

## NEGOTIATING NUKES WITH IRAN

Some lessons on what not  
to do

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**T**his *AIR*'s cover story looks at the renewed nuclear negotiations with Iran in Vienna – and why they appear to be faltering.

Non-proliferation experts Behnam Ben Taleblu and Andrea Stricker offer a convincing portrait of a US-led approach under the Biden Administration that has persuaded Teheran that America is uncomfortable with escalation and eager for an agreement at almost any cost, while Iran specialist Amir Toumaj analyses how the Iranian regime views the talks – making a strong case that attempts to demonstrate US good faith are futile and counter-productive. Finally, security reporter Yaakov Lappin looks at how Iran's exports of increasingly sophisticated weapons to its local proxies are escalating instability across the Middle East.

Also featured this month is the inside story of Israel's single most ambitious military operation in many decades during the recent Gaza war, as reported by *Jerusalem Post* editor Yaakov Katz. Plus, American academic and human rights activist Anne Bayefsky explores how the backlash against the UN's Durban IV conference in September proved it is possible to fight back against UN bias.

Finally, don't miss Amotz Asa-El on Israel's unprecedented new ties with Morocco, Ran Porat's latest exposé of conspiratorial extremism being published in Australia and a heartfelt plea from Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

We invite your feedback on any aspect of this edition at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au).

Tzvi Fleischer

## ON THE COVER

The spectre of Iranian nuclear weapons is the main issue as tentative talks resume (Credit: Shutterstock)



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# FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN

## HOPES FOR UN REFORM

**A**t a time when the world is facing an unprecedented array of challenges, the politicised and dysfunctional state of the United Nations and its associated bodies and organs cries out for major reforms more than ever. Fortunately, there are some genuine reasons to hope such reform may soon become possible.

There is no shortage of global crises that demand action – Iran’s nuclear weapons program; China’s increasing aggression; the COVID-19 pandemic; climate change; the crisis in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover, and many more.

The United Nations was conceived in the wake of the horrors of World War II as a better way for the world to mobilise in times of crisis, and improve relations in times of calm. Yet the broken UN system has instead often made itself a worrying part of the problem.

UN processes are often cynically exploited by undemocratic countries engaging in selfish and destructive behaviour to whitewash abuses and undermine effective responses.

In addition, for decades, the tiny country of Israel, the only Jewish state, has been used as a convenient scapegoat – absorbing a ridiculous amount of the UN’s attention, and singled out and vilified out of all proportion and context. This occurs in almost every UN forum and organ – even seemingly apolitical ones like the World Health Organisation (WHO) or the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Symbolic of the often Orwellian flavour of the UN’s obsession with Israel was the infamous 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, known as the Durban Conference. As veteran human rights campaigner Anne Bayefsky recalls (see page 30), this degenerated into a “global antisemitic hatefest” that essentially resurrected the infamous 1975 UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 3379 (repealed in 1991) equating Zionism with racism.

Yet 2021 saw a growing number of countries distancing themselves from anything to do with the 2001 Durban conference. Durban IV in September was the third time the UN held a conference to re-affirm Durban, and its least successful effort yet. No fewer than 38 states boycotted it, including three quarters of the EU – usually the most unwavering boosters of the UN.

Meanwhile, at the misnamed and hypocritical UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), many European nations have in recent years been following past US and Australian examples and automatically boycotting and voting against resolutions proposed under the grossly discriminatory Agenda Item 7. This agenda item requires that Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians be debated and condemned at every single session of the UNHRC, while all the rest of the world’s conflicts and human rights problems are considered under Agenda Item 4.

In addition, the UN’s highly destructive agency for Palestinian refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), has never been subject to more scrutiny and financial pressure. In late November, an international fundraising conference for UNRWA failed to raise anywhere near the US\$100 million the organisation said it needs, and UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini claimed the organisation was “on the brink of collapse.”

Dramatic claims are frequently a part of UNRWA’s fundraising pitch, but there is no doubt that its funding problems also reflect the fact that there is increasing international recognition that UNRWA is far from a neutral provider of services to refugees. It is a body actively creating obstacles to Israeli-Palestinian peace by promoting incitement; by making refugee status a Palestinian birthright and thus expanding the number of such “refugees” ad infinitum; and by spruiking for a so-called Palestinian “right of return” to Israel that has no basis in international law and is incompatible with the goal of two states for two peoples.



The Trump Administration withdrew US funding from UNRWA, and while the Biden Administration restored it, for the first time new conditions regarding incitement in education were successfully imposed. Meanwhile, Arab states increasingly have no interest in contributing to UNRWA, and even in Europe UNRWA's work has come under greatly increased scrutiny.

Even in the General Assembly, there may be hope for change, despite the long-standing tradition there that, as the famous Israeli diplomat Abba Eban once quipped, "If Algeria introduced a resolution declaring that the earth was flat and that Israel had flattened it, it would pass by a vote of 164 to 13 with 26 abstentions."

And indeed, December saw the passage of the usual annual cavalcade of anti-Israel resolutions. According to UN Watch, between 2015 and 2020, the UNGA passed 115 condemnatory resolutions against Israel and 45 against the rest of the world combined.

Yet the historic 2020 Abraham Accords have led a widening circle of Arab and Muslim countries to establish close and warm relations with Israel, while Israel's ties with traditionally non-aligned countries including India, Brazil,

and numerous states of Africa and Latin America have also improved dramatically. These changing diplomatic realities have yet to lead to major shifts in UN voting, but there is every likelihood that the rigid bloc system that has long guaranteed a majority for virtually any anti-Israel resolution could soon break down.

**"There have never been better reasons to hope that a democratic movement for change can, over time, help the UN overcome its self-defeating Israel obsession"**

Australia has long been an important voice for UN reform and has an excellent, honourable record of opposing the farcically one-sided anti-Israel votes that re-appear every year.

Australia does not have the power to reform the UN by itself, but it should now seek to extend its increasingly impressive international leadership role and help spearhead a positive movement for change at the world body through the power of its vote and the principled messages it sends to Europe and our other allies. There have never been better reasons to hope that a democratic movement for change can, over time, help the UN overcome its self-defeating Israel obsession. Doing so would allow the world body an opportunity to refocus its priorities and reform its structures so that it can genuinely help serve the causes of international peace, cooperation, and welfare – all of which would greatly benefit the future of Australia and the free world.

AIR

## AIJAC MOURNS DOUGLAS DAVIS

AIJAC mourns the loss of *AIR*'s long-standing Europe correspondent Douglas Davis, who passed away in London on Dec. 4.

Born in South Africa, he had a highly-varied journalistic career which saw him live and work on four continents. Among his many roles, he served as Middle East correspondent for the *Australian* for more than five years in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was also a senior editor of the *Jerusalem Post* for more than ten. He was the co-author of three books – *Scharansky: The Journey Home* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1988); *The*

*New Antisemitism?* (Profile Books, London, 2003) and *Israel in the World: Changing Lives Through Innovation* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 2005).

For AIJAC, Douglas was a good friend, as well as, at different times, an inspiration, a mentor and invaluable colleague. He was a brilliant writer – greatly valued and admired for his insightful articles for the *Australia/Israel Review* – and will be sorely missed.

AIJAC offers our sincere condolences to Douglas' widow Helen and to the rest of his family.

## WORD FOR WORD

"There's no need for uranium enriched to 60% for civilian purposes. There's no need for three enrichment sites. There's no need for thousands of active centrifuges — unless, that is, there is an intention to develop nuclear weapons... Iran will not have nuclear weapons... That is my promise, that is Mossad's promise."

**Mossad chief David Barnea (*Times of Israel*, Dec. 2).**

"What we've seen in the last couple of days is that Iran right now does not seem to be serious about doing what's necessary to return to compliance, which is why we ended this round of

talks in Vienna."

**US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Iran's demands at the nuclear talks in Vienna (*Reuters*, Dec. 4).**

"There is no place in Australia for their hateful ideologies... There are people here who have the intent and the capability to do us harm... We are aware of their activities in Australia and overseas and we will continue to monitor them."

**Australian Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews on the designation of all of Hezbollah and neo-Nazi group The Base as terrorist organisations (*SBS*, Nov. 24).**

"I thank the government of Australia... Australia's decision joins similar decisions by 17 other nations in the last 2 years who understand there are no separate wings in a terrorist organization."

**Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on Australia's recent decision on Hezbollah (*Twitter*, Nov. 24).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## MARTYRDOM COMPLEX

Israel has been experiencing a sharp uptick in “lone wolf” terror attacks in recent weeks, mainly by young people not directly affiliated with any terrorist group using knives or a vehicle.

There are concerns this could be the beginning of something like the so-called “Knife Intifada” which took place in late 2015 and early 2016. That six-month period saw 211 stabbings or attempted stabbings of Israelis by Palestinians, 83 shootings and 42 car-ramming attacks – leading to the deaths of 32 Israelis and tourists and some 200 Palestinians. Most attacks were perpetrated by young people, with many deliberately copycatting previous attacks, incited to do so by social media, official Palestinian Authority (PA) media and pronouncements by PA leaders. PA sources contributed to that wave of senseless terrorism by frequently presenting the Palestinian attackers killed in the midst of a stabbing or car-ramming as innocent “martyrs” murdered by Israel for no reason.

This destructive pattern is showing signs of being repeated (all quotes below courtesy of Palestinian Media Watch).

For instance, on Nov. 21, 42-year-old east Jerusalem resident Fadi Abu Shkhaydam used a sub-machine gun to open fire upon three Jewish civilians walking through Jerusalem’s Old City. He killed one of them, Eliyahu David Kay, 26, and injured the two others, before Israeli police responded and shot and killed Abu Shkhaydam.

(That particular attack was unusual compared to other attacks in the recent wave because the attacker was older, he was known to be affiliated with Hamas, and he used a firearm.)

The official Palestinian news agency *WAEA* reported this incident by saying that: “Israeli occupation forces today opened gunfire and killed a Palestinian man ... in the Old City of occupied Jerusalem, according to witnesses. The man was identified as Fadi Abu Shkhaydam, a 42-year-old teacher of Islamic education...” The agency did say that “The Israeli Police claimed that Abu Shkhaydam opened gunfire on police officers killing one of them and injuring another three” – but this not only falsely claimed the targets were police, but came at the very end of the dispatch after the story was presented as an Israeli attack on a Palestinian.

The next day, the official PA paper *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*’s report on the incident started out by saying that: “Fadi Abu Shkhaydam a 42-year-old civilian from the Shuafat refugee

camp in occupied Jerusalem, was shot by the Israeli occupation forces and died as a Martyr yesterday...”

It went on to say: “The occupation police claimed that a shooting operation occurred in the Old City of Jerusalem, in which 1 settler was killed and 3 others were wounded, one of them seriously.” Note that the attack by Abu Shkhaydam was portrayed as only a “claim” by “occupation forces”, while the alleged victims were now “settlers” (Kay actually lived inside pre-1967 Israel). Meanwhile, Abu Shkhaydam was explicitly labelled a “martyr”.

A stabbing attack near Jerusalem’s Old City on Dec. 5 was also similarly misrepresented by Palestinian Authority official media. An Israeli police video shows 25-year-old Muhammad Shawkat Salima suddenly pulling out a knife and stabbing a nearby 21-year-old Jewish pedestrian in the neck (he survived). Salima then lunges at two nearby Israeli police officers who shoot him three or four times – including twice after he falls to the ground but is trying to get up – in an incident that lasted only a few seconds.

Palestinians passing by later uploaded video to social media showing only the two shots fired while Salima was on the ground, amidst claims that he had been executed.

*Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda* headlined their story on the incident: “The occupation executes young Muhammad Salima in Jerusalem, Bennett and Lapid support the soldiers’ crime!” The paper’s story said Salima “died as a Martyr after the occupation forces fired at him from point-blank range after he was wounded, and left him on the ground without allowing him to be given [medical] assistance.” And again, his stabbing attack was labelled as only something the “occupation police” had “claimed” despite video readily available showing Salima stabbing the Jewish pedestrian.

What’s more, the story then editorialised that the incident was “clear proof of the instructions that the occupation soldiers receive... which allow them to murder and execute any Palestinian.” Meanwhile, both PA President Mahmoud Abbas and PA Prime Minister Muhammed Shtayyeh publicly condemned the “murder” of Salima.

By labelling terrorists like Salima and Abu Shkhaydam as “martyrs” and creating unjustified outrage over their deaths – when their own actions made their deaths virtually inevitable – the Palestinian Authority is clearly helping encourage similar copycat attacks.

Also note that, alongside the confected outrage, there is no hint anywhere in the PA’s coverage of any suggestion Palestinians should not be murdering random Jewish civilians.

In 2015-16, similar incitement contributed to the senseless deaths of scores of Palestinian young people – one would have hoped that the PA had at least learned some lessons from that.



## THE PFLP HEARTS TERROR

The sceptical reaction in some circles to Israel's banning of six prominent Palestinian NGOs in October for close links – including diverting funding – to the terrorist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), involved efforts to play down PFLP terrorism. Some suggested that the PFLP may have been a terror group in the past but is now mostly out of the terrorism business.

It is thus worth highlighting how the PFLP reacted to Fadi Abu Shkhaydam's Nov. 21 shooting attack on Israeli civilians, noted above.

The PFLP put out an official statement praising the "heroic operation" and urging Palestinians to "to learn from the example of the self-sacrificing fighter," and "escalate the resistance."

Does anyone still think that the PFLP is no longer in the terrorism business?

AIR



Khaled Abu Toameh

## HAS HAMAS CHANGED?

One of the arguments being raised against the British Government's recent decision to designate all of Hamas as a terrorist organisation is that the Gaza-based movement has changed and now supports the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel.

Opponents of the UK's decision claim that in 2017 Hamas "softened its stance on Israel by accepting the idea of a Palestinian state in territories occupied by Israel in the six-day war of 1967."

The purported change, they argue, was included in a new document announced by Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal at a press conference in Doha, Qatar. Mashaal was quoted as saying:

*"Hamas advocates the liberation of all of Palestine, but is ready to support the [Palestinian] state on 1967 borders without recognizing Israel or ceding any rights."*

A year later, however, Mashaal said in an interview with the Qatari-owned Al-Jazeera television network that the document was "not a tactical or strategic change," adding that Hamas has not changed or abandoned its 1988 Charter.

There are three points that need to be taken into consideration when talking about the 2017 Hamas document.

First, the document reportedly depicting Hamas as a moderate group that accepts the "two-state solution" is a bluff intended to dupe the international community. As Mashaal himself explained, even if Hamas accepts a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east

Jerusalem, that does not mean that it would ever recognise Israel's right to exist. Hamas, in short, is saying: We will take whatever you give us now – starting with a Palestinian state – and we will use this to slaughter you.

Second, Hamas has not renounced violence and terrorism. In fact, it intends to continue the "resistance" and *jihad* (holy war) against Israel *after* the establishment of the Palestinian state with the purpose of "liberating all of Palestine." When Hamas leaders talk about "resistance," they are referring to the murder of Jews through suicide bombings, stabbings, drive-by shootings and rockets fired from the Gaza Strip at Israeli cities and towns.

Third, the new document did not cancel or change the content of the Hamas Charter, which, according to Hamas leaders, remains valid and relevant to this day.

Hamas' representative in Iran, Khaled Qaddoumi, clarified in 2017 that the talk about Hamas accepting a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem was in the context of a plan to destroy Israel in phases.

Qaddoumi was asked: "We understand that you (Hamas) are seeking to liberate Palestine in phases?"

He replied by explaining that even if Hamas accepts a Palestinian state on the pre-1967 lines, it will never recognise Israel's right to exist:

*"We don't accept the concept of recognising the Zionist entity in return for a Palestinian state. The concept we accept is one that says that you can liberate part of the homeland now in order to liberate the other part [later]."*

Like most Hamas leaders, Qaddoumi, too, is saying that his group remains committed and loyal to its 1988 Charter.

