



## TWO SUMMITS, TWO AXES

СЕДЬМОЙ ВСТРЕЧЕ  
СТРАН-ГАРАНТОВ  
АСТАНСКОГО ПРОЦЕССА  
ИЮЛЯ 2022. ТЕГЕРАН



ASTANA SÜRECİ  
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ZİRVE TOPLANTISI  
TEMMUZ 2022. TEHRAN



Biden and Putin Mideast visits  
underscore changing regional alignments

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This edition of the *AIR* looks at the implications of trips by US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin to the Middle East in July, and the regional polarisation these trips revealed.

Veteran commentator Henrique Cymerman suggests the Biden visit may have presaged the development of a "Middle East NATO", while top US analyst and former official Elliott Abrams looks at the significance of the "Jerusalem Declaration" Biden signed with Israeli PM Yair Lapid. Plus, Ben Cohen looks at the Putin visit to Iran and the growing Russian-Iranian alliance, while Israeli strategic analyst Amir Avivi offers some policy advice on countering this worrying axis.

Also featured this month is a look inside the attitude of ordinary Iranians toward Israel from Iranian-born activist Marjan Keypour Greenblatt. Plus, Israeli academic Shany Mor reviews the lasting scars and lingering political after-effects of the second Intifada after 20 years.

Finally, don't miss Lahav Harkov's interview with top American scholar Walter Russell Mead regarding his new book on Israel-US relations.

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

Tzvi Fleischer

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(Top) L-R: Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations Asaad bin Tariq al-Said, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa al-Khalifa, US President Joe Biden, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Jordan's King Abdullah II, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Kuwait's Crown Prince Meshal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, and Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at the 'Security and Development Summit' in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on July 16 (Image: Balkis Press/ABACAPRESS.COM/AAP); (Bottom) L-R: Russian President Vladimir Putin, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a three-way summit in Teheran, Iran, July 19 (Image: SalamPix/ABACAPRESS.COM/AAP).



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

In mid-July, US President Joe Biden visited Israel and Saudi Arabia. He also met with multiple other Arab leaders, as well as the Palestinian Authority.

A week later, Russian President Vladimir Putin travelled to Iran for his first international trip beyond former Soviet republics since the launch of the invasion of Ukraine in February. There, he met with the leaders of Iran and Turkey, a continuation of the trilateral meetings covering Syria that have been taking place since early 2017.

Some are arguing that Biden's Mideast trip failed to produce any deliverables or was even counterproductive, but they misunderstand both the trip and the current dynamics of the Middle East.

Biden explained before his trip, "I'm going to Israel to meet with Israeli leaders to affirm the unbreakable bond Israel and the United States have. And part of the purpose... is to deepen Israel's integration in the region, which I think we're going to be able to do and which is good for peace and good for Israeli security."

These are admirable and sensible metrics, and according to them the trip was an unmitigated success.

In the first place, it is both symbolically and practically vital for the Washington to reassure Jerusalem of its commitment to Israel's security, particularly as the US shifts its focus to great power conflict with Russia and China. The "Jerusalem US-Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration" that resulted from the trip did exactly this, underlining that the US "is prepared to use all elements of its national power to ensure" Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon, something Biden said explicitly meant military force as a last resort. (See Elliott Abrams on p. 13)

This is a dramatically stronger statement than those previously made by Biden and his Administration – and one which is sorely needed given Iran's increasingly heedless and headlong rush to nuclear weapons capabilities.

In the Declaration, the US also pledged to help Israel combat Iran and its terrorist proxies, push back against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and other attempts to single out and discriminate against the Jewish state, and strengthen the Abraham Accords.

When it comes to Israel's regional integration, one of the substantive deliverables was Saudi Arabia's historic decision to open its airspace to flights to and from Israel. Both Biden and Lapid declared this was hopefully a first step toward Saudi Arabia's normalisation with Israel, despite public denials from Riyadh.

Reports suggest that Biden's visit also advanced the Middle East Air Defence (MEAD) pact, an initiative to link the sensors and air defence systems of Israel and its Gulf partners, creating an integrated air defence network to combat the drones and missiles of Iran and its proxies. While no explicit announcements have been made, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz said the pact was "already in action" in June.

Of course, spokespersons for both Saudi Arabia and the UAE publicly pushed back against any such idea, with the former saying, "There was no discussion about a GCC-Israeli defence alliance or anything of the sort" and the latter saying it would have nothing to do with "targeting any other country in the region and I specifically mention Iran."

These nervous statements are no surprise – but they also should not be taken at face value.

Unlike Israel, the Gulf states have no consistent security interests or relationships, preferring to try to have good relations with everyone. They fear Iran, but will do their best



to pretend this is not the case and leave their options open in case they ultimately come to the conclusion that there is no choice – especially if they doubt US credibility – but to seek terms from Teheran.

Indeed, both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have also been developing problematically close ties with China and Russia over recent years, partially for ideological reasons.

This is why Biden focussed his efforts and statements on Israel, the lynchpin of the US security architecture in the region and only completely reliable ally. But while moderate Arab states may have their reasons for being publicly coy, Biden's trip and meetings helped build on a US-coordinated joint security architecture that is already in place and only likely to grow stronger and more significant.

The Abraham Accords are developing into much more than simply normalisation and economic relations. They are becoming the core of a covert defensive alliance covering not only Israel, the UAE, Morocco, and Bahrain, but also Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Oman, all under a US umbrella.

Putin, meanwhile, won explicit backing for Russia's invasion of Ukraine from Iran, and is reportedly engaged in discussions to purchase hundreds of Iranian drones to use in that war. Rather than demonstrating strength, the fact

that Russia may have to rely on Iran militarily for help is an international embarrassment.

Yet the visit underscored how Iran and Russia are clearly more closely aligned than ever – cooperating to bust the sanctions they both face, as well as diplomatically, rhetorically, and in terms of military exchanges.

China is, of course, also a key part of this global and regional revisionist bloc challenging all status quo nations,

helping to keep both Moscow and Teheran afloat through oil purchases, among other measures. Warning allies against China's efforts to gain regional influence would likely have been a key sub-text of the Biden visit.

The Putin and Biden trips underscored how the region

is increasingly polarised, suggesting echoes of the super-power competition which was the key dynamic across the Middle East during the Cold War.

Despite the much-discussed US "retrenchment" in the Middle East, Biden's visit makes clear that no such withdrawal is actually taking place (despite the disastrous optics and implications of the Afghanistan withdrawal last year). Whether it's regional competition with Russia and China or containing Iran, the US is in the Middle East to stay. This reassurance to both Israel and the Gulf states is real, and the most significant outcome of Biden's important regional visit.

AIR

## WORD FOR WORD

"In a few days we were able to enrich uranium up to 60% and we can easily produce 90% enriched uranium... Iran has the technical means to produce a nuclear bomb but there has been no decision by Iran to build one."

**Kamal Kharrazi, senior advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (France24, July 17).**

"[Iran's nuclear program] is advancing at a gallop and we have very little visibility... This does not imply that Iran is making a nuclear weapon, but no country that does not have warlike projects enriches at that level, at 60 percent."

**International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi in an interview with a Spanish newspaper (Times of Israel, July 22).**

"The United States and Israel reaffirm the unbreakable bonds between our two countries and the enduring commitment of the United States to Israel's security... The United States stresses that integral to this pledge is the commitment never to allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, and that it is prepared to

use all elements of its national power to ensure that outcome."

**The Jerusalem US-Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration (White House, July 14).**

"War is a hostile, harsh matter & the Islamic Republic never favors seeing ordinary people afflicted by wars. However, in the issue of #Ukraine, had Russia not initiated taking action, the other side would have started a war. #NATO is a dangerous entity."

**Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei throws his support behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Twitter, July 19).**

"You need not be a Jew to be Zionist... Every chance to return to this great country, where the ancient roots of the Jewish people date back to biblical times, is a blessing. The connection between the Israeli people and the American people is bone deep."

**US President Joe Biden in Israel (Jerusalem Post, July 13).**

"There is a fear today that the Iron Curtain will close completely, and that one day it will become impossible [for Jews] to leave Russia at all."

**Exiled former Chief Rabbi of Moscow Pinchas Goldschmidt amidst a Russian crackdown on the Jewish community and the Jewish Agency (Times of Israel, July 17).**



# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## GIVE WAR A CHANCE?

Lebanon is today an absolute basket case, with a plummeting standard of living and shortages of basic necessities such as food and fuel, constant blackouts, a collapsing currency and financial system, and political paralysis. You'd think the last thing a country in such terrible shape needs is a war.

Yet, as Amos Harel outlines in this edition (pp. 24-25), Israel and the Iran-sponsored Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah may today be closer to a new war than they have ever been since they fought an actual war in 2006.

This is not because either side wants war, but because Hezbollah has decided to strongly push the envelope regarding a dispute about the maritime border between Israel and Lebanon that could easily be solved in a mutually beneficial way. A resolution to that dispute – which the US has been mediating for a number of years – would allow Lebanon to extract offshore gas from fields known to exist along the maritime boundary area and make some money to address its urgent welfare needs. There have been numerous compromises proposed which would be advantageous to Lebanon, but Hezbollah has effectively vetoed them all.

Hezbollah recently sent four reconnaissance drones to buzz an Israeli offshore gas drilling platform in Israeli waters, and is now openly threatening to launch a war if Israel does not capitulate to its demands regarding the maritime boundary by September. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah is threatening to attack “All the [gas] fields, wells, and rigs” along the so-called “Palestinian shore”.

Bizarrely, Hezbollah is trying to sell a war with Israel – or at least the threat of such a war – over the maritime boundary as the solution to all of Lebanon's problems.

In an address on July 25, Nasrallah insisted

*We only want our rights and we're escalating our rhetoric so that the Americans and Israelis submit, because the course of the collapse in Lebanon is continuing.*

*If the alternative is that... Lebanon is pushed towards collapse, hunger and people fighting one another... war is a much more honourable alternative. The threat of war, and even going into war, is much more honourable and glorious. The first track of letting things collapse and go into ruin has no future. There is no future in people fighting over food, but a war has a future. If we decide to go to war, this alternative has a future.*

*The enemy can be defeated – before the war, when it begins, during the war, when it ends... Then we will be able to impose our conditions, bring in hundreds of millions of dollars, and save our country.*

Given the state of Lebanon, this “Give War a Chance” message seems like madness – especially when there is an obvious alternative in the form of simply settling the border dispute via a compromise, without any risk of bloodshed. Yet it is worth remembering that Hezbollah's interests are not really Lebanon's. In fact, to a great extent, it's Hezbollah's history of “madness” in service of its pro-Iranian and sectarian aims that is responsible for paralysing and hollowing out the Lebanese state and leading the country to the disaster it currently faces in the first place.

## A BETTER WAY FOR LEBANON

Speaking of Lebanon and its severe problems, the international community would do well to look at a new report on policy toward Lebanon from one of Australia's best-known strategic analysts David Kilcullen, now based in Washington.

His new report, titled “Missing the Mark: Reassessing U.S. Military Aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces,” concludes that the US policy – with broad international support – of spending large sums of aid money funding, training and equipping the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to serve “as an institutional counterweight to Hezbollah” is not working.

The report says that US efforts to bolster the LAF over the past 15 years have coincided with “a significant increase in Hezbollah's influence.”

It notes that, “The argument for strengthening the LAF rests in part on the assumption that the LAF is in competition with Hezbollah for prestige and influence.” However, it says, this is not really the case and, “in fact, the two are conjoined at the highest levels because Hezbollah's influence over Lebanon's civilian authorities is so extensive. The terror group has effective veto power over the choice of prime minister and the actions of the Lebanese Cabinet.”

“Hezbollah's influence over the institutions of government ensures the LAF does not threaten the group's vital interests,” the report notes.

Kilcullen's key policy recommendation is simple:

“Abandon the LAF counterweight theory and focus instead on directly weakening Hezbollah by interdicting Iranian and Syrian support for the group; by maintaining or increasing sanctions on Iranian sponsorship of Hezbollah; by allying with anti-corruption, non-Hezbollah, and anti-Hezbollah components of the civilian government; and by amplifying anti-corruption voices within the opposition movement.”

The international community would do well to take heed – especially now that Lebanon's situation, and the instability it projects, has become so desperate, and Hezbollah's role in creating and maintaining that situation so clear.



**Blaise Misztal and Jonathan Ruhe**

## **FORGET THE JCPOA, WHAT ABOUT THE NPT?**

Iran has not only irreversibly shredded the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), but – much more worryingly – it has long been in violation of the original nuclear agreement: the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Rather than pursuing yet more unproductive diplomacy with Iran over the JCPOA, US President Joe Biden should focus on working with his European counterparts to push Iran back into NPT compliance, lest Teheran’s wanton disregard spell the beginning of the end of the world’s most successful arms control regime.

Since the treaty entered into force in 1970, more countries – 190 in total – have joined than any other arms control agreement ever, and none have attained nuclear weapons as a signatory. This effectiveness stems from a basic trade-off: Parties gain access to peaceful nuclear technology in exchange for forgoing enrichment. Article IV speaks only of an “inalienable right to develop research, production and use” of peaceful nuclear energy, and this right is conditioned explicitly on not pursuing, transferring, or possessing nuclear explosive devices. The treaty also effectively ties this right to adherence to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.

However, Iran asserts an “inalienable right” to enrich uranium under the NPT, even as it has worked on a nuclear explosive device and failed repeatedly to comply with safeguards. These efforts and Teheran’s covert enrichment activities prompted inspectors to declare Iran in violation of the NPT in 2005. By 2010 the UN Security Council had imposed six resolutions, five of them legally binding, requiring Iran to suspend enrichment and come clean on its other NPT violations, including past development of a nuclear weapon. Teheran did no such thing, despite the IAEA issuing a lengthy 2011 report detailing Iran’s covert weapons program and its blocking of inspectors.

This formed the immediate backdrop to the JCPOA and the 2013 interim deal, which blessed Teheran’s self-proclaimed right to enrich and declared, “Iran’s nuclear program will be treated in the same manner as that of any non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT.” The JCPOA’s preamble even said the deal would “mark a fundamental shift” in the world’s treatment of Teheran’s nuclear program. Rather than actually compelling Teheran to address its NPT violations, the deal dismantled the legal case against Iran’s illegal nuclear activities. Accomplishing this entailed ending all Security Council sanctions on Iran, via a perfunctory roadmap that failed to


address the 2011 report or confirm the peaceful civilian nature of Iran’s nuclear activities. The JCPOA nevertheless took effect in January 2016.

Israel’s daring 2018 seizure of Iranian nuclear archives confirmed Teheran’s bad faith throughout this process, putting paid to the JCPOA’s claim that Iran could be an NPT member in good standing. Teheran has underscored this fact by obstructing ongoing IAEA probes into suspected sites, revealed in Iran’s archives exposed by Israel, where work on nuclear weapons occurred.

Rejoining the nuclear deal would not resolve inspectors’ concerns, which were serious enough for the IAEA to censure Iran in June. However, it would legitimise an eventual industrial-scale Iranian enrichment program, including explicitly removing by 2025 the basis for future Security Council action. By enshrining an Iranian nuclear program on the cusp of weapons capability, it would also trigger an inherently unstable proliferation cascade as other NPT members around the Middle East raced for the bomb.

And it would fatally devalue America’s “123” civilian nuclear agreements – often called the non-proliferation “gold standard” because US partners in these deals forswear enrichment – with key NPT signatories like South Korea, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, and Ukraine. In a world where US resources and presence are stretching thinner across Europe, the Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East, and where actions like Russia’s invasion of Ukraine are magnifying the allure of nuclear deterrence against aggression, the NPT’s viability remains paramount for global stability.

Fortunately, US President Joe Biden can avoid these outcomes through “snapback” sanctions. Based on Teheran’s significant JCPOA and NPT violations, any of America’s European partners to the 2015 nuclear deal can initiate a 30-day process restoring the previous six Security Council resolutions. Though Russia or China could submit a resolution to the contrary, the United States, France, or Britain could veto it, after which legally binding prohibitions and sanctions on Teheran’s enrichment program – plus its arms trade and missile programs – would resume.

