

## AFTER “SHIELD AND ARROW”

Israel’s latest  
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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This month's *AIR* edition focuses on the significance, aftermath and implications of "Operation Shield and Arrow" - the brief but intense conflict between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad that took place between May 9 and May 13.

Israeli military analyst Ron Ben-Yishai makes the case that the operation was a success, which helped restore Israel's deterrence against threats from Iranian proxies, and Yaakov Lappin argues that, while the Gaza problem remains, Israel may now enjoy a period of quiet on that front. Also, Lazar Berman brings together some expert opinions on why Hamas stayed out of this war, while David Makovsky assesses the state of Israeli politics in the conflict's wake.

Also featured this month are several pieces on the ugly spectacle at the UN's "Nakba Day" commemoration on May 15, including commentary from Shany Mor and David Horovitz and the editorial by Colin Rubenstein. In addition, veteran Mideast mediator Dennis Ross critiques US policy on Iran in an interview, while Oved Lobel looks at the history of Iran's "multi-front" strategy targeting Israel.

Finally, don't miss Tammy Reznik on the plight of the Jews of Iran, Ran Porat on "al-Quds Day" in Australia and Allon Lee's review of a revealing memoir by a veteran Australian diplomat.

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

Tzvi Fleischer

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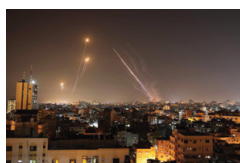
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Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system in Ashkelon, southern Israel, fires interceptors at rockets launched from the Gaza Strip, May 11, 2023. (Image: Tsafir Abayov/ AAP)



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

On May 15, the day following the 75th anniversary of Israel's establishment, the United Nations chose to endorse the Palestinian rejectionist narrative by convening the first-ever "Nakba (Catastrophe) Day" commemoration, under the mandate of the General Assembly.

The *Nakba* is the term Palestinians use to refer to losing the war they and their Arab military allies launched to attempt to undo Israel's establishment in 1948, a war which by its end saw the displacement of about 750,000 Palestinians.

However, Nakba Day is only 25 years old. It was the PR brainchild of former Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who was looking for a way to offset positive publicity surrounding Israel's 50th anniversary. To this end, he chose as the date the day after Israel had been established on the Gregorian calendar.

According to the false Nakba Day narrative, Israel's creation itself caused the Palestinian refugee crisis, and this was always the intent of the Zionists.

Yet in fact, UN General Assembly Resolution 181 on November 29, 1947, endorsed the partition of the British Mandate of Palestine into two states, Jewish and Arab. The plan drew borders based on existing demographics, with majority Jewish areas assigned to the Jewish state and vice-versa. The Jews accepted the plan and began by preparing their institutions for statehood. The Arabs violently rejected it and launched a war of aggression, utilising the armies of five Arab states to try to prevent the Jews from exercising their right to self-determination anywhere in the Mandate.

Israel won this desperate, existential war at the cost of around 1% of its total population being killed. The territory held by Arab armies, including the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, was ethnically cleansed down to the last Jew. On the other side, most Arabs inside the newly formed Jewish state fled the fighting, sometimes at the behest of their own leaders, though in some particularly strategic villages, the residents were expelled in the context of the Jewish state's desperate war of survival. Around 156,000 remained and became Israeli citizens.

While it is understandable that Palestinians wish to mourn the displacements and losses they suffered in the 1948 war, even if they were ultimately caused by their own leaders, the UN has absolutely no business effectively having a day of mourning for the loss of a war of aggression launched against the UN's own partition plan, in violation of the UN Charter, much less labelling that loss a "catastrophe".

Fast forward to this year's Nakba Day event at the UN. Ageing Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas railed against Israel for a full hour, making hateful statements totally inimical to the international community's consensus vision for a two-state Israeli-Palestinian peace.

He denied any Jewish historical connection to Judaism's holiest sites including not only the Temple Mount, but even the Western Wall.

As noted on p. 7, Abbas also reversed reasonable comments he had previously made about the "right of return" to his original hometown of Safed – going all in on the Palestinian demand for implementing this legally baseless "right" in full, even though it is completely incompatible with a two-state resolution.

Abbas, whose doctoral thesis promoted Holocaust denial and who was last year widely criticised for a speech accusing Israel of perpetrating "50 Holocausts," also likened Israel to Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda chief.

The PA leader also blamed the US and Britain for the Nakba, saying that Israel was created for their own "colonial goals" and "these countries wanted to get rid of their Jews."



Abbas called for Israel's suspension from the UN, claiming that Israel's original membership in the UN was conditional on it accepting both a "right of return" of Palestinian refugees and the creation of a Palestinian state. Neither of these claims are true. Moreover, Israel had no role in the failure of Egypt and Jordan to create a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza between 1948 and 1967.

This ugly performance was completely unhelpful to the well-being of Palestinians. It's a moral imperative to separate humanitarian compassion for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, who have been

used as pawns by Arab leaders, with Nakba Day, a cynically politicised creation whose sole purpose is to undermine the legitimacy of Israel.

The Nakba Day ceremony underscored how ridiculous the UN's institutional anti-Israel obsession has become. There are two permanent UN committees devoted to nothing but demonising Israel and promoting the Palestinian cause, plus a "Division of Palestinian Rights" in the UN Secretary-General's office and a new and completely unprecedented permanent inquiry against Israel in the UN Human Rights Council. Now there are also not one but two Palestinian "special days" set aside in this year's UN calendar – in addition to Nakba Day, there is also the annual Day of International Solidarity with the Palestin-

ian People (Nov. 29). The UN has no other "special day" to express "solidarity" with or commemorate the history of any other national group.

The Albanese Government deserves credit for having Australia join the US, Canada and dozens of other countries in steering clear of the Nakba Day spectacle. By declining to attend, Australia upheld its longstanding support for two states for two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, achieved through direct peace negotiations – meaning you cannot treat the establishment of one of those states as a crime and a disaster.

President Abbas' speech, full of untruths and extremist claims, was a strong reminder why there is no two-state peace today. Negotiations are the only way forward toward peace, but Abbas' speech demanded that the UN force Israel to concede Palestinian claims without negotiations – typical of a totally counter-productive Palestinian strategy over recent years of rejecting all talks and focussing instead on demonising Israel in international forums.

Abbas has called upon the General Assembly to make Nakba Day another permanent day to "commemorate the Palestinian plight." For the UN, whose credibility is at an all-time low, one can only hope that Abbas' vile speech caused enough embarrassment that the Nakba Day hate-fest will not be repeated.

AIR

## WORD FOR WORD

"With complete surprise and continuous initiative, we eliminated Islamic Jihad's entire top brass in Gaza, destroyed 17 Islamic Jihad command centres, eliminated dozens of terrorists, struck missile storage sites, took out anti-tank squads and more... Today Israel's enemies – in Gaza and beyond – know that even if they try to hide, we can and are willing to reach them at any time."

**Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on "Operation Shield and Arrow" (Times of Israel, May 14).**

"A firm Israeli response at a time and place that is good for us is the way to deal with terror from Gaza. We will back all operational activity to protect the residents of the south."

**Israeli Opposition Leader Yair Lapid offering backing for Operation "Shield and Arrow" despite the ongoing intense controversy over the Government's judicial reform proposals (JNS, May 9).**

"Syria, from tonight, is a full member of the Arab league, and starting tomorrow they have the right to participate in any meeting. When the host nation, in this case Saudi Arabia, sends

the invitation, (Assad) can attend if he wishes to."

**Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit (CNN, May 7).**

"We have made clear to all of our partners that Syria does not merit readmission into the Arab League... we will not normalise our relations with the Assad regime and we don't support our allies and partners doing so either."

**US State Department spokesperson (State Department, May 8).**

"We demand today, officially, in accordance with international law and international resolutions, to make sure that Israel respects these resolutions, or suspend Israel's membership from the UN... Israeli and Zionist claims continue... saying that Israel made the desert bloom... These are lies. They continue to lie, like Goebbels."

**Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at the United Nation's first commemoration of "Nakba Day" (Times of Israel, May 15).**

"We write today, as Republican and Democratic members of the United States House of Representatives, to respectfully urge Australia to swiftly act to designate the Islamic Republic of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), in its entirety, as a terrorist organisation."

**Bipartisan letter from 22 US Congress members to Australian PM Anthony Albanese (Website of Congresswoman Claudia Tenney, May 11).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## AN IRON DOME AGAINST GAZA CIVILIAN CASUALTIES?

In “Shield and Arrow”, the IDF’s name for the five days of fighting between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) which followed Israel’s targeted attack on three top PIJ leaders on May 9, 37 Palestinians lost their lives. While deaths in conflict are always regrettable and sad, that raw number conceals the fact that the IDF appears to have done remarkably well in making sure Palestinian civilian casualties were kept to the absolute minimum.

Some pro-Israel analysts have looked in detail at each of those casualties and the story they collectively tell – and that story suggests a major breakthrough in Israel’s ability to operate against terror groups who have embedded themselves among Gaza’s civilians in a dense urban environment while sparing civilians.

Here is the breakdown of those 37 casualties, as detailed by Abu Ali Express, an anonymous but reliable Israeli online military intelligence expert who provides good sources for all his conclusions, such as funeral notices from the militant groups themselves:

- 13 PIJ militants, killed by Israel, including six senior commanders;
- Seven militants from two other terror groups – the Popular Mobilisation Front and the al-Mujahideen Brigades;
- Ten civilians killed in the initial strike on the homes of three PIJ commanders on May 9 – all family members or neighbours of these commanders. One of them was an unarmed Hamas operative. Sadly, three were children;
- Four civilians, including three children, killed by PIJ rockets that misfired and landed inside Gaza;
- One child is claimed to have died of a heart attack caused by the Israeli strikes, although this is unproven;
- One Palestinian worker hit by a PIJ rocket that struck the construction site he was working at inside Israel;
- One man killed by a PIJ rocket which blew up on the launchpad.

What’s amazing about these numbers is that apparently, after the initial strike which targeted the three senior PIJ commanders who were the initial targets of “Shield and Arrow” – and sadly but apparently inevitably also cost the lives of some family members and neighbours – Israel killed a total of zero Palestinian civilians throughout the rest of the operation.

After those initial strikes on the PIJ commanders, the IDF reportedly carried out 419 attacks on terrorist-linked

targets in Gaza during the five days of fighting – apparently without killing any civilians.

This is virtually unprecedented in urban warfare. How did the IDF manage it? Well, Israeli media reports make it clear that IDF intelligence in Gaza in this operation was remarkable – considerably better than in past operations in Gaza (see the piece by Ron Ben-Yishai, p. 12). Aided by improvements in military technology, the IDF was apparently able to use its ability to monitor almost all of Gaza in real time to abort any strike likely to end up killing civilians. And indeed, video footage has been released of strikes aborted because children suddenly entered the target area.

While Israel carefully avoided targeting Hamas, which is actually the big threat from Gaza, this conflict almost certainly gave Hamas leaders a lot to think about.

Israel invented Iron Dome to provide amazing protection from Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli towns – and it has been able to reduce but not eliminate the effects of rocket attacks from Gaza on Israeli civilians. Yet Hamas and PIJ have another strategic reason for launching such attacks. In addition to wanting to kill Israelis and disrupt normal life in Israel, Hamas also believes it benefits when it forces Israel to kill Palestinian civilians in counterstrikes. By forcing Israel to fight back in a way that inevitably kills Gaza civilians, Hamas believes it damages Israel and furthers its quest for the Jewish state’s destruction by getting Israel globally condemned and vilified for causing those civilian casualties – especially in the Muslim world.

If Israel can continue improving its ability to use comprehensive intelligence and high-tech weaponry to keep civilian casualties in Gaza to an absolute minimum in future conflicts, it may have now found a way to supplement Iron Dome and defang Hamas’ other key strategy for using rocket attacks to harm the Jewish state.

## ABBAS’ NAKBA DENIAL

As noted elsewhere in this edition (pp. 4-5, 7, 21), the Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, is pushing hard to spread its narrative that Israel’s creation in 1948 was their “*Nakba*” (“catastrophe”), which should be commemorated, mourned and condemned. As part of this process, in early May, Abbas issued a decree making it a crime to deny the Nakba. This decree seems to be part of ugly and absurd efforts to create parallels between the Nakba and the Holocaust – intentionally mirroring efforts to counter the racist phenomenon of Holocaust denial, including laws against it in some countries.

The decree said, “the Nakba of Palestine is an integral part of the Palestinian national narrative based on historical right and international resolutions, and the denial of the Nakba is a crime punishable by law with imprisonment not exceeding two years.” It then goes on to say that Nakba denial includes “Denying the classification of the Nakba crime



as a crime against humanity”; “Absolving Zionist groups of their responsibility for the crimes” and “Claiming that the Palestinian people left voluntarily and without coercion.”

Yet as the American blogger *Elder of Zion* has pointed out, under this wording, Abbas himself appears guilty of “Nakba denial”. In a 2009 interview, he described his own family’s flight from Safed during the 1948 war – and basically admitted they fled “voluntarily and without coercion.”

He said, “People were motivated to run away... They feared retribution from Zionist terrorist organisations... Those of us from Safed especially feared that the Jews harboured old desires to avenge what happened during the 1929 uprising... They realised the balance of forces was shifting and therefore the whole town was abandoned on the basis of this rationale.”

AIR



## DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

David Horovitz

### MAHMOUD ABBAS EMBRACES FULL-BLOWN REJECTIONISM

For years, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has delivered speeches, at the UN and elsewhere, inciting viciously against Israel – describing Zionism as a colonial enterprise unrelated to Judaism, denying Jewish history in the Holy Land, accusing Israel of carrying out “holocausts” against the Palestinians.

Often, his most incendiary remarks are ad-libbed – absent from the officially distributed, presumably carefully prepared texts of his addresses. Remarks thrown in at his pleasure, and thus the most faithful expression of what he really believes and wants to say.

Such was the case at the UN General Assembly’s anti-Israel *Nakba* fest on May 15. This was an unprecedented event convened to highlight the “catastrophe” that befell the Palestinians with the revival of Israel in 1948 – the “catastrophe”, that is, that stemmed from the Arab world’s violent rejection of the UN’s endorsement in 1947 of the Jewish people’s right to the revival of their ancient Jewish homeland alongside what was to have been the first-ever Palestinian state.

Abbas, as has become his norm, utilised the forum to castigate the UK, the US and the international community for supporting the Jewish people’s right to statehood and, departing from his prepared text, accused Israel of utilising Nazi-style propaganda to advance its narrative.

But the Palestinian Authority President also ad-libbed a highly significant reversal of his previously stated positions, a change of stance that shows him now rejecting not only any Israeli presence and claims in east Jerusalem, the West

Bank and Gaza, but also Israel’s legitimacy in its pre-1967 boundaries, while demanding the termination of Israel as a majority-Jewish state.

In years past, Abbas was reliably reported to have made clear that he did not expect Israel to take in millions of descendants of Palestinians made homeless during the fighting that surrounded the establishment of Israel, since this would turn the world’s only Jewish state into a binational Jewish-Palestinian entity. “On numbers of refugees, it is illogical to ask Israel to take 5 million, or even 1 million – that would mean the end of Israel,” Abbas was quoted telling his own peace negotiators in 2008, for example, in documents reported by *Al Jazeera*.

Citing his own circumstances, moreover, Abbas told Israeli television in 2012 that the Palestinians under his leadership sought statehood only in the territories captured by Israel in the 1967 war and had no claims on pre-1967 Israel, and that he himself, a refugee from Safed in northern Israel, did not consider that he had the right to return to live there.

“Palestine now for me is the ’67 borders, with east Jerusalem as its capital,” said Abbas to *Channel 12*. “This is now and forever... I am a refugee, but I am living in Ramallah... I believe that the West Bank and Gaza is Palestine, and the other parts are Israel.”

He vouchsafed that he had visited Safed, and would like to do so again, but did not expect to make it his home: “It’s my right to see it, but not to live there,” he declared.

In New York on May 15, in stark contrast, Abbas, sporting a little key in his lapel to signify the Palestinian demand for a “right of return”, reversed his 2012 Israeli TV interview promise.

“I am a Palestinian refugee. I want to return to my land,” he told the General Assembly. “I want Safed”, he specified, to warm applause.

