

## UKRAINE'S WAR FOR SURVIVAL

Israel's efforts to assist and surprising role as mediator

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This month's *AIR* cover story focuses on how the Russian invasion of Ukraine is affecting Israel and the wider Middle East.

Amotz Asa-El looks at how Israel's cautious approach to the conflict led to an improbable role as a mediator, while David Schenker explores the reasons most other Middle Eastern states have elected to be carefully neutral. Plus, Ahron Shapiro debunks the widespread efforts on social media and elsewhere to portray the Palestinians as suffering a similar fate to Ukraine, Judy Maynard looks at some blatant antisemitism spawned by the war, and Tzvi Fleischer examines the debate about Israel potentially providing the Iron Dome missile defence system to Ukraine.

Also featured this month is Naomi Levin's look at extremist rhetoric coming from two of Australia's most important minor parties – the Australian Greens and the United Australia Party – in the lead up to the federal election in May. Plus, Blaise Misztal and Jonathan Ruhe look at the alternative to what appears to be a terribly flawed new nuclear deal with Iran currently being finalised in Vienna. Finally, don't miss Jonathan Tobin's exploration of how a "true crime" investigation has cheapened the legacy of iconic Holocaust victim Anne Frank and Ran Porat's dive into the activities of a pro-Islamic State preacher in Australia.

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

Residents of Irpin, Ukraine flee their city in the wake of Russian bombing (Image: Shutterstock)



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Print Post Approved – 100007869****[www.aijac.org.au](http://www.aijac.org.au)****FROM THE  
EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN****COLIN RUBENSTEIN**

# UKRAINE AND THE ISRAEL OBSESSION

**A**t a time when Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine has created millions of refugees, levelled cities and killed untold numbers of Ukrainian civilians, it's remarkable how much critical commentary on the war seems to be focused on Israel – a tiny country far removed, both geographically and geopolitically, from the fighting.

Many Palestinians and their supporters have tried to compare their grievances to the plight of Ukrainians in an effort to exploit the wave of global outrage towards Russia. In claims widely made in both social and regular media, they would have you believe that, damn the facts, Israel's defensive military actions and "occupation of Palestine" are no different to Russian President Vladimir Putin's naked aggression.

As Ahron Shapiro demonstrates in this month's *AIR*, there is no parallel whatsoever.

In fact, a more reasonable analogy to make is between Putin's determined rejection of Ukraine's right to exist, and similar assertions regarding Israel from both Hamas and elements of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Indeed, even while they have been trying to hitch their propaganda cart to the Ukrainian wagon, the Palestinian leadership hasn't been giving embattled Ukraine much in the way of diplomatic support. The PA has declared itself neutral over the war, while Hamas hastily issued a statement saying a quote attributed to its leader Khaled Mashaal calling for Russia to stop the invasion had been "fabricated".

Yet, even beyond the obsessions of the anti-Israel brigade, Israel's response to the war has come under the microscope in a way that hardly any other country's has, but it has largely managed to navigate responsibly through a difficult position. While Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has condemned Russia strongly, and Israel has supported a condemnatory resolution at the UN, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has been more circumspect in his comments to allow himself to conduct shuttle diplomacy between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky – with Ukraine's blessing and gratitude – to try to find a way to end hostilities.

Israel has flung open its doors to Jewish refugees of the war, including options for permanent resettlement, and is providing temporary haven for thousands of non-Jewish refugees. On the ground, Israel has delivered more than 100 tons of humanitarian aid and became the first outside country to open a field hospital in Ukraine.

From a security standpoint, Israel's handling of Russia is necessarily complex, as it must delicately balance Israel's instinctive desire to stand strong morally with its US and European allies with its crucial need to maintain freedom of operation to strike Iranian bases in Syria. Russia has had control over the skies of Syria since 2015, after the US effectively abandoned the field in 2014. Also, Israel has an interest in safeguarding the welfare of substantial Russian and Ukrainian Jewish communities.

Compared to other similar sized countries, Israel is doing its part, and indeed has surprisingly become a key peace facilitator and mediator. Perhaps Jerusalem could do more, as many in Israel argue it should – and it probably will – but a little perspective is in order.

It is curious that there is so much media focus on Israel, and what it is and is not doing with respect to the Ukraine crisis – and so little on vastly larger and more important countries like India and Brazil, which unlike Israel, have insisted on remaining strictly neutral and avoiding criticising Russia at all.

The disproportionate attention given to Israel's actions during this war is not just simply



unfair to Israel, it is also entirely unhelpful to the overarching military goal of stopping the advance of the Russian army – which is threatening both millions of innocent Ukrainians, and the pillars of the global international order.

The unseemly and judgmental scrutiny that has been placed on Israel's role, or non-role, in the Ukraine crisis to a great extent mirrors the disproportionate, often grossly distorted and hypercritical attention Israel routinely receives across the international stage, especially at the UN, and among prominent left-wing NGOs like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

For instance, despite the seriousness of the Ukraine crisis, Amnesty has nonetheless continued to prioritise campaigning against “apartheid Israel”, based on its absurd report released in early February – which built on errors of omission, fact, law and basic logic to claim Israel has been an apartheid state since its foundation. Amnesty's obsessiveness and irrationality on the subject was further highlighted by a widely-condemned speech given on March 9 by Paul O'Brien, the Executive Director of Amnesty International USA, in which he insisted that “Amnesty takes no political views on any question,” but that Israel “shouldn't exist as a Jewish state.”

These trends are evident in Australia as well, where Amnesty International has recently co-sponsored an event with the Palestinian lobby group Australia Palestine Advo-

cacy Network (APAN) and, as Naomi Levin writes in this issue of *AIR*, the discriminatory Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel now apparently enjoys the support of at least major elements of the Australian Greens.

If there is one obvious lesson from the nakedly illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia, it is that the international order and system of international law are under serious threat from malign actors. Russia is the most obvious, but others include China and Iran, both of which have tacitly backed Russia's narrative justifying the invasion.

This profound threat demands a new seriousness from the international community and international institutions if there is to be any hope of preserving this international order on which ongoing prosperity and global security depend. The anti-Israel obsessions at the UN, in major international NGOs like Amnesty, and in the wider “what about Palestine” ideological movement, are the absolute opposite of such seriousness.

This one-eyed obsessiveness must be confronted and marginalised if there is to be any hope of mustering the resolve and steadfast purpose to address what really matters. And that is the world struggling to preserve a stable international order, anchored by US-led open, democratic societies, in the face of the major threat to it represented by Russia and other rogue actors.

AIR

## WORD FOR WORD

“The prime minister of Israel, Mr. Bennett, is trying to find a way of holding talks, and we are grateful for this. We are grateful for his efforts so that sooner or later we will begin to have talks with Russia, possibly in Jerusalem.”

**Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky thanking Israel for its mediation efforts shortly after giving a controversial speech to Israel's Knesset (Jerusalem Post, March 21).**

“Israel will not be a route to bypass sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and other Western countries... Israel... condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and calls for an end to the fighting. There is no justification for violating Ukraine's territorial integrity, and there is no justification for attacks on a civilian population. [Israel] will do everything it can to assist mediation efforts, to stop the shooting and restore peace.”

**Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid (Times of Israel, March 14).**

“I continue to see Iran as the greatest threat to regional security and stability. They furnish weapons, support and direction to proxies across the region who engage in acts of terror and un-

dermine local governments... The IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] and the elite sub-element of the IRGC, the Quds Force... they're the principal malign actor in the theater.”

**Outgoing chief of US Central Command Gen. Frank McKenzie (Department of Defense, March 18).**

“Unfortunately, there is determination to sign a nuclear agreement with Iran at almost any price, including saying that the world's largest terrorist organisation is not a terrorist organisation. That is too high a price. The IRGC is the largest, most murderous terrorist organisation in the world, and unlike ISIS or other organisations, they have a state behind them. This is not just an Israeli problem; other countries, US allies in the region, are dealing with this organisation day after day, hour after hour.”

**Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on possible delisting by the US of the IRGC (Jerusalem Post, March 20).**

“One lesson of the Russian-Ukrainian war is that the era of US unipolar domination has ended. The US was not in a position to declare war on Russia; those who cannot declare war will not set the international agenda. From here we can begin to talk about the future of the Zionist entity...”

**Hamas politburo member Mousa Abu Marzouq (Times of Israel, Feb. 27).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## IRON DOME FOR UKRAINE?

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is an unlikely yet amazing modern-day hero. Despite previously having been an entertainer with no political experience, and despite the fact that he was struggling severely in the polls before the unprovoked Russian invasion of his country, he has become the man of the hour. In a story that ostensibly belongs in a movie script or novel, he has risen to the moment remarkably since his country's very existence came under attack from Russia in late February. If Ukraine improbably succeeds in holding off the Russian onslaught, as is looking increasingly possible, he will deserve a great deal of the credit.

Having said all this, nobody is perfect, and Zelensky made some mistakes when he addressed Israel's Knesset virtually on March 20. His speech was poorly received – and thus would not have served his aims of gaining greater military and diplomatic support from the Jewish state. Part of the problem was his hectoring tone – but more important was his repeated and unfortunate use of Holocaust comparisons to call attention to Ukraine's plight.

Comparing Russia's invasion of Ukraine to Hitler's "Final Solution", and saying that Israel should save Ukrainians like Ukrainian Righteous Among the Nations saved Jews during the Holocaust, was neither wise nor helpful – as numerous Israeli leaders noted in its aftermath.

In addition, Zelensky asked for Israeli "missile defence systems", presumably meaning Israel's much discussed Iron Dome anti-missile system.

While it is understandable, given his country's plight, that he requested the world-leading missile defence system developed by Israel and the US, there are solid reasons why this is not really a practical request.

It is true that Israel appears to fear the Russian reaction that may come if it should supply military aid to Ukraine and so far is not doing so – though it is supplying ample aid of other sorts, especially medical. But Iron Dome would not be a realistic way to help Ukraine militarily in any case – at least, not unless the war drags on for many months.

Iron Dome is a very expensive and complex system. According to the website, the Strategy Page: "Each [Iron Dome] battery has radar, control equipment, and 3-4 missile launchers (each with 20 missiles) and costs about [US]\$37 million to 50 million depending on how many missiles it is shipped with . . . if the computers predict a rocket coming down in an inhabited area one (or often two to be sure) [US]\$50,000 Tamir guided missiles are fired to intercept the rocket."

Israel itself currently has only a reported 10 such batteries – and has not managed to get to the 15 batteries it said it wanted to protect the whole country in 2014. The batteries are thus moved around to protect different areas.

Israel also used up much of its stock of Tamir interceptors during the missile barrages from Gaza during the war with Hamas last May, and has been struggling to replace them.

In other words, Israel does not have spare Iron Dome batteries lying around to give to Ukraine, even if it wanted to.



Iron Dome in action: Is it a realistic way to help Ukraine? (Image: Isranet)

Nor is it clear how it would even get one to Ukraine. It probably couldn't be sent by air. The one time in history a complete Iron Dome system was flown – from the US to Israel in 2020 – the largest plane in the world was used, the Antonov 225 cargo plane. But the only Antonov 225 ever made was destroyed in a Russian attack outside Kyiv on Feb. 24. Nor would it do to send a dismantled system through the contested airspace of war-torn Ukraine.

It would also be hard to ship by sea – the Russian Navy controls access to all of Ukraine's Black Sea ports.

But let's hypothesise that Israel was prepared to sacrifice some of its own security, despite the massive missile inventories threatening it owned by Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and give Ukraine one of its Iron Dome batteries. Let's further imagine a way could be found to get it to the Ukrainian military and further imagine the Ukrainians could be trained to use it, a process that usually takes months. Would it help Ukraine much?

According to its manufacturer, each Iron Dome battery can defend an area of "up to nearly 60 square miles [155 km sq.]" – which is not much compared to Ukraine's 603,548 km sq. But even to defend a city, say Kyiv, the battery would likely not be that useful, and also almost certainly not useful for very long.

Russia has a huge inventory of missiles – and could quickly overwhelm and exhaust a single Iron Dome battery. It also has advanced missiles, such as the hypersonic missiles it has already reportedly been deploying in Ukraine, that Iron Dome would be unable to stop. Russia could either destroy the battery with such missiles or with



artillery, or else quickly exhaust its supply of Tamir interceptors by firing many missiles at the area. And as noted, Israel does not have enough of those for itself at the moment and would not be able to give Ukraine more.

There may be a case for Israel to do more for Ukraine – and there are certainly people in Israel making that argument. However, while Iron Dome may be amazing cutting-edge technology which showcases Israel's ability to use hi-tech to overcome its major security dilemmas in original ways, it is not a sensible answer to Ukraine's admittedly desperate military needs.

AIR



Gil Troy

## COULD UKRAINE'S FATE HAPPEN IN ISRAEL?

Imagine if Ukraine had 1,700 nuclear warheads at its disposal today because it had not surrendered them in 1994 – in exchange for supposedly-binding promises of peace and territorial integrity from Russia, America and the world.

Admittedly, history is a river; you cannot isolate one current. Had Ukrainians resisted the American and Russian pressure then, Ukraine might be a rogue state today. Still, as they dodge another Russian missile, fight tanks with pistols, remove more corpses from rubble or flee their homes, historically-minded Ukrainians must be thinking, “Boy, were we suckers,” as sober-minded Israelis sadly agree.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Ukraine controlled one-third of the USSR's nukes. Bruising negotiations led Ukraine to relinquish the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal. Years before this Putin-triggered invasion, one Ukrainian website called the Budapest Memorandum, which also neutralised the nuclear powers of Belarus and Kazakhstan, “the Greatest Treason in Ukrainian History.”

The international community's impotence, and the irrelevance of promises made 28 years ago, haunt Israelis. Despite Volodymyr Zelensky's inaccurate Holocaust shaming, most Israelis have rallied with the rest of the Jewish community and the West to support Ukraine – sidestepping without sanitising Ukraine's blood-drenched Jew-hating past.

But for most Israelis, Vladimir Putin's war has stirred this rarely mentioned but ever-present anxiety that our little Promised Land paradise could become a warzone instantaneously.

We all know: Ukraine could happen here and we would be on our own far more than Ukraine because even some of our best friends would blame us, soft-peddalling our

enemies' enmity, deeming our tragedy self-inflicted.

Israel is super-skittish because as the Russian bloodbath grows despite impressive Western sanctions and massive arms shipments, the United States seems to be succumbing to Iranian charms again. Whenever someone from or for President Joe Biden's Administration says Putin's aggression proved that you must take dictators' threats seriously, I want to scream, “What about Iran?!”

How do those murderous mullahs keep fooling so many Americans? It's particularly mystifying to watch many liberals go soft on these thugs. Talk about politically incorrect! These Iranian dictators weaponise religion. They oppress women, torture dissidents and execute gays. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) drains Iran's economy to export terror throughout the Middle East and beyond. Moreover, when the mullahs threaten genocide, they target “Big Satan” US, not just “Little Satan” Israel.

Under those circumstances, how could any responsible American consider delisting the IRGC as terrorists, pumping billions back into the IRGC's coffers as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal did in 2015, or trusting anything Iranian officials say about slowing down their irrational rush toward nuclear power?

Further adding to the anxiety, although Biden has wisely avoided inflaming the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, his new Ambassador to Israel, Tom Nides, chose to attack the settlements while addressing Americans for Peace Now, and instead of advancing the cause of Middle East peace, risked draining his credibility in Israel.

Instead of regurgitating the now-discredited Peace Now talk, Nides should be updating the conversation with Peace More talk. The Abraham Accords prove how many Arabs and Israelis seek a new approach. The first step involves “shrinking the conflict” as Professor Micah Goodman argues – reducing Palestinian hardships and Israeli-Palestinian frictions.

But that's tactical. The Peace More strategy expands the circles of peacemakers, elbowing out the haters. While building peace and robust alliances region-wide, progress cannot start closer to home without ending the Palestinians' evil, self-destructive crusade against normalisation.

More is more. More ties, economically, culturally, personally, will yield progress diplomatically, militarily and politically. America and the West should be building toward peace, not imposing it, trying to nurture Palestinian democracy, reduce delegitimation of Israel and refute their destructive delusions, while fostering Israel's peace consensus with the goodwill, person-to-person gestures and business ties that have made the Abraham Accords the greatest step towards peace in decades.

Unlike Ukraine's 1994 Budapest Treaty or the Oslo Accords, Abraham Accord-fused relationships are real, lasting, textured and bottom-up ties not fleeting top-down promises. Ultimately, this approach builds nation to nation



and people to people bonds rather than simply trusting leaders to keep the peace.

AIR

*Prof. Gil Troy is a distinguished scholar of North American history at McGill University and the author of nine books on American history and three books on Zionism. His book Never Alone: Prison, Politics and My People, co-authored with Natan Sharansky, was published by PublicAffairs of Hachette. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Despite being constitutionally barred from seeking a third term in office, Indonesian President Joko Widodo still has unfinished business.

