### AUSTRALIA/ISRAEL REVIEW

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### EDITOR'S NOTE

his month's AIR is a special edition celebrating Israel's 75th birthday, being marked on April 26.

Leading Jewish intellectual Daniel Gordis kicks off our exploration of the reasons to celebrate the many achievements of Israel as a Jewish homeland, including its transformative effects on the Jewish people, while historian Gil Troy places the

ONTHE COVER

Tel Aviv City Hall is lit-up as Israel celebrates its Independence Day. (Image: Alamy)



story of Israel in the context of the vision of its founders. In addition, we offer a detailed statistical snapshot of Israel today, and a visual review of key moments in Israeli history through photographs, while Colin Rubenstein's edito-

rial reflects on the interplay between Israel's birthday celebrations and the current intense controversy there over proposed judicial reforms.

Also featured this month is Amotz Asa-El's insightful analysis of the state of the judicial reform controversy in the wake of President Isaac Herzog's release of a proposed compromise on March 15, and its rejection by the Government.

Finally, don't miss Yoni Ben Menachem on the likelihood of a major Iranian-fuelled outbreak of Palestinian violence over Ramadan, Douglas Murray's review of a movie being touted as an Arab answer to the hit Israeli TV series Fauda, and Jeremy Jones' compilation of the troubling lessons of the Adelaide Writers' Week brouhaha in early March.

As always, we invite your feedback on any or all aspects of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

#### Tzvi Fleischer

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## ISRAEL AT 75

ndependence Day in Israel is a joyous event on the annual calendar, with large energetic gatherings in the streets and loads of music, dancing and flag waving, as Israelis revel in the revival of Jewish self-determination in the land where the Jews became a people.

This year, Israel's 75th Independence Day, which falls on April 26, should be especially boisterous, and we have indeed been seeing seas of Israeli flags out early, amidst crowds measured in the hundreds of thousands. Unfortunately, though, these have not been celebrations, but rather demonstrations by large and significant mainstream segments of Israeli society protesting against the controversial judicial reforms being advanced by PM Binyamin Netanyahu's Government.

This is not the place to discuss the substance of the Government's plans, or the objections of opponents. Rather, it's worth instead noting the level of democratic and pluralistic engagement of both detractors and supporters of the plans.

There is no question that this debate has been fraught and angry and divisive, and the sinews of Israeli democracy have been placed under severe strain. Yet paradoxically, many of the admirable qualities which have made that Israeli democracy such a success story have also been on display - patriotism, commitment, engagement and productive political passion have been expressed from virtually every sector. Both sides insist their quest is to uphold Israel's national charter as laid down in its Declaration of Independence – that Israel should remain a Jewish and democratic state "based on the ideas of liberty, justice, and peace... [that will] uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed, or sex."

Without diminishing at all the seriousness of Israel's political crisis, it is vitally important not to lose sight of the resilient and positive outlook in the country as a whole -acountry whose history, and current overall national life and institutions reflect economic, cultural, defence and technological achievements that are so remarkable as to be almost miraculous.

The Economist ranked Israel as the fourth most successful economy among OECD countries in 2022. Simultaneously, the UN's Sustainable Development Solutions Network has rated Israel as the world's fourth happiest country in its 2023 survey.

Another number adds to the picture of a society that is both unique and uniquely successful – that being Israel's fertility rate. Israeli women have an average of 2.9 children each – by far the highest number in the OECD club of wealthy economies.

While the reasons for this uniquely high birth rate are doubtless complex, they reflect not only values that emphasise family and children, but also Israeli society's close and supportive networks of family and friends that help make family life more fulfilling. Despite the violence and physical threats Israelis constantly face, despite high costs of living and often small living spaces, despite the fact that Israeli parents know their children will have to enter military service when they turn 18, children are valued and cherished. Children represent life, and Israel is a life-affirming society.

Israel's high happiness rating is also no doubt the product of an explicit and implicit social contract of tolerance, equal rights and opportunity engraved in Israel's DNA. It is a small country whose political, social and cultural life is sometimes loud, sometimes tense, sometimes raucous, but still, at bottom, offers a shared space where every tribe and subculture usually feel its voice is heard and way of life respected.

If Israel is a remarkable place today, the 75-year journey to arrive at that place is



at least as remarkable. The story of Israel is the story of how a people returned to their ancient homeland, reinvigorated and reinvented their ancient language; integrated the largest per capita immigration in modern history; overcame massive hostility from powerful neighbours and numerous wars to become militarily

unchallengeable and widely emulated and envied on the security front; went from a dirt poor third world country to the hub of innovation and entrepreneurship encompassed by the name "start-up nation"; built a uniquely vibrant culture

"It is hard to think of any other national story over that same period which has been as eventful, amazing and, despite many tragedies, uplifting"

blending Jewish traditions with other values, customs and ideas brought from Europe, the Middle East and beyond; and so much more.

It is hard to think of any other national story over that same period which has been as eventful, amazing and, despite many tragedies, uplifting.

As it reaches the milestone of 75 years of existence, Israel is also both more accepted in its own region and better connected to the rest of the world than ever.

The 2020 Abraham Accords which normalised relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco are continuing to bear fruit.

From practically nothing before 2020, Israel's exports to the UAE alone reached US\$635.53 million (A\$976m) last year, surpassing even the value of its exports to Aus-

tralia. Significantly, Oman and Saudi Arabia have tacitly supported the Accords. Everyone expects further progress on this front in the next few years.

Of course, huge challenges remain and must be overcome. The judicial reforms controversy has exposed growing internal divisions that urgently require healing

> and reconciliation based on tolerance and mutual respect. Israel's fundamental security and acceptance in its region are still a work in progress, and Iran's rapidly advancing nuclear weapons capabilities represent a huge, even existential challenge

to both. And of course, the Palestinian problem still festers — thanks to a Palestinian political culture and leadership which largely reject co-existence and have missed opportunity after opportunity to create a negotiated two-state peace. Israel will have to continue to manage that problem, with all its unfortunate dilemmas and costs, until the situation changes enough for genuine peace to become achievable.

But despite it all, and despite the undoubted intensity and gravity of current domestic controversies, Israel's 75th birthday should be an occasion to "marvel at everything that has been created," and "revel" in Israel's success, as Daniel Gordis says in this edition (p. 12). Historically and still today, there is too much to marvel at and revel in to do otherwise.



"This framework protects each and every one of you, the citizens of Israel. This framework protects Israel as a Jewish and democratic state... Those who think that a real civil war, with human lives, is a border we won't cross, have no idea... the abyss is within touching distance... At any price, and by any means, I won't let it happen."

Israeli President Isaac Herzog unveiling his "People's Framework" compromise proposal for reform of the judicial system in a primetime address to the nation (Times of Israel, March 15).

"The proposal of the President... means the complete cancellation of the necessary changes in the judicial system. It is one-sided, biased and unacceptable. The proposal ignores the root problems presented by the President in his first speech and even exacerbates them."

Representatives of Israel's Government oppose President Herzog's "People's Framework" proposal in a joint statement (*Times of Israel*, March 15).

"The plan that the president presented yesterday is not perfect.

It is not what we wanted, but it is a fair compromise... The government took 17 minutes yesterday to announce that it rejects the plan. They didn't even bother to study it. In their own way, they told the president that he, too, can go to hell."

Israeli Opposition Leader Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid, responding to President Herzog's "People's Framework" proposal (JNS, March 16).

"The Parties reaffirmed their commitment to advancing security, stability and peace for Israelis and Palestinians alike, and recognised the necessity of de-escalation on the ground, the prevention of further violence, as well as of pursuing confidence building measures, enhancing mutual trust, creating political horizon, and addressing outstanding issues through direct dialogue."

Joint communique from Sharm el-Sheikh meeting between Egyptian, Jordanian, Israeli, Palestinian and US officials seeking to address escalating Israeli-Palestinian violence (US Department of State, March 19).

"We will protect the Palestinian people with all our might and when it is necessary to intervene, we will intervene..."

Deputy Hamas commander Marwan Issa threatening that Hamas will "intervene" if the Al Aqsa status quo is "violated "during Ramadan (Ha'aretz, March 15).





#### **Tzvi Fleischer**

#### "POWERLESS VICTIMS"

Palestinian writer Susan Abulhawa's visit to Australia for the Adelaide Writers' Week was a useful reminder not only of how extreme and ugly Palestinian discourse about Israel, Zionists and Jews can get — but also how unapologetic some Palestinian advocates can be about even blatant racism, open support for violence against civilians, clear dehumanisation, and deliberate disregard for the truth.

On radio, Abulhawa defended her racism and extremism by saying that Palestinians are "quite literally a colonised, exiled people who live under a brutal military occupation" and that it was "shocking... that after 75 years of this, we are still being tone policed." In other words, no one has a right to object to anything Palestinians say or do in their total, no holds barred, war against Israel because they are powerless victims. Abulhawa even explicitly used the excuse "we are powerless" in that interview.

A few other recent Palestinian quotes further illustrate this phenomenon.

One was another colleague invited to the Adelaide Writers' Week, Muhammad El-Kurd, who at a panel discussion on March 5 admitted calling Israel "Apartheid" might be a misuse of the term, but said he didn't care, as long it meant "the villain [Israel] is portrayed clearly":

I think what the word itself as a word — I'm not even talking about the legal definition of the word 'apartheid'... — but the negative word that is 'apartheid' and the negative connotation it carries in the psyche of the public. I think... it has been, engineering and establishing a cultural shift in the way people approach and talk about Palestine.

But I'm less concerned with the accuracy of the word... I don't care. As long as there is a conversation happening in which the villain is portrayed clearly, I think that's good.

El-Kurd also defended saying Jews are thirsty for Palestinian blood as poetic licence.

Another Palestinian who illustrates the extent to which the Palestinian sense of total victimhood can lead to utter disregard for basic human morality is Rasha Abdullah Salameh, a Jordanian of Palestinian descent who visited a Holocaust museum in the US. She wrote about her anger at that visit in a Jordanian newspaper, *Al-Ghad* (March 13, translation by MEMRI):

My fury was growing every minute... The Jews in charge of the museum... do not mention that they emerged from their darkness, thirsting for blood, and inflicting more than the Holocaust, suffocation in gas chambers, and execution by firing squad, on the Palestinians, until this moment... The ornate Jewish tales have been greatly exaggerated. They claim a number of victims exceed-

ing 6 million Jews, with an almost complete absence of historical sources... with an absolute absence of the complementary narrative, which is the occupation of Palestine... the massacres of its inhabitants, and the infliction of torture on them that exceeds what the Nazis did.

Yes, she was furious that Jews commemorate the Holocaust – not only because she insists it was exaggerated, but because what happened to Palestinians is so much worse!

Such extremism, hate without limits and disregard for historical truth — among Palestinian intellectuals, not gun-toting militants — and insistence that it's okay because Palestinians are "powerless victims" go a long way toward explaining why peace has proven so elusive. More than this, they must also be terribly destructive of efforts to develop a healthy and life-affirming Palestinian culture and civil society.

# SETTLER VIOLENCE IS REAL AND INDEFENSIBLE, BUT...



A social media image from the Huwara rampage on Feb. 26 (Image: Twitter)

The world witnessed a horrific and indefensible attack on the town of Huwara by a few hundred Jewish radicals on Feb. 26. The Huwara attack led to 30 homes being burned or damaged, numerous injuries, and one death in unclear circumstances. It was the worst example of such violence against Palestinians by Jewish civilians since the Duma attack in 2015, when a firebombing of a Palestinian home killed three members of the Dawabsheh family, including an 18-month-old baby.

The Huwara attack can be contextualised to some extent by the anger in local communities over the cold-blooded murder of two young Jewish motorists travelling through the village earlier that same day. This absolutely does not make it excusable or defensible.

Nonetheless, the phenomenon of settler violence does need to be put into a larger context.

The UN says that there were 621 settler attacks leading to damage to Palestinian property in 2022, and 228 attacks that led to injury to Palestinian persons — a sharp increase from the previous year.



Obviously, that is 849 attacks too many (let's set aside reservations that these numbers come mainly from politicised Palestinian NGOs, and are thus questionable).

Yet that same year, there were well over 9,000 Palestinian terror attacks emanating from the West Bank — including 7,589 rock throwing incidents, 1,268 Molotov cocktail incidents, 285 shooting incidents, at least 350 pipe bomb attacks, as well as dozens of stabbing and car ramming attacks.

Aside from the magnitude of difference in numbers, there is also a clear difference in lethality. The vast majority of the settler attacks were incidents like spray-painting graffiti, or damaging cars or crops. Attacks on people often involved physical beatings or violent altercations, or stone-throwing. Clearly criminal, but most not really murderous.

The same cannot be said of the Palestinian attacks, which were mostly intended to kill — and they did, leading to 31 Israeli deaths. (More Palestinians were killed in 2022, but almost all were armed militants or active terrorist attackers, as documented in the last two "Scribblings" columns.)

Residents of settler communities bore the brunt of the 25 or so Palestinian attacks per day last year. This is the context in which the violence by a tiny fringe of the settler movement takes place.

That context absolutely does not excuse it. Israeli security forces should almost certainly have been doing more about this violence against Palestinians before Huwara, and the need for tougher measures today, after Huwara, appears overwhelming.

Nonetheless, those — like the UN and pro-Palestinian NGOs — who downplay or ignore the issue of murderous Palestinian violence against Israelis, while denouncing settler violence in the most vehement terms, are ignoring the elephant in the room.



#### **Michael Rubin**

#### **RE-EVALUATING THE IRAQ WAR**

BAGHDAD, Iraq — March 20 marked the 20th anniversary of the Iraq War. Much of Washington follows John Kerry's lead: they were with it until they were against it. Beltway wisdom is that President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq and oust dictator Saddam Hussein was a strategic disaster.

The irony here is that those who most counsel diversity, checking privilege, and cultural sensitivity readily speak on behalf of Iraqis often without knowing any, let alone visiting the country. I have visited Iraq several times each

year over the past two decades (once even with my eight-year-old daughter). I lived in Iraqi Kurdistan prior to that. Many pundits forget that the status quo was not tenable. The sanctions regime was collapsing. Even if intelligence indicating Saddam's retention of weapons of mass destruction was wrong, the dictator's own documents show that America's choice was between ending Saddam's rule and allowing him to reconstitute his weapons.

The idea that the United States had broken "the Pottery Barn rule," as Secretary of State Colin Powell implied, and destabilised what otherwise might have been a stable country was a myth.

Iraqi Kurdistan had already peeled away. While Saddam's Republican Guards dominated the day across southern Iraq, their control faded away from sundown to sunrise. If Saddam were alive today, he would be nearly 86 years old. His two sons were incompetent sociopaths. The notion that Iraq would have resisted the winds of the Arab Spring is ludicrous. To understand what Iraq would have looked like absent US intervention, picture the Syrian civil war. The only difference is that absent US presence, Iran would have had no checks on its ambitions.

Nor is it fair to blame the United States for a million deaths in Iraq. US forces did not kill one million Iraqis; insurgents and Iranian-backed militias did. To absolve these forces and bash America, which sought to counter such terrorism and protect Iraqis, is backward. The implied policy prescription: Abandoning Iraqis to local versions of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Islamic State, or other Islam-tinged Khmer Rouge-like groups, would be morally obtuse.

For that matter, the Code Pinks of the world should come clean: The end of Saddam's regime exposed the falsity of the accusation that Clinton-era sanctions killed a half million children.

This is not to say the US made no mistakes. Quite the contrary: L. Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority (in which I briefly worked) was a disaster, disconnected from reality. Nation-building greased dysfunctional corruption. Ninety percent of the blood and treasure the US expended was not in the war but rather in seeking to build the country for which Iraqis did not feel full ownership. Designing elections to prioritise party lists over individual constituencies compounded the problem by empowering the ethnic warlords and sectarian extremists who drew up the slates.

Iraq today is a different place, and positively so. Half of Iraqis were born after the war; almost two-thirds have no real memory of Saddam. Iraqis instead know politicians debating issues ad nauseam and achieving only a fraction of what they promise. They complain the government is ineffective, but the culture of debate has sunk in. They do not fear to argue politics in restaurants or coffee shops — both of which thrive in Baghdad and across the country. Iraq's



Parliament is not a rubber-stamp body but hosts the most robust debates in the Arab world.

