

## JCPOA 2.0?

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

September's edition of the *AIR* focusses on an apparent new iteration of the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal with Iran which reports say may be imminent.

Omri Nahmias gets some top expert opinion on what is being discussed in the negotiations from Elliott Abrams, Richard Goldberg, Dennis Ross and others. Brig. (res.) Jacob Nagel, the former head of Israel's National Security Council, writing with US-based expert Jonathan Schanzer, looks at the history of nuclear negotiations with Iran, the problems with a return to the JCPOA, and alternatives. Plus, in the wake of the Rushdie stabbing and Iranian attempts to murder former senior US officials John Bolton and Mike Pompeo, Michael Rubin explains how Teheran continues to get away with murder without serious consequences.

Also featured this month is a review of the outcome of "Operation Breaking Dawn", Israel's three-day conflict with Palestinian Islamic Jihad, by veteran Israeli military correspondent Ron Ben-Yishai. Plus, Eliana Chiovetta reviews the lasting legacy of Australia's unsuccessful efforts to deal with the Nazi war criminals who immigrated here after the Second World War.

Finally, don't miss Amotz Asa-El on the renewal of Israel-Turkey ties, Ran Porat's revelations of a hateful online gimmick by Islamist extremists in Australia, and Jeremy Jones on the ugly "anti-Zionist" radicalism at Melbourne University.

As always, please give us your feedback at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au).

Tzvi Fleischer

## ON THE COVER

Iranian missiles are displayed in the War Museum in Teheran. (Image: Morteza Nikoubazl/ZUMA Wire/ZUMA-PRESS.com/Alamy Live News)



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EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN****COLIN RUBENSTEIN**

# STRIKING A TERRIBLE BARGAIN

The European Union released a self-described “final” proposal to Iran in mid-August, aimed at closing the gaps between Teheran and the P5+1 (US, UK, France, Russia, China and Germany) and trying to revive, in some form, the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) deal on Iran’s illegal nuclear weapons program. Recently, there has been a flurry of reports suggesting a deal is close, even imminent.

Yet the reality is Iran rejected the EU’s “final” offer out of hand, while deftly signalling it would offer counterproposals using the EU text as a starting point.

Meanwhile, reports on the content of the EU draft itself, if accurate, alarmingly suggest the crossing of numerous red lines once considered sacrosanct – including potentially making it harder to reimpose sanctions in the future; allowing Iran to keep advanced centrifuges it has built illegally; limiting or circumscribing ongoing International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigations into past illicit Iranian nuclear weapons activities; and easing unrelated sanctions that have been imposed for Iranian terror activity.

Analysts have detected a shift in the talking points by the Government of hardline Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to the Iranian people. Previously, Iranian officials had downplayed the need for a deal, but they have recently pivoted to promoting a narrative whereby accepting a deal on Teheran’s terms – either now or down the road – would be a great triumph for the regime over hostile foreign interlocutors.

The key words above are “on Teheran’s terms”.

There’s no denying sanctions have been a thorn in Iran’s side, reducing its ability to sponsor global terrorism and the aggressive, expansionist, military destabilisation Teheran is continuously instigating through proxies such as the Houthis of Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza.

Yet if the cost of having sanctions removed is permanently abandoning nuclear weapon ambitions, that is a price Iran’s leaders have never once shown a genuine willingness to pay – though they have clearly been prepared to make empty promises.

As former Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu put it, Iran’s thinly disguised goal is to have its “yellowcake and eat it, too.” That is, achieve sanctions relief, and still become, if not a fully-fledged nuclear-armed power, then, at minimum, a nuclear threshold state with the ability to weaponise at a moment’s notice, and thus able to enjoy the full strategic and status advantages of being a nuclear power.

Disturbingly, it looks like the P5+1, led by the US Biden Administration, may be preparing to strike a deal to allow Iran to achieve exactly this outcome.

The most fundamental flaw of the JCPOA nuclear deal was the fact that it offered Iran open-ended sanctions relief for limited and temporary nuclear concessions. This was clearly acknowledged by then-US President Barack Obama, who noted in 2015 that, even if Iran abided by the deal, its advances in centrifuge technology under the deal’s terms would eventually shorten its breakout times “almost down to zero.”

That “eventually” is now imminent. As Jacob Nagel and Jonathan Schanzer explain in this *AIR* edition (p. 14), the “sunset clauses” of the JCPOA, gradually lifting all restrictions on Iran’s nuclear enrichment, are all going to come into effect in just a few years.

Moreover, in exchange for this almost uselessly weak deal, Iran is going to gain a financial windfall credibly estimated to be US\$275 billion (AU\$396 billion) during the



first year in effect and US\$1 trillion (AU\$1.44 trillion) by 2030.

Even if it briefly delays Iran's nuclear progress, the deal's financial benefits to the regime will supercharge Teheran's ability to target the oil fields, tankers and refineries of Gulf states, driving up energy prices; wage missile and drone wars against Israel and the Arab Gulf states through its proxies; hunt down dissidents and political adversaries; and threaten to obliterate Western countries in a nuclear holocaust by developing inter-continental ballistic missiles.

How can we be so sure Iran's clerical rulers will go down this devastating path rather than moderate through increased acceptance and concessions from the West? Because they are in fact already heading down this extremist path as much as possible even with the sanctions in place.

In August alone, we saw it all: a pro-Iranian zealot nearly assassinated author Salman Rushdie, the subject of a death warrant by Iranian clerics for decades; an Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) assassination plot against former US officials John Bolton and Mike Pompeo was uncovered; an apparent Iranian-sponsored attempt was made to murder prominent Iranian dissident Masih Alinejad in New York; a bomb was uncovered at a festival in Sweden where an Iranian dissident singer was to perform; the IRGC released a video threatening to build

nuclear missiles capable of "turning New York into hellish ruins"; and last but certainly not least, a threatened major terror attack on Israel by the Iranian-funded and controlled Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was thwarted in a brief but intense three-day escalation that saw more than 1,100 rockets launched by PIJ from Gaza at Israel, even as Teheran hosted its leader.

We know Iran's intentions because we've seen this

movie before. After the JCPOA was approved in 2015, Iran poured billions into its war machine instead of improving the lives of ordinary Iranians.

The terrible bargain being struck here seems obvious – at best minimal and brief restraint

on Iran's nuclear program, in exchange for greatly empowering a rogue regime to murder, destabilise, proliferate, become more powerful and threatening, and also intensify active and genocidal plans to try to surround, overwhelm and destroy Israel.

As Nagel and Schanzer note, there are better alternatives. It will be a strategic error of monumental proportions if these better alternatives are ignored in favour of a wilfully blind belief in some quarters that the always inadequate JCPOA, now made much weaker by the passage of time and the imminence of the sunset clauses, is the answer to Iran's increasingly dangerous and illegal nuclear program.

AIR

## WORD FOR WORD

"As a result of our initiative, operational activities, and close co-operation between the political echelon and operational levels, we have reached three achievements during Operation Breaking Dawn: removing the imminent threat from Gaza; Maintaining our freedom of action in all arenas; And maintaining deterrence, while sending a clear message to our enemies in each of the arenas – Israel is determined to maintain its sovereignty and protect its citizens."

**Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz on Operation Breaking Dawn against Palestinian Islamic Jihad (*Israel Hayom*, Aug. 9).**

"In this attack, we do not consider anyone other than Salman Rushdie and his supporters worthy of blame and even condemnation. By insulting the sacred matters of Islam and crossing the red lines of more than 1.5 billion Muslims and all followers of the divine religions, Salman Rushdie has exposed himself to the anger and rage of the people."

**Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani on the attempted assassination of author Salman Rushdie (*Guardian*, Aug. 16).**

"Hezbollah's sons are making plans to bring down the last blow against the Zionist regime...and to realize the wish of Imam Khomeini to eradicate Israel from the map and the face of the Earth."

**Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Quds Force chief Esmail Qaani (*Iran International*, Aug. 6).**

"They [the Iranians] say they are making strides and amazing advances and the program is moving ahead very, very fast. And not only ahead, but sideways as well. It is growing in ambition and capacity."

**International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi on the Iranian nuclear program (*Voice of America*, Aug. 2).**

"Israel will continue to do everything to prevent Iran from attaining a nuclear capability."

**Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid tells French President Emanuel Macron that Israel will not be bound by a new nuclear deal (*Times of Israel*, Aug. 22).**

"My fellow Americans, on Saturday, at my direction, the United States successfully concluded an airstrike in Kabul, Afghanistan, that killed the emir of al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri."

**US President Joe Biden announces the assassination of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan (*White House*, Aug. 1).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## DOUBLING DOWN ON DISASTER

On Aug. 17, during a state visit to Germany, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said something at a Berlin press conference that strongly angered his hosts, led to widespread international condemnation, and, by any reasonable reckoning, caused damage to the Palestinian “cause”.

Abbas was asked by a reporter whether the PLO would apologise for the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre, when 11 Israeli athletes and officials were killed by PLO-affiliated terrorists 50 years ago this month. Abbas responded by saying “If we want to dig further into the past, yes, please, I have 50 massacres that were committed by Israel... 50 massacres, 50 Holocausts.”

This was in Germany, as noted. His remarks were widely described there with various versions of the word “disgusting”, including by Chancellor Olaf Scholz who said he was “disgusted by the outrageous remarks.” Abbas’ remark even became the subject of a criminal investigation by the German police.

Abbas’ “50 Holocausts” outburst was actually consistent with a long-standing pattern of minimising or denigrating the Holocaust by the Palestinian leader. His 1982 university thesis cast doubt on the number of six million Jews killed in the Holocaust, and also bizarrely insisted “the Zionist movement” had been the “basic partner” with the Nazis in perpetrating the Holocaust. He repeated similar claims about Zionist responsibility in 2003 and 2013. Then, in 2018, he said the Holocaust was caused by the Jews’ “social behaviour, [charging] interest, and financial matters.”

Yet despite this highly troubling record, even Abbas recognised that, after the Berlin remarks, he was in a hole and he needed to stop digging. His office issued a statement which did not apologise for the remarks, but did say Abbas accepted that the Holocaust was “the most heinous crime in modern human history.”

Yet despite this apparent retraction, many other Palestinian leaders, including key members of Abbas’ own Fatah party, doubled down on his original disastrous remarks, insisting Abbas was right.

Here are just some of the examples being reported:

- The ruling Fatah faction posted a photo of a smiling Abbas on social media with a caption reading “Mr. President, you are strong. Continue with God’s blessing and rest assured. We are proud of you and we are all behind you.”
- Munther al-Hayek, a senior Fatah official, said Abbas’ remarks in Germany were designed to “remind the

world of the suffering of the Palestinian people, who deserve an apology for the crimes committed against them.”

- Bassam Salhi, member of the PLO Executive Committee on Facebook: “Abu Mazen’s [Abbas’] statements in Germany that Israel has and continues to commit holocausts against the Palestinian people are truthful and express the position of the Palestinians.”
- Tayseer Khaled, another member of the PLO Executive Committee, said Abbas “did not miss the point when he told the German Chancellor that Israel has committed 50 holocausts...”
- Hassan Asfour, a former PLO negotiator with Israel and editor-in-chief of the Palestinian *Amad* news website, insisted; “President Abbas’ statements are not self-invention... Palestinians should not remain silent toward the war against President Abbas, whose words represent every Palestinian inside and outside the homeland.”
- Bakr Abu Bakr, a former member of Fatah’s Revolutionary Council, published an article in the online daily *alwatanvoice.com* saying; “Our brother President Abu Mazen [Abbas] was right ... [to say] that, since the Nakba of 1948 – the Palestinian holocaust – the Israelis have perpetrated several [additional] holocausts [in the form of] repeated massacres.” He also included antisemitic remarks about Jews thinking it is fine to murder Palestinians because of their “delusion” of being “the chosen people”.
- Even the Palestinian Authority Foreign Ministry got in on the act. It didn’t exactly endorse Abbas’ “50 Holocausts” claim, but it did attack Israeli PM Yair Lapid for criticising Abbas’ remarks. It said Lapid’s criticism of Abbas was “an attempt to protect the false narrative that Israel is trying to market in order to deceive the world” and “proves that the occupying state has no desire to apologise for the crimes committed by the Zionist gangs against the Palestinian people.” Apparently, the only proper response to Abbas’ “50 Holocausts” claim was an Israeli apology for having committed them.
- Perhaps the most telling remark came from PA Presidential Advisor Mahmoud Al-Habbash speaking on official *PA TV* (Aug. 17), who said Abbas, “spoke in the name of all of us. He conveyed what we all feel, and he conveyed the reality of what his entire nation is facing.”


As noted, even Abbas seemed to recognise that making such obviously extreme and offensive Holocaust claims, displaying gross ignorance about history, was detrimental to the Palestinian reputation and to public efforts to gain sympathy and support. So why did so many Palestinian leaders insist on repeating them?

The fact is that, as Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) has documented, official government-controlled Palestinian media outlets such as the newspaper *Al-Hayat Al Jadida*



and *PA TV* feature claims that Israelis are “Nazis”, or even “worse than Nazis”, inflicting a “Holocaust” or “Holocausts” on Palestinians, all the time. PMW lists more than a dozen examples in the last year. This is simply standard Palestinian discourse.

The assertion that the Palestinian national fight is not merely for self-determination and land, but a battle against a cosmologically evil enemy utterly determined to wipe out every last Palestinian – Zionist Nazis committing a Holocaust of Palestinians – seems to have become a core tenet of the ideology of the Palestinian national movement.

If this claim were true, it follows there could be no co-existence or compromise with such an enemy. So is it any wonder that a two-state peace remains so elusive? 

## DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

Clifford May

### BEAT THE PRESS

Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood branch that rules Gaza, sat out the recent conflict between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a smaller Gaza-based terrorist group tied to Iran’s rulers. But, perhaps to show it still rules the roost, Hamas issued sweeping restrictions on foreign journalists working in Gaza.

Among them: a prohibition against reporting on Gazans killed by misfired Palestinian rockets and a requirement that Israel be blamed for the battle.

In addition, Hamas ordered all foreign correspondents to employ Palestinian “sponsors” who must submit full reports on where those correspondents go, what they do, and any “illogical questions” they ask.

The new rules warned that sponsors must “demonstrate national spirit, defend the Palestinian narrative and reject the foreigner’s bias to the Israeli narrative.”

The Foreign Press Association protested these “severe, unacceptable and unjustified restrictions on the freedom of the press.” Discussions ensued and, before long, the FPA was happily announcing that Hamas officials had come around.

Salama Marouf, Director of the Government Media Office in Gaza, agreed. “There are no restrictions,” he said. “We welcome all foreign journalists and media into Gaza, and we call on them to come.”

A happy ending, right? Not exactly. The *Associated Press*, one of the media organisations represented by the FPA, pointed out: “Even if the rules are officially withdrawn, Hamas has still signalled its expectations, which could have a chilling effect on critical coverage.”

That, too, fails to reflect reality which is this: Reporters in Gaza have never been free and are not now.

Since Hamas wrested control of Gaza from rival Fatah

in 2007, foreign journalists have been unable to work in the territory without Palestinian sponsors (more commonly known as “minders”, “stringers”, or “fixers”) answerable to Hamas. They endanger both themselves and these hires if Hamas disapproves of their reporting.

Matti Friedman, a former reporter and editor in the Jerusalem bureau of the *Associated Press*, has revealed all this and more in articles he wrote for *Tablet*, the *Atlantic*, and more recently *Sapir*.

His pieces exposed Hamas’ intimidation and censorship, as well as the limits most journalists covering the Palestinian-Israeli conflict impose on themselves based on ideology, bias, and the desire for acceptance within social circles dominated by UN officials and employees of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who ignore Palestinian terrorism and rejectionism while regarding Israeli Jews as oppressors.

The media are usually obedient. For example, during the conflict with Israel in the summer of 2014, Mr. Friedman wrote, the *AP* staff in Gaza City could see that Hamas was launching missiles from “right beside their office endangering reporters and other civilians nearby – and the *AP* wouldn’t report it.”

Nor did they inform readers that Hamas fighters had “burst into the *AP*’s Gaza bureau” and threatened the staff. And cameramen “waiting outside Shifa Hospital in Gaza City would film the arrival of civilian casualties and then, at a signal from an official, turn off their cameras when wounded and dead fighters came in, helping Hamas maintain the illusion that only civilians were dying.”

Toeing the Hamas line does not guarantee safety: In 2006, *Fox News* reporter Steve Centanni and cameraman Olaf Wiig were kidnapped, blindfolded, handcuffed, and held in an abandoned garage in the Gaza Strip by “a previously unknown group” calling itself the Holy Jihad Brigades. The two men were forced at gunpoint to denounce American policies and convert to Islam.

Released after 13 days, they were escorted to a Gaza hotel to meet with Hamas leader Ismail Haniya who, the *New York Times* reported, “had called for their captors to free them.”

The *Times* added that, “there was speculation” that the kidnapping was an attempt “to embarrass Mr. Haniya.”

