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A “Less for Less” nuclear agreement
with Iran appears imminent

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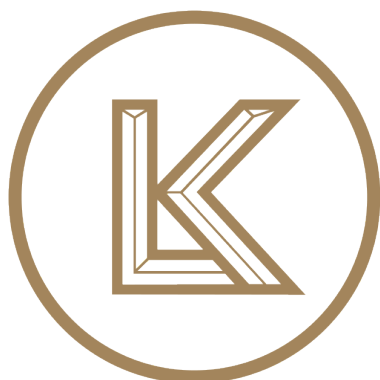


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EDITOR'S NOTE

July's *AIR* offers a preview of the details and implications of a new "less for less" limited nuclear deal between Iran and the US, which news reports suggest will likely be announced shortly.

Israel Kasnett speaks to top Israeli and American experts about the terms of the deal, what the Biden Administration hopes to achieve and what it will likely mean for the Middle East. In addition, Lahav Harkov explains why the Biden Administration will likely insist on labelling the deal an "understanding" rather than an "agreement", while British strategic analyst Col. Richard Kemp argues that the planned deal appears to amount to a dangerous act of appeasement.

Also featured this month is Ahron Shapiro's deconstruction of the Australian Greens Party's extreme and intellectually incoherent policy on Israeli/Palestinian issues. Plus, Salo Aizenberg recounts the often forgotten, ignored and misrepresented details of the 2008 peace offer to the Palestinians made by then Israeli PM Olmert, and their leadership's rejection of it.

Finally, don't miss Amotz Asa-El on the latest flare-up in Israel's intense political controversy over proposed judicial reforms, academic expert Zachary Abuza's preview on Indonesia's watershed election campaign and Allon Lee's review of a new book exposing the 1930s origins of today's Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As always, please let us know what you think of any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, right, visits an exhibition of the country's nuclear achievements, at his office compound in Teheran, Iran, June 11, 2023. (Image: Office of the Iranian Supreme Leader, via AP)



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EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN****COLIN RUBENSTEIN**

SLOGANS AND SYMBOLISM VERSUS COMMON SENSE

The Victorian Labor Party and the federal Greens Party have very different political worldviews. However, regrettably, when addressing the sensitive and contentious issue of the deadlocked conflict between the Palestinians and Israel at their respective conferences recently, both fell into the same trap of choosing to pass resolutions embodying empty slogans and mindless symbolism rather than seeking to advance constructive policy ideas.

On June 4, the Greens passed a policy resolution erasing the party's official support for a two-state resolution or even peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Smearing Israel as "practising apartheid," nothing better encapsulates the frothing vitriol contained in the unhinged, nearly 1,500-word manifesto than the fact that it includes a noxious quote plucked from a report by none other than United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese, who just months ago was notoriously disgraced for having made blatantly antisemitic social media posts (see p. 18).

All inhibitions cast aside, the Greens resolution calls for open-ended boycotts, sanctions and even implied international military intervention to force Israel to erase itself demographically by implementing the legally baseless Palestinian so-called "Right of Return" to the territory of pre-1967 Israel. It is hard to think of a scheme more antithetical to peace. Flooding Israel with millions of hostile descendants of Palestinian refugees and their extended families would likely lead to a civil war on the scale of the 1948 war, which saw very substantial portions of both communities lose their lives.

Meanwhile, the Victorian Labor State Conference on June 18 passed a resolution calling on the Albanese Government to recognise "Palestine" as a state during this term of parliament.

The Greens have openly replaced their prior, comparatively balanced official position towards Israel with one of scorched earth animosity, adopting every Palestinian slogan and ambit claim willy nilly.

The Victorian Labor resolution, by contrast, deceptively decorated itself with a halo of peace-loving good intentions, saying, absurdly, that recognising Palestine is the only way to save a two-state resolution. Yet this is also damaging and counterproductive.

Firstly, this idea directly undermines the peace process by violating the plain language of the Oslo Accords. It also contradicts settled international law, by demanding Australia recognise a "state" which clearly does not meet the criteria set down for one in the relevant global treaty, the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States.

But beyond these legal questions, on a practical level, recognising "Palestine" would unequivocally damage rather than "save" hopes for a two-state peace.

The only way such a peace can possibly be achieved is for the Palestinians to agree to accept a future Israeli offer of a state in the framework of peace negotiations – which sadly the Palestinians have refused to even engage in since 2014.

Veteran Israeli journalist and respected Palestinian affairs analyst Ehud Ya'ari has summed up the current Palestinian leadership's goals in two words: "Runaway state". Ya'ari explains that, based on their own words, they have made it clear they are only interested in statehood if it is handed to them with no requirement to negotiate peace with Israel or concede any claims or grievances. This includes especially the fantasy of undoing Israel's creation through the legally baseless and historically unprecedented "right of

return” to pre-1967 Israel of all descendants of Palestinian refugees.

The Victorian Labor motion plays directly into the hands of this strategy. Its key argument is to try to make Australia’s current policy seem outdated by misleadingly stating that 138 other countries have recognised Palestine. This, of course, omits the crucial fact that Sweden is the only Western democracy to have done so, while most of the other 137 countries recognised “Palestine” in the context of the Cold War, at a time when many of them did not even recognise Israel itself. Moreover, given the choice, many of these countries would not recognise “Palestine” today.

There are very good reasons why none of our allies have taken this premature and destructive step. If Labor genuinely cares about Middle East peace – as indeed it should – it needs to follow their example.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong are doubtless aware of these realities. Nevertheless, the obvious must be laid out plainly, since widespread misinformation and simplistic and emotive sloganeering dominate public discourse on this issue, especially on social media – fuelling the sort of ill-informed approaches that surfaced at the Greens and ALP conferences.

The crucial fact is that the primary reason there is no peace is the intransigence of the Palestinian leadership, which has rebuffed and wrecked repeated efforts to


achieve a two-state resolution.

The Palestinian Authority walked away from generous offers of statehood made by Israel in 2000, 2001 and 2008 without even making a counter-offer, and has refused to negotiate about peace for a decade. Meanwhile, Hamas turned Gaza into a terror enclave after Israel completely withdrew from the territory in 2005.

The people who drafted and then voted for the resolutions at the two conferences were either totally unaware of this essential historical context, grossly misinformed about it, or simply didn’t

care because of a morally obtuse approach which says the “oppressed Palestinians” must be supported in whatever they demand, no matter how counter-productive.

Rewarding intransigent and destructive Palestinian behaviour will only encourage such rejectionist behaviour to continue – to the great detriment of all parties involved.

More than that, these grandiose resolutions propose to reduce Australian foreign policy to illusory cheap, simplistic and hollow gestures in a way that is anything but cost-free. If these ill-advised resolutions were followed, Australia would gain no benefit, pointlessly anger the US and many European allies and devalue our hard-earned respect as a reliable, middle-power Western democratic actor. On top of this, we would undermine our essential national interests in a stable international order, and the prospects for the eventual creation of lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace. 

“WORD FOR WORD”

“The most limited understandings, what are termed ‘mini-agreements’, do not – in our view – serve the goal and we are opposed to them as well.”

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on alleged limited US-Iran negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program (Associated Press, June 18).

“With respect to Iran’s nuclear program, there is no deal. The reports that there [is] a deal or some agreement...however you want to describe it – are not true.”

US State Department spokesman (US State Department, June 15).

“I congratulate Islamic Jihad’s victory in Gaza’s recent battle... The continually growing authority of resistance groups in the #WestBank is the key to bringing the Zionist enemy to its knees.”

Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Twitter, June 15).

“I have said before and it’s quite clear that we believe that normalisation [with Israel] is in the interest of the region, that

it would bring significant benefits to all. But without finding a pathway to peace for the Palestinian people, without addressing that challenge, any normalisation will have limited benefits. And therefore, I think we should continue to focus on finding a pathway towards a two-state solution.”

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan dampening speculation about a normalisation deal with Israel (US State Department, June 8).

“Glad to have welcomed [Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen] to Manila, the 1st visit by an Israeli Foreign Minister to [the Philippines] since 1967. We discussed expanding cooperation in areas such as trade, defence, agriculture and people-to-people exchange, to further deepen our strong and historic ties.”

Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines Enrique Manalo on the historic Israeli visit (Twitter, June 5).

“Xinjiang-related issues are not human rights issues at all, but anti-violent terrorism, de-radicalisation and anti-separatism. Palestine firmly opposes interference in China’s internal affairs under the pretext of Xinjiang-related issues.”

Joint Chinese-Palestinian statement supporting China’s genocidal treatment of Uyghurs, following Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas’ visit to Beijing (Radio Free Asia, June 15).



SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

ANTISEMITISM AND THE PALESTINIAN NARRATIVE

As I have previously documented in this column, the dominant Palestinian narrative about Israel is not simply the claim that Jews came and took land that rightfully belongs to the Palestinian people. In addition, Palestinian leaders, spokespeople and popular culture almost always allege that this process was a conspiracy – Jews were not simply seeking to create a homeland, they went or were sent to “Palestine” for a darker, secret purpose. Multiple versions of what that covert purpose really was are put forward, but perhaps the most common one is that it was a plot by the colonial powers to divide the Arabs and keep them weak.

But a very common part of that explanation is the allegation that Jews were dangerous and impossible to live with, so the European powers wanted to get rid of them, and therefore inflicted them on the Palestinians.

Here are a few recent examples of this type of claim from official Palestinian media or leaders, as collected and translated by Palestinian Media Watch:

- Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said in his May 15 speech at the UN to mark “Nakba day”: “They [the colonial powers] decided to establish and plant another entity in our historical homeland... to get rid of the Jews and enjoy having them in Palestine – two birds with one stone.”
- In another comment earlier this year, Abbas said on official *PA TV* (February 12), “The colonialist states conspired together to issue [the Balfour Declaration] – and foremost among them was Britain and America – in order to get rid of the Jews in Europe on the one hand, and establish a so-called national home for them in Palestine on the other hand. The truth is that they wanted to build an outpost to protect their interests in our region.”
- A fuller example of this narrative was a controversial speech Abbas gave to the Palestinian National Council in 2018. In it, he denied Jewish claims to be longing for a homeland were genuine, saying, “They are talking about longing for Zion and that’s why they are going [there] and so forth. I say – not me, rather history says, that these words are baseless.”
- And he also said, “these Jews who migrated to eastern and western Europe were subjected to massacres by some state every 10 to 15 years from the 11th century until the Holocaust that took place in Germany. OK, but why did this happen? They say: ‘Because we are

Jews.’... the Jewish problem that was common in all of the states of Europe... was not due to their religion, but rather due to their social role that was connected to usury, and banks, and so forth.” (Under international pressure, Abbas later apologised for this speech.)

- Up until at least 2021, the official Facebook page of Abbas’ Fatah movement included a documentary film clip proclaiming that “the Jews allied with Nazis to accumulate wealth,” “the Jews established ghettos in order to separate from other people out of arrogance and disgust of non-Jews,” and “Jews were hated because of their racism and filthy behaviour... Zionism was born from the womb of exploitation, while taking advantage of this hatred [of Jews] and turning it once again into a colonialist tool.”
- The spokesperson for PLO General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) Wisam Al-Rais said on official *PA TV* on November 7, 2022: “Jews... were generally hated by the masses. There was a need to get rid of them, but in a manner that would suit Britain’s interests. They [wanted to] plant a foreign body in the Arab homeland... it would be a knife in the heart of the Arab world.”
- An article in the official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* on December 19, 2022 declared, “The Jews... are continuing to fulfill the same negative social, economic, and political role that caused societies in Europe to vomit them out.”

Note that all of the above statements came from individuals or outlets associated with the “moderate” Palestinian Authority – not the rejectionist Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

I want to call attention to two implications of this common element of the Palestinian narrative about Israel and Zionism.

Firstly, it helps explain the very widespread antisemitism among Palestinians. A 2014 survey on antisemitic attitudes administered in 100 nations by the US-based Anti-Defamation League (ADL) found that fully 93% of Palestinians surveyed agreed with six or more of the 11 sentences presenting anti-Jewish stereotypes that made up the survey. This is the highest of any group in the world. And anyone who looks at Palestinian media sees blatantly antisemitic claims made all the time.

This is not simply because Palestinians are in a long-standing conflict with the Jewish state, but also because the Palestinian narrative – a core belief system that is a foundation of Palestinian national identity – says that not only did the Jews steal “Palestine”, they did so because everyone justifiably hated them in the lands where they previously lived.

Secondly, this belief is a key underpinning for widespread Palestinian support for the “ethnic cleansing solution” that I have previously documented in the column. As

I have shown from both polls and statements from Palestinian opinion leaders, many, perhaps most, Palestinians do not ultimately seek either a “two-state” or a “one-state solution”. They often openly suggest that what they really want and expect is that all or most of the Jewish inhabitants of Israel will leave, be expelled, or be killed.

Why? They are taught in the shared Palestinian narrative that the Jews are so awful and impossible to live with that the European powers dumped them in Palestine – for their own nefarious purposes. Taught this, it is easy to see why many Palestinians are sure that coexistence with Jews is impossible.

Is it any wonder a two-state peace based on such coexistence has proven impossible to achieve?

AIR



Hussain Abdul-Hussein

ISRAEL'S MINORITY REPORT

Palestinian propagandists want you to believe that Israel is engaged in the “ethnic cleansing” of non-Jews. A closer look at demographics, however, proves otherwise.

On the occasion of Jerusalem Day last month, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics published numbers showing that close to 40% of the residents of Jerusalem are Arabs, a level unchanged since a census was taken as far back as 1947 – a year before the founding of the state. Israel is a Jewish state. Its minorities are Arab: Muslim, Christian, and Druze. Their numbers have grown steadily along with the country's overall population.

In areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA), everyone is Arab. Muslims are the majority and Christians a dwindling minority that fears for its security. In neighbouring Lebanon, whose population is overwhelmingly Arab, Christians were a majority when the state was founded in 1920, although not anymore. If one asks where minorities thrive in the Middle East, the answer is Israel.

The percentage of Christians living in areas now under the PA has been declining rapidly, from 51,000 out of 435,000 in 1949 – or 12% – to one percent in 2017. Christians are now minorities in Palestinian cities where they had historically maintained a majority. In Bethlehem, they shrank from 84% in 1922 to 28% in 2007, when the PA carried out a major census. For the same period, in the West Bank towns of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, Christians decreased from 99% and 81% to 81% and 65%, respectively. In 2020, when the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) asked Christian Palestinians “how they felt under Israeli occupation,” 70% responded that they felt safe, 94% said they were free to travel, and

57% said they never felt harassed when crossing Israeli checkpoints.

If Israel does not make Christian Palestinians feel unsafe, then who does? According to PCPSR, 87% of Christians worried about a surge in crime in PA territory, 77% feared radical Islamist groups, including Hamas, and 67% of Palestinian Christians said they felt unsettled about a provision in the Palestinian Basic Law that stipulates that “the principles of Islamic sharia are a main source of legislation.” Admittedly, the number of Arab Christians in Israel has declined, but only by one percentage point, from 2.9% in 1949 to 1.9% in 2021. Interestingly, the decrease in the number of Christians mirrors that of the Jewish majority. Both communities have been outpaced by the rapid increase in the number of Muslims. Therefore, while the populations of Jewish and Christian Israelis grew, their share of the population shrank.

Christians of the Middle East have not been vanishing from Palestinian cities only. To the north, in neighbouring Lebanon, the percentage of Christians since 1932 has shrunk by nearly 20 percentage points, from 53 to 34%. The Lebanese population has grown substantially since 1932, from 790,000 to roughly five million. But the relative size of different groups has changed dramatically.

The Druze, once the rulers of Lebanon between the 16th and 19th centuries, saw their share of the population decline from 6.7% in 1932 to 5.5% today. Meanwhile, their coreligionists in Israel enjoyed a tenfold increase in their numbers between 1949 and today, so the size of the Druze community kept up with the Jewish state's overall population growth. Their share of the population has held constant at 1.6% since 1949.

One Lebanese minority has all but vanished: The Jews. Lebanon's Jews numbered some 3,600 in 1932, or 0.5% of the population. Today, they stand officially at 0.11%, or 4,000 in total, according to voter lists. But those figures are a bureaucratic fiction. Efforts to locate actual Lebanese Jews have turned up fewer than thirty.

Had the Jews of Lebanon grown demographically at the same rate as Shi'ites, they would have numbered some 35,000 today. But in Lebanon, Jews have not been welcome since the birth of Israel in 1948.