Long harassed by rivals and opponents with accusations that he is insufficiently Islamic, “Jokowi” has steadily pushed back – not with performative acts of piety but by targeting disruptive, anti-democratic political actors – banning Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) on the grounds that their ideology is fundamentally in conflict with Indonesia’s founding pluralist credo of *Pancasila*.

These moves have to be viewed as part of a broader long-term strategy of heading off the reach of Islamist ideology into key national institutions.

Indonesian military and police have now pledged to crack down on personnel who attend religious gatherings involving radical preachers, after President Widodo warned the institutions to improve discipline in their ranks.

Speaking at the annual leadership meeting of the military and police in early March, Jokowi cited cases of soldiers and police discussing government policies in online messaging groups as an example of poor discipline, and emphasised that members must be careful when choosing a preacher to speak at a religious study session.

Amirsyah Tambunan, the Secretary-General of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), a semi-official group of Islamic scholars, backed Jokowi’s order. “The definition is clear,” he said, adding that radical preachers’ sermons lead to “acts of extremism and terrorism.”

In November, Ahmad Nurwakhid, a director at the National Counter-terrorism Agency (BNPT), said militants linked to the outlawed Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) group

had tried to infiltrate the Indonesian military, police and government ministries for more than a decade.

The agency has since announced that alleged JI operatives have also infiltrated political parties. Irfan Idris, head of de-radicalisation at the BNPT, said the suspects join such organisations not to launch terror attacks, but to slowly instil their ideology amongst their colleagues.

Two arrests have been made. In February, a newly-joined member of the Ummah Party, founded last year by veteran politician Amien Rais, was one of three alleged JI members arrested in Bengkulu, a province in Sumatra, where he is a well-known preacher. In November, police similarly arrested Farid Ahmad Okbah, chairman of the little-known Indonesian People’s Calling Party, on suspicion that he headed JI’s council of advisers.

Meanwhile, national police chief Gen. Listyo Sigit Prabowo says the Government plans to double the number of personnel in the Densus 88 anti-terror unit in response to the evolving threat. While police have arrested close to 900 JI members since the 2002 Bali bombings, they warn

that the number of members and sympathisers was estimated to be 10 times as many, with 67 JI-affiliated religious schools suspected to be breeding grounds for militants.

JI, which was outlawed in 2008, has not staged a major attack since 2011. And yet, Indonesian police said they arrested 339 suspected militants in 2021, an increase of 56% compared

to the previous year. Police also killed 18 militant suspects last year.

Pushed into the background by the concerted government crackdown and the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS), an organisation it was strongly opposed to, JI appears to have come to the conclusion that violence was not the way to achieve its objective of a universal caliphate, Sidney Jones of the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict told the *Asia Times*.

“They (JI) decided that what needed to be done was to think through how to gain power in Indonesia,” she said. “It soon became clear that the more effective way... was to operate as a coalition with a division of labour and use local elections and local regulations to try and move the country towards a more Sharia-influenced polity.”

Although JI has survived and periodically regenerated, the Widodo Government’s crackdown has arguably been deeper and more extensive than any in the past.

Jokowi’s strategic moves against Islamist forces stem largely from the period of his second presidential election victory in 2019. He won crucial support from the mass Muslim organisation Nahdlatul Ulama, whose ranks




Indonesian President Widodo: Pushing hard against Islamist influence (Image: Shutterstock)



number up to 90 million, in return for nominating its ageing supreme leader Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate – enabling his victory over opposition candidate Prabowo Subianto, despite losing heavily in West Java, home to many of the country's hardline Islamists.

Despite his open flirtation with Islamists and encouragement of violent protests over alleged voting irregularities, Prabowo abruptly reverted to his nationalist roots, joined the governing coalition and secured the role of defence minister, leaving the opposition benches to a small rump lead by the Islam-oriented Prosperous Justice Party.

With his approval rating currently around 70% despite two years of COVID-related upheaval, Jokowi has the political capital to further defang the Islamist bloc. 



Alex Benjamin

## RESPONSIBLE FOR EACH OTHER

“*Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh La Zeh*” is a traditional Jewish saying. Loosely translated, it means “All of Israel are responsible for each other.”

That sentence is foundational and fundamental to us as a people.

When one thinks of unity in the face of adversity there's a deep well of quotes to draw from. One of my favourites is from Shakespeare's *Henry V*: “From this day to the ending of the world, but we in it shall be remembered – we few, we happy few, we band of brothers; For he to-day that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother.”

As I write this, the war in Ukraine is in its third week. Ukrainians are dying, or trapped, caught up in a sudden criminal attack by a neighbour. Russian President Vladimir Putin's attitude appears to be that of a psychotic ex-boyfriend telling them, “If I can't have you, nobody will.” So, naturally the world is bathed in admiration for a people who wish to remain free, a people whose bonds to each other have been forged in a long arc of history that encompasses famine, hardship, persecution and now, war and exile.

That last sentence sounds eerily familiar to Jewish ears.

Look at our family histories. In my case, we were living in Romania until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then pogroms. Then London. If you are Jewish, there is probably a good chance your family ended up in Australia (or wherever else you are reading this from) because of upheaval or worse. Almost every Jewish family has a similar story, Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, Ethiopian, Russian etc. We have a good idea what the Ukrainians are now feeling.

Most of us are not particularly surprised at events there. Horrified yes, but surprised? Why would we be?

Our shared memory of European life is one of regular displacement, and we understand only too well that apparent stability is often precariously fragile.

Little wonder then, that we at the European Jewish Association have been inundated with calls from Jews from Bordeaux to Bucharest, and indeed from further afield, from Buenos Aires to Brisbane too, all asking what they can do to help. From clothing, to physically housing Jewish refugees in their homes, to generous donations and prayers, the response has been humbling and overwhelming. Of course, many Jews are seeking to help Ukrainian citizens regardless, but the majority of emails in my inbox concern Jews seeking to help other Jews first and foremost.

Take a gentleman in Paris who called me, his voice choking with emotion, asking how he could accommodate some Jewish exiles from Ukraine. He told me that this was his chance to rectify the lack of humanity shown to his grandparents, who had nowhere to escape to, no warmth, no light, only a cattle truck towards death.

It was more than an act of *tzedakah* (charity) for this person – it was a cathartic experience. And this is happening in every city as Ukrainian Jews are finding a warm and welcoming place to live amongst their brothers and sisters in Spain, Italy, or closer to home in Poland or Romania.

Just yesterday, I could barely enter the office. Along with stacks of boxes of *mishloach manot* (traditional gift baskets for the Purim holiday) that we send to communities across Europe at this time of year, were bags and bags of donated clothing that left shortly afterwards in trucks to Ukraine. It was a powerful moment. I stopped and thought long and hard about the contradiction it represented. The joy represented by one set of boxes, and the misery represented by the bags of clothing.

The slogan *Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh La Zeh* was born out of necessity. We have had to look after each other because we are the very embodiment of that *Henry V* speech. In good times, and bad.

I genuinely believe that it matters little to most Jews in Europe where we are from. Israeli PM Golda Meir made a famous aside to Henry Kissinger when the then US Secretary of State told her that he considers himself “an American first, Secretary of State second, and a Jew third.” Meir replied, “In Israel, we read from right to left.” This sums up where most of our community is at this moment.

Our response so far in doing what we can – indeed what we must – makes me very proud. I choke up when I think of the 90 Jewish orphans from Odessa now safely ensconced in the Jewish community in Berlin, or that act of selflessness from that gentleman in Paris, bringing strangers into his home. But seeing these refugees as strangers is the last thing on his mind. Jews, first and foremost, share a responsibility for each other passed from generation to generation.

We few. We happy few. We band of brothers. 



# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

No rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel between Jan. 2 and late March.

On March 23, an Arab Israeli Islamic State supporter released from prison in 2019 rampaged through Beersheva, killing four Israelis and wounding two others with a knife in the worst terror attack in Israel since 2016.

On March 19, an Israeli jogger was stabbed and injured in Jerusalem. The suspect was shot. On March 20, one police officer was moderately wounded and another lightly wounded in a knife attack in east Jerusalem. The suspect was detained.

There were numerous other attacks by Palestinians against Israelis, including stabbings, car-rammings and Molotov cocktail attacks.

On March 20, Israel's Shin Bet security service announced it had arrested two Israeli Arabs the previous month for acting on behalf of Hezbollah to smuggle weapons, relay information and plan attacks.

## PLO SAYS IT RENOUNCES ALL AGREEMENTS

On Feb. 18, Palestinian National Council (PNC) Deputy Chairman Ali Faisal announced on an official Palestinian Authority (PA) TV station that a decision had been taken to renounce all agreements by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the PA with Israel, and that "we have entered a path of resistance in all its forms."

The PNC is the PLO's highest authority. However, as of late March, no change had reportedly taken place with respect to security coordination between Israel and the PA, or other existing arrangements.

Meanwhile, on March 10, Israel announced that the number of permits allowing residents of Gaza to work in Israel would increase from 10,000 to 12,000, having previously been increased from 7,000 in October.

In addition, agricultural exports from Gaza to Israel in January and February were reportedly up by 142% compared to the same months in 2021.

## ISRAEL DESTROYS HUNDREDS OF IRANIAN DRONES

Israeli media reports say Israel sent six drones to attack the Kerman-shah air base in Iran, located 450 km southwest of Teheran, in mid-February and destroyed dozens to hundreds of Iranian military drones stored there.

In addition, two senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officers were killed on March 7 in an attack, attributed to Israel, on a weapons warehouse in the Damascus area.

## IRAN STEPS UP REGIONAL ATTACKS

On March 14, the IRGC fired 12 ballistic missiles at targets in Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of northern Iraq, damaging property but causing no injuries. Iran claimed it had targeted a "secret Israeli Mossad base," in retaliation for the deaths of the two IRGC officers. However, Kurdish officials denied the presence of an Israeli base. Erbil's airport, the home of a Kurdish leader, a TV studio and the US consulate were either damaged or in close proximity to the impact zone.

Meanwhile, on both March 10 and March 20, Iranian-sponsored Houthi forces based in Yemen used drones to hit multiple targets in Saudi Arabia, including oil and gas processing sites and desalination and power plants.

On March 14, Israeli government websites were rendered unreachable for an hour as the result of a massive distributed denial-of-service cyberattack identified as likely the work of Iranian hackers.

## IRAN'S BREAKOUT TIME NOW 2-3 WEEKS

A report issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in early March indicated that Iran continues to 'break out slowly' towards achieving nuclear weapons capabilities. With almost 200kg of highly enriched uranium and more advanced centrifuges operating than ever, Iran is apparently now capable of amassing enough weapons-grade uranium for one nuclear warhead in less than a month.

At the same time, the IAEA's ability to monitor Iran's atomic activities has reached a historic low. Following his snap visit to Teheran on March 4, IAEA head Rafael Grossi received an Iranian promise to promptly provide answers to inquiries regarding several alleged illegal nuclear activities currently being investigated by the agency.

## BRITISH HOSTAGES RELEASED FROM IRAN

On March 16, two British nationals departed Iran for London following their release from prison.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was jailed in 2016 for five years, allegedly for seeking to overthrow the Iranian government, while Anousheh Ashouri had been sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in 2019 on charges including spying for Israel. Both denied the charges, and evidence against them was never produced publicly. Their arrests and release seem consistent with a pattern whereby the Iranian regime holds foreigners on bogus charges to gain



concessions from their governments.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said that “in parallel” with the release, the UK had repaid £400 million (AUD\$711 million) for an arms sale that was cancelled following the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

## ISRAELI PRESIDENT VISITS TURKEY



Israeli President Herzog in Ankara with Turkish President Erdogan (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Israeli President Isaac Herzog made a landmark visit to Turkey to meet with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on March 9, the first visit by an Israeli leader in 14 years, and the culmination of a recent Turkish push to normalise relations with Israel. Turkey has recently been working at improving relations with various countries across the region due to shifting geopolitical winds and Turkey’s growing economic problems.

Separately, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett participated in a surprise summit meeting in Egypt on March 21 with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

## SAUDI CROWN PRINCE CALLS ISRAEL “POTENTIAL ALLY”

In an interview in early March with the *Atlantic*, Saudi Arabia’s powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for the first time referred to Israel as a “potential ally”, stating the Saudis “hope that the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is solved” and mentioning future ventures with

Israel and “many interests that we can pursue together.”

One possible foundation for such pursuits is a new high-speed data cable currently being constructed under the Red Sea from Israel to Saudi Arabia by Google and Telecom Italia. It is due to be finished in 2024.

## ISRAELI ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINE

Israel has taken an active role in assisting Ukrainian citizens since the beginning of the Russian invasion, including shipping Ukraine many tonnes of aid, much of it medical equipment and supplies.

Israeli also opened a 66-bed field hospital in the western Ukrainian city of Mostyska on March 22. Staffed by more than 60 Israeli personnel, it will be able to service 150 patients at a time and includes an ER, men’s, women’s and children’s wards, obstetrics facilities, imaging and telehealth technologies, mental health services, a lab, a pharmacy and an outpatient clinic.

## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### DISASTROUS PERSPECTIVES

It is often the case that “unique” perspectives regarding world events emerge from the Middle East, and that is certainly true regarding the Ukraine war.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) published a statement bemoaning Israel’s plan to absorb refugees from the war. The statement claimed that this would entail “1,000 housing units in settlements,” even though Israel’s published plans would place none of the arriving Ukrainian immigrants in the West Bank. The PA seems to regard all Israeli towns as “settlements”.

The statement’s headline reads “Disaster for one is a greater disaster for another” (Translation by Palestinian Media Watch) – implying that the “disaster” for the Palestinians of Ukrainian refugees having 1,000 houses in Israel is “greater”

Meanwhile, Israeli diplomats in neighbouring countries have facilitated the evacuation of Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptian citizens, as well as Israelis, from Ukraine, arranged airlifts of seriously ill Ukrainian children to Israel for life-saving treatments, and provided six giant electrical generators for Lviv’s main hospital.

## COVID REPORT

Like a rollercoaster, Israel saw off January’s massive Omicron wave with daily cases dropping to just over 7,000. However, by March 19, a new wave had developed and 13,803 new cases were reported on March 20. Sadly, 430 COVID deaths occurred between Feb. 21 and March 21.

The Palestinian territories saw a similar slackening of cases, but so far appear to have avoided following Israel into a new wave. 10,184 cases in total were observed in the West Bank between Feb. 21 and March 21, with 188 COVID-related deaths over the same period. Gaza recorded 6,894 cases.

than the disaster befalling Ukraine!

Then there was a song performed at a Palestinian wedding by singer Mohammed Arani with lyrics such as “Harden your heart, oh Putin. Increase your attacks. Banish them to Palestine and we will marry Ukrainian women.” (Translation by Middle East Media Research Institute) Arani went on, “Also, we say to China: Why don’t you invade Taiwan? This way we will smash the nose of the Americans, who make the [Israeli] airplanes.”

For pure opportunism though, it’s hard to beat Kaveh Afrasiabi, who is on trial in the US charged with acting as an unregistered foreign agent for Iran. Afrasiabi emailed the presiding judge on Feb. 28 requesting that his case be delayed for three months to allow him to travel to Ukraine to fight against the Russian aggression. He said he felt compelled to do this as a “life-long peace activist”, and added that it would set a good example for other Muslims. He also assured the judge that he wouldn’t then return to Iran.

## COVER STORY

ISRAEL AND  
UKRAINEA CAUTIOUS APPROACH LEADS TO A MEDIATING  
ROLE

Amotz Asa El

Israel was hardly two years old when the Cold War produced its first hot war, as 53,000 North Korean troops crossed the 38th Parallel and stormed Seoul.

As Washington set out to rally its allies, and with UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie formally asking Israel to join the international force being prepared to fight the invasion, then Israeli PM David Ben-Gurion assembled his cabinet and made the case for heeding the request. He was overruled.

Led by future prime ministers Moshe Sharett and Golda Meir (then Foreign and Labour Ministers, respectively), opponents argued that Israel was in no position to militarily confront the Soviet Union. Ben-Gurion duly agreed to settle for making an offer of medical assistance.

Now, as war rages in Ukraine while Russian-American acrimony resumes in earnest, Israel faces a similar dilemma and appears to be adopting a similarly cautious attitude. Circumstances, however, are very different despite the apparent similarities, and so is the actual policy.

Israel's reluctance to take sides in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict surfaced originally during Russia's forced annexation of Crimea in 2014. Back then Israel refrained from joining American-led international sanctions against Russia, even in the face of pressure from then-US President Barack Obama.

Like Sharett and Meir during the Korean War, Israeli leaders were concerned about the sizeable Jewish population under Moscow's sway. Led by then-Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman, his Foreign Minister at the time, that policy was a matter of national consensus, endorsed also by then-Opposition Leader (now President) Isaac Herzog.

