

THE ROAD TO RIYADH

Reports suggest an Israel-Saudi
normalisation deal could be
reached soon

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WITH COMPLIMENTS

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EDITOR'S NOTE

September's *AIR* provides detail, background and analysis regarding the growing number of reports suggesting that an Israeli-Saudi normalisation agreement, mediated by the US Biden Administration, looks possible in the near future.

Former Israeli diplomat turned academic Mark Regev makes the case that such a deal can be achieved and would be a major game-changer for Israel and the region, while Haisam Hassanein points out the increasing signs of Saudi openness to such a deal. Also, Simon Henderson and David Schenker explore the complications created by Saudi demands for a full nuclear energy fuel-cycle as part of any agreement. Finally, Catherine Cleveland and David Pollock, and Giora Eliraz, look respectively at the likely reactions among Palestinians and in Indonesia to Saudi-Israel normalisation.

Also featured this month is Jamie Hyams' analysis of the debate in Canberra over the Albanese Government's sudden announcement it would begin referring to the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem as "occupied Palestinian territories". Plus, Iranian-born author Roya Hakakian addresses the "first-world narcissism" motivating most Western anti-Zionists.

Finally, don't miss Amotz Asa-El's update on the state of play in Israel's ongoing judicial reform controversy, Yaakov Lappin on the deteriorating West Bank security situation and Jeremy Jones on antisemitism in Australia's public schools.

Please share with us your views on any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

ON THE COVER

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (left) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Images: Alamy Live News)



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EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN****COLIN RUBENSTEIN****LABOR'S "PALESTINE" FOLLY**

The recent ALP National Conference decision to leave unchanged the party's existing party platform on Israeli-Palestinian issues, despite calls from extremist and ideological elements in the party for immediate recognition of the currently non-existent 'state of Palestine', has to be seen as a relatively positive development, given all the circumstances.

However, unprecedented changes to Federal foreign policy on the Middle East made in the days leading up to the conference, tilting towards Palestinian maximalist positions, appear to have been announced to appease these same extreme elements.

This incessant pressure coming from substantial fringes of the Labor party risks undoing Australia's foreign policy achievements with Israel developed over many decades, as part of policy initiatives of successive Australian governments led by both major parties. It also risks denting the credibility of Australian national security interests more broadly.

This trend can't be attributed solely to political differences with the current controversial Government in Israel, since the Albanese Government began this regrettable process in mid-2022 – when Naftali Bennett and then Yair Lapid were leading Israel's broadest unity government ever. It was in October 2022 under Lapid that Foreign Minister Penny Wong announced a sudden reversal of recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Just as suddenly, on August 12, Senator Wong announced that the Australian Government would henceforth term the entirety of the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, and Gaza "occupied Palestinian territories" and begin referring to Israel's West Bank settlements as "illegal under international law."

This unprecedented Australian position of insisting on referring to "occupied Palestinian territories" – in contradiction to the publicly-stated positions of like-minded democracies such as the US and Canada, and the stances of all past Australian governments – flies in the face of previous comments by the Foreign Minister that final status issues should only be resolved by negotiations between the parties. This was the rationale offered for reversing the previous Morrison Government's recognition of Israel's right to declare where its capital is – a right every other country on the planet has.

The Morrison Government's Jerusalem decision did not in actuality affect final status issues, because no one disputes west Jerusalem will remain in Israel in any two-state resolution. However, purporting to determine which territory is "Palestinian" is very much taking a position on a final status issue.

As the Government is well aware, no Palestinian state has ever existed. Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem from Jordan – which illegally occupied the areas – in a defensive war. Before any future Palestinian state can be established, its territory must be determined by final status negotiations – not baseless legal claims made in foreign capitals, or politicised and unhelpful UN votes.

As for the legal status of the settlements, these are complicated questions, with varying views from learned experts, and our Government should not be making legal determinations about this vexed issue.

That aside, the most concerning element of the new Government policy is the idea that any Jewish presence in any part of the West Bank, where Jews have lived for thousands of years, and in east Jerusalem, where Judaism's holiest sites are located, is illegal simply because the Jordanians ethnically cleansed the areas of Jews between 1948 and

1967. Asserting that the Western Wall and Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest sites, are on "Palestinian territory" is simply unacceptable.

These policy changes make it extremely difficult for Australia to present itself as a credible and effective advocate for a two-state peace, and strain our long-standing bipartisan national policy of supporting a negotiated two-state resolution. They are thus detrimental to Australia's national interests.

Of course, if enacted, the Labor platform demand for the Government to recognise "Palestine" as a state would make matters worse by an order of magnitude. Such a foolhardy decision, in contradiction to the stance of almost all our democratic allies, would make Australia complicit in a violation of the Oslo Accords, which explicitly bar any such unilateral steps to change the status of the territories in question.

As the world observes the 30th anniversary of those Accords this month, it's understandable some are questioning the viability of a peace process that has been in a deep freeze since 2014. That's when the Palestinians walked away from US-brokered peace talks under then-President Barack Obama, and went all-in on a long-term strategy of "internationalising" the conflict – warfare by other means against Israel.

The Albanese Government risks being drawn into, and reinforcing, that deliberately obstructive Palestinian strategy. Elements of the ALP want to prioritise feel-good symbolism over substance. Their idealism is ill-informed, empathetically one-sided and lacking nu-

ance – which is not at all the same thing as constructive idealism shaped by realism and genuine on-the-ground knowledge, and dedicated to fostering genuine coexistence. The latter should be the basis of Australian policy-making on this issue.

The Labor platform's retention of a demand to recognise "Palestine" as a state – a dictate inserted while Labor was in opposition, when real-world consequences seemed distant – appears to have been swept under the rug for now.

Yet the activists behind it plan to raise it again and again in the future, and the Australian Federal Government can't afford to have its foreign policy held hostage by these ideologues and one-eyed obsessives.

Prime Minister Albanese and his front bench should stand up to the gadflies within their party and defuse the time bomb in the Labor platform. They should deliver, openly and clearly to the activists, haters and factional powerbrokers, a dose of sorely needed pragmatism, based on historical and contemporary realities – which would be much more likely to foster the desired outcome of negotiations leading to a two-state outcome.

The Government should take premature Palestinian state recognition off the table by expressing in no uncertain terms that a Palestinian state can only arise out of a negotiated peace agreement between the two parties, and ALP bodies cannot change this fact. They can only make its eventual arrival more distant through ill-informed, counter-productive and short-sighted posturing.

AIR

WORD FOR WORD

"There's a rapprochement maybe under way."

US President Joe Biden speaking at a fundraiser about prospects for an Israel-Saudi normalisation deal (Reuters, July 29).

"If there is a political will, there will be a political way to achieve normalisation and formal peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia. That has enormous economic consequences for the investors and if they have to bet on it right now, I'd bet on it, but I can't guarantee it."

Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu in an interview with Bloomberg Television (JNS.org, Aug.7).

"The most significant change on the ground is related to Iranian financing and intent. Iran is looking for any way to harm the citizens of Israel. We will take several actions that will restore security to the citizens of Israel... all options are on the table."

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant on the surge in Palestinian

terrorist attacks (Times of Israel, Aug. 21).

"Israel's position is known, according to which arrangements that do not dismantle Iran's nuclear infrastructure will not stop its nuclear program and will only provide it with funds that will go to terrorist elements sponsored by Iran."

Israeli Prime Minister's Office statement regarding the recently announced hostage deal between the US and Iran (Times of Israel, Aug. 12).

"Ever since Western colonialism... conspired to issue the ominous Balfour Promise (i.e., Declaration) in 1917, in which one who has no ownership gave a promise to one who has no right, our people that is carrying out *Ribat* ("religious conflict over land claimed to be Islamic") in Jerusalem and around Jerusalem has been fighting and carrying out *Jihad* against the colonialism and the occupation... We will certainly triumph... for every occupation passes in the end, and this will be the fate of the hated Israeli occupation of our homeland."

PA President Mahmoud Abbas refers to the Palestinian fight against Israel as a *Jihad* ("religious war") in a speech to a gathering of Palestinian factions in Egypt (Palestinian Media Watch, Aug. 4).



SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

EFFORTS TO CONFRONT ANTISEMITISM DISTORTED BY PROPONENTS OF AN ANTISEMITIC CONSPIRACY THEORY

If you were an institution trying to find ways to identify and counter Islamophobia, would you ask the National Federation of Australia Japan Societies for their insights? Would you consult the Atheist Foundation of Australia to help identify what is and what is not Islamophobic?

Of course not – if you have any sense. The National Federation of Australia Japan Societies simply has no relevant expertise or experience in dealing with Islamophobia as such. Meanwhile, the Atheist Association has aims that are antithetical to the beliefs that are dear to a vast majority of the victim group – in this case, Muslims.

Yet there is a bizarre belief out there that it is necessary to consult Palestinians, or pro-Palestinian advocacy groups, when discussing how to identify and counter antisemitism.

An example of this bizarre – and, as I will explain, ugly – trend came out of something La Trobe University Vice-Chancellor John Dewar announced on August 10. He wrote that a working group established for the purpose of considering university policies on antisemitism had decided to adopt the gold standard International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism – but without the 11 examples in the definition, which are essential to applying it. Moreover, appallingly, the university also decided to adopt an alternative definition, “the Jerusalem Declaration”, which was developed by a group of fringe academics for the specific purpose of condoning certain types of antisemitic behaviour acknowledged as such by the vast majority of Jews worldwide.

The IHRA definition has been adopted by more than 35 democratic countries, dozens of other local and state governments and hundreds of institutions worldwide. The Jerusalem Declaration has been adopted by no governments, and perhaps a handful of institutions.

Moreover, La Trobe said its consultation process for reaching this appalling decision included AIJAC (whose role amounted to simply writing La Trobe an unsolicited letter urging adoption of the IHRA definition), three tiny far-left Jewish fringe groups and the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN).

It is bad enough that La Trobe apparently did not actually consult with any part of the mainstream Australian Jewish community in considering what to do about antisemitism. (Though the university did later claim to have consulted with the Australasian Union of Jewish Students [AUJS])

But what takes the La Trobe “consultation” on antisemitism beyond absurdity is the inclusion of APAN. Why on earth would you give a pro-Palestinian group a role in the process of considering what to do about antisemitism – that is, hatred of and discrimination against Jews – on campus?