Such embarrassment was not apparent. And Mr. Haniya was doubtless pleased when, at a press conference, Mr. Wiig said he hoped his experience would not prevent other foreign journalists from covering Gaza.

The *AP*’s dispatch on the new restrictions added what we might call the requisite moral equivalence clause: “In the long-running Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both sides have attempted to impose their narratives and limit negative coverage.” How so? Israeli authorities restrict media access to some military activities as well as to the country’s nuclear program.

So, the *AP* considers concealing who is killing whom on a par with Israelis not revealing military secrets. Really?

While I see no cure for this situation, I can imagine treatment. It would entail reporters working under duress in Gaza – and elsewhere e.g. Iran, Russia, and China – acknowledging that to readers and viewers.

At the very least, they should stop propagating the falsehood that there is no significant difference between Hamas-ruled Gaza and Israel when it comes to “the freedom of the press.”

AIR

*Clifford D. May is founder and President of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) and a columnist for the Washington Times. © FDD, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

### GATHERING PACE

Amidst Israel’s well-known difficulties in securing diplomatic relations with Indonesia and Malaysia, another relationship in the region, unburdened by religious and cultural baggage, has quietly grown in recent decades – that with Vietnam. The extent of these ties will be highlighted over the coming year as the two countries celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties.

Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc received a visit from former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in Hanoi on Aug. 17, in which the Vietnamese leader said Israel has become an important partner of Vietnam, citing the key areas of national defence and security, sci-tech and renewable energy, as reported by the state-run *Vietnam News Agency*.

Phuc suggested the two countries regularly maintain high-level visits and offer mutual support at international forums and organisations, and that the former Israeli PM use “his role and influence” to share Israel’s experience in “building startup support policies, develop sci-tech and innovation, nurture young talents and connect with experts and businesses in Israel and the world.”

For his part, Barak expressed optimism that the two countries are moving towards the signing of a free trade agreement and a labour cooperation deal. His visit followed on from a visit to Israel by Politburo member and Chairman of the Central Theory Council Nguyen Xuan Thang in May.

Israel is now Vietnam’s fifth largest trading partner, with two-way trade having grown rapidly in recent years. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, two-way trade

still rose by 36.4%. The figures for the first half of 2022 have reached US\$1.14 billion (AU\$1.64 billion), up 55% on the same period in 2021. A free trade deal could quickly lift the annual figure to US\$3-4 billion, analysts say.

Vietnam’s major exports to Israel currently include mobile phones, computers and accessories, cashew nuts, apparel, footwear, coffee, machinery and equipment, natural rubber, plastic and wooden products, handicrafts and ceramics. Meanwhile, Israel’s main exports to Vietnam include fertiliser, technical, medical and electronic equipment, machinery, plastics, tools and miscellaneous chemical and pharmaceutical products.

Owing to Vietnam’s slow economic and political emergence from a 30-year civil war, it was decades behind most other countries in establishing relations with the Jewish state in 1993 and did not secure an embassy in Israel until 2005. Prior to this, contact had been limited, although Israel permitted approximately 360 Vietnamese refugees to enter the country between 1977 to 1979, most notably in 1977, when an Israeli freighter ship headed to Taiwan encountered an ailing refugee vessel. Since then, many Vietnamese have gone to Israel to work and study.

Israeli technology and know-how are becoming increasingly important to the Vietnamese economy – now one of the strongest in the developing world – across several key areas.

Medical assistance provided by Israel was one of the first initiatives, beginning in 2006-07 when Israel sent a team of doctors and nurses to remote areas of Vietnam to give medical care, clothes, food, and also farm animals to those in need, thereby supporting the economic base. Moves like this remain a staple of the Israeli-Vietnamese relationship.

Agriculture makes up around 13% of Vietnam’s GDP and a third of its employment. Government officials from various ministries in Vietnam have visited Israel on study tours as well as for training in fields such as agriculture, aquaculture, livestock, dairy milk production and education, under the auspices of MASHAV, Israel’s official international development cooperation program. Vietnamese students have also been sent to Israel to learn these innovations and bring them back home.

Needs in the defence sector have been a high priority for Vietnam. The first Israeli military mission to Vietnam was initiated in 2012 and in its wake, Israel Weapon Industries Ltd opened a light arms factory in Thanh Hóa, producing small arms for the Vietnam People’s Armed Forces – the only Israeli weapons manufacturing facility in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese Government continues to express interest in further cooperation, and even joint military exercises.

In 2015, Vietnam purchased Rafael’s Spyder air-defence system for \$600 million – the largest ever military deal between the two countries. Vietnam has since emerged as



one of the main Asian buyers of Israeli weapons and surveillance systems alongside India and Azerbaijan.

The Israeli daily *Haaretz* reports that a high-ranking delegation from Vietnam's Defence Ministry is due to visit Israel in September as guests of Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to advance the US\$500 million (AU\$721 million) purchase of three of the defence firm's Barak 8 missile defence systems, developed jointly by IAI and India.

Such developments add weight to the warm words of officialdom during the reciprocal visits in the 30th Anniversary year.

AIR



Alex Benjamin

## WHEN IN ROME...

I'm writing this after having returned from a much-needed holiday with my better half in Rome. There are many things the Italians do well – fashion, food and Frascati to name but three. But the city is dirty and covered in graffiti. The last I don't mind so much, as it is often instructive.

I spend a lot of time in various countries in Europe and always look at the walls to gauge the barometer of tolerance and dissent. Graffiti is how the disaffected and disenfranchised express themselves, after all. Often it makes no sense, nicknames or references to various crews or gangs. But other times it gives me a sense of the health of a democracy.

In Poland, for instance I disturbingly see a lot of Stars of David crossed out, particularly in the countryside. In Prague, it's usually political. In Montenegro there's a fair amount of pro-Serbian graffiti written in the Cyrillic alphabet. In Rome, alarmingly, I saw what I regarded as a disproportionate amount of SS symbols besides the name of the local football team Lazio. Of course, this is purely anecdotal, but I couldn't help feeling, and I've spent a lot of time in Germany, that nobody would so brazenly reconjure the spectre of the SS on a wall in Berlin. Even if they did, authorities would have it cleaned up so quickly, it would be gone before your disbelieving eyes returned for a second look.

Neuroscientist and author David Eagleman famously noted that everyone dies three times: after their last breath, at their burial, and lastly, when their name is no longer spoken by anyone ever again. When in Germany, I get the feeling that they are at stage 3 when it comes to the Nazis: let us never speak of them again.

And yet, Italy, home to the second-most famous fascist leader of all time, appears to be on the cusp of electing a Prime Minister who once praised Benito Mussolini as “a

good politician, the best in the last 50 years.” She has also praised as a hero Giorgio Almirante, the founder of the party from which her own party descends, but also a Nazi collaborator and editor-in-chief of the antisemitic and racist magazine, *La Difesa della Razza*, which published the “Manifesto of Race” in 1938.

Without even a hint of irony, Giorgia Meloni heads up the *Fratelli d'Italia* (“Brothers of Italy”) party, which includes amongst its ranks descendants of Benito Mussolini, as well as many others whose nostalgia for the Italian Fascist past is troubling, to say the least.

She is riding high in the polls, and her alliance with the *Lega Nord*, led by Matteo Salvini, looks set to capture the most seats in elections scheduled for Sept. 25, handing her the Prime Ministership. Her posters are all over Rome, and she stands ready, according to the strapline, to “Revive Italy”. “Revive what exactly?” I asked my wife as we rounded a piazza to find yet another poster coming into view.

It is worth remembering that up until this latest crisis in Italian politics, Italy had really and truly turned a corner politically and reputationally under Mario Draghi, the former European Central Bank Chairman, who saved the euro countless times. Draghi is someone who straddles the sweet spot between the ego of France's Macron and the blandness of Germany's Scholz, and had put Italy back in the pantheon of European power-brokers. But Draghi's achievements look set to be short-lived.

In an attempt to placate the fears of those who describe the Brothers of Italy as “neo-fascist” or far-right, including real fears within the European Commission that she could lead Italy towards the “illiberal democracy” of Hungary under Viktor Orbán, Meloni has told the foreign press that Italian Fascism is history.

Yet in Italy there is none of that all-pervading sense of shame one finds in Germany, no third stage in the trilogy of death that I spoke about earlier. Meloni's memoirs, her hostility to migrants, gays and lesbians, is in plain sight, as is her desire to protect Italy's “Christian heritage”.

In August, she again repeated her claim that Italian Fascism is the past and decried the anti-Jewish laws that the Fascists introduced. But if I were an Italian Jew, I wouldn't be able to reconcile this position with the adulation she has for her ‘heroes’ – the very same people who brought in those laws. I would be worried.

I would be worried because it's one thing to see some unpleasant graffiti on a wall and put it down to the disaffection of a minority, but when the sinister undercurrent of the graffiti moves from scratches on a wall to the town square, to a political manifesto, and ultimately perhaps to the highest political office in Italy, it is a sign that a country has refused to learn the lessons of the past. Instead, it appears – incredibly – to be on the cusp of embracing them again.



# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

On Aug. 5, Israel launched a preemptive assault on Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) dubbed “Operation Breaking Dawn”, killing PIJ’s northern Gaza commander Taysir al-Jabari. The operation was prompted by PIJ threats to retaliate for Israel’s arrest of senior PIJ West Bank leader Bassam al-Saadi on Aug. 1, and solid Israeli intelligence that the terror group was about to carry out attacks against Israeli civilians using anti-tank missiles. Following a subsequent barrage of PIJ rockets, Israel assassinated several other senior PIJ military commanders in Gaza, attacked its military infrastructure and killed approximately two dozen terrorist operatives. PIJ and smaller Gaza-based groups launched more than 1,100 rockets at Israel, many of which fell inside Gaza and killed Palestinians, including children and a Hamas operative. There were only minor injuries and little damage in Israel, because about 96% of the rockets that were headed for populated parts of Israel were shot down by Iron Dome. A ceasefire was brokered by Egypt on Aug. 7.

On Aug. 15, the IDF announced it had destroyed a Hamas attack tunnel from Gaza into Israel.

On Aug. 14, a terrorist mass shooter wounded nine people, including a pregnant woman and four American Jews, right outside Jerusalem’s Old City. Other attempted shootings and stabbings by Palestinians resulted in no casualties.

Israeli counterterrorism raids continue to round up operatives and suspects in the West Bank, and killed wanted terrorist Ibrahim al-Nabulsi in a gun battle on Aug. 9.

On Aug. 18, Israeli forces raided and closed the Ramallah offices of seven Palestinian NGOs Israel had

previously proscribed as terrorist groups for their links to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

## ISRAEL AIMSTO IMPROVE GAZA LIVING CONDITIONS

On Aug. 21, as part of its policy to improve living conditions in the Gaza Strip, Israel increased by 1,500 the number of work permits issued to Gazan Palestinians, bringing the total to 15,500. The Defence Ministry has already tentatively agreed to raise this further to 20,000.

Palestinian workers in Israel often earn more than six times the average daily wage in Gaza.

According to Israel’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), crossings by Gaza residents into Israel rose by 311% this year.

Other measures introduced by Israel include expanding exports of food and other products from Gaza to the West Bank and to Israel. COGAT expects the latter such exports from Gaza to rise by 93.8% this year.

Meanwhile, the Israel Airports Authority announced on Aug. 9 that in a pilot project, West Bank Palestinians will be able to fly internationally from Israel’s Ramon Airport in Eilat in the country’s south. The first such flight, on Aug. 22, carried 40 Palestinians to Cyprus. Previously, such travellers generally needed to depart from the Jordanian capital Amman.

## PALESTINIAN SUMMER CAMPSTRAIN KIDSTO FIGHT ISRAEL

At annual summer camps run in Gaza and the West Bank, Palestinian children received both ideological indoctrination and military training.

On July 23, 500 Hamas-led camps



Gaza summer camps train kids to be soldiers or even terrorists (YouTube screenshot)

were launched in Gaza, attended by approximately 100,000 girls and boys. Terrorists were glorified at the opening ceremony, and photos of children handling rifles and “shooting soldiers” in a simulator were posted on the camps’ Facebook account.

Similar summer camps were also held in the West Bank. Palestinian social media carried videos of the children at a camp in Bayta near Nablus being given military training by masked operatives of the Palestinian security forces and Fatah.

## ATTEMPTS TO KILL RUSHDIE, POMPEO AND BOLTON

Author Salman Rushdie, subject of a 1989 *fatwa* (religious edict) calling for his death from then Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was stabbed whilst on stage at an event in Chautauqua, NY, on Aug. 12. The renowned novelist was addressing an audience of thousands, when New Jersey resident Hadi Matar, 24, stormed the stage and stabbed him in the face, neck and abdomen. As a result of the stabbing, Rushdie was temporarily placed on a ventilator, sustained liver and arm damage, and may lose an eye. According to intelligence sources, Matar had been in contact with “people either directly involved with or adjacent to the Quds Force,” the external operations arms of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), prior to the attack.



On Aug. 10, the US Department of Justice revealed that a member of the IRGC, Shahram Poursafi, had been charged with attempting to pay an individual, who turned out to be a US Government informer, to hire assassins to murder former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former Trump Administration National Security Advisor John Bolton.

## IRAN EMPLOYING YET MORE ADVANCED CENTRIFUGES

In early August, Iran notified the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it had installed and started running more cascades of advanced IR-6 uranium enrichment centrifuges at the Natanz plant. Teheran also announced that it will be installing six more IR-2m centrifuge cascades. Experts now estimate that Teheran will have more than 1,500 advanced centrifuges set up in various locations, which enrich uranium much more quickly than older models and are not allowed to be used under the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal. This is 70% more than in May.

## RUSSIA-IRAN COOPERATION ON SATELLITES AND DRONES

On Aug. 9, Russia launched a Russian-built Kanopus-V satellite into space for Iran, which will dramatically increase Iran's capabilities to monitor targets and sensitive facilities across the Middle East. Iran claims it will have immediate use of the satellite, though other reports suggest Russia initially wants to use it to monitor Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russian plans to begin deploying Iranian drones in the Ukraine war are reportedly advancing rapidly. Since June, Russian officials have been travelling to Iran for demonstrations of Iranian armed drones, and training in their use has already begun, according to intelligence reports. According to an unverified

claim by Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to the Ukrainian President, Iran has already handed over 46 of these drones to Russia and they are being deployed on the battlefield.

## UN OFFICIAL SACKED FOR CONDEMNING PIJ ROCKET FIRE

In the wake of the recent escalation in Gaza, Sarah Muscroft, UN Director of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (Occupied Palestinian Territory), was removed from her post after she tweeted support for the ceasefire. The tweet stated in part, "Such indiscriminate rocket fire of Islamic Jihad provoking Israeli retaliation is condemned. The safety of all civilians is paramount." The tweet was swiftly deleted, but not before being met with criticism from pro-Palestinian activists, who claimed Muscroft had put the blame on Palestinians whilst

failing to hold Israel accountable, and she was stood down.

Meanwhile, another UN official, Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory Francesca Albanese, took to Twitter to label Israel's "Operation Breaking Dawn" a "flagrant act of aggression" and "a violation of International Law." She was not sanctioned.

## AL-QAEDA LEADER ZAWAHIRI KILLED

On July 31, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed in a CIA drone strike while standing on the balcony of his home in an exclusive neighbourhood of Afghan capital Kabul. Zawahiri had provided the intellectual strategy for al-Qaeda, and had planned the September 11 and numerous other terror attacks alongside its original leader, Osama bin Laden. He took over as al-Qaeda leader when bin Laden was killed in a US raid in 2011.



## ANOTHER GLORIOUS VICTORY

The latest skirmish between Israel and the Iranian proxy Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was on almost every level an unmitigated disaster for the terror group. It lost its entire senior military echelon in Gaza, numerous other fighters, and considerable military infrastructure; it failed to inflict any casualties or even significant damage on Israel; its reputation suffered a hammering as a result of approximately 200 of the 1,100 plus rockets it fired landing in Gaza, killing more civilians, including children, than Israel's strikes did; Hamas, the terror organisation in charge of the Strip, stayed on the sidelines, and PIJ had to quickly agree to a ceasefire (see page 21).

However, that did not stop Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and PIJ Secretary-General Ziyad Nakhleh, who happened to be in Teheran

during the fighting, exchanging triumphant letters about PIJ's great victory.

According to Iran's semi-official *Fars* news agency, the Aug. 11 letter from Khamenei stated, "The recent event has added to the honours of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement and elevated the status of Islamic Jihad in the magnificent resistance movement of the Palestinian nation. You have proven that each section of the resistance is able to crush the enemy."

In his letter, Nakhleh claimed, "This battle frustrated the Zionist regime's estimates to such a large extent that after just three days they were forced to ask for a ceasefire and to accept the terms set by the resistance." Israel accepted a ceasefire suggested by Egypt because it had achieved its aims, but did not accept any of PIJ's demands, such as releasing PIJ's recently arrested West Bank commander, or giving immunity to him and other PIJ fighters there.