Other pressures would need to be ramped up in tandem, just as they would when a renewed nuclear deal provides Teheran sanctions relief for regional aggression. But a clearly conveyed push for snapback, drawing on Iran’s horrible record as an NPT party, would be a vital and timely reinforcement of America’s commitment to non-proliferation in an increasingly unstable world. 

*Blaise Misztal and Jonathan Ruhe are Vice President for Policy and Foreign Policy Director, respectively, at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America. Reprinted from The Dispatch (thedispatch.com). © The Dispatch, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

# ASIA WATCH

Giora Eliraz

## INDONESIA AND THE UKRAINE CRISIS

In late June, Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), arrived in Europe on a peace mission focused on meetings in Kyiv with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and in Moscow with President Vladimir Putin. This mission also included efforts to address the urgent food insecurity issues which have been aggravated by the Ukraine-Russia war. According to the Indonesian President, he conveyed a message from Zelensky to Putin and stated that his country was willing to be a “communication bridge” between the two warring nations.

Outsiders might wonder how it happened that the President of the faraway Indonesian archipelago ended up getting involved in such a mission on European terrain. But a wider view of Indonesian history and foreign policy suggests this should not really be a surprise. During the authoritarian Suharto era (1966-1998), Indonesia was involved in efforts to settle conflicts in its own region. For example, it significantly contributed – both through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations – to efforts to realise peace in Cambodia which, between 1979 and 1992, had struggled with both internal and external conflicts. In the early 1990s, Indonesia was involved in mediation between the Government of the Philippines and Muslim separatist groups.

Such initiatives became even more prominent during the *Reformasi*, post-Suharto era, following the stormy early years of transition to democracy during the late 1990s and early 2000s. As Jakarta gained confidence in its new democratic model of governance, it began to initiate a more aspirational foreign policy, including an ambition to promote democracy and support conflict resolution and peace building.

In 2011, Jakarta used its chairmanship of ASEAN to mediate a border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia. After the junta in Myanmar officially dissolved itself that same year, Indonesia – the de facto leader of ASEAN – started to lead this regional organisation in efforts to support reforms in Myanmar. After a junta again seized power in a coup in early 2021, Indonesia sought to lead ASEAN to encourage peaceful stabilisation of Myanmar. And in Afghanistan, until the Taliban took control of the country in August 2021, Indonesia was extensively involved in efforts to promote political reconciliation between the various Afghan factions.

Today, Indonesia is approaching the tangled issues associated with the Ukraine-Russia war with a somewhat higher international profile, as the current chair of the prestigious Group of 20 (G20). In addition, President Widodo is one of six “Champions” of the Global Crisis

Response Group set up by the UN Secretary-General to help decision-makers develop strategies to address the three main problems in the global crisis caused by the war – food, energy and finance.

Indonesia believes that one of the key factors that makes it fit to mediate in the Ukraine conflict is its traditional policy of neutrality in world politics, which has been in place since 1948. A formative guiding principle underlying Indonesia’s foreign policy since that time has been “rowing between two reefs” (Ind. *mendayung antara dua karang*). This was further institutionalised during the 1950s, when Indonesia played a leading role in the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In the Ukraine-Russia war, Indonesia has again appeared to be trying to navigate carefully between the “reefs”. It supported the UN General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian attack on Ukraine but has declined to join Western sanctions against Russia and abstained from the vote to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. Hence, Indonesia has been described by observers as a “fence sitter”.

But what is driving Indonesia to seek to play a mediating role in this bloody European conflict?

Like many other parts of the world, Southeast Asia is heavily affected by the consequences of the war, in particular in terms of commodity shortages and commodity prices.

There are also concerns about the aggravation of great power competition in the Indo-Pacific. The war has proven yet again that the blatant trampling of national sovereignty does not provoke truly effective responses by the international community.

Finally, there are domestic interests: as a major importer of Ukrainian wheat, Indonesia needs a stable supply in order to maintain the production of wheat-based food and to meet potential domestic challenges caused by rising prices.

In its current one-year chairmanship of the G20, Indonesia has an interest in leading this prestigious economic forum to address the global food insecurity exacerbated by the war. Thus, while eyes are directed towards the planned G20 Summit meeting in Bali in November, Indonesia, the perceived neutral actor, hopes to see participation of the Russian leader despite Western pressure. However, Indonesia has also invited President Zelensky, even though his country is not a member state, to attend the summit.

Indeed, it seems that Indonesia, a rising actor in the international arena, considers its leadership of the G20 a major platform for both upgrading its international profile and promoting its essential interests, including regarding the Ukraine conflict.

AIR

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Alex Benjamin

## POST-BREXIT, POST-BORIS BRITAIN

On Feb. 1, 2020, Britain left the European Union. It wasn't the first to do so – that honour (or calamitous decision, depending on how you feel about Brexit) went to Greenland. It left what was then called the EEC in 1985.

But with all due respect to Greenland, Britain is a much bigger fish, economically and politically. It was a major and important member of the European Union.

From my perspective as a director of a pro-Israel Jewish advocacy group operating at the heart of the EU institutions, Brexit was a big, big deal at the time. Many questioned if the EU could withstand such a blow, or whether it was the beginning of wave of countries peeling away.

And today? After COVID and the war in Ukraine, Brexit is yesterday's news. The EU continues to lurch from crisis to crisis but endures. The single currency, on paper and against all logic, survives. As Mario Draghi, President of the European Central Bank, said in 2012, the Euro is like a bumblebee: It shouldn't fly – and yet it does.



Boris is going, but in policy terms, will his departure really make a difference? (Image: Twitter)

But what of another fluttering thing that also continues to defy the odds, the Union Jack? A smaller symbol of United Kingdom, PM Boris Johnson, one of the architects of Brexit, has been ousted. The battle to succeed him is between two

names that are hardly on the tips of anybody's tongue, former Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak and current Foreign Minister Liz Truss. We should know the result on Sept. 5.

But honestly, in the grand scheme of things does it really matter? From Brussels, watching the Tory leadership contest feels a bit like waiting on the announcement of who the next James Bond will be. Not only because, while it is of interest, it will have little impact on your life, but also because Bond is representative of a Britain that no longer really exists – of rule Britannia, of empire, of central importance and stature. Sure, the suit is sharp, the car is sexy and the martini is still shaken and not stirred, but in the cold light of day, it feels, well, nostalgic.

As advocates for Israel and for Jewish interests, do we still seek out British approval and help on initiatives? Yes, of course, we seek allies wherever we can get them. But looking at recent history, the UK-Israel relationship has

been and remains a rollercoaster ride with as many highs as lows: From the conflict during the British Mandate to good relations during the Suez Crisis. In the '60s, Britain was seen as mostly pro-Arab. The '80s were not much better, with Britain imposing an arms embargo on Israel during the 1982 Lebanon war.

But since then, things have been on the up again. Relations are strong, a majority of British parliamentarians are pro-Israel (over the last couple of years the British Government began efforts to outlaw the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement's efforts to impose systematic discrimination against Israel in the UK) and this July, unshackled by EU rules, Britain announced that it is actively pursuing a free trade agreement with Israel.

Of course, all that could have changed dramatically if hard-left former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn had won the 2019 election, but since his ouster, major policy alterations with respect to Israel now look much less likely even if current Labour leader Keir Starmer were to win the next election.

On the whole, it is clear that, as advocates, we lost a good, solid and largely dependable pro-Israel voice within European institutions as a result of Brexit. But as Ian Fleming himself presciently wrote, "history is moving pretty quickly these days, and the heroes and villains keep on changing parts."

So, who are today's heroes from a Brussels-based, pro-Israel perspective? The Visegrad group of countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), and the Baltic states. Since Brexit, their voices have become louder in the European Council, Parliament and Commission. Britain's departure showed cracks in the old established power blocs, and these smaller nations are now the cement keeping the EU together.

As these countries enjoy a by and large excellent relationship with Israel, so their fortifying role can only be good news for Jewish advocates like myself, and we already enjoy a deeper and more co-operative relationship with them at the Permanent Representative and EU institutional level. When it comes to the EU, size doesn't matter: Latvia's veto and voice on foreign affairs is as meaningful as France's.

The truth is, in my line of work, the adage of a week being a long time in politics is true. When Britain left the EU playing field, we didn't have any other choice than to adapt quickly.

Can Britain take its place at the global casino table of European politics again?

In "Skyfall", James Bond says "everybody needs a hobby." When Raoul Silva asks in response: "What's yours?" Bond replies: "Resurrection".

This not a word that resonates with many Jews – so here in Brussels, we won't be holding our breath for a British resurgence.

# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

On July 16, four rockets were launched from Gaza into Israel, prompting Israeli retaliatory strikes against Hamas targets, including a major facility for manufacturing raw materials used in rockets, allegedly causing significant disruption to rocket production.

On July 19, bullets were fired from Gaza into Israel. Israel struck a Hamas target in response.

Stabbing attacks in Jerusalem near the Temple Mount were thwarted on June 24 and 28, while a stabbing attack was thwarted at Tapuah Junction in the West Bank on July 24. On June 30, Palestinians opened fire on and threw firebombs and IEDs at Jews at the Joseph's Tomb holy site in Nablus.

Israeli counterterrorism activities and raids continued throughout the West Bank, with multiple suspects apprehended and several Palestinians killed.

## ISRAEL DOWNS HEZBOLLAH DRONES HEADED TO GAS FIELD

On July 2, Israel shot down three Hezbollah drones heading towards offshore facilities in the Karish gas field in the Mediterranean, shortly after Hezbollah threatened to attack the area. Later, the IDF announced that a fourth drone had also been downed heading towards Israeli maritime assets a few days before the July 2 attempt.

None of the drones seem to have been armed. Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah threatened attacks to stop Israel drilling at Karish, slated to begin in September, barring some sort of agreement regarding the disputed Israel-Lebanon maritime boundary.

A suspected Hezbollah drone was downed after crossing into Israel on July 18.

## ISRAEL ATTACKS "GAME-CHANGING" IRANIAN WEAPON IN SYRIA

Israel's ongoing campaign to contain the Iranian presence in Syria continued over July. An Israeli airstrike on the coastal town of al-Hamidiyah on July 3 was unusual, reportedly targeting a weapons transfer into Syria from Iranian vessels docking at the nearby Tartus port. According to Israeli sources, the attack was aimed at stopping an attempt by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to introduce "game changing" air defence systems into Syria to protect their operatives and bases in the country.

On July 22, Israel struck Iranian targets in a-Sayyida Zaynab, south of Damascus, where a drone production workshop was reportedly located.

## TEHERAN: WE CAN PRODUCE THE BOMB

Senior Iranian officials have escalated public claims that Teheran can produce a nuclear weapon at will. On July 17, Kamal Kharrazi, Foreign Policy Advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, boasted on Al Jazeera that Teheran has "the required technological capabilities to produce a nuclear bomb," but said, at this stage, the regime has "not decided to do so." A short time after that, Mohammad-Javad Larijani, another top Khamenei adviser, warned that if the regime decides to build the bomb, "no one could stop us... and they know that."

Meanwhile, in early July, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iran, in another blatant vi-

olation of its international obligations, had started enriching uranium to 20% purity at the fortified underground facility at Fordow, using advanced cascades of centrifuges. Both uranium enrichment at Fordow and the use of the advanced centrifuges violate the JCPOA nuclear agreement.

## IRAN ALLEGEDLY TO SEND DRONES TO RUSSIA

On July 11, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan revealed that Iran was preparing to provide Russia with hundreds of drones, including models capable of firing weapons, "on an expedited timeline" to assist with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He added that Iran was also preparing to train Russians to use the weapons.

On July 19, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi in Teheran. Both Iranian leaders endorsed the Russian invasion, claiming that Russia needed to act to prevent Ukrainian and Western aggression against Russia.

## SECRET ISRAELI-SAUDI DEFENCE COOPERATION

Israel and Saudi Arabia have been quietly cooperating on regional anti-missile and anti-drone defence for much of the past year, according to Israeli news reports. The coordination between the two countries is reportedly part of a US CENTCOM regional defence framework that predates the visit by US President Biden to the two countries in mid-July. As early as March 2021, Israeli warplanes reportedly intercepted and shot down an Iranian attack drone before it could reach Israeli airspace – possibly over Saudi Arabia.



Further, in March 2022, Israeli defence officials discreetly met with their regional Arab counterparts in the Egyptian Sinai to discuss security coordination against Iranian missiles and drones.



Reports say Israeli-Saudi links continue developing behind the scenes (Image: Shutterstock)

Meanwhile, Israel's ties within the region continue to develop, with Israel's military Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi, visiting Abraham Accords partner Morocco on July 25 to discuss defence cooperation, marking the first ever official trip to the kingdom by an IDF leader.

## SAUDI AIRSPACE OPENS TO ISRAEL

In mid-July, the General Authority of Civil Aviation of Saudi Arabia announced the state's airspace will be open to all carriers that meet its requirements for overflights, a step that will give Israeli airlines unrestricted rights to overfly the Kingdom for the first time. Flying over Saudi Arabian airspace would significantly reduce flight times on various routes between Israel and Asian and Pacific destinations, including potentially Australia.

This announcement coincided with US President Joe Biden's visit to the region, during which Biden became the first American president to fly directly from Israel to Saudi Arabia. The Saudis are also reportedly going to permit direct charter flights from Israel for Muslims participating in the annual *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca.

Analysts suggested these moves indicated acceleration of a trend toward gradual normalisation of Israeli-Saudi relations, but Saudi officials denied this.

## US FINDS ABU AKLEH DEATH AN ACCIDENT

On July 4, the US Biden Administration announced the results of its investigation into the shooting death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during a firefight in Jenin between Palestinian militant groups and the IDF on May 11. US investigators concluded that her death was probably caused by an Israeli bullet, but said they "found no reason to believe that this was intentional."

The report noted that the bullet itself, which was produced by the Palestinian Authority after weeks of delay, was too badly damaged to be able to be matched with any weapon through ballistics testing.

## UNILEVER ENDS BEN AND JERRY'S ISRAEL BOYCOTT

The Unilever corporation has

ended a boycott of Israel by its subsidiary Ben & Jerry's, selling the ice cream brand's operations in the Jewish state to a local manufacturer. Avi Zinger, the owner of American Quality Product, the previous distributor of Ben & Jerry's ice cream in Israel, has now purchased the right to make and market the ice cream in Israel, using the name "Ben & Jerry's" in Hebrew and Arabic, but not in English.

Last year, the Ben & Jerry's board declared that selling its ice cream in "occupied Palestinian territory" did not align with its values, and cancelled its previous licence agreement with Zinger. Unilever had acquired Ben & Jerry's in 2000 under an arrangement allowing the Ben & Jerry's board to continue to control business decisions independently.

Before this latest agreement with him, Unilever was being sued by Zinger and had come under strong public pressure to reverse the Ben & Jerry's boycott decision.

## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### SYNDICATE OF CYNICISM

Palestinian journalists are represented by a union, the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (PJS). On July 21, the PJS put out a statement demanding that Arab and international media boycott all of the Israeli media. This is a serious demand, so we would expect it to be motivated by serious misbehaviour by the Israeli media.

Yet the source of the PJS's ire was one Israeli newspaper photographer, Meshie Ben Ami, who works for the Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*. As the PJS explained, "Yesterday, a *Yedioth Ahronoth* cameraman shot at a Palestinian civilian, seriously wounding him in occupied northwest Jerusalem."

Even if this were true, surely calling for a boycott of the entire Israeli media is a little over the top. However, the PJS explained, this shooting proved that Israeli media personnel are security personnel, part of the "fascist" occupa-

tion apparatus, and the Israeli media is therefore a "fascist" group which "glorifies the perpetrators of the crimes against the Palestinians."

This, of course, is projection — Palestinian bodies are constantly accusing Israelis of things they themselves are guilty of. The Palestinian media plays a major role in all-pervasive incitement to hatred against Israel in Palestinian society, including glorifying terrorists.

But the real kicker is that the PJS somehow neglected to mention that the Palestinian "civilian" shot had been in the process of carrying out a terrorist attack, stabbing an Israeli civilian with a screwdriver. Ben Ami ran towards the terrorist during the stabbing with his gun drawn, at which point the terrorist advanced towards Ben Ami with the screwdriver. It was only after calling on him to stop that Ben Ami shot him.

The fact that even the journalists' union is so eager to spread ridiculous false propaganda like this says a great deal about the state of Palestinian journalism, governance and society.

## COVER STORY

# THE NEW MIDEAST AXES

## FOUNDING A MIDDLE EASTERN NATO?

Henrique Cymerman

**T**he Middle East is experiencing a geostrategic earthquake, and its epicentre is in Saudi Arabia. This seismic shift is leading to the creation of a military alliance between countries that, at least technically, are still enemies.

The political and commercial contacts between Israel and the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries, led by Saudi Arabia, stopped being a secret in August 2020 when the dramatic signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain took place. Later, Morocco and Sudan joined the framework.

Now, however, the new alliance is on the cusp of evolving into a regional NATO-type system, with states cooperating under an all-for-one and one-for-all logic. There has been a series of recent reports of regular meetings between military chiefs from Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan, as well as ongoing discussions about joint defence agreements on missile and drone attacks from Iran or its proxies.

The publicising of joint Israeli-Emirati air force drills employing F-15 and F-16 fighter jets flying side by side would have been the stuff of science fiction just a few years ago. Today, it is a concrete reality.

During recent trips to the Gulf cities of Jeddah, Abu Dhabi and Doha, I heard explanations of this shift that cast light on recent developments. The Iranian threat – both nuclear and conventional – is the glue that binds together this unique coalition.

According to senior military officials, as early as 1973, after the Yom Kippur War, the Arab powers understood that there was no military option against Israel. A former Saudi intelligence chief explained this reasoning to me in detail, saying, “We surprised you on your Day of Atonement. You started the war on your knees, but in the end, you won it. And now Israel is much stronger; it is the greatest power between Indonesia and Gibraltar.”

The rulers of Abu Dhabi, the capital city-state of the UAE, do not hide their dream of turning the Israeli “startup nation” into a “startup region”.

“What we are looking for is not to buy and sell like in a bazaar, but to do joint ventures,” a prominent Emirati businessman told me. According to him, for the UAE, peace with Israel is a strategic bet on the future.

Many secret and private flights have occurred in recent years between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Former Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and heads of the Mossad have reportedly made such journeys. Even a few weeks ago, a private jet with prominent Israeli businessmen and women was reported to have done so as well. All of them first landed in Jordan for a few minutes so they could not be tracked by any app and no questions would be raised. Then they continued on to Saudi Arabia.

In his first tour of the Middle East as US president in mid-July, Joe Biden, who ultimately understood the extraordinary potential of the Abraham Accords achieved by the previous Republican administration, decided that Air Force One would be the first plane to fly directly from Tel Aviv in Israel to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, where a summit was scheduled to take place under the leadership of the Saudi kingdom.

Some say that Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), the strong man of Saudi Arabia, is carrying out a revolution, and if his grandfather and some of his uncles saw it, they would roll over in their graves.

Many of the internal Saudi dynamics that enable this change are tied to a demographic factor that is very noticeable on the streets of Jeddah, Riyadh and the other Gulf

**“The new alliance is on the cusp of evolving into a regional NATO-type system, with states cooperating under an all-for-one and one-for-all logic”**





Seeking a “win-win” for four countries: US President Biden in Saudi Arabia with Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (Image: Alamy Live News)

capitals: 70% of the population is under 30 years of age. And for most of them, the 20th-century wars between Israel and the Arabs are as ancient and irrelevant as the wars of the Romans.

The Saudis have removed all antisemitic references from their school curriculum, and even the Secretary General of the Muslim World League Mohammed al-Issa made it a point to visit Auschwitz and maintain close relations with rabbis from Israel and around the world. His critics call him “the Zionist Imam”. Recently, he was chosen by the Saudi authorities to deliver the main sermon for the festival of Eid al-Adha.

MBS, together with his Abu Dhabi mentor and new Emirati President Mohammed Bin Zayed (MBZ), Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid, are now betting on Biden’s help to push the Abraham Accords into a new phase.


The American President is seeking to reach an agreement that will be a win-win for the four countries. According to this arrangement, Saudi Arabia will grant Israel complete use of its airspace for all Israeli and foreign airlines operating out of Israel, effectively shortening all flights from Tel Aviv to many Asian capitals and Australia.

Saudi Arabia will receive approval from Israel for the transfer of two strategic Egyptian-controlled islands in the Red Sea – Sanafir and Tiran, off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula – to Saudi hands. The need for Israel’s approval of this is stipulated by the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty.

Cairo will be financially rewarded by Riyadh, and this will pump plenty of oxygen into the very poor and fragile Egyptian economy.

Finally, the US will receive an increase in oil production from Saudi Arabia, which is necessary to replace the black gold lost by the West as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Biden, who throughout his political career has been one of the champions of the 80-year-old strategic alliance between the United States and Israel, also visited eastern Jerusalem and Bethlehem to remind the region that the Palestinian issue remains pending. The Palestinians do not hide their concerns that they have been relegated to the sidelines in world politics by a new cold war, the global energy crisis and the ongoing normalisation process between Israel and a growing number of Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries.

It is said that what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas. Recent events prove once again that what happens in the Middle East does not stay in the Middle East. And, although American presidents want to leave the region, the Middle East will pursue them wherever they go. 

*Henrique Cymerman is a publishing expert at the MirYam Institute. He has covered current affairs in the Middle East for over 30 years and has been nominated “Comendador,” a title of nobility, by the King of Spain and the President of Portugal. © Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## WHY BIDEN’S JERUSALEM DECLARATION MATTERS

Elliott Abrams

**D**uring his visit to Israel on July 14, US President Joe Biden issued what he and Israel’s Prime Minister Yair Lapid are calling the “Jerusalem Declaration”. Is it of any consequence?

Formally called the “Jerusalem US-Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration,” a phrase no one will remember or repeat, the declaration can be sloughed off as mere rhetoric. It is, after all, binding on neither party and can be forgotten as soon as Prime Minister Lapid or Joe Biden leaves office. In Lapid’s case, that could be just a few months away. Barack Obama contemptuously dismissed the pledges made in a letter by President George W. Bush in 2004 to then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon – even after large majorities in both houses of Congress had affirmed those pledges. This reveals what words are sometimes worth – even a president’s words.

Yet this declaration does matter.

First, as president, Joe Biden had only once, offhandedly, said Iran would not be permitted to get a nuclear weapon “on my watch”. This was a far cry from more specific commitments made by his predecessors, including Barack Obama in 2012. Biden has only now, in the declaration, said something specific and earnest:

The United States stresses that integral to this pledge [to preserve and strengthen Israel’s capability to deter its enemies and to defend itself by itself against any threat or combination of threats] is the commitment never to allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, and that it is prepared to use all elements of its national power to ensure that outcome.

Though not using the words “force” or “military force” (whose use would have made this declaration stronger), Biden has taken a significant step forward. Previously, the Administration had spoken of using only diplomatic and economic pressure on Iran, so “all elements of national power” is a more substantial threat.

And in an interview with Israel’s *Channel 12*, when Biden was asked whether he would use force to stop Iran from getting nukes, he replied, “If that was the last resort, yes.”



Signing the Jerusalem Declaration: Non-binding, yet consequential (Image: IGPO/Flickr)

The dissonance between Biden’s new, more rigid line and his endless, fruitless nuclear negotiations with Iran is evident; equally evident are the likely future gaps between the United States and Israel about when Iranian nuclear advances mean the time for that “last resort” has actually been reached. Nevertheless, travelling to Israel has forced Joe Biden to confront the Iranian nuclear weapons issue as he had never done before.

Biden also fully embraces in this declaration the “Abraham Accords” – a series of agreements between Israel and various Arab states negotiated by the Trump Administration. Initially, Biden was cool to this Trump achievement. But in this declaration, he is entirely committed: The Accords “are important to the future of the Middle East region and to the cause of regional security, prosperity, and peace.”

Second, Biden’s repetition of pledges to Israel that previous presidents have made is consequential because it is 2022, and the Democratic Party is drifting into an anti-Israel position. The most recent Pew poll finds that while Republicans view Israel more favourably than they view Palestinians by a two-to-one margin, Democrats view Palestinians slightly more favourably – and this is just one in a series of polls going back years and tracing the evolution of Democrats away from support for Israel. There is now a group of Democrats in the House of Representatives whose hostility to Israel is displayed frequently in votes and speeches.

In that context, Biden’s adherence to the “old religion”, the support for Israel that used to characterise Democrats when he was a younger man, is a valuable antidote to recent trends. From the viewpoint of Israel and its support-

**“Biden’s repetition of pledges to Israel that previous presidents have made is consequential because it is 2022, and the Democratic Party is drifting into an anti-Israel position”**

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ers, there is some utility in having a Democratic president who is 79-years-old and knew Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin. Still, how powerful that antidote proves is simply unknowable – as is Biden’s ability to affect the views of Democratic voters, especially younger ones, about US-Israeli relations.

Biden will be in office next year when Israel celebrates its 75th anniversary. He can proudly tell the story of how his Democrat predecessor, Harry Truman, recognised the infant state within minutes of its Declaration of Independence.

Whether this “Jerusalem Declaration” will eventually be seen as just one in a series of such collegial US-Israel statements or as an anachronism reflecting an aged president who no longer represented the views of his party will be clear only long after Biden has passed from the scene. 

*Elliott Abrams is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the chairman of the Vandenberg Coalition. © National Review (www.nationalreview.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## A BIDEN ERROR ON REFUGEES

**Jonathan Schanzer and Asaf Romirowsky**

**U**S President Joe Biden earned deserved modest praise for his visit to Israel and Saudi Arabia in mid-July, restoring confidence in core Middle East alliances. But the President made at least one major misstep: He pledged US\$201 million (A\$296 million) to the corrupt and bloated United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), a step back into the failed policies of the past on a trip dedicated to continuing the forward progress made in the region in recent years.

Biden’s move was wildly out of step with the current global refugee crisis, sparked by Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine in February of this year. Nearly half a year later, the epicentre of the world’s refugee crisis today is unquestionably in Europe. UNRWA, by contrast, serves only a small segment of the Middle East. In fact, UNRWA is the only agency dedicated to serving one specific refugee population. For seven decades, the Palestinians have received special treatment, while the UN High Commissioner for Refugees is tasked with handling every other refugee problem on the planet.

Worse, UNRWA has adopted the unjustifiable policy of recognising the descendants of the original refugees from the 1948-1949 war with Israel. This means that the

agency’s roster of dependents continues to grow each year, even as the number of original refugees continues to shrink because of their ageing population. In other words, UNRWA has ensured that its services will always be needed; the agency that originally had no more than 715,000 refugees from the first Arab-Israeli war now has 7 million clients. Under the current policy, that list will only grow.

Biden’s support for UNRWA is also odd given that the agency has been under fire in recent years owing to credible allegations of corruption, mismanagement and extremism, to name a few. A recent study on agency textbooks validated again the shocking extent of the antisemitism found in the materials that Palestinian students are required to learn.

It gets worse. The agency has a bloated roster of employees. Its payroll is a whopping 30,000 or more. And UNRWA has been increasingly infiltrated by members of radical groups, primarily the Iran-backed Hamas terrorist group that runs the Gaza Strip. Terrorists are believed to hold jobs as teachers and administrators within the agency’s bureaucracy, thanks to poor vetting and oversight procedures. Hamas has cynically wielded UNRWA facilities as shields to protect its underground commando tunnels that were deliberately built beneath or alongside the agency’s buildings. Hamas and other militant groups have a history of firing unguided rockets at Israel from sites adjacent to UNRWA buildings for similar reasons. It’s a practice commonly known as “human shields”, which is recognised as a war crime in the United States and the UN, among others.



Supporting UNRWA is not only unhelpful to peace hopes, but a mis-allocation of funds when Ukraine’s refugees are sorely in need (Image: Shutterstock)

Supporting an organisation so deeply beset with problems is a glaring misallocation of American and United Nations resources at any time. But it’s especially egregious when those resources are sorely needed elsewhere as the refugee crisis in Ukraine spirals out of control.

By one conservative estimate, 7 million Ukrainians are internally displaced as a result of the war. No fewer than 5 million refugees have already fled Ukraine. The UN



predicts a total of approximately 8.35 million refugees by the end of this year. According to one British House of Commons report on Ukraine, “29% of Ukraine’s 44 million population (12.8 million people) have been forcibly displaced within the country or beyond it. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said it is the fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II.”

Poland, Moldova, Hungary, and Slovakia are among the front-line states in this crisis. They will need significant international assistance to absorb the massive numbers of refugees streaming across their borders. The President’s decision to throw more money at UNRWA is downright bizarre in this context.

A responsible policy would be to divert some of these resources, if not most of them, to the escalating refugee crisis gripping Europe.

Throwing good money after bad at the UN is nothing new, of course. The massive refugee crisis stemming from the civil war in Syria should have prompted a shift in policy. The same goes for the internal displacement of Yemenis from that country’s civil war, prompted primarily by the Iran-backed Houthi terrorist groups. But those crises may soon pale in comparison to the misery from the war in Ukraine.

With an acute refugee crisis already underway, coupled with a food scarcity predicted to hit next year, the time has come for a shift in global refugee policies. UNRWA sits at the top of the list of agencies that divert funds from needy refugees worldwide.

Donors from the Arab world have reportedly curtailed support to UNRWA in recent years, even before the Ukraine crisis. So have Britain and Austria. The result has been a scramble at the UN to make up the shortfall – without giving thought to why there’s a shortfall in the first place. In fact, the message is unmistakable: The world’s confidence in this agency has fallen.

For now, the damage is done. Biden is not likely to reverse course. In fact, his allocation of funds to UNRWA looks like he is doubling down on this controversial policy. His own State Department recently hired Elizabeth Campbell, formerly UNRWA’s Washington lobbyist who notoriously helped disseminate bigoted education lessons to Palestinians via agency textbooks.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has already highlighted what the United Nations *can’t* do: It has little to deter Vladimir Putin’s war machine. But the UN *can* and should continue to coordinate refugee relief; it’s an area in which it has demonstrated relative competence. As the Ukrainian refugee crisis worsens, the Biden Administration should conduct a review of its refugee assistance policies, with an eye toward optimising them. Congress can play an important role in spurring this oversight. Better efficiency is urgently needed. So is purging hate and vitriol. This should not inhibit assistance to the refugees who need America’s

help the most. Neither should it mean an end to assistance programs that support Palestinians. But it should prompt a long-overdue review of the efficacy of the refugee initiatives America supports, with the goal of much-needed change.

AIR

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## MR. PUTIN GOES TO TEHERAN

Ben Cohen

Despite spending five months baiting Ukraine’s leaders as “neo-Nazis”, among them the country’s Jewish President Volodymyr Zelensky, Russian dictator Vladimir Putin didn’t bat an eyelid as he embraced a genuine Nazi sympathiser and Holocaust denier in the shape of Iran’s “Supreme Leader”, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Putin visited Teheran beginning July 19 on his first trip outside the borders of the former USSR since launching the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. The immediate focus was not the war in Ukraine, but that other Russian-fuelled bloodbath in Syria. The main meeting brought Khamenei and Putin together with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is seeking Russian and Iranian backing for a renewed onslaught against Kurdish forces in

**“The Teheran visit was an opportunity for Putin to showcase his status as an international leader who is relied upon by two of the region’s key influencers”**

Syria. Putin refrained from making a formal commitment to his Turkish counterpart, but he will have been reassured by Erdogan’s reference to him as “my dear friend,” and gratified by Turkey’s shameful antics in holding up Sweden and Finland’s NATO membership applications because of the backing of those two nations for the Kurds.

The Teheran visit was an opportunity for Putin to showcase his status as an international leader who is relied upon by two of the region’s key influencers. It was also an occasion to address the dire state of both the Russian and Iranian economies as they labour under the weight of international sanctions. Not coincidentally, on the day that Putin landed in Teheran, the Russian energy giant Gazprom announced a US\$40 billion development and exploration





Putin in Teheran with Iranian President Raisi: Building ties between two authoritarian, revisionist regimes (Image: Abbasi Mohammadreza/ATP/SPP/Alamy Live News)

deal with the state-owned National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). According to NIOC's Chief Executive, Mohsen Khojastehmehr, the influx of Gazprom cash represents the largest foreign investment on record in the history of Iran's energy sector. Additionally, it's a step that will further consolidate the deep ties between Iran and Russia – one an authoritarian regime claiming divine sanction, the other an authoritarian regime promoting nationalist chauvinism, both of them sworn enemies of Western democracy.

It's highly unlikely that anyone outside of Russia – where the drumbeat of official propaganda through state media channels has turned much of the populace into “zombies”, as the Ukrainians like to say – will have been persuaded by Putin's grandstanding. Russia's poor military performance, particularly in the opening phases of the war, punctured the notion that Russian forces are a match for NATO's combined armies. Now, admittedly, the situation is becoming more complex, with Russia maintaining its heavy assault in the east of the country and preparing the breakaway regions of Luhansk and Donetsk for “independence”.

Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, has even suggested that Russia will take the war deeper into Ukrainian territory as a result of the US provision of high-mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS) to Ukrainian forces. “If the West delivers long-range weapons to Kyiv, the geographic goals of the special operation in Ukraine” – Russia's Orwellian euphemism for its war of aggression – “will expand even more,” Lavrov told state media outlets last week.

The delivery of the HIMARS system to Ukraine has already yielded results on the battlefield, enabling the destruction of some 30 Russian command centres and ammunition depots, according to the Ukrainian Defence Ministry. Ukrainian commanders are clamouring for more aid and training as they try to turn the tide against the

Russians, who have already lost 15,000 troops through the invasion, according to a CIA assessment – more than seven times the number of US military personnel who were killed in Afghanistan in the entire period after 2001. But as vulnerable as Russia has shown itself to be and as contemptuous as it is towards the lives of its own soldiers, as well as the beleaguered Ukrainians, there is no sign of imminent defeat and no indication that Putin is planning to leave office. Being battered and bruised is not the same as being defeated, as the Russians have learned many times during their history.

The point, however, is that a continued stalemate, whereby the Russians are in control of much of eastern Ukraine but

repelled from further advances by the Western-backed Ukrainian forces, isn't tenable. As long as Russia occupies Ukrainian territory and prevents the Kyiv Government from accessing its Black Sea ports, the rest of the world will be dragged further into an energy and food crisis, with a recession lurking around the corner. Internally, Russia's only option is to become more repressive, choking off alternative sources of information and carrying out mass arrests of anti-war activists and political dissidents. So, if the price of securing a Ukrainian victory seems too high, it's worth remembering that these are the costs of *not* doing so.

As is often the case, Russian Jews have been the proverbial canary in the coal mine when it comes to the boosting of state repression in Russia. Along with their constant propaganda jibes about neo-Nazis in Ukraine, Russia's leaders have abused and distorted the Holocaust in their failed bid to persuade the outside world that the invasion of Ukraine is the unfinished business of World War II. Then, on July 15, the Russian Ministry of Justice announced that it was seeking a court order to close down the local operations of the Jewish Agency for Israel,

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alleging that it had violated Russian law by maintaining a database of Russian citizens seeking to make *aliyah* – that is, immigrate – to Israel.

There are some ominous parallels between the move against the Jewish Agency and the notorious “Doctor’s Plot” in the Soviet Union in 1953. As the post-war USSR turned venomously against its Jewish community, a group of mainly Jewish doctors was accused of attempting to poison the Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), a humanitarian organisation that had been assisting needy Soviet Jews since the 1917 revolution, was identified as the “Zionist spy organisation” behind the supposed conspiracy.

Now, almost 70 years after the “Doctor’s Plot” laid Soviet antisemitism bare, fabricated tales of “Zionist spies” are filtering their way back into the legal system and the state-run media in Russia. Meanwhile, Russian representatives in Israel have been saying in soothing tones that the Jewish Agency facing closure is Israel’s fault for having the temerity to speak out in defence of Ukraine’s sovereignty; if that stops, then so will we, they emphasise.

Yet again, a ruling regime in Moscow is using its Jews as a bargaining tool; this time, only a serious military setback will force it onto a different path. AIR

*Ben Cohen is a New York City-based journalist and author who writes a weekly column on Jewish and international affairs for JNS. © Jewish News Syndicate (www.JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## COUNTERING THE EMERGING RUSSIA-TURKEY-IRAN ALLIANCE

**Amir Avivi**

**L**ess than a week after US President Joe Biden left the Middle East following a visit that focused on the informal Israeli-Sunni Arab alliance in the region, Russian President Vladimir Putin boarded a plane to Iran, the leader of the opposing Shi’ite axis. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan joined the summit in Teheran.

The three regimes represented in Teheran are not friends of the West. Russia is engaged in a brutal war against Ukraine and dishes out threats to European countries on a weekly basis. Iran funds terrorist proxies across the Middle East, has a robust nuclear weapons project, and has stated many times that it seeks the complete annihilation of the United States and Israel. Finally, Turkey has proven itself an unreliable partner of the West on core issues such as sanctions on Russia, use of Russian defence

systems, support for malign Iranian activities and more.

Putin’s summit has worrying implications for the Middle East. It appears that an anti-American alliance is forming at the behest of Russia and China, and it includes Iran and its terrorist proxies. As a result, Iran could soon find itself comfortably exporting oil and weapons and attracting foreign investments, despite Western sanctions. It might well become self-sufficient within its bloc of allies, leaving the West unable to pressure Iran on its nuclear program and other malfeasances.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan revealed recently that Iran already feels emboldened enough to send sophisticated weapons systems to Russia. Putin said last week in Teheran that Russia-Iran relations “are developing at a good pace,” adding that the countries can “boast of record figures in terms of trade growth, including the strengthening of cooperation on international security issues.”

Such statements are made by leaders who are completely undeterred by the West.

When asked about the possibility of advanced Iranian weapons being sold to Russia, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said, “We would advise Iran to not do that.” He added: “We think that’s a really, really bad idea.”

This is not enough. When Iran is emboldened enough to transfer sophisticated unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to Russia and attempt to bring Turkey into its orbit, the West must see Iran for what it is and what it is attempting to do: conquer the region in the name of the Islamic revolution. Iranian leaders say this on a daily basis. We need only listen.

Iran must be made to understand that it cannot continue to expand its influence and aggression in the region, detach Turkey from the Western orbit or find new ways to evade Western sanctions. Right now, it seems that, even if these messages are being sent by the West, Teheran doesn’t particularly care.

The best way to make Iran care is by creating a strong and concrete alliance against the axis Iran is attempting to build. The US is already the leader of the bloc opposing Iran, and it must do all it can, in cooperation with its many allies, to stop Iran’s aggression in the region, as well as its nuclear program.

Finally, just like Eastern European countries faced with Russian aggression in their region, Israel cannot be expected to remain passive in the face of Iranian aggression in the Middle East. Israel must be prepared to use all means at its disposal to stop this aggression and ensure its own security. AIR

*Brig. Gen. (Res.) Amir Avivi is the founder and CEO of the Israel Defense and Security Forum (IDSF). The IDSF promotes research, education and policy focused on Israel’s security as a cornerstone of its existence. © Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*





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# We chanted ‘death to Israel’

But Iranians know who their real enemy is

Marjan Keypour Greenblatt

“Tell me something I don’t know about Iran.” The question hit me hard, coming from Yair Lapid, the acting Prime Minister of Israel, as we sat in the small conference room outside his office in Jerusalem. Lapid is the head of a country with an all-consuming focus on the Islamic Republic of Iran. And there’s a good reason for that.

For more than four decades, Israel has had to grapple with a hostile enemy ferociously committed to the annihilation of the Jewish state. Long before he overthrew the Shah, Ruhollah Khomeini encoded the destruction of Israel as an essential element in his revolutionary creed. Today that enmity has been institutionalised in nearly every dimension of Iranian policy: military doctrine, religious affairs, energy policy, foreign affairs, education and even entertainment.

Much like classic antisemitism that blamed the Jewish people throughout history, the regime portrays the Jewish state as the ever-present scapegoat for all the ills of the world. This seething hatred is more than an existential threat to Israel; it is an existential element of the rationale for the Islamic Republic, one that props up a corrupt and feckless leadership that long ago lost any vestige of legitimacy.

But Lapid certainly already knew that. As a human rights activist and an Iran watcher, I was familiar with the regular reports of Israeli intelligence services’ daring exploits deep inside the country.

I was part of a delegation of the US Anti-Defamation League, led by my husband, Jonathan Greenblatt, and I was an approved guest of the Prime Minister’s office. As I processed the question, I initially thought there was not much insight that I could offer in response to the Prime Minister, who was intrigued by my Iranian background. And yet, I knew that I had a profound conviction that I wanted to share and did not want to lose the special opportunity to answer this most important question.

“Mr. Prime Minister, you should know that the people of Iran don’t share the hatred of Israel that is forced upon them by their regime.”

**“Before we sat down at our desks, we were compelled to shake our fists and chant in unison, ‘Death to Israel!’ That this came before grammar or math was a clear indication of the priorities of the Iranian educational system”**



Annual Revolution Day march in Isfahan, Iran (Image: Shutterstock)

His eyes lit up. I could hear the seat leather cracking as his advisers leaned forward and focused their attention on the corner of the table where I was seated. So, I continued.

“The public knows that the source of their suffering is not the state of Israel, but rather the repressive regime that seeks to control and dominate nearly every aspect of their lives. In reality, ordinary people admire Israel. Some of them even love the Jewish state.”

I proceeded to explain the perspective founded on my years of engagement with dissidents and my personal experiences living in Iran.

As a child growing up in post-revolution Teheran, I started every school day by standing outside in a line with other girls. After the fall of the Shah, school had become

an apartheid-like environment with students entirely segregated by gender and an Islamic dress code imposed on young girls regardless of our religion. Even as a Jewish person, every day I made sure my hijab was tied tightly around my chin to hide even a hint of hair in compliance with the modesty rules imposed by the clerics who sought to control all aspects of our lives. Before we sat down at our desks,

we were compelled to shake our fists and chant in unison, “Death to Israel!” That this came before grammar or math was a clear indication of the priorities of the Iranian educational system. Throughout my teenage years, anti-Zionism was burned into my mind, a staple of every single school day.

I never believed this propaganda, not only because I come from a Jewish family. Most of us did not, because these were not our words. But we experienced a kind of collective brainwashing firsthand as hate was pounded into our heads. Every single day. And yet most of us could not find Israel on a map, knew nothing of the Arab-Israel conflict, and could not understand how this distant place connected to our lives.

Because it didn’t.

In fact, we were preoccupied with far more pressing problems like avoiding the overnight bombardments of the Iraqi Air Force during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, or managing the food rations and the general unavailability of basic nutrition, let alone choosing our own clothing or finding ways to listen to music that suddenly had been banned. While anti-Israel propaganda undoubtedly seeped into many young minds because of the constant repetition, it mostly fell on deaf ears. We disregarded it because, as war invaded our lives and poverty spread, Israel literally was among the farthest things from our minds.

The quiet scepticism has broken through the surface in recent years, thanks mainly to social media. Anonymous activists have used platforms to push back on the propaganda with growing success. For example, #NoHateDay has become a dynamic grassroots movement on social

media, launching a flurry of positive messages designed to counter the tired programming of “Quds Day,” an artificial event created by the regime to attack the Jewish state. New campaigns are constantly emerging such as #StandsWithIsrael and #IraniansLoveIsrael, initiatives that express friendship and tolerance. Activists have designed creative graphics and banners in support of the Jewish state and filled social media with messages of friendship and peace between the two people.



A series of social media campaigns has allowed Iranians to express their true, positive, feelings about Israel (Image: Twitter)

Over the past four decades, Iranians have witnessed the failure of the Islamic Revolution and its inability to deliver on basic promises of peace and prosperity for the majority of the population. Although the regime ruthlessly controls the media and uses it to drive its desired narrative, Iranians see through this contrivance. Across the country people resort to VPNs, satellite media and other services to circumvent the censors and access news that they actually can trust.

For example, legions of people have tuned in for decades to hear the daily broadcasts of Menashe Amir, a long-time anchor on *Israel Radio International*, as well as others on Israel's *Pars TV*. While the regime endeavours to demonise Israelis, ordinary Iranians know that Amir's reporting and analysis out of Israel is far more informative than what is provided by state-approved anchors in Teheran. Persian-language accounts and those of other diaspora outlets such as *Iran International*, *ManotoTV* and *VOA Persian* provide listeners with a more accurate and nuanced perspective on world affairs and the policies that impact their lives.

While the clerics assail the so-called Zionist regime, the Iranian people actually appreciate the many unsolicited gestures of kindness coming from Israel over the years.

These have ranged from the symbolic, such as congratulatory messages during the festival of Nowruz, to the substantive, such as the humanitarian offers of aid after earthquakes and the gift of vaccines when the COVID virus seized the country. While Teheran reflexively rejected these offers, the Iranian people knew they themselves were the real victims. Time and again, the public has seen how their star athletes are humiliated, forced to abandon years of training and forfeit matches simply so that they don't have to compete against Israeli athletes. Such acts tear at the deep sense of pride among ordinary Iranians and increasingly underscore that the official posture of the regime against Israel is hurting only them.

Over time, poverty and unemployment have increased, natural resources have been depleted and patriotism has declined. Meanwhile, thanks to social media and diaspora-

based news, Iranians increasingly are aware of the regime's mismanagement of the country. They see how, while their opportunities have diminished, opportunities have grown for Palestinian terrorists whose families are compensated by the regime when they kill Israeli civilians; for the child soldiers in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen whose training and weapons are financed by the regime; for the drug smugglers in South America who are paid

by the regime. The Iranian people see their leaders express compassion for marginalised minorities around the world, but neglect the pain and dismiss the suffering of their own people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

“Mr. Prime Minister, the Iranian people know that the cause of their misery is not the far-away state of Israel. It is the oppressive Iranian regime that is prioritising its destructive ambitions for Israel over the well-being of their own civilians.”

The exchange took only a few minutes, but I felt great relief in conveying this message on behalf of my compatriots. Prime Minister Lapid was gracious and also shared his



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amity toward the people of Iran. He closed the exchange by expressing hope for their eventual liberation from oppression – a hope that all freedom-loving people can get behind.

AIR

*Marjan Keypour Greenblatt is a human rights activist and founder of StopFemicideIran.org, and ARAMIran.org. She's a non-resident fellow at the Middle East Institute and member of ADL's Task Force for Middle East Minorities. © Times of Israel (www.timesofisrael.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## ELECTION #5 IN ISRAEL: A PREVIEW

Amotz Asa-El

The experiment has ended. Following one year of surprisingly effective incumbency, Israel's eight-party coalition of strange bedfellows has been dissolved. A politically-perplexed Israel is now headed to its fifth general election in just three years on November 1.

The outgoing Government was unique not only in terms of Israeli history, but also anywhere in the world. Most governing coalitions in democracies are built around one large party, with smaller allies. In extraordinary situations, some have been led by a pair of large rivals. This one, however, left the largest party, Likud, in the opposition, while the coalition's largest component, *Yesh Atid* ("There is a Future"), won less than 15% of the electorate, as opposed to Likud's 25%.

Moreover, the self-named "government of change" was a rainbow coalition that ranged from a right-wing party headed by Naftali Bennett, a former head of the West Bank settler organisation, to an Arab party, Ra'am, led by an Islamist preacher, Mansour Abbas.

Even more oddly, the Government was headed by Bennett despite the fact that his faction, *Yamina* ("Rightward"), represented only seven out of the Knesset's 120 lawmakers. According to the coalition agreement, Bennett was scheduled to hand over the premiership to the centrist Yair Lapid, of *Yesh Atid*, in August 2023, halfway through the coalition's four-year term.

However, the coalition that initially included 62 lawmakers incrementally lost four of its members, three from

Bennett's faction and one from the left-wing Meretz.

All four cited various disagreements with the coalition's compromises on assorted issues, from religious affairs to Arab-Israeli relations. The common denominator among all four is that they were relatively marginal politicians. The coalition's eight party leaders actually worked in surprisingly effective harmony, despite their huge ideological differences, and even delivered some long-term change.

Most crucially, Israel's 36th Government passed a budget after three years of fiscal paralysis during which the budgets of Israel's ministries, rather than reflecting changing events and priorities and government plans, simply continued to be a monthly one-twelfth of their share of the 2018 annual budget.

Equally important, the Bennett Government fended off successive pandemic waves without imposing any lockdowns, while displaying remarkably close cooperation between Bennett and his political opposite, Health Minister Nitzan Horovitz of the Meretz faction.

Macro-economically, Bennett's Government undid the pandemic's shock, ultimately reducing to zero the budget deficit which in 2020 soared to NIS 160 billion (A\$67 billion), or 11.9% of GDP, and overseeing a fall in unemployment from 18.2% to 3.4%.



For one year, Israel's eight party "rainbow coalition" worked in surprisingly effective harmony (Image: Flickr)

Led in this effort by Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman of the right-wing secular-nationalist *Yisrael Beitenenu* ("Israel is Our Home") party, the outgoing Government's restoration of fiscal planning and discipline came coupled with some long-term reforms, including raising the retirement age for women from 62 to 65.

Perhaps most importantly, the Bennett Government set out to tackle the law and order crisis in Arab towns, defining it as a major strategic goal for Israeli Police and investing heavily in arresting gang leaders, multiplying street patrols, building intelligence resources, and collecting illegal arms.

Lastly, on the Palestinian front, despite its eclectic structure, the Bennett Government displayed resolve toward Gaza, delivering the quietest year Israel has seen on that front this century even while balancing two seemingly contradictory policies – on the one hand, letting thousands of Gazans enter Israel to work as day labourers, and on the other hand, changing the arrangement whereby Hamas received monthly cash infusions from Qatar to an allegedly more transparent process designed to make sure the money does not reach Hamas' terrorist activities.

Fittingly, the Government displayed harmony even as its two leaders announced its dissolution on June 20, and

the consequent passage of the premiership from Bennett to Lapid, as per the terms of their original coalition agreement. The joint, televised address was laced with mutual compliments and underscored by Lapid's statement to Bennett: "I love you; you placed the state above your personal interest."

However, over its year in office, the Lapid-Bennett coalition only smoothed over, but did not undo, the crisis that has largely paralysed Israeli politics for the past three years. As its downfall made plain, Israel's politicians remain split down the middle between those prepared and those unwilling to serve in a government led by the indicted former PM Binyamin Netanyahu. The key question, therefore, is whether the Nov. 1 election can finally end this stalemate.

The agenda and main protagonists of Israel's 25th general election are the same as in the previous four contests, all of which revolved around one issue and one man: Netanyahu.

The agenda remains the extraordinary situation whereby Israel's most electable politician is facing trial, as Netanyahu has been since his indictment in November 2019, for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust.

Lurking behind the controversy over Netanyahu the person are divided attitudes toward the judiciary, media and police, which Netanyahu has accused of collectively conspiring to unseat him and tarnish his family. The pro-Netanyahu camp also includes the ultra-Orthodox parties and the ultra-nationalist Religious Zionism party, as well as Netanyahu's Likud party.

The anti-Netanyahu camp is led by acting PM Lapid's Yesh Atid, which has 17 lawmakers and is flanked by five allied parties – two to its right and two to its left, and one also occupying similar centre ground to Yesh Atid. On the left are Labor and Meretz, which currently have seven and six Knesset seats respectively. On the right, Netanyahu's opponents include Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu, with five seats, and Justice Minister Gideon Saar's New Hope with six. Meanwhile, Defence Minister Benny Gantz's centrist Blue and White currently has eight.

In terms of personalities, there are two notable changes in the approaching election. The first is Bennett's decision to take a break from politics for an unspecified period of time.

The 50-year-old hi-tech entrepreneur's Yamina party will thus be led this time around by his long-time political partner, Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked. However, like Bennett before last year's election, she is in no position to rival Netanyahu electorally – polls suggest her party will barely pass the electoral threshold of 3.2%.

The second personnel re-alignment is Justice Minister Saar's decision not to vie for the premiership, as he did in the last election, and instead endorse Gantz's candidacy and merge his New Hope party with Gantz's Blue and White. This, for now, is the most important development the new election has generated.

While the electoral contest for the premiership is set to be mainly between Netanyahu and Lapid, with Netanyahu enjoying a ten percentage-point lead as of now, what will decide the election is the balance between the pro- and anti-Netanyahu blocs – and here the Gantz-Saar joint ticket could be significant.

The Gantz-Saar ticket is expected to garner about 12-15% of the electorate. Moreover, they are the only ones in the anti-Netanyahu camp whose leadership is also acceptable to Netanyahu's ultra-Orthodox satellite parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism.

This could become very meaningful in the not-unlikely event that neither bloc wins a majority of 61 in the 120 seat Knesset. The balance of power in

such a scenario will lie with the anti-Zionist Joint List party which, unlike Mansour Abbas' Ra'am party, is unacceptable to both major parties as a coalition partner – and would likely reject participation in a governing coalition in any case.



A new alliance between Defence Minister Benny Gantz and Justice Minister Gideon Saar could be the key to a stable coalition government after the upcoming election (Image: Twitter)

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If another inconclusive election outcome results, pundits predict that some of Netanyahu's partners, especially the United Torah Judaism party, will refuse to allow him to push for yet another premature election. However, they find Lapid disagreeable due to his liberal record on religious issues. Therefore, pundits predict they will likely offer to support a rotation deal whereby the anti-Netanyahu camp gets the premiership first, but the top job would go to Gantz rather than Lapid.

The second prime minister in the rotation arrangement would be an unnamed Likud candidate. This way, everyone can await the results of Netanyahu's trial, which will hopefully end before any prospective rotation comes about. If the court clears him, everyone would accept his return to the premiership, while if he is convicted, even the staunchly loyal Likud would presumably replace him.

If such a deal would indeed come about, Israel would have what it hasn't had since 2018: a broad, consensual, stable, and durable government.

AIR

## HEZBOLLAH'S CALCULATED GAMBLE OVER GAS RIGHTS

Amos Harel

Israelis might not yet completely feel it, but their political and military leaders have recently shifted their attention to the north. The danger of an escalation with Lebanon over natural gas reserves in the Mediterranean has increased significantly.

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah has found a new axe to grind – the demarcation of the Israel-Lebanon maritime border – and looks like he has no intention of letting up.

Very quietly, the Israeli energy industry has been putting out feelers for alternatives to the drilling at the Karish site that was planned for September, for fear it will be

disrupted by the tension. The intelligence community, however, is reiterating that the danger of an all-out war with Hezbollah remains low.

A senior Israeli officer was recently asked about his confidence in these forecasts. On the face of it, he replied, Lebanon's political morass and woeful economy should deter Nasrallah from taking action.

But Hezbollah's shock kidnapping of two Israeli reservists in 2006, triggering the Second Lebanon War, remains a searing memory. "On July 11, a day before the war, we didn't have a clue," the officer said. "Looking back, I would have given a lot for us to have had just one day to prepare."

The intelligence community admits that the picture has become more complicated since then. Hezbollah had been floating threats at varying intensities for a few weeks, but around noon on July 2 this year, something happened, or maybe three somethings.

Hezbollah launched three drones to photograph the Karish rig in Israeli waters just south of the Lebanese border (though the border's exact location is in dispute with Hezbollah). The air force and navy shot down the drones and later announced that it had downed another drone a few days earlier.

The incident ended without casualties, but it was no minor affair. Compared to the years following the 2006 war, events are occurring at the border, and at a quicker pace. And when economic assets worth billions of dollars enter the picture, the size of the gamble also rises.

On July 13, Nasrallah threatened to disrupt the start of the drilling at Karish if an agreement on the border isn't reached by September with US mediation. He added that Lebanon could disrupt gas supply to Europe.

That's a significant point considering the implications of Russia's war on Ukraine. Not only have the prices of oil and gas surged, but Russia is threatening to reduce or even halt its supply to Europe this winter as punishment for the continent's support for Ukraine. EU officials who visited Israel in June admitted that they see Israeli gas as one of the alternatives to count on in the future.

A few days later, in private remarks that were leaked, Nasrallah warned that "things are liable to deteriorate into a war with Israel if it doesn't let Lebanon receive its rights and extract gas from the water. We're adopting a hard line: There will be no [gas] production in the whole Zionist entity if Lebanon doesn't get what's coming to it."

At the same time, it's important to note that Hezbollah's drones were taking pictures; explosives weren't attached. For now, Hezbollah's preferred method is psychological warfare; the aim doesn't seem to be war but rather a good agreement on the maritime border. Nasrallah is hedging the risk.

In response, the Israeli leadership, which released few statements following the downing of the drones, sharpened its tone. Prime Minister Yair Lapid and Defence Minister

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The preferred way out is an American demarcation of the maritime border in a way that's acceptable to both sides. In such a case, Israel would continue to drill at Karish and Lebanon would at last be able to launch a gas project north of the border.



But other experts believe that the gas issue is too Lebanon-specific for the Iranians to dictate the tone. This story, they say, begins and ends with Nasrallah.

Still, a dynamic of an escalation has been unleashed. With each side responding to a growing threat from the adversary, it's hard to control the process. Military Intelligence's 2022 appraisal mentioned Lebanon as an unexpected source of bad tidings. That danger, though being managed, has become

*Amos Harel has been the military correspondent and defence analyst for Haaretz for the past 12 years. © Haaretz (www.haaretz.com), reprinted by permission all rights reserved.*

# FARAH NEWS: HATE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Ran Porat

Continuing its long and established behaviour of spreading conspiracy theories, extremism and anti-semitism, the Australian Arabic online news and opinion portal, *Farah News*, has hosted several articles featuring antisemitic and extreme anti-Israel content over the last few months.

## AL-DAWLA: ISRAEL AN “AGGRESSIVE, RACIST, TERRORIST ENTITY”

Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood supporter and purveyor of antisemitic tropes Mohammad Seif al-Dawla is regularly featured in *Farah News*.

Noting the passing of 55 years since the 1967 Six Day War, known as the *Naksa* (setback) in Arabic, al-Dawla reminds readers in his column (originally on the Palestinian website *Qudsnet*, but republished in *Farah News* on June 5) that “On the anniversary of the setback... Israel is still the enemy.”

Al-Dawla claims, “the Zionist entity is still based on the alleged and false allegations that Palestine, Egypt and all the countries of the region have been occupied lands and peoples for 14 centuries of Arab and Islamic colonisation, and that the Zionist movement is a national liberation movement that succeeded in liberating part of its occupied land from these occupying Arabs.”

The mega-evil plan of the Jewish state, according to al-Dawla, is to divide and conquer the Middle East by encouraging peoples living within the Arab world to rebel against their governments: “It [Israel] provides all support to the ‘indigenous peoples and groups’ to liberate themselves from their Arab and Muslim colonisers and to establish their own independent states and states on the model of the Jewish state within the framework of its

declared project to break up the current Arab states.”

Moreover, asserts al-Dawla, Israel is “the spearhead of the Western colonial project and its military base and advanced strategy in our region, with the aim of separating our easts from our wests and preventing our unity, and a condition of ... subjugation against anyone who tries to liberate themselves from the grip of Western hegemony to the American squad.”

Israel is also the “settler enemy that uproots the Palestinians, abandons them, demolishes their homes, and seizes and settles on a daily basis what remains of Palestine’s land in the West Bank,” he adds. The Jewish state is also an “aggressive entity that has not stopped waging dozens of wars against us [the Arabs] and causing thousands of victims... It is the terrorist entity that considers terrorism and murder a cornerstone of its Zionist ideology and not just a means.”

A similar tone is found in al-Dawla’s ‘analysis’ (June 19 in *Farah News*, first published on *Qudsnet*) on an emerging coalition of Arab countries working together with Israel to counter the threat from Iran.

Al-Dawla is convinced, in line with the classic conspiracy about Jewish domination, that Israel (the “aggressive, racist, terrorist entity”) will transform these countries in the region into “protectorates” under Israeli control. “Which is more dangerous to the national security of countries like Egypt and Jordan? Iran or [Israel]?” he asks.

Al-Dawla also expresses dissatisfaction that the Arab states did not pursue nuclear weapons in response to Israel’s alleged capabilities: “Why did the Arab countries accept to play the same American-Israeli-European tune that bans nuclear weapons from all countries in the region except (Israel), instead of starting to build Arab nuclear projects to modify the balance of power and deterrence in the face of Israeli nuclear weapons?”

In “The mother of defeats” (July 4 in *Farah News*), al-Dawla warns that joining these ventures with Israel to counter Iran is “adoption of the enemy’s narrative – the Zionist [one].” Moreover, it would mean “handing over the leadership of the region to this enemy, and employing Arab military capabilities to protect its security, whose basic philosophy is based on eliminating the Arab presence.”

## JERUSALEM “RAPED” BY THE JEWS

Tensions between Palestinians and Israel in Jerusalem during Islam’s holy month of Ramadan also provoked *Farah News* to openly spread lies and conspiracies about Israel.

Al-Dawla’s “Palestine has waited for us for a long time” (May 19, also published on an Iraqi website) criticises what he describes as Arab impotence in assisting the Palestinians. The article finishes with the infamous fabrication about Israel’s evil plan to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Al-Dawla is angry because “when the hands of [Israel] began to extend to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Islamic



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and Christian holy sites,” the Palestinians were not aided by the Arabs and Muslims, who did not heed the call to “save Jerusalem and the holy sites from the clutches of occupation and Judaisation.” Instead, the Arabs were either silent or even normalised relations with Israel, which, he insists, is “at the height of its implementation of the temporal division scheme of Al-Aqsa Mosque.”

Al-Dawla’s *Farah News* article “Jerusalem is our flag” (April 18), published a month earlier, was an exercise in historical distortion, rejecting all historical connection between Jerusalem and Judaism.

“Jerusalem is the gate through which the aggressors throughout history,” says al-Dawla, “whether the Crusaders, the Franks or the Zionists, were trying to enter through it to our homelands, under false religious pretexts.” The Jewish “false religious pretext”, says al-Dawla, includes the existence of the Jewish Temple there “according to the fatwas of rabbis and contemporary Zionist leaders.”

This is all fake history, according to al-Dawla. Jerusalem “has always been a symbol ... of our Arab and Islamic identity,” and it is also “a false, fabricated and alleged symbol of the Zionists and the Crusaders before them.” Protecting it from the Jews “represents a wall of resistance against immunising Zionist usurpation with a false religious legitimacy,” he argues.

Jerusalem nowadays, cries al-Dawla, is being attacked by Israel: “the enemy today is escalating and intensifying the aggression against it, to digest it and swallow it up as soon as possible.” This organised Jewish campaign of “raping and Judaising Jerusalem is ancient” but continues today, he says.

Al-Dawla praises the “heroic steadfastness and resistance against the occupation’s wars on Gaza, against the Zionist policies of uprooting everything that is Palestinian, and in the face of the daily incursions into the Haram al-Sharif [Temple Mount] in the protection of the occupation forces, and the plans for the temporal division of the mosque as a prelude to seizing and demolishing it.”

Following the same line in denying the Jewish historical connection to Jerusalem, *Farah News’* editors selected for publication an article by Dr Ibrahim Hammami, the manager of “The Centre for Palestinian Issues” in London (taken from his blog). In “Correcting and directing the media discourse” (May 9), Hammami claims that the Western Wall (Kotel), a remnant of the second Jewish Temple compound, is “the Al-Buraq Wall [according to Islamic tradition, al-Buraq was Muhammad’s mythical horse that took him in a single night from Mecca to Jerusalem and back] and it is an absolute Islamic endowment.” Jerusalem, states Hammami, is “purely Arab and Islamic [and] no one can share it.”

Hammami’s article finishes with a justification for kidnapping Israeli soldiers: “The Israeli soldier is neither on a

picnic nor on vacation, he is a heavily armed soldier who practises aggression and criminality, and if he is caught, this is a capture and not a kidnapping.”

## ABU AKLEH KILLED BY ZIONIST “EXECUTIONER”

Following the tragic killing of Al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh in Jenin on May 11, *Farah News* immediately joined the chorus of media outlets repeating the Palestinian narrative pinning the blame for the journalist’s death on a deliberate attack by Israel designed to silence her reporting, without presenting any credible proof to support this accusation (and despite the independent US investigation that concluded in early July that even if it may have been an Israeli bullet that killed the reporter, there is no evidence to suggest it was anything but an accident).

Just two days after the incident (May 13), *Farah News* editors republished the original Al-Jazeera article “Why did Israel target Shireen Abu Akleh?”, which claims that the journalist was killed “with a bullet to the head fired by an Israeli sniper.” The text insists, “A lot of evidence confirms that the targeting of Shireen Abu Akleh was deliberate, because of her activity and daring” criticism of Israel.

The article then rehashes the conspiracy that “Israel [is] heading to complete the Judaisation of Jerusalem and the seizure or demolition of Islamic and Christian holy sites in the Holy City” and for that reason, “human rights centres have reported an increase in Tel Aviv targeting media crews.”

A week later, another regular *Farah News* contributor, Brussels-based Mostafa Meneg (who ironically presents himself as a “world peace ambassador”), jumped into the fray, spreading unfounded claims about Abu Akleh’s death.

In “The blood of two evils and the rulers of the Palestinians” (May 23), Meneg poetically deplores how Israel had supposedly deliberately assassinated the reporter to silence her.

“A single bullet was enough to silence the voice of Palestine, launched from the barrel of an unusual gun filled with hidden hatred, behind it a Zionist equipped with certainty, to put an end to the media thorn” that has exposed “the criminals, the leaders of the unjustified occupation” and “the rapists”.

“The executioner was chosen, as the mission would not be repeated twice. His number and military rank were known and he hated Palestinian rights with the advantage of fanatics,” Meneg adds.

AIR

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## THE BIBLIO FILE

# Busting myths

## Walter Russell Mead's new book examines the "Israel lobby"

Lahav Harkov

Israel has been an object of fascination for Americans since long before the establishment of the state, with the US founding fathers repeatedly comparing their fledgling republic to ancient Israel. And Israel has been on Team America for almost all of its existence – even when it felt a chill from Washington.

Walter Russell Mead, *Wall Street Journal* columnist and foreign affairs professor at Bard College, sets out to examine that relationship in his new book *Arc of a Covenant: The United States, Israel, and the Fate of the Jewish People*, reaching some surprising conclusions. He debunks myths about the American Left and Right's roles in supporting Israel and argues that Christians in the US played a more instrumental role in drumming up support for Zionism than American Jews did. He also thoroughly demolishes the myth of an all-powerful "Israel lobby" guiding US foreign policy.

Mead spoke with the *Jerusalem Post* about his new book and the current US-Israel relationship. The interview has been edited and condensed.

**You write that Americans exaggerate their influence on the region [and posit] that the influence of non-Jewish Israel supporters was greater than people think. How do**

### those things come together?

"I think probably the most important decision the US ever made regarding the future of Israel was the decision to cut mass emigration from Europe by 90% in 1924. As I say in the book, I think if we look at what percentage of Jews leaving Europe went to Palestine, and what percent went to the US before 1924, something like 2 to 3% went to Palestine and 80%



Walter Russell Mead

went to the US, more if you include Canada and so on. It's very interesting to speculate: If the US had kept open mass immigration, would there have ever been a large enough mass of Jews in Palestine to actually create a state?...

"I think from an American point of view, our conscience will always bear the memory, that if we had a different immigration policy in the 1920s and '30s, there might never have been a Holocaust... But on the other hand, would there be a State of Israel if Jews had been free to go elsewhere?"

### Is that question one of the things that inspired you to write this book?

"Several things inspired me to write the book. One was my sense that people in the US and around the world project antisemitic tropes and legends onto their discussion

of US-Israel policy. I've travelled all over giving lectures and meeting with people for the State Department as a speaker, and it was almost a universal conviction, not just in the Middle East, but I found it in Europe and Latin America, Malaysia, that the Jews run America, which is why America has a pro-Israel policy.

"Now there's a debate, is it that the Jews in Israel tell the American Jews what to do? And then they pass the instructions on to the American government? Or is it that the Jews in America are actually using Israel as part of their even grander Jewish plot? That kind of hate is morally reprehensible, but also, that kind of ignorance is dangerous.

"Part of the book is just trying to clear some things I want to dispel, some rancid urban legends about Jews and Jewish influence."

### What's a little-known fact or misunderstanding that you think Israelis need to better know about the relationship with the US?

"I spent a lot of time in the book, looking at the politics in the US, under [President] Harry Truman, between 1945 and 1948, leading up to the War of Independence. And it seems very clear to me that the idea was very common in America... that somehow Harry Truman saved the Jews. There's the story that in the spring of 1948, it all looks very dark and Harry Truman is refusing to see any Zionists, any American Jews. But then little Eddie Jacobson, Harry Truman's old Jewish friend and business partner from Missouri, comes in and says – kind of like Queen Esther – says to the moody gentile ruler, you've got to do something for my people. And so, Truman meets with [Chaim] Weizmann and then everything is settled, Israel was saved, and even the littlest Jew in the littlest town in America can play a role. That's this beautiful legend that people have. It's factual in the sense that Jacobson did intervene, and Truman



Truman with Weizmann – the story of Truman's role in Israel's birth is different than the traditional myths (Image: Truman Library)

did have a meeting with Weizmann.

“But in fact, American policy did not change as a result of that meeting, and right up through [the Israeli] Declaration of Independence, the US opposed the declaration of a Jewish state and wanted a new trusteeship to replace the British. The last thing the Israeli cabinet did before voting for independence was to vote to reject the American proposal for longer mediation. Israel actually begins its independent career by saying no to the US.”

**Truman pushed through recognition of the new State of Israel, despite State Department opposition.**

“What Truman said to the State Department in May '48 is, ‘you didn't give me a policy. You told me the Partition Plan was terrible. I said, fine, what should we do? You said a new trusteeship to avoid a war and then we'll have time to figure it out. Nobody supported the trusteeship and the old mandate ends at midnight. What should I do? You have no answer. Meanwhile the Soviet Union is going to recognise Israel.’

“That was not a good position for him to be in. There may be a connection between Weizmann's visit and Truman's thinking at this point, but there's no documentation.

“Truman didn't save the Jews in 1948. The Jews saved Truman because the success of Israel made Truman's policy look terrific.”

**That brings us to what you say in your**

**book, that the US-Israel relationship didn't grow because Israel was weak, but that once Israel was strong, the US was more interested in Israel.**

“That is true in all international relationships, not just the US-Israel relationship. That is one of the points I want to make. If you really study the US-Israel relationship, it doesn't look that different from other relationships. The same questions and interests go into the thinking on both sides.

“The hypothesis that the Jews or the Israel lobby are making the US behave differently where Israel is concerned just doesn't fit the facts as far as I can tell.”

**One of the things that you wrote is that you thought Americans are overly optimistic about the prospects for peace. The Biden Administration has said there's not going to be peace with the Palestinians in the short term, so they're trying to push for small incremental changes. How do you evaluate that policy?**

“It's a bit too soon to tell... but I think that there is a growing sense everywhere that the two-state solution has less support among Palestinians and Israelis.

“I do think the Biden Administration understands that there are limits to what it can achieve and, in this way, I would say it shows a good deal more intelligence than the Obama Administration did.”

**There is a lot of concern about Israel losing popularity in the US. How worried do you think Israel needs to be and what do you think is at the root of this decline?**

“Let me start by saying I don't actually think Israel's security or

survival depends on its popularity in the US. In 1948, the US might have recognised Israel, but Truman almost immediately started pressing for territorial concessions, and in the '50s, the Eisenhower Administration tried to get Israel to give up the Negev and take a lot of refugees, and Israel was an incredibly weak state. It had a terrible economy, was overwhelmed with refugees and facing enemies, who in many cases, were better equipped than they were.

“And Israel still stuck to its knitting, and got the job done.

“I say in the book that Israel didn't become strong because it had an American alliance, it got the American alliance because it became strong. So, in that sense, Israel should not get into some kind of nervous emotional meltdown every time people look at a poll result from the US.

“That said, the relationship offers a lot of benefits to Israel and is not something that one would lightly throw away, especially without an obvious alternative.

“I do think there's a sense in which a lot of people in Israel would like to isolate the Palestinian question completely from the relationship with the US. That's really not realistic. Israel really does need to think these things through. It's a puzzle, and all countries have these puzzles and things you might want to do. How do you balance them? That's part of what politics is about, right?”



*Lahav Harkov is the Senior Contributing Editor and Diplomatic Correspondent at the Jerusalem Post. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

# REBEL

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# ESSAY

## Storm damage

### The scars of the Second Intifada

Shany Mor

For most Jews, Passover means a festive meal, a Seder (or two) with family and close friends, eating matzah and retelling the story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery into freedom.

For many Israeli Jews, however, reflections on the holiday this year turned to memories considerably more recent, and less hopeful.

It was 20 years ago, on the first night of Passover 2002, that the most infamous suicide bombing in Israel took place. That night, and the weeks that followed, marked a dramatic turning point in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The reverberations of that time still dictate the contours of the conflict today.

This is not just a question of psychology, though it is that too. The dramatic events of those weeks left lessons to be learned for both sides, and as with all such dramas, some lessons have been overlearned. Beyond that, however, there was an irreversible change in the positions of the sides. Options for a political settlement that might still have existed before Passover 2002 permanently disappeared into a new reality. And rather different options that were not considered beforehand, both for a negotiated settlement and a *modus vivendi* in the absence of diplomacy, suddenly became conceivable.

This year, too, the Passover holiday coincided with yet another of the pe-

riodic escalations of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. The attacks themselves, as well as the whole vocabulary of the conflict, show just how deep the scars of Passover 2002 are.

### THE GLOOM BEFORE THE STORM: THE SECOND INTIFADA

The months leading up to Passover 2002 were the bloodiest Israelis had experienced on the home front since the 1948 war. In March 2002 alone, more than 100 Israelis were killed in suicide bombings; hundreds more were injured.

Sitting at a café, riding a bus, walking through an outdoor market – everyday tasks became imbued with a feeling of danger. You made bargains with yourself about what times you would go out, where might be the safest place to sit, or whether the day after an attack was the best time or the worst time to face the danger again.

Everyone came to know the sound of explosions, and if not explosions, then at least sirens. One or two could just be a heart attack or car accident. Three or more meant you grabbed your phone and started calling your friends, your parents, anyone with whom you might have had an unresolved argument earlier in the week.

*Are you ok? I think something happened.*

Hardcore ideologues and cranks had simple solutions, but for most people there was an overwhelming feeling of desolation and gloom. Nothing, it seemed, could be done.

The consensus that a military offensive would be folly was not just the ramblings of mushy leftists and pacifists. It was by and large the consensus of nearly all the experts in Israel and abroad. Any operation, it was argued, would result in hundreds of casualties to Israeli forces. It would not have the support of the United States or other major powers. It would leave in its wake hundreds if not thousands of civilian casualties. And, most importantly, it simply would not work. Every dead terrorist would spawn three new ones, increasing the sense of grievance and rage that was supposedly fuelling the violence to begin with.

We know today, with hindsight, that many of these premises turned out to be false. But it is worth recalling that the arguments made were robust and accepted as being largely true back then. If Israel had embarked on a major military offensive in

**“It was 20 years ago, on the first night of Passover 2002, that the most infamous suicide bombing in Israel took place”**

response to the wave of suicide bombings it had been dealing with throughout 2001, it is very likely that hundreds of soldiers would have been killed, that the US would have opposed the operation,

and that its success would have been limited.

But in those months of relentless suicide bombings, the IDF was making preparations. Beginning in October 2001, there were several small incursions into Area A of the West Bank, the parts that under the Oslo Accords were supposed to be under the exclusive control of the Palestinian Authority. Military tactics were honed, and operational lessons were learned.

On the diplomatic front conditions were also evolving. The 9/11 attacks made any association with terrorism





In Israel during 2001 and 2002, everyday activities such as sitting at a café, riding a bus or walking through an outdoor market became imbued with a real sense of danger (Images: Isranet)

a liability. In the initial months after September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration reached out to Arafat's Palestinian Authority in order to shore up its credibility in the Arab world as it was embarking on its "war on terror".

But then in January 2002, Israeli forces intercepted the *Karine A*, a ship laden with Iranian weapons *en route* to Gaza (then still under the control of Arafat's Palestinian Authority). The Bush Administration was outraged, and Arafat's lies to the President in a one-on-one call about the shipment only made matters worse for him. Arafat, who over the previous decade had grown accustomed to the status of an accepted world leader, would never again have an open line to the White House.

Thus, as a new wave of suicide bombings began in February 2002 – a month after the *Karine A* incident – Israeli leaders re-assessed their opportunity to respond militarily. The public could not withstand the relentless attacks on civilians, the IDF was readier than it had been before, and the Americans were more favourably disposed to Israeli action.

A quirk in the domestic political situation also gave the government a lot of breathing room to pursue its strategic patience. The right-wing Ariel Sharon had been directly elected as PM in a stunning landslide in 2001 (63-37%), but without a new Knesset (parliament) being elected. It was the only such election held in

Israel's history under an electoral law that has since been cancelled. Sharon came into office and inherited the parliament that had swept in with the more left-wing Ehud Barak's victory in 1999. The only way for Sharon to form a government was to keep Labor on board and have a broad-based national unity government, with leading dove Shimon Peres as his Foreign Minister. The lack of an effective opposition gave the government breathing room in a crisis that otherwise may have led to rash action.

## THE TIPPING POINT

By the time of the Passover Massacre, it seemed there was little left that could shock the Israeli public. A year earlier, 21 young Israelis, mostly teenage girls, were murdered outside a nightclub in Tel Aviv in a suicide bombing. Such attacks had become commonplace and were launched in pizzerias, on buses, throughout city centres. And as Passover approached at the end of March 2002, the pace had picked up to nearly one every two days.

And yet something about that night's deadly attack felt different. Perhaps it was the death toll, at 30, higher than in any other such attack. Perhaps it was that a third of the victims were Holocaust survivors. Perhaps it was the holiday itself that imbued it with such gravity – Jews gathering as Jews with families to celebrate deliverance from bondage into freedom. Whatever it was, a limit had

been breached, and it was obvious to all that the response would be qualitatively different than anything which preceded it.

That weekend, 20,000 reservists received emergency call-up orders. In a country normally wracked with infighting, there was a brief, determined, grim agreement about the necessity of a large military offensive.

The Israeli response was not, however, supported by an international consensus. Protests against Israel erupted in all the major Western capitals though, notably, there were few if any protests against the Palestinian suicide bombings.

The US was nearly alone then in defending Israel's right to self-defence. European condemnations were swift and occasionally severe. The European Parliament passed a non-binding resolution calling for sanctions against Israel.

International media coverage of the operation was overwhelmingly negative and certain that the operation could never achieve its goals of ending the wave of terrorism targeting Israeli civilians. Major global NGOs, mobilised only a few months before at the UN's infamous Durban Conference to dedicate their work to fighting Israeli "apartheid" and "war crimes", issued reports employing language never used for even the worst human rights violators. The two standard tropes that accompany discussion of any Israeli military operation – *Israel is harming a holy site! Israel has committed an atrocity!* – were both rolled out this time.

News reporting focused on three major events, none of which related to attacks on Israelis. The first was the IDF's breach of Arafat's Mukataa compound in Ramallah.

The second was at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, where dozens of wanted terrorists had taken refuge, secure in the knowledge that Israel wouldn't harm such a holy Christian site. The IDF surrounded the Church and left only

after five weeks when an agreement was reached that saw most of the wanted men deported. Tellingly, this was reported at the time as an “Israeli siege” of a Christian holy site, leading to some rather explicitly antisemitic imagery in the European press.

The third locus of combat that caught the world’s attention was, of course, the Jenin refugee camp, site of a pitched battle between the IDF and assorted Palestinian militant factions. It was the site of one of the only tactical successes Palestinian forces had against the IDF, when booby-trapped houses exploded on an invading force and killed thirteen Israeli soldiers. It was soon after that rumours that the IDF had conducted a “massacre” in Jenin began.

For more than two weeks, the news of the “massacre” dominated foreign press coverage, especially in Britain. “Firsthand” accounts spoke of entire families wiped out, of the stench of bodies buried under rubble, and of active efforts by the Israelis to cover it up.

After more than a fortnight of hysteria, it became clear that there was no massacre at all. All the dead in the battle were accounted for – 23 Israeli soldiers and 52 Palestinians, the bulk of whom were combatants.

There was never a moral or professional reckoning among the media outlets and NGOs about the fabricated reports of massacres. And the pattern of reporting which relies on a demonic archetype of Israelis, scheming, plotting, killing, covering up, was repeated again in Israel’s war with Hezbollah in Lebanon four years later, again in Israel’s war with Hamas in Gaza three years after that, and again ever since.

## FOR ISRAELIS, A BITTER DISILLUSIONMENT

The 1993 Oslo Accords were pitched to Israelis with a double promise. They would improve the security of Israel, battered by decades of terrorism. And if that first promise remained unfulfilled – even after Israel recognised the PLO and carried

out the staged withdrawals from the Gaza Strip and West Bank as called for in the Agreements – then the whole world would see who the bad guys really were and stand by Israel.

Neither promise was realised and each disappointment left deep scars on the Israeli psyche.

The scars of the first broken promise are the most visible and measurable. Almost immediately after the Accords were signed, the number of attacks against Israeli civilians went up rather than down. Then came the suicide bombings. There was a brief lull in the years 1998 and 1999, but by 2000, with the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Israelis experienced violent attacks with an unprecedented intensity and frequency.

The effect on public opinion was stark. On the one hand, an enormous scepticism emerged about peace with the Palestinians. On the other, there was a growing wariness about the utility of the occupation.

This is what opened the way for a right-wing leader like Ariel Sharon to eventually undertake a large military offensive as well as a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip (and four settlements in the northern West Bank) in 2005.

The scars of the second broken promise aren’t as visible, but they run much deeper and, if anything, weigh even more heavily on Israeli thinking. Israelis still obsessively pay attention to global public opinion, but the broad centre of Israeli politics is no longer moved by expectations of global support.

There has, in the last 20 years, emerged among the Israeli Left a healthy cynicism about the motivations of much of what passes for “criticism of Israel,” as well as about



Following the Passover massacre tipping point, Israeli forces retook the cities of the West Bank, then began construction of the West Bank security barrier (Images: Isranet)

how much that “criticism” can be an argument for or against any policy.

The two disappointments together may have eviscerated the old pro-Oslo Left electorally, but they have also rendered the policy debate in Israel altogether more mature. Israel will take the steps it needs to protect its security and long-term viability, but not because of a fantasy of pacific intentions from its enemies or the accusations of its critics, but because it will be the strategically and morally right thing to do.

In later years, slowly, gradually, without any announcement or fanfare, the Intifada receded into memory, and life returned to a kind of normalcy. Security checks at restaurants and event halls became cursory and then disappeared altogether, as did fences around sidewalk cafes.

But the lessons of the two broken promises would not be forgotten.

## FOR PALESTINIANS, A DELAYED RECKONING

The Palestinians, too, took some



time to understand the meaning of the events of that spring. By that point, the second Intifada was already well into its second year, and it was clear even then that it was a costly affair. It was also clear that statehood, which could have been achieved in final status talks in 2000, had been put off indefinitely.

It would take a few years for the Palestinians to understand the magnitude of their defeat. By the end of 2002, the IDF was operating freely throughout the West Bank, including in Area A. A massive fence was soon under construction, making access to Israel more difficult and reversing decades of economic integration between Israelis and West Bank Palestinians. By the end of 2004, Arafat was dead (from illness) and most of the leaders of various militant groups were either dead (by assassination) or in prison.

The rejection of statehood and descent into suicidal violence had yielded absolutely nothing positive for the Palestinian cause.

Oslo had brought them the first ever Palestinian Arab self-rule and government. Palestinian passports were issued as were Palestinian postage stamps. An international airport was built and operated in the Gaza Strip. An armed force, referred to technically as a “police” force, was established under Palestinian control. Diplomatic legations opened in both Ramallah and Gaza City. Elections were held in the West Bank and Gaza, and even east Jerusalem Palestinians were allowed to participate, despite east Jerusalem not being in the territory allotted to the Palestinian Authority. International investment and development aid were showered on the Palestinians at a per capita rate unseen anywhere else in the world.

These were not just the symbolic trappings of statehood. They led, in fact, to final status talks at which statehood was offered in exchange for a full peace with Israel – and rejected.

## WAR HAS CONSEQUENCES

History has periods of plodding stability and bursts of irrevocable change. The bleak reality of Palestinian politics is mostly the outcome of three very different Arab-Israeli wars which broke out in 1947, 1967 and 2000.

The first was a year-long total war between two national communities, fought village by village and town by town, whose belligerents included militias, guerrillas and eventually standing armies. The second, in 1967, was a rapid war between modern, conventional armies across three fronts fought, for the most part, distant from civilian populations. And the third, beginning in 2000, was a long struggle between assorted militias and civilians as well as the armed forces of a state-in-the-making and an occupying army.

Each one of these wars was preceded by bellicose rhetoric from the Arab side and almost unbridled enthusiasm for a fight, with few if any dissenting voices. Each ended in a catastrophic defeat and with the memory of the pre-war ecstasy completely effaced, replaced with a feeling of victimhood and a genuine memory of having come under unprovoked attack.

And here we are, twenty years after the third catastrophe. It is gutting to realise that in 2000 there were no significant dissenting voices to the Palestinians’ decision to refuse peace with Israel and instead launch a violent campaign of suicidal terrorism, where suicide was not just a means,

but something of a metaphor for the whole endeavour. It’s depressing to realise that even now, two decades after the climax of that campaign, there is still no significant voice – not even an unpopular voice of dissent – to articulate why, or even that, it was a mistake.

And it is maddening that in the broader community of pro-Palestinian activism in the West, this view is simply non-existent.

Quite the opposite: The idea that the final defeat of Israel is near if we just wish for it hard enough has never had more purchase on the pro-Palestinian intellectual discourse. With each glossy new report accusing Israel of being an inherently criminal enterprise; with each gushing proclamation of the “new” idea of a possible one-state solution (which is neither a solution, nor new, nor possible), the path to liberation grows longer and more treacherous.

AIR

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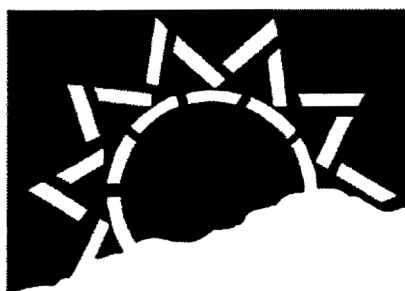
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Andrew and Carol Crawford

# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### THE SEMANTICS OF “SEMITISM”

On the ABC “Religion & Ethics” website (July 13), writer and broadcaster John Safran used the South Australian Parliament’s recent adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism to challenge claims aired by its critics.

Safran noted Greens MP Tammy Franks’ speech to Parliament, which condemned antisemitism, but claimed that the IHRA definition was designed to prevent criticism of Israel.

Franks, he noted, told Parliament that “a Semite... includes a much broader range of people than the Jewish people” and because it’s not clear what a Semite is, it’s not clear what antisemitism means.

Safran explained that the word ‘antisemitism’ only refers to hatred for Jews. The word was coined in “the nineteenth century, when European ‘race scientists’ began labelling Jews as ‘Semites’ to distinguish them from the supposedly superior Aryans. Responding to this, a Jewish intellectual, Moritz Steinschneider, coined the term ‘anti-semitism’,” he wrote.

Earlier (July 8), a news brief in the *Advertiser* on South Australia’s Parliament adopting the IHRA definition was headlined “SA to adopt anti-Semitic legal ruling.” In fact, the definition is not a piece of legislation and adopting it has no legal ramifications. It is a document explaining what anti-semitism is and providing 11 examples to assist in identifying it.

Meanwhile, the *Australian* (June 29) welcomed Sydney University Vice-Chancellor Mark Scott’s statement that “anti-Semitic language or behaviour on campus” will not be tolerated in his condemnation of an extreme anti-Israel motion passed by the institution’s

Student’s Representative Council on June 1.

### UNDOCUMENTED

Accusations of antisemitism at this year’s German arts festival *Documenta* made the news in Australia.

*Guardian Australia* reported (July 18) *Documenta* Director General Sabine Schormann’s resignation after the board expressed “profound dismay” about “clearly anti-Semitic content”.

The report noted the controversy centred on a mural by Indonesian art group Taring Padi which depicts a pig wearing a helmet with the word “Mossad” on it, and an Orthodox Jewish man with SS insignia and fangs dripping with blood. [Ed. Note – *The imagery allegedly relates to unfounded claims that Israel supposedly helped former Indonesian President Sukarno murder thousands of political enemies in 1965*].

The festival also faced criticism for including a Palestinian group which supports the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which the report said is a problem because half of *Documenta*’s budget comes from the German government, which considers BDS antisemitic.

Earlier (July 2), the ABC website profiled Australian artists who are exhibiting at *Documenta* and referenced the current controversy.

The ABC noted the involvement of Western Sydney Arab theatre group but not this group’s boycott of this year’s Sydney Festival because Israel’s embassy in Canberra had provided funding for a dance performance. The article also did not note that the controversial mural by Taring Padi was first exhibited at the Adelaide Arts Festival in 2002.

### ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

In the *Age* (June 24), Hindu academic and priest Dr Jayant Bapat welcomed the Victorian Parliament’s recent vote to ban public displays of the Nazi swastika saying “no one could disagree that such symbols must be stamped out.”

Dr Bapat explained that the new laws exempt displays of the swastika for the Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and other faith communities.

The swastika is found all over India, he said, and “far from being a hate symbol, the Indian swastika is steeped in auspiciousness, goodness and love” and “the Sanskrit word swastika literally means ‘all is well’.”

### GOING DOWN

An *SBS TV* “News in Arabic” report (June 17) about an elevator Israel is installing outside the Tomb of the Patriarchs/Ibrahimi Mosque holy site in Hebron on the West Bank to give easier access for elderly and disabled people included totally baseless claims by the reporter.

With no evidence whatsoever – and no Israeli or Jewish perspectives included – the reporter stated as fact that the project is meant to “facilitate settler incursions into the mosque with the aim of Judaising and controlling it.”

Later, the reporter again stated as fact that, “in order to obliterate the place’s Islamic identity, the elevator installation extends over an area of 300 square metres in the courtyards of the Ibrahimi Mosque.”

The report also included two Palestinians making the same false claims as the reporter.

The report concluded by noting the site’s significance as a Muslim landmark but ignoring its religious importance

in Judaism, which regards it as the second holiest site in the world after Jerusalem.

On July 13, *SBS Radio* “Arabic24” and *SBS TV* “News in Arabic” incorrectly referred to Tel Aviv and not Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

On June 27, “News in Arabic” reported on a Palestinian cultural exhibition in Sydney and claimed it “reveal[s] the secrets of Palestinian heritage and deepens the sense of belonging to the homeland and to history, despite attempts to abolish this Palestinian heritage and its Arabism.”

## SHORT BUT SWEET

In the *Daily Telegraph* (July 4), *AI-JAC*’s Colin Rubenstein said the brev-

ity of Israel’s outgoing Bennett-Lapid Government belies its achievements.

Dispelling suggestions that it was an “experiment which failed”, Dr Rubenstein opined, “After almost two years of political paralysis, and four election campaigns in 24 months all ending in deadlock, the ... government was able to govern reasonably effectively for that year, including passing a budget in November 2021 – the first in almost four years – and keeping the economy progressing on an even keel.”

In foreign policy, “the government... extended the historic 2020 Abraham Accords with a series of impressive new agreements and meetings with the UAE, Morocco, Bahrain, Egypt and Jordan,” while Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons “led to closer

strategic co-operation with the US and important regional allies, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia.”

Moreover, the decision by the Islamist Ra’am party to join the Government “broke a long-held political taboo by Arab parties” and marked a turning point for future Jewish-Arab relations, he argued.

## SELECTIVE JUSTICE

In the *Australian* (June 23), Australian Strategic Policy Institute Executive Director Justin Bassi said people lobbying the Albanese Government to intervene in “another country’s legal process” so Julian Assange can return to Australia were “hypocrites”.

Bassi asked, “Where is the loud



## IN PARLIAMENT

The following speeches were made in the Legislative Council of the South Australian Parliament on June 15 on the motion by **Sarah Game** (One Nation) that the Council “Endorses and adopts the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism together with its contemporary examples...”

**Dennis Hood** (Liberal) – “It is imperative that a universal definition of antisemitism is recognised in order to better protect our Jewish citizens and inform policymakers and, indeed, debate in this place... Indeed, it is unfortunate that the Jewish community is one of the only groups within Australia whose places of worship, their schools, their communal organisations and community centres are required to operate under the protection of high fences in many cases, armed guards in some cases, metal detectors, CCTV cameras and the like, for security purposes.”

**Tammy Franks** (Greens) – “What is not as clear is what is a Semite? In my exploration of this issue, it has become clear that the definition is not as simple as it has been portrayed. Originally, a Semite was someone who spoke a Semitic language. This is a family of languages that came from areas that spanned from western Asia to Africa. The meaning includes a much broader range of people than the Jewish people. The definition of antisemitism clearly requires clarity in order to be understood here.”

The following speeches were made regarding the same motion on July 7:

**Emily Bourke** (ALP) – “Antisemitism has no place in our country or, indeed, anywhere. These racist and repugnant views should rightfully be condemned... It is concerning that there are reports of antisemitism being on the rise in our commu-

nity... The motion seeks to endorse a definition of antisemitism as defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. I understand that this definition has been recognised and endorsed in a number of other jurisdictions, including interstate. I agree that a definition of antisemitism will have value in governments and individuals being able to identify and respond to antisemitic behaviours in our communities. On this basis, the government will be supporting this important motion.”

**Connie Bonaros** (SA-Best) – “In May last year I introduced a motion in this place calling on us to recognise the right of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced... we cannot support motions or actions that risk silencing the conversation about people suffering and about the suffering of Palestinian people—the Palestinian people who continue to live without basic human rights in an open-air prison with sweeping restrictions on movement.

“...I also will place on the record, the analysis of the motion by [the Australian Friends of Palestine Association]. Can I say that is an organisation that I am extremely proud to be involved with. This has been provided by Paul Heywood-Smith QC:... Jewish students at the University of Adelaide are entitled to be upset over pro-Nazi posters, swastikas, etc. They are not entitled to be upset over for example:...comparing Israel’s ethnic cleansing of east Jerusalem with Nazi policies...”

**Frank Pangallo** (SA-Best) – “I am not so sure that many in this place will have taken the time to seek some clarity and consider the possible implications, particularly the chilling risk to limiting the freedom of expression in criticism of Israel and discussing the violation of the human rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories, should the IHRA definition be widely adopted.”



constant cross-party effort in relation to Australians detained in China?... How often do you hear Assange supporters talk about them or those Australians on death row in China, one of whom, Ibrahim Jalloh, is intellectually disabled? It boils down to this: global fear of being punished by China for any criticism versus the confidence that the US and the UK will rationally engage.”

Similarly, he said, “the hypocrisy is matched by many Muslim-majority countries that have the freedom to criticise Israel in relation to its treatment of Palestinians but are too scared or don’t care about Muslim minorities in China.”

## COLD TURKEY

In the *Spectator Australia* (June 25), Israeli journalist Anshel Pfeffer reviewed the numerous foreign policy missteps Turkish President Erdogan has presided over, which have left “him... out in the cold” and forced him to strengthen relations with Israel after freezing them nearly a decade ago.

According to Pfeffer, “under Erdogan, a robust alliance between Israel and Turkey, which had lasted for nearly half a century, ended. Seeing himself as the leader of the Muslim world, Erdogan assumed patronage of the Palestinian cause, accusing Israel of ‘genocide’ in Gaza and using anti-Semitic language.”

In the intervening years, Israel responded by forming “a new alliance with Turkey’s rivals, Greece and Cyprus, holding joint military exercises and planning with them a natural-gas pipeline under the eastern Mediterranean. Israel has also been improving its ties with ‘moderate’ Arab-Sunni regimes in the region who have no time for the Turkish President.”

## GREY EMINENCE

One year shy of his centenary, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger showed he has lost none of his acumen, warning in the *Spectator Australia* (July 2) about the dangers of

resurrecting the flawed 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

Kissinger said, “it is very dangerous to go back to an agreement that was inadequate to begin with [or worse] to modify it in a direction that makes it apparently more tolerable to the adversary.”

The flaws in the deal, he said, included the difficulty of verifying “Iran’s promises”.

Although the deal may have slowed down Iran attaining nuclear weapons “a little”, he said, it actually made it “more inevitable” by formalising it.

The 2015 deal also does not resolve the problem that “there is no way you can have peace in the Middle East with nuclear weapons in Iran, because before that happens, there is a high danger of pre-emption by Israel, because Israel cannot wait for deterrents. It can afford only one blow on itself.”

## AN UNHOLY TRINITY

AIJAC’s Oved Lobel in the *Australian* (July 21) warned Australian policymakers to prioritise the increasing threat posed by Iran, Russia and China working together to advance each other’s imperial interests.

Lobel noted the critical support Iran receives from China. This includes China signing an economic cooperation agreement worth hundreds of billions of dollars, contributing to Iran’s ballistic missile program and mitigating the worst effects of crushing US sanctions by illegally purchasing Iranian oil.

Citing media reports, Lobel said Iran is undermining efforts to stop the war in Ukraine by sending Russia hundreds of drones.

“It has been recognised on a bipartisan basis in Australia that it is no longer possible to compartmentalise the challenge from Russia and China,” he argued. “Yet, strangely, Iran often is left out of the discussion, even though it’s clearly a core partner in the combined effort to undermine and displace the US and its allies and associated ideas of democracy and human rights. Iran’s

intention materially to support Russia’s invasion of Ukraine ideally will rectify this oversight.”

## RIGHT-WING ROUNDUP

The Adelaide *Advertiser*’s Michael McGuire warned that Indigenous Australians in Adelaide are at risk from attacks by a resurgence in support for the far right (July 5).

McGuire recalled the proliferation of far-right groups in Adelaide during the 1980s and 1990s, including anti-Asian rallies of the National Front, the Holocaust-denying Adelaide Institute and skinheads belonging to National Action giving the Hitler salute.

“Perhaps”, he said, “they feel emboldened that their views are not as repellent to broader society as they have been.”

He cited former US President Donald Trump’s dalliances with White Supremacist groups, domestic leaders who “demonise asylum-seekers, refugees and immigrants” and the “confluence between the far-right and the anti-vaxxers.”

Meanwhile, the Hobart *Mercury* (July 9) reported the Jewish community in Launceston was frustrated at the inaction of the local council in failing to remove a swastika graffitied near their synagogue.

On July 18, the *Herald Sun* reported the discovery of an antisemitic flyer blaming Jews for COVID-19 and lockdowns posted on the fence of the Sassoon Yehuda Synagogue in Melbourne.

## NATURE CALLS

Journalist Irris Makler’s profile of Israeli-based, Melbourne-born environmental consultant Gidon Bromberg in the *Australian* (July 2) discussed how environment-based projects are effectively normalising relations between Israel and its neighbours.

The construction of three modern waste water treatment plants in Gaza has resulted in Palestinians being able to swim in the sea for the first time in a de-

cade. Previous attempts to complete the project were hampered by Israel's fear Hamas would "siphon" cement off to use to build terror tunnels, Bromberg said.

However, he noted, Israel acquiesced after being informed sewage from Gaza was infecting Israeli territorial water with *E. coli* bacteria and had also forced the nearby desalination plant in Ashkelon to shut down occasionally.

Another environmental project with the potential to create real change is an agreement signed in 2021 whereby Jordan will "produce solar energy for sale to Israel and Israel will produce desalinated water for sale to Jordan."

"Politicians speak of disengagement. Politicians speak of blockades. But ... you can never disengage from a shared environment. What the environment teaches us is that we're dependent on each other, whether we like each other or not," he explained.

## WHAT'S MCGREAL'S DEAL?

The *Guardian Australia* (July 20) ran another instalment from former Jerusalem-based correspondent Chris McGreal implying it was somehow illegitimate and undemocratic for pro-Israel organisations in the US to spend money opposing Democratic candidates with anti-Israel track records.

The article focused on the contest between former Congresswoman Donna Edwards and Glenn Ivey in Maryland's 4th Congressional District.

McGreal implied there was a racist element to AIPAC's campaigning, noting that Edwards served "eight years as the first Black woman elected to Congress from Maryland before losing a bid for the Senate in 2016."

Not revealed was that Ivey, Edwards' challenger, who subsequently won the nomination, is also Black and belongs to the progressive camp!

The report also used provocative language saying, "Critics accuse AIPAC and its allies of *distorting* Democratic politics in part because much of the money used to influence primary races

comes from billionaire Republicans" [*emphasis added*].

The article quoted Logan Bayroff from J Street, a left wing lobby group that claims to support both Israel and two-state peace but frequently parrots Palestinian talking points. Bayroff called AIPAC "a Republican front organisation" – despite its long history of support for both Republicans and Democrats – and accused it "of crushing a fairly popular mainstream candidate who they've labelled anti-Israel with no evidence... It's really alarming and it's fundamentally anti-democratic."

The report did include AIPAC supporter Patrick Dorton pointing out that the group receives financial backing from high profile Democrat donors and noting that "We're exercising our democratic first amendment rights in participating in these elections. If you want to look at politicians who've intimidated people and chilled discussion on ... US-Israel relationship, look at the Squad... there [a]re an increasing number of candidates with radical anti-Israel views running for Congress. Our view is that is dangerous for American democracy and could negatively impact the bipartisan support for the US-Israel relationship."

## POWER PLAYS

Other media reports showed how AIPAC's actions are entirely reasonable and McGreal's articles amount to beat ups.

The *Australian's* US correspondent Adam Creighton (July 19) reported on the astronomical sums the Democratic Party has spent to, as McGreal put it, "distort" the primaries of its Republican party rivals.

According to Creighton, the Democrats have "spent a fortune – \$US44 million so far – elevating and supporting the most ardent supporters of Donald Trump in the Republican primaries, elections which determine which GOP candidates will stand against Democrats in the November

midterm Congressional and gubernatorial elections, in the hope they'll be easier to beat than moderates."

"Such sums are more than any major US political party has spent meddling in the affairs of its opponents, with well over three months still to go."

It is worth noting that the US\$44 million being spent by Democrats to promote pro-Trump Republicans dwarfs the US\$8.5 million that AIPAC reportedly has allocated for its political action committees to spend to promote candidates this year.

On July 26, *Guardian Australia* reported that the Democrats spent US\$3 million to help a pro-Trump Republican who also supports the antisemitic QAnon conspiracy theories win the party nomination for Governor of Maryland. That article was not by Chris McGreal.

## OFF SIDE RULES

A *Guardian Australia* article (July 12) on the Palestinian national football team was a typical pro-Palestinian advocacy piece.

Making no reference to the wars of aggression and terrorism Israel has faced since before it was created, the piece claimed the development of Palestinian football has been adversely affected by "Israel's increasing control of Palestinian territory since 1948... a major international issue with consequences in every field."

Except, of course, from 1948 till 1967, Egypt and Jordan controlled Gaza and the West Bank respectively and neither country made any move to create a Palestinian state on those territories, let alone foster a Palestinian football team.

Including accusations that Israel has killed and injured Palestinian players and bombed stadiums, the story ignored the context for those things, such as the Second Intifada's suicide bombings and Hamas' indiscriminate firing of tens of thousands of rockets into Israel from Gaza, precipitating four wars.

# MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

## BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND RIYADH

Joe Biden's first official trip to the Middle East since becoming US President was freighted with the foreign policy legacies of the Obama and Trump Administrations, and the strategic challenge of China, Russia and Iran working to dominate the region.

On *ABC RN* "Breakfast" (July 14), Dan Shapiro, President Obama's former Ambassador to Israel, said the strategic aim of the visit included encouraging "recognition of Israel by Arab states who previously did not do so... [and] deepen[ing] Israel and US security cooperation... in the context of Israel now being included in... CENTCOM, the US military command... that oversees the Middle East." He added that "the hope" is that this "will lead to an eventual integration of air defences [with Arab militaries] against the common threats... from Iran and its proxies."

*Jerusalem Post* writer Seth Frantzman told *ABC RN* "Drive" (July 14) that the visit aimed to recalibrate the Democratic Party's relationship with the US's traditional Middle East allies – Saudi Arabia, Israel and Turkey – which "some key policy people around Obama, not necessarily Biden himself... chuck[ed] aside [to] mov[e] the US] potentially closer to Iran or... out of the region in general."

On *ABC TV* "The World" (July 14), the US Studies Centre's Jared Mondschein said Biden has "not really back[ed] down from a number of the sort of steps that the Trump Administration took in Israel... there's no question... the region is... more stable than it was before... Trump... The fact that Joe Biden is flying [directly] from Israel to Saudi Arabia is unprecedented... you could say that Saudi Arabia now is sort of a de facto signatory to the Abraham Accords. And again, that is a major pivot from where we were just ten, 15 years ago."

Discussing the Administration's relations with the Palestinian Authority, Israeli analyst Neri Zilber told *ABC News Radio* (July 15) "there are major disagreements... The Palestinians [are] angry and disappointed at the Americans for not delivering more in terms of a real political horizon and a resumption of peace talks and an end to the occupation... On the flip side, the Americans are making it very clear that while they support Palestinian aspirations and are striving to improve the daily lives of Palestinians here

in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip... a peace process is not on the table at the moment."

The *Australian* editorialised (July 15), that the Biden Administration "is paying a high price for the... neglect of the region" and needed to "make... it clear... to Israel

and Saudi Arabia [it is] determined to end the US policy stasis and to fully re-engage." Meanwhile, the *Guardian Australia* (July 21) warned that the US effort to "bolster ties between Israel and the Arab states... risks not only pushing Tehran closer to Moscow, but also heightening conflict... an arms race and

long-term instability."

On *SBS Radio* "Arabic24" (July 14), Ibrahim Qadan, a former member of the anti-Israel Sydney Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, said the "the first and last goal of the visit is Israel" and claimed that settlements have made it impossible to establish a Palestinian state between the "river and the sea."

There was also wide media coverage of Biden and Israeli PM Lapid's signing of the "Jerusalem Declaration", which deepens US and Israel security ties against Iran and commits to helping Israel retain its qualitative military edge. On *SBS TV* "News in Arabic" (July 15), Beirut-based analyst Tariq Aboud told the program "an alliance or bloc between Israel and the Gulf states will not protect Israel and the Gulf states from Iran. What protects the Gulf states is the cooperation between Iran and the Gulf states."

The bulletin also noted Biden and Lapid's virtual meeting with the leaders of India and the UAE as part of the new "I2U2" summit.

Media reports (July 17/18) of Biden's visit to Riyadh focused on the Administration's about face towards Saudi de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), who US intelligence has alleged ordered the gruesome murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey in 2018. Many reports said that when Khashoggi was raised by Biden in his meeting with MBS, the Prince asked why the US wasn't investigating the death of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akhle, hit by a bullet during a firefight between Israeli forces and Palestinian terrorists on May 11.

On the ABC website (July 17), Stan Grant noted that the message Biden heard in Riyadh was "if he doesn't see the potential of Saudi [Arabia]... China will."



# THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

## DEFYING DEFINITION

Discussions of the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism have seen some extraordinarily unsavoury commentary.

In the NSW Upper House, Greens MLC Abigail Boyd completely mischaracterised the Working Definition so as to criticise it for failing to do what it actually does do and for doing precisely what it doesn't.

With no understanding of the way the definition came about, she framed it as a defence by Israel against "evidence-based criticism" and urged the adoption of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, which has precisely zero support from serious organisations seeking to analyse and respond to contemporary antisemitism.

She claimed that her party stood against antisemitism, but failed to list even one initiative or action it has ever taken in defence of the Jewish community.

Her party colleague in the South Australian Parliament, Tammy Franks, began by limiting antisemitism to far-right wing extremism, neglecting any other sources of this hatred.

Having made it clear she didn't know what forms antisemitism takes, she then said, "What is not as clear is 'what is a semite?'" before demonstrating an apparent aversion to the most basic of research.

As John Safran wrote on the ABC Religion & Ethics website, "This is like arguing that, because the original meaning of 'lesbian' was 'person from the Greek Island of Lesbos', a discussion about lesbian bars in Adelaide can't continue until we have gotten that straight."

As Safran noted, Franks was in lockstep with *Green Left Weekly*, which recently published a piece on "Anti-Arab Antisemitism".

In his article, which I highly recommend, Safran notes, "The Jews came up with the word [antisemitism] to describe the activity of those clobbering us while calling us Semites. It's wild that this has been twisted into both an

ancient and very modern take; that the Jews are always up to something suspicious, always plotting – in this case, they

are culturally appropriating a word that doesn't belong to them!"

Of course, it is not only Greens who have made ridiculous contributions on this subject. The Honourable Shaoquette Moselmane, an ALP member in the NSW Parliament, continued his tradition of making teenage Trotskyists look like balanced thinkers. The highlight of his speech was saying that the Working Definition "is a political tool being used to deflect criticism of Israel as

an apartheid State, which has subjugated, oppressed and dehumanised the Palestinian people for the past seventy years."

In possibly one of the most infantile comments made by a parliamentarian, Moselmane said, "If members Google the IHRA Definition they will find many documents criticising it."

His party colleague, the Hon. Antony D'Adam described himself "as the grandson of a refugee from fascism and someone with Jewish ancestry." He made the bizarre claim that "the definition implies that Israel is a proxy for Jewish people, and it is not," thus denying that people who do not like Jews as individuals generally do not like the one country where the majority of citizens are Jewish.

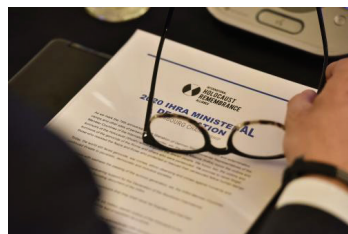
Providing evidence of his ignorance, D'Adam added, "in fact, I would argue that Israel has made Jewish people even more unsafe," without any coherent explanation of where this stunning conclusion came from.

Over in New Zealand, long time anti-Israel propagandist John Minto broadened the attack to encompass not just the Working Definition but the globally respected International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

IHRA sets the gold standard on Holocaust Remembrance and education, yet Minto framed it as a "partisan political organisation", saying that he is disgusted his Government has decided to join.

Let me be clear: opposing Holocaust remembrance and education because you are worried it will give people an understanding of the Middle East which you do not want them to have is about as low a moral act as one can commit.

These Parliamentarians and propagandists should hang their heads in shame.



A widely-used definition of anti-semitism is provoking some very unsavoury claims (Image: Twitter)



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