The APAN website, which has a section on antisemitism, provides a clue to the answer. After condemning antisemitism and promising to fight it, the website goes on to say this:

We stand against the weaponisation of accusations of antisemitism:

In recent years there has been a dramatic escalation of accusations of antisemitism towards people who support Palestine – from small solidarity groups to political leaders. These accusations are made not to enhance freedom, but to shut down discussion of Palestinian human rights.

Frankly, the claim that Jews “weaponise accusations of antisemitism” to shut down “discussion of Palestinian human rights” itself amounts to an anti-Jewish conspiracy theory.

The claim is not merely that some Jews make accusations of antisemitism when they are not justified in doing so. Jews are as prone to error as anyone else, so some doubtless do this. But this claim alleges an organised campaign, a deliberate strategy of “weaponisation”. Moreover, this conspiracy theory is widespread in Palestinian advocacy circles, and indeed, wider left-wing circles strongly sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

Moreover, the IHRA definition is presented as part of this great “Zionist” conspiracy – including on the APAN website, which says the IHRA definition is being “revived” as “a political tool... used to stifle discussion of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians.”

As UK academic David Hirsh noted in last month’s *Australia/Israel Review*, Britain’s Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) found in a 2020 report that “Suggesting that complaints of antisemitism are fake or smears” was a type of antisemitic conduct that amounted to “unlawful harassment” of Jews. Yet believing in a deliberate Jewish campaign of fake antisemitism accusations is increasingly an essential part of a widespread worldview in Western societies, including Australia.

Now let’s return to the question of why an institution like La Trobe would think it appropriate to include APAN in its consultations about how to deal with antisemitism – when it would never include, as implied earlier, the National Federation of Australia Japan Societies or the Atheist Foundation of Australia.

What do Palestinians or pro-Palestinian groups know about antisemitism that these groups do not?

The only explanation that seems remotely plausible is that the University, or key figures who led its “working group” on antisemitism, believe in the conspiracy theory that APAN is pushing; namely, that Jews are deliberately

deploying false accusations of antisemitism – “weaponising” them – to stifle criticism of Israeli behaviour toward Palestinians.

Only if you believe these accusations are real does it make sense to invite pro-Palestinian groups to weigh in on antisemitism on university campuses.

In other words, something recognised as antisemitic conduct by the UK’s Equalities and Human Rights Commission – not to mention virtually every mainstream Jewish group in the world – is currently distorting efforts to identify and crack down on antisemitism. And it is clear that this is occurring beyond university campuses as well; for instance, in media responses to complaints about antisemitism.

Given this reality, is it any wonder that a new survey by the Zionist Federation of Australia and AUJS shows 64% of Jewish students on Australian campuses say they have experienced antisemitism, while 57% say they have felt a need to hide their Jewish identity to feel safe? Or, indeed, that antisemitism has been increasing rapidly in almost all Western countries, according to numerous indicators?

AIR



Mitchell Bard

WHY IS THERE STILL A REFUGEE CAMP IN JENIN?

In all the coverage of Israel’s operation to root out terrorists from the Jenin refugee camp in early July, did anyone ask the question: Why is there a refugee camp in an area controlled by the Palestinians?

The refugee camp has been a nest of terrorism for years but should not exist. The Jordanians first established it in 1953 to accommodate Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war after the government annexed the West Bank. Jordan’s 19-year occupation of the area, which generated none of the uproar associated with Israel’s “occupation,” was recognised by only two countries – Great Britain (which had aided Jordan in conquering the area the UN had allotted for an Arab state in its partition resolution of 1947) and Pakistan.

During those years, Jordan could have created an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, but it had gone to war to expand its territory. The Palestinians, falsely portrayed as having always dreamed of statehood, never demanded independence. The international community, including the United States, did not propose a two-state solution, partitioning Jordan to create Palestine, which might have spared the world the subsequent decades of debating the Palestinians’ fate and making Israel the scapegoat

for their statelessness.

The Oslo Accords gave the responsibility for Jenin to the Palestinian Authority, which might have been expected to ameliorate the suffering of the residents by dismantling the camp and moving the “refugees” into permanent housing. Neither Yasser Arafat, head of the PLO, nor Mahmoud Abbas, current head of the Palestinian Authority, had any interest in helping them. It was not for lack of money, as the international community showered billions of dollars on the PA over the years, much of which has been lost to corruption. Even today, instead of allocating funds to eliminate the camp, Abbas pays hundreds of millions of dollars to terrorists in Israeli jails and the families of suicide bombers.

The PA, not Israel, keeps more than 12,000 people in the Jenin camp and nearly 1.4 million in 25 others under its control. Why? Because it allows them to be portrayed as victims of Israeli “occupation” as part of the broader propaganda campaign to demonise Israel. Confining them in wretched conditions also serves the interests of the PA and Hamas in maintaining breeding grounds for terrorists.

Recent events have demonstrated the effectiveness of this strategy. Terrorists from the Jenin camp were responsible for more than 50 terror attacks, prompting Israel’s counterterror operation. Though it was conducted with textbook efficiency, Israel unsurprisingly attracted international condemnation.

Israel would have no reason to take action if the Palestinians dismantled the camp or if the PA security forces created by the Oslo Accords to prevent terrorism did their jobs.

The UN and international supporters of the Palestinians don’t care about the people in Jenin or any other refugee camp unless Israel can be blamed for the hardships. During the years it controlled Gaza, Israel wanted to move the people out of camps. However, the Arabs would sponsor UN resolutions demanding that Israel “desist from the removal and resettlement of Palestine refugees.” After Israel withdrew from Gaza, the PA received billions of dollars in aid, and I do not believe it was used to build a single house to allow even one family to move out of a refugee camp.

The PA is responsible for doing away with Jenin and the other refugee camps. Instead of insisting that it acts, the United States and other supporters of the Palestinians serve as enablers, parroting the PA’s propaganda about “refugees” and providing funds to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian “refugees” to perpetuate their misery.

For those in the US Administration and elsewhere who claim to be interested in the Palestinians’ welfare, a good place to start would be to demand that the PA dismantle the refugee camps and move the residents into permanent housing where they can begin to live normal lives.

AIR



Dr. Mitchell Bard is a foreign policy analyst and an authority

on US-Israel relations who has written and edited 22 books, including *The Arab Lobby*, *Death to the Infidels: Radical Islam's War Against the Jews* and *After Anatevka: Tevye in Palestine* © Jewish News Syndicate (*JNS.org*), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Some Malaysian civil society groups had hoped their country would slowly become more tolerant once the progressively-minded Anwar Ibrahim became prime minister in November last year. However, with a resurgent conservative and Malay Muslim-centric opposition, such hopes would appear to be premature at best.

In the lead-up to elections in six Malaysian states – five of which are majority ethnic Malay – Anwar's Government moved to ban Swatch watches and accessories with LGBTQ references and made possessing them punishable by up to three years in prison.

"The Malaysian government is committed to preventing the spread of elements that are harmful or may harm morality, public interest and the country... or national interest, by promoting, supporting, and normalising the LGBTQ+ movement that is not accepted by the general public in Malaysia," the Home Ministry's Facebook post said.

The ministry did not specify which Swatch watches it banned, but in May it seized 172 rainbow-coloured watches from Swatch's 2023 Pride collection from 11 stores around the country, and told five of them to remove those items from their shelves. On its website, Swatch describes its Pride collection as "vibrant designs represent[ing] six colors of the Pride flag – a symbol of humanity that speaks for all genders and all races."

In July, the Government banned a British indie-rock band 'The 1975' after singer Matt Healy at the Good Vibes music festival launched an on-stage expletive-laden rant against Malaysia's anti-LGBTI laws, saying: "I do not see the point of inviting 'The 1975' to a country and then telling us who we can have sex with," and then kissed bassist Ross MacDonald. The outburst led to the band's set being cut short and the eventual cancellation of the remaining two days of the festival.

Some say the recent heavy-handed interventions were an attempt by Anwar's Pakatan Harapan-led (PH) coalition to increase its vote base among the rural, conservative Malay Muslim electorate. If so, the results in the August 12

state elections show the needle has not shifted – with both the PH coalition and the conservative, Islamist Perikatan Nasional (PN) opposition bloc retaining control of three states each as widely expected.

Some interpret the result as a personal triumph for Anwar in resisting what was feared to be an opposition tide, as PH triumphed in Selangor and Penang, two of the country's richest states, as well as Negeri Sembilan. He may well have bought some time to introduce promised reforms, having said a win for his unity government would save the country from racial and religious bigotry.

Yet, the sobering reality is that the PN bloc, led by former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, made gains in the three Government-held states, notably making big inroads in the key state of Selangor, and made nearly a clean sweep of seats in Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu. These states, along with Perlis captured last November, effectively constitute a "green wall" of conservative, rural Malay-dominated states, clearly dividing the Malaysian peninsula into two politically distinct parts, polarised as never before.

PN's largest member, the ultraconservative Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), despite a poor economic track record in the three states it rules, played heavily to Malay-centric racial and religious sentiments and was rewarded with its strongest ever result – winning all but two of 45 seats in a landslide victory in Kelantan and fully capturing Terengganu, leaving the state without an opposition. It now has the best electoral machinery in the country, making PN a formidable opponent in the next general election due in 2027.

PH's major problem is that it isn't popular within the Malay heartlands – many view Anwar as too liberal and fear their Islamic identity and economic privileges under the entrenched affirmative action program could be eroded. The fact that Anwar retains strong approval ratings among minority Chinese and Indians only feeds this perception.

Meanwhile, the coalition partner that enabled it to form government – the long-dominant United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), led by the indicted and tainted Ahmad Zahid Hamidi – has become a liability. The Malay support it was able to harness for 70 years has quickly drained away to the opposition PN bloc amid perceptions that the party has been relegated to a junior partner in government.

UMNO is now beset by internal strife, with some senior party figures openly calling for Zahid's resignation, which could potentially destabilise the unity government in the months ahead, given the pivotal role Zahid played in Anwar's rise to the premiership.

The alliance between former long-time adversaries may well limp on, while the question of who is a liability to whom remains an open one.

Miriam Bell

JEWISH VIEWS ON NZ'S BRUISING ELECTION BATTLE

New Zealand's election campaign is now underway, and it is set to be inward-looking and bruising, but there are points to watch for the Jewish community.

