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EDITOR'S NOTE

This AIR edition looks at Binyamin Netanyahu's victory – after five tries over four years – in Israel's general election on Nov. 1, and his efforts to form a new governing coalition.

Amotz Asa-El analyses the coalition-building conundrums Netanyahu is facing, with radical right-wing partners Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich controversially demanding sensitive senior ministries. Meanwhile, academic Gil Troy debunks some over-the-top claims about the significance of the relative electoral success of Ben Gvir and Smotrich, and political analyst Haviv Rettig Gur delves into the real, complex story of the shifting right-left balance in Israel. Finally, defence correspondent Amos Harel looks at the terror challenge the new government will have to meet.

Also featured this month is top analyst Jonathan Spyer on the state of the anti-regime protests in Iran. Plus, noted American foreign policy expert Walter Russell Mead argues that the protests have given the US Biden Administration an unmissable opportunity.

Finally, don't miss Jamie Hyams' look at the good, the bad and the ugly in the Australian political debate about our stance on Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Jeremy Jones' take on the debate about antisemitic claims being spread by African-American celebrities and Washington Institute head Robert Satloff's report on the real situation in today's Saudi Arabia.

As always, we invite your feedback at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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Israel's Likud Party leader Binyamin Netanyahu makes a statement after Israel's President Isaac Herzog assigned to him the task of forming a government, in Jerusalem, Nov. 13, 2022.

(Image: AAP/ Maya Alleruzzo)



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EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN****COLIN RUBENSTEIN**

AUSTRALIA NEEDS TO JOIN THE IRAN CONSENSUS

Recently, a consensus has finally been developing among Western governments about the hostile intentions and rogue behaviour of the Iranian regime.

As Walter Russell Mead writes in this *AIR* (p. 23), thanks to both the bravery of Iranian anti-regime protesters, and Iran's blatant complicity in Russian crimes in Ukraine, Western advocates of appeasement, bend-over-backwards deal-making and trade as a cure-all with respect to Iran have now mostly been silenced or sidelined.

The widespread, inspiring protests inside Iran over the regime's long-standing trampling of the human rights of its own people – sparked initially by brave young women but later spreading to numerous other groups and classes – have been met with a ruthless, violent response before the eyes of the world.

At the same time, Iran has shamelessly allied with Russia's Putin to supply Moscow with deadly suicide drones and ballistic missiles to bomb Ukrainian cities, in defiance of a UN embargo.

Iran also continues to funnel arms and war chests to its proxies in Lebanon, Gaza, Yemen and elsewhere, even while the local populations suffer worsening poverty.

And Iran is not only blatantly sprinting toward nuclear weapons capabilities, it is now effectively blocking most International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) scrutiny of its nuclear facilities and flagrantly stonewalling urgent IAEA questions about man-made uranium particles found near three undeclared sites.

This is after generous offers to Iran to agree to return to a weakened version of the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal have been rebuffed.

Even policymakers who have been blindly dedicated to the idea that the always deeply flawed JCPOA is the one and only way to contain Iran's nuclear program are now admitting a return to that agreement is likely impossible.

The US Biden Administration appears to be listening. Recently, it has stopped turning a blind eye to Iran's soaring illegal oil sales by imposing sanctions on shipping companies engaging in this illegal trade. The US has also repeatedly added sanctions on Iranian companies that manufacture and develop drones, as well as top officials in Iran's security forces and state-run media for their role in the persecution of anti-regime demonstrators. And after years of blinkered obsession with returning to the JCPOA, the Administration is now admitting this is no longer on the agenda, at least for now.

The EU, long dominated by JCPOA cheerleaders and self-interested advocates of increased trade with Iran, has similarly ramped up its own sanctions on Iran over human rights issues at least three times in recent weeks.

Also imposing sanctions have been numerous individual European states, such as the UK, Germany and France. Meanwhile, Canada has become a global leader in pursuing human rights sanctions on Iran.

Yet, unlike almost all our Western allies, as of Nov. 21, Australia had not introduced a single sanction on any Iranian individual, institution or entity in response to Iran's rogue behaviour and recent bloody crackdown on protesters. This is despite the fact that Australia last year passed, on a bipartisan basis, a "Magnitsky-type" law designed to facilitate exactly such targeted sanctions on gross human rights violators.

The Government has issued statements condemning Iran over its treatment of the protesters on several occasions, but we had done next to nothing beyond these rhetori-

cal gestures. Moreover, Australia was yet to even verbally condemn Iran over its illegal weapons sales to Russia.

Virtually the whole Western world today understands the danger to global stability from a nuclear-armed, revisionist, rogue actor on the shores of the Persian Gulf. They also know that Iran is becoming ever more closely allied with even more powerful actors threatening international peace and stability – Russia and China – and that allowing Iran to flout international norms, organise aggression against its neighbours and illegally build nuclear weapons will only strengthen, embolden and empower Iran’s dangerous allies. And our allies want to assist the incredibly courageous Iranian people in their fight for basic human rights.

It is hard to see any justification in terms of Australia’s national interest for refusing to join that Western consensus. Yet that is where we seem to be.

Meanwhile, Canberra – with the assistance of AIJAC – has just hosted the eighth annual Beersheva Strategic Dialogue, bringing together apolitical defence officials, advisors, experts and strategists from Israel and Australia. This year, as every year, there was intense and insightful discussion on numerous matters of global and regional concern. However, the Beersheva Dialogue has always aspired to be about more than just talk, and every conference has ended with ideas on how to translate the discussions into actions that could materially contribute to the security of both Australians and Israelis.

This year’s Dialogue made it clear that both Australia’s Government and Opposition, as well as most of Australia’s top strategic and defence experts, strongly believe that this country needs to rapidly expand and upgrade our defence capabilities and self-reliance in the face of an increasingly dangerous strategic environment – which is expected to worsen over coming years. There is definite interest in exploring if Israel can help Australia to do so.

Meanwhile in Israel, Prime Minister-elect Binyamin Netanyahu’s political comeback after the country’s Nov. 1 election has returned an outspoken voice against Iranian aggression to the world stage. Netanyahu has

stated many times that Israel is prepared to act alone, if necessary, as a last resort, to prevent Teheran from obtaining weapons of mass destruction that regime officials openly threaten to use against Israel.

Netanyahu is known to have an appreciation for Israel’s relationship with Australia – but his government is likely to be concerned, like other friendly nations, if Australia remains the Western odd-man-out on Iran.

The reality is Australia cannot possibly prepare to cope with our worsening strategic environment without help from our allies and friends, of which Israel is of course only one. This is yet another reason why our seeming “not our problem” stance on Iran, completely out of step with our allies, is so hard to comprehend and hopefully will change soon.

AIR

“WORD FOR WORD”

“Today we received a tremendous expression of confidence from the people of Israel, because it became clear once again that the Likud is the largest party in Israel, by a significant margin... The people of Israel want to return the national pride that was taken from us. They want a Jewish state, a state that respects all its citizens, but our national state.”

Israel’s PM-elect Binyamin Netanyahu in his post-election victory speech at the headquarters of his Likud party (TIME, Nov. 2).

“The state of Israel comes before any political consideration. I wish Netanyahu success, for the sake of the people of Israel and the state of Israel.”

Outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid concedes the Israeli election to Netanyahu (PBS, Nov. 3).

“The events over the past few weeks weren’t simple street riots. The enemy started a hybrid war. The US, Israel, some sly, vicious European powers, & certain groups used whatever they

had to do this. What does ‘whatever they had’ mean? It means they used their intelligence services, their media, their internet capabilities, & their past experience to try to overcome the Iranian nation. The Iranian nation truly returned their punch & defeated them.”

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on the recent unrest in Iran (Twitter, Nov. 2).

“I condemn the actions of the Iranian regime in cracking down on democratic protests, which were occurring in Iran. It’s important to assert the human rights of women in Iran. These protests are protests about human rights... I condemn the crackdown of the regime and I call upon the regime to respect human rights and respect the rights of people to protest peacefully.”

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (SBS, Oct. 27).

“From our perspective, we see the Jewish community getting it from all sides... Not only have they long been a target of foreign terrorist organisations... but then, in addition to that, they’re of course the target of domestic violent extremists.”

FBI Director Christopher Wray speaking to the US Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on Nov. 17 (Algemeiner, Nov. 17).



SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

QUANTIFYING THE SELF-HARM OF “ANTI-NORMALISATION”

AIJAC and the *AIR* have long sought to document the terrible self-harm that Palestinian society has inflicted on itself through an obsession with “anti-normalisation”. This is the view that any Palestinian contact or interaction with Israelis is tantamount to treason to the Palestinian cause, because not only is Israel completely illegitimate, but all Israelis should be treated only as irredeemable enemies.

Hezbollah-supporting Lebanese journalist Lea Azzi explained the ugly logic of anti-normalisation in an ABC interview in 2019. She said it was wrong for Lebanese-Australian doctor Jamal Rifi to be part of an Australian-based charity which operates in Israel to help provide medical aid to Palestinian children, because doing so amounts to “normalising the relationship with Israel. So the enemy becomes a human.”

In addition to the anti-normalisation attempt to prevent medical aid to Palestinian children in that case, here are a few other examples illustrating how “anti-normalisation” fanaticism has hurt Palestinians without achieving anything for the Palestinian “cause”:

- In 2019, the two leading Palestinian software companies were driven off the campus of Birzeit University by anti-normalisation activists who charged that these purely Palestinian companies did business with Israeli technology firms. The companies had wanted to participate in a careers day and possibly hire students.
- Palestinian American millionaire Bashar al-Masri was attacked by anti-normalisation activists over his efforts to construct Rawabi, the first planned city in the West Bank built by and for Palestinians, north of Ramallah. His “offence” was to work with Israeli officials to obtain essential basic services and supplies for Rawabi, such as water, electricity and cement – things that most other Palestinians also obtain from Israel.

- In 2020, the Palestinian Authority rejected a shipment of medical supplies sent from the UAE to help with the COVID emergency because it was flown in via Israel and this was described as encouraging “normalisation”.

- Also in 2020, a PA body invited a group of Israeli journalists to Ramallah to try to explain the Palestinian case to them, and through them to the Israeli public. This may seem a sensible thing to do, but when news of this came out, protesters took to the streets in Ramallah; students at Birzeit University held a sit-in over the

participation of a member of the university’s board of trustees in the meetings; and Molotov cocktails were thrown at the Ramallah restaurant where a meeting had been held.

I could go on, but hopefully readers get the picture.

As the final example above illustrates, the Palestinian Authority is in a strange position in the anti-normalisation campaign. Publicly, it fully supports and verbally calls for it. For example, in late October, Fatah Central Committee Secretary Jibril Rajoub commented on an exhibition of Palestinian products in remarks broadcast on official *PA TV*, saying that he hoped the exhibition would be “be part of a heightened and comprehensive effort... to ... create an awareness for distancing and boycotting the Israeli products.”

The PA has also arrested Palestinians accused of normalisation when there is a public outcry from activists, and promotes anti-normalisation education in schools. Yet it also engages in diplomatic contact with Israel’s political leaders, and there is considerable security cooperation with Israeli forces – which is actually critical for the PA’s survival in the face of threats from radical rivals like Hamas.

But, more than this, the PA does not really seek to create a complete boycott of Israelis and Israeli products because actually doing so would be economically catastrophic.

It is estimated some 200,000 Palestinians cross into Israel or Israeli settlements for work every day, earning more than twice as much on average as Palestinians employed in PA-controlled towns. These workers provide a huge chunk of the Palestinian GDP.

Moreover, Palestinian Media Watch has looked at PA Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) statistics on trade – which show that if the anti-normalisation campaign achieved its goals, the Palestinian economy would basically cease to exist.

In August of this year, 56% of all goods imported into the PA were Israeli goods.

Moreover, no less than 91% of all goods exported by the PA that month were sold to Israelis or Israeli companies.

Boycotting all contact with Israel, as anti-normalisation activists demand, would thus actually be the ultimate act of self-harm imaginable – costing the PA economy the huge portion of its GDP that comes from workers employed in Israel, more than half its imports and almost all its exports.

Yet this is what both Palestinian civil society groups and the PA itself ostensibly advocate. It’s a fantasy as completely divorced from reality as the oft-heard Palestinian prediction that all of Israel’s Jews will one day be convinced to return to the countries they, or their ancestors, came from.

Justin Amler

UN COURTS FURTHER SHAME

On November 12, a United Nations Committee, called the Special Political and Decolonisation Committee, approved a resolution to request the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague to “urgently” weigh in on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and render an opinion on Israel’s “prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of Palestinian territory.”

The resolution, requested by the Palestinians, passed easily with 98 in favour, 17 against and 52 abstentions. It will move to the full General Assembly in the next couple of weeks.

This was just another farcical chapter in the UN’s inglorious history when it comes to Israel. It was spurred on by another absurd UN instrument of bias and destructiveness called the “Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory”.

This Commission, created by the obsessively anti-Israel UN Human Rights Council last year, is more akin to the Spanish Inquisition than a genuine fact-finding body. It is chaired by three individuals with ferociously anti-Israel histories who, in a surprise to absolutely no one, find Israel guilty of pretty much anything they can think of. Its latest report argues that Israel’s presence in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza is no longer an “occupation” but an “annexation” and therefore illegal under international law.

The resolution itself mostly repeats numerous clauses that have already been debated and brought to votes at the UN many times, but what is new is the clause calling for the UN to approach the International Court of Justice for an opinion. This idea is the latest attempt by the Palestinians to bypass any negotiations and instead obtain their goals through international pressure on Israel via UN bodies.

Essentially, the Palestinian position is that Israel should simply withdraw to the 1949 Armistice lines without any reciprocal action or commitments on their part at all. Their hope and expectation is that the world, via the UN, will force Israel to do this – while ignoring 74 years of history, including what actually happened in the lead-up to the 1967 war, the ongoing terrorism against Israel, the other security threats to it, and the various peace treaties signed over the years, including both the 1993 Oslo Accords and the recent Abraham Accords (2020), and the repeated Israeli two-state peace offers.



The International Court of Justice in The Hague is the latest international body being drawn into the UN’s anti-Israel obsessions (Image: Shutterstock)

They have this hope because the UN’s obsession with the Jewish State knows no limits. There is no other country that is scrutinised and demonised the way Israel is. Entire committees with vast resources are set up to examine purported “human rights violations” by democratic Israel while simultaneously ignoring the crimes of the world’s bloodthirsty dictatorships – regimes that often dominate those same committees.

A resolution like this says more about the countries supporting it than the country it is targeted against.

To paraphrase William Shakespeare, this resolution is a tale told by idiots, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

The International Court of Justice can merely offer advisory opinions in response to requests like this one, but such rulings have no binding legal force.

Furthermore, the ICJ is effectively more a political body than a judicial one. Its 15 judges are elected by the UN General Assembly, but often picked, as many UN bodies are, through diplomatic deals, rather than to maximise legal expertise and knowledge. Many ICJ judges are thus essentially there to uphold the political interests of their home governments.

After Australia’s disappointing decision to withdraw its recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel’s capital last month, it was encouraging to see a strong, common sense position from Canberra on this resolution. Australia voted against it, saying ICJ advisory opinions should not be used to settle bilateral disputes. Our diplomats also correctly noted that this resolution would not help to bring the parties together for negotiations.

This zeros in upon the main reason why a resolution such as this one is so destructive. It does nothing to encourage the Palestinians to negotiate and does everything to incentivise them not to.

Despite a request from President Herzog to PA President Mahmoud Abbas to retract the resolution, Abbas predictably refused, because the Palestinians do not want to negotiate. Doing so would require compromise. They want everything while giving nothing – and if they can get the politicised ICJ to essentially say that any Israeli presence over the 1967 armistice lines is illegal, this seems to be a way to get exactly that.

Yet, ultimately, there is no shortcut for the Palestinians to reach some kind of resolution with the Israelis, despite their best efforts to have one imposed by international bodies.

Meanwhile, this latest resolution is just the most recent mark of shame for the UN, an organisation that was founded to bring about international peace and security, but that often does everything in its power to bring about the opposite.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

SLOW PROGRESS

Several years after an historic peace agreement and a long, complicated process towards demilitarisation and political autonomy, deadly conflict can still break out suddenly.

Not for the first time, an apparent misunderstanding between the Philippines military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a former rebel group, resulted in a series of clashes over two days that left three soldiers and up to ten MILF combatants dead on the southern island of Basilan.

The fighting broke out on November 8 when MILF members allegedly shot at a security detail escorting Lt. Col. John Ferdinand Lazo, the commander of the 64th Infantry Battalion, who had arrived on site to open a dialogue with the MILF about apprehending suspected militants involved in extortion and intimidation using homemade bombs. The commander believed the “lawless elements” – whose activities include twin bombings that wounded two people in the capital of Basilan in May – were benefitting from MILF protection.

