing to date, and have been missing throughout the process, whether it was the UN partition plan of 1947 and 1948, which was rejected; or the three noes of the Khartoum summit, which rejected Israel's

right to exist; or the failure of the Camp David process... or even the John Kerry-led process launched during the Obama administration."

The following questions and comments come from the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee Estimates hearings – Oct. 28.

Senator **Janet Rice** (Greens, Vic.) – "...last week the Israeli defence ministry designated six prominent human rights organisations in the occupied West Bank as terrorist organisations, effectively outlawing their activities... Will the Australian government denounce this dangerous attack against Palestinian human rights defenders?"

"What's the Australian government saying to the Israeli government about the expansion of settlements?"

Chair, Senator **Eric Abetz** (Lib., Tas.) – "... I'm delighted that, as I understand it, the government has adopted the IHRA definition of 'anti-Semitism'. Is that correct that in recent times we have adopted that?"

Foreign Minister Senator **Marise Payne** – "Yes, we have embraced that."

Chair, Senator **Eric Abetz** (Lib., Tas.) – "The UN Human Rights Council passed that resolution creating a permanent commission of inquiry [into Israel]. What other country is subject to such a permanent commission of inquiry?... I'm just making the point that the UN's credibility in that regard is severely dented when you think of Israel having democratic elections, believing in the rule of law, et cetera, and some very gross human rights violators are not subject to a standing item on the United Nations Human Rights Council."

Senator **Anne Urquhart** (ALP, Tas.) – Environment and Communications Legislation Committee Estimates hearings – Oct. 26 – "Given that [Jewish community leader Vic] Alhadeff has been, throughout his career, a prominent advocate for Israel, was there consideration that his appointment [to the SBS Board] might compromise the SBS's perceived impartiality with regard to international affairs? Was that taken into consideration?"

denunciations by anti-Israel Australian groups and individuals.

A *Sydney Morning Herald* report (Oct. 29) noted that “Australian human rights advocates, aid groups and the Australian Council of Trade Unions claimed the move was ‘designed to criminalise, persecute, and silence’ Palestinian civil society and human rights defenders.”

Greens Senator Janet Rice’s condemnation was noted, while Australia Palestine Advocacy Network head George Browning was quoted calling the NGOs “six key, internationally recognised, reputable organisations.”

AIJAC Research Associate Dr. Ran Porat was also quoted, explaining that “The close PFLP links of these groups have become increasingly clear internationally in the past few years, and acknowledged by governments... In many cases, arrests were made and trials were held where officials and employees of these groups were found guilty of terror-related activities.”

AIR WAVES

A news brief on *ABC News Radio* (Oct. 27) reported that the Australian Greens called the NGO ban an “outrageous move” but noted Israel alleges the NGOs were “covertly financing” a group that has “carried out deadly attacks against Israelis.”

An inhouse report on the ABC website (Oct. 27) was marked by minimal balance and quoted controversial Human Rights Watch spokesperson Omar Shakir, a supporter of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israel, telling the ABC, “This attack grows out of years of efforts by the Israeli government to muzzle human rights reporting.”

An *SBS TV* “World News” report (Oct. 25) included comment by Shawan Jabarin, the director of one of the designated groups, Al-Haq, which the report said was a “respected and award-winning, internationally funded rights defender which investigates abuses on both sides.”

In fact, Jabarin was found to be a “senior operative” in the PFLP by Israel’s Supreme Court in 2007.

In contrast to the ABC report, SBS included some balance, quoting Australia-based Israeli-born academic Eyal Mayroz saying, “there likely is an incriminating money trail,” and “I imagine that there is some solid information” behind the ban, although he also questioned “punishing entire organisations”.

The report said that the PFLP is a designated terrorist group “according to Israel, the US, the EU and Australia among others.” In fact, the PFLP is not directly proscribed in Australia, although it is on a UN list of proscribed groups to which Australia is a signatory.

HACK ATTACK

A long online feature by ABC Radio *Triple J* “Hack” reporter Avani Dias about claims by Iraqi-born, UK-based Gadear Ayed, who worked as a junior moderator for social media platform TikTok between December 2020 and June 2021, was marred by a lack of balance, unfounded claims and factual errors.

Ayed said TikTok’s ban on material that includes violence and brutality is “inconsistently applied when dealing with content about Palestinian people” and accused her former employer of blocking pro-Palestinian accounts and removing content that showed Palestinians being attacked.

The examples Ayed used to prove her claim stem from the May 2021 war between Hamas and Israel and the Sheikh Jarrah property dispute which was used by Hamas as an excuse for it.

But the evidence offered of anti-Palestinian moderation was flimsy – such as Palestinian US Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib calling on TikTok to “stop censoring Palestinian political speech” and one Australian TikTok user saying his pro-Palestinian videos were censored.

Moreover, no details were offered about the content of the videos purportedly censored.

There is a wealth of TikTok content that undermines Ayed’s claims, including pro-Palestinian activists crowing about their success rate on TikTok.

At the height of the conflict in May, the BBC reported that a TikTok video of an airstrike on Gaza had 4.4 million views. A video during the conflict which equated Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians to the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 whilst being arrested by Minneapolis police had 9.2 million views. Content marked with the hashtag #savesheikh-jarrah has been viewed 905.7 million times!

Meanwhile, there are plenty of pro-Israel TikTok users who complained their accounts were suspended and content blocked.

None of this easily available information was included by Dias.

Dias noted the Israeli claim that TikTok fomented anti-Jewish violence with a disturbing video she said “reportedly” showed Palestinians slapping two ultra-Orthodox Jewish boys in Jerusalem. But Dias downplayed what was a genuine copycat phenomenon. It is a documented fact that there were several subsequent similar unprovoked assaults on Jews perpetrated to film and share on TikTok – yet Dias incorrectly claimed it was just one incident shared multiple times on TikTok.

Mirroring the ABC’s inexcusable practice during the May turmoil of reversing the order of events, Dias wrote that “Israel carried out hundreds of air strikes in Gaza and Palestinian Hamas militants fired multiple rocket barrages at Tel Aviv and the southern city of Beersheba.” It was, of course, Hamas that started the conflict by firing rockets at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, after which Israel started to hit targets in Gaza.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

SBS TV “World News” reporter Claudia Farhart, who earlier this year filed a number of stories on the Sheikh Jarrah property dispute – the dispute that was cynically exploited by Hamas to trigger an 11-day war with Israel in May – covered the Israeli Supreme Court’s delayed ruling on the case in an online feature (Nov. 3).

Farhart noted that the Court had proposed a compromise whereby the affected Palestinian families would pay A\$1,000 a year in rent and receive “protected tenant status” in exchange.

The Israeli group seeking the court’s endorsement that it owns the land would be prevented from “initiating any legal proceedings to evict them for 15 years. But the group would be recognised as the owners of the land,” she explained.

Farhart said, “Jordan and the UN built the Sheikh Jarrah homes in 1956 for 28 Palestinian families displaced by the formation of the state of Israel eight years earlier. But the settler group says the land was owned by Jews before that, and Israeli law allows them to reclaim it.” It is not just settler groups that say this – a whole series of court cases have already ruled that the land was legally owned by a Jewish society before 1948.

The report featured Israeli activist Daniel Seidemann suggesting all attempts at compromise are futile: “inevitably, there will be a coalition crisis, there will be a change in government, or there will be a terror attack with double digit casualties in which the bloodlust of certain elements within Israeli society will soar, and they will be evicted.” Yet to evict the families, an Israeli government would have to take the decision out of the remit of Israel’s fiercely independent legal system. This appears highly unlikely, especially since it has not happened over the three decades that the Sheikh Jarrah property dispute has been before the courts already.

VANISHING TRUTH AND CONTEXT

On *ABC Radio National* “Religion & Ethics” (Nov. 10), former Middle East correspondent Janine di Giovanni promoted her book *The Vanishing* that focuses on the decline in the Middle East’s millennium-old Christian communities, including in Gaza.

Di Giovanni claimed that Gaza’s Christian population currently numbering “about 800” is “shrinking” because “they live under terrible siege conditions imposed by the Israeli Government. They endured an 11-day bombing campaign in May. Electricity cuts, water cuts. Terrible, terrible life that they have there.”

Host Andrew West asked her to discuss the Brazilian Catholic priest who left the Vatican to “be the shepherd of the Gaza Catholics.”

Di Giovanni called him a “remarkable man” before promptly returning to attacking Israel for “punishing” Gaza’s civilians since the election of Hamas in 2007 and “basically besieging them”. This has prevented them going to “Bethlehem for Christmas or Easter,” she said.

It was left to West to point out that Egypt enforces the “boycott” of Gaza too and that “Hamas is [not] the most benevolent governor for the Christian population.”

While di Giovanni conceded that Hamas are “not good guys” she insisted they were simply used “as the boogeyman for every time Israel has a bombing campaign which is absolutely inappropriate use of force.” Hamas rocket and terror attacks on Israel – the reason for Israeli counter-attacks – were never mentioned.

She also insisted that “Christians I talk to, they less complain about Hamas, and more complain about life under siege” – as if Gaza’s beleaguered Christians are free to publicly complain about their Hamas overlords.

She also cited a young Gazan who graduated from dental school but was

unable to find a job in Gaza, again blaming Israel.

Weirdly, di Giovanni’s actual book undermines her assertions in the interview that Israel is the be all and end all for Gaza’s troubles, while Hamas is no issue.

In the book, she wrote that the young dentist said “his parents, both government workers, had been receiving only half their salaries since the most recent political falling-out between Hamas and the PA in 2017,” quoting him saying “so we are being punished by our own people.”

As for the Brazilian priest, she writes that he said, “The Christian leadership in Gaza – the doctors, the government workers, the engineers – left when Hamas came in. And they took with them their sons and daughters.”

And regarding her silence on the troubled relations between Christians and Muslims in Gaza? In the book, she writes of the priest, “The relationship between Christians and Muslims in Gaza, he said, is deteriorating. No one will admit it, no one wants to talk about it. He told me that his parishioners spoke of times in the past when their relations were better. But Hamas changed that.”

Moreover, the priest tells her that after Hamas and the PA failed to form a unity government in 2016, “Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas began punishing Gaza.”

The book thus does go some way in acknowledging that Gaza’s suffering is a consequence of decades of mismanagement and oppression by first Fatah and then Hamas, and the situation for Christians has been particularly difficult under Hamas’ Islamist rule. Yet nothing of this appeared in the interview.

And as for di Giovanni’s central claim that the Christian populations across the Middle East are disappearing, this is not happening in Israel, where Christian numbers are increasing. Yet she fails to note this fact in either the interview or her book.

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

A MATTER OF DEFINITION

The Morrison Government's announcement in October that Australia would "embrace" the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism unleashed a flurry of media commentary.

In the *Age* (Oct. 21), Jewish Greens party activists David Zyngier and Daniel Coleman asserted that the IHRA definition will not make "Jews one iota safer" and asserted without any evidence that "pro-Israel organisations are campaigning" for its adoption "to shut down legitimate debate on Israel's policies towards the Palestinians and to harass and silence critics." The pair called for people to "ally" with the Greens who back a "national anti-racism strategy" to combat "far right extremism", which they said the Morrison Government was ignoring.

An op-ed for the *Guardian Australia* (Oct. 23) from Michael Visontay, editor of the Jewish website *Plus61J*, noted that competing alternative definitions to IHRA's have recently arisen from people who are unhappy with the IHRA definition's mentions of Israel. Visontay quoted AIJAC's Jeremy Jones' appeal at a panel discussion that "we can have a conversation about better and worse ways to fight antisemitism. But the main thing is fighting it."

On *ABC Radio National* "Religion & Ethics Report" (Oct. 27), Visontay agreed with host Andrew West's proposition that "if someone took a totally consistent line in a sense that they were opposed to pan-Arabism... pan-Africanism... all forms of ethnic based nationalism, do the supporters of Israel then say, yes, criticism of Zionism could be part of that consistent opposition?"

A week later, *Guardian Australia* ran an op-ed attributed to "a collective of Palestinians who work and study in Australian universities" who said they were compelled to write "anonymously because the threat to our academic positions and future careers is already present." Somewhat ironically, the link included justifying the claim of a "present" threat was to the *Al-Jazeera* website – owned by the Qatari royal family, who are not exactly known for their commitment to freedom of speech.

The article claimed that universities adopting the IHRA definition "would pose a dangerous threat to academic freedom" and provided examples purporting to show where the IHRA definition had a detrimental effect on legitimate criticism of Israel. But in every example given, the individuals either were not actually penalised for their

criticism or had actually been guilty of clear antisemitism, such as the UK academic who accused his Jewish students of dual loyalty to Israel.

In the *Canberra Times* (Nov. 2) AIJAC's Jones included the vital context that the aforementioned commentators all omitted, namely that the IHRA definition specifically states "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic."

Jones, who was involved at the early stages of the IHRA process, explained that "the single driver of the development of the definition was concern with real-world experiences of anti-Semitic phenomena" and it was "designed for assisting

the work of tribunals, institutions with codes of conduct, law enforcement and others."

He described as "confected outrage" the claims that the IHRA definition is aimed at "furthering a political agenda," noting it is "not legally binding" and no one is calling for "any new restrictions on speech or behaviour."

Jones said it is a basic fact that "opponents of Israel in this country have included vile stereotyping, misrepresentation and defamation" of Jews.

He also called attention to "the proliferation of conspiracy theories and slanders in online and other discussions of the coronavirus [which] sometimes have promoted anti-Jewish myths."

On *Sky News* "Sharri" (Oct. 31), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein noted that the IHRA definition "allows you to criticise Israel as you would criticise any other country, its policies and its politics. But once you start undermining the very existence of the State of Israel, you're crossing the red line."

The most bizarre reaction was the number of letters on the IHRA definition that appeared in the Hobart *Mercury* after the paper published an anti-Israel column by Greg Barns (Nov. 8) totally unrelated to the definition.

One letter (Nov. 10) claimed that "Israel's treatment of Palestinians has promoted a definition of 'anti-Semitism' that strongly implies that any criticism of the actions or policies of Israel is automatically anti-Semitic."

Another on Nov. 12 claimed the IHRA definition was responsible for the media self-censoring criticism of Israel.

Hobart Hebrew Congregation President Jeff Schneider (Nov. 13) restored a modicum of coherence by pointing out that "IHRA... clearly states... 'criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic.'"

"AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein noted that the IHRA definition 'allows you to criticise Israel as you would criticise any other country, its policies and its politics'"

THE LAST WORD

Efraim Zuroff

IN REMEMBRANCE OF BABY ERIKA

Holocaust survivor Emil Farkas of Haifa was one of the best gymnasts in Israeli sports history. He was Israeli national champion twice and won multiple medals in the Maccabiah Games. But his greatest badge of honour may be the testimony he gave in a German court in early November.

At nearly 93, Farkas was the first witness to testify in person – and, apparently, the only Israeli survivor who will do so – at the trial of former SS guard Josef Schütz, who served for almost three years in the notorious Sachsenhausen Nazi concentration camp.

Emil was born in February 1929 in Zilina, then Czechoslovakia and today Slovakia, to a middle-class Orthodox Jewish family. In the wake of the Nazi invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, Slovakia became a separate political entity, ruled by the fascist Slovak Hlinka Guard.

Restrictions on Jewish life became increasingly severe: the yellow badge was made obligatory, and, in March 1942, the first deportations to Auschwitz and Majdanek began, as did the tragedy of Emil's family.

Among the deportees to Auschwitz were his brothers Bela and Arpad, his sister Peppi and her husband and infant daughter, all of whom were murdered there. Emil was soon sent to two Slovak forced labour camps, and from there in 1943 or 1944 to three German concentration camps in which the conditions for the prisoners were much harsher, and the chances of survival much slimmer.

The first was Sachsenhausen, where by sheer luck his athletic prowess helped save his life. Every day Emil would get up an hour or so before rollcall, wash himself with snow (in the winter) and do gymnastic exercises with incredible precision. The SS guards were shocked by his performance and reported him to the camp commander,

who transferred him to work on the "Shoe-Testing Commando", a group of political prisoners (all non-Jews), whose task was to

break in new army boots for the SS. They did so by marching 30-40 kilometres from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day in a brand new pair of boots, while singing German military songs. Their reward was an extra piece of bread, which helped Emil survive.

Needless to say, testifying at the trial was not an easy task for Emil.

After relating the major details of his travails in the camps in which he was incarcerated, with a special emphasis on Sachsenhausen, Emil addressed the defendant directly:

"I am sure you must have seen me many times running with the 'Shoe Commando.' Today I came to Brandenburg to see you. And therefore I want to ask you: At the end of your one-hundredth year, is your dark secret worth so much to you, that you cannot bring yourself to apologise for your contribution to my suffering? Isn't it time for you to be brave?"

"You didn't only see me, you also always heard me sing the song I was forced to sing. The name of the song was 'Erika.' And thus you heard me sing the second stanza again and again... as I thought about my sister Peppi's one-year-old daughter, whose name was Erika."

"You Mr. Schütz, you became an adult, living 100 times longer than Erika!"

Hearing that testimony in Hebrew in a German courtroom, read by Emil's granddaughter's husband Doron Ben-Ari, who had to replace Emil for technical reasons, was an unforgettable experience and one which I found extremely moving.

Emil gave an equally poignant speech at the main Berlin synagogue and magnified the impact of his presence at the trial through powerful interviews with the media in which he emphasised the importance he attributes to trials of elderly perpetrators like Schütz, even this many years after the crimes were committed.

AIR

Dr. Efraim Zuroff is the chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the director of the Center's Israel Office and Eastern European Affairs. © Times of Israel (timesofisrael.com) reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



93-year-old Holocaust survivor Emil Farkas giving testimony (Screenshot)



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