If this was a victory worth lauding, it's hard to imagine what a defeat for the group would look like.

## COVER STORY

## JCPOA 2.0?

## DEAL OR NO DEAL?

Omri Nahmias

It's the deal that nobody is willing to walk away from because keeping the spectre of its survival alive serves the interests of all involved. Ever since then-US President Donald Trump pulled out of the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran (JCPOA), it's been on life support. And nobody seems willing to finally pull the plug.

The European Union and United States said on Aug. 17 they were studying Iran's response to what the EU has called its "final" proposal to save the agreement, after Teheran called on Washington to show flexibility.

Ned Price, the US State Department spokesman, said the US was sharing its views on Iran's response with the EU after receiving Teheran's comments from the bloc.

"We are engaged in consultations with the EU as well as with our European allies on the way ahead," he said at a press briefing on Aug. 17. "We ultimately agree with the bottom-line proposition of High Representative Borrell. The reason he put forward this proposal in the first place was out of recognition that what could be negotiated has been negotiated. The High Representative, and the way in which he has handled this process, has certainly narrowed the scope of that conversation. It has crystallised the decision for Iran."

He went on to say that the US is confident that a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA "remains the best and really the most effective means by which to once again verifiably and permanently constrain Iran's nuclear program."

After 16 months of fitful, indirect US-Iranian talks, with the EU shuttling between the parties, a senior EU of-



The negotiations with Iran in Vienna: Reaching a conclusion? (Image: Twitter)

ficial said on Aug. 8 the bloc had laid down a "final" offer and expected a response within a "very, very few weeks."

Iran responded to the proposal on Aug. 16, but none of the parties provided any details. Iran's Foreign Minister called on the US to show flexibility to resolve three remaining issues, suggesting Teheran's response

would not be a final acceptance or rejection.

Iran has made demands the US and other Western powers view as outside the scope of reviving the deal, such as insisting the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) drop its claims Iran has failed to fully explain uranium traces at several undeclared sites.

Diplomats and officials have told *Reuters* that whether or not Teheran and Washington accept the EU's "final" offer, neither is likely to declare the pact dead, because keeping it alive serves both sides' interests.

The question is whether the Iranians are truly seeking to re-join the 2015 agreement, or it is merely a tactic to buy more time.

## IS A DEAL STILL POSSIBLE?

After more than a year of negotiations, Washington experts remain sceptical.

Dov Zakheim is a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Zakheim, former Under Secretary of Defense during the George W. Bush Administration, and former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Planning and Resources during the Reagan Administration, said that Iran is playing what it thinks is a win-win game.



“If the US agrees to compensate Iran in the event that a future president walks from the deal, Iran wins,” he said. “If the IAEA investigation into the Iranian nuclear program is stopped, Iran wins. If the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is taken off the terrorist list, Iran wins. And if the deal collapses and Iran proceeds with its nuclear weapons program, Iran wins that one, too.”

The West should make its current offer “take it or leave it,” Zakheim said. “Iran will proceed with its clandestine nuclear weapons program whether there is or is not a deal.”

Dennis Ross, a distinguished fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said that the Iranians “are always about tactics.

“They believe that pressure works on us and the Europeans,” he said. “Their advancing nuclear program is a pressure tactic that has already made them a threshold nuclear power state. They continue to want to see what more they can get – [for example], get the IAEA investigations of the three sites where traces of uranium were found dropped, and be able to keep their excess enriched uranium in-country – as opposed to having to ship it outside – as a hedge against the US again withdrawing from the deal.”

“So they can be using pressure as a tactic and still want to have a deal,” said Ross.

Elliott Abrams, senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations, said that he believes the Iranians are willing to make a deal if they get what they want out of it, and it looks as if that may now happen.

“They are tough negotiators, and right now they are trying to see if they can squeeze some more out of the United States,” he said.

“My greatest concern is that the United States appears ready to abandon the insistence on disclosures about the previous military work by Iran,” said Abrams. “Iran has stonewalled the IAEA, and if we sign an agreement without insisting on answers, Iran will have won this negotiation and we will have abandoned the IAEA. The method of doing this will be to say that that whole question of previous military work by Iran is between Iran and the IAEA and should not hold up a deal among the governments in question. It would be a great mistake, and it would be shameful and quite dangerous.”

In mid-August, the US Department of Justice charged a member of the IRGC with attempting to hire hit men to murder former National Security Advisor John Bolton in an apparent retaliation attempt for the January 2020 assassination of IRGC Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani.

Shahram Poursafi, also known as Mehdi Rezayi, a resident of Teheran, attempted to pay individuals in the

US\$ 300,000 (~A\$436,000) to murder Bolton in Washington DC, or Maryland on behalf of the Quds Force, according to court documents.

In a separate incident on Aug. 12, acclaimed author Salman Rushdie suffered serious wounds when he was repeatedly stabbed at a public appearance in New York state.

The accused attacker, 24-year-old Hadi Matar of Fairview, New Jersey, said he respected Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini but would not say if he was inspired by a fatwa issued by the former Iranian leader, according to a *New York Post* interview.

Matar also told the *New York Post* he had only “read a couple of pages” of Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses*.

Rushdie, 75, was set to deliver a lecture on artistic freedom at the western New York venue when police say 24-year-old Matar rushed the stage and stabbed the Indian-born writer on Friday last week.

“I respect the ayatollah. I think he’s a great person.

That’s as far as I will say about that,” the tabloid cited Matar as saying in a video interview from the Chautauqua County Jail.

Some experts suggest that the US should take these incidents into account when considering the final stages of the deal. “We do not yet know if the attack on Salman Rushdie was an official act by Iran, but we know if they have been trying to kill former high officials,” said

Abrams. “I would have suspended the negotiations until it was very clear that they had desisted from those efforts. By going forward as if those threats did not exist, we send a message to Iran that this conduct is acceptable.”

Richard Goldberg, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington, said the US and its European partners should cut off talks “and take decisive action in retaliation for ongoing terror plots against the US homeland.”

“The Security Council should complete its snapback of sanctions to take away the JCPOA sunsets once and for all, and the IAEA Board of Governors should find Iran in noncompliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,” said Goldberg.

“It’s appalling that the White House appears to be limiting the information flow on the Rushdie attacker,” he continued. “Why do we not have any information yet on the attacker’s contacts with the IRGC? Following the Bolton plot, if the attack on Rushdie links back to Teheran, we need to be honest that the Iranians are committing acts of war against the United States. You don’t respond to terrorism and acts of war by offering money.”

He went on to say that the Iranians are trying to keep the door open to a deal on their terms.

“If the Americans cave, they’ll say yes. If the Americans

**“Dennis Ross, a distinguished fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said that the Iranians ‘are always about tactics. They believe that pressure works on us and the Europeans’”**



hold out, they're positioning themselves to say we tried but the US side balked," he said.

AIR

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## A STARK CHOICE

Jacob Nagel and Jonathan Schanzer

After multiple failed rounds of nuclear diplomacy in Vienna and Doha, talks between Iran and the P5+1 (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China) moved back to Vienna in July. The revived talks first hit a snag earlier this year when Teheran raised several new demands, including the removal of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from the US State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list. Washington initially balked but reportedly then acquiesced to a partial solution: removing secondary sanctions on companies doing business with the IRGC.

"I am absolutely sincere... when I say that Iran got much more than it could expect," said Russian diplomat Mikhail Ulyanov back in March. The deal now on the table is far better for Teheran than the one to which Ulyanov referred.

Admittedly, the regime has more than once pumped the brakes on nuclear diplomacy. This intransigence signalled that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Islamic Republic's supreme leader, may not have ever wanted an agreement at all. Rather, he may seek to prolong talks to advance the regime's nuclear program while avoiding harsh decisions by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Still, recent news out of Vienna suggests a deal may be imminent, with even more Western concessions.

This article chronicles Teheran's dangerous nuclear advances in recent years, the results of American-led diplomacy to curtail this activity, and the actions Israel has taken both to encourage greater American leverage and to hinder Iranian progress.

## IRAN'S QUEST FOR A NUCLEAR WEAPON

For more than three decades, Teheran has worked, with varying degrees of intensity, to develop a fully-fledged military nuclear program. Its leaders deny this, citing a purported *fatwa*, or Islamic ruling, from Khamenei that abjures nuclear weapons. Israel ultimately proved Iran's assertion false in 2018, when the Mossad exfiltrated from a Teheran warehouse a secret nuclear archive documenting the clerical regime's efforts to develop a nuclear weapon.

The archive revealed that Iran's covert nuclear weapons program, which began in the late 1990s, was far more advanced than Western intelligence had previously assessed. One of the documents included handwritten instructions by Iranian leaders to the program's directors, ordering them to design, build, and test five 10-kiloton nuclear warheads. Attached to the document were blueprints for a warhead and descriptions of a plan to affix it to a long-range ballistic missile.

The regime in Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which theoretically should restrict its nuclear ambitions. However, this has not stopped Teheran from building uranium enrichment facilities and concealing them from the IAEA, the UN body that monitors and verifies Iran's nuclear commitments.

For a country to become a nuclear-threshold state, it must develop three key components: fissile material (enriched uranium or plutonium); a weapon system to detonate the fissile material; and a delivery system to carry the weapon. Once a nation completes these steps, its acquisition of a nuclear weapon depends not on technology or capability, but only on political will and timing.

The Iranian regime has worked for years to master all three components. But progress has not been linear. In 2003, Teheran curtailed but did not end its nuclear weapons development, likely fearing an attack by the West in the wake of America's invasion of Iraq. The regime may or may not have resumed those weaponisation activities. If it has, it is probably keeping a low profile, mostly under the cover of academic work.

Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic has steadily added to its nuclear gains for 15 years and counting. In 2007, it initiated enrichment at the Natanz nuclear site, which had been covert until an Iranian opposition group exposed it in 2002. In 2009, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France exposed another underground enrichment site in Fordow, located in the Iranian province of Qom. Months later, in 2010, the regime began enriching uranium to 20% purity at Natanz, likely to gain leverage in future negotiations.

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The level of 20% purity is significant. While a nuclear weapon requires a few dozen kilograms of uranium enriched to more than 93%, the time and effort to enrich natural uranium to 20% purity accounts for the majority of the process.

Between 2006 and 2010, the UN Security Council imposed four rounds of nuclear and economic sanctions on the regime. Between 2010 and 2013, Washington imposed additional sanctions that crippled the Iranian economy. Yet Teheran defiantly continued to expand its nuclear program, ultimately amassing large quantities of uranium enriched to 5% as well as a smaller amount enriched to 20%.

Israel, in turn, launched what it described as the “war between wars” – an asymmetric “grey zone” campaign targeting Iranian assets related to Teheran’s nuclear and conventional military capabilities. According to various sources, this campaign included cyberattacks against Iran’s nuclear facilities.

Fears mounted in both Washington and Teheran about a possible Israeli military strike. This prompted an international effort to reach an agreement that would halt Teheran’s program. Yet the more the West endeavoured to meet Iran’s demands, the more the regime increased them. Teheran advanced its nuclear program and committed additional NPT violations. This was the case a decade ago. It is the case now.

## NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN

While various initiatives to engage Teheran were reported in the decade prior, the first serious effort to negotiate with the Iranian regime began in 2011. The Obama Administration understood the importance of securing Israeli support for the negotiations given the threat that Iran posed to the Jewish state. Thus began a series of US visits to meet with senior Israeli officials. American officials said they sought an interim deal that Iran would reject, thereby making it easier for the UN Security Council to impose additional sanctions.

Still, the Obama team argued that even if Iran accepted the interim plan, in full or in part, the final agreement would meet Israeli demands, based on the limitations specified by the Security Council. Jerusalem stated that the only suitable outcome would be “zero, zero, zero”. Teheran could have no enrichment facilities or centrifuge research and development (R&D); no plutonium, heavy water reactors, or separation plants; and no fissile material inside Iran.

However, while one American team was building trust with Israel, secret negotiations between the United States and Iran began in Oman in 2012. The talks were led by figures now holding key positions in the Biden Administration: National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and CIA



The announcement of the JCPOA in 2015, which granted Iran – for the first time – a de facto authorisation to enrich uranium, contravening multiple Security Council resolutions (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Director William Burns, then serving as the State Department’s Director of Policy Planning and Deputy Secretary of State, respectively. These secret negotiations laid the foundation for both the 2013 interim agreement, formally known as the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA), and the 2015 final agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In exchange for minimal nuclear concessions, the JPOA granted Iran – for the first time – a de facto authorisation to enrich uranium, contravening multiple Security Council resolutions. This concession directly reneged on the Obama Administration’s pledge to Israel. Billions of dollars in sanctions relief injected new life into Iran’s sanctions-battered economy.

## ISRAEL’S WARNINGS

With negotiations underway, Israel formed a group of experts from the Israel Defence Forces’ Military Intelligence Directorate and Planning Directorate, the Mossad, the National Security Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence’s Political-Military Division, the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, and the Ministry for Strategic Affairs. While Israel was not a party to the negotiations, the group of experts worked intensively with the world powers negotiating with the Iranians to underscore the dangers of an agreement that failed to permanently prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

The team of experts forwarded dozens of technical papers to the American and other negotiators. They called for an Iranian breakout time – the time needed to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear bomb – of at least several years rather than merely one year (as proposed in the talks). The Israeli experts wanted Teheran to dismantle all enrichment infrastructure and ship it out of Iran. They called for a full disclosure of the Iranian nuclear program’s past “possible military dimensions” (PMD).

The experts also sought a complete cessation of Iranian R&D on advanced enrichment centrifuges. They recom-



mended the retention of sanctions on the Islamic Republic for at least 20 years, if not longer. These recommendations went largely unheeded.

## A DEAL IS STRUCK

The final round of talks lasted approximately nine consecutive weeks in 2015, concluding with the finalised JCPOA on July 14. The deal gave Iran nearly everything it wanted. Communication between the Israeli experts and the US negotiators broke down. The Obama Administration blamed Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's March 2015 speech to the US Congress – delivered against the wishes of the President – criticising the emerging deal. But this was not the only reason. The discussions were simply no longer productive. The American negotiators wanted an agreement at almost any cost, and Israel's protests were no longer welcome.

Thus, even as Teheran continued to call for the annihilation of Israel, the JCPOA provided the regime with a clear path to nuclear weapons and the ability to acquire the necessary infrastructure. The agreement effectively enabled Iran to become an internationally recognised and legitimate nuclear-threshold state. The regime also reaped a massive financial windfall, enabling an alarming increase in Iranian support for terrorist groups across the region – Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen, among others.

Moreover, UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorsed the agreement, codified the JCPOA's sunset provisions. Per the resolution, the UN arms embargo on Iran expired in 2020 even though Teheran had repeatedly violated it by sending weapons to violent proxies and terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain. Resolution 2231 also removed the ban on Iranian tests of "ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons." The resolution merely "call[ed] upon" Teheran to halt its missile development, and even that non-binding language will expire next year. Since 2015, Iran has tested dozens of ballistic missiles.

## THE ISRAELI RESPONSE

The Israeli cabinet issued a statement rejecting the deal on the day of the JCPOA's finalisation.

Thereafter, the Israeli government launched a campaign to educate Congress and the broader US public about the loopholes, gaps, and other flaws in the agreement.

It was no use, however. Congress failed to muster the necessary votes to stop the agreement. By the end of 2015, the IAEA prematurely closed its investigation of the PMD of Iran's nuclear program, paving the way for the JCPOA's implementation in January 2016. The Iranian economy soon received billions of dollars in sanctions relief, enabling a conventional military buildup and a surge in terror sponsorship worldwide.

Apart from concealing from the IAEA the existence of a secret nuclear weapons archive, undeclared nuclear sites, and undeclared nuclear material, Iran abided by most of its other commitments under the deal. Teheran understood that patience was all that was needed to ultimately gain a legitimised nuclear program along with massive economic benefits. This calculus was upended when US President Donald Trump pulled out of the agreement in 2018. Before he made his final decision, however, the Administration offered the Iranians opportunities to negotiate a more comprehensive agreement. They refused.

Teheran trod carefully at first, but then substantially increased its violations following the November 2020 election of President Joe Biden, who signalled an eagerness to return to the deal and removed a credible US military threat from the equation.

Russia, China, and Europe assert that Iran's nuclear violations were the result of Washington's unilateral withdrawal. However, the most egregious Iranian violations did not occur until 2021, after Biden's election and the subsequent renewal of negotiations. Teheran appeared to be seeking leverage for these talks.

In response, Israel has increased the intensity of its war between wars. According to a wide range of Israeli and other sources, this campaign has impeded Iran's military expansion in Syria and limited the regime's efforts to supply its Lebanese terrorist proxy, Hezbollah, with lethal precision-guided munitions. More importantly, Israel has reportedly acted against Iran's nuclear program, eliminating senior nuclear officials as well as some physical components.