Israel's choice in 2014 appeared vindicated in 2015, as Russia intervened in the Syrian Civil War, and its fighter jets and other military assistance ultimately won that war



Israeli PM Bennett with Russian President Putin: Bennett has parlayed Israel's strong relationships with both Moscow and Kyiv into a mediating role (Image: IGPO/Flickr)

for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. With the Russian air force now parked hardly a 15-minute flight north of Tel Aviv, Russia effectively became, overnight, Israel's neighbour.

The good rapport Israel had cultivated with the Kremlin now proved crucial, as Moscow readily agreed to assemble, together with Jerusalem, a military coordination forum in which Russian and Israeli officers met regularly to discuss how to prevent mishaps when Israel attacks Iranian targets in Syria.

That was last decade. Now, as Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine and Washington drafted an anti-Russian resolution in the UN Security Council, Israel was asked, along with the rest of America's allies, to co-sponsor the resolution, which was indeed backed by 81 delegations. Israel, however, politely refused, even after Foreign Minister Yair Lapid had already condemned the invasion as "a grave violation of the international order."

That decision was relatively simple because the Security



Council resolution was always going to be vetoed by Russia, so Israel's deviation from the Western line didn't matter. Moreover, the following week, the limits of Israeli caution were exposed when Jerusalem co-sponsored and voted for a UN General Assembly condemnation of Russia's invasion. Moreover, Israel also reportedly lobbied for its friends in the Arab world, such as the United Arab Emirates, to also back the General Assembly motion.

Yet in terms of the more substantive matter of sanctions on Russia, Israel has so far also resisted American pressure to follow its lead, much the way Netanyahu did in 2014.

Israel imports US\$2.14 billion (~A\$2.89 billion) of oil and grains as well as heavy and precious metals from Russia annually, and exports to Russia US\$960 million (~A\$1.3 billion) worth of goods, mostly food, medical equipment and other technological products.

Much of this trade stands to be affected by the US-led international sanctions due to the American ban on using dollars in deals with Russia. However, the Israeli Govern-

**“Israel's cautious approach to the conflict has placed it in an improbable diplomatic position where it had never previously been: as a mediator”**

ment is not interfering in this traffic, and Israeli companies are free to trade with Russia if they can. That is why El Al continues flying to Russia, virtually the only Western airline to do so, if one sets aside Air Serbia. El Al explained the decision by saying it “is operating flights to Russia at the request of the Israeli government, and we will continue to provide means of travel for Israelis and Jews from Russia for as long as possible,” adding it had delivered humanitarian supplies for Ukraine and evacuated thousands fleeing the war.

At the same time, Israel has so far turned down Ukrainian pleas to send arms, even non-lethal military items like helmets and protective vests, while making a special effort to extend humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, especially in terms of medical care.

What began with the delivery of 100 tons of equipment



Israeli aid is loaded to send to Ukraine (top); Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky remotely addresses the Knesset (Images: IGPO screenshot/Flickr)

in three flights – including medical equipment, pharmaceutical products, water purification systems, tents and blankets – was then followed by a Government decision to set up a field hospital in Ukraine.

Located in the town of Mostyska, some 60 km west of Lviv and 10 km east of the Polish border, and using 17 tons of equipment all flown in from Israel, the hospital is designed to treat the war's civilian casualties and also includes an obstetrics ward. Staffed by Israeli doctors and nurses and protected by Israeli security, it started operating on March 25 and cost Israel NIS 21 million (~A\$8.7 million).

In its hope to remain on good terms with Ukraine despite its overtures to Russia, Israel also agreed to allow

President Volodymyr Zelensky to address the Knesset via Zoom. He used the opportunity to scold Israel for its failure to sell arms to Ukraine and to join anti-Russian sanctions, and also used Holocaust analogies regarding his country's plight that were not well received.

Still, Israel's cautious approach to the conflict has placed it in an improbable diplomatic position where it had never previously been: as a mediator.

Israel's position as a key mediator between Russia and Ukraine emerged unexpectedly on Saturday, March 5, when news broke that Israeli PM Naftali Bennett had met for more than three hours with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin after an unscheduled last-minute trip to Moscow.

Bennett thus became the first, and, for now, the only Western leader to visit Putin since the war's outbreak. When the meeting ended, Bennett held a telephone call with Zelensky, and then flew to Berlin where he met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Neither Jerusalem nor Moscow reported the contents of that meeting in the Kremlin. A *Financial Times* report 10 days after the meeting claimed Bennett played a central role in creating a 15-point document that is serving as the basis for talks over a peace deal involving a Russian retreat from Ukraine in return for a Ukrainian commitment to a policy of neutrality and accepting limitations on its military.

While this report's accuracy is for now unclear, what is clear is that Israel is currently the only Western country Putin trusts as a potential arbiter.

Whatever the meeting's meaning in terms of the war, it clearly dealt with other issues as well. While no one has hard information on this, the assumption in Israel is that Bennett detailed Israel's willingness to refrain from joining anti-Russian sanctions, and in return asked for Russian assistance on three fronts.

The first, and most obvious, front is Syria. Israel must make sure that whatever happens between the superpowers does not affect its activities in Syria. This was tested sooner rather than later.

Two days after the meeting in the Kremlin, the Israeli Air Force struck military targets in the Damascus area, according to a Syrian Government statement. Two senior Iranian officers were reportedly killed in the attack. Israel has been striking Iranian targets in Syria since 2013, including military bases, ammunition bunkers, missile factories, and arms convoys. Israeli pundits believe Putin agreed to continue staying clear of this Israeli activity.

The second issue Bennett is believed to have discussed with Putin is the evolving international agreement on Iran's nuclear program. With reports piling up that negotiators in Vienna are close to agreement, and with Israel despairing of dissuading Washington from signing this deal, Bennett is believed to have tried to dent the Russian position.

With or without connection to Bennett's efforts, the week after his meeting in the Kremlin, Russia raised a new obstacle in the Iran talks when it demanded that Washington promise not to sanction Iranian-Russian trade under the sanctions regime imposed on Moscow for the Ukraine invasion. The demand reportedly stalled progress toward the deal's signing, and looked like it might derail it, before the impasse over these Russian demands was reportedly resolved a few days later.

Lastly, Bennett and Putin are believed to have discussed immigration.

The exodus of refugees from Ukraine, though obviously flowing mostly to its European neighbours, has also reached Israel. Some 6,000 refugees eligible for immediate



Ukrainian immigrants arriving in Israel (Image: Shutterstock)

Israeli citizenship according to the Law of Return arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport during the war's first three weeks.

Estimates are that fighting may ultimately generate an influx of 50,000 to 100,000 Jewish immigrants. Immigration officials believe the war will spark emigration not only from Ukraine but also from Russia, where the weight of sanctions is expected to create economic hardships. This is besides non-Jewish refugees, whose ultimate total is expected to be relatively low.

Ensuring these immigrants' safe passage to Israel from both sides of the war zone is for Israel a strategic imperative, and may have been the main reason for Bennett's journey.

Bennett flew to Moscow with Housing Minister Zeev Elkin, a native of embattled Kharkiv who arrived in Israel in 1990, and is one of Israel's most experienced Russia hands. Having attended many of Netanyahu's meetings with Putin over the years, Elkin this time served as Bennett's translator and advisor.

Both Elkin and Bennett are Orthodox Jews who do not ordinarily travel on the Sabbath. This time, however, they flew together on the Sabbath, a religious compromise observant Jews are supposed to make only if what is at stake is a matter of life and death. And the Ukraine crisis, almost everyone agrees, is clearly that.

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# PUTIN'S WAR HAS MIDEAST COUNTRIES HEDGING THEIR BETS

David Schenker

Like their counterparts around the world, Middle Eastern leaders are adjusting to the new geopolitical era created by the largest war in Europe since 1945. While the battle for Kyiv rages, many Persian Gulf governments are looking at what's happening some 800 miles further west – in Vienna, where negotiations on a revived Iran nuclear deal are nearing their denouement.

For the Biden Administration, a deal in Vienna would represent a crowning diplomatic achievement – and Washington appears to be in an even greater hurry to end Iran sanctions in the vain hope that Iranian oil will hit the market and help lower prices sent spiking by the conflict. Already, therefore, Russia's war in Ukraine is spilling into the Middle East.

It also won't be lost on Washington's partners in the region that the United States gave a security guarantee to Ukraine in 1994 – in exchange for Ukraine relinquishing the nuclear weapons it inherited from the Soviet Union. Only this past January, President Joe Biden's White House issued a similar assurance to the United Arab Emirates after it had come under drone and missile attack by the Iranian-backed Houthi militia in Yemen. Responding to the attacks, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan assured the UAE of "unwavering" US commitment, pledging that Washington would "stand beside [its] Emirati partners against all threats to their territory."

Washington has also made explicit or implied security commitments to several other long-standing Middle Eastern partners, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, and Israel – the latter three as major non-NATO partners. To emphasise the point, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin just re-upped Washington's perennial "ironclad" commitment to Israel during a visit to the region last November.

While the Biden Administration followed up its latest security guarantee by deploying F-22 fighter jets and dispatching a guided missile destroyer to the UAE, Abu Dhabi seems to have its doubts about US commitments. Since then, the UAE has announced the purchase of 12 Chinese L-15 fighter jet trainers, with an option to buy 36 more. The announcement came just a few months after the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that China was constructing a military facility at a port north of the Emirati capital. Shortly after that revelation, in December 2021, Abu Dhabi suspended negotiations with Washington for the US\$23 billion purchase of 50 F-35 jets.

The UAE's hedging is by no means exceptional. Saudi

Arabia has also learned not to rely on the United States. After Iran's cruise missile attack on Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq oil processing facility in 2019, the Trump Administration sent nearly 3,000 US troops, two fighter jet squadrons, and air defence batteries to reassure Saudi Arabia. But relations have chilled under the Biden Administration, even as Washington ostensibly remains "committed" to providing "equipment, training, and follow-on support necessary to protect Saudi Arabia, and the region, from the destabilising effects of terrorism, countering Iranian influence, and other threats." But having learned that US commitments can be fickle, Saudi Arabia appears to be cooperating with China to construct its own ballistic missiles, according to satellite imagery.



Putin and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman: Saudi Arabia is sticking with its OPEC+ oil deals with Russia (Image: Flickr)

Riyadh has also rejected the Biden Administration's requests to increase oil production to help alleviate the spike in global prices exacerbated by Russia's war on Ukraine. Instead, as oil approaches US\$120 per barrel, Saudi Arabia will abide by the quotas inked in its deal with Russia in the context of OPEC+. Besides its reluctance to abandon its oil strategy, Riyadh notes that this is another flip-flop in Washington: Only two years ago, then-President Donald Trump was begging the Saudis to do the opposite and cut production.

Of course, the primary concern uniting Washington's Middle Eastern partners is Iran, a threat that the Gulf states and Israel anticipate will become even more pronounced when and if the Biden Administration re-enters into a nuclear agreement with Iran. In the region, the bitter experience of what transpired after the 2015 deal remains fresh: Flush with cash, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ran amok throughout the Middle East, better funding its destabilising proxy militias in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon, while developing advanced ballistic missiles. Fearful of jeopardising the nuclear agreement, the Obama Administration did very little to check Teheran's regional ambitions.

To be sure, Middle Eastern recipients of US security assurances are under no illusions that Russia or China will fill the gap. But Washington's so-called "pivot to Asia" coupled



with the messy withdrawal from Afghanistan, an articulated reluctance to use military force, and an increasing reliance on economic sanctions, have several long-standing US security partners in the Middle East diversifying their relationships.

Egypt, which is poised to accept delivery of Russian-made Su-35 fighter jets – a purchase that could trigger US congressional sanctions – may be the most prominent example of this phenomenon. With the exception of Israel, however, turning to Russia and China for weapons is a growing trend.

If partners are getting increasingly nervous about relying on the United States as their main defence supplier, the shift toward Russian and Chinese arms has other reasons as well. Restrictions on the use of these weapons are not as onerous as those imposed by the United States. In fact, restrictions are non-existent. The shift to other suppliers also

**“The primary concern uniting Washington’s Middle Eastern partners is Iran, a threat that the Gulf states and Israel anticipate will become even more pronounced”**

reflects the reality of an increasingly multipolar world in which Russia is now a player in Syria and Libya, and is likely to remain one even after the Ukraine war. Both Russia and China also have important energy-related economic ties

to the Gulf. China, for example, imported roughly three times as much Middle Eastern crude in 2021 as the United States.

These new realities are impacting not only defence relationships but also US diplomatic initiatives. During both the Trump and Biden Administrations, notwithstanding multiple senior-level US requests, not a single Gulf state has condemned China for its genocide of Muslim Uyghurs. Nor did any US partner in the Gulf – with the notable exception of Kuwait – denounce Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in the initial days of the war. Even Jordan, a major recipient of US military assistance, kept quiet. After the UAE’s refusal to condemn Russia in the United Nations Security Council last week, the Gulf states only came around to censuring Moscow in the UN General Assembly’s vote on March 2.

While Israel has criticised China on the Uyghur issue and censured the Russian attack on Ukraine, it reportedly vetoed the sale of the Iron Dome anti-missile defence system – jointly developed by Israel and the United States – to Ukraine. The Israelis apparently feared that the transfer would anger the Russians, complicating the already difficult deconfliction of Israeli Air Force operations against Iranian military targets in Syria, where Moscow’s sophisticated anti-aircraft batteries guard the airspace.

Notwithstanding the pivot to Asia, the United States’ diplomatic and military presence in the Middle East re-

mains considerable. But the region’s diminished confidence in Washington undermines US efforts to push back against China’s and Russia’s growing regional influence.

Facing greater demands and limited resources going forward, Washington will have to be more judicious in its obligations and more consistent in following through, lest its assurances fail to assure. In the near term, whether or not Biden re-enters the Iran nuclear deal, no US commitment in the region is more critical than the pledge to assist its partners against the growing Iranian threat, even short of a nuclear weapon, especially as the high oil price sends ever more cash into Iran’s coffers. No matter what US officials call their commitment – “firm,” “unwavering,” “ironclad,” or any other such diplomatese – standing by its long-standing partners is the best way for Washington to maintain credibility and deter adversaries. AIR

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## MYTHS AND FACTS: THE “UKRAINE = PALESTINE” ABSURDITY

Ahron Shapiro

**S**ocial media can be a useful tool for sharing stories, ideas, commentary and breaking news, though it can just as easily be misused to spread disinformation, fake news and false narratives. In the days following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a talking point took shape among many anti-Israel activists – drawing false parallels between Ukrainians and Palestinians in an effort to recruit new activists to their own cause. Here is a look at some of the myths about Israel and the Palestinians vis-à-vis Russia and Ukraine being promoted on Twitter in recent weeks:

**Myth: Russia’s occupation of parts of Ukraine is illegal. Israel’s occupation of Palestine is similar, and similarly illegal.**

**Fact:** The crime in the Russian occupation of Crimea, and its current war in Ukraine, is the naked aggression of invading and seizing control of internationally-recognised territory of a neighbouring sovereign state without provocation. However, military occupation as such is not a crime under international law, and Israel’s occupation of the

territories it captured in the defensive war of 1967 – a war which threatened Israel’s very existence – is absolutely legal. The West Bank, unlike Ukraine, is not recognised sovereign territory of any country – certainly not of “Palestine”, a country that has to date never existed. It is instead disputed land, and Israel and the Palestinians assert two conflicting claims of right there. The fact that negotiation between these parties has not yet reached an agreement to end the occupation does not affect the legal status of the occupation.

As international law scholar Ariel Zemach has persuasively argued, “the notion of illegal occupation in international law does not extend to occupation resulting from the lawful use of force by a state in self-defense... [but is] restricted to occupations created as a result of unlawful use of force.”

(Zemach, Ariel, “Can Occupation Resulting from a War of Self-Defense Become Illegal?” (2015) *Minnesota Journal of International Law*, 316.)

Israel is under no legal obligation to endanger itself by withdrawing from territory, in the absence of a secure peace agreement, that would then be used as a staging area for renewed war. This was the wisdom behind UN Security Council Resolution 242, passed after the 1967 war. Nevertheless, Israel has repeatedly taken risks for peace and ceded control of Palestinian population centres in the Oslo Accords of the 1990s while the Palestinians rejected Israeli offers for statehood in Gaza and the vast majority of the West Bank in 2000, 2001 and 2008. The Palestinian Authority completely abandoned negotiations with Israel in 2014 and has not agreed to resume them since.

**Myth: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is no different to Israel’s previous military operations against Palestinian militants in Gaza and the West Bank. If anything, Russia has fought less brutally.**

**Fact:** Russia’s invasion of the sovereign state of Ukraine was an unprovoked act of naked aggression, with no serious pretence of being a response to prior Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory. By contrast, Israel’s military engagements with Palestinian forces in Gaza and the West Bank have been purely defensive and legitimate military responses in order to neutralise threats or restore deterrence after attacks. Often, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) takes these measures only after exercising great restraint following numerous prior attacks.