Fallujah and Ramadi, two former insurgent strongholds, are the envy of Iraq as local politicians buckle down to attract investment and build what the central government cannot. Late President Jalal Talabani was often unwell, and current President Latif Rashid is also unhealthy. They can disappear for weeks at a time, and Iraqis do not bat an eye.

Was the Iraq War mishandled? Yes. Was occupation bungled? Certainly. Will historians judge it better than its contemporaries did? Of that I am sure.

Michael Rubin is a contributor to the Washington Examiner's Beltway Confidential. He is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Reprinted from the Washington Examiner (washingtonexaminer.com). © Michael Rubin, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



#### **Michael Shannon**

#### PLAYING BY THE RULES

Even though many sports lovers insist that "Sport and politics don't mix," any arena containing national flags inevitably creates a space for political posturing. The news of an Israeli football team playing at the Under-20 World Cup, which Indonesia is hosting, has revived public debate over whether Indonesia is opening up to Israel.

On the pitch, Israel's U-20 team booked its place in the tournament by virtue of being one of the best youth teams in the European confederation (UEFA), reaching the semi-finals of the 2022 U-19 Euros. This would be Israel's debut U-20 World Cup appearance.

The headline is that Indonesia will not prevent Israel from participating in the tournament — slated to kick off in May — despite political differences and the fact that Indonesia has never established diplomatic relations with the Jewish state.

Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah stated the obvious by saying his country does not have a say in deciding the rules and the qualified teams at the championship.

"Our stance on Palestine has always been, and will always remain consistent. It is FIFA that decides on the participation of all teams and the rules of the game at the U-20. Despite Indonesia's position as the U-20 host, our country's consistent stance on Palestine will not waver, not even a little," Teuku told a press briefing in Jakarta on March 10.

Teuku added that Indonesia had always been vocal about

its pro-Palestine stance in every international forum. "During his visit to Indonesia last October, Palestinian Prime Minister [Mohammad Shtayyeh] expressed his utmost gratitude for Indonesia's unwavering support," Teuku said.

At the recent 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva, Foreign Affairs Minister Retno Marsudi told the forum that "we cannot close our eyes to the sufferings of the Palestinians." Retno later said that no other country raised the Palestine issue at the session.

The air of justification about these statements reflect a government awkwardly juggling the wishes of FIFA (not to mention Indonesia's passionate football fans) and conservative Islamic groups unable to stomach any Israeli presence.

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the highest Islamic clerical body in the nation, called on the Government to explain how it will accommodate the Israeli team without compromising Indonesia's stance towards Israel. Chief of the MUI for Foreign Relations, Sudarnoto Abdul Hakim, said it is "a sensitive issue" for Indonesians.

"Accepting even providing security guarantees to the Israeli national team for the U-20 World Cup shows that Indonesia has been subjugated by pro-Israel forces through this football diplomacy," Hakim told *Xinhua* on March 14. Allowing the Israeli team to compete in Indonesia with its flag flying could lead to social unrest and harm the Palestinian people, he added.

A small group staged a protest in Solo, Central Java — the host city for the tournament's final match on June 11. Among their concerns were that the unfurling of the Israeli flag on Indonesian soil could be construed as the host nation's validation of Israel as a "legitimate" country. A week later, more than 100 protesters filled a major thoroughfare in downtown Jakarta, halting traffic, chanting "Allahu Akbar" and "Get out Israel from U-20 World Cup."

The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), an Islamist opposition party, also joined in. "Israel was repeatedly boycotted on the sports stage. This time, PKS also bans Israel's participation in the U-20 Football World Cup! The world's colonialism must come to an end!" said a post on PKS's official Twitter account.

Yet, good sense prevailed at the *Jakarta Post*. The national daily's editorial of March 15 applauded the "determination" of Soccer Association of Indonesia (PSSI) chairman Erick Thohir in asserting Indonesia's readiness to host the tournament and provide security to all participants, the Israeli team included.

"As a good host Indonesia should not mix sports with politics. The government, in this regard, is responsible for the safety of the Israeli team to prove its compliance with the FIFA ruling... We welcome all teams, including the Israelis, to Indonesia. As a proper host, Indonesia will do what it takes to make sure all the guests are safe and sound."

Meanwhile, Coordinating Political, Legal and Secu-



rity Affairs Minister Mahfud MD says the Government is well-prepared to protect the Israeli football team, as well as other squads. "We have discussed it and prepared every track. The political, diplomatic, and security aspects of this have all been discussed," he said.

The tournament will kick off on May 20 at the Gelora Bung Karno (GBK) Stadium in Jakarta, with Team Indonesia to play the opening match against a team to be determined by a draw on March 31. All things being fair, Indonesia being drawn in the same group as Israel is an intriguing, albeit somewhat unnerving, possibility.



#### **Alex Benjamin**

#### **AIRING THE LAUNDRY**

Most Jewish households in Europe, certainly mine anyway, had an unwritten code when it comes to Israel. No matter the political situation, we didn't wash our dirty linen in public.

In that regard, it's been a challenging time for many of us in Europe. What the heck do we do when the country is so utterly riven with division over the Government's judicial reform proposals?

In our office, there are two schools of thought. One says that we shouldn't talk about it. Nobody knows how this will end, and in any case, no good can come from pitching in on something that is being so widely reported.

The second school of thought says that we owe it to those who have placed their trust in us, journalists and politicians alike, to explain what is going on. And more to the point, how can we expect to be taken seriously if we ignore the huge elephant in the Israeli room?

Doubtless there are some readers who have already chosen their school before reading any further. I'm a member of the second school, by the way.

I'm a member because if we don't explain, others will try to fill the space for us. Take, for example, a debate headed by EU Foreign Policy Chief Joseph Borrell in Strasbourg: "Deterioration of democracy in Israel and consequences on the occupied territories."

More readers may remember that in a previous column I mentioned that Borrell was unlikely to ever be invited to dinner in Israel.

I think you can now add breakfast and lunch. He has been blocked from visiting the country by Israel's Foreign Ministry not only because of his views of the state of Israel's democratic credentials, but also because of a published article in which he compared Israeli settler attacks in the West Bank to Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israelis.

Even that wasn't enough. He then criticised Israeli mili-

tary operations that "frequently cause civilian Palestinian deaths, often without effective accountability" and "illegal settlements" that are "expanding on occupied land."

A wit in our office said, "If I was the PA's spokesman I'd be quaking in my boots: Borell wants my job!" Subtle diplomacy this was not. And Mr Borrell has a phalanx of press people to help him spread his words across Europe. For me, silence is therefore not an option.

Whilst I am obviously concerned at the levels of "dirty linen" that Israel is exposing to the world, I also believe in being circumspect about alarmist language. For me what Israel is going through right now is a sign of a healthy democracy. We should also remember that Israel is a young democracy — a mere 75 years old.

Speaking of history, debates on the role of Israel's judiciary recall both the ancient Greek philosophers who asked "who judges the judges?" and present-day Europe, where Poland's and Hungary's democratic credentials have been criticised over efforts to strip power away from their own judiciaries.

In truth, there is clearly a case for some modicum of reform of Israel's judiciary, and a debate about it should take place. But in order for a meaningful debate to take place, trust in the people leading it is a pre-requisite. Would you trust a government made up in part of untried and untested fringe parties, one-issue populists, and religious groups concerned primarily about the narrow needs of their separatist communities, all headed up by a prime minister under indictment? I don't say that to be glib — it is just a reflection of reality.

Of course, on the other hand, this coalition was duly and legally elected by the Israeli public, and it has a point in saying that the courts should respect its mandate and not put undue obstacles in the way of its agenda.

I won't be getting off the fence here, even though I clearly have an opinion. That's because, one, I'm not an Israeli citizen and two, unlike some organisations, my view is largely inconsequential and would be proffered only as a way to stroke my own vanity.

But I believe I can and must provide some muchneeded context to friends, and the politicians and diplomats with whom I work and who trust my analysis.

I must because if I don't, more voices like Borrell's will have a field day. And, indeed, the more I think of it, our "dirty laundry" – the scuffs and stains of fighting for democracy – should be something to be talked about with pride. I mean, look at how our neighbours Iran, Syria, Lebanon or Egypt deal with political debate and civil unrest?

None of us are whiter than white. Democracy is never straight forward and is often messy. And spotless laundry only exists in detergent adverts. That's why I talk about Israel, even when issues are complicated and uncomfortable.





# BEHIND I THE NEWS

#### **ROCKET AND TERROR** REPORT

One rocket was fired into Israel from Gaza on March 8.

A shooting attack killed Israeli brothers Hallel and Yagel Yaniv on Feb. 26 in Huwara in the West Bank. The terrorist responsible was killed by Israeli forces in a March 7 raid in Jenin that also saw five other Palestinian gunmen killed in the fighting. On Feb. 27, another shooting attack killed an Israeli-American near Jericho. On March 9, a member of Hamas shot and wounded three people in Tel Aviv before himself being killed. One victim subsequently died.

Multiple other shooting attacks have also occurred since the end of February as well as a number of attempted stabbings.

On March 13, an IED exploded at the Megiddo Junction, seriously injuring an Israeli Arab driver. Israeli security forces subsequently found and shot dead a heavily-armed suspect in a vehicle. He apparently infiltrated into Israel from Lebanon, and is believed to have been a Hamas member trained by Hezbollah.

#### **HUWARA RAMPAGE SPARKS OUTRAGE**

In the hours following the Palestinian terror attack in Huwara on Feb. 26, a group of some 400 Jewish extremists, incited and assembled through social media, violently rampaged through the town, torching a significant number of Palestinian homes, business, and vehicles.

The IDF and local Border Police units failed to arrive with sufficient manpower to confront the mob, though they did rescue nine families from burning homes. Palestinian authorities reported numerous injuries and one fatality among residents,

although the circumstances surrounding the death were unclear.

Eight Jewish suspects were arrested after the attack. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant also placed two Jewish extremists under administrative detention.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu condemned the violence and admonished Israelis against "taking the law into their own hands." However, Minister in the Defence Ministry Betzalel Smotrich called for Huwara "to be erased" before later backtracking.

#### **SUMMITS OVER WEST BANK VIOLENCE**

Senior officials from Jordan, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and US met on Feb. 26 in Aqaba, Jordan for a regional security summit aimed at stemming the spiralling tensions between Israelis and Palestinians in the lead up to the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Israel and the PA agreed to temporarily hold off on "unilateral measures" opposed by the other side. One result was that the Palestinians withdrew a vote against Israel in the UN Security Council, while Israel reportedly committed not to advance plans for new settlement homes for four months or move to legalise West Bank outposts for six months.

A March 19 follow up summit of the same parties at Sharm el-Sheikh issued a joint communique that included a commitment from both sides to establish a mechanism to reduce violence, incitement, and inflammatory statements. The parties also agreed to reconvene for more talks in April.

#### MORE ALLEGED ISRAELI AIRSTRIKES IN SYRIA

Recent strikes against targets in

Syria allegedly included a March 8 drone strike on an Iran-backed weapons factory in eastern Syria in which seven people, at least three of whom were pro-Iranian militia members, were reportedly killed.

On March 12, a weapons store belonging to Iranian militias in the area between Hama and Tartous province was reportedly destroyed, with two people killed.

According to a March 17 broadcast on Iranian state TV, Iran is "likely" to sell surface-to-air missiles and radar to Syria to help beef up its air defences, presumably to try to stop such Israeli strikes.

#### **IAEA: IRAN EDGING CLOSER TO THE BOMB**

March 2023 reports on Iran from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) show that Teheran needs less than two weeks to produce enough highly enriched uranium for one atomic bomb warhead. The reports also indicate that Iran's nuclear program remains almost free of IAEA supervision after Teheran removed monitoring equipment from its facilities two years ago.

However, Iran avoided condemnation at the IAEA Board of Governors meeting on March 6 to 10, following an agreement to restore the inspection equipment achieved during a snap visit to Teheran by IAEA Director General Emmanuel Grossi. Teheran also promised to finally cooperate with the IAEA's years-long investigation into undeclared atomic sites and activity. A similar agreement with Iran made one year ago failed to produce any significant progress on monitoring.

Meanwhile, reports say that Moscow has decided to return enriched uranium to Iran that had been stored



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in Russia as part of the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal.

## IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA RESTORETIES

On March 10, Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement to restore diplomatic relations that were cut off in 2016. The agreement, brokered by China, includes re-opening embassies and development of economic and cultural ties. The deal is expected to lead to an end to the war in Yemen, where the Iranian backed Houthi militia have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition since 2014.

Meanwhile, a few days before the agreement with Iran, it was reported that Riyadh gave the US a list of the preconditions it would require, including security guarantees and assistance in developing its own indigenous civilian nuclear program, before normalising ties with Israel.

# IRAN CURRENCY CRATERING

Protests against the Government continue across the streets of Iran, with some hitting Teheran's Grand Bazaar and the Alaeldin cell phone markets. The focus of these protests is Iran's failing national currency, the rial, which nosedived to a new record low in March — one US dollar was traded for 52,650 rials. This translates into high inflation and soaring food prices across Iran, adding to existing major unrest since last September.

Meanwhile, there have been multiple reports of poisonings of schoolgirls, going back to November, affecting thousands of students at hundreds of schools across Iran. Symptoms included fainting, nausea, and shortness of breath, after having experienced "unpleasant" odours on school premises. Some students have been hospitalised, but there have been no fatalities. Iranian authorities have blamed opposition groups abroad, but analysts have suggested hardline regime elements could be responsible.

#### ISRAEL SEEKING TO EXPAND ABRAHAM ACCORDS

Israel is working to expand the Abraham Accords with Muslim-majority countries Mauritania, Somalia, Niger and Indonesia, according to Israeli reports.

Israel and Mauritania had diplomatic relations until Mauritania cut

them in 2008, but Israel has never had diplomatic ties with the other three countries.

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, who has been working on the normalisation with US officials, has hinted that negotiations with Mauritania are advanced.

Reports have also said Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is interested in establishing ties.

Israel and Indonesia have long had unofficial connections in trade, technology, and tourism.

## ISRAEL-AUSTRALIA FLIGHTS TAKING OFF

Direct flights between Israel and Australia look closer than ever, after Victorian Minister for Industry and Innovation Ben Carroll and EL AL CEO Dina Ben Tal Ganancia signed a Letter of Intent on March 14 to work together to secure non-stop flights between Tel Aviv and Melbourne by June 2024. The Israeli national carrier is planning to operate three services per week.

This development was made possible by a decision by Oman, in late February, to open up its airspace to Israeli flights. Saudi Arabia decided to allow such flights last year.



#### **REGIME REVENGE PORN**

Just when you think Iran's regime couldn't sink any lower in its treatment of its own people, it proves it can. Not content with killing, torturing, imprisoning and beating dissenters of all ages who object to any aspect of its fundamentalist, misogynist, tyrannical rule, it has now taken to forcing schoolgirls to watch pornography. There are reports that schoolgirls from a number of schools where there had been chanting against the regime were subjected to this treatment in late 2022 and the first

few months of this year.

And it's not just any pornography. The mandatory video sessions include scenes of rape and of sex between people and animals. The purpose of these sessions is apparently to show the girls where the greater freedoms that many of them are bravely demonstrating for will supposedly lead. One parent reported that the school principal said they "wanted the girls to see the results of the sexual revolution," while Hamid Rasaei, a hardline member of Iran's parliament, said the protestors' goal was "to sleep with someone every night and graze like animals."

There are reports that some of the girls required medical care due to shock caused by the viewings, and that atten-

dance numbers at some schools dropped sharply following these incidents.

Those showing the videos and enforcing the girls' attendance are described as plain-clothed agents of the regime, believed to be from the Basij, the paramilitary arm of the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In some cases, parents have complained to education authorities, but rather than looking out for the girls' welfare, authorities have instead threatened the parents with consequences, including denouncing them to the regime's security services.

This latest warped tactic should be seen as an indication of how seriously the regime regards the threat of protesting schoolgirls.



#### **COVER STORY**

# 75 YEARS

#### THE STORY OF ISRAEL

#### **Daniel Gordis**

These are difficult days in Israel. Leaders and citizens are deeply divided on the issue of the proposed judicial reform, some saying it is long overdue, others saying that it portends the end of Israeli democracy. Much has been written about the proposals, and much more will be. There is much that is troubling about the current situation, not the least of which is the potential for violence in a society that has already known its share of political violence.