Once the clashes subsided, both the military and MILF commanders at the scene accused each other of violating the 2014 peace accord, which eased years of bloody and extensive fighting between government forces and the Muslim rebel front, the largest separatist insurgent group in the south.

The fighting was the first major clash between government forces and MILF members since January 2015, when 44 police commandoes were killed by MILF forces as they entered a rebel stronghold to arrest the notorious Malaysian Jemaah Islamiyah bomber known as Marwan.

The recent skirmish underscored the fragility of law and order in a southern region faced with abundant loose firearms, private armies, crushing poverty and a long history of violence.

Under the 2014 peace pact, the MILF dropped its secessionist demands in exchange for a more powerful and better-funded Muslim autonomous region called Bangsamoro. The five-province Muslim region is now led by MILF leaders under a transition period ending in 2025.

Nearly half of about 40,000 guerrillas have agreed to lay down their firearms and return to normal life in exchange for cash and other incentives from the government, while other rebels have kept their firearms while waiting to be subjected to a years-long “decommissioning process”, a less-confronting term for surrendering their weapons.

Mohagher Iqbal, who led the MILF in years of peace talks with the government, said the violence “was an unfortunate incident that no one desired to happen... while

the peace process’ dividends have started to be felt by the people.”

Earlier this year, a Malaysian-led international peace monitoring organisation, known as the International Monitoring Team and tasked with safeguarding a ceasefire agreement, ended its mission in the south after then-President Rodrigo Duterte decided that its presence was no longer needed.

“We need the IMT back. In times like these, their presence is needed,” Mohagher Iqbal said.

In more encouraging news, ten members of the Abu Sayyaf extremist Islamist group have surrendered to government forces in recent days rather than risk being killed in a counter-militant offensive.

This year, 174 Abu Sayyaf suspects have turned themselves in to military forces in the south, including about 40 non-combatants who were providing logistical support to the group, the military said. The overall strength of the Abu Sayyaf is believed to have fallen to 130 active fighters in its strongholds on the southern islands of Basilan and Jolo.

Military officials say that Abu Sayyaf has weakened manpower and capability, and are constantly on the run from government forces. “They grew tired, thus, they surrendered,” said one local commander.

Meanwhile, the Philippines’ military modernisation program continues. The national air force has officially inducted the Israeli-made Spyder ground-based air defence system (GBADS).

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr was in attendance for the induction of the long-sought defence system, three years after the Department of National Defence signed a deal with Israel’s Ministry of Defence and manufacturer Rafael Advanced Defence Systems for three batteries of the Spyder GBADS in 2019 for P6.8 billion (A\$176 million) as part of the Philippine military’s Horizon 2 modernisation program. The first two batteries arrived in September while the third will be delivered in 2024.

The Spyder system is designed to protect critical installations from aerial threats such as “combat aircraft, attack helicopters, unmanned air vehicles, incoming missiles, guided munition, and rockets.” It comprises radar, a command and control unit, and Python 5 and I-Derby missiles with an estimated range of 50 kilometres.

AIR



AIR NEW ZEALAND

Miriam Bell

DISINFORMATION REPORT PROMPTS ANTI-ZIONISM DEBATE

Signs of antisemitism in New Zealand have long been brushed under the carpet, and ignored – particularly if it does not come from traditional foes.

The small size of the Jewish community might be one reason for this. Another might be a lingering belief in the country's supposed egalitarianism where everyone gets a fair go.

But antisemitism does exist here, and is apparently growing in visibility and vehemence, and there is increasing documentation of it.

The latest evidence for this came in a new report which looked at misinformation and disinformation in New Zealand through the lens of online antisemitism.

Produced by domestic human rights group Humanity Matters, the report aimed to "gain a deeper understanding of the issues that underpin online antisemitism within the Aotearoa context."

To do so, it employed various methods, including one-on-one interviews, discussion groups, and an online survey, to capture the insights of 130 people. Of those, 102 were Jewish community members.

A key finding of the survey was that 65% had experienced antisemitism on social media in the last three years.

The most common form of antisemitism encountered was misinformation or disinformation that was anti-Zionist and anti-Israel in nature, with 52% saying they had been exposed to it in the last year.

"Financial" antisemitism, which revolved around the trope that Jewish people control international finance, or are "good with money", was the second most common form. Twenty-seven percent had experienced it over the last 12 months.

"Social" antisemitism, involving claims such as Jewish people keep themselves separate, are secretive, or are behind COVID-19, was the third most common form, with 19% encountering it.

The report also explored where and how the misinformation was experienced, the impact of it on the community, and potential pathways to address this situation.

This new report follows the release earlier this year of the NZ Jewish Council (NZJC) survey on antisemitism, which put 18 internationally recognised statements of anti-Jewish sentiment to 1017 New Zealanders.

In that survey, 21% agreed with two or more classical antisemitic views, while 25% expressed support for two or more extreme anti-Zionist views.

NZJC spokeswoman Juliet Moses said the Humanity Matters research had some limitations, but was another useful resource on certain manifestations of antisemitism in New Zealand.

But, as with the NZJC report, what garnered the most attention was the finding around the antisemitic misinformation and disinformation relating to anti-Israel or anti-Zionist sentiment.

Once again, Palestinian advocates took umbrage at this, and at "criticism of Israel" or "criticism of Zionism" being included and labelled "political antisemitism".

In a joint article, Justice for Palestine's Neil Ballantyne and Alternative Jewish Voices' Marilyn Garson said they rejected "political antisemitism", arguing "criticism of Israel need not necessarily target Jews or Jewishness at all."

They said that uncritically reporting the finding that anti-Zionist or anti-Israel sentiment was experienced nearly twice as often as any form of classic antisemitism overshadowed the real, growing, threatening antisemitism of the far right.

Moses said she could understand why Ballantyne and Garson would be upset at the survey's findings, and the fact that a majority of Jews experience and think about things differently to how they would have us do so.

"Unfortunately for them, they don't get to dictate how people respond to the questions, or what the questions were."

The claim that anti-Zionism is simply criticism of Israeli policies, and that describing it as antisemitism is an attempt to silence people, amounted to gaslighting, she said.

"Every Jewish person I know understands the difference between criticising Israeli

policies and anti-Zionism, which fundamentally opposes the continued existence of a Jewish state, and is careful to distinguish between them."

Moses said while there were lots of tests and texts dealing with this matter, there seemed to be agreement that it is up to minority groups to define what constituted bigotry and hatred directed towards them – except for Jewish people.

"Not only that, but it is implied that Jews act in bad faith when they make accusations of antisemitism because they want to exercise control over others. Sounds a bit like antisemitism in itself, to me."

Yet the antisemitic threat from the far right was very present and growing, and tended to get overshadowed by the debate over anti-Zionism, she added.

Dane Giraud, an active member of the Jewish community and of the NZ Free Speech Union, said there was no doubt there was an existential threat from the far right, but most people recognised the rhetoric was wrong and not normal.

The problem with anti-Zionist ideology was that the antisemitism within it was being normalised and accepted, which is very troubling, he said.

"And some of those who espouse it are being elevated as voices for the Jewish community, when they are not."

"It should be the Jewish community itself which is driving the dialogue around antisemitism, whether it's from the left or the right, and also working on solutions to address it. But currently it is not, it's in the hands of others," he added.



Anti-Zionism is no longer being ignored in New Zealand (Image: Alamy Stock photo)

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Four rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel on Nov. 4, the first since the end of Operation Breaking Dawn in August. One was intercepted by Iron Dome while the others fell inside Gaza. Israel struck a Hamas facility in response.

Multiple shooting, stabbing, and car ramming attacks took place in the West Bank and Jerusalem. On Oct. 29, a Palestinian attacker killed an Israeli father and wounded his son, a rescue worker and others near Kiryat Arba, before himself being killed. On Oct. 25 in the village of Funduq, a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli civilian, who later died. On Nov. 15, a Palestinian attacker killed three Israelis and wounded three others in a stabbing and car ramming spree in and around Ariel.

Israeli counterterrorism raids in October and November resulted in scores of detentions and targeted killings against the Lions' Den terrorist group responsible for multiple attacks. Several other Palestinians were killed and wounded in these raids, mostly when attacking Israeli forces.

In October, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party boasted of conducting over 7200 "acts of resistance", many of which would be considered terrorist attacks, in 2022.

MORE ISRAELI STRIKES IN SYRIA

Alleged Israeli strikes against Iranian positions in Syria continued. On Oct. 21, 24 and 27, sites near Damascus were struck. On Nov. 9, a suspected Iranian weapons convoy crossing the border from Iraq was targeted, and on Nov. 13, it was the Shayrat airbase. Casualties among Syr-

ian, Iranian and Iranian proxy forces were reported.

PA AND HAMAS CRACK DOWN ON DISSENT

Repression by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) of freedom of speech and media has intensified, as illustrated by several recent incidents.



Hamas security forces (Image: Shutterstock)

In Hamas-ruled Gaza on Oct. 31, journalist Ahmad Saeed was arrested after Hamas-affiliated police raided his home. Saeed had exposed alleged Hamas involvement in an attempt to smuggle Gazans to Europe that ended with at least seven passengers drowning.

On Oct. 23, police raided the Gaza home of Belgium-based activist Ramzi Herzallah and issued threats against his family, following accusations by Herzallah of Hamas involvement in corruption.

In the West Bank in early November, PA forces banned activists calling for reform of the Palestinian political system from holding two separate conferences.

IAEA "SERIOUSLY CONCERNED" ABOUT IRAN

The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) latest periodic report on Iran, issued in early November, revealed that, as of late October, Iran had accumulated 62.3kg of uranium enriched to 60%, near mili-

tary level – 6.7kg more than it had in September.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said he is "seriously concerned" about Iran's continuous failure to present "technically credible explanations" about human-manipulated fissile material particles found in several locations in Iran. Following a meeting with Iranian representatives about this issue, Grossi stated that the Iranians "didn't bring anything new."

The IAEA's Board of Governors meeting in late November again rebuked Teheran (as it did in June), noting that "it is essential and urgent" that Iran hand over to the IAEA "without delay" all information necessary for the agency's investigation of the particles and allow IAEA access to the relevant locations and material.

Iran's breakout time, the time needed to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear warhead, remains effectively zero. Iran would need only a few weeks to manufacture enough material for four warheads.

IRAN GETS CAPTURED WESTERN WEAPONS FROM RUSSIA

On Nov. 9, *Sky News* reported that an unnamed security source told it that Russia had supplied Iran with a cache of captured UK and US weapons, including British NLAW anti-tank missiles, US Javelin anti-tank missiles and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. Iran could potentially reverse-engineer these weapons for use in future conflicts.

On Nov. 10, General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Aerospace Force, claimed Iran has developed an advanced hypersonic ballistic missile.

Such missiles are both very fast, travelling at Mach 5 or greater, and highly manoeuvrable, giving them great ability to evade radar and defence systems. However, Western analysts expressed scepticism over Hajizadeh's claim.

IRAN HUNTS JOURNALISTS AND DISSIDENTS IN THE WEST

On Nov. 16, the head of UK security agency MI5 revealed that Iran had tried to kidnap or kill ten British residents this year alone, and that the Metropolitan police had warned several UK-based journalists of threats to their lives from Iran. This includes two journalists working for the UK-based *Iran International* media outlet who were warned in early November that their lives were under serious threat from an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps hit squad. Iran has assassinated, or attempted to assassinate, multiple regime enemies in Europe over the years.

In the US, the Biden Administration confirmed that Iran is still trying to kill former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former senior official Brian Hook.

ISRAEL INCREASES ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINE

Israel has reportedly agreed to give military communication equipment to Ukraine. This equipment, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, had been requested months ago – before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

This is in addition to an aid package of defensive equipment, including large numbers of helmets, protective vests, mine protection suits, and gas masks, that Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz agreed to supply in July this year, and earlier humanitarian aid.

However, Gantz reiterated in a briefing to EU ambassadors in Israel in October that while Israel would

help Ukraine develop a missile early warning system, it would not be providing weapons systems.

ISRAELI DEFENCE EXPORT ACHIEVEMENTS

Satellite images published in September appear to reveal deployment in the UAE of two Israeli Barak 8 missile launchers, together with the Elta ELM 2084 radar system, near al-Dhafra airbase south of Abu Dhabi. This combined system provides defence capabilities against missile, aircraft and drone attacks like those recently conducted on Gulf states by Iran and its proxies. The supply of these systems to the UAE has never been publicly announced by Jerusalem.

The Barak 8 missile was developed together with India. Meanwhile, a new Israeli-Indian project to jointly

develop an electronic warfare system for India's Navy and Coast Guard was launched on Oct. 29

In addition, in early November, Israeli company Elbit Systems signed a US\$70 million (A\$103 million) deal to provide Morocco's army with advanced electronic warfare and intelligence equipment.

ANOTHER NATURAL GAS FIND IN ISRAEL

In early November, the energy company Energean announced a new commercial natural gas discovery of 13 billion cubic metres off the shore of Israel.

The discovery confirmed the company's initial speculation that the "Olympus area" located between the existing Karish and Tanin gas fields contained commercially viable quantities of gas.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

PA: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY – FOR TERRORISTS

The Palestinian Authority (PA) Minister for Women's Affairs, Amal Hamad, and other senior female figures celebrated Palestinian Women's Day on Oct. 26 by proudly saluting the gender equality in Palestinian society. Their proof? Palestinian women can participate in terrorism.

Speaking on *PA TV*, Hamad gave three examples of equality – the involvement of women in the violent 1929 anti-Jewish riots; mass murderer Dalal Mughrabi, who led a 1978 attack that killed 37 Israeli civilians; and the fact that "there are also female prisoners in the occupation's prisons."

Ramallah Governor Laila Ghannam, in the Oct. 26 edition of official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, lauded the fact that Palestinian women "have been self-sacrificing fighters, expelled, wounded, prisoners and Martyrs." Similarly, Health Minister Mai Al-Kaila, in the same edi-

tion, wanted to emphasise "the role of the female Palestinian prisoners in all stages of the national struggle," while her "message to the Palestinian women is that they should continue in the popular resistance" (translations from Palestinian Media Watch).

However, it appears that respect does not extend to non-Palestinian women who help the Palestinian cause. In the recent TV documentary series "*Shtula*" or "Double Agent", which focuses on the behind-the-scenes goings on in "human rights organisations" in the PA areas, members of the International Solidarity Movement told a woman posing as an anti-Israel activist that she should expect sexual harassment from Palestinian men.

It then came out that an Israeli peace activist was "severely sexually assaulted in Sheikh Jarrah," but the organisers of the Sheikh Jarrah protests pressured her to withdraw her complaint, and then warned all Western women to cover their hair and bodies. Another activist revealed to an Israeli reporter that she knew of other similar rape cases.

Apparently gender equality in the PA areas goes only so far.

COVER STORY

BIBI'S BACK

NETANYAHU'S COALITION CONUNDRUMS

Amotz Asa-El

It should have been a cakewalk. Having finally achieved victory after four electoral failures in less than three years, Binyamin Netanyahu hoped to present a coalition in tandem with the 25th Knesset's inaugural session, which was held on November 15, two weeks after the Nov. 1 vote.

Instead, the morning after the new Knesset assembled, talks were stalemated, as Netanyahu's likely coalition partners raised conflicting demands.

Though no landslide, Netanyahu's victory was decisive. His Likud won 32 of the Knesset's 120 seats, and ultra-Orthodox and far right allies collectively won another 32, so what Netanyahu calls his "natural coalition" emerged sizeable and cohesive enough to ostensibly govern for at least most of the new Knesset's four-year term.

In itself, this solid majority would be welcome even to many who did not vote for Likud and its allies, as this result signals the end of half-a-decade of Israeli political instability, with five general elections in less than four years.

However, the new coalition is proving more difficult to build than initially assumed, for both personal and programmatic reasons.

On the personal side, Netanyahu is challenged by the leaders of the Religious Zionism Party, a confederation of three far-right parties that emerged from the election with 14 seats, before splitting into separate factions. This is three more than the ultra-Orthodox Shas and twice as much as the other ultra-Orthodox party, United Torah Judaism.

The reason for the far right's electoral success is a matter of interpretation.

Some see it as the technical result of its three leaders' readiness to run together, an inversion of what happened at the political spectrum's opposite end, where Labor refused to form a joint ticket with the left-wing Meretz party, which then ended up just under the electoral threshold of 3.25%, and will not be in the Knesset at all. Had the two left-wing parties run jointly they would have won seven



Binyamin Netanyahu should ostensibly have an easy walk back to power, but his erstwhile allies appear to have other ideas (Image: Shutterstock)

seats, and thus shrunk Netanyahu's majority to perhaps one seat.

Other analysts have pointed out the electoral effect of last year's violence in cities where Israeli-Arab and Jewish communities cohabitate, and of a crisis of Arab Bedouin lawlessness in southern Israel.