It is a reflection of how irrelevant and hopeless the notion of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become – with Israel shifted to the right since the Second Intifada suicide bombing onslaught – that this drastically changed stance barely registered in the reporting of the Nakba event and Abbas’ address to it.

Abbas, at 87, is a fading force who evidently has decided he wishes to be remembered as a leader in the Yasser Arafat mould whose rejectionist positions doomed the Palestinian quest for statehood. Meanwhile, the Islamist Hamas, consolidating its hold on Gaza and relentlessly building up its forces toward its undimmed goal of eliminating the Jewish state, is working assiduously to supplant the Palestinian Authority – thwarted, ironically, by the security forces of the very Israel that Abbas demonises.

AIR

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# ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

## HOT BUTTON ISSUES

With elections approaching in six Malaysian states this year, both Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's Pakatan Harapan (PH) and the opposition Perikatan Nasional (PN) multi-party coalitions will be looking to issues that reliably rouse their constituencies towards the polling booths.

In a country where ethnic Malays make up close to 70% of the population – almost all of them being Muslim – any party or coalition aiming for majority support has to play to Malay sensibilities. One of the safest ways to do this is via ritual gestures of support for their global Muslim brethren and denunciations of an agreed-upon bogey figure – the Jewish nation state of Israel.

Malaysia has, since its inception, staunchly refused to establish diplomatic relations with Jerusalem – a policy that is broadly popular. Even in the unprecedented political instability of recent years, no Malaysian government has deviated from the well-rehearsed arguments on Israel-Palestine.

Regardless, the head of the Malaysia Consultative Council of Islamic Organisations (MAPIM), Mohd Azmi Abdul Hamid, has urged PM Anwar to reject any attempts to normalise diplomatic relations with Jerusalem. Launching the Save Al-Aqsa Fund program on May 9, he said, "There are currently forces that are pressuring Malaysia to normalise relations with Israel. MAPIM are monitoring the situation very closely.

"I need to stress all Muslim nations to never promote diplomatic ties with Israel, they are currently plotting to promote itself in Southeast Asia, with Malaysia and Indonesia being two countries it is highly interested in. Anwar must stand firm and reject any attempts from Israel to pressure us into holding diplomatic ties with them," he said.

There is no prospect of this. On Dec. 19, soon after becoming PM, Anwar pledged that Malaysia would remain "steadfast" in supporting the "just cause" of the Palestinians, and backed this up recently (May 15) with a statement on Facebook: "To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Nakba, Malaysia reiterates its unwavering commitment and solidarity towards the Palestinian people in opposing the imperialist policy of the Zionist apartheid regime of Israel which... tramples on humanitarian principles."

Anwar further called upon the UN Security Council to "ensure that Israel is accountable to the obvious violence and the violation of the international laws and UN Charter every year." Hardly the language that suggests an imminent rapprochement with Israel.

Indeed, Malaysia is pursuing its stance internationally, with its permanent representative to the United Nations, Ahmad Faisal Muhamad, unanimously elected by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) to be its vice-chairman and rapporteur. Established by the UN General Assembly in 1975, the CEIRPP forms part of a web of UN bodies that make no pretence of being non-partisan on Israeli-Palestinian issues.

In a statement, Muhamad said the Palestinian people had been "subjected to despair and agony for far too long," and pledged "Malaysia's commitment and support for the work of this committee and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence, and sovereignty."

The sum of these items is just more evidence that the "debate" over Israel-Palestine is essentially an echo-chamber of broad unanimity. But it remains a hot button issue, especially for ethnic Malays, where the spectre of hidden, enigmatic Israeli/Jewish hands is regularly invoked for domestic purposes.

Anwar himself has often been targeted in this way. Even after he assumed the Prime Ministership, an opposition MP from the conservative Islam-oriented PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia) was accused of spreading rumours that Anwar had "contacted Israel and foreign powers" to secure his appointment. Anwar immediately responded, threatening legal action over the "slander" of being linked to Israel.

While he is still the only Malay leader who espouses multiculturalism and inclusiveness, Anwar's critics argue that he too has used Islam and pandered to Malay identity politics when his ambitions have required it. He remains vulnerable on his right flank, where Muhyiddin Yassin's Malay-centric Perikatan Nasional coalition includes PAS, the largest single party in the 222-seat parliament with 43 seats.

PN's strategy heading into the state elections has clearly been to portray Anwar's multi-racial and multi-religious Government as anti-Islam and anti-Malay, and the ethnic Malay majority as a community under threat.

A case in point was a Government interfaith project in Kuala Lumpur to give youth a better understanding of Malaysia's diverse faiths through visits to churches, temples and mosques. PN politicians claimed it was an attempt to spread Christianity among Muslim youth, which predictably provoked outrage from sections of the Muslim majority on social media. The Government suspended the program.

With the six state polls due within the next few months, and saddled with the corruption-tainted UMNO as coalition partner, Anwar's coalition is vulnerable while most debate is predicated upon who is Malay enough or Islamic enough to gain the support of the majority.



Alex Benjamin

## ANTISEMITISM IS ITS OWN THING

As a hobby, a rabbi and I run a Jewish film club for anyone working in the EU bubble. We watch movies with Jewish themes, stereotypes or characters, then talk about it.

We finished Spike Lee's *BlacKkKlansman* a couple of weeks back. The director put together a Jew and a Black man – both police detectives – to infiltrate the KKK at the height of the post-Martin Luther King civil rights movement. In doing so, Mr Lee reminded the audience that Jews and Black people used to make common cause.

Thus, in *Mississippi Burning*, two Jews accompanying a murdered Black civil rights activist are also murdered. And almost everyone has seen the famous picture of Martin Luther King accompanied by two rabbis, one of them holding a Torah scroll. In *BlacKkKlansman*, an influential Black civil rights speaker even quotes Hillel.

At the end of *BlacKkKlansman*, Lee runs footage of the infamous 2017 “Jews will not replace us” Charlottesville march in North Carolina, alongside Black Lives Matter footage. Powerful stuff.

So, what happened to the Black-Jewish alliance? There is no simple answer. But I think the Six Day War, when Israel moved from a plucky little upstart to a bona fide military power, is one factor, along with the Jewish diaspora becoming more upwardly mobile socio-economically.

In any case, the idea of fraternity or common cause between Jews and other marginalised groups is no longer prominent. This is not because Jews no longer face discrimination and hate, but because in these circles, as British author David Baddiel has noted, “Jews don’t count”.

The Jews who fled pogroms, the Holocaust and persecution in the USSR, who returned to their ancestral homeland and were cheered before 1967, are now vilified as oppressive colonialists by Black Lives Matter groups. LGBTQ+ groups will not even allow gay Jews to wave rainbow Star of David flags at protests because it supposedly offends. Worse, many accuse Zionists of ‘pinkwashing’ if they note that Israel is gay friendly, insisting that even mentioning this fact is a deliberate misdirection away from the plight of Palestinians (whilst remaining quiet about what happens to gays in Gaza and the West Bank).

And yet, on campus, Jewish student groups are trying to align themselves with the ‘intersectionality’ movement,

trying to find a space to make common cause with fellow Black or gay students.

It’s dangerous, and it won’t work.

In our film club there is a young Jewish student. After I pointed out that the whole ‘inter’ part of intersectionality was missing for Jews, and that there is no solidarity or empathy towards Jewish communities from other groups affected by hate when antisemitic atrocities occur, he said to me: “Intersectionality is a great concept, but it’s poorly executed, we have to keep at it.” I thought to myself that people used to say the same thing about Communism.

No, we don’t have to keep at it – because we can see what is happening as a consequence.

The EU has recommended to its member states to come forward with plans for addressing antisemitism. So far, France and Spain have released their plans. The Spanish one is okay, but the French one is definitely problematic.

Antisemitism isn’t addressed in isolation but is thrown into the hate bouillabaisse along with hate against other ethnic groups, Roma and LGBTQ+ people.

Why is this muddying of antisemitism with other forms of hate and discrimination in there? According to French politicians I spoke to, with confirmation from

sources in the European Commission – because Jewish student groups asked for it to be included.

The vast majority of Jewish community leaders believe this approach is dangerous because there is not one cure for all cancers. Antisemitism is unique and must be treated as such. Most forms of racism paint the demeaned group as inferior or contemptible, but antisemitism typically paints Jews as “a nefarious group that seeks to control the economy, religion... the media, and basically, the world” in the words of US expert Dr Karen Auerbach.

Today, many of the other target groups for hate that we spoke to do not even recognise antisemitism as real hate or racism, instead identifying it as a mild and unimportant form of discrimination (as asserted, for example, in a controversial letter from British MP Diane Abbott which made headlines in April).

Jews are instead accused of enjoying “privilege” or “leveraging” the Holocaust.

Senior figures at the top of the EU hierarchy want to stop the one-size-fits-all approach to racism in these plans and insist that antisemitism is unique and needs to be treated as such.

I typed this column on a flight to Porto, Portugal, to attend a conference in which Jewish leaders will approve a resolution that calls for the oldest hatred to be treated as its own thing. Because the 1970s are over. Because a film is a film. And because even amongst the hated, Jews continue to be isolated and treated differently.



A scene from the movie *BlacKkKlansman*, which recalls an era of Blacks and Jews making common cause

# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Seventy-nine rockets were launched into Israel from Gaza on May 2 and 3 following the death of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operative Khader Adnan in Israeli prison from a hunger strike, with 104 fired altogether between May 2 and May 9. While most were intercepted, some resulted in property damage and injuries.

Israelis were lightly injured in drive-by shootings in the West Bank on April 25 and May 2. In a firefight on May 4, the IDF killed the terrorists who had murdered Lucy Dee and her daughters Maia and Rina in a drive-by shooting on April 7. A stabbing near Hawara injured an IDF soldier the same day.

Continuing counterterrorism raids throughout the West Bank resulted in the detention of scores of suspected terrorists and several Palestinian casualties, mostly militants or those engaging in violent activity against the IDF during arrest raids into West Bank towns.

## OPERATION SHIELD AND ARROW

There were 1,478 rockets and mortars fired from Gaza during Israel's operation "Shield and Arrow" (May 9 to 13) against the PIJ terror organisation.

1,139 projectiles crossed into Israel, 291 landed in Gaza, and the rest fell in the sea. 437 rockets were intercepted by Iron Dome and two by David's Sling – an estimated 95.6% interception rate of those rockets heading for populated areas.

Israeli forces conducted 422 strikes on 278 different locations and targets in Gaza.

Israeli citizen Inga Avramian and

a Palestinian worker, Abdallah abu Gaba, lost their lives within Israel. Thirty-six Gazans were killed (for more details, see p. 6).

## IRANIAN CYBER-ATTACKS AGAINST ISRAEL

Hackers believed to be linked to Russia and Iran made unsuccessful attempts to sabotage Israeli rocket alert systems during Operation "Shield and Arrow" amidst a global escalation in Iranian cyber-attacks over recent months.

While some ancillary websites were temporarily taken offline, the official mechanisms that alert Israelis about incoming missiles via sirens and phone notifications were not affected.

However, the cyber-attacks did highlight a growing threat for Israel from cooperation between mainly Iranian-affiliated hackers and Palestinian attackers attempting to harm Israel's civil defence infrastructure.

## IRAN HIJACKS OIL TANKERS, SHIPS WEAPONS TO RUSSIA

Iran seized three oil tankers between April 27 and May 15, one of which was allegedly hijacked in retaliation for the US seizure of Iranian oil from a tanker in late April. On May 15, Iran announced it had "retaken" an oil tanker that had been "illegally" used by a foreign company for the past five years.

New reports also revealed Iran has been using the Caspian Sea to ship a million rounds of ammunition and hundreds of thousands of artillery shells to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine over recent months – providing an alternative route to the usual cargo flights flying Iranian drones and ammunition to Russia.

## DESPERATE IRANIANS SELL THEIR ORGANS

Iranian media reports from early May said that Iranians are resorting to selling their organs in ever larger numbers due to the deepening crisis in the country's corruption-plagued economy. The organs, including kidneys, livers, corneas, bone marrow, and even sperm and ova, can fetch up to US\$15,000. The process is being facilitated by middlemen in neighbouring countries such as the UAE, Turkey and Iraq. Iran is the only country in which such organ sales are legal.

## ISRAEL ARRESTS WEAPONS-SMUGGLING JORDANIAN MP



Imad al-Adwan (Image: Twitter)

A Jordanian member of parliament, Imad al-Adwan, was caught on April 22 attempting to smuggle more than 200 firearms into Israel. According to an investigation by Israel's Shin Bet security service, al-Adwan had smuggled various types of contraband into the West Bank on 12 previous occasions, including birds, electronic cigarettes and gold.

He carried out the smuggling using his diplomatic passport and reportedly received "large sums of money" for his smuggling efforts.

Despite there being no extradition treaty between Israel and Jordan, Israel handed him over to Jordanian authorities after his parliamentary im-



munity was removed, allowing him to stand trial there.

## EU PARLIAMENT CALLS OUT PALESTINIAN TEXTBOOK INCITEMENT

For the fourth year in a row, the European Parliament has condemned the antisemitism and incitement depicted within textbooks used by students in Palestinian schools, some of them funded by the European Union.

This year's resolution by the European Parliament, passed on May 10, has a greater focus on the importance of removing antisemitic references than in previous years.

The resolution calls on the EU to freeze funding to the Palestinian Authority until the content of the textbooks falls into alignment with UNESCO standards of peace and tolerance. However, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borell has said he will not allow the measure to be translated into action against financial aid to the PA.

## DEADLY ATTACK ON TUNISIAN SYNAGOGUE

Five people were shot dead by

a naval guard in an attack on the 2,500-year-old El Ghriba synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia on May 9, as hundreds of Jewish worshippers participated in an annual pilgrimage to the site.

The victims were Aviel Haddad, an Israeli living in Tunisia, his French cousin Ben Haddad, another naval guard, and two police officers protecting the synagogue. At least ten other people were injured.

Following the attack, Tunisia's President Kais Saied twice denied that the attack was antisemitic, and mocked those who continue to talk about antisemitism today. He claimed Western countries voicing concern over antisemitism in Tunisia were ignoring Israel's repression of Palestinians.

## ISRAELI AID TO UAE REVEALED

Israeli journalist Barak Ravid has revealed Israel's pivotal role in providing aid to the UAE when it faced a series of missile strikes from Houthi rebels in Yemen last year, in the latest edition of his book, *Trump's Peace*, on the Abraham Accords. Ravid reports Israel sent a delegation of intelligence officials to assist with the investigation into the first of the attacks in early

2022, and later transferred a shipment of batteries from the SPYDER air defence system to the UAE.

Meanwhile, Israel's Economy Minister Nir Barkat was in Morocco in early May for Morocco's largest agricultural Trade Fair, SIAM, seeking to strengthen agricultural relations between the two countries. While there, he met with Moroccan Agriculture Minister Mohammed Sadiki, and the two discussed joint training and exchange programs focused on agriculture and agritech.

## ISRAEL-PA GAZA GAS FIELD TALKS

Israeli reports say the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority (PA) held secret talks during early May to discuss the Gaza Marine gas field, located 36km off the coast of the strip. Mediated by US officials, representatives discussed technical and legal arrangements for the extraction of gas from the relatively small field, including potentially exporting the gas via Egyptian pipelines or processing it in Israel. However, significant progress on implementing this project is not expected anytime soon given Hamas, not the PA, controls the Gaza Strip.



## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### SOCIAL INJUSTICE

It is well-known that, when it comes to the Middle East, and especially Israel, the United Nations commits travesty after travesty. Sometimes, however, even by these deplorable standards, it appears that the world body is actually trying to parody itself.

On May 10, it was announced by the President of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), a body notorious for routinely condemning Israel more than every other country put together, that Iran's Ambassador to the UN, Ali Bahreini, will be chairing the UNHRC's

Social Forum in November, after having been nominated by regional coordinators.

While the notion of Iran chairing anything to do with human rights is laughable, this honour is particularly obscene. The Social Forum is supposed to highlight the contributions of science, technology and innovation to the promotion of human rights, and the Islamic Republic is currently actively deploying artificial intelligence (AI) to aid in quashing human rights.