Yet there is another possible impact of the current situation, which though less momentous, also deserves our attention. Shortly, Israel will celebrate its 75th anniversary. That would be an important milestone no matter what; but given the challenges that Israel has faced over the past three-quarters of a century, it is nothing less than extraordinary, if not miraculous.

So, at this moment of turmoil, worry, and even dread, it is worth taking a moment to review, even very briefly, what the Jewish state has accomplished. Or to put matters slightly differently, how has the Jewish people changed because of the Jewish state?

First, and perhaps most importantly, the existential physical condition of the Jews has changed. There are no longer defenceless Jews anywhere in the world. Though Israel was certainly not created primarily to be a refuge, the Law of Return welcomes every Jew who does not feel safe where s/he lives. For any Jew who seeks it, there is now a homeland in which they are welcomed, a homeland in which they are safe.

The rebirth of a people, though, is made manifest in many ways far beyond physical security. Zionism and Israel have breathed new life into Hebrew, a language that was long dormant. Only in Israel (except for a few ultra-Orthodox enclaves in the diaspora which speak Yiddish) is there an entire society that speaks a distinctly Jewish language. And how real could culture be without its distinct language? Could there be great French culture without



A ceremony from the Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers in Jerusalem, which is a uniquely Israeli tradition because it occurs the day before Independence Day — creating an especially moving emotional transition from sadness and mourning to celebration (Image: Isranet)

French? Russian literature written the same way without Russian? The thousands and thousands of books published, plays written and performed, concerts staged and much more in many hundreds of venues across Israel are testimony to more than a vibrant cultural scene. They are the markings of a people brought back to life.

Peoples also have rhythms of life. In Israel, the rhythm of life is a Jewish rhythm. There are entire swathes of cities in Israel in which, on a Friday afternoon, the nation transforms itself. Streets become much more still, people are home preparing for Shabbat, whether or not they are punctiliously religious. On Yom Kippur, one can walk in the middle of the highways, because not a car moves. When air raid sirens go off on Holocaust Memorial Day or Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers, an entire nation comes to an utter standstill. That cannot happen anywhere else. Nowhere else can both joy and sadness bring millions of people together for intense moments of connectedness across racial, denominational, ethnic, and socio-economic lines and more.



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Israel has even made us rethink what a Jew looks like; that, too, is a dimension of a people reborn. Before there was an Israel, most North American Jews assumed that Jews looked like most of the people reading this column. But once the Jews from the Levant came to Israel in large numbers and then Jews from Ethiopia, and others began to stream in, we began to understand that "what a Jew looks like" is far more complex and nuanced than we could ever have imagined.

#### THE FOUNDERS OF ISRAEL

There is much more to point to, but instead, let's

"The story of Israel is, plain and

simple, the story of the rebirth of the

land, speaking its own language, liv-

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thriving Jewish people in its own

go back in history, to that momentous meeting on May 12, 1948, when ten men had to vote whether or not to declare independence. Yigal Yadin, who would become a great Israeli archaeologist but at that time commanded the pre-state Jewish military

forces, was asked how much of a chance the Jews had of surviving the onslaught that was sure to follow. Said Yadin, "50/50 – the Arabs have a lot of power to bring to the battle."

Still, in a vote of six to four, which means that it could not have been closer, those ten men voted to create a state, hoping against hope that it might be able to somehow hold out.

They didn't know if the United States would recognise Israel (the State Department was vehemently opposed), whether enough Jews would move to Israel to make the state viable, whether there would be enough food (Israel had to institute strict food rationing of even basics like flour and fruit). They certainly didn't imagine that the Arab world would embrace them.

Had someone asked them, back then in May 1948, what they imagined the state they were creating would look like in 2023, could they have imagined a world-class military so powerful that no nation-state dares attack it any longer? When Israel almost ran out of money in the 1950s and had 445% inflation in the 1980s, could they have imagined the economic engine that Israel is today? When Israel was attacked on all sides in 1948, or 1973, could they have imagined that Egypt (1979), Jordan (1994) the UAE and Bahrain, then Morocco (2020) and then Sudan would make peace? That the Saudis would be in the on-deck circle? That the Arab world would be reaching out to the Jewish state?

Could they have imagined not only an end to the hunger, but a country so overflowing with food that it's actually a "foodie" country? Could they have imagined the bounty, the confidence, the cultural output, a country with more non-profits per capita than any other country in the world, a country with a birth rate among *secular Jews* higher than that of any other OECD country, a country that ranks

higher on the World's Happiness Scale than the United States and most of Europe?

They could have imagined none of this. So, even in these worrisome times, let's use the upcoming 75th anniversary of Israel's creation as an opportunity to change the nature of the conversation we have about Israel. To be sure, the conflict with the Palestinians is grinding and heartbreaking, and it does deserve attention, but it is not the story of what Israel is. The Israeli rabbinate's treatment of non-Orthodox Judaism is important and needs to be addressed, but it, too, is not the story of Israel.

The story of Israel is, plain and simple, the story of the

rebirth of the Jewish people, the re-creation of a thriving Jewish people in its own land, speaking its own language, living according to its own calendar, producing its own great works of literature and celebrating thousands of years of Jewish tradition.

ing according to its own calendar"

Jewish tradition.

Of course, we are worried. Some of us are disappointed. Still, what we need to do is to weep, not in heartbreak, but in celebration and thanksgiving. We dare not be satisfied or unconcerned, but we have to marvel at everything that's been created. We need to revel in the success of a country that was founded in order that the Jewish people could leave the horrors of the middle of the 20th century and everything that came before it in the past, never to for-

get, but without allowing it to define us. We created a state

to create a new Jewish future. And we succeeded.

Rabbi Daniel Gordis is Koret Distinguished Fellow at Shalem College in Jerusalem, and author of the forthcoming Impossible Takes Longer: 75 Years After Its Creation, Has Israel Fulfilled Its Founders' Dreams? (Ecco/HarperCollins), to be published in April. Republished from the Detroit Jewish News. © Detroit Jewish News (jewishnews.com), reprinted by permission of the author, all rights reserved.

# ISRAEL AT 75: A SNAPSHOT

**AIJAC staff** 

#### **POPULATION**

Approximately 9,506,100 (as of May 2022 – Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics)

#### **Largest cities:**

Jerusalem: 971,000
 Tel Aviv: 468,000
 Haifa: 285,000



**Ethnicity:** Around 73.9% of the population identify as Jewish. The remainder of the population is mostly Arab (around 21.1%), with the remaining 5% consisting of various other ethnic groups.

**Age:** The median age in Israel is around 31 years old. Around 28% of the population is under the age of 14 and 12% are over the age of 65.

**Religion:** As mentioned above, the majority of Israelis are Jewish. Muslims make up around 17.7% of the population, with smaller numbers of Christians, Druze, and other religions.

**Growth:** Israel's annual population growth rate stood at 1.6% per annum as of 2021, faster than the OECD average of around 0.3%.

There have been more than 3.3 million immigrants to Israel since its founding in 1948, meaning Israel

has taken in more immigrants per capita than any other country. 74,915 people moved to the Jewish state in 2022, a sharp spike compared to previous years, mostly Ukrainians and Russians fleeing the war.

Israel also has by far the highest fertility rate in the OECD, averaging 2.931 births per woman as of 2023. The OECD average is 1.7.

**Life Expectancy:** Projected life expectancy as of 2023 is 83.49 - 81 for men and 86 for women. This is near the top of the OECD table, and similar to Australia, which has a life expectancy of 83.94 in 2023.

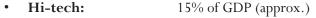
The Bloomberg Healthiest Country Index released in 2019 found Israel to be the tenth healthiest country in the world.

#### **ECONOMY** (2023 EST.)

- **GDP:** US\$560 Billion (A\$837 billion)
- **GDP per capita:** US\$58,000 (A\$86,600)

The *Economist* ranked Israel as the 4th most successful economy among the developed countries for 2022.

**Key sectors:** 



Agriculture: 2.5%
Manufacturing: 16%
Tourism: 7%
Diamonds: 5%
Financial: 6%
Wholesale/Retail: 11%

Israel's poverty rate is currently 20% — with 1.9 million people living below the poverty line.

#### **TRADE**

**Total exports:** US\$50.8 billion (A\$76 billion – software and communication equipment were the largest component)

**Total imports:** US\$68 billion (A\$101.6 billion – machinery and transport equipment were the largest component)

#### **Major trading partners:**

By OECD standards, Israel has a fast-growing, young

population (Image: Jose Hernandez/ Shutterstock)

• USA: US\$35 billion per annum

China: US\$17 billion
UK: US\$7 billion
Germany: US\$6 billion
India: US\$5 billion

#### INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Israel is a world leader in hi-tech and research and development, spending nearly 5% of GDP on innovation.
- Israel has the highest percentage of scientists and engineers in the world, at 135 per 10,000.
- Israel produces more scientific papers per capita than any other nation by a large margin – 109 per 10,000 people as well as one of the highest per capita rates of patents filed.
- With more than 3,000 hi-tech companies and start-ups, Israel has the highest concentration of hi-tech companies in the world – apart from the Silicon Valley in California.
- Israel is ranked no. 2 in the world for venture capital

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funds per capita.

- On a per capita basis, Israel has the largest number of biotech startups.
- Twenty-four per cent of Israel's workforce hold university degrees, ranking third in the industrialised world, after the United States and the Netherlands, and 12% hold advanced degrees.
- Israel has the third highest rate of entrepreneurship –
  and the highest rate among women and among people
  over 55 in the world.
- The city of Tel Aviv is home to an estimated 6,000 start-up companies.

#### **TOURISM**

After a record 4.55 million tourism visits in 2019, numbers declined dramatically in 2020 (831,000) and 2021 (397,000) due to COVID.

However it has started to pick up again and in 2022 there were 2.675 million visits with a sharp increase expected in 2023.

A survey of Israeli tourism by Ernst and Young noted that Israel's different cultures and religions, its diverse landscapes, the contrasts between cities (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv), and combination of European, North African and Middle Eastern culture produced a "very high density of experience."

The Western Wall in Jerusalem is the most-visited tourist site, followed by other sites in Jerusalem's Old City: the Jewish Quarter, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Via Dolorosa, and the Tower of David Museum, as well as the Mount of Olives just outside. Outside Jerusalem, the most popular tourist sites are Masada, the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, Tel Aviv Port, Capernaum and Caesarea. (Israeli Ministry of Tourism)

#### **ENVIRONMENT**

- Israel is the only country that was home to more trees in 2000 than in 1900.
- 85% of Israeli households get their hot water from rooftop solar heaters, compared to around 13% in Australia.
- Israel has more than 50 alternative meat startups a disproportionately high number compared to elsewhere around the world making it a meat alternative powerhouse. Perhaps this is no surprise, given Israel is reportedly the most vegan country in the world, with 5% of Israelis vegan, 4% vegetarian and 8% "flexitarian" (semi-vegetarian).

#### WATER INNOVATION

- Israel recycles 90% of the wastewater it creates, making it the leading nation for water recycling.
- Around 75% of Israel's remaining domestic water supply is desalinated seawater. Experts say that Israel's five

major desalination plants are arguably the most energyefficient in the world.

#### **FUN FACTS**

- There are more than 4,000 buildings in Tel Aviv in the Bauhaus architectural style, the largest concentration in the world. This has led to a UNESCO world heritage listing.
- Israel has more museums per capita than any other country – 230 and counting. A new museum dedicated to women is opening soon.
- Israel is home to the largest known dog cemetery of the ancient world. More than 1,300 dog skeletons, most of them puppies, were found at the Ashkelon site.
- Israel is the fourth happiest country in the world according to the 2023 figures released by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Australia ranked 12th.

## ISRAEL'S FIRST 75 YEARS: 15 MEMORABLE MOMENTS

#### **Ahron Shapiro**

For Israel's 75th anniversary, Ahron Shapiro selects 15 singular moments from Israel's timeline, captured on film, that offer a tiny and incomplete glimpse into the complexity of the endless remarkable story of the little country that could.

#### 1. May 14, 1948:

With the end of the British Mandate, in a ceremony at the Tel Aviv Museum, Head of the Jewish Agency David Ben-Gurion announces the establishment of the



State of Israel with a reading of the Declaration of Independence, which states, in part: "The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations." (Credit: GPO)



2. May 28, 1948: Two weeks after the establishment of Israel, the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem surrenders to the Jordanian Arab Legion. During the 19 years



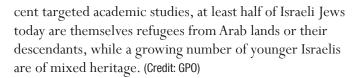
of Jordanian occupation that followed, historic buildings and synagogues in the Jewish Quarter were razed and left in ruins, including the historic Hurva Synagogue, shown here. The armistice agreement between Israel and Jordan, signed at Rhodes on April 3, 1949, stated that a special committee would be formed to allow Israelis "free access to the Holy Places and cultural institutions and use of the cemetery on the Mount of Olives." In practice, this provision was never implemented, and Jews were forbidden from visiting the Western Wall and other holy sites under Jordanian control. (Credit: Moshe Milner/GPO)

3. 1949: Shalom
Havivi, himself a new immigrant to Israel from Yemen, looks after a planeload of Yemenite
Jews on their way to resettle in Israel during
Operation On Wings



of Eagles. Over the years, scenes like this were repeated many times, from many destinations in the Arab world, in operations that were given many different names. According to historian Martin Gilbert's 2010 book, *In Ishamel's House: A history of Jews in Muslim lands*, more than 616,000 Jews were expelled from Arab lands and found refuge in Israel between 1948 and 1972 (some 200,000 Jewish expellees ended up elsewhere). In addition to providing refuge for the Jews from Arab lands, Israel has settled more than 90,000 Ethiopian Israelites, mostly since 1980, and several thousand Jews of northeastern India, known as Bnei Menashe. According to population statistics and re-

WITH COMPLIMENTS



4. 1965: Negev Kibbutz
Hatzerim signs a deal with
drip irrigation innovator
Simcha Blass to develop
irrigation systems under
the name Netafim, specialising in reducing the amount



of water required to hydrate crops, a very crucial need in many of the world's arid and semi-arid agricultural regions, including most of Australia. In 1966, Netafim marketed the world's first commercial drip irrigation system. As of 2020, the company continued to hold a 30% share in the world's drip irrigation market, with revenues of over US\$1 billion (A\$1.5b), including from Australia. (Credit: Herman Chanania/GPO)

5. June 9, 1967:

Shortly after Israel captured the Old City of Jerusalem from Jordanian forces, an IDF paratrooper and his fiancée are wed at the newly



liberated Western Wall, recalling the prophetic words of Jeremiah: "Yet again there shall be heard, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." Over the following years, the Jewish Quarter of the Old City was rebuilt, restoring whatever historic buildings could be saved and erecting new homes in styles that matched the setting. Meanwhile, the municipality paved the streets of the entire Old City with cobblestones with utilities routed underneath them, thus providing reliable electricity and running water to many residents for the first time. Today, the Jerusalem Municipality remains committed to serving all residents of Jerusalem. In 2023, it opened Wadi Joz Park in east Jerusalem, giving Arab neighbourhoods one of the city's largest parks. (Credit: GPO)

6. October 17, 1973: On the 11th day of the Yom Kippur War – the day after an Israeli expeditionary force crossed the Suez Canal – former Chief of Staff Haim Bar-Lev



(centre-left) and Defence Minister Moshe Dayan (centre)

consult with Maj. Gen. Ariel Sharon (with bandage) somewhere in the Sinai Desert. Israel had been taken by surprise, believing overconfident intelligence evaluations that the risk of Egypt and Syria launching a major war was low. As a result, observation posts on the Golan Heights and the Suez Canal were easily overrun, many Israeli aircraft were shot down by enemy surface-to-air missiles and in the first days of the war, there was genuine fear at the highest levels that Israel would lose. Only a US resupply airlift and incredible resourcefulness and determination on the battlefield pulled an Israeli victory from the jaws of defeat. Yet, the cost was very high. Israel lost 2,656 soldiers, with more than 7,000 wounded – more than three times the number lost in the Six-Day War. In the aftermath of the war, Prime Minister Golda Meir resigned, confidence in the Labor Alignment Government plummeted, and the stage was set for Likud leader Menachem Begin to lead Israel's right-wing factions to their first historic victory in 1977. (Credit: Yossi Greenberg/GPO)