Just looking at the past 20 years or so – while then-Palestinian President Yasser Arafat launched the Second Intifada in September 2000, it took until March 2002 and many Israelis killed in bombings, shootings and other terror attacks, before the IDF launched Operation Defensive Shield to recapture the Palestinian Authority-controlled areas, only to withdraw from them in subsequent years.

The several wars and escalations between Israel and Hamas in Gaza since 2008 have each followed insufferably intense, indiscriminate, and increasingly sophisticated rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli towns, villages and eventually, its largest city, Tel Aviv and capital Jerusalem.

Israel takes every conceivable precaution to protect Palestinian civilians caught up in these Hamas-instigated military escalations –

including stringent humanitarian ceasefires, phone calls, texts, leaflets and the “knock on the roof” attacks with dummy weapons to warn civilians of upcoming airstrikes on military targets in their vicinity. From all accounts, Russia has taken no precautionary steps to protect innocent Ukrainians, while there are increasing reports of deliberate bombings of residential areas with no military target in the vicinity.

The difference between Russia’s aggressive actions in Ukraine and Israel’s defensive ones in Gaza is also illustrated by the fact that Russia is openly trying to gain control of Ukrainian cities, whereas Israel has deliberately refrained from retaking Gaza, even though it has the capabilities to do so.

The illustrative Tweet above also disingenuously makes a murky reference to an Israeli artillery barrage to defend hundreds of Israeli troops trapped in a Hamas ambush in the Gazan neighbourhood of Shejaia. First of all, artillery is not at all comparable to missiles, and by all accounts, Russia has fired many thousands of artillery shells at Ukrainian cities and towns. Moreover, at the time of the Shejaia battle, Gazan civilians had already left the area in question thanks to advance IDF warnings, given despite the fact that the laws governing war do not require such warnings.

**Myth: Supporting sanctions against Russia for invading Ukraine but not against Israel for military actions in the Palestinian territories is hypocritical.**

**Fact:** While the decision to slam Russia with crippling





sanctions is both justifiable and sensible from a diplomatic and geopolitical standpoint, there is nothing Israel has ever done to Palestinians to remotely warrant sanctions being placed on it.

First, let's look at why sanctions were clamped on Russia in the first place, at an unprecedented speed and scale. The process was eased by the urgency of Europe's fear that Putin's military campaign would expand beyond Ukraine and pessimism that diplomacy would have any meaningful effect at slowing or stopping the Russian military offensive. Moreover, given the risk that direct confrontation between NATO and Russia could descend into a nuclear war that could wipe out all of humanity, it was the strongest measure available.

In contrast, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, on a basic level, a long-standing dispute over the status and division of a territory a third of the size of Tasmania. Moreover, the stated willingness by some Palestinian leaders to consider accepting a state alongside Israel is something of an obfuscation, since at the same time no Palestinian leader has ever relinquished their demand of the legally baseless "right of return" that would require Israel to open its borders to millions of descendants of Palestinian refugees, thereby snuffing out Jewish self-determination demographically.

From where, then, comes the Palestinian fixation on sanctioning Israel? In the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement's toolbox, there is only a hammer. They see one nail – Israel (despite other countries having far worse records). In service of the zero-sum, Palestinian rejectionist narrative they embrace, it suits them (and key BDS leaders admit their goal is to end Israel's existence, not change its policies). This is because the push for sanctions on Israel is a long-standing form of warfare that traces its roots back to the Arab boycott of Jewish commerce in the land of Israel that predates Israel's establishment in 1948.

Meanwhile, out in the real world, a diplomatic toolbox is full of all sorts of policy tools besides the sanction hammer – in fact, a broad range of both deterrents and incentives. This is for good reason. In 1998, Richard N. Haass, later Director of Policy Planning for the US State Department, explained why sanctions must be used sparingly in a policy paper for the Brookings Institute.

While Haass makes many points, two are particularly germane. Firstly, that "Economic sanctions are a serious instrument of foreign policy and should be employed only after consideration no less rigorous than what would precede military intervention,"; and secondly, in other words, "Sanctions should not be used to hold major or complex

bilateral relationships hostage to a single issue or set of concerns." While it's easy to see how Iran and North Korea's nuclear programs, and Russia's invasion westward, would pass the sanctions test, even if every unproven Palestinian claim against Israel were actually true, there is no aspect of Israel's complex conflict with the Palestinians that even comes close to meeting both of these common-sense foreign policy benchmarks.

Furthermore, the IDF, as an occupying force, is legally bound to secure the territory under its control while its political status remains unresolved. There are, of course, rules and limitations to occupation that must be stringently followed (and accountability is required for incidents where, for whatever reason, they aren't). However, the vast majority of IDF activity in the West Bank de-

scribed by Israel's extreme critics as "illegal" isn't, but rather is necessary and legitimate to maintain order, fight terrorism, and to allow peaceful life to continue.

### Myth: Israel is cynically exploiting the war in Ukraine to recruit "illegal settlers" who will "uproot" Palestinians.

**Fact:** Established just three years after the end of the Holocaust – a period where millions of Jews perished because they had no place that would take them in – Israel has always proudly ensured that "never again" will Jews be left without a safe haven. To that end – and at great expense – Israel maintains a flexible budget and civil service infrastructure for accepting and absorbing Jewish refugees from around the world on short notice. Beneficiaries have included distressed Jews from Ethiopia, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Europe, South America and today, Ukraine.

Revealingly, many rabid social media critics of Israel's offer to take in distressed Ukrainian Jewry don't even bother trying to falsely claim that the Ukrainians will be sent to Israel's West Bank settlements (Israel's absorption plan, released by its Cabinet on March 13, announced 12



Seb Alam BDS @SebPalac

US accused of hypocrisy for supporting sanctions against Russia but not Israel



theguardian.com  
US accused of hypocrisy for supporting sanctions against Russia but not Israel  
Critics compare Israeli military actions of Palestinian territories with Russian invasion of Ukraine but pro-Israel groups dismiss allegations as false parallels

11:16 AM · Mar 12, 2022 · Twitter for Android

13 Retweets 27 Likes



Doire Palestine @CaitDoire · Feb 28

More displacement, more oppression. While #Ukrainian refugees are given safe haven by colonial occupiers of #Palestine, Palestinians will be uprooted & driven from their homes to make way for more illegal settlers.



Amany Khalifa @Amanykhalifa · Feb 28

Here we are again! When shit hits the fan in Europe, Palestinians pay the price. The Zionist state has already established 6 Aliyah stations at 4 Ukrainian border crossings. Thousands of settlers are expected to arrive to occupied Palestine, while thousands of us are displaced.

Show this thread



cities that would house Ukrainian refugees – none are in the West Bank.) Perhaps they saw no need for such distinctions, since such extremists see all of Israel as one big illegal settlement that needs to be removed, and all Jews who live there as settlers “displacing” the rightful Palestinian owners.

Separately, Israel is opening its borders to what are potentially tens of thousands of temporary refugees, including non-Jewish ones, starting with any Ukrainians with a family member in Israel. AIR

## UKRAINE WAR INEVITABLY SPARKS ANTISEMITISM

Judy Maynard

**I**t seems no major conflict or serious incident occurs in the world today that is not seen as fertile ground for exploitation by antisemites. The origins of the war between Russia and Ukraine have virtually nothing to do with Jews or Israel, yet both the Jewish people and the Jewish state have been caught in a crossfire of slander amongst very diverse opponents.

That Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is Jewish has presented antisemites with the opportunity to deploy this fact in their hateful narratives. Unsurprisingly many of these claims have emanated from the Middle East.

Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, a member of the Houthi Supreme Political Council in Yemen, was straightforward in explaining the war: where you have Jews, you have malignancy. He told the Lebanese TV channel *Al-Mayadeen* that what has happened to Ukraine “is the result of the evil-doing of the Jews. This is proof that when a Jew is the leader of a country, it results in war.” He expressed concern that Russia was “being dragged into this war” in order to exhaust its power and allow America to become omnipotent.

More byzantine – and largely incomprehensible – is the analysis by Gamal Roshdy, which appeared in Egyptian newspaper *AlWafd*:

All the wars, conflicts and epidemics in the world, since before the First World War until now, are arranged and

manufactured by global Zionism: the fall of the British Empire on which the sun did not set, and the emergence of America as a superpower, all of this is in a great Zionist arrangement.

... the current president of Ukraine is a Jew and was a comedian, and Zionism set up his position with all his government men in Ukraine... I am certain that Russia’s leaders know the dimensions of the scheme... the Zionist scheme... plans a nuclear clash between NATO and Russia for total mass destruction...

For good measure Roshdy then seems to imply that the Zionists are responsible for COVID-19, which, he said, is on its last legs with “only a percentage of Zionist goals... achieved”, thus supposedly fuelling the need for the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Another convoluted fantasy was written by Mowafak Mahadin – who appears to be president of the Jordanian Writers Association – and published in a Houthi newspaper. It appeared to blame both Jews and Turkey for the war – though of course it said Turkey is also secretly run by Jews, as are the Arab Gulf states:

News agencies that are subject to the whims of the imperialist, reactionary and Zionist intelligence reported that the Atlantic and Turkish intelligence began assembling Erdogan and Uyghur mercenaries in Syria to send them to Ukraine to participate in stopping the Russian advance

on the ruling Jewish protectorate in Kyiv...

It is not a coincidence that the declared and disguised Ukrainian Jews made an alliance with the “Abrahamic” Gulf Jews and the Turkish Donma Jews who, like Ukraine, dominate the government in Ankara.

Meanwhile, in Turkey, on March 7, Yigit Bulut, a leading adviser to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, posted a comment on Twitter vilifying Ukraine’s Jewish presi-

dent: “Let’s talk about the reality of Zelensky, supported by [Jewish billionaire George] Soros, leading the Ukrainian people to death, Israel-push Zelensky tomorrow, a country and its people are being thrown away, let’s look at the reality, not the perceived!!”

On March 5, Egyptian Islamic scholar Sheikh Zaghloul Al-Naggar appeared on a Muslim Brotherhood TV channel based in Turkey, and was asked his view of the appeal by President Zelensky to the Mufti of Ukraine to pray for Allah to protect his country.

He responded with the non-sequitur “Obviously, this position is completely false. [Zelensky] is a Zionist extrem-



Antisemites have seized on Ukrainian President Zelensky’s Jewishness to make him a central figure in their hateful narratives (Image: Shutterstock)

ist, whose positions about the Palestinian cause are very negative, which are devoid of justice and humanity. So how can he ask the Muslims in his country to pray for the victory of Ukraine? This is clear hypocrisy.”

It seems Al-Naggar cannot fathom Ukrainian Muslims praying for their own nation’s victory, and their own safety, if the request to do so came from a “Zionist”.

Lebanon’s ‘Imad Rizq, said to be a “researcher”, falsely told the audience on Hezbollah-owned Lebanese television station *Al-Manar* on March 1 that Ukraine’s President holds Israeli citizenship.

Rizq characterised Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as “part of a conflict between Ukrainian Jews and Russian Jews,” although is not clear how Russian President Putin fits into this scenario. Perhaps Rizq thinks he’s also Jewish.

Such nonsense is of a piece with an interview Rizq gave on Iranian TV station *Al-Alam* in 2014, in which he stated that “The Jews have always created existential crises for the others... They would buy wars in which to embroil other nations. The Jews would always weaken the other nations and then come to their rescue.”

A different conspiracy appeared in the Qatari state daily *Al-Watan* in a March 13 piece by Palestinian journalist Samir al-Barghouti. This article is notable both for the unique suggestion that large numbers of Jews will emigrate from Israel to Ukraine – audaciously at odds with the usual Palestinian complaint concerning Jewish immigration to Israel – and for the sheer number of antisemitic conspiracy theories which al-Barghouti managed to cram in.

Al-Barghouti wrote that “Putin’s stated reason for launching the all-out war [against Ukraine] is [his demand] that Ukraine be a neutral country and his opposition to the presence of NATO forces on the Russian border. But [the real reason,] which is presently secret, is the Jewish immigration to Ukraine, which started recently, and the [Jewish] declaration that the sanctity of Jerusalem will be transferred to the sky of Kiev. The meaning of this is the arrival of a nation that Putin knows is dangerous, and President Putin, who came from [Russian] intelligence, will not allow those who are harming the US and Europe to harm Russia [as well].”

Al-Barghouti goes on to assert that Putin knows or believes that the Jews executed Tsar Nicholas II; financed Lenin and Stalin; own the US Federal Bank; bankrolled Napoleon; caused the deaths of 26 million out of the 62 million Russians killed in the Gulag; were behind the assassinations of American presidents Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy; were responsible for the destruction of the World Trade Centre; and “stole the gold of the Chinese emperors.”

Meanwhile, Syrian President and Putin ally Bashar al-Assad referred to Ukrainian President Zelensky as “a Zionist Jew” who “supports the Nazis that killed the Jews” in a speech.

## THE CONSPIRATORIAL FAR RIGHT

Dr Sherri Tenpenny, an osteopath from Ohio, is an anti-vaxxer who has been named as one of the most prolific spreaders of false information about COVID-19 vaccinations. She has also used popular messaging application Telegram for antisemitic posts mentioning Jewish figures such as the Rothschild family and Jewish billionaire George Soros, some in the context of alleged world domination, and shared an interview in which Bishop Richard Williamson denied that Jews were gassed during “the quote-unquote Holocaust.”

Recently she quoted a Holocaust-denial Telegram channel, *EndTimesNewz*: “Whilst everyone is distracted by the events in (((Ukraine))), the (((WHO))) [World Health Organisation] is ramming through an international treaty on ‘pandemic’ procedures.” This was followed in bold by “Same tribe every time” and a Star of David emoji.

Triple parentheses are used on social media as an antisemitic symbol intended to indicate that those thereby identified are of Jewish background or owned by Jews – in this case, nonsensically, Ukraine and WHO.

Although united by their common goal of smearing Jews, even amongst white supremacists there is no common agreement as to which side to support.

In an article in *The Daily Beast* titled “White Nationalists Are Tearing Each Other Apart Over Ukraine,” Mark Hay points out this lack of agreement across far-right groups.

He notes that for some, Vladimir Putin is a champion of white Christian nationalism and steadfast defender against “globalist” (i.e. Jewish) schemes. The title of a March 8 episode of the internet show of US conspiracy theorist Stew Peters sums this up: “International Conspiracy: Globalist Zelensky Installed To Wage War Between Christians”.

Others stand with Ukraine, though not necessarily its government and Jewish president, seeing Putin’s stated (but spurious) claim of aspiring to “denazify” Ukraine as an attack on their own ideals, and his invasion of Ukraine as a betrayal of national self-determination. Many of these see Putin – or “Jewtin” – as controlled by Jewish Russian oligarchs, or even as a secret Jew himself.

Many white nationalists also decry this so-called “brother war”, and claim Jews instigated it for the purpose of destroying white Europeans.

Similarly, former Vatican envoy and papal nuncio to the US, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, warned that the conflict is a “trap for Russia just as much as Ukraine, using both to allow a globalist elite to bring its criminal plot to fruition.”

The extent to which Jew-hatred has coalesced around the war between Russia and Ukraine – as it seems to do with all major international events – and the amazing variety of bizarre justifications cited for this, are both astonishing and frightening.





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# Fringe Dwellers

## Pre-election extremism from the Greens and UAP

Naomi Levin

*With a federal election due in May, the AIR has examined some of the extremist rhetoric coming from two of the minor parties expected to play a significant role in the upcoming poll – the Australian Greens and the United Australia Party (UAP)*

### HOW GREEN WAS MY BOYCOTT

This parliamentary term, it seems the Australian Greens' policy of opposing boycotts of Israel has been binned.

The party has openly and repeatedly called on the Australian Government to impose a military boycott of Israel. A Senator publicly congratulated artists who boycotted the Sydney Festival because the festival accepted sponsorship from the Israeli Embassy. And a rank-and-file Greens group circulated a petition calling for Australian universities to sever ties with Israeli universities.

First, a bit of history. At its March 2010 conference, the Australian Greens explicitly rejected a resolution to support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. This rejection came under the leadership of Bob Brown. Brown's successor Christine Milne reiterated this position in 2012, as did her successor Richard Di Natale in 2015.

But it was under Di Natale that this position became increasingly compromised. Under current leader Adam Bandt, it seems to have been effectively discarded entirely – albeit without any formal change to the published official party platform.

Supporters of BDS claim it is a non-violent human rights movement seeking to persuade Israel to withdraw to its pre-1967 borders. But leaders of the BDS movement have publicly acknowledged their campaign is intended to end the existence of Israel. Meanwhile, the movement's tactics have frequently led to discrimination against not only Israelis, but non-Israeli Jews who support Israel's right to continue to exist as a Jewish homeland. This has led to legal efforts to curtail BDS discriminatory actions in numerous US states and in France, and to proposed anti-BDS laws in Britain.

It was the BDS movement that inspired a fringe group



Then Greens leader Richard di Natale joining with the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN) on a petition regarding children in detention in 2018 (Image: Facebook)

of Palestinian activists to bully performers into withdrawing from the Sydney Festival earlier this year after learning the festival had solicited and accepted modest sponsorship from the Israeli Embassy in Canberra for a dance performance. Boycott organisers claimed the Israeli sponsorship meant the festival was “culturally unsafe” for anyone who is opposed to “racism and colonialism”.