It is using surveillance technology coupled with AI to identify anyone breaching its restrictive rules, such as women appearing in public without a hijab (headscarf), as well as deploying facial recognition technology to identify protestors.

The regime blocks many social media and messaging platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp; censors key internet services; and sometimes shuts down the internet altogether. It also routinely accesses the social media accounts of Iranians to investigate and prosecute them. On May 8, two days before the announcement, it executed two men, Yousef Mehrad and Sadrollah Fazeli Zare, for blasphemy because they participated in a social media discussion titled "Critique of Superstition and Religion."

Iran's appointment as head of its Social Forum can only really be explained if the members of the UN Human Rights Council believe its purpose is to allow them to swap notes on how best to suppress human rights.

## COVER STORY

# “SHIELD AND ARROW”

## ISRAEL SHOWED IT CAN BOTH UNITE AND DETER

Ron Ben-Yishai

Operation Shield and Arrow was intended primarily to get Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) commanders sitting in Lebanon to think twice before instructing their people in Gaza to launch rockets toward Israeli territory – whether in response to disorder in the al-Aqsa Mosque, a prisoner dying during a hunger strike, or simply to attempt to impose terror on Israeli citizens and watch as TV news broadcasts civilians frantically rushing to shelters.

Israel can safely say that the operation achieved this goal. More than this, Operation Shield and Arrow achieved a great amount through the targeting of operatives of PIJ, and not only towards PIJ directly.

Hezbollah and Hamas have now witnessed how Israel’s intelligence directorate identifies and targets senior operatives, striking them one after another, even during combat, despite their attempts to remain hidden. All of this was accomplished while Israel maintained international and public legitimacy to continue its operation, as it demonstrated that it does everything possible to avoid harming uninvolved civilians.

On top of Israel’s success in maintaining effective deterrence, the second most significant achievement for the Israel Defence Forces and Shin Bet security service was in fact this preservation of legitimacy for Israeli actions. The US Government refrained from demanding Israel cease the operation for about three days. And even when Washington did raise concerns, it was in the form of a polite request rather than a forceful ultimatum – which was the go-to tactic during the days of former President Barack Obama.

It is not that the Democratic Administration led by US President Joe Biden has softened its humanitarian approach, but rather that Israel demonstrated that it acts out



Israel’s Iron Dome defence system confronts some of the 1,400 rockets fired at Israel from Gaza (Image: Alamy Live News)

of self-defence, forced to act aggressively against a terrorist organisation operating deliberately from amidst a civilian population. Strikes which risked non-combatant lives as collateral damage were carried out only when Israel determined that the targeted individuals posed an immediate danger to the well-being of hundreds of thousands of Israelis.

### A POWERFUL EXAMPLE TO ALL REGIONAL ADVERSARIES

The Israeli achievements were felt not only in Gaza but also in Iran, Beirut and even in Yemen. Both Israel’s adversaries and allies have learned an important lesson from the civilian resilience and domestic cohesion they witnessed in Israel, even during the period of unprecedented social and political division created by controversial judicial reform plans.

Another valuable Israeli asset revealed in Operation Shield and Arrow is a huge leap in Israeli intelligence-gathering capabilities, specifically in identifying and targeting the



operational entities responsible for launching rockets. The seamless collaboration between the IDF, Shin Bet, Air Force and various ground units represents an additional component of Israel's enhanced capabilities. More than this, the command-and-control capabilities demonstrated – enabling swift responses within minutes – are also worth noting.

These impressive strategic capacities were developed and employed by former IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi, who completed his service earlier this year, and current Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi, who served as Kochavi's deputy, working with Southern Command chief Eliezer Toledano and Shin Bet Director Ronen Bar. Together, they have proven that this approach is effective and feasible.

The operational unit of the Shin Bet demonstrated capabilities that had rarely been seen in recent years, but have now become the standard. The Air Force proved its ability to plan and execute with maximum precision while avoiding damage and casualties to non-combatants as much as possible.

### IDF GAZA DIVISION'S 'FIRE CANOPY'

Potentially the "MVP" of the recent operation was the Gaza Division's "Fire Canopy" system, which proved to be extremely successful with its impressive capabilities to target PIJ missile launchers and mortar teams. This system represents a significant advancement since Israel's last operation in Gaza.

This conflict was the first time that PIJ has failed to hit a target in Israeli territory with weapons other than the rockets it fired. This achievement is attributable not only to the offensive capabilities of the IDF and Shin Bet, but also to the well-prepared military and civilian defence arrangements ahead of the operation and the Israeli citizens who displayed remarkable resilience.

The achievements of the Iron Dome missile defence system are nothing new, but they too deserve a shout-out. However, Israel was reminded that even when Iron Dome reaches a success rate of over 90% in intercepting rockets, mortar shells can still manage to strike and inflict harm. It is important to note that in potential confrontations with Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, Israel would suffer much greater losses than it did this time – when PIJ was taken by surprise and likely had fewer available capabilities than in the past.

Regarding "the convergence of fronts" (Iranian plans for its proxies to attack across multiple Israeli borders at the same time) that the heads of the security system and PM Binyamin Netanyahu have been warning about – such a situation did not present itself this time. Thus, it is possible that we are exaggerating the level of danger posed by this phenomenon. The leaders of Hamas, Hezbollah and even Iran are not eager to engage in direct confrontations with Israel, despite their supposed unity and coordination. They engage in verbally aggressive statements, boast, give advice

to one another and coordinate talks, but refrain from actual intervention, given this would come at a high cost for them.

However, it is not entirely true to say that Hamas was not involved in the fighting in Gaza. Hamas explicitly gave permission for PIJ to act and even provided some operational assistance, although not to a large extent.

This did not escape the attention of the Israeli Government and its security forces but, based on tactical and strategic considerations, they chose to focus on PIJ. By doing so, Israel managed to restore deterrence throughout the entire Middle East region without paying a heavy price. It is all a matter of cost-benefit analysis, and the partial differentiation between PIJ and Hamas allowed Israel to achieve renewed deterrence at relatively low cost and without suffering significant casualties.

### A SUCCESS, WITH ONE DRAWBACK

Operation Shield and Arrow was, in my opinion, a success mainly because it reassured all Israelis that in times of national and personal security threats, we know how to unite and defend ourselves. These characteristics were not only displayed by the pilots of the Air Force, the Military Intelligence personnel, and the Shin Bet, but also by the civilians on the home front, who demonstrated both self-discipline and high morale, and knew how to practically and verbally support the IDF and the Shin Bet.

This is very uplifting – and it is also encouraging that the security hierarchy, under the leadership of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and Chief of Staff Halevi, alongside Prime Minister Netanyahu, managed to refrain from responding to the provocative ultimatums of far-right minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and his associates. Instead, they meticulously and quietly prepared the operation, including both its military and civilian aspects, and then carried it out calmly, securely and efficiently.

There was only one drawback: This was merely a mini-operation. The IDF, Shin Bet and Mossad must be capable of dealing with Iran with the same operational and intelligence efficiency and holding the fort when attacked from all directions. It has yet to be proven they can, and it must also be remembered that the IDF still did not manage to suppress the offensive rocket and mortar fire throughout the conflict.

In my opinion, the upcoming year or two should focus on searching for significant advances in quickly suppressing and preventing rocket and mortar attacks. Only a substantial leap forward in this field will truly alleviate the suffering of Israel's civilian population, especially those who live near Gaza.

AIR

*Ron Ben-Yishai is an award-winning veteran Israeli military affairs correspondent © Yediot Ahronot (www.ynet.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*



# A PERIOD OF QUIET AHEAD?

Yaakov Lappin

On the day that a truce between Israel and the Iranian-backed Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) group in Gaza took hold, it was already clear that the escalation which took place from May 9 to May 13 wouldn't change the situation in the Gaza Strip. However, it does offer the potential of an extended period of quiet and stability for Israel's south.

At the same time, "Operation Shield and Arrow" carried broader messages to larger Israeli adversaries — Hamas in Gaza, which stayed out of the fighting despite its declarations of solidarity with PIJ, and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The Israel Defence Forces together with the Shin Bet intelligence agency exhibited a high degree of military intelligence and matched that intel with precision firepower strikes that eliminated PIJ's Gazan terrorist leadership. The opening strike alone delivered a shock to PIJ, as its three top military-terrorist leaders were eliminated in the space of three seconds, in three separate locations.

The tactics employed by PIJ are the same as those used by other members of the radical Iranian-backed axis: Human shields — planting rocket launchers and weapons production centres in civilian areas; widespread indiscrimi-



An IDF strike in Gaza: Israel was able to hit with extraordinary precision thanks to some new intelligence achievements, shocking both PIJ and Hamas (Image: Alamy)

nate rocket fire on Israeli population centres; and seeking to flood Israeli air defences; though the level of capabilities possessed by each adversary varies greatly. Hamas is several times more powerful than PIJ; Hezbollah is much more powerful than Hamas.

Since the start of the operation on May 9, the Israel Air Force, together with the IDF's Southern Command and Military Intelligence Directorate and others, came together to demonstrate to all Middle Eastern terror armies that these tactics will not be effective.

On May 2 and the next few days, PIJ fired dozens of rockets at the city of Sderot in the middle of the day, when Israeli children were heading home from school. It wasn't the first time. Israel previously responded to such attacks by striking Hamas, as the sovereign of Gaza, in an effort to make it restrain PIJ, which has in the past been compared to a pyromaniac at a gas station.

But after the May 2 attack, Israel made a different decision. According to an Israeli military official, the decision was made that it was time to act against PIJ directly, which was destabilising the area, in order to avoid entering into a larger escalation with Hamas, which would be far more destructive.

## HUMAN SHIELDS

Hence, on May 9, Israel began targeting PIJ commanders, after spending a week gathering data on their locations and waiting for conditions that would create minimal risks for Palestinian noncombatants, according to the official. PIJ uses women and children as human shields as its combat doctrine, both routinely and in time of war.

"Even now we saw that they conduct command and control from apartments, with their own families inside. They drive from apartment to apartment with their families in the car," said the official. "That creates a bigger challenge."

A total of nine Gazan noncombatants were killed by IDF attacks, and another four were killed by failed PIJ rocket launches.

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Twenty-one combatants from PIJ and other groups were killed, including six senior PIJ commanders, most from the faction's rocket division.

Two civilians were killed in Israel; an 80-year-old woman in the city of Rehovot, when a rocket smashed into her living room, and a Gazan worker in the western Negev (while his brother, also a Gazan worker, was seriously injured).


In five days of conflict, PIJ fired 1,469 rockets at Israel, of which 1,139 crossed into Israel (there were also 291 failed launches, 20% of all PIJ rockets).

Iron Dome intercepted more than 95% of rockets heading for built-up areas. The longer-range David's Sling system intercepted two rockets, making its operational debut. The IDF struck more than 371 PIJ targets, including command and control apartments, usually located in one- to three-storey residential buildings, which the IDF warned so they could be evacuated before the aerial attacks.

The strikes on military leaders and command and control centres placed PIJ under pressure, ultimately pushing Beirut-based PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah to accept a truce, according to an Israeli official. Hamas pressure likely played a role in al-Nakhalah's decision as well.

Gaza will remain a hornet's nest of terrorism where Islamist factions hold hostage 2.3 million civilians and use them as human shields to threaten millions of Israelis, all using Iranian funding and know-how.

"Operation Shield and Arrow" was not designed to change that basic reality. But as a byproduct, larger Israeli adversaries, Hamas and Hezbollah, witnessed Israeli determination to eliminate those who threaten Israeli security, to overcome the human shield tactic, and to employ world-leading intelligence and firepower capabilities in urban warfare settings.

The threat to the safety of their own terror commanders, operatives and assets will not have been missed. 

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## WHY HAMAS SAT THIS ONE OUT

Lazar Berman

For the third time since Operation "Black Belt" in 2019, Hamas sat out a fight between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

Though it maintains a "Joint Operations Room" with other groups and put out a statement with PIJ about resistance, the Gaza-ruling terror group seemed to be content watching from the sidelines and letting the smaller organisation bear the brunt of Israeli strikes during the five days of conflict.

The Netanyahu Government sought to portray the terrorist group's inaction as evidence of helplessness. Hamas used to dictate everything that happened in the Gaza Strip, one senior Israeli official said; now it can't even control the much smaller PIJ.

But Hamas seemed comfortable with the situation. It suffered little, while its main rival in the Strip lost commanders and materiel.

"Its position improved after this round," argued Kobi Michael, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies and past head of the Palestinian desk at the Strategic Affairs Ministry. PIJ is a "headache" for Hamas, said Michael.

The two groups have very different priorities that are often in direct conflict.

PIJ is a classic terrorist group, with the fight against Israel its only significant priority. It is also entirely dependent on Iran, which has an ongoing and overt desire to see its proxies carry out attacks on Israel.

Hamas, on the other hand, has an interest in maintaining quiet in the Gaza Strip. It is trying to see through some sort of economic recovery after its 2021 fight with Israel, while also building its military capabilities for the next round.

Unlike PIJ, Hamas rules territory and has responsibility for over two million inhabitants.

It also has a long-term goal of building legitimacy both within Palestinian society and in the region, and replacing Fatah as the leading faction of the Palestinian national movement. At times, firing rockets at Israel might serve that aim, but annual destruction and bloodletting in Gaza generally undermine its march toward credibility.

Hamas is also less susceptible to Iranian pressure than PIJ.



Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar has ties with Egypt, which seeks quiet in the Strip (Image: Anas Mohamed/ Shutterstock)



Hamas has a much richer and more diverse set of relationships with foreign powers than does PIJ.

Turkey still refuses to expel Hamas officials and units in the country, even after the recent rapprochement between Ankara and Jerusalem. Qatar maintains close ties with Hamas, and the group also enjoys growing relationships with Russia and China.

Hamas is also not a monolith. Though much of its foreign political leadership – men like Ismail Haniyeh and Saleh al-Aroui – are close with Iran, its leader on the ground in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, enjoys extensive ties with the Egyptian regime, which seeks quiet in the Strip.

Given Hamas' desire for quiet and legitimacy, why did it allow PIJ to set off several days of fighting?

"Hamas, if it wants to, can impose order on the Strip," said Michael Milshtein, Palestinian affairs expert at the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies. "It decided it wants to sit on the fence. It feels very comfortable there."

Kobi Michael agrees that watching Israel and PIJ fire away at each other for a few days played into Hamas' hands.

"It's quite pleased with the blows Islamic Jihad suffered from Israel," he said, "because it weakens Islamic Jihad and gives Hamas more quiet and freedom of action within the Gaza Strip."

That doesn't mean Hamas did nothing beyond offer rhetorical support. It well may have given PIJ some rockets and allowed them to be launched from Hamas positions.

Milshtein says Israel should have imposed "strict conditions" on Hamas rather than let it evade punishment.

Since Operation Guardian of the Walls in 2021, Israel and Hamas have had an understanding. Israel allows thousands of workers from Gaza into the country every day – the number is currently 21,306 – and allows money for public sector salaries to reach the Strip from abroad.

In exchange, Hamas is meant to guarantee that none of the Gaza-based terror groups fire rockets or anti-tank missiles at Israel.

Despite the fact that it didn't stop PIJ from attacking Israel, Hamas' economic privileges were not rescinded. On May 14, hours after a ceasefire with PIJ came into effect, the Israel Defence Forces announced it would be reopening the border crossings into the Strip.

"We're not operating intelligently," Milshtein charges. "We should say, from now on, if you allow rocket fire, if you stir things up in the West Bank, you won't have workers, you won't have salaries."

AIR

## ISRAELI POLITICS AFTER "SHIELD AND ARROW"

David Makovsky

On May 13, Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) reached a ceasefire deal – brokered by Egypt with involvement from the United States and Qatar – following a brief Israeli operation known as Shield and Arrow targeting Gaza. The Israeli campaign hearkened back to August 2022, when the Government led by Yair Lapid also fought PIJ over a short period. Then as now, Israel hoped the larger, better-armed, and politically stronger Hamas would stay out of the fray.

### OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE CRISIS

As an Iranian proxy, PIJ lacks Hamas' broad public support in Gaza, and its rockets lack the lethality or range of those held by Hamas. Despite its military limitations, between May 9 and May 13, PIJ fired 1,469 rockets at Israeli civilian areas, although roughly one-fifth landed in Gaza. PIJ also managed to fire a few rockets that reached the southern Tel Aviv suburbs and a West Bank settlement near Jerusalem.