By contrast, Israel today is the only Middle Eastern country that affords equal rights to Muslims, Christians, and Druze. And while the system is far from perfect, the numbers of these minorities reflect a heartening reality. Israel's demographics are holding steady. So much for “ethnic cleansing”.

AIR

Hussain Abdul-Hussein is a research fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), a non-partisan organisation focused on national security and foreign policy. He was born in Lebanon. © Times of Israel (timesofisrael.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



ASIA WATCH

James Dorsey

INDONESIAN POLITICS RISKS ANOTHER SPORTS DEBACLE

Three months ago, I Wayan Koster, the Governor of Hindu-majority Bali, made his mark on the international stage by banning an Israeli squad from participating in this year's FIFA Under-20 World Cup.

Operating at the intersection of domestic Indonesian politics, his country's foreign relations and the fuzzy lines allegedly separating sports and politics, Mr. Koster is weighing a repeat performance with a double whammy.

However, this time around, the stakes for Indonesia and Mr. Koster may be higher.

If Mr. Koster opposes Israeli participation again, Indonesia could be deprived not only of the hosting of the Association of National Olympic Committees' (ANOC) World Beach Games, the world's most significant water and beach sports event, but also of its general assembly scheduled to open on August 13, the day after the tournament.

Worse, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) could sanction Indonesia by banning it from the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games.

In 1964, the IOC barred Indonesia from participating in the Tokyo Summer Olympics after the Southeast Asian nation refused to let Israel and Taiwan compete in the 1962 Asian Games.

Under international sporting rules, hosts must guarantee access to qualifying athletes and teams irrespective of whether countries have diplomatic relations. Indonesia refuses to recognise Israel as long as the Jewish state fails to solve its long-standing dispute with the Palestinians.

So far, Mr. Koster and the Indonesian Government, eager to avoid suffering additional reputational damage after FIFA stripped Indonesia of hosting rights earlier this year and moved the U-20 World Cup to Argentina, appear to be hedging their bets.

As Governor of a tourism-dependent island famed for its tolerance and hospitality that was hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, putting Bali at the centre of international controversy would seem not to be in Mr. Koster's interest.

In addition, the refusal, backed by Central Java Governor Ganjar Pranowo, to host an Israeli World Cup team produced mixed results.

Mr. Koster reportedly banned the Israeli soccer team at the behest of Megawati Sukarnoputri, a former president of Indonesia and head of President Joko Widodo's ruling Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P).

The ban was intended to bolster support for Mr. Pranowo, the PDI-P's candidate in next year's presidential election. Mr. Widodo is constitutionally barred from running for a third term.

The move proved problematic because it juxtaposed two deep-seated Indonesian passions: support for the Palestinian cause and a love of soccer. Passion for soccer may be less of a consideration with the Beach Games, even though football is one of the tournament's 14 disciplines.

"Instead of gaining an electoral boost by echoing anti-Israel Islamic elements, Koster and Pranowo's public rejection of the Israeli youth soccer team has become a boomerang. These two men are attracting negative attention, not least from a large number of Indonesian football fans," noted political scientist Burhanuddin Muhtadi.

Mr. Koster and Indonesian Sports Minister Dito Ariotedjo appear to be betting that Israel will not qualify for any of the Beach Games' disciplines. That could be a risky bet, with the last qualifying events only ending next month.

Mr. Koster's track record with the World Cup, coupled with the confusion, has ensured that, unlike the FIFA tournament, the Beach Games have not sparked anti-Israeli protests.

The Israel Olympic Committee insists that "Israeli athletes will participate in the ANOC only if they are given equal conditions to those of other countries."


The Committee said the International Olympic Committee "is in continuous contact with us on the matter, and we are confident that they will uphold the equality and right of the State of Israel to compete."

So far, Israel's men's basketball 3x3 team and Israeli woman swimmers are believed to have qualified for the Bali Beach Games.

Losing the Beach Games, just months after the World Cup loss, would cast a further shadow over Indonesia's efforts to play a more prominent international role.

The Southeast Asian nation last year earned kudos for chairing the Group of 20 (G20), which brings together the world's largest economies.

Controversy over the Beach Games puts Mr. Widodo in a bind.

"Israeli participation in the Beach Games puts Widodo between a rock and a hard place. What is good for Indonesia may not be what his party thinks is good for its electoral prospects," said an Indonesian analyst. 

Dr. James M. Dorsey is an award-winning journalist and scholar, an Adjunct Senior Fellow at Nanyang Technological University's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, and the author of the syndicated column and podcast, "The Turbulent World with James M. Dorsey," where this column originally appeared (jamesmdorsey.substack.com/p/for-indonesia-sports-diplomacy-is). © James Dorsey, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

Miriam Bell

RADIO NZ SCANDAL RAISES SPECTRE OF ANTI-ISRAEL BIAS

Revelations that a sub-editor at New Zealand's national broadcaster had been inappropriately editing wire stories, including some about Israel, have reignited discussion of anti-Israel media bias in the country.

In June, it emerged that Radio New Zealand (RNZ) was investigating after a story on the war in Ukraine, which originally came from *Reuters*, was published on its website with a pro-Russian slant.

The investigation quickly uncovered other stories, syndicated from international media partners, that had been "inappropriately edited" by one sub-editor.

Initially, the "edits" appeared confined to Ukraine-Russia stories, but it soon emerged they extended to stories on a range of issues, including Taiwan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

One example was a *Reuters* story with the headline "Israel's Netanyahu returns with hard-right cabinet set to expand settlements," which had four edits.

One edit was the substitution of "far-right" for "hard-right" in the first sentence and headline, while another was changing a sentence from "Most world powers deem settlements built on land captured in war illegal" to "The settlements are, according to international law, illegal."

Examples from other stories include "Palestinian gunmen" being changed to "Palestinians"; "militant" being changed to "resistance"; and "including eight gunmen" being removed from the sentence "10 Palestinians including eight gunmen were killed."

All the stories identified have now been restored to the original copy, and had notes appended saying the story was edited inappropriately, and that RNZ took the matter seriously and was taking action.

At the time of publication, the ongoing investigation had identified a total of 33 edited stories, and the RNZ board had appointed an independent three-person panel to undertake a review of the broadcaster's editorial processes.

Both the Zionist Federation of New Zealand (ZFNZ) and the Israel Institute of New Zealand (IINZ) have called for an independent review of what had happened at RNZ.

ZFNZ president Rob Berg said the Federation would like to see an independent investigation into how so many news stories had been changed to fit a particular political agenda.

"We have often seen the bias in the New Zealand media when it comes to Israel, and this confirms what we already knew.

"We would like to hope it is the doing of one rogue journalist, but it wouldn't surprise us if this is not an isolated case. The New Zealand public needs to be reassured of the journalistic integrity of the media."

IINZ co-director David Cumin said there had to be an independent review and accountability, as the edits were clearly made to introduce egregious bias, and in some cases false information, into stories.

"The most important outcome of the inquiry will be to identify the scale of the offending, and ensure safeguards are put in place so that it doesn't continue."

But for a long time, even unadulterated wire stories used in New Zealand had been biased in many cases, as illustrated by the work of Honest Reporting, Camera.org and others, he said.

"That bias from the international outlets is less excusable than local bias, because their reporters are on the ground and should have a better idea of the facts and context."

Members of the Jewish community have raised concerns about media bias in relation to Israel in the past, and the Broadcasting Standards Authority has upheld several complaints against New Zealand's media.

One of these was when Rachel Smalley talked about Israeli actions against Hamas, and claimed that actions of the IDF targeted civilians and "killed everyone inside" a building, which was untrue, Cumin said.

"Another was reporting by Te Karere which claimed the naval blockade imposed on Gaza was 'illegal' when it was legal and necessary to prevent terror.

"RNZ have also fallen foul of the 'controversial issues' standard of the BSA for not allowing an alternative perspective to anti-Israel messages they were reporting," Cumin added.

He also said that work IINZ did a few years ago showed local newspapers disproportionately published anti-Israel letters to the editor, while pro-Israel submissions had been denied.

Local journalists also appeared unwilling to publish on the government funding of UNRWA, which operated schools where children were exposed to lessons that glorify the murder of Jews, he said.

Cumin encouraged people to write to the media when they saw something unbalanced or egregious in reporting on Israel, and to read widely, as it made it more likely to see all sides of an issue.

In New Zealand, if people want to make a complaint about the reporting in a story, they first have to get in touch with the media organisation in question.

But if their concerns are not resolved, there are organisations set up to investigate the actions of the media. The New Zealand Media Council deals with complaints about newspaper reporting, and the Broadcasting Standards Authority deals with complaints about radio or TV.

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

No rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel between the end of Operation Shield and Arrow on May 13 and June 21.

On June 20, two Palestinian terrorists affiliated with Hamas carried out a shooting attack against Israeli civilians at a restaurant near Eli in the West Bank, murdering four and wounding four others. Both terrorists were subsequently killed, one during the attack, the other while attempting to flee hours later.

In response to this attack, groups of Israeli settlers torched cars and crops, and threw stones at Palestinians in villages near the West Bank city of Nablus. One person was killed in these riots and dozens injured.

On June 19, eight Israeli troops were wounded either by a roadside bomb or by gunfire during a raid in Jenin to arrest two wanted terror suspects. Six Palestinian gunmen and one civilian were killed in the intense battle which followed, which included an Israeli helicopter firing missiles to facilitate evacuation of the wounded (see p. 22).

Three Israeli soldiers were killed on June 3 by a rogue Egyptian border policeman who infiltrated the Sinai border, prompting an IDF probe into the security breach.

Numerous attempted and actual shooting, stabbing and car ramming attacks targeting both the IDF and civilians occurred in the West Bank between mid-May and mid-June, most without casualties.

US APPROVES PAYMENT OF BILLIONS TO IRAN

On June 10, the US allowed Iraq to indirectly pay off US\$2.7 billion of its energy debt to Iran via a restricted

account in Iraq that Iran can only access “for humanitarian and other non-sanctionable transactions by US-approved third parties.”

While smaller similar payments have been routine since 2018, analysts say the US approval for this larger payment in Euros was likely a goodwill gesture to Teheran – intended to bolster indirect US-Iran talks occurring in Oman in pursuit of a limited and informal “understanding” that would see Iran limit its nuclear activity in exchange for the US providing some sanctions relief (see p. 12).

IAEA: IRAN CAN PRODUCE 8 WARHEADS IN 3 MONTHS

The June 2023 IAEA reports on Iran indicate that Iran has amassed enough highly enriched uranium to produce sufficient military grade fissile material for one nuclear warhead within 12 days, and eight warheads in three months.

The IAEA also said that Iranian excuses regarding the uranium enriched to near weapons-purity (83.7%) found at Fordow in March was “not inconsistent” with other available information. In addition, IAEA investigations into two alleged undeclared old nuclear sites at Varamin and Turqezabad have been shelved, with the agency saying it has “no more questions” about them, meaning that it has given up on getting genuine answers about them from the Iranians.

NEW IRANIAN UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR SITE

Reports, photos and satellite imagery released in mid-May revealed that Iran is building a new nuclear facility deep underground next to its existing

Natanz site. Built inside a mountain, the new plant will allegedly be able to withstand potential airstrikes by Israel or the US. While Iran says the facility is a future centrifuge manufacturing workshop, experts caution that it could also be used for uranium enrichment.

Meanwhile, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant revealed on May 22 that Iran has been transforming civilian ships into “floating terror bases”. These large vessels, said Gallant, are already partially operational, and will carry various types of weaponry, aircraft, missiles and intelligence systems to be deployed far from Iranian shores with the aim of threatening sea shipping routes.

IRAN CLAIMS SIGNIFICANT MISSILE ADVANCES



Iran's new hypersonic missile unveiled (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

On June 6, Iran unveiled its new “Fattah” hypersonic missile, claiming that it can travel up to 1400km at 14 times the speed of sound and bypass Israel’s Iron Dome missile defence shield. Israeli military experts have said that, while Iran’s new missile is an impressive original design, it does not present a threat to Israel and cannot bypass Israel’s defence systems, despite Iranian claims.

This announcement by Iran came on top of its reportedly successful testing of a conventional ballistic missile in May with a potential range of

2000km, far enough to hit Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel's Rafael Advanced Defence Systems announced on June 14 that it is midway through developing a new defence system, dubbed "Sky Sonic", for countering all kinds of hypersonic missiles.

BRITISH UNIS ALLEGEDLY ASSISTED IRAN'S DRONE PROGRAM

According to an investigation by the *Jewish Chronicle* released in early June, scientists from at least 11 British universities, including Cambridge and Imperial College London, have unwittingly contributed to Iran's drone program through research projects. According to the report, staff across the universities produced up to 16 studies with potential Iranian military applications, including working with Iranian counterparts to test sophisticated new control systems for jet engines aimed at increasing their "manoeuvrability and response time," and an Iranian-funded project to improve drone engines, boosting their altitude, speed and range.

UN REPORT ATTACKS ISRAEL'S SUPPORTERS

The UN's notoriously one-sided "Commission of Inquiry on the Oc-

cupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel" presented its third report to the UN Human Rights Council in early June. In addition to the usual findings alleging Israeli human right abuses, and calls for international criminal prosecution of Israel, this report accused Israel of silencing Palestinian civil society. It also attacked the 35 US states that have enacted legislation against boycotts of Israel, and demanded that Israel's non-governmental supporters be held accountable for facilitating Israel's alleged human rights abuses.

IRAN AND QATAR'S NEW UN POSITIONS CRITICISED

On June 1, Iran was elected as a vice-president of the UN General Assembly and rapporteur of the UN's Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Committee. On June 6, Qatar was appointed to head the International Labour Organisation's annual conference. Both elevations have drawn condemnation from critics.

Qatar is known for its mistreatment of migrant workers, and it has been estimated that at least 6500 migrant workers died on the job during preparations for last year's FIFA World Cup there.

Critics also noted that it is bizarre to appoint Iran to help oversee "Disarmament and Non-Proliferation" when Teheran is well-known for destabilising the Middle East by arming murderers and terrorists, pursuing nuclear weapons capabilities in violation of the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty and illegally exporting drones and other weapons to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

ISRAELI FM VISITS PHILIPPINES, SOUTH KOREA

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen visited the Philippine capital of Manila on June 5 in a historic visit aimed at strengthening bilateral ties in the areas of trade, tourism, and security. It was the first official visit to the Philippines by an Israeli foreign minister in 56 years.

Accompanied by a delegation of Israeli businesspeople, Cohen met with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Foreign Minister Enrique Manalo and other senior officials. It was also revealed that plans were being renewed to launch direct flights between Tel Aviv and Manila.

Cohen and a separate group of businesspeople then travelled on to South Korea for additional talks.



STRANGER THAN FICTION

INTELLIGENCE FAILURE

Shi'ite Islam's early history is laced with tragedy. The first Shi'ite Imam, the Caliph Ali, was assassinated with a poisoned sword by a dissident while at prayer. Ali's oldest son, Hassan, the second Shi'ite Imam, was briefly caliph until he abdicated in favour of a stronger rival, Umayyad ruler Mu'awiya.

Hassan died prematurely, probably by poisoning. Mu'awiya, who wanted his own son to succeed him, is suspected of complicity, possibly with the help of Hassan's wife.

The next Shi'ite Imam, Hassan's younger brother Hussein, was killed with most of his family at the Battle of Karbala by followers of Mu'awiya's son Yazid, after Yazid became caliph and Hussein refused to swear loyalty to him.

However, Qais al-Khazali, leader of the Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'ite militia *Asaib ahl al-Haq*, has a surprising wrinkle on all this bloodletting – Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, founded in 1949, was responsible for all of it!

A video shows al-Khazali claiming, "The Jews! The Jews! The Jews! They assassinated Hassan... by using a woman. The Umayyads were mere collaborators with the Jews. Then they assassinated Imam Hussein."

He also claimed, "What had been the *modus operandi* of the Israeli-Jewish intelligence agency?... How do they get their sources? It is either through money or through women. Right? In this case, it was a woman. There is no doubt that she worked for the Israeli Mossad back then, and through her, they recruited [Ali's killer]. (Translation by Middle East Media Research Institute)

It's hardly surprising an Iranian proxy is making wildly antisemitic claims – that is commonplace. What is surprising about these claims is that the Iranian regime and its proxies usually assert Israel is a cancerous foreign implant in the region – yet one now says Israeli institutions have been there since the birth of Islam in the 7th century!

COVER STORY

“LESS FOR LESS”

IMPLICATIONS OF A NEW IRAN-US DEAL

Israel Kasnett

Washington and Teheran are engaged in indirect negotiations to close a deal with regard to Iran's illicit nuclear program that will effectively bring the rogue country in from the cold.

While the precise details of the emerging deal are not yet known, it will reportedly limit Iran's uranium enrichment to its current production level of 60%.

According to the *New York Times*, it will also reportedly require Iran to halt attacks against US contractors in Syria and Iraq, increase cooperation with international nuclear inspectors and cease ballistic missile sales to Russia.

In exchange, Washington would agree not to increase economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic, stop confiscating Iranian oil as occurred in April, and to not seek punitive resolutions against Iran at the United Nations or at the International Atomic Energy Agency, according to the report.

However, the real question is what happens the day after the deal is signed. According to various experts who spoke with *JNS*, the answer isn't good.

Such an agreement will bolster Iran's hegemonic ambitions, increase the regime's support for its terror proxies, deepen its growing defence ties with Russia and bring closer a conflict with Israel, they said.

According to veteran Israeli-Arab affairs and diplomatic commentator, Yoni Ben Menachem, the secret negotiations between the United States and Iran “are based on the principle of ‘less for less’.”

He said the parties are aiming to reach a temporary agreement only on specific issues they can agree upon, which means the focus is on Iran halting uranium enrichment in exchange for releasing its sanctioned assets abroad, “which amount to several hundred billion dollars,” he said.

(In its report on June 14, the *Times* reported that while Iran wants the United States to unfreeze billions in Iranian assets in exchange for the release of three Iranian American



A US-Iran nuclear “mini-deal” is in the works, despite the fact that it may empower Iran's troubling behaviour on multiple fronts (Image: Shutterstock)

prisoners, Washington has not confirmed that this is part of the emerging deal.)

With such an influx of funds, Teheran is expected to boost its support for its terror proxies, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip.

The US State Department has declared Iran “the leading state sponsor of terrorism.” According to the department's most recent Country Reports on Terrorism, Iran “continued its support for terrorist-related activity, including support for Hezbollah, Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza, and various terrorist and militant groups in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, and elsewhere throughout the Middle East.”

The State Department currently lists four countries as state sponsors of terrorism – Iran, Syria, North Korea and Cuba – “for having consistently provided support for acts of international terrorism.”

And according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), “Iran has been building and training forces to target and kill US personnel and expel US forces from Syria.”

Ben Menachem said he is perplexed by the US rushing to an agreement, given that Iran has continued to threaten the world, even during the negotiations. For example, it recently revealed a hypersonic ballistic missile that could potentially threaten numerous countries in the West.

Furthermore, in recent weeks, the Biden Administration itself has released intelligence showing the deepening defence relationship between Russia and Iran, as Iran manufactures drones and ships them to Russia. Iran is also helping to build a drone factory in Russia. As repayment for its support of Russia's war against Ukraine, Iran is seeking to acquire large numbers of Russian attack helicopters, warplanes and air-defence systems, according to US officials.

"This is a full-scale defence partnership that is harmful to Ukraine, to Iran's neighbours and to the international community," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said at a press conference in mid-June.

But despite Iran's severely troubling behaviour, the Obama and Biden Administrations have long believed that diplomacy with Iran will ultimately work, and that the Iranian leadership will be willing to stop uranium enrichment and overall terrorism-related activities in the region and beyond.

And yet, Iran has dragged out negotiations while fooling the American and European negotiators.

In May, US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said, "We have always believed, we continue to believe that diplomacy is the best way to reach that solution, but we have seen no progress in terms of actions from the Iranian Government in the region."

Now, Iran has shown willingness to make progress, or is at least pretending, and the United States appears intent on cementing an agreement at all costs, even as Iran supports Russia while it attacks Ukraine, which is backed by the Biden Administration.

David M. Weinberg, a senior fellow at the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy, a new think tank in Jerusalem headed by former Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben Shabbat, believes a US-Iran agreement is problematic for the entire region.

"We know from experience that US capitulation to Iran on nuclear matters emboldens, not restrains, the hegemonic ambitions of the mullahs," he said. "Teheran's regional swagger certainly will be bolstered by sanctions relief and the release of embargoed Iranian assets in Iraq and Europe."

Regarding Israel, Weinberg said a "weak US deal with Iran moves a frontal Iran-Israel clash closer than ever."

A deal which provides Iran with billions of dollars "is even more illogical given Teheran's supply of weapons

to Russian President Vladimir Putin for Russia's war in Ukraine," he added. "One would think this might bother President Biden, who just asked Congress for billions of dollars more in support of Kyiv."

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei commented on June 11 on the talks, saying, "There is nothing wrong with the agreement [with the West], but the infrastructure of our nuclear industry should not be touched," according to state media.

US State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel declined to specifically comment on Khamenei's remarks, reiterating the Biden Administration stance that the United States "is committed to never allowing Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon."

Patel also admitted that "Iran continues to expand its nuclear activities in a way that [has] no credible civilian purpose," and that "cooperation from the Iranian regime remains significantly lacking."

Even so, Patel reiterated that the Administration wants an agreement and continues to believe that "diplomacy is the best way to achieve that goal on a verifiable and durable basis."

According to Ben Menachem, a new interim agreement poses several dangers, including the expectation that an influx of hundreds of billions of dollars would immediately flow from Iran's coffers to its terrorist proxies in the Middle East, causing major problems for Israel, the region, and beyond.

"Weinberg said a 'weak US deal with Iran moves a frontal Iran-Israel clash closer than ever.'"

He also noted that in May, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) closed one of its three open investigations into the remains of highly enriched uranium discovered at unrecognised nuclear sites in Iran. The IAEA was investigating the origin of uranium particles enriched

to up to 83.7% at its Fordow enrichment plant. Iran claimed it was due to "unintended fluctuations" in enrichment levels.

According to Andrea Stricker, deputy director of the Nonproliferation and Biodefense Program at the Foundation for Defence of Democracies, "Iran's explanation that it unintentionally produced near atomic-weapons grade uranium is not credible – Teheran was likely experimenting with higher enrichment and was caught red-handed."

Israel accused the IAEA of having surrendered to the Iranian regime in what is now understood to likely be a preparatory step towards a new nuclear agreement with Iran. This comes even as the IAEA estimates that Iran currently possesses 114 kg of uranium enriched to 60% purity, a level that is only a short step away from nuclear weapons grade purity.

"Khamenei is trying to throw sand in the eyes of the West," Ben Menachem said. "Israel has provided the intelligence agencies in the US and Europe with decisive intelligence evidence that Iran has a secret military track to

produce a nuclear bomb and that this is the ultimate goal of its nuclear program.”

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said on June 13 during a closed-door, three-hour meeting with members of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee that Washington and Teheran are nearing a “mini-agreement, and not a nuclear agreement,” and it is something Israel “will know how to deal with.”

He reiterated that whatever the terms of the agreement, “Our position is clear: No agreement with Iran will be binding on Israel, which will continue to do everything to defend itself.”

AIR

Israel Kasnett is deputy Jerusalem bureau chief at the Jewish News Syndicate (JNS). © JNS (www.jns.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

A DEAL THAT MUST NOT BE NAMED?

Lahav Harkov

In the Harry Potter books, characters call the villain “He Who Must Not Be Named,” for fear that saying “Voldemort” will conjure up the evil villain.

The Biden Administration won’t say “Iran Deal” – apparently because it fears Congress. It is negotiating “the deal that must not be named.”

Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu and Defence Committee Chairman Yuli Edelstein have called it a “small agreement”, a “mini-deal” and a “memorandum of understanding”, but the State Department is doing the rhetorical equivalent of whistling and saying, “nothing to see here.”

Why is the Biden Administration not saying, “Iran Deal”?

The reason for this is the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA), which requires the US president to

bring any agreement relating to Teheran’s nuclear program to Congress for a 30-day review period.

Legally, the president may enter into an executive agreement without approval from Congress, so in that sense, INARA-based congressional review can’t stop President Joe Biden from doing what he wants.

A lesser-known element of INARA is what former State Department adviser on Iran, Gabriel Noronha, has called “legislative snapback”. The law states that “if the President does not submit such 90-day compliance certification” – that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) – “or has determined that Iran has materially breached an agreement and not cured it, legislation reinstating statutory sanctions against Iran introduced within 60 calendar days of such event shall be entitled to expedited consideration.”

In other words, if Iran is violating the JCPOA – which it has been, for years – then Congress can fast-track a bill to reinstate sanctions.

There is a question of whether that is relevant after the US left the JCPOA in 2018, but there’s a fair chance someone in Congress will test it.

At a recent J Street event, former Obama Administration lawyer Tess Bridgeman, who worked on JCPOA, essentially called to keep the details of the new Iran agreement secret.



Biden and Blinken have congressional opposition in mind when they label the new Iran deal an “understanding” rather than an “agreement” (Image: US State Dept/ Flickr)

“With elections coming up, we are not going to see the Administration do anything that requires voting in Congress, so I think it’s really important to keep in mind... that [agreements] be in that realm of discretionary, unilateral gestures,” she said. “Something that’s written down on a piece of paper for all sides to try to implement is a recipe for Congress making it impossible.”

The Biden Administration, many of whom are Obama alumni, clearly understands that INARA is a political landmine, because of the weaknesses of the “not-a-deal” that they are concluding.



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Secretary of State Antony Blinken started to talk about the need to put Iran “back in the box” of the 2015 JCPOA, soon after Biden was elected president. This unnamed agreement seems to be their way of doing that – except that if the JCPOA put Iran in a box, the new understandings are a shipping container.

Back in 2012, Iran had enriched large quantities of uranium to 20%, and a small quantity to 27%, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency. That was enough to rouse Netanyahu to display a cartoon bomb at the UN and urge the world to take action. The subsequent JCPOA limited Iranian uranium enrichment to 3.67% purity.

Today, Iran is enriching uranium to 60%, plus a small quantity reached 84%. (Weapons-grade uranium is enriched to 90% purity.) The “not-deal” would limit Iran to continuing to enrich to 60% – that’s a lot more than 3.67%.

It’s almost enough to make one nostalgic for the JCPOA, which had the inherent downside of recognising an Iranian “right to enrich”.

Other weaknesses of the JCPOA that the “not-agreement” repeats are the sanctions relief – money that props up the mullahs’ regime and can be used to terrorise the Middle East – and lack of significant restrictions on Iran’s ballistic missiles program and proxies in the region.

Yes, the new understandings reportedly stop Iran from selling missiles to Russia or having its proxies kill Americans in Syria, according to the *New York Times*. Even those narrow limitations seem unlikely to be effective. Iran’s post-sanctions “resistance economy” relies on Russia and China, such that alienating the former would be a bad idea from Teheran’s perspective. Plus, Iran does not generally admit to being behind its proxies when they attack Americans, so why would they change now?

Meanwhile, members of both parties and both houses of Congress are not accepting the Biden Administration’s attempts to circumvent them and are questioning the wisdom of a deal with Iran at this time.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul, a Republican, wrote to Biden: “Rather than using United States diplomatic leverage and military deterrence to dissuade Iran from engaging in these malign activities, this administration is rewarding Iran’s bad behaviour in exchange for a false promise of de-escalation.

“I urge the administration to remember that US law requires that any agreement, arrangement, or understanding with Iran needs to be submitted to Congress pursuant to INARA. Any continued obstruction will rob the American people... of answers about why the United States is facilitating the lining of Iran’s coffers.”


“Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said of the Biden Administration’s talks with Iran, to *Jewish Insider*: ‘They want a deal so bad they can taste it.’”

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said of the Biden Administration’s talks with Iran, to *Jewish Insider*: “They want a deal so bad they can taste it. They’ll crawl through glass for it. It’s unseemly.”

Graham and two Democratic senators, Richard Blumenthal and Robert Menendez, proposed a bill requiring the Administration to notify Congress within two days if Iran enriches uranium past 60%.

Tim Kaine, a Democratic senator who voted in favour of the JCPOA in 2015, told *Jewish Insider*: “I think you would find even those of us who were supporting the JCPOA, we’re so sceptical of Iran right now that you wouldn’t just get people up here who – because they supported in the past – are just going to be [supportive]...

[Iran’s] misbehaviour in the region, but in particular against its own people, has led to intense scepticism.”

INARA was passed in 2015 to force the Obama Administration to admit the details of the deal it was reaching to Congress. That agreement was unpopular once the American people knew what was in it. It’s hard to see how this will be any different, unless the Biden Administration does get away with hiding it as a “deal that must not be named.” 

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

APPEASING IRAN IS A TERRIBLE IDEA

Colonel Richard Kemp

A new interim nuclear deal between the US and Iran may be imminent. US denials that such a deal is on the table are likely motivated by an intention to frame it as an informal understanding rather than an international treaty in order to avoid the need for Congressional endorsement, thus reflecting semantics instead of reality.

Leaked details of the “non-deal” suggest Iran would agree to cease enrichment activity and give other undertakings, including freeing US-Iranian dual citizens currently held in custody, in return for sanctions relief that would immediately release around US\$20 billion (A\$29.5 billion) in frozen Iranian funds – with hundreds of billions more to follow.

The White House knows that no diplomatic understanding with Teheran is worth the paper it’s printed on and that no such undertakings will stop Iran from becoming a nuclear-armed state.



So why is it heading down this path? There are two reasons. The first is to give Biden a win on the international stage that he so badly needs after the debacles over withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and China supplanting the US as power broker in the Middle East.

The second is to pile pressure on Israel and this again has two parts. Part one is to deter Jerusalem from executing a major military strike against Iran's nuclear programme which has become more plausible since Binyamin Netanyahu resumed the premiership.

Despite the catalogue of foreign policy failures that have arisen directly from craven weakness in Washington, the White House does not seem to have learned that deterrence is the most effective means of averting war and remains fearful not only of wielding a credible military threat against Iran but also of Israel doing so. Biden and those around him know that an extant nuclear agreement with Teheran, supported by the Europeans, complicates any military action by Israel.

Part two is the pursuit of the elusive two-state solution which remains a fixation in the minds of policy-makers in Washington despite continued iron-clad Palestinian intransigence that has spanned many decades, demonstrating that any prospect of that – at least in the foreseeable future – is unachievable.

Biden thinks he can seduce Jerusalem with the honey trap of an Abraham Accords-style normalisation with Saudi Arabia in exchange for acquiescence – or at least keeping quiet – over an Iran nuclear deal. Riyadh has made clear that one of its conditions for normalisation is the creation of a Palestinian state and of course the Administration not only supports but actively encourages that thinking.

If Biden's non-deal materialises it will represent another catastrophic foreign policy failure that will have repercussions well beyond the Middle East. It will be supported by European governments and will reinforce the perception, and the reality, of Western weakness that encouraged Putin to invade Ukraine last year. What we're talking about here is pure appeasement and empowerment of a regime that is implacably and actively opposed to the US and everything it stands for.

Teheran has become the main weapons supplier to Russia, providing thousands of killer drones that have been used to aid and abet war crimes against Ukrainian civilians. Aside from the drones' criminal use, even their export

by Iran is currently illegal under the terms of the UN Security Council resolution that supported the JCPOA nuclear deal. That restriction is due to expire in a matter of months, along with UN restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile program.

The mood of appeasement in Washington and European capitals suggests no attempt will be made to extend or replace it. Failure to clamp down effectively against Iran's support for Putin's war, so obviously to help bring about Biden's deal, also increases the flow of traffic in the opposite direction – with Russia already providing significant funds to Iran and considering the supply of combat planes and missile technology.

Meanwhile, as well as the violent oppression of its own people, Iran continues to facilitate and direct its proxies

to attack Israel as we saw last month when 1,500 missiles were fired by Islamic Jihad at the civilian population.

No doubt a condition of Biden's deal will be to desist from these activities, but Teheran will not do so any more than it will cease enriching uranium and working on weaponisation. Unfreezing of assets will help fund such aggression despite any attempts to control how that money is spent.

Then there is the spectre of China looming across the entire picture. Every weakness exhibited by Washington is carefully noted in Beijing and feeds into its plans for global expansion, not least over Taiwan.

President Xi has certainly not failed to appreciate that Washington's pursuit of diplomatic accommodation with Iran is the reason the US has failed to enforce sanctions prohibiting oil trade between his country and Iran, with exports currently running at a million barrels per day.

In mid-June, Khamenei made encouraging noises about the prospective deal, a change in attitude that only reinforces what some of us already know – that Biden's proposals work in favour of Iran and against Israel and the US.

Among other benefits for Iran of Washington again kicking the nuclear can down the road is the time it buys the ayatollahs to continue burying and hardening their nuclear facilities – adding even greater challenges to whoever has to bomb them and perhaps ultimately placing Iran's nuclear program beyond military reach.

AIR



Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei is now making noises in favour of a deal – perhaps because Teheran wants to buy time to harden its nuclear facilities against attack (Image: Office of the Supreme Leader website)

Colonel Richard Kemp is a former UK Armed Forces commander. Reprinted from the Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot (Ynetnews.com). © Yediot Ahronot, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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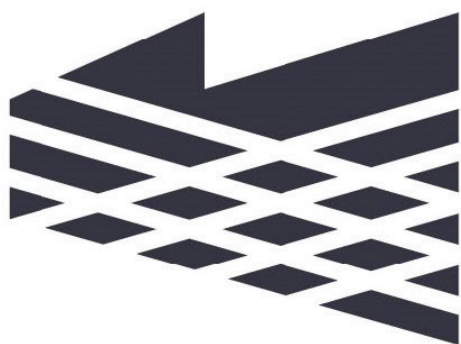
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In Greenland

New party policy is off the planet

Ahron Shapiro

In its first update to its “Israel/Palestine” policy since 2010, the June 4 federal Greens Party national conference agreed on a patently delusional and duplicitous document. The conference’s resolution ends the party’s support for a negotiated two-state resolution without explicitly supporting an imposed one-state solution involving Israel’s dissolution – although it lays out a road map to achieve just that result.

This time, as in 2010, the Greens’ policy is rooted in a one-sided worldview that sets out, in their words, not to achieve peace, but to “rectify” Israel’s “injustice” perpetrated against Palestinians.

This time, as in 2010, the Greens disregard Israel’s generous offers of a state for the Palestinians, on virtually the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip (with mutually agreed land swaps and a capital in Jerusalem), at least three times since the turn of the century. Nor do they even acknowledge the historic 1993 Oslo Accords, which gave Palestinians their own Palestinian Authority government and security forces.

This time, as in 2010, the Greens’ policy does not mention Israel’s total withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. Nor is there any reference to Hamas, which seized power from the PA in Gaza 16 years ago in a violent coup, and has controlled Gaza’s border with Egypt ever since.

The big difference, however, between the 2010 policy and the latest version, is that the new policy speaks out of both sides of its mouth. Previously, the Greens explicitly supported Israel and a new state of Palestine living side by side, with Jerusalem as their shared capital. No longer.

Now the policy begins by paying lip service to “self-determination” for both Palestinians and “Israelis” (not Jews, interestingly, and it’s not clear how “Israelis” are to be defined). But then the rest of the policy clearly points towards replacing Israel with an Arab majority state which would encompass the entire area of what is now Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. It’s envisaged that this would happen in stages through a progression of Machiavellian manoeuvres which, the Greens hope, will be “endorsed by the UN.”

The recipe for this upheaval includes open-ended sanctions, boycotts, International Criminal Court (ICC) tribunals and even, by implication, military force against Israelis (i.e. “Israeli Jews”) to implement the so-called Palestinian “Right of Return” to pre-state Israel. Unlike in 2010, the Greens now suddenly insist this is international law. It isn’t, and it never has been.

The Greens apparently want us to forget that, until June 4, they did not consider the Palestinian “Right of Return” a right at all. Instead, they called for “a just and practical negotiated settlement of the claims of the Palestinian refugees that provides compensation for those who are unable to return to their country of origin, Israel or Palestine.”

Promoting the “Right of Return”, the Greens’ goal, is a policy to end 75 years of Jewish-majority democratic



The Greens’ new policy means the party’s official stance has finally caught up with the increasingly radical statements and tweets coming from Greens Senators and MPs (Image: Australian Greens website)

rule in Israel by creating a Palestinian majority inside Israel. Moreover, the Greens advocate “the establishment of international mechanisms guided by international law to facilitate” the immigration of millions of descendants of Palestinian refugees and their extended families into Israel. In other words, if Israel does not agree to its own destruction by demographic means, “international mechanisms” will be employed to force it.

It is in this context, and this context alone, that the Greens claim to support “self-determination” for both Palestinians and Israelis: Israel can exist but only if Jews are the minority.

What happens after that? The Greens hope that international “peacekeeping” forces – presumably part of the same “international mechanisms” that enforced Israel’s destruction – will ensure a smooth transition from Israel’s demise to the new state. A more realistic scenario, however, recalls what happened after the UN voted on Nov. 29, 1947, for the partition plan of Mandate Palestine.

The vote, interestingly, explicitly proposed two states for two peoples, a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Jews accepted it, the Arabs violently rejected it. What followed was essentially a brutal and very bloody civil war. Meanwhile, the British Mandatory garrison, acting as little more than “peacekeepers”, prevaricated and gradually abandoned the field. There is no reason to believe a repeat performance would end very differently.

About the only accurate assumption guiding the Greens’ resolution is that Israelis would never willingly agree to commit national suicide. Apparently, that’s just fine for the Greens, since their policy no longer foresees the need for any “negotiations” between Israelis and Palestinians at all. The word “negotiations” appeared in four key passages in their 2010 policy update, but not once in the new resolution.

Now the new policy calls on the “peacekeeping” forces to monitor the implementation and – you can’t make this stuff up – immediately implement six diktats that the Australian Greens have developed:

1. The immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Israeli military from all Palestinian cities, towns, refugee camps, surrounding areas and transport routes, allowing freedom of movement of Palestinians.
2. The immediate release of Palestinian political prisoners and all Palestinian child prisoners held in Israeli detention.
3. The end of dispossession and destruction of Palestinian homes by the authorities of the state of Israel and Israeli settlers.
4. Palestinian control of their borders with Jordan and Egypt.
5. The immediate freezing of all Israeli settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including expansion, and the simultaneous commencement of the repatriation of the Israeli settlers from the Palestinian territories.
6. The immediate dismantling of the separation wall.

To say that the Australian Greens are just parroting Palestinian propaganda points without exhibiting any grasp of the weighty issues they are battling around, particularly the security aspects, would be merely stating the obvious. But this misses the bigger picture. This is protest-sign sloganeering masquerading as policy.

The new policy is a rambling rant, some 50% longer than the 2010 resolution it replaces. Much of the extra space was evidently reserved for offering some justification for the policy pivot from two states to one, and from a negotiated solution to an imposed one.

“To say that the Australian Greens are just parroting Palestinian propaganda points without exhibiting any grasp of the weighty issues they are battling around, particularly the security aspects, would be merely stating the obvious”

The June 4 resolution quotes gratuitously from the September 2022 Report of United Nations Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese. The report accused Israel of “settlercolonialist” [sic] actions that had “prevented the realisation of Palestinian people’s right to self-determination.” Yet of all the anti-Israel UN-generated pap to choose from, this quote says much more about the Greens than about Israel. Let’s recall that less than three months after

publishing this report, Albanese had been exposed and discredited for earlier blatantly antisemitic social media posts.

Elsewhere in the resolution, the Greens “recognise that the state of Israel is practising the crime of apartheid.” Nothing really surprising there. Some left-wing NGOs and paid activists have repeatedly made the same false and ridiculous accusa-

tion, largely based on the accusation also being made by other left-wing NGOs and paid activists. And to justify the accusation they have had to invent a definition of apartheid which was developed only so it can be applied to Israel – even though it would probably also label most countries in the world as “apartheid” if similarly applied to them.

On this point, however, the Greens appear to have taken their cue from the Palestinian strategy to “internationalise” the conflict against Israel. This began in 2012 with the Palestinian move to upgrade their status at the

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UN to “non-member observer state”. This opened up other fronts of Palestinian political attack on Israel, such as the International Criminal Court. And tellingly, the word “international” appears a whopping 18 times in the Greens’ document.

If all this wasn’t enough, the new policy is rife with its own contradictions. On one hand, it deems two states “unachievable” because of expanding settlements in the West Bank. But on the other hand, it sets out a preliminary goal of “the removal of Israeli settlers and Israeli security and military forces from all the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967” – a goal so important it’s repeated.

But if the settlers are to be removed, as the Greens are demanding, what is there to prevent the negotiated two-state peace outcome based on the pre-1967 lines which the Greens called for in 2010? Yet they reject this now.

Here two prominent activists in the Jewish Greens, Larry Stillman and David Zyngier, may provide a clue. Writing for the Australian Jewish website *Plus61j*, they claimed that “J-Greens independently and forthrightly developed its own policy on [“Israel/Palestine”] for the Greens. So did Greens for Palestine. We negotiated through Senator Jordon Steele-John to establish consensus.”

Therein lies the unfortunate truth. Arriving at a pro-Palestinian consensus can only reach as far as the Jewish Greens, and the price of admission for the Jews to be part of that consensus was embracing the Palestinian “Right of Return”. Moreover, Stillman and Zyngier explicitly concede that the Greens policy amounts to a call for Israel’s destruction, saying what they foresee is “the end of the state of Israel as a Zionist Jewish democratic republic, and indeed an independent state of Palestine, ‘from the river to the sea.’”

In other words, the Jewish J-Greens appear to have agreed to completely endorse the maximalist Palestinian program, and it’s hard to see what, if anything, they received in return. Almost the only thing Stillman and Zyngier claim the policy offers Jews is that they will still be allowed to “take pride in its renascent people and culture in the historic land, as Jews do” as Israel is destroyed.

The end result of all of this is the embarrassing, confused, self-contradictory and sloganistic excuse for a policy on “Israel/Palestine” that the Greens passed at their national conference.

In a race to the bottom with activist MPs and a rabidly anti-Israel base, the Greens’ official policies have finally caught up with the tweets their Senators have long been putting out. As a result, they’ve found themselves untethered from both real-world foreign policy and international diplomacy. Like the left-wing NGOs that they credit for the baseless linkage between Israel and “apartheid”, the Greens have voluntarily written themselves out of any serious discussion about policymaking on the Middle East.

AIR

ISRAEL’S JUDICIAL REFORM CRISIS REIGNITES

Amotz Asa-El

A six-month political saga seemed ready to end when the plot suddenly took a new twist, resuming in earnest the constitutional perplexity, parliamentary theatrics and political warfare that have unsettled Israeli society since last November’s general election.

The crisis was sparked by Justice Minister Yariv Levin’s unveiling of a sweeping plan to limit the Israeli Supreme Court’s power and reconfigure the selection of its justices. But the mayhem had seemed to be petering out after Binyamin Netanyahu and his circle began hinting he had decided to shelve the plan.

Constitutional reform, he said in several interviews to foreign media, will only be passed by broad agreement – which seemed to rule out legislation supported only by his ruling coalition’s narrow majority of 64 of the Knesset’s 120 lawmakers.

Netanyahu’s intentions were put to a test on June 14, when the Knesset assembled to elect its two representatives to the nine-member Judicial Selection Committee.

Traditionally – but not by law – the pair of lawmakers chosen to the Committee consists of one member from the ruling coalition and one from the opposition. The rest of the panel is made up of two ministers, including the justice minister, three Supreme Court justices, including the Court President; and two representatives from the Israeli Bar Association.

Levin’s reform plan proposed to recast that panel by deleting the Bar Association lawyers, adding two politicians – one additional lawmaker and one additional minister – and inserting two “public representatives” to be selected by

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the justice minister. The result would have been complete government control of all judicial appointments.

It was perhaps the most crucial, and most contentious, part of Levin's broader judicial reform blueprint, which has triggered mass demonstrations, weekend after weekend, month after month. This opposition in the Israeli streets has been bolstered by batteries of academics, literati, bankers, retired justices, generals, ambassadors and secret-service directors, as well as world leaders, who



Netanyahu and his cabinet: The PM would likely prefer to lower the heat on judicial reform but is under pressure from Coalition hardliners (Image: GPO/ Flickr)

all voiced fears that the reform would dilute or diminish Israeli democracy.

In the face of the public outcry, along with negative responses in the financial markets and an unprecedented lack of an invitation to the White House for Netanyahu, the Israeli PM began backtracking from Levin's gambit in March.

After unprecedented mass protests following the firing of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, who had called publicly for suspending the reforms, Netanyahu cancelled his dismissal and agreed to hold talks with the opposition over an agreed compromise package of judicial reform.

Evidently struck by the spontaneity and magnitude of the protests, Netanyahu said he would now seek a broad consensus, and agreed to take advantage of President Isaac Herzog's offer to host talks between Netanyahu's representatives and members of the opposition to craft a reform that could command a reasonably broad consensus.

The talks proceeded slowly but appeared to produce some progress. Netanyahu reportedly agreed to discard the plan's highly controversial "override clause" that would have allowed a simple Knesset majority to re-legislate laws the Supreme Court had dismissed as unconstitutional.

At the same time, there appeared to have emerged an unofficial agreement that in this year's scheduled vote over the Knesset's representatives in the Judicial Selection Committee, the Government would work within the exist-

ing formula. In other words, the plenary would elect one representative from the coalition and one from the opposition, and the rest of the panel would remain unchanged.

This is what was widely expected to happen – a vote that would have implied Netanyahu was retreating from a reform package that had become a major political headache for him, as well as a potential international embarrassment.

However, events before, during, and after the vote turned out entirely differently. Multiple actors in this scenario failed to play their expected roles, departing from the script in three different ways.

The first to defy the script was Netanyahu himself who, on the day of the Selection Committee vote in the Knesset, decided with his colleagues in Likud's Knesset faction to vote against all candidates for the Committee. The plan behind this manoeuvre was to delay by a month finalising the members of the Selection Committee, and thus buy more political time.

This ploy was reportedly concocted by Levin and his hard-line allies, who realised that if the Government elected an opposition representative to the Selection Committee, the reform package would effectively be all

but dead and buried.

It was also an about-face that made the opposition fume, arguing that by voting against all candidates, Netanyahu was violating the tacit agreement reached that the vote for members of the Selection Committee would be held according to the existing formula.

That's when the next surprise arose, and from a direction no one foresaw.

For his tactic to work, Netanyahu had to convince all the coalition's seven members who had put their names forward to serve on the Selection Committee to withdraw their rival candidacies for the coalition's lone seat on it. Six agreed, but the seventh, Likud backbencher Tali Gottlieb, refused – even after Netanyahu begged her, and reportedly even yelled at her, in a personal meeting.

The Government's improvised last-minute strategy to temporarily avoid finalising the Selection Committee was thus derailed, and Likud arrived at the vote with a candidate who, according to the faction's own plan, it would not back. On the other hand, the opposition had united around one candidate for its slot – former energy minister Karine Elharar from the *Yesh Atid* ("There is a Future") party.

That's when the third surprise arrived – the vote itself.

In accordance with Israel's Law of the Judiciary, the Knesset elects its representatives for the Judicial Selection

Committee by secret ballot (voting for rival candidates when the spots are contested, or for or against candidates when they are uncontested). Party discipline thus cannot be enforced.

When the ballots were opened it turned out that four coalition members had defected, electing MK Elharar to the Committee with a 58-56 majority. Equally oddly, MK Gottlieb, who was supposed to win no votes except her own, won 15 votes alongside the 59 votes against her candidacy.

Just who cast the defecting votes for both Elharar and Gottlieb, and what motivated them, has been a matter for intense speculation.

There are two Likud lawmakers – Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Yuli Edelstein and Economics Committee Chair David Bitan – who have been openly critical of the way the judicial reform plans were presented without regard for the need to build a political consensus, and of the damage this has done to Likud’s electoral prospects (some recent polling shows the Likud vote down 20%, with most of this support moving to former Defence Minister Benny Gantz and his centrist National Union party.)

Edelstein and Bitan declined to say how they voted, as did a third suspect, Defence Minister Gallant.

Whoever the defectors who supported Elharar were, they were likely concerned first and foremost with the reform’s political impact and only secondly with its substance. Personal relations with Netanyahu could also have helped motivate the defections.

Yet the votes for Gottlieb, whose candidacy he personally tried to prevent, would be even more concerning for Netanyahu. That is why he had Likud’s lawmakers assemble soon after the vote and sanction her, removing her from all parliamentary committees and forbidding her to address the plenary as a representative of Likud.

Whatever the full story behind the defections in the vote, they arguably exposed and further damaged Netanyahu’s effectiveness as coalition leader in the wake of the reform package controversy that some analysts believe was thrust on him by Levin.

Netanyahu must now be concerned that the lawmakers who voted with the opposition may be coordinating their actions – and could effectively form the nucleus of a potential anti-reform underground in his own party.

The opposition, for its part, flabbergasted by Netanyahu’s U-turn on the vote and buoyed by its surprise tactical win in the Knesset, announced it was suspending its participation in the judicial reform talks at the President’s residence until the Judicial Selection Committee is actually convened.

Such was the picture in Israel on Saturday, June 17.

Yet the following day, Netanyahu lobbed a new bombshell, announcing that he now intends to resume Knesset

passage of the reform legislation, albeit in piecemeal fashion. Reportedly, the first bill the Government plans to pass would dilute the role and powers of the legal advisors that serve in every government ministry, and also limit the ability of the Supreme Court to use the “reasonableness” standard it has employed in the past when reviewing governmental appointments.

Opposition leaders Yair Lapid and Benny Gantz said in response that any unilateral judicial legislation would end their participation in the talks being led by President Herzog. Meanwhile, the activists leading the protest movement were preparing to return to the streets in full force.

The upshot is that Israel’s constitutional crisis over judicial reform appears far from over. The June 14 vote which was expected to mark the beginning of its end may turn out to have been but the end of the beginning.

AIR

ISRAEL’S WORSENING JENIN PROBLEM

Herb Keinson

Day after day, night after night, IDF soldiers enter Palestinian cities, villages, and refugee camps looking for terror suspects and making arrests.

The troops almost always encounter some resistance: gunfire, petrol bombs, heavy objects dropped from rooftops, a barrage of rocks. Increasingly, the terrorists detonate roadside bombs.

The raids are usually successful: The suspects are apprehended, and the IDF troops leave mostly unharmed. But in some cases – like on June 19 – there are casualties: five border policemen and two IDF soldiers were wounded when a powerful roadside bomb was detonated alongside their armoured vehicles in Jenin.

These raids are a critical component of Israel’s security.

They were vital during the Second Intifada in bringing down the level of terrorism once the decision was made in 2002 for the IDF to re-enter the Palestinian towns. And they have been key over the last year and a half in keeping a mini-wave of terror from turning into a tidal wave.

As National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi said in a *KAN Bet* interview, soldiers operate in the extremely hostile environment of Jenin to prevent terror attacks in the heart of Israeli cities.

“If we don’t meet those roadside bombs in Jenin, we will meet them on buses in Jerusalem or as car bombs in Tel Aviv. We have to bring the battle to the enemy,” he said. “That is what the IDF has done for months, with amazing results. But it is not an easy battle.”

The June 19 skirmish was especially difficult, and necessitated using an Apache attack helicopter to help extricate the wounded – the first-time air power was used during a West Bank operation in some 20 years.

Former OC Central Command Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Gadi Shamni said there is a saying in the IDF that in dealing with West Bank terror, it is preferable to use an M-16 rather than an F-16, meaning ground forces rather than air power.

The reason for this is not solely because air power is so much more destructive but also because using air power against West Bank cities only builds up the Palestinian ethos. “If you use these tools, they say, ‘Look how serious [a threat] we are,’” Shamni said.

Not wanting to feed the Palestinian ethos or give the terrorists any “victory picture”, the IDF spent hours under heavy gunfire on Monday extracting the crippled vehicles from Jenin once the wounded soldiers had been successfully evacuated.

Using the helicopter gunship to ensure the evacuation of the IDF soldiers was a reminder to the terrorist organisations of the military’s capabilities. But the fact that the IDF even needed to deploy the helicopter – and, in addition to firing a missile at the gunmen who were making the evacuation of the wounded difficult, also fired off flares as decoys against shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles – revealed the terrorists’ capabilities as well.

The type of roadside bomb used against the armoured IDF vehicles in Jenin unveiled disturbing military capabilities. This was not “only” a lone-wolf terrorist shooting at IDF soldiers or passing civilian Israeli motorists. Rather, the building and detonation of this type of bomb indicate a terrorist infrastructure in Jenin of a different league.

And that calibre of terror, that league of terror, will necessitate a recalibration of Israeli tactics.

The Israeli security establishment has long been aware of these capabilities. It has long been aware of Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad’s investments in building up the terrorist infrastructure in this West Bank hotbed.

In May, Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) head Ronen Bar publicly stated that Israel had thwarted an Islamic Jihad attempt to produce rockets and a rocket launcher in the Jenin refugee camp to be fired at Israel, much like rockets are fired into the Jewish state from Gaza.

Some Palestinians were celebrating a “victory” as clips of the bomb detonated alongside the IDF vehicles on June 19 went viral. But it will likely be a hollow victory. The military is adept at learning lessons and will undoubtedly study what happened and adjust its tactics accordingly.

One thing these recent events will not do is deter the IDF from nightly raids to arrest terror suspects, since that has become a central component in keeping the terror at a relatively low level.

Beyond an enhanced military capability, the roadside bombing revealed something else everyone knows at a theoretical level but only truly appreciates when it becomes manifest: the Palestinian Authority asserts no control in Jenin nor in the northern West Bank.



Israeli military vehicles under fire during an arrest raid into Jenin (Image: Twitter)

That terror organisations can build and detonate these types of sophisticated roadside bombs shows that a substantial terrorist infrastructure has arisen unimpeded by the PA. Jenin and the northern West Bank have been the focal point of terror against Israel over the last several months because there is no Palestinian governance or monopoly over the use of force there. A vacuum has been created, and in that

vacuum, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other terrorist organisations simply thrive.

Jenin today, where the PA has lost its grip, is a chilling preview of what is likely to emerge throughout the West Bank the day after 87-year-old Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas dies or can no longer continue in his current role.

If PA impotence is now centred in Jenin and the northern West Bank, this impotence will spread through the territories when Abbas leaves the scene. Currently, the IDF is struggling to figure out how to deal with the vacuum left by the PA in Jenin. Lessons learned there will likely be used elsewhere once Abbas departs and the PA vacuum inevitably spreads.

AIR

Herb Keinon is a senior contributing editor and analyst at the Jerusalem Post. © Jerusalem Post (jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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INDONESIA'S CONFUSING ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Zachary Abuza

Eight months out from the first round of Indonesia's presidential election, scheduled for February 2024, the three-way race is wide open. The election, the sixth since the restoration of democracy in 1998, is unlikely to be settled in February as no candidate is likely to attain a majority of the vote, prompting a runoff in July.

INDONESIA'S DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Before we get to the candidates themselves, it's important to start with a little bit of context.

Indonesia just marked the 25th anniversary of the fall of Suharto and the end of the military-backed New Order regime. Indonesia's transition to democracy was messy. The country experienced five presidents in as many years. There was intense competition for power between the newly empowered Parliament and the president, and no leader was able to effectively deal with the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis, which led to the collapse of currency and a 13% contraction of the economy in 1998.

Nonetheless, the foundations for Indonesian democracy were laid, including political and economic decentralisation, the freeing of the media, and the end of the military's direct role in civil administration, known as *dwi fungsi*. The military returned to barracks and began to professionalise, focusing more on external security. From 2004, the president was directly elected by the public.

Elections have been run well, no easy task, across 17,000 islands in the world's third largest democracy. Voter turnout is high, and elections have been free of political violence. Most importantly, there has been the regular and orderly transition of power.

It's not that there have not been setbacks. The incumbent president Joko Widodo, better known as Jokowi, allowed the independent anti-corruption agency to lose much of its autonomy and some investigative and subpoena powers. Since 2014, the military has been pursuing a national security policy known as *bela negara*, that has identified secessionism, communism, illicit narcotics, and LG-BTQ rights as the greatest threats to Indonesian security. It has been clawing back civilian authorities that it ceded after 1998, most evidently in the 2018 Counter-Terrorism Law, but also in a host of other issues, including food security. The new Penal Code has criminalised cohabitation and made criticism of the presidency illegal. A number of other laws, including the Blasphemy Law, have been used to stifle free speech, repress religious minorities, and target political opponents. And no president has been able to staunch the country's endemic corruption. 2022 saw a movement to amend the constitution to give Jokowi a third term, though the public pushed back.

In short, no country has done more to consolidate democracy in such a short period of time – but it's not irreversible.

THE CANDIDATES

There are currently three candidates running for the presidency: Minister of Defence Prabowo Subianto, Ganjar Pranowo, and Anies Baswedan. Each has their base of support, and there is no clear front-runner.

All three are statist: none is an outsider looking to fundamentally change Indonesia's political economy. All will protect the state sector and all are – to varying degrees – protectionist.

Prabowo Subianto, the former son-in-law of Suharto and a Kopassus (special forces) commander, is running for the third time. He was implicated in egregious human rights abuses in East Timor, as well as being involved in the riots in Jakarta's Chinatown in 1998 that left more than 1,100 dead and hundreds of women raped.

Ostracised from other parties, Prabowo formed Gerindra to contest the 2014 election, which he narrowly lost to Jokowi, receiving 47% of the popular vote. He ran on a clear law-and-order platform, vowing to re-concentrate political authority in Jakarta. He ran again in 2019, again losing to Jokowi, this time by a slightly larger margin, winning 44.5% of votes.

Prabowo's supporters threatened political violence after the loss – something that he did not explicitly condemn – until Jokowi brought him into the Government as the Minister of Defence.

“No country has done more to consolidate democracy in such a short period of time – but it's not irreversible”

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The three presidential candidates (From left): Ganjar Pranowo, Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan (Image: Twitter)

In that position, Prabowo has been allowed to recapitalise and fund the Indonesian National Armed Forces' (abbreviated TNI) modernisation program, but with significant amounts of foreign borrowing, something that critics argue the country can ill-afford. He is now under fire for the purchase of 12 ageing Rafale fighter planes from Qatar for some \$734.5 million, to bridge the gap until France delivers six new fighters in 2026. Prabowo was recently derided for his high-profile speech at the Shangri-la Dialogue in which he proposed an ill-conceived peace plan in Ukraine that would effectively reward Russia for its aggression.

Prabowo, who had been sanctioned by the US Government for war crimes, has now seen those sanctions waived and has made two trips to the United States, which is keen to bring Jakarta closer as competition with China mounts. This has effectively whitewashed his human rights record.

Anies Baswedan is the former governor of Jakarta, who came to power after the controversial arrest and sacking of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as "Ahok"), the Chinese-Christian governor who was charged with blasphemy, prompting mass street protests. Ahok was jailed for two years in May 2017.

Anies, a US-educated political scientist, is nothing short of ambitious. He spent a lot of time in the United States and studied how to run a Western-style campaign. His governorship ended in 2022, and since then, Anies has been a full-time candidate. He is very close to the Islamist parties, and is the most socially conservative of the candidates.

Ganjar Pranowo, the PDI-P candidate, is Jokowi's hand-selected successor and the most liberal candidate. He was soaring in the polls a few months ago, with 44% support. But he was hurt by an uproar over Indonesia losing hosting rights for this year's FIFA Under-20 World Cup after local governors banned Israel.

Ganjar was also weakened by internal PDI-P infighting. The party President, former Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, has been lobbying for her daughter, Puan, to be the candidate, despite her lacklustre 1% polling.

Ganjar is running a campaign largely on a continuation of Jokowi's economic-centred policies, but with a bit more focus on the micro-economy. He's less concerned with courting foreign investment and more interested in fixing potholes and making sure the fruits of economic growth are distributed more evenly.

SO WHO'S AHEAD?

At this point, no candidate has a clear edge.

Polling in Indonesia is notoriously bad.

Pollsters tend to be tied to media conglomerates that are often owned by or connected to the politicians themselves. So all polls have to be taken with a grain of salt.

In the latest May polling by the national daily *Kompas*, Ganjar remains ahead in a three-way race, with 40% of the vote, though down from 44% in January. Prabowo enjoyed 36.8% support, up from 29.1% in January. Anies was third, with 23.2%, down from 26.8% in January, which was when Anies had his highest polling results.

However, in a two-way race, Prabowo is beginning to gain an edge. In January 2023, Ganjar enjoyed comfortable lead over Prabowo, 56.7% of the vote compared to 43.3%. Yet by May 2023, the two were running at a near dead heat, with Prabowo now commanding 51.1% of the vote.

Prabowo is definitely gaining at the expense of the other two, but recent gaffes could hurt him. One noticeable thing about Prabowo is that he's polling well amongst millennials who are too young to have lived through or to recall his flawed record during the New Order regime years. There are definitely attempts to soften his image.

The youth vote – defined as those under 39 – is enormous in Indonesia and is now the dominant voting bloc of 114 million, roughly 60% of the electorate. While one might expect the youth vote to go to Ganjar, the most progressive of the candidates, the country has been becoming increasingly conservative and Islamist. The more progressive urban youth have grown disaffected with Jokowi, whom they felt betrayed the cause of democracy with the passage of several controversial pieces of legislation.

In the first round, Prabowo and Anies will be splitting the votes of the same share of the electorate. But Prabowo enjoys a very comfortable lead over Anies in any two-way race, with some 62% of the vote.

Prabowo could also potentially co-opt Anies and nominate him as his vice president. But it seems unlikely the ambitious Anies, who has been campaigning full time for over a year, would agree. Ego is clearly a factor, even for a person trailing in third place. But conservative forces could force such a Prabowo-Anies alliance. Ganjar has

consistently polled significantly better than Anies in any two-way race.

Despite the endorsement of a President who still enjoys very high public approval and has overseen fairly strong economic growth (despite some missteps at the start of the pandemic), Ganjar is unlikely to win in the first round – unless PDI-P is able to buy off a significant number of defections.

A final point – all presidential candidates in Indonesia are nominated by a coalition of parties, not just a single one. But political coalitions are weird in Indonesia and do not reflect the normal grouping that we see in other countries, i.e. centre-left or centre-right. Coalitions in Indonesia tend to span the political spectrum.

Ganjar's coalition is the most cohesive, with his own PDI-P supported by two centre-left parties. Anies has the support of two centre-left parties, the NasDems and Democrat Party, but also several Islamist parties on the far right. Prabowo's coalition, likewise, spans the political spectrum.

Right now, the old New Order party machine, Golkar, is up for grabs. As such, it's hard to predict how the coalitions will shake out, especially after the first round of voting. Moreover, many of the top 15 parties are polling well below the electoral threshold, and may not make it back into the next parliament.

AIR

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ANTISEMITIC PARTY WITH FASCIST ROOTS ACTIVE IN AUSTRALIA

Ran Porat

The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) is a pro-Assad Lebanese international political party, influenced by European fascism and Nazism. Its vision is to set up “Greater Syria” on an area stretching from Lebanon, through Israel and Jordan and into parts of Iraq. The party has a long and well-known history of terrorism, violence and antisemitism. The party's name, its anthem and flag (a red swastika-like symbol inside a white circle against a black background) were inspired by the German Nazi party (short for “National Socialist party”). The party has a military wing called *Nasur al-Zuba'a* (“Eagles

of the Whirlwind”), which was tied in 2018 to Hezbollah activities on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights. And the party is active in Australia.

FANS OF THE BUTCHER OF DAMASCUS

As revealed previously in the *AIR*, SSNP has branches in Melbourne and Sydney, operating freely on Australian soil and holding events regularly. The party is officially endorsed by Syrian officials such as the Honorary Consul of Syria in Sydney, Maher Dabbagh, who often attends its events. Members of the party are mostly Australians of Syrian descent.

The party enjoys the support of prominent Australian politicians and public figures. In 2022, then NSW ALP MP Shaoquett Moselmane participated in the annual meeting of the party in Sydney. Victorian Federal ALP MP Maria Vamvakinou took part in a March 2023 Melbourne SSNP fundraising event for the victims of the earthquake in Syria, and reportedly used that event to call for international sanctions on Damascus to be lifted.



Then-NSW MP Shaoquett Moselmane (left) at the 2022 SSNP annual meeting (Image: Syrian SSNP official website)

The party enthusiastically champions Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad – notorious for killing and torturing tens of thousands of his own people and using chemical weapons against them. In Sept. 2021 SSNP Sydney held a joint party with the Syrian Baath movement to celebrate Assad's “landslide victory” in the yes or no vote on his presidency among Syrians (of course, such polls in a dictatorship do not truly reflect the people's choice), sending a congratulatory message to Assad. A few months earlier (May 2021), a delegation of party leaders accepted the invitation of the Syrian Consul in Sydney to attend a cocktail party to honour Assad's re-election to a new term as the country's President.

Some regular guests at SSNP Australia events are aligned with the Iranian regime, most notably Hussein Dirani, the head of the Australian branch of al-Tajamu, Teheran's international propaganda network.

Other groups heavily connected to the Australian SSNP are Palestinian. Regular guests at SSNP events include Izzat

Abdulhadi, the Head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, and representatives of the Palestinian club, the Palestinian Workers Union and Fatah – the faction of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Similarly, SSNP members took part in pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne.

ANTISEMITISM AND SUPPORT FOR TERROR

True to the founding principles of their party, Australian SSNP activists openly voice antisemitism and support for terror. At a party meeting in Melbourne in October 2017, speakers warned against “The danger of the Jews” and praised the terrorists Habib Chertouni, who assassinated Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel, and Khalid Alwan, who killed Israeli soldiers at the Wimpy café in Beirut in 1982.

In April 2022, SSNP Sydney held a youth camp named after terrorist Sana’a Mehadli, a Shi’ite SSNP member who committed a suicide car-bombing attack against an Israeli convoy in Lebanon in 1985, killing two soldiers and wounding four others.

During July 2022, the Sydney branch of the party commemorated the date of the execution by the Lebanese government of their founding father, Antoun Saadeh (July 7, 1949) in two events. In one of them, local Australian SSNP operative Mustafa al-Ayyubi reportedly “pointed out that everyone who participated in the crime of the leader’s mock trial and execution carried out Jewish orders.” In the other event, SSNP leader Mahmoud Al-Sahili, stated that “On the eighth of July, we bow in honour of the martyr teacher His Excellency and raise the salute to the martyrs of the nation in the face of Judaisation and humiliation projects to the martyrs of its tormented entities.”

In a similar event of the Melbourne branch in 2021, one of the speakers claimed that Saadeh’s “assassination” was “aimed at perpetuating the entity and sectarianism in our country, and facilitated the *Yehud* [Jews] to take over southern Syria, that is, Palestine.” This theme was repeated

in a 2021 speech by Melbourne SSNP party leader Al-Amin Habib Sarah, who argued that the “Greater Syria” plan put forward by Saadeh was also aimed “to fight the Zionist movement lurking in our nation.”

At the SSNP March 2023 annual meeting in Sydney, according to a report in an Australian Arabic language local media outlet, the host “saluted the heroes of the *Fedayeen* [“warrior”, used to refer to anti-Israel terrorists] operations in Palestine.”

That same month, during an SSNP Melbourne fundraising event for Syrian victims of the earthquake there, the head of the local branch, Samir Al-Asmar, gave a speech that included an attack on the Jewish state, without mentioning the name ‘Israel’. Still, his remarks targeted the Jewish religion:

“What about the scourge of societies and the deformation of humanity who usurp our land in Palestine and bomb our lands, facilities and airports in the most difficult stages and in the midst of humanitarian work after the earthquake, with unparalleled sadism? It expresses the psychology of Jehovah, the morality of Jehovah, and the criminality of Jehovah.”

“We also salute our people inside Palestine, specifically in the occupied West Bank, for the fierce confrontation of the occupation, through the daily qualitative operations [meaning terror attacks – RP] that brought down the hypnosis projects adopted by the [Palestinian] authority and the nonsense of security coordination with the occupation.”

The fact that SSNP freely operates in Australia – promoting hate, antisemitism and terrorism – while voicing support for a war criminal dictator is worrying. One can only hope the legal authorities are keeping track of this group and both its promotion of terrorism and its open incitement of anti-Jewish racism.

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.

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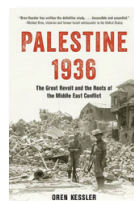


A Revolt that Still Reverberates

Palestine 1936: The Great Revolt and the Roots of the Middle East Conflict

Oren Kessler

Rowman & Littlefield, Feb. 2023, 334 pp., A\$ 57.99



Allon Lee

Oren Kessler's book covers the seminal events of the three-year bloody uprising by Palestinian Arabs against British rule and increasing Jewish immigration from Europe to Mandatory Palestine.

Many of the *dramatis personae* may be unfamiliar to modern readers, yet the terminology and scenarios are instantly recognisable: terror, boycotts, betrayals, inquiries, riots, pogroms, antisemitism masquerading as anti-Zionism, negotiations rejected, moderates permanently silenced, house demolitions, civilians indiscriminately slaughtered, security barriers and collective punishment, to name just a few.

The book's main contention is that the Revolt in the short term dealt a mortal blow to Palestinian Arab society, which then contributed to its failures in 1947/48 and, longer term, set the contours for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as we know it today.

The statistics tell the tale, as Kessler notes:

The Great Revolt... exacted a withering toll... About 500 Jews had been killed... British troops and police suffered around 250 fatalities... But the most onerous price of all was paid by the Arabs themselves: At least 5,000... were dead, of whom at least 1,500 likely fell at Arab hands... As many as 2,000 homes were demolished. Forty thousand people had fled the country... disproportionately representing the political, commercial, and landed elite. The Arab economy was crippled. Crops had dried up as landowners fled and peasants were required to provision, feed, and fund thousands of armed men. Thousands of Arabs lost government jobs due to reduced public revenues and doubts over their allegiance... the Arab boycott of Jewish businesses and buyers, which continued informally throughout the revolt, slashed Arab income. Half of all cargo that once passed through the port at Jaffa was now diverted to the Jews' port at Tel Aviv.

Kessler shows great skill in his thumbnail portraits of British, Arab and Jewish figures in Mandate Pal-

estine, whilst situating them in the context of a world on the precipice of all-out war.

On the Jewish side there is the double act of Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion.

Weizmann, tall and urbane, is charming and scolding in equal measure on the international stage. Ben-Gurion – stocky and humourless, yet, Kessler says, he immediately grasped the nationalist underpinnings of the Revolt and saw an opportunity for the *Yishuv* (Jewish community in Palestine) which paid off when Jewish statehood arrived in 1948.

The British officials running the Mandate, Kessler notes, may have admired the *Yishuv*'s achievements but were more partial towards the Arabs than the Jews.

However, he notes, there were also extraordinary figures in the Mandate – mainly Christian Zionists – who counterbalanced this bias, offering critical assistance in the development of the *Yishuv*.

This includes the Australian-born Lewis Yelland Andrews, appointed district commissioner of the Galilee and guided by a belief that the Jewish people's return to Israel would expedite the return of the Christian Messiah.

Driven by similar motives was the legendary figure Orde Wingate, whose creative thinking was instrumental in halting Arab sabotage of oil pipelines at night. The *Yishuv*'s eventual successes during Israel's War of Independence in 1948 are traced in large part back to the training Jews received from Wingate to assist in counterterrorism operations during this period.

Kessler argues that the counterinsurgency methods used by the British to quell the Revolt were often indistinguishable from atrocities. When an army truck drove over a land mine, killing four soldiers on board, troops went to the nearest Arab village and machine gunned and torched it. They forced 20 men onto a bus, ordering the driver to travel down a road

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where a land mine was buried, with inevitable consequences.

The cast of Palestinian Arab leaders Kessler focuses on in finer detail are individuals who favoured an accommodation with the Yishuv and privately abhorred the rising death toll from internecine Arab violence. This includes Musa Alami, who enjoyed a cordial relationship with Ben-Gurion that stretched from the 1930s until the latter's passing in 1973.

The villain of the book is the infamous Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem. Kessler demonstrates that Britain's greatest mistake was to elevate al-Husseini to the leadership of Palestine's Arabs in the 1920s.

Kessler is unsparing in his portrayal of a leader who is unwilling to compromise, continually expresses his opposition to Zionism in antisemitic terms, ruthlessly condemns hundreds of his own people to death for daring to fraternise with Jews, and consistently plays the role of spoiler.

No one, including especially his Arab peers, has a good word to say about the Mufti, whose obsession with preventing Jews from reaching Palestine drove him to collaborate with the Nazis at the highest levels. As Kessler notes, the Mufti's own memoirs admit that as early as 1943, he learnt from Heinrich Himmler that the Nazis had already killed three million Jews. The Mufti's own ignoble efforts included recruiting two divisions of Bosnian Muslims for the Waffen-SS and broadcasting Nazi themed antisemitic propaganda in Arabic from Berlin.

The final part of the book details the series of inquiries set up by Britain to create a political horizon that would dampen Arab incentives to resume their campaigns of violent terror.

Kessler records Ben-Gurion's enthusiasm for the 1937 Peel Commis-

sion's proposal to partition Palestine into a large Arab state and a tiny Jewish state, believing it "dwarfed" the Balfour Declaration in importance. Jews would have their own state with a "Jewish army" and access to the sea to permit large scale immigration, he notes.

Yet this proved to be a false dawn. The storm clouds of another world war convinced London to capitulate in the face of the resumption of Arab terror – which it had largely subdued – amid fears that the wider Middle East could back Nazi Germany. The 1938

Woodhead Commission, pithily called "Re-Peel", essentially gutted the Mandate's original rationale – namely, to facilitate Jewish immigration to Palestine and the creation of a Jewish national home – just when European Jewry most needed a safe haven.

The book's account of the London conference in February 1939, organised to try to reach an understanding between Arabs and Jews, is fascinating, if sadly predictable.

British PM Neville Chamberlain delivered his opening remarks twice because the Palestinian Arab delegates – under the strict orders of the Mufti – refused to be in the same room as their Jewish counterparts.

Arab dignitaries from other countries relented, and Kessler writes that Ben-Gurion and a former Egyptian PM conversed directly in Turkish.

Ultimately, Britain adopted a plan restricting Jewish immigration to a mere 75,000 over the next five years, after which Palestinian Arabs would exercise a veto over intake numbers. An independent Palestinian state – which would be neither Arab nor Jewish – would be created at the end of ten years.

There was widespread rejoicing by Palestinian Arabs when they heard the details, Kessler notes.

Fourteen members of the Arab Higher Committee wanted to vote in

favour, but the 15th member was the only voice that mattered – the Mufti, who overruled them and rejected the British plan.

Nonetheless, Britain's 1939 acquiescence to the Mufti's demands was his high-water mark as leader, Kessler notes, and ended the Revolt.

The price paid by Palestinian Arabs is summed up in a quote from Yusuf Hanna, editor of the *Filastin* newspaper, who opined, "there is not an Arab who wants to see himself ruled by the Jews, but there is not also an Arab with sense who wants to see himself ruled by assassins."

Unsurprisingly, the Mufti went on to reject the 1947 UN Partition Plan and his political heirs to this day continue his legacy of opposition.

Aside from the book's last chapter, Kessler largely avoids editorial comment, letting events and protagonists speak for themselves.

With the shadow of the Holocaust a constant backdrop, Kessler doesn't need to telegraph why Jews were desperate to settle in Palestine and secure their own state. Indeed, Kessler shows that not all of the antisemitism emanated from Nazi Germany, relaying how Poland's ambassador in London called for Britain to give Palestine to the Jews so his country could be rid of them.

Perhaps the most poignant section in the book is Chaim Weizmann's weary and dark address in Geneva on the last night of the last World Zionist Congress before WWII – which started only a week later. "Many in the audience wept", Kessler records, knowing war was imminent, adding, "most of the Eastern European Jews were never seen again."

While *Palestine 1936* is easy to read, much of what it records is not easy to accept and digest.

But it stands as an essential reminder that many of the setbacks experienced by Palestinian Arabs are the result of the poor choices made by their own leaders dating all the way back to the 1920s.



The villain of *Palestine 1936*: Haj Amin al-Husseini (Image: Wikimedia Commons)



ESSAY

The Third Rejection

Mahmoud Abbas and the Olmert peace offer

Salo Aizenberg

Characterised as a “crime” and a “tragedy” by then-US Ambassador Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia, Yasser Arafat’s rejection of the Bill Clinton-brokered 2000-2001 peace deal appeared to be the nail in the coffin for the elusive two-state solution.

While it was undeniably a lost opportunity, a similar offer of statehood was proposed to the Palestinians by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in September 2008. Unfortunately, Olmert’s offer was met with the same response by Arafat’s successor, Mahmoud Abbas: rejection through silence, with no counter-offer.

But why do proponents of the anti-Israel narrative pretend that Olmert’s statehood offer did not occur or was inconsequential?

The truth is that three consecutive Israeli leaders – Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, and Olmert – sought to hand over permanent control of territory to the Palestinians, which is frequently ignored by the likes of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as they perpetuate the notion that Israel wishes to control and dominate the Palestinian people.

If they would actually acknowledge that Israel offered full statehood on territory equal to 100% of the West Bank and Gaza, then the image of a perpetually intransigent Israel that refuses to end its occupation would be proven false.

OLMERT’S PROMISE OF PEACE

Following Olmert’s Kadima Party triumph in the March 2006 election, he indicated a desire to seek a peace agreement with the Palestinians through the creation of a Palestinian state in his first policy speech.

Despite dealing with the Israel-Hezbollah war in the Summer of 2006 and an airstrike against a suspected nuclear reactor being built in Syria in September 2007, Olmert actively pursued a two-state solution with the Palestinians throughout his term as prime minister.

The peace process under Olmert formally began at the Annapolis Con-

ference in November 2007 and sought to follow the so-called “Roadmap for Peace” as proposed by President George W. Bush in June 2002.

The roadmap was a phased plan that would if fulfilled eventually lead to full Palestinian statehood.

Over the course of several months, Olmert and Abbas met 36 times, mostly in Jerusalem and once in Jericho. There were approximately 300 meetings among senior officials and professional committees from both sides.

A key understanding of the negotiations was that “nothing is agreed upon until everything is agreed upon,” which meant that no position on any matter was final until an entire deal was final.

“Three consecutive Israeli leaders – Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, and Olmert – sought to hand over permanent control of territory to the Palestinians, which is frequently ignored by the likes of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as they perpetuate the notion that Israel wishes to control and dominate the Palestinian people”

After months of discussion and negotiations, the process culminated in September 2008, with Olmert presenting a final proposal that included a package of concessions based on many rounds of prior discussions, along with the latest version of a map based on prior negotiations on land swaps.

It included:

- The creation of an independent Palestinian state with contiguity on 93.7% of the West Bank, with the other 6.3% comprising major settlement blocks that would be permanently added to the State of Israel. As compensation, Israel would swap 5.8% of its territory to the Palestinian state, and the other half percent from a dedicated highway would be built inside pre-1967 Israel to connect the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

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Mahmoud Abbas (left) and Ehud Olmert during one of their 36 meetings in 2007 and 2008 (Image: GPO/ Isranet)

- Jerusalem would be divided under the basic principle that Jewish neighbourhoods built after 1967 would remain as part of Israel, and Arab neighbourhoods that were not part of Israel before 1967 would be part of the Palestinian state.
- The Temple Mount would be placed under an international trusteeship led by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the US, Israel, and the Palestinians.
- Regarding the so-called “Right of Return,” Palestinian refugees would not be able to “return” to locations inside Israel. Israel would agree to a symbolic number, and working with international bodies, establish a fund to provide reparations to both Palestinians and Israelis harmed by the 1948 conflict.

THE PALESTINIAN REJECTION

According to Olmert, Abbas replied that he did not want to sign the agreement upon it being presented to him, and wanted to hold further discussions about the map with his team of experts before acceptance. The two sides would meet the next day, Abbas said.

However, the Palestinian side never returned for the meeting on the

next day, and never communicated again about the negotiations. It was total silence from that point onward, and the Sept. 16, 2008, meeting ended up being the last between the parties after a nearly year-long process.

By never showing up for the follow-up meeting and never offering any other type of response or move to restart the negotiations, it was effectively a complete rejection. Abbas played the exact same move as Arafat almost eight years earlier – simply walking away without responding and ending months of negotiations without another word.

WHAT THE KEY PLAYERS SAID

Ehud Olmert

In an op-ed that Olmert wrote in the *Washington Post* in July 2009, one of his earliest comments on the events of the prior year, he said:

“To this day, I cannot understand why the Palestinian leadership did not accept the far-reaching and unprecedented proposal I offered them. My proposal included a solution to all outstanding issues: territorial compromise, security arrangements, Jerusalem and refugees. It would be worth exploring the reasons that the Palestinians

rejected my offer and preferred, instead, to drag their feet, avoiding real decisions. My proposal would have helped realise the ‘two-state solution’ in accordance with the principles of the US administration, the Israeli government I led and the criteria the Palestinian leadership has followed throughout the years. I believe it is crucial to review the lessons from the Palestinians’ rejection of such an offer.”

Mahmoud Abbas

Abbas made statements in November 2015 in which he acknowledged the main details of the statehood offer and admitted rejecting Olmert’s offer because he was not allowed to study the map that Olmert presented to him:

“He [Olmert] showed me the map. He didn’t give me the map ... he told me, “this is the map” and took it away. I respected his point of view, but how can I sign something that I didn’t receive.”

Abbas neglected to mention that Olmert did not present the map as a final take-it-or-leave opportunity at that very moment, and that Olmert specifically accepted further review of the map and that the Palestinian negotiation team had agreed to review the map the following day. Abbas also omitted the fact that the Palestinians never communicated with the Israelis ever again about the matter.

Saeb Erekat

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat made clear that a refusal to budge on maximalist Palestinian positions was the true reason why these proposals were rejected, rather than not being able to review a map: “There will be no peace whatsoever unless East Jerusalem – with every single stone in it – becomes the capital of Palestine.”

In a December 2018 interview on official PA television, Erekat again confirmed the parameters of Olmert’s offer, indicating that the total

land area for a Palestinian state was actually *greater* than the total area of the West Bank and Gaza Strip:

“I heard Olmert say that he offered [Abbas] 100% of the West Bank territory. This is true. I’ll testify to this. He [Olmert] presented a map [to Abbas], and said: ‘I want [Israel] to take 6.5% of the West Bank, and I’ll give [the PA] 6.5% of the 1948 territory in return.’ [Olmert] said to Abbas: ‘The area of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on the eve of June 4, 1967, was 6,235 sq. km. [I, Erekat, said to Abbas]: ‘There are 50 sq. km. of no man’s land in Jerusalem and Latrun. We’ll split them between us, so the territory will be 6,260 sq. km.’ [I said to Abbas:] ‘Olmert wants to give you 20 sq. km. more, so that you could say [to Palestinians]: ‘I got more than the 1967 territories.’ Regarding Jerusalem, [Olmert said:] ‘What’s Arab is Arab, and what’s Jewish is Jewish, and we’ll keep it an open city.’”

Condoleezza Rice

As Secretary of State under President Bush, Rice was involved in every aspect of the peace negotiations from Annapolis through to the end of the



US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (c), a key mediator, made it clear in her memoirs that Abbas missed a potential historic turning point (Image: GPO/ Isranet)

Bush Administration in January 2009.

Rice published a lengthy memoir in 2011, and in the last chapter recounts the final days of the Olmert-Abbas negotiations. Rice confirms the basic elements of Olmert’s proposal on September 16, 2008, and the

planned meeting the following day, which never took place. Rice recounts that after the “no show,” she asked her team to construct an approximation of the territorial compromise to “preserve the Olmert offer.” Rice asked President Bush to host Olmert and Abbas one last time to perhaps convince them to accept the parameters of the proposal. Rice was aware that Olmert was a lame duck prime minister. However, Rice believed that “to have an Israeli prime minister on record offering these remarkable elements and a Palestinian president accepting them would have pushed the peace process to a new level.” The proposed final meeting never occurred, as Rice explains: “Abbas refused”.

Elliott Abrams

Abrams was closely involved in all matters related to the negotiations for the US as Deputy National Security Adviser.

On the matter of the Olmert statehood offer, Abrams wrote in his 2013 book, *Tested by Zion*:

“The Palestinians did not believe they were missing an irreplaceable opportunity. Although they were told they would never again see this combination of Israeli

prime minister and American president so keen on a deal, they had heard that before.

In 2001, the American negotiator Dennis Ross said precisely the same thing to Arafat about the Barak government and Clinton... Yet Arafat had let the deal pass, Abbas watched him do so, and now Abbas took the same action: inaction.

“The Palestinians did not wish to sign but also wished to escape being blamed for saying no.”

THE PALESTINE PAPERS

In January 2011, *Al Jazeera* obtained more than 1,600 previously secret documents regarding the

Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The documents comprised detailed memos, emails, maps, minutes from meetings, and strategy papers covering a period from 1999 to 2010.

The *Palestine Papers*, which have been authenticated and are not in dispute, generated outrage among many Palestinians who saw that Palestinian negotiators were actually considering Israeli proposals, such as those that would compromise on the full and literal “right of return”. The outrage compelled Saeb Erekat to write a response stating that negotiators “made no backroom deals” and that “no agreement has ever been reached between the parties on any of the permanent status issues.”

Importantly, the *Palestine Papers* contradict the narrative put forward by some that Abbas was unable to agree to Olmert’s proposal because he and his team needed more time to study the map. In fact, based on earlier discussions and detailed proposals, the Palestinian negotiating team already drew up a highly detailed map based on numerous rounds of discussions and a later meeting held on Aug. 31, 2008.

AFTERMATH

The fateful and final meeting on Sept. 16, 2008, was effectively the end of the peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. After about ten months of discussions that began at Annapolis, the final Palestinian response was a no-show with no further explanation or counteroffer.

We can look to reporting by the *New York Times* as a good proxy for how these events were conveyed to the world at the time: on Sept. 16 and 17, the newspaper reported that Olmert met with Abbas for two hours in Jerusalem and that Olmert was “keen to reach some kind of historic peace agreement with the Palestinians before he finally ends his term.”

Similar to the sequence of events and reporting in the final weeks of the Clinton Administration, the media

was not made aware of the details of the meeting as there was still hope that a deal could be reached. On Sept. 29, 2008, the *New York Times* reported that Palestinian official Yasser Abed Rabbo said that Olmert, “had not yet presented a detailed plan for a border between Israel and a Palestinian state.” But today we know that Olmert in fact did so and that the Palestinians had in their possession a detailed map of the proposal.

MEDIA INDIFFERENCE AND BURIAL

The events of September 2008 remained unknown to most of the world until Saeb Erekat gave an interview to *Al Jazeera TV* on March 27, 2009. Until then, there had not been a public admission by the Palestinians of the Olmert offer and Palestinian rejection.

Mark Lavie, an *Associated Press* (AP) journalist in the Jerusalem bureau, claimed that he became aware of Erekat’s interview and admissions and sought to run the story through AP, but was banned by AP’s Jerusalem chief from publishing the story. According to Lavie, AP rejected the story since, “the bureau’s editorial line was still that the conflict was Israel’s fault, and the Palestinians and the Arab world were blameless.”

Coverage in the first years after Olmert’s offer was scant, in part because many of the key negotiators had not yet revealed details of the peace process.

Olmert wrote an opinion piece in the *New York Times* in September 2011, where he recounted the details of the offer he made to Abbas. AP ran a story about the Olmert offer and Abbas’ rejection only several years later in November 2015, following Abbas’ admission on Israeli television of the offer and his rejection. According to the 2015 AP story, Abbas rejected the offer “because he was not allowed to study the map” – but we of course know today that this narrative is false.

Revisionists have provided Ara-

fat with myriad and endless excuses for why he was justified in saying no. However, the Abbas rejection is not generally disputed, in large part because of the public and specific admissions by Abbas and Erekat of the events. Apologists typically repeat the falsehood that Abbas was not allowed to review a map or that there was no formal offer in writing, but again, after 36 meetings between the two sides, the details of the statehood offer were well known to both sides.

A CERTAIN FAILURE

Would an affirmative response by Abbas have led to a final end-of-conflict agreement?

There were certainly major concerns, such as Olmert’s weak position as prime minister and evidence that in the later stages, his successor, Tzipi Livni, attempted to undermine the process. Despite these flaws, the Americans believed that if the two leaders came to an agreement, momentum would prevail, and that no subsequent leader would reverse course and say no to the deal.

Rice makes this exact argument, writing in her conclusion on this topic: “Had Abbas expressed a willingness to accept the extraordinary terms he’d been offered, it might have been a turning point in the long history of the intractable conflict.”

There is no way to know of

course, but the Palestinian rejection ensured certain failure. What is beyond doubt is that a sitting Israeli prime minister was ready to agree to a definitive peace agreement that would establish a Palestinian state on territory equal to 100% of the West Bank and Gaza, but Abbas said no by refusing to show up to a follow-up meeting and never offering another response or counteroffer.

The real reason for the rejection was not Olmert’s weak standing; it was Abbas’ unwillingness to budge from maximalist Palestinian demands, even if it meant losing out on the chance for Palestinian statehood. The notion of Israel seeking to permanently “dominate” Palestinians or “perpetually occupy” them is completely shattered by the Olmert offer and the Barak offer several years earlier.

Anti-Israel discourse deliberately omits or falsifies these events to promote a fabricated narrative of an intransigent Israel unwilling to make peace and end its control of the West Bank.

AIR

Salo Aizenberg is a contributor to HonestReporting, a Jerusalem-based media watchdog with a focus on antisemitism and anti-Israel bias, where a version of this article first appeared. © Algemeiner (www.algemeiner.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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THE MONTH IN MEDIA

THE REAL ISRAEL

In the *Australian* (June 10), media commentator Gemma Tognini filed a column written during her recent trip on an AIJAC-organised Rambam study visit to Israel.

Tognini was troubled by the disconnect between what is reported about Israel and the reality she was seeing during her visit.

According to Tognini, “We have travelled the length and breadth of the country. From the southern borders to the north, spent successive days on the West Bank, in refugee camps, meeting with leaders of the Palestinian opposition parties...

“One thing I’ve learned this week is how incredibly complex this country is. How, on both sides, there is a hunger for an end to conflict. How, on both sides, there are many for whom peace would mean unemployment and irrelevance on the world stage, so they won’t entertain it...

“Throwing around the word apartheid so freely and so recklessly? It’s an insult and it’s ignorance writ large.

“Language matters. Language is about intent. Oh, the irony that these words are typically thrown about by those who love to constantly remind us words can equate to violence.

“Moreover, it’s the latent anti-Semitism underpinning the free and easy use of these words.”

FLYING THE FLAG

A radio report by ABC Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn on “AM” (May 19) concerning the annual Jerusalem Day march on May 18, which marks Israel’s capture of the eastern half of the city in the 1967 Six Day War, was criticised by the *Australian’s* “Media Watch Dog” column that same day for lacking balance.

The column said even the *New York Times* – which is “no friend of Israel” – had noted, “Israeli officials say the parade is a largely peaceful and festive event marred by only a small minority of participants. But several groups of marchers were filmed making threats to Arabs, and some threw sticks and bottles for several minutes at Arab journalists in full view of the police... Some Jewish Israelis attempted to set a different tone [and] distributed flowers to Palestinians in the Muslim quarter of the Old City.”

Horn’s report was focused only on the rightist elements in the march.

Moreover, Horn’s script said that “For Israelis, it’s a day of celebration. They see this as the day Jerusalem was unified as their capital. But according to international law, Israel occupies east Jerusalem.” Aside from asserting as fact a disputed international law issue, what was missing is the real reason for the joy, which is that unification means Jews can visit and pray in the Old City, where Judaism’s holiest sites are located. This was denied them when Jordan illegally occupied the eastern half of Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967 – and often before that, as well.

The report included a Palestinian woman saying that “everything they’re doing is out of fear. If they were the rightful owners of this land, you wouldn’t need all the police.” If Palestinians accepted that Jews have a right to live in Israel and stopped trying to kill Jews engaged in peaceful activities, there would also be no need for “all the police”.

SBS TV “World News” (May 19) noted accurately that, “Despite the tense atmosphere and a few scuffles, the event ended with no major security incidents.”

NO MISSING LINK

On *ABC TV* “The World” (May 25), visiting former deputy speaker of the Knesset and member of the left-wing Meretz party, Naomi Chazan, dispelled some misconceptions about the protests in Israel against judicial reform.

Chazan said it was unlikely there was a direct link between Palestinian terror and Israel’s judicial protests.

She explained, “some outside parties have seen [the protests] as a sign of Israeli weakness. I think incorrectly,” citing Israel’s “five sets of elections in the last three years” as a sign of the country’s ongoing political instability.

Concerning the Gaza violence, she said, “I would say this was the 14th round of violence between Israel and Gaza. And since the turn of the century, the beginning of this millennium... the cycles now are very clear... there are attacks in Israel. The[n], Israel bombs Gaza... two populations are totally traumatised.”

On May 29, *Nine Newspapers’* Matthew Knott’s article on Chazan noted, “Chazan questioned whether it was the right time” for the Albanese Government to recognise a Palestinian state or “whether this would only inflame tensions further.”

MUDDYING THE WATERS

Nine Newspapers Culture and Lifestyle reporter Nell Geraets (June 1) misunderstood the substance of the allegations against former Pink Floyd band member Roger Waters.

Geraets said Waters “has drawn the ire of some Jewish groups for his stance supporting Palestine, and has faced accusations of anti-Semitism” and noted his support for the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS) movement, “which encourages musicians to

boycott performing in Israel.”

In fact, BDS’s real goal is the destruction of Israel, as several of its key leaders have publicly acknowledged.

The article said, “Waters has repeatedly denied accusations of antisemitism, arguing elements of his performances are in protest against Israeli policies rather than Jewish people.”

Yet no less a person than Polly Samson, the wife of Waters’ former bandmate David Gilmour, tweeted to

Waters, “you are antisemitic to your rotten core,” with Gilmour supporting this with his own tweet: “every word demonstrably true.”

Waters has repeatedly compared Israel to Nazi Germany, absurdly accused Israel of genocide and compared the plight of Palestinians to what the Jews suffered in the Holocaust, and used antisemitic tropes, such as the giant pig balloon with a Star of David he previously deployed at concerts.

On June 9, Nine Newspapers columnist Malcolm Knox also misrepresented the nature of Waters’ offensive views, writing that he “has made statements against Israeli government policy, and somehow this has dovetailed with his songs to get Waters cancelled.”

HOMELAND TRUTHS

On *ABC Radio National* “Breakfast” (May 19), former Palestinian negotia-



IN PARLIAMENT

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) – May 22 – Tabled in response to a petition: “The Albanese [Government]... believe the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict... must be resolved through negotiations between the parties... viewing the conflict from just one perspective will not achieve peace...”

“We have reaffirmed Australia’s previous longstanding and bipartisan position that Jerusalem is a final status issue... doubled... funding to [UNRWA]... We are also rebalancing Australia’s position in international forums. [We] shifted five votes related to Israel and the Palestinian Territories in the UN...”

“Australia does not support unilateral actions that reduce the prospects for peace... Settlements are an obstacle to peace...”

Attorney-General **Mark Dreyfus** (ALP, Isaacs) – June 14 – second reading speech, Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Prohibited Hate Symbols and Other Measures) Bill: “Everyone can, and must, call out hate... Schedule 1... makes it a criminal offence to publicly display prohibited symbols—the Nazi Hakenkreuz, the Nazi double sig rune, and the Islamic State flag—and trade items bearing these symbols.”

Josh Burns (ALP, Macnamara) – June 15 – “In... Melbourne... we saw some of the most confronting scenes of bigotry and of the glorification of an old ideology that saw one of the worst chapters of human history... people... flippantly signalling... the Nazi salute, and parading around like foolish, young, lost souls...”

Senator **Dean Smith** (Lib., WA) – June 14 – “The systemic murder of over six million Jews during the [Nazi] terror... The horror of these events is difficult to properly express or represent in words. The world has relied heavily on the contributions of those brave survivors...”

Julian Leeser (Lib., Berowra) – May 22 – “Nazism is not just another political viewpoint; it’s an evil... whose fundamental tenet is the racial superiority of one group of people over another.”

Greens Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Senator **Jordon Steele-John** (WA) – June 13 – “When one group seeks to dominate

another based upon race... to perpetuate and entrench and dispossess systemically, there is a word for it... apartheid. And it is a crime against humanity. The Australian Greens believe... Israel is guilty of practising the crime of apartheid.”

The following two speeches were in the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee estimates hearings, June 1.

Senator **David Fawcett** (Lib., SA) “The European Parliament... recently passed a resolution expressing concern at the extent of antisemitism, glorification of violence and martyrdom in the textbooks provided by the Palestinian Authority... then used by UNRWA in schools...”

Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas.) “The material that UN Watch has investigated here shows instances of extreme antisemitism and the glorification of terrorism.”

The following four speeches were in the NSW Legislative Council, May 24.

Natalie Ward (Lib.) “I move... That this House recognises Israel’s 75 years of independence and congratulates this achievement.”

Treasurer **Daniel Mookhey** (ALP) “Israel... a small country, has become a tech powerhouse and is showing the world how innovation should be done.”

Abigail Boyd (Greens) “Some 75 years later, the atrocities committed against the Palestinian people continue... The Greens cannot support the celebration of the creation of an apartheid State.”

Anthony D’Adam (ALP) “It is disingenuous to pretend that this motion is anything more than a provocation... Israel was established and Palestine was erased as a consequence.”

Speaking in the Victorian Legislative Council, **Ryan Batchelor** (ALP) – May 30 – “In just 7½ decades, Israel has become a thriving nation and a beacon of arts and innovation.”

The following two speeches occurred in the South Australian parliament:

Tony Piccolo (ALP, Light) – May 17 – “The Palestinian people paid and continue to pay a very heavy price for the sins of Western nations to address one injustice by only creating another.”

Irene Pnevmatikos (ALP, Legislative Council) – May 17 – “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

tor turned analyst Gaith Al-Omari supported the United Nations General Assembly's decision to commemorate "Nakba Day" – which mourns Israel's creation and the displacement of Palestinian Arabs in 1948.

He criticised the use of the "event" as a "political football" – reproaching pro-Israel supporters, but also Palestinians, including PA President Mahmoud Abbas, who "try to cast some doubt on the legitimacy of Israel."

Al-Omari explained that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is about two nationalist movements with "a very strong, profound connection" to the "same piece of land."

His explanation for the displacement of Palestinian Arab refugees in 1948 was refreshing. He said, "there was a war between the pre-state Israeli forces and the Palestinians and some Arab armies, and ultimately Israel won. Like what happens in every war, there was mass displacement. Some was a result of some of the Arab governments telling the Palestinians to leave to go out of the way. Some was a result of deliberate Israeli massacres. And I would say the majority was, you know, what people do when there's a war, they get out of the way of the fighting."

While Palestinians may yearn to return to places that are now in Israel, he said, "obviously [they] will not be reclaimed if one accepts that the solution to this conflict is a two-state solution."

MISPLACED AND DISPLACED

In a rare lapse, an *SBS TV* "World News" report (May 16) of the UN "Nakba Day" commemoration lacked real balance. The newsreader spoke of "thousands of Palestinians [being] killed," during the 1948 war. Thousands of Jews also died in that conflict, around one percent of the total Jewish population in Mandate Palestine.

The report included 97-year-old

Palestinian woman Intisar Muhana saying that Israel "destroyed our house" during the 1948 war and they moved to Gaza "and they did it again, destroyed our house." No context was given for what might have caused Muhana's family home to be destroyed – namely the bloody war launched against the Jewish inhabitants of the area by Arab leaders who rejected the UN Partition Plan that would've created an Arab Palestinian state.

SBS reporter Virginia Langeberg said, "around 5.6 million Palestinian refugees currently live across the Middle East, as well as in the West Bank and Gaza. According to the Palestinian Foreign Ministry, about half of the registered refugees remain stateless."

There are 5.5 million refugees currently registered with the United Nations Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA). According to NGO UN Watch, UNRWA's website "admits that most of the 2 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan have Jordanian citizenship. Likewise, the nearly 2.2 million registered Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza already reside in their homeland, i.e., territory that was once part of Mandatory Palestine and designated for a future Palestinian state."

Langeberg said, "Israel accuses Palestinians of trying to distort history. It denies the Nakba ever occurred and that Palestinians had fled of their own volition."

Israel doesn't deny the Nakba occurred, just disputes Palestinian claims about its nature and causes.

The report quoted Israel's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen saying, "We shall fight the falsehood that is the Nakba with all our power. And we will not allow the Palestinians to continue spreading lies and to twist history."

GUARDIAN OF A MYTH

On May 26, *Guardian Australia* ran a report by its Middle East correspondent Beth McKernan alleging Israel's Alexandroni Brigade carried out a

massacre of anywhere between 40 and 200 Palestinian Arabs in the village of Tantura near Haifa in Israel in May 1948 – a claim whose principal proponent, Teddy Katz, renounced it after he was sued for defamation.

According to the *Guardian Australia*'s report, the NGO Forensic Architecture has identified three sites near Tantura that may contain mass graves from aerial photos.

The *Guardian Australia* said the project was commissioned by Palestinian NGO "Adalah," described as a "human rights group focusing on legal issues." Adalah is in fact closely tied to the PFLP, a listed terrorist group in many countries.

The report said, "Adnan AlYahya, now 92, was 17 when Tantura fell to Israeli forces. He has testified in several academic and journalistic publications over the years that he and a friend were forced by soldiers to dig a grave at the site and throw dozens of bodies in."

The report did not include any balance for claims that have been vehemently denied by surviving members of the Alexandroni Brigade and disputed by Benny Morris, Israel's foremost historian of the 1948 war.

Pro-Israel media organisation CAMERA quoted Morris' response to the *Guardian* report; "As most historians have acknowledged, myself included, as many as 70 villagers, combatants and non-combatants, died in Tantura on 22-23 May 1948 and were buried (as were 13-14 Haganah soldiers, who were buried elsewhere). The existence of evidence that there were mass graves proves nothing about numbers and nothing about how those buried died ... it certainly adds nothing, no corroboration, to the ... charge of an organised, systematic massacre of 200-250 villagers, for which there is no persuasive evidence."

GUSHING OVER WATER LIBELS

On May 17, *Guardian Australia* cor-

respondent Beth McKernan was also responsible for a long feature focusing on claims that West Bank settlers “use three times as much water a day as West Bank Palestinians do” and claimed Palestinians only receive 85.6 litres per capita per day, which is less than the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) recommended minimum requirement of 100 litres.

In fact, as CAMERA noted, according to Israel’s Bureau of Statistics, settlers use the equivalent of 1.8 times more water than Palestinians, while according to WHO’s guidelines, the recommended minimum is actually between 50 and 100 litres per capita per day. The *Guardian* subsequently amended the article.

GREENS BLUES

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* (June 14), AIJAC’s Ahron Shapiro said the Australian Greens Party’s decision to remove “support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace paradigm of two states for two peoples” in its latest party platform showed they are “untethered from [the] real world.”

According to Shapiro, “Look for the [two states for two peoples] concept in the policy and you won’t find it. In its place is a murky endorsement of the ‘right to self-determination’ for Palestinians and ‘Israelis’ (not ‘Jews’) – whatever an ‘Israeli’ is supposed to be at the end of the day... the Greens... decreed that millions of Palestinians have a (nonexistent) legal ‘Right of Return’ to Israel, guaranteeing that Israel will be replaced by a majority Arab state. Just in case those meddlesome Israeli Jews disagree, the Greens ‘support the establishment of international mechanisms guided by international law to facilitate this outcome.’”

He noted that the Greens have reached their new position by ignoring certain fundamental truths about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as Palestinian Arab leaders rejecting

opportunities to create a Palestinian state, including the 1947 Partition Plan and Israeli offers in 2000, 2001 and 2008.

An online ABC report (June 4) amounted to free publicity for the Greens’ policy platform on Israel and the Palestinians, simply repeating the party’s own media releases, and quoting DFAT’s and Foreign Minister Penny Wong’s public statements on Israeli-Palestinian issues as the only balance.

ABC CORRECTIVE

A *Reuters* report uploaded to the ABC website (May 22) about an Israeli counterterrorism operation in the Balata refugee camp near Nablus failed to identify that the three Palestinians killed actually belonged to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade – a terrorist group.

Following a complaint, the ABC later added an editor’s note at the bottom of the item pointing out it did not include the political affiliation of those killed.

However, the text and the headline of the article – “Three Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank, ministry says” – remained unchanged.

A DEFECTIVE CORRECTIVE

On June 1, the ABC’s revamped complaints unit – now called the Ombudsman’s Office – rejected most of the substance of a formal AIJAC complaint lodged regarding an April 2 online article about the judicial reform controversy in Israel by ABC Middle East correspondent Tom Joyner (see *AIR*, May 2023).

The report was mostly news oriented until the end – when Joyner indulged in an evidence and context free analysis that questioned Israel’s democratic credential, saying its democracy “differs widely from Australia’s.”

Joyner described Israel’s military

rule over the West Bank as “brutal” – which is clearly his own opinion.

Other nonsensical claims included a suggestion that enforcing a partial blockade on Gaza – which the UN’s Palmer inquiry found was legal – somehow calls into question the nature of Israel’s democracy.

The article also appeared to suggest that the millions of Palestinians in the West Bank whose daily lives have been under Palestinian self-rule for 30 years actually live under direct Israeli rule, when only tens of thousands of Palestinians living in Area C can be categorised that way.

The report further stated that “Palestinians view the Israeli courts as a key instrument for their oppression.”

AIJAC argued that this final section of the article was inappropriate in not being labelled as either opinion or analysis; that it lacked context; was factually inaccurate; and did not include supporting evidence.

The response by the Ombudsman’s office to AIJAC’s complaint was amateurish and perfunctory. It failed to engage with the substance of the complaint and instead quoted from large sections of the article that AIJAC had not complained about. Somewhat unsurprisingly, it said those sections were not opinion. The response dismissed the use of the word “brutal” by arguing the NGO Amnesty International and others had referred to Israel that way.

The response also said the report did not need to provide proper context about the status of West Bank Palestinians because “not all information relating to an issue or event can be or should be included in every factual story.”

The only concession made was to add the word “many” before the line “Palestinians view the Israeli courts as a key instrument for their oppression” to take into account AIJAC’s point that many Palestinians “petition the Israeli Supreme Court, suggesting they recognise it can be useful in maintaining their rights.”

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

LABOR PAINS

The Victorian Labor State Conference's decision on June 18 to pass a motion calling on the Federal Government to recognise a state of Palestine in its current term created a flurry of media interest.

On June 20, the *Australian* editorialised that "[PM] Albanese would be foolish to allow his government to be railroaded by mindless left-wing pressure within the ALP into recognising a non-existent Palestinian state. Doing so would be against Australia's interest. It would overturn decades of sensible political bipartisanship over Israel's security and its right to exist in a hostile world."

In the *Daily Telegraph* (June 21), AIJAC's Ahron Shapiro called the decision to pass the motion "a reckless move".

"Moreover, for an Australian government to consider unilaterally recognising Palestine, one must first ask which one? The one controlled by a crumbling Palestinian Authority in the West Bank that has in recent years left a power vacuum in northern West Bank cities of Jenin and Nablus filled by armed gangs? Or the one in the Gaza Strip controlled by the terror group Hamas, taking turns launching indiscriminate rockets into Israel with its partner-in-war-crime, Iranian proxy Palestinian Islamic Jihad?"

He also pointed out that the Palestinian Authority has rejected three Israeli offers to create a state and since 2014 has refused to negotiate, period, and said, "this history proves that those who argue that Palestinian statehood must be recognised... to 'save' a two-state solution, have it completely backwards."

The same day on the *Australian* website, AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein and Jamie Hyams were scathing about the ALP resolution, saying, "elements of the ALP would rather play counter-productive undergraduate politics than make any serious contribution to Middle East peace."

Critiquing the text of the resolution, they said, "The ALP motion cites Israeli settlement building as an obstacle to peace, but the settlements have barely expanded geographically since 2011 when former Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat admitted they only covered approximately 1.1 per cent of the West Bank, and they certainly didn't prevent the previous offers of Palestinian statehood."

"The motion also states that 138 other countries have recognised Palestine – yet omits the crucial fact that

Sweden is the only Western democracy to have done so. Moreover, most of the others did so in the context of the Cold War, and many did not then recognise Israel. It is unlikely that many of those states which have at some time recognised Palestine, such as the former Soviet bloc countries, many African nations, or India, would make the same decision today."

In the same edition, the *Australian's* Rachel Baxendale reported that Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews repudiated his own Socialist Left faction for pushing the motion, saying he would have voted against it had he been present at the conference.

Premier Andrews was quoted saying Israel is the "only true democracy" in the Middle East, "the only place in the region with a pride march, the only place in the region where women are treated equally... I can go on and on."

Commenting on the resolution itself, he said, "if you want peace, you need a partner for peace. You need a partner, and without a partner, this is all just words really. Words and tragedy."

Earlier, *Australian Financial Review* political editor Phil Coorey reported on June 20 that "Labor's faction bosses will work between now and the ALP National Conference in August to ensure no motions are passed that will embarrass the Albanese government [including] on Israel and Palestine... However, with the Left controlling the floor of conference for the first time in decades, this will involve the faction having to inflict defeat on itself so as not to embarrass Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and Foreign Minister Penny Wong, who are also from the Left."

On June 19, Nine Newspapers quoted Australian Palestine Action Network president Nasser Mashni backing recognition, saying doing so "would put us in lockstep with our neighbours and tell them our foreign policy is not made in Washington."

On June 20, Nine Newspapers quoted former Indonesian Vice-President Jusuf Kalla – who apparently was approached by those papers for a comment on the resolution – saying, "If Australia recognises Palestine just as the UN Resolution [which is] the two-state solution, it will become an important step to help making peace in the Middle East particularly, between Israel and Palestine." However, he did not explain how.

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

VANDALS OF MEMORY

Many readers will be familiar with *Stolpersteine* – the concrete cubes with brass plates engraved with the names and dates of life of victims of Nazi persecution and genocide.

Translated as “stumbling stones”, these small memorials are placed in countries across Europe at the last place a Jewish person, and latterly other victims of Nazism,



A *Stolpersteine* (“Stumbling Stone”) memorial for Holocaust victims in Mantua, Italy (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

lived freely prior to arrest or deportation.

I personally have stumbled on them in a number of European cities, often when I have been in the company of non-Jews, and know the powerful effect these small reminders of history can have.

According to *Deutsche Welle*, well over 75,000 of these stumbling stones have now been set in place.

They constitute not only the most extensive decentralised memorial project in the world – but one with particular power to contextualise both Nazi victims and Nazi crimes.

In the German town of Aschaffenburg in June, several *stolpersteine* were “doused with an unknown, apparently corrosive liquid,” and police were still looking for the perpetrators at the time of writing.

This appears to have been an attempt to erase the memory of murdered victims of Nazism. It was vandalism against history which was as transparent and obvious as it was offensive.

But there are others who feel a need to deny history, erase relevant information and act as if they prefer a world without inconvenient facts which they would rather were forgotten.

A stunning example of this is the recent Middle East policy issued by the Australian Greens Party.

Imagine, if you will, a treatise on Israelis and Palestinians which does not include any discussion of why a State of Palestine wasn’t established 75 years ago. Add to this the com-

plete exclusion of all of Israel’s subsequent two-state peace offers.

Remove regional considerations, including the declared genocidal intent of Iran on one side and the Abraham Accords on the other, in case they challenge the narratives that Israel has no reasonable security fears and anyway does not belong anywhere in the region.

Reading the Greens’ policy, one imagines an Israeli entity appeared out of nowhere and decided that it would engage in occupation of another people’s “land, water, airspace and resources.”

This evil entity is engaged in on-going colonisation, practises apartheid and is particularly cruel to children – and is even responsible for making it harder to end the climate crisis. Yet the Greens graciously oppose all forms of violence (although terrorism or military threats such as those from Iran are never mentioned) – but do support an untrammelled “right of resistance”.

The Greens aren’t just pouring acid on the historical record and the facts of the contemporary situation – they are bringing shovels to uproot reason and truth, seeking to supplant it with the poison ivy of anti-Israel propaganda.

That said, what struck me most when reading the bile that makes up the Greens’ call for “Justice and Human Rights in Palestine and Israel” was their inclusion in it of an attack on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s Working Definition of Antisemitism.

The Definition covers a number of manifestations of antisemitism, with a consistent emphasis on understanding nuance and context.

It stresses that criticism of Israel which is equivalent to criticism of any country is not antisemitic, and that even in situations where there is *prima facie* evidence of malice, context and all relevant circumstances must be considered.

But the Greens Party felt the need to include an attack on it in an anti-Israel tirade. This prompts one to ask what it is the Greens want to say which they are afraid might be considered antisemitic? And it leads to the conclusion that they want to use double standards, demonisation and historic defamations in their battle to dismantle Israel – the things the definition identified may be evidence of antisemitism in discussing Israel.

This disgusting policy should forever condemn the Greens to the contempt of all thinking people.

AIR



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