While one politically unaffiliated group, Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Australia, celebrated the boycott as the “most successful boycott campaign since the anti-apartheid movement against South African apartheid,” the reality is that the overwhelming majority of Sydney

Festival performances went ahead undisrupted.

One high-profile backer of the Sydney Festival boycott was Greens Senator Mehreen Faruqi. On Jan. 10, she tweeted, “My full support to

the courageous artists who have withdrawn from @sydney\_festival due to its partnership with the Israeli Embassy ... Solidarity with everyone standing against artwashing apartheid. Justice for Palestine!”

This tweet looks very much like support for BDS – but to the *Australia/Israel Review*'s knowledge, Senator Faruqi was not disciplined or reprimanded for expressing a view that is contrary to the party's official policy.

In addition, to the knowledge of the *Australia/Israel Review*, nobody has sought to put any distance between the Australian Greens and its grassroots group, Greens NSW for Palestine, after the latter shared posts praising artists who joined the boycott.

Nor did the Australian Greens sanction Greens NSW for Palestine when it asked its Facebook followers to sign a petition calling for a ban in Australia on the import of “settlement goods and services.” And a petition remains on the group's Facebook page calling for an end to a partnership between the University of Technology Sydney and Haifa's



Technion because the Technion is supposedly “complicit in the Israeli Government’s grave breaches of international law and human rights conventions in relation to Palestine.” These are key tactics of the global BDS movement being practised by a Greens-affiliated group.

Support from Senator Faruqi and Greens NSW for Palestine for the Sydney Festival boycott followed the introduction of a Greens policy, in May 2021, officially calling for Australia to impose a military boycott on Israel.

The boycott call, part of a resolution passed at the Greens National Conference on May 16, demanded the Australian Government “halt military cooperation and military trade with Israel.”

The Greens do not actually specify a reason why such a military boycott is warranted. It seems especially puzzling, given Australia’s military relationship with Israel benefits Australia significantly through imports of defence technology. Additionally, the intelligence relationship between the countries is known to have helped thwart terrorist attacks, including an Islamic State plot to blow up a plane and conduct a chemical weapons attack in Australia in 2017.

The Greens Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Senator Janet Rice, confirmed the intent of the national conference resolution by writing to Foreign Minister Senator Marise Payne calling on her to impose a military boycott on Israel because Israel is “credibly alleged to have committed human rights violations.”

Senator Rice’s request to Senator Payne – which unsurprisingly was not acted on by the Government – came as the ink was still drying on a ceasefire that ended nearly two weeks of conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in 2021.

That conflict, according to the Greens, was “sparked by injustice and Israeli Government policies in Jerusalem,” according to Senator Rice.

This is, to be blunt, bogus. There is no doubt that there is an ongoing messy and unfortunate private legal dispute over ownership rights over a small number of properties in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of east Jerusalem. But to try to spread the notion that Hamas, supported by its benefactor Iran, had no role in provoking the 11-day conflict is factually indefensible. It misses entirely the fact that Palestinian leadership had been inciting violence for weeks in the lead up to the conflict, that there had been unprovoked attacks by Palestinians on Jewish Israelis, and that Palestinian rioters had planned and carried out violent riots at the Al-Aqsa Mosque – and that a civil dispute in Jerusalem became a military conflict between Israel and Hamas-led Gaza when Hamas committed the war crime of firing dozens of missiles at civilian targets inside Israel on May 10.

Yet, in all the material that the *Australia/Israel Review* has examined from Greens Members of Parliament and supporter groups during and after that conflict, there is not one mention of Hamas.

Hamas is of course the terrorist organisation that was responsible for the firing of more than 4000 rockets into Israeli neighbourhoods, kindergartens and restaurant strips, and which was responsible for not only 12 Israeli deaths, but many more Gazan deaths due to misfiring rockets and the group’s penchant for co-locating military facilities in residential neighbourhoods. The closest the Greens came to mentioning Hamas and its blatantly illegal tactics was a nebulous reference to an “opposition to any violence... which impacts innocent civilians” in the 2021 National Conference Resolution.

Senator Faruqi, who rallied in support of Palestinians and made multiple speeches raising awareness about the Palestinian plight, closed out 2021 by insisting to the Senate that people like her are being silenced.

“The ultimate taboo in Australian politics is to talk about the human rights of the Palestinian people,” she said.

As soon as anyone raises Palestinian human rights, Senator Faruqi told the Senate, “you are hounded and you are condemned. Shamefully and shamelessly, they try to label you as antisemitic, all designed to shut you up, to silence you.”

It is interesting that Senator Faruqi’s devotion to raising awareness of the human rights of the Palestinian people does not appear to extend to condemning Hamas – which violently cracks down against dissenters, arbitrarily arrests journalists, supports honour killings and criminalises homosexuality. Hamas is now being proscribed as a terrorist organisation in its entirety by the Australian Government – a decision not a single Greens MP welcomed or publicly supported.

Senator Faruqi’s views – and by implication those of her party – on Israel, boycotts, and the Palestinians should now be clear to readers of the *Australia/Israel Review*. What should also be clear to readers is the obsolescence of the party’s traditional stance opposing BDS. The Australian public, and especially voters, should be taking this new radical Greens stance into consideration in all interactions with the party.

## KELLY GANG SHOOT FROM THE LIP

United Australia Party (UAP) candidates running in seats with sizeable Jewish communities have spread conspiracy theories associated with antisemitic tropes and drawn inappropriate and disrespectful comparisons between local public health orders and Nazi Germany.



Like some of his candidates, UAP leader Craig Kelly has his own history of inappropriate Nazi analogies (Image: Facebook)





The UAP is the populist political party founded by Queensland-based businessman and one-time Member of Parliament Clive Palmer, and today led by former Liberal MP and current crossbencher, Craig Kelly.

Jefferson Earl has been pre-selected as the UAP candidate for Macnamara, the inner-Melbourne seat currently held by Labor's Josh Burns. The heavily Jewish suburbs of Caulfield, St Kilda East and Elsternwick are all part of Macnamara.

Earl is active on social media, where he has a Twitter account, and also a video channel on BitChute.

BitChute is an uncensored video-sharing platform rife with antisemitism, conspiracy theories and hate speech. Why not the much more widely used YouTube? Presumably because Earl's views are so far from mainstream, they would likely be classified as misinformation and removed by content moderators on the Google-owned site.

For some time, Earl has opposed COVID-19 vaccination and promoted alternate medical therapies as effective treatments. He has joined protests at Victorian Parliament and recorded videos outside the Shrine of Remembrance for his small number of Twitter followers.

Earl has also posted a multitude of comparisons between local public health measures and Nazi Germany.

On July 7, 2021, on the cusp of one of Melbourne's lengthy lockdowns, Earl shared a Tweet with a large photo of Adolf Hitler, comparing the Nazi dictator's purported political strategy to that of Australia.

On Sept. 6, 2021, Earl called Victoria's Premier, "Hitler @DanielAndrewsMP", and on Sept. 22 he tweeted at Victoria Police enforcing public health measures during lockdowns "enough you Nazis". On Sept. 14, the UAP

candidate called vaccine certificates "#nazipassports".

Making such inappropriate Nazi analogies and labelling leaders making decisions, however controversial, within democratic societies as comparable to Adolf Hitler cheapens the crimes of the Nazis, and shows disrespect to the millions of victims of Nazi Germany and its genocidal policies.

Yet to the best of our knowledge Earl has not been reprimanded for his social media posts by party leader Kelly. In 2020, Kelly himself compared Victorian lockdowns to Nazi Germany and while he apologised to his "many good friends in the Jewish community," the comparisons have spread unchecked among UAP supporters and candidates.

In addition to engaging in such inappropriate and ugly analogies, Earl has warned of signs of the coming of a "new world order". The new world order conspiracy theory posits that there is a cabal of world leaders who are seeking to spread repressive, socialist or tyrannical policies. It is very often linked to Jewish business leaders or politicians and has echoes of the old *Protocol of the Elders of Zion*-based conspiracy theories that Jews are seeking to control the world through commerce, politics or the media.

On Sept. 11, 2021, Earl tweeted

"Vitamin D is critical in case reduction and preventing serious disease of Covid-19. Anyone else noticing very strange cloud formations? Check this yesterday in Melbourne. This is not normal, look at the straight line and the wispy [sic] trail it's leaving. New World Order?"

A few months later, he tweeted that Melbourne is the "test case for the New World Order."

In recent weeks, Earl has also taken to Twitter to express his support for Russian President Vladimir Putin and condemn Western support for Ukraine.

"Every Australian needs to DEMAND that governments back off Russia immediately," he wrote on Jan. 25.

On Feb. 21, he tweeted, "Russia deserves security. NATO should stop expanding on Russia's borders."

Two days later, he admitted to his Twitter followers that his views on Putin were not UAP policy.

In the neighbouring electorate of Higgins, held by Liberal MP Katie Allen, UAP candidate Ingram Spencer has filmed himself being reprimanded – though not arrested – by police after an altercation at a Malvern church over mandatory mask rules.

Spencer, who shares his unorthodox views on COVID-19 on Twitter, has also shared material apparently



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deploying inappropriate and disrespectful Nazi analogies with his small number of followers. On Feb. 15 this year, he retweeted an image that distorted Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's face to look like Hitler's. A few days later, in response to another tweet about Canada, he wrote "absolute Nazis".

Spencer is also interested in the "new world order" conspiracy theory, sharing a meme featuring Putin with the text, "Do you know why your media programs you to hate me? Because I told them the new world order is not welcome in my land."

He has also shared conspiracy theories accusing the World Economic Forum (WEF) of planning to genetically engineer humans and accusing Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky of somehow being directed by the WEF and global elites, including Hungarian-born Jewish businessman and philanthropist George Soros.

Spencer, who appears to favour loosening gun control laws in Australia, also shared a conspiracy theory denying Port Arthur Massacre gunman Martin Bryant ever fired a shot during the massacre.

The UAP has claimed it will run a candidate in every seat at the upcoming federal election. AIJAC urges voters to research the UAP candidate in their seat before considering casting their ballot for them.

AIR

## A TERRIBLE IRAN DEAL, OR PLAN B?

Blaise Misztal and Jonathan Ruhe

Russia has opened a new front in the Ukraine war, more than 1,000 kilometres west of Kyiv – in Vienna, where world powers have been negotiating a nuclear deal with Iran. The contours of that agreement were already dangerous enough. Now, Moscow is making new demands, using the talks to distract from and disrupt attempts to punish its illegal invasion.

It is difficult to gauge just how close the United States, its European partners, Russia, and China are to a nuclear agreement with Iran. For months, US officials have said that they are "weeks, not months" from a deal. In recent weeks, they have claimed to be just days away.

What does seem clear is that the deal emerging in Vienna is neither the simple "return" to the previous 2015 agreement negotiated by the Obama Administration nor the "longer, stronger" deal the Biden Administration promised.

The Obama-era agreement sought to keep Iran a year away from a nuclear weapon for 13 years. The new deal appears to leave Iran with half the breakout time (six

months) for half as long (seven years). It also could commit Western countries to pay Russia to take Iran's close-to-weapons grade uranium, even as Moscow is sanctioned by those same countries.

Meanwhile, Iran would get more concessions than in 2015. This includes lifting nuclear sanctions, but also those based on Iran's sponsorship of terrorism. Most appallingly, negotiators are reportedly considering rescinding the designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation – even as the IRGC fires missile volleys at US targets in Iraq.

This deal is drastically different – shorter and weaker – from the original it purports to revive. It, as the Russian negotiator put it, gives Iran "much more than I expected, others expected."

Still, it was not good, or bad, enough for Russia.

Just when the deal seemed done, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov suddenly demanded a "written guarantee" to exempt Russian-Iranian transactions from any sanctions against Russia for invading Ukraine. Ultimately, the Biden Administration refused Moscow's more broad-ranging demands for blanket exemptions on all its trade with Teheran, but Russia is still walking away with US waivers for its state-run nuclear energy company's US\$10 billion contract to expand Iran's nuclear power plant at Bushehr.

Moreover, Russia's ploy means that the talks now continue dragging along. With US and European attention focused on Ukraine, and with Lavrov's demand pausing the Vienna negotiations indefinitely, Iran continues enriching more uranium and installing more advanced centrifuges, further shrinking its perilously small four-week breakout window. Washington's Middle Eastern partners grow even more alarmed and less cooperative, even before the missile attack on Iraq on March 13. A new regional conflict becomes all too possible, further stretching a United States already dealing with Ukraine.

Amid these mounting delays, and with Iran delaying things further by demanding more US concessions, the Biden Administration should do what it has long promised – recognise that time has run out and exit the talks.

Instead of a dangerous deal, especially one granting Teheran and Moscow economic lifelines, or protracted negotiations with constant Russian spoilers, the United States and its European partners should move to a serious "Plan B".

Because viable military options can most reliably counter Iran's malign behaviours, the United States must urgently enhance its Middle East force posture for operations against Iran and its proxies.

The Biden Administration also must strengthen Israel's freedom of action. Foremost, this means expediting the transfer of KC-46A refuelling tankers, and F-15I and F-35 fighter jets.



Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei with leaders of the IRGC, the parallel military created to protect and spread the Islamic revolution (Image: Twitter)

Diplomatic outreach to and security cooperation with US partners in the Gulf must also be prioritised. These partners worry correctly that a new nuclear deal – especially one that lifts IRGC sanctions – could threaten them foremost. These partners are also critical to blunting the impact on world prices of necessary sanctions on Russian energy exports.

Nominating high-profile and trusted ambassadors to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, whose US embassies inexplicably have no chief of mission, should be a priority. Redesignating Iran's Yemeni proxy, the Houthis, as a terrorist entity would strongly signal that Washington takes its partners' security seriously.

These steps would push back on Iran's dangerous nuclear advancement, lay the groundwork for the "longer, stronger" deal Biden promised, and help erect a common front against Russia as well.

Rather than simply staying in Vienna for as long as Iran wants, the only way out for the United States now is the door.

AIR

*Blaise Misztal and Jonathan Ruhe are Vice President for Policy and Director of Foreign Policy, respectively, at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA). Originally published in the National Interest. © JINSA (www.jinsa.org) reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## DELISTING THE IRGC WOULD BE A BOON FOR TERRORISM

Jacob Nagel and Meir Ben-Shabbat

A US decision to remove Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from its foreign terrorist organisations blacklist would not simply be a distortion of truth and adoption of a double standard regarding terrorism. Worse, it would be an American show of surrender to Iran and a reward to the main sponsor of terrorism in our time – a sponsor that sows chaos in the Middle East and the entire world, from Syria and Lebanon to Argentina.

Additionally, it would put spokes into the wheels of Israel and America's other allies in the region, who deal with destructive terrorist plots daily, courtesy of the Revolutionary Guards.

Were it not for steps previously taken by the Biden Administration, one might suspect that the discussion of delisting the IRGC was a tactical move by Washington, designed to provide the Administration with an opportunity to refuse the request and assume an uncompromising stance toward Iran. Such a stance might help dull down the torrent of criticism aimed at it for surrendering to Tehran's dictates on other issues in the nuclear talks.

Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to take such a possibility seriously when one recalls the words of Russia's main negotiator in Vienna about the concessions Iran was able to extract from the US during the talks. Russia's delegation head at the talks, Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov, told Iranian media in early March that "Iran got much more than it could expect, much more... Realistically speaking, Iran got more than frankly, I expected or others expected."

Moreover, a decision to remove the Revolutionary Guards from the blacklist does not seem far-fetched when remembering that one of the first decisions the Biden Administration made was removing the Houthis from the same listing only two days after they attacked Saudi Arabia. The Administration has also refrained from adding them back onto the list ever since, despite the fact that the Houthis have continued to conduct more attacks, this time against the United Arab Emirates.

In 2019, when then-US President Donald Trump decided to designate the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist group, the White House explained that this move recognised a reality in which Iran not only funds terrorism but actively participates in it and uses it to advance its political goals via this body.

Then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was also familiar with the organisation's misdeeds due to his previ-

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ous work as Director of the CIA, said it best:

“For 40 years, the Islamic Republic’s Revolutionary Guard Corps has actively engaged in terrorism and created, supported, and directed other terrorist groups. The IRGC masquerades as a legitimate military organisation, but none of us should be fooled... From the moment it was founded, the IRGC’s mandate was to defend and export the regime’s revolution by whatever means possible... The Trump administration is simply recognizing a basic reality. The IRGC will take its rightful place on the same list as terror groups its supports [such as Hezbollah, and others.]

The Revolutionary Guards was founded in 1979 by order of then-Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as a counterweight to the Iranian military – which he did not trust because of the American education its senior commanders had received and their previous closeness to the shah. It is organised and operates as a parallel military.