At the time of writing, Parliament was in its final two weeks of sitting before it disbands prior to the election on October 14. Valedictory speeches are flowing, alongside policy promises and fundraising appeals.

There have been launch events and manifestos.

Prime Minister Chris Hipkins of Labour has claimed his party is the underdog, but vowed it would fight back and campaign vigorously.

The reason? A sharp downward trend in recent polls, which culminated in a particularly brutal result for Labour in the latest 1NEWS Verian poll.

Hipkins took over as leader earlier this year, following the surprise resignation of then-PM Jacinda Ardern, and the party's fortunes in the polls improved initially.

Labour and the main opposition party, National, had both been jostling around similar mid-30s levels in polls for much of the year, but the latest 1NEWS Verian poll has Labour down 4% to 29% and National up to 37%.

A potential minor party partner for National, the libertarian ACT, was up 1% to 13%, while Labour's potential coalition partner, the Green Party, was up 2 points to 12%. The Te Pati Maori (Maori Party), which currently holds one electorate seat, was at 3%.

Veteran populist and former Foreign Minister Winston Peters – whose New Zealand First party was knocked out of Parliament in 2020 – has also managed to bring his party back to within touching distance of the 5% electoral threshold.

If reflected on election day, these poll results would translate to 65 seats for the centre-right bloc of National and ACT. Sixty-one seats are needed to form government.

These results are Labour's worst since 2017, and political pundits have turned pessimistic on Labour's chances.

Labour's decline in the polls comes after a series of ministerial mishaps, which have dominated headlines.

The 2020 election was dominated by domestic issues and fought against the backdrop of COVID. This year the battleground will again be local.

To quote James Carville (Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign strategist), "it's the economy, stupid." The cost of living consistently rates as the biggest concern for the public.

That's left all parties focused on related issues, such as tax and housing, with crime, health and education also in the mix.

So what does that mean for issues that might have special significance for the Jewish community?

New Zealand Jewish Council (NZJC) spokesperson Juliet Moses pointed to antisemitism/community safety and Israel-related issues as key focusses for New Zealand's Jews.

"I don't think these are figuring high on the agenda of any of the parties, given the numerous issues we have in the country at the moment.

"If there is a change of government, I am not sure what its stance might be, but it will depend in part on its composition in terms of coalition partners," she said.

To date, foreign affairs discussions from the two main parties have been limited. But the Greens say they want the government to formally recognise Palestine as a state in their manifesto.

David Zwartz, the former Honorary Consul of Israel in New Zealand and a long-term community leader, said the country's foreign policy is closely linked to its overseas trade needs.

"There are growing business relationships with Israel that are not publicised, partly because the media prefers to report on conflict that can be used to vilify Israel, rather than on successful constructive achievements."

He said he does not think there is any Jewish political consensus on domestic affairs, "but there is a strong desire for parties to keep away from foreign affairs policies that help create a negative, anti-Israel climate that impacts on Jews in a way that doesn't happen for any other minority – anti-Israelism turning into antisemitism."

One domestic policy being put forward which would have an impact on the Jewish community is ACT's plan to abolish the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, along with a range of other "demographic" ministries. National has refused to rule out this policy.

Moses said the NZJC would be disappointed if the Ministry for Ethnic Communities was to go. "They do important work – perhaps it is not visible to all – and have provided us with good support."

Zwartz agreed, and said the Jewish community had benefitted from the strengthened security and support for minority communities provided by the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs, and other government departments, since the Christchurch mosques massacre in 2019.

"Right-wing electioneering against this is, unfortunately, a reflection of underlying racism, chiefly dog-whistled against Maori.

"But more than a quarter of New Zealand's present population was born overseas, and increased immigration will continue this trend."

As in Australia, rising local antisemitism has been egged on by overseas social media influences, and this was on display at the raucous 2022 Wellington anti-vaccine mandate occupation outside the Parliament, he noted.

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

No rockets have been fired at Israel from Gaza since July 5, although on Aug. 20 and again on Aug. 21, Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system shot down drones over Gaza that were heading for Israel. A group called the al-Ayash Battalion claimed to have fired a primitive rocket in the West Bank on Aug. 15, the seventh in three months, although all attempted launches seem to have failed.

Multiple shooting, stabbing and car ramming attacks targeting both Israeli civilians and security personnel occurred from late July through August throughout the West Bank as well as within the Green Line and Jerusalem, some resulting in injuries and fatalities. On Aug. 1, a shooting in Ma'ale Adumim injured six. On Aug. 5, a patrol officer was killed by a Palestinian gunman in Tel Aviv. An Israeli father and son were killed in a shooting in Huwara on Aug. 19. An Israeli woman was murdered and the driver of the car she was in seriously wounded in a drive-by shooting near Hebron on Aug. 21. Many of the Palestinian assailants involved in these attacks were killed or detained.

Counterterrorism raids continue throughout the West Bank, leading to Palestinian casualties, almost all of whom are militants or involved in violence against the IDF.

ABBAS FIRES REGIONAL GOVERNORS

On Aug. 10, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas dismissed 12 out of 16 regional governors in the West Bank and Gaza Strip without prior notice. This move came amidst speculation PA Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh may resign and an ongoing PA crisis of legitimacy.

The firing affected mainly regions known for hosting Iran-backed extremist groups like Islamic Jihad, such as Jenin, Nablus, Tubas, and Tulkarm.

Several Palestinian factions, including the PA and Hamas, held a four-hour meeting in Egypt on July 30 to attempt to achieve "national unity". However, the talks failed to even produce a joint communique.

PROTESTS IN GAZA



Scene from the "We Want to Live" protests in Gaza (Twitter screenshot)

Thousands of demonstrators in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip took part in the "We Want to Live" mass protest movement on July 31 and Aug. 4, protesting against dire economic conditions and demanding necessities like regular electricity supply. The movement revived the slogan from 2019 protests, addressing high living costs, internal divisions, electricity shortages, unemployment and food insecurity. Organisers, mainly Gazan expats, called for more protests despite past suppression by Hamas forces.

Meanwhile, on Aug. 6, a Hamas military court issued death sentences to seven Palestinians for alleged "collaboration" with Israel, saying they had provided information to Israeli

security forces.

PA SUMMER CAMP INCITEMENT

Numerous recent reports have detailed how Palestinian Authority (PA) summer camps have been indoctrinating children with hate and terrorism. This summer, these camps focussed on a world without Israel, erasing it from maps and teaching kids to draw this version. Activities include arts, crafts and body painting to reinforce this narrative. Youths at the camps reportedly learned firearm handling, simulated clashes with the IDF and visited graves of slain terrorists.

WARNINGS IRAN CLOSE TO NUCLEAR TEST

Intelligence reports issued by security organisations in the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany published in August warn that Iran is moving closer to possibly testing a nuclear weapon. The reports also reveal that the Iranians continue to illegally purchase banned materials and equipment for their nuclear program and engage in industrial espionage for the same purpose.

Meanwhile, UK Home Secretary Minister Suella Braverman stated on Aug. 5 that Teheran "worries us the most," as a threat to UK internal security, following reports Iranian agents are aggressively operating against regime dissidents on British soil, including by trying to recruit criminal gangs.

US-IRAN PRISONER SWAP DEAL

Following a reportedly year-long negotiation via mediators, Teheran and Washington agreed in August on

a prisoner exchange deal. As a first step, Iran released five US citizens from prison to house arrest in a hotel. The US is expected to release an unspecified number of Iranian prisoners in return. The US has also allowed South Korea and Iraq to unfreeze up to US\$10 billion of sanctioned Iranian assets and funds, to be transferred through European financial institutes into restricted bank accounts in the Gulf for Iran to purchase non-sanctioned humanitarian goods. The prisoner swap is expected to be completed in September.

In addition, Iran has reportedly temporarily slowed down the production rate of uranium enriched to 60% purity, possibly as a result of the same negotiations with the US.

US BEEFING UP GULF PRESENCE TO DETER IRANIAN PIRACY

The US is reportedly considering putting marines or other armed Navy personnel on commercial ships travelling through the Strait of Hormuz to deter Iranian piracy. All ships were warned by the US on Aug. 12 to avoid Iranian territorial waters, and 3,000 US marines arrived in the region on Aug. 6, along with other

military assets. Iran later released footage showing Iranian speedboats and drones harassing the ships carrying the troops.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) navy has repeatedly seized or attempted to seize tankers in the strategic strait and on Aug. 2 demonstrated a new naval vessel equipped with missiles amidst exercises on and around Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb, three islands controlled by Iran, but claimed by the UAE.

PARAGUAY TO OPEN EMBASSY IN JERUSALEM

After a meeting with newly inaugurated Paraguayan President Santiago Peña on Aug. 16, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen announced that Paraguay had agreed to reopen its embassy in Jerusalem, five years after moving it to Tel Aviv. Cohen also revealed that he invited the President to visit Israel within a year to dedicate the new mission, and Peña had accepted. Paraguay will be the fifth country to open an embassy in Jerusalem, following Kosovo, Honduras, Guatemala and the US.

Cohen also announced that Uruguay will open a new diplomatic office in Jerusalem, focusing on inno-

vation, after meeting with Uruguayan President Luis Lacalle Pou.

SURPRISING DROP IN SETTLEMENT GROWTH

Despite a policy of the current Israeli Government to expand housing in West Bank settlements, Israel's 2023 statistics on both housing starts and sales of new housing in the West Bank actually indicate a precipitous drop in settlement growth. This appears to be due to lower demand, a result, in part, of high interest rates. West Bank housing starts appear to be on track to be the lowest since 2010.

Sales were down 53.92% through June compared to last year (868 to 400). The first quarter of 2023 also saw a 61% drop in construction of new units compared to the same time period in 2022 (639 units to 249).

The number of new housing permits issued for construction in Israel's West Bank settlements also plummeted 24.43% (from 3,172 to 2,397) between April 2022 and March 2023. Only 2.95% of new housing sales in Israel in the first four months of 2023 were in the settlements.



STRANGER THAN FICTION

LISTEN TO THE BANNED

The Middle East is a place where things that are welcome in the rest of the world can be banned, often for obscure or vague reasons. This was the fate of rapper Travis Scott, who had a concert at the Pyramids in Egypt scheduled for July 28 cancelled by the Egyptian Syndicate of Musical Professions.