Israel's Iron Dome air defence system intercepted 95.6% of the rockets on track to hit Israeli civilians, although one Israeli was killed in a Rehovot apartment building and a Gazan labourer was killed in Israeli territory. Reports suggest Israel twice delayed the start of the operation amid concerns that innocent people could be killed. Overall the operation killed 34 Palestinians in Gaza, including ten innocents in the opening airstrikes, according to the Israel Defence Forces. Most casualties were militants, the IDF elaborated, and some occurred as a result of PIJ misfires.

As for the broader context, Israel was responding to PIJ rocket attacks on Israeli cities launched after PIJ figure Khader Adnan died on May 2 while on a hunger strike in Israeli custody. Israeli defence officials also harboured concerns about PIJ's burgeoning rocket production capability in the West Bank city of Jenin.

As in August 2022, Hamas resisted reported urging by Iran to enter the fighting, and this round it reportedly even refused to shelter PIJ operatives by pairing them with Hamas fighters as shields. Rather, Hamas continued its policy of keeping Gaza quiet in order to consolidate its control and make economic gains (i.e., maintaining access for a minority of Palestinians to higher-paying jobs in Israel), while focusing on its West Bank operations against Israel.

Hamas would have struggled to stay on the sidelines had the fighting lasted longer.

Lazar Berman is the Times of Israel's diplomatic reporter. © Times of Israel, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

On May 14, polls conducted by three Israeli television networks showed that nearly 60% of Israelis were satisfied with the security actions against PIJ. At the same time, they did not see the campaign as a turning point. A *Channel 13* poll revealed that 53% of respondents believed it was a matter of “months” before another Gaza confrontation, whereas only 17% thought more than a year would pass. Military analysts interviewed on television, and even relatively upbeat analyses, generally failed to offer reassurance of a long-term solution to the Gaza tensions.

## NETANYAHU RISES FROM LOWS

Given general public support for short, focused military operations, the bump experienced by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is unsurprising. Yet the Israeli leader needed any help he could get following the uproar over his Government’s controversial proposed judicial overhaul. Support for the coalition was basically in free fall by late March amid public anger over the sudden dismissal of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, who called for a pause in the reform plans. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets in protest, and the Histadrut general trade union called for widespread strikes. In response, Netanyahu was forced to backtrack, publicly voicing support for compromise talks facilitated by President Isaac Herzog.

Netanyahu’s aides have conveyed to reporters on background that the Prime Minister does not want to advance any controversial unilateral legislation during the spring-summer Knesset session, given that it could derail passage of the two-year budget before the month’s end. (By law, Israel’s government dissolves if it does not pass a budget by May 29.) Undoubtedly, though, the far-right elements of Netanyahu’s bloc will see the budget deadline as an opportunity for brinkmanship on various issues.

Friction could centre, first, on large, proposed shifts in funding for the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, including increased assistance for educational institutions that exclude core subjects such as math and English. The anti-overhaul movement will see this as part and parcel of its opposition to the sweeping changes the Government is trying to implement, and the sharp increase in subsidies is sure to rekindle resentment.

Second, overhaul proponents like Knesset Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee chair Simcha Rothman will threaten to advance the legislation during the budget debate if the Herzog talks bog down.

The May 14 surveys by *Kan*, *Channel 12*, and *Channel 13* appeared to offer a political path for Netanyahu. By

late April, polls showed that the Prime Minister’s Likud Party would plummet to 20 seats if elections were held right then, down from its existing 32-seat position. But by mid-May, Netanyahu’s party appeared to have gained back seven or eight of the lost seats. An election today could still see a bloc led by de facto National Unity head Benny Gantz triumph by anywhere from three to seven seats.

Gantz’s strength has impressed analysts, who had presumed – after five elections in three-plus years – that the political fight would come down to a narrow slice of soft-right voters. But at Netanyahu’s April low point, Gantz appeared to have a much higher ceiling. Moreover, despite

falling short in previous national elections, Gantz has gained public respect as a unifying figure intent on avoiding a culture war over the judicial overhaul.

Netanyahu understands that the judicial issue is a political lightning rod that he cannot now touch, and that his association with extremist political figures like National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, and Justice Minister Yariv Levin –

who lately are perceived as being able to overpower him – is weakening him in the eyes of the broader public. A military conflict, by comparison, links the Prime Minister to more pragmatic, straightforward military chiefs and would appear to boost his political prospects.

## CONCLUSION

Netanyahu must now walk a political tightrope. On the one hand, he will try to avoid angering the coalition’s ideological base, an act that will involve hinting that the overhaul has merely been postponed – not scuttled – or that Herzog can facilitate a compromise palatable to the right. Yet anti-overhaul protesters do not trust Netanyahu and believe that the issue is only temporarily on the backburner and can return at any time. Thus, protests are expected to continue.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister will seek to signal to the Biden Administration his desire to jointly counter Iran while building stronger ties with Saudi Arabia, both of which require prior consultation between the leaders in the Oval Office. Investors, meanwhile, are awaiting a clear signal from the Prime Minister either that judicial overhaul is dead or that a reasonable compromise has been reached, but Netanyahu may seek to maintain ambiguity in the hope that the issue will either fade or lose its political potency.

AIR

*David Makovsky is the Ziegler Distinguished Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. ©Washington Institute (www.washingtoninstitute.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

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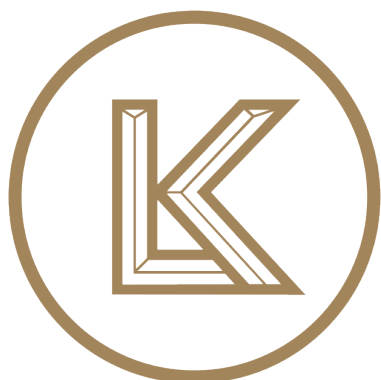
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# “Iran Needs to Fear Us”

An interview with Dennis Ross

Ariel Kahana

Ambassador Dennis Ross served as a senior advisor to three US presidents and took part in the Middle East peace process for decades.

Speaking with *Israel Hayom* in an exclusive interview conducted virtually ahead of Herzliya Conference 2023 at Reichman University, Ross criticised the current Administration's policy on Iran.

“Iran doesn't fear us the way they need to fear us. They're on a track where they're enriching to 60%. They clearly did a test that allowed them to produce some particles to 83.7% [enrichment level].”



Amb. Dennis Ross: Veteran Middle East mediator and former Obama Administration point man on Iran (Image: Screenshot)

Ross adds, “I would like us to change our declaratory policy and make it very clear. Rather than saying all options are on the table, we should be saying we prefer democracy, we prefer diplomacy as a way to resolve this issue, but apparently the Iranians do not. And they need to understand they have invested 40 years in a nuclear infrastructure, and they are putting that entire investment at risk.”

Ross, who worked under Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama on Middle East policy, doesn't see a breakthrough in relations between Riyadh and Jerusalem happening in the near term.

“Saudi Arabia today is different than Saudi Arabia in the past. From an American standpoint, ten years ago, if you'd asked me or anyone in the government if we knew that Saudi Arabia was going to change the source of its identity and legitimacy to modernisation, nationalism, and away from Wahhabism, we would have said, ‘Where do we sign up?’ Because Wahhabism was the ideology of al-Qaeda and

ISIS... There is a social revolution taking place. Are they about to become a democracy? No. But the fact is, the scale of change... instead of being a source of Wahhabism, it now becomes one of those who is fighting that, even in an ideological sense. So the significance of that for the Middle East is huge.”

**Q: So why do you believe no breakthrough is in the offing?**

“Mohammed Bin Salman is determined to transform the country. As he has said to many people, he does not look at Israel as an enemy. What's clear is that when he thinks about normalising ties with Israel, I would put it this way: There is a process where you build normal relations from the ground up, and then there's the issue of normalisation, where you establish formal diplomatic relations. So what we're seeing, I think, is a duality here. If you ask me, ‘Are we on the brink of normalisation?’ My answer is no. If you asked me, ‘Are we witnessing what will be a process where normal relations are built?’ My answer is yes. And by that, I mean: Israelis were invited to what the Saudis call their ‘Davos in the Desert.’ Israelis can be on panels there... There can be their readiness to invest in Israeli companies. So you're building relations that become normal, which, if you really are focused on the meaning of normalisation, ultimately, that builds a foundation that is much more enduring and creates connections much more between peoples and societies... but it takes time.”

**Q: You were appointed by the Obama Administration as an advisor on Iran. Iran has since breached all red lines, including in its uranium enrichment and spreading of terrorism against the US, and most recently it has been helping Russia in Ukraine. But the US is not willing to counter that threat. Has America chosen the wrong policy all along?**

“Iran doesn't fear us the way they need to fear us. They have to understand that the path they're on, especially the nuclear path they're on, is one that is extremely risky for them as they measure risk, not as we think they should measure risk, but as they measure this. The fact that they enrich to 60%, that they have 16 cascades of new centrifuges, advanced centrifuges, IR6s, in enriching the 60% level... they're on a pathway where even if they haven't made a decision to have a nuclear weapon, they're putting themselves in a position where they can have the option to have a nuclear weapon. And they continue to proceed. They're going to get to a point where not only do they have the option, but it'd be difficult to reverse it. They clearly... don't see that is exposing them to risk. So we have got to communicate, talk to them in a way, both in words and in, action that gives them a reason to see something is different. The exercises we're running now are good. They can reinforce the image of the words. The words are out there, but if there's nothing that reinforces them, they won't mean a lot.”



Ross adds that the US should provide Israel with aerial refuelling capability that would send the message that America will not stand in Israel's way.

"Israel has bought four KC-46s. This will allow them [Israel] to be much more effective. The problem with the Iranian hardening of their targets is you will have to hit the same target multiple times in the same spot to be able to destroy it. The Iranians believe not only that we won't act militarily but that we will stop [Israel] from acting militarily... we should push Israel to the front of the line [in KC-46s] to immediately send a message to the Iranians, that not only are we not going to stop the Israelis – we will support them."

Ross also says the US should exact a price for Iran's aggression against US forces in the region. "We have been hit 83 times now by Iranian proxies in Syria and Iraq; we responded three times. The problem... is that Iranians will fight to the very last of the proxies – they don't care

**"The Iranians believe not only that we won't act militarily but that we will stop [Israel] from acting militarily... we should... send a message... that not only are we not going to stop the Israelis – we will support them."**

about proxy casualties; they care about their own casualties. We need to hit them in a way they don't expect. If you begin to do that, they'll also get the message, even in the region, that some of what they're doing is more dangerous than they thought. We have to convince them by our words and our actions that they have miscalculated about us and they're running a risk."

Ross says the US "should take a page from the Israeli playbook, where you carry out certain kinds of strikes and you don't admit it."

**Q: Does the fact that Biden has yet to invite Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu undermine the relations between Israel and the US?**

"No. No. Look at the scope of what we're doing with Israel right now. We have unprecedented exercises with Israel. Unprecedented... If you ask me, 'Will they have a meeting at some point?' My answer is yes. Prime Minister Netanyahu said to him 'I've got my hands on the steering wheel, this is my government, my decision.' But then Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich appears before a map that shows no Jordan and says there is no such thing as a Palestinian people. And you have Itamar Ben-Gvir's statements. I think the whole nature of the way the judicial reform process has been handled raised questions.

"I think that Biden wants to see that Bibi is the Bibi that he's always known. I saw plenty of their interactions in the three years of the Obama Administration I was a part of. They have a relationship that is a very interesting relation-



Biden and Bibi: Ross predicts they will meet again soon, despite disagreements over the handling of judicial reforms (Image: GPO/ Flickr)

ship. And I mean, it is interesting in a positive way. One of the things I've always felt about Prime Minister Netanyahu is when he believes that you're a friend of Israel, he can accept all sorts of things and he views Biden genuinely and understandably as someone who has an emotional connection to Israel. Of all the presidents I've worked for... Biden is one of those who has, I think, maybe the strongest emotional connection to Israel, of any of the presidents that I've known and worked for. You saw when he went to Yad Vashem [Holocaust memorial] and bent a knee. This is Biden. His connection to Israel is an emotional one." AIR

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## THE UN'S "NAKBA" MISREPRESENTATIONS

Shany Mor

**O**n May 15, the United Nations General Assembly held a special event for Nakba Day, including a "special commemorative event" in the General Assembly Hall. Coined by the Syrian intellectual Constantine Zureiq, *Nakba* – Arabic for "disaster" – is the word used to describe the events of 1948 leading up to the creation of the State of Israel, and is synonymous today with perceptions of Israeli cruelty and the fracturing of Palestinian society.

The Nakba Zureiq describes in his 1948 book *The Meaning of Disaster*, however, was the failure of the Arabs to defeat the Jews – far from the misleading potted history the UN's website provides.

"Seven Arab states declare war on Zionism, stop impotent before it, and then turn on their heels," Zureiq writes. Regarding displaced Palestinian Arabs, it's notable that his

concern is that they might be “forced to return to their homes, there to live under the Zionist shadow.” He laments that “dispersion has become the lot of the Arabs rather than of the Jews.”

This is no longer how the word Nakba is used today. The Arab defeat has been recast as a Palestinian tragedy, the conflict as a one-sided historical crime, and the Jews’ perilous war of survival as a colonialist endeavour of racial supremacy.

The late German historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch explained how a traumatic defeat can come to be reimaged as a great moral victory.

The canonical case was the American Confederacy, an act of treason against the United States created for the preservation and further spread of the enslavement of Black Americans, which transmogrified into the “Lost Cause” of Southern heritage battling a rapacious and exploitative capitalist North.



The UN’s obsession with the Palestinian cause now extends to not one but two special days a year (Image: Twitter)

The political evolution of the word Nakba in the decades following 1948 is the story of how a defeat was refashioned into an injustice. The high point of this process was 50 years later in 1998, when a newly formed Palestinian Authority turned the date most associated with the Nakba, 15th May, into an official national day of commemoration, eagerly adopted by pro-Palestinian partisans.

The transmutation of the Arabs’ failed effort to wipe out the Jewish state into their own cosmic tragedy, together with the adoption of this counter-narrative by intellectuals and self-styled humanitarians in the West, is noteworthy in itself. But for the UN, and the General Assembly specifically, to play along is particularly ironic for a number of reasons.

The Arab war against Israel was a war against a landmark resolution of the UN General Assembly (181) calling for the peaceful partition of British Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state. For the General Assembly itself to be marking this defeat as a “disaster” to be mourned is curious, to say the least. It was also the first major violation of Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, which forbade the “use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”

In violating the UN Charter and violently seeking to prevent the implementation of Resolution 181, the Arab coalition in 1948 was also attempting to block the first major UN effort at peacemaking in an international conflict. What’s more, in fighting to prevent partition, Arab armies were also violently resisting the UN’s first notable endeavour in decolonisation. The partition resolution, after all, held out the prospect of creating sovereign self-governing nation-states in land vacated by a European imperial power.

The UN’s commemoration was for only one aspect of this war, the mass displacement it caused, and for only one side. And here too another irony is buried.

Displacement in war wasn’t unusual then, just as it isn’t now. In the late 1940s tens of millions were displaced by war, including defeated Germans and hundreds of thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors in central Europe,

**“Displacement in war wasn’t unusual then, just as it isn’t now. In the late 1940s tens of millions were displaced by war, including defeated Germans and hundreds of thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors in central Europe, but also Hindus and Muslims”**

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but also Hindus and Muslims following the partition of India. None except for Palestinian Arabs had an entire UN agency created for them, dedicated to maintaining their refugee status rather than rehabilitating them. This, though, is precisely what UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, does.

The decision to mark May 15 as Nakba Day shows just how much the mythology of the Arab defeat in 1948 has evolved separately from the obsessive attention to the Palestinian cause at the UN. After all, the UN already sets aside another day every year to commemorate the Palestinian struggle. In 1977, the General Assembly proclaimed November 29, date of the original partition resolution in 1947, as International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and it remains one of the organisation's most notable annual events.