The seal of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, including a revealing Koranic verse

It has ground forces, air and space forces, a navy, a special force called the Quds Brigade, an intelligence arm and the Basij – a paramilitary volunteer militia that is used to maintain internal

security and brutally oppress opponents of the regime. The IRGC also operates Iran’s ballistic missile arsenal.

The Revolutionary Guards serves not only as the main means of ensuring the survival of Iran’s clerical regime but as the main means to achieving its ambitious vision: to establish Iranian hegemony in the region and to spread the idea of the Islamic Revolution throughout the world.

The Quds Force is the main Iranian group that manages Iran’s terror and military proxies and Shi’ite militias outside the country. Its arms extend, among other places, to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, the Gulf States, East Asia, Africa, South America and the Gaza Strip.

The US-led assassination of Quds Force chief Qassem Soleimani in early 2020 exposed to the world the scope of this organisation’s activities, and its great prominence in Iran.

The Quds Force has a special status within the Iranian regime that comes from the combination of its military, economic and political power, and its special closeness to the supreme leader. If Iran developed a nuclear weapon, it would most likely be kept and operated by the Quds Force.

Adding an organisation like the IRGC to the terrorist listing is not just a symbolic move. It is an essential means to delegitimise it, limit contacts with it and impose heavy economic sanctions on it.

Removing the Revolutionary Guards from the list will hence pave the way for an increase of its economic power,

which it will then leverage into an increase of its military and political capabilities. All of this would happen following the signing of a new nuclear agreement – meaning at the same time when Iran will be gaining the release of billions of dollars into its coffers.

And what is Iran supposed to give in return for the IRGC delisting? Commit to “de-escalation”? And even with regards to that the Iranians are still bargaining over the content and characteristics of any such promise. In any case, there is no need to delve deeper into the questionable validity of any such Iranian promise.

To understand how much such a commitment is worth, it is enough to take a brief look at the logo of the IRGC that includes the Koranic verse (8:60) chosen as its motto: “Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power...” [the next phrase of that verse is “to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah.” Ed.] AIR

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## AUSTRALIAN PRO-ISIS PROPAGANDIST: “ALLAH! DESTROY ISRAEL!”

Ran Porat

**S**ydney resident Wisam Haddad, also known by the name Abu Ousayd al-Mashaqli, is a fundamentalist Islamist and self-declared ISIS supporter with a long record of ties to people who later allegedly engaged in terrorism. According to the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Haddad is “a central figure in the radical Salafi and jihadi community in Australia and among English-speaking jihadi followers on social media.”

### FROM A BOOKSHOP TO ONLINE EXTREMISM

In 2012, Haddad opened the Al-Risalah (“The Message”) Islamic Centre and bookstore in Bankstown in western Sydney, which quickly “gained a reputation as a centre of Islamic extremism,” according to an ABC investigation. By 2013 it had become a hub for extremist

preachers recruiting young Australian Muslims to illegally travel to Syria to fight for, or to join humanitarian missions associated with, Islamist groups there. One of the preachers who lectured at Al-Risalah was Abu Sulayman (Mostafa Mahamad Farag), one of Australia's highest-ranking Al-Qaeda terrorists in Syria. Among Haddad's friends was ISIS terrorist Khaled Sharrouf – infamous for posting photos of his children holding severed heads – who frequently visited Al-Risalah before he travelled to Syria, where he was alleged to have been killed fighting for ISIS.

Al-Risalah was raided by the Australian authorities in September 2013, and a month later, the centre was forced to close.

In 2013, Haddad was allegedly involved in a fire-bombing attack on a juice bar in Bankstown right next to the Al-Risalah centre. Haddad is suspected of being behind a two-week campaign of threats and intimidation against the owner of the juice bar, Ali Issawi, after the latter was alleged online to be a supporter of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. According to newspaper accounts, Haddad openly threatened Assad supporters, saying people should “crush them down with our feet,” and demanded Issawi donate money to Syria. Reports suggest that Haddad influenced the individuals who later attacked Issawi's shop.

In 2014, Haddad became the spokesperson of the Australian branch of the German-based *Millatu Ibrahim* (“Religion of Abraham”) organisation – which had been outlawed by Berlin two years earlier. ASIO cancelled the passports of leading *Millatu Ibrahim* members in Australia, and the bank accounts the group used to channel funds to Syria and to Egypt, supposedly for humanitarian aid, were shut down.

Haddad told the media that more Australians should go to Syria to join jihadist groups there: “Even if it's a thousand [Australians going to Syria to fight and give aid to Islamist groups], I think it should be double that.” He begged to go to Syria himself to join ISIS and challenged Australian Prime Minister at the time, Tony Abbott, to revoke his citizenship to enable the trip.

In January 2015, the police raided Haddad's home in Leppington in western Sydney, uncovering weapons, a machete hidden under his bed, ISIS DVDs (including with sermons by the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi) and an ISIS flag, along with dozens of newspaper clippings about counter-terrorism operations and arrests in Australia. He escaped a prison sentence despite having been caught in illegal possession of three weapons (two tasers and a can of capsicum spray) hidden in his house.



Wisam Haddad in one of his online sermons (YouTube screenshot)

Haddad also collected donations to help convicted terrorists held in Australia (called the “Brothers Behind Bars” campaign), including for Sydneysider Hamdi Alqudsi, who was charged with aiding at least six men to get to Syria and join ISIS. In 2019, while still serving his six-year sentence in jail, Alqudsi was also charged with several counts of terrorism and with leading a terror cell in Australia.

Haddad's radicalism was even too much for another Australian Sunni extremist organisation often featured in past exposes in this magazine, *Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah* (ASWJ, translates as “The family of the way of the prophet, the Sunnah, and his Companions”). In 2016, Haddad was banned from ASWJ's Revesby Mosque in Sydney.

Yet Haddad continues to preach his ideology in mosques and online. According to MEMRI, he has recently “expanded his online presence, sharing content on platforms such as Telegram, Instagram, SoundCloud, and YouTube, in addition to his website,” including promoting content by the pro-ISIS British preacher Anjem Choudury.

A central idea in Haddad's teaching is to urge Muslims to re-establish the Islamic empire (Caliphate) to subdue all humanity to Islam. In a video recently posted (Feb. 25) on his social media account, Haddad called on all Muslims to rebuild the Caliphate so that Islam would “dominate”, explaining that Islam “will dominate all other ways of life, even if the disbelievers they hate it, [and] even if the *mush-rikeen* [polytheists] detest it.” Haddad says in the video, “We aim to establish Allah's religion in its entirety in every soul and upon every inch of this earth.”

## “ALLAH! DESTROY THE NATION OF ISRAEL”

In May 2021, Haddad released a video on the conflict between Hamas and Israel in Gaza at the time, titled: “They Are The Enemy, So Beware Of Them | #Palestine”.

The video opens with images from the war in Gaza. A Jihadi song playing in the background calls on Muslims to send their armies to fight against their enemies. While the

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song cries, “So where are all your armies? Please answer us,” images of Israel’s Prime Minister at the time, Binyamin Netanyahu, and of Israeli officers and soldiers appear with animated splashes of blood on them.

The song praises martyrdom and war: “When the battle becomes fierce, they [Islam’s enemies] turn into female sheep [...] we wonder when Salah al-Din is coming to save us, or maybe al-Miqdad [ibn Aswad, one of Islam’s early generals], the one who loved paradise. We will never bow down to a cowardly oppressor who hunts down anyone who follows the *Din* [religion] of Allah!”

When Haddad first appears on the screen he talks about “what is happening to them [the Palestinians] by the hands of the Zionist Israeli Jews, the Israeli army and the Israeli police force, who for years have been doing what they were doing, but in Ramadan of this year they increased these attacks on the Muslims.”

The Palestinians, says Haddad, want to live in a land “liberated for the Muslims and for the *Ummah* [the global community of Muslims]” by past Muslim conquerors.

Talking about contemporary Arab leaders, Haddad states that “they are *tawarid* [Trojan horses], they are the enemies of Allah. They are the protectors of Israel. They are the guard dogs in the Middle East.” These leaders are reprehensible because they have “stopped” the *Mujahideen* (Muslim warriors) from attacking Israel, Haddad says.

Haddad encourages young Palestinians to wage war: “But there are Mujahideen today. They are the youth of Palestine! They are the youth of the West Bank. They are the youth of Gaza. They are the youth of Al-Aqsa who are protecting it! They are the heroes today. They are the warriors today [...] They are fighting to make the word of Allah the highest, and the words of the disbelievers the lowest.

“What is happening in Palestine is not something old. Every year, year after year, the Zionists, the Zionist regime, the oppressive illegal State of Israel – it kills our brothers and sisters,” says Haddad.

Promoting the narrative that Jews have been ‘planted’ in the region by foreign powers, Haddad argues that the Palestinians, unlike the Jews, “did not come there a hundred years ago or so. They weren’t placed there by the UN. They existed far before any anyone else invaded their land and took over their land and oppressed their land and oppressed its people.” Haddad warns, “those who are fighting the Muslims [will] have a further and a worse punishment in the hereafter.”

Using a ghoulish metaphor, Haddad describes Israel as a butcher killing the innocent Islamic nation while claiming to be the victim. “The Ummah at the moment is like a sacrificial animal who is being brought to the slaughter, and the one doing the slaughtering is a man wearing completely white from head to toe. He’s wearing white clothing. He takes his knife, he slaughters the animal. And when the blood of the animal spills out and it spills

onto the clothes, the white clothes of the slaughterer, the slaughterer returns and says – ‘Look what this animal did! Look what you have done to me. Look at the blood on me. Oh UN! Oh community of the world! Oh people across the world! Look at this blood on me, look what they have done.’ This is Israel right now. This is what it does.

“And we are that sacrificial animal. We are the animal which is being slaughtered and nobody looks at us being slaughtered.”

Israel is further demonised by Haddad as a murderous enemy of Islam and of God: “Our brothers and sisters and our children are being crushed by buildings, killed by rockets and terrorised by these enemies of Allah.

“They [Israel] have been fighting our brothers and sisters in Palestine since 1947, or if not earlier than that and they have still not been able to kill them off,” argues Haddad.

Muslims outside Palestine should have joined the battle, laments Haddad, but they are stopped by laws and state security agency oversight: “We have laws. We have borders. We have agencies, security agencies, whatever it may be that stop us from doing certain things.”

Haddad finishes by urging Muslims to “Hate it [Israel] in your heart” and calls on Allah “who is above them, who is above the warplanes – Allah! destroy the nation of Israel!” Haddad asks his followers to pray and “ask Allah to destroy these enemies of Allah.”

## CELEBRATING THE DEATH OF COLIN POWELL

In Oct. 2021, former US Secretary of State Colin Powell passed away. Powell is remembered for his senior positions during both US wars in Iraq – in 1991 as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in 2003 as the Secretary of State during the George W Bush Administration. For Haddad, Powell’s death was a cause for celebration.

On his Telegram channel, he told followers: “We praise and thank Allah on hearing about the death of this evil individual. The amount of deaths, abuse, rape, torture and oppression at the hands of the US is forever embedded in the hearts and minds of all Muslims across the globe... May Allah intensify this individual’s punishment in the grave and in the Hellfire by 84-fold. No remorse for mass murderers and killers. My brothers and sisters, make prostration of thankfulness that this enemy will now get what he deserves from the Creator of the heavens and earth. There is no escape from Allah!!! #*alhumdullilah* [praise Allah].”

AIR

*Dr. Ran Porat is an AIJAC Research Associate. He is also a Research Associate at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University and a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya.*







# ESSAY

## A True Crime

### Anne Frank “investigation” trashes the Holocaust

Jonathan Tobin

**B**ooks, movies, and television shows about actual murder cases have been a staple of popular culture ever since Truman Capote turned the story of a gruesome Kansas family slaying into his mammoth 1966 best-seller, *In Cold Blood*. Capote launched a genre, now commonly known as True Crime. As the available fare on 2022 cable and streaming services demonstrates, the public’s appetite here is insatiable.

It was therefore inevitable that sooner or later an author or a team of would-be detectives would take up the case of who was responsible for betraying the teenage girl whom Dara Horn aptly described in her book *People Love Dead Jews* as “everyone’s (second) favorite Jew”: Anne Frank.

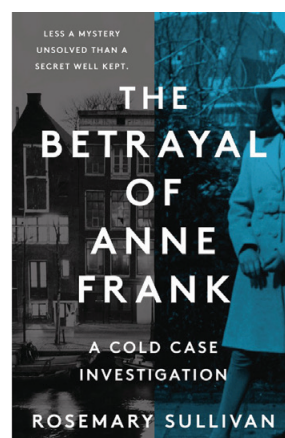
Among the most frequently asked questions by tourists who visit the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam is who was responsible for the raid on the secret annexe behind the false bookcase at Prinsengracht 263 on Aug. 4, 1944. For more than two years, eight Jews (Otto, Edith, Margot, and Anne Frank; Herman, Augusta, and Peter van Pels; and Fritz Pfeffer) had hidden in the annexe above the warehouse where Otto Frank had run his business. All were arrested. Only Otto survived their imprisonment in the Westerbork Camp and then their subsequent

transport to Auschwitz. The other seven, including Anne, perished in the death camps. Her diary, found later, would immortalise all of them.

Dutch authorities conducted two investigations into the betrayal, one in the immediate post-war era and another in 1963, but no culprit was discovered. Over the years, suspicion has fallen on several figures. Willem van Maarten, a warehouse employee who had asked a lot of questions of those who were helping the hidden Jews, was long considered the most likely betrayer. Other suspects included Lena Hartog, the wife of the assistant manager of the warehouse; Anton Ahlers, a notorious criminal; Nelly Voskujil, the sister of one of the helpers; and Anna van Dijk, a Jewish woman later convicted of helping the Nazis find hidden Jews and the sole Dutch woman executed for the crime of collaboration.

But conclusive proof or anything close to it has always been lacking. The only real clue was the fact that the Nazi SD officer who led the raid on the annexe, Otto Silberbauer, claimed it was prompted by a phone call from a source with information about hidden Jews.

Since we know the identity of the true culprit – Hitler – the mechanics of the Frank family’s exposure would not really seem to matter much. But for True Crime obsessives, an unsolved mystery is a challenge not to be ignored. In 2016, Dutch filmmaker Thijs Bayens and journalist Pieter van Twisk assembled a team to investigate. Former FBI agent Vince Panoke, who had used profiling techniques and technology to combat drug traffickers and Wall Street swindlers in America, subsequently joined them. The team was completed when Canadian non-fiction author Rosemary Sullivan, who had previously written a book about escape from France during the Holocaust, joined their ranks in 2019 as the Cold Case Team’s (the term is used in initial caps by Sullivan) Boswell.



Sullivan turned the team’s six years of labour into a book called *The Betrayal of Anne Frank: A Cold Case Investigation*.

According to Sullivan, after considering the case from every angle and even employing an artificial intelligence program specially created for them by Microsoft and metadata analysis to

make sense of the mountains of information about the Holocaust in the Netherlands, the team produced an answer to the mystery. The team was “85 percent” sure that the person who betrayed the Franks and the others in the annexe was someone even those well-versed in the lore of the diary had never heard of. His name: Arnold van den Bergh. He was a Dutch-Jewish notary and a member of the Jewish Council of community members that had, like similar councils in every other occupied country and ghetto, collaborated with the Germans.

The sole piece of evidence for this claim was an anonymous note sent to Otto Frank after the war. The note claimed that van den Bergh had

given the Germans information about Prinsengracht 263, which led to the raid. While it is possible that Frank believed the claim, he did not publicise it in any way or present it or the note when van den Bergh was put on trial by a Jewish honour court after the war.

The assumption here is that van den Bergh had somehow obtained the addresses of Jews living in hiding and passed them on to his German interlocutors so that he could escape the fate of deportation and murder that would be the lot of 75% of Dutch Jews. Though van den Bergh survived the war, he died of cancer in 1950.

Sullivan's book was rolled out in January 2022 by its American publisher with the kind of ballyhoo most authors could only dream of. An exclusive segment on the US version of "60 Minutes" highlighted the book and its findings while asking no tough questions about the broad conclusions Sullivan and her Cold Case Team heroes had reached. Laudatory reviews in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and many other publications soon followed.

In the initial surge of good publicity, some did note that the evidence pointing to van den Bergh's guilt was, at best, flimsy. But the book was praised for Sullivan's narrative skills and the picture she painted of life in wartime Holland as seen through the prism of detectives searching for the truth about the identity of the person who cut short the life of a beloved figure. Stories in newspapers around the world heralded their achievement, with some, like Britain's *Daily Mail*, employing headlines that proclaimed, "Anne Frank was betrayed by a JEWISH notary."

It would take only a couple of weeks for all the good feelings about Sullivan and the book to evaporate. Once the Harper Collins publicity blitz had run its initial course, the

book stayed in the news – but for reasons that were not to the liking of the author or her publisher.

Holocaust historians including the Dutch author David Barnouw pointed out that there is no real proof that the Jewish Council in Amsterdam had possessed the addresses of the Jews who were hiding there, least of all the address of Otto Frank, who had plotted his escape with his former employees and not with the Dutch

**"What makes *The Betrayal of Anne Frank* so extraordinarily tone-deaf to the implications of its conclusion is not just the paper-thin nature of the case it makes against van den Bergh"**

resistance. Moreover, the Jewish Council had been disbanded in 1943, with most of its staff deported and murdered – the Franks were betrayed in 1944.

Van den Bergh was a shady character who had profited from the sale of Jewish property to Nazis before having to go underground himself to save his life and those of his wife and daughters. But nothing uncovered in the investigation linked him to the possession of such addresses or any knowledge of Jews in hiding other than his own family.

It is also worth noting that the software and the FBI crime-solving techniques the team employed did not advance the case a jot. And while

the team did locate a copy of the anonymous accusation against van den Bergh, its members were not able to discover who had sent it or why its author believed him to be guilty.

Like those who had come before, the team came to the conclusion that the more obvious suspects, like Maarten, were probably innocent. Some historians, faced with the same evidence, have come to believe that, with other scenarios ruled out, the

most likely answer to the puzzle is that there was no betrayer. It may have been that the raid was an accident caused by a series of robberies of the warehouse that had come to the attention of the police. Though this theory, like all the others, is unproven, it does make sense that authorities might have concluded that thieves were using a secret hiding place in the building to escape detection or for storing loot and happened upon the hidden Jews without being tipped to their presence there.

But a True Crime tale simply cannot allow for the possibility that a mystery may never be solved. Its heroes these days are primarily dogged people who take up heretofore cold cases and bring the truth behind them to light. For the Cold Case Team to come to the end of its labours without producing a murderer would have been unthinkable – not to mention



Arnold van den Bergh (second from left): Accused of betraying Anne Frank's family

that it would have ended any hope of its investigation being considered a success and Sullivan's book a commercial triumph. And so they implicated a Jew in the murder of a secular saint at a time of rising antisemitism in America, Europe, and across the globe.

Neither Sullivan nor Harper Collins backed down in the face of a torrent of criticism, including a highly negative *New York Times* article on the controversy. Sales have been brisk, helped along by the Costco discount outlet making the book a "buyer's pick".

But the German division of Harper Collins has not been so sanguine. It released a statement that it would reconsider the book's findings before publishing it in March. Even worse for the book, Ambo Anthos, a publishing firm that had produced a Dutch translation of *The Betrayal of Anne Frank* on the same date as the US release, halted publication entirely. That was in keeping with the demand of the European Jewish Congress, which believes that the book's unproven accusations are "potentially incendiary" in the current climate in which Jews have been under siege in Western Europe.

This all matters because Anne's diary is the best-known example of Holocaust literature. Rather than just the jottings of a bored teen trapped in an intolerable rabbit warren where she, her family, and a few others were forced to live in silence, *The Diary of a Young Girl* is a genuinely great work of literature. Anne's keen powers of observation and honesty, mixed with the hopes and dreams of a teen who still envisioned a productive life once her ordeal was over, have made the *Diary* immortal. Its unique power is rooted in the way ordinary readers, especially young ones, can identify with Anne and the idea of having to hide to avoid being murdered by totalitarian thugs.

The *Diary* subsequently was adapted into a hit play and then movie – with much of the specifically Jewish content edited out by authors who,

acting with the approval of Otto Frank, wanted to make Anne into a universal heroine rather than a Jewish one. Frank had also seen to it that Anne's thoughts about her sexuality and some of the more bitter criticisms of her mother were not included in the first published editions.

The universalist theme is reinforced by the much-quoted line toward the end when Anne writes, "I still believe, that in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart." As Dara Horn notes, Anne thereby became "the innocent dead girl" who "offered us grace" for the slaughter of six million Jews, and thereby allowed readers to glide past and through the brutal facts of a genocide. As more than a few Jewish commentators have noted, Anne would soon be given every reason to understand that people are *not* good of heart – especially when the fate of powerless Jews is at stake – when she had to watch her mother and sister succumb to disease and hunger before herself dying at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. But that grim truth is not a lesson as easy to stomach as the one that tells us that we can all prevent Holocausts by being nice to one another.

What makes *The Betrayal of Anne Frank* so extraordinarily tone-deaf to the implications of its conclusion is not just the paper-thin nature of the case it makes against van den Bergh. Leave aside the fact that there's no reasonable basis to conclude with 85% (or any other arbitrary number) certainty that van den Bergh was the culprit. What's worse is the fact that Sullivan and the investigators spent so little of their time trying to make sense of the complicated dilemmas faced by the various Jewish Councils (or *Judenrats*, as they were called in Eastern Eu-



Anne Frank's memory has increasingly been misappropriated, but the "True Crime" approach has taken this ugly trend to new heights, Tobin argues (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

rope) set up by the Germans in every occupied country.

Though *Judenrats* were reviled by the Jews they governed for the Nazis, and especially by those who chose the more heroic path of resistance, Holocaust scholars now see the members of the councils as just a different class of victim rather than active collaborators. Many of those on the councils were given little choice about joining. And even if some did volunteer, few if any of them knew enough about what was going on to be considered shameless criminals by history.

In Isaiah Trunk's 1972 book *Judenrat* – the single best study of the topic – he outlines the three basic questions that needed to be asked about the members of these bodies. One was whether they should have revealed to the Jews in their communities any knowledge they might have had of the impending disaster facing them. The second was whether any Jew, however reluctantly, lent a hand in the "selection" of Jews for the deportations that meant almost certain death. The third – and the one that applies almost across the board to all those placed in such positions, including non-Jewish authorities who either chose or were forced to collaborate with the Germans – is whether they were right to



offer up some victims to be sacrificed in order to rescue others.

It is breathtakingly easy for contemporary readers to come to definitive answers to those questions, but doing so in the years from 1941 to 1944 was far harder. Many of those placed on Jewish Councils believed that the Nazis were still more interested in profiting from exploiting the Jews rather than killing them all, and therefore genuinely believed they could save many lives by acting as intermediaries.

Far more notorious examples of these dilemmas exist than the case of van den Bergh. Hungarian Zionist leader Rudolf Kastner negotiated with Final Solution mastermind Adolph Eichmann for the lives of a trainload of Jews who, along with him, did wind up surviving the Holocaust. But Kastner, unlike many others who were placed in such positions, did likely know what awaited those who could not escape. The descendants of those who were saved by him still honour his memory. But his failure to raise awareness among the Jews left behind so that they might seek some method of escape or resistance embittered those who were not so fortunate. He was also accused of betraying the martyred resistance heroine and Hebrew poet Hannah Senesh to the Nazis.

All dramatic depictions of the Holocaust must wrestle with the reality that fiction is ultimately incapable of capturing what Elie Wiesel called “the kingdom of death” the Nazis created – a network of mass murder unlike anything else that had ever existed.

A play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett adapted from Anne’s diary, which debuted to rave reviews in 1955, is a key example of the banality that can ensue. The Goodrich and Hackett play, which has since been revised many times, ends with the quote about people being good at heart. This has the effect of sending audiences home happy even though they know Anne is doomed.

If that is so of even the most well-intentioned depictions of the Holocaust, it is especially true of one that views the murder of even the most famous victim of the Nazis as fodder for True Crime exegesis.

Sullivan’s excited prose, peppered throughout with the sort of clichés that might not pass muster in a “Law & Order” episode (such as her description of an ex-FBI sleuth Panoke as someone who “believes in evil and has seen a lot of it”), sometimes suggests that she’s writing the treatment for a movie script rather than a work of non-fiction.

Attention is lavished on unimportant details about the investigators’ work to draw the reader’s attention more to the process by which they arrive at their conclusion than to the facts of the case, let alone the history.


The claim that an anonymous, untraceable, and unverifiable letter is “the only real physical evidence in their case” is risible. Each effort to build an argument for the team’s assertion of van den Bergh’s guilt is so peppered with ifs, maybes, and probabilities that it’s hard to see how it stood up to a fact check or serious editorial scrutiny.

With so little to go on, to focus so relentlessly on one admittedly unheroic Jew to the exclusion of so much other depravity and criminality is as

outrageous as it is irresponsible.

What in another context might be forgiven as mere authorial excess or True Crime faux drama in an ordinary murder mystery is, when applied to the story of Anne Frank, an unforgivable bowdlerisation of a topic that requires both humility and seriousness from those who venture onto what ought to be considered sacred space.

The problem here is not that the Cold Case Team and Sullivan failed to provide a convincing answer to the question asked by those who visit the Anne Frank House. Regardless of what might well have been their good intentions, by the time their investigation concluded, its purpose was not to honour Anne’s memory or that of the millions of other Jewish victims. Rather, it was to exploit and profit in a familiar manner from the story of their fate – to portray it as just another notorious homicide.

That they did so by ultimately coming up with a Jewish villain for their drama makes it even worse. For that sin, Sullivan and her publishers deserve far more opprobrium than they have thus far received. 

*Jonathan S. Tobin is editor in chief of JNS.org and a columnist for the New York Post. © Commentary magazine (www.commentarymagazine.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

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# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### SPECTATOR SPORT

On March 5, Ida Lichter warned in the *Spectator Australia* that Russian President Vladimir “Putin’s threat of using nuclear weapons in the Ukraine conflict is a timely reminder of the terrifying power held by nuclear-armed states. Iran vows to annihilate Israel and attacks regional states through proxies. If the regime owned nuclear weapons, could the Middle East survive? Even worse, Iran’s mullahs might try to realise their version of apocalyptic Shia theology that prophecies world domination through war.”

Lichter castigated the Biden Administration for reportedly “capitulating” to Iran while negotiating a “revised nuclear deal”.

The purported new deal “would legitimise nuclear weapons for Iran,” she said, whilst ignoring Iran’s human rights abuses. It will also give the regime “sanctions relief” and let it keep advanced centrifuges it is not entitled to possess, she added, and warned that “many restrictions on nuclear weapons production are due to expire in two and a half years” because there are no extensions to the sunset clauses from the 2015 deal.

Meanwhile, an *SBS TV* “World News” report (Feb. 22) on the state of the negotiations claimed, “as the US is yet to re-join the deal it’s not been able to engage in direct negotiations.”

In fact, Iran refuses to hold direct talks with the US, despite Biden Administration officials begging it to do so. This follows an order from Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2018 forbidding direct talks.

### PEACEFUL NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM?

On *ABC TV* “The World” (March 16), Iran analyst Sahil Shah trumpeted

Iran’s success in stopping Moscow insisting on inserting a clause in any renewed nuclear deal that would have let it trade with Iran in contravention of sanctions imposed following its invasion of Ukraine.

With a straight face, Shah said Teheran had told Russia, “Our people are heavily sanctioned and we don’t want these external factors between you, the US and Europe to get in the way including the prospect of more oil entering the market.”

The last time Iran received sanctions relief, angry Iranians demonstrated *en masse* in protest that the promised economic benefits were swallowed up by regime lackeys and the country’s regional proxy militias.

Shah also talked up the importance of Russia’s involvement for any nuclear deal while treating it as obvious that Iran’s nuclear program is wholly for peaceful purposes, saying that “Iran benefits from having a major world power be able to help it make sure that its nuclear program is efficient, running well and delivering energy to the Iranian people. And more so, not even energy, but things like radio isotopes, things for medical reasons. Other things nuclear energy can provide.”

Iranian documents prove conclusively that Teheran’s nuclear program was never constructed to provide either energy or “radio isotopes” – both of which Iran could get easily without building up a vast and very costly uranium enrichment industry – but nuclear weapons capabilities.

### MUDDLED EAST POLICY

An *Australian* editorial (March 17) blamed a reluctance by the West’s traditional Arab allies in the Gulf to support efforts to pressure Russia on

the Biden Administration’s posture since taking office.

These decisions include the Biden Administration’s “chaotic abandonment of Afghanistan,” cosying up to Iran, and the decision to treat Saudi Arabia as a pariah state for murdering journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

Saudi Arabia “rebuffed the White House’s recent request to pump more oil on to global markets to tame surging crude oil prices,” the editorial noted.

Long term, it said, the US risks letting Russia and China further “expand their influence across the Middle East,” noting that the Saudis are contemplating accepting Chinese yuan instead of US dollars as payment for Chinese oil sales.

### SIZE MATTERS

On March 4, *Australian* foreign editor Greg Sheridan called Russia’s invasion of Ukraine “the most powerful, shocking wake-up call to Western strategic complacency since the end of the Vietnam War” which will require Australia’s military to “urgently... completely reconfigure itself.”

Among a raft of procurements needed, Sheridan included Australia acquiring “thousands of long-range, land-launched missiles. Hezbollah, a terrorist guerrilla group, has 100,000 missiles and constitutes an existential threat to Israel. We acquire missiles in the dozens if we’re lucky and are a threat to nobody.”

However, military historian Ross Eastgate challenged Sheridan’s analogy, writing on the *Spectator Australia* website (March 12) that Australia has the benefit of “a vast landmass of 7.692 million km<sup>2</sup> with no contiguous land borders leaving it separated from potential aggressors



by a formidable air-sea gap.” Israel, he said, is inextricably linked to its regional enemies by contiguous land borders and whilst tiny, has the advantage of being able to deploy aircraft within moments of launching.

## A DIM VIEW

In an interview on *Sky News Australia* (March 10), left-wing anti-Israel activist Antony Loewenstein said he doubted sanctions could remove Russian President Putin from power.

According to Loewenstein, “The

truth is a lot of countries in the last 10, 20 years that have been sanctioned, I’m thinking here Syria, Iraq and others, Libya. Those regimes, uh, the leaders are still there obviously.”

Sanctions on those three countries were not intended to force regime change – although, contrary to Loewenstein’s assertion, the leadership of both Libya and Iraq did in fact change following the imposition of sanctions, though not directly because of them.

Interviewed by *Sky News* on Feb. 26, Loewenstein said if “we condemn US aggression in Iraq or Afghanistan or

Israeli actions in Palestine, we also have to condemn Russian imperialism.”

Loewenstein’s grouping of Russia with the US and Israel is a false comparison. The US led a multinational intervention in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban and al-Qaeda who were responsible for acts of mass international terror. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was launched in the belief of the existence of weapons of mass destruction. In both cases, UN Security Council resolutions were cited as legal justifications for US-led military action.



## OUT OF IN PARLIAMENT

Senators **Eric Abetz** (Lib., Tas) and **Kimberley Kitching** (OBM) (ALP, Vic.) – Feb. 3 – Media Statement on Amnesty International Report on Israel:

“Amnesty International’s report is littered with errors that rehash discredited claims from other biased reports. It’s wrong in detail and disturbing in its intent.

“Israel is a vibrant beacon of democracy in the Middle East, comprised of Jews and Arabs, Druze and Christians – both secular and religious – whose rights and liberties are protected in equal measure.

“The misappropriation of hateful words does nothing to aid the peace process for a mutually negotiated and enduring two-state solution... We won’t help Israel or the Palestinians by pretending things are different from what they actually are in Israel or by encouraging delusions that the concept of the Jewish state can be crushed by external forces...”

Victorian Deputy Opposition Leader **David Southwick** (Lib., Caulfield) – March 21 – Facebook: “Kimberley [Kitching]... was a true friend of the Jewish community and Israel.”

Senator **James Paterson** (Lib., Vic), Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security – Feb. 17 – Media Release: “The Morrison government cannot and will not turn a blind eye to the campaign of violent terror against innocent civilians which is so evidently organised, financed and authorised by Hamas’ leadership.”

**Josh Burns** (ALP, Macnamara) – Feb. 26 – Posted on Facebook and Twitter a photo of one of his election posters graffitied with a Nazi swastika: “There’s no place for the Swastika in Australia... I’m putting this graffiti up as a reminder that there are some lines that shouldn’t be crossed.”

The following are from comments in reply on Feb 26.

Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and the Digital Economy Senator **Jane Hume** (Lib., Vic) – “This is totally unacceptable. The evils of antisemitism must be condemned,

consistently.”

**Anne Aly** (ALP, Cowan) – “This is disgraceful. We shouldn’t tolerate this type of behaviour in a pluralistic, multicultural nation. I’m sure that the majority of Australians stand with you Josh in condemning this.”

Opposition Leader **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – “Australians are better than this. There’s no place for this kind of attack in our community.”

Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs **Jason Wood** (Lib., La Trobe) – “Those who committed this crime must bow their pathetic heads in shame.”

**Dave Sharma** (Lib., Wentworth) – “Disgraceful and unacceptable... I’m heartbroken you have to put up with this rubbish.”

**Mike Freedlander** (ALP, Macarthur) – “Shocking... this should never happen in Australia.”

**Brian Mitchell** (ALP, Lyons) – “We stand with you Josh Burns, the people of Macnamara and the Jewish community against this evil and hatred.”

Shadow Minister for the Environment and Water **Terri Butler** (ALP, Griffith) – “Disgusting.”

Senator **Hollie Hughes** (Lib., NSW) – “That is truly disgusting... No one should have to put up with that.”

**Kate Thwaites** (ALP, Jagajaga) – “Terrible. As you say, no place for this.”

**Milton Dick** (ALP, Oxley) – “Sickening to see.”

**Matt Keogh** (ALP, Burt) – “This is absolutely atrocious and unacceptable.”

Shadow Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) – “This is disgraceful and should be universally condemned...”

Victorian Deputy Opposition Leader **David Southwick** (Lib., Caulfield) – March 9 – Legal and Social Issues Committee: “There is no place for hate in this state... and we know that hateful [Nazi swastika] symbol and that hurtful symbol is used against so many communities, not just the Jewish community, which I proudly represent... my federal colleague Josh Burns... on his political signage... a swastika was painted on his face... There is no place for that... Let us get that symbol banned.”

As for his comparison of Russia and Israel, see p. 16.

## NO ROOM FOR BALANCE

In March, the *Guardian Australia* proved itself a perpetual source of articles one-sidedly hostile to Israel.

On March 2, the *Guardian's* Jerusalem-based correspondent Bethan McKernan wrote, “in the years since the peace process ground to a halt, Israel has faced growing criticism of its treatment of Palestinians as the conflict is increasingly viewed internationally as a struggle for equal rights rather than a territorial dispute.”

If the views of increasingly radical NGOs like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are the barometer of international opinion, then McKernan is arguably correct.

But most reasonable people understand that peace requires two sides to negotiate and the Palestinian political leadership is hopelessly split between the corrupt, despotic Palestinian Authority (PA) which has rejected Israeli peace offers and refused to negotiate since 2014, and the Islamist terror group Hamas in Gaza. This is why virtually all Western governments have rejected extreme claims from groups like Amnesty.

On March 7, the paper ran a long feature from McKernan on a controversial artwork displayed at the Museum of Israeli Art near Tel Aviv depicting two images of an ultra-Orthodox man praying at the Western Wall with the words in Hebrew “Jerusalem of Gold” and “Jerusalem of Shit”. The article only interviewed supporters of the artwork but no critics.

On March 14, *Guardian* columnist Arwa Mahdi accused people and organisations of pretending Palestinians don't exist, which is ironic given the vastly disproportionate column space the *Guardian* devotes to Palestinian allegations against Israel.

Mahdi condemned liberals for allegedly “abandon[ing] their progressive values, or their courage” and

said merely mentioning Palestine “in a vaguely sympathetic way can be enough to elicit bad faith accusations of antisemitism.”

This ignores the frequent expressions of crude antisemitism in pro-Palestinian activism and how it is used by the PA and Hamas to incite Palestinians to carry out terrorism and justify perpetuating the conflict.

Mahdi disingenuously said, “there is seemingly no acceptable way for a Palestinian to protest oppression or stand up for our rights.”

Maybe Mahdi can start standing up for Palestinian rights by protesting against Hamas, which makes Israeli military operations against Gaza inevitable by firing rockets at Israeli civilians? Otherwise, maybe she can protest against Hamas' persecution of Palestinian journalists, Christians, and members of the LGBTQI community in Gaza?

## GIDDY HEIGHTS

In the *Guardian Australia* (March 11), US journalist Peter Beinart, a shrill advocate for a one-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, insisted the Biden Administration reverse its predecessor's 2019 recognition of Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights, which it captured from Syria in the 1967 war.

Beinart slammed US President Donald Trump's recognition, saying international law prohibits the acquisition of territory by force and that “if the US chooses continued hypocrisy, it will make Ukraine, Taiwan and every other weaker nation bordered by a rapacious neighbour more vulnerable.”

This is an astounding claim that inverts the causation of historic events.

The Six Day War is widely accepted as a legally defensive war precipitated by combined Syrian, Egyptian and Jordanian aggression.

In the years and months leading up to the war and during it, Syria launched artillery strikes from the

Golan onto Israeli farms and towns.

After the war, the United Nations Security Council accepted that Syria was a belligerent, which is why Resolution 242 called for Israel to return captured territories, but not necessarily all the territory, and said it need only do so upon the conclusion of peace. Israel's Arab neighbours, including Syria, refused to negotiate.

Despite Israel annexing the Golan in 1981, Israeli governments from the left and right tried unsuccessfully to trade the Golan for a peace treaty with Syria in the 1990s and 2000s.

The Assad regime's brutal murder and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Syrians, mostly civilians, with the cooperation of Iran, Hezbollah and Russia during the Syrian civil war put a stop to those talks.

It is widely understood that no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan is possible nor desirable in the foreseeable future given the regime's use of chemical weapons and Iran's efforts to build missile factories and other military installations in Syria to launch attacks on Israel.

## SANITY PREVAILS

In the *Australian* (March 14), columnist Alan Howe expounded on the threat Israel faced in the Six Day War, writing, “on May 24, 1967, Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, said that if there were to be a war ‘our basic objective will be to destroy Israel’. Planning for that war was well under way. Ten days earlier Nasser had removed the United Nations Emergency Forces stationed on the Sinai Peninsula. Two days later he blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping and began massing 100,000 troops on its border. Everyone knew what was coming. Israel's combined enemies, with more than 500,000 troops, almost 1,000 combat aircraft and 2,500 tanks between them, were about to take on Israel, which had 50,000 troops.”

The brutal reality of Syria in 2022 was exposed on Feb. 25 in the *Guardian*

ian, by chemical weapons expert Hamish de Bretton-Gordon who said, “Assad has continued to bomb hospitals and schools, and burn villages to the ground in a macabre, medieval-style scorched-earth policy... Idlib, a province in northwest Syria, is the only region still free of the tyranny, but with millions of malnourished souls trapped there, and Assad throwing incendiary devices to smoke them out as you would vermin, it still resembles hell on earth.”

## LOUD AND CLEAR

Surveying global responses to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Nine newspapers’ foreign editor Lia Timson correctly noted on March 3 that Israel “condemned the invasion and voiced solidarity with the Ukrainian government, but said it was keeping open channels of communication with Moscow... Israeli... Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said his country would back a UN vote to condemn Russia.”

In contrast, a timeline of events on the ABC’s website (March 8) stated for “Sunday, March 6” that “Israeli PM Naftali Bennett – one of the nations sitting on the fence and refusing to outwardly condemn Russia’s actions – met with Putin and later Zelenskyy.”

AIJAC asked the ABC to correct this, pointing out its own website had run an infographic showing Israel had voted for the United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning Russia’s invasion, and Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid had earlier issued a clear condemnation of Russia. The email to the ABC also noted that Russia had officially written to Israel expressing its displeasure.

The ABC agreed and changed the wording to state that “Naftali Bennett, prime minister of Israel – which is sitting on the fence and has been moderate in its condemnation of Russia – met with Putin and later Zelensky.”

The change renders the text less inaccurate, but given Israel unequivocally condemned the invasion in word

and deed and is not in fact “sitting on the fence,” perhaps the ABC should be seeking to achieve a standard higher than just “less inaccurate than it was.”

## TRUTH UNDER SIEGE ON ABC

On March 1, *ABC Radio National* “Late Night Live” decided that ABC listeners needed more opportunities to hear from journalist and author Janine di Giovanni.

*AIR* readers may recall December’s “Noted and Quoted” highlighting the incongruity between the contents of di Giovanni’s recent book *The Vanishing* on the Middle East’s disappearing Christian population and her statements on *ABC Radio National* “Religion & Ethics” in November 2021.

The book accurately attributed most of Gaza’s problems and the challenges faced by Christians there to Hamas and the Palestinian Authority but in her ABC interview, di Giovanni named Israel as the predominant cause of the situation.

The pretext for di Giovanni’s latest ABC appearance was a recent factually inaccurate article on Gaza she wrote for *Vanity Fair* magazine.

That article’s problematic statements included an untrue claim that in May 2021, “Israeli police tried to expel long-time Arab residents from East Jerusalem.” Israel’s Supreme Court has not yet adjudicated on the long running Sheikh Jarrah property dispute in question, so there were never any such attempted expulsions. Moreover, in the worst case, these residents may be evicted from specific properties they have been found not to own, but there is no reason they will have to leave east Jerusalem.

Even more outrageous was the claim in the piece that in the Gaza war, “Hamas and the group Palestine Islamic Jihad sent cascades of rockets onto Israeli settlements.” When did Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and Ashkelon become settlements?

Apart from an acknowledgement

that “the Palestinian Authority and Hamas are at war and have been for some time”, her latest ABC appearance featured more of the same.

Palestinians in Gaza, she said, “are effectively under siege, both by the Israelis and by Egypt. And this is because of... the election of Hamas. But it’s collective punishment, which of course, is illegal under international law.”

A siege is intended to compel people to surrender using starvation methods.

Gaza is under a limited blockade designed to hamper Hamas’ capacity to carry out terror attacks in Israel, a blockade which a UN inquiry found to be legal. It wasn’t imposed because Hamas was elected but because, since Israel vacated the territory in 2005, Hamas has used Gaza to fire thousands of rockets at Israel’s civilian population, and launch other terror attacks.

There is no historical precedent anywhere in international law for regarding such blockades as illegal “collective punishment”. Indeed, if they are, why are sanctions against Russia not illegal “collective punishment”?

Instead of attributing the outbreak of the May 2021 war to Hamas’ firing of rockets at Israel, she accused Israel of “punishing Hamas. But, you know, bombs don’t distinguish between civilians and Hamas.”

Actually, Israel tries very hard to distinguish between civilians and Hamas’ fighters when it carries out airstrikes – and careful examination of casualty statistics actually demonstrates that it largely succeeds. This is despite Hamas’ strategy of carrying out rocket attacks on Israel from built-up areas in Gaza knowing Israel risks killing and wounding civilians if it targets the rocket crews in return.

Di Giovanni also framed Israeli settlements on the West Bank as the central cause of the conflict, as well as “the settler movement, which is stronger and stronger and supported by, you know, many people in the US and probably Australia, Canada.”



# MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

## FROM KYIV TO JERUSALEM

The topics of Jews and Israel featured heavily in the media's ongoing coverage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

A Russian airstrike which very nearly damaged a memorial to the 33,000 Jews massacred by Nazi soldiers and Ukrainian collaborators at Babyn Yar in 1941 was widely reported. On *Radio 3AW* (March 3), Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said, "whether you were Jewish or not Jewish, I think you felt the same thing about the insensitivity and brutality of the Russian forces."

On March 11, the *Nine* newspapers' Anthony Gallo-way reported from Ukraine on how Ukrainian Jews who survived the Nazi invasion in 1941 are coping.

The many reports of Russian President Vladimir Putin's claim that he needed to invade to "denazify" the country noted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's Jewish background.

Another consistent media trend was the efforts of some commentators to analogueise the invasion with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On March 14, *Mercury* columnist Greg Barns accused the West of double standards for condemning Russian attacks on Ukrainian medical facilities, but ignoring allegedly similar attacks carried out by Israel in Gaza. He suggested it was because of "the West's view of those who do not share the same skin colour or whose culture is not borne of the European tradition."

Earlier (March 1), the *Mercury* ran a letter from Friends of Palestine Tasmania which argued that "sanctions have been applied swiftly on Russia, but we are still waiting for action to bring Israel to account."

The *Mercury* published a response by AIJAC's Jamie Hyams (March 4) noting, "Russia[n] actions... have been unprovoked acts of aggression. Israel captured the West Bank in a defensive war, having been attacked from there by Jordan and immediately offered a land for peace deal, which was unequivocally rebuffed by the Arab League. Israel has also made three offers of a state to the Palestinian Authority... all have been rebuffed."

*Guardian Australia* reporter Chris McGreal's long article on March 8 quoted from NGO reports critical of Israel and from activists calling for the world to agree the Russian invasion and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are alike. Minimal balance was included, notably an extract from a *Jerusalem Post* editorial that stated, "Sadly, some

will only see that the Russians are the far stronger side in this war, that Israel is the far stronger side when it fights Hamas in Gaza, and reflexively just sympathize with the underdog, the weaker side... Weakness, however, does not automatically bestow virtue."

The trip by Israeli PM Naftali Bennett to Moscow

to try to mediate an end to the conflict was reported on March 6 by *ABC News Radio* and *SBS TV* "World News", as well as the websites of *Channel 10* and 7.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's virtual speech to

the Israeli Knesset on March 21 had a much larger media presence. *ABC TV* "Mornings" North America correspondent Barbara Miller focused on Zelensky's request for Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile defence system. Miller said, "Israel is in a very difficult position. It wants to keep in with Russia... There is also a substantial Jewish community in Russia... They are delivering aid, but [Zelensky] says that is not enough. He's called on Israel to deliver military aid." Miller also incorrectly claimed that Israel is "relatively happy with the role that Russia now plays in the Middle East" – Israel has to deal with this role because it has no choice, but the government has definitely never been happy about it.

A more realistic view of the relationship was apparent in a nuanced report on the ABC website quoting ANU Professor John Blaxland explaining that "Israel is deeply worried that by providing Ukraine with this technology, Russia will then let slip its forces and its proxies and provide incentive for Hezbollah and Syrian anti-Israel groups to attack Israel and make life difficult for Israel."

*Channel 7* and *10* news bulletins ran short reports too, emphasising Zelensky's references to the Holocaust in his speech.

In the *Daily Telegraph* (March 8), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein took a holistic view of events, warning that the Biden Administration needs to learn the appropriate lessons from Russia's invasion and apply them to the "Iran nuclear file".

Dr Rubenstein said, "Russia's actions show that the idea that concessions and understanding can moderate the behaviour of dictators and expansionist regimes is dangerously wrong. This is a lesson the world in general – and the Biden Administration in particular – must consider before supercharging Iran's aggressive, rogue regime."

# THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

## UKRAINIAN REFLECTIONS

“When we win Olympic medals, we are Soviets – but when we are Nazi collaborators, we are Ukrainians.” My interlocutor’s frustration was palpable.

He was an Australian of Ukrainian background who had reached out to me, in my capacity as a Jewish community leader, in the wake of the novel *The Hand that Signed the Paper* receiving the 1995 Miles Franklin Award – Australia’s most coveted prize for fiction.

In the time between the publication of the novel and its author, “Helen Demidenko”/Helen Darville, being exposed as someone quite other than a dutiful young Ukrainian attempting to bring nuance to a complex political debate, some were applauding the novel’s “authenticity”. Yet a number of people with real knowledge of Ukraine correctly assumed that the book was not written by someone with deep knowledge of their community or the nature of 20th century Ukraine.

One response to what reads as a defence of participation in genocide in the novel (it features an accused Nazi war criminal putting his side of the story) was a discussion about Nazi war criminals living in Australia, with some attention paid to the fact that there were criminals identified as coming from a variety of nationalities and European arenas of battle.

While Nazi-occupied Ukraine was the backdrop for the alleged crimes in the novel, the Australian protagonist, Fiona, has to come to terms with her family’s history via a trial in a South Australian court.

Earlier, lengthy public debate had preceded the introduction of *The War Crimes Amendment Act 1988*, with members of Australia’s Ukrainian and Jewish communities playing an active part. The peak bodies of the Jewish and Ukrainian communities in Australia, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, formally presented a joint position emphasising that the ethnicity of the perpetrator was not the

issue – it was the criminal actions which demanded a response.

The debate over both the novel and the introduction of

legislation allowing for Nazi war criminals to be prosecuted in Australia brought me in to contact with a community which was diverse and vibrant. It included both antisemites and people completely opposed to all forms of racism, bigotry and discrimination.

For decades prior to the war crimes issue arising, the Jewish and Ukrainian communities shared interests in fighting the Soviet Union’s human rights abuses and in the development of Australian multiculturalism.

Subsequent visits to Ukraine have reinforced my interest in that country and perception of both vibrance and over-all progress on the issue of inter-communal relations.

The issue of antisemitism inevitably arises in any discussion of Ukrainian-Jewish relations.

The notorious Mendel Beilis blood libel trial of 1913 took place in the heart of Ukraine, setting in stone a marker

which will forever be a stain.

Even better known is the infamous Shoah killing site of Babyn Yar – located well inside metropolitan Kyiv. Not in the hinterlands, hidden away, but in a central location.

The reality is that in modern Ukraine, there are civil society leaders who will not try to hide or whitewash this past, but grapple with its meaning as they continue to develop a post-Soviet identity.

There are Jewish Ukrainians with a range of political views, many making significant contributions to shaping modern Ukraine.

In recent years, I have had the privilege of having developed relations with Ukrainian Australians who are contributing to both countries, and who have involved me, in a minor way, in developing bilateral ties.

It is very difficult for me to witness the Russian assault on that country, and not only because of my friends who are defending their country or have fled and are living as refugees.

We must think of Ukraine not just as the victim of Russian brutality and military barbarism, but as a nation that should, indeed must, soon have the opportunity to continue its development as a modern, forward-thinking democracy.



The memorial menorah at the notorious Shoah killing site at Babyn Yar, inside Kyiv (Image: Shutterstock)



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