The Syndicate released a statement saying, "Photos and reports showed that Scott [uses his concerts] to hold rituals that contradict with our values and traditions. The [syndicate] thus decided to cancel the license for the concert."

The Syndicate was responding to complaints that Scott promoted "masonic thoughts", carried out "satanic rituals" and was involved in "anti-Egyptian Afrocentrism agendas".

There is a great deal of suspicion of Freemasonry in the Middle East, while Egypt staunchly rejects historically dubious claims its earlier rulers may have been black Africans.

Meanwhile, the *Barbie* movie was banned in Kuwait and Lebanon. Kuwait announced the ban on Aug. 9 on the grounds that the movie contained "ideas and beliefs that are alien to the Kuwaiti society and public order," but didn't specify what they were. Lebanon was more explicit. Culture Minister Mohammad Mortada announced that allowing the

movie would "contradict values of faith and morality" and "promote homosexuality and sexual transformation." While the movie does include gay and transgender actors, it doesn't have any gay or transgender themes.

Even cakes get into trouble in Lebanon, with Beirut bakery Pain d'Or feeling obliged to withdraw its rainbow cakes from sale, and apologise, after complaints the multicoloured cakes – similar to ones produced in bakeries around the world for decades – were promoting homosexuality (because of the gay community's rainbow flag). Apparently, in Lebanon, whenever there's rain and sunshine at the same time, nature is actually propagandising for the LGBTIQ+ agenda.

COVER STORY

THE ROAD TO RIYADH

ISRAEL-SAUDI PEACE APPEARS A REAL POSSIBILITY

Mark Regev

The widespread assumption has been that under Israel's current right-wing Government, further progress on Middle East peace would be near impossible. But some very serious behind-the-scenes diplomacy currently afoot has the potential to create a breakthrough in Israel's relations with the Arab and Muslim worlds.

At the end of July, during a re-election fundraiser in Freeport, Maine, US President Joe Biden shared with the audience his hopes for a historic normalisation of ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia. "There's a rapprochement that may be underway," Biden said.

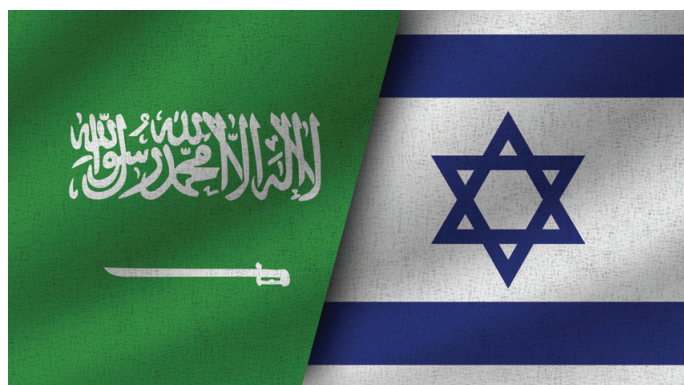
The President's remarks came after a visit to Jeddah by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and the Administration's Middle East Envoy, Brett McGurk.

The White House statement on their talks in the kingdom was appropriately guarded, innocuously referring to discussions on "a common vision for a more peaceful, secure, prosperous, and stable Middle East." Privately, US officials were more upbeat, expressing cautious optimism that progress could be made.

Biden's comments in Maine followed the publication of a Thomas Friedman piece in the *New York Times* based on the columnist's conversation with the President. Friedman reported that Biden was working on "a US-Saudi mutual security pact that would involve Saudi Arabia normalizing relations with Israel."

Over the past decade, the Jerusalem-Riyadh channel has grown steadily warmer. It is widely assumed that the 2020 Abraham Accords with Gulf states the UAE and Bahrain could not have materialised without some level of Saudi approval.

And in 2022, when El Al aircraft received Riyadh's permission to fly over Saudi airspace on their routes from Ben-Gurion Airport to destinations in Asia, more than one Middle East expert concluded it was a public manifestation of a veiled yet burgeoning relationship – sometimes



The US Administration is suggesting that Israeli-Saudi ties are about to move from the shadows into the light of day

referred to as "mushroom diplomacy", after the fungi that grows best in the dark.

Moving Israel-Saudi ties from the shadows into the light of day will require a triangular convergence of interests between Jerusalem, Riyadh, and Washington, and it is quite possible – perhaps even probable – that such a confluence is emerging.

STABILISING THE MIDDLE EAST

From Biden's perspective, an Israel-Saudi peace would be a momentous achievement, eclipsing even former US President Donald Trump's success in brokering the Abraham Accords.

From a national security point of view, the signing of a Saudi-US security pact would stabilise and upgrade Washington's ties with Riyadh. Of late, these relations have been plagued by recurring problems, from candidate Biden's comments about making Saudi Arabia a "pariah nation" following the October 2018 murder of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi to Riyadh's rolling out the red carpet for America's rival, Chinese President Xi Jinping, in December 2022.

Israel-Saudi normalisation would also augment regional

stability, with two of Washington's most important Middle East partners reaching a pro-Western and pro-American accord that would undoubtedly serve US interests.

Adding the laurel of peacemaker to Biden's political persona could prove advantageous in his forthcoming re-election bid. Although Americans seldom prioritise foreign policy at the ballot box, accomplishing an Israel-Saudi deal would demonstrate compelling presidential leadership and help Democrats dispel Republican accusations of an aged and ineffectual chief executive.

For its part, Riyadh could see the approaching presidential election as a window of opportunity to achieve a long-sought-after Saudi-US mutual security pact that would codify Washington's commitment to protect and defend the kingdom.

In recent years, the pro-Western Arab states have had doubts about Washington's obligation to their security – fearing the rise of American neo-isolationism or a strategic “pivot” in US priorities away from the Middle East to regions further afield. The signing of a pact would mitigate such concerns by formalising a Saudi-US alliance.

In addition, Riyadh believes that such an agreement will give its armed forces access to state-of-the-art American military hardware which until now has been denied the kingdom, especially the advanced F-35 stealth combat aircraft.

Saudi Arabia is also demanding US support for its plans to build a civilian nuclear power program, including indigenous enrichment.

While Washington has been reticent to go down that route, Riyadh has a powerful argument: If America is willing to acquiesce to Iran, a professed enemy of the West, operating a “civilian” nuclear program, why can't a loyal friend build a similar capability? (Many assume that the Saudis want a developed nuclear infrastructure for the eventuality that Teheran crosses the threshold).

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has declared Jerusalem-Riyadh normalisation a key goal of his Government, knowing full well it would be a geopolitical game-changer. The kingdom's special status across the Arab world almost guarantees that additional Arab countries, which have been sitting on the fence, would follow Riyadh's lead.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia enjoys a unique leadership role in the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation. If the kingdom was to make peace with Israel, Muslim-majority countries – from Southeast Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa – could follow suit.

While appreciating that relations with Riyadh would spur additional normalisations, many in Israel will remain wary about the kingdom having unfettered access to advanced US weaponry, as they surely will be over the idea of a Saudi nuclear program.

“Israel-Saudi normalisation would also augment regional stability, with two of Washington's most important Middle East partners reaching a pro-Western and pro-American accord that would undoubtedly serve US interests”

Of paramount importance is a parallel Jerusalem-Washington dialogue on the parameters and safeguards governing any nuclear development, as well as ensuring that the Saudi military upgrade will not adversely affect the IDF's qualitative military edge (QME) to which the US is committed.

Presumably, the Palestinian issue cannot be sidelined. But if the Saudis once placed an Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines and the establishment of a Palestinian state as preconditions for normalisation, today Riyadh is in a very different place.

While the kingdom is no longer willing to accept a Palestinian veto over its foreign policy, a deal may nonetheless necessitate Israeli concessions in the West Bank.

Netanyahu might be asked to publicly rule out any unilateral annexations, proclaim an openness to the possibility of eventual Palestinian statehood, and even limit settlement construction.

Although difficult, these sorts of steps are neither unprecedented nor impossible: In exchange for diplomatic relations with the UAE in 2020, Netanyahu shelved plans for annexation. He gave qualified acceptance of Palestinian statehood in his June 2009 Bar-Ilan speech, and more recently in his championing of Trump's January 2020 “Deal of the Century” Israeli-Palestinian peace plan. He could also revisit the understanding of settlement growth discussed with the Trump White House.

Of course, while Netanyahu can be expected to rise to the occasion, it is not clear that all his current coalition partners will go along too.

AIR

Ambassador Mark Regev, a former adviser to the prime minister and former Israeli Ambassador to the UK, is chair of the Abba Eban Institute for Diplomacy at Reichman University. © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com) reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

READING THE SIGNS FROM RIYADH

Haisam Hassanein

Is a Saudi-Israeli peace deal just around the corner or still just a long-term hope? The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Washington and Riyadh “have agreed on the broad contours of a deal” for the Saudis to recognise Israel. Yet when asked about that story, a State Department



spokesman seemed to throw cold water on it, saying that normalisation has “a long road to go with an uncertain future.”

What may get lost among these duelling headlines is the degree to which Riyadh is laying the foundation for peace so that when a diplomatic breakthrough becomes possible, the new relationship has a foundation on which it can rest. Diplomatic statements, positive local media coverage, tolerance toward people-to-people interactions, and changes in textbooks are all preparing the Saudi public for a potential normalisation deal with the Jewish state.

Traditionally, Riyadh has adopted an unfriendly stance toward Israel due to its conflict with the Palestinians. Clerics in Friday sermons would lash out at Washington and Jerusalem over the plight of Palestinians. Conspiracy theories about Israel abounded. In 2011, Saudi newspapers claimed a vulture was caught inside the kingdom spying for Israel’s Mossad. A May 2022 report from the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education noted that while Saudi textbooks still erase Israel from the map and associate Zionism with threats to Muslim religious sites, since the signing of the Abraham Accords, entire chapters and several examples of Jew-hatred have been removed.