The two dates chosen speak volumes about the tragedy of the Palestinian cause. Accepting partition would have resulted in the first ever Arab state in Palestine 75 years ago. The Arab rejection of partition and subsequent wars against Israel were, for the Palestinians, the real disaster.

AIR

*Shany Mor is Director of Research at United Nations Watch. Reprinted from Unherd (Unherd.com) © UN Watch, reprinted by permission of the author, all rights reserved*

## WHAT DOES TURKEY'S ELECTION MEAN FOR ISRAEL?

Shimon Sherman

Turkey's High Election Board (YSK) declared on May 15 that the country would be heading to a runoff election in late May after incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan failed to secure more than 50% of the vote in the national election the previous day. In Turkey, a candi-

date must win a majority of the vote to win the election outright. Otherwise, another election is held between the two leading candidates.

Erdogan faced possibly his most formidable challenge in this election round, after almost 20 years of serving in Turkey's highest office, from opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu. Opinion polling before the election showed a razor-thin race, with many polls placing Kilicdaroglu above the 50% mark. However, the results told a different story.

YSK said in a statement on May 15 that with 100% of the ballots counted, Erdogan had received 49.51% of the vote, Kilicdaroglu 44.88% and third-place candidate Sinan Ogan, whom many have called a "kingmaker" in the runoff election, 5.17%.

In a post-election speech given from the balcony of the ruling AKP party headquarters, Erdogan thanked his supporters and said he appreciated the "outcome of the national will and the clear lead that was delivered," signalling his confidence regarding the upcoming May 28 runoff vote.

Meanwhile, Kilicdaroglu delivered a much more sombre message, questioning the integrity of the election process and accusing Erdogan of "blocking the will of Turkey" and turning the election into "a fait accompli". However, Kilicdaroglu also signalled confidence regarding the runoff election, saying, "If our nation says a second round, we accept it. We will win this election in the second round."

Despite Kilicdaroglu's confidence, however, many analysts have predicted that the second round will almost certainly go to Erdogan. Dr. Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, an expert on modern Turkey at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS) and the Moshe Dayan Centre at Tel Aviv University, told *JNS* that in his view Erdogan will "almost certainly" win.

### "RELATIONSHIP HAS CERTAINLY TAKEN A HIT"

Gallia Lindenstrauss, a senior research fellow at the



Erdogan with Israeli President Herzog: The Turkish leader is no supporter of Israel, but will likely maintain relations for pragmatic reasons (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

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Erdogan vs. Kilicdaroglu: The former looks all but guaranteed to win a second round on May 29 (Image: Tolga Ildun/ Shutterstock)

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), agreed, saying: “At this point, Kilicdaroglu’s chances are slim to none.”

For the past few months, this election has mostly pivoted around economic issues, with historic inflation recently plaguing Turkey. In addition, the February earthquake which claimed the lives of more than 50,000 people in Southern Anatolia, and the Government’s slow response to the natural disaster, was another major campaign issue in the election.

Besides economics, Turkey’s elections also have major implications for the country’s foreign policy, including Turkey’s relationship with Israel.

Erdogan currently leads a bloc of mostly Islamist parties in Turkey’s Parliament and has in the past expressed anti-Western sentiment. Furthermore, he has traditionally led a very cold foreign policy towards Israel, which has even elevated into open hostility a few times during his 20-year rule.

“The Israeli-Turkish relationship has certainly taken a hit under Erdogan’s rule,” said Lindenstrauss. By contrast, Kilicdaroglu has traditionally been seen as a pro-Western candidate. He has on several occasions signalled his interest in pivoting Ankara’s foreign policy more in the direction of the United States and Europe, and further from the Islamist influence which has significantly expanded in Turkey in recent years.

Despite his pro-Western attitude, however, Kilicdaroglu is seen by some experts as a potentially destabilising figure for the Israeli-Turkish relationship.

“Kilicdaroglu has said some very troubling things about Israel, including expressing support for the Palestinian cause, criticising Israel’s arrest of a Turkish citizen on the Temple Mount, and perhaps most troubling, expressing interest in reopening the *Mavi Marmara* case,”

said Lindenstrauss, referring to a diplomatic crisis that erupted following a 2010 Israeli raid on the Turkish ship, which had been attempting to break the Gaza blockade. The crisis was closed in 2016 after Israel offered Turkey \$20 million in compensation and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu officially apologised.

Kilicdaroglu’s rule is also seen as potentially threatening to Israel due to his political partners.

“Kilicdaroglu’s alliance has political leaders who are staunchly anti-Israeli. Erdogan also has anti-Israeli influences, but he is much more politically stable and is therefore much less susceptible to political pressure from his allies. Kilicdaroglu by contrast would be much less

independent if he won, and therefore can be more problematic,” Yanarocak told *JNS*.

Furthermore, Turkey’s recent actions have experts believing that an Erdogan victory will likely lead to continued improvements in the Israeli-Turkish relationship.

“Israel and Turkey have recently renormalised, we have blossoming trade, and good tourism, overall the trajectory is positive in the past year,” said Lindenstrauss. “Israel’s recent actions during the Turkish earthquake were taken very positively in Ankara, and we can expect this to steadily continue improving over time.”

Yanarocak agreed with her assessment, saying, “Erdogan is certainly no supporter of Israel, but he is a deeply practical politician who understands that developing good ties is the pragmatic thing to do.”

Beyond receiving a clear lead in the primary election, Erdogan’s AKP party also managed to secure 35%, allowing the AKP-led people’s alliance to retain its majority in the parliament.

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INGREDIENT SPECIALISTS



# PERSIAN PARADISE LOST

Tammy Reznik

In 1979, when I was a child of seven, two equally terrifying television news stories were being cycled daily on our home TV – images of bloated abandoned children, victims of Pol Pot’s genocide in a place called Kampuchea (current day Cambodia), and recurring visuals of an intimidating bearded man named “the Ayatollah Khomeini”, who had stolen power in a far-flung place called Iran. According to the whispers that I heard in the living room of our suburban Melbourne home, this was not a good time to be in Iran, let alone a Jew in Iran.

Within the limits of my young mind, it never occurred to me you could be both Jewish and Iranian. I only knew of Jews who spoke Yiddish and ate gefilte fish and nothing of the thriving Jewish culture that spoke Farsi and ate *Gondhi* (a Persian Jewish dish of meatballs traditionally served on Shabbat).

As I stood there transfixed by the image of Iran’s new Supreme Leader on my TV in Melbourne, a young Jewish boy named Beni, the exact same age as me, stood with his parents, crammed in with tens of thousands at Teheran’s local airport, ready to welcome the returning exiled Ayatollah and soon-to-be Iranian Supreme Leader as he disembarked from his personal aircraft.

## PERSIAN AND JEWISH – A LIFE OF CONTRADICTIONS

Last week, I succeeded in tracking Beni Sabti down. Beni Sabti is now a social media and Iranian regime researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies in Jerusalem. He was one of the founders of the IDF spokesman’s platform in Persian and acted as an advisor for Israel’s hit TV series “Tehran”.

Born in Teheran in 1972, he fled with his parents and

siblings to Israel in 1987 in a harrowing escape that sounds like a movie script – complete with smugglers, long days traversing the desert, bribes and car chases.

I had so many questions – what was life like under the Islamic regime, how did you leave and is it even possible to get out now? I assumed the remaining Jews must be like prisoners – why else would any Jew remain in this repressive country whose government actively denies Israel’s right to exist and discriminates against Jewish citizens by law? Some of his responses surprised me.

Iran is indeed controlled by a regime which rules through fear and intimidation, and espouses hate and antisemitism, yet Jews remain there in sizeable numbers – the largest community in the Middle East outside of Israel. According to Sabti, “Their relationship [to Iran and the Islamic regime] is complex,” in some ways reminiscent of the social integration that was a factor in the life of the Jews in Germany on the eve of the Second World War.

“Jews in Iran”, says Sabti, “are Iranian first, they do not embrace change, and for some who have lived there for centuries, they are influenced by Iranian Muslim practices – there is a tacit exchange of traditions.”

Sabti says members of the community try to maintain a low profile and be physically indistinguishable from the wider society. They try to blend in to avoid unwarranted attention or being accused of disloyalty to the Iranian state – though a handful did participate during the protracted nation-wide protests that followed the death of Mahsa Amini last year. At least five Jews were arrested as a result.



Beni Sabti: Iranian expat and leading researcher on the regime

## A COMMUNITY ON A TIGHTROPE

There are an estimated 8,000 to 8,500 Jews living in Iran today. Their life under theocratic rule – and the flight of the overwhelming majority of the Jews who once lived there – has led to the emergence of a community that is more religiously observant than that which existed during the more liberal era of the Shah, Sabti notes.

According to Iranian state policy, Jews are purportedly “free” to practise their religion, but this comes with caveats and limits. As a recognised minority, Jews are granted one token representative to the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) – which is dominated by Islamic clergy. Jews and other recognised minorities are barred by law from serving in Iran’s judiciary and security services or running for public office. They also cannot hold authority over Muslims in the armed forces. Like all Iranians, Jews must also abide by Islamic Shari’a law.

Iran has a number of synagogues and Jewish centres. The current Chief Rabbi of Teheran, Rabbi Yehuda Gerami, says his community has achieved some positive developments in recent years, like persuading Iranian authorities to let Jewish schools close on Saturdays for the Sabbath,

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A celebration of the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omer in Teheran (Photo courtesy of Beni Sabti)

the Jewish day of rest – which they previously were not allowed to do – and to renovate a Jewish ritual bath (mikveh) in Teheran. “Also, we now have about six kosher restaurants in Teheran, two in Shiraz and two in Isfahan,” Gerami said. “And we opened a Jewish seminary in Teheran.” There is regular attendance at synagogue and Jews mostly attend Jewish schools.

As recently as March, Gerami tweeted footage of Jews singing the Shoshanat Prayer at the end of Purim.

Yet a month later, the regime renewed public threats directed at the Jewish community – warning them to cancel traditional post-Passover Mimouna celebrations and join the regime’s vehemently anti-Israel and antisemitic al-Quds Day protest rallies (held on the last Friday of the Muslim holy month Ramadan).

According to Sabti, all the congregations chose to cancel Mimouna, while the Jewish representative in the Iranian parliament, Dr Homayoun Sameyah, joined the anti-Israeli al-Quds Day march. Dr Sameyah, a pharmacist by profession, was even quoted in Iranian media saying, “Every year there are important things for al-Quds Day, this day is very important not only for Iranians, but also for all nations.”

## THE LONG JEWISH HISTORY IN PERSIA

The Jewish presence in Iran dates back over 2,700 years, to the Babylonian exile, when King Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in 539 BCE and allowed many Jews in exile there to return to their homeland in today’s Israel, while others remained in the Persian empire. The traditional Jewish Purim story, involving Esther and Mordechai, is set in Persia during the reign of one of Cyrus’ successors.

At its height, just ahead of the Islamic Revolution, the then-thriving Jewish community in Iran numbered approximately 80,000 individuals.

The tensions between the loyalists of the Shah and opponents, including the Islamists, throughout the 1970s sparked the beginning of a mass-migration of Iranian Jews even before the 1979 Revolution led to the establishment of a theocratic government under Khomeini. The new constitution recognised Jews as an acknowledged religious minority, granting them certain rights, but it also imposed various restrictions on them. Some of the remaining Jews tried embracing the revolution and the nation’s new rulers – some 5,000 of them even took part in the Ayatollah’s official welcoming ceremony following the revolution.

Yet, as devoted as they were to their ancient Persian heritage, around half of the Persian Jewish community fled Iran within the first few months after the revolution. The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) saw another mass migration.

It was during this period that life became increasingly harder, stricter and more threatening, Sabti recalls. Gaining access to government services like passports became near impossible.

“We were regularly threatened or bashed for no reason. Everyone in Iran suffered. But the Jews suffered more,” says Sabti.

“From time to time,” he recalls, “IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps]

officers would come to Jewish shops and intimidate or arrest.” Sick of the fear and beatings, Sabti decided at age 14 to join the ranks of the IRGC himself! It was the only way to stay safe. “They didn’t care who you were as long as you pledged allegiance to the State,” he says.

The tipping point came in 1986, when Sabti’s father was the victim of a hit-and-run accident. The family looked for a way out. It took a year to finally leave, and they had to do so illegally via smugglers. “Today it is different,” says Sabti, “but you do need to have both contacts and money to leave.”

**“We were regularly threatened or bashed for no reason. Everyone in Iran suffered. But the Jews suffered more,” says Sabti”**

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## ANTI-JEWISH PARANOIA

In February this year, a top-secret letter written by an Iranian lieutenant colonel was leaked revealing the deep paranoia about Jews in the regime. “All Jews are secretly spying on behalf of the state of Israel or working for the Mossad,” it said.

Such anti-Jewish paranoia has been a perennial problem. Shortly after the ’79 revolution, several Iranian Jews were accused of spying for Israel and executed.

Sabti believes there is a “deep suspicion and secrecy that is a part of life for all Iranian citizens, but even more so for the remaining Jews.”

Israeli-Iranian journalist Yasmin Mottadeh, with whom I also spoke, agrees, noting, “Currently there are a number of Jews detained in an Iranian prison on charges of spying for Israel... as well as 16 non-Jewish Kurdish Muslim Iranians detained in prison in Iran sentenced to death on charges of spying for Israel.”

## HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND NAZI SYMPATHIES

Another consistent trend under the Iranian revolutionary government has been the promotion of Holocaust denial. Former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was notorious for both his Holocaust denial and calls for Israel to be “wiped off the map.” Current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has repeatedly used Twitter to deny the Holocaust. And the regime not only denies the Holocaust but makes use of Nazi material and ideology.

Sabti says the promotion of Nazi ideology was endemic to the education he received in Iran. “They would hand out copies of *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* for free in mosques, and translated copies in Farsi online.”

More recently, before this year’s International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Islamic Republic-controlled *Channel 4* ran an entire series featuring British and American Holocaust deniers. The *Kayhan* newspaper – Khamenei’s own favourite media outlet – last year published a guest column praising Hitler.

## IRAN’S JEWS AND ISRAEL

Sabti says that, like with everything else, Iran’s remaining Jews are forced to use code words when discussing Israel. They often even find ways to visit by circumventing the borders and exiting Iran via a third country. The community is tight, and information on how to travel to Israel secretly is shared.

Yet even after they depart Iran, that sense of tight connection among Iranian Jews never leaves them.

Iran specialist Professor Lior Sternfeld of Penn State University points to the district in south Tel Aviv widely known as Little Persia “where one can find spices and goods from Iran and authentic Persian restaurants.” There are similarly strong Persian Jewish enclaves in Los Angeles and Long Island, New York. The recent visit of the late Shah of Iran’s eldest son, Reza Pahlavi, to Israel, gives Sabti hope for a brighter future for the unique global community he is a part of. “You can take the Jew out of Iran, but you can never take Iran out of us,” says Sabti with a laugh.

AIR

## “QUDS DAY” BECOMES ANTISEMITISM DAY

Ran Porat

After the 1979 revolution in Iran, the country’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini initiated the tradition of marking International al-Quds (Jerusalem) Day every year on the last Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. On that day, the Iranian regime and its anti-Zionist allies hold protests and processions around the world in support of the Palestinians and against Israel, often shouting antisemitic slogans and carrying hateful signs.

As reported previously in the *AIR*, over the last few years, pro-Palestinian groups and fans of Iran have been commemorating Quds Day in Sydney and Melbourne. 2023 was no different in that respect, with the event in Sydney (April 14) dominated by senior members of the Australian branch of Teheran’s international propaganda network, al-Tajamu, along with official Palestinian and Syrian representatives.

Fewer than 40 participants (men only) gathered at the Arncliffe (NSW) Bernie Wright Meeting Room to note the occasion. Guests this year included the Honorary Consul of Syria in Sydney, Maher Dabbagh, and representatives of the Palestinian Workers Union. The hall was decorated with the flags of Iran and Australia, and the Palestinian flag, as well as a big picture of Khomeini.

One of the speakers in the event was leading al-Tajamu figure and former academic Dr Tim Anderson. As the

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network's General Coordinator in Australia, Anderson participated in early April in an online conference to launch the 2023 international Quds Day program that was organised from Beirut by Hezbollah, Palestinian terror groups and pro-Assad Syrian groups. At the Sydney event, Anderson reportedly hailed Khomeini for starting Quds Day, while another speaker, Dr Muhammad Sadiq, spoke about "the racism of the Zionist entity."