Here is what the Charter says about peace initiatives and plans to solve the Israeli-Arab conflict:

*"[Peace] initiatives, the so-called peaceful solutions, and the international conferences to resolve the Palestinian problem, are all contrary to the beliefs of the Islamic Resistance Movement. For renouncing any part of Palestine means renouncing part of the religion... the movement educates its members to adhere to its principles and to raise the banner of Allah over their homeland as they fight their jihad [against Israel]... There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by jihad." (Article 13)*

Days after the UK decision was announced, the Hamas leadership said in a statement published on Nov. 29, 2021:

*"Palestine – all of Palestine – from its [Mediterranean] sea to its [Jordan] river, is for the Palestinian people, and there is no place or legitimacy for strangers over any inch of it. The comprehensive resistance is a legitimate right guaranteed to us by all international laws, foremost among which is the armed resistance against the Zionist enemy that has usurped our land."*

Hamas, evidently, has not changed or "softened" its position towards Israel. In fact, since the 2017 document was announced by Mashaal, Hamas has fired thousands of rockets at Israel and carried out dozens of terrorist attacks against Israelis. The statements of Hamas leaders show that



they dissemble less than many of their own apologists in the West, who claim that they understand Hamas better than Hamas understands itself.

*Khaled Abu Toameh is an award-winning journalist based in Jerusalem. Reprinted from the Gatestone Institute (www.gatestoneinstitute.org) by permission of the author. © Khaled Abu Toameh, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

### SQUASHED OUT

An article of faith in Malaysian politics is that nothing must be seen to threaten the primacy of ethnic Malay identity. One of several time-honoured ways to express this is via ritual gestures of support for their global Muslim brethren and denunciations of an agreed-upon bogey figure – the Jewish nation state of Israel. International sport has provided another opportunity for Malaysia to display its position.

Having been awarded the right to host the men's World Team Squash Championships earlier this year after New Zealand pulled out due to COVID travel restrictions, Malaysia would surely have anticipated that an Israeli team would be among the 26 international squads.

Yet it was not until Dec. 2, five days before the scheduled start, that the World Squash Federation (WSF) had to announce that tournament was cancelled, citing growing coronavirus concerns and the "possibility that some nations would be unable to compete due to the lack of confirmation over the issuing of visas." In other words, it had become clear that Malaysian authorities would not budge in their refusal to issue visas to the Israeli competitors.

WSF president Zena Wooldridge said that it "believes in an open and inclusive" event and that officials had sought to "influence the highest authorities of Malaysia to ensure the ability of all participating teams, including Israel, to enter Malaysia and compete."

"It is important to WSF that no nation who wishes to compete misses out on the event," she said.

The Israeli Squash Association (ISA) had previously said that countries that participated in a tournament from which Israel was barred would be closing their eyes to "racism and discrimination".

The WSF decision came after the ISA took its case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland.

Malaysian officialdom was characteristically unapologetic. Sports Minister Ahmad Faizal Azumu reiterated that as Malaysia has no diplomatic relations with Israel, Israel-

is are not allowed to enter the country for any reason, including sports.

"The immigration (department) will not allow them to enter the country, not the Sports Ministry nor the (local) organisers," said Faizal.

"When international federations decide to appoint Malaysia as a host country for international competitions, they should be well aware that we do not allow Israeli athletes to compete. The whole world understands that we do not have any diplomatic relations with Israel."

Indeed, international sports administrators should be aware that Malaysia has form on this issue.

- In 2019, Malaysia threatened to refuse visas for Israeli athletes for the World Para Swimming Championships and was stripped of its right to host the event.
  - In 2015, Israeli windsurfers pulled out of a competition on the island of Langkawi after being refused visas.
  - In 2011, an exhibition football match in Kuala Lumpur featuring English Premier League team Chelsea was marred by the repeated booing and antisemitic catcalling of their Israeli-born midfielder Yossi Benayoun.
  - Back in 1997, an Israeli cricket team was granted visas to compete in a tournament in KL for second-tier cricketing nations, but it was forced to play at secret locations as hundreds of protesters repeatedly invaded grounds where it was previously scheduled to play.
- Malaysia's unyielding position on this latest case has won praise from a predictable source – Hamas.

"Malaysia's permanent stance of opposing normalisation with Israel, supporting the Palestinian people and strengthening their steadfastness is represented by this visa ban," said Hamas spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanun.

Whatever the recent political instability, Malaysian governments seldom deviate from the well-rehearsed arguments on Israel-Palestine.

Speaking on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a United Nations-organised event on Nov. 29, Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah attacked Israel for its "oppressive" policies towards the Palestinians.

"The Palestinians have suffered tremendously under the Israeli occupation and blockade and the latter's racist and discriminatory policies... Malaysia's continuous support for the Palestinian struggle is also in recognition of the aspirations of the new generation of Palestinian activists towards realising the Palestinian peoples' aspiration for freedom and their independent State of Palestine," he said.

Despite the one-way invective, commercial relations between the two countries do exist. Israeli exports to Malaysia were US\$7.02 million (A\$9.83 million) during 2020, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Unfortunately, a team of squash players only count as props for political posturing.





Miriam Bell

## MAORI FOR JEWISH INDIGENOUSNESS

It is an age-old incantation of the Jewish people: “Next year in Jerusalem.” The final words of the Passover seder have resounded over centuries, representing the Jewish people’s deep and ongoing connection with their ancestral homeland.

This connection to, and over 3,000 years of continuous presence in, the land of Israel, is a characteristic found in indigenous people around the world.

In New Zealand, Maori are *tangata whenua*, the people of the land, and the land is critical to their identity. That is the case for the Jewish people, too.

One of the most pernicious, false anti-Zionist claims of modern times is that the Jewish people of Israel are colonisers from Europe, foreign to the land which they have “stolen” from the indigenous Palestinians.

This untrue narrative has increasingly taken root and many fervent pro-Palestinian supporters believe it. In New Zealand, that includes many Maori.

A prime example was a segment on the New Zealand TV program “The Project” in May, during which presenter Kenoa Lloyd said the Gaza conflict and, by extension, Israel’s claim to the land, sounded “a tiny bit like colonialisation” which was a “tiny bit familiar to me as a Maori person in New Zealand.”

Holocaust and Antisemitism Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand co-founder Dr. Sheree Trotter, who is also Maori, published an open letter to Lloyd explaining why it was not colonisation at all. She did not receive a response.

This incident was reminiscent of Green Party co-leader Marama Davidson’s trip to Gaza five years ago, in which Davidson said she went “as an indigenous woman” to support “indigenous Palestinian women”. On that occasion, Trotter responded with an article “Not all Maori on Board with Marama.”

It soon became obvious to Trotter that there was no official Maori or Indigenous entity to speak up on such occasions and to galvanise indigenous support for Israel, she said.

She added, “There is a real need for it as the pro-Palestinian position has become well embedded in Maori communities. The pro-Palestinian push has come from both ends of the spectrum, through academia and the trade union movement... despite the fact that historically there has been a unique relationship between Maori and Jews.”

Trotter and former National MP Alfred Ngaro, who previously headed the New Zealand-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group, have therefore established the Indig-

enous Coalition for Israel.

The coalition’s goal is to change the perception of Israel among Maori and Pasifika (Pacific Islander) communities and create greater understanding.

They are already off to a flying start. Their website features articles and videos with views and information not often presented in New Zealand media. They also published letters to the guardians of the NZ SuperFund over its decision to divest from Israeli banks and to Foreign Affairs Minister Nanaia Mahuta, urging her to commit to a boycott of the event marking the 20th anniversary of the UN’s notorious anti-racism conference in Durban in September (New Zealand ultimately did boycott the conference).

Recently, an article by Trotter on the indigeneity of the Jews and the comparison with Maori, titled “A Light for the Indigenous Nations”, ran in *Tablet*, a prominent US-based online magazine. It has generated good feedback and strong interest from overseas.

But Trotter said that, as much as possible, the group will also use traditional face-to-face engagement:

*“Maori and Pasifika cultures work by building relationships – whakawhanaungatanga. Through this we seek to facilitate the building of relationships of mutual trust and understanding.”*

An example of this was a recent event in which the Israeli Ambassador to New Zealand Ran Yaakoby was welcomed to the most prestigious *marae* (communal sacred meeting ground) in Rotorua by the Te Arawa *Iwi* (confederation of Maori tribes). Yaakoby was the first ambassador to be welcomed by the Te Arawa.

*“Iwi business leaders and kaumatua [elders] were excited by the possibilities presented by the ambassador for an ongoing relationship with Israel based upon business interests. This hui [gathering] was a first step. We, as an organisation are following up with iwi, to discuss the way forward. It’s a very exciting development.”*

To build relationships, the coalition hopes to connect with local Jewish, iwi and Pacific groups and organisations, as well as international indigenous groups. At this point, they are working with a couple of iwi groups and have partnerships with the European Coalition for Israel and the International Coalition for Israel.

It is early days yet, and when it comes to advocacy, it is a difficult area to gain media interest in, unless there is a war happening, Trotter said.

But the coalition is there for the long-haul because, despite what anti-Zionist ideologues might assume, the Jews of Israel are an inspiration for many Maori, she added.

“We want to highlight the indigenous argument, that Jews as indigenous people have indigenous rights in their land. We also want to cultivate the connections between Jews and Maori/Pasifika peoples by highlighting the stories and building bridges between communities,” she added.



# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKETS AND TERROR

As of mid-December, no rockets had been fired from Gaza into Israel since Sept. 12. However, there had been a sharp increase in so-called “lone wolf” terrorism against Israelis in late November and early December.

A 16-year-old Palestinian stabbed two Border Police officers in Jerusalem’s Old City on Nov. 17 before being shot dead. On Nov. 21, a Hamas-affiliated gunman opened fire on civilians in the Old City, killing 26-year-old Eliyahu David Kay, and wounding four others. That same day, a Palestinian stabbed two Israeli pedestrians in Jaffa. On Dec. 4, a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli civilian in Jerusalem and then tried to attack two Border Police officers, who shot him dead.

On Dec. 6, a car ramming attack at a checkpoint in Tulkarem resulted in one Israeli soldier being injured. The driver was shot dead. On Dec. 8, a young woman was stabbed in Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, allegedly by a 14-year-old girl.

## ISRAELI COUNTER-TERROR MEASURES

On Dec. 7, Israel announced that construction had been completed on a 65 km high-tech barrier around Gaza, built over three years at a cost of NIS 3.5 billion (A\$1.5 billion). The barrier, designed to end the threat of cross-border attack tunnels from the Palestinian enclave, consists of an underground reinforced concrete wall and a six-metre steel fence, all interwoven with extensive surveillance sensors.

Earlier, on Nov. 22, Israel’s Shin Bet security agency announced it had rounded up more than 50 Hamas operatives in the West Bank allegedly preparing an imminent wave of major

terror attacks. The massive cell was allegedly led and financed by senior Hamas official Saleh al-Aroui, based in Turkey.

## DETAILS REVEALED OF MOSSAD ATTACKS ON IRAN

New purported details about Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency operations against Iran’s nuclear program were revealed in media reports during December.

It was reported that in July 2019 agents pretending to be construction suppliers sold the Iranians building materials with hidden explosives that were then used to construct the Advanced Centrifuges facility at Natanz. In July 2020, the hidden charges exploded, demolishing the site and the centrifuges there.

Another report of a different incident said the Mossad persuaded up to 10 Iranian scientists working at Natanz to collect explosives smuggled into the facility via drones and a catering truck and plant them at the underground A1000 centrifuge area. The explosives were detonated in April 2021, destroying almost all the centrifuges there and halting activity at the site for nine months.

Finally, in June 2021, the TESA centrifuge parts plant at Karaj was attacked with missiles fired from a quadcopter drone assembled by Mossad agents from parts smuggled into Iran, according to media reports.

Meanwhile, conflicting reports have emerged about another possible attack at Natanz on Dec. 4, perhaps involving drones.

## IRAN PREPARING TO ENRICH TO 90%

Israeli intel shared with the US

and some European countries in mid-November revealed evidence that Iran might be preparing to enrich uranium to bomb grade purity of over 90% and could do so within weeks.

Meanwhile, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported on Dec. 1 that Iran has begun enriching uranium at the Fordow underground facility on a cascade of 166 advanced IR-6 centrifuges. Until now, mostly basic IR-1 centrifuges were operating at Fordow, but IR-6 centrifuges enrich uranium roughly five times as quickly.

Both deploying such advanced centrifuges to enrich uranium and doing so at Fordow constitute breaches of the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal.

## RARE ISRAELI STRIKE AT LATAKIA

Israel reportedly launched rare strikes against shipping containers in Syria’s Latakia port on Dec. 7, as part of an allegedly expanding campaign against Iranian assets and weapon shipments to Hezbollah. Parts of Latakia port are allegedly under the control of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, but Israel rarely targets it because of the strong Russian presence in the area.

## SYRIA BECOMING A NARCOSTATE

A *New York Times* investigation (Dec. 5) detailed how Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad’s close associates and family members, including his brother Maher as well as Hezbollah-affiliated individuals in Lebanon, are running a multi-billion dollar drug cartel revolving around the production and smuggling of the illegal



amphetamine Captagon. The story said more than 250 million Captagon pills have been seized this year globally, from the Mediterranean and Middle East all the way to Malaysia, an exponential increase over previous years, and cited estimates that Captagon smuggling far exceeds the value of all Syria's legal exports. The report alleged the Syrian network has also started smuggling more dangerous drugs globally, such as crystal meth.

## UK BANS HAMAS, AUSTRALIA TO BAN HEZBOLLAH, THE BASE

The UK announced it had designated Hamas in its entirety as a terrorist group on Nov. 26, joining the US and European Union, in a move likely to disrupt European funding sources for the organisation. Previously, the UK had only designated the "military wing" of Hamas.

Meanwhile, on Nov. 24, Australia announced its intention to list all of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, along with the neo-Nazi group The Base.

While Australia currently only proscribes Hamas' "military wing", in October, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security recommended that the Government should consider listing the entire organisation – a similar recommendation to one the Committee made about Hezbollah in June.

## HISTORIC BENNETT VISIT TO UAE

Israeli PM Naftali Bennett became the first Israeli premier to visit the United Arab Emirates (UAE), when he landed in Abu Dhabi for a state visit on Dec. 12. Bennett was greeted by UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, and also met with Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's de facto ruler, and other senior officials. Before the trip, Ben-



Israeli PM Bennett in Abu Dhabi (Credit: Haim Zach/IGPO)

nett described Israel-UAE relations as "excellent and extensive," and called to "nurture and strengthen them."

## ISRAEL PLEDGES VACCINES FOR AFRICA

At the end of November, the Israeli Government announced that it would donate "millions of doses" of the AstraZeneca vaccine to developing countries through the international COVAX vaccine sharing scheme. Although it is unclear whether Israel will be able to select the countries that receive the vac-

cines given to COVAX, the Israeli Government said it preferred that African countries would be given priority.

## COVID-19 UPDATE

As of Dec. 8, the daily number of new COVID infections in Israel had stabilised at slightly over 500 cases per day, most of them among young people, with fewer than 150 hospitalisations. Israel reported a total of 42 suspected or confirmed cases of the new Omicron variant as of Dec. 8 – a relatively low figure owing in part to an Israeli Government decision to shut the border to tourists and reimpose quarantine requirements on returning Israelis beginning Nov. 29.

Meanwhile, in the Palestinian Territories, COVID infection levels remain relatively low, with Gaza reporting a seven-day average of around 100 new daily cases, and the West Bank fluctuating around 250.



## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### BEAUTY IN THE LIE OF THE BEHOLDER

It looked like a major coup for the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) campaign – Miss Greece, Rafaela Plastira, had announced she would boycott the Miss Universe Pageant, to be held in Eilat, Israel on Dec. 12.

Plastira posted on Instagram on Oct. 1 that it "hurts my heart", but she would not be attending because she couldn't "go up that stage and act like nothing is happening when people are fighting for there (sic) lives out there." In late November, this announcement was noted and greeted with rapturous acclaim by BDS activists.

What probably hurt her heart even more is that Plastira isn't actually Miss Greece. When queried about this supposed withdrawal, the organisation that chooses Miss Greece for the pageant,

"Star and Mr. GS Hellas", confirmed that while Plastira was Star Hellas 2019, she was never its Miss Universe candidate. On Nov. 28, it posted on Facebook a photo of the actual Miss Greece, Sofia Arapogianni, holding Greek and Israeli flags. The caption accompanying the photo stated, "Between the two flags – Greece [and] Israel shows the world the sisterly relationship between the two countries. Go Greece. Go Sofia."