Over the past year, there have been numerous signs of open warming. Last Autumn, Riyadh hosted Dr. Samer Haj Yehia, chairman of Israel’s Bank Leumi, as a panellist at

the Saudi investor forum, where Yehia described “amazing” opportunities in the desert kingdom. In a June press conference, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said that normalisation with Israel “would bring significant



Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

benefits” to the region. The Saudi Ambassador to the United States made a similar pronouncement at the Aspen Ideas Festival later in the month, declaring that her kingdom wants to see “a thriving Israel”. In July, Saudi Arabia signed an agreement with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation allowing member states, including Israel, to attend the World Heritage Committee’s meeting in September, which would mark the first official public Israeli presence in the kingdom.

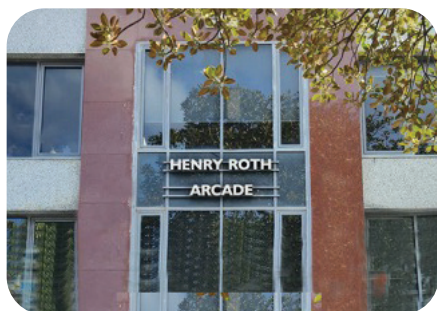
In Saudi-affiliated media as well, Israel and normalisation are no longer taboo. When rockets from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip were launched at Israel in July, the London-based Saudi newspaper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* avoided pejorative labels for Israeli troops such as “occupation forces”. The Saudi news network *Al-Arabiya* hosted Israelis to share their thoughts on issues unrelated to the Palestinians as well as Arab commentators who shared favourable views of Gulf normalisation with Jerusalem while demanding that the Palestinians give peace a chance. In August, the Jeddah-based daily newspaper *Okaz* published an article by a Syrian writer urging Palestinians to conclude peace with the Jewish state under the auspices of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

People-to-people interactions have also been on the rise. An Israeli national team participated in FIFAe World Cup in Saudi Arabia, where Israel’s national anthem was played.

Saudi activists and professionals openly attended cultural normalisation events and discussed with Israeli citizens potential peace deals between their respective governments in the United Arab Emirates and the United States without facing any backlash from the Saudi security apparatus back home. Saudi authorities also chose Muslim World League head Sheikh Mohammad al-Issa, who is known for his friendly gestures toward Jews, to give the prestigious Arafat sermon at the 2022 Hajj.

This openness stands in stark contrast to popular attitudes among Israel’s longtime Arab peace partners, Egypt and Jordan. Just last month, a hotel in Egypt reportedly kicked out an Israeli model after discovering her nationality. Meanwhile, Israeli and Jewish tourists have complained of antisemitic abuse when entering the Hashemite Kingdom.

Saudi-Israeli normalisation has also hit some bumps



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along the road. The Saudi Foreign Ministry recently condemned Israeli Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir for visiting the Temple Mount. And last March, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen could not participate in a conference of the United Nations World Tourism Organisations in Riyadh due to Saudi authorities delaying issuing visas.

But the overall trend is running strongly in favour of normalisation. The kingdom has been paving the road to prepare its population for such a historical moment so that when peace comes, it will hopefully be a warm one. AIR

Haisam Hassanein is an adjunct fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), where he analyses Israel's relations with Arab and Muslim countries. The article was originally published in the Washington Examiner (www.washingtonexaminer.com). ©FDD (www.fdd.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

SAUDI ARABIA'S PROBLEMATIC NUCLEAR "ASKS"

Simon Henderson and David Schenker

According to accounts of recent off-the-record comments by Saudi Arabia's de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (aka MbS), the kingdom wants three main things in return for a potential normalisation agreement with Israel: US security guarantees, access to top-shelf American military equipment and technology, and support for a domestic civil nuclear program. The third "ask" may be the most challenging for Washington, since it includes access to uranium enrichment technology that can be used to produce a nuclear explosive.

SAUDI WEAPONISATION ASSURANCES?

The most recent iteration of such a deal would create a "Nuclear Aramco", mimicking the historical involvement of US oil companies in the 1930s that eventually led to the Saudis wholly owning the world's largest oil company. Riyadh reportedly suggested this idea to US officials in part to reduce their concerns about potential weaponisation.

Yet Washington also surely recalls the Crown Prince's nuclear remarks in a 2018 interview with the US version of "60 Minutes": "Saudi Arabia does not want to acquire any nuclear bomb, but without a doubt if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible." Some might dismiss this as an impromptu comment rather than a statement of policy, but the interview was pre-recorded and came amid an important trip to Washington

— his first after being named heir to the throne. Moreover, his uncle, the late King Abdullah, gave the same message to US special envoy Dennis Ross in 2009. And as recently as last December, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told a conference in Dubai, "If Iran gets an operational nuclear weapon, all bets are off."

WHAT EXACTLY DOES RIYADH WANT?

Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, the Crown Prince's half-brother, gave an indication of the kingdom's specific thinking this January, telling a local mining conference that Riyadh wants "the entire nuclear fuel cycle, which involves the production of yellowcake, low-enriched uranium, and the manufacturing of nuclear fuel both for our national use and of course for export." The potentially troublesome phrase "entire nuclear fuel cycle" implies that the kingdom wants to reprocess spent fuel, which can generate explosive plutonium as a side product.

In the end, MbS is highly unlikely to accept any agreement that gives the kingdom less than what Washington conceded to Iran in the 2015 nuclear accord. Indeed, US-Saudi discussions on the matter have centred on Iran's regional policies and its huge enrichment program, which is supposedly intended to fuel civil reactors but has also been clearly identified as a military program. Most observers believe Teheran is now on the cusp of being a nuclear-armed state — if it so chose, it could quickly enrich its large stockpile of fissile material to produce as many as five nuclear bombs, though it may need months or even years to perfect the requisite implosion mechanism, missile warhead, or other delivery system.

Saudi Arabia's current nuclear plans include the proposed construction of two civil power reactors, pruned back from the 16 reactors proposed in 2013. According to Riyadh's logic, using its recently discovered indigenous uranium deposits to fuel new reactors and



Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman with IAEA head Rafael Grossi (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

generate electricity would enable it to export most of its oil, which remains the cheapest in the world to produce and is still necessary to fund the kingdom's transition to a greener, more diversified economy in the coming decades. Yet the size and quality of its uranium reserves are questionable. In April, Bloomberg reported that Saudi "exploration yielded only 'severely uneconomic' deposits so far."

Moreover, US officials have already expressed concerns about the kingdom's previously reported steps toward nuclearisation. On August 4, 2020, the *Wall Street Journal* cited unnamed officials who asserted that China had built

a facility in the Saudi desert to convert uranium ore into yellowcake, an intermediate stage before enrichment. The next day, the *New York Times* also cited unnamed sources in reporting that two buildings near Riyadh could be undeclared “nuclear facilities”.

If the kingdom has already built enrichment facilities, where did it acquire the necessary technology? Well-placed Western officials concede that Saudi Arabia was the fourth, unpublicised customer of A. Q. Khan, the late Pakistani nuclear scientist and proliferator who sold centrifuge equipment to Iran, Libya, and North Korea. Khan retired in 2001, suggesting that his activities with the kingdom happened more than 20 years ago.

US OPTIONS

Given that the situation with Iran provides the overall context for US-Saudi nuclear deliberations, any technical advance by Teheran could change everything overnight. If the status quo persists, however, the current ambiguity surrounding the scope of Iran’s capabilities and potential US deal-making could provide opportunities for diplomacy with Riyadh.

Grandfathering in existing Saudi facilities may be one way forward. Prince Abdulaziz stated in January that “the kingdom intends to utilise its national uranium resources, including in joint ventures with willing partners in accordance with international commitments and transparency standards.” Although this seems to run against the idea of the US directly monitoring Saudi activities as part of a “Nuclear Aramco”, it does imply an unspecified role for the Vienna-based IAEA, the world’s top nuclear watchdog. Currently, the kingdom has a low-level agreement with the IAEA but has not signed the “Additional Protocol”, which allows for intrusive inspections. One way to boost US confidence in a “Nuclear Aramco” scenario would be for Riyadh to submit to more rigorous and continuous IAEA inspections, as more than 140 countries have done.

Another consideration is Israel, whose Government has not yet articulated an authoritative, unified view on a potential Saudi nuclear power program. In June, Energy Minister Israel Katz voiced opposition to such a program at the United Nations. During an interview a few months later, however, National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi downplayed the potential risks. Notably, Israel opposed Jordan’s proposal to build a nuclear energy plant in 2009 due to safety concerns. A reactor on Saudi Arabia’s Red Sea coast – distant from Iran but in range of missile fire from Teheran’s Houthi partners in Yemen – would no doubt generate similar fears.

Saudi enrichment demands place the Biden Administration in a difficult position as well. Washington has long proscribed enrichment when negotiating civil nuclear cooperation with regional states. For instance, it convinced the United Arab Emirates to abjure the practice and opposed

Jordanian ambitions to pursue commercial enrichment. Indeed, the US legal framework for civil nuclear cooperation – Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, under which Washington has signed agreements with 23 countries – explicitly prohibits enrichment and reprocessing.

Yet there have been exceptions, most notably India. And earlier this year, the US included enrichment in the civil nuclear agreement it signed with Britain, Canada, France, and Japan, in a deal intended to insulate allies from sanctions against Russia, the world’s leading provider of civil nuclear fuel. The game-changing regional possibilities of Israeli-Saudi peace – coupled with concerns that Riyadh might look elsewhere for its nuclear program if Washington does not help, which would mean fewer safeguards – could push the Biden Administration toward a more flexible outlook on enrichment.

Even as it encourages normalisation between Riyadh and Jerusalem, Washington is probably trying to balance policies that constrain Iran, preserve US diplomatic options, and address Middle East proliferation concerns – namely, the likelihood that further Iranian nuclear advances will prompt other regional countries to actively pursue their own military nuclear alternatives. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE are widely believed to have the technological base for such efforts or access to it, while Russia, China, and perhaps even France may oblige with additional help (e.g., Paris signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with Riyadh in July).

AIR

Simon Henderson is the Baker Fellow and director of the Bernstein Program on Gulf and Energy Policy at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. David Schenker is the Institute’s Taube Senior Fellow and director of its Rubin Program on Arab Politics. © Washington Institute (washingtoninstitute.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

THE SURPRISING PALESTINIAN SPLIT ON SAUDI NORMALISATION

Catherine Cleveland and David Pollock

After years of stagnation and conflict, a new Israeli-Palestinian deal is once again on the international agenda – only this time, remarkably, in return for steps toward “normalisation” of Israeli relations with Saudi Arabia. The possibility of such an agreement has been rumoured for years and is now an explicit goal of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Informal ties are already warming, including the opening of Saudi airspace to Israeli flights

and early public joint ventures between Saudi and Israeli companies.