The keynote speaker of the evening was Sydneysider Hussein Dirani, who heads al-Tajamu Australia and is also a senior official in the Australian office of the Ahlul-Bait World Assembly – an Iran-based international Shi'ite organisation dedicated to spreading Khomeini's theological ideas. True to his past record of voicing extremist views and spreading antisemitism, Dirani did not mince his words that night.

## THE 'BASTARD ENTITY' WILL SOON FALL

Dirani opened his speech by arguing that "millions", including Jews, participate in Quds Day events across the globe "in solidarity with the Palestinian people who suffer under the yoke of the oppression of the Zionist occupation and terrorism, and in rejection of all practices of oppression and terrorism that the bastard entity is doing daily against the defenceless Palestinian people."

Next, he warned that "The faithful, patient and oppressed Palestinian masses are preparing to march towards al-Quds al-Sharif [Temple Mount in Jerusalem] in hundreds of thousands despite the Zionist siege and oppression... to defend the sanctities in al-Quds al-Sharif with all they possess... until the liberation of the entire soil of Palestine."

These "millions", cried Dirani, "are marching to participate in this blessed day that revives hearts, blood and consciences so that they... ignite anger in order to pour a fire on the forces of evil and the Zionist, racist, terrorist aggression that is getting more brutal day after day against the oppressed Palestinian people."

Referring to the recent internal divisions over judicial reforms within the Jewish state, Dirani prophesied that a civil war will soon erupt in the "temporary entity" which will "destroy this entity without the forces of opposition and resistance making an effort to remove it." Spinning a genocidal fantasy about the end of Israel, he claimed that "Senior rabbis, politicians, and intellectuals have started to seriously talk about the destruction of their homes with their own hands."

Dirani cited a notorious speech given in 2000 by Has-

san Nasrallah, leader of the Iranian proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, claiming Israel is feeble than a spider's web. Is-raelis, said Dirani, "are emphasising" that Nasrallah's vision that "Israel [is] weaker than a spider's web, has become a reality, digging into the depths of the Israeli consciousness, whose fate has become exposed before their eyes." Refer-

ring to other 'predictions' that Israel's end is near, Dirani mused that "There is a firm belief that their racist, terrorist state will not celebrate its sinister 80th anniversary." This fate, explained Dirani, is based on the prophecy by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who "gave us glad tidings [in 2016] that this bastard entity will fall within 25 years."

## ZIONISTS 'DRINKING CHILDREN'S BLOOD'

"Racist Zionist politicians", said Dirani, are calling for "the extermination of the Palestinian people." Attacks attributed to Israel (the "usurping Zionist entity") in Syria and in Iran (against Iran's nuclear program, its drone and missile projects and weapons supplies to Teheran's terrorist proxies across the Middle East), suggested Dirani, are "an attempt to export [Israel's] severe internal crises abroad."

Dirani angrily addressed Australian politicians, "whose election success is dependent on the Arab and Islamic community. They [the politicians] invite us to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the usurpation of Palestine [Israel's independence]."

In his conclusion, Dirani wove familiar antisemitic themes into his rhetoric, including classic conspiracy theories about the power of the 'Jewish lobby' and the blood libel of Jews drinking the blood of children.

"The Zionists are threatening to establish their state on the skulls of the Palestinian people," he said, "and seek to silence our free and proud voices and intimidate us to prevent us from reviving these national and Islamic events to please the Zionist lobby – even accusing us of antisemitism while they slaughter the Semites and drink the blood of the children of Palestine."

The 2023 Quds Day event in Sydney brought to light yet again the existence on Australian soil of a de-facto network of Iranian agents who actively promote antisemitism and hatred.

AIR

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



Dirani during the 2023 Quds day event in Sydney (Source: <https://visions-sy.com/40373/> Screenshot, Syrian website)





## THE BIBLIO FILE

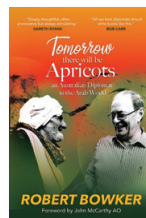
### A Bob One Way

**Tomorrow there will be Apricots**

**Robert Bowker**

Shawline Publishing Group, Oct. 2022, 307 pp, A\$36.95

Allon Lee



Former Australian career diplomat Robert “Bob” Bowker’s new book *Tomorrow There Will be Apricots* provides a window into one man’s experiences representing his country in the Middle East from 1971 until his retirement in 2008.

A book of two halves, the first part focusses on Bowker’s career, while the second part shifts gears and summarises Bowker’s thoughts on a range of topics – Israel/Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Iran, the failure of the Arab Spring, Islamism, etc.

From the get-go, Bowker describes himself as a Middle East tragic and says being an “Australian diplomat in the Arab world... was my life.” It shows.

He writes that his “personal interest in Islam began during my student days in Indonesia,” but it was in Malaysia that “my professional interest in the Islamic world” began.

Bowker admits he had to struggle to remain professionally detached, writing that “I had to be on my guard against allowing fascination, if not empathy... to interfere with hard-edged analysis of major issues. A dilemma that persists with me to this day is how to pay due heed to the poetic power of mythologies and memories, real and imagined, without losing critical perspective.”

For this reviewer, given his frank admissions throughout the book, this

appears to be a battle that Bowker may have lost.

His first sustained exposure to the Middle East was a posting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in early 1974, just as the first Arab oil embargo was at its height.

In Jeddah, Bowker writes, “mostly I enjoyed the company of Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian expatriates” and would fly every few months to Beirut and visit other capitals, including Cairo and Teheran.

Returning to Australia, he served on the Middle East desk. The pro-Palestinian opinions he had developed appear to have never been far from the surface.

Tasked with providing analysis in 1976 of how “a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict” might look, Bowker’s advice was that “Israel risked being seen as an apartheid state... if it maintained an uncompromising stance towards the Palestinians.”

Never mind that at that time, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), were still very much wedded to terrorism and refused to recognise Israel’s right to exist.

In 1979, he was appointed as First Secretary in the Damascus Embassy, writing that his work was “mostly liaison with the Syria-based... members

of the Palestine Liberation Organization” and hosting “dinner parties” where US officials could circumvent legislation preventing them meeting with PLO members.

In December 1979, Bowker led the first meeting of Australian officials with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and was left unimpressed – assessing Arafat as “primarily a politician, and a facile interlocutor, rather than a strategist.”

He was more taken by “other Palestinian contacts and friends” through whom “I developed substantial sympathy for the Palestinian cause vis-à-vis Israel.”

This sympathy extended to Bowker “develop[ing] a sceptical view of the 1978 Camp David Accords and subsequent peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, at least so far as [they] impacted on the prospects for achieving a durable peace with the Palestinians.” His opposition to the Accords included crossing swords via classified cables with Australia’s ambassador in Tel Aviv David Goss, who supported the Accords.

Bowker does say he was less than impressed by “Syrian officials, who were unfailingly polite, sophisticated interlocutors” but failed to acknowledge their own “contribution to the circumstances under which [Israel’s] occupation [of the Golan Heights] had arisen.”

A chapter dedicated to his stint as Ambassador to Jordan between 1989 and 1992 recounts that Jordanians were rather sheepish about having believed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s empty promises to “force Israel’s hand in regard to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.”

Returning to Australia just as the Oslo peace process began, Bowker undertook a year’s paid leave to write an MA Thesis at the Australian National University’s newly formed Centre for Middle East and Central Asian Studies under Amin Saikal, which later became the basis of Bowker’s 1996 book *Beyond Peace: The Search for Security in the Middle East*.

Despite his reservations over whether Oslo would give Palestinians a “measure of justice”, Bowker does rightly point to one key problem – to make progress in peacemaking requires convincing Palestinians to normalise relations with Israelis, and he admits this has proven very difficult.

In 1995 he was appointed to head the Middle East and North Africa section (MENA) at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, but not before, he alleges, there were objections from local pro-Israel leaders, which he attributes to the fact that in 1987-88 “I had been prepared to push back against the advice offered by certain Australian officials who I felt were promoting unduly sympathetic interpretations of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians.”

**B**owker’s personal devotion to the Palestinian cause is further revealed in his self-described “shouting match” with Michael Thawley, the international policy adviser to then newly-elected Prime Minister John Howard, at a Zionist Federation of Australia/United Israel Appeal dinner in 1996.

The Howard Government wanted to dilute the language of Australian support for Palestinians to have their own “independent state” to something more ambiguous, which infuriated Bowker.

Whilst Bowker acknowledges governments have the right to set policy, he asserts they compromise too easily over Israeli-Palestinian issues due to electoral considerations and the influence of the pro-Israel lobby.

The story concludes with a telling incident demonstrating how deeply emotionally involved in the Palestinian cause he is. Bowker writes that when he attended a luncheon given by the Australia/Israel Chamber

of Commerce in 2000 at the same venue, “the events of that night [at the 1996 dinner] came flooding back, and I suffered an attack of post-traumatic stress disorder which needed to be addressed with the assistance of the Departmental Counsellor.”

In 1997-98, Bowker moved to Gaza to work for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) that provides medical and education services to Palestinian refugees in the Middle East – but also uses an unprecedented and ridiculous definition of such refugees and effectively promotes a Palestinian “right of return” that is completely incompatible with a two-state peace.

His account of the agency is illuminating. Writing on the politics of Pales-

tinian refugee status and the theatrics involved in fundraising, he notes that “dwellings that needed refurbishment” are called “shelters” to avoid any suggestion of “permanency which was not politically acceptable to the refugees.”

Potential donors were shown Gaza homes that were “devoid of items such as satellite television dishes that might detract from the imagery

required. All visitors had to step over at least one open drain.” To his credit, Bowker’s efforts to call attention to problematic fundraising-oriented policies at UNRWA led to him being effectively pushed out of the organisation.

His disappointment at Arafat’s “utter failure” to “exercise leadership” by promoting the two-state solution are also to his credit.

Yet Bowker’s recollections are compromised by such factual lapses as claiming that Shimon Peres lost the 1996 election to Binyamin Netanyahu because “Arab Israelis... largely chose not to vote” to protest Israel shelling the Lebanese village of Qana in April

1996. In reality, Peres’ 20 point lead over Netanyahu evaporated after a series of Palestinian suicide bombings that killed 59 Israelis in the weeks before the poll.

In Chapter 17, Bowker expounds upon his highly problematic thesis that the two-state solution is dead (see Bowker’s letter on the subject published in last month’s *AIR* and our response) and therefore that there must ultimately be a “one-state solution” that “treats Israelis and Palestinians as equals.”

His claim the Oslo process “degenerated” because “Israelis lost interest” fails to properly acknowledge the detail in the 2000, 2001 and 2008 offers that provided a realistic horizon for Palestinian aspirations, including for Jerusalem and its holy sites, as well as the withdrawal from Gaza and its aftermath. His figures claiming Palestinians outnumber Jews in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza combined and that they also have more children are just plain wrong.

There are many more assertions that will frustrate the informed pro-Israel reader and paint Bowker as being on autopilot, happy to regurgitate inaccurate or questionable pro-Palestinian talking points that he imbibed during his salad days in the Middle East in the 1970s and 80s.

Overall, despite Bowker’s attempt to portray himself as an even handed expert on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, his knowledge about Israel clearly relies on refracting it through the prism of what he has heard from Arab and Palestinian sources. The book contains little evidence of any close relationships or friendships with Israelis.

As a memoir of Australia diplomatic service over several decades, including some first-hand insights into historical events and realities, this book has value. Politically, however it is also largely an example of how outmoded and one-sided Arabist thinking developed in the 1970s and 80s impedes clear analysis of contemporary Mideast realities today.



# ESSAY

## A New Multifront Strategy?

Coordinated IRGC proxy war against Israel is decades old

Oved Lobel

**H**amas for the first time allegedly fired a large salvo of rockets from Lebanon in April 2023 – to coincide with rockets also being launched from Syria and Gaza. All of these attacks were coordinated by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani, who had been meeting with Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the IRGC’s Lebanese subsidiary Hezbollah in Beirut, as well as other proxies across the region, to coordinate attacks against Israel. Shortly thereafter, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant warned that “this is the end of the era of limited

conflicts,” and that Israel now faces an era of multifront war with the IRGC and its front groups, proxies and client states – a network known collectively as the “Resistance Axis” – due to a “convergence of the arenas” overseen by Iran.

And indeed, given the expanding size and sophistication of the Resistance Axis’ missile arsenals ringing Israel and the IRGC’s increasingly complete control of both Iraq and Yemen and consolidation of power in Syria over the past decade, a multifront war could in theory represent a strategic nightmare for Israel. The recent report of Qaani meeting all the Resistance Axis elements to increase and coordinate attacks against Israel, along with intelligence that a “nerve centre” has been established in Beirut to help the IRGC, Hezbollah, Hamas, PIJ, and other groups work together, further fuels Israeli anxiety.

AIJAC has published articles previously (for instance in June 2021) on how the IRGC has been attempting to coordinate a “Resistance Axis” war on

Israel from all fronts – Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and even Iraq and Yemen – including from claims of representatives of the Axis boasting about how close coordination has been since at least 2018.

However, what appears at first glance to represent a relatively new “convergence of arenas” strategy by the IRGC needs to be contextualised as part of the perennial Iranian strategy for waging war on Israel in place since the 1980s, one Israel has managed to counter very successfully, at least so far.

### 1970s–1990s

An inextricably linked Iran-Syria-Palestinian axis has actually been in existence since the early 1970s, with Lebanon the geographical fulcrum of the relationship and Damascus serving as the primary operational headquarters. Lebanon, from the 1980s until 2005, was under the direct military control of Syria, which itself slowly

transformed from an ally to a client of the IRGC following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The nexus between Damascus, Beirut and the Palestinian territories should therefore always have been viewed as one front, both geographically and operationally. It’s clear that the multifront war strategy was already in operation during the first intifada years, from 1987-92.

**“An inextricably linked Iran-Syria-Palestinian axis has actually been in existence since the early 1970s, with Lebanon the geographical fulcrum of the relationship and Damascus serving as the primary operational headquarters”**

The IRGC and Syria were already deeply involved throughout the 1980s in attacks inside Israel, the West Bank and Gaza and had local agents and groups, such as the former imam of the al-Aqsa Mosque Sheikh Assad Bayoud al-Tamimi, the leader of his own Khomeinist Islamic Jihad faction, operating throughout. To a large degree, PIJ, an Iranian proxy, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

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– General Command (PFLP-GC), a Syrian proxy force, catalysed, inspired and spearheaded the terrorist element of the first intifada, alongside Hamas.

The Resistance Axis coalesced further when the PIJ leadership – already ideologically Khomeinist – was deported by Israel to Lebanon in 1988 and the group then subsumed into the IRGC command structure via Hezbollah, which is better regarded as the IRGC's Lebanese branch than a truly independent entity. It is no coincidence that the first Palestinian suicide attack in Israel was conducted a year later by an Islamic Jihad faction

Axis branches to coordinate attacks are noted in reports thereafter.

In 1992, Israel deported hundreds of Islamic Jihad and Hamas operatives and leaders from the West Bank and Gaza to Lebanon, allowing for further integration of Hamas into the axis.

Already in 1992, Syria-controlled Lebanon hosted basing and training infrastructure for multiple groups, including Hamas, PIJ and the PFLP-GC, all of which also had headquarters in Damascus that were overseen by the IRGC. To Israel's south, Iran also integrated PIJ and Hamas, among others, into the IRGC in Sudan in 1991, with

the Iranian regime were held in 1999 and 2000, while the IRGC constantly met with its agents in Damascus to encourage coordinated attacks on Israel.

For some reason, Hezbollah's guerrilla war against Israel in Lebanon in the 1980s-1990s was and often still is viewed as a separate phenomenon to the first intifada, when they were in fact better thought of as two fronts in the same battle.