7. July 4, 1976: In what was called Operation Thunderbolt, a team of Israeli counter-terrorist commandos rescue 102 hostages from an Air France plane which had been hijacked by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terror group. The flight, which had originated in Tel Aviv a week earlier, was diverted after a stopover in Athens via Beng-



hazi to Entebbe, the main airport of Uganda. The surprise rescue operation, which required a force of more than 100 fighters as well as multiple air support crews to be transported over 4,000 km and back (with refuelling in Kenya), was considered to be an unqualified success. Sadly however, the commander of the mission, Yoni Netanyahu (older brother of current Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu) was killed in the fighting, as were three hostages during the mission. Another who had been ill and been taken to hospital was murdered subsequently. The mission galvanised Israel's resolve not to capitulate to the demands of terrorists, and added to the IDF's reputation as perhaps the world's best counter-terrorism force. In the photograph, hostages and their families share a tearful reunion on the tarmac back in Israel. (Credit: GPO)

**8. March 26, 1979:** On this day, at the White House, Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin, US President Jimmy Carter and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat shake hands after the signing of the peace treaty between Israel

and Egypt, marking the first formal acceptance of Israel in peace by an Arab country. The agreement, known as the Camp David Accords, had Israel agree to uproot its settlements in the Sinai and



return to Cairo the entire peninsula, which it had captured in the 1967 war. For its part, Egypt agreed to demilitarise most of the Sinai and establish full diplomatic relations. In the coming years, passenger flights and bus services would connect the two countries. While the peace has, for the most part, been a cold one lacking grassroot support among the Egyptian people, with relatively little economic cooperation and tourism, Israeli defence officials consider it a crucial gamechanger that practically eliminated the prospect of massive multi-front war of the kind that Israel faced in 1948, 1967 and 1973. (Credit: Tal Shabtai/GPO)

**9. June 7, 1981:** The Israeli Air Force is deployed to attack Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor, which was under construction near Baghdad,



and put a stop to Iraq's illicit nuclear weapons program. It was previously determined that fully loaded planes with additional external fuel tanks could just barely manage the 3,200 km return trip without requiring in-air refuelling which had seemed all but impossible. The attack squadron consisted of eight recently acquired F-16As, each with two unguided Mark-84 2,000-pound (910 kg) delay-action bombs. The attack established the Begin Doctrine - Israel's preventive counter-proliferation policy regarding its potential enemies' capability to possess weapons of mass destruction – a policy which remains relevant today. The plane shown here was flown on the mission by Ilan Ramon, who later became Israel's first astronaut, on the US Space Shuttle Columbia, a mission which ended tragically when Columbia disintegrated on re-entry into the atmosphere on Feb. 1, 2003. (Credit: KGyST/Wikipedia)

10. February 12, 1986: Soviet refusenik Natan Sharansky, imprisoned for over 13 years due to his request to emigrate to Israel, celebrates his newfound freedom at



Jerusalem's Western Wall the night he arrives in Israel. Earlier, at Ben-Gurion Airport, Sharansky told the crowd that came to welcome him: "Even while in solitary confinement I sang this song 'How good it is to sit together, brothers together."



Sharansky was freed in a prisoner exchange and most refuseniks were forced to wait several more years for their opportunity to move to Israel, but by the year 1990, the floodgates opened. In that year almost 200,000 Jews from the disintegrating Soviet Union would make Aliyah. Today, more than a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union and their offspring have played a major role in Israel's modern-day story as the "Start Up Nation". (Credit: Eli Sharir/IPPA/Dan Hadani collection, National Library of Israel)

#### 11. March 3, 1996:

For the second Sunday morning in a row, Jerusalem's No. 18 bus is targeted along the city's downtown thoroughfare, Jaffa Road, by a suicide bomber from the Hamas



terror organisation, killing 19 people and wounding seven. In the aftermath, a small crowd of onlookers gather and stare at the crumpled frame of the bus. In the seven-year period between the 1993 Oslo Accords and the outbreak of the Second Intifada, nearly 300 Israelis were killed in terror attacks. (Credit: Ahron Shapiro)

12. August 9, 2001: At

the Jerusalem downtown crossroad of Jaffa Road and King George Street, a Palestinian suicide bomber detonates his explosives inside the Sbarro pizzeria, killing 15 people, including 15-year-old Australian-Israeli student Malka Chana (Malki) Roth. Roth's parents, Arnold and Frimet, established in her honour Keren Malki, a foundation that provides



families of children with severe disabilities in Israel with the means to care for their children at home. During the Second Intifada, which lasted from September 2000 until December 2005, 1,100 Israelis were killed in terror attacks, prompting Israel to build a physical separation barrier between the West Bank and Israel to make it harder for terrorists to infiltrate the country. (Credit: Avi Ohayun/GPO)

13. April 7, 2011: For the first time, Israel activates its new Iron Dome anti-rocket defence system against Hamas rockets from Gaza. The incredible technology, which had been described by its creators as "stopping a bullet with another bullet," was pioneered by Rafael Advanced Defence Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries. According to the military requirements specified, what was needed

was a system that could continuously scan all of Gaza, detect a rocket the instant it was fired, determine within seconds if it was going to hit a populated area and, if so, knock it out of the sky with its own missile. The project went from theoretical idea to field tests within four years. While not 100% effective, Iron Dome has greatly weakened the ability of Hamas and Hezbollah



to terrorise Israeli communities and has avoided loss of life that in the past might have led to costly escalations and wars. Today, Israel is field testing a system to complement Iron Dome and destroy incoming rockets with a simple but ultra-powerful laser beam — one of several Israel-developed and produced interception technologies that together form perhaps the world's most sophisticated multi-layered anti-projectile defence system. (Credit Kobi Gideon/GPO)

#### 14. February 10, 2016:

Then-US Ambassador Dan Shapiro takes a ride in a selfdriving car equipped with Israeli start-up Mobileye's road-sensing technology. On March 13, 2017, the tech gi-



ant Intel bought Mobileye for US\$15.2 billion in a sale that marked the biggest acquisition of any Israeli tech company in history. (Credit: US Embassy, Jerusalem)

15. September 15,

2020: With the assistance of the United States, Israel signs the historic Abraham Accords with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates on the South Lawn of the White



House. Building on the success of peace agreements of the past, the normalisation agreements in the Abraham Accords are aimed at facilitating Israel's integration and acceptance in the region — a warming of person-to-person ties and economic and security collaboration. They heralded a move away from a mindset of conflict management to a bright future of development and innovation in an erawhen the world will be moving away from fossil fuels and into a green-powered tomorrow. From left, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, US President Donald Trump, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the United Arab Emirates Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyani. (Credit: White House/Shealah Craighead)

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## DANCING THROUGH HISTORY – A LOVE STORY

**Gil Troy** 

On April 26, everyone toasting Israel's 75th anniversary by the Jewish calendar — will be dancing through history.



The dancers who celebrated israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948 were in effect celebrating a major turning point in the long history of the Jewish people (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

The ancient love story between the Jewish people and their homeland, the Land of Israel, goes back 3,500 years to the Bible. The romantic story of Zionism reaches back a century-and-a-half. And the history of the State of Israel chronicles one of the few functional post-colonial democracies to emerge after the Second World War.

Although history has not always been kind to the Jewish people, the ongoing Israel adventure feels downright miraculous.

Invoking the Bible to explain a small hi-tech democracy that has generated 92 of the world's nearly 1,200 billion-dollar unicorn start-ups may seem strange — but that's the Jewish story. Beyond revealing the Jews' deep roots in the Promised Land, the Bible explains the unique nature of Jewish identity.

Judaism is a religion, but the Jews are a people, too. That unique intertwining can produce non-religious Jews and a Jewish state that is a democracy, not a theocracy.

Jews lived for centuries without worrying that they did not fit conveniently into Western categories. They were Jews, fusing their national, religious, cultural and ethnic identities — praying toward Zion, Jerusalem, the Jewish people's forever-capital, wherever they lived.

Tragically, in the centuries following the Romans' destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Jews worried about much more than labelling. The vast majority living under Christian monarchies in Europe, the expanding minority living under Muslim rule in the Middle East and

North Africa, and the smaller minority still living in the land the Romans renamed "Palestine", were often busy fighting persecution and poverty, while building a robust religious and ethical civilisation.

Starting in the 1700s, modernity mugged Europe's Jews. The reason-based intellectual movement (the Enlightenment) and the freedom-based political emancipation movements freed some Jews from the ghetto. The few Jews who assimilated desired equality, acceptance and dignity, not just prosperity.

Alas, a renewed Jew-hatred shattered their hopes. Buoyed by the new, scientific-sounding term "antisemitism," Jew-haters proved that this ancient hatred was also the most plastic of hatreds — adjustable, artificial and often toxic. By the late-1800s, "the Jews" were bashed as communist and capitalist, as too rich and too poor, for fitting in too well and for standing out too much.

Zionism was one of many Jewish responses to these shocks. While Abraham and Sarah spawned the Zionist idea

that the Jews are a people with ties to a particular homeland, Theodor Herzl founded the formal Zionist movement.

An assimilated Viennese journalist born in 1860, with piercing eyes and a striking black beard, Herzl embodied the Jews' faith in modernisation. In 1895, Herzl claimed he had his Zionist epiphany. At the time, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish-French artillery officer, was being tried for treason — falsely. Rather than attacking him individually



Theodor Herzl provided the impetus for a Jewish "leap of hope" (Image: GPO)

as a traitor, the Parisian crowds yelled, "Death to the Jews." Herzl realised that without a Jewish state, Jews would never be respected.

In truth, this *Judenfrage* — the Jewish question — had haunted Herzl since university. The Dreyfus Affair allowed his inner playwright to plot out the Jewish people's Zionist journey in three acts: we tried to fit in; they rejected us; we became Jewish nationalists, seeking to rebuild our





historic homeland in Palestine.

In 1897, Theodor Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress. This launched the formal Zionist movement, after millennia of longing, centuries of prayers and decades of other attempts. After too many paralysing leaps of faith, Jews finally took a leap of hope.

"Judaism is a religion, but the Jews are a people, too. That unique intertwining can produce non-religious Jews and a Jewish state that is a democracy, not a theocracy"

This was Herzl's great gift to his people. Hope inspired downtrodden Jews to believe that tomorrow would be better — while challenging them to roll up their sleeves to make it happen. And dreaming made Zionism more than anti-antisemitism. Zionism sought to rebuild the

Jewish soul. Fittingly, the Jewish national anthem became "Hatikvah" – "The Hope".

Beyond providing a script pointing to redemption – return home! – Herzl launched intense diplomatic initiatives. When he died at 44 in 1904, after only nine active years as a Zionist, the Ottoman Turks still controlled Palestine.

By 1917, Zionist diplomacy had its great breakthrough. One leading Zionist, Chaim Weizmann, helped develop synthetic acetone, which was used for launching British shells. This positioned him to explain Zionism to British leaders.

When one aristocrat wondered why the Jews insisted on Palestine "when there are so many undeveloped countries you could settle in more conveniently," Weizmann replied: "That is like my asking why you drove 20 miles to visit your mother last Sunday when there are so many old ladies living on your street." Weizmann understood that your home offers identity, not just shelter.

Great Britain recognised the Jewish right to a homeland in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration was the most dramatic affirmation of the Jewish national movement's legitimacy. The 1920 San Remo Conference formalised

Britain's mandate over Palestine. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George told Weizmann: "Now you have got your start, it all depends on you."

As the British ruled a truncated Palestine, having hived off Transjordan, Jews trickled home. This immigration upset some local Arabs — even as wandering Arabs settled there, too, attracted by British order and prosperity. Yet a series of clashes sharpened Palestinian Arab identity against "Palestinian Jews".

By the 1930s, some British officials deemed the territory ungovernable. Talk of partitioning Palestine into Jewish and Arab entities grew. Unfortunately, so did British efforts to appease Arab rejectionists by imposing harsh immigration quotas — just as Adolf Hitler emerged.

The Nazi murder of six million Jews confirmed what Theodor Herzl and other Zionists had said decades earlier: the Jews were a people, and they needed a state on their own homeland.

On Nov. 29, 1947, the United Nations, which was founded to secure a post-war peace, agreed. Remarkably, both the Soviet Union and the United States approved Resolution 181, which recognised the Jewish right to a homeland in Palestine, but partitioned the land into a Jewish state and an undefined Arab entity.

Most Jews accepted this painful compromise. Palestine Jewry's provisional leader, David Ben-Gurion, accepted "half a loaf" as better than none, especially to a people reeling from so much loss. Spurred by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, Arab extremists rejected any compromise — and targeted Arab moderates. This rejectionism, historian Efraim Karsh argues, was the true "betrayal" of Palestinians.

Civil war erupted as the British prepared to leave in May 1948. Back in November, as most Jews rejoiced, Ben-Gurion worried. He knew that many of the young people who were dancing with joy would not survive the upcoming war. And he knew how much needed to be done.

His to-do list included a government, a constitution, an anthem, a name, a capital, a currency, a budget, airports, a police force, an army. After decades of infrastructure building, population growth and ideological development,

With compliments from





the Zionist movement was ready.

By May, with more than 1,000 Jews dead and chaos spreading, many advised the Zionists to delay declaring independence. America's Secretary of State, Gen. George Marshall, urged US President Harry Truman not to alienate the Arab world by recognising a clearly doomed Jewish state.



In declaring Israeli independence on May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion affirmed both the Jewish people's biblical roots, and a commitment to democracy which has stood the test of time (Image: GPO)

Zionist legend has one analyst warning Ben-Gurion that the Jews had no weapons, no bullets, no oil. Ben-Gurion responded, "But we have hope." Ben-Gurion loved defying naysayers. When a committee of experts concluded that the desert town of Beersheba would never grow much past its 28,000 inhabitants, he replied: "Appoint a new committee." Today, more than 650,000 people live in the booming metropolitan area.

The provisionary council debated whether to declare a state. When Chaim Weizmann heard that after 12 hours, Ben-Gurion won and the state would be declared, Weizmann snapped: "What are they waiting for, the idiots." Two-thousand years of waiting was long enough.

At 4pm on May 14, 1948, shortly before the Jewish Sabbath, David Ben-Gurion read the Israeli Declaration of Independence in the Tel Aviv Museum of Art — today known as Independence Hall. Ben-Gurion affirmed the Jews' biblical roots — and their pressing, legitimate right to establish a state in their homeland. Launching this Jewish democracy, Ben-Gurion offered "equality" to all the state's "inhabitants", despite the looming war.

Seven Arab armies attacked. Starting with only a population of 600,000, Israel would lose 6,000 people. By the 1949 truce, Israel had secured more defensible borders, while 700,000 Arabs fled their homes — some voluntarily, awaiting victory; others in fear.

Israel's War of Independence established this old-new state. Despite the war's distractions, Ben-Gurion made another fateful decision: overruling his economic advisers, again, he welcomed every Jew who wished to immigrate. Arab hostility throughout the Muslim lands and North Africa soon triggered an exodus of 850,000 Jews from Arab countries. These Jewish refugees became Israeli citizens on arrival — stabilising the state the Arabs had tried to destroy.

Seventy-five years after these epoch-making events, it's important to remember that life in Israel has often been stressful. Since 1948, Israel has had to overcome numerous challenges.

While full peace remains elusive, since Israel won the Yom Kippur War in 1973, no Arab army has attacked it. The once-monolithic Israeli-Arab conflict is now a series of conflicts, largely due to peace treaties signed with Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco.

Along the way, Israel solved its water shortage, developed from a poor, primitive economy into a hi-tech behemoth, and ended its often vulgar and macho clubby culture. Although bigotry never fully disappears, the initial hostility against the Jews from Arab lands, the "*Mizrachim*", has abated, and Arab-Israelis, who were under military rule until 1966, have now built a thriving middle class with full legal rights.

Ultimately, the instability that had Israelis before the 1967 war joking that the last person fleeing the country should "turn off the lights" at the airport, is no more.

Zionism can also toast seven miraculous Israeli achievements. First, after millennia of homelessness, the Jews reestablished sovereignty over their homeland. Second, Israel has integrated three million immigrants since 1948, mostly refugees fleeing from persecution in post-Nazi Europe, the Arab lands, Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union.

Third, the Jews returned to history, as full participants, sometimes facing complex dilemmas, but no longer victims. Fourth, Israel's Western-style capitalist democracy maintains a strong Jewish flavour, expressed in the holidays, the traditions and the Jewish national culture, while guaranteeing all citizens equal rights.

Fifth, Herzl's vision of "Altneuland," an old-new land, balances traditional values with trend-setting culture.

Sixth, the once-dormant Hebrew language has become alive again. And finally, for all its challenges, Israel revolutionised the Jews' image — and self-image — worldwide.

Israel remains a project-in-formation. Israel is one of the world's few democracies, guaranteeing regular votes and permanent rights to every citizen. And for most Jews, Israel remains a favourite destination, a point of pride and their greatest collective endeavour in the world today.

Gil Troy is a 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, the inaugural publication of the Library of the Jewish People (www.theljp.org). © National Post (national-post.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



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# Reaching a crescendo

Now what for Israel's judicial mayhem?

#### **Amotz Asa-El**

With the Israel Philharmonic behind him and more than 2,000 concertgoers in front of him, conductor Lahav Shani told the audience, "We will soon play all the music we have prepared for you," but before that he spoke several lines that were not part of the repertoire.

"We are anxious about the future of our state," said the 34-year-old maestro to the audience's applause, and went on: "Our democracy is a miracle, the cultural life we have built here is a miracle, and we should by no means lose what we have built." And after, he added "I hope we quickly find a solution and unity," the 50 musicians on stage began playing the national anthem, with the crowd rising and joining spontaneously in what sounded like a mixture of prayer, protest and hope.

It was but a sliver of what has been unfolding in Israel over recent weeks — the most extensive protest movement the Jewish state has ever seen.

Fearing that the Government's plan to overhaul the judicial system is a gateway to autocracy or "illiberal democracy", hundreds of thousands of Israelis

have been taking to the streets for 11 straight weeks, as of this writing. Centred in Tel Aviv, but spread over more than 50 locations nationwide, the weekly rallies' attendances have been growing steadily and recently exceeded 250,000, according to *Channel 13* TV.

The demonstrators carry Israeli flags, thus creating blue-and-white forestations that transmit the protest movement's first message, which is that its motivation is patriotic, and thus the opposite of the nihilism with which some cabinet ministers have tried to associate it.

The protests' organisers are avoiding breaking the law, but some demonstrators have tried spontaneously to block

traffic on Tel Aviv's main artery, the Ayalon Highway. In one case, police stopped and arrested an angry anti-protest driver who appeared to be intending to drive at high speed into the protestors on the highway.

While friction builds on the streets, the protest has been joined by broad swathes of Israel's economic, cultural and academic elites, as well as pillars of the defence establishment.

Protestations like maestro Shani's have been joined by novelists, playwrights, and performers. Some, like singers Hava Alberstein and Aviv Gefen and author Etgar Keret, showed up at the street rallies carrying signs they made themselves, like Gefen's "maybe it's all over," a line from a famous Hebrew song.

Warnings by more than 200 economists, including Nobel laureates and former governors of the Bank of

Israel, that the reform might spark capital flight, were underscored by current Governor Prof Amir Yaron. In an interview with *CNN*, he termed the Government's move "hasty," and said it lacks the broad agreement it requires, and might discourage foreign investors and also cause a brain drain.

Even more ominously, Nadav Argaman, a former head of Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, said the reform might destroy Israel. "The car is racing to the abyss," he warned in an extensive interview on *Channel 12* TV, "Bibi (Netanyahu) is the navigator and the way has been lost."

Argaman, who headed the secret service for seven years — all under Netanyahu, who also appointed him — said he feared for Israel's social cohesion. "If these laws pass Israel might arrive at the brink of dictatorship," he said, and people in the military,

the Shin Bet, and the Mossad spy agency "might conclude a dictatorship is evolving" and thus "choose to leave their organisations."

Days after the interview, 180 reservist pilots and navigators, all civilians who give the air force one workday every week, reportedly told their units they would not show up for the upcoming week's training session. So did 650 cyber warriors and other special operations officers.

Argaman's first-ever interview was followed by an even more improbable public statement by Brig-Gen. (res.) Zeev Snir, who headed the Israel Atomic Energy Committee which oversees Israel's nuclear activity. Snir, who also





The anti-judicial reform rallies continue every week, with huge numbers. Most protests have been law-abiding, but there have been repeated attempts to block Tel Aviv's Ayalon Highway (Images: Wikimedia Commons)



served under Netanyahu and was his appointee, had never spoken out publicly about anything.

Now, however, he told the mass-circulation Yediot Aharonot newspaper that the judicial reform is "a political coup" that destroys democracy's checks and balances, and will turn Israel into "a Third World country." Snir then also wrote a public letter to Netanyahu, warning his former boss that his Government's "arrogance" is risking Israel's very survival.

Snir and Argaman are but two of a vast collection of major figures who enlisted to fight the planned judicial overhaul, including retired Supreme Court justices, the CEOs of major banks, former chiefs of the IDF and the Mossad, and all ten living former commanders of the Israeli air force, from Amikam Norkin, 56, to Dan Tolkowski, 102.

Most of these people would be ready to accept a compromise formula that will allow constitutional legislation to be passed via a broad consensus. There have been several such formulas offered by assorted jurists, most notably one crafted by President Isaac Herzog, and presented by him in a dramatic televised address in which he warned of the danger of civil war, called any such violence "a red line", and vowed: "I won't let it happen."

the Knesset's 120 legislators, or 70 in two consecutively elected legislatures, to pass; that the Supreme Court justices' effective veto power over the appointment of new justices will be removed; that ministerial appointments will not be subject to any "reasonableness" standard; that



Israeli President Herzog presented his compromise proposal on March 15. It was knocked back by PM Netanyahu and his government within the hour (Images: GPO/ Flickr)

equality before the law and freedom of expression will be explicitly made constitutional rights (they are currently only "inferred" from other legislated rights); and that rulings by the attorney-general will continue to be binding.

als that judicial annulment of legislations will require the

support of at least two-thirds of Supreme Court justices;

that constitutional legislation will not be subject to judi-

cial overrule, but will require the support of at least 80 of

Conspicuously missing from the presidential plan is any mention of the override clause, which in the Government's plan would allow the Knesset to annul any court decision by a simple majority vote. Herzog also sought to appease ultra-Orthodox demands by suggesting that the Court will be forbidden from overriding legislation relating to deferring or cancelling the enlistment of ultra-Orthodox men in the IDF – the primary reason the ultra-Orthodox parties want the override clause in the first place is to prevent the Court from invalidating such legisla-

tion, as it has in the past.

On the day of March 15, after Herzog's TV address was announced but before it was delivered, it was widely assumed that a deal of some sort had been struck, and the ordeal over the judicial reform proposals was coming to an end. Instead, hardly ten minutes after Herzog's dramatic presentation of his proposal, Netanyahu flatly rejected it, saying it "perpetuated the existing situation."

Netanyahu's main misgiving was reportedly that Herzog's proposal does not grant the coalition an absolute majority on the committee that appoints judges.

Netanyahu's game-plan now is unclear. Some reports say he is eager to return the genie to the bottle and was ready to accept Herzog's proposal, but faced a resignation threat from Justice Minister Yariv Levin - the judicial reform's ideological mastermind and political godfather.

In any case, Netanyahu's rejection of Herzog's ideas quickly returned the masses to the streets, despite unseasonable rain. The demonstrators' resolve underscored recognition among some Likud lawmakers that the reform plan must somehow change, lest events take a turn that everyone will regret.

One Likud lawmaker, Knesset Economics Committee Chairman David Bitan, called on Netanyahu to halt

fter having previously presented broad guidelines for negotiation on Feb. 12, which this column discussed last month, Herzog produced a detailed blueprint for a deal on March 15.

Considering the Israeli presidency's largely ceremonial role, it was a highly unusual move, reflecting Herzog's sense of alarm and frustration in the face of the failure of the political combatants to strike a deal.

The Herzog roadmap includes, among others, propos-





the reform legislation and seek dialogue over an alternative. Before that, Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Yuli Edelstein chose to miss the plenary vote on the first reading of the reform package's first piece of legislation. It was a clear message of displeasure with the direction of events. Even more meaningfully, there are reports that Defence Minister Yoav Gallant has privately told Netanyahu to seek compromise, suggesting he would not be able to continue in office if the PM did not.

As the plan's elements approach their second and third readings, possibly before the Passover holiday which begins on April 5, the pair of dissenters might be joined by several others — and thus torpedo the whole judicial reform package. Yet such a scenario remains, for now, improbable.

A more likely scenario is that the Government will dilute and abridge its plan, in the hope of both assuaging its critics and saving face. The first such attempt came on March 19, when the Government said that, for the time being, it would only pass a law to allow the coalition to control the appointment of the successors to the next two retiring supreme court justices, and delay the rest of the package until later this year. The opposition immediately rejected these proposals, saying they were a trick designed to take the wind out of the protest movement.

Whichever way all this goes, as Israelis sit down for their Passover Seder meal, which celebrates ancient Israel's liberation from slavery, millions of Israelis will likely be feeling that an unpredicted political storm has tarnished this festival of spring.

## IRANIAN PROXIES THREATEN DURING RAMADAN

#### Yoni Ben Menachem

Sometime on March 11 or 12, a terrorist infiltrated from Lebanon into Israel's Galilee and launched a bomb attack in the Megiddo area using a sophisticated explosive device. These actions were major intelligence and operational failures for the IDF. Israel's political echelons should have ordered a military response; the lack of such a response erodes Israel's deterrence.

It is believed that the terrorist who infiltrated Israeli territory was a Palestinian who belonged to Hamas forces in southern Lebanon and was trained by Hezbollah experts in how to activate the sophisticated, shaped explosive device. Hamas is reportedly recruiting in the Tyre and Sidon refugee camps.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah knew about the infil-

tration operation and approved it. It was a joint operation by Hezbollah and Hamas even though the two organisations took no responsibility for the attack.

According to intelligence data from various sources, Israeli security officials assess that over the month of Ramadan, which runs from March 23 until April 21, there will be an unprecedented conflict with Palestinian terrorist factions on several fronts that may deteriorate into a military conflict even more acute than the major conflict in the Gaza Strip in May 2021.

Public signs also testify to this likelihood: Hamas and Islamic Jihad have increased the incitement against Israel in recent weeks and launched a campaign of psychological warfare to weaken Israeli morale.

#### HAMAS TERRORIST CHIEF'S WARNING

Saleh al-Arouri, the Vice Chairman of the Hamas movement and head of its military wing in the West Bank, and the man who coordinates Hamas' activity with Hezbollah in Beirut, said in an interview on the official Hamas website on March 14 that the events to come will be very difficult for the "occupation and its settlers." The "resistance" in the West Bank is in a state of escalation and it is diversifying its weapons, he added.

Marwan Issa, the shadowy deputy commander of Hamas' military wing in the Gaza Strip, hinted at the possibility of massive rocket fire from the Strip towards Israel. He told the *Al-Aqsa* channel on March 15 that the "political project in the West Bank has ended; the enemy brought the Oslo Accords to an end; and the coming days will be eventful."

Issa also said a political solution in the West Bank "is a thing of the past... Any escalation in the Al-Aqsa Mosque area will result in a reaction in the Gaza Strip; Hamas in Gaza will not [just] be an observer to events in Jerusalem.

"The desire to commit suicide among the [Muslim] residents of the West Bank is unprecedented, and the state of resistance in the West Bank is excellent. So is the state of national unity in the face of the Occupation," Issa claimed.

#### THE IRANIAN CONNECTION

A spokesman for the military wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) also threatened Israel with a new intifada and a conflict it had never experienced before.

The accumulation of these statements by the heads of the terrorist organisations, and intelligence information from Israel, indicate an impending escalation. The security meeting initiated by the United States in Aqaba on Feb. 26, 2023, failed, and the aftermath of the next meeting, held at Sharm el-Sheik in Sinai on March 19, remains uncertain. It is very doubtful whether Israel will be able to stop the approaching tsunami of terrorism since this is a strategic decision by several terrorist organisations acting in coordination with Iran.





Palestinian Islamic Jihad fighters display their intentions towards Israel at a rally in Gaza City, October 2022 (Image: Anas Mohammed/Shutterstock)

Meanwhile, terrorist cells are showing an increasing use of explosive devices in the West Bank, and attempts to employ them also within the territory of Israel itself. The Shin Bet has recently foiled several attacks using explosive devices by Palestinians from the West Bank, who were recruited by Hamas operatives from the Gaza Strip through social media networks.

According to officials in the military wing of Hamas, the shooting attack on Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv on March 9 marked a decision by the organisation to resume sponsoring attacks within Israel.

#### HEZBOLLAH'S TIGHTENING COORDINATION WITH HAMAS AND ISLAMIC JIHAD

According to Israeli security sources, Hezbollah Secretary-General Nasrallah increased his coordination meetings in Beirut with Ziyad al-Nakhala, the Secretary-General of PIJ, and with Saleh Al-Arouri, the head of the military wing of Hamas, in the lead up to Ramadan. An agreement was reached between Hezbollah, Hamas, PIJ, and the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to increase terrorist activities in the coming days.

Nasrallah predicted in mid-March that Israel will collapse even before it marks its 80th Independence Day. The internal dispute in Israel and the wave of protest over the

legal reform issue have increased the feeling among terrorist organisations that Israel is on the verge of disintegration and that this is the time to increase the pressure on it through terrorist acts.

Despite the hoopla at the time, the US-brokered agreement signed in October 2022 on the division of the Israel-Lebanon maritime boundary — designed to allow Lebanon to explore for offshore energy resources — has not reduced Hezbollah's motivation to commit terrorist acts against Israel. Moreover, it allowed the Hamas organisation to strengthen its military infrastructure in southern Lebanon and in the refugee camps in Tyre and Sidon.

Hamas officials say that the attacks on Israel in the coming days will come from all directions, according to the doctrine of "unification of fronts", including rocket fire from southern Lebanon and infiltration operations from southern Lebanon into Israeli territory.

According to security officials in Israel, coordinating all this malevolent activity is Iran, which in the past year has smuggled arms and funds through Jordan to the northern West Bank and into the hands of the terrorist organisations there.

The "axis of resistance" led by Iran is preparing for a major escalation over the month of Ramadan. Israel is preparing seriously for a scenario that may be more violent than the military conflict that took place in May 2021.

Yoni Ben Menachem, a veteran Arab affairs and diplomatic commentator for Israeli radio and television, is a senior Middle East analyst for the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (JCPA). He served as Director General and Chief Editor of the Israel Broadcasting Authority. © JCPA (jcpa.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

## MISEDUCATION LEADS TO TERROR TEENS

#### **Enia Krivine and Jonathan Conricus**

Within a few weeks in January and February, three teenage boys carried out terror attacks against Israelis in Israel's capital.

What is motivating children to pick up deadly weapons? The official Palestinian Authority (PA) school curriculum demonises Jews and promotes martyrdom.

In late January, 13-year-old Mahmoud Aliwat, from the eastern Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan, ambushed a small group of Israeli pedestrians outside of Jerusalem's Old City, shooting and injuring two.

Then, just a few hours apart on February 13, a 14-yearold Palestinian boy stabbed a Jewish teenager in the Old







Eighth-grade textbook teaching reading comprehension through a violent story promoting suicide bombings. (Image: IMPACT-se report, 'The 2020-21 Palestinian School Curriculum, Grades 1-12,' May 2021)

City, wounding him lightly, while a 13-year-old Palestinian stabbed an Israeli police officer at a checkpoint near the village of Shuafat. The officer was subsequently hit by friendly fire and died from his wounds. Each teen terrorist was apprehended and will stand trial in Israel.

Impact-SE, an international research and policy organisation that monitors education around the world, has done extensive research into the Palestinian Authority curriculum. The PA published its reformed curriculum for grades one to 11 in 2016 and 2017 and, according to the Impact-SE research, it is saturated with incitement to violence, glorification of terror against Jews and Israelis and promises of heavenly rewards for heroes who commit acts of martyrdom.

The curriculum describes Israel as satanic and is rife with antisemitic tropes including Jewish manipulation of global events. It praises Dalal Mughrabi, the woman who took part in the murders of 38 Israelis, including 13 children, on an Israeli bus in 1978, as a "female Arab jihad warrior." Palestinian children are taught to sacrifice themselves for their homeland and "redeem it with blood."

The above child terrorists, all residents of Israel's capital, were likely victims of this kind of miseducation. The Palestinian Authority (PA) school curriculum is taught to more than two million Palestinian children in Gaza, the West Bank and the vast majority of eastern Jerusalem schools. In PA textbooks, Israel doesn't exist, peace isn't even an option, and the only way to obtain fame is through jihad. It is no surprise that these children chose to emulate the acts of terrorism glorified in their classrooms, taking the violence to the streets of the city where they were indoctrinated.