The shocking footage last year of torched synagogues in Israeli cities, and Arab mobs trying to lynch Jewish passersby during the May 2021 fighting in Gaza, were exploited by the leader of the *Otzma Yehudit* ("Jewish Power") party which ran as part of Religious Zionism, Itamar Ben Gvir, a former disciple of banned racist extremist Rabbi Meir Kahane. Ben Gvir promised in his campaign to seek to become the minister of homeland security, and use that office "to restore order".

Ben-Gvir, who had been convicted in the past of racist incitement and supporting a terror group, has indeed demanded Netanyahu appoint him to that sensitive cabinet position, which oversees the Israeli police force.

Meanwhile, his former running-mate Bezael Smotrich, the leader of Religious Zionism and a former transport minister, has demanded to become either treasurer or defence minister. If appointed, he is expected to use either

office to seek to push settlement expansion, legalising unauthorised Jewish outposts in the West Bank and transferring increased funding to settler-related causes.

Reports attributed to Smotrich's aides claimed he has met with no fewer than six retired IDF generals since the election in order to prepare for the position of defence minister. While it is not clear if these meetings actually happened, the reports evidently alarmed Netanyahu, who for several days avoided communicating with Smotrich, and when he finally met him it was in order to tell him he wouldn't agree to Smotrich becoming defence minister.

Why Netanyahu doesn't want to make the appointment is a matter of speculation.

Some claim Netanyahu received strong messages from Washington that the Biden Administration would prefer an appointee at defence with whom it could work smoothly. Others say Netanyahu thinks Religious Zionism emerged too empowered from this election, and letting it head the defence ministry would make it even stronger. Still others think Netanyahu wants his own candidate, former education minister Yoav Galant, a retired IDF major-general, to get the post. Finally, some think Netanyahu simply finds Smotrich, who served in the IDF for only 14 months in a non-combat role, unsuitable for the position.

Netanyahu may be ready to hand Smotrich the post of treasurer, but that ministry has been demanded by Netanyahu's other key ally, Shas leader Aryeh Deri.

The 63-year-old Deri is a lifelong politician who first became a cabinet minister in 1988, so is much more experienced. As far as Netanyahu is concerned, Deri is also far more dependable than the 42-year-old Smotrich, who has been in the Knesset only seven years, and may seem overly ambitious to Netanyahu.

Yet to make things even more complicated, Deri's prospective appointment as treasurer faces legal hurdles, since he was convicted last year of tax offences. This is in addition to the jail term he served 20 years ago for accepting bribes in the 1980s. There will almost certainly be legal challenges against Deri's appointment to any cabinet seat, and how Israel's High Court of Justice will rule is anyone's guess.

The one coalition partner with whom Netanyahu's negotiations have been relatively simple is United Torah Judaism (UTJ). The party requested, and has already been granted, the housing ministry and the chairmanship of the Knesset Finance Committee, amongst other positions.

In keeping with that party's tradition of seeking financial benefits for its ultra-Orthodox constituents in previous governments, UTJ used the prospect of a compact, conservative coalition to demand a sharp expansion of spending on religious institutions and scholars. Most notably, its leaders demand a near doubling of the average monthly

stipend paid to Talmudic seminary students, with the current budget of NIS 1.15 billion (A\$495 million) for such students expanding to NIS 2 billion (A\$860 million).

The other ultra-Orthodox party, Shas, which strives also to represent the poorer social classes, has demanded food subsidies for "needy families" through special plastic cards that would be an Israeli version of America's food stamps.

From Netanyahu's viewpoint, such demands, while fiscally expensive, are politically relatively cheap.

That cannot be said of his prospective coalition partners' expectations that the new government will quickly and swiftly pass legislation that would limit the powers of the High Court of Justice. Widely referred to as "the overriding clause", this controversial bill would allow a simple majority of 61 lawmakers to reinstate any legislation the High Court invalidates as unconstitutional.

Netanyahu is no less critical of Israel's judiciary than his partners, having alleged publicly that the courts were part of a conspiracy to unseat him, along with the prosecution, the media and police, following his indictment on corruption charges.

However, the extent to which he is coordinating with his allies on this sensitive front is not clear.

The ultra-Orthodox parties want the High Court's power diminished because they want a full exemption from military service granted to their constituents. The court has repeatedly thrown out legislation in this spirit, arguing such laws violate the principle of equality before the law.

The Religious Zionism party wants the High Court sidelined because it poses an obstacle to unchecked land expropriations in the West Bank. Netanyahu's main concern, however, is a deal that would undo, or at least reduce, the indictments he faces in court.

As Netanyahu likely sees things, a scenario whereby he is in a narrow coalition dependent on ultra-conservative militants is highly uncomfortable.

In his previous governing coalitions, he has always included at least one senior minister from a party to his left. Most recently it was Benny Gantz of Blue and White as his defence minister, before that it was Moshe Kahlon of the Kulanu party as treasurer, before that Yair Lapid and Tzipi Livni, who were respectively Netanyahu's finance and justice minister, before that it was Ehud Barak of Labor as his defence minister, and back in the 1990s it was a centrist party called The Third Way.

It is against this backdrop that Israel's *Maariv* newspaper claimed that secret talks are being held between Netanyahu and his centrist arch-rivals, outgoing prime minister Yair Lapid, whose *Yesh Atid* ("There is a Future") party won 24

"As Netanyahu likely sees things, a scenario whereby he is in a narrow coalition dependent on ultra-conservative militants is highly uncomfortable"

Official Number of Votes	Percentage	Ballot	Political Party
1,115,049	23.41%	לחל	Likud
847,145	17.78%	פה	Yesh Atid
516,146	10.83%	ט	Religious Zionism
432,376	9.08%	ק	National Unity
392,844	8.24%	שס	Shas
280,125	5.88%	ג	United Torah Judaism
213,955	4.49%	ל	Yisrael Beiteinu
193,916	4.07%	עם	Ra'am
178,661	3.75%	וס	Hadash/Ta'al
175,922	3.69%	אמת	Labor
150,696	3.16%	חרצ	Meretz
138,093	2.90%	ד	Balad
56,793	1.19%	ב	Jewish Home

The official results from Israel's Nov. 1 election. Parties with less than 3.25% of the vote missed the electoral threshold and will not be represented in the Knesset.

seats, and Benny Gantz, whose National Unity won 12.

The reports have been flatly denied by all parties, and there appears to be no formula that will see either Lapid or Gantz striking a deal with Netanyahu – both parties insist that he must clear the political stage so long as he faces a trial on corruption charges.

Most Israeli pundits expect the current coalition negotiations stalemate to drag on for at least a couple of more weeks. Yet ultimately, the negotiations will almost certainly eventually produce the sort of narrow, ultra-conservative government that foreign governments would tend to view with suspicion and Netanyahu has been so reluctant to

form. The decisions of Israeli voters have made this all but inevitable.

AIR

BEN GVIR AND ISRAELI LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Gil Troy

Columnist Thomas Friedman's much-forwarded *New York Times* lament for Israel's soul – “The Israel We Knew is Gone”, published November 4 – has demoralised the Jewish world. Feeding off the disgust many share for Itamar Ben Gvir's bigotry, Friedman has gone too far.

The Israel I and so many others know is not the Israel that Friedman ever bothered to know or *The New York Times* deigns to cover. So let's say to the “I-wash-my-hands-of-Israel” crowd, the Israel we know still lives, with all its flaws and challenges, its greatness and possibilities. Rather than jumping ship, we're swabbing the deck; rather than giving up on Israel because of some politicians, we won't give up on our lifelong mission to make Israel the best it can be.

I'm not sure what's most galling about all these ship abandoners: their arrogance, their ignorance, their disrespect for the democratic process, or their narrow vision.

Beyond overlooking so many liberal-democratic trends still thriving in Israel, Friedman and his colleagues have barely covered the violence and terrorism that spawned Ben Gvir. It's like condemning the 2020 lockdowns, without mentioning COVID.

It's heartbreaking. Many of Israel's closest friends know Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, but look blank when you say names like Yezen Falah, Amir Khoury, Shulamit Rachel Ovadia, Eytam Magini, Ido Baruch, Noa Lazer and Noam Raz. These are among the 26 Israelis murdered in over 2,200 terrorist attempts or attacks in 2022 – so far!

Yezen, 19, was a Druze police officer. Amir, 32, was a Christian Arab cop, whose funeral was mobbed by ultra-Orthodox Jews, thanking him for stopping a terrorist in the ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak. Shulamit, 84, was bludgeoned to death. Eytam, 28, about to marry, was shot with his childhood friend in a Tel Aviv bar.

Ido was a 21-year-old hero – known for his generosity, including DJing for free frequently, including at a bat mitzvah for a special needs girl. His mother spoke so poignantly at his funeral, about the partnership she and the other army parents had with their kids and one another: “This boy was all heart and generosity, *melach ha'aretz* – salt of the earth.”

Noa was merely 18. Her mother, who like Ido's girl-friend, immediately sensed something wrong, summarised all the mourners' feelings, saying: “I am in a nightmare that never ends.”

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Noam was a 47-year-old father of six, killed just as he was finishing a counter-terrorism operation. On Thursday, two days after the election, his 78-year-old father Yeshayahu Rosenberg heard that one of Noam's murderers had been killed while resisting arrest; a few hours later, Yeshayahu died.

Their stories are etched into every Israeli's soul, weigh on every voter's heart. If more outsiders knew how many Israelis fear walking around their neighbourhoods, and felt the outgoing Government was not responding effectively, perhaps they would understand that many – alas, not all



Many voters for controversial far right politician Itamar Ben Gvir were motivated by worries about terrorism and violence (Image: Shutterstock)

– of Ben Gvir voters were worried, not bigoted.

I believe the Bennett-Lapid Government handled these threats effectively, and I fear anti-Arab bigotry only heightens tensions. But I understand that some of my fellow citizens differed. Moreover, outgoing PM Yair Lapid's listless campaign did

not help. When Lapid denounced radical MK Aida Touma-Suleiman for praising a new group of Palestinian terrorists, "The Lions' Den," as martyrs, few noticed. Such restraint was political malpractice.

Even so, the margin separating winners from losers was marginal. Shifting 4,000 votes would have yielded a different outcome.

Democratic countries are more than their politicians – or one electoral outcome. "The Israel" of last year's experiment in centre-fielding, including Arabs in the coalition, was pretty much the same "Israel" of this year's right-wing backlash. Life is a continuously evolving multi-plot movie, not a simplistic snapshot, frozen in time.

Even regarding Israeli Arabs, which moment defines them?

- March 2020, when so many marvelled about how many Israeli Arabs were heroic nurses, doctors, pharmacists and ambulance drivers fighting COVID?
- May 2021, when some Israeli Arabs rioted in mixed cities like Acre and Lod?
- June 2021, when the Islamist Ra'am party joined the government?
- Or November 2022, when Ben Gvir triumphed, partially thanks to those same mixed cities where his vote quadrupled?

The day after Election Day, my wife and I visited Tel Aviv; it was as vibrant and tattooed and optimistic and hip as ever. That Friday, we visited our son Yoni at the base where he is doing reserve duty for a month near Hebron. Exploring Susiya, an ancient Jewish village nearby, reminded us how rooted we are historically in every inch of this land – no matter what we end up doing politically to

live with the other inhabitants on that land.

A dose of reality, meaning complexity, is always good for the soul – and an invitation to the humility and nuance so many finger-pointers lack.

Patriotism means loving your country despite its politicians sometimes – and beyond just its politics always. The US is more than the January 6 riots, even with 140 election deniers elected to Congress. Israel is more than Smotrich and Ben Gvir – much more.

My preferred candidates may have lost Israel's election, but my hopes for Israel are not lost. Israel will not only outlast the bullying bigots of the moment, it will also outlast the sky-is-falling chicken liberals like Thomas Friedman who only think they know Israel.

AIR

Prof. Gil Troy is a distinguished scholar of North American history at McGill University, and the author of nine books on American history and four books on Zionism. He is the editor of the new three-volume set Theodor Herzl: Zionist Writings. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

NEW GOVERNMENT WILL CONFRONT TERROR WAVE

Amos Harel

The terror attacks in the West Bank are continuing, unrelated to the outcome of the Israeli election or the upcoming government transition. The killing spree by a Palestinian terrorist on November 15 near Ariel, in which three Israeli civilians were murdered, is the most serious of its kind since the attack in the city of Elad at the end of Independence Day in April.

The wave of terror that began last March is no longer really a wave, but seems like a kind of new reality, which is likely to be long-term.

There are ups and downs in the extent of the violence, but the violence itself is now almost a permanent fact, even if it doesn't reach the scale of a third intifada. There is never total quiet in the West Bank. There is permanent friction tied both to the policing by the Israel Defence Forces against the Palestinian population, and the tensions between Palestinian villages and neighbouring settlements.

But in addition to the numerous incidents of stone throwing on the highways, in recent months there have been more serious incidents: shooting, car ramming and stabbing attacks, with relatively great frequency.

These are accompanied by a reinforced IDF presence; broad campaigns of arrest, the most widespread of which are focused in the northern West Bank; violent land disputes between Palestinians and settlers; and mutual acts of revenge.

Because the Nov. 15 attack took place towards the end of the tenure of the Lapid-Bennett Government, it was senior members of the outgoing Government who responded officially to the murder of the civilians near the settlement of Ariel.

But several hours after the incident, the swearing-in ceremony of the 25th Knesset began. Apparently in a few weeks from now at most, Palestinian terror will become a problem of the new right-wing government being formed.

The belligerent rhetoric that characterised many members of the prospective coalition when they were sitting in the opposition will no longer avail them. The public will expect the new people in charge to prove themselves.

Statements about restoring deterrence, the death sentence for terrorists and total support for soldiers and police will have to withstand the test of reality.

In recent weeks there has actually been a decline in violence in the territories. That was evidently also due to the success of the IDF and the Shin Bet security service in striking at the leaders of the "Lions' Den" terror group based in Nablus.

As a result, the group was apparently disbanded and dozens of its members handed themselves over to the Palestinian Authority, as part of a new agreement, to which Israel seems to be acquiescing. But when most of the attacks are the work of lone terrorists, one successful attack may be enough to change the atmosphere – and perhaps give rise to a new wave of copycat attempts.

On Nov. 14, the IDF and police published the conclusions of their joint investigation into the killing of IDF Sgt. Noa Lazar at Shoafat checkpoint in northern Jerusalem last month. The investigation levelled criticism at the feeble response of police posted at the checkpoint to the shots fired at them and at soldiers. In the end it was decided that the three Border Police officers and three career policemen would receive an official reprimand.

Even now, based on the initial testimony from the Ariel attack, the response of some members of the security

services seems to have been slow and hesitant. The terrorist, armed only with a knife, stabbed a security guard at the entrance to the Ariel industrial area, while evading another security guard.

Afterwards he stabbed two civilians to death at a gas station, then continued on a spree of stabbing and car ramming, while stealing two cars. Only about 20 minutes later, and several kilometres to the west of where the attack began, was he shot dead by a soldier and a civilian.

According to the declared policy of the defence establishment and political leadership in recent years, the widespread employment of Palestinians with entry permits inside should continue, both within the Green Line and in the settlements' industrial zones.

It was argued that any collective punishment would only push additional Palestinians into the arms of the terror organisations. It is doubtful whether that will be the opinion of the Religious Zionism party in the next government, but the degree of its influence on upcoming decisions remains to be seen.

AIR

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

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT ISRAEL'S LEFT- RIGHT DIVIDE

Haviv Rettig Gur

A strange thing happened on November 1. As the Israeli election results came in, two things became clear. One, Netanyahu's rightist-religious bloc had won a sweeping, unassailable victory. Two, it had done so without fundamentally changing the actual numbers of votes.

Two political parties, progressive-Zionist Meretz and Palestinian-nationalist Balad, failed to meet the 3.25% vote minimum required to enter the Knesset, and so cost the anti-Netanyahu half of Israeli politics about 6% of the total votes cast. Netanyahu's 64-seat majority is almost entirely a function of that threshold mechanic, which caused the disappearance of well over a quarter-million votes.

And there's the rub. In Balad's case, the implosion was foreseen for weeks, a function of its decision to run separately from and without even signing a vote-sharing agreement with the other Arab-majority factions.

In Meretz's case, the same question was anxiously raised back in September, with calls by activists and centre-left leaders for Labor and Meretz to unite to avoid falling

below the cutoff. Labor refused, even as all understood that a failure by any one of the small parties in the anti-Netanyahu bloc to clear the threshold would break the four-year deadlock and hand Netanyahu his victory.

All understood and a great many predicted that the anti-Netanyahu camp was headed for failure from the simple fact that so many of its parties hovered at the threshold.

In other words, the left and Balad self-immolated, their leadership too devoted to party brands, their own standing and narrow ideological nuances to respond to a clear and present electoral threat. They spoke of Netanyahu's imminent return to power as a vast danger, but then did everything required to make that outcome more likely.