## RETURNING TO THE JCPOA?

Israel's shadow war notwithstanding, the regime's nuclear advances have rendered a return to the old agreement futile. Iran's nuclear progress since 2015, and particularly since Biden's election, is beyond the point of containment. This underscores why the original deal was a mistake. The data disclosed by the nuclear archive, as well as new information obtained by IAEA inspectors since 2015, show that the JCPOA failed to account for the full range of Iranian nuclear activities, including activities that preceded the agreement.

Between the JCPOA's finalisation and America's 2018 exit from the deal, the Iranian regime increased uranium enrichment and added advanced centrifuges, as permitted under the agreement. This enabled Iran to transition to clandestine underground enrichment.

Worse, the agreement did not bar the regime from stockpiling raw materials or producing advanced centrifuges. This undermined optimistic calculations of Teheran's breakout time projected by supporters of the deal. Iran has already mastered the enrichment technology needed to amass enough fissile material for a weapon.

As Secretary of State Antony Blinken conceded in April 2022, Iran's breakout time was "down to a matter of weeks." Since then, the regime's breakout time has reportedly dropped to near zero. A return to the original agreement as written is therefore futile.

## THE FAILURES OF THE IAEA

The decision to close the PMD investigation was among the West's biggest mistakes. Today, the regime insists this issue is not open for discussion. Regime negotiators now demand that all IAEA investigations – new and old – be closed or written off. This is reportedly one of the remaining sticking points in Vienna.

Regardless of the terms of any deal that is reached, the regime in Iran is much closer to a bomb than previously estimated. The IAEA has only recently reached this conclusion, thanks largely to Israeli evidence. The nuclear watchdog appears incapable of fulfilling its mandate independently. This alone raises troubling questions about the feasibility of a sustainable agreement, which would require reliable monitoring and verification.

A fundamental aim of the 2015 deal was to establish airtight, unprecedented inspections of Iranian nuclear sites. The IAEA's strict inspections were supposed to be the most effective tool in the agreement. Yet these inspections, which never extended to military sites or sites connected to Iran's secret nuclear-military Organisation of Defensive Innovation and Research, missed the nuclear archive and all the nuclear sites and activities the IAEA subsequently discovered thanks to the archive.

The IAEA Director General, Rafael Grossi, has repeatedly travelled to Teheran in an attempt to reach new understandings with the regime. Yet Teheran has accelerated its nuclear activities, breaching not only the JCPOA but also the NPT, Iran's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, and the Additional Protocol. The IAEA's failure to address these violations has severely damaged its credibility and could effectively end the agency's status as an independent body.

## THE IRANIAN STRATEGY

The Iranian nuclear strategy appears to be based on four assumptions. The first is that the United States, under its current leadership, lacks the will to attack Iran's nuclear facilities. This view has yielded a second – and erroneous – belief that Israel lacks sufficient capabilities to strike Iran's nuclear program and will not attack without American support. Third, the Islamic Republic believes its economy can withstand Washington's current economic pressure, which is significantly weaker than the sanctions of past administrations. And finally, the regime believes it faces no meaningful internal threats to its survival. These four views explain why Teheran has not exhibited any flexibility at the negotiating table.

## A JCPOA-MINUS AGREEMENT

With negotiations now at a pivotal moment, Jerusalem's primary concern is that Washington will agree to a "JCPOA-minus". The White House is reportedly willing to offer sanctions relief that goes far beyond the JCPOA's concessions. In particular, the Biden team has offered to lift sanctions on thousands of individuals and entities, including Iranian banks, the Supreme Leader, and his inner circle. Moreover, US Special Envoy for Iran Rob Malley and his team, together with some EU high officials, have explored ways to comply with the Iranian demand to remove IRGC-related entities from the FTO list despite promises from the White House to the contrary.

Offering additional concessions to the regime is irresponsible, particularly amidst a spate of regime-inspired attacks and plots on American soil. Moreover, Iran is already enriching uranium at 60%, manufacturing and testing advanced centrifuges, and blocking the IAEA's access to active nuclear sites and other locations where violations have occurred in the past. Teheran refuses to dismantle the advanced centrifuges it has produced in violation of the 2015 agreement.

And the clock is still ticking. In 2027, the JCPOA's limitations on the regime's industrial-scale production and installation of centrifuges, including advanced ones, will expire. In 2031, the deal's restrictions on Iranian fissile-material stockpiles and enrichment, including to weapons-

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grade, will expire, too. Enrichment at Fordow and the building of new enrichment plants will be permitted. The bans on processing plutonium, storing heavy water, and constructing heavy water reactors will be lifted. Teheran will be in a position to produce dozens of bombs.

## TOWARD A BETTER AGREEMENT

Should the Biden Administration wish to negotiate a deal that would truly restrain Iran from attaining a nuclear weapon, it must address the three key steps for becoming a nuclear-threshold state. The IAEA should strictly prohibit Teheran from producing fissile materials and/or possessing the technology needed to develop a bomb. This cannot be subject to negotiation. Without such restrictions, the Iranians will be three to five months away from a nuclear weapon – with tacit international approval.

Additionally, while the United States and Israel have long measured Iran's nuclear progress in terms of break-out times, this concept is no longer helpful. Teheran has no intention of "breaking out" to a weapon. Rather, it will "sneak out" in undisclosed underground facilities using advanced centrifuges that enrich at much higher speeds.

Any viable deal must force the regime to come clean about its past activities, reopen the PMD investigations closed in 2015, and answer all questions stemming from new findings. The United States cannot conclude a worthwhile deal if Iran fails to confess to its past violations and fully disclose all its previous nuclear activities.

Finally, addressing the Iranian regime's delivery systems, primarily ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, requires more than weakly worded UN resolutions. The missile-test ban, already rendered toothless in 2015, will expire entirely in 2023. A better agreement should put a permanent stop to the development of these missiles.

## RECENT IRANIAN AND AMERICAN POSITIONS

In nuclear talks over the past year, Iranian negotiators introduced several new demands. In addition to its requirement to remove the IRGC from the FTO list, Teheran called for guarantees for compensation in an event of another American withdrawal. The regime also sought to close all the IAEA's open files and to end all investigations, past and present.

In an effort to demonstrate it has not capitulated to the regime's terms, Washington made new demands: Teheran must commit to halt aggression in the Persian Gulf, particularly by curbing the IRGC's activities there, and to communicate directly with Washington. The viability of such an arrangement is questionable given the regime's past behaviour and stated goal of destabilising the region. Interestingly, US efforts to reach a "longer and stronger" accord, as the Biden team promised upon his election, have ended.

An immediate concern is that the JCPOA's restrictions will soon sunset. In 2025, world powers will lose the "snapback" mechanism to reinstate all sanctions in response to an Iranian nuclear violation, as stipulated in the original agreement. Iran has already committed multiple violations to justify such a move.

The neutering of the IAEA is further undermining Washington's ability to hold Iran to account. The IAEA has already halted its investigation of Iran's development of uranium metal. Three other files relevant to illicit nuclear activity await Iranian explanations that will probably not materialise. If Washington and Teheran reach a new agreement, the likelihood that the IAEA will press for answers on other possible Iranian nuclear violations seems even more remote. The United States should wield its economic leverage to require the regime to come clean on its past activities.

## CONCLUSION

The talks in Vienna present Washington with a stark choice. It can acquiesce to the regime's demands and empower a terrorist state with nuclear ambitions. Or it can devise a joint plan with Israel and other Middle Eastern allies to push Iran to embrace a new and completely comprehensive agreement. The goal must be to permanently and verifiably block the regime's path to a nuclear weapon. Such a deal would restore American and IAEA credibility in the region while preventing a slide toward war.

AIR

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## HOW IRAN GETS AWAY WITH MURDER

Michael Rubin

**O**n Aug. 12, Hadi Matar, a 24-year-old raised in the United States but loyal to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, stabbed author Salman Rushdie as he prepared to give a talk in western New York.

The Iranian Government both celebrated and denied responsibility. *Kayhan*, whose editor the supreme leader appoints, wrote, "A thousand bravos... to the brave and dutiful person who attacked the apostate and evil Salman Rushdie in New York... The hand of the man who tore



the neck of God's enemy must be kissed." The Foreign Ministry, however, said, "We firmly and strictly deny any connection between the assailant and Iran."

Such disavowals are disingenuous, but they work.



Hadi Matar, the man who stabbed Rushdie, is being hailed as a hero in Iran (Image: Twitter)

Consider what Iran has gotten away with by pleading that its terrorism was the work of rogue agents: In 1989, assassins gunned down Kurdish dissidents in Vienna. In 1992, it was Berlin's turn. In 1992 and 1994, Iranian terror-

ists struck Israeli and Jewish targets in Buenos Aires. Two years later, an Iranian operation destroyed a US barracks in Saudi Arabia. Beginning in 2003, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its proxy militias targeted Americans in Iraq, ultimately killing more than 600. In 2007, the IRGC began hijacking ships, seizing British and, in 2016, American sailors. IRGC tanker hijackings continue. In 2019, after Iran shot down a \$176 million American drone, President Donald Trump eschewed retaliation.

"Somebody under the command of that country made a mistake. I think that it could have been somebody who was loose and stupid that did it," he told reporters. Trump was wrong, just as are those in the Biden Administration who give Iran a free pass and dismiss Matar as a lone wolf. After each "rogue" action, the Supreme Leader rewarded or promoted the perpetrators. Why does Washington repeatedly fall for the "rogue" excuse?

For one, cultural blindness. To judge the Islamic Republic by American standards fails, as military command structure and culture differ. The US military is a strict hierarchy capped by the president as commander in chief. Ranks are well-defined, and orders and tasking flow down the chain of command.

Command structure and strategy evolved differently in Iran. Whereas the West has Machiavelli and Clausewitz, Iranians turn to writers from nearly a millennia ago who wrote their advice in a genre known as "mirrors for

princes". Rather than streamline command, Iranians duplicate it in order to force bureaucracies to compete against and inform on each other.

The same philosophy applies to terrorism: After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, analysts debated whether the Badr Corps or Jaysh al Mahdi were the pro-Iranian militia; the answer was both. Iranian patronage shifted back and forth to keep both in check. Likewise, in 2010, Kuwaiti security captured two Iranian terrorist cells, one answering to the IRGC Quds Force and the other to the Intelligence Ministry. Interrogations showed neither was aware of the other's presence.

Just as important, Iran is a dictatorship unlike any other.

The supreme leader does not simply issue commands for the bureaucracy to follow but rather leads by veto. He issues guidelines about what underlings cannot do, leaving them with autonomy to do anything not expressly forbidden. Weekly sermons, delivered directly or by appointed substitutes, refine red lines. In practice, this means Iran's mid-level officers have greater autonomy than their U.S. counterparts. But it also means there will rarely be a paper trail that offers a smoking gun of direct command culpability.

Iranian politics adds to the obfuscation. Whereas Biden sees Islamic Republic reformers as sincere, the reality is the "hard-liner v reformer" dichotomy is a game of good cop-bad cop posturing in which both camps act for the same theocratic control.

Together, this creates a system of plausible deniability in which Iran can attack its enemies without ever paying the price. As Iranian assassins roam from California to New York to Washington, the question for the White House is how long will it remain blind to the insincerity of Iran's excuses and fail to recognise how the Iranian system really works.

AIR

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# “Dawn Breaks”

## The aftermath of a successful operation in Gaza

Ron Ben Yishai

Some 66 hours passed from the moment acting Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid gave the green light for the IDF and Shin Bet [Israel’s internal security agency] to take out high-profile Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) commander, Tayseer Jabari, to the moment the terror group was compelled to agree to a ceasefire on Sunday, August 7.

The usage of the word “compelled” here is crucial. PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhleh, who was in Teheran at the time, as well as the organisation’s other leaders in Gaza and Damascus, had no choice but to accept what the Egyptian mediators offered, even though it asked for no significant sacrifice from Israel.

The ceasefire lacked any form of substantial political or military content, and did anything but put the organisation at ease. It was essentially an unconditional surrender for PIJ, for the sake of Hamas and Gaza residents.

In return for the restraint shown by Hamas throughout the few days of fighting, Israel immediately resumed its obligations vis-à-vis Gaza that were agreed upon before the operation, such as allowing workers with permits to cross the border to return to their jobs inside Israel.

There is no doubt that “Operation Breaking Dawn” was an outright Israeli triumph in all aspects: military, political, and financial. It showcased Israel’s impressive ability to manage a security crisis, which involved not only the IDF and Shin Bet, but also the Government and civilians, who displayed great determination and compliance.

The Israeli public, with the cooperation of the Shin Bet intelligence unit, soldiers and commanders, pilots, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operators, also took part in making this operation a memorable Israeli victory.

The spirits of PIJ would have been raised by any sign of Israeli weakness. Casualties on the Israeli side would have likely caused the terror group to prolong its offensive.

This time around, instead of mourning losses at home, Israelis came out of the operation feeling uplifted that justice had been done. This is contrary to previous Gaza

campaigns, in which Israeli casualties and material losses sometimes blinded us from seeing the accomplishments.

This morale boost has directly influenced the political echelon, especially Lapid and Defence Minister Benny Gantz, who approved the daring plan presented to them by the IDF and Shin Bet.

However, it must be noted that the IDF and Israeli civilians were blessed with a lot of luck. Many things had the potential to go wrong, yet the odds were in Israel’s favour.

The missiles fired by Israel’s jets almost always landed exactly where they were supposed to, the intelligence was flawless, and the collateral damage, i.e. innocent Gazan civilians, was kept to a minimum.

There’s no point in dwelling on the poor management



Scenes from a short, but uniquely successful, three-day conflict (Images: Flickr)

of PIJ’s military wing, but it is important to pay attention to the organisation led by al-Nakhleh. The absentee leader was far too eager to please his patrons in Teheran, and thus allowed the IDF and Shin Bet to manage the operation in ideal circumstances.

Nonetheless, it’s important that the Government and the IDF investigate and learn lessons from this campaign – not just from the failures, but also from the accomplishments. Luck may not be on Israel’s side next time, and “next time” may be just around the corner.

The main takeaway from this operation is that precise political and military preparations are necessary for success in the battlefield. This kind of preparation calls for resources – mostly time – hence the IDF must plan and conduct exercises to prepare for operations where Israel is not the initiator, who automatically has the upper hand.

We must also applaud the restraint of Lapid and Gantz, who kept quiet, thus setting the stage for IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi and Shin Bet Director Ronen Bar to surprise the PIJ with a multidimensional blow. Less than three minutes into the mission, the PIJ was already thrown off



balance, giving Israel the upper hand. Had Lapid and Gantz disclosed the plan to additional parties, the surprise attack may not have been possible.

Israel also stood strong in refusing the PIJ's ridiculous terms for a truce proposed to the mediators, while at the same time showing readiness to end the fighting.

Both the entry and exit strategies of the operation were managed perfectly, especially considering the common mistakes the winning side sometimes makes by neglecting the diplomatic and political fronts upon victory.

Still, the operation neither solved the problem in Gaza, nor promoted any solution. PIJ was not obliterated. It still has the ability to cause harm both in Gaza and the West Bank.

Additionally, we must not forget that this round of fighting was conducted under ideal circumstances – against a cruel yet very limited enemy, in a small battlefield in which Israel not only has the authority to impose a blockade, but can also gather intelligence and maintain mobility very easily.

An operation in Lebanon or Syria, or both simultaneously, will require the IDF to activate all its units and function under much tougher conditions. Moreover, the phenomenal 97% success rate of the Iron Dome in Operation Breaking Dawn cannot be seen as a standard in the case of missile attacks from Hezbollah or Iran.

The launchpads used by PIJ during this operation were very limited, and no UAVs were activated at all. Thus, the IDF's air defence systems enjoyed ideal circumstances. Operation Breaking Dawn was not representative of potential conflicts the IDF may get caught up in in the future.

Nonetheless, Israel came out of this operation with three major accomplishments.

Firstly, thwarting a strategic attempt by PIJ to impose restrictions on Israeli action against its members in the West Bank, who want to carry out deadly terror attacks against Israeli citizens.

Secondly, deterring Israel's regional enemies, such as Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas. They sat on the sidelines and watched as Israel's impressive intelligence bodies and Air Force managed to isolate PIJ from Hamas and Iran,

and maintain international legitimacy throughout the conflict.

Thirdly, strengthening Israel's regional and international status and relations with the countries that are part of the Abraham Accords, Israel proved that it is indeed ready and capable of fighting to secure its civilians and sovereignty.

AIR

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## IRAN VS. THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

**Bassem Eid**

**O**n August 5 through 7, Israel fought a short, sharp conflict with Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) termed "Operation Breaking Dawn". The battle began when Israel received intelligence information regarding PIJ's intent to fire anti-tank missiles at Israeli targets near the Gaza border, and responded with precision strikes targeting PIJ's senior leadership in Gaza. PIJ fired a barrage of more than 1,100 rockets at Israel during the 55 hours of fighting.