Jerusalem is a mixed city made up of mostly Arabs and Jews, with Arabs comprising 38% of the total population. After Israel expelled the Jordanian Army from eastern Jerusalem in 1967, Israel doubled the municipal boundaries of the capital. Its jurisdiction included about a dozen Arab towns, villages and refugee camps housing a few tens

of thousands of Arabs, located north, east and south of the Jewish neighbourhoods of Jerusalem.

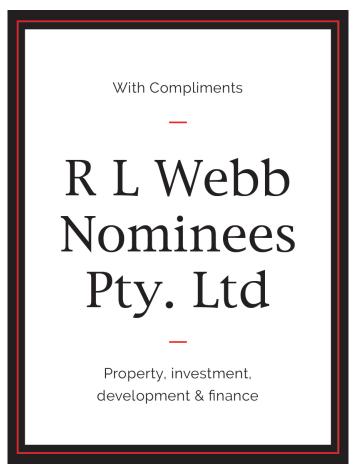
Today, more than 340,000 Arabs live in these neighbourhoods, have Israeli resident permits and are able to move almost unhindered across Jerusalem and all other parts of Israel. Most work in western Jerusalem and are part of the economic fabric of the city.

With Ramadan — historically a period of increased tensions between Arabs and Jews — beginning, the situation is extremely volatile. The past several months have seen a consistent rise in Palestinian terror attacks, both by established terror organisations like Hamas and Fatah and by unaffiliated youth. So far in 2023, these attacks have killed 15 Israelis and one Ukrainian national. Approximately 80 Palestinians — mostly gunmen but also some civilians — were killed in the same period.

On his recent trip to Israel, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken touted the "enduring goal of Palestinians and Israelis enjoying equal measures of freedom, security, opportunity, justice and dignity." Washington could contribute to those goals by unequivocally demanding the PA radically reform its curriculum so that Palestinian schools become a place where children can develop skills, humane values and hope.

Without reform in Palestinian schools, child terrorists will tragically become more of a norm and less of an exception.

Jonathan Conricus is an adviser to the Foundation for Defense of





Democracies, focusing on the Middle East, terrorism, media and information warfare. Enia Krivine is the senior director of the Israel Program and the National Security Network at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

# WHAT'S BEHIND THE RIYADH-TEHERAN RECONCILIATION?

#### **Yaakov Lappin**

The March 10 announcement by Saudi Arabia and Iran regarding their re-establishment of diplomatic rela-

tions after a seven-year severance jolted not only the Middle East but also the United States, after it was revealed that China played a key role as mediator.

While some in Israel quickly pinned the decision on a Saudi perception of Israeli weakness due to the country's ongoing domestic political crisis, others took a different view.

Prof. Eyal Zisser, Vice Rector of Tel Aviv University and Chair in Contemporary History of the

Middle East, told *JNS* that the Saudi decision was actually about Riyadh's perception of Washington, not Jerusalem.

"I believe that Israel was not a factor in the Saudi decision. Saudi Arabia in any case is not counting on Israel to protect it. It had hoped that the United States would protect it, but the Americans turned out to be hesitant, following the 2019 unmanned aerial vehicle attacks on Saudi Arabia, the UAVs launched against oil tankers and oil facilities," said Zisser.

While Saudi Arabia, a leader of the Sunni Arab bloc, remains adversarial to Shi'ite Iran and does not trust it, neither does it seek war with the Islamic Republic, said Zisser.

"From the start it was clear that at some point, reconciliation would arrive," he added.

Saudi Arabia is signalling its distrust of Washington through this move, and does not view the United States as an ally it can rely on for defence, according to Zisser. This assessment, he said, is strengthened by the fact that the Saudis did not consult with the Americans prior to their decision to re-establish ties with Iran. It is clear that the Iranians and Saudis have been engaged in talks for a long

time, according to Zisser.

He also noted that "the decision does not have practical implications for Israel – because if Saudi Arabia wants to normalise relations with Israel, it will do so."

The United Arab Emirates, for example, has diplomatic ties with Iran despite having normalised ties with Israel, meaning that Saudi Arabia can follow the same precedent if it decided to, he said.

However, he added, "What is clear is that this does not improve Israel's standing and situation."

But Israel's power projection was being harmed much more severely by the country's domestic situation, he said.

"The sense that something bad is occurring to us, and the fact that even the US Administration has reservations [about Israel's stability]," he said, "in my view, projects onto Israel's image. But everyone here is going with their interests, so I assume that Saudi Arabia will continue to speak with us, though not at the pace we envisaged."

In responding to the apparent Saudi-Iranian détente, a coordinated American-Israeli response would be the preferable scenario, but these days, that would be difficult to pull off, said Zisser.

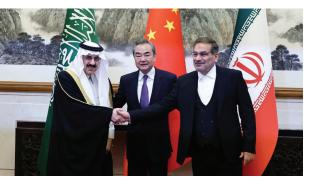
"There is a problem surrounding the question of the American level of commitment to defending the regional states. That's not tied to Israel, but rather to what the US views as its objective in the world. At the

moment, the Middle East is not at the top of the American priority list," said Zisser. "What needs to be ensured is that beyond the formal relations, Saudi Arabia continues to be on the right side."

According to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), Iranian state media reported that the agreement with the Saudis emerged after a week-long meeting in Beijing between Ali Shamkhani, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Saudi National Security Adviser Musaad bin Mohammed Al Aiban, and Wang Yi, China's most senior diplomat.

"Renewed Iran-Saudi ties as a result of Chinese mediation is a lose-lose-lose for American interests," said FDD CEO Mark Dubowitz. "It demonstrates that the Saudis don't trust Washington to have their back, that Iran sees an opportunity to peel away American allies to end its international isolation, and it establishes China as the majordomo of Middle Eastern power politics."

Richard Goldberg, FDD senior adviser, described the move as the "ultimate hedge for Riyadh as a direct result of US policy. Hedge against a lifting of sanctions and a return



Chinese diplomat Wang Yi (middle), Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (right), and Saudi Minister of State Musaad bin Mohammed Al Aiban announce the normlisation deal in Beijing on March 10 (Image: Xinhua)



to a nuclear deal [with Iran]. Hedge against a US pullback from the region by entering a new China-brokered Middle East architecture."

China, a major importer of oil and petroleum products from the Sunni Arab countries that compose the Gulf Cooperation Council, and from Iran, has taken advantage of Saudi fears of a gradual US withdrawal from the region, FDD said in a statement.

It noted that in 2021, the US State Department removed Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi terrorist organisation, which fired missiles and suicide UAVs at Saudi Arabia for years prior to an April 2022 ceasefire, from America's foreign terrorist organisations list, and pressured Riyadh to end the war in Yemen.

In February, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and a large Iranian delegation visited Beijing, where they signed 20 cooperation agreements on trade, agriculture and renewable energy.

Hours before announcing its agreement with Iran, Saudi Arabia revealed its terms for normalisation with Israel, according to a report on March 9 by *TheWall Street Journal*. The Saudi proposal asks for security guarantees from the United States, assistance in developing a civilian nuclear program, and fewer restrictions on US arms sales to Riyadh.

"With its offer to the United States, Riyadh appears to be leaving the door open for a stronger US-Saudi relationship but is making clear, by pursuing a hedge with China, that they will not be waiting around," said FDD.

Yaakov Lappin is an Israel-based military affairs correspondent and analyst. He is the in-house analyst at the Miryam Institute, a research associate at the Alma Research and Education Centre, and a research associate at the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University. © Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

## ABSENT "SNAPBACK", ISRAEL IS THE LAST HOPE ON A NUCLEAR IRAN

#### **Richard Goldberg**

n February, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu declared that Europe "identifies more with the Israeli position" on Iran's nuclear program, a conclusion he reached after meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. But as Teheran enriches uranium to near weap-

ons-grade purity and European powers resist triggering the snapback of UN sanctions, a dim reality comes into view that only one country — Israel — has the political will and military capability to prevent the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran.

The issue of "snapback" is a complicated one, but essential to better understand the bleak reality Israel now faces. Snapback is the name for a mechanism that can be used to restore all international restrictions and sanctions on Iran that were lifted by the UN Security Council alongside the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ("the nuclear deal"). UN Security Council Resolution 2231 replaced all prior resolutions on Iran — removing the international demand that Iran halt all enrichment activities, striking the outright UN prohibition on Iranian ballistic missile testing, and establishing a series of expiration dates on other key international restrictions.

In 2020, the UN conventional arms embargo on Iran expired. This October, a missile embargo on Iran will expire, despite Teheran's provision of drones — and potential future transfer of missiles — to Russia to attack Ukraine. Nuclear restrictions sunset soon after, eventually legitimising Iran's production of weapons-grade enriched uranium and perfection of missile systems capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

But UNSCR 2231 came with one condition: If Iran ever violated its own commitments under the nuclear deal, any party to the agreement could notify the Security Council and restore all prior sanctions and restrictions in 30 days. This process is called "snapback", and France – like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany – has the individual power and prerogative to trigger it.

In January 2020, after Iran began producing lowenriched uranium at its underground Fordow nuclear site, the so-called "E3" of Paris, London, and Berlin initiated the nuclear deal's dispute process — a preliminary step to snapback, aimed at bringing Iran back into compliance with its commitments. But as 2020 dragged on and public polls indicated Donald Trump would likely lose re-election, Europe opted to keep the deal alive in hopes that Joe Biden's pledge to rejoin the pact would induce improved Iranian behaviour.



Iran's Natanz nuclear facility (Image: Twitter)



Once it was clear that Biden would be president, rather than reward Europe's decision to maintain the nuclear deal's sunsets, Iran began a two-year undeterred push toward nuclear threshold status.

In January 2021, Iran began enriching uranium to 20% purity — the threshold for highly enriched uranium — at its Natanz nuclear facility. Rather than continue his predecessor's maximum pressure campaign, President Biden pulled back economic pressure and offered to lift US sanctions if Iran returned to compliance with the nuclear deal. Teheran responded by producing 60% enriched uranium at Natanz — then 20% at Fordow, and finally 60% at Fordow by November. At any point, the E3 could have moved forward with the snapback process it started in January 2020, but no party did. Instead, Iran was allowed to amass larger and larger stockpiles of high and low enriched uranium — enough to produce "several" weapons, according to the UN's top nuclear watchdog.

Neither the E3 nor Washington seemed disturbed enough by Iran's decision to suspend international monitoring at a key advanced centrifuge manufacturing plant to trigger the snapback. Nor has the E3 felt the need to trigger the snapback in the face of Iran's refusal over the last four years to answer basic questions about why man-altered uranium particles were discovered at three sites previously unknown and still undeclared to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) — a fundamental breach of Iran's obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, let alone the nuclear deal.

If the recent confirmation that Iran has enriched uranium to just under the 90% weapons-grade threshold — a line many analysts long believed to be a trigger for military action — does not force Paris, Berlin, or London to complete the UN snapback process — a political action — Jerusalem should finally accept the reality that Israel will need to confront this threat on its own terms, in its own ways, and on its own timelines. There is no cavalry coming from Paris or any other Western capital.

Teheran knows the difference between deterrence and deference, between pressure and platitude. Today, it fears only one country: Israel. This tiny democracy of nine million people will soon be forced to act in a manner that preserves freedom and prosperity for every American and European threatened by the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran. The best Netanyahu can hope for is a "thank you" when the job is done.

Richard Goldberg is a senior adviser at the US-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). He previously served as the White House National Security Council's director for countering Iranian weapons of mass destruction, and as a Navy Reserve Intelligence officer. This article originally appeared in the Algemeiner (www.algemeiner.com) © FDD, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

# AMUST'S "GLOBAL ZIONISM" TROPES

#### **Ran Porat**

The Australasian Muslim Times (AMUST) does not support Israel or Zionism. On the contrary. As AIJAC has reported in the past, AMUST has, more than once, provided a platform for antisemitic views and promoted baseless and extreme anti-Israel content.

The events in Israel in early 2023 prompted *AMUST* to lash out at the Jewish state and spread more anti-Israel extremism and untruths.

AMUST's March 2023 edition covered the violent attack by the small extremist group of Jewish settlers in the Palestinian town of Huwara on February 26, burning property and cars and trapping people inside their burning homes. This reprehensible event should of course be condemned in the harshest terms. This violence followed the murder of two Israeli brothers, Hallel and Yagel Yaniv, earlier that day by Palestinians as they were driving through Huwara. Those murders of course do not in any way justify the rioting and violence against innocent Palestinians or their property, but they do put things into a context of general violence in this area.

#### **AMUST EDITORIAL: GLOBAL ZIONISM**

Yet AMUST's chief editor, Zia Ahmad, writing in the paper's editorial — titled "Palestinians amidst occupation, oppression, violence & silence" — paints these events through the lens of notorious antisemitic jargon about Jewish world domination, while denying Jewish connection to the land of Israel: "The indigenous people of Palestine... have been suffering for a long time under the global might of Zionism."

Next, Ahmad repeats the infamous lie that Israel "is in fact an apartheid society having illegally occupied the Palestinian lands for more than half a century," then bemoans that the Jewish state is "virtually enslaving its Palestinian population."

The slander continues, blaming the whole of the Jewish state for every crime committed by a Jewish person: "Israel is literally getting away with murder." Rehashing the Palestinian claim that Israel is "keeping Gaza as [an] open air prison," Ahmad ignores Hamas' iron rule over the population, the fact that many Gazans work in Israel and that Gaza residents can leave to other places via Egypt.

Ahmad goes on with a tantrum about how Israel is "terrorising the Palestinians in the West Bank under its occupation through settler violence, almost daily armed raids into houses in Palestinian towns and villages." Trying to bring his point home, he says that Israel is "killing ... anyone

who resists the occupation as well as bulldozing their family homes."

In fact, the IDF is trying to arrest heavily armed Palestinian terrorists roaming the West Bank who are responsible for deadly terror attacks against Israelis, while the Palestinian Authority fails or refuses to stop them. When the Palestinian terrorists being targeted, and other gunmen, attack the Israeli forces trying to capture them, they get killed. But in Ahmad's narrative, Israelis have no right to self-defence against Palestinian "resistance" — so seeking to arrest perpetrators is itself a crime.

Tropes about the mystical global might of the Jews

resurface when Ahmad argues that Israel is using its powerful army to assert its "hegemony" over the Middle East, by "power-blackmailing the Gulf States... into submission."

Israel supporters, says Ahmad, are part of this evil world-dominating Zionist network: "The global network of the Zionist lobby, particularly in centres of power in the West ensures that Israel's illegal

occupation, attacks and spying activities are not challenged and flouting any UN based resolutions on a regular basis."

Australian Muslim Times Chief Editor Zia Ahmad

(Screenshot)

Moreover, according to Ahmad: "The Israel lobby does not tolerate any criticism of the Israeli state in mass media, social media, academic institutions or in public and actively monitors its critics demonising them as anti-semite (sic)." Ahmad chooses to ignore the basic fact that many of those attacking Israel — including Ahmad himself — are indeed saying things that are clearly antisemitic.

And he continues: "These supporters of Israel with resources for research, finance, influence in political and academic institutions have the strength to silence any one (sic) critical of Israel targeting any tweet, Facebook comment, press articles or media statement."

Most Zionists doubtless wish they had the enormous influence and resources attributed to them in antisemitic tropes.

## PRAISE FOR ANTISEMITIC GUESTS OF ADELAIDE WRITERS'WEEK

The editorial concludes with admiration for the Palestinian-American guests of the Adelaide Writers' Week (4-9 March). Susan Abulhawa and Mohammed El-Kurd attended this year's festival despite a public outcry against them by the Jewish community for spewing antisemitism, and outrage from the Ukrainian community in Australia for Abulhawa's defence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Disregarding their toxic views, Ahmad applauds the two guests, describing them as "critically acclaimed, internationally renowned Palestinian writers."

The AMUST editorial closes with a quote from Palestin-

ian-Australian author Randa Abdel-Fattah, who describes Israel as "a brutal colonising occupying apartheid regime," which therefore one must act against with "rage, anger, poetic artistic resistance."

Another article discussing the guests of the Adelaide Writers' Week featured in *AMUST*'s March 2023 edition was a republished piece originally from The Conversation (Disclaimer: the author of this article also publishes occasionally in The Conversation). In it, Melbourne University's Dr. Denis Muller agrees that Abulhawa's tweet to "DeNazify Ukraine" is extreme, and in line with Russian propaganda, only to oddly argue, that such statements are

"essentially political" and hence should be heard.

El-Kurd's case is "more complex", says Muller — a strange view, given that El-Kurd has accused "Zionists of eating the organs of Palestinians and of lusting for Palestinian blood" and compared the State of Israel "to the Nazi regime."

On the one hand, Muller admits that El-Kurd's "accusations

are grossly offensive to a reasonable person of ordinary sensibilities, and civilised societies are rightly vigilant to challenge speech that creates any equivalence with the Holocaust." He also mentions that the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) concluded that these remarks are antisemitic.

But Muller presents "a counterview ... that El-Kurd's comments are directed at Zionists and at the State of Israel specifically, rather than at Jews as a people, and that therefore they are political in nature rather than racist. This is a distinction on which people of goodwill can differ."

Apparently, in Muller's simplistic "counterview", any antisemitic statement in which the word "Jews" is replaced with "Zionists" or "Israel" ceases to be antisemitic and becomes merely "political".

The ADL explains that "Anti-Zionism is a prejudice against the Jewish movement for self-determination and the right of the Jewish people to a homeland in the State of Israel. It may be motivated by or result in anti-Semitism, or it may create a climate in which anti-Semitism becomes more acceptable." In other words, while criticism of Israel similar to that against any other country is not antisemitic, anti-Zionism and antisemitism can be different forms of the same racism. *AMUST*'s latest edition appears to be living proof of this.

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.



# CINE FILE

# Art or Propaganda?

**Farha** 

Written and Directed by Darin Sallam; Starring: Karam Taher, Ashraf Barhom, Tala Gammoh; 91 mins; Netflix

#### **Douglas Murray**

What is the difference between art and propaganda? Well, among much else, propaganda tells you what to think. Art, meanwhile, is meant to teach you how to think—even to think for yourself. One result from that is that propaganda tells you that the world is simple, while art reflects the fact that the world is complex.

It's not a comprehensive definition, but it was one that was constantly at the back of my mind as I watched the recent Netflix-released film Farha, which has received especially rave reviews in the Arab press. For instance, Al Jazeera celebrated this film being released on Netflix. In the words of the Qatari-owned news outlet, the film "depicts the horrors of the Nakba in 1948, when Israel achieved so-called 'independence' on Palestinian land by killing more than 10,000 Palestinians and destroying more than 500 villages. Fast forward 75 years and Israeli soldiers still do not need much help looking like murderers."Thus does one of the world's most propagandistic news sites write about one of the most propagandistic films I have seen in years.

As something of a binge-watcher, I had just finished the latest season of the similarly titled Israeli series *Fauda* and was looking for new content. *Farha* 



Karam Taher as the title character in Farha (Screenshot)

has received some rave reviews, and it is interesting that this — an Arabic-language film with subtitles — should have made its way onto the world's most popular on-demand streaming service. Netflix is famously hungry for new content to keep its millions of subscribers hooked, and foreign-language films do sometimes appear on the platform. Not that they are always well received (as those who remember the *Cuties* controversy will recall).

The problem for *Farha* as a work of art is that it is not only inaccurate, and propagandistic, it is almost unbelievably simplistic. The film (which on a side-note is one of the slowest-moving films I have seen) starts with portrayals of "Palestine" before the dreaded creation of the State of Israel. To say that the depiction is saccharine is to severely understate things. The camera lens practically has Vaseline smeared over it. It concentrates on

long drawn-out depictions of a young Palestinian girl, Farha, and her friends in an utterly Edenic land. Most of the day is spent sitting on swings, feeling the land's innocent breeze rustle through the luscious trees. Occasionally time is taken out from this activity in order for characters to wander over to a fresh-water spring or waterfall and bathe in the clear-blue waters of this rich desert land.

To the extent that there is any suspense in this portion of the film, it relates to the fact that Farha wishes to attend school in the nearest city to her village. Her father, by contrast, thinks that she should stay at home and get married. Eventually the stern

yet kind-hearted father gives his daughter the permission she wishes for. Thus do we get both the popular current-day motif of the girl who wishes to improve herself and the resolution of the only minor trouble that exists in this Edenic world.

The tiniest rustles of trouble emerge. In one scene we see British soldiers withdrawing, and the children happily throwing rocks at the dastardly Brits.

This is really all the build-up we get to the possibility that all will not be well.

For soon enough the Jews arrive. At this point the film turns both to its most dramatic moment and the least dramatic treatment imaginable. As war comes to the village, Farha's father locks her in the food store cupboard of their courtyard house, promising that she will be safe there and that he will come back for her. In the hands of a more competent director this could have worked. The person in the midst of great events who cannot understand what is going on. But all we have is endless footage of Farha sitting in a darkened food store while noises go on around her. The dramatic non-build-up is interminable.

Only one thing breaks the nontension which is when the Jews enter the courtyard of Farha's family home.



By this point Farha has found a way to look through a crack in the storehouse door. The Jews search the house looking for weapons, but inexplicably do not bother to search beyond the very large and prominent locked door

from the other side of which Farha peers out.

Perhaps this is because if they were to do so the main climax of the film would be negated. The climax (spoiler alert) is this: The dastardly Jews line up the Palestinian family against a wall and for no reason form a fir-

ing squad and kill them all. One of those shot is a Palestinian mother who we have just seen giving birth. Her newborn child is not killed by the firing squad so the lead Jew orders one of the junior Jews to kill the baby.

To show that the Jews are not good people — in case this is not yet clear enough to the viewers — the lead Jew tells the junior Jew not to waste a bullet on the baby but instead to crush the baby to death with his rifle or foot. The younger Jew tries to kill the baby with his foot but in the end covers him over and leaves him to die alone. The rest of the film is Farha wandering through the wasteland that has been left behind, including the dead baby left out by the Jews to die.

started to make a list of things about which the viewer in this film will be left entirely ignorant. These include – but are not limited to – the fact that the War of Independence of 1948 was not simply an ethnic genocide carried out by Jews against Palestinians but a war of very nearly all against all. Not only Palestinians against Israelis, but a war of all of the neighbouring states on the newly created country. Although we get that one glimpse of Mandate-era British troops retreating, we have no sense of Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian, and other troops advancing. We have no sign that Palestinians or other

Arabs were involved in any atrocities or even fighting at this time.

The film fails as a work of entertainment because it is so un-entertaining. But it fails as a work of art because it is so artless. So what is it

doing on Netflix?

"The film fails as

a work of enter-

tainment because

it is so un-enter-

fails as a work of

art because it is

so artless."

taining. But it

My suspicion is that the platform has taken a certain amount of criticism because of the number of Israeli-made productions that have appeared on the platform. Dramas like *Fauda* have been among the most popular series of their kind on the platform

– something that has drawn a certain amount of negative attention in the Arab press. Though just consider the difference between what *Fauda* does and what *Farha* does.

Does *Fauda* show all Palestinians to be evil child-killers? No, absolutely not. The series repeatedly shows Palestinians, Israeli Arabs, and others who want the best for their people and advocate and work for peace. Does *Fauda* show all Israelis as suffering, put-upon victims and people who are morally untainted? No, it shows people at all levels of society who are morally complex, torn, and self-questioning.

Would *Fauda* even work as drama if it showed Israel without the Arabs as the sort of sepia-tinted Eden as

Farha portrays the land without Jews as being? Absolutely not. And in that comparison you see the true ugliness of what Netflix has done here.

The platform has clearly fallen for the idea that it must balance out Israeli productions with Palestinian or Arab productions. In the process it has forgotten the fact that the Israelimade productions just happen to be made by Israelis. The fact that they are Israeli-made is a production detail, not the point. Such productions are not propaganda films arguing a one-sided pro-Israeli case.

They are not, for instance, onedimensional cartoons depicting Arabs as evil, sadistic child-killers. Yet that is precisely the "balance" that Netflix has chosen to apply against Israel in the belief that this creates some kind of level playing field. It doesn't.

It simply highlights the differences not just between one side in a conflict and the other but the difference between bigoted sermonising and entertainment, between propaganda and art.

Douglas Murray is a senior fellow at the National Review Institute, a columnist at the New York Post, and author most recently of The War on the West. Republished from the Washington Free Beacon (freebeacon.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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THE MONTH IN MEDIA

#### **NETANYAHU'S TRIALS**

Writing on protests in Israel against the Netanyahu Government's judicial reform legislation, Nine Newspapers columnist Peter Hartcher (March 7) quoted a recent piece by visiting AIJAC non-resident scholar Ehud Yaari saying that Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu is a "leader who rose against his own people." Hartcher also quoted Yaari saying Netanyahu has been worn down by his ongoing corruption court cases.

On ABC Radio National "Saturday Extra" (March 11), Yaari predicted the conflict created by the Israeli Government's push for judicial reform, and the huge protests occurring weekly against it, will be resolved through "a compromise which is going to be sensible, which will not amount to the Government taking over control over the Supreme Court and the rest of the judicial system."

Yaari also said Netanyahu "has shot himself in both legs. Now he is limping towards a compromise which will be a very far cry from what he and his lieutenants expected to achieve... All his moves are intended to reach to bring him to a point where he is freed of the chains of [his] trial."

#### **CASE NOT HEARD**

A six-minute report on the ongoing protests against the Netanyahu Government's judicial reform legislation from Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn on *ABCTV* "7.30" (Feb. 16) wasted an opportunity to bring viewers an explanation of the projudicial reform case, alongside the arguments of critics.

The failure to do so was frustrating because Horn went to the effort to interview Eugene Kontorovich, a legal scholar who, as she explained, belongs to a "right-wing think tank that drafted the policy papers for the judicial changes."

Horn said Kontorovich believes "the Supreme Court... has too much power over Israeli society." Immediately the piece cut to Kontorovich saying, "Everyone has a sense that there's a need for checks and balances. And the Supreme Court is currently the only institution in Israel with no checks, but yet [has] power over every single issue of public life."

A second grab of Kontorovich featured him focusing on the protests, not the case for reforms, saying, "when the opposition mobilises people to conduct massive demonstrations, says it's the end of democracy, it's not surprising that... foreign investors will get worried... in a sense, they're trying to create a crisis."

Apart from Netanyahu condemning protestors, the other four talking heads all opposed the proposed reforms.

#### **TVTRIALS**

SBS TV "World News" (March 17) reported Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholtz's criticism of the proposed changes during Netanyahu's recent trip to Berlin. The segment included Netanyahu saying, "The ideas that are presented in Israel as though this is a break with democracy is not true. Israel was, Israel will remain a liberal democracy, not different. And as strong and as vibrant as it was before and as Europe is today. We are not going to deviate from that one bit, and we're committed to it."

On March 19, "World News" reported a Melbourne demonstration,

which included senior Rabbi Ralph Genende saying, "It really disturbed me that [Israeli President Isaac Herzog's compromise] ... proposal was given hardly any time at all. It was just brushed off."

An SBS TV "News in Arabic" (March 16) report on anti-judicial reform protests included an Israeli protestor opposing weakening the power of the Supreme Court by alleging, "Our country is not good at equality for minorities, not for women, not for LBGTQ."

ABCTV "The World" (Feb. 22) interviewed *Times of Israel*'s Tal Schneider, who said the reforms would "chang[e] Israel's democracy overnight... to something of a semi-dictatorship where the executive power, which is the government, controls both the House, the Parliament, and the judicial system."

Schneider said protest leaders "don't trust either [Netanyahu's] coalition or [the] opposition" which is willing to consider compromise legislation that she said would still amount to "half a dictatorship".

#### **WARNING BELLS**

On March 3, the *Australian* editorialised that International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors' detection of traces of uranium enriched to 83.7% in Iran shows the country is on the "cusp of being able to build an atomic bomb [which] sounds an alarm the international community must not ignore."

The Guardian Australia (March 8) reported that IAEA chief Rafael Grossi had walked back widely reported comments that Iran had agreed to the Agency resuming monitoring of its nuclear facilities.

The article noted that Grossi "said



35

there was no agreement at this point on Iran handing over older footage and data taken by cameras and other equipment at the nuclear-related sites, or on future provision of that footage and data."

#### **GULF COURSE**

On *ABC Radio National* "Breakfast" (March 13), Atlantic Council analyst Jonathan Panikoff blamed Iran for the rupture in relations between it and Saudi Arabia in 2016 – now recommenced under a deal brokered by China.

Panikoff cited, "an increase [in] Iranian aggressiveness in the region, including arming a variety of entities... prominently in Iraq but also in Yemen that started to become a real issue for the Saudis. They felt like they were more and more under threat and you also had a situation in which, at the time, the Iranian government felt like it was in a better place with the US" after the 2015 nuclear deal.

He said China, as the largest importer of Saudi and Iranian oil, was well placed to mediate between the two countries, given Iran is boycot-

ting direct talks with the US.

On *ABCTV* "World News" (March 15), Israel's Institute for National Security Studies analyst Tuvia Gering said, "many people here in the region are very sceptical that this would be able to hold... even when they had the embassies in place, the relationship was really fraught and violent. So, it still remains to be seen."

#### THE FEDERMAN FACTOR

Discussing the cold-blooded murder of two Israeli brothers who were driving through the Palestinian vil-



# IN PARLIAMENT

Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) — March 22 — Moving that Shadow Attorney-General Julian Leeser be allowed to present a bill amending the Criminal Code to ban Nazi symbols and salutes: "The Nazi regime is one of the greatest evils ever visited on humanity. Nazism is an ideology of unparalleled hate... Nazi symbols... must be condemned wherever and whenever they are found and displayed... It is Australian to stand with people of Jewish faith. It is Australian to stand against those antisemitic incidents..."

Shadow Attorney-General **Julian Leeser** (Lib., Berowra) seconding the motion: "There must be no place in Australia for Nazi-style flags, uniforms, salutes and boycotts, because they are the means by which this sickness seeks to perpetuate and promote itself."

Manager of Government Business in the House **Tony Burke** (ALP, Watson) speaking against the motion: "I've been advised that work on this exact area is being done... in the office of the Attorney-General... These symbols have become the symbols of the worst of humanity..."

Senator **James McGrath** (Lib., Qld) — March 22 — "I stand in this chamber and I cannot comprehend why any Australian would join the Nazi Party or give the Nazi salute."

Attorney-General **Mark Dreyfus** (ALP, Isaacs) — March 21 — "There is no place in Australian society for public displays of Nazi symbols or the Nazi salute. These are markers of some of the darkest days in the world's history—of ghettos, deportations and mass murder... We must never, ever forget."

Senator **Dean Smith** (Lib., WA) — March 21 — "In accordance with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition on antisemitism, hostility towards the legitimacy of Israel and the right of the Jewish people to statehood is ultimately an act of antisemitic hate."

Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Senator **Jordon Steele-John** (Greens, WA) — March 7 — "There can be no democracy while there is also occupation and inequality. A state that denies rights to millions of people and systemically discriminates against a fifth of its citizens cannot be considered a true democracy... The Greens are calling on the Australian government to immediately end all engagement and trade with the Israeli military..."

**Josh Burns** (ALP, Macnamara) — March 6 — Moving that the House "reaffirms its commitment to the IHRA working definition of antisemitism... Unfortunately, antisemitism is on the rise again, occurring far too frequently and increasing in hostility... The IHRA definition of antisemitism was created by international Holocaust and genocide scholars to academically understand what antisemitism is."

The following speeches were in support of the motion:

Julian Leeser — "Sadly, today the epicentre of antisemitic activity is our universities. The situation on campus for Jews is particularly bad. In 2022, SRCs at Sydney, Melbourne, ANU, Adelaide and Wollongong passed motions supporting the antisemitic Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement... There should be no place for antisemitism on Australian campuses."

Allegra Spender (Ind., Wentworth) — Seconding the motion: "...on antisemitism, it seems we have gone backwards, particularly at universities. This is why the work of IHRA is so important. By proposing a working definition of antisemitism, it provides a tool for organisations, including government and universities, to frame what constitutes antisemitism, to set clear expectations and to help ensure the behaviour of individuals in these organisations is appropriate and respectful... individuals who are subject to racism should be listened to as we try to define what racism is in relation to these people."