LAMENTATIONS

While party leaders did what failed politicians usually do – squabbled over blame – the broader left-wing discourse since Election Day has not shown as much clarity as might be expected about the left's own role in engineering its loss. Instead, there was much lamentation and dire prognostications.

"You want Bibi, but you'll get Ben Gvir," Sima Kadmon, the iconic left-leaning political columnist in the *Yedioth Ahronoth* daily, railed at right-wing voters in her Wednesday column. "You, by your own hand, will bring about the end of the country as we've known it."

Celebrities threatened to leave the country. Reports claimed that the word "relocation" was enjoying a spike in Hebrew-language Google searches and social media, along with phrases like "how to leave the country" and "the country is lost."

And so it went across the left-wing Hebrew-language social media landscape, until even very left-wing commentators began to express disgust at so much mournful keening.

THE LONG-AGO COLLAPSE OF THE ISRAELI LEFT

To be sure, the pathos is understandable. This is an era that imposes on its contemporaries a permanent state of moral panic.

Some of this is structural: Social media algorithms forge radicalising echo chambers, the economics of a shrinking journalist class drive a news cycle permanently set to the highest intensity, and so on. Some of it is substantive: A very real and dramatic shift is underway in the politics of

the democratic world, including in Israeli politics.

It is hard not to connect the rise of Itamar Ben Gvir to the astonishing 41% vote for Marine Le Pen in the French presidential election, to the victory of formerly fascist political elements in Italy in September, or to far-

right politics in the US, Canada, Brazil, Hungary and elsewhere. Formerly fringe right-wing actors, now declaring themselves to have moderated, seem on the march everywhere.

The reasons have been much discussed in recent years, from dire warnings of a "democratic retreat" to more empathetic diagnoses that suggest these radicalising electorates are responding to hollowed-out national and transnational institutions that have failed to address their needs

and anxieties.

In Israel, as in other countries, the votes for radical political forces come from the edges, from poorer, marginalised communities. In Ben Gvir's case, many of his voters come from *Mizrahi* (*Middle-Eastern Jews*)-majority development towns where talk of recent crime waves and rising inter-ethnic tension is a source of daily fear and suffering. It is a vote as much against the 12 years of neglectful



Disappointed faces at the headquarters of the left-wing Meretz party, which failed to cross the electoral threshold (Image: Isranet)

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Netanyahu governments as against the 18 months of the Bennett-Lapid Government. These forces will not be defeated by moral rebuke alone; the social realities that drive them must be addressed.

Yet even as this rightist shift in Israel fits neatly into broader global trends, there is a unique feature in the Israeli case, one that sets Israel apart and helps explain the surge in apocalyptic discourse on the Israeli left: The Israeli left collapsed long before the Israeli far-right surged into power.

If one counts Labor and Meretz as “the left” – they’re the only parties in which a majority of voters identify that way according to polls – then the decline is easy enough to track.

Labor and Meretz won a combined 44% of the vote in 1992, the year Yitzhak Rabin was elected and launched the peace process with the Palestinians. That number fell to 34% in 1996, ushering in Netanyahu’s first term in power. It then continued falling, in part because of an experimental change to electoral rules and in part because of growing disillusionment with the peace process that had become the left’s defining political project. It hit 28% in 1999, 20% in 2003 following the suicide bombing wave of the Second Intifada, 19% in 2006 and 13% in 2009.

Two relatively successful Labor leaders – Shelly Yachimovich and Isaac Herzog (now Israel’s president) – managed to reverse the trend briefly, with 16% in 2013 and 22.6% in 2015. But it didn’t last. In the five-election run of the past 43 months, the left’s fortunes all but collapsed, with it winning 8%, 9%, 6%, 10.7% and 7%.

In other words, the Israeli left didn’t collapse in a sudden, recent rightist lurch of the electorate. It has been in a tailspin for three decades. And three decades of failure suggest a simple, unsparing conclusion that hovers over the anxiety about the election results and the patina of moral panic that accompanies it: The left that just collapsed, in terms of raw political strategy, doesn’t deserve to exist.

NO VICTORY AT HAND

It’s a point few are raising now, perhaps out of misplaced sympathy: Even if the Lapid-led camp had won, it would not actually have *won*; it would merely have denied Netanyahu a win.

As many have noted, that’s because two Arab-majority parties, Hadash and Balad, supported voting with Lapid against a Netanyahu-led coalition, but almost certainly would not have voted *for* a Lapid-led one.

The political strategy of the centre-left was, in effect, the hope that a fifth consecutive Netanyahu failure might see an increasingly frustrated religious-right alliance replace him.

Yet this very hope is an implicit acknowledgment of the basic hopelessness at the heart of left-wing politics. If the right had responded to another failure by ousting Netanyahu, that would almost certainly have meant an even larger rightist coalition than the one set to be sworn in later this month. Right-leaning political forces that oppose Netanyahu, such as the *Yisrael Beytenu* (“Israel our Home”) party or the ex-Likudnik MKs now part of Benny Gantz’s National Unity slate, are now parked on Lapid’s side of the ledger as they hope and plan for Netanyahu’s political demise. They may well return to their political home after Netanyahu’s exit.

The political left has in effect surrendered all hope of ever returning to power, consigning itself to sometimes, with the help of disillusioned rightists, fighting the other side to a draw.

THE SHRINKING TRIBE

It gets worse. Even this goal will soon be out of its grasp. Tuesday’s election highlighted a point long known but adamantly ignored by the left’s political institutions and leaders: It is losing the demographic contest, and quickly.

Israeli politics are built along cultural, religious and ethnic divides often called *migzarim*, “sectors”, or *shvatim*, “tribes”. The electoral system itself – a single nationwide constituency with a proportional vote for party lists – is built to reflect and express these tribal affinities as cohesive parliamentary actors.

The specific delineations of the “tribes” are not as rigid as Israeli identity politics suggest; Haredi-Sephardi Shas and traditionalist Likud have exchanged voters over the years, as have Labor and Yesh Atid. But these self-defined boundaries are nevertheless the most basic predictors of Israeli political behaviour.

Ethnicity is a factor in constructing these tribes. In last year’s election, according to a study by the Israel Democracy Institute, Meretz and Labor’s voters were majority Ashkenazi (Jews of European origin), Likud and Shas’s mostly Sephardi (Jews of Middle Eastern origin).

So is income. Yesh Atid voters were more likely to have above-average income (46%) than below-average (30%), Likud the reverse (29% above, 46% below).

But by far the most successful predictor of voting patterns is level of religiosity. The centre-left is startlingly uniform in its secularism. In the 2021 election, religiously-minded voters (who self-defined as “ultra-Orthodox,” “religious,” or “traditional-religious”) made up just 2.5% of Meretz voters, 6% of Yesh Atid, 7% of Labor, 8% of Yisrael Beytenu, 12% of Blue and White and 14% of New Hope.

The opposite was true on Netanyahu’s side of the aisle. Fewer than 1% of Shas and United Torah Judaism vot-

“Even if the Lapid-led camp had won, it would not actually have won; it would merely have denied Netanyahu a win”

ers defined themselves as secular, and among the voters of the Religious Zionism party, the figure stands at just 5%. Likud may be the most religiously diverse Jewish-majority party, with 28% of its voters calling themselves “secular”, 35% “traditional non-religious” and 23% “traditional-religious”.



The larger size, on average, of religious families in Israel inevitably has demographic effects over time on the political balance of Israel’s “tribes” (Image: Isranet)

And that’s a political cataclysm for the left as it is currently constructed, because some of these ethno-religious tribes are growing much faster than others, almost entirely by the tried-and-true method of having more children.

Two unique features of Israeli society make this a uniquely potent method for political expansion: Israeli society is younger than other democracies, and young Israelis, more than in other democracies, remain loyal to their parents’ political preferences.

Israel is among the youngest populations in the developed world. Its median age is 30.5, compared to America’s 38.1, France’s 41.7 or geriatric Germany’s 47.8 [Australia’s is 38.4 – Ed.] Some 35% of the population is under 20 (compared to America’s 25%), and some 15% of the electorate is under 24, more than any other Western democracy.

And these vast cohorts of young people hail disproportionately from the religious side of the divide. Haredi [ultra-Orthodox] women, according to Central Bureau of Statistics 2021 data, average about 6.5 children per woman; among religious but not Haredi women it’s 3.9. The average for all Jewish non-Haredi women, including the secular and “traditional,” is 2.5.

And they vote, as noted, like their parents.

“One of the most interesting things about the youth vote in Israel is the rate of conformity to the families they come from,” Prof. Tamar Hermann of the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) told *Channel 12* recently. “In many other countries we see young people who turn away from or even turn to the opposite [political choices] of their parents, a rebellion against the parents. But the young Israeli is very, very conforming to their family, and the result is that at most we see radicalisation from the home they came

from. In most homes where there is radicalisation, it’s in the same direction but sharper. There’s very little jumping in the opposite direction.”

In fact, these tribal politics stick around even when religion is abandoned. “The interesting thing is that when we interview Haredi or religious young people who left their religious communities, they’ve often changed their relationship to their religious lives, but they remain in the same political camp. It’s as though you can be forgiven for one deviation, but two already makes Friday dinners too difficult.”

(It’s worth noting that as the gap in religiosity widens between Israel and Europe, it is shrinking between Israel and its Arab neighbours. According to the 2019 Arab Barometer survey, fewer than 10% of Palestinians say they are non-religious; among Lebanese it’s less than 15%.)

And the net result of these trends is clear. An IDI survey of under-24 voters found that 71% define themselves as “right-wing”. Less than 11% call themselves “left”.

THE TRIBE THAT DOESN’T KNOW IT’S A TRIBE

The steady decline of the Israeli left’s factions and institutions is thus about more than just the failed peace process. It reflects deep social changes. If the left does not fundamentally redraw the Israeli political map – that is, fundamentally reconceive itself – then the result on Nov. 1 will be more than a single painful failure. It will be a harbinger of the foreseeable future.

It is this reality that drives the “end of the country as we’ve known it” panic.

Yet this anxiety is not a diagnosis of Israel so much as a statement about the left’s sudden discovery, through a single-percentage-point shift of votes in unlucky ways, of the vast gap it has allowed to grow between its sense of the electorate and the very different reality.

Nov. 2’s Israel was not a different country than Oct. 31’s Israel. It was just as tribal, nearly as traditional and just as Mizrahi as when it was ruled by the Ashkenazi left pursuing secularist, left-wing policies. Those elements of its character were simply not as visible to left-wing elites and institutions.

But as with any failure, once the problem is clear, constructive paths forward emerge. To that end, there are three points of good news for the left in the election debacle.

The first is that almost nothing actually happened on the ground. Without diminishing the valid fears about an incoming government dependent on what were once considered extremist and illegitimate political forces, it’s important to note that the rise of far-right politician Itamar Ben Gvir was not driven by any significant shift in votes.

In the 2021 election, the two religious-Zionist factions, Yamina and Religious Zionism, won a combined 499,477



votes. In 2022, the single party running from that “tribe” of Israeli society, Religious Zionism, won 516,146 votes, just 3% more. Its total share of the vote actually declined, from 11.33% to 10.83%, amid a three-point jump in turnout.

This was no Le Pen pivot or Meloni takeover.

In fact, except on the edges, in poor development towns or in tense, ethnically mixed neighbourhoods, most voters didn’t seem to register Ben Gvir’s presence at all, despite the anxiety his candidacy aroused on the left and abroad.

Israeli voters vote their tribes – on Nov. 1, as before.

The second piece of good news for the left is simply the clarifying effect of disastrous failure. The divide of the left into Labor and Meretz is a distant echo of now irrelevant differences between two leftist factions at the birth of the state, when socialist Mapai and communist-Stalinist Mapam found themselves on opposite sides of the US-Soviet global divide. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then, but the basic institutional divide inexplicably remains embedded in the political psyche of left-wing elites.

Today, the left can no longer pretend that its old political structures were an appropriate way to build a liberal political camp. While there are differences in self-reported political identity between the two constituencies (in Labor, 24% call themselves “far-left,” 44% “moderate left”; in Meretz it’s 58% to 29%), these are not fundamental divides that justify the danger of a recurrence of the result on Nov. 1.

Failure is unpleasant, but it is also liberating from old orthodoxies. Handled properly, it can rejuvenate.

And third, there’s a growing awareness on the left of the need to rebuild itself in ways that better fit its potential electorate.

This is not a new debate. Dr. Ram Fruman, founder in 2011 of the Secular Forum and author of the 2019 book *The Secular Path*, has argued for years that the secular left is the only one of Israel’s tribes that refuses to acknowledge it is one. As with the ultra-Orthodox or conservative-Islamic or religious-Zionist or Arab-progressive tribes, it has its own distinct culture, its own geographic concentrations, its own school system. Fruman suggests that a self-conscious new secularism can offer the shared civic foundations for this tribe to finally recognise its existence and build a political vehicle that can better secure its interests.

This might be a successful way forward. But there’s some chance that a clever, ambitious political left can do better. The cultural-religious-ethnic divides are fundamental, yes, but they are also more porous than they seem in snapshot polls. When it comes to the Ashkenazi-Sephardi divide, in every single electorate, including the voters for the two Haredi parties UTJ and Shas that are defined by their Ashkenazi or Sephardic bent,

double-digit percentages of voters are no longer willing to tell pollsters whether they are one or the other – in most cases because they are both, the children of mixed marriages.

Nor is religion, so successful a predictor of political behaviour, quite as hard and fast a question as the simplistic categories of pollsters might suggest. The line that divides the religious Zionist from the Haredi has blurred, producing a *hardal* community, a word that combines the Hebrew terms for ultra-Orthodox and religious-Zionist. This porousness drove some Haredi voters to support Ben Gvir on Nov. 1.

Similarly, the “secular” Israeli tends to be a more traditionally minded animal than his or her Western counterpart. Families are larger, birth-rates higher, and religion-based rituals more widespread among secular Israelis than secular Europeans. Much of everyday Israeli life, even the most prosaic elements like the calendar or the country’s geography, is tied in some way to religious ideas or traditions.

Israelis, including on the left, are closer to the Middle Eastern societies from which most Israeli Jews hail than to the European progressive politics to which the Israeli left often feels it belongs.

At the moment, the future belongs to the tribes that are producing more children. But the lines may be blurring. A left serious about shaping the Israeli future must reorient itself to take advantage of these changes.

It is tempting to turn to sackcloth and ashes and conclude that the world is ending. It is, indeed, the expectation in the age of Twitter and TikTok.

But there remains a large liberal Israeli political camp. Beginning with the emergence of Kadima in 2006, an Israeli “centre” grew to fill the vacuum of the shrinking left, largely by defining itself as non-left and mostly avoiding attempting to resolve the Palestinian impasse. This replacement suggests the left’s problem is not as apocalyptic as its doomsaying spokespeople like to think. The left’s most basic failure is simple: Its venerable institutions, heirs to political structures dating back to before the founding of the Israeli state, no longer correspond to significant social or political realities on the ground.

Had Meretz and Labor been less concerned with their own institutional success and more with the way the voters themselves think, they would have arranged themselves differently in the runup to last month’s elections. Had the left run as a bloc unified along the lines of voters’ fundamental political impulses – as the right did – Netanyahu would likely now be trying to explain to his voters why they must back him for a sixth attempt.

AIR

Haviv Rettig Gur is senior analyst at the Times of Israel. © Times of Israel (www.timesofisrael.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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A Turning Point?

Iran's protests reach a critical juncture

Jonathan Spyer

Protests in Iran have now passed their eighth week. There are no signs as yet that the determination of the demonstrators is flagging. The situation appears to directly refute claims by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in early November that Iran's cities were "safe and sound".

From their beginnings in Iran's Kurdistan province, the demonstrations have now spread throughout the country. The US-based Institute for the Study of War, which has been closely monitoring developments, counted at least 30 protests taking place in 15 cities across 11 of Iran's provinces in the first days of November.

These included a commercial strike in Saqqez, hometown of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini, whose death at the hands of the authorities triggered the current unrest. Students demonstrated at a variety of locations across Teheran. Mashhad, Sanandaj, Mariwan and many other cities witnessed unrest.

The chants of the protesters are no longer limited to calls for ending the compulsory wearing of the hijab, or indeed to the generic call of "Women, Life, Freedom" – originally a Kurdish revolutionary slogan the Iranian demonstrators made their own.

Rather, the demonstrators now are openly calling for the overthrow of the Islamic regime, which has ruled Iran for the last 40 years. Frequently, now, according to multiple reports, slogans such as "death to the dictator" and "death to the system" may be heard.

The usual methods employed by the regime for the rapid dispersal of protests, meanwhile, do not appear to be working. In the past, the shutting down of the internet across large swathes of the country, and then the employment of extreme force, served to bring periods of protest to a close. In this way, in 2009 and then again in 2019, the regime managed to quell widespread demonstrations.

This time, too, the regime's approach has been very far from restrained, and is including the use of live ammunition against unarmed protesters. Iran Human Rights, an Oslo-based human rights organisation, estimates that by November 12, 326 people had been killed by the Iranian authorities in their efforts to put down the protests.

The organisation, notably, also recorded 123 of the deaths of protesters occurred in Sistan and Baluchestan. In this remote, majority Sunni province, far from the eyes of the world, the Iranian authorities appear to be adopting harsher tactics.

Sistan and Baluchestan also appears to be witnessing incidents of armed resistance. In the latest of these, four policemen were shot dead at a checkpoint on the Iran-shahr-Bampur road in the province.

Some observers have suggested that the high representation of women in the protests in many parts of the country is serving to prevent the application of more harsh and brutal tactics by the authorities.

Whether or not this is the case, it is a fact that the situ-



The regime's usual methods to disperse protest movements are not working, but the protesters are also still unable to truly threaten the regime's survival (Image: Twitter)

ation in Iran appears to be approaching a turning point. The authorities have failed to halt the protests. The regime is unable to tolerate indefinitely a situation of widespread and ongoing disruption and disorder, which by its very nature undermines its authority.

But the protesters, too, have not yet succeeded in truly posing the question of power in Iran. That is, the level of pressure currently employed against the regime is nowhere near the amount that would be necessary to threaten its continued existence.

No revolutionary leadership, able to direct the ongoing demonstrations and focus them as part of a plan for the seizure of power, currently exists in Iran. This inchoate, decentralised nature of the protests has been much remarked upon by observers. Many have seen this as part of the "Generation Z," "TikTok" character of this uprising, which represents the entry of a new, unafraid generation of activists onto the Iranian stage. While such a characterisation may well be accurate, it should be noted that ultimately, to take power, an organised movement, with political and probably also military aspects, is a necessity.

Also, there are no visible signs yet of serious cracks and fissures in the Iranian security forces, a necessary requirement for any chance of toppling the regime.

So Iran today is characterised by ongoing and widespread unrest, at a level intolerable to the authorities. But it is not yet in what might be called a pre-revolutionary situation.

This means that both the authorities and the demonstrators face hard choices in the phase now opening up. The authorities need to find a way to delegitimise the protesters as a prelude to the use of greater force.

A recent report in the *Wall Street Journal* revealed indications that the regime may be planning to achieve this by artificially heightening regional tensions, to distract attention and portray the protesters as unpatriotic and separatist. According to the report, the regime may be planning an imminent military strike, either on Saudi Arabia or on targets in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Any attack on Saudi Arabia would likely be carried out by a proxy organisation, probably either Yemeni or Iraqi. In Iraqi Kurdistan, by contrast, the regime's track record suggests that it would be more likely to employ its own declared forces. This is in keeping with Teheran's general approach of using the greatest and most direct force on its weakest enemies while disguising or avoiding the employment of force against stronger foes.

There is already a precedent for action against Kurdish targets in Iraq. On Sept. 28, Teheran launched missile attacks on the facilities of two Iraq-based Iranian Kurdish militant groups – the KDPI and Komala parties. The intention was to portray the protests in Iran as directed by external militant organisations.

Once the protests could be “framed” in this way as representing an externally directed security threat, the way would be clear for the use of greater force against them. This may well be the direction the regime chooses in the period ahead. It is not without risk, although, in general, the Iranian Kurdish groups are isolated and without powerful friends. (Ed. Note: *In fact there were two such attacks on Iraqi Kurdistan shortly after this article was written.*)

For the protesters, the dilemma is no less stark. In the event of the application of harsher tactics by the regime, or even in their absence, the protesters now need to find a way to increase the pressure.

Many Iranians supportive of the protests nevertheless fear what they refer to as a “Syrian” scenario in Iran. By this, they mean a situation in which an attempt to crush the protests using maximum force then leads to an armed response by elements of the opposition. This would then open the door to armed civil strife in Iran, with a potentially terrible cost in human lives.

“The revolutionary dynamic in Iran appears to be approaching an inflection point, beyond which it must either escalate or dissipate”

The opposition, particularly in Kurdistan and Sistan and Baluchestan, has some access to weaponry. There have already been instances where protesters have taken temporary control of neighbourhoods, only to disperse after the authorities moved forces toward the area.

But many observers caution against the premature introduction of weapons into the fight, since this may provide the authorities with precisely the excuse they are looking for.

On the other hand, ongoing passivity amid a rising death toll is also not an attractive option.

There are no easy solutions.

Iranian protesters are likely to confront the fact in the period ahead that revolutions are by their very nature a leap in the dark. Whether you get a victory – or Syria – on the other side of the jump cannot be known in advance.

In any case, the revolutionary dynamic in Iran appears to be approaching an inflection point, beyond which it must either escalate or dissipate.

AIR

Jonathan Spyer is Director of Research at the Middle East Forum and director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis. Reprinted from the Jerusalem Post. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

AN OPPORTUNITY IN IRAN

Walter Russell Mead

Joe Biden is a lucky man. The heroism of the Ukrainian people saved him from a Russian victory. Now the people of Iran, led by their women, are offering him a historic opportunity to weaken Russia, reduce long-term American vulnerabilities in the Middle East, and even return a sense of caution and sobriety to Chinese foreign policy.

Like many great opportunities, it comes unexpectedly. The Middle East has been a dreary place for Team Biden.



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The failure to enlist the Iranians in a renewed nuclear deal, the shambolic Afghan withdrawal, the embarrassing fist bump with a price-hiking Mohammed bin Salman, Binyamin Netanyahu's electoral victory: Nothing in the Middle East has gone Joe Biden's way.

This string of embarrassing failures has confirmed the Administration's determination to downgrade the Middle East as a strategic priority. But the Middle East refuses to stay quiet.

Blowing off Biden Administration threats dating back to last summer, Iran is selling sophisticated drones to Russia for use in the war on Ukraine. Those drones have enabled Russia's latest assault on Ukraine's electrical infrastructure, threatening

shutdowns of Ukrainian industry and leaving civilians without light or heat as winter nears. As Robin Wright observes in the *New Yorker*, Russia salvaged Iran's position in Syria in 2015 by bolstering the criminal Bashar al-Assad regime. Now Iran is returning the favour by helping Russia in its flagrantly illegal attack on Ukraine.

Enter the women of Iran, whose resistance to clerical bigotry opens the door to a new era in Iranian and even world history.

We do not know whether the Iranian protesters can win. The track record of democratic revolutions across the Middle East is anything but inspiring, and the protesters in Iran have yet to coalesce behind a single group of leaders or political program. But using all the diplomatic and economic tools at America's disposal to help the Iranian people's fight for freedom is both the right thing to do and the best way to advance US interests at a critical time.

The time for action is now. Iran's arrogant, incompetent rulers have isolated themselves to an unprecedented

degree. Their ruthlessness at home has silenced regime apologists across the West. Their cynical alliance with Vladimir Putin places them in opposition to Europe as well as the US. Their weapons sales to Russia violate a Security Council-imposed arms embargo. Their unconscionable

intransigence at the nuclear negotiating table has convinced most Europeans that Iran, not the US, is the chief obstacle to a reasonable agreement. The combination of recklessness abroad and instability at home has persuaded smart European businesses that the current regime is a bad bet.

A resolute White House bent on supporting the Iranian people would have many useful options to pursue. Working diplomatically

with Europe for a "snapback" of UN sanctions to punish Iran for arming Russia, cracking down on black-market Iranian oil exports, and otherwise crippling the regime economically would undermine it at a critical hour. Assuring the Iranian people that normal economic relations would quickly follow the establishment of a law-abiding government in Teheran would encourage regime opponents. Taking steps to restore internet service where the regime seeks to cut communications and providing other nonviolent, non-military assistance to democratically minded protesters would further help the Iranian people regain control of their future. American cooperation with interested neighbouring states could support the protests, make life more difficult for Iranian proxies such as Hezbollah, and put more pressure on both Russia and Iran.

The end of the clerical dictatorship that has blighted the lives of the Iranian people and troubled the peace of the Middle East since 1979 would be an unmitigated blessing for the US, its Middle East allies and the cause of freedom around the world. Russia would lose access to some of the missiles with which it hopes to crush Ukraine. Russia's position in Syria would become unsustainable, and the Assad dictatorship would face a just reckoning.

The pressures on world fuel prices would dramatically shrink as Iran's oil returns to the market. The reintegration of Iran into the world economy would offer a historic opportunity for European and other businesses at a difficult time. The US could reduce its military footprint in the Middle East without compromising the security of its allies. China would reflect on the resilience of American power. A world order that now looks fragile would suddenly seem much more robust.

There are risks to supporting the Iranian people, but



US President Joe Biden has been extraordinarily lucky, thanks to both the heroism of the Ukrainian people and the inspirational bravery of Iran's protesters (Image: Flickr/Whitehouse.gov)

With compliments

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America's current Iran policy offers only the certainty of failure. The mullahs have offered President Biden an unprecedented opportunity; let us hope he seizes it with both hands.

AIR

Walter Russell Mead is the Ravenel B. Curry III Distinguished Fellow in Strategy and Statesmanship at the Hudson Institute, the GlobalView Columnist at the Wall Street Journal and the James Clarke Chace Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College. Reprinted from the Wall Street Journal (www.wsj.com). © Dow Jones and Company, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

JERUSALEM COMES TO CANBERRA

Jamie Hyams

The October 18 Australian Government decision to no longer recognise west Jerusalem as Israel's capital attracted more debate and comment in Federal Parliament than Israel has received for a very long time, maybe ever. It took place in many forms in both houses, starting with a rush on Oct. 25, the first day Parliament sat after the announcement.

In Question Time, Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) asked, "...I refer to the decision taken... on a Jewish holy day to stop recognising Israel's capital of west Jerusalem... which deeply offended our closest ally in the Middle East and the Jewish community in Australia but which was praised by two violent terrorist groups. Has the Prime Minister spoken to or communicated with the Israeli Prime Minister and offered an apology?"

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) replied, "...We have reaffirmed Australia's previous, longstanding and bipartisan position that Jerusalem is a final status issue that should be resolved as part of peace negotiations... the same position... held by the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, New Zealand and Canada... [and was held by] John Howard [and] Tony Abbott..." before accusing the previous government of recognising west Jerusalem for political advantage in the context of the Wentworth by-election.

That day, in Senate Question Time, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator **Simon Birmingham** (Lib., SA) said it "was announced with initial denials by the minister's office on the Jewish holy day of Simchat Torah and just two weeks out from polling day in the Israeli elections," and asked, "The Prime Minister has described as 'deeply regrettable' the Government's handling of the announcement. He also said that it could have been done better and... caused distress... has the Prime Minister spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Lapid to apologise for the ham-fisted handling of this matter?"

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) replied, acknowledging "there are few issues that are more central for members of the Jewish community than the status of Jerusalem," but adding, "What the Government has done is reaffirm Australia's previous longstanding and bipartisan position... that Jerusalem is a final status issue that should be resolved as part of any peace negotiations" and that "this has been Australia's position for decades," before accusing the previous government of changing Australia's stance for political advantage and saying that the ALP had said at that time it would reverse the decision if it won government.

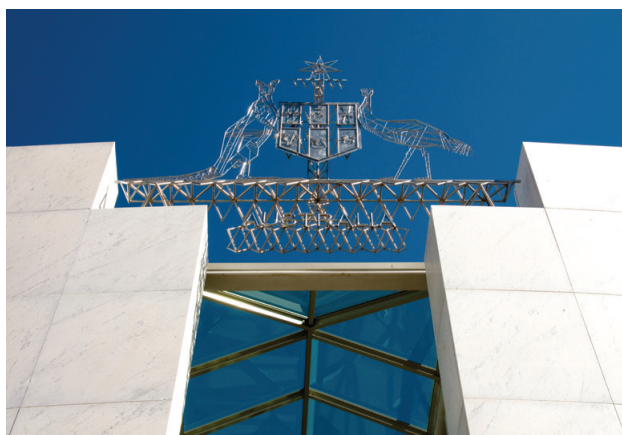
Following Question Time, senators are able to respond to answers. Senator **Matt O'Sullivan** (Lib., WA) noted, "The Australia-Israel bilateral relationship has been one of the

more important pillars in Australia's international relations since... the Second World War." He urged "the Albanese Government to apologise to Israeli Prime Minister Lapid and undo this unwise decision."

Similarly, Shadow Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas.) said, "The idea that Australia should reject Israel's acknowledgement of its own capital is wrong. It does not assist or help the peace process, and it diminishes Australia."

Later that afternoon, in the House of Representatives, Shadow Minister for Science, Arts, Government Services and the Digital Economy **Paul Fletcher** (Lib., Bradfield) moved that the issue be discussed as a matter of public importance, which was approved. This allowed debate on the issue. Coalition speakers condemned the decision.

Mr Fletcher described Israel as "a beacon of freedom around the world." He said the Coalition's "recognition of west Jerusalem did not in any way pre-empt peace negotiations or undermine prospects of a peaceful settlement," and that it had "followed a review by the secretaries of the departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Defence, and Home Affairs which included



Recent weeks have seen more debate about Israel in the Australian Federal Parliament than there has been for a very long time (Image: Shutterstock)

consultation with community representatives, former heads of relevant agencies and Australia's international allies and partners."

Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians **Julian Leeser** (Lib., Berowra) said, "West Jerusalem is Israel's capital. Its parliament is there, its Supreme Court is there, the President lives there – it looks like the capital city of any other country. Yet Labor is lending credence to the fiction that it's not." He concluded, "West Jerusalem is territory that has not been disputed and is not disputed... Israel is a sovereign nation with a right to determine where its capital lies."

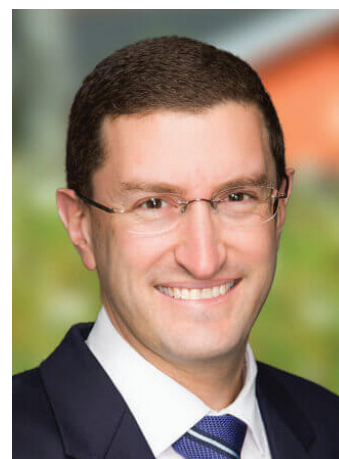
Shadow Assistant Treasurer **Stuart Robert** (Lib., Fadden), **Scott Buchholz** (Lib., Wright) and **Keith Wolahan** (Lib., Menzies) also spoke against the decision.

Those on the Government side mainly repeated the points made by Mr Albanese and Senator Wong in their answers in Question Time, although some also said that the fact Australia's embassy was not moved proved the previous government's initial announcement that it was reviewing the site was a political stunt.

For example, Assistant Foreign Minister **Tim Watts** (ALP, Gellibrand), stated, "there can be no lasting peace that does not address the status of Jerusalem, and the Albanese Government will not undermine that approach," and mentioned many past Australian governments that had not recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Minister for Early Childhood Education and Youth **Anne Aly** (ALP, Cowan), **Joanne Ryan** (ALP, Lalor), **Josh Burns** (ALP, Macnamara) and **Peter Khalil** (ALP, Wills) spoke in similar terms, although Mr Burns also said that for people in his electorate, "to understand Jerusalem as the capital is as simple as us understanding Canberra as [our] capital, and it would be like someone telling us that Surfers Paradise was the capital instead of Canberra – something that doesn't really make sense."

Still on Oct. 25, in the Senate, **Simon Birmingham** requested that "The need for the Senate to reaffirm the importance of consultation and careful consideration when dealing with complex and sensitive foreign affairs matters, and the need for Prime Minister Albanese to apologise



Some of the prominent players in the recent debate include (left to right, top to bottom) Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong, Shadow Foreign Minister Simon Birmingham, ALP backbencher Tony Zappia and Shadow Attorney-General Julian Leeser

to Israeli Prime Minister Lapid for the hasty and careless manner in which the [Jerusalem] decision... was made," be considered as a matter of urgency. This was allowed.

In his comments, he stated, that, contrary to ALP assurances before the election that "on the question of Israel, it didn't matter which way [people] voted... the Albanese Government has taken... multiple steps... of change of policy."

Assistant Minister for Trade and Manufacturing Senator **Tim Ayres** (ALP, NSW) countered that "There was nothing hasty, careless or surprising about Senator Wong's announcement last week. When the Morrison Government announced its position in 2018, Senator Wong made our position very clear."

Greens Foreign Affairs Spokesman Senator **Jordon Steele-John** (WA) stated, "... Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other groups have concluded that the Israeli government... is guilty of the crime of apartheid. Following the decision... we are calling on the Federal Government... to recognise the self-determination and statehood of Palestinians and push to ensure an end to the Israeli occupation; to halt military cooperation and military trade with the State of Israel..."

Senator **David Fawcett** (Lib., SA) said that even for people who say we should go back to the pre-1967 boundaries,

WITH COMPLIMENTS



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INGREDIENT SPECIALISTS

“West Jerusalem is very much the territory that Israel has always controlled and will continue to control,” adding that the Abraham Accords showed there could be peace without a final settlement.

Senator **Deborah O'Neill** (ALP, NSW) said, “I particularly want to say as Chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Israel that I know how deeply the attachment to Jerusalem is felt by Jewish people, who, in the immortal words of Chaim Weizmann, lived in Jerusalem while London was still a marsh,” before adding it was therefore to the shame of the Coalition that it had politicised the issue.

Senator **Malcolm Roberts** (One Nation, Qld) said, “One Nation considers it the responsibility of the Israeli government to decide the location of Israel’s capital city, not the Australian government.”

Greens Deputy Leader Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (NSW) said, “We need now to move forward with an approach that recognises the brutality and horror of the occupation and makes Australia an effective and impassioned supporter of Palestinian rights.”

Senator **Andrew Bragg** (Lib., NSW) said, “...the historical and contemporary reality is that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. For anyone who has visited the State of Israel, that would be... obvious.”

The motion was defeated 33 to 29.

All ALP and Greens senators present and Senator **David Pocock** (Ind., ACT) voted against, while all other senators present voted in favour.

On Oct. 26 Senator **Ralph Babet** (UAP, Vic.) made a statement, saying, “Every nation has the right to determine its own capital, and making an exception of Israel is discriminatory... West Jerusalem... is the seat of its president, its parliament and its Supreme Court. It is the home of national monuments.”

On Oct. 28, in the Budget Estimates hearing in the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee, Senator **Birmingham** questioned at length whether Mr Albanese had spoken to his Israeli counterpart about the decision, and also the process leading to it. Senator Wong and public servants answered that Senator Wong had engaged with the Israeli ambassador, that it was a decision of cabinet and that DFAT had handled the matter.

On Nov. 7, Mr **Leeser** moved a motion that the House: “(1) notes that:

(a) Israel, as a sovereign state, is free to decide its own capital...

(b) ...Jerusalem...has been the seat of government of Israel since 1950;

(2) recognises that... West Jerusalem:

(a) has been part of Israel’s sovereign territory since the state was established in 1948...

(b) is therefore outside the scope of... UN resolutions since 1967...and

(c) has never been the subject of peace negotiations...;

(3) further notes that:

(a) Australia’s recognition of West Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in 2018 did not... pre-empt the outcome of peace negotiations, or undermine the prospects of achieving a peaceful settlement... based on the UN-endorsed principle of two states for two peoples; and...

(4) calls on the Government to:

(a) reverse its recent decision...”

It was seconded by **Aaron Violi** (Lib., Casey) who reserved his right to speak.

Opposing the motion, **Susan Templeman** (ALP, Macquarie) referred to “those who are suffering the consequences of a system that divides and segregates people depending on whether they’re Jewish or Muslim,” a false and offensive slur against Israel. She also mentioned that “2022 is looking to be the deadliest year for Palestinians living in the

West Bank since the UN began keeping records... 17 years ago,” without mentioning the surge in Palestinian terrorism that led to this increase.

Mr Leeser was joined in speaking for the motion by Mr **Fletcher** and by **Alex Hawke** (Lib., Mitchell), who said, “From any cursory examination of

Middle Eastern history, people understand why the issue of Jerusalem is so important to the Jewish people and why it will always be central to the Jewish religion and... Israel.”

Tony Zappia (ALP, Makin) showed he didn’t understand the history or his own party’s policy, saying previous governments “have consistently accepted that Tel Aviv is the capital of Israel and that that’s where our embassy should be.” In fact, neither previous governments, nor the current one, have said Tel Aviv is the capital (and it would be incredibly insulting for a government to nominate for another country where its capital is) – they have just not recognised that Jerusalem is the capital. His conclusion was even more confused, referring to “Labor’s decision... to recognise Tel Aviv as the capital of Jerusalem.”



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Mike Freedlander (ALP, Macarthur) said, “Israel is an outstanding liberal democracy in the Middle East,” but strongly defended the Government’s decision.

Allegra Spender (Ind., Wentworth) supported the motion, saying the decision “ignores the fact that west Jerusalem has never been contested in any peace negotiations, and [the decision] has undermined our ability to play a constructive role in supporting a peaceful two-state resolution...”

The matter was then suspended before going to a vote.

On Nov. 10, **Michelle Ananda-Rajah** (ALP, Higgins) made a statement, saying, “The... Jewish diaspora... are anchored to Israel. If Israel is the homeland, then Jerusalem is its beating heart... My Jewish constituents are hurt following the announcement... Falling on a Jewish holiday only added insult to injury, for which I am sorry.” She also attacked antisemitism, adding, “The teaching of the IHRA definition of antisemitism in our workplaces, schools, universities and sporting clubs is a good place to start,” and said she “riles” at the description of Israel as apartheid. She did, however, support the Government’s position.

Also on Nov. 10, in Budget Estimates hearings in the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Senator **Birmingham**’s questions included querying what led to the previous change on the DFAT website that precipitated the Government to take its decision on Jerusalem. Senator **Wong** stonewalled, saying, “a mistake was made. I don’t intend... to start pointing the finger of blame. I took responsibility as minister and I moved to ensure there was clarity around Australia’s position.” She added, “I’ve publicly and privately said that the timing of this announcement falling... on Simchat Torah was deeply regrettable.”

No doubt many feel that not only the timing, but the decision itself was “deeply regrettable”. However, it is pleasing that the Coalition was so focussed on holding the Government to account, and that the Government at least appreciated the importance of this issue enough to be willing to debate it.

AIR

MORE HATE FROM HT

Ran Porat

In previous editions of *AIR* we have covered the ongoing hateful rhetoric, antisemitism and support of extremism and terror by the Australian branch of the pan-Islamic fundamentalist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT, Arabic for “the party for liberation”).

In recent weeks, HT Australia and its leader, Palestinian-born Ismai’l al-Wahwah (Abu Anas), have continued to promote messages of violence and calls for the destruction of the Jewish state.

PROMOTING THE CALL TO NUKE ISRAEL

On Nov. 2, the Facebook page of HT Australia shared a video from an HT Palestinian preacher at the al-Aqsa Mosque, Sheikh Issam Amira (Abu Abdullah). In 2020, Israel banned Amira from entering the mosque for six months after he praised the Muslim youth who beheaded French teacher Samuel Paty after Paty showed his class cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. In recent years, Amira called on British Muslims and the Taliban in Afghanistan to “liberate Palestine” by force. He also claimed in 2021 that the Omicron variant of COVID-19 spread because Muslim rulers were permitting homosexuality and feminist organisations in their countries.

In the latest video, shared (Nov. 2) by HT Australia on its Facebook page (also on YouTube), Amira directs his words at Pakistani Muslims, and especially the soldiers of the Pakistani Army. The video is part of a social media campaign by HT Pakistan titled “The global leadership for Khalifah is ready.”

Amira opens his speech with a plea to the Pakistani Muslims: “The al-Aqsa Mosque is calling you, and complaining to you, about the imprisonment, that has lasted for so long, as well as the prevention of Muslims from praying in it and visiting it.” Repeating the infamous false narrative that “Al-Aqsa is in danger”, he then cries for help in the name of Muslims in Palestine that the mosque “complains to you, about the daily violations carried out by the Jews, in defiance against all Muslims.”



A sermon calling for Pakistani soldiers, with their nuclear weapons, to attack Israel, that was shared by the Australian branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Screenshot)

Muslims in Palestine, says Amira, “have high hopes in the great army of Pakistan, to move and liberate [al-Aqsa].” “It is the strongest among the Muslim armies”, determines Amira, “ranks as the ninth strongest army in the world, whilst possessing nuclear weapons.” He also claims that the number of Muslim soldiers in the world exceeds ten million.

And the duty of these fighting forces, according to Amira, is to attack the Jewish state. “For the sake of Allah, why don’t these armies carry out their obligation, which was assigned to them?” he asks.

Under an Islamic leader, he says, “these armies will immediately march to execute what is asked of them, and

will liberate the imprisoned al-Aqsa Mosque.” He adds that under a Muslim Khalif, the Muslim troops will be “eager to embark on ventures of Jihad in the way of Allah to liberate al-Aqsa Mosque, Palestine and the rest of the occupied Muslim lands by force, just as they were occupied by force.”

“If these Muslim armies were to march forth”, insists Amira, “they would launch themselves like a missile towards its target, tearing it apart and destroying it completely.”

Amira calls on Muslim soldiers to rebel against their leaders and commanders because “O how al-Aqsa misses your roaming Takbeers [shouts of “Allah-hu Akbar”, meaning “Allah is the greatest”] heralding victory.”

“HT Australia and its leader, Palestinian-born Ismai’l al-Wahwah (Abu Anas), have continued to promote messages of violence and calls for the destruction of the Jewish state”

On Oct. 12, the HT Australia Facebook page posted a press release by the UK branch of the movement titled “Being a ‘Huge #Zionist’ means being like #Putin and supporting a #Brutal and #Illegal #Occupation.” Targeting then British PM Liz Truss, who said she was “a huge Zionist”, the text argues that this

“means that you support the Zionist entity’s brutal occupation of nearly 75 years,” comparing Israel’s existence since 1948 to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Attacking the “Zionist entity” and denying Jerusalem has any Jewish history, the press statement repeats the notorious and false trope, common among anti-Israeli extremist groups, that “It is important to note that Zionism has very little to do with Judaism. Many of the original Zionist leaders were atheists, while many committed Jews actively oppose the goals of Zionism.”

TWO-STATE SOLUTION IS “A BETRAYAL OF ALLAH”

HT Australia leader, Ismai’l al-Wahwah, has a long history of incitement to violence, antisemitism and calls to destroy Israel. Possibly due to concerns about scrutiny of his hateful messages and calls for violence, the posts reviewed below have all subsequently been hidden from the public.

In October, al-Wahwah took to social media to praise Palestinian terrorist Udai Tamimi, who killed Israeli soldier Noa Lazar at a roadblock. In his Oct. 22 post on Facebook, al-Wahwah shared a video of a group of Palestinian women visiting Tamimi’s mother to offer their condolences after he was killed by Israeli forces. “Victory is for you... Allah is aware [of you]”, says al-Wahwah in the text next to the video.

Two days earlier (in a post on Oct. 20), al-Wahwah shared pictures of Udai Tamimi shooting Israeli soldiers



Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia leader Ismai’l al-Wahwah (Abu Anas)

just before he was killed, saying, “And he got engaged to ‘my enemy’ from Paradise above ... The eyes of traitors and cowards never slept...”

In a series of other posts in October, al-Wahwah viciously attacked any coexistence with Israel in any borders as contrary to the will of God.

For example, he attacked a statement by the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) supporting the decision by the Australian Government to reverse the 2018 recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. According to al-Wahwah (Oct. 19), the statement “acknowledges surrendering most of Palestine to the Jewish entity and demands the so-called two-state solution, [which] is a betrayal of Allah, His Messenger and the believers.” This idea of a two-state solution to the conflict, he argues, “was proposed by all the countries that created the Jewish entity in the first place... it is the solution that the traitors and normalisers of the Arab and Muslim rulers have followed.”

As was highlighted in the submission made by AIJAC to the Australian Parliament in 2021, efforts should continue to review whether Hizb ut-Tahrir, which openly supports and promotes terrorism, should be listed as a terrorist group under Australian law.

AIR

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

WITH COMPLIMENTS





THE BIBLIO FILE

What lurks beneath

Rise of the Extreme Right: The new global extremism and the threat to democracy

Lydia Khalil, Penguin, Aug. 2022, 160 pp., A\$12.99



Jeremy Jones

Far right-wing extremism has never been off the radar for the Jewish community in Australia.

It has always been a challenge to assess how it rates as a threat and policy priority, how it is mutating, what circumstances might allow it to flourish, and its international context.

After the Great Depression through the middle third of the 20th century, Australia had its share of antisemitic propagandists and activists, including those who thought we should have sided with, not against, the Nazis.

The Australian League of Rights and other promoters of conspiracy theories and “race science” kept the flame of hatred alive, while various formulations of Australian right-wing extremism, including open Nazism, have arisen, under a motley array of wannabe Führers.

Australia served as a safe haven and base for adherents of overt antisemitic ideologies who were part of the large-scale post-WWII immigration, and exploited the reality of the Cold War.

Supporters of Nazi-allied regimes relocated to Australia, distributed propaganda in a variety of languages, provided a recruitment pool for existing Australian extremist groups and, in some cases, became important links in international far-right networks.

Towards the end of the 20th

century, there was a growth of violent, highly motivated racist extremist groups in Europe and the Americas, opposing the concept of multiculturalism and the ideals of liberal democracy.

Some formed alliances offering mutual support and Australian extremist groups, particularly those including younger members, engaged in these transnational networks.

Contemporaneously, some rural Australian extremists were inspired by the US-based Patriot Movement, with the language of revolution to save the population from a mythical “New World Order” and “operations” to recruit serving police and military in order to have an armed vanguard.

With the development of on-line communications, the far-right gained increased connectivity, access to resources and more platforms on which and from which to cause harm.

To determine the importance of the threat at any given time has been a challenge.

For all Australians concerned with understanding where we are in 2022, Lydia Khalil, Research Fellow at the Lowy Institute and Associate Research Fellow at Deakin University, has performed an important service with her *Rise of the Extreme Right: The new global extremism and the threat to democracy*.

With tremendous skill, she has produced a clarion call for attention

to be paid to a problem she correctly views as serious, growing and global.

Right-wing extremism in Australia is given both a global and domestic context, amidst a passionate call for us all to pay attention to the factors which give fuel and encouragement to promoters of malicious ideologies.

She begins and ends with discussions of the ways governments have mishandled the problem, noting a failure to recognise where extremist views leach into the mainstream, the violent intent and means of these groups, and their transnational nature.

Khalil brings together personal testimonies, primary source material and her own analysis to find both common features and unique elements in extremist groups in Europe, the Americas, Australia and Asia.

There is only a little historical context, but that does not detract from the book’s presentation of the “globalised extreme right”, “the Great Replacement” ideology and its parallels in Asia, or the concise but information-packed section on online extremism.

Each chapter canvasses concerns and challenges, with the latter sections discussing the impact of government public health measures as responses to COVID-19, and the threat to liberal democracy whenever right-wing extremism is not appropriately identified and combatted.

As the writer acknowledges, there are extremist threats from a variety of sources and concern with far-right extremism should not be at the expense of defending liberal democracy from other forms of assault – with justifiable concern about violent Islamist terrorism such as that of al-Qaeda, Iranian state-sponsored terrorism by groups such as Hezbollah and manifestations of left-wing political violence.

Yet this book presents a very compelling argument for Australians, and policy makers broadly, to treat far right-wing extremism more seriously that they currently are.

To Kingdom come

The view from inside Saudi Arabia

Robert Satloff

Washington Institute for Near East Policy Executive Director Dr. Robert Satloff, together with Taube Senior Fellow David Schenker, recently led a 30-person delegation of Institute trustees and staff on a weeklong visit to Saudi Arabia. The following are Dr. Satloff's insights from the trip.

The Washington Institute delegation visited five cities in seven days – Riyadh, Abha, Dammam, al-Ula, and Jeddah – travelling throughout the kingdom to see different topography and geography, observe various aspects of Saudi society and culture, and assess the status of political, economic, and sociocultural reform.

In addition to political meetings, the group spent an evening with artists at a contemporary gallery; visited King Saud University's artificial intelligence centre and interacted with a mixed group of male and female students; visited the small and medium enterprise promotion centre and met with high-tech start-up entrepreneurs; visited Aramco headquarters to meet its corporate leadership and see its operations; travelled to the Nabatean monuments of al-Ula, a major target of tourism investment; visited the Riyadh "giga-project" of Dariyah, a massive UNESCO site where Saudis are rewriting their national origin story; and spent an enjoyable evening in the Boulevard zone of the Riyadh Season festival, where thousands of Saudis were playing, eat-

ing, and listening to music.

In the course of their trip, the delegation met with Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and an array of other officials: the Defence Min-



The pace, scope, and content of Saudi Arabia's ongoing transformation are impressive, as visitors to the country can see for themselves (Image: Shutterstock)

ister, Foreign Minister, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, Chief of the Joint Forces Command, the Human Rights Commission, and various US and British diplomats. None of these officials will be cited individually, and none of the observations below should be ascribed to any particular one of them.

KEY THEMES

Five words sum up my main thematic observations:

Grievance. Senior leaders ac-

knowledge serious errors such as the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, but complained that the kingdom gets blamed "ten times" more than other countries that commit similar or more extensive abuses, especially America's adversaries. They also bitterly noted what they believe was US indifference to Saudi security concerns, specifically citing the withdrawal of Patriot air defence systems, the decision to remove Yemen's Houthi movement from the State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organisations list, and the suspended delivery of weapons systems for which Riyadh had already paid.

Ambition. Saudi Arabia's national security strategy is based on growth, and the leadership's ambition in this

regard is impressive. Senior leaders expressed great pride at having the fastest-growing G20 economy (at a rate of 7.5-8%), increasing its GDP to more than US\$1 trillion (~A\$1.48 trillion) while maintaining an enviable inflation rate of just 2.5%. And the kingdom's future is characterised by massive projects involving trillions of dollars in investments. There is wide recognition that this would not be possible without the talents of Saudi women – female workforce participation has grown dramatically, more than doubling from the mid-teens to



above 30% in less than a decade.

Identity. One of the most striking aspects of our trip was seeing the emergence of a strong, self-assured Saudi nationalism in which Islam is just one of many attributes, not a determinative or particularly central one. Saudis made a point of showing us examples of this nationalism: the Dariyah project in Riyadh, which tells the story of the first Saudi state 300 years ago without referencing the religious hierarchy; the Aramco headquarters compound, which is designed to project competence and professionalism; and al-Ula, which celebrates the achievements of a pre-Islamic culture in the Arabian Peninsula.

Energy. This word has a dual meaning for Saudis today: energy in terms of oil, which Riyadh is betting will remain the key ingredient of global growth for many decades even with a major push on renewables; and energy in terms of the human drive to create, innovate, and grow, which we saw in numerous settings, from universities to tech start-ups.

Uncertainty. Despite this impressive progress, several questions remain. One concerns the “losers” in the current reforms – that is, the morality police and conservative religious leaders who have been stripped of power and authority, along with others from the older generation for whom change is disruptive and threatening. Where does this minority stand on the kingdom’s evolving future? Why are they being so quiet, and what might trigger them to vocally oppose the ongoing transformation? A second question concerns the oddly dissonant aspect of human rights. In contrast to Riyadh’s



Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s reforms have been impressive in the social and economic spheres, but have nothing to do with political liberalisation (Image: Twitter)

polished, well-crafted approach to many other issues, official discussion of human rights remains tone-deaf. How can the kingdom be cutting-edge in so many areas of reform yet so backward in this area?

OBSERVATIONS ON FOREIGN POLICY

US relations. We are clearly facing a moment of great tension in US-Saudi relations – a moment that some characterise as “the worst since the 1973 war.” My view is that the two governments will work through their current disagreement over oil production, and that the level of recrimination will likely dip over the next two months. However, I fear that the relationship’s foundation is weakening. The fact that the empowered poles of the American political spectrum – the progressive left and the “America First” right – will increasingly be in a position to clash directly with a more assertive, nationalistic, and audacious Saudi Arabia is a recipe for fracturing the bilateral partnership. Both governments say they need and want each other as partners, but both are simultaneously taking measures that signal they are prioritising self-interest, not cooperation. This cycle

has the potential to feed on itself in a highly destructive way.

Iran. Broadly speaking, Saudi leaders say that economic growth is the heart of their strategy to defeat their main adversary in Teheran. According to this view, a strong, vibrant, self-assured Saudi economic powerhouse will leave the Islamic Republic in the dust. But fear of Iranian ambitions and capabilities is real. The kingdom is convinced that Teheran is on a mission to gain nuclear weapons capability within the next two years, and senior officials believe that if the regime succeeds, it will not hesitate to use the bomb, either directly – against Israel – or indirectly as a lever to bully the region. Saudi leaders say they have yet to hear a realistic and detailed Plan B to prevent this given that the diplomatic Plan A (reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear agreement) is, in their view, no longer operative. They also warn that if Iran gets a bomb, Washington should expect Saudi foreign policy to shift in order to accommodate Teheran and safeguard the kingdom’s security – hardly surprising when one considers that this scenario would mean the emphatic non-proliferation promises of successive US presidents had been hollow.

Yemen. However one characterises the Yemen war, Saudi Arabia clearly wants out of the conflict today. But it is not at all clear that the Houthis and their Iranian backers will go along with this. Indeed, at this moment of US-Saudi tension, Teheran is presumably keen on testing how Washington will respond if the Houthis or Iran-backed militias in Iraq start launching rockets or drones into the kingdom again. This is a very real and urgent concern.

Israel. Five years ago, when a similar Washington Institute delegation visited Riyadh, we heard senior leadership characterise Israel as a “potential ally”. Now we see evidence of creeping normalisation all around, with businesspeople, bankers, and

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athletes beginning to visit the kingdom in their professional capacities.

Yet one would be mistaken to conclude that full normalisation is right around the corner. This is not due to lack of progress on the Palestinian issue, but rather to the fact that normalisation – while certainly beneficial to the Saudis – is less important to them than it was to the states that signed onto the Abraham Accords. For one thing, the kingdom will be grappling with other major political, social, and economic reforms and has to carefully consider the manner and order in which they are implemented. Two such reforms on the agenda are lifting the ban on alcohol consumption (which will most likely begin with restricted tourist zones where drinking is permitted) and allowing organised non-Muslim prayer (likely a consequence of Riyadh's requirement that major corporations move their regional headquarters to the kingdom in order to do business with the government). A society can only take so much reform at any one time, and normalisation with Israel would compete with these items.

Still, we heard some remarkable talk about this issue, including a proposal from a very senior Saudi official that normalisation could occur more rapidly if the United States were willing to take three major steps toward the kingdom:

- A congressionally endorsed affirmation of the US-Saudi alliance
- A commitment to follow through on weapons supplies as though Saudi Arabia were a NATO-like country (the fact that it is not on the lengthy list of "major non-NATO allies" must rankle Riyadh)
- An agreement that allows the Saudis to exploit their extensive uranium reserves for a restricted civil nuclear program

How much of this proposal was an opening gambit for actual talks on these issues is not clear. What is clear is that the Saudis have thought out the mechanics of what they want from

OPTIMISM WITHOUT HUMAN RIGHTS?

David Schenker

During the trip to Saudi Arabia, we witnessed a largely optimistic and seemingly happy population. Granted, our sample size was limited to five cities, but this observation is not simply anecdotal – Saudi Arabia has moved from 36th to 25th in the World Happiness Report rankings since 2016. This development is apparently linked to the ambitious social and economic reforms undertaken by the Crown Prince.

Throughout the country, megaprojects are under way to entice tourists to the previously closed kingdom, diversify the economy, and provide jobs. On the outskirts of Riyadh, the Dariyah Gate Project is under way. Taking up a plot of land the size of Manhattan, it is envisioned as a carbon-neutral city with electric vehicles driven above ground and gas-powered vehicles below. The US\$50 billion (A\$75 billion) project aims to attract 27 million visitors a year.

Al-Ula, a tourist destination with 2,000-year-old Nabatean ruins, is now also home to a 600-seat concert venue


Washington in exchange for normalisation, similar to what other countries have sought for their own outreach to Israel. That alone suggests Riyadh is well down this path.

BOTTOM LINE


A visitor cannot but be impressed by the pace, scope, and content of Saudi Arabia's ongoing transformation. Americans may take many of these changes for granted (such as lifting the ban on public music), but they are revolutionary in the Saudi context. The paradox is that the kingdom has a lot more room for freedom, but not for dissent. Since the former naturally produces the latter, figuring out that conundrum will be one of Riyadh's main challenges in the years ahead.

that hosted Mariah Carey a day before we arrived.

In Abha – a breathtaking destination with a temperate climate, 3,050 metre peaks, and indigenous baboons – the Government is expanding the airport to accommodate two million tourists a year. When we arrived, Riyadh's ceasefire with Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebel movement had just lapsed and the locals were bracing for renewed drone and missile attacks – a frequent occurrence since the Houthis took over large swathes of territory.

While many Saudis appear pleased with the social and economic transformation, this progress should not be mistaken for political liberalisation. Male guardianship policies have been revoked and the religious police are now sidelined, but few other advances have been made on human rights. Dual citizens and Saudi citizens living abroad are reportedly still being arrested for speaking critically of Saudi leaders. When asked about these matters, the new head of the Saudi Human Rights Commission claimed that the kingdom faced no human rights challenges. 

David Schenker is the Taube Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and a former US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.

As the Saudis grapple with this challenge, America has a huge stake in their success – not the success of any one person, but success in completing a radical transformation. This would be the best insulation against Islamist extremism, which formerly competed with oil as Saudi Arabia's prime export. It is also crucial to ensuring that the eventual post-oil landing is a soft one, which this part of the world will sorely need in order to avoid truly convulsive, even violent change. In my view, this is an under-recognised strategic imperative. 

Dr. Robert Satloff is Executive Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. © Washington Institute (Washingtoninstitute.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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THE MONTH IN MEDIA

GOLLY GHOSH

The *Australian's* James Madden and Sophie Elsworth (Nov. 14) reported on ABC Managing Director David Anderson's admission in Senate estimates that Fouad AbuGhosh, a long serving producer in the ABC's Jerusalem bureau, had "absolute[ly] breach[ed]" the broadcaster's social media policy, which "undermines his ability to impartially report from that region."

Madden exposed AbuGhosh's tweets in early September, including one claiming Zionists want to control and dominate the Middle East's Arabs and another which referred to Israeli actions with "This is how the Nazis treated the Jews. Maybe it's time for...!!!"

The article noted that Anderson told estimates the internal review into AbuGhosh's social media activity was ongoing and he remained on staff.

Later that day on *Sky News'* "The Kenny Report", Elsworth said "these investigations seem to take... a long time... Anderson admitted it's difficult now for [AbuGhosh] to do his job and not have bias, given the... pretty offensive tweets that he was putting out there. So, the ABC doesn't really have much of a social media policy... They don't seem to enforce it."

THE BEST DEFENCE...

In the *Australian* (Oct. 27), veteran defence expert Duncan Lewis called on Australia to "take a lead from Israel with respect to maintaining cutting edge, sovereign development and enhancement of weapons systems."

On Nov. 3 in the *Australian*, Lowy Institute Nonresident Fellow Alan Dupont warned that "we have no defence industry strategic plan or a funding model that meets our needs and provides a pathway to greater

defence self-reliance. Israel and Sweden, both smaller than us, have built world-class defence industries."

SILENCE IS NOT GOLDEN

On *News.com.au* (Nov. 16), AIJAC's Oved Lobel argued that Australia's inaction on Iranian domestic human rights abuses and total silence on Iran's provision of weapons to Russia sent a dangerous message to China about Australia's willingness to defend its principles.

While the US, UK, EU and Canada strongly condemned Iran for its role in Ukraine and imposed sanctions, "Australia... has not even condemned Iran, much less imposed sanctions," Lobel wrote.

Although Australia has strongly condemned Iran's domestic crack-down against protesters, Lobel said "Australia has once again done nothing," while "between Australia's first official condemnation on September 27 and the most recent condemnation [in November], several... [other]... countries... imposed multiple tranches of sanctions against Iran."

Lobel wrote, "If Australia is unwilling to [join] its allies in punishing the brutal regime in Tehran, which is economically and militarily weak, politically isolated and geographically distant, why should anyone expect it would act decisively when the stakes are far higher," such as with respect to China?

FEMINISM IN ACTION

In the *Daily Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* (Nov. 8), AIJAC's Tammy Reznik explained how increasing restrictions on women since Iran's hardline President Ebrahim Raisi took power last year had contributed to the promi-

nent role of women in the ongoing protests in Iran.

These measures included greater enforcement of the Islamic dress code, and plans to use public surveillance technology to "track down women breaching hijab laws," she said.

Meanwhile, the *Herald Sun* (Nov. 14) quoted Australian academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert, imprisoned by Iran for 800 days on false charges, reproaching the Australian Government for not taking "meaningful action to curb and punish the Iranian regime for its horrendous behaviour" against protesters.

The previous day, News Corp papers reported Basketball Australia's decision to cancel a scheduled Boomers trip to Iran for a Basketball World Cup qualifier, given the ongoing violence there.

RED CARD TO QATAR

In the *Herald Sun* and *Courier Mail* (Nov. 16), AIJAC's Tzvi Fleischer exposed the anti-liberal side of Qatar, which is the FIFA World Cup 2022 host nation.

"Unlike the smooth words to foreigners, when speaking in Arabic, Doha routinely spreads messages of support for terrorism and for Islamist extremist groups, as well as messages of hate against both LGBTIQ+ people and Jews," Dr Fleischer wrote.

UNMOVED

The *Sydney Morning Herald's* Nov. 12 editorial claimed that Australia's "problems [in Asia] are partly the result of mistakes by the Morrison government, such as the decision in 2018 about moving Australia's embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, which antagonised

Muslim countries. Albanese acted correctly in reversing this decision last month, although he could have done it more diplomatically.”

The editorial’s choice of words suggested that the Morrison Government actually relocated Australia’s embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, or made a decision to do so, which is just wrong.

In October 2018, during the campaign leading up to the Wentworth by-election, then PM Scott Morrison announced a review into the feasibility of changing Australia’s official position on Jerusalem. Morrison said, “the Government will carefully examine the arguments... we should

consider recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, without prejudice to its final boundaries, while acknowledging East Jerusalem as the expected capital of a future Palestinian state... [and] examine the merits of moving Australia’s embassy to West Jerusalem, in the context of our support for a two-state solution.”

In December 2018, after an extensive review process, Morrison announced that Australia would recognise west Jerusalem as Israel’s capital but that Australia’s embassy would remain in Tel Aviv for the foreseeable future. He also said Australia acknowledged Palestinian aspirations for a capital in east Jerusalem.

In October 2022, the Albanese Government announced it was reversing recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Given that no Embassy move had happened or was under consideration, there was no decision announced regarding the Embassy .

Moreover, the editorial’s insinuation that Asian countries all share the same position on foreign policy issues and demand Australia must do so too is absurd and, frankly, cringeworthy.

CYNICS CORNER

On *ABC Radio “PM”* (Oct. 18), former Middle East correspondent



IN PARLIAMENT

Andrew Wilkie (Ind., Clark) – Nov. 10 – “The [UN Special Rapporteur] report even suggested that Israel’s actions could constitute apartheid. Mind you, this term still doesn’t capture the inherent complexities and consequences of the illegal occupation of Palestine. It’s time for Australia and the world to scale-up our response to this horrific situation... we must also recognise Palestine, call for Israeli accountability in international courts and compel Israel to allow Palestinians to have the most basic of rights: self-determination.”

Maria Vamvakinou – (ALP, Calwell) – Nov. 8 – congratulating Melissa Parke for winning the “Jerusalem Peace Prize” awarded by the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network: “... it recognises the inspirational and extraordinary contributions and devoted efforts of Australians seeking to work alongside Palestinians in their quest for justice.”

Tony Zappia (ALP, Makin) – Nov. 10 – also congratulating Parke: “Melissa... saw first-hand the daily hardships, violence and repression of Palestinian people and the ruthless incursion of Israeli settlements into their land. Almost daily, new reports of violations against Palestinian people are exposed, and all too often the victims are children.”

Senator **Hollie Hughes** (Lib., NSW) – Nov. 8 – questioning the ABC in a Senate Estimates hearing: “... Mr AbuGhosh’s personal Twitter account... identifies him as an ABC producer, and it actually demonstrates him showing extreme racist and antisemitic views about Israelis... he uses social media to promote crazy anti-Israel conspiracy theories... what was the result of that review that the ABC undertook in relation to the social media activity of Fouad AbuGosh?”

Keith Wolahan (Lib., Menzies) – Nov. 9 – “Iranian Australians

are pleading with us to follow the lead of the United Kingdom, Canada and the EU and impose sanctions against a regime which has violated the rights of Iranian women. Beyond words of support and condemnation, what action does the Government intend to take?”

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – answering Mr Wolahan’s question: “I have, as well as the Foreign Minister, expressed my abhorrence at the actions of the Iranian regime in clamping down on the rights of women... The Labor Government will continue to work with our allies, including in multilateral forums such as the United Nations... I acknowledge the enormous hurt that Iranian people, but Iranian women in particular, are feeling... watching this clampdown on human rights in Iran for things that we... take for granted... we’ll continue to speak out. We’ll continue to vote in any forums in which Australia has a presence to ensure that the people of Iran – who are showing great courage in standing up for their human rights – know that Australia, as always and in a bipartisan way, is friends of all those who stand up for their individual rights...”

Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) – on the same question: “The scenes and the reporting are horrific, and the treatment of women is completely unacceptable... The Coalition will support any actions the Government takes, even if it means an economic consequence for our country... a very clear, significant, tangible message needs to be sent that this type of behaviour is abhorrent, unacceptable in any society, and completely against the values of our country.”

Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians **Julian Leeser** (Lib., Berowra), **Jerome Laxale** (ALP, Bennelong), Senator **Marielle Smith** (ALP, SA), Shadow Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas), **Tony Zappia** (ALP, Makin), **Sophie Scamps** (Ind., Mackellar), **Keith Wolahan** (Lib., Menzies) and Senator **Nick McKim** (Greens, Tas.) also all made speeches between Oct. 25 and Nov. 8 condemning the human rights abuses in Iran.

and current ABC global affairs editor John Lyons insisted the Morrison Government's announcement in the 2018 Wentworth by-election "was a cynical political move" while the reversal "re-establishes a sense of fairness and balance... What Donald Trump did and Scott Morrison, was hand to one side of a conflict, the ultimate prize without getting any concessions."

When Trump recognised all of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, he said, "We are not taking a position on any final status issues, including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the resolution of contested borders. Those questions are up to the parties involved."

Morrison's recognition extended only to the western part that has been sovereign Israeli territory since 1949 and acknowledged Palestinians seek a state with a capital in east Jerusalem. Considering Israel regards all of Jerusalem as its capital, it is hard to see how Morrison's limited endorsement of reality amounted to handing "to one side of a conflict, the ultimate prize."

BALONEY OVER JERUSALEM

Lyons' "analysis" on the issue on the ABC website (Oct. 23) exhibited the same factual flaws and bias that blighted his two anti-Israel books *Balcony over Jerusalem* and *Dateline Jerusalem*.

Echoing his radio appearance, Lyons' analysis completely omitted to note that the Morrison Government did not recognise all of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, only the western half.

Despite outlaying 2,400 words, most of which were off topic and merely another opportunity for Lyons to attack Israel on numerous grounds, he was also unable to spare 30 words to inform readers that west Jerusalem has actually been Israel's capital since 1950.

This omission was of a piece with Lyons' general fudging of the timeline of the key events since Israel's creation in 1948.

According to Lyons, "generation after generation... of leaders accepted the status of Jerusalem should not be unilaterally decided by Israel... To give the ultimate prize – Jerusalem – to one side was seen by most countries as reducing the chance of a permanent peace agreement... by acknowledging Jerusalem as the capital of Israel most countries realised it would become harder to convince Israel to agree to end its occupation and form a Palestinian state, as was outlined by the UN in 1947."

The 1947 UN Partition Plan proposed creating two states and stipulated Jerusalem should be under international administration. The Arabs refused to accept any element of the Partition Plan and went to war. This resulted in Jerusalem's division, with the eastern part illegally occupied by Jordan until the 1967 war.

Despite the Partition Plan being effectively dead, Jerusalem divided and Arab leaders refusing to ever accept Israel's existence, the UN General Assembly still insisted the city must be internationalised. This is the actual reason why Jerusalem was never recognised as Israel's capital by most nations – not, as Lyons implies, because of the occupation of the West Bank, which began only after the 1967 war.

Lyons clumsily asserted that "One of the few things that would entice Israel back to the negotiating table is for the international community to recognise West Jerusalem as its capital. One of the few things that would entice the Palestinians back to the negotiating table is for the international community to recognise East Jerusalem as its capital."

Israel does not need to be coaxed to negotiations. Every negotiating effort to end the conflict has been spiked by Palestinian leaders, including in 2000, 2001 and 2008 when

they rejected Israeli proposals to create a Palestinian state that included a capital in east Jerusalem. Moreover, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has refused all Israeli offers to negotiate since he abandoned talks in 2014.

Other howlers include Lyons' claim that "older members of the [Australian Jewish] community support Israel's military occupation of the West Bank," unlike the New Israel Fund (NIF) Australia "a centrist group" which supports a Palestinian state. NIF is a small, proudly left-of-centre group, while support for a two-state resolution including a Palestinian state is the consensus position of most of the "older" Jewish organisations.

Feigning outrage that Palestinians in east Jerusalem cannot vote, Lyons then conceded, "they don't want to become Israeli citizens if that part of the city – East Jerusalem – becomes the capital of a state of Palestine. They are Palestinian and would rather be Palestinians than Israelis."

Wrong. Numerous surveys show most east Jerusalem Palestinians would prefer to be Israeli citizens in any final peace deal.

Regurgitating crude and false Palestinian propaganda, Lyons also claimed Israel has arrested 770,000 Palestinians since 1967. This would amount to 14,000 new individuals arrested year-on-year – a ludicrous figure.

TAHMER THAN LYONS

In contrast to John Lyons, SBS reporter Rayane Tahmer's Oct. 19 online "explainer" at least accurately explained that the Morrison Government "limited Australia's recognition to West Jerusalem and kept the embassy in Tel Aviv until a peace agreement was achieved."

However, like Lyons, Tahmer decided an "explainer" did not need to inform SBS readers that west Jerusalem has been Israel's capital since 1950.

A signatory of the #dobetteron-palestine open letter from May 2021, which called for the media to prioritise the Palestinian narrative, Tahmer claimed that “the status of Jerusalem is understood to be a significant obstacle in reaching a two-state solution.” Yet this is belied by the fact that past Israeli governments have repeatedly offered to share the city with Palestinians as part of a peace deal.

REALITY EXPURGATED

PhD candidate Reb Halabi’s op-ed on the ABC “Religion & Ethics” website (Oct. 28) correctly noted the Morrison Government recognised west Jerusalem as Israel’s capital but then oddly praised the Albanese Government’s reversal, saying, “the Labor government’s decision means that Palestinians can feel supported in their claim to at least *part* of Jerusalem in some future two-state solution.”

The Morrison Government acknowledged of Palestinian aspirations for a state with its capital in east Jerusalem did exactly that!

The piece claimed that, “I have recently returned from Jerusalem. The angst on the cobbled streets of the Old City was palpable. Israel has gone to extraordinary lengths to expurgate Palestinians from their sight: barbed wire, high walls and checkpoints make movement for them almost impossible.”

Anyone who has visited Jerusalem’s Old City, Hebrew University, or Hadassah Hospital, or travelled on the light rail there, knows Palestinian Jerusalemites are absolutely not “expurgated from sight”.

REALITY RECOGNISED

There was pushback against the substance of the decision to reverse recognition of west Jerusalem.

On Oct. 20, the *Herald Sun* accused the Labor party of using “ambiguous” language before the May 2022 election on whether it would

revoke recognition of west Jerusalem. It noted that the US Biden Administration has retained its predecessor’s recognition of Jerusalem and opined “Australia recognising Israel’s right to West Jerusalem is hardly counter to any hope for peace and that two-state solution.”

On Oct. 25, News Corp columnist Joe Hildebrand, who recently visited Israel on an AIJAC study tour, agreed that the “initial recognition of West Jerusalem by the Morrison government was...ham-fisted and clearly geared towards the Wentworth by-election,” before adding that, “just because Morrison might have recognised West Jerusalem for the wrong reasons doesn’t make it wrong.”

On *Sky News*’ website (Oct. 22), Liberal Party member Sherry Sufi accused Foreign Minister Penny Wong of misrepresenting the former Government’s actual position on recognition of Jerusalem, calling her announcement “confusing and provocative.”

MAJORITY DOESN’T ALWAYS RULE

On Nov. 11, *Guardian Australia*’s Daniel Hurst, whose initial inquiries led to the Albanese Government reversing recognition of west Jerusalem, reported that the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN) was calling for Palestine to be recognised as a state as per Labor’s national platform.

Hurst quoted APAN president Nasser Mashni saying, “The easiest and simplest step this government can take to join the majority of the world’s nations and support a peaceful resolution.”

On Oct. 22, Nine Newspapers’ Matthew Knott’s long feature on recognising Palestine noted that, “Currently, 138 of the United Nations’ 193 member states recognise Palestine as a state – a list that includes almost every country in Africa, South America and Asia. Australia is among

the countries that do not, alongside the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand and others.” As Knott hinted but did not quite say, the only Western democracy that recognises “Palestine” is Sweden – and most of the other 138 countries who recognise “Palestine” are ex-Communist and non-aligned nations which did so during the Cold War as part of superpower competition.

On *ABC TV* “Insiders” (Oct. 23), host David Speers said “I think [the Government’s] position [on recognition of Palestine] is to consult on this and take that step if it’s regarded as a positive step towards a resolution of the conflict,” but doubted the Government would “rush”.

TEACHING MOMENTS

In the *Daily Telegraph* (Oct. 25), the Australia Israel Labor Dialogue’s Adam Slonim condemned a virulent anti-Israel resolution recently passed by the National Tertiary Education Union “whose terms evoked classical tropes of hostility towards the Jewish people.”

Slonim wrote, “A fanatical form of anti-Zionist fundamentalism is a blind spot among the hard left because [the] Israel-Palestine narrative is about the powerful (read: Jewish people) getting their comeuppance. Israel, as a supposedly Western nation (no matter that half its Jewish population are Arab, North African and Persian Jews forced to leave their homelands following the 1948 war of independence), has been turned into an exclusivist, racist, colonialist, supremacist entity oppressing and occupying innocents.”

On Nov. 9, the ABC’s website reported veteran Adelaide-based Jewish communal leader Norm Schueler’s frustration that Victoria Police did not charge a man who made Nazi salutes at Schueler and expressed a desire for all Jewish people to be killed when he visited Melbourne in late September.

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

ALL RIGHT?

By and large, the Australian media reported sensibly on the reasons for the relative electoral success of the far right in Israel's fifth election in four years, and what the potential consequences might be for Binyamin Netanyahu's new coalition government.

On election day (Nov. 1), Israeli commentator Gayil Talshir told *ABC RN* "Breakfast" the far right parties "keep... pulling... even moderate right-wing parties to the extreme right," noting that at the last election Netanyahu "was willing to go with the Islamic party... but [the] religious nationalist party said 'no'."

That same day, AIJAC research associate Dr Ran Porat predicted on *Radio 2GB* that "whoever wins, the main regional undercurrents will not be affected by the outcome of Israel's polls," listing the Iranian nuclear issue and the ongoing "stalemate" between Israelis and Palestinians as examples.

The next day on "Breakfast", US-based commentator Ishaan Tharoor said the past five elections have all "been a referendum on Netanyahu. And each time Netanyahu has sought a different set of right-wing allies to broaden his camp."

Australian Israel-based journalist Irris Makler told *SBS TV* "World News" (Nov. 2) that "Itamar Ben Gvir is the surprise success... Two years ago, he tried to get into power. He didn't get half of 1%... joining this alliance has been very good for him... the security situation... too."

On Nov. 3, left-wing Israeli political analyst Bernard Avishai noted to *ABC News Radio* that total votes cast for left and right blocs were "almost dead even" but the "vanity" of left-wing party leaders in refusing to "join... with other parties to create larger blocs" resulted in "wasted votes."

On *ABC RN* "Breakfast" (Nov. 3), Israeli journalist Anshel Pfeffer said Netanyahu succeeded because he "has controlled his bloc of parties with incredible discipline... There's no wastage of votes between them," whereas the three Arab-majority parties "were at each other's throats."

AIJAC's Ahron Shapiro discussed the role of Palestinian and Israeli Arab terror in the election, telling *ABC News Radio* (Nov. 2) that the day before the election, the front-page story in Israel's biggest selling commercial newspaper "call[ed] attention to the terror wave... Their top colum-

nist Nahum Barnea... not a friend of the right wing... was lamenting that in the 1988 election... Likud [won] because there was a terrorist attack right before the election. Here we've had two terror attacks in the three days before the election."

"The Age decided that the only person who would be allowed to comment on the election for its opinion page would be anti-Zionist writer Antony Loewenstein"

The *Australian* (Nov. 2) editorialised, "it is no surprise voters turned to [Netanyahu] again... in the face of threats posed by Iran and its proxies" and the "2204 terror attacks in Israel this year, leaving 25 Israelis dead."

Condemning Ben Gvir's "unacceptable, anti-Arab... extreme rhetoric," AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein told *Sky News* (Nov. 3) that Netanyahu's "challenge now" is "to trend back to the centre... And I think his speech on election night saying he's going to govern for all Israelis, Arab or Jew, left or right, was reassuring."

Veteran Israeli analyst and visiting AIJAC fellow Ehud Yaari told *ABC TV* "The World" (Nov. 3), "Netanyahu will make sure that his new partners from the radical right don't have much say in foreign policy and defence issues."

The *Age* decided that the only person who would be allowed to comment on the election for its opinion page would be anti-Zionist writer Antony Loewenstein (Nov. 13). He used the election result to smear Australia's mainstream Jewish leadership, falsely accusing them of not expressing concern about the inclusion of far-right parties in a coalition government. Absurdly, Loewenstein seemed to suggest that Australia's pro-Israel organisations should be advocating on behalf of anti-Zionist Jews like himself, whom he concedes are in a minority but who, he claimed, seek to "improve our multicultural society."

Speaking on *ABC Radio National* "Religion and Ethics Report" (Nov. 16), David Myers, the US-based head of the left-wing New Israel Fund, called the result "a triumph of Jewish ethnonationalism." It was only after host Andrew West asked, "isn't it just possible to say this election was an old-fashioned law and order election and that, unsurprisingly, the left lost?" that Myers acknowledged the role terrorism likely played in the result.

Myers even said – somewhat inaccurately – "we should just note that the anti-Netanyahu camp actually polled more votes than the pro-Netanyahu camp. Were it not for some decisions made by a number of parties on the left, it's entirely possible that Netanyahu would not have reached 61 mandates."

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

NO CAUSE FOR LAUGHTER

Some years ago, the US television program “Saturday Night Live” ran a sketch “And So This Is Chanukah”, in which comedians played the parts of famous celebrities performing real and invented Chanukah songs and making other contributions, parodying the ubiquitous TV Christmas Specials.

The performer playing “Britney Spears” said “Chanukah is a special holiday, where we, as Christians, take time out to think about forgiving our Jewish friends for killing our Lord.” The “Celine Dion” character said her mother had taught her that Chanukah is a holiday celebrated by the people who own all the movie studios.

The passions the skit invoked were intense. Some US and international leaders in combating anti-Jewish manifestations said it was appalling antisemitism. Others said it was poor taste but nothing to be bothered by. A more nuanced response was that it was funny as a parody of antisemitism, but many Americans would not understand it was a joke, which was problematic.

A similar debate has been provoked by the recent appearance of controversial comedian and influential cultural figure Dave Chappelle on the same program.

Chappelle delivered a monologue riffing on the recent forays into antisemitic territory by both Ye (formerly Kanye West) – singer, fashion designer and *Time Magazine*’s “Most Influential” person of 2015 – and basketball star Kyrie Irving.

Ye had made a series of antisemitic comments alleging Jewish control of media and finance, as well as individual Jewish greed.

Irving was suspended by his team “for refusing to apologize for peddling a film full of dangerous antisemitic tropes to his 4.6 million Twitter followers,” as the American Jewish Committee put it.

In his monologue, Chappelle played on stereotypes of Jewish control of Hollywood, Jewish power to censor views we do not like and the alleged attribution of blame to “Black Americans” for the “terrible things” which Jews have “been through”.

Reaction to the monologue was, to say the least, mixed, although there was broad consensus that the reaction of the audience

to some of the comments was disconcerting, if not alarming.

Yet critics and supporters of Chappelle’s performance should agree that the subject matter itself, the increasing normalising and mainstreaming of antisemitism in a number of sectors of the American community, is no laughing matter.

Ye’s threats to Jews and distortions of history and genealogy were expressed in his uniquely bizarre manner, but were still very recognisable as part of contemporary anti-Jewish discourse.

His apparent failure to understand what he had objectively done wrong, and how empowering racism is hardly in his own interest, was echoed in Kyrie Irving’s non-apology for promoting hateful anti-Jewish propaganda to countless impressionable followers.

A social media monologue by veteran hatemonger Louis Farrakhan in support of both the two celebrities and their anti-Jewish propaganda was a chilling reminder that organised antisemitism has many sources and promoters.

Farrakhan said threateningly, “We know the Talmud. We know you and your history. Leave our people alone.” He incited the “Black people of America” to despise, hate and continue to attack Jews for “killing us, raping us, castrating us, enslaving us and making us chattel [sic].”

Irving and Ye both promoted Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam’s Black supremacist, antisemitic conspiracy theory which says that people claiming to be Jews are liars who have stolen the birthright of Black people, the “authentic Jews”. Bizarrely, this exactly mirrors a strand of belief by White Supremacist Identitarians.

Indeed, the context for the behaviour of Ye, Irving and Farrakhan is a virtual tidal wave of antisemitic activity in the USA from a variety of sources, which need to all be fought simultaneously.

The field is not uncontested – singer John Mellencamp called for people of all backgrounds to have zero tolerance for antisemitism, while basketball legends Shaquille O’Neal and Charles Barkley slammed the antisemitism of “idiot” Irving to their huge social media followings.

Sadly, with each day comes more evidence of the challenge of defending not just the truth concerning Jews, but Jewish people’s physical safety.



Dave Chappelle (Image: Twitter)



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