## 2000s

Israel opted for a perilous unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, which Hamas' Ghosheh argues was a "direct factor" in precipitating the start of the Second Intifada later that same year. This one was largely run by the Resistance Axis, not only in terms of financial and logistical support, but direct orders and action. Hezbollah restarted substantial attacks against Israel itself, the first since Israel's May withdrawal and timed to coincide with the start of the intifada, and also infiltrated advisers and agents into Gaza and the West Bank and directly ordered and oversaw the first use of mortars in Gaza in 2001. Its extremely popular media channel *al-Manar* became the primary propaganda instrument of the intifada and openly encouraged Palestinians to become suicide bombers.

Hezbollah also abducted four Israelis in 2000, including three soldiers it had killed, and exchanged them in January 2004 for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in what its spokesmen called a "gift" to the intifada. That year also saw Iranian drones infiltrating Israeli airspace from Lebanon, while rockets were fired from Gaza, foreshadowing the much larger rocket attacks from there since then.

The IRGC funded, recruited and smuggled weapons through a variety of routes, including via tunnels in the Sinai into Gaza, which likely accounts for the first use of jerry-rigged Qassam rockets in early 2002 by Hamas. Jordan also arrested Hezbollah opera-



Senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders attend a meeting with Iran's Supreme Leader in Teheran, Iran (Image via Iran's Supreme Leader's website)

that called itself Palestinian Hezbollah. As Meir Hatina has documented, PIJ and Hezbollah began launching joint operations into Israel and releasing joint communiques after those deportations.

In late 1991, this axis was formalised during a conference held under Iranian auspices to coordinate the intifada and obstruct nascent Israeli-PLO peace talks. According to a 1992 US terrorism report, Iran "hosted a series of high-profile meetings with Hizballah [sic.] and HAMAS with the stated goal of coordinating their efforts against Israel... In the aftermath of these talks, Hizballah increased its operations against Israel, including its repeated use of rockets to attack villages in northern Israel." Other Iranian meetings with these Resistance

Khartoum acting as a logistics hub and sanctuary like Damascus. The transshipment route for Iranian missiles and other weapons from Sudan to Gaza is well-known and forced Israel to target such shipments and relevant sites in Sudan several times between 2009 and 2014.

That Iranian-organised conference in 1991, the first of many, also established the "Damascus 10" – an alliance of ten Palestinian factions that rejected any peace process with Israel. According to former Hamas spokesperson and senior official Ibrahim Ghosheh, he spoke to then Hezbollah Secretary-General Abbas al-Musawi at the conference and coordinated Hezbollah attacks from Lebanon in support of the intifada. Further important meetings between Hamas and

tives attempting to smuggle dozens of rockets to open a third rocket front in the West Bank in 2001, something it has continued to attempt unsuccessfully – largely due to Israel’s massive intelligence and security presence in the area – ever since. However, rockets were reportedly fired in 2005 from the West Bank, and other rockets have been found that were allegedly manufactured in the area.

Even before the US deposed Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003 and inadvertently provided Iran a land corridor to ship rockets and other weapons to Syria and thence to Lebanon, journalist Charles Hines said that “By 2002, the transshipments from Iran through Syria into Lebanon looked at times like a trail of ants.” Moreover, as Teheran is doing today, a horrendous 2003 earthquake in Iran was used by the IRGC to fly missiles into Syria for Hezbollah under the guise of humanitarian aid flights. Hezbollah was already estimated to have “at least eleven thousand” rockets, including hundreds of long-range rockets, by 2003.

When Israel assassinated Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in March 2004, Hezbollah attacked Israeli positions in response. Hamas’ new leader Khaled Mashal and Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah held a massive memorial service, with the latter proclaiming:

*Consider us in Hezbollah, from the secretary-general and leadership down to our fighters and women, members of Hamas, and soldiers under your command... Be sure that your blood is our blood and your sheikh is our sheikh. We share the same destiny and this means that our fight is one.*

This was demonstrated in 2006,



(From top) Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Iranian proxies that are key to implementing Teheran’s multifront strategy (Images: Shutterstock)

the first qualitative escalation in the multifront war. Following the ambush of Israeli soldiers and kidnapping of Gilad Shalit near Gaza by Hamas on June 25, Israel launched Operation Summer Rains inside Gaza and simultaneously buzzed Bashar al-Assad’s palace in Damascus as a warning, given his hosting of Hamas’ leaders.

Like in 2000, Hezbollah then ambushed and kidnapped Israeli soldiers along the Lebanon border less than two weeks later, a mission undertaken in order to relieve pressure on Hamas, according to the son of a Hamas co-founder. Nasrallah himself publicly and explicitly linked the two events, declaring he would oversee

joint negotiations for the return of the soldiers Hezbollah had kidnapped as well as Shalit.

The Israel-Lebanon war that followed was overseen by former IRGC Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani, who was shuttling between Iran, Syria and Lebanon throughout.

Immediately after the war ended, the IRGC began rearming Hezbollah, Hamas and PIJ with rockets, with reports that the former was receiving Scuds via Syria in 2010. Lebanon, as mentioned previously, had been essentially a Syrian province despite the borders on paper, and the Resistance Axis had long stored its long-range missiles inside Syria. As Daniel Sobelman noted in 2004 for the Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, after Israel bombed a PFLP-GC camp in Damascus in Oct. 2003 – its first recorded strike in Syria in decades – “official Hizbollah reaction to the Israeli strike in Syria equated it with an attack on Lebanon.”

According to journalist and analyst Ronen Bergman, the then Mossad chief Meir Dagan told the Israeli government not to attack Hezbollah in 2006

before striking its missile depots in Syria. When the Syrian domestic revolt against Assad began in 2011, the IRGC reportedly began transferring the weapons previously based in Syria for Hezbollah’s use into Lebanon.

## THE FAILURE OF THE MULTIFRONT WAR

There have been assertions by various Resistance Axis representatives for years – and, more recently, by the Israeli Defence Minister – that the “deterrence equation” between Israel and the Axis has changed because the IRGC network is now coordinating fully. The argument is that this new coordination means the



IDF can no longer isolate the various fronts – Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria – and deal with them separately.

Yet it is far from self-evident that this is the case. Instead, Israel has continued successfully isolating and containing various battlefields, and the elements of the Resistance Axis have done little more than token rocket or drone launches, if even that, to show support for the Palestinian front or to retaliate against Israeli strikes against the IRGC across the Middle East. These symbolic actions are unlikely to significantly alter the deterrence equation.

Even within Gaza alone, Israel has managed to isolate PIJ from Hamas three times, with no interference by Hezbollah and the other IRGC fronts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Clearly, the idea of an actual multifront war remains more an IRGC aspiration than a concrete reality.

Over the last ten years, Iran has gained much greater control over Iraq and Yemen, where the local IRGC subsidiaries now possess a vast array of drones and ballistic missiles, and also consolidated its control over most of Syria. There is little doubt that the missile arsenals of various IRGC fronts have increased in quantity and quality and been dispersed over a much wider region, while its organs themselves have grown substantially in personnel. Local production capabilities have also increased.

In addition, Iranian nuclear weapons, should Iran succeed in building them, would be intended to back-stop a multifront attritional war by providing deterrence; Syria's abortive nuclear program, ended by an Israeli strike in 2007, was also likely intended to facilitate attacks from there by deterring any Israel efforts to

respond against Syrian territory.

Of course, technological improvements and quantitative increases are what one would expect with the passage of decades. None of this information is new, however, and while on paper the situation seems like a potential strategic nightmare, "this nightmare is still a long way from a reality," as I wrote last year.

Israel has successfully managed multifront wars waged against it by rejectionist opponents, initially by the Arab states directly and later also via the Palestinians, since its creation. Iran and Syria simply picked up where the Arab states – including Syria – left off.

Iran's strategy has not substantially evolved since the Islamic Revolution,

even though external developments in Iraq, Yemen and Syria have allowed it more means and opportunities to attempt to implement it. Even Hamas firing rockets from Lebanon for the first time recently, far from indicating a new front – the PFLP-GC has fired rockets from Lebanon numerous times since the 2000s – more likely suggests Hezbollah's wariness of opening any substantial northern front in the event of a conflict.

Jerusalem still feels comfortable

initiating operations in Gaza against PIJ as well as constantly bombing IRGC targets in Syria, Iraq, Iran and perhaps elsewhere, as well as conducting a substantial tanker war with Iran since 2019.

It's possible Israel may one day face a substantial, coordinated conflict with the Resistance Axis spanning from Gaza up to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen – Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu himself warned of the Yemen front back in 2019 – and even Iran itself, but this isn't a qualitatively new threat so much as an evolution of a 1980s phenomenon. Fears about such a war have been voiced since at least early 2018.

There are countless reports and examples since the early 1990s of Iran coordinating the activities of the Resistance Axis to wage its multifront war. The strategy and tactics are old – although the threat has perhaps grown with the increasing size and sophistication of the arsenals controlled by the IRGC, the expansion of territory IRGC subsidiaries directly control, and Iran's continually advancing nuclear program.

Yet, notwithstanding recent developments, Israel can still isolate the various fronts and hit the IRGC – even inside Iran – at will and with seeming impunity. Far from launching a dangerous multifront war on Israel in response, the IRGC appears barely capable of substantial retaliation of any sort, even locally.

AIR

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# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### HUNGER GAMES

Media reports of the events that followed the death of Khader Adnan, a senior leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), in an Israeli prison after 87 days on a hunger strike in early May, were confused.

On *ABC TV* “Mornings” (May 3), Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn correctly said, “it was mid-afternoon when rocket alarms rang out across several towns surrounding the Gaza Strip. More than 20 rockets were fired from Gaza into southern Israel.”

But a follow up report later that day on the ABC website absurdly muddled the sequences of events: “in response to the death... Israeli jets struck in Gaza as armed groups there fired rocket barrages towards Israel.”

The *Guardian Australia*’s report on May 4 was given the flawed headline “Israel strikes Gaza as unrest continues after death of hunger striker,” with an introduction that mirrored the ABC article. In contrast, the *Australian*’s report from the *Wall Street Journal* on May 4 accurately stated that “militants in Gaza fired a barrage of rockets at Israel... after the death of a Palestinian hunger striker.”

### COUNTING ERRORS

A week after Adnan’s death, Israel targeted and killed three senior PIJ commanders in Gaza who had ordered the barrages of rockets be fired and were preparing further attacks.

A mini war broke out (see pp. 12-16), with more than 1,400 rockets fired at Israel from Gaza by PIJ, and Israel hitting more PIJ targets.

Media reports focused on the ratio of alleged civilian versus terrorist Palestinian fatalities based on figures supplied by Hamas-run health ser-

vices in Gaza – which turned out to be incorrect (see p. 6).

On May 11, *ABC TV* “7pm News” Victorian edition newsreader Mary Gearin said, “at least 27 people have been killed, mostly Palestinian civilians.”

Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn’s report did note that “Israel says some militant rockets also fell within Gaza, killing civilians.”

Horn’s report earlier that day on *ABC TV* “Mornings” said, “Gazan health authorities say at least 20 Palestinians have been killed, among them, at least seven militants and also five children.”

An ABC online report said, “20 Palestinians – including at least five women and five children, as well as three senior Islamic Jihad commanders and four gunmen – have been killed.”

On May 12, *ABC TV* “The World” reported that “at least 30 Palestinians, mostly civilians, have been killed since Tuesday.”

A report on May 12, *ABC TV* “7pm News” Victorian edition erroneously said Israel’s capital is Tel Aviv.

On May 13, an ABC website report from *Reuters* noted that “Israel... says it had made every effort to limit civilian casualties... and accuses Islamic Jihad of deliberately locating its command centres in residential areas.” The report noted that like Hamas, PIJ “spurns coexistence with Israel and preaches its destruction.”

On May 14, *ABC TV* “7pm News” Victorian edition accurately said, “at least 33 Palestinians were killed in the past five days, among them, six senior Islamic Jihad commanders. Thirteen civilians also lost their lives, including children. Two people in Israel were killed by rocket fire from Gaza.”

### A MATTER OF TIMING

On May 11, *ABC TV* “The World” host Bev O’Connor inaccurately put it to Michael Chaitow, from the left-wing New Israel Fund Australia, that “maybe... 20 civilian casualties as part of this latest campaign. Can [Israeli air strikes] be more targeted?”

Chaitow said, “Gaza is one of the most densely populated places on Earth” but blamed far right Israeli minister Itamar Ben-Gvir for the conflict, claiming he “threatened to boycott the coalition” if there was no military action taken. This is incorrect – reports from Israel make it clear the operation was planned by the IDF on May 2 or 3, before Ben-Gvir began his grandstanding. The IDF then waited a week for the most appropriate moment to hit the three PIJ commanders.

### SHAHEEN ON

On *ABC Radio National* “Breakfast” (May 12), host Patricia Karvelas said Israel had “killed 28 people, including at least ten civilians, in the Gaza Strip” – which was accurate.

Yet the program’s guest, Gaza-based political science professor Ayman Shaheen, suggested that most of the dead were civilians.

According to Dr Shaheen, “Israeli air forces, they strike many houses, apartments and many civilian casualties, many civilians dead. We have six kids were killed within the last three days. And for women and other civilians, not for militants. There were five militants belong to Islamic Jihad, but the rest of the 29, just a few an hour ago... the number of the death people reached to 20, 29.”

He falsely said Gaza is the most densely populated area in the world. In fact, according to the World

Population Review, “Gaza City itself is likely the 40th most densely populated urban area globally.”

Karvelas asked if PIJ had fired over 500 rockets at Israel “doesn’t Israel have the right to target militant leaders who direct these attacks against them?” Dr Shaheen suggested Palestinians have the right to fire rockets because Palestinians in Gaza are “under the occupation and these people is struggling for their freedom, for their independence.”

## A MATTER OF RECOGNITION

Nine Newspapers reported (May 5) that Israel’s Ambassador to Australia Amir Maimon had called on the

Albanese Government not to act on the Labor Party’s national platform resolution calling for recognition of a Palestinian state.

The Australia Palestine Advocacy Network’s Nasser Mashni was quoted arguing that “Australia recognised Israel before a final peace settlement between the two sides and should do the same for Palestine.”

Australia’s diplomatic recognition of Israel in 1949 happened after it was already clearly an independent state and had survived the Arab war of aggression to destroy it. “Palestine” is not currently a state under the criteria laid down by international law.

Western governments believe that a Palestinian state should be created through negotiations that resolve all

outstanding claims, not unilateral declarations that pre-empt that outcome and do not reflect realities on the ground.

The report noted that “most United Nations member states” recognise Palestine but Australia’s “close security partners... the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Japan” do not.

This is misleading. No Western democracy recognises Palestine except Sweden, and many or most of the states that supposedly recognise “Palestine” recognised it in place of, rather than alongside, Israel during the Cold War.

The Nine report also noted that US commentator Michael Rubin – a recent AIJAC guest – has urged



## IN PARLIAMENT

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) – May 10 – Twitter: “Australia is deeply concerned by the tragic loss of civilian life, including children, from Israeli airstrikes overnight in Gaza. We continue to urge all parties to exercise restraint. Civilian lives must be protected.”

Senator **Wong** – May 11 – Twitter: “The escalating violence in Israel and the Palestinian Territories is deeply concerning. Australia condemns the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza and respects Israel’s right to defend itself. We continue to urge all parties to exercise restraint and protect civilian lives.”

Senator **David Shoebridge** (Greens, NSW) – May 11 – “Israeli military strikes in recent days have killed women and children in Gaza, people trapped behind the Israeli-imposed blockade. With the recent election of the most extremist government in Israel’s history, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, the reality of the Nakba has never been more present or more terrifying for Palestinians than it is today. A second Nakba, pushed by senior members of this extremist Israeli government, is a real and growing threat... I will join with protesters in Sydney this Saturday to mark 75 years since the beginning of the Nakba.”

Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (Greens, NSW) – May 9 – “The Nakba is live [sic] every day for the more than seven million refugees displaced during Israel’s creation and their descendants still awaiting justice. Every day Palestinians are killed or imprisoned or have their houses destroyed or their land taken by Israeli settlements, and they live under an apartheid system of laws... It is lived every day that they are denied the right of entry to their land. It is lived every day by the people in the

Gaza Strip who are kept in an open-air prison camp because Israel and Egypt refuse to open the borders. It is lived every day in the West Bank as Israel’s settlements expand and settlers are allowed to behave with impunity.