Miss South Africa encountered similar issues. On Nov. 9, several BDS groups claimed that she had withdrawn in accordance with BDS demands. However, while this time they had the right Miss South Africa – Lalela Mswane – they were still wrong. She had not withdrawn, and on Nov. 27, landed in Israel to attend the pageant.

Given the delay between Plastira's claims and the BDS campaign's reaction, it seems likely she acted alone. However, if victories for BDS weren't so few and far between, they may have taken the time to check their facts before celebrating.

## COVER STORY

# TALKING NUKES WITH TEHERAN

## THE WRONG WAY TO NEGOTIATE WITH IRAN

Behnam Ben Taleblu & Andrea Stricker

The first week of December marked the first time the Biden Administration partook in indirect negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran's new ultra-hardline Government. Unsurprisingly, after days of discussion, no deal was clinched to revive the faltering 2015 nuclear accord. Iran made maximalist demands and upended initial agreements reached during previous rounds of talks. Washington now faces the uphill challenge of containing Teheran's expanding nuclear program while recalibrating its Iran policy.

Teheran is increasingly comfortable with reducing international monitoring of its atomic activities and making irreversible nuclear advancements on the ground. The regime may even be inclined to push uranium enrichment to weapons grade. Teheran's more recent boldness stems in great part from signals Washington sent throughout 2021 that the United States is unwilling to hold the regime accountable.

A close look at Iran's nuclear advances over the past two and a half years shows Teheran's most egregious nuclear violations occurred under Biden's watch. The Trump Administration's May 2018 withdrawal from the nuclear deal, or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), provided an avenue – and political argument – for Iranian escalation, yes. But withdrawal merely expedited the *fait-accompli* of Iran's growing enrichment capacity. It didn't create it. The 2015 accord had already allowed for significant Iranian nuclear expansion after 2026.

Teheran's initial responses to Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign was to absorb what it hoped would be a

short-lived attempt at unilateral sanctions. In May 2019, however, Iran embarked on a policy of graduated escalation in which it incrementally and overtly breached the JCPOA's limits. The regime also embraced other forms of escalation – particularly in the maritime and regional domains – in hopes of generating sufficient fear and leverage to make the Trump Administration end its mounting pressure policy.

Despite early fears that Teheran might use the withdrawal to dash to a weapon, at the start of 2020, even non-proliferation experts supportive of the JCPOA assessed that Iran was not expanding its nuclear program as quickly as it could. While Teheran touted the end of all nuclear-related restrictions and continued growing its uranium stockpile, its advances up until late 2020 paled in comparison to the nuclear risk-taking that followed.

During the 2020 presidential campaign, candidate Joe Biden sought a sharp contrast with the Trump Administration's Iran policy, which he critiqued as risky and war-prone. By pledging to restore the deal Trump left, which offered sanctions relief in exchange for temporary nuclear limitations, the Biden team implied that military force would not be on the table as a tool of counterproliferation.

Weeks after Biden's election, Iran's Guardian Council approved a new parliamentary law mandating a significant escalation of the country's nuclear activities. Both events would foreshadow the conflicting sensibilities guiding Washington and Teheran in 2021: risk-aversion and restraint by the former and risk-tolerance and escalation by the latter.

**"The US response to Iran's advances has been almost non-existent. Along with its European partners, Washington failed to backstop the IAEA"**

Starting in January 2021, Iran resumed enrichment of uranium to 20% purity, a level technically considered highly enriched and an activity that Teheran had paused in 2014. Iran carried this out at Fordow, a highly fortified enrichment bunker that the West failed to shutter in previous rounds of nuclear talks. In February, the regime pulled out of an inspection agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that gives greater insight into nuclear activities, and threatened to delete agency recordings and data at relevant Iranian sites. In April, Iran began to enrich uranium to 60% purity, a historic first for the Islamic Republic, putting it a stone's throw from 90%, the ideal level for atomic weapons.

In 2021, Iran also began to phase-in hundreds of advanced centrifuges, machines that can more efficiently produce enriched uranium than older, JCPOA-permitted models. Advanced machines are essential for any Iranian attempt to “sneak out” of its non-proliferation commitments – read: Make a covert dash for a bomb.

In August, Iran reportedly produced 200 grams of uranium metal using 20% enriched uranium. Teheran has no immediate civilian need for the material, which can be used in the core of a nuclear weapon.

Iran also stepped up production of advanced centrifuge parts days ahead of the latest nuclear talks. On the third day of negotiations, Teheran started enriching uranium at Fordow using a cascade of advanced centrifuges known as the IR-6, which can enrich uranium at more than five times the speed of Iran's first-generation machines.

The totality of these moves has implications for a future nuclear weapons program and offers the Islamic Republic technical and engineering feats that cannot be unlearned, regardless of any deal.

**T**he US response to Iran's advances has been almost non-existent. Along with its European partners, Washington failed to backstop the IAEA – even as its director general likened Teheran's reduced monitoring as putting the agency in a position of “flying in a heavily clouded sky.” At all quarterly IAEA Board of Governors meetings in 2021, the parties failed to censure Teheran over non-proliferation safeguards violations.

Moreover, in the absence of vigorous US sanctions enforcement and additional penalties against illicit Iranian oil exports, Teheran continued selling oil to China, providing the Islamic Republic with greater financial incentive to resist diplomatic entreaties for restraint.

In 2021, the Biden Administration also resisted taking a hard line against Iran-backed terrorism and other activi-

ties. Washington removed Iran-backed militants in Yemen from the US Foreign Terrorist Organisation list, gave only a muted response to the attempted kidnapping of a US citizen on American soil, and reportedly withdrew missile defences from the Middle East at a time when Iran's missile capabilities were rapidly evolving.

Throughout, the Biden Administration continued denigrating the notion of pressure on Iran and showed no real indication of a “Plan B,” other than blaming its predecessor.



Iranian Centrifuges: Iran has dramatically escalated its JCPOA breaches since the Biden Administration took office (Credit: Shutterstock)

Put differently, the Biden campaign, and later the Administration's own words and deeds, cemented an impression for Iran's leaders that America was uncomfortable with escalation and eager for any agreement – even a lesser one – that could be spun as capping Iran's nuclear program. Underwriting this view was the United States' bungled exit from Afghanistan in August. As the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

said a month later, “The America of today is not the America of the past ten, twenty, or thirty years.” Without counterpunches from Washington, Teheran's revolutionaries proved once again that old habits die hard: The regime pocketed each concession and continued escalating.

Predictably, Iran has come to the latest negotiations with an attitude of obstinance, levying major demands for sanctions easing, and making the US and European quest to return to the deal nearly futile. On Dec. 3, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom – the “E3” – issued one of their clearest and sternest rebukes, noting, “Over five months ago, Iran interrupted negotiations, and since then, Iran has fast-forwarded its nuclear program.” The E3 concluded, “Time is running out.”

As is evident from the timeline of Iran's nuclear advances, an American willingness to turn the other cheek has only invited additional escalation. Yet Teheran's economy, still faltering from Trump-era sanctions, remains vulnerable to revived international pressure. To change Iran's calculus, Washington and its European counterparts must now flip the script.

Step one requires scheduling a special IAEA Board meeting to condemn Iran's nuclear advances and safeguards violations and give Teheran a deadline for compliance. If Iran fails to meet the board's deadline, the board should refer Iran's case back to the UN Security Council.

At the Security Council, the United States and the E3 must “snap back” international sanctions on Teheran that are currently suspended under Resolution 2231, which enshrines the JCPOA. Russia and China can veto new Iran sanctions at the Security Council, but a provision in the



JCPOA means they cannot prevent the restoration of prior resolutions and their penalties.

Separately, the US and Europe must backstop international pressure with action of their own. The parties must prepare a new set of sanctions that would be triggered absent Iran's clear nuclear restraint and rollback.

In addition, America must bolster its military deterrence against Iran. Washington should express an unambiguous willingness to use force to prevent Teheran from developing a nuclear weapon. The Administration can try to change Iran's impression about American will by forcefully responding to drone and rocket attacks from Iran-backed militias in Syria and Iraq and by empowering the US Naval Forces Central Command's newly established "Task Force 59," which can become an effective tool against Iranian maritime escalation. Ultimately, the Islamic Republic is unlikely to change course unless it knows that further malfeasance invites ruin.

Iran's amassing of atomic knowledge and its willingness to run greater risks is driving it closer to the nuclear weapons threshold, after which stopping Teheran's forward momentum might be impossible. In a 2012 debate, then-Vice President Biden said of Iran, "facts matter." President Biden must recognise the fact that his Iran policy risks giving birth to an Iranian threshold nuclear capability. Washington should embrace pressure before it's too late.

AIR

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## HOW TEHERAN VIEWS THE NUCLEAR TALKS

Amir Toumaj

In a recent public address, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, railed against the West and domestic "traitors" for blocking the Islamic Republic from blossoming into a global beacon of scientific progress and establishing an advanced "modern Islamic civilization."

Kafkaesque is the apt word here because Khamenei, despite his lofty rhetoric, has engaged in rampant mismanagement resulting in a plethora of national crises, from brain drain to social discontent to environmental degradation. Yet, instead of honouring the work of intellectuals and other pioneers, the regime, which suffers from a paranoid streak, has persecuted, jailed and sometimes even killed them, including those who were not open dissenters. Teheran's behaviour can be likened to an arsonist who sets fire to a house, kneecaps the firefighters, and then blames the residents.

As nuclear talks with Iran continue, US negotiators should not assume the ayatollahs will bend in their perception that Washington wants regime change. No amount of deal-cutting or modulation in rhetoric will change this view, which has prevailed in Iranian halls of power since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, regardless of who occupies the White House.

For decades, American policymakers have wrestled with the question of how to approach a government that propounds anti-Americanism as a core feature of its identity. Even the notion of basic diplomatic relations with the United States is taboo in Iran. According to a common view in US policy circles, Iran's hostility toward America, and the accompanying "Death to America" refrain, can be traced to the US-backed 1953 coup d'état that felled Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, along with subsequent American support for the autocratic Reza Pahlavi monarchy.

This view also holds that US backing of Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), President George W. Bush's inclusion of Iran in the "axis of evil," and the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions in the 2000s hardened anti-Americanism in Iran. Furthermore, in this conception, former President Donald Trump's withdrawal from

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the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal, US reimposition of sanctions, and the targeted killing of Quds Force Gen. Qassem Soleimani have poisoned the well, making future deals exceedingly difficult. The conclusion is that the United States should address the roots of Iranian anti-Americanism by explicitly acknowledging its “wrongs,” laying the groundwork for fruitful diplomacy.

But the acknowledgment of past actions could well go unreciprocated. Moreover, the United States can certainly refrain from military and diplomatic moves perceived as steps toward regime change, but it has little control over a more amorphous area – America’s cultural influence in Iran.

Iranian hardliners, who dominate the country’s political and security centres, believe that the United States long has been conducting a “soft war” against the regime, aimed at overthrowing it from within through cultural products such as movies, television, music and social media. Examples include Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine’s Day displays in Iran in recent years, raising the alarm of pro-regime figures and publications; one so-called “cultural analyst” this year called Halloween a “celebration of worshipping Satan.” Although the US Government has certainly worked with Hollywood at certain periods in history, Iranian hardliners consider all American civil society to be a pillar of the US Government.

A sort of US parallel to the Iranian worldview is the QAnon conspiracy theory – from which, as observers have noted, it is frighteningly difficult to dislodge adherents. Further, the soft war threat helps fortify hardliners in the face of perceived threats, such as the anti-government protests that have swept Iran in recent years. Hardliners likewise rely on anti-Americanism to remain in power. Looking at the historical record, they cast a wary eye at China’s loosening of Maoist principles in 1979 – note the year – to reestablish ties with the United States and open up to the world. All the same, Iranian hardliners today look to Beijing’s authoritarian prosperity with envy.

When it comes to negotiations, US officials should not strive to change Iranian minds about the “soft war” charge. Instead, they should stick to the brass tacks of negotiation. Indeed, Washington doesn’t need to convince the regime that it has abandoned pursuit of an overthrow to cut a deal with it. During the Obama Administration, the hardliners truly believed that the President wanted to overthrow them and that the US was behind the 2009 post-election Green Movement protests, but that didn’t stop the Su-

preme Leader from demonstrating “heroic flexibility” to agree to the deal.

Afterward, the threat perception regarding a US-inspired overthrow grew when Barack Obama touted the deal as potentially strengthening regime moderates over time. As far as hardliners were concerned, this was the same playbook as that used by the Reagan Administration to seduce Mikhail Gorbachev to dissolve the Soviet Union in 1991 when confronted with mass protests. That is the lesson Khamenei and his cohorts learned from the Soviet collapse, an event they have studied closely. Yet they remained in the nuclear accord.

Even before President Trump’s withdrawal from the



Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei with President Ibrahim Raisi: No US concessions or messaging will change their paranoid worldview (Source: Khamenei.ir)

JCPOA in 2018, Iran’s hardliners were convinced that the US was behind the nationwide protests that erupted in December 2017 and lasted into 2018. The “maximum pressure” policy subsequently enacted by the Trump Administration, along with the January 2020 killing of Soleimani, darkened the threat perception further. Talks with the Biden Administration would seem to be less hostile and offer more promise at a baseline, but

the Iranian regime also would have negotiated with Trump had he won a second term. Simply put, Teheran will be pragmatic if conditions dictate such a course. Past deals with mortal enemies such as Iraq’s Saddam Hussein serve as examples.

Teheran has stated repeatedly that it wants the lifting of sanctions, particularly on oil and banking, as an outcome of ongoing JCPOA talks. Whether that would come in the shape of a JCPOA revival is unclear. Iran’s diplomats have put forth maximalist demands so far in Vienna, in an apparent attempt to play hardball, but they may well overplay their hand.

Given the hardline composition of Iran’s ruling class, America should not expect a fresh start with the Islamic Republic, at least any time soon. Keeping that in mind, however, it should still pursue opportunities to advance US national security interests by striking deals and, when necessary, pushing back against regime aggression and duplicity.

AIR

*Amir Toumaj is a senior Iran analyst with Sayari Analytics in Washington and co-founder of Resistance Axis Monitor, a resource for news and analysis on Iran and its proxies. Reprinted from the Hill. © The Hill (www.thehill.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

# THE WEAPONS THAT DRIVE THE IRANIAN REGIONAL THREAT

Yaakov Lappin

Three weapons systems form a triangle at the heart of the Islamic Republic of Iran's program to entrench itself in the Middle East. Precision-guided missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and surface-to-air missiles are finding their way into increasing numbers of areas, and into radical hands.

Iran is present in several Arab states suffering from weak sovereignty, infiltrating with proxy forces, arms, and money. Now, Teheran hopes to be able to spread its fundamentalist Shi'ite agenda with greater force, by equipping its proxy forces with new levels of military systems.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's goal is to paint as much of the regional map in Iranian colours as he can, reaching eventual hegemony, and to bring down any state that stands in his way, whether Jewish or Sunni. Those investments are evident in Yemen, Gaza, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. As the ballistic missile attack on the Saudi capital Riyadh on Dec. 6 illustrated, the firepower that Iran spreads around the region does not remain in storehouses.

Iran manufactures advanced weapons, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force's smuggling network then distributes them to the proxies. Iran thereby becomes more threatening to the security of America's key allies in the region, including Israel, Saudi

Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan.

Whereas in the past, Iran would mostly smuggle simple mortars, rockets, and IEDs to its radical proxies, today, the Iranian smuggling networks funnel far more advanced technologies into the wrong hands.

This means that Iran's proxies, such as an Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias in Iraq, can decide to fire sophisticated ballistic or cruise missiles at Riyadh or Tel Aviv, from the same Iraqi launchpads.

The fact that Iran's proxies have some level of independence in their decision making, while still being obligated to take orders from the Iranian "mother ship," merely adds to the instability.

The strike range of these weapons grows with time, the warheads become larger, and the activity further destabilises regional security.



Together with UAVs and air defence systems, exports of precision-guided missiles are the key to Iran's quest for regional hegemony (Credit: Shutterstock)

## AN EXPLOSIVE TRIANGLE

The precision-guided missiles that Iran makes for itself and its proxies provide long-range strike capabilities that were once reserved for great powers. Some of Iran's ballistic, cruise missiles, and UAVs can reach ranges of 2,000 kilometres. Iranian pledges to not exceed that range are undermined by its space program, which

many observers suspect doubles up as a testing program for future intercontinental missile systems.

Meanwhile, Iran's surface-to-air missile batteries can challenge the activities of any air force seeking to monitor or strike Iranian-backed ground targets. And the Iranian UAVs portfolio forms a long-range, accurate strike tool that, when used in swarms, can pose severe problems even for advanced air defences, as recent incidents, such as the Oct. 20 suicide drone strike on the US military base in al-Tanf, southeast Syria, have illustrated.

Iran is also able to hide behind the excuse that its prox-



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ies fired the weapons – even when the attack originated from Iranian territory, such as the 2019 drone attack on Saudi Arabian oil facilities at Abqaiq and Khuaris, which reduced Saudi oil exports by 50%.

It is harder to trace the origins of manoeuvring, low flying weapons like cruise missiles and UAVs, meaning that the presence of multiple “immediate suspects” makes using those weapons more attractive in Iran’s increasingly bold “grey zone” operations. They can be used to terrorise civilians in cities, reduce oil production, target international maritime traffic, paralyse seaports and airports, and hit power plants. The list goes on.

The fact that Iran’s suicide drones are now able to hit moving targets, like a civilian oil tanker, was demonstrated in a lethal manner in the July attack on the tanker *Mercer Street* in the Sea of Oman.

In an additional twist, Iran has placed a new emphasis on attempts to get its proxies set up with their own domestic weapons production capability, in order to evade disruptive actions, such as Israel’s ongoing preventative strike campaign.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah controls precision-guided missile factories, allowing it to assemble its own missiles on Lebanese territory and not rely on Iran for imports, representing one of the most dangerous scenarios for Israel. In fact, Israel has repeatedly warned that it cannot allow Hezbollah to have its own domestic defence industry, due to the instability and threat this would pose to key strategic sites in Israel.

The ability to target multiple sensitive sites at the same time could, in theory, shut down a modern country’s very ability to function. This is because some radars and interception missiles can struggle to deal with multiple attacking UAVs that come raining down in a swarm. This makes UAV swarms a strategic threat.

In Yemen, too, Iran has been working to install a “locally made” industry of weapons so that the Houthis can arm themselves and threaten international shipping in the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Red Sea. These same Yemen-based capabilities are routinely used to threaten Saudi Arabian sovereignty, and even the Israeli Red Sea city of Eilat, 2,000 kilometres away.

In dealing with these threats, cooperation appears to be on the rise among Israel and Sunni states, as well as with the United States. In April, the US and Israel set up an inter-agency working group “on the growing threat of unmanned aerial vehicles and precision guided missiles produced by Iran and provided to its proxies in the Middle East region” – reflecting the high priority this is receiving in Washington and Jerusalem.

Israel has a multi-layered air defence system to deal with UAVs and precision-guided missiles, featuring some of the most advanced technology in this sphere in the world.

This structure includes a host of sophisticated radars, and the ability to intercept the threats – whether through ground-launched missiles or fighter jets – as they enter Israeli air space.

A UAV fired at Israel in May is a case in point. In that incident, the UAV approached Israeli airspace near the northern city of Beit Shean. The IDF only stated that it was monitored by Israeli Air Force air control units, and that its fragments had been collected by security forces on the ground. It turns out that this UAV came not from Syria, as originally reported, but from Iraq.

No less remarkably, a UAV that infiltrated Israeli airspace in 2018 from Syria turned out to have been carrying TNT explosives on a delivery mission for terrorists in the West Bank, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz revealed last month.

Gantz noted that it was launched from Syria’s T4 air-base, near Palmor, which has been under the control of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Israel continues to optimise its early detection and interception capabilities to defend against these threats, as well staying on top of the intelligence picture.

But Israel’s efforts don’t stop at defence. Since 2013, it has developed a large-scale offensive strike program designed to disrupt Iranian entrenchment activities, and to stop advanced weapons that change the regional balance of power from reaching their intended destinations along Iranian supply routes.

Those routes include the transfer of weapons on the ground, in the air, and at sea, meaning that a major monitoring program must be active 24-7 to be able to detect them and respond in time.

Israel’s campaign has stopped many advanced Iranian weapons from reaching their destinations, forcing Iran to look for new tactics – such as getting its proxies to build their own weapons.

Israel’s recent shift into the US military’s CENTCOM command, which is responsible for the Middle East, can help facilitate the transfer of technology and capabilities for countering these threats from Israel to pragmatic Sunni countries, as well as create new joint training and intelligence-sharing opportunities.

As Iran prepares to smuggle yet more of its triangle of destruction, the anti-Iranian bloc in the Middle East will be looking for new ways to cooperate in order to defend itself.

AIR

*Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT) Senior Fellow Yaakov Lapin is a military and strategic affairs correspondent who conducts research and analysis for defence think tanks, and is the military correspondent for the Jewish News Syndicate. His book, The Virtual Caliphate, explores the online jihadist presence. © Investigative Project on Terrorism, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*



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# Mission “Metro”

## Inside an unprecedented IDF operation

Yaakov Katz

The tunnels were dug by hand and with jackhammers, as heavy machinery was out of the question – it would have attracted too much attention from the drones constantly hovering in the skies above.

Every battalion had its assignment and was responsible for the burrowing in its area of operations. Budgets were allocated according to a detailed plan, and deadlines were set for each stage of the project.

Supervising it all was Mohammed Deif, the elusive Hamas commander who became legendary for surviving numerous Israeli assassination attempts spanning more than two decades. According to some estimates, the entire project cost over NIS 1 billion (~A\$446 million).

It all started seven years ago, as part of the lessons Hamas learned from the Gaza war of the summer of 2014, known in Israel as “Operation Protective Edge”. Hamas was effective using some of its underground tunnels to sneak across the border and kill soldiers, but for the most part the underground passageways were uncovered and destroyed. Hamas needed a new capability that could alter the balance of power with Israel.

Deif’s tunnels were supposed to do the job.

The idea was grandiose but also simple. Spanning around 100 km beneath almost the entire Gaza Strip, the tunnel network consisted of three different kinds of spaces: passageways to get from one point to the other; places to sleep, eat and even shower; and spaces for launching rockets. The entire network was designed to quickly and covertly move gunmen so they could surprise and attack invading Israeli infantry troops and armoured forces.

The network was a far cry from the old makeshift tunnels Palestinians once used to smuggle weapons and contraband under the border with Egypt.

“It was an underground city,” explained one senior IDF officer. “It was supposed to be their most protected weapon.”

But 2014 was also a turning point for the IDF in its

battle against these underground systems. After Hamas fighters successfully infiltrated Israel, the military understood that it was far behind in the capabilities it needed. It immediately launched three simultaneous efforts.

The first was on the intelligence level – hunting for tunnels and mapping them out to the smallest detail; the second was investing resources in developing a system that could detect the tunnels as they were being dug, something like an Iron Dome for tunnels; and the third effort was in developing attack capabilities that could then destroy the tunnels.

“When attacking a tunnel, you don’t only need maximum precision,” explained Air Force Brig.-Gen. Matan Adin, commander of the Israeli Air Forces’s (IAF) Air Support and Helicopter Division. “You also need munitions that will penetrate the ground, since if they detonate on the ground, then you essentially did nothing.”



The 100-km system of tunnels below Gaza, dubbed the Metro, was supposed to be Hamas’ secret weapon (Credit: IGPO)

The IDF and the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) invested unprecedented resources in gleaning as much information as they could about the tunnel network. After a few months it was named the “Metro” by one of the officers in Military Intelligence.

Aerial surveillance was helpful but could not provide information on the routes underground. Cellular reception was also not

helpful, since once underground, all reception was lost and the people inside could not be tracked.

This left the Shin Bet to focus on old-school intelligence-gathering tactics – recruiting agents and spies within Gaza who could reveal details about the routes of the tunnels and what exactly they contained.

The tunnels became an obsession for Israel. Intelligence showed that Hamas battalions were already training inside them. The terrorist operatives stored their weapons there and knew the different routes, the different exits and how to move quietly in and out.

In an effort to prevent the plans from leaking out, the Hamas battalions in the beginning were allowed to enter only their regional sections, without knowing how to cross to other areas. Hamas commanders knew that Israel would be watching. If someone was going to leak something, it wanted as much as possible to contain the damage.

Gaza is one of the most carefully scrutinised pieces of land in the world, not only surrounded by cameras on the border fence but also constantly patrolled in the skies above. Every suspicious movement is carefully tracked. Unmanned aircraft are referred to as *zenana*, local slang for





the buzzing of a mosquito, due to the monotonous humming sound the drones' engines make when flying in the skies above.

The precise information Israel had gathered varied. In some cases, Israeli intelligence was able to draw an exact picture of a section of the network, learning from its sources what weapons were stored there, where they were, the type of communication network, and on which wall TV screens hung. For other sections, all it had was the route but nothing more.

The IDF plan was in place by 2018, a joint operation planned within the IDF Southern Command – responsible for the Gaza Strip – and IAF headquarters in Tel Aviv. Due to the size of the network and the need to surprise the enemy, the initial operational requirement spoke of the need for more than 100 aircraft that would drop more than 500 bombs within the span of less than 30 minutes. It was the kind of operation not seen before in the Gaza Strip.

In November 2018, a covert IDF operation in the southern Gaza Strip went awry. Israeli commandos on an intelligence-gathering operation raised suspicion at a Hamas checkpoint. In the ensuing gunfight, Lt.-Col. M. – a decorated officer whose name is still banned from publication – was shot and killed. In response, Hamas fired dozens of rockets into Israel.

Then Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu convened the Security Cabinet to discuss Israel's response. Avigdor Lieberman, Defence Minister at the time, pushed to launch Operation "Lightning Strike," the codename the IDF had given for the campaign to destroy the tunnels, a simulation of which he had personally overseen a few months earlier.

The IDF brass resisted. It was in the final stages of preparing a manoeuvre to destroy a series of cross-border tunnels that Hezbollah had dug along Israel's border with Lebanon. Within Military Intelligence, there were concerns that launching "Lightning Strike" now could lead to a longer and larger conflict with Gaza, which would force the IDF to postpone the operation against Hezbollah's tunnels – and the longer it waited, the greater the chance that something would leak out.

The Cabinet sided with the IDF, and "Lightning Strike"



The Israeli Air Force preparing for missions in Gaza earlier this year (Source: IDF)

was put on ice. Upset over the Government's weak response to the Gaza rocket fire, Lieberman resigned from the Cabinet, eventually leading to the disintegration of the Government and the first of what would turn into four consecutive elections.

In the years since, the Southern Command continued honing the operation with new intelligence constantly provided by the Shin Bet. When "Operation Guardian of the Walls" broke out in May 2021, "Lightning Strike" was put back on the table. Some generals were still hesitant, feeling that such a bombing needed to be saved for an operation whose objective was to topple Hamas. That is not what "Guardian of the Walls" was planned for.

OC Southern Command Maj.-Gen. Eliezer Toledano believed it needed to be launched. If not, he warned, it might not be relevant in a future operation. Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kohavi agreed.

"Even if we don't kill hundreds of terrorists, it is still worth setting back Hamas by 10 years," Toledano was later quoted as saying.

That is how just after midnight on May 14, 160 IAF fighter jets took off and headed out to the Mediterranean Sea. The planes – F-15s and F-16s – were loaded with

GPS-guided bombs, many of them GBU-39s, also known as the Small Diameter Bomb, a weapon made by Boeing that is small, accurate and has the ability to

penetrate steel-reinforced concrete. Since they are relatively small, Israel's F-15Is – known by their Hebrew name *Ra'am* (Thunder) – can carry 20 SDBs on their wings and fuselage. In Hebrew, the SDBs are called "Lethal Hail".

It was the largest and most complicated IAF sortie since the Six Day War, when almost all of Israel's fleet took off to destroy Egypt and Syria's air forces in the opening salvo of that conflict.

But on this night Israel wasn't going after an enemy air force. It was looking to take out Hamas's prized possession – the secret weapon it had skilfully and secretly built up over a period of almost a decade.

The challenge was huge. Not only was it a painstaking effort to discover the exact route, but the IAF also had to figure out how to destroy the tunnels without toppling

**"It was the largest and most complicated IAF sortie since the Six Day War, when almost all of Israel's fleet took off to destroy Egypt and Syria's air forces"**

entire neighbourhoods: the tunnels were not under empty fields but under apartment buildings and peoples' homes.

Israel needed to attack in a way that would on the one hand destroy the tunnels but also be so accurate that it would leave the least amount of collateral damage and not undermine the greater war effort of weakening and delegitimising Hamas.

Attacking such a small space in such a short period of time requires a level of precision and synchronisation rarely seen on the modern battlefield, especially when considering that 160 fighter jets were involved.

In many of the cases, the idea was to hit parts of the tunnels that were not adjacent to buildings, and if there was no choice, then to try to hit it on an angle.

"It was very strict planning, and everyone knew their route," explained Lt. Ori, a 26-year-old F-16 pilot who flew that night. "We came in waves, group after group."

The planes, which took off from different bases across Israel, gathered over the Mediterranean and waited there for the green light. Once they got it, the attack began. Every group of planes had preinstalled the GPS coordinates of their targets. The planes didn't even have to fly over Gaza. They were able to drop their munition while still over the water.

The mission took just 23 minutes.

As Ori later explained, the challenge wasn't the attack but synchronising the different sorties.

"The difficulty was the planning and ensuring that everyone took off on time and got to where they needed to be," he said.

Five hundred bombs were dropped that night over the so-called Metro. While the attacks were carried out by



Given that Israel attacked at least 1,500 targets in densely populated Gaza, it is actually remarkable how few civilian casualties occurred (Credit: Shutterstock)

fighter jets, drones that flew high above Gaza transmitted images back to IAF headquarters in Tel Aviv so officers there could immediately assess the extent of the damage caused.

Palestinians reported that at least 42 people were killed, some inside the tunnels and others in a couple of buildings that collapsed because of the destruction. How many of the dead were affiliated with terrorist organisations – Hamas or Islamic Jihad – was not immediately clear.

Weeks later, research conducted by the Meir Amit Terrorism and Information Centre in Israel – a think tank closely affiliated with security agencies – showed that out of the 236 Palestinians killed during the entire operation in Israeli attacks, at least 114 of them belonged to terrorist organisations. The IDF put that number even higher, claiming that close to 200 of the dead were known terrorists.

Before we break this down, an important statement: every civilian life lost in war is a tragedy, but there is a question of responsibility that needs to be addressed.

Palestinians argue that Israel is the side attacking and

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dropping the weapons. As a result, they say, it is Israel that is responsible.

Israel argues that Hamas intentionally stores its weapons and builds its command centres inside civilian infrastructure; and while Israel goes to great lengths to minimise collateral damage, it cannot ensure that there will not be civilian casualties.

The Metro is a case in point. That 500 bombs were dropped on a small space in such a short amount of time and “only” 42 people were killed – at least half of them terrorists according to Israel – is unprecedented in the history of war.

This was not done easily. Though intelligence revealed the tunnel network’s course, Israel could not just drop bombs along the route. That not only would have toppled dozens of buildings – it would have killed thousands of civilians.

Instead, what Israel did was astounding. It knew exactly how to hit the corner of a tunnel at a street intersection, having analysed precisely how many bombs and pounds of explosives would be needed so the explosion would have a greater effect underground and not above. When buildings did fall, it was because the collapse of the tunnel led to a collapse of the building. The structures themselves were not attacked.

“Considering the number of bombs that were dropped, it could have been much worse,” explained one senior IDF officer involved in planning the operation. “Had we done what Hamas wanted, we would have had thousands of dead civilians.”

When looking at the entire operation, that accomplishment is even more impressive. Israel attacked over 1,500 targets throughout 11 days of fighting. That is at least 1,500 bombs that were dropped on targets – and in many cases more than one bomb was used on a target to ensure they were destroyed.

Considering that Gaza, with its mere 365 square kilometres, is one of the most densely populated places in the world, the operation was an impressive achievement – and a testament to the way Israel operates and the measures it has in place to minimise civilian casualties.

While the world tends to look at this conflict through the dry and simple numbers of a scorecard – how many are dead in Gaza (more) compared with how many are dead in Israel (less) – this is a distorted perspective.

It should instead evaluate what exactly happened during the operation – the most accurate and precise military operation of this scale in modern military history.

Think about it: more than 1,500 bombs dropped in Gaza, on 1,500 targets – and maybe 60 civilians killed. That is something that has never been done before.

This does not mean the IDF did not make mistakes. Just as all wars include collateral damage, all wars include mistakes. But when looking at dry numbers, as the international community likes to do, what the IDF did in May is an unprecedented military accomplishment. AIR

*Yaakov Katz is the Jerusalem Post’s editor-in-chief. He previously served for close to a decade as the paper’s military reporter and defence analyst. He is the author of Shadow Strike: Inside Israel’s Secret Mission to Eliminate Syrian Nuclear Power and co-author of two additional books: Weapon Wizards – How Israel Became a High-Tech Military Superpower (with Amir Bohbot) and Israel vs. Iran – The Shadow War (with Yoaz Hendel). © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## RABAT SEASON

Amotz Asa-El

With 1,400 enemy tanks charging at them and 800 artillery pieces firing from behind those, the Israeli military units that faced Syria’s surprise attack did not know the attacking force included a Moroccan infantry brigade, as well as a battalion of 33 Moroccan tanks, half of which did not survive the battle.

That was in October 1973. In November 2021, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz was greeted in Rabat with all the fanfare of a foreign dignitary’s official visit, replete with a uniformed guard of honour at the entrance to the Defence Ministry as well as prominent coverage in all the major local media. Two dailies, the Arabic-language *Ahdath Maghreb* and the French-language *L’Observateur du Maroc*, went so far as to publish an article by Gantz, in which he hailed the two nations’ shared history and future.

On the face of it, this trip was just a continuation of the August visit by Israel’s Foreign Minister Yair Lapid – who formally opened Israel’s mission in Rabat and met Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita, with whom he left an invitation from Israeli President Isaac Herzog for King Mohamed IV to visit the Jewish state.

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Yet Gantz's visit actually represented the maturation of what was formally begun in December 2020, when Jerusalem and Rabat signed a normalisation agreement, following on from the signing in Washington that September of the Abraham Accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.



Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz arrives for a meeting with his Moroccan counterpart in Rabat (Credit: Ariel Hermoni/Israel Defense Ministry)

In a meeting with Defence Minister Abdellatif Loudiyi, Gantz and his host signed a memorandum of understanding that sets the stage for Israeli-Moroccan arms deals, intelligence sharing and joint military exercises. Defence experts say this will likely lead to Moroccan purchases of Israeli drones and anti-missile systems, as well as Israeli upgrades of Moroccan fighter jets.

This is apparently what Gantz meant when he wrote in those two newspaper articles that the two countries are looking forward to jointly combatting terrorism and also working together on “border and air threats.”

Fuelled by North African, pan-Arab and Jewish circumstances, such direct cooperation between Israel and an Arab country is both dramatic and unprecedented.

The African background to the story is the long-standing conflict between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara.

About the size of the UK, the arid coastal territory is believed to contain natural resources like potash as well as offshore oil. In 1975, Morocco unilaterally annexed the area – which is tucked along Morocco's southwest and is about one half the size of Morocco's original area.

Morocco's claims have been challenged by an independence movement, the Polisario Front, which has been backed from its inception by Algeria. The Moroccan claim

has been recognised by most Arab states and also by three European Union members, all formerly communist, while Polisario has been backed by radical countries like Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Syria, but also by more mainstream countries like Kenya, Uruguay, Mexico and Peru.

The superpowers, however, have generally been either neutral or ambiguous about the conflict, with Western powers tilting toward Morocco and the Russian and Chinese blocs against it, but none fully taking sides – until last year, when then-US President Donald Trump recognised Morocco's claim.

The American move was made as part of the successful efforts to coax Rabat to normalise ties with Israel. For Morocco, this was a priceless achievement, serving a long-term strategic cause for which the kingdom fought a war and confronted two uprisings since 1975 and also built a 2,700 km anti-guerrilla sand-wall which it calls “the security wall”.

Violence resumed last year, and Algeria severed diplomatic ties with Morocco and discontinued its gas supplies to the kingdom. This is what Morocco's budding

military alliance with Israel is primarily about.

Knowhow earned confronting Palestinian terror is relevant for the challenge Polisario poses to Morocco's south, while Israel's experience in conventional warfare is relevant for the challenge Algeria poses to Morocco's east, along the 1,400 km border the two countries share.

However, beyond these North African concerns, Morocco's new attitude toward Israel is also driven by Arab circumstances.

**T**he so-called “Arab Spring” social upheaval that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and then spread to multiple Arab capitals has convinced Arab leaders to

seek economic transformation. Failure to deliver millions of new jobs, they now realise, might result in more revolts like those that unseated four veteran Arab presidents and sparked a number of civil wars.

This new quest for economic vitality is what inspired the Abraham Accords in general, and Morocco's new pragmatism in particular. With 36 million people and an annual per capita GDP of about US\$ 8,000 (A\$11,200), lower than 150 other countries. Morocco must develop economically, and it knows Israel can, and happily will, help make that happen.

Morocco's hopes in this respect are aided by the coun-

**“Considering the complex and rich history of Israeli-Moroccan relations since the 1950s, this is hardly the beginning of a beautiful friendship, as Humphrey Bogart put it in the film *Casablanca*”**

try's unique place in Jewish history.

Jews arrived in Morocco during the Roman era, but the country became a major Jewish centre in the aftermath of the Spanish expulsion of its Jewish population in 1492, producing famous rabbinical sages, philosophers, physicians and merchants.

Marginalised, along with the rest of the Muslim world's Jews, while Europe underwent the industrial revolution, Morocco's place in the Jewish future was transformed because of the Holocaust. With European Jewry decimated, Middle Eastern Jewry suddenly became a much more significant part of the global Jewish population.

Morocco, home to the largest Jewish community in the Muslim world, thus became a major centre of world Jewry.

Most of that community left for Israel during the 1950s and 1960s, thanks to quiet collaboration between King Hassan II (1929-1999) and Israel's Mossad intelligence agency.

The king's willingness to quietly help Israel was a by-product of Morocco's tensions with Algeria, which resulted in a full-scale war in 1963-64. Israel paid Morocco cash for each Jew it allowed to leave, and also secretly helped Morocco modernise its agricultural sector and develop its security services.

Since then, Israelis of Moroccan descent have come to play a central role in Israeli politics, business and culture, while maintaining ties with the small Jewish community that has remained in Morocco.

This was the backdrop against which King Hassan hosted a landmark meeting in 1977 between then Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and Egyptian presidential

adviser Hassan Tohami – which led to Anwar Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem that year.

Morocco was similarly part of the Oslo process, having hosted the 1995 Middle Eastern economic conference, and established consular relations with Israel that year. The diplomatic ties were severed in 2000 as the second Intifada flared, but tourism persisted, with 30,000 Israelis visiting Morocco annually.

Now Royal Air Maroc has announced it will fly three weekly flights to Tel Aviv, while Israel's El Al inaugurated flights to Marrakesh in July – to be followed by regular flights to Casablanca.

Considering the complex and rich history of Israeli-Moroccan relations since the 1950s, this is hardly the *beginning* of a beautiful friendship, as Humphrey Bogart put it in the film *Casablanca*. Even so, for millions of Israelis, it is beautiful nonetheless.

AIR

## MORE AUSTRALIAN CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Ran Porat

**B**elow are some more examples from our ongoing coverage of antisemitic, radical anti-Israeli content and conspiracy theories published in media outlets based in Australia.

### FARAH NEWS

*Farah News*, an Australian portal for news and views in Arabic, has been caught numerous times in the past promoting antisemitism and extremist hate against Israel.

One of *Farah News*' regular "stars" is Syrian antisemite Mouaffaq Alsibai. In "Why do they hate the Muslim Brotherhood?" (Oct. 27), Alsibai presented his version of history, in which the Jews conspired with other evil non-Muslim elements to bring about the downfall of the Islamic empires of the past: "the demise, destruction, ruin, and rupture of the last state that ruled Islam, [was] at the hands of the malicious, reprehensible, spiteful Jew, who held a grudge against Islam and its people, in cooperation with the evil Crusader, Zionist, Freemason alliance in Europe and America." Alsibai made similar conspiratorial claims a month later (Nov. 21), alleging that Muslim Brotherhood founder and ideologue Hassan al-Banna was assassinated in 1949 in Egypt on "British Zionist Masonic orders."

In "Why the whole world wants to kill the Syrians" (Nov. 13), Alsibai argued that hatred of the Syrian people is the real reason there were so many victims of the civil war in that country. According to Alsibai, this hatred is

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motivated, among other factors, by fear that success of the anti-Assad forces would endanger Israel, painted as part of a global conspiracy: “[One reason for the killing of Syrians is] if this revolution threatens the security and safety of the Zionist state, which is supported by the forces of the whole world.”

Another antisemitic columnist frequently featured on *Farah News* is Egyptian Muhammad Saif Al-Dawla, who is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Dawla has been busy “celebrating” his loathing for Israel by noting several dates and events in articles appearing on *Farah News* over the last few months.

Praising the escape of six Palestinian prisoners from an Israeli jail in September (they were later all re-captured), al-Dawla penned “All this joy” (Sep. 9). The escape, he said, “deserves to be recorded in books and encyclopedias of resistance movements throughout history and in all countries of the world, not only in Palestine.”

Noting the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, al-Dawla rehashed the famous conspiracy that a dark force was behind that event which was merely an excuse to invade Muslim countries. “Many people in the world and not only in my country,” said al-Dawla, “still have doubts about the real perpetrator, his motives and the beneficiary, especially after taking what happened as a pretext for invading the region and occupying Afghanistan and Iraq.”

Al-Dawla went on to argue that “Modern colonialism” (which he addressed anthropomorphically as “you”), aspires to establish global control, but “the resistance of the Arab and Islamic peoples to you in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and others, and their refusal to submit before you, unlike many of the world’s regimes and rulers, constitutes a major obstacle to your historical project for world sovereignty and domination.” For that reason, the Arab and Islamic nations are being targeted and placed “at the top of your list of enemies.”

Al-Dawla also commemorated the outbreak of Second Intifada – that five-year-long terror war which led to thousands of casualties on both sides – in “The uprising that saved the nation” (Sep. 29). For Al-Dawla, the “blessed” Al-Aqsa Intifada “injected new blood into the political life. Its heroism, martyrdom operations, and victories inspired the Arab peoples, and restored their confidence that the nation did not die and could not die. It also revived the project of struggle and resistance, and the inevitability of confronting American hegemony and the Zionist occupation.”

The anniversary of the riots which led to a violent invasion of the Israeli embassy in Cairo in 2011 was another reason for Al-Dawla to rejoice (in a piece published in *Farah News* on Oct. 9). For him, the embassy was “a symbol

of the presence of the Zionist enemy in Egypt.”

In November, Al-Dawla reminded *Farah News* readers (Nov. 12) that it was the anniversary of the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat – who died on Nov. 11, 2004 due to natural causes. Al-Dawla, on the other hand, said Arafat was eliminated in “a poisoning plot” – a refuted conspiracy theory. Al-Dawla blames “Zionists and Americans”, along with Arab rulers, for humiliating Arafat on several occasions and insists that he was eventually murdered when “they [the US and Israel] decided to get him out of the scene once and for all, killing him.”

## AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM TIMES

In the *Australian Muslim Times*’ (AMUST) October edition, on Oct. 8, Mohamed Ainullah attacked the appointment of former NSW Jewish Board of Deputies Chief Executive Vic

Alhadeff to the board of SBS. Quoting statements against the appointment by Australian organisations known for their rejection of Israel’s right to exist, Ainullah argued that Alhadeff “may politicise SBS” because of his “pro-Israel track record.”

In December, the editors of *AMUST* chose to publish in the readers comments section a short but vicious attack on Israel by Gary Dargan, who has in the past made allegations published in *AMUST* that Australian Jews are disloyal to their country. In his comment about the Israeli ban on six Palestinian NGOs for close links to the terrorist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Dargan states that “It’s typical of Israel, one of the world’s most murderous terrorist organisations, branding the targets of its crimes against humanity as terrorists.”

Also in *AMUST*’s December issue was scathing criticism of the US (“The contradictions between two Americas”) by the newspaper’s managing editor Zia Ahmad. His editorial concluded by condemning the US for “its domestic record of inherent racism, long time belligerent but failing foreign policy, war mongering record from the Vietnam war to the

**“Noting the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, al-Dawla rehashed the famous conspiracy that a dark force was behind that event which was merely an excuse to invade Muslim countries”**

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so-called war on terror resulting in the destruction of so many countries in the Middle East.” And of course, worst of all, according to Ahmad, was Washington’s “unflinching support for an apartheid settler state of Israel.”

## GUMSHOE NEWS

### The People Are Unaware of the War Being Conducted Against Them

October 12, 2021 32



Child “surrenders” to the Gestapo in Warsaw ghetto, Photo: Getty images

Screenshot from Gumshoe News

*Gumshoe News*, an Australian one-stop-shop for looney conspiracies, fervent anti-Israel attacks, antisemitism and Holocaust denial, was exposed in the *AIR* in Feb. 2021.

In October, *Gumshoe News* republished an anti-vaccination and COVID conspiracy article (Oct. 12) titled “The People Are Unaware of the War Being Conducted Against Them.” What was most disturbing is the Holocaust distortion practised by the editors when they chose to accompany the article with the famous Warsaw Ghetto Boy photo of a Jewish child raising his hands in fear while Nazi soldiers point their guns at him. On *Gumshoe News*, the caption of the picture reads “Child ‘surrenders’ to the Gestapo in Warsaw ghetto” – apparently casting doubt on the authenticity of the whole horrific scene. This picture did not accompany the article in question when it was first published on a different website.

AIR

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search Associate at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University and a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya.

## MORE WEBINARING WITH AIJAC

Jamie Hyams

**A**IJAC’s very successful webinar series continued through 2021, with numerous fascinating speakers providing a variety of important insights and perspectives on numerous different issues (For summaries of AIJAC’s earlier webinars, see the July 2020, Nov. 2020 and May 2021 editions of the *AIR*). Here is a summary of each of their presentations.

### David Schenker – April 28

David Schenker, a Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and former high-ranking White House and Pentagon official discussed, “From Trump to Biden: Shifting Policies Towards the Middle East.” He outlined a number of apparent changes between the two administrations, the most obvious being the end of Trump’s maximum pressure campaign against Iran in favour of attempting to return to the JCPOA nuclear deal and on the Palestinian front, but also continuities. He noted Iran was pursuing its own maximum pressure campaign of violence against the US, and urged the US to retain sanctions as leverage to pursue a broader deal.

### Ambassador Dore Gold – May 12

Dore Gold, President of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and former Director General of Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave an update on the situation in Israel two days after the Gaza conflict commenced. Of the violence in Jerusalem that Hamas used as a pretext for initiating the conflict, he said, “I have to say that the evidence that this is something that was incited and planned is overwhelming.” He said he believed Hamas initiated the violence to try to break down the Abraham Accords and damage improving relations between Israel’s Jews and Arabs.

### Bassem Eid – June 1

Jerusalem-based political analyst and Palestinian human rights pioneer Bassem Eid set out the “Palestinian Case Against Hamas”. He said Gaza’s people want to get rid of Hamas, which always starts any violence between it and

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Webinar guests (L-R, Top to Bottom) Alexander Downer; David Schenker; Karen Mock; Behnam Ben Taleblu; Ehud Yaari; Irwin Cotler; Tal Becker; Seth Frantzman and David Rich

Israel. He stated, “In my opinion, the Hamas are...sacrificing their own people. We saw recently how the Hamas leaders hiding themselves in the tunnels, they have shelters to protect themselves. But the other two million civilians, they have no shelters...And Hamas is not care about his people. Hamas is much more care about their own political agenda, how to gain power, and how to gain riches.”