But further progress, according to Saudi officials, will depend on some Israeli concessions to the Palestinians. The kingdom has publicly emphasised this factor by appointing the country's first-ever non-resident Ambassador to the State of Palestine in mid-August. And one key component to this conversation has been missing: How do Palestinians – the people themselves, not their leaders – see the potential of Saudi normalisation?

In July, the Washington Institute conducted a poll with the Palestine Centre for Public Opinion – based in Beit Sahour just outside Bethlehem – involving over 1,500 face-to-face interviews in the West Bank, Gaza, and east Jerusalem. The results provide a unique snapshot of Palestinian public opinion on this and other key issues. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they agreed with this statement: “If Saudi Arabia normalises relations with Israel, the Palestinian leadership should also normalise relations and end the conflict.”

Contrary to common misconception, there is no single attitude on this and other issues relating to normalisation across Palestinian society. And on this question – as with many others – attitudes sharply diverge between the West Bank and Gaza. Two-thirds of West Bank residents reject this proposal to normalise ties in the face of a Saudi-Israeli deal. But turn instead to Gaza, and attitudes are split: 50% of Gazans would support normalising relations with Israel were Riyadh to do so. Strikingly, 21% of Gazans agree strongly with this idea – statistically equivalent to the 23% of Gazans who strongly disagree.

This split is also evident in attitudes about the impact of the Abraham Accords on the region – 47% of Gazans say they have had at least a somewhat positive impact, versus 29% of West Bankers. Similarly surprising is that nearly half (42%) of Gazans agree with this statement: “I hope someday we can be friends with Israelis, since we are all human beings after all.” In the West Bank, the corresponding figure drops to just 30%. Even more striking is that in east Jerusalem, whose nearly 400,000 legal Palestinian permanent residents have daily contact with Israelis, the clear majority (63%) agree at least “somewhat” with that purposely provocative proposition about friendship with Israelis someday.

More broadly, however, the majority of Gazans and West Bankers alike (58% and 61%) agree with this statement: “Arab governments are neglecting the Palestinians and starting to make friends with Israel because they think the Palestinians should be more willing to compromise.”

In the case of Gaza, a similar percentage has expressed this attitude for years – including when first asked in

2019. Among West Bankers, by contrast, the prevalence of this attitude is much newer. When presented with the same question in June of last year, just 38% of West Bank residents had agreed with this statement, but 61% do so now.

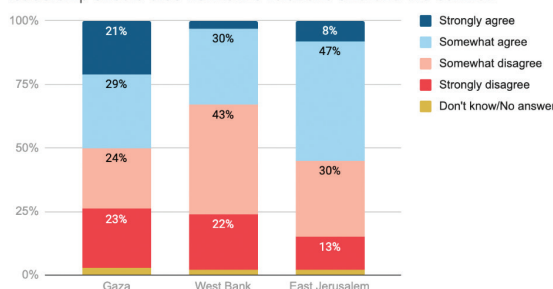
Today, moreover, fully three-quarters of Gazans support Arab governments taking “a more active role in Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking, offering incentives to both sides to take more moderate positions” – with almost half (48%) saying they “strongly” agree. And when it comes to Jerusalem in particular, a remarkable three-quarters of Palestinians in each of the three territories

polled also say that Saudi Arabia should have some role in the holy city's future: Gazans, 73%; West Bankers, 71%; east Jerusalem Palestinians, 77%.

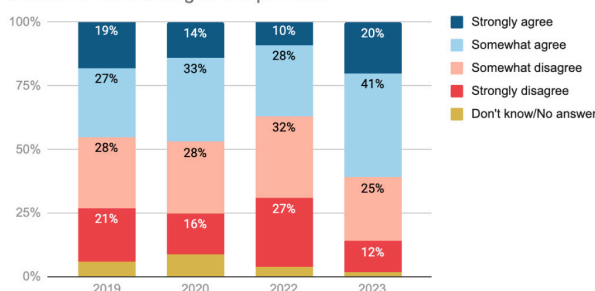
These numbers also reflect a desire among many Palestinians for change to the status quo, including – again contrary to conventional wisdom – by peaceful means if possible. Half of Gazans agree that Hamas should “stop calling for the destruction of Israel and instead accept a permanent two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.” And at least half in Gaza and the West Bank alike support the Palestinian resumption of negotiations with Israel, 58% in the former and 50% in the latter.

As private Israeli-Saudi negotiations continue, Saudi

June 2023: If Saudi Arabia normalizes relations with Israel, Palestinian leadership should also normalize relations and end the conflict.



West Bank: Arab governments are neglecting the Palestinians and starting to make friends with Israel because they think the Palestinians should be more willing to compromise.





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engagement and the resulting concessions on the Palestinian issue it may obtain from Israel are likely to find a favourable reception among many in Gaza. In the West Bank, more residents may be cautious about whether such an agreement is in their interests. But the majority of Palestinians are clearly searching for change, one way or another. If steps toward Saudi-Israeli normalisation can provide meaningful improvements in Palestinian life – even without full Palestinian statehood – many Palestinians are not likely to see them as the “stab in the back” that some of their leaders have proclaimed. And for the United States, these striking new survey findings demonstrate that if Palestinians continue to view Saudi Arabia as working for their interests, they are likely to see the current US push for this historic agreement as beneficial. AIR

Catherine Cleveland is the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Croft-Wagner Family Fellow and editor of the "Fikra Forum". David Pollock is the Bernstein Fellow at the Washington Institute, focusing on regional political dynamics and related issues. © Washington Institute (washingtoninstitute.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

COULD SAUDI-ISRAELI NORMALISATION LEAD JAKARTA TO FOLLOW SUIT?

Giora Eliraz

Against the backdrop of increasing media reports regarding a potential normalisation agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, negotiated and underwritten by the US, questions about a possible Indonesian shift in policy towards Israel are again coming to the surface.

Discussion of Saudi-Israel normalisation inevitably recalls the reports from a few years ago when the Trump Administration pursued normalised relations between Israel and various Arab nations, culminating in the Abraham Accords in 2020. There were expectations at that juncture that the US might persuade Indonesia to reconsider its stance and agree to normalise relations with Israel. However, Jakarta soon denied such speculation, asserting it would not normalise relations until a comprehensive peace agreement between the Palestinians and Israel was achieved.

The Palestinian cause resonates powerfully within the Muslim majority in Indonesia – based on emotional chords of pan-Islamic solidarity. The Palestinian struggle is largely perceived as a cause which engages all Muslims. So, when it comes to policy towards Israel, domestic opinion considerations have a heavy influence on national decision-making, lest policy change trigger a major public backlash, especially from Islamic groups.

Such risks act as a constraining factor on available policy choices. This dynamic was clearly evident during the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid (1991-2001). His plan to move towards official diplomatic relations with Israel by first establishing direct trade ties met with robust opposition, and his government was ultimately forced to abandon it.



The domestic forces that blocked the plans of former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (above) for closer ties with Israel are still powerful in Indonesia (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia might – or might not – be a game changer.

Saudi Arabia, as custodian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, is seen as the hub of the Sunni Muslim world and the centre of Islamic religious inspiration. Of course, there are many high hurdles that must be cleared before normalisation can occur between Riyadh and Jerusalem. But assuming the Biden Administration manages to negotiate a normalisation deal, this could significantly reduce the weight of domestic constraints on policy change in Jakarta towards Israel.

Would this be enough to make a breakthrough possible? Not necessarily. Indonesia's strong commitment to the Palestinian cause should actually be seen first, historically speaking, in the context of its long-standing national anti-colonialist stance and ethos, traceable back to both the War of Independence against the Dutch (1945-1949) and Indonesia's role in the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1950s.

The national commitment to the Palestinian cause and distance towards Israel is often publicly claimed to be an



outcome of the first clause of the preamble of Indonesia's Constitution of 1945: "With independence being the right of every nation, colonialism must be eliminated from the face of the earth as it is contrary to the dictates of human nature and justice." Such binding national policy guidelines built into the Constitution, and formulated by the forefathers of the Indonesian state, have been absorbed into national public discourse, and sustain anti-Israel antagonism. So, it is these constitutional national arguments about "Colonialism", rather than Islamic arguments, that appear as the main *leitmotif* in Indonesian debates about the question of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel.

Hence, even if the risk of strong domestic opposition motivated by pan-Islamic sentiments would significantly decrease in Indonesia following normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, there would still be a national ideological rubicon any Indonesian government would need to cross before Jakarta would or could follow Riyadh's example.

A policy change might remain anathema as long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not resolved and an independent Palestinian state has not been established – or at least as long as there is no substantial movement toward such a resolution.

The two striking cases early this year – in which the stubborn opposition of top Indonesian political leaders to the participation of Israel athletes in international sporting events cost the country the rights to host these events – offered a fresh reminder of how high a hill to climb official Indonesian relations with Jerusalem still remains.

FIFA revoked Indonesia's hosting rights for the Under-20 soccer World Cup, while Indonesia announced its withdrawal from hosting the Association of National Olympic Committees World Beach Games. No specific official explanations were given in either case, but the political context was quite clear. Leading politicians from the ruling party PDI-P led the opposition to Israeli participation in both events, emphasising a firm commitment to the Palestinian cause and rejecting ideological compromise by citing the constitutional clause condemning colonialism. Observers also suggest that these moves opposing Israeli participation in sporting tournaments likely indicated a calculation ahead of the 2024 general elections, that such a stance would lead to wider support for the party among Muslim voters.

However, Indonesian soccer fans directed their frustration towards these politicians for politicising sports and costing the country a unique opportunity. Outgoing President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), despite pursuing his political career through the PDI-P, tried unsuccessfully to avoid losing the rights to host the FIFA tournament and publicly argued that sports and politics should be kept separate.

Nonetheless, Jokowi did not succeed in keeping the Under-20 World Cup hosting rights, and the majority view in Indonesia now seems to be that political leaders went too far in unyieldingly extending ideological maxims relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into international sporting matters.

Indeed, there is some historical irony to Jakarta's apparent rigidity in this case – Indonesia actually has an impressive record of supporting conflict resolution and navigating pragmatically and adeptly the turbulent waters of the international arena. However, when it comes to its policy towards Israel, Indonesia's overall pragmatic approach appears to disappear. Even Qatar, a nation that not only has no diplomatic relations with Israel but openly supports Hamas, dedicated to Israel's destruction, clearly understood that international sports is not the place to take a stand on anti-Israel principle. In 2019, Doha enabled Israeli participation in the World Beach Games and, in 2022, it permitted Israeli football fans to attend FIFA World Cup games there, even though the Israeli team did not qualify.

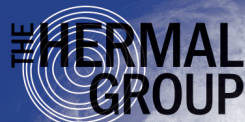
Indeed, even Indonesia has shown more pragmatism in the past. As recently as last February, shortly before the football controversy gained momentum, an Israeli athlete, track cyclist Michael Yaakovlev, stood on the podium in Indonesia proudly wearing an Israeli national uniform with his country's flag flying next to his name, after he secured third place in a heat of the Jakarta Cup of Nations. Indonesians could even learn about this event through reports in their own language.

Israel has courted Indonesia since its earliest days, hoping back in the fifties that Jakarta might follow the example of another significant non-Arab Muslim-majority country, Turkey, which became the first Muslim-majority country to officially recognise Israel in 1949. It soon became clear that Jakarta viewed things very differently to Ankara.

Since then, not much has changed; Indonesia consistently denies engaging in any official interactions with Israel (despite the considerable covert trade that exists, mostly via Singapore).

So could the normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia finally lead to a change? It would weaken the pan-Islamic argument and domestic political constraints against diplomatic relations with Israel – but not the argument based on "anti-colonialist" tradition. The outcome of Indonesia's self-destructive sports boycotts from earlier this year could also have some effect. But it is far from clear this would be enough to get the establishment of full Israel-Indonesia diplomatic ties over the line. 

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A Parliamentary Preoccupation

The debate in Canberra over “Occupied Palestinian Territories”

Jamie Hyams

On the morning of August 8, several news outlets reported that Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) had announced in ALP caucus that morning that the Government would refer to land captured by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War as “Occupied Palestinian Territories”, and Israeli settlements in those areas as “illegal”.

This became the subject of much debate in Parliament. That afternoon, in the final question of Senate Question Time, Senator **David Fawcett** (Lib., SA) asked Minister Wong, “Will the Albanese Labor government be changing Australia’s position in terms of how we describe Israeli settlements as being legal or not under international law... [and] also be changing Australia’s position to formally recognise such territories as occupied Palestinian territories?”

Minister Wong responded that the Government “is guided by the principle of advancing the cause of peace and progress towards a just and enduring two-state solution. It is clear that viewing the conflict from one perspective will not achieve such peace, and any lasting solution... cannot be at the expense of either Palestinians or Israelis. The conflict is a matter to be resolved through negotiations between the parties.”

She added that previous Government steps had been “consistent with these principles” and it was now “gravely concerned about alarming trends that are significantly reducing the prospects of peace” and was therefore “strengthening its opposition to settlements by affirming that they are illegal under international law and are a significant obstacle to peace.”

Senator Fawcett then, crucially, asked, “Minister, the media is... saying that the government will recognise certain territories as occupied Palestinian territory. Has the government determined precise boundaries for these territories, and, if so, how has such determination been anything other than, as the minister has previously said, a unilateral action which reduces the prospects of a just two-state solution?”

Minister Wong responded that “In adopting the term, we are clarifying that the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza were occupied by Israel following the 1967

war and that the occupation continues.” She stated that was consistent with UN resolutions, the approach taken by “key partners” and it “is a term which has been used on past occasions, by past foreign ministers and past governments.”

In fact, while previous Australian governments may have casually referred to the territories as “occupied” or “Palestinian”, “Occupied Palestinian Territories” had never previously been a term used officially or in common practice by any Australian government or senior minister.

A transcript of Minister Wong’s answers was posted on her website in lieu of any official statement.

The following day, in the House of Representatives, Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) opened Question Time by asking Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler), “Can the Prime Minister explain why his government has taken a decision to unilaterally determine where Israel’s borders lie? Does the Prime Minister think it was appropriate for him to hang one of Australia’s



An Israeli settlement in the West Bank – Canberra witnessed some sharp disagreements over claims such communities are “illegal” and built on “occupied Palestinian territory” (Image: Shutterstock)

closest Middle East security partners out to dry as part of a backroom deal to avoid an embarrassing factional fight over AUKUS at Labor’s national conference?”

Prime Minister Albanese responded, “There has been no unilateral action by my government. My government is a strong supporter of Israel and its right to exist within secure borders... We believe that it is in the interests of both Israelis and Palestinians to have a settlement to what has been a substantial dispute... that has had implications not just for the region but for the world. My government will continue to engage constructively on these issues. My government has the same position as the Conservative government led by Rishi Sunak, as European governments and as Australian governments historically... We regard a two-state solution as being essential. We think that it is in the interests of both Israelis and Palestinians for there not to be actions by either side that undermine the potential of the achievement of that two-state solution.”

At the same time, in the Senate, Shadow Foreign Minister Senator **Simon Birmingham** (Lib., SA) opened Question



Time by citing various criticisms of the decision from Jewish sources, and asking Foreign Minister Wong, "... can you cite precisely what motivated your government to make this unilateral change at this time other than to appease Labor's factions ahead of next week's party conference?"

Minister Wong responded by basically repeating her answers from the previous day, and saying that Senator Birmingham's assertion that "this is inconsistent with long-standing Australian policy" is "simply incorrect".

Senator Birmingham then asked Minister Wong how the decision was not contrary to positive trends in relations between Israel and other Middle Eastern countries, and whether further changes to Australia's position towards Israel could be ruled out regardless of "whatever factional divisions, debates, shenanigans, occur at next week's Labour Party Conference." Minister Wong responded by claiming that the Coalition had been inconsistent when in government, but she had always been consistent.

Responding to the answers straight after Question Time, Senator **James McGrath** (Lib., Qld.) said, "As someone who went to Israel last year" he saw that Israelis "live in a liberal democracy. Everyone is equal. But... there is no democracy or freedom in the West Bank."

Later that afternoon, in the Senate, Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas.) moved a motion,

"...to condemn the Albanese Labor Government's latest broken election promise on Israel, as a result of a backroom factional deal ahead of Labor's national conference, which unilaterally changes Australia's position, and does nothing to advance Australia's long-standing position to support a lasting two-state solution..."

Speaking to her motion, Senator Chandler said the Government's decision would "be welcomed by dangerous organisations and regimes, which are not just violently opposed to the existence of Israel but are also violently against the West," and contrasted the Government's speed on this issue with the fact "it is now six months and counting and the Albanese government still hasn't managed to respond to a Senate committee report on the emergency human rights situation in Iran."

The following also spoke on Senator Chandler's motion.

Senator **Deborah O'Neill** (ALP, NSW) Chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Israel, said Australia is a friend of peace, of Israel, and "of the occupied Palestinian territories" and insisted the Government was following the policy of previous Coalition and ALP governments. She added that the Government has "strong support for the legitimacy and continued security of the State of Israel," welcomes the Abraham Accords and "respects Israel's right to

defend itself in a uniquely challenging environment."

Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (Greens, NSW), her party's Deputy Leader, said she is proud her party "long ago recognised Palestinian statehood and has the courage to call out Israel's systemic injustice for what it is: apartheid," adding that "Labor's shift in language" is "the bare minimum", and that Palestinians "are subject to daily humiliation, brutality and violence by the Israeli government," and Australia's Government is "aiding and abetting this violence, oppression and systemic elimination of the Palestinian people."

Senator **Paul Scarr** (Lib., Qld) said the issues can only be resolved by negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians, but the Government decision "presupposes the outcome of a negotiated settlement process. That is totally inappropriate. This matter will not be resolved by international parties seeking to unilaterally impose their views on the parties..." He said no consideration had been given to the fact that some of the Jewish people's most holy sites are in the territories in question.

Senator McGrath accused the Government of "making international foreign policy based on internal factional whims."

Senator **Raff Ciccone** (ALP, Vic.) argued that the Government's steps "do not prejudice any of the final status issues" and do "not change the fact that Australia is a committed friend of Israel," and assured that "Australia will not be imposing its views on the final borders and boundaries, which should be the result of peace negotiations." He added that the Government would continue to work "against the scourge of antisemitism, which is often propagated by conspiracy theorists in relation to the State of Israel," and also claimed the language is not new.

Finally, Senator **Hollie Hughes** (Lib., NSW) referred to the plight of gay Palestinians who have to flee for their lives to Israel, and said, "Just this year, Minister Wong claimed in Senate estimates: 'We do not support unilateral actions which reduce the prospects of a just two-state solution.' Clearly, that was misinformation." She noted that "the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council has referred to this decision by Labor as 'profoundly disappointing'."

The motion proposed by Senator Chandler was defeated along party lines, with the ALP, Greens and Senator **David Pocock** (Ind. ACT) voting against.

Tying with Senator Faruqi for the most unhinged contribution was Senator **Lidia Thorpe** (Ind., Vic), formerly of the Greens. On Aug. 10, she stated, "I... condemn the violent occupation of Palestine, the brutality of the colonial power that is Israel and their state-sanctioned murder of the Palestinian people." She accused Israel and Australia of "attempted genocide" and apartheid.

"Claire Chandler (Lib., Tas.) moved a motion, '...to condemn the Albanese Labor Government's latest broken election promise on Israel, as a result of a backroom factional deal ahead of Labor's national conference'"

NEW YEAR, NEW POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY IN ISRAEL

Amotz Asa-Ei

Rosh Hashana – the day on which Jews review the outgoing year and pray it will be followed by a better one – falls on September 16 this year. And this traditional day of soul-searching and reflection on where things are going could hardly be more timely, as the judicial crisis that has unsettled Israeli society moves into its tenth month.

The crisis came to a crescendo on July 24 when the Israeli legislature passed the third reading of an amendment to Israel's Basic Law: The Judiciary, which forbade the Supreme Court using "reasonableness" as its standard in reviewing decisions taken by the government, the prime minister or any cabinet minister.