**Steve Georganas** (ALP, Adelaide) — "It's important to remember that Holocaust denial and distortion are also forms of antisemitism."

**Andrew Wallace** (Lib., Fisher) — "We must act to counter antisemitism... We also have a duty to defend the state of Israel, the world's only Jewish state and our friend and ally."



lage of Huwara and the indefensible violent riots in response by settlers against the Palestinian residents of the town, *Associated Press* Middle East correspondent Josef Federman provided some rarely heard context about the dynamics that underpin recent upticks in violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Talking to ABC Radio National "Breakfast" (March 1), Federman explained that on the Palestinian side, "there are lots of weapons now in the West Bank, something we haven't seen in the past... Many of these attackers act individually. So, the army has a hard time going after organised groups to stop this. And then when you combine this with the presence of far-right Israeli politicians who are constantly calling for a tougher approach, a harder crackdown and so forth, this creates a very combustible atmosphere."

Federman noted the Israeli army acknowledged serious operational failings contributed to the riot, including closing roads to prevent vehicles travelling to Huwara but not anticipating rioters might instead simply walk into the village on foot.

Discussing the murder of American-Israeli Elan Ganeles, killed driving through the West Bank, Federman noted, "he was 26 or 27 years old, and he did not even live in Israel... He was in the country to visit friends and to attend a wedding. So, you know, a very, very sad story on the individual level."

#### **HUWARA HORRORS**

An SBS TV "World News" (Feb. 28) report on the Huwara violence noted that "There's been more bloodshed in the West Bank with a suspected Palestinian gunman killing an Israeli American motorist near the city of Jericho. It comes a day after Israeli settlers rampaged through the Palestinian village of Huwara in response to the deaths of two other settlers."

The report included Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki condemning the international community, saying, "Did it sanction the occupying power for committing international crimes? Did it assist the Palestinian people in seeking redress at the International Court of Justice? No."

This is an absurd claim — the Palestinian Authority constantly incites terrorism against Jews and Israelis and uses international aid to financially reward acts of terror carried out by Palestinians. Meanwhile, the Jewish violence in Huwara was widely condemned in Israel. So, if anyone has earned a hearing for inciting violence before the ICC, it is the PA.

A report on *Channel Ten*'s "5pm News" (Feb. 27) said, "This year alone, more than 60 Palestinians have been killed by security forces. On the other side, 13 Israelis have lost their lives." This does not take into account that the overwhelming majority of Palestinian fatalities were gunmen or those involved in violent acts, whilst Israeli civilians are deliberately targeted.

The *Age*'s headline, "Settlers torch homes in deadly rampage" (Feb. 28), placed the emphasis on the reaction to the murder of two Israelis, while the introduction to the story was more balanced.

The Guardian Australia (March 3) was one of the few media outlets to note that Israel subsequently arrested five settlers over the riot in Huwara. However, it was actually eight, not five.

#### JENIN SCENE

SBS TV "World News" (March 8) reporter Claudia Farhart's story on an Israeli raid in Jenin appropriately noted that the "six [Palestinians] who died have all been claimed by Palestinian militant groups."

ABCTV"7pm News" (March 8) Victorian edition newsreader Tamara Oudyn noted that "One of them was a Hamas fighter suspected of fatally shooting two brothers from a Jewish settlement last week."

#### **CARRTOON SHOWS**

In Tasmania's *Mercury* (Feb. 23) former Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr peddled a familiar tale of vitriolic half-truths about Israel in an op-ed calling for immediate Australian recognition of a currently non-existent Palestinian state.

The Albanese Government's condemnation of a recent Israeli announcement of an intention to build 10,000 new units in settlements was welcomed by Carr who implied the construction would be in new settlements and said, "it's a big step to criticise Israel because in Australia its organised friends are a powerful lobby."

Given the current Government reversed Australia's recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel's capital and changed the country's votes at the UN on a slew of resolutions without the "powerful lobby" being able to do anything about it, that's a stretch.

He called Israel's policy of trying 12-year-old Palestinians in Israeli military courts "cruel" but failed to note that Israel is obligated to use a military justice system under the rules of belligerent occupation.

The *Mercury* ran AIJAC's Jamie Hyams' response to Carr (March 1) which pointed out that the two-state solution is currently off the table simply because Palestinian leaders kept rejecting past Israeli offers to create one, while the current leadership is refusing to even try to negotiate an end to the conflict, so recognising a Palestinian state would be wrong and counter-productive.

#### KYIV – NOT CHICKEN

The myth that only the pro-Israel lobby was disconcerted by the inclusion of Palestinian writer Susan Abul-



hawa in the 2023 Adelaide Writers' Week was punctured by the Ukrainian Ambassador to Australia Vasyl Myroshnychenko, interviewed on *Sky News*' "Sharri" (March 7).

Ambassador Myroshnychenko said, "It's very disappointing that somebody of that reputation and being racist and being antisemitic is allowed actually in that, in that forum. I understand the value of plurality and I understand the value of the freedom of speech. But I think this is just going too far beyond. I know a lot of people are boycotting the Adelaide Writers' Festival. Ukrainian commentators and speakers have pulled out, including the moderator. And I think that's quite shameful [that] it's allowed here in Australia."

#### **NOT A FIT STATE**

On ABC Radio National "Late Night Live" (March 16), former Australian Ambassador to Egypt and Jordan Bob Bowker offered his view that the twostate peace formula to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was dead.

According to Bowker, "when I look at the Israeli-Palestinian situation, the two-state solution is indeed no longer an avenue that is able to be pursued... it's difficult because you can't expect a[n Australian] minister to advocate a one state approach, which is in fact the only way that this can now go when neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians are prepared at this stage or organised politically and ideologically to pursue that one state approach." In other words, he argues that a two-state solution is dead, but admits his own "one-state approach" is also hopeless because no one wants it. So, it must be asked, why is he pushing this plan – a plan which effectively calls for Israel's destruction - if he admits it is just as dead?

solution and admitted there's no appetite for the one-state solution, Bowker had earlier proposed his own rather confused plan in the *Australian Financial Review* (March 3).

According to Bowker, the path forward temporarily might be a "defacto two and a half state outcome for the coming decade.

A state, in effect, functioning for the ultra-nationalist and religious Jews; a state functioning for the remainder of the Jews in Israel, and the 1948-era Palestinians, in a divided country; and a semi-state for the remaining Palestinians — which will struggle, with external support, to maintain at least the symbols and service delivery of statehood, but which will lack genuine sovereignty," he wrote.

So now his plan calls for Israel to be broken into two parts — before being replaced by "a state that treats Israelis and Palestinian as equals."

Bowker's proposal ignores the very real probability that, without Israeli security help, any Palestinian state would fall under Hamas' control and would become an Islamist run dictatorship a la Gaza, as well as the overwhelming likelihood that, even if it did not, any such state would hardly be the basis for a new state which would fairly "treat Israelis and Palestinian as equals."

#### **CAPITALTHOUGHTS**

On Sky News "Sharri" (March 2), visiting AIJAC guest Ehud Yaari said Israel was "puzzled" by the Albanese Government's decision last September to reverse its predecessor's 2018 recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Yaari explained, "honestly, we did not understand the Australian move about west Jerusalem. For a very simple reason. Even the Palestinians have no problem with recognising west Jerusalem as Israel, as part of Israel. So, Australia withdrawing recognition of west Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was something of a surprise to the Palestinians too."

He also said Israel is puzzled by former Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr "calling for recognition of a Palestinian state where the urgent task now is to rebuild, upgrade and make the Palestinian Authority most effective... before it collapses."

#### **TALKING PICTURES**

ABC Radio National "Saturday Extra" (March 12) interviewed Center for Peace Communications founder Joseph Braude about the movie series "Whispered in Gaza" which combines animation with audio testimonies from Palestinians who share their uncensored views of life under the 16 years of Hamas rule in the Strip.

Host Julian Morrow noted that the Gaza blockade "began after the military takeover... by Hamas in 2007," but incorrectly attributed its enforcement only to Israel, and not to Egypt too, which applies it far more harshly.

Braude said the interviewees "describe their lives, their travails, their aspirations for the future and their experience above all of Hamas as a governing actor. There's considerable research in Gaza, opinion polling by Palestinian polling groups, human rights work and reportage that shows that Hamas is unwanted by much of its population, that Gazans blame Hamas for starting wars with Israel it can't win and hiding in bunkers and leaving civilians to suffer the casualties. Hamas rule is a kind of a familiar, corrupt dictatorship that certainly doesn't live up to the Islamic principles it claims to represent."

The program noted that the Iraqbased Islamic Fatwa Council issued an "unprecedented fatwa [Islamic religious decree] declaring Hamas to be illegitimate according to Islamic law" based on the fact that it oppresses Muslims. One of the justifications for the fatwa was the testimonies in the film, Braude explained.



#### A BOB EACH WAY

Having rejected the two-state

# MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

#### WRITES AND WRONGS

Intense debate continued in the media over Adelaide Writers' Week Director Louise Adler's decision to invite ten Palestinian writers — including radicals like Susan Abulhawa and Mohammed El-Kurd who have expressed toxic views about Ukrainian President Zelensky, Israel and Jews

– but no Israelis.

In the Australian (Feb. 25), columnist Gerard Henderson argued the "the real issue... is [there's] no balance in the... program that would make it possible for the views of this anti-Semitic duo to be contested."

"Despite the ABC having the only mainstream Australian media interview with Abulhawa, only a very short segment was uploaded to its website"

On Feb. 26, before the festival, *Age* columnist Jon Faine argued the two should be challenged at the event. Post-event (March 12), Faine, a festival participant, reported that when he attempted to talk with Abulhawa backstage "strangely her minders then shut down our chat and shortly after whisked her away." Faine naively asked if "Adler would have invited Abulhawa if she had known about her extreme tweets."

The Australian's Caroline Overington also initially argued the extremists should be heard and challenged in Adelaide (Feb. 27) but changed her position (March 6) after hearing the panel, saying "this wasn't a discussion. There was no attempt by anyone to consider the ways in which Israel and Palestine might find a lasting peace."

On March 1, *Age* columnist Julie Szego challenged Adler's position she was not interested in creating "safe spaces", only "brave spaces", asking "would these writers have scored an invite in the first place had their bile been directed at a group other than Jews?"

In the *Age* (March 6) former Attorney-General George Brandis argued the writers' invitations should not be withdrawn, saying, "Adler does not condone the language or endorse the opinions of the Palestinian writers."

In the *Australian* (March 3), Norm Schueler of the Jewish Community Council of South Australia criticised State Premier Peter Malinauskas' decision to open the festival alongside Adler, after he had condemned the participation of Abulhawa and El-Kurd.

Former Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek's report on *ABC TV* "7pm News" Adelaide (March 7) included the important point that Abulhawa was "opposed by Ukrainian groups and [this] played a part in a major sponsor pulling its support for the festival. Critics said her tweets calling Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

a Nazi-promoting Zionist who was dragging the whole world into the inferno of World War Three amounted to hate speech."

Zionist Federation of Australia's Jeremy Leibler's letter in the *Age* (March 4) rebuked a flattering profile of Louise Adler by Chip LeGrand (Feb. 24), saying, "LeGrand

contends that my issue is simply with the number of writers who are Palestinians or activists for the Palestinian cause," rather than the inclusion of "two specific Palestinians, who have spread age-old antisemitic tropes."

The Advertiser (March 8) reported on a group of Ukrainians who protested at Abulhawa's session, including Nataliia Bakhurynska whose son was killed whilst fighting against Russian forces in February. Earlier, on Feb. 25, the paper announced it was cutting all ties with the festival, stating that it helped raise \$200,000 to help settle Ukrainian refugees in Adelaide.

Responding to the *Age* features editor Maher Mughrabi's March 3 op-ed (see p. 40), a letter by AIJAC's Jeremy Jones (March 10) said, "it is untrue and offensive to portray our concern [over antisemitic speech] as some sort of disingenuous attempt to stop legitimate political debate. The proliferation of antisemitic imagery and tropes should concern [everyone]."

In the *Daily Telegraph* (March 10), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein argued, "Palestinian authors, of course, can and should have a place... along with Israelis... However, a line must be drawn that excludes people... who engage in hate... yet... it is increasingly argued haters like Abulhawa deserves a pass just because they mainly hate Israel."

In a searing 18-minute interview with ABC Radio Adelaide "Mornings" host David Bevan (March 7), Abulhawa rejected claims she says "hateful things", arguing Palestinians are "powerless" and thus cannot be racist. She then undermined her own argument that she doesn't say hateful things by arguing Ukrainians say hateful things about Russians and no one takes "them to task. Why the double standard?" She also defended the terrorist murder of American Elan Ganeles, visiting Israel for a wedding, on the basis that he'd previously served in the Israeli army.

Despite the ABC having the only mainstream Australian media interview with Abulhawa, only a very short segment was uploaded to its website, and the full episode containing the interview is no longer available.



# THE LAST WORD

**Jeremy Jones** 

#### **ADELAIDE WRITERS'WEEK'S "TRUTHS"**

Now that the gaggle of autobiographers and other fiction writers, together with a few serious scholars and entertaining story-tellers, have had their Adelaide party, we can ask how those few days contributed to our collective sum of knowledge.

- To call someone a "Nazi-promoting Zionist" is simply to employ "a colourful characterisation" (T. E. Collins, *Canberra Times*). Alternatively, it is simply "a criticism" (Jon Faine, *The Age*).
- The reason racists like to employ comparisons of Jews to Nazis isn't actually because it is particularly offensive and because their hate-level has passed boiling point, but because they believe it will "cut through and eliminate grey areas" amid the "cacophony of competing voices" (Maher Mughrabi, in the *Age*, March 3).
- Inviting people who regularly propagate extremist vitriol to speak unchallenged is using a "considered approach" to allow people to "engage with complex and contentious issues" (Louise Adler, Sydney Morning Herald).
- You can believe both of these statements at once: The
  Zionist lobby controls Australian media and culture,
  and Palestinian activist writer Samah Sabawi has a play
  taught at Victorian schools despite "the Zionist lobby in
  Melbourne" opposing it (Penelope Debelle, IN Daily).
- You can tweet a mistruth, be corrected and told that
  it was never true, then tweet that a success has been
  achieved because it didn't happen (Bob Carr, Twitter).
- Poetic licence excuses racist stereotyping (Mohammed El-Kurd, in a presentation by video).
- It is so self-evident that Australian media outlets had "pre-emptively buckled" to a relentless Zionist lobby, that no evidence is necessary or requested when making this statement in, of all places, an outlet which is part of that "buckled" media (Louise Adler, unchallenged by Chip Le Grand, *Sydney Morning Herald*).
- After denying being a racist, one may justify one's comments by saying racists on the other side of the argument do what you are doing (Susan Abulhawa on ABC

Radio Adelaide).

Without making light of the problems which we have as a society if any of the above become mainstream thought, there were two arguments put forward in the wake of Adelaide which were particularly pernicious and dangerous.

The first is that it is okay to be racist if the cause you are advocating is righteous.

This is not just a crude example of a belief that the end justifies the means — it is a subset of the immoral idea that you can lie or do anything else if it helps the "victims" overthrow their tormentors.

Mohammed El-Kurd seemed blissfully unaware that lying is bad form when he said outright he is willing to essentially say anything if it makes Israel look bad.



Mohammed El-Kurd (Image: Twitter)

Maher Mughrabi, in an article which contained

so many straw men it was a major fire hazard, was more sophisticated in his sophistry, but in effect echoed this view — although he cautioned against lies which are so ridiculous as to undermine one's cause.

But it was another implication by Mr Mughrabi which deserved the most unambiguous condemnation.

Those of us who flag antisemitism when we see it are all liars, unworthy of being heard, because our attempts to safeguard the Jewish community and Australians in general are in reality "actually about creating a smokescreen around Israel's conduct."

Think about what those who push this line are saying: Jews are lying about our motives — our concerns about antisemitism are disingenuous, motivated solely by allegiance to a villainous nation.

Forget the principle of hearing out victims of racism and giving them the benefit of the doubt — with Jews and antisemitism, assume dishonesty and base motives.

The public discourse arising from Adelaide Writers' Week showed that "truth" is not valued or even particularly relevant to a disturbing number of people.

I suppose we should give thanks to Writers' Week Director Louise Adler, whose conscious decision to try to one-sidedly reframe debate on the Middle East had the consequence of bringing all this dangerous and ugly discourse to light.