“For 75 years the Palestinians have been betrayed by countries in the so-called West that refuse to hold their persecutor, Israel, to account and that give a blank cheque of diplomatic cover to anything the state of Israel does. That extends here to Australia and to this parliament, where there is a bipartisan commitment to the denial of Palestinian rights and a minimisation of the crimes of the Israeli state.”

Senator **Paul Scarr** (Lib., Qld) – May 9 – “During the month of April two incredibly important commemorations occurred in Brisbane... The first was the Holocaust Remembrance Day service, which took place on 16 April. We should remember and we should note in this place that this year is the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which was brutally put down by the Nazi regime, but one reflects a great heroism of those who participated, and pay respect to their courage. It was a very moving service this year, and I was particularly touched by the contribution of a number of young leaders from the Jewish community who made extraordinarily thoughtful presentations.”

Senator **Scarr** – May 2 – Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee: “The first area that I want to explore with you is the fact that, when we talk about Nazi symbols, we’re talking about symbols which were particularly designed by Adolf Hitler and others to be an expression of an antisemitic ideology which necessarily flowed into industrial genocide; consequently, the manifestation and display of those symbols represents something more than simple freedom of expression or political communication because of the very nature of those symbols and how they’re embedded in the antisemitic ideology of the Nazi Party.”



the Biden Administration to lobby Albanese not to recognise Palestine because doing so would “legitimise and encourage Palestinian, Hezbollah, and Iranian terrorism.”

## DEMOLITION JOB

Media reports of Israel’s demolition of an illegally built Palestinian primary school in Jabbet al-Dhib near Bethlehem omitted vital information.

An *AFP/Reuters* story on the ABC website (May 8) noted that Israel gave the village two months’ notice that the structures would be removed because they were illegally built and were a safety hazard and that the order to do so was upheld by a Jerusalem court.

The item included condemnation of the Israeli decision from the European Union, which had funded the school.

However, the report failed to point out that the school is located in Area C of the West Bank, which is under full Israeli military and administrative control under the 1993 Oslo Accords.

Also missing was that the fact that the EU has a deliberately provocative policy of giving funding to Palestinians to erect structures in Area C, even knowing that no building application is likely to be lodged, and Israel is therefore likely going to demolish them.

*SBS TV* “World News” ran a brief report on the subject on May 8 that was similarly deficient.

## ASSAD AFFAIR

On *SBS TV* “World News” (May 8), former academic Professor Amin Saikal said Syria’s readmittance to the Arab League was a “real U-turn.... it sends the message that the Syrian regime has survived and is there to remain.” Reporter Claudia Farhart noted that eight of the 22 Arab League member states did not attend the meeting and that Qatar said the decision does not mean it will normalise

relations with Syria. Melbourne University’s Dara Conduit was quoted saying the decision was motivated by neighbouring states wanting to “curtail the drug trade and... deal with the issue of [Syrian] refugee returns.”

## BEYOND REHABILITATION

*Guardian Australia* columnist Simon Tisdall (May 15) slammed the Arab League’s decision to readmit and rehabilitate the regime of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, which slaughtered at least 300,000 Syrian civilians during the civil war.

Yet, predictably, Tisdall devoted considerable space to attacking Israel, too.

Tisdall said, “Israel’s... unedifying attempts at ‘normalisation’ – by building alliances with Gulf autocracies to counter Iran and confederates such as Hezbollah – are imperilled if not confounded” by these developments.

Moreover, Tisdall said, “Then there’s their longest-running failure of all – the unfulfilled promise of Palestinian statehood. Palestinian civilian suffering has intensified as Israel, unchecked by Arab governments or the West, has lurched to the extreme right. The West Bank has seen more than 100 killings by security forces this year... renewed Gaza-related violence is claiming more innocent lives, predominantly Palestinian. Yet many western politicians, media and commentators behave as if this isn’t happening. This is what normalisation truly means in the Middle East. The killing of civilians has become routine.”

Except the overwhelming majority of those killed in both the West Bank and Gaza this year have not been civilians.

## TERMINAL OBSESSIONS

On *ABC RN* “Saturday Extra” (May 13), inveterate anti-Israel BBC reporter Jeremy Bowen got in a couple of digs at Israel whilst discussing his

new book, *The Making of the Modern Middle East*.

Bowen nominated three regional issues that needed to be dealt with including “the Israeli-Palestinian problem... because while it’s been going for a long time, sometimes it gets a bit ignored... It’s like a cancer at the heart of the region.”

The claim it is ignored is laughable – arguably only Russia’s invasion of Ukraine garners more attention than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Tellingly, Bowen felt no need to raise the Assad regime’s culpability for 500,000 dead Syrians, or the 12 million Syrians displaced during the civil war – half of whom remain refugees in neighbouring countries.

## DISTRACTIONS AND INFRACTIONS

Writing in the *Australian* (May 15), AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein warned that Iran is using the world’s focus on “Ukraine and economic worries” to “test... the limits of Israel’s military restraint” by launching a “multifront campaign against the Jewish state” using its proxies based in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon.

Moreover, he added, “Iran’s aggressions today would worsen drastically if it were operating under a nuclear shield. This would massively magnify global proliferation and instability and greatly endanger the interests of the community of free nations, including Australia’s.”

## HISTORY LESSONS

*ABC Radio* “Nightlife” (May 15) interviewed US historian Jeremy Pressman on the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Pressman said large scale migration of Jews to Palestine began in 1880 when the Ottoman Empire controlled the Middle East.

Asked if Jews acquired land “legitimately”, Pressman said, “I guess I find it hard to answer the question because

the standards by which people in the 1930s, let's say, would have judged land ownership were not exactly the same as the standards by which we would do it" but "the main thrust of Zionist control of land pre-1948 was the effort to purchase land."

In discussing the 1947 UN Partition Plan that proposed dividing the territory into two states – one for Jews and the other for Arabs, Pressman correctly noted that the "Zionist movement... largely accepts the partition plan. The Palestinian leadership largely rejects the plan," adding that "a lot of Palestinian leaders... before the UN votes refused to meet with the UN delegation that has come."

Yet Pressman's account of the war that followed was somewhat garbled – framing the Zionist forces as the aggressors, noting they captured more land than allotted under the UN plan. Whilst true, for the first few months of the war the Jewish side largely simply repulsed the attacks of Palestinian Arabs. As the British withdrawal in May 1948 approached and the Arab invasion loomed, they realised this approach was not sustainable and they needed to hold on to provisionally Arab areas that were being used as bases to attack the Jewish state and its vital lines of communication.

Pressman did explain that the Arab countries which invaded the newly established Jewish state on May 15, 1948, were motivated by their own territorial ambitions.

On what caused the displacement of Palestinian Arabs, Pressman favoured the Palestinian narrative.

He said, "I think it's pretty clear that a significant number of them became refugees because they were expelled by Israeli forces... A number of other Palestinians did also flee, and sometimes Israel or its supporters will hold that up as sort of suggesting that Israel is somehow blameless. And while I'm not here to assign blame, I think what we see in many wars and many conflicts is that civilians, in an effort to survive, will flee a dangerous war situation seeking safer territory and safer shelter." The fact that this was a war in which the Jewish community was in mortal danger was given less emphasis.

Pressman said that after the war's end, Israel refused to allow Arab refugees to return. This is not strictly true – Israel did allow some Arabs to return, but given the bloody war of extermination it had just fought and won, and the fact that Arab states vowed never to make peace, allowing large numbers to return was obviously unwise.

## LOEW BLOWS

To promote his new book *The Palestine Laboratory*, Nine Newspapers' "Good Weekend" magazine (May 13) ran a long op-ed by anti-Zionist writer and activist Antony Loewenstein that regurgitated his ill-informed claims about both Israel and Australian Jews who support it.

He asserted that "to not believe in Israel was to somehow forfeit one's name as a good Jew" and that in 2003, after he first said Israel's actions "paralleled apartheid-like policies" and that "its treatment of Palestinians centred around a racist ideology," he and his family were attacked and ostracised within the Australian Jewish community.

While any personal abuse he may have experienced from some individuals is regrettable, Loewenstein

clearly thinks his extreme, angry and factually-challenged denunciations of Israel and all its supporters should be regarded as beyond reproach, while any efforts by those he slams as racist to criticise or rebut his often dubious claims, unfair generalisations and black hole-sized omissions of vital context amount to evidence he is being persecuted and silenced.

Implying that most Australian Jews oppose a Palestinian state, he said "it was possible to both support Israel's right to exist and the rights of Palestinians."

In fact, most Jews and mainstream Jewish organisations support the two-state formula for peace – and thus do exactly this. Loewenstein is actually the outlier who does not back this formula – he backs a one-state solution and Israel's destruction, and thus does not support "Israel's right to exist."

Loewenstein said that during his first trip to Israel and the West Bank in 2005, he "began to see what the occupation of a subjugated people looks like: Israeli soldiers screaming orders at Palestinians at militarised checkpoints."

What Loewenstein failed to tell readers is that when he visited, Israel had endured an unprecedented five-year campaign of terror known as the Second Intifada that resulted in the murder of more than 1,000 Israelis. His accusation that Israel practises apartheid is a sick misrepresentation of the security measures required to stop Palestinians carrying out terror attacks against Israelis that included suicide bombings in cafes and buses and mass rocket attacks from Gaza.

Moreover, Loewenstein failed to note that this wave of planned terrorist violence began only months after the Palestinians rejected then-Israeli PM Ehud Barak's offer to create a Palestinian state that would've ended the so-called Palestinian "subjugation", and subsequent offers to create a Palestinian state were similarly rejected in 2001 and 2008.

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# MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

## CHEERS AND JEERS FOR ISRAEL'S 75TH

Coverage of Israel's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary was punctuated by both the ongoing protests against the Netanyahu Government's controversial judicial reforms and the intractable conflict with the Palestinians.

On the *Spectator Australia* website (April 26), columnist Stephen Daisley, who is not Jewish, opined, "while Israel is a necessity, that is not all it is. Zionism is not only sovereignty for the sake of security but sovereignty for the sake of sovereignty. It is an assertion and realisation of Jewish national rights in the Jewish national homeland. When someone [migrates there] today, it is more likely because they feel or seek a connection to Israel than it is because they are fleeing persecution... Israeli independence, as it reaches 75 years, is still a miraculous application of a mundane idea: Jewish self-determination."

In the *Daily Telegraph* (April 28), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein said Israel's "economic, cultural, defence and technological achievements... 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 fourth happiest country in the world in its 2023 survey. Another number adds to the picture of a society that is both unique and uniquely successful – Israel's fertility rate. Israeli women have an average of 2.9 children each, by far the highest number in the OECD."

More equivocal was UK *Sunday Times* special correspondent Josh Glancy's op-ed on the *Australian* website (April 30), which said, "Israel... [i]s one of the most astonishing achievements of the modern age," but went on to insist "there is an enormous catch" in Israel's story – the predicament of the Palestinians.

On May 2, the *Australian* editorial called Israel "a miracle of the modern era" and described the protests against judicial reforms as "a manifestation of a healthy democracy, in contrast with the miserable fate of Sudan and Arab nations... where protests regularly are suppressed... by totalitarian regimes."

In the *Hobart Mercury* (May 1), anti-Israel columnist Greg Barns tried to analogise the experience of Indigenous Australians to Palestinian Arabs, writing that "Europeans... stole... land from the original owners, we might also

pause to recognise... the dispossession of another people from their home... Palestinians... were also driven off their land."

But as AIJAC's Allon Lee argued in an op-ed published by the paper (May 8), "Jews are not European colonisers who rocked up one day and displaced the native population. As one of the Middle East's oldest indigenous peoples, Jews have an unbroken link to their ancestral land stretching back 4000 years... more than half of Israel's current population descends from Jews who moved there from Muslim and Arab countries, not Europe."

On *ABC Radio National* "Between the Lines" (May 13), American Israeli author Daniel Gordis refuted claims Israeli democracy is a myth, explaining that "20% of its population are Israeli Arabs. Any minority in any democracy, there are always issues of equity and equality to work out. But they have the same legal protections that I have as an Israeli Jew... Israel is a very successful democracy. It hasn't missed... a beat in the 75 years since it was founded. Every election has been fair."

As for Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gordis said, "the majority of Israelis do not want to occupy the Palestinians. The problem is that the Palestinian people remains opposed to Israel's existence."

In the *Canberra Times* (May 15), pro-Palestinian lobbyist Ammar Abu Shamleh wrote "[today] Palestinians around the world will mark the 75th anniversary of what we call the Nakba, Arabic for 'catastrophe', where over 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homes, and 530 villages destroyed. My grandfather's village was one of them."

But as AIJAC's Jamie Hyams noted in a letter run by the paper on May 18 in response, "The only reason any Arabs in Israel left their land was because of the war of aggression launched against Israel as soon as it declared independence within the boundaries allocated it by the UN. It was attacked by its Arab neighbours and much of the Arab community living within its borders... Shamleh complains about the checkpoints, but they are only there... to prevent Palestinian terrorists entering... Israel to bomb and shoot civilians... He wants a liberated Palestine. That could have happened in 2000, 2001 or 2008, when the Palestinians were offered a state... each time, their leaders refused without even further negotiation."



# THE LAST WORD

Gunther Jikeli

## MACHINE LEARNING VS. ONLINE HATE?

What do discussions about Hamas, Kanye West, and COVID-19 have in common? Well, they seem to trigger antisemites.

The conflict between Palestinian terrorist groups and Israel, the pandemic, vaccinations, lockdowns, and celebrity antisemitic statements were some of the prominent causes of an increase in antisemitic messages on Twitter and other social media platforms.

The pandemic helped unleash an uninhibited wave of online antisemitism, with Jews being blamed not only for COVID, but also for immigration, culture wars, and even racism, settler colonialism, and imperialism by those on the opposite political spectrum.

All of this can be observed in real-time on social media. However, the challenge lies in comprehensively monitoring the millions of messages across various platforms and languages. Moreover, it is even more difficult to determine the impact when stereotypical comments about Jews evolve into something more harmful, forcing Jews out of online or offline spaces, or posing physical threats. In other words, when does an antisemitic message become a threat?

Exact figures for the number of antisemitic messages sent over the Internet every day remain unknown, but on Twitter alone, focusing only on English conversations explicitly mentioning the word “Jews”, we estimated over 4,000 antisemitic tweets per day in 2020.

This number increased in 2021, both in absolute numbers and in the proportion of antisemitic messages within conversations about Jews. When people talk about Jews on Twitter, roughly six to 20 percent of such conversations are found to be antisemitic, depending on the time period. The highest peak was observed during the violent conflict between Israel and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in May 2021. Fortunately, there are also many Twitter users who object to antisemitism and denounce it in their messages.

Our estimations are based on representative samples of live tweets, which we classify using the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism. The manual classification of samples is an important step toward semi-automated monitoring of

online antisemitism.

Automated detection has made significant advancements in recent years, thanks to the development of deep learning techniques. The Network Contagion Research Institute and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue have utilised some of this technology to detect antisemitic messages during Elon Musk’s acquisition of Twitter. However, automatically detecting antisemitism remains challenging for several reasons.

First, access to data is limited due to platform restrictions and the computational power needed to process such large amounts of data. Second, the datasets used to train the models are relatively small and do not encompass all variations of antisemitic manifestations in the rapidly changing online environment. Third, the classification is not always accurate, especially if annotators do not work with live data to understand messages in their “natural” context, including threads, images, links, videos, etc.

Identifying antisemitism is difficult for human annotators and even more so for machine learning programs at this stage.

We have been working on annotation projects to classify messages as antisemitic or not antisemitic and have been publishing the data to train machine learning programs. Similar projects are also underway, and the hope is to eventually have a large and diverse dataset that can detect antisemitic messages with a high probability, enabling the monitoring of developments, especially radicalisation, within certain conversations. We have observed that conversations can quickly radicalise in the absence of opposition to antisemitic ideas. When there is an established norm within an online community that deems Jews as evil, it only takes a small step for someone to physically attack Jews.

Antisemitism attracts antisemites who feel emboldened by it. This cycle needs to be monitored, understood in its dynamics, and eventually disrupted.

AIR

Gunther Jikeli is the Erna B. Rosenfeld Professor at Indiana University’s Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism. © Algemeiner ([www.algemeiner.com](http://www.algemeiner.com)), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved

