

## THE “NAKBA” NARRATIVE



## Myths and Facts about 1948

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The June edition of the *AIR* looks at some myths and facts about what really happened during and after Israel's founding in 1948, in response to claims about it made by Palestinians marking it as their *Nakba* ("Catastrophe").

Palestinian human rights activist Bassem Eid takes on the Palestinian practice of marking May 15 as "Nakba Day", arguing this is destructive to Palestinian interests and misrepresents history. Also, US-based writer Salo Aisenberg provides some essential context about the fate of Palestinian refugees following the 1948 war, while Israeli academics Roie Yellinek and Assaf Malach explain the key role of Arab states in preventing a Palestinian state from being established.

Also featured this month are Colin Rubenstein's take on Australia's Federal election and change of government, US expert Danielle Pletka's analysis of the roots of the current wave of terrorism afflicting Israel and Oved Lobel's discussion of the lessons to be drawn from the Russian invasion of Ukraine for dealing with Iran and China.

Finally, don't miss Jamie Hyams' report of an edifying encounter with former Australian hostage in Iran Dr Kylie Moore-Gilbert, Amotz Asa-El on Jerusalem's growing pains and Dr Ran Porat's report on what the Iranian-sponsored day of anti-Israel hate known as "Quds Day" looked like in Australia.

As always, we invite your feedback at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au).

Tzvi Fleischer

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Protesters demonstrating solidarity with the Palestinians commemorating "Nakba Day" in the Plaza de las Provincias, Madrid, Spain on May 15. (Image: Atilano Garcia/SOPA Images/AAP Image)



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

# A VOTE FOR CHANGE – AND CONTINUITY

**W**hile the composition of the Senate is still to be finalised, it was self-evident after the May 21 watershed Federal election that the Australian public had voted for significant change and a new government under ALP leader Anthony Albanese. Yet it is clear they also want continuity in certain respects.

Labor's victory, despite a very low primary vote of around 32%, appears both decisive and yet part of a politically complicated picture.

A 76-seat supermajority looks almost certain in the lower house, which, fortunately, should free the new Government from undue dependence on the Greens and independents. Whatever one may think of the Greens' environmental priorities, they offer problematic and unworkable ideas in other domestic policy areas, and their foreign policy and defence stances are largely either naïve, dangerous or extreme.

The success of the "teal" independents in key Liberal seats seems to stem from them having capitalised on vulnerabilities of the outgoing government relating to climate change policy and women's issues. However, the teal campaigns typically avoided being drawn out – or offered problematic stances – on pivotal economic and national security issues that will be at the centre of Australian politics over the coming Parliamentary term.

Albanese and his team, including Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Treasurer Jim Chalmers, have projected an ambitious agenda in line with the Labor campaign.

Albanese has prioritised further integrating and reconciling Australia's national identity with its First Nations communities – which would be a historic achievement.

On foreign policy, the debate between Wong and outgoing Foreign Minister Marise Payne before the election was remarkable for the overwhelming number of issues the political adversaries agreed on, particularly with regards to concerns about China. Happily, it's expected that Australian foreign policy will stay the course on the new AUKUS alliance, the Quad and in regard to other security priorities.

The passing of the baton from the Morrison team to the Albanese Government appears to represent a tangible continuation of Australia's bedrock support for Israel. Even before his first day in the job ended, Albanese thanked Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett for his "warm wishes" over Twitter, assuring Bennett, "I look forward to working with you to continue the strong relationship between our two nations."

The Albanese Government inherits a blossoming Australia-Israel relationship, thanks in no small part to the commendable policies of the Morrison Government to seek to nurture such ties for the mutual benefit of both countries. Morrison, Payne, incoming Liberal leader Peter Dutton and other members of the frontbench also extended a diplomatic safety net in staunchly defending Israel's right to existence, security, and basic fairness in word and deed, including condemnation of the discriminatory BDS movement, an unsurpassed supportive voting record on Israel in the UN and its agencies, and the historic and long overdue recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Another vital area of continuity is government adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, which the Morrison Government "embraced" last year, at which time the Albanese-led ALP had also already supported its adoption.



While there are some strident critics of Israel in the parliamentary ALP, there also many supportive friends. It will be an important measure of the Albanese Government to maintain continuity on issues like the IHRA definition, UN voting and marginalising BDS, even as it seeks to implement change in important policy areas.

So too will be how the new Government handles the worryingly wrong-headed and counterproductive foreign policy position inside the ALP platform which calls “on the next Labor government to recognise Palestine as a state” as “a matter of priority.” This ill-considered proposition both ignores the fact that Palestine is not currently a state under international law, and would take Australia out of step with the US, Canada, the UK, New Zealand and the vast majority of the EU. Most damagingly, it would remove a major incentive for Palestinians to negotiate and make peace with Israel, thereby seriously undermining Labor’s own commendable policy that “the only way that a two-state solution can be achieved is through a negotiated outcome between the two parties.”

Formal recognition of Palestinian statehood without a peace agreement – or even a Palestinian agreement to return to the negotiations with Israel they have rejected since 2014 – would send precisely the wrong message when it comes to the need to reach a negotiated outcome. Wiser heads in the new Government hopefully do well understand this obvious reality.

That being said, there is much an Albanese Government can and should do substantively to help the

Palestinians by increasing the chances of a genuine negotiated two-state peace. For instance, it could allocate any increased foreign aid it has flagged to give to the Palestinians towards empowering moderates and disincentivising violence, incitement and intransigence – for instance, by conditioning aid to the Palestinian Authority on ending “pay for slay” subsidies to terrorists and their families, and aid to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees on removing antisemitic incitement from its textbooks.

Sadly, the election has seen the departure from politics of some fine lawmakers, among them many good friends of the Jewish community and supporters of Israel-Australia friendship, including outgoing treasurer Josh Frydenberg; former ambassador to Israel-turned MP Dave Sharma; Senator Eric Abetz, the Chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Israel; Tim Wilson; Greg Hunt; Ken Wyatt, the first ever Indigenous Minister for Indigenous Affairs; Katie Allen; Trent Zimmerman, Jason Falinski and Senators Kristina Keneally, Zed Seselja and Amanda Stoker.

AIJAC extends its heartfelt appreciation to the outgoing PM Scott Morrison and his Government and all our departing Parliamentary friends. We also offer congratulations, best wishes and a warm welcome to the incoming Albanese Government and all elected representatives and Senators of 2022. We look forward to building constructive relationships with many of them over the coming term, for the benefit of Australia and its core national interests.



## “” WORD FOR WORD

“Congratulations to Anthony Albanese upon being elected Prime Minister of Australia. Israel and Australia are close friends and I look forward to working together with @AlboMP to deepen that friendship & strengthen the bond between our nations.”

**Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (Twitter, May 22).**

“Thank you for the warm wishes @naftalibennett and I look forward to working with you to continue the strong relationship between our two nations.”

**New Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (Twitter, May 23).**

“Foreign Minister Lavrov’s remarks are both an unforgivable and outrageous statement as well as a terrible historical error. Jews did not murder themselves in the Holocaust. The lowest level of racism against Jews is to accuse Jews themselves of

antisemitism.”

**Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid responds to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s remarks that Hitler had Jewish blood, and “the most ardent antisemites are usually Jews.” (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 5).**

“The Palestinian people, led by the resistance – especially those in the West Bank and Jerusalem – will not permit this Jewish, Talmudic rubbish to go unanswered. Our decision is clear and unhesitating... We will resist with all our capabilities and we will not permit the violation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque or thuggery in the streets of Jerusalem.”

**Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh warns Israel against allowing the annual “Flag Day” march to take place in Jerusalem on May 29 (Times of Israel, May 22).**

“[Israelis are] the new Nazis who are committing acts of terror officially, and whose prisons are an identical copy of Auschwitz and the death camps.”

**Senior Fatah official Jibril Rajoub on official Palestinian Authority TV on May 5 (Palestinian Media Watch, May 17).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## DON'T CONFUSE ME WITH FACTS...

In his article in this edition on the aftermath of the tragic death of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jenin on May 11, veteran journalist Mark Lavie makes the observation that saying that “my mind is made up, don’t confuse me with facts” used to be a joke but “today, it’s a reality.”

Palestinian-Australian documentary filmmaker and former ABC journalist Sherine Salama – who also once worked for the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) – provided a brilliant illustration of what Lavie was on about in a piece on Abu Akleh’s death in the *Sunday Age* (May 22).

Like most Palestinian advocates, Salama takes it as given that Israeli forces deliberately made a decision to murder Abu Akleh, and her death could not possibly have been the result of an accident caused by stray Israeli or Palestinian fire during a gunbattle.

The main argument she gives for taking this stance is insisting that she knows from her own experience that the “IDF targeted journalists, particularly when they did not want their actions caught on camera” and described Abu Akleh’s death thus:

Shireen woke at 4:30am and joined her colleague Ali al-Samoudi at the Jenin refugee camp. They were wearing flak jackets with the word “PRESS” emblazoned on them and helmets. Shortly after arriving, Shireen was shot in the head and her colleague Ali in the back. Another journalist, Shatha Hanaysha, who was standing next to Shireen at the time she was killed, could not even help her friend because they were still under Israeli fire.

Note that she does not mention that all accounts agree that Israeli soldiers were a least 150 to 200 metres away at the time Abu Akleh was shot.

Yet what is stunning about Salama’s account is that she not only takes it as given that Israel deliberately killed Abu Akleh, but she appears outraged that Israel called for an investigation to determine what actually happened.

She writes: “The Israelis immediately blamed Palestinians for Shireen’s death, suggesting stray fire had killed her and calling for an ‘investigation’ of the incident,” before immediately adding “As a Palestinian, you are never allowed the opportunity to properly grieve. How can you process grief when you are constantly disbelieved, questioned and interrogated about what you’ve just witnessed with your own eyes?”

Now, obviously, Salama did not “witness with her own eyes” Abu Akleh’s death, but more than this, apparently it means Palestinians cannot grieve properly if Israel does not

agree with their account of events and calls for an investigation. It is apparently anti-Palestinian to seek to obtain the facts about the incident via an investigation.

As Lavie suggests, facts do not appear to be wanted.

A similar attitude probably helps explain why the Palestinian Authority (PA) has refused Israeli requests to hold a joint investigation or even to provide access to the bullet that killed Abu Akleh so tests can be conducted to determine conclusively whether it was an IDF rifle that fired it. Instead, the PA insisted it would conduct its own investigation – but also that it already knew exactly what it would find.

PA Civil Affairs head Hussein al-Sheikh, who announced the PA solo investigation, said at the same time, “all indications, evidence and witnesses confirm her assassination by Israeli special units.” If al-Sheikh knows this already, it is not clear why he is bothering with an investigation at all.

Another apparent case of “my mind is made up, don’t confuse me with facts.”

## CALLS FOR ETHNIC CLEANSING/ GENOCIDE CONTINUE

There continue to be numerous ugly and worrying calls from leading Palestinian sources not only for Israel’s elimination, but that strongly imply the elimination or extermination of Israelis or Jews. This antisemitic and genocidal language deserves to be regularly called out, because the worldview expressed by Palestinian leaders is essential background for understanding why Israeli-Palestinian peace remains so elusive:

- As noted in last month’s *AIR*, a Ramadan sermon by an unidentified Imam broadcast on official Palestinian Authority TV on April 17 included the following phrase: “Allah, delight us with the extermination of the evil Jews, O Master of the Universe, and [the extermination] of their hypocritical supporters who have evil in their hearts.”

[Source: *Palestinian Media Watch (PMW)*]

- On May 15, Muhammad Al-Lahham, a member of Fatah’s Revolutionary Council, told Egyptian TV that the Jews “were banished from 70 different countries... this is a loathsome nation, which is founded on deception... They came to Palestine in order to erase the truth... the ideology of Fatah and of most Palestinian organisations still considers our conflict with the occupation to be a conflict over existence, not over borders. It is either us or them on this land.” [Source: *Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)*]

- On Hamas TV on May 16, Mraweh Nassar, the Secretary-General of the Jerusalem Committee of the International Union of Muslims Scholars, said that “[The Quran says:] ‘You shall find the strongest in enmity towards the believers to be the Jews.’ So if we want to resolve our problems as Muslims in general, we must cut off the head of the Zionist snake... They provoke the Christians, they



provoke the Muslims, they provoke the entire world. The world will not remain silent about them much longer, and they will be removed, Allah willing. It is Allah's promise... They will never rise again, after that." [Source: MEMRI]

• An organised crowd chant at one of the funeral processions following Shireen Abu Akleh's death included the line, "How sweet it is to kill Jews." [Source: PMW]

Those who glibly insist that Israeli-Palestinian peace would be easy to achieve if Israel only ended the "occupation" and pulled back to the 1967 armistice lines really need to listen to what Palestinian leaders say publicly in Arabic.

AIR

## DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

Mark Lavie

### IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO KILLED SHIREEN ABU AKLEH

It could have been me.

As a radio reporter for four decades in the Mideast, I was in the line of fire any number of times.

The most memorable incident, because I have it on tape, came in January 1988 in the Jelazoun Palestinian refugee camp, near Ramallah. I walked alongside Palestinians as they marched through their camp to the edge of the shantytown below the main highway. Then they started throwing rocks at the Israeli soldiers above.

The soldiers responded by firing tear gas canisters and rubber bullets at the demonstrators. On the tape, you hear me say: "Now the soldiers are aiming in this direction BOOMBOOM!"

The soldiers didn't know I was there. Even if they did, they were too far away to see the large, colourful network logo on the tape recorder hanging across my middle. Luckily for me, I wasn't hurt.

And if they had shot me, there would not have been a worldwide flood of condemnation of Israel and a defamation campaign reaching far and wide. Several of my colleagues suffered gunshot wounds back then. I was thrown to the ground by one police officer and tear-gassed by another around that time, for example. There was no US State Department condemnation of any of those incidents.

There are two reasons:

First, broadcast reporters have to be in the middle of the action, and though we're trained to stay out of the way, sometimes we can't. That's the profession. Some-

times we get hurt.

Second, way back in the last century, there was no "antisocial media" to whip up a frenzy with amateur and/or fake videos and "evidence," or just pure hatred.

That's why it doesn't matter who killed Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh in the Jenin refugee camp on May 11. These days, truth doesn't matter. Saying that "my mind is made up, don't confuse me with facts" used to be a joke-today, it's a reality.

There are new rules (some would say no rules) in today's media jungle. Dedicated, traditional reporters still play by the old rules of fairness, context and dispassionate analysis – but they are overwhelmed and outshouted by media playing to their target audiences (even once-respected, old-time publications) and outlets that make no such claims, shamelessly and quickly scooping up any piece of information, real or fake, to promote their cause.

Add to that the drive toward political correctness that limits what a reporter is allowed to say in the first place.

In recent days, there was a story about a bunch of people who attacked the doctors and nurses in a Jerusa-

lem hospital ICU after another person died there. It wasn't until nearly a full day later that local broadcast media hinted that the attackers were Arabs from east Jerusalem, and that the deceased died of a drug overdose.

Until then, listeners were left to guess who the attackers were, and left to speculate that perhaps the poor guy was

killed by cruel Israeli soldiers or police – thus "justifying" the violence.

A few days later, there was a similar violent incident at a hospital in the northern Israeli city of Nahariya, and similar incomplete reporting.

Yet clearly those missing facts are vital for the understanding of the context of the event.

I left daily journalism in 2014 after years of fighting, and usually losing, battles with my colleagues over fairness and context. I was being cast as the "pro-Israel" element in my office, and that's not what I signed up for when I became a journalist in 1963.

The worst case, was my agency's refusal to allow me to report on my discovery of Israel's 2008 peace offer to the Palestinians. "That's not news," my boss said.

I don't write articles like this without suggesting solutions. This time there aren't any easy ones. With antisemitism disguised as anti-Zionism (whatever that is in the 21st century) sweeping university campuses, promoted by groups that make up their own facts and "narratives" – two terms that basically mean the opposite of each other – at-



Shireen Abu Akleh: A victim of the danger that all war correspondents place themselves in (Source: Twitter)

tempts to respond with facts are comforting but mostly useless.

AIR

*Mark Lavie worked as an Associated Press correspondent in the Middle East for 15 years, concluding in 2014. He worked as a radio reporter for National Public Radio (US), NBC, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He won the Overseas Press Club's Lowell Thomas Award for "Best radio interpretation of foreign affairs" in 1994. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

### ENDLESS MISSION

Indonesia's elite Densus 88 counter-terrorism taskforce continues to make gains in its seemingly endless mission, but the extreme religious and political ideology that drives militant groups remains, ensuring that violent activity is an ever-present possibility.

Over the weekend of May 14-15, Densus 88 arrested 22 suspects in Central Sulawesi province, an area with a long history of sectarian violence and extremism, and a further two in Java and Kalimantan. Subsequent interviews revealed that some of them had pledged allegiance to the overall Islamic State leader Abu Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi via the WhatsApp messaging service. Al-Qurayshi took over after the previous leader was killed during a counter-terrorism raid by US special forces in Syria in February.

All suspects were found to be members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), which Indonesian authorities have blamed for most terror attacks in the nation over the past six years, and one of two militant groups affiliated with Islamic State. The other is the East Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT) network, accused of carrying out beheadings and bombings but now reduced to a small rump hiding in the mountains and jungles of Central Sulawesi. Police believe those arrested had sought to deliver food and ammunition and join with the MIT fighters.

These developments came in the wake of the arrest in March of more than 20 suspected members of Negara Islam Indonesia (NII), also known in Arabic as Darul Islam. Interrogations yielded documents relating to an alleged conspiracy to foment chaos and overthrow the government before the next general elections, replacing secularism with a caliphate-based system, police claimed.

"The evidence we found shows that NII is trying to overthrow the sovereign government before the 2024 elections," Senior Commissioner Aswin Siregar, head of operational support at Densus 88, told reporters. The suspects admitted that they had been ordered to acquire weapons to prepare for an attack, he added.

While NII has not been associated with terrorism, its origins date back to pre-independence Indonesia. Established by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwiryo in 1942 with the goal of establishing an independent Islamic state of Indonesia, the group initially played a supporting role alongside Indonesia's nationalist forces in ending colonial rule, but soon diverged when the state was established under the secular pluralist ideology of Pancasila.

NII waged an armed rebellion against Jakarta until the Indonesian government suppressed it in the 1960s. Kartosuwiryo was executed in 1962 after his group declared a war against the government and tried to assassinate President Sukarno in 1961.

Currently considered by analysts to lack the logistics and coordination between cells to mount significant attacks, NII has been notable in recent decades for its most radicalised members splintering off into hardcore terrorist groups, including Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the aforementioned JAD.

It has survived largely because of its ability to keep its followers' dream of an Indonesian caliphate alive through social programs, including health clinics, orphanages and welfare programs that – for many of its members – give credence to its ideology. In 2019, Kartosuwiryo's son, Sarjono, said about 2 million NII sympathisers are spread across the country.

The resilience of the caliphate dream is something that neighbouring Singapore is clearly wary of. Border officials in the city-state denied entry to Indonesian Muslim cleric Abdul Somad on May 17, citing what it said were his "extremist and segregationist teachings."

In a statement, Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) cited some examples of his teachings, including how he had preached that suicide bombings are legitimate in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict and are considered "martyrdom" operations.

"He has also made comments denigrating adherents of other faiths, such as Christians, by describing the Christian crucifix as the dwelling place of an 'infidel *jinn* (spirit or demon)' ... In addition, Somad has publicly referred to non-Muslims as 'kafirs' (infidels)."

In his social media postings, Somad was indignant. Asked about his thoughts on being held in a detention room, he said, "Singapore is such a small country. If everyone in Indonesia were to piss in the direction of this place, this country would sink." He further implored Indonesians to ask Singapore why he was "deported".

"A visitor's entry into Singapore is neither automatic nor a right. Each case is assessed on its own merits," Singapore's MHA added. "While Somad had attempted to enter Singapore ostensibly for a social visit, the Singapore Government takes a serious view of any persons who advocate violence or espouse extremist and segregationist teachings, or both."

AIR



Alex Benjamin

## THE “DEVIL YOU KNOW” IN FRANCE

“Hold your nose and vote Christian Democrat,” an Italian journalist once quipped back in the early 90s, such was the dearth of choice facing the electorate there.

This Hobbesian choice immediately sprang to mind after talking to a number of French Jews about their vote in the recent French election, the one that pitted the “Sun King” Emmanuel Macron against a xenophobic wolf in sheep’s clothing, Marine Le Pen. As you likely know, Macron won by 58.55% to 41.45%, a greater margin than expected.

Brussels collectively breathed a sigh of relief at the result, and some commentators predicted that populism had reached a high-water mark and was now receding. Yet there was little jubilation and few cries of “*Vive la République!*” to be found amongst French Jewry.

The same unanswered questions, the same threats that led to the highest levels of emigration to Israel in Europe, remain under Macron.

For French Jewry, Marine Le Pen represented a case of “know your enemy” writ-large. Her National Rally party’s attempt to whitewash its past right-wing antisemitism; her vow to ban the wearing of Kippot in public along with the Hijab; her rejection of Kosher and Halal slaughter and her cosyng up to dodgy despots and “strongmen” across the world put her beyond the pale. Such a transparent political choice is in a sense comforting. You know what’s on offer, the agenda is in plain sight.

Macron offered no similar clarity. Mercurial, adept at nuance and appealing to the widest possible audience, he tries to be all things to all people, apparently without a strongly defined set of core values. He throws tidbits to the right to sate their worst impulses. He courts the left by offering reformist social policies. As a result, many French Jews feel he stands for nothing, or, worse, he is hiding what he really thinks.

They know his ambivalence towards Israel and support for Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon. They hear his rehearsed lines about fighting antisemitism, but many feel he does little to actually deal with the real causes. Many see him as an enabler of a bigger problem: a reluctance to regulate immigration from Muslim lands, accompanied by a failure to ensure proper integration into French society. Some of these immigrants bring their antisemitic and radical bag-

gage with them, unchecked, where it festers in the suburbs and explodes periodically. This results in dead Jews in kosher supermarkets, at Jewish day schools and in their own homes after being attacked by neighbours.

Those French Jews who send their kids to state schools report horrific antisemitism and a reluctance to tackle this baggage when it ends up in the classroom. Calling out these problems is perilous. Teachers are slapped, attacked and in one tragic case a secondary school teacher, Mr Samuel Paty, was beheaded for trying to teach about the circumstances leading up to the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack in 2015 (he showed the cover of *Charlie Hebdo* that depicted the Islamic prophet Muhammad in class).

French Jewry therefore finds itself in perpetual limbo. Key issues that matter to them, that affect their well-being and their future, are glossed over or rarely touched upon by the political classes.



French Jews largely supported incumbent Emmanuel Macron, but that does not mean they are thrilled with the election result (Screenshot)

I witnessed this first hand in the early days of the first Macron presidency. Following attacks in Paris, I went along with a colleague for an informal meeting with the French diplomatic team based in Brussels. I decided to address the elephant in the room – this imported, festering antisemitism – and suggested that to even begin moving forward would require a recognition of said elephant in France. I was told to

my bafflement that this could not be done: it would lead to civil war and the fracturing of French society. I didn’t have the tenacity to point out that it was already fractured and, without a thorough self-examination, had little hope of healing, while France’s Jews would continue to die or simply vote with their feet.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that when Europe’s Jews prosper, Europe prospers. For this small minority of the population to be regarded as such a barometer is flattering, of course, but there is a wider truth here. I earnestly believe that the health of a democracy can be measured by how its Jewish population is treated.

Do French Jews feel they live a healthy democracy? A democracy, yes; a healthy one, less so, hence the consistently high levels of emigration.

Macron once asserted that “the status quo leads to self-destruction”. I think he was rhetorically gilding the lily a bit – it would be better to say that the “status quo leads to decay.”

And that is why French Jews held their noses and supported Macron – while noting that the decay is starting to smell. That this was their choice is a frankly depressing replay of an old adage. For many French Jews, it was simply a case of “better the devil you know” in the second round of voting on April 24.

# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

No rockets were fired into Israel between April 26 and late May. A Hezbollah drone was shot down after flying into Israel from Lebanon on May 16.

The terror wave in Israel continued. On April 29, two Palestinians carried out a shooting attack in the settlement of Ariel, killing a security guard. They were later captured. On May 5, two Palestinians from a village near Jenin snuck into the Israeli city of Elad before killing three people and wounding four in an axe and knife attack. Both were later captured. On May 8, a Palestinian stabbed a border guard near Damascus gate in Jerusalem and was shot. There were numerous other attempted stabbings.

Several weapons smuggling attempts were also thwarted, and there were continuing counterterrorism raids and arrests throughout the West Bank, particularly around Jenin, the source of several recent terror attacks. A gun battle in Jenin during one such raid led to the death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh on May 11.

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONDEMNS PALESTINIAN TEXTBOOKS

At a hearing on April 20, members of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control, who were examining the content of Palestinian Authority (PA) educational materials, expressed shock and condemnation regarding the content of the PA Education Ministry's new study cards. These cards were developed in response to the Parliament's previous declaration that the PA's existing textbooks were unacceptable due to their incitement and promo-

tion of violence.

MEP Lukas Mandl stated, "It's shocking to see that once again these educational materials propagate hatred. In no case should we be sending EU taxpayers' money, that's absolutely mad."

In early May, the European Union announced an annual aid budget of €82 million (A\$124m) to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for the period 2022-24. This represents a reduction of 40% on the previous three-year period.

## ISRAEL-RUSSIA CLASH OVER NAZI CLAIMS



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Italian TV (Photo: YouTube screenshot)

On May 5, Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly apologised to Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett for comments made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on May 1 that suggested Jews were responsible for the Holocaust.

Asked on an Italian TV station why Russia needed to "denazify" Ukraine when the country's President Volodymyr Zelensky is himself Jewish, Lavrov responded, "So what if Zelensky is Jewish? The fact does not negate the Nazi elements in Ukraine. I believe that Hitler also had Jewish blood. It means absolutely nothing... the most ardent antisemites are usually Jews."

The comment sparked a furious reaction in Israel, prior to Bennett's claim that Putin apologised.

## RUSSIA FIRES AT ISRAELI PLANE DURING STRIKE ON SYRIA

Russian forces reportedly opened fire on Israeli jets with its advanced S-300 anti-aircraft system at the conclusion of an IAF bombing raid on targets near the north-western Syrian city of Masyaf on May 16. This was seen as a sign of a possible political shift or signal from Moscow, which had previously turned a blind eye to Israeli strikes on Iranian military targets in Syria. The raid marked the 12th Israeli attack on Syrian territory since the beginning of the year.

Later, reports said six Syrian soldiers were killed on May 20 when the Israeli military struck targets near Damascus.

## CIVILIAN PROTESTS RESUME IN IRAN

Anti-regime protests across Iran resumed in May, this time following a spike in the cost of living, as Teheran fails to manage the economic impact of the war in Ukraine, and the Government also reduced subsidies on certain basic foodstuffs. Protesters shouted, "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, I will give my life for Iran!", "Death to the Dictator!" and other slogans against the regime. Government forces reacted with a heavy hand, firing live ammunition and tear gas at the demonstrators in numerous locations, killing at least three civilians, wounding and arresting dozens, and blocking internet access.

Meanwhile, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there has been a sharp drop in sales of Iranian oil to China, Iran's main petroleum market due to US-led sanctions. Only some 250,000 barrels per day of Iranian oil were sold to China during April,



down from almost one million in March. Beijing apparently prefers to buy Russian oil, which is cheaper because of the international sanctions on Moscow.

## IRAN WEEKS AWAY FROM ENOUGH URANIUM FOR A BOMB

While negotiations for a new nuclear deal with Iran are stalled indefinitely, Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz warned on May 17 that Teheran is a "few weeks" away from amassing enough fissile material for an atomic bomb. He also said that Iran is currently manufacturing and installing 1,000 advanced centrifuges, capable of enriching uranium many times faster than previous models, in a new underground facility at Natanz.

A week earlier, on May 10, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, said that the Iranians have not provided the IAEA with the information they promised for the agency's investigation of suspected illegal nuclear activities detected at several locations throughout the country. Grossi told the European Parliament, "The situation does not look very good. Iran, for the time being, has not been forthcoming in the kind of information we need from them."

## IRGC OFFICER ASSASSINATED

Colonel Hassan Sayad Khodayari, a senior commander in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Quds Force, was assassinated on May 22 by several unidentified motorcycle riders who shot him outside his home in Teheran.

Reports allege that Khodayari was involved in attempted terror attacks against Israelis abroad, as well as in smuggling of weapons and missile guidance systems to Syria. Media speculation suggested Israel's Mossad

intelligence agency could have been responsible.

## SAUDI ARABIA INVESTS IN ISRAELI STARTUPS

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund has, for the first time, publicly invested in Israeli start-up companies, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

The funding is part of a US\$2 billion (A\$ 2.81b) investment by the kingdom into Affinity Partners, the private-equity firm of Jared Kushner, the former senior White House advisor who had an influential role in brokering the 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel and four Arab countries.

In addition, on May 23 in Casablanca, Morocco, 13 memorandums of understanding were signed between Israeli and Moroccan officials in areas such as technology, agriculture and climate at a 'Connect to Innovate' forum.



## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### WHO WAS THAT MASKED MAN?

Since World War II, German authorities have been at pains to try to demonstrate that their country has learned from the Holocaust, and Germans now understand the danger and ugliness of antisemitism. However, it appears that some staff from the German national airline Lufthansa didn't get the memo.

On a May 4 flight from New York to Frankfurt carrying a large number of Hassidic Jews on a pilgrimage to a site in Hungary, a few passengers, both Jews and non-Jews, objected to or failed to comply with the airline's COVID mask mandate.

When the pilgrims reached the boarding gate for the connecting flight to Hungary, they discovered that no one who looked visibly Jewish was being allowed on. When one Jewish passenger asked why, and why non-Jews from New York were being allowed on the flight, he

Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu visited Israel and the Palestinian territories in the last week of May – the first such visit by a senior Turkish official in 15 years, and a sign of improving ties between the two countries after many years of estrangement.

## ISRAEL'S POPULATION REACHES 9.5 MILLION

On the eve of its 74th birthday, the population of Israel reached 9.5 million people, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. Of those, some 7 million, or 74%, are Jews, 2 million are Muslim, Christian or Druze Arabs (21%) and nearly 478,000, or 5%, are neither Arab nor Jewish.

Israel's population had increased by 1.9% over the past year, including 38,000 new arrivals. This was the highest number of immigrants in two decades, reflecting the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

was told, "Jewish people were the mess, who made the problems."

Apparently, the staff were indifferent to the obvious fact that punishing or excluding all people of a certain ethnicity for the behaviour of a few of them is textbook racism – and this was an especially bad look for a German airline when the victims of this discrimination were Jews.

Lufthansa subsequently apologised for the fiasco, stating the staff behaviour had been inconsistent with its policies and values and that the ban should have been limited to non-compliant passengers rather than "the large group."

However, this apology drew fire from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), among others. The ADL described it as a non-apology, noting it referred to the Jewish passengers as a "group" even though many were complete strangers, and failed to identify the banned passengers as Jews.

The airline staff should surely have been able to identify and separate out the miscreants. After all, they were the one who weren't wearing masks.

## COVER STORY

# 1948: MYTHS AND FACTS

## THE PROBLEM WITH “NAKBA DAY”

**Bassem Eid**

**W**ho in the Middle East has not been traumatised by the upheavals of the last century? All of us celebrate the history of our families and treasure the places where we have lived, yet only the Palestinian leadership has weaponised the memory of displacement and transformed it into an ideology of genocide.

“Nakba Day,” which occurs every year on May 15, was established in 1998 by former Palestinian Authority President – and international terrorist mastermind – Yasser Arafat, to turn Israel’s Independence Day into a festival of grievance. The very fact of Israel’s existence was branded a “catastrophe” – *Nakba* in Arabic – but not the displacement that affected both sides in the subsequent war, which included the ethnic cleansing of all Jews from what became the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem. And during and after Israel’s War of Independence in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Jews were expelled from Arab lands; that is, in fact, the true *nakba*.

In the war in what had been British Mandatory Palestine, Jewish communities were uprooted and expelled from their homes in Gush Etzion and Atarot in the modern-day West Bank by the British-commanded Transjordanian Arab Legion. The ancient Jewish community of Hebron, where the Cave of the Patriarchs – burial site of the biblical forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – is located, had already been pushed out by a 1929 Arab riot and prevented from returning by the British authorities.

Baghdad was one-third Jewish in the early 20th century, and like the Temple Mount today, there were many sites there that were shared by both Jewish and Muslim worshippers, such as the Prophet Ezekiel’s Tomb in al-Kifl, home for centuries to both a mosque and a synagogue.



Nakba Day is part of a wider policy which “weaponised the memory of displacement and transformed it into an ideology of genocide” (Image: Shutterstock)

In 1941, during the brief Nazi-backed coup led by Rashid Ali al-Gailani, an antisemitic mob was allowed to murder and rape members of Baghdad’s Jewish community in a pogrom called the Farhud. Iraq also persecuted its Jewish community after Israel’s independence and, by 1951, Israel had rescued by airlift almost the entire Iraqi Jewish population in “Operation Ezra and Nehemiah”.

The Jewish community in Yemen was also rescued by the embryonic Jewish state in 1948-49, within a year of Israel’s independence, in “Operation Wings of Eagles”. According to legend, many Yemenite Jews had never even seen an aeroplane before and took them as a literal fulfillment of the biblical promise that “they that wait for the Lord ... shall mount up with wings as eagles” (Isaiah 40:31).

In all, more than 850,000 Jews were forced to flee Arab countries for Israel, followed by more than 70,000 Jews from Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Like Iraq, Iran was home to multi-confessional sites honoured by both



faiths, such as Queen Esther's Tomb in Hamadan, Iran. On "Nakba Day" 2020, a vandal set parts of the shrine on fire in a probable hate crime.

The Arab world has seen more displacement than almost any other region, as modern refugee populations from Iraq and Syria can attest. Although my family is Muslim, I was born in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, then under Jordanian control. In 1966, when I was eight years old, the Jordanian government moved my family north of Jerusalem to the Shuafat Refugee Camp. It was the government of Jordan, not the government of Israel, that made me a refugee.

The difference between a Palestinian culture taught to celebrate grievance and an Israeli culture that idealises freedom is stark. The Christian minority population, for example, has plummeted in Palestinian Authority-controlled territory. In Bethlehem, it has dropped from 84% to 22% in the last decade alone. Meanwhile, a party with Islamic foundations has a critical role in Israel's current Government, and Israel's Supreme Court recently appointed its first Muslim justice, Khaled Kabub.

**P**alestinians should celebrate our rich heritage and, like our Jewish cousins, grieve our losses. But now is the time for negotiated reconciliation, not the perpetuation of generation-old victimhood. "Nakba Day" is part of the victimhood problem, not part of the forward-looking solution. Reconciliation happens only when both sides take a step back and acknowledge joint suffering. "Nakba Day" does the reverse. Whereas Israel has three times offered Palestinians peace, dignity and independence, Yasser

**"Palestinians should celebrate our rich heritage and, like our Jewish cousins, grieve our losses. But now is the time for negotiated reconciliation, not the perpetuation of generation-old victimhood"**

Arafat launched – and Mahmoud Abbas has failed to contain – the violent public culture of the 2000 to 2005 Second Intifada, for which the 1998 establishment of "Nakba Day" can be understood as a buildup.

The fetishisation of Israel's very existence as a catastrophe is a distortion that wounds our children and leads them to war and

suicide bombing. Nearly 1 million Jews in Islamic lands faced their own *nakba* after Israel's independence. Perhaps if more Palestinians understood this, we would better understand our Israeli neighbours.

We must teach our children about our neighbours, seek understanding and champion peace. The Palestinian leadership should reverse course on the incitement against Israel and Jews – including the spread of antisemitic stereotypes – in public education and media. Instead, Palestinian schoolchildren and citizens should learn the history, the

joys and the traumas of our neighbours the Israelis, with whom we have a great deal in common. In so doing, we can lay the foundations of a new Middle East, and cities like my native Jericho in the Jordan Valley can blossom as hubs of international cooperation and commerce. This can only be achieved if we learn to understand our neighbours' grief, not exacerbate our own.

"Nakba Day" does the opposite and should be abolished.

AIR

*Bassem Eid is a Palestinian human-rights activist, political analyst and journalist. © JNS.org, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## WHY REFUGEES COULD NOT 'RETURN' AFTER THE 1948 WAR

**Salo Aizenberg**

**S**ocial and other media were busy blaming Israel for wrongdoing this past May 15th, the so-called "Nakba Day", which commemorates and laments the displacement of approximately 700,000 Arabs as a consequence of the 1948 war between Jews and Arabs. This article will not delve into the never-ending debate whether these Arabs fled or were expelled by Jews during the war. Serious scholarship shows that there was a combination of the two events, with a large majority of Arabs fleeing the conflict as happens during war, while some were expelled, often in the context of the war. Anti-Israel discourse maintains that Jews had pre-planned and then implemented wholesale expulsion, but the evidence does not back this claim.

These same anti-Israel scholars and activists always ignore Arab rejection of partition, Arab launching of the civil war against Jews in November 1947 and the invasion by several Arab states determined to destroy the new Jewish state as factors which caused Arab flight.

In the context of Nakba Day, I recently had a discussion with a fair-minded person as to why Israel did not allow Arab refugees to return to their villages inside the newly formed state of Israel after the war ended in Jewish victory. True, we agreed, Arabs rejected the partition plan that would have created an Arab state, launched an attack against the new Jewish state, and the refugee crisis was mainly a consequence of the war. Nevertheless, the discussion questioned 'why couldn't Israel allow Arab civilians to simply return to their villages after the war? Wouldn't that have been the right thing to do after Israel



Fleeing Palestinian refugees: It was neither a legal requirement nor a norm at the time that they would be allowed to return to Israel (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

won, regardless of who started the conflict and regardless of the fact that no international law actually mandated such a “return”? (UN Resolution 194 neither mandates return nor comprises international law; there has never been an international law that compels a sovereign state to accept persons into its territory against its wishes). The question is reasonable but has many clear answers:

#### **Allowing refugees to return was not the norm in the 1940s:**

The fact is that in the 1940s allowing refugees to “return” was simply not expected behaviour post conflict. Millions of Germans were permanently forced out of eastern European nations following World War II. Massive population exchanges were seen in India and Pakistan around the same time. Allowing Arab refugees to return to areas inside Israel following a war that was started by Arabs was well outside of international expectations in 1949, particularly considering Israel’s absorption of 800,000 Jewish refugees expelled from Arab nations soon thereafter. Israel considered the two refugee groups as effectively an exchange of populations similar to several other post-conflict situations in the first half of the twentieth century.

#### **Arabs refused to make peace with Israel after the war ended:**

This is perhaps the most obvious reason. A gesture of peace and goodwill to allow refugees to return would seemingly only make sense if the hostile parties to the conflict agreed to a definitive peace. But the Arab nations indicated the exact opposite, agreeing only to armistice agreements and making it clear that a state of war remained. Jewish leadership believed that Arabs were preparing for another round of conflict, and statements by Arab leaders conveyed continued hostility. It made absolutely no sense for the new Jewish state to allow several hundred thousand Arabs to enter Israel when the Arab world remained actively hostile to the existence of Israel and Jewish sovereignty.

**Palestinian leadership collaborated with Hitler:** This aspect of Palestinian history is generally buried in anti-Israel discourse but certainly played a role in Jewish thinking at the

time. Palestinian leader Haj Amin al-Husseini collaborated with Hitler and the Nazis in World War II and after the war returned to the Middle East to actively work against the partition plan and the new Jewish state. The new Jewish state was loathe to accept the return of a population who, for a significant amount of time, was led by an individual who collaborated with the main perpetrator of the Holocaust.

**Arabs spoke in genocidal terms only three years after the Holocaust:** The Arab nations who invaded the new state of Israel did not just seek to stop a Jewish state from forming, but their leaders spoke about the destruction of the Jewish people (e.g. comments by Azzam Pasha, Secretary-General of the Arab League). This came only three years removed from the murder of 40% of world Jewry. It did not make sense for Israel to be unusually generous to the Arab refugee population when the Arab leadership spoke of the further destruction of the Jewish people soon after the Holocaust, and did not change their bellicose discourse post war.

**Struggling Israeli Post-War Economy:** The new state of Israel suffered heavy losses, with 6,000 persons killed (1% of the Jewish population), and its economy was in poor shape as would be expected after a long war. Israel was in a difficult position to care for its own citizens let alone several hundred thousand refugees. For several years after the war, Israel imposed austerity measures (known as *Tzenna*) due to shortages of food and foreign currency. Israel was simply not economically in a position to absorb hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees. Perhaps in the context of a regional peace agreement and collaboration to build a post-war economy, taking in refugees would have been possible, but as discussed, Arab nations were clear in maintaining active hostility.

**Israel had its own refugee crisis to manage:** The new state of Israel had to deal with its own refugee crisis, absorbing 200,000 Holocaust survivors and hundreds of thousands of Jews who were forced to leave Arab nations with no compensation. Over a few years post-1948 this combined refugee population exceeded 1 million persons. Today’s anti-Israel discourse continues to treat the Arab refugee population as deserving of “return” and reparations, but ignores a similar number of Jewish refugees who were also displaced and never compensated.

**Arabs had no intention of reciprocating:** Arabs expelled Jews from all areas under their control during the 1948 war and did not allow Jews to return or reclaim their property. While the numbers were much smaller on the Jewish side, it was clear that Jews were not welcome in Arab controlled areas and there was no expectation that Jews would be allowed to return or reclaim property. Most notably, the ancient Jewish community in the Old City of Jerusalem was expelled in full and dozens of synagogues razed. At the same time, about 150,000 Arabs who



did not flee the war remained inside the new Jewish state and they and their descendants today comprise 2 million Arab citizens of Israel with full democratic rights. It made no sense for Israel to accept Arab refugees, when Jordan was not obligated to restore the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem to its Jewish residents. AIR

*Salo Aizenberg is a US-based author and writer, having published "Hatemail: Anti-Semitism on Picture Postcards" which was nominated as a finalist for the National Jewish Book Awards, and other insightful articles about the Israel-Palestine conflict. © Times of Israel (www.timesofisrael.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## HOW ARAB RULERS UNDERMINED A PALESTINIAN STATE

**Roie Yellinek and Assaf Malach**

**W**hile the "Palestine question" has long dominated inter-Arab politics, not only have the Arab states been driven by their own ulterior motives, but they also have shown little concern for the wellbeing of the Palestinians, let alone their demand for a state of their own. This pattern dates back to the mandate years (1920-48) when the self-styled champions of the nascent pan-Arab movement – King Faisal of Iraq, Transjordan's Emir Abdullah, and Egyptian King Faruq – viewed Palestine as part of their would-be empires. This situation culminated in the 1948 war when the all-Arab assault on Israel was launched in pursuit of the invading states' imperialist goals – not in support of Palestinian self-determination. In the words of the Arab League's Secretary-General Abdel Rahman Azzam:

"[King]Abdullah [of Jordan] was to swallow up the central hill regions of Palestine, with access to the Mediterranean at Gaza. The Egyptians would get the Negev. [The] Galilee would go to Syria, except that the coastal part as far as Acre would be added to Lebanon."

In the decades following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the Arab states continued to use the Palestinians for their own ends, exploiting the newly created "refugee problem" to tarnish Israel's international standing and channel their oppressed subjects' anger outwards. They did practically nothing to relieve this problem, let alone to facilitate the crystallisation of Palestinian nationalism and the attainment of statehood.

This consistent lack of recognition of a separate Palestinian nationality by the Arab states was perpetrated by the

main parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict: Jordan, Egypt, and Syria.

### JORDANIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Jordan has ruled over more Palestinians than any other Arab state, especially during its occupation of the West Bank between 1948 and 1967. In these years, the kingdom became home to some 368,000 Palestinians who fled the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and the government systematically erased all traces of a distinct Palestinian identity in an attempt to create a wider Jordanian national identity.

Even during the 1948 war, King Abdullah made a brief visit to Jerusalem on November 15 where he proclaimed himself the ruler of Palestine as well as Jordan, and in April 1950, Jordan formally annexed the area it occupied in the war and designated it the "West Bank of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan." A decade later, Abdullah's grandson and successor King Hussein declared his firm opposition to the idea of a separate "Palestinian entity," convening a conference of Hashemite loyalists in January 1960 to denounce the "despicable innovation" of the establishment of a Palestinian entity.



Jordan's King Abdullah (centre) tried to erase all traces of a distinct Palestinian identity (Image: Wikipedia)

The Palestinian residents of the east and west banks were incorporated into Jordan's social, economic, and political fabric to a far greater extent than their brothers in any other Arab state, primarily due to the kingdom's dire need to boost its scarce population and because of the high ratio of Palestinian refugees vis-à-vis the original Bedouin population. This explains why Jordan was the only Arab country to integrate fully the Palestinian refugees of 1948. Following the Israeli capture of the West Bank during the Six-Day War in June 1967, about 240,000 Palestinians were displaced for the first time and some 190,000 were refugees who had been displaced in 1948, increasing Jordan's Palestinian population to more than half of the kingdom's total inhabitants.

Tension between the Hashemite regime and its Palestinian subjects grew steadily in the wake of the 1967 war as the Palestinian terror organisations established a state within a state in the kingdom, transforming its territory into a springboard for attacks on Israel. Matters erupted in September 1970 with an attempt on King Hussein's life as part of a wider Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) bid to subvert the Hashemite monarchy and take over the state. This led to an all-out confrontation that came to be widely known as Black September.

Amid heavy fighting with massacres of thousands of innocent civilians (including many of Palestinian descent) and a limited Syrian invasion in support of the PLO, the group was expelled from Jordan, a process completed in July 1971. And while this military routing failed to deal a mortal blow to the PLO, which quickly substituted Lebanon for Jordan as its home, Hussein continued his tireless efforts to weaken and marginalise the organisation and by extension Palestinian nationalism. This was vividly illustrated by his March 1972 plan of a united Arab kingdom under his headship comprising Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, in which the Palestinians were to enjoy autonomy. To the king's frustration, the plan, conceived with Israel's blessing, met with

**“This consistent lack of recognition of a separate Palestinian nationality by the Arab states was perpetrated by the main parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict: Jordan, Egypt, and Syria.”**

widespread Arab outrage, particularly in Egypt, where the government responded by severing diplomatic relations with Jordan.

The 1973 Yom Kippur War boosted the PLO's inter-Arab stance as most Arab states sought to empower the organisation as a means of advancing their own positions vis-à-vis Israel. The Arab League would have recognised the PLO as the “sole representative of the Palestinian people” during its November 1973 Algiers summit had Jordan not derailed the initiative at the last moment. But this was but

a Pyrrhic victory as the pan-Arab recognition of Palestinian nationalism (and the PLO as its sole champion) was passed a year later – in the October 1974 Arab League summit in the Moroccan

capital of Rabat.

This set in motion a process of Jordanian-Palestinian disengagement culminating in Hussein's July 1988 renunciation of Jordan's claims to the West Bank, in favour of the PLO, following the failure of three initiatives to institutionalise relations between Jordanians, Palestinians, and Israelis. But the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza (December 1987-September 1993), or the Intifada, drove the final nail in the King's hopes to regain the West Bank: The Palestinian population did not support this option while his Bedouin subjects feared the uprising would spill over into the East Bank and subvert the Hashemite kingdom. The uprising seemed to have closed the lid on the idea of a unified kingdom reincorporating the West Bank's Palestinians as Jordanian subjects as did the September 1993 launching of the Israel-PLO Oslo “peace process” and the conclusion of a Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement a year later.

But calls for the resurrection of the “Jordanian option” resurfaced over the following decades, reflecting growing disillusionment with the Oslo process. On the Israeli side, the realisation grew that the PLO leadership (let alone those of Hamas and Islamic Jihad) viewed Oslo not as the means to a two-state solution – Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza – but for the substitution of a Palestinian state in place of Israel. This understanding of PLO motives kindled warm memories of the Zionist movement's long-standing collaboration with the Hashemite dynasty dating back to the early 1920s.

Similar sentiments were aroused on the Palestinian side by the widespread disillusionment with the corrupt and oppressive nature of the PLO-dominated Palestinian Authority, with 51% of respondents to a 2013 poll supporting the “Jordanian option” – roughly 10% more than in a similar poll five years earlier. This mindset was reflected in the June 2016 suggestion by al-Quds University president Sari Nusseibeh – who had previously gone to



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great lengths to disengage himself from his late father's legacy as the 1950s Jordanian defence minister – for reconsideration of a Jordanian-Palestinian federation. More importantly, former Jordanian prime minister Abdel Salam Majali voiced support for the idea, stating, "Jordan cannot exist without Palestine, and Palestine cannot exist without Jordan." And while Nusseibeh's and Majali's ideas are hardly representative, they indicate that prominent figures and substantial public opinion still support the blurring of Palestinian distinctiveness and the creation of a collective identity on both sides of the Jordan River.



Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (centre) with Yasser Arafat and Jordan's King Hussein: Nasser's view was that the "Palestinians are useful to the Arab states as they are."

## EGYPT AS INTERMEDIARY

While Egypt's government indicated no desire to annex the Gaza Strip after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, it was no more amenable than Jordan to the development of Palestinian national identity or Palestinian statehood. Instead, it subjected the residents of the Gaza Strip to a harsh military regime and did not offer them Egyptian citizenship. As Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser told a Western journalist:

"The Palestinians are useful to the Arab states as they are. We will always see that they do not become too powerful. Can you imagine yet another nation on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean!"

Despite this view, Nasser was paradoxically instrumental in the development of Palestinian nationalism by instigating the formation of the PLO in 1964. He did so not out of concern for Palestinian wellbeing but as a means, Edward Said explains, of "institutionalizing (perhaps even containing) Palestinian energies" and using them to promote his ultimate goal of pan-Arab leadership. To this end, he selected Ahmad Shukeiri to head the PLO. Shukeiri was a Lebanon-born politician loyal to the Egyptian president who in turn helped install Shukeiri as deputy secretary-general of the Arab League. This ensured the PLO's subservience to Nasser's will and prevented it from pursuing undesirable directions, particularly those based on Palestinian nationalism.

In yet another paradox, it was the Six-Day War that gave a major boost to Palestinian national identity by loosening the grip of the Egyptian chokehold. When the Gaza Strip (and West Bank) populations came under Israel's rule, the Arab states' direct control over these Palestinians weakened, allowing the PLO to break from Egyptian dominance. This was illustrated by the election of a PLO chairman, Yahya Hamuda, who was not personally beholden to Nasser.

More importantly, this loosening of the Arab states' domination allowed for the creeping takeover of the PLO's

decision-making organs by the Fatah terror group, which had previously vied with the PLO for Palestinian leadership. By 1969, with Yasser Arafat at its head, Fatah and its satellite factions had gained 45 of the Palestinian National Council's 105 seats; in contrast, the veteran pro-Egyptian Palestine Liberation Army dropped sharply from 20 to 5 seats. With the support of the 28 independent representatives, Fatah managed to win a majority on the council, and on February 3, 1969, Arafat became PLO chairman, a post he held until his death in November 2004, and which he would use to free the organisation from the Arab states' domination.

Small wonder that Arafat's relations with Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat were no warmer. Sadat's outright rejection of King Hussein's federation, which led to a brief severance of Egyptian-Jordanian diplomatic relations, fully coincided with the PLO's ambitions. But Sadat's stance reflected no sympathy with the organisation or with Palestinian nationalism; rather, it indicated a reluctance to see a surge in Jordan's inter-Arab prestige as a result of such a move as well as fear of the corresponding loss of Egyptian control over the Palestine issue, which had started to play a growing role on the international agenda.

For this reason, Sadat insisted that the crystallising Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, negotiated at the September 1978 Camp David summit, must include recognition of the Palestinians' right to autonomy for an interim period of five years, after which the West Bank and Gaza Strip's final status would be negotiated with Israel. Yet this was as far as he was prepared to go in placating supporters of the most celebrated pan-Arab cause. When the autonomy plan was contemptuously dismissed by Arafat, who also declined US president Jimmy Carter's personal appeal to join the peace process, Sadat had no qualms about breaking the Arab taboo and signed a separate peace agreement with Israel.

Palestinian-Egyptian relations improved significantly after Sadat's assassination, largely due to the PLO's 1982 expulsion from Lebanon and its deteriorating relations

with Syria, but neither Egyptian presidents Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) nor Abdel Fattah Sisi (2013 to date) cancelled the peace treaty with Israel or made a real effort to promote Palestinian statehood. Instead, they used their relationship with Israel as a lever to enhance their regional and international position, especially vis-à-vis successive U.S. administrations, by playing an intermediary role between Israelis and Palestinians without seeking resolution.

## SYRIAN CLAIMS

The Syrian political elite was no more sympathetic to Palestinian national self-determination than its Jordanian or Egyptian counterparts. In the decade-and-a-half following its independence in 1946, the unambiguous political line advocated the unification of Greater Syria comprising the territory of present-day Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel, under Damascus' reign (Transjordan's King Abdullah also strove for the creation of this entity under his headship). Even the pan-Arab Baath party, which seized power in a military coup in 1963 and which espoused the vision of a unified "Arab nation" from "the [Persian] Gulf to [Atlantic] Ocean," continued to view Palestine as an integral part of "southern Syria." This view was especially strong during the 30-year reign (1970-2000) of Hafez Assad, who claimed that "a state by the name of Palestine has never existed."

Two years after the Arab League had formally recognised the PLO as the "sole representative of the Palestinian people," Assad met with Arafat and Lebanese Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt. In the April 1976 meeting, Assad had no qualms about telling the Palestinian leader that

"...you do not represent Palestine as we do. Never forget this one point; there is no such thing as a Palestinian people, no such thing as a Palestinian entity, there is only Syria! You are an integral part of the Syrian people. Palestine is an integral part of Syria."

It is no surprise, then, that the Syrian President attempted to use Israel's 1982 expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon to impose Syria's hegemony on the organisation, preventing the PLO's return to the country and instigating an internecine war among the Palestinian factions in Lebanon that raged for years and cost thousands of lives. He was no less vehemently opposed to any attempt by the PLO to assert an independent course – notably by embarking on the Oslo process – going so far as to threaten Arafat with death.

This outlook prevailed under the rule of Bashar Assad, who succeeded his father upon the elder's death in June 2000. The lukewarm Syrian position was manifested at inter-Arab conferences in the 2000s that adopted resolutions backing the Palestinians over a host of key issues at the centre of their relationship with Israel (e.g., sovereignty over the Temple Mount and Jerusalem). No less important, in March 2002, Syria opposed Security Council Resolution 1397 –

the first binding resolution on the need for an independent Palestinian state as part of "a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders." And while Damascus justified its position by the resolution's failure to "take into account any Arab concerns" and to "deal with the root question at the heart of this issue—the Israeli occupation," the fact remains that it withheld public support for an international resolution on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

## CONCLUSION

The 1967 Six-Day War placed the "Palestine question" at the forefront of international attention with the PLO gaining worldwide prominence as "the sole representative of the Palestinian people" while maintaining its terrorist ways. However, the Arab states have shown no real interest in Palestinian statehood beyond the customary lip service.

Despite Jordan's 1988 renunciation of claims to the West Bank, the Hashemite monarchy has neither shown any desire for the establishment of a Palestinian state, which it fears might subvert its rule, nor shied away from making peace and closely collaborating with Israel with the kingdom's possible return to the West Bank occasionally mooted by both sides. Similarly, while Anwar Sadat went to great lengths to attach the Palestinian issue to the Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations, the agreed formulation spoke about a transient autonomy without specifying statehood as the end result, let alone insisting on its attainment. Nor was Sadat deterred from opting for a separate Egyptian-Israeli peace once Arafat rejected his overture. Add to this the Assad regime's adamant subscription to its perception of Palestine as Syria's southern province and its outright rejection of "peace" that did not entail Israel's destruction.

This half-hearted approach toward Palestinian nationalism notwithstanding, decades of staunch anti-Zionist propaganda have entrenched the "Palestine question" in the collective regional psyche to the extent of making it exceedingly difficult for the Arab states to conclude functional peace treaties with Israel without a *pro forma* Palestinian-Israeli agreement. Yet while this state of affairs gives the Palestinians some veto power over inter-Arab politics, it is unlikely to derail the intensifying, multifaceted, and increasingly overt Arab-Israeli collaboration even in the event of severe deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations, as the 2020 normalisation agreements between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco show.

AIR

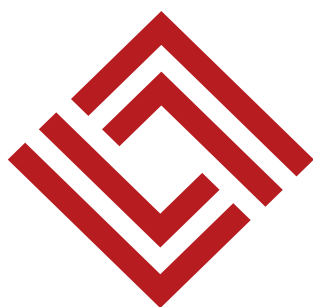
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# A Terror Wave Explained

Multiple causes, but incitement is key

Danielle Pletka

Seven terrorist attacks from late March to early May left 19 Israelis dead. Some attacks were beyond gruesome, with the attacker wielding an axe. Others were shootings in crowded city cafes. In one attack, a victim shielded his fiancée and died in the act. In another, a teen girl was motivated by the death of her boyfriend to stab a Jew. Israeli authorities expect the terror wave, the worst in many years, to continue. The perpetrators have all been arrested or killed, but Israeli authorities expect there are more to come.

Experts agree that there is no one theme, no one group that can claim responsibility. Hamas, the terrorist group that governs Gaza, celebrated each murder, but the Israeli Government hasn't fingered the group for plotting attacks. ISIS took credit for another. In the United States, these might be called "lone-wolf" killings, though the presence of so many terrorist groups around Israel — Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and ISIS, all generically promoting violence — renders the label pointless. To the dead, sponsorship is not really the point. So what's behind the uptick in killings?

Some have fingered Palestinian anomie, or worse yet, Sunni anomie: losing wars, terrible leaders, failed battles for supremacy, democracy, everything. Others have blamed Ramadan, the Islamic holy month, traditionally (though hardly Quranically) a time of increased violence.

Traditionalists have cast the Israelis as the villains, with heavy handed interventions on the Temple Mount in the wake of Palestinian violence and the usual tension between Arabs and Jews. Still others have harked back to the Sheikh Jarrah controversy — a mundane Jerusalem housing matter that escalated into a symbolic battle for ownership of Jerusalem. It contributed to last year's 11-day war and tensions are still simmering.

Many also believe that increased incitement over social media, including Telegram, Facebook, WhatsApp and

other platforms has encouraged young men to kill. It will be worth keeping an eye on whether the shooting death of Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh on May 11 will inflame tensions further. Abu Akleh was killed while IDF forces were exchanging gunfire with armed Palestinians near the Jenin refugee camp, though it's unclear whether her death was caused by IDF or Palestinian fire.

If all of this feels like the same story, different day, in the endless Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there's a reason for that. The so-called peace process is done for, with even the Democratic Biden Administration — normally a haven for peace processors — preoccupied with inflation, immigration, crime, Russia, Ukraine, China, Taiwan, everything but the Middle East. A proposed visit by the President to east Jerusalem, once (and perhaps again) home to a US consulate and de facto "embassy" to Palestine, is unlikely to shake things up.

A smarter approach by the United States would look at the topography of the Palestinian people and think more

clearly about how to address their problems rather than falling back on the two-state solution as the answer to everything.

First, what do Palestinians believe? Fine work by both the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and veteran Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki lay bare part of the trouble. Almost half of Palestinians polled believe "armed struggle" is the solution to their problems. Fully 58% oppose a two-state resolution; 70% oppose "unconditional return to negotiations with Israel"; almost as many oppose dialogue

with the United States. Most troubling of all, "73% believe the Qur'an contains a prophecy about the demise of the state of Israel; but only 32% think the year for this demise is 2022."

Yikes, *"only"* 32% (and it's already May!).

Pre-pandemic crowd-sourced polling done by the Washington Institute indicated an almost across-the-board trend among Palestinians toward more pessimism about the future, less realistic aspirations for victory in conflict, increased commitment to the return of all "historically Palestinian" lands, and diminished support for a two-state resolution. While support for a new mass uprising or intifada was also low (for a variety of reasons, including lack of confidence in Palestinian leadership), there remained an overall commitment to violent means.

Another source of trouble is the Palestinian economy: vulnerable before COVID and uniquely dependent on foreign assistance, Palestinians endured a dramatic economic downturn, job losses and a continued contraction of aid



Twin gunmen attack in Hadera, March 27 (Screenshot)



inflows – per the World Bank from “27% of GDP in 2008 to 1.8% in 2021.” There has been some post-COVID recovery, with the unemployment rate reportedly “bouncing back” to around (a still unfathomable) 25% in the West Bank and Gaza, though it is likely substantially higher in Gaza. Among younger people, the story is starker: in 2020, 42% of young (15-24) Palestinians were unemployed.

How has this happened? Aid programs out the wazoo, cash transfers from Gulf countries straight into the coffers of both the West Bank and Gaza governments, liberalised Israeli work permits and greater engagement with the Palestinian leadership... and still, 19 dead in six weeks.

Sure, the aid has declined over the last two decades, and more conservative Israeli governments have had harsher policies, permitted more settlement activity, and enforced more stringent border closures. But the Palestinians themselves deserve some agency. And the answer is perhaps less complex than some wish to believe.

There is violence because there is incitement to violence. There is organic hatred toward Israel and Jews for historic and current policy reasons to be sure, but there is also unending political encouragement and glorification of killing (though Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned several of the recent attacks). There is a loss of faith in democratic self-government because the Palestinian Authority has not conducted a presidential election in 17 years. There is a loss of faith in the peace process because it has not delivered peace. There is rising unemployment because of failed leadership and corruption.

There is a growing sense among Palestinians that they are being left behind by history. Israel has made peace with four Arab states in the last two years, and will likely ink additional agreements before too long – with or without encouragement from Washington. “Palestine” the cause has lost its lustre among all but the most extreme of governments. Should it be any surprise that without work, without economic security, without political and civil society, and with incessant governmental encouragement to kill and glorification of murder, young men turn to violence? It doesn’t excuse it, but it helps to explain it.

In the case of Salafi-jihadis, the United States government understands that defeat is the prelude to extinguish-



Emergency services rush to the site of the Tel Aviv bar attack, which killed three civilians, on April 8 (Image: Alamy Live News)

**“There is organic hatred toward Israel and Jews for historic and current policy reasons to be sure, but there is also unending political encouragement and glorification of killing”**

ing groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS (though current US policy is another story). In the case of Hamas, PIJ, and even those within the Palestinian Authority who incite terror, however, defeat seems to be off the playbook. The US makes little effort to unseat or even destabilise the terror group holding the reins of power in Gaza, and still less to corral others like PIJ. Sanctions do little to stem the flow

of cash from Iran and others.

There is scant messaging about the need for fresh leadership, and almost no serious efforts on the part of the US or Europe to dislodge President-for-life Mahmoud Abbas.

Similarly, there is occasional bleating from concerned politicians about incitement and social media glorification of violence, but little serious effort to quash, for example, the use of Facebook to encourage terrorism. There was also once a time when the US prioritised the imperative of economic reform in the Palestinian Authority, putting some real muscle behind former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, but even that has fallen largely by the wayside.

Israel can do more to mitigate some of the immediate economic problems among the Palestinians, but it has neither the leverage nor the power with Palestinian leaders that is required for real change.

One option is simply to let the Palestinian people wither on the vine, and tolerate the loss of a few dozen Israelis every year to terrorist attacks. Another is to allow “Palestine” to become another Iran, a nexus for greater violence in the Middle East along the lines of Lebanon or Syria. But the better choice is to re-engage on the basis of reality, and seek to loosen the grip of crooks, killers and

extremists, look to discredit their failed rule, search and support a new and better generation of leaders and help the Palestinian people find a better path.

AIR

*Danielle Pletka is a senior fellow specialising in Middle East policy at the American Enterprise Institute. © The Dispatch (www.thedispatch.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## CAPITAL GROWTH

**Amotz Asa-El**

**C**onfident of his solid alliance with Rome, Judea's King Herod Agrippa (11 BCE – 44 CE) decided to add a vast wall to Jerusalem's north and east around 42 CE and thus double the area of his magnificent capital.

The need to expand Jerusalem became evident at every Jewish holiday, when the city's famous temple attracted a tri-continental flood of pilgrims who congested the city's markets, roads and alleyways.

Works on the ambitious project that would have doubled the city's area and included 90 watchtowers were under way when the Emperor Claudius learned of the venture and ordered its cancellation, apparently seeing in it a potential threat to Rome's sway.

The uncompleted wall's foundations are still visible in various places, all of which are well within today's municipal Jerusalem, thus demonstrating the difference in size between the city's ancient and modern maps.

A sprawling metropolis of 126 sq. km., today's Jerusalem is 50 times the size of what the city would have been like had Herod Agrippa been able to carry out his plan. With 930,000 inhabitants within its municipal borders, and more than a million when counting its periphery, Jerusalem is challenged with transportation problems it has never before faced in its history over more than three millennia.

A Supreme Court ruling on May 15 approved a controversial cable car proposal which reflects Jerusalem's serious infrastructure challenges, as well as an inventive spirit which inspires mega-projects that seek to transform the holy city – which was once derided by coastal Israelis

for its perceived remoteness and provinciality.

The cable-car plan is designed to reduce the pressure affecting the most complex and fraught location in the city's historic nucleus – the Western Wall.

Attracting more than 10 million annual visitors, the Wall's 58-metre-long plaza is accessible via one narrow road within the Old City's walls and another road, not much wider, outside the walls. The ancient walled city, where some 35,000 inhabitants live within one square kilometre, has long been closed to private vehicles, except for a few parking lots that are restricted to use by local residents. Even so, congestion caused by buses shuttling pilgrims to the Wall is unsustainable.

The new project will send many of the Wall's visitors to a cable car station that will be located opposite Mount Zion, in what was Ottoman-era Jerusalem's railway station and is now a restaurant and recreation strip.

The cable car's 1.4 km ride will provide a breathtaking view of the Christian Quarter's spires, David's Citadel, the

biblical Valley of Hinnom, and the iconic golden Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount before landing at the Dung Gate, about a two minute walk from the Wall.

It is backed by Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Leon, but the project's most senior opponent, Israeli Transport Minister Merav Michaeli, argues it will damage Old Jerusalem's unique skyline and also cause security problems and political tensions. The Supreme Court overruled these argu-

ments, and also those of the city's community of Karaites (a small, ancient Jewish sect who observe the five books of Moses but not rabbinic law), which is protesting the proposed cable car's passage above its historic cemetery.

Straddling a cluster of other historic graveyards, from the Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion to the Jewish necropolis on the Mount of Olives and the Muslim tombs along the opposite slope, Jerusalem's cable car will arguably embody a bold effort to impose modernity on antiquity, while avoiding actual disturbance to those centuries-old burial places.

Time will tell how successful this project will be, but even its supporters do not claim it will solve the city's arterial problems. The answer to that lies in the highways and railways that climb the Judean mountains from the Mediterranean coast, and in the light railway system developed within the city over recent years.

A major breakthrough on this front happened four years ago, with the inauguration of a fast train from



Jerusalem today is a sprawling metropolis of 126 sq. km. and nearly a million residents (Image: Pinterest)



downtown Tel Aviv that reaches Jerusalem's Yitzhak Navon Station in 38 minutes – as opposed to about an hour by car.

Running every 30 minutes from 6am until midnight, this double-decker train tunnels its way through the Judean Mountains carrying up to 1,000 passengers on each trip. Its clientele for now is made up mainly of the carless population – soldiers, students and ultra-Orthodox families – but this will likely change once a huge parking lot that is being built underneath it opens in some two years' time.

The aim is to divert thousands of drivers from the highways to the railways, not only for travel to Tel Aviv, but also to Ben Gurion Airport – the only stop on the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem line – as well as the large town of Rishon LeZion south of Tel Aviv via a new line that is planned to start operation in four years.

The public works commotion created by the cable car and fast rail projects is actually relatively small compared with what is happening in Jerusalem due to work on its light rail system.

A decade after it launched Israel's first city light rail line, a 14 km service that links the capital's west and north while crossing downtown Jerusalem, the city is now a continuum of busy construction sites. Two new lines are under construction while the existing line is being extended in three directions, to Hadassah Hospital, the Israel Museum, and Jerusalem's northernmost tip, Neveh Yaakov.

The existing line is already a success, having cleared buses and private cars from downtown Jerusalem's main street, Jaffa Road, and turned it into a lively pedestrian mall. By the time the other lines are completed in roughly seven years, thousands of drivers who now clog Jerusalem will hopefully be using public transport for much of their daily travel.

Revolutionary though all this will be in terms of traffic and lifestyle, it will not affect Jerusalem's character. Something much more likely to transform that character on a significant scale is happening at the city's main western entrance – a huge real estate project that will redraw Jerusalem's skyline and hopes to provide a heart transplant for the city's relatively feeble private economy.

Bordering the new train station, the Jerusalem Convention Centre and the iconic Chords Bridge, this "Jerusalem Gateway" scheme will see the construction of nine skyscrapers up to 40 storeys high, each surrounded by another

15 buildings of up to 12 storeys. All these buildings except one will be non-residential, and are expected to collectively generate 60,000 jobs in hi-tech, finance, hospitality and entertainment.

Jerusalem has suffered from a relatively weak economic base throughout its modern period – living in the shadows of commercial Tel Aviv and industrial Haifa. With govern-

ment and the Hebrew University its leading employers, and a nightlife which is no match for Tel Aviv's exuberance, Jerusalem's successive mayors watched helplessly as secular university graduates migrated to the coast.

The Jerusalem Gateway mega-project that purports to give Jerusalem the kind of economic base it never had before might indeed transform it in other ways – first and foremost visually. A cluster of high-rise structures will in due course greet those approaching the city from Tel Aviv or Ben Gurion Airport.

Deliberately adjacent to the new fast rail station, the Jerusalem Gateway is designed to become an extension to the coastal plain's commercial bustle and the technology industry's creativity and wealth. It would all add up to

a celebration of worldliness, which would be the opposite of the spiritual other-worldliness that has been Jerusalem's claim to fame since Isaiah, Jeremiah and Jesus walked its streets.

However, while planners do their best to lead the city to a future of mundanity and wealth, its familiar mixture of religious piety and political strife remains very much an ongoing reality at present.

With the Jewish Passover and Muslim Ramadan overlapping, Palestinian rioters and Israeli police clashed on



An artist's conception of the cable car plan (top); the expanding light rail system transforming transport in Jerusalem (bottom). (Images: Twitter, Ashernet)

WITH COMPLIMENTS



Temple Mount on April 15, after Palestinians emerging from the Al-Aqsa Mosque hurled rocks at Jews praying by the Western Wall abutting the mosque's courtyard.

The riots, which continued for some three weeks and broke out in the midst of a series of shooting and knifing attacks outside Jerusalem, resulted in hundreds of arrests.

The new cable car is unlikely to prevent the holy compound's transformation into a battlefield again in the future. It would, however, be an emblem of the current Sisyphian efforts going on to turn Jerusalem into the normal city it has never before been.

AIR

## DOES HEZBOLLAH'S ELECTION SETBACK MATTER?

Lazar Berman

**W**hen results from Lebanon's May 15 parliamentary election started coming out, headlines made it seem like the outcome was a win for Hezbollah's opponents in Lebanon, the region, and of course, for Israel.

There is no question that Hezbollah's Christian and Druze allies lost seats, while the firmly anti-Hezbollah, anti-Syrian Lebanese Forces party will become the largest Christian group in Parliament. An impressive showing by several independent reform candidates also indicates a public desire to do away with the corrupt leaders that have run the country into the ground.

But any expectations that the country has managed to turn itself around, or that the Hezbollah threat to Israel is going to be reduced, is "some wishful thinking," said Jacques Neriah, Middle East analyst at the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs.

"The final picture of what we see today is the quagmire of Lebanon," Neriah continued. "There is no possibility of

reform. There is no possibility of change in the political system. We are stuck in paralysis and stagnation."

The election comes after years of turmoil in Lebanon, which has in recent years defaulted on its debt and seen the Lebanese pound lose 95% of its value.

It has also been traumatised by the devastating explosion, where ammonium nitrate improperly stored in a Beirut port warehouse caught fire and exploded, killing more than 200 people and injuring thousands more.

Political leaders have succeeded in obstructing investigations into the 2020 blast, and two of the main suspects even looked to have secured re-election in the May 15 polls.

After the elections, Lebanon is no better situated to cope with the deep dysfunction at the heart of its governing system.

"The Republic of Lebanon is a destroyed state," said Amos Gilad, Executive Director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy at Herzliya's Reichman University. "The Government is paralysed, the state is corrupt. And these elections don't help in any way."

"No one can affect any change in that country, which is suffering from a terminal disease," he said.

With the Hezbollah bloc and its rivals splitting Parliament fairly evenly, the next major political decision for the country won't come easy. Eighty-eight-year-old President Michel Aoun, a Hezbollah ally, steps down in October, and Parliament will be tasked with choosing his replacement, who by convention must be a Maronite Christian. Aoun wants his corrupt son-in-law Gebran Bassil to succeed him, but he is personally unpopular and has lost Hezbollah's support.

"This Parliament will not be able to vote for a president," predicted Neriah.

While the ongoing dysfunction makes it impossible for ordinary citizens to return to some sort of normalcy, it won't get in the way of Hezbollah's continued military build-up.

"No one is going to take Hezbollah's weapons, that's not on the agenda at all," stressed the Mitvim Institute's Michael Harari, Israel's former ambassador to Cyprus.

The worst-case domestic scenario for Hezbollah after Sunday's voting is that it loses its majority in Parliament. "That would mean the political game is harder for Hezbollah," said Harari.

But that's about the extent of the potential bad news for Nasrallah.

"There is no trend of significant weakening of Hezbollah or disarmament," Harari explained.

What's more, Lebanon's political and economic morass offers plenty of opportunity for Hezbollah.

"Between Beirut and the border there are 150,000 rockets, and the one that operates them is Nasrallah," said Gilad. "Hezbollah is the only actor that is organised there."

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Nasrallah knows that his organisation will be fine whatever the final outcome is. Just before the elections, he felt confident enough to threaten Israel's gas exploration in the disputed Karish gas field.

"The elections don't solve it," Gilad said. "The results are such that its either Hezbollah will lead, or it will take advantage of this crisis in order to grow stronger." AIR

*Lazar Berman is the Times of Israel's diplomatic reporter. © Times of Israel (www.timesofisrael.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved*

## A PRISONER'S DILEMMA

Jamie Hyams

**A**IJAC was recently privileged to host an address by Dr Kylie Moore-Gilbert, the Australian academic who was arrested in Iran on trumped up charges and held prisoner as part of the regime's hostage diplomacy policy for 804 days. Given the trauma she endured, it is amazing how calmly and matter-of-factly she was able to talk about her ordeal and the insight it gave her into the inner workings of the Iranian regime.

She said that, while not an initial reason for her arrest, it did complicate matters once her captors learnt of her connections to Israel and Judaism – Moore-Gilbert was married to an Israeli, had lived in Israel for a while, had converted to Judaism and speaks Hebrew.

However, she realised it didn't actually matter to them so much, as they had already crafted their narrative around her to extort her government, whether it be Australian or British – Dr Moore-Gilbert is a dual citizen.

She explained that she spoke about her Judaism to her guards frequently, and gained some interesting insights into the way even the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) members regarded Israel, Judaism and Zionism. While they did see them as the enemy, there were also "grey areas" which led to some "interesting chats" about matters such as the similarities between the Islamic and Jewish religions. She said she came to realise that many of them "were not hostile to Jews per se or Judaism as a

religion," despite the IRGC's espousal of antisemitism and enmity towards Israel.

She added that many weren't even clear about why they had a problem with Israel. Despite over 40 years of indoctrination to hate Israel, it wasn't true, in her experience, that the Iranian people, and even IRGC members, had been completely turned against the Jews and Israel, and there was some hope of rapprochement in the future. In fact, some Iranians had a positive view of Israel, most weren't antisemitic and some said they didn't really understand why their regime was so vehemently against the Jewish state.

She explained that the IRGC used intense interrogations to try to blackmail her into agreeing to spy for them. She told the audience she asked them what was to stop her agreeing and then reneging once she had been released, given they would have no leverage over her once she was outside the country, as they did with expatriate Iranians. She was told that they have people everywhere, and if she ran away, they would kill her. Moore-Gilbert said that she

refused because she wanted to walk out of Iran's prisons as a free woman.

She explained that fellow political prisoners who became very close friends helped her keep her spirits up, and she now regards two of them as her sisters. They communicated with her for ten months through a ventilation system before they even met. She's heartbroken that they are still imprisoned, having been arrested for investigating and advocating for the protection of



Dr Kylie Moore-Gilbert (centre) with AIJAC's Mark Leibler (left) and Joel Burnie (right)

an endangered species, not knowing they were in an area where the IRGC had missile launchers.

Moore-Gilbert said she believes the regime will eventually fall, because the Iranians are "revolutionary people", and it will then be possible to see friendship arising again between the Iranian and Israeli people. Even some IRGC guards would acknowledge to her in private that the Holocaust did happen, and they didn't want to kill Israelis. Most everyday people "weren't at all anti-Israeli", especially once they realised the shortcomings of their regime. She even met some Iranians in prison who were there for supporting Israel or contacting Israelis. She was quite heartened by these interactions.

There are major protests against the regime every couple of years, which might start with a single issue, Moore-Gilbert noted, such as prices, but they typically grow into demonstrations against the regime in general. Support for the regime, she added, very much falls away the younger

people get. She said she strongly believes that when the West is trying to come to an agreement with Iran, its appalling human rights record should also be brought up. The Iranian people, she says, want democracy, and the West should be pushing for that, as well.

Dr Moore-Gilbert said she is very grateful for the efforts by the relevant governments that ultimately got her released, including those of Israel in approving the release of terrorists who had tried to carry out an attack against Israel's ambassador in Thailand, as part of a prisoner swap, but that she and her family had long called for the diplomatic efforts to release her to be more public. She said she questions the logic of keeping it behind the scenes. Her advice is that in future cases, more public pressure should be put on the regime.

She described the Iranian regime as “master negotiators” who regard any concessions offered under negotiations as weakness and vulnerability and as a sign they should demand more rather than come to a compromise. They don't like to compromise, they like to get everything they want, she added. They also like having Israel as something they can blame, and they liked having Donald Trump as US President, because he was seen as a black-and-white bad guy character they could use to tell the Iranian public there was no point in negotiating about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal, Moore-Gilbert said.

She added that there are forces within Iran that are very much bent on undermining anyone who makes an effort to make any accommodation with the West, including the current President [Ebrahim Raisi], who, as well as being a war criminal, is a very extreme hardliner. They don't want to get along with the West, they don't want the JCPOA and they like the tension with the West. In fact, she said, they have grown very rich off it, with the IRGC controlling huge sectors of the economy, including much of the oil and gas markets. Should the JCPOA be renewed, the IRGC will have competition again, so for a number of reasons, they don't want the JCPOA or any deal with the West.

Dr Moore-Gilbert also provided insights into her frame

of mind in going to Iran, why she was arrested (she was sold out by someone who she had spoken to who seemed entirely innocuous), the circumstances of her arrest at the airport, the people she met in prison, how she approached her interrogations and her other experiences in Iran.

If her talk to the AIJAC audience was any indication, her book, *The Uncaged Sky* (Ultimo Press), reviewed in the May *AIR*, will be absolutely fascinating, if more than a little harrowing. AIR

## AL-QUDS DAY AT A SYDNEY MOSQUE

Ran Porat

The website of the Shi'ite mosque and commemoration hall known as the Hussaineyat Ale Yassin in Sydney contains articles about Islam; for example, explaining why it is a religion of peace. Yet, all pretence of peace disappears when it comes to Israel.

The analysis about war in Islam published on the website argues that “Capitalism has begun to break up bit by bit. Both Japan and France have lost their empires, and British and American colonialism have here and there started tottering, especially in the Middle East, with the advent of the dirty policies of the state of Israel.”

Sheikh Mohammed Mehdi al-Amooli is the senior preacher at Hussaineyat Ale Yassin. A respected member of his community, he was interviewed in 2018 by the ABC about Shi'ites in Australia, and before the coronavirus pandemic, he also led tours to holy places of the Shi'ite faith in Iran and Iraq.

Speaking in perfect English, Mehdi consistently spreads anti-West conspiracies and hate of Israel during his sermons to his followers.

For example, in 2021, he told mosque attendees that “ISIS, Daesh” were “manufactured by whom? By the United States.” To prove his claim he quoted former US President Donald Trump, who blamed his predecessor President Barak Obama and Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, for “founding” ISIS. “And they [Obama and Clinton] never got up and denied it. They didn't say this is wrong. They didn't make an issue about this being mentioned. It was normal,” concluded Mehdi.

The Sheikh is also not a fan of members of the LG-BTQI+ community. In a 2021 lecture, Mehdi complained that commenting against “rainbow people” might result in being fired.

## COMPARING ISRAEL TO NAZI GERMANY

After the 1979 revolution, the Supreme Leader of Iran,

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Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, started the tradition of marking “International Al-Quds Day” every year on the last Friday of Ramadan. During that day, the Iranian regime and its allies hold protests and processions around the world in support of the Palestinians and against Israel, often shouting antisemitic slogans and carrying hateful signs against Israel, the Jews and the West.

Al-Quds Day has also been commemorated in Australia over the last few years, especially by Iran’s network of propagandists and supporters here.

This year Sheikh Mohammed Mehdi gave a special Al-Quds Day Friday sermon (April 29) at his mosque. His lecture was a masterful mix of anti-Israel propaganda, conspiracy theories and hate.

Mehdi opened by presenting his own version of the history of the Middle East. After World War II, claims Mehdi, “the plans and the conspirators had come along for the nation, or the illegitimate nation, of Israel that exists today.”

Next, he introduced an anti-American conspiracy, claiming that the US used the September 11 terror attacks as an excuse to invade Iraq, explaining that “when the Americans wanted to invade Iraq, they wanted the opportunity to invade Iraq and September 11th was that opportunity that allowed them to have a reason to invade Iraq. So, they said, we will go into Afghanistan at first. And on the way, we’ll also take Iraq in this manner, but September 11th... even though ... the people that they say committed the attacks on September 11th were majority Saudi nationals, Saudi Arabia was not on their agenda.”

From there, Mehdi slides towards Holocaust distortion, arguing that after World War II, Jewish survivors could have stayed in Europe. “With Palestine, they [the West] said that we need to give these misplaced Jews, these persecuted Jews, a home, which is not true because the misplaced and persecuted Jews they spoke about, a lot of them that were Holocaust survivors actually still lived in the regions that were in their homes or moved to the United States or other countries.” In fact, most Holocaust survivors were displaced after WWII, living in refugee camps. With their families dead, their homes destroyed or taken by others, Europe still rife with antisemitism and the US blocking most immigrants from moving to America, many Holocaust survivors had nowhere to go to.

Mehdi uses the classic anti-Israel argument that Jews under Muslim rule flourished until the State of Israel was created. “We are not anti-Jewish”, Mehdi sanctimoniously says, to justify what he is about to say next. “We never have been. Even the Jews that lived amongst the Muslims, they call it the golden age when they have lived in, there was the golden era of the Jews. There were no problems... the Jews living in Palestine beforehand, lived in these regions... It wasn’t until the secular Zionist neo-conservative

entity came in and changed everything... they destroyed everything that existed there.”

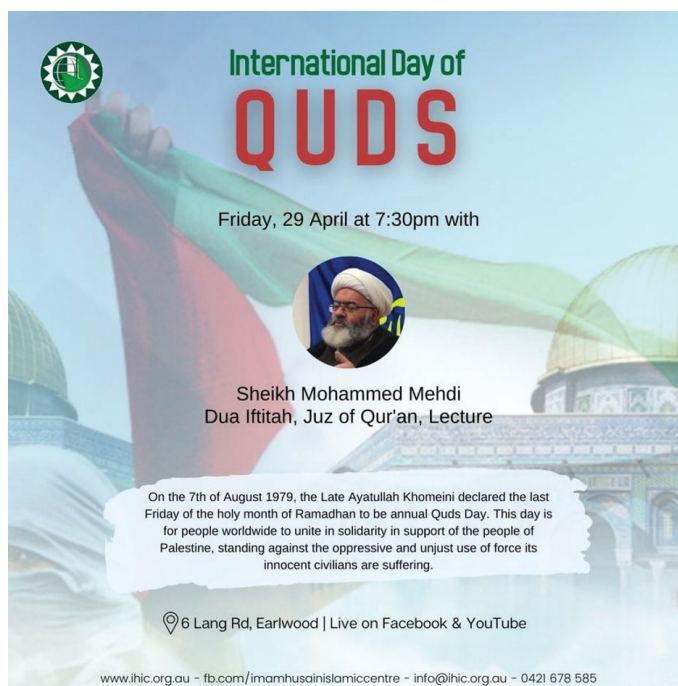
It is true that during the 1,300 years of Islamic rule in different parts of the world, Jews had in some places and for some periods enjoyed something of a ‘golden age’ – for instance, in Muslim Spain from roughly 912 to 1066 CE. Yet Jews in Muslim countries were never better than second class protected non-citizens (Dhimmis), always precariously dependent on not offending Muslim rulers, and suffering prosecution, expulsions and pogroms in many periods and in many locations, especially

in the last 200 years.

Mehdi escalates his rhetoric, likening Israel to Nazi Germany. “The tragedy here and the irony”, muses Mehdi, “is that what happened to the Palestinians in 1948 was a mirror of what had happened to the Jews a decade before, by Nazi Germany.”

The comparison between Israel and the Nazis, which is an example of antisemitism given in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism, again resurfaces when Mehdi shares a story about the time he was questioned at the UK’s Heathrow Airport about his support for the Lebanese terrorist organisation Hezbollah. According to his story, Mehdi told his interrogator: “You’re British-born. He said, yes. I said, when the Nazis attack [...] what would you think of any Englishman that refuse to defend the country or refuse to support the defence of the country? He said that person would be a traitor. I said, when Israel invaded Lebanon, are we denied that same right? [...] He agreed with me.”

Later (near the end of his speech) Mehdi is complaining how unfair it is that “you’re not allowed to support [Hezbollah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah] now because he’s considered a terrorist [in Australia]. They consider him the same



Poster advertising the Quds Day event at Sydney’s Hussaineyat Ale Yassin (Image: Twitter)

as Abu Bakr al Baghdadi [former ISIS leader], you know, or Usama bin Laden.”

Revealing again his views on the LGBTQI+ community, Mehdi sarcastically comments: “You know, honestly, if you were to think about it, that someone like Elton John [who is gay] would become a knight and someone, like Hassan Nasrallah would become a terrorist. Honestly, what kind of a world do we live in?”

## CELEBRATING SADAT’S ASSASSINATION

The assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat by Muslim Brotherhood fanatic Khaled Islambouli in October 1981 is celebrated by Mehdi. “Khaled Islambouli rid the world of Anwar Sadat. Sadat was killed by the Muslims. They executed him. Yet, if you go to Iran, Iran, they have a Khaled Islambouli square [in his honour]. They remember him, a young 18-year-old that was killed [executed by Egypt]. And he was martyred over this issue, why? Because Anwar Sadat was the first to give recognition to Israel.”

Mehdi’s next aim is to “prove” that Zionism and Judaism are opposites. “The people that moved [to Israel] were not Jews, the majority of the Zionist government and regime are Jews by race, but that are secular that have no association with Judaism,” he says.

His explanation? Zionists do not follow the Ten Commandments and “accept” homosexuality.

“Firstly, Judaism has the Ten Commandments, two of those commandments are destroyed [by Zionists]. Thou shall not kill – the sixth commandment. And that’s what the Zionists do all the time... They’re actually target children.”

Another commandment broken by Zionists, according to Mehdi, is “thou shall not covet” thy neighbour’s house or wife. “Not only do they [Israel] not respect [their neighbours], they also remove them from their homes and take their homes.”

**“Mehdi’s bottom line: Israel is responsible for everything bad in this world. ‘Just remember this, always remember,’ he harangues the crowd, ‘this is the root of all problems.’”**

Finally, quoting from Leviticus, he notes that the bible “condemns homosexuality... it actually says they [homosexuals] should be put to death. Tel Aviv today is the most homosexual friendly city in the world. So, it’s not Jewish. It’s secular,” concludes Mehdi.

## ISRAEL – THE ROOT OF ALL PROBLEMS

Commenting on the 2022 elections (the sermon was given prior to the elections), Mehdi criticises what he describes as the leading Australian politicians grovelling and humiliating themselves to show their support of Israel. “You noticed everyone before they’re running for election, go up to [ALP leader Anthony] Albanese or [Coalition leader, PM Scott] Morrison.

Ask them about Israel. They’ll do you a little jig and dance and start singing a quartet. Just so that you would vote for them. Why? Because this is what the most important thing is for them when it comes to getting into election. It’s how loyal and how in love are you with Israel?

This is where it goes to. And the perpetrators [Israel] are almost always portrayed as the victims, no matter what happens.”

Approaching the end of his sermon, Mehdi lists the steps Muslims should take with regards to Israel.

“The first thing is never recognise the existence of Israel, refusal to recognise the existence of an entity [Israel].”

Mehdi’s bottom line: Israel is responsible for everything bad in this world. “Just remember this, always remember,” he harangues the crowd, “this is the root of all problems. Whenever someone talks about Daesh [ISIS], the root is Israel. All the Arab governments which are doing Sujud [worshipping] to Tel Aviv, the root [of this] is Israel. You know, you saw Al-Aqsa [mosque in Jerusalem] been attacked while they were doing Iftar [dinner at the end of fasting during Ramadan] – the root is Israel. The origin of all problems is the Zionist entity that exists in the Middle East. So this is what you always need to keep in your mind.”

Actually, extremist conspiratorial views like Mehdi’s are much more at the heart of the region’s problems than the existence of a small Jewish homeland. And Mehdi represents, knowingly or unknowingly, the Iranian regime’s efforts to bring those destructive views to Australia.

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## The Treasure of the Jews

### Under Jerusalem: The Buried History of the World's Most Contested City

Andrew Lawler, Random House, 2021, 464 pp., A\$54.50

Matti Friedman

In 1867, the Scottish adventurer John MacGregor descended a rope ladder into a subterranean tunnel by the walls of Jerusalem's Old City. His guide was the famous British archaeologist Charles Warren, engaged just then in one of the first serious excavations of Jerusalem. Once underground, the men scrambled happily through the filthy shafts "like cats or monkeys," peering into the city's ancient layers, the walls slick with moisture and the floor soggy with sewage. "Once we have got down," Macgregor wrote of the experience, "we can scan by the magnesium light a subterranean city, the real city of Jerusalem."

That idea – that the real city of Jerusalem lurks somewhere beneath the actual city with its grocery stores, traffic, and inconveniently present residents – has been a powerful one since the mid-1800s. when the seductive aura of that *real* city began to draw a string of fascinating and often misguided characters with a Bible in one hand and a shovel in the other,

looking for something beneath the surface.

These are the stars of Andrew Lawler's book *Under Jerusalem: The Buried History of the World's Most Contested City*, a survey of some of the colourful and fraught episodes that have played out here underground over the past



An archaeological tunnel under modern Jerusalem: The idea of digging up Jerusalem has inspired much misguided enthusiasm (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

century and a half.

The idea of digging up Jerusalem caught on in Britain and elsewhere, as science began to supplant religion in the nineteenth century and as some of the old preoccupations of Europe were dressed up in new rationalist clothes.

Lawler gives us an excellent re-counting of the 1865 creation of the Palestine Exploration Fund in London, where the founders included the naturalist Richard Owen, believed to have coined the word "dinosaur", and the Archbishop of York, who "called for a new crusade to rescue from darkness and oblivion much of the history of that country in which we all take so dear an interest." Charles Darwin chipped in eight guineas. The explorers were inflamed by the possibility of grand findings from Jewish antiquity – palaces, figures, gold, the treasures of Solomon's Temple! – to rival the ones from Egypt, Assyria, and Greece that were then filling up the storerooms of the British Museum.

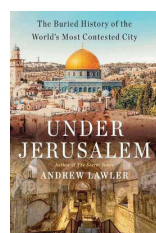
Much of this betrayed a misunderstanding of Jewish history, as a few lonely souls knew even at the time. The archaeologist Austen Henry Layard, for example, pointed out that the Jewish aversion to graven images meant the expeditions were unlikely to find statues. Even at their height, the Jewish kingdoms of the Bible were

small, and monumental treasures would be hard to come by. Although "some interesting fragments might be discovered, no series of sculptures such as those at Nineveh or Babylon could be hoped for," Layard cautioned.

No one listened, but he'd identified the key problem with much of the Holy Land archaeology enterprise. Using the Bible's words to locate the monuments and treasures of the Jews misses the point: the

words *are* the treasures of the Jews.

Nonetheless, off the explorers set from London, storming the alleys of the Old City and Silwan, tunnelling beneath the paving stones and sniffing around the mosques of the Temple Mount, to the displeasure of Muslim authorities and religious Jews, setting



the stage for an enterprise that has continued in different forms to the present.

One digger, the dissolute aristocrat Montagu Brownlow Parker, arrived in 1909 armed with the work of an obscure Finn, who believed his mathematical calculations based on Bible passages had decoded the location of the Ark of the Covenant. The excavation ended with the crew fleeing Muslim outrage to a ship sailing hurriedly from Jaffa. A *New York Times* headline announced that the Temple treasures were on board. A long modern tradition – credulous journalism reporting archaeological “science” that is actually laundered spirituality mixed with wishful thinking – had begun.

There is much to say about the days of Byzantine Jerusalem, or early Muslim Jerusalem, or the colourful and short-lived Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, all of which have been excavated in recent decades. But these layers under Jerusalem are mostly overlooked in Lawler’s book in favour of more familiar fare: a recounting of the decades of Jewish-Muslim rivalry around the Temple Mount. This choice isn’t surprising, but it’s too bad, because it narrows the focus, and places what could be a story about history and discovery into a predictable political context.

By the end of World War I, he writes, “Yiddish-speaking Europeans” dominated Jerusalem, and “in many ways they had more in common with European Christian colonisers than with the Jews who had lived in Jerusalem for generations.” Whether you think the early Zionist pioneers fleeing pogroms had anything to do with European colonisers, they spoke Hebrew and tended to avoid Jerusalem. The “Yiddish-speaking Europeans” of the city at the time were still mostly impoverished ultra-Orthodox Jews who had nothing to do with European colonisers or with modern Zionism and its desire for a Jewish state.

Lawler also describes Israel’s Ashke-

nazi Chief Rabbi as “leader of the faith’s Ashkenazim” and his Sephardi counterpart as “leader of the Sephardim,” when both are actually government functionaries with no real following. And there are more serious missteps in the descriptions of Jewish history and practice, like the idea that there’s no material evidence for Judaism as a “distinct religion until about the first century BCE.” It is true that rabbinic Judaism crystallised in late antiquity as one of several rival versions of Jewish faith and practice, but all sprung from the Israelite culture whose ample texts and traces, including the Temple Mount, stretch over the preceding millennium. To leap to the idea that this “makes Christianity a younger cousin [of Judaism], but only by a century or so,” as Lawler writes, elides a great deal to make a questionable point.

These problems are linked to a more central one, affecting many Western observers, with their narrative of a city “sacred to three faiths” – namely, a failure to understand the unique centrality of Jerusalem in Judaism or to admit that the city is of interest to other religions only because it was sacred to Jews first. It’s impossible to understand the city without grasping that Jerusalem has existed at the centre of Jewish consciousness since Rome was a village on the Tiber and that it has that role in no other religion. Christianity cares about Jerusalem because Jesus and his followers were Jews who orbited the Jewish ritual centre on the Temple Mount. Islam built the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount because that was the site of the Jewish temple. Both imperial religions have more important cities elsewhere, but came here with architects and stonemasons to create a physical expression of a claim central to both – that they had supplanted the numerically insignificant but historically imposing natives of Judea. That’s the fact that exists “under Jerusalem”.

*Under Jerusalem* plays this down in favour of the idea that the Jews

have only one story of three, and one they’ve probably overstated. For example, Lawler tells us that for several centuries before the 1800s, Christians, Muslims, and Jews all forgot Jerusalem, and “while the Talmud admonished the Jewish people not to forget Jerusalem, few actually paid a visit, much less settled there prior to the nineteenth century.” This misses the fact that Jews from Yemen to the Yukon invoked Jerusalem and prayed to return in each of the three prayer services they conducted every day, which they recited facing Jerusalem, and also swore fealty to Jerusalem at the end of every Passover Seder and wedding. Given the difficulties, a remarkable number of Jews did manage to come throughout the centuries, and as soon as a Jewish national movement was created, it was called “Zionism” – that is, “Jerusalemism.”

Lawler’s book ends with the idea that Christianity and Judaism are actually “cousins,” and Islam just barely younger, meaning that everyone has the same kind of claim, and, anyway, the borders between the religions are mostly “illusory”. This idea – that all thought systems and cultures are interchangeable and everyone’s ideas equal – is a religious idea in itself, the product of a specific moment in Western thought and one that could use some more rigorous introspection from its adherents.

Andrew Lawler does his best to understand the motivations and prejudices of all the people poking around Jerusalem – except his own. It’s a missed opportunity in a work that contains much of value.

AIR

*Matti Friedman is a journalist and author based in Jerusalem. Previously, he was a reporter and editor in the Jerusalem bureau of the Associated Press (AP). His latest book is Who By Fire: Leonard Cohen in the Sinai (Spiegel & Grau). Reprinted from the Jewish Review of Books. © Jewish Review of Books (www.jewishreviewofbooks.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*





## Diplomatic Delusions

### Applying the lessons of Ukraine to Iran and China

Oved Lobel

The Russian invasion of Ukraine took many by surprise – it shouldn't have. Since he took power, Russian President Vladimir Putin has been telling every world leader and representative in the West privately that Ukraine was not a real country, a long-standing and pervasive dogma in Russia, even among dissidents and anti-regime intellectuals. He has repeated this message publicly and in writing for years. Moreover, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was the logical culmination of three decades of failed Russian attempts to bring Ukraine fully under its control, attempts that began even before the official collapse of the Soviet Union.

Despite decades of attempts by the West to appease Russia, diplomatic engagement and months of direct public and private warnings of what the political and economic consequences would be should Putin choose to invade, the Russian regime still opted to pursue its imperial ambitions. As German President and former Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier recently admitted, "I did not believe Vladimir Putin would embrace his country's complete economic, political and moral ruin for the sake of his imperial madness."

The unfortunate Western delusion that imperial powers care about their economies or people is belied

by the reality that these leaders are driven first and foremost by ideology. No matter how often they make this explicit in word and deed, Western leaders often ignore them, chalking up all rhetoric and action to domestic politics and mischaracterising proactive aggression as a reaction to Western policies and rhetoric. Most of the time, neither carrots nor sticks can alter the calculus of autocratic imperial regimes, which are prepared to incur almost any cost in blood and treasure to pursue their openly expressed goals. This fact should impact how the West deals with two other

such regimes aligned with Russia: Iran and China.

### IRAN

Like Putin's regime, since 1979, the clerical regime ruling Iran has pursued regional imperialism at hideous cost to its economy and the lives of its citizens, prioritising the export of its Islamic revolution over almost any other concern. A core element of this imperialism, which has thus far brought Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and, to a large extent, Iraq, effectively under the control of regional branches or proxies of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), has been the regime's nuclear weapons program.

From the Western perspective, Iran's refusal to forego its uranium enrichment program for decades, despite being offered every possible incentive, and on the other hand, being slapped with significant political and economic isolation, is senseless. Iran, however, is happy to pocket political concessions and financial bribes such as those offered to her under the 2015 nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), to temporarily stall certain elements of the program – only to stealthily continue its pursuit of nuclear weapons.



Vladimir Putin (left) told the world what he was going to do in Ukraine, but was not believed. We should believe the words of his Iranian counterpart and ally Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (right) (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

All of the regime's activities are intimately linked – from hostage-taking and terrorism to regional destabilisation and the nuclear program – to its explicit overall goals, made clear at every level of the regime both rhetorically and practically, of exporting its revolution across the region and destroying Israel.

Yet the West continues to believe that diplomatically engaging the regime is the key to dealing with any of these issues. The lesson of fruitless engagement with Russia should be applied to Iran, which has also dragged out useless talks on coming back into compliance with the JCPOA for more than a year while it rapidly advanced its nuclear and missile capabilities. As flawed as the original deal itself was, it is only a subset of the broader problem with diplomatic engagement with Iran; namely, that the regime is implacably dedicated to its zero-sum conflict with the West and its partners.

This is on top of the fact that International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi pointed out a year ago that a linear return to the JCPOA was impossible due to Iran's recent nuclear advances, many of which "only countries making bombs" would be pursuing. Like Russia, over the longer term, the Iranian regime cannot be bribed, cajoled or persuaded to abandon its aggressive

goals – its ideology and the policies necessary to pursue it are non-negotiable. A renewed JCPOA would result in only one outcome: more money for Iran to pursue its imperial program, even as the regime continues to doggedly pursue a nuclear weapons capability.

Despite a level of historical mistrust, Russia and Iran have long cooperated to expand their respective empires and undermine the US and its allies and partners. Thus, not only is diplomatic engagement with Iran or Russia of, at best, only limited utility and a means for them to extract political concessions in exchange for little or nothing, but it is a fantasy to imagine that productive cooperation is possible with either via compartmentalisation – for instance, thinking that Russia should continue to be involved in JCPOA negotiations despite its political isolation over Ukraine.

There is little evidence that Russia considers it a vital interest to prevent Iran gaining nuclear weapons, particularly given Moscow's relationship with North Korea.

Furthermore, both Iran and Russia can and will cooperate to circumvent sanctions, something Iran has mastered over the years due to its long economic isolation.

Instead of trying to trade sanctions relief for temporary limits on Iran's nuclear program, the US and its allies should expand sanctions, close loopholes and recognise once and for all that, as with Russia, further diplomatic engagement with wholly ideological regimes is at best a marginal part of a policy toolbox in which coercive tools must do most of the heavy lifting.

The purpose of sanctions should not be simply to pressure Iran into a deal, but also to buttress a broader containment policy, with a strong military component, both to limit Iran's ability to carry out its ideological designs and to keep the regime constantly under pressure. Concessions and engagement will never change the

Iranian regime's underlying goals, as evidenced by more than 40 years of Western policy failure.

## CHINA

Finally, looming behind Russian and Iranian imperialism is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its leader Xi Jinping. Much like Putin, Xi will relay to any world leader who will listen his imperial narrative and goals, particularly as they relate to the conquest of Taiwan and domination of the Pacific. As former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison recently said, leaders who spoke to Putin are "subjected to a rather lengthy lecture on nationalistic aspirations of Russia and what is rightly theirs. That has a chilling reverberation with similar lectures [by Xi Jinping] that I have been on the receiving end of about situations in the Indo-Pacific and what people claim to be theirs."

China is engaged in the largest peacetime military buildup since World War II and has used its substantial political and economic influence across the world to isolate Taiwan and intimidate states in pursuit of "reunification". Indeed, the CCP's attitude, and the attitude of the Chinese broadly, towards Taiwan is essentially identical to Russia's attitude towards Ukraine. There is no reason to believe they too will not act on their rhetoric and beliefs unless they can be effectively deterred militarily.

The Chinese buildup is part of a broader, explicit imperial project to dominate the world in every area, as detailed by Rush Doshi in his book *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, which is partially based on Chinese policy documents and discussions. US military officials have settled on 2027 as the year by which Xi Jinping wants the capability to launch the invasion of Taiwan based on his own remarks, with one well-connected Chinese academic saying the CCP will invade by that year.

Like Russia and Iran, China can-

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The belief that China will not sacrifice its economic growth to achieve its imperial ambitions is being disproven by what Xi Jinping is doing right now (Screenshot)

not be persuaded by diplomacy or engagement. A false narrative has developed that China will not sacrifice economic growth for imperial goals. However, this does not hold up under serious scrutiny, whether one analyses Beijing's imperial investments under the so-called "Belt and Road Initiative" or watches how willing the Chinese regime is to economically punish and blockade countries like Australia and Lithuania and risk broader economic blowback from the US and European Union.

As Xi Jinping economically eviscerates China with ideologically-driven crackdowns on every sector of the Chinese economy and a "zero COVID" policy of hard lockdowns due to the Party's conspiratorial rejection of Western vaccines, it has become quite clear that neither money nor the well-being of Chinese subjects are significant factors in the Party's decision-making.

Yet in Australia, the argument is still made that pointing out the simple reality that China is gearing up for a potential massive war with the West amounts to "warmongering" and what is needed is more diplomatic engagement – as if China were responding to Australian actions and rhetoric rather than the reverse. This argument is still being made despite the deliberate leak of the CCP's outrageous "14 demands" of Australia in 2020, which "was really an invitation from China

to Australia to become a vassal state," as the chair of Federal Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee Senator James Paterson put it.

The simple reality is, like the Russian and Iranian regimes, the CCP is also driven first and foremost by its ideology, and its behaviour cannot reasonably be explained as a reaction to anything the West is doing or saying. The only choice Australia and its allies have is to increase defence spending and cooperation, as they have been doing, and prepare for a war that appears increasingly possible within the decade. Insofar as Western actions factor into CCP decision-making at all, its calculation of Western military power and will carries far more weight than anything Australia and its allies and partners do or say on the diplomatic front.

## CONCLUSION


The actions of the regimes in

Russia, Iran and China are not significantly driven by Western policies or external circumstances – these regimes have an ideological vision, and they will pursue it regardless of Western policies. Engagement cannot change this.

In addition, the problems represented respectively by each of these three regimes cannot be fully compartmentalised, as all three are effectively aligned in their crusade against the US-led international order. China, for instance, has almost single-handedly kept Iran afloat despite sanctions via its oil purchases.

Moreover, CCP proliferation agent Karl Lee (Li Fangwei), according to the US State Department, remains "the most important overseas supplier of items and material for Iran's missile program," and this has "contributed to Iran's continued development of more sophisticated missiles with improved accuracy, range, and lethality."

Russia, China and Iran have also recently deepened their trilateral military cooperation, including joint exercises, and continue to coordinate across the world to support anti-Western regimes. A Russo-Iranian alliance in this regard has existed since before the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The only choice the West and its partners have is to contain, deter, constrain and ultimately defeat these regimes – there is no diplomatic solution or shortcut. Failure to apply the lesson of Putin's intransigence to Iran and the CCP will only empower both. 

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# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### MORE THAN SYMBOLIC

A Victorian Government announcement that a bill will be introduced mandating that neo-Nazis who display swastikas could be fined more than \$20,000 and even spend 12 months in jail received wide media coverage.

Victorian Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes was quoted in the *Age* (May 12) explaining the law won't apply to online content because the state Government has no power to regulate the digital sphere.

The article quoted Deputy Liberal leader David Southwick, who is Jewish, saying the ban was "the proudest moment" of his political career.

Jewish Community Council of Victoria president Daniel Aghion was quoted by the *Herald Sun* (May 12) noting that antisemitic incidents had increased 37% year on year.

On May 4, the *Herald Sun* reported that a group of neo-Nazis celebrated Adolf Hitler's birthday at a Bavarian beer hall in Melbourne's Docklands.

On May 18, the *Age* reported two Jewish men, one of whom was dressed in Orthodox garb, were assaulted in an antisemitic attack in the Melbourne suburb of Elsternwick.

### COMPARING THE INCOMPARABLE

News Corp columnist David Penberthy (May 1) lamented the "growing... misuse of Nazis allusions" by "even bright and reasonable people" who "cannot distinguish the horrors of the Third Reich with other lesser issues with which they happen to disagree or people they happen to dislike."

Penberthy's list included anti-vaxxers wearing "Stars of David" at rallies to protest against vaccine

mandates or likening governments wanting to stop the unauthorised arrival of boats carrying asylum seekers to the "Final Solution".

He chided lawyer Julian Burnside for "think[ing] nothing of likening Coalition figures to Goebbels"; Liberal federal candidate Katherine Deves for drawing parallels "between the trans community and the Nazis"; a protester who egged UAP leader Craig Kelly whilst telling him "to stop hanging around with Nazis" and Climate 200 candidate Monique Ryan for sharing a mashup image on social media of Donald Trump and Hitler.

### DOING THE HARD YARDS

A long feature in the *Guardian Australia* (May 2) focused on a visit to the Nazi death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland by former Yorkshire cricket player Azeem Rafiq, famous for the testimony he gave in 2021 to a UK Parliamentary inquiry on the anti-Pakistani and anti-Muslim racism he allegedly experienced whilst playing at the club.

The visit, which included meeting Holocaust survivors and participating in the March of the Living walk, was prompted by media reports that Rafiq had made antisemitic remarks in a text message, for which he apologised and promised to "take time to understand and learn and educate myself."

Rafiq said, "I can't remember ever studying the Holocaust in school... I'd genuinely never heard of it before I met [Holocaust survivor] Lily Ebert... but like they say, once you listen to a witness you become a witness. That's the responsibility of all of us who have come and learned about it to encourage other people to learn about it... A lot of it I still can't quite process on a human level at all..."

we've bumped into groups of Ukrainian refugees. It just feels like it's right on our doorstep again and what are we doing?"

### NOT FIT FOR CHILDREN

*Age* / *Sydney Morning Herald* film critic Paul Byrnes' review on May 19 of a new movie about children's writer Roald Dahl said he was "a man judged by some to have been an anti-Semite (Dahl considered himself anti-Israel, not anti-Jew)."

But as AIJAC's Jeremy Jones explained in a letter published by the *SMH* (May 21), Dahl "acknowledged his antisemitism in an article in *The Independent* in 1990." Moreover, Jones said, it is "difficult to argue otherwise in the face of his numerous offensive statements, such as the time he told *The New Statesman*, 'There is a trait in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity ... Even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason'; his reference to 'great Jewish financial institutions' purportedly controlling the US government; and his appalling slur that during his service in WWII, Jewish soldiers were difficult to find."

In fact, according to Dahl biographer Jeremy Treglown, in 1983, the then editor of the *Literary Review*, Gillian Greenwood, had to change a review Dahl wrote about Israel's invasion of Lebanon from referring to "Jews" to instead criticise Israelis, which "allow[ed] Dahl to claim later, 'I am not anti-Semitic. I am anti-Israel.'"

Even so, according to Treglown, "throughout the article, even as it was finally published, he associated actions of the Israeli government (roundly condemned by many other commentators) with the behaviour and beliefs of Jews everywhere."

## GET REAL

A beat up in the *Guardian Australia* (May 18) written by former Jerusalem based correspondent Chris McGreal, implied improper behaviour by US pro-Israel lobby group American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), alleging it was “pouring millions of dollars” into preventing Democrats from getting elected, particularly “female candidates” who might “align” themselves with the “Squad” – progressive Congresswomen who have been “critical of Israel”.

The article quoted mainly from Logan Bayroff from the left-wing Jewish lobby group J-Street, who complained that AIPAC-affiliated

organisations promote their preferred candidates by highlighting their stances on issues other than their record on Israel. “Healthcare and reproductive rights and things that have nothing to do with Israel. Which makes sense because those are the things that decide elections, not Israel,” he said, adding AIPAC wants to ensure its preferred candidates get elected.

So, in other words, the story is that J-Street is unhappy that its bigger rival AIPAC, which has broken no laws and is perfectly entitled to spend money supporting candidates, is not supporting the same candidates as J-Street is. Not much of a story.

## IT'S A RIOT

*ABC Radio National* “Religion and Ethics Report” host Stan Grant’s introduction (May 6) to a report on violent protests by Palestinians on the Temple Mount left a lot to be desired.

According to Grant, “Clashes at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem... followed a pattern. Israeli police raided the Al Aqsa Mosque compound, a site holy to both Muslims and Jews after dawn prayers, and to remove Palestinian youth throwing rocks and firecrackers.”

The Israeli police “raids” were conducted to arrest Palestinian youths who were violently rioting and attacking Jewish worshippers at the nearby Western Wall, not just for the sake of it, as the script implied.



## IN PARLIAMENT

Then-Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** (Lib., Cook) – May 5 – Israeli Independence Day Message: “Australia admires Israel. In Israel, we see a companion on our journey as sovereign and free democratic nations... Australia will always speak in support of freedom and the people of Israel... My government stands with Israel. On this day... there are many in the world who continue to seek to bully Israel – we won’t be part of that, and we won’t put up with it. We will stand by Israel every step of the way.”

Then-Federal Opposition Leader **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – May 5 – Israeli Independence Day Message: “Few things so perfectly illustrate the power of hope and all that can flow from it quite like the existence of Israel. When it was first proclaimed in 1948 by David Ben-Gurion, that declaration of independence was nothing less than a triumph over the darkness of the Shoah... No matter which party is in power here, Israel will have Australia’s friendship and support. As leader of the Australian Labor Party, I can tell you that you will always have ours.”

Victorian Minister for Crime Prevention **Natalie Hutchins** (ALP, Sydenham) – May 12 – “The display of symbols associated with Nazi and neo-Nazi ideology is harmful and offensive to all members of our society, and particularly to the Jewish community. The display of such symbols in Victoria is particularly abhorrent given, outside of Israel, Melbourne has the largest per capita concentration of Holocaust survivors in the world.”

The following speeches are from the NSW Parliament:

Opposition Leader **Chris Minns** (ALP, Kogarah) – May 12 – “I would like to acknowledge the Australian Israeli Community as we come together to celebrate Israel’s 74th anniversary of

independence. Australia has had a long, warm and close relationship with Israel... Australia is home to vibrant Australian-Israeli community and I thank them for the rich contributions to Australia over the years.”

**Chris Rath** MLC (Lib.) – May 11 – “Today I use my first private member’s statement in this place to demonstrate my unwavering support for the state of Israel and its right to defend itself as the only truly free and truly democratic nation in the region. I also commit to doing everything I can... to combat antisemitism... To target an arts festival demonstrates the low depths that the BDS movement is willing to sink to in their vehemently political anti-Israel campaign. Such fundamentally wrong initiatives must have no place in this State.”

**Lynda Voltz** (ALP, Auburn) – May 19 – “On 15 May many of my local residents marked the Nakba, the great tragedy when 700,000 Palestinians were forced in 1948 not only from their homes but from their lands... In this Chamber we condemn all acts of violence, but as my colleague the member for Watson, Tony Burke, recently noted, let us not forget that the violence directly stems from the settlement activity, evictions and hardships Palestinians are enduring alongside attacks on Palestinian holy places.”

**Anthony D’Adam** MLC (ALP) – May 18 – “On 11 May Israeli soldiers shot and killed prominent Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh... Despite clearly being a member of the press, an Israeli soldier shot Abu Akleh in the face.”

**Scott Farlow** MLC (Lib.) – 18 May – “I refer to a private member’s statement made earlier today that was littered with inaccuracies and assumptions based on dubious media reports and statements from the Palestinian Authority. Laying blame solely on Israel before the results of an investigation are complete is highly irresponsible and a gross example of a member’s clear bias against the Jewish State.”



Israel-based Australian journalist Irris Makler's report included a Palestinian claim that "settlers" are entering the Mosque. This is nonsense. Non-Muslims have been banned by the Waqf religious authorities from entering any of the Muslim structures on the Temple Mount for 20 years now.

## MOTION TO DISMISS

In the *Herald Sun* (May 6), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein excoriated the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) for passing an "extreme anti-Israel and anti-Semitic motion" on April 29 [*the motion was subsequently rescinded on May 26, Ed.*] that demanded the University boycott Israel, accused Israel of apartheid and "employed language... expected from Hamas or Hezbollah."

Dr Rubenstein said UMSU had created "a fictitious, one-sided narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Palestinians as natives and any Jewish connection to the land denied... In deeming Zionism a 'racist, colonial ideology' and Israel a 'settler colonial apartheid state' and 'colonial project', yet demanding self-determination for Palestinians, this motion is clearly antisemitic. It denies to Jews the right to self-determination in the Jewish homeland, where Jews have lived for thousands of years, yet demands that same right for others."

The motion's claim that Israel "denies the native Palestinians of their right to self-determination, freedom, dignity and equality" ignored the "numerous offers of statehood from Israel that the Palestinian Authority has spurned," he added.

Dr Rubenstein also condemned as "arrogant" a clause stating "Judaism and Zionism are not to be conflated as one", noting that "for most Jews, Zionism – meaning belief in a right to Jewish self-determination in their ancestral homeland – is an integral part of their Judaism."

## BARNS MAKES HAY

On May 9, Hobart *Mercury* columnist Greg Barns defended the UMSU motion, saying claims of antisemitism are a "cheap and nasty slur" to silence "advocate[s]... for the rights of Palestinian people to have a homeland."

Disingenuously, Barns said BDS "is a movement that says the oppression of Palestinians is unlawful, and calls for sanctions and other economic punishments against Israel – not dissimilar to those actions that, in the end, crippled apartheid South Africa."

The *Mercury* (May 18) ran a response by AIJAC's Allon Lee, who noted "many of the reports [cited by Barns] labelling Israel an apartheid state actually acknowledge there is no real similarity between Israel and apartheid South Africa. Instead, apartheid is redefined to essentially include any discrimination or inequality between ethnic groups" – and most nations could be considered Apartheid under this definition, not just Israel.

Lee explained that people incorrectly "presume... BDS's goals include ending the occupation and implementing a two-state formula for peace," noting that BDS documents make no reference to the two-state solution.

The article quoted numerous statements by BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti that, it said, unequivocally prove that BDS's "clear... goal... is the elimination of Israel."

## SCARY STUFF

In Barns' May 16 column, he praised Tasmanian independent federal MP Andrew Wilkie, who was running for re-election in the seat of Clark, for supporting "the rights of Palestinians" and not being frightened of "the right-wing media and the Israel lobby" like "so many members of parliament in Australia are."

Or maybe most voters and MPs can recognise that the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict is more complicated than presented in Barns' factually challenged assertions without having to be "frightened" into this recognition.

## RIGHT TO KNOW

On May 2, the *Australian* reported that the ABC Board was waiting until after the Federal election on May 21 to release the findings of the independent inquiry it had commissioned into the ABC's complaints procedures. The story suggested the inquiry's report agreed with many of the grievances raised by ABC critics, including the lack of procedural fairness for complainants.

Writing in the *Australian* (May 9), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein and Allon Lee called on the ABC Board to release the report, saying "the ABC's complaints process is a hotly debated political item, and the public has a right to know the response from political parties to the report and its recommendations, before they vote." They argued that not doing so was inconsistent with the ABC's "member[ship] of Australia's Right to Know Media Coalition."

The report was indeed released on May 17. It acknowledged many of the criticisms levelled at the current internally run complaints setup, including the lack of procedural fairness for complainants; the ABC's problematic and limiting webpage for lodging complaints; the ABC's tendency as an organisation to exhibit a culture of defensiveness in the face of complaints; and problems with the ABC publicising successful complaints adequately.

However, rather than accepting calls for an independently run system to replace the current set-up, the inquiry recommended creating an Ombudsman position which would have oversight of complaints and be totally separate from the editorial departments of the ABC, reporting to the Managing Director and the Board.

## REPORT REPORTS

Nine Newspapers' Zoe Samios' article (May 18) on the inquiry's findings said the "review found it needed to remove the perception the national broadcaster 'marked its own homework'."

The *Guardian Australia* (May 17) spun it differently, saying the inquiry found "the ABC's internal complaints unit is an 'efficient' system which could... benefit from the addition of an ABC ombudsman to review the findings."

An *Australian* article (May 23) quoted Zionist Federation of Australia President Jeremy Leibler asserting that ABC shows have "disproportionately represented one viewpoint over time, in violation of its editorial standards" and "the diversity of perspectives standard should be applied to programs individually, not the ABC as a whole."

## ELEMENTARY, MR HOLMES

An op-ed on Nine Newspapers' website (May 18) by former *ABC TV* "Media Watch" presenter Jonathan Holmes attacked the decision of the ABC Board to disregard the report's recommendation for the ombudsman to report to both the ABC Managing Director and the Board, and have them report only to the Board. Holmes acknowledged that the ABC Board has a statutory responsibility to ensure the broadcaster's content is accurate and impartial but he insisted there is not a "single media organisation in the democratic world whose complaints process is kept separate from editorial management."

Given the ABC Managing Director has a seat on the ABC Board, Holmes was splitting hairs. Moreover, contrary to his claim, a number of European countries do have genuinely independent complaints procedures for public broadcasters.

## HARTCHER WORDS

On May 17, while speculating on the probable contours of foreign policy under an Albanese Government, Nine Newspapers international editor Peter Hartcher spouted well-worn myths about the Morrison Government's announcement in 2018 that it was considering moving our embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

Hartcher said, "[Labor's Penny] Wong points out that the government almost scuttled its own free trade negotiations with Indonesia when Scott Morrison announced his gambit to move Australia's embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He was pandering to the Jewish vote for the 2018 byelection in Sydney's Wentworth. And mimicking a Donald Trump move. It was a debacle. Indonesia was unimpressed, the National Security Committee of Morrison's own cabinet sidelined the proposal and the Liberals lost the byelection."

Donald Trump's announcement recognising Jerusalem and an intention to move the US embassy there was not done to "pander" to the "Jewish vote" but to fulfil an election promise Trump made to his Christian evangelical base. In the US, Jews overwhelmingly vote Democrat.

Moreover, in contrast to Australia, where media, academics and former diplomats notable for having anti-Israel views warned of dire consequences should Australia recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, in Indonesia the response was far more measured. It was not an issue that featured in the media or public debates there, and there is no real reason to think it jeopardised the Free Trade Agreement. After all, the anticipated benefits of the Free Trade Agreement were of greater significance for Indonesia's economy than Australia's.

## LESER LEARNED

Media commentator Gerard Hen-

derson's Australian "Media Watchdog" column (May 13) poked fun at journalist David Leser's anecdote in Nine Newspapers' *Good Weekend* magazine (May 7) revealing that ABC executive and harsh Israel critic John Lyons was very unhappy to be challenged on his views about Israel at the Byron Writers Festival in 2017.

Leser was quoted by the *Good Weekend* saying, "I will always deeply regret the interview I did with John Lyons for his book, *Balcony over Jerusalem*. John and I had been colleagues and friends for 35 years. His book is a kind of polemic against the Occupation [of Palestine]. He knew how bitterly opposed to the Occupation I've always been. I decided to be provocative. I thought the interview required more than a 'Let's just agree on all of this', but it went pear-shaped, and I blame myself for that. It hurt John, it hurt me. And it hurt our friendship, and I regret that."

Henderson commented, "Shucks. At the ABC, John Lyons has presided over numerous programs which have fanged individuals and organisations. Yet he got oh-so-upset when his views were challenged... yet another example of a journalist who likes to dish out criticism but cannot take criticism."

## NOT VERY POLITIC

An *SBS TV* "News in Arabic" (May 11) interview with Arab Australian Federation secretary Hassan Moussa on how to vote in the then-upcoming federal elections included him calling on Arab Australians to vote for candidates of Arab background. As a political lobbyist, Moussa's political advice on who to vote for should not have been included in a segment on how to vote. Especially because it was unnecessary — *SBS TV* "News in Arabic" on May 10 had noted that the Australian Electoral Commission's website has a whole section in Arabic explaining how to vote.



Allon Lee

## GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY

The lack of conclusive evidence to prove who fired the shot that killed Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during a May 11 gun battle in Jenin between Israeli forces and Palestinian terrorists was no barrier to many in the media declaring Israel had done it.

An *AFP* report on SBS's website (May 11) claimed, "Abu Akleh was shot dead by Israeli troops... an *AFP* photographer reported."

A report on *SBS Arabic Radio's* website (May 11) stated "that the Palestinian Ministry of Health confirmed the killing of Abu Akleh by the Israeli army."

The lead in to *SBS TV* "News in Arabic" (May 11) said Abu Akleh was "killed from a bullet of the Israeli army."

An appallingly one-sided online SBS article (May 22) by Rayane Tamer – an SBS journalist and signatory of the #dobetteronpalestine open letter – insinuated Israel was responsible for Abu Akleh's death, while stating that Israel's "decision not to pursue a criminal investigation... has prompted growing concerns for the safety of press." The piece omitted the critical point that the Israeli investigation – which is still ongoing – is being stymied by the Palestinian Authority's (PA) refusal to let the bullet that killed Abu Akleh be tested. There is no evidence to begin a criminal investigation, if one is indeed warranted, without that bullet.

*ABC TV* "The World" (May 11) also stated Israel killed her, saying, "Abu Akleh... was shot by Israeli fire in the town of Jenin."

On *ABC TV* "7pm News" (May 12), Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn's report included footage that Israel said might prove a Palestinian gunman was responsible for Abu Akleh's death. Horn cautioned that "an Israeli human rights group [B'Tselem] says it is very unlikely the fatal shots were fired from here, saying Abu Akleh was too far away." Horn added, "since April, the Israeli military has been performing regular raids in Jenin in the wake of several attacks," without noting that 19 Israelis have been murdered in these attacks.

*Channel 7's* (May 14) report of Israeli riot police confronting mourners who had seized Abu Akleh's coffin outside a Jerusalem hospital said, "Israeli riot police have clashed with mourners," adding that "police said they acted only after stones were thrown at them." It correctly said the coffin was "almost" dropped.

**"The lack of conclusive evidence to prove who fired the shot that killed Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh ... was no barrier to many in the media declaring Israel had done it."**

In contrast, Horn's *ABC TV* "7pm News" report (May 14) claimed that the coffin was dropped and did not include Israel's explanation for its actions. An *ABC TV* "News at Noon Weekends" newsreader report earlier that day falsely suggested Israel had prevented Abu Akleh's family from taking the coffin to the cemetery.

*SBS TV* "World News" (May 14) also included Israel's explanation that its police "were forced to intervene" after "bottles and rocks" were thrown at them by rioters who prevented family

members from loading the coffin onto a hearse.

On *ABC Radio National* "Drive" (May 12) Pauline Ades-Mevel from Reporters without Borders strongly insinuated Israeli culpability for Abu Akleh's death, saying Abu Akleh "knew perfectly how to deal with the Israeli army." Ades-Mevel insisted Israel cannot be involved in any investigation, even a joint one.

Drive host Andy Park did not follow up by asking if the PA – which has already declared Israel guilty of deliberately targeting Abu Akleh – was a credible partner in any such investigation. Instead, Park asked, "how independent can an investigation be if it is conducted by Israeli authorities?"

On *ABC Radio National* "Breakfast" (May 16), host Patricia Karvelas failed to probe extreme claims made by Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories.

Accusing Israel of apartheid, Albanese was sure she knew who killed Abu Akleh, saying, "the footage that is circulating... is quite telling about... what happened that day... I've worked on Palestine for more than a decade now... I've never seen... safeguards in place [for journalists]... over 40... media personnel... have been killed by Israeli forces."

The footage is not "telling", otherwise the shooter would've been identified. Moreover, many of those 40 so-called "media personnel" were actually Hamas fighters who also worked in Hamas media outlets.

On May 22, an extreme op-ed in the *Sunday Age* from Palestinian Australian documentarian Sherine Salama claimed Israel "target[s] journalists".

In fact, according to the list of slain journalists maintained by the NGO the Committee to Protect Journalists, Israel has murdered no journalists at all. However, ironically enough, the PA's Presidential Guard has.

# THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

## MORAL LEADERSHIP

Well away from the public spotlight, a highly significant meeting took place in Jerusalem last month.

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), a global body representing more than 600 million people in a network of 143 national alliances, held its first ever meeting with the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) – the most authoritative and representative global Jewish organisation in the field of interfaith relations.

Although I was, unfortunately, unable to travel to be part of the dialogue, as a member of the Board of IJCIC I am familiar with the complex history of the relationship between Evangelicals and Jews – and the devotion of the leaders of the two networks to organising this truly momentous gathering.

The sessions included a joint visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum and Memorial – which not only allowed the WEA delegates to learn about the Shoah and its ongoing significance to the Jewish world, but also to hold a wreath-laying ceremony in the Hall of Remembrance.

At Yad Vashem, the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA), one of the most important components of the WEA, announced it was adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism.

The declaration of support for the IHRA Definition, which is proving to be a useful tool for organisations and institutions which genuinely wish to understand and respond to contemporary variations of antisemitism, was consistent with “the promise for future solidarity” which was inscribed on the wreath.

The EEA noted that it represented the part of the world in which the Nazi genocide took place, and that its action was necessary as “antisemitism in various forms and facets has today become a global threat.”

“It poisoned societies and Christian-Jewish relations around the globe, even in nations where there are no Jews.”

The meeting with the full WEA declared that its purpose

was “to increase the mutual understanding between the two faith communities and identifying issues of common concern.”

The leaders of the combined delegations stated that “the WEA and IJCIC explored ways in which, working together, our advocacy and interventions may be forces for good in the world... areas of possible collaboration included: mutual education; environmental concerns; and promotion of peace.”

The delegations agreed to continue to communicate regularly and to implement action programmes to effect the changes they had agreed needed to be made.

Shortly after this meeting, another Christian group also made an historic move towards improving Jewish-Christian relations.

Eight hundred years after the Synod of Oxford forbade social interactions

between Jews and Christians; introduced special identifying badges to be worn by Jews; imposed financial obligations on them; banned Jews from some professions; and prohibited building new synagogues, a special service was held at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford.

At this service, the Church of England apologised for those historic anti-Jewish laws, noting that the Synod’s strictures had led to the mass expulsion of England’s approximately 3,000 Jewish residents in the year 1290, with the ban on Jews lasting 360 years.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said that the service was “an opportunity to remember, repent and rebuild... Let us pray it inspires Christians today to reject contemporary forms of anti-Judaism and antisemitism and to appreciate and receive the gift of our Jewish neighbours.”

The Bishop of Oxford, Rev. Dr. Steven Croft, said the antisemitism problems in the British Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn had left him “disturbed” and emphasised the importance of the apology.

It is a sad reality that antisemitism has become so prominent this century. Given the historic relationships between Christians and Jews, the significance of the steps being taken by Evangelicals and Anglicans at this time should not be underestimated.



The first ever gathering of the World Evangelical Alliance and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations in Jerusalem (Image: Yoni Reif)



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