PIJ's aggression was armed, funded, and controlled by Iran, which considers its revolutionary goals to be served by fighting Israel to the last drop of Palestinian blood. Much violence and sorrow were averted because other Palestinian factions, even the terrorist group Hamas, showed themselves too savvy, on this occasion, to be drawn into Iran's maelstrom. However, Iran's cynical manipulation of the Palestinian people continues and must be understood in order to be countered.

PIJ's ideology is inspired by the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and PIJ's former leader Ramadan Shallah described his organisation as "another fruit of the Ayatollah Khomeini's fructuous tree." Speaking of PIJ's arms and equipment, he admitted that "the whole world knows that they come mostly from Iran or were purchased with Iranian funding." Iran has funded PIJ since 2000 by means of an incentive structure that encourages successful terrorist attacks. As of 2016, Iran's funding for PIJ had reached an astonishing US\$70 million (A\$101.8 million) annually. Iran currently funds the majority of the PIJ budget, according to the US State Department.

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On Aug. 4, the day before the conflict, top PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhleh was meeting with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Teheran. On Aug. 6, the day after it erupted, he was pictured meeting with Hossein Salami, head of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Iranian paramilitary organisation listed by the US State Department as a terrorist organisation that actively supports terror proxies in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, and Yemen.



PIJ fighters in Gaza (Image: Shutterstock)

PIJ's headquarters and senior leadership have resided in Teheran since 2012, when they relocated from Damascus due to the Syrian Civil War. PIJ maintained its lockstep support for Iran during the worst of the Syrian struggle, when the Yarmouk Refugee Camp outside Damascus – once home to the largest concentration of Palestinians in the world – was placed under a brutal siege by Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah, which strained relations between the Iranian bloc and Hamas. Ultimately, more than 4,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Iran-backed Syrian Government during the conflict, and more than 500 have been tortured to death. Nevertheless, as the *Jerusalem Post's* Herb Keinon has explained, "Iran supports Hamas but it controls Islamic Jihad. There is a difference."

When it is understood that PIJ follows an Iranian, and not a Palestinian, agenda, it makes sense why PIJ is so callous in regard to Palestinian life. PIJ is a purely military organisation and unlike Hamas does not provide social services or participate in Palestinian elections. More Gazan civilians were killed by failed PIJ rockets than by Israeli airstrikes during Operation Breaking Dawn.

Iran's nightmare is the possibility of peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours, including the Palestinian people. This is because Iran remains a revolutionary state threatened by stability, and it maintains the goal of exacerbating conflict throughout the region. Under the framework of the Abraham Accords, Israel has normalised relations with several Arab neighbours. Most recently, Saudi Arabia took the momentous step of permitting Israeli commercial flights over its airspace.

Most importantly, the people of Gaza are ready to

move past endless conflict: a recent survey found that 52% of young people in Gaza, compared to only a quarter in the West Bank, agree with the statement that "[t]he Palestinian-Israeli conflict is mostly just for politicians or old people, and I simply don't think about it very much." Only Iran, the outside mischief-maker, seeks to uproot the shoots of peace. The rest of the world, and particularly the Palestinians, must not be duped by this malign influence, and instead follow their own interests and ensure a better tomorrow for their children and grandchildren, living in peace and security alongside the Jewish homeland, the State of Israel.

AIR

*Bassem Eid is a Palestinian living in Israel who has had an extensive career as a Palestinian human rights activist. He now works as a political analyst for Israeli TV and radio. © Times of Israel (www.timesofisrael.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## TALKING TURKEY

Amotz Asa-El

It took years to evolve, but the Turkish Government has decided to mend its relationship with Israel, after having previously steered that relationship away from warm friendship and toward open animosity.

Israeli-Turkish friendship harked back to the 1950s, when then-Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion secretly created the so-called "periphery alliance" linking Israel, Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia, all non-Arab countries that border the Arab world. After later losing Ethiopia to the Soviet bloc in the mid-1970s and Iran to Islamism in 1979, Israel and Turkey quietly became closer. By the 1990s, Ankara and Jerusalem developed an intimate alliance that included joint military exercises, large arms deals, and close intelligence cooperation, alongside frequent cultural exchanges and brisk trade – underscored by Turkey's emergence as the most popular destination for Israeli holidaymakers.

All this ended in the aftermath of Turkey's transition to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's long rule and increasingly Islamist orientation.

Though it took six more years to spin fully out of control, Erdogan's verbal hostility emerged as early as 2004, hardly a year after his rise to power, when he likened Israel to the terror organisations it faced. Erdogan's anti-Israeli vitriol then became habitual, most memorably in Davos, Switzerland, in 2009, when, sharing a stage with then-Israeli President Shimon Peres, he accused Israel of "killing babies" before storming off the panel. On other occasions, Erdogan compared Israel to Nazi Germany.



As Erdogan's grip on Turkey tightened steadily over the years, military cooperation with Israel rapidly declined, although diplomatic relations remained intact. That, too, ended, following the 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident in which six Turkish ships carrying hundreds of Islamist activists sailed toward Gaza with the declared intention of breaking the Egyptian-Israeli naval blockade of the strip.

The IDF's raid on the flotilla in response resulted in a clash aboard the main vessel, the *Mavi Marmara*, between Israeli naval commandos and hundreds of Turks wielding metal bars, bats and knives. The clash ended with nine Turks dead and ten Israelis injured, two of them severely. Another casualty was diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Jewish state, which were reduced to the lowest level.

Initial efforts to reconcile Jerusalem and Ankara were led by Washington, which felt it could not afford disharmony between two of its most important and long-standing Middle Eastern allies. A breakthrough seemed to arrive during US President Barak Obama's visit to Israel in 2013, when he mediated a phone conversation between Erdogan and then-Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's apology for the loss of lives during the flotilla incident ignited three years of negotiations that ended with an exchange of ambassadors following Israel's payment, through a special fund, of US\$20 million (A\$28.6 million) intended for the families of the flotilla's fatalities.

Yet what seemed like a path to reconciliation soon unravelled, as Erdogan first persisted with his verbal broadsides against Israel whenever Palestinian-Israeli violence flared, and then, in 2018, again expelled the Israeli ambassador.

Now reconciliation is again taking place, only this time Turkey has some strategic motivations it did not have in the past.

A change in the atmospherics coming out of Ankara first surfaced a year ago, when Erdogan called then newly-elected Israeli President Isaac Herzog to congratulate him. The gesture was followed by another phone call two days later, after which Ankara said both men had discussed how to seek ways to improve their countries' relations.



Israeli President Isaac Herzog paved the way for the latest announcement with his visit to Turkey, and meeting with Turkish President Erdogan, in March (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

In March, Herzog travelled to Turkey for a state visit in which Erdogan hosted him personally and with full ceremony, the first such event since then-Israeli PM Ehud Olmert's journey to Turkey in 2008. Herzog's visit was soon followed by a visit by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu to Jerusalem and then-Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid's visit to Ankara in June.

Then, on Aug. 17, following a phone conversation between Erdogan and now acting Israeli PM Lapid, the two Governments announced their decision to fully restore diplomatic ties and develop their economic and cultural ties.

**W**hat, then, made the Turkish leopard change its spots? The Erdogan era began with a dramatic redirection of Turkey's foreign policy. The legacy of Turkey's founder, Kamal Ataturk, who resolved to detach Turkey from the Middle East and turn it towards Europe, was replaced with a quest to return Turkish leadership to the Ottoman Empire's lost lands.

Commonly referred to as "neo-Ottomanism", the new policy direction was part of a growing rejection of Ataturk's secular legacy led by Erdogan. Had it worked, it would have refashioned Turkey as the Middle East's economic engine and political compass. It also would have meant, as Erdogan's circle saw things, gaining the attention and support of the Arab masses by assuming leadership of the Palestinian cause. This reboot, however, failed.

Erdogan's attempt to create a free trade zone with the Arab world was politely rejected by its main targets, the Arab Gulf states and Egypt. The Arab rejection of Turkey's extended hand was so comprehensive that even the embattled Libyan leader, Muammar Qaddafi, when faced with the rebellion that soon afterward unseated him and led to his death, rejected Erdogan's offer of asylum.

Turkey's Arab orientation then suffered additional setbacks in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring that began in 2011.

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To its south, Ankara's effort to unseat Syrian President Bashar al-Assad failed, and the Islamist rebels it backed in Syria were defeated. Further south, Turkey's backing for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, even after that Islamist party's defeat by President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi in 2013, resulted in intense diplomatic hostility between Ankara and Cairo, with Erdogan calling al-Sisi a "tyrant" and his Government "illegitimate".

Finally, at home, the Syrian civil war sent more than three million refugees into Turkey, creating a major burden on its economy, and sparked Turkey's invasion and occupation of northern Syria, the first such intrusion anywhere in the Arab world since the Ottoman Empire's downfall a century earlier.

**A**dded up, these developments have left Turkish policymakers disillusioned about the Arab Middle East, and thus less motivated to provoke Israel than they had previously been.

Meanwhile, the Erdogan era's economic achievements gave way to economic crisis, now underscored by 80% inflation, 10% unemployment, and the lira's 53% collapse against the US dollar over the past year alone. Lastly, and most painfully from Ankara's point of view, vast Mediterranean gas fields discovered in recent years have been developed in Israeli and Cypriot waters – close to Turkey but just beyond its reach.

Thanks to Ankara's long-standing occupation of northern Cyprus, and Erdogan's hostility toward Israel, this gas is being exported to Arab countries, and there are plans to send it to Europe through a pipeline via Greece, but none of it has gone to Turkey. Turkey thus manoeuvred itself into an isolated position contrary to both its geographic location and national interests.

With Turkey's economic crisis multiplying the urgency, the energy dimensions of Ankara's relations with Jerusalem were clearly the key inspiration for the Turkish decision to mend fences with the Jewish state.

Where, then, will this rapprochement lead?

Emotionally, Erdogan's hatred for Israel, which has at times sounded pretty blatantly antisemitic, is very unlikely to vanish, and his rhetoric will almost certainly remain a problem. Security relations will also not return anytime soon to what they were under Turkey's secular governments, when Israel upgraded Turkish battle tanks and fighter planes. Intelligence cooperation appears to have been largely restored, yet Turkey will continue to host a Hamas presence, to Israel's chagrin.

Economically, however, trade will likely now accelerate, led by tourism, with Israelis already returning in droves to Turkey's beaches, resorts, and bazaars, while also benefiting from the lira's weakness and the shekel's strength. Part of this commercial restoration will involve Israeli airlines again flying to Turkey. This traffic will hopefully

help reduce the tension that overshadowed Turkish-Israeli relations for the better part of two decades.

Something will also likely happen on the gas front. If it were up to Turkey, it would host a pipeline from Israel's offshore gas fields into Europe, an idea that is technically complex, but has now become more relevant and urgent in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the consequent European thirst for non-Russian gas. Even if such a transcontinental scheme does not materialise, Israeli gas will almost certainly reach Turkey itself.

Finally, on the regional front, Turkish-Israeli reconciliation will impact Iran. In June, the Islamic republic's agents reportedly tried to stage a terror attack in Turkey against Israeli tourists. The attempt was foiled by Israel's spy agency Mossad in close cooperation with its Turkish equivalent, MIT.

Suspicion between Ankara and Teheran, neighbours and historic rivals, was already rife, but worsened in recent years as the pair found themselves on opposite sides in the Syrian civil war.

War thus hovers behind Turkey's change of course regarding Israel, but so does peace. Turkey's mediation of a grain-corridor agreement between Russia and Ukraine has impressed diplomats for its inventiveness and utility. Jerusalem will be hoping this proves to be part of something larger – a kinder and gentler Turkey of the sort that Israelis recall fondly from the years before the rise of Erdogan.

## THE NEW NORMAL

Hillel Frisch

**S**ince a Palestinian mob attempted to lynch Tunisia's President in 1964 for suggesting peace with Israel, the "Arab Street" has come a long way. Even a warm handshake between Israel's army chief, Major General Aviv Kochavi, and senior Moroccan defence officials in the north African country on July 19 elicited little reaction. The Arabic-speaking publics are too preoccupied with their own problems to demonstrate in support of the Palestinians.

Nearly 60 years ago, Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba was nearly lynched in Jordan's Baqa'a refugee camp for suggesting normalising relations with Israel as a strategy to bring down the Jewish state. He claimed that Jews were innately a roving, trading, diaspora people. Allow Israelis to trade among us, he contended, and the Sephardim [Jews from Arab nations] would soon emigrate from Israel and return to their commercial pursuits in the Arab states they had fled, leaving Israel an empty shell.

The story's significance is not in Bourguiba's analysis – Israel's Jewish population (like its Arab citizens) enjoy travelling abroad and engaging in international business while keeping Israel as their beloved home base. The Jewish population in Israel has more than doubled since Bourguiba escaped from death, and Israel is one of two non-European countries in the top ten on the World Happiness Index.

What is significant about Bourguiba's bout with the Palestinian mob is how much light it reflects on the dramatic shift of the "Arab Street" toward Israel, particularly the Abraham Accords process in what is known as "normalisation" in the Arab world. Of course, normalisation, *tatbi'* in Arabic, may remain a derogatory term in the lexicon of intellectuals and the Arab street, perhaps even to the point of being a curse word. Still, the fact is that the Arab world's reaction to the ever-deepening process of normalisation arouses less and less interest, let alone protest.

What more could be done to arouse anger than the trip by Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz, whose title in many Arab-speaking media outlets is "Minister of War," to the United Arab Emirates to discuss military cooperation? Worse, there are the almost messianic photos of Kochavi shaking hands with his Moroccan counterparts.

To be sure, Hamas and Hezbollah media outlets were quick to condemn these treasonous acts, and Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas' propagandists either commented on these "unfortunate" and "sad" events or ignored them entirely.

But words are cheap; the real issue was the Arab street's



Scenes that once would have provoked outrage are now routine: Israeli Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi with his Moroccan counterpart (top); Israeli PM Yair Lapid meets Jordan's King Abdullah (bottom) (Images: Flickr)

reaction in the streets themselves. Very little happened. In most Arab capitals and major cities, nothing happened. In a few that exhibited any activity, a dozen activists, mostly with greying hair, gathered behind banners opposing normalisation, while many more than the demonstrators passed by without raising an eyebrow.

Even in the Palestinian Authority and Gaza, these moves elicited only a cursory response. The same scenes that played out in Arab cities were played out among Palestinians.

It is not surprising, then, that Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid's meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah in late July, in which they agreed to develop a joint economic hub near the King Hussein Bridge where Israeli and Jordanian businessmen could meet, was met with calmness – in

almost prophetic contrast to the reaction to Bourguiba 58 years ago.

Neither the meeting nor the proposal demonstrated any bravery on the part of the Hashemite King. Jordan signed an agreement six years ago to purchase 45 billion cubic metres of Israeli gas for ten billion US dollars over 15 years.

There was so little opposition on the "Jordanian street" that security forces took no action against Hisham al-Bustani, the coordinator of "the Campaign Against the Enemy's Gas," who accused by name the Jordanian ministers involved in the agreement's ratification. If the regime had felt threatened, it would have arrested him for incitement. It was correct: two years after the video in which al-Bustani appeared, only 145 people had viewed it, with only one comment, which was supportive of the King.

Normalisation with Israel is not met with equanimity in so many Arab states because of a love for Israel. Nor has the realisation of Israel's technological achievements changed public attitudes toward the Jewish state.

The transformation is far more fundamental and internal. Arab publics are engrossed by the challenges that they face in their own states. For example, in Lebanon there are economic burdens, growing animosity toward Hezbollah, and the threat of renewed civil war that Hezbollah control evokes. In Iraq there is the danger of political and economic meltdown – not as a result of the Shi'ite/Sunni divide as it was a decade ago, but more ominously, in an intra-Shi'ite conflict fuelled by Iranian meddling. And in

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Egypt, there is the perennial concern of keeping Egypt above water economically, not to mention Tunisia.

In short, when the “Arab street” takes to the streets, they cannot add the burden of the Palestinians to their concerns. Last year, a Syrian opposition member who Palestinian students heckled at Hebrew University responded, “You live in paradise compared to what Syrians face!”

The Arab street’s lack of reaction allows Arab leaders to pursue their relations with Israel to benefit themselves and their constituents.

*Hillel Frisch is professor emeritus at Bar-Ilan University and former Senior Researcher in the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Centre for Strategic Studies. © Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies (www.jiss.org.il), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## “GIMC” – A HATEFUL GIMMICK FOR EXTREMISTS

Ran Porat

According to its Facebook page, the aim of the Government Intervention in the Muslim Community (GIMC) group is to “[Raise] awareness about government intervention in the Muslim community through its counter-terrorism policy. Initially for Australia, however, because intervention is a global phenomena [sic], the page now also addresses interference internationally.”

“It is well-known that world governments’ counter-terrorism policies post 9/11 primarily target Muslim communities in their respect [sic] countries,” say the group’s administrators in the page description. “Follow-



HT Australia leader Ismai'l al-Wahwah speaking at the Nov. 2015 “Innocent Until Proven Muslim?” conference in Melbourne. Behind him is the HT Australia banner (YouTube screenshot)

ing the London bombings of 2005 a greater focus on the ‘home-grown’ terrorism phenomenon brought Muslims living in Australia and in other countries into the firing line more sharply. Since then, governments have developed and implemented a broad range of counter-terrorism policies that target Muslim communities. It is also well-known that much of the counter-terrorism agenda of governments, with the US and UK leading the way, is politicised. It is as much a political agenda, if not more, as it is a security one”.

GIMC is not the grassroots community group it purports to be. It is actually a project of the Australian branch of the Hizb ut-Tahrir organisation (HT Australia), which advocates for reconstitution of a global Muslim Caliphate based on Islamic religious law (Shari’a), while rejecting integration of Muslims into non-Muslim societies.

As I have documented in the *AIR* several times over the past few years, HT Australia and its leader, Palestinian born Ismai'l al-Wahwah (Abu Anas), are notorious for supporting terrorism and spreading conspiracy theories, antisemitism, and poisonous anti-Israel rhetoric, including continuous calls for the destruction of the Jewish state.

### “JEWS WILL SUFFER THE WORST TORMENT”

Here are a couple of recent examples of previously unrevealed messages and statements from HT Australia. On Aug. 9, the HT Australia Facebook page posted a new antisemitic video narrated by al-Wahwah. In it, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) is described as “the army of Jews to which the money of the world flows. A Jewish army supported by all the tyranny of the world.” Al-Wahwah repeats HT Australia’s familiar call to Arab armies to wage Jihad (holy war) “to liberate Palestine”, while labelling the international community (and especially the US) as “the enemies who planted this state [Israel]. They are the ones who created this state. They are the ones who financed this state. The blood of Muslims is on their hands, all of them.”

The video ends with a prophecy that on Judgment Day, “they [the Jews] will suffer the worst torment. These are the Jews. Therefore, Jews will not rise forever. They will not be reassured forever and will not have peace forever. God promised that he will set his men back at them [the Jews] with great might. They will enter the homeland, God willing, Palestine.”

A day later (Aug. 10), during the clashes between Israel and the terror organisation Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza (“Operation Breaking Dawn”), the HT Aus Facebook page republished a message posted from the HT international website, quoting the Quranic verse “And kill them [the aggressors] wherever you overcame them, and expel them from wherever they expelled you” (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:190). The statement concludes with a call to soldiers in Arab nations to “Brush off the dust of humiliation from yourselves. Do



not obey the agents of the *kufr* [infidel] West. Uproot them and install sincere men who will lead you towards the liberation of your land and the restoration of glory for your Ummah [Islamic nation].”

## NO TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE, YES TO STABBING RUSHDIE

What is GIMC’s association with HT Australia? Followed by more than 11,000 people, the GIMC Facebook page was created after the first “Intervention in the Muslim Community” conference which took place in Sydney in November 2013. In fact, the text of the Facebook page description of the group quoted above is taken directly from the report published by HT Australia after that conference.

That report is an attack on what HT Australia describes as Australia’s “brutally exploitative foreign policy towards the Muslim world.” Accordingly, the authors of the report recommended Muslims in Australia undertake actions which would undermine Canberra’s efforts to protect citizens against terrorism. Muslims, it says, must “expos[e] the counter-terrorism policy of the Government for what it is, challenging and critiquing it, in a sustained and coherent manner, along with the flawed narrative that underpins it, and propagating a counter-narrative reflective of the truth.” Also, Muslims should “[Refuse] to partake in any of the Government’s counter-terrorism programs and initiatives which serve their agenda and perpetuate their narrative about terrorism,” as well as “Adopt more thought-out, confident and assertive approaches towards various aspects of state interaction with Muslims, such as those of ASIO and the AFP.”

The GIMC Facebook page is consistently in lockstep with HT Australia’s hateful messages about Israel, Jews and social harmony. It shares HT Australia content, videos and ideology (such as calls to reinstate the Caliphate), as well as conspiracy theories spread by HT Australia. For example, it repeats the myth that the global fight against terror is just an excuse by the West to rule other countries – “The world knows the whole ‘war on terror’ was a lie and was merely America’s latest scramble for more resources and hegemony over the lands.”

Responding to the news about re-normalisation of relations between Israel and Turkey in mid-August, GIMC posted (Aug. 18): “[Turkish President] Erdogan rewards the Jewish occupation for killing children with a return to full diplomatic ties.” During “Operation Breaking Dawn”, a GIMC post (Aug. 7) asked Allah to “curse every enabler of the Jewish occupation.”

Just like HT Australia, GIMC rejects interfaith dialogue and multicultural exchanges if they involve Jews. In


response to an interfaith conference in NSW, a GIMC post (Aug. 7) warned that “Those Muslim Organisation representatives who continue to attend ‘interfaith’ events with Zionists send a message that Muslims in Australia don’t really mind what the criminal occupation does to Muslims in Palestine.” Even Muslim school kids should not meet with Jews. “Muslims [sic] schools continue to participate in Interfaith activities with supporters of the occupation of Palestine. What happened to boycotting the Zionists?” decried GIMC on July 2.

Several GIMC posts were dedicated to defence of the stabbing of author Salman Rushdie in New York on Aug. 12. One post (Aug. 18) included a video of HT UK member Kenan Malik justifying this attempted murder on TV as being a response to “insults”. In another (Aug. 14), the West was blamed by GIMC for praising Rushdie “for insulting and mocking the Ummah... One can only conclude that Western regimes wish only to keep their self-given right to mindlessly insult, mock and anger Muslims so that the

west [sic] can continue to murder innocents through their invasions and occupations on the back of the West’s ‘freedom’ to speak lies in justifying their crimes.”

## THE “INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN MUSLIM?” CAMPAIGN

A few years ago on its YouTube channel, GIMC published videos attacking Australian government counter-terrorism policies as part of its “Innocent Until Proven Muslim?” campaign. These featured interviews with wives of Australian Muslims in local prisons for terror charges. The campaign also included a conference in Melbourne under the same name in November 2015, organised by HT Australia. Keynote speakers in that conference were HT Australia leader al-Wahwah, radical HT Australia preacher Wassim Doureihi and HT Australia media representative Uthman Badar. One of the participants in that 2015 conference was Omar Chandab, whose passport was cancelled after he tried to fly to Syria to join militants there. Speaking to the audience, Chandab opened with praise of HT Australia.

As recently as 2021, AIJAC made a submission to the Australian government recommending it consider a ban on HT Australia. The latest evidence included in this article provides further support for the need to do so, and soon. 

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# A sad legacy

## Australia's experience with Nazi war criminals

Eliana Chiovetta

For most of the last 70 years, Australia had a long-standing public policy problem with regard to dealing with the hundreds, at least, of alleged Nazi war criminals who immigrated here following the Second World War. An environment of indifference, even tolerance, for these alleged Nazi war criminals was sustained for decades due to a number of factors, notably significant gaps in legal frameworks and ambivalence within government circles, and the context and tensions of the Cold War. Finally, starting in the late 1980s, efforts were belatedly made to prosecute and later extradite some alleged Nazi war criminals, but none of these efforts succeeded.



Charles Zentai, the last known alleged Nazi war criminal in Australia, who died in 2017

On Dec. 13, 2017, the legal element of this long saga came to an end with the death of 96-year-old Perth resident Charles Zentai, the last known alleged Nazi war criminal in Australia.

This article is an attempt to analyse the lasting imprints Australia's poor record of identifying and failure to take successful legal action against Nazi war

criminals has had on this country, both in terms of the many Australian communities impacted, and its legacy for Australia's legal system.

### THE POST-WAR IMMIGRATION

Australia's response to Nazi War criminals can be divided into three main periods: 1. the 1940s through 1980s (i.e. the period of indifference); 2. the late 1980s to 1990s (the period of prosecution attempts), and 3. the 2000s (the period of extradition attempts).

Australia joined the United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC) in the 1940s, alongside other allied nations, with the aim to "investigate and record the evidence of war crimes," ultimately leading to the Nuremberg trials. International and national legal structures to pursue and punish Nazi war criminals were developed, with Australia's participation in UNWCC focussed on Japan.

However, in 1947 then Australian Prime Minister Ben Chifley declared, with reference to the Japanese, that "the major tasks of UNWCC have been completed and the laws pertaining to war crimes adequately developed." Chifley told Parliament that he "could not see purpose in continuing investigations aimed at tracing war criminals, which could go on for an extended period." Australia did, however, ratify the UN Genocide Convention in 1949.

Many of the alleged former Nazi war criminals who settled in Australia immigrated from the former Baltic states (especially Lithuania) and eastern Europe (i.e. Belarus, Poland, and Czechoslovakia). Australia was one of four nations which had mass post-war-immigration programs for displaced persons from war-ravaged Europe, the other three being the US, Canada and Israel. All of these states, apart from Israel, later had issues with Nazi war criminals being identified, although a very small percentage of those immigrants.

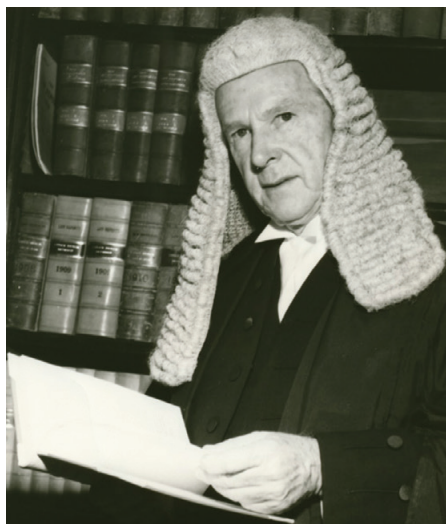
Meanwhile, Jews have historically been a significant part of Australia culturally, politically and socially. In 1933, Australia's Jewish population was approximately 23,000. Between 1933 and 1938, 8,000 Jewish refugees immigrated to Australia, with an additional 5,000 in 1939. By 1961, the Jewish population increased by almost two and a half times, reaching 60,000, thanks to post-war immigration, mainly of Holocaust survivors.

Australia's Jewish community came to have the second largest per capita number of Holocaust survivors – second only to that of newly formed Israel. In total, Australia came to be the home of approximately 31,000 Holocaust survivors.

The discovery of former Nazi war criminals living in Australia had, unsurprisingly, significant effects on Holocaust survivors in Australia. These discoveries both enraged many survivors, and arguably helped create an increased impetus for Holocaust education and preserving the Holocaust remembrances of Australian survivors.

The lack of effective laws and the presence of alleged Nazi war criminals within Australia was very occasionally raised in mainstream public debates in subsequent years, but it was not fully addressed and acknowledged until the 1980s.

A key background reason for this was the Cold War, where Australian foreign policy was focussed heavily on anti-Communism, and where the



Sir Garfield Barwick (top), who argued war criminals who came to Australia should be allowed to “turn their back on past bitterness... and make a new life”; and Konrad Kalejs, the Australian citizen whose arrest in the US on war crimes charges in 1985 sparked a debate about Australia’s legal responses. (Images: High Court of Australia, AAP)

push to prosecute war criminals from eastern Europe was often seen as a dubious initiative, based on suspect evidence, originating from totalitarian communist regimes.

Thus, in 1961 Australian Attorney-General Garfield Barwick turned down a Soviet request for extradition of alleged war criminal Ervin Viks. Barwick said that it was “the right of this nation, by receiving people into this country, to enable men to turn their backs on past bitternesses and to make a new life for themselves and for their families in a happier community.”

By the 1970s, the Australian Jewish community, as well as others in Australian society, had become vocal

in calling attention to the alleged war criminals. The late 1980s to early 1990s marked a transition period, when significant progress began to be made towards seeking to address and take action on the issue of Nazi war criminals within Australia.

## STEPS TOWARDS PROSECUTION IN AUSTRALIA – THE HAWKE GOVERNMENT

The Hawke Government was the first to officially acknowledge Australia’s apparent unofficial “safe haven” status for war criminals, leading to the Menzies review of 1986, in which the Government appointed A.C. Menzies AM OBE to oversee a review of material related to the entry of suspected war criminals into Australia. Menzies concluded that it was likely that a significant number of people who had committed war crimes had entered Australia and that action needed to be taken.

Two key events had sparked the Australian Government changing its approach to war criminals at this time. One was public controversy over the arrest in the US in 1985 of a long-term US resident with Australian citizenship named Konrad Kalejs on war crimes charges. The US Department of Justice alleged that, between July 1941 and June or July 1944, Kalejs was a company commander in the notorious Arajs Kommando, a local police unit which assisted the *Einsatzgruppen* death squads to murder Jews and Roma in Latvia. After several years of court battles, Kalejs was eventually deported back to Australia.

The other event was the broadcast of the pioneering radio documentary series “Nazis in Australia”, produced by investigative journalist Mark Aarons, on ABC *Radio National* in 1986, demonstrating Kalejs was only one of many Nazi war crimes cases.

The Hawke Government subsequently introduced the *War Criminal Amendments Act*, which passed the House of Representatives in October

1987 and finally passed the Senate in December 1988.

The 1988 Act amended the *War Criminals Act* of 1945, allowing Australian Military Tribunals to try Japanese defendants for the alleged commission of atrocities in World War II, to also allow the prosecution of any Australian citizen or resident who committed war crimes between “on or after 1 September 1939 and on or before 8 May 1945.” Section 21 of the amended act required the attorney-general to report annually on operations to carry out such prosecutions.

The plan to introduce the *War Crimes Act* in the 1980s sparked intense public debate, including strong opposition from some sources. Justice Michael Kirby, then President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal, argued that Australia could not prosecute Nazi war criminals after such an extended period of time if “fairness and respect for human rights” were to be upheld within Australian courts. The President of the Bar Association, Ken Handley QC, asserted that the *War Crimes Act* was merely “an expensive propaganda excuse” and the Law Council of Australia argued a fair trial was unlikely due to the lack of availability and lack of reliability of key evidence.

David Pennington, Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, urged forgiveness instead of “vengeance for crimes long after they were committed,” raising concerns about traditional Christian anti-Jewish discourse being deployed in these debates over war crimes.

## THE SIU

Based on a Menzies Review recommendation, the Hawke Government also established the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) in May 1987, tasked with collecting evidence on the commission of war crimes.

The primary role of the SIU was to investigate all allegations of Nazi war criminals living in Australia. Allegations ranged from leading death squads to serving as SS guards – 841 people



were investigated in all. Victoria had the most cases of any state, with New South Wales a close second. Eight hundred and nineteen of the cases were suspended for a variety of reasons, including unsubstantiated or insufficient evidence, the defendant being deceased or in poor health and, in some cases, investigators concluding the allegations of war crimes were simply false. Twenty cases remained open when the SIU was shut down in late 1992 for the following reasons: four cases were referred to the DPP for prosecution, four cases were amalgamated with earlier files, and 14 allegations were made on June 10, 1992, only 20 days before the SIU was shut down (leaving the investigations incomplete and still open).

Despite funding increases through its last year of operation, suggesting the importance and growing viability of the organisation, the SIU was controversially shut down by the Keating Government, which argued it had accomplished its goal and was no longer necessary.

The SIU remained in operation until June 30, 1992, when it was replaced with the War Criminal Prosecution Support Unit (WCPSU), tasked with prosecuting defendants based on the SIU's evidence. From its formation in July 1992 to its disbandment on Jan. 31, 1994, the WCPSU only launched three prosecutions, none of which resulted in a conviction.

The three cases that were prosecuted based on SIU evidence demonstrated many practical and evidentiary problems within Australian criminal law with respect to war crimes cases for crimes committed overseas; specifically, difficulties pertaining to obtaining reliable eyewitness accounts, testimony, and identification.

The SIU's most famous case was against Ivan Polyukovich, the only person to be tried under Australia's amended *War Crimes Act*. In January 1990, Polyukovich was arrested in Adelaide for his alleged involvement

in a mass execution of some 800 Jews from the Jewish ghetto in Serniki in occupied Ukraine when he served in the Forestry Department of the Nazi Wehrmacht, as well as personally killing others later during WWII. The case took over three years, with the formal trial beginning in March 1993.



Ivan Polyukovich

However, Polyukovich was found "not guilty" by a jury on May 18th, 1993. Despite corroborating eyewitness testimony, there were issues with some of the translations and some of the witnesses were too elderly to take the stand. As crusading journalist Mark Aarons explained, "Many of the witnesses had died, many were elderly, the defence lawyers were able to cast doubt on the veracity of their memories."

The other two cases prosecuted by the SIU also failed, with charges against Mikolay Berezowsky dismissed at his committal hearing and the case against Heinrich Wagner dropped due to Wagner's poor health after he suffered a heart attack. These cases re-emphasise the incredible importance of speedy trials and the serious difficulties created by long time lapses between the commission of war crimes and the prosecution of the perpetrators.

The fourth case recommended for prosecution by the SIU was later revealed to be against Karlis Ozols, [see below], but this case was never pursued due to the closure of the SIU by the Keating Government before investigations could be completed.

## EFFORTS AND PROGRESS POST-SIU

After the SIU was closed, progress

on addressing the legacy of Nazi war criminals in Australia largely dropped from the public radar for some time. Efforts revived again in the 2000s, especially regarding amending Australia's extradition process to allow alleged perpetrators to face trial in the European countries in which their crimes were allegedly committed.

Previously, this had not been viewed as possible because most of the countries concerned were part of the Soviet Union or its satellites, and there was little confidence defendants could receive fair trials in those totalitarian countries. Attitudes were slowly shifting, as demonstrated by Justice Minister Senator Christopher Ellison, who commented in a media release "transnational crime requires transnational response." Successive Australian governments therefore continued to strengthen their commitment to dealing with this issue, and improve the legal system's capabilities throughout the 2000s, with repeated amendments to the *Extradition and Mutual Assistance Arrangements Act* of 1988.

However, no extradition effort led to an actual conviction in an Australia Nazi war crime case. In one prominent case, Konrad Kalejs was sought for extradition to Latvia in 2000. A Melbourne Magistrate found Kalejs should be extradited, but he died in late 2001 before the extradition process could be completed. In another case, Charles Zentai was ordered to be extradited to Hungary in 2009, but his extradition was overturned by the High Court in 2012.

The growth of Australia's commitment to additional measures to seek justice concerning Nazi war criminals



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can be seen via revisions within the Simon Wiesenthal Centre's (SWC) national ratings on dealing with Nazi war criminals. In the 1990s, Australia regularly received an "F" for "consistently failing to hold Holocaust perpetrators accountable" and "a weak will to proceed with prosecutions." Australia was upgraded to a "D" and then to a "C" in the 2000s. The upward shift in grade can be attributed primarily to the proceedings to seek to extradite Charles Zentai. However, despite better efforts, the SWC still described Australia as "lacking in political will" with respect to seeking justice for alleged Nazi war criminals in Australia.

## AUSTRALIAN WAR CRIME LAW REFORMS

Legally, 2002 was a threshold year, establishing more solid foundations for Australia to continue the progress seen over the past two decades in learning from the impact of alleged Nazi war criminals' immigration to Australia. This was due to the passage of new provisions for the prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes which came into operation under div 268 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth) ('*Criminal Code*'). However, these new measures also have not yet resulted in any successful prosecutions in Australia – though the extradition of Croatia Serb militia leader Dragan Vasiljkovic in 2015 led to his conviction in Croatia.

After the SIU's closure, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) became responsible for investigating potential war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide within its jurisdiction. But this jurisdiction prior to 2002 was very narrow, excluding war crimes committed in non-international armed conflicts (like the Rwandan genocide).

Up until 2002, such legal frameworks only pertained to first Japanese and then Nazi war criminals. These limitations excluded the ability to prosecute many other war criminals, resulting in Australia again being a

potential "safe haven" for alleged war criminals, including, for example, former leaders in the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, or perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide.

The Lowy Institute released a policy paper in 2009 which indicated that there were potentially hundreds of war criminals from former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and East Timor in Australia. The paper further emphasised the importance of prosecution in a timely fashion. Additionally, this policy paper, written by John Stapleton, analytically supported the need for the establishment of a war criminal unit within the AFP. The Lowy Institute paper argued that the formation of such a unit would be both more beneficial for identification and prosecution of potential war criminals and more economical for the government, with a war criminal unit being cheaper than the current system. Unfortunately, this advice was not heeded and the AFP today still has only limited capacity to investigate war crimes within its existing units.

Another legal legacy of the war crimes debate involves changes to the law regarding revocation of citizenship for those who lied about their past activities – such as the commission of war crimes – when they applied for immigration or citizenship. The Menzies Review noted that revoking the Australian citizenship of alleged war criminals on this ground was not possible because Australian law at the time only allowed such revocation for ten years after the act of providing false information on an immigration claim was committed. The *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* removed this ten-year limitation period for offences involving false statements and representations used to fraudulently obtain citizenship or an immigrant visa.

Moreover, the legacy of the Nazi war criminals within Australia arguably had other legal effects. For example, this year bills were passed banning the display of the swastika

and other Nazi symbols in Victoria and NSW. Victorian Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes noted that "the symbol does nothing but cause pain and division." Arguably, the readiness of Australian governments to enact such measures to ban Nazi symbols is in some small part a by-product of the educational processes about Nazism and its impact in Australia that occurred during the war crimes debates that have regularly been a part of Australian public discussion since the 1980s.

## LASTING IMPACTS ON AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES

Many communities are still grappling with the legacies left by Nazi war criminals in Australia, especially when former Nazis were highly integrated, influential, or otherwise prominent members of a community or group. These impacts are long-lasting and still present today.

For example, the residents of the city of Wollongong were recently forced to reconcile with the highly problematic past of a beloved and prominent community member, Bob Sredersas. In March 2022, it was shockingly discovered that Sredersas was a former SS member. Here are the salient facts of the case:

- Sredersas arrived in Wollongong in 1950 at 39 years of age, building a house on Hoskins Street, Cringila. He was employed as a crane driver at the Port Kembla steelworks. Having no family, he spent his spare wages on works of art.
- In 1976, he donated his entire collection of about 100 works to the city of Wollongong. This became the catalyst for the founding of the Wollongong Art Gallery.
- He has been celebrated by the city and the Australian Lithuanian community, with special plaques and special exhibitions and positive pieces within local media.
- Sredersas' involvement with war crimes during WWII was not dis-

covered until long after his death in 1982.

- In 2018, former Wollongong councillor Michael Samaras became suspicious of Sredersas' story and began doing some research. In 2022, Samaras uncovered archival evidence which indicates Sredersas served in the intelligence arm of the Nazi SS during WWII, a unit which was in turn central to the systematic killing of 212,000 Lithuanian Jews.
- As a result of Samaras' findings, the Wollongong Art Gallery is currently rethinking its legacy and structure and has removed the naming plaque within the gallery acknowledging him.
- Sredersas' deep integration into the Wollongong community is indicative of the "safe haven" status Australia once provided and the contributions and impacts Nazi war criminals have had on Australia.

Another prominent Nazi war criminal case which impacted a sector of Australian society involved Karlis Aleksandrs Ozols.

- Ozols allegedly served as a sub-commander in Minsk, Belarus during WWII, of the Arajs Kommandos, an elite killing squad of local Latvians who served under the command of the SS.
- It is alleged Ozols was commander of a unit numbering 110 men – whose function was the execution of Jews at the killing pits outside Minsk, Belarus. It was estimated that 12,000 people died as a result of Ozols' command. Witnesses alleged that he also killed with his own hands.
- He came to Australia in 1949 and resided in Melbourne.
- The interesting aspect of Ozols' case is that he was a public figure, a renowned chess player, well-known through the chess community in Australia and even beyond. Ozols was Victorian chess champion nine times and Australia



Karlis Ozols, the Australian chess champion who is alleged to have overseen the murder of 12,000 people (Image: Ashley Gilbertson)

- lian champion in 1956. He was Australia's representative at international chess tournaments.
- He often frequented a Latvian retirement home, in which his friend Konrad Kalejs (another alleged Nazi war criminal who also allegedly served in the Arajs Kommandos) lived. Upon learning of these visits, reporter Mark Aarons traced Ozols' life, connecting him back to the massacres in Belarus.
- Ozols acknowledged his "sympathy for the German occupation of his country" to the *Age* newspaper but denied collaboration with the Nazis in extermination of the Jews.
- His status as a public figure known for his achievements in chess shows that not only former Nazis who kept low profiles were able to find a "safe haven" in Australia. Like Wollongong with Sredersas, the chess community in Australia has

had to come to terms with the fact that one of its best known icons was allegedly a very senior Nazi war criminal with up to 12,000 deaths on his hands.

## CONCLUSION

Nazi war criminal immigration to Australia has had long-lasting impacts on the community, both socially and legally. Australia's Jewish community, with its large component of Holocaust survivors and their descendants, was significantly impacted by the discovery of the presence of these criminals, the initial official indifference to their presence, the later efforts to provide the tools to achieve some justice, and the ultimate failure of these efforts.

In the course of the debates about dealing with these criminals, Australia's ideas about multiculturalism and immigration were developed and refined. Legal frameworks now in place make it much less likely that war criminals from current and future conflicts will be able to find Australia a "safe haven". And despite the fact that all the alleged war criminals are now gone, as we see in places like Wollongong and the Australian chess community, the legacy they left behind still sparks difficulties, dilemmas and debates, and will likely continue to do so into the future.

Despite the failure of Australia's efforts to bring the war criminals to justice, there is at least a case to be made that the effort to do so, and the debates it sparked, left Australia a more mature, more sensitive and aware nation.

AIR

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# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### LIFE SUPPORT

Following the attempted stabbing murder of writer Salman Rushdie in New York on Aug. 12, an *Observer* editorial run in the *Guardian Australia* (Aug. 15), urged “let this attempt on [Rushdie’s] life be what shocks complacent liberals out of their stupor.”

The *Australian* (Aug. 15) said the knife attack was “a reminder of the threat free, civilised societies continue to face from the evil spawned by Ayatollah Khomeini’s 1979 Iranian revolution... Rushdie’s alleged attacker... was US born... [but] an admirer of Khomeini... current Supreme Leader... Khamenei has never resiled from the fatwa.”

The *West Australian* expressed incredulity (Aug. 15), saying, “it is unbelievable to think that after all this time he is nearly killed for writing a book” in 1989.

### STICKS AND STONES

On Aug. 15, News Corp columnist Andrew Bolt derided the ABC and SBS coverage of the Rushdie attack.

Bolt said the headline “Motive unknown” on an SBS online report was “like [saying] this attack was just some random horror,” when it was actually carried out by “an admirer of Hezbollah and Iran... less than a week after Iran’s official online news site called Rushdie’s death sentence an ‘unforgettable verdict for Muslims.’” The ABC, he said, “typically explained this as faults on both sides, difference of opinion.”

Bolt also suggested the “Islamist war on our free speech” seemed to inspire the Left who now demand “trigger warnings or bans on speech they, too, claim is ‘harmful’.”

### OLD DOG, OLD TRICKS

The ferocious stabbing attack upon writer Salman Rushdie was a reminder for some commentators that a return to the 2015 nuclear deal will not cause Iran to moderate its behaviour.

*Guardian Australia* commentator Simon Tisdall (Aug. 12) wrote, “deal or no deal, the regime’s behaviour seems unlikely to alter radically.”

Tisdall succinctly mapped out Iran’s extensive regional interference, explaining that Supreme Leader “Khamenei personally commands the Quds Force, Iran’s extraterritorial military arm, which operates via proxies in Yemen, Lebanon and Palestine... Most disruptive right now is the huge instability rocking Iraq, caused by rivalry between Tehran-backed Shia parties and militias and the popular, anti-Iranian, anti-American nationalist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. Iran’s self-interested attempts to mediate have got nowhere.”

### PETER’S PRINCIPLES

Nine Newspapers’ international editor Peter Hartcher (Aug. 16) noted that Rushdie’s attempted assassination was only one of a number of recent “Iran sponsored plots to emerge in recent days,” including attempts to hire assassins to kill former US National Security Advisor John Bolton and former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Hartcher noted that Bolton, whom he interviewed during a recent visit to Australia, faulted the Biden Administration for “pursuing a nuclear deal with Iran even as it attempts to murder Americans.”

Moreover, “the fact they are allowing them to enrich uranium at all is a huge concession,” while the economic

windfall Iran stands to gain from sanctions relief “will only increase its cooperation with Russia and China to defeat the international sanctions against Moscow over the Ukraine war.”

Hartcher also discussed the recent assassination plots on *ABC TV* “The World” (Aug. 16), pointing out how Teheran had not only praised the Rushdie attack, but has also renewed the fatwa (religious decree) and raised the bounty on Rushdie’s head since it was first issued in 1989.

### WRITERS’ CORNER

Australian academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert was profiled in the *Age* (Aug. 13) ahead of her appearance at this year’s Melbourne Writers Festival where she will discuss her book *The Uncaged Sky*, which tells of her 804 days’ imprisonment in Iran on false spying charges.

Moore-Gilbert was quoted saying, “I am... determined to be a thorn in the side of an Iranian regime which is imprisoning its own citizens by the tens of thousands for ‘crimes’ which in Australian terms amount to little more than going about our everyday lives.”

Earlier, in the *Sun Herald* (July 31), writer and Hawke-era minister Barry Jones pointed out that “Iran with a population of 83 million has a higher execution rate per capita than China. There were 977 executions in 2015, when Hassan Rouhani, regarded as a moderate, was president.”

### PROXY WAR

AIJAC’s Oved Lobel explained in the *Daily Telegraph* (Aug. 17) how the terrorist group Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which fought a three-day

war with Israel in early August, fits into Iran's strategy to destroy Israel.

Lobel said despite Iran seeking to surround Israel with heavily armed proxies, Israel managed to kill the entirety of PIJ's senior military leadership in Gaza and degrade its capabilities, while easily absorbing the more than 1,100 rockets fired in retaliation by the group without casualties.

Furthermore, Iran's other Gaza-based proxy Hamas did not join in the fighting.

"While the prospect of a multi-front [Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] war against Israel involving thousands of rockets and missiles flying from all directions is Jerusalem's ultimate strategic nightmare, Israel has once again demon-

strated this nightmare is still a long way from reality," Lobel wrote.

## PERMANENTLY BIASED

The *Australian* (Aug. 5) reported condemnations of Miloon Kothari, one of three commissioners on the UN Human Rights Council's permanent commission of inquiry into Israel's alleged human rights abuses against Palestinians, who claimed "the Jewish lobby" controls social media and questioned Israel's ongoing UN membership.

The article noted Australian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Amanda Gorely's tweet expressing "deep... concern... Anti-Semitism is unacceptable and we condemn it wherever it appear(s)," and UN Moni-

tor on Freedom of Religion Ahmed Shaheed's outrage that "this [antisemitic] trope has come to the UN!"

AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein was quoted welcoming the Albanese Government's criticism of Kothari and urging it to publicly call for the disbanding of "the whole unacceptable and unfair inquiry."

In the *Spectator Australia* (Aug. 13), former Federal minister Neil Brown satirised the UN Human Rights Council's obsessive fixation with the Jewish state, focusing on the many major human rights abusers which are the ones sitting in judgment on Israel.

## IRISH EYES AND NOES

In the *Canberra Times* (July 31),



## IN PARLIAMENT

Shadow Attorney General **Julian Leeser** (Lib., Berowra) – Aug. 2 – "During the coalition's term in office, Australia was a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for three years... We spoke out against the notorious Item 7 of the Human Rights Council agenda, which singles out Israel for special treatment."

Senator **David Shoebridge** (Greens, NSW) – Aug. 2 – "Whether it's the struggle for Palestinian justice, or Kashmiri or Kurdish self-determination, we know that human rights need to be seen as global rights and very much the business of this parliament."

The following comments were among the many strongly supporting the Crimes Amendment (Prohibition on Display of Nazi Symbols) Bill 2022 which passed unanimously in the NSW Legislative Assembly on Aug. 8 and the NSW Legislative Council on Aug. 11:

Shadow Attorney General **Michael Daley** (ALP, Maroubra) leading for the Opposition – "...when we pass this legislation, we are saying in the most stark possible terms to the people who will offend this legislation, who can do so freely now but will not be able to by the end of this week, that their behaviour disgusts us."

Minister for Multiculturalism **Mark Coure** (Lib., Oatley) – "Symbols associated with Nazism are a remnant of a dark and evil period in our world history. They are a painful reminder of what happens when evil goes unchecked, but that is where the symbols should remain – in the pages of our history. They do not belong in public view throughout our tolerant, multicultural society... The bill sends a clear message that the display of Nazi symbols and the hatred and bigotry that they represent will not

be tolerated and sends a strong message to Neo-Nazis that their brand of hate has no place in our society."

Attorney General **Mark Speakman** (Lib., Cronulla) – "There is no room in our society for what Nazi symbols represent – hatred, abject racism and genocide. The bill reaffirms the New South Wales Government's powerful opposition to extremism and neo-Nazism and its powerful commitment to abolishing serious vilification and hate crimes."

**Peter Poulos** MLC (Lib.) – "The events that occurred under the Nazi regime represent one of the darkest periods of recorded human history. The atrocities committed during that period are almost unimaginable, and the intergenerational trauma they have caused continues to be felt by many people today – in particular, by the Jewish community in New South Wales. New South Wales enjoys a vibrant and inclusive multicultural community. It is based on values of acceptance and tolerance, social cohesion and a common humanity between all of the many people who call this State home. The hateful ideology that is represented by Nazi symbols has no place in our community. The display of those symbols causes harm, especially to our Jewish community, who are frequently targeted by these acts, but also to other groups who were persecuted under the Nazi regime, including other diverse cultural groups, the LGBTIQ community and people with disabilities."

Then-Shadow Minister for Police and Counter Terrorism **Walt Secord** MLC (ALP) – "The Nazi flag is an emblem of genocide and racism. The decision to fly a Nazi flag is a simple expression of hatred. The Nazi swastika represents a regime that murdered six million Jews, including more than a million children. It represents a regime that sought nothing less than total fascist domination of Europe... I believe that there is no room in our society for what Nazi symbols represent – hatred, abject racism and genocide."



visiting Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald explained that Republican Irish support Palestinians because “we were on the receiving end of colonialism and imperialism. We know how that feels, we know what that means. We have nowhere to hide on this question.”

Jews are not colonisers but an indigenous people who are simply seeking to exercise their right to self-determination in their homeland. Moreover, Israeli leaders have made multiple offers to create a Palestinian state but their Palestinian counterparts have refused to agree if it means recognising that Jews have a right to self-determination in their own state.

On July 29, the *Australian*’s Alan Howe’s obituary for Northern Irish Nobel Peace Prize laureate David Trimble noted that he was a regular at the annual Australia-Israel-UK Leadership Dialogues.

Asked in 2019 what he would do to “fix” the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Trimble told Howe he wasn’t sure, but “you need goodwill on all sides.”

## MOTION SICKNESS

A motion by the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) calling for a boycott of Israeli academics and institutions, which was passed in May and then rescinded after a non-Jewish student threatened legal action, was revived in a slightly amended form in August.

An *Age* report (Aug. 13) ahead of the vote said anti-Israel activist Greg Barns warned that a renewed threat of legal action against UMSU “represents a serious attack on freedom of speech.” Aren’t boycotts of academics for their nationality or views also an attack on free speech?

A News Corp story reported that Jewish students fear the motion (Aug. 15) will encourage verbal and physical attacks against openly Jewish students on campus.

University of Melbourne student Justin Riazaty, who initiated legal

proceedings against UMSU’s earlier motion, was quoted saying of its latest resolution it “is a declaration of war against every Jewish student at the University of Melbourne and a blatant attempt to defame and delegitimise anyone who supports Israel and Zionism.”

The report noted that AIJAC, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Zionist Federation of Australia, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and Zionism Victoria issued a joint condemnation of the motion which they said “advocates the eradication of Israel as a state and thus denies the basic right of national self-determination of the Jewish people.”

## LISTEN AND LEARN

On the ABC “Religion & Ethics” website (Aug. 19), Alissa Foster, Vice President of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS), accused UMSU of ignoring its commitment to consult with AUJS after it rescinded the earlier motion.

Foster said UMSU chose to ignore the possible effects a motion which “denounc[ed] Zionism as a ‘racist, colonial ideology’” would have on the welfare of Jews on campus.

Listing examples of extreme anti-Israel rhetoric expressed at Australian universities, Foster said, “When a student council passes a motion attacking Zionists but squeezes in a line about condemning antisemitism of all kinds, how much reassurance are Jewish students meant to feel?”

## JOE TO THE WORLD

News Corp columnist Joe Hildebrand, who travelled to Israel recently on an AIJAC study tour, found plenty to write about upon his return to Australia.

On July 26, Hildebrand said Israel “is a state constantly obliged to justify its statehood. It is locked in a perpetual struggle for survival” and yet “it is one of the most free and outspo-

ken societies on the planet. So much so one Arab-Israeli journalist told me he felt almost obliged to critically investigate the Palestinian Authority because his Israeli colleagues were so critical of their own government.”

Controversial statements by Sue Lines, the Senate’s new President, prompted Hildebrand to recall on July 31 her claims last year that “(T) he Israeli lobby is so powerful within the [Labor] party and outside of the party and it really does impact on the sort of movement we’ve been able to make in our policy.”

Hildebrand said, “this seems an odd target for an anti-genocidalist given that the modern state of Israel was founded by the UN in 1947 in the burning embers of the greatest genocide in human history.”

On Aug. 9 he noted that “even in mid-2022, in the famously vaccine charged state of Israel, tourism still hadn’t recovered to a fraction of its former levels. Even the great pull of pilgrimage for billions wasn’t enough to pull a crowd.”

## OLYMPIC SIZED FAILS

The reporting on SBS was a study in contrasts regarding Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’ wild accusation in a joint press conference with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz that Israel has committed “50 Holocausts” against his people when he was asked to apologise for Palestinian terrorists murdering 11 Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics 50 years previously.

*SBS TV* “World News” (Aug. 18) noted that Palestinian militants “attacked the Israeli team at the Munich Olympics 50 years ago.” Footage was run of Israeli PM Yair Lapid saying “Six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, including one and a half million Jewish children.” The report also noted that Abbas’ office released “a written statement” reaffirming that “the Holocaust is the most heinous crime in modern human history.”

In contrast, the newsreader on *SBS TV* “News in Arabic” (Aug. 18) described the massacre as “the Munich hostage-taking operation” and failed to note that anyone, let alone Israelis, were killed.

The reporter also appeared to assume as a given “Israeli crimes against the Palestinians” and said the Holocaust “left more than 6 million dead,” without noting that number specifically refers only to Jews murdered. The report also failed to note that Abbas’ office subsequently issued a statement acknowledging the Holocaust as unique.

No ABC TV or radio flagship programs appeared to cover the controversy, but *NewsRadio* ran a report from *Deutsche Welle* (Aug. 18) noting that Chancellor Scholz was pilloried in Germany for waiting until after the press conference ended to condemn Abbas’ comments.

Commercial TV primetime news programs also apparently did not report it.

## UNPALATABLE CLAIMS

An SBS website profile (July 21) of Melbourne caterer Huda Albardawil stated that she “may have grown up in Qatar, but her heritage is Palestinian. Her family comes from Ashkelon, a city north of the Gaza Strip. During the Palestine War, Albardawil’s family and almost all Palestinian inhabitants of Ashkelon were deported.”

This last claim is simply incorrect. According to historian Benny Morris, the overwhelming majority of Palestinian Arabs who lived in the region around Ashkelon were not expelled or deported. After the Egyptian army occupied the area during the 1948 war and then retreated, most locals fled with it.

## UNEVEN STEVENS

A feature on ABC news chief Justin Stevens by Nine Newspapers media reporter Zoe Samios (Aug. 13)

noted that AIJAC was one of a number of communal stakeholders to raise concerns about the broadcaster.

Samios wrote, “The Murdoch-owned Fox News, the Australia/Israel Jewish Affairs Council [sic], former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull and former Labor political adviser Milton Cockburn have all accused the ABC of bias, unfairness or breaches of editorial standards in the past year (Murdoch’s News Corp competes against the ABC in many areas). This has put immense pressure on a division that the public relies on as a trusted source of information.”

According to Samios, Stevens “focus[e]d mostly on the allegations of political favouritism.” Although he did agree that “we have to accept people who don’t work at the ABC have accused the ABC of being biased for a number of years,” he defended the integrity of the ABC’s widely criticised inhouse complaints process.

## ROLE MODEL

Amid the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine and Chinese military drills directed at Taiwan, Israel was repeatedly cited as a role model for how a small nation is able to defend itself.

On *ABC TV* “Insiders” (Aug. 7), federal MP Andrew Hastie said, “we need to start thinking, with this new development... how we secure ourselves into the future. And I think the strategic culture of Singapore and Israel are good examples of how we can prepare for the challenges ahead, given our size and strength relative to countries like China and Russia.”

On Aug. 9, *Australian* Foreign Editor Greg Sheridan also tagged Israel, writing, “South Korea and Israel... are two societies superb at living normal lives despite existential threats on their doorstep. Yet both societies, while allies of the US, also take every reasonable measure to ensure their own security.”

“Israel,” he said, “under its own resources, could meet any threat from any nation. Taiwan is a much bigger

economy than Israel. It does not make a similar effort at military preparedness. Like most US allies, it is psychologically profoundly dependent on the Americans. This is dangerous.”

Elsewhere, Israel was mentioned in a Nine Newspapers report (Aug. 9) on the Albanese Government’s announcement that it wants to lift Australia’s abysmal spending on R&D as a share of GDP. The report noted that “between government and the private sector, Australia spends about 1.8 per cent of gross domestic product on research and development, less than in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Iceland. Among advanced economies, the average is 2.6 per cent. Israel spends 5.44 per cent.”

## DOUBLE CROSSED

The *West Australian* apologised to its readers who complained that the paper’s “Big One” crossword puzzle on July 23 contained inappropriate pro-Palestinian political propaganda.

The crossword asked for a nine-letter word to the clue “Occupied Middle Eastern Country” with the answer being “Palestine” as well as a four-letter word to the clue “Largest open-air prison” with the answer given “Gaza”.

Palestine has never existed as a sovereign independent country and Gaza is not a prison but a blockaded territory run by a terror group that is at war with Israel.

The paper said, “the puzzle was compiled by a former staff member who inserted content that was not appropriate for a general crossword puzzle.”

On Aug. 20, a crossword in News Corp papers also presumed to classify Palestine as a country with defined geographical borders, by asking “Israel, Palestine and which other country have a coastline on the Dead Sea?” Not only is there currently no Palestinian state but there is also currently no territorial contiguity between the Palestinian self-rule areas on the West Bank and the shore of the Dead Sea.

# MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

## HITS AND MISSES

A three-day mini war between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in early August highlighted the limitations of the media's capacity to rise above generalities and propaganda.

Israel's revelation that misfiring PIJ rockets falling back into Gaza contributed to a significant proportion of the Palestinian death toll was picked up by most newspapers and on TV reports from ABC and SBS. However, the evening news bulletins on the commercial stations seem to have totally overlooked it.

*Channel 7* (Aug. 6) incorrectly claimed Tel Aviv and not Jerusalem is Israel's capital and said, "in the tightly packed streets of Gaza, civilian deaths are almost inevitable." Deaths are only "almost inevitable" because Palestinian groups deliberately base themselves and their weapons in residential areas. The next night, *Channel 7* incorrectly called Gaza a "disputed territory".

*Channel 9* (Aug. 7) attributed the deaths of 32 Palestinians in Gaza to "Israeli air strikes" and erroneously claimed Palestinian militants "retaliated by firing at least 6,000 rockets into Israel." An ABC website headline (Aug. 9) incorrectly claiming "Israel reopens Gaza crossings as truce with Palestinians holds, after 44 people killed in Israeli air strikes," was subsequently corrected.

One feature of the media coverage was the ubiquity of the Shamalakh family, whose home was destroyed in the Israeli airstrike in Rafah which killed PIJ southern Gaza commander Khaled Mansour.

On Aug. 8, Nine Newspapers quoted Huda Shamalakh saying "[Israel] warned us with rockets and we fled." On *SBS TV* "World News" (Aug. 7), Ibrahim Shamalakh said he received a call to leave his house, while Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn's report for *ABC TV* "7pm News" (Aug. 7) said, "residents were warned to evacuate" and then cut to Ibrahim Shamalakh. After the ceasefire, Horn visited the ruins of the Shamalakh home where a third family member was interviewed. *Channel 10*'s Aug. 7 report interviewed wheelchair bound Safa Shamalakh seated next to an elderly woman.

Information in most reports about the availability of electricity in Gaza was ill informed and incomplete.

A typical example was News Corp's post-ceasefire report (Aug. 9) that fuel trucks had resumed supplying fuel to Gaza's sole power plant ensuring hospitals could treat the wounded.

**"Israel's revelation that misfiring PIJ rockets falling back into Gaza contributed to a significant proportion of the Palestinian death toll was picked up by most newspapers and on TV reports from ABC and SBS"**

In fact, Israel directly supplies Gaza with much of its electricity even when the sole power plant is not operating, or during conflict. Moreover, there is nothing preventing Egypt choosing to open its shared border with Gaza to

allow fuel trucks to enter, as it did in 2017. Except that Egypt rarely does, which the media ignores.

Moreover, as a matter of public record, Gaza's hospitals are equipped with backup generators.

On the *Wire* (Aug. 13), Australia Palestine Advocacy Network Vice-

President Nasser Mashni accused Israel of preventing Gaza from receiving the fuel needed to run the power plant, impacting sewage treatment and leading to "raw sewage... being pumped into the Mediterranean."

Mashni admitted, "Egypt is complicit in the siege of Gaza," but said this was a condition for Cairo receiving US aid.

There is no siege, but a limited blockade which Egypt enforces because it views Hamas' rule in Gaza as illegitimate and its affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood as an existential threat. There is absolutely no evidence the US has coerced Cairo to keep its Gaza border closed.

On Aug. 9, *ABC RN* "Breakfast" host Patricia Karvelas absurdly asked Yousef Hammash, Norwegian Refugee Council advocacy officer in Gaza, whether the Rafah refugee camp "that was reportedly struck by Israeli missile fire on Saturday... was destroyed?"

Hammash also blamed Israel for Gaza's lack of fuel and electricity, but wasn't asked about the Egyptian crossing.

On Aug. 8, Karvelas indulged Qatari commentator Omar H Rahman, who professed not to know why Israel targeted a PIJ leader in Gaza and said the "suffocating air, land and sea blockade" ensures fighting will resume.

The *Australian* (Aug. 9) editorialised on Teheran's patronage of PIJ, saying "Iran's malevolent thumbprints are all over the worst violence in the Palestinian enclave since May last year... so deep are the links ... [PIJ's] top terrorist, Ziyad Nakhleh, was not in Gaza but in Iran... [meeting]... General Hossein Salami, commander of the Revolutionary Guards, and President Ebrahim Raisi."

*SBS TV* "World News" (Aug. 6) reporter Nick Wells ran a clip of Israeli PM Yair Lapid saying "Islamic Jihad is an Iranian proxy... The head of Islamic Jihad is in Teheran as we speak," but Allyson Horn's *ABC TV* "7pm News" (Aug. 6) report cut Lapid's reference to PIJ's chief being in Teheran during the fighting.



# THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

## LOWER EDUCATION

In Germany this August, a public discussion took place about the responsibility of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas for the murder of Israeli Olympians at the Munich games in 1972, with Abbas having been named by Mohammed Oudeh (aka Abu Daoud) as one of the three senior officials of Fatah who assisted him in planning the Munich massacre.

With the 50th anniversary approaching and Abbas visiting Germany, there were many calls for a public apology, personally or on behalf of the PLO, to the survivors, the families of the victims, to Germany and to the Olympic movement. (Abbas' response, at a well-attended media conference in Berlin, was to accuse Israel of committing "50 massacres, 50 Holocausts" against Palestinians – comments widely condemned as disgusting, abhorrent and repulsive.)

Within the PLO, a variety of units had roles in this and other spectacular acts of terrorism.

The same year as the Munich massacre, the West German government expelled hundreds of members of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) as a result of collaboration with the terrorists.

Just three years after the Munich massacre, the leadership of the Australian Union of Students (AUS) invited GUPS representatives to tour Australia to propagandise in favour of the PLO's maximalist agenda.

When given the opportunity to express a view in campus votes, an overwhelming number of AUS members stated that there was no benefit to students for their union to indulge in Middle East politics at all, let alone offer support to an openly eliminationist terrorist group.

The ideological grandchildren of the 1970s AUS leadership live on, as demonstrated by the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) passing a motion at its August Council meeting which oozed ignorance of, and malice and contempt for, Jewish people.

This was the second, similar motion UMSU had passed

this year, with the first being rescinded due to fear of legal action and after the University Council took the unprecedented

step of publicly branding the text as antisemitic.

The motion drew immediate praise from groups with maximalist anti-Israel agendas, with BDS Australia applauding its passage, in particular the calls to abolish Israel in the long-term while condemning each and every supporter of positive Australian-Israeli relations in the short term.

Using the language terrorists regularly use to justify and promote murder of civilians, the motion included terminology from the 1960s Soviet playbook for condemning Zionism.

It represented an assault on the right of anyone supporting Israel's existence to even express a view – excluding from the "community of the good" supporters of dialogue and mutually beneficial co-operation, as well as the right of Palestinians to live free from the anti-democratic rule of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

As sure as day follows night, a chorus arose to defend the students from any charges of antisemitism, generally repeating the boring trope that the motion's advocates were simply being "critical of Israel" – as if supporting terrorism, misrepresenting history, excluding pertinent information about current events and demeaning Jewish identity, are what one normally understands by the term "criticism".

The student leaders behind the resolution apparently don't understand the concepts of humility, preferring to condemn Israelis and Palestinians to permanent conflict rather than think beyond the clichés of the eliminationists.

The Palestinians, as well as "Zionists", were treated as political playthings by egocentric student politicians.

In a powerful essay on the ABC's Religion and Ethics platform, Alissa Foster, Vice President of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students, wrote, "the modern day manifestations of antisemitic tropes within progressive spaces means that many people seem not even to be aware that they are enabling antisemitism."

Jewish students (and even some staff) on Australian campuses are regularly speaking of their discomfort, even fear, due to events like the UMSU resolution and anti-Jewish atmospherics out of which it arose.

This will only end when the "anti-Zionist" bullies face real consequences for their behaviour, which I hope comes sooner rather than later.



A Melbourne University Student Union motion supporting BDS "oozed ignorance of, and malice and contempt for, Jewish people."



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