#### **Ehud Yaari – June 8**

Ehud Yaari, Israel’s leading Middle Eastern affairs commentator, spoke about “Israel’s Next Government – Domestic & International Challenges.” Yaari was sceptical about Israel’s then-new broad coalition Government. He said it was unprecedented that there were agreements between Yair Lapid’s Yesh Atid party and every other party, with the primary agreement between Yesh Atid and incoming PM Naftali Bennett’s Yamina party giving each of them a veto over any decisions.

Overall, he described it as a complex puzzle with many contradictions to eject Binyamin Netanyahu from office.

He also said that Hamas leaders were claiming victory in the Gaza conflict, but had suffered a severe blow.

#### **Dr Emanuele Ottolenghi – June 29**

Emanuele Ottolenghi, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies, addressed “Hezbollah and the Toxic Terror Crime Convergence.” He explained that Hezbollah is different to other terror groups that use crime to finance their activities, because its crime and terror had merged. Hezbollah, he said, is especially involved in the drug trade, but has also set up a global money-laundering network that services criminal syndicates. He added that its international criminal operators provide logistical support for its terrorists, and it has established criminal networks in many countries, including Australia.

#### **Seth Frantzman – July 15**

*Jerusalem Post* columnist and drone expert Seth Frantzman spoke about “Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah: The growing drone and rocket threats to Israel.” Israel, he said, leads the world in drone technology. He argued that Hamas had carefully planned and choreographed the May conflict, using it to test out Israel’s missile defences against barrage attack, and noted it had, for the first time, used a drone to attack Israel. However, Frantzman believes Iran exaggerates its advances in drone and missile technology, arguing if it really worked, Iran would keep it for attacks rather than continually showing it off.

#### **Dave Rich – July 26**

Dave Rich, Director of Policy at the UK Community Security Trust, and an expert on antisemitism, terrorism and extremism, discussed “Antisemitism in 2021”. He explained that modern antisemitism comes from the left, the right and radical Muslims. New forms, such as accusing Israel of being the same as the Nazis, mix with classical tropes. There was a huge escalation in antisemitic incidents during the Gaza conflict. COVID-19 also brought new strains of antisemitism – claims that COVID-19 is good because it kills Jews, conspiracy theories that Jews created the virus or perpetrated a hoax pandemic, and assertions that Israel is an equivalent to COVID-19.

#### **Ehud Yaari – Aug. 6**

Yaari’s next topic was “Gaza, COVID and Iran: The Key Challenges for Israel’s New Government.” Iran, he said, was not interested in reviving the JCPOA and was making many demands the US could not accept. At the same time, Iran was dropping its doctrine of strategic patience against Israel, and seeing how Israel reacted to attacks on its assets. He felt that the Biden Administration wasn’t likely to push for final status talks between Israel and the Palestinians, instead encouraging small-step agreements on matters such as security and economic cooperation. Meanwhile, tension between Turkey and Iran was causing Turkey to rethink its diplomatic strategy, he said.

#### **Dr Michael Rubin – Aug. 20**

Michael Rubin, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and former Pentagon official, addressed “The Implications of the Afghanistan disaster.” He explained that, while the Afghan forces had been fighting the Taliban, the US provided air cover, intelligence and logistics, but despite the Afghans having been trained to work with that support, cut it off, knee-capping the Afghans on

its way out. Meanwhile, Pakistan continued to provide the Taliban essential support. The withdrawal, he said, had empowered Islamists and US enemies. Together with previous actions, it had normalised US betrayal of allies, and showed no country should predicate its security on the word of the US, he said.

#### **The Hon. Alexander Downer AC – Aug. 30**

Australia's longest serving foreign minister, Alexander Downer spoke on "Australia's Performance in a Challenging and Changing World." He said the tension between Australia and China was all China's doing, with Australia having done nothing wrong in protecting its national interests. China had tried to bully Australia to set an example, but learned Australia can be "pretty robust". He is concerned that internal dynamics are weakening the US ability to be a "beacon to the world." He argued Trump was right to have abandoned the nuclear deal with Iran, as it only helped Iran, and instead focus on the Abraham Accords.

#### **Dr Tal Becker – Sept. 13**

Tal Becker, the Australian-born Director of Legal Affairs for Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a highly respected peace negotiator, discussed "One Year of the Abraham Accords: Their Impact and Future." Becker himself was involved in drafting the Accords, which he said were the product of two decades of diplomacy, and driven by a variety of issues, not just a shared threat from Iran. It shouldn't have been surprising the Arab countries didn't put the Palestinian issue first, he said, because it is natural for countries with common interests to cooperate. Israel, he added, was making significant efforts to expand the Accords.

#### **Prof. Irwin Cotler & Dr Karen Mock – Oct. 6**

Former Canadian Attorney-General Irwin Cotler and fellow distinguished human rights advocate Karen Mock spoke on "The infamous 2001 Durban World Conference against Racism and the Ongoing Challenge of Antisemitism." Mock described how antisemitism was rampant at the 2001 Durban Conference and its preparatory meetings. Cotler described the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as "not only the most authoritative, but representative definition that we have" which is "anchored in human rights law, anchored in inequality rights law." He added that, in contrast to Durban, it is "a blueprint for protecting human rights, for protecting equality rights, for protecting freedom of speech."

#### **Behnam Ben Taleblu – Oct. 26**

Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow at the FDD, considered "Iran: Is There a Plan B?" He noted that currently the US is interested in de-escalation while Iran is interested in escalation, and Iran was responding to US tolerance of Iranian provocation with more violence, violations

and nuclear advances. At an absolute minimum, he said, US steps should include censuring Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency, working with its European partners to snap back sanctions on Iran, broadening the JCPOA and cracking down on Iran's oil revenue. Otherwise there clearly is no Plan B as an alternative to hopes to resume the nuclear deal.

#### **Moroccan Ambassador to Australia His Excellency Karim Medrek – Nov. 4**

Ambassador Karim Medrek spoke about "Morocco, Israel and the Jewish World: a new era of relations." He said there had always been peaceful relations between Morocco's Jewish and Muslim communities, and the Moroccan Jewish community has always been important. The Abraham Accords as they relate to Morocco shouldn't be called normalisation, rather a consolidation of relations. He expects the improved relations will help bring prosperity for both Morocco and Israel, opening a real partnership for North Africa with the Indo-Pacific through the Middle East, and establishing a new paradigm for peace in the Middle East.

#### **David Horowitz – Nov. 15**

Founding editor of the *Times of Israel* David Horowitz' topic was "Assessing the Bennett-Lapid Government and Prospects for 2022." He called it the most implausible coalition in Israel's history, but noted it had passed Israel's first budget in three years, and said as long as Binyamin Netanyahu leads the opposition, it's easier for the diverse coalition to stay together. He said it was too early to say whether relations between Israel's Jewish and Arab communities would improve, and the Government's main challenges will include the Iran nuclear issue and relations with the Palestinian Authority – describing PA President Abbas as "a very, very difficult partner."

#### **Dr Jonathan Schanzer – Nov. 24**

Jonathan Schanzer, Senior Vice President for Research at the FDD, covered "Gaza Conflict 2021: Hamas, Israel and Eleven Days of War", having just written a book on the topic. He said he had watched Israeli, Arabic and Western television coverage of the war, and it was as if the Western media was covering a different conflict, often being more anti-Israel than even the Arabic media. Lessons the media should learn from the war include not to ignore the internal Palestinian dynamics that often contribute to wars with Israel and not to ignore Israeli coverage. To avoid Hamas starting another war, he said, don't enter another nuclear deal with Iran, because that will just give Iran money to pass on to Hamas.

AIR

*Recordings of and excerpts from all these webinars are available on AIJAC's website, YouTube channel and Facebook page.*





## The Bystanders

### Final Account

Director: Luke Holland; 94 mins; available to view on Amazon Prime for A\$6.99

Linda Marric

“**M**onsters exist, but they are too few in numbers to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.”

These words from Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi ring truer than ever as they act as an opener to Luke Holland’s harrowing Shoah documentary *Final Account*. In it, the British filmmaker, who has subsequently died, travelled to Germany in the hope of understanding the collective psyche that resulted in the murder of millions.

In 2008, Holland began interviewing the last living generation of Germans who had lived and even participated in Hitler’s barbaric persecution of Jews. These weren’t the infamous names we all grew up knowing, but everyday men and women who stood by and watched it all happen. These were also the young men and women who became members of Hitler Youth, Wehrmacht fighters and concentration camp guards who enabled the slaughter of innocent lives. A decade and 250 interviews later, Holland created a damning document of denial and collective amnesia.

He mixes in-depth witness statements and previously unseen archival material that goes some way into explaining the shift in moral norms



What do Germans who watched the Holocaust happen have to say for themselves today? (Image: Focus Features)

that allowed for the unimaginable to happen. Perhaps the most shocking aspect of his film is the nonchalance with which some of his subjects recount those events.

Quite beside the willingness to hop on Hitler’s destructive bandwagon out of nationalist pride, one must also remember that these people watched their neighbours, former school friends, family doctors and local shop owners rounded up and sent to their death without so much as lifting a finger to help. What’s even more shocking is while some come across as genuinely remorseful and ashamed

of that chapter of German history, others still refuse to accept accountability, and in some cases go as far as to make excuses for Hitler’s actions.

As we observe interviewee after interviewee swear blind that they either didn’t know or were just following orders, it falls upon characters such as Heinrich Schulze to truly demonstrate how casual it all felt. Returning to an old family farmhouse near Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, the old man tells a story about finding starving Jewish camp escapees hiding in the out houses and calling the guards on them. Elsewhere a visibly frail Karl Hollander admits to still honouring Hitler’s memory and point blank refuses to blame him for what happened.

This is a troubling and arresting account of the dangers of conformity within societal norms. There are some clear parallels being drawn here with the current wave of nationalist fervour flourishing all around the world. This is further cemented by Hans Wierk, one of Holland’s more remorseful interviewees, as he addresses a group of students, who seem to hold worryingly right-wing views. “I ask only this of you,” he tells them. “Do not let yourself be blinded.” AIR

Linda Marric is a freelance film critic and interviewer with a degree in Film Studies from King’s College London. © Jewish Chronicle [UK] ([www.thejc.com](http://www.thejc.com)), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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# Fighting Back

## UN antisemitism in the aftermath of Durban IV

Anne Bayefsky

**“T**he United Nations is a place where lies are told.” So said Daniel Patrick Moynihan on Nov. 10, 1975. As America’s ambassador to the UN, Moynihan was addressing the General Assembly after it had adopted a resolution declaring the self-determination of the Jewish people – Zionism – to be a form of racism.

Forty-six years later, on Sept. 22, 2021, the General Assembly restated that lie. This time, though, 38 countries voted with their feet and boycotted the place where lies are told. That’s more than the 35 nations that in 1975 had voted against the resolution rightly characterised by Moyni-

han as an “abomination of antisemitism.” It was the first major global loss for the Palestinian legal and political war on the Jewish state in a long time.

The blow was delivered at the fourth iteration of the UN’s “anti-racist” world conference, which was first convened in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. Durban IV had been carefully planned for over a year as a 20th-anniversary commemoration of what became a global antisemitic hatefest. NGO representatives and members of so-called civil society roamed the conference grounds and the streets of Durban with signs that read: “For the liberation of Quds, machine-guns based upon FAITH and

ISLAM must be used,” “the martyrs’ blood irrigates the tree of revolution in Palestine,” and “down with Nazi-Israeli apartheid.”

In government backrooms, negotiators at the first Durban conference had deleted draft language from the final declaration that would have “underline[d] the role of political leaders in combating anti-Semitism” and urged states to “provide information about good practices for combating anti-Semitism.” They got rid of the call for “legal and judicial cooperation in combating anti-Semitism” and the recommendation to “take action against Holocaust denial” and promote “the study of the Holocaust.” In short, the Durban Declaration that emerged from the 2001 world conference replicated the 1975 lie and claimed that Palestinians were victims of Israeli racism. The only state the declaration specifically denounced under the UN banner of combatting racism and xenophobia was the Jewish state.

The United States and Israel walked out of the conference and, for the past 20 years, have refused to legitimise Durban and its message. The UN has done just the opposite. Successive UN high commissioners for human rights – Mary Robinson, Navi Pillay, and Michelle Bachelet – have championed Durban. Pillay, a native of Durban herself, launched Durban II and III in the form of follow-up conferences and a 10th-anniversary gala.

In the run-up to 2021, Palestinians and their UN allies believed that they had been handed a unique opportunity to reframe their cause in terms that played on perceived American bigotry. Filling the airwaves of UN-WebTV came broadcasts, statements, resolutions, and reports on American racism and the alleged despoliation of the US Constitution and its national soul. In December 2020, the General Assembly decided to mark the 20th anniversary of the Durban conference and give the event the theme of “people of African descent.” Palestin-



“The United Nations is a place where lies are told” – Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Source: United Nations)



ian officials imaginatively rewrote their history as a tale that mirrored that of African Americans.

Durban IV took place not in South Africa but in New York and was deliberately scheduled to capitalise on the presence of hundreds of world leaders already assembled for the annual opening of the General Assembly. And so, on Sept. 22, 2021, the usual UN “General Debate” was interrupted midway for the affair.

The boycott spoiled the party. Outside the UN event, standing by Israel were the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, over three-quarters of European Union states – including France and Germany – and others from Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Inside, was another story. Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Hossein stated his appreciation for what he logically presumed was an invitation to promote antisemitism. He was following in the footsteps of then-President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who opened the “anti-racism” exercise at Durban II in 2009 by questioning the veracity of the Holocaust and decrying the “ugly faces” of Zionists. In 2021, Hossein told the Durban IV crowd: “I’m honoured to announce that my nation’s willpower is dedicated to the total elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, including apartheid and Zionism. These are crimes that constitute horrible atrocities.”

The Durban audience also heard from Palestinian foreign-affairs spokesman Riad al-Maliki, who conjured up every form of cultural appropriation and historical revisionism he could. There was Israeli “apartheid,” repeated references to “our African brothers and sisters,” and “our peoples”. He claimed that Palestinians and blacks were victims of the “same exceptionalism” and “privilege”, and concluded by “reaffirming the bond between the Palestinian and African struggles, an ongoing fight of two



Predictably, Palestinian FM Riad Al-Maliki and Iranian FM Amir Hossein used Durban IV to denounce Zionism (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

peoples dehumanised and relegated to inferior status in the context of racial regimes.”

No matter that Arabs in Israel – one-fifth of the population – have more democratic rights and freedoms than in any Arab state; that an Islamist party is part of Israel’s governing coalition (while banned in Egypt and Jordan); that Arabs volunteer to serve in the Israel Defence Forces, represent Israel as ambassadors, and are decision-makers on the Israeli Supreme Court. On the other hand, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has publicly stated that “in a final resolution, we would not see the presence of a single Israeli, civilian or soldier, on our lands” – in other words, a *Judenrein* Palestinian state not defiled by “their filthy feet”.

**B**ecause the UN broadcast the event worldwide, many observers noticed that the lies being told were not only about Jews. The opening session of Durban IV featured Saudi Arabia, which had been given the honour of speaking on behalf of the 54 states in the Asian regional group. In a country where women are chattel, the public practice of Christianity is illegal, and critics are flogged or otherwise dispatched,

Saudi UN Ambassador Abdallah Al-Mouallimi said, “We reaffirm our belief, as we have always, in the importance of spreading a counsel of peace and dialogue among civilisations, highlighting tolerance and respect for diversity.”

China, now devastating a million Uyghurs, contributed this to the UN’s Durban forum: “China believes in a culture of respect, tolerance, and equality, and a social environment free from discrimination.” And Qatar (where non-citizens without political rights and few civil liberties are 90% of the population) added this to the Durban hymn book: “We aim to strengthen the values of tolerance and equality for everyone... with 1 million foreigners living with Qataris in perfect harmony.”

Durban IV’s scripted performance culminated in the General Assembly’s adoption of a “political declaration.” It reaffirmed the original Durban Declaration, demanded its “full implementation,” and called for it to be “mainstreamed” throughout the entire “United Nations system.”

Here’s what it did *not* do. On July 23, 2021, during negotiations, the European Union asked for a declaration that “unequivocally condemns antisemitism in all its forms and manifestations, and urges states to intensify efforts to prevent and combat antisemitism, including hate speech and violence motivated by antisemitism.” The proposal was rejected along with an EU call at the end of August for the declaration to encourage “national action plans to prevent and combat antisemitism.”

The Palestinians and South Africans evidently believed that they could spin the story and minimise any negative fallout. A week before Durban IV, on Sept. 14, 2021, the Palestinian Authority (PA) issued a statement railing against the boycott and representing themselves as torch carriers for “people of African descent.” Notwithstanding the UN’s own concerted effort to portray Durban as



having “transcended divisive and intolerant approaches,” in the words of Navi Pillay, the Palestinian meltdown gave the game away. In the words of the PA: “Rooted in the valiant struggle of South Africans against apartheid, the Durban Conference serves as basis for anti-racism advocacy efforts worldwide... The Palestinian people, whose noble struggle against Israel’s apartheid continues, consider themselves an integral component in the efforts to combat all forms of systematic racism and discrimination.”

The plight of Africans enslaved in Libya, the Baha’is tortured in Iran, the Africans subjugated in Mauritania, the clans starved in Somalia, the ethnic groups slaughtered in Sudan and South Sudan, and the human beings relegated to mass graves in Ethiopia – none of them elicited a single word in eight hours of speeches about combating racism and xenophobia and peddling the Durban mantra.

Clearly, selling Durban required historical revisionism, a point exemplified by Natalia Kamen, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund. She intoned to her Durban IV listeners: “I was present in Durban to witness the power of voice, inclusion.” This was an utter falsehood, as every Jew present at the first Durban conference (myself included) could attest.

In addition to sacrificing the truth, Durban IV laid bare that combating racism in UN circles comes with another kind of price tag. The Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, spelled out a list of demands embedded in the implementation of the Durban Declaration: reparations in the form of “a technology transfer program”, “capital transfers”, “debt cancelations”, “a reparatory restructuring of international institutions,” a “restructure” of the “terms of international trade and the... rules of international finance and economic governance,” as well as a “transformative global development agenda.” (All of which, she assured Durban fans, “need not be contentious.”)

In thinking about Durban IV, a few conclusions suggest themselves.

First, the UN is still a place where lies are told. And it’s a place where calls for the destruction of a UN member state are answered not by cutting the mic and escorting the speaker off the premises but instead by “I thank the minister of foreign affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Second, for the enemies of Israel who had high hopes that the 20th-anniversary celebration would fast-track Israel to political isolation and oblivion, the global gathering was instead a major setback. Not only did 38 states boycott the event, but they boycotted it specifically because the demonisation of Israel was recognised as a form of antisemitism.

Third, remember the identity of the three European nations that

sion of inquiry” aimed at Israel and tasked with uncovering “all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict, including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity.” And whom did the UN select to chair this commission to ferret out the perpetrators of racial and religious discrimination in this context? None other than Navi Pillay, reigning monarch of all things Durban. This is the same woman who sat glued to her seat at Durban II, directly behind Ahmadinejad as he laid out his case for a second Holocaust. Multiple diplomats got up and walked out when they heard his words. But Pillay – who had received his speech in advance of delivery – stayed where she was.



Michelle Bachelet, the latest UN Human Rights Commissioner to champion Durban (Source: United Nations)

openly aligned themselves with the inveterate enemies of the Jewish state. Belgium, Ireland, and Portugal all spoke out in favour of the affair. Another handful of EU states – Finland, Luxembourg, and Malta – refused to boycott it.

Fourth, the Palestinian leadership has no intention of letting facts get in the way of UN fictions. After the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in May 2021, the Palestinians manoeuvred the UN Human Rights Council into creating the mother of all anti-Israel investigations – an investigation with no equal in the history of the United Nations. The Council established “an ongoing” commis-

There’s a telling postscript to Durban IV. A mere two weeks after the event, the UN’s Israel-bashers were back in action and attempting to reverse the moral defeat imparted by the Durban boycott. The UN Human Rights Council provided the path.

Led by four co-sponsors – Cameroon (on behalf of African states), Turkey, Yemen, and Chile – the Council was presented with a resolution on combating racism, xenophobia, and related intolerance. It was irrelevant that the Islamic states of Cameroon, Turkey, and Yemen play lead roles in promoting such intolerance, including antisemitism. Chile, which is not

even a member of the Human Rights Council, took its cue from its former president, Michelle Bachelet, who is the current UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, an architect of Durban IV, and a supporter of the BDS campaign to gut Jewish self-determination.

The proposed resolution warmly welcomed Durban IV and its “political declaration,” and ordered the UN Secretary-General and the High Commissioner to produce an “outreach and a public information campaign for the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary... and follow-up thereto.” In other words, the resolution was diametrically opposed to the policy decision that had been taken by the 38 states that had boycotted Durban IV.

Twelve of those 38 states were also members of the 47-seat Human Rights Council and, therefore, faced the quandary of how to vote. They were Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay.

The resolution was cunningly crafted and ostensibly about combating racism. Opponents to it could anticipate that their objection would be framed as racist, as indeed it was. Additionally, objectors knew that they didn’t have the numbers to prevail. This is because almost all UN members avoid exposing the human rights charade in operation at the UN’s top human rights body. Some of the boycotting countries preferred to do battle on other ignominious resolutions on the Council’s agenda and worried about expending limited political capital. Opposing yet another anti-Jewish and anti-Israel UN resolution was annoying and troublesome – precisely the UN environment that antisemites can so readily manufacture.

The states that boycotted Durban IV, though, could not avoid the choice either to allow the resolution to be adopted by consensus or to “call for the vote” and demonstrate their objections. Britain stepped up and called for the vote. On Oct. 11, 2021, the final tally was 32 in favour, 10

**“Over the course of seven decades of the violent rejection of the Jewish state, it is the United Nations that has provided Israel’s enemies with the political weaponry to avoid peace”**


against, and five abstentions. Accompanying their no votes, the UK (speaking also on behalf of Australia), Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic made statements in “explanation of vote” that specifically referenced the issue of antisemitism.

As with the boycott of the 20th anniversary itself, those negative votes indicated that key democracies in the United Nations understand this truth: The UN’s discriminatory treatment of Israel, and especially Durban’s racism lie, is a form of modern antisemitism. That is truly important.

Still, these states are in the UN minority. The resolution was adopted. It demands the launch of a new UN “communications strategy” to flog the Durban Declaration and all its components worldwide, making special use of “social media” and targeting “young people,” the “news media,” and “educational entities”.

Ambassador Moynihan concluded his 1975 condemnation with these words: “A great evil has been loosed upon the world. The abomination of antisemitism... Evil enough in itself, but more ominous by far is the realisation that now presses upon us – the realisation that if there were no General Assembly, this could never have happened.”

Almost a half a century later, the realisation presses upon us that if there were no General Assembly, the outrages of Durban I, II, III, and IV could never have happened. Over the course of seven decades of the violent rejection of the Jewish state, it is the United Nations that has provided Israel’s enemies with the political weaponry to avoid peace. It has promoted “Zionism is racism”, “apartheid Israel”, and Durban “victims” in order to isolate, sanction, and ultimately eliminate the Jewish state.

Ominous, but, as the boycott of Durban IV proved, the UN is not omnipotent. At the same time, it makes doing the right thing more difficult, not less. UN-driven antisemitism will not be impeded by the faint of heart. 

*Prof. Anne Bayefsky is the Director of the Touro Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust, and President of Human Rights Voices. © Commentary magazine (www.commentarymagazine.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*





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# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### TERROR VISION

A worrying increase in Palestinian terror attacks on Israelis has not gone unreported in Australia.

This includes *SBS TV* "World News" on Nov. 22, which reported the murder of an Israeli tour guide and the wounding of "two civilians and two police officers" after "a Palestinian gunman opened fire near a holy site in east Jerusalem."

SBS said the gunman "was later identified as a teacher and a known member of Hamas. It's the second recent attack in the Old City. Last week, a Palestinian youth stabbed two officers and was shot dead."

*SBS TV* "World News" (Dec. 5) also showed CCTV footage of an ultra-Orthodox man being stabbed in Jerusalem by a Palestinian assailant who was shot dead by Israeli security forces. The *Australian's* Dec. 6 report of the same incident was given the accurate headline "Cops kill Palestinian assailant" and noted that the attacker was from the West Bank.

### NO JOY IN COURT RULING

On *ABC TV* "The World" (Nov. 26), Middle East correspondent Tom Joyner reported on an Israeli Supreme Court ruling rejecting Palestinian Dr Izzeldin Abuelaish's legal appeal for an apology and compensation over the tragic deaths of three daughters and a niece killed by IDF shelling during the 2008/09 Gaza war.

Joyner noted that the court said the shelling "was an act of war" meaning "the military isn't liable." He added that "Israel's military has long maintained that they fired on the apartment building where the doctor lived thinking they'd seen fighters belonging to Hamas, the militant group that controls Gaza, on the upper lev-

els of his home. Something the doctor has always denied."

In fact, the building was targeted when IDF soldiers saw people on the roof acting in a manner that suggested they were lookouts for Hamas. The IDF also said there was evidence that Hamas arms were stored in the building without Abuelaish's knowledge.

### MEDIA MASH UP

In the *Canberra Times* (Nov. 22), Australia Palestine Advocacy Network vice-president Nasser Mashni used the appointment of former NSW Jewish Board of Deputies CEO Vic Alhadeff to the board of SBS as an opportunity to smear both him and Israel.

Mashni said in appointing Alhadeff "what many Australians hear is that they don't care to see Palestine and Israel reported on accurately."

Yet, in terms of accuracy, Mashni was guilty of making his own factually challenged statements, including that "Israeli soldiers fire[d] rubber bullets at people praying at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, even as Palestinians in Jerusalem fought to avoid a repeat of the brutal ethnic cleansing of 1948. Then Israel rained munitions on Gaza, in what Israeli commentators routinely call 'mowing the grass', a ghastly euphemism for violence which saw over 260 people – including 66 children – killed in a week, and the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip decimated."

Footage clearly shows Israelis security forces responding to Palestinians throwing stones and Molotov cocktails from within the Mosque. Similarly, Israel did not "rain" munitions on Gaza. It carefully responded to the thousands of rockets fired indiscriminately at Israel, including by targeting Hamas' military infrastructure deliberately located in high density civilian

areas in Gaza.

And "mowing the grass" is a not-so-routine phrase meaning simply managing the constant military threat posed by Hamas and similar terrorist movements in the absence of any acceptable way to permanently end it.

Furthermore, Mashni's so-called "brutal ethnic cleansing" refers in fact to what is merely a long running property dispute – in which Israel's Supreme Court has bent over backwards to avoid evicting Palestinians who it has found are living on property they do not own. And in 1948, it was Jews who were ethnically cleansed from east Jerusalem.

Mashni also asserted that "the world increasingly grasps that Palestinians either live in exile or under the boot of a merciless military occupation." Israel, he falsely claimed, "has been criticised by almost every country in the world... for completely disregarding Palestinian rights."

The reality is that as a former journalist and newspaper editor Alhadeff is well equipped to meet the statutory duty incumbent on SBS board members "to ensure... that the gathering and presentation by the SBS of news and information is accurate and is balanced." Maybe that is what has Mashni so wildly upset?

### SEEING RED OVER GREENS

The *Australian* website (Dec. 1) reported that Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA) President Jeremy Leibler sent a letter to Greens federal leader Adam Bandt that "accused the party of not consulting any mainstream or elected Jewish community groups in formulating its new anti-Semitism statement" and criticised it for "pushing back" against the major parties' endorsement of the Inter-

national Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism.

The report noted that the Morrison Government had recently adopted the working definition and that "Labor endorsed the working definition following consultations with Jewish community leaders", which the Greens failed to do.

Greens multiculturalism spokeswoman Senator Janet Rice was cited saying the party was "committed to fighting anti-Semitism, racism and hatred 'in all its forms'," but was concerned "how the definition may be weaponised in order to further particular political agendas and questioned

how useful the pursuit of adoption of the definition can be in combating antisemitism."

Leibler was quoted explaining that the definition "explicitly states that 'criticism of Israel, similar to that levelled against any other country, cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic'. However, where the Jewish people, collectively, are held responsible for Israeli government actions or when Israel's right to exist is challenged, a dangerous line has been crossed."

## FESTIVAL FLOP

A failed attempt by pro-Palestinian groups to pressure the Melbourne

Queer Film Festival (MQFF) to drop Israeli films from its line up generated a modicum of mainstream media coverage.

This included the *Age* culture writer Karl Quinn's report on Nov. 26, stating that "The festival has been accused of helping to 'perpetrate institutional violence' against Palestinians by including an Israeli feature, *The Swimmer*, in its program."

Quinn quoted a letter written to festival organisers in March attacking the inclusion of a film from Israeli director Eytan Fox, accusing him of "pinkwashing" – perpetuating an image of Israel as a queer-friendly safe-haven in order to conceal the



## IN PARLIAMENT

Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (Greens, NSW) – Dec. 1 – "Palestinians for decades have been amongst the most oppressed people in the world... subject to daily humiliation, brutality and violence... Yet as soon as you raise these injustices you are hounded and condemned. Shamefully and shamelessly they try to label you as anti-Semitic... the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism... has been used to silence critics of the Israeli government for its human rights abuses of Palestinian people... the ultimate taboo in Australian politics is to talk about the human rights of the Palestinian people."

Senator **Anne Urquhart** (ALP, Tas.) – Nov. 30 – "This includes labelling a man like Mr El Halabi [arrested in Israel for ties with Hamas] a terrorist and providing absolutely no evidence... We have recently seen [Israel] use the same tactics with civil society organisations in the West Bank, with six of the most respected Palestinian NGOs now officially classified as terrorist organisations."

Greens Leader **Adam Bandt** (Greens, Melbourne) – Nov. 30 – "All people have the right to peace, justice and freedom... But, for decades, Palestinians have lived under occupation, and they are denied these rights... Australia should recognise Palestine and advocate meaningfully for an end to the occupation... and ending the Gaza blockade."

**Maria Vamvakinou** (ALP, Calwell) – Nov. 22 – "We... continue to see Palestinians suffer the indignities and violence of occupation and conflict... Action means ending the crippling military occupation, the world's longest in modern history."

**Mark Coulton** (Nat., Parkes) – Nov. 22 – "If you're for Palestine, somehow you're supposed to be anti-Semitic... I think that we're beyond [a two-state solution]. I think we have a level of apartheid, with a suppressed people, and the West Bank has

been cut up to such an extent that I don't know how that would work."

**Alicia Payne** (ALP, Canberra) – Nov. 22 – "The establishment of Israel resulted in more than 700,000 Palestinians being forcibly removed... they and their families... have the right to return to their homes... Gazans... should be allowed to come and go from the Gaza Strip whenever they like."

**Ken O'Dowd** (Nat., Flynn) – Nov. 22 – "I've seen firsthand what it's like to live under apartheid rule. At a mosque in Hebron, a line going into the mosque had Israelis on one side and Palestinians on the other side. If that's not apartheid, I'd like to know what apartheid is. All [Palestinians] seek is fairness, equality and democratic rights for all parties who live in that one stretch of land... The Gaza Strip should be abolished. Let the people be free to move outside those borders."

**Andrew Leigh** (ALP, Fenner) – Nov. 30 – "Extremists are exposing vaccine-hesitant audiences to anti-Semitic propaganda on a wide scale... In Melbourne, recent anti-vax protests were attended by several prominent neo-Nazis and addressed by a speaker who once decried the influence of Australian Jews in media and business. The organising page of the Adelaide anti-vaccination rally claimed, 'Satanic Jews run the health industry.'"

Senator **Paul Scarr** (Lib., QLD) – Nov. 30 – "Australia should adopt [the IHRA definition of antisemitism]... That is extremely important to note, that the mere act of denying the state of Israel its right of existence is in itself an act of anti-Semitism because to do that is to deny the Jewish people their right of self-determination."

**Julian Leeser** (Lib., Berowra) – Nov. 29 – "Sadly we're witnessing a growth of Holocaust denial around the world... In parts of the Muslim world it is a way of playing into an anti-Jewish message that bolsters an anti-Israel message. In the West it is fuelled by social media and a regression... where people seem incapable of reasoning and assessing sources of information... to tell fact from fiction."

immense injustices committed against the Palestinian people, especially queer Palestinians... An essential component of pinkwashing – and the reason it is so fervently supported by the Israeli government – is its utility in propagating the notion that Israel is ‘the only liberal democracy in the Middle East.’”

*The Swimmer* was attacked, Quinn noted, not because it was about Palestinians, but “BDS activists claim that, in order to receive [state] funding, [Israeli] artists must sign a contract that includes two clauses that declare: (1) I will not undermine the policies of the state of Israel, and (2) I will do my best to serve the policies of the state of Israel. This is state propaganda.”

Quinn’s piece was later updated to include Israel Film Fund executive director Lisa Shiloach-Uzrad saying, “there is not an ounce of truth” in the claim that Israeli filmmakers must sign such clauses, and that “Although the Israel Film Fund is supported by the Israeli ministry of culture, we are proud to say that it allows for complete freedom of speech and promotes artistic expression, even though many films do not show Israel in the best of light.”

The report quoted MQFF co-president David Micallef declaring, “We will not discriminate based on country or national identity... If in the future a film were to come from Israel, it would be assessed on its merits.”

The report mischaracterised BDS as merely “seek[ing] to use cultural boycotts as a way of pressuring Israel to change its policies towards Palestinians.” In fact, statements by BDS founders make it clear they seek to eliminate Israel and replace it with an Arab-majority Palestinian state.

## ONE EXTREME TO ANOTHER?

An AFP report in the *Guardian Australia* (Dec. 8) noting that the UAE will begin weekends on Saturday and

not Friday to make it more globally competitive, included a footnote that “The new arrangement is another bold step for the UAE, which last year bucked decades of Arab consensus by normalising relations with Israel, unlocking hundreds of millions of dollars in deals.”

Yet when the deal was first announced in August 2020, the response by *The Observer* – the Guardian’s weekend edition – was hostile, stating that, “By breaking ranks with the 2002 Arab peace initiative and setting a precedent for other Gulf states, the UAE, egged on by Trump, has measurably reduced Israel’s incentive to negotiate what has long been considered the only available, just and lasting Middle East peace settlement – a two-state solution honouring the aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike. Extremists on either side may ultimately be the historical beneficiaries.”

## VANISHING TRUTH REAPPEARS

Readers may recall last month’s “Noted and Quoted” pointed out how journalist Janine di Giovanni’s claims on *ABC Radio National* “Religion & Ethics” (Nov. 10) blaming Israel and not Hamas for the precipitous decline in the Christian population in Gaza were largely at odds with what she herself wrote in her new book *The Vanishing*.

It was therefore unsurprising to see that even in a sympathetic review of the book run by the *Spectator Australia* (Dec. 4) there was no mention of Israel but it was correctly noted that “in Gaza... there were 46,000 Christians in the early 1950s. Now, with Hamas in charge, perhaps only 1,000 remain.”

## A VAXXED ISSUE

The media was awash with reports of the growing incidence of protesters against COVID-19 lockdowns and mandatory vaccination making

inappropriate comparisons to the Holocaust using Nazi symbols, including Swastikas and Holocaust iconography such as the Yellow Star Jews were forced to wear by the Nazis.

In the *West Australian* (Nov. 27), Steve Liebllich, Vice President of the Jewish Community Council of WA, whose parents were Holocaust survivors, was quoted calling on people to educate themselves by visiting Holocaust museums.

Liebllich said, “The Nazis had an industrialised killing operation, the entire nation was mobilised to transport and murder people by the thousands on a daily basis... for people to talk about vaccine policy as being comparable to [that]... It’s just ridiculous.”

Holocaust academic Jan Lanicek was quoted explaining that the comparisons are “offensive, but I think the protesters want to offend, because then the media will discuss their protest and thus they gain the attention they seek.”

On Nov. 22, the *Herald Sun* ran an op-ed from AIJAC’s Naomi Levin based on a longer article in the December *AIR* looking at the deleterious effect of “comparisons used by anti-lockdown protesters to Holocaust tropes.”

The global nature of the problem was highlighted in the *Australian Financial Review* (Nov. 30) by the UK writer Edward Luce’s observation about anti-vaxxer “protesters wearing yellow stars to liken themselves to the Jewish victims of Nazism.”

Earlier, the *Herald Sun* (Nov. 14) quoted Anti-Defamation League chairman Dvir Abramovich, condemning placards circulating at protests showing Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews dressed as Adolf Hitler. Dr Abramovich explained that “There is no place in the debate about the new pandemic laws for cheap Holocaust analogies, and equating Premier Daniel Andrews to the bestial Hitler responsible for the gas chambers and the murder of six million Jews and millions of others is beyond



offensive... History has taught us that such hateful discourse can and does create a climate that can lead to actual violence."

## GOING FOR WOKE

In the *Canberra Times* (Dec. 6), journalist Gabrielle Briner, whose grandfather was a Holocaust survivor, wrote that protesting against COVID-19 measures "in a democracy... is allowed" but the Holocaust imagery they are appropriating to "demonstrate the 'hardship' and 'oppression' they're facing" is "not theirs to use" – especially because these measures are there to protect the public health.

Briner said, "Though they may not mean it, they're fuelling the anti-Semitic vitriol that is once again seeping from the sidelines into the mainstream public discourse."

Briner said, "we live in a world that is becoming increasingly unsafe for Jewish people, as anti-Semitic hate crimes spike worldwide" – citing incidents of physical and verbal attacks on Jews around the world, including an incident in London in December when "a group of men spat and threw shoes at a bus full of Jewish teens heading to a Hanukkah celebration in the central Oxford Square."

Yet, she lamented, in "this new 'woke' world, where inclusion is worshipped and racism is rejected, anti-Semitism somehow doesn't have a place in this era's definition of racism."

In the *Saturday Paper* (Dec. 4), writer and broadcaster John Safran reported seeing placards at a rally in Melbourne with the phrase "QUI?" – French for "who" – which is used by far-right groups as code for the "Jews" being behind whatever they are protesting against.

With Jews being scapegoated for the COVID-19 pandemic and governments implementing emergency measures to contain it, Safran opined that "Amazingly, the venom some on the left feel towards Jewish people

has led them to tell Jews to stay away from the anti-racism movement... Their gambit is to cast Jews as 'white' and thus not the people to talk about, or fight, racism."

## SIN OF THE TIMES

*Australian* foreign editor (Dec. 9) Greg Sheridan slammed a BBC report on the antisemitic incident in London during Hanukkah mentioned above, seeing it as a symptom of the disdain shown by some living in the West towards Western culture, of which Christianity and Judaism are "foundation stone[s]".

Sheridan wrote "The BBC... claimed there were anti-Muslim slurs shouted from the bus. Everyone on the bus denies this. The BBC later changed its report to one anti-Muslim slur, but this too is denied and may have been misheard Hebrew language cries for help... The BBC is forever desperate to find an Islamophobic element to balance any anti-Semitism it reports."

In an echo of Safran and Briner, Sheridan noted that even "though the West has its own hideous tradition of anti-Semitism" it is "a standard feature of contemporary anti-Semitism to hold Jews of any nationality, citizenship or age responsible for all actions, real and imagined, of the Israeli government".

According to Sheridan, "the BBC cannot bear to defend Jews, much less Israel, lest it unintentionally find itself defending the West."

## MANY UNHAPPY RETURNS

The lead item on the *Advertiser's* "Remember When" column for November 29 was the "International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people" but it offered no context for this day – which first started in the 1970s when the PLO succeeded in having it included as an item in one of the many anti-Israel resolutions

the United Nations General Assembly passes each year.

According to the official website of the United Nations, "on that day in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which came to be known as the Partition Resolution [which] provided for the establishment in Palestine of a 'Jewish State' and an 'Arab State'... Of the two States to be created under this resolution, only one, Israel, has so far come into being."

Missing from the UN website is the explanation why no Palestinian state "has so far come into being" – which is that Palestinian and Arab leaders rejected the Plan because it meant also living in peace alongside a Jewish state, something which some seemingly still cannot accept.

## AMAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Highlighting the real impediments to achieving lasting peace was Australian-born Israeli journalist Irris Makler's report in the December *Australian Women's Weekly* which focused on Rami Aman, a Palestinian journalist in Gaza who tries to foster peace with Israelis at a grassroots level.

The article explained that the death and destruction caused during the first Gaza war in 2008/09, convinced Aman that Palestinians needed "leaders for peace" and he was compelled to establish an NGO called the Gaza Youth Committee to reach out to likeminded Israelis.

Yet for his efforts, in April 2020, Aman was imprisoned and interrogated by Hamas for holding a Zoom conference that included more than 200 Palestinians and Israeli Jews calling for peace.

Aman said, "They accused me of collaboration, trying to make deals with Israel. They accused me of being from the rival political group, Fatah. They accused me of working for the Israeli spy service, Mossad. But I was very clear. I said none of that was true... I am not an agent for anyone."

Allon Lee

## NUKE AND NECK

The resumption and then suspension of faltering talks in Vienna aimed at resurrecting the 2015 Iran nuclear deal kept the media spotlight firmly on Iran.

Ahead of the talks, the *Australian* (Nov. 18) reported that Iran has been building advanced centrifuges since August which will help “reduce Iran’s breakout time to as little as a month.”

SBS TV “World News” (Nov. 24) quoted academic Amin Saikal explaining that Iran is “unlikely to budge”, saying “it is a question of Iran’s sovereignty and independence.”

The *Australian’s* report on Dec. 2 quoted an unnamed European official warning that “you cannot enrich to weapons grade and say that you are seeking a return to an agreement whose goal is to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program.”

In the *Spectator Australia* (Nov. 23), commentator Max Jeffery warned that “the Gulf states are also less concerned than Israel about Iran wanting nuclear weapons.” Saudi Arabia, he said, would likely cut a deal with Teheran if it reined in Houthi attacks on its territory.

Meanwhile, a special report on *Sky News Australia* (Dec. 4) looked at Iran’s cyber warfare against Israel, which targeted water infrastructure, hospitals and even an LGBTQ dating site.

In the *Daily Telegraph* (Dec. 8), AIJAC’s Dr Colin Rubenstein cut to the chase, writing that Iran returned to talks after executing a five-month delay only to “back-track... on promises made in previous rounds. Iran now demands a substantively weaker agreement than the 2015 nuclear deal.”

Rubenstein warned that since the last round of talks, Iran “has accelerated its nuclear violations.” Such violations include blocking International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections of key facilities, “enriching increasing quantities of uranium to 60%, just short of weapons-grade, and... producing enriched uranium metal, a material used almost solely in nuclear bomb cores.”

These developments demonstrate the Biden “administration urgently needs to have in place a ‘Plan B’ which would attempt to change Iran’s nuclear trajectory through vastly increased sanctions and the threat of a credible military option,” he said.

It was in Australia’s “national interest” to stop a “nuclear Iran”, Rubenstein said, because the alternative would be

“increasing global instability and terrorism, [threats to] energy flows and... nuclear proliferation across the volatile Middle East.”

On Dec. 5 in the *Spectator Australia*, journalist Jake Wallis Simons cautioned that Israel is planning on increasing its sabotage operations against Iran’s nuclear facilities if the US agrees to sign a “less for less deal” that “allow[s] Iran to receive sanctions relief while retaining the progress it has made towards the bomb.”

Earlier (Dec. 3), Australian Strategic Policy Institute senior analyst Dr Malcolm Davis warned in the *Daily Telegraph* of the 2015 deal’s flaws – such as a failure to include Iran’s ballistic missile pro-

gram and generous sunset clauses which meant that Iran could legally enrich uranium to nuclear weapons threshold levels by the early 2030s, from where it could make a “dash to the bomb.” He also warned that returning to the 2015 deal would likely see Saudi Arabia and its allies “consider their own nuclear options.”

Lowy Institute fellow Rodger Shanahan blamed Iran’s increased nuclear activities on the Trump Administration abandoning the 2015 deal and pursuing a policy of “maximum pressure”.

He said, “It defies logic to think that anyone in the Trump administration could have seriously thought any government in Tehran could, or would, be willing to enter a new agreement with an administration that had unilaterally torn up an agreement that was working and by which they abided.” Only Iran had not abided by it, as the nuclear archive Israel captured in 2018 demonstrated.

Shanahan did say Iran’s “malign activities across the region have won them few friends.” Of course, Iran’s malign activities only increased once the deal was signed and it began receiving sanctions relief – which was another flaw in the 2015 agreement.

Meanwhile, Iran featured in media coverage of the Morrison Government’s announcement that Australia will cease making a legal distinction between Hezbollah’s military and political wings.

News Corp papers (Nov. 25) said, “since its inception in 1982, Hezbollah has committed atrocities aimed at damaging Israel and consolidating Tehran’s influence in Lebanon” while the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* (Nov. 25) quoted AIJAC’s Dr Rubenstein saying he believes the new Hezbollah proscription “send[s] a strong message that Australia will ‘not tolerate these Iran-backed terrorists.’”

**“Dr Malcolm Davis warned in the *Daily Telegraph* of the 2015 deal’s flaws – such as a failure to include Iran’s ballistic missile program and generous sunset clauses”**



# THE LAST WORD

Isaac Herzog

## THINK GOOD

Tell me, what has happened to us?

How did the discourse between us become so violent, so extreme and unrestrained? How did social media become a place where nothing seems to be off limits, where people feel free to badmouth others, humiliate them, denigrate them, and treat rivals or simply people with different opinions as enemies?

It is hard to deny that social media networks have brought a lot of good to the world. They often allow for a plurality of opinions and the creation of terrific communities that provide help and support and sometimes even save lives.



Time to stop tolerating the harassment, bullying and violence which taints so much of social media (Credit: Shutterstock)

But today, there is also no doubt that the boundaries are too blurred and that these wonderful platforms are also used for harassment, bullying and violence. We have all come across insults, foul language and forms of expression that we must not tolerate. The Internet doesn't need to tolerate this, and we don't need to tolerate this either.

We have to change this extreme and violent discourse. This change begins with the keyboards and smartphones of each and every one of us. Just before sending out another insulting reply, simply because we

can, and just before we use our words to sully or trample on people who see things differently from us, we have to

stop, take a deep breath, and remember: foul language and hurtful words never do any good. They only cause harm.

They harm not only the individuals we attack. First and foremost, they harm all of us: they harm our society, and our ability to live here together and build a shared future together. This is the first necessary step: to put an end to keyboard violence.

There is another step, one of bringing light and good to the world, or as the psalmist says: "Shun evil and do good." Because words carry incredible power. The power to create new realities and to transform them; the power to destroy, but also to rebuild. Therefore, believing in our ability to transform our social media discourse, I call on all of us to think good thoughts and I invite you all to join our campaign to encourage a different way of behaving online.

If we change the atmosphere, if we lift each other up, if we see the good in each other, compliment each other, shine our inner light and help others shine theirs, I am confident that together we can create a more pleasant public space, for the sake of our shared life here in this beautiful land. As the Jerusalemite poet Yehuda Amichai, wrote: "In this burning land, words must provide shade."

As I said in my inaugural address as president: Let us choose, every day anew, a sense of "us". Let us choose to win together, not to win out over each other. Let us choose to be gracious, to extinguish the flames of hatred with the Israeli spirit, to be generous in our love of Israel. Let us choose to be united, not only in our principles and values, but also in our hopes and dreams.

I believe that if we think good thoughts, and type good words, good will surely follow.

AIR

*Isaac Herzog is the President of the State of Israel. This article was first published in several Israeli media outlets as part of a new "Think Good" campaign launched on Dec. 7 by the President's office and Meta (formerly Facebook) in Israel to change online discourse. As part of the initiative, dozens of celebrities and public figures in Israel will share video clips of themselves reading the most hurtful responses that they have received online, with the offensive words censored and overlaid with words of positive reinforcement.*



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