The amendment is only a small part of a much broader package, but it marks the first transformation into actual law of any portion of the Government's deeply controversial judicial reform plans.

The crisis first erupted on Jan. 4, when Justice Minister



Israeli Justice Minister Yair Levin, the main architect of the Government's controversial judicial reforms package (Image: screenshot)

Yariv Levin used a televised address to outline a blueprint for sweeping reforms that would redefine the Supreme Court's mandate, alter the way its justices are chosen, and redesign the overall relationship between Israel's judiciary and executive branch.

Levin's announcement touched off mass demonstrations in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other locations throughout the country. Hundreds of thousands protested, weekend after weekend, against what they described as a direct and deliberate threat to Israel's democratic future.

Levin and his colleagues and supporters say the judiciary has, over the last few decades, gathered excessive and undemocratic powers, at times reversing legislation and annulling government decisions. The plan's opponents say that, since Israel has no written constitution and only a unicameral parliament always controlled by the ruling coalition, the court is the only form of check on governmental overreach built into the Israeli system of governance. While many of these opponents agree that some judicial reforms are needed, they demand that any such legislation – which would become part of the "basic laws" that are Israel's alternative to a constitution – should only be

implemented with a broad public consensus.

In the streets, the protests gathered unpredicted momentum, energised by a backwind of public support from thousands of key figures in Israeli academia, the technology sector, business and culture, as well as a battery of former heads of the army, air force, navy, Mossad and Shin Bet internal security service.

The opposition to the reforms has also been bolstered from abroad. US President Joe Biden called on Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to pass such legislation only by consensus, while French President Emmanuel Macron warned Netanyahu that, if his reforms passed, Paris will not be able to continue viewing Israel as the same democracy it has been since its establishment.

Financial markets responded to the situation by weakening the shekel, from 3.37 to the US dollar back in January to 3.8 in August. Israeli entrepreneurs have been warning that if the judicial reform legislation is passed, the foreign capital that has been fuelling Israel's economically vital hi-tech industry might seek alternative shores.

Over the first half of this year, the protest movement managed to stall the legislation. Meanwhile, the political dynamics that drove that movement assumed a life of their own, thrusting new figures to the forefront while casting shadows of uncertainty on older ones.

One figure thrust to public prominence by the protest movement has been Shikma Bressler, 43, a Weizmann Institute physicist and former basketball star who, after being arrested in one of the demonstrations, became the face of

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the protest movement. Charismatic though she clearly is, she has no political ambitions, and Bressler is seen by the protesters as an emblem of the free, successful and worldly Israel which they value.

On the political side, the winner so far from the ongoing mayhem has been former Defence Minister Benny Gantz, head of the centrist National Unity party.

Gantz heads only a 12-member faction in this Knesset, half the size of Opposition Leader Yair Lapid's *Yesh Atid* ("There is a Future") party. However, recent polls suggest National Unity could be gaining up to 30 seats, surpassing Lapid, whose party is predicted to shrink to 17 seats. National Unity is also outpolling Netanyahu's Likud, which the polls suggest could decline from 32 to 27 seats if elections were held now.



Benny Gantz, leader of the National Unity party, appears to have been the main political beneficiary of Israel's divisive judicial reform controversy (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

were held now.

Gantz is an ineloquent but straightforward pragmatist, and he apparently appeals to a critical mass of Likud voters who are either displeased with the entire judicial reform package or with the way it has been introduced and handled.

The original reform plan was indeed sweeping, not

only according to its opponents, but also according to its mastermind, Justice Minister Levin.

Had it been up to Levin, the governing Coalition would have by now had the power to appoint the Supreme Court's new justices and pick the Court President, and to override, by a simple parliamentary majority, any judicial decision to invalidate a law. In addition, legal guidance from the attorney-general and other government legal advisors would have been redefined as non-binding – and these civil servants would also have been transformed into political appointees that ministers could fire or hire at will.

None of this happened. The Government has made do, for now, with the single amendment it passed in July – a relatively marginal part of the original blueprint.

The momentum to pass the package as a whole was lost in March, when Netanyahu fired Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for demanding the legislation be suspended. Gallant had argued the reform push and the harsh reaction it generated were harming military readiness and cohesion, as an undisclosed number of reservist pilots suspended their voluntary, weekly training in protest against the reforms.

Gallant's dismissal sent hundreds of thousands into the streets, convincing Netanyahu to withdraw the dismissal, suspend the legislation, and take advantage of President Isaac Herzog's offer to host talks between the Government and the Opposition over an agreed set of judicial reforms that would be passed with a broad consensus.

The talks proceeded until June, when it turned out that the governing Coalition was refusing to allow a newly selected Judicial Appointments Committee to convene. If the committee had convened – and made decisions to appoint new Supreme Court justices – this would have effectively buried most of the reforms for the rest of the current legislative term, since altering the process for selecting such justices was one of its most central and ambitious planks.

As a result of the refusal to convene the Committee, the Opposition concluded that Netanyahu was using the presidential talks simply to temporarily divert public anger and play for time, before ultimately resuming the reform legislation. The Opposition therefore suspended participation in the talks until the Selection Committee was convened. The Government responded to this move by unilaterally passing the "reasonableness" amendment in July. The Opposition boycotted the vote, and the amendment passed by a vote of 64:0.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, in a blitz of TV interviews – all of them to foreign and not Israeli channels – claimed he would ultimately seek judicial legislation by consensus, but stressed that he still intended to change the structure of the Judicial Selection Committee later this year.

The Committee's current formula balances between jurists on the one hand and politicians from both sides of aisle on the other, with both jurists and government effectively having a veto over any Supreme Court pick – thus compelling them to reach some consensus between them.

Netanyahu's promise to continue to seek changes to the Committee only further fuelled the protesters. The only change in his attitude, critics argued, is tactical – to now seek to legislate the judicial reform package piecemeal, rather than in one fell swoop.

Meanwhile, more reservist officers responded by an-

"With the Knesset Autumn session scheduled to open on Oct. 15, pundits are divided over whether Netanyahu is now seeking a way to shelve the reforms"

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nouncing suspension of their voluntary service, including two very senior commanders from the Navy. Unnamed military sources quoted by Israeli TV reportedly warned that the army's battle readiness was being harmed, as an unspecified, but high, number of reservists failed to show up for voluntary training sessions.

Now, with the Knesset Autumn session scheduled to open on Oct. 15, pundits are divided over whether Netanyahu is now seeking a way to shelve the reforms, or still plans to seek to push them through despite the risk of shattering the national consensus.

Even before then, another major drama is brewing, with the Supreme Court scheduled to sit in mid-September to rule on multiple appeals to overturn the "reasonableness" amendment, or at least order the Knesset to amend it.

Meanwhile, on top of the ongoing pressure he faces from the protest movement, Netanyahu is also facing growing pressures from within his coalition that are no less intense.

At the heart of Netanyahu's current coalition predicament is the so-called Conscription Law, a bill that would permanently and categorically exempt ultra-Orthodox students in religious academies from military service. (At the moment, de facto arrangements mean relatively few ultra-Orthodox males serve in the IDF, but the Supreme Court has repeatedly struck down laws that would codify such exemptions for the ultra-Orthodox as discriminatory).

For Israel's two ultra-Orthodox parties, which represent 15% of the 120-seat Knesset and nearly 30% of the coalition's 64 seats, this is their most important political demand. For most other Israeli Jews, including many Likud voters, the proposed law is disagreeable at best, anathema at worst.

Now, faced with the grassroots anger sparked by the judicial reform proposals, some of Likud's 32 lawmakers are reportedly fearful that it would be politically suicidal for them to pass conscription legislation that would pour yet more oil on the political bonfire they are already facing.

Messages in this spirit have reportedly been transmitted to the ultra-Orthodox parties, but their response has been anything but flexible. From their point of view, they now have a rare parliamentary opportunity to gain the permanent conscription exemption they have been seeking for decades. Ultra-Orthodox leaders are therefore threatening that if the Conscription Law isn't passed, they will suspend their support for the judicial reforms – while some are reportedly saying they would prefer to abandon the reform package altogether.

Just where all this will lead is anyone's guess. One certainty, however, is that when Israelis from both camps flock to synagogues for Rosh Hashana services, they will likely recall the past year with great perplexity and look ahead with equal hope – praying that the Jewish year 5784 will be happier than 5783.

AIR

IDF FACING PROLONGED ESCALATION IN WEST BANK

Yaakov Lappin

The murderous terrorist attack on Route 60 in Hebron on August 21, in which an Israeli woman was shot dead and a man seriously injured, was just the latest indication of the sad fact that Israel is in the middle of a prolonged security escalation in the West Bank – with no end in sight.

The incident came two days after an Israeli father and son were shot dead in Huwara, an attack that may have helped "inspire" the Hebron shooting.

So far in 2023, 34 people (33 Israelis and an Italian tourist) have been killed by Palestinian terrorism, and almost 200 shooting attacks have occurred in the West Bank. In the whole of 2022, terrorists killed 31 people and there were 281 shooting attacks.

These figures attest to the scope of the escalation. The Israel Defence Forces and Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) are engaged in a non-stop effort to combat terrorism in the area, sending in backup forces and holding assessments daily all the way up to the level of the General Staff, according to an Israeli military source.

Over 20 IDF battalions are active in the West Bank, including the Givati Reconnaissance Battalion, which was dispatched on Aug. 19 after the Huwara shootings.

In the end, however, no matter how many backup forces it sends, the IDF still cannot be everywhere at once or pre-empt every attack.

There are many roads in the West Bank that provide easy targets for terrorists looking to fire on Israeli vehicles, including Route 60 and the Huwara "corridor," which Israelis in the area must use to move between north and south – although the decision by the murdered father and son on Aug. 19 to visit Huwara for several hours to have their car serviced was extremely dangerous.

Other signs of the escalation can be found in the fact that, whereas in the past a single IDF company was sufficient to hold the Huwara area, now an entire battalion is needed, according to the Israeli military source.

In July, work reportedly began to construct a Huwara bypass road, which if completed will significantly ease the pressure on Israeli security forces.

While the current situation is not a full-blown intifada, the figures indicate that it is indeed a prolonged escalation, and despite the massive resources and efforts that the IDF and Shin Bet are pouring into the area, the terrorists' motivation remains high.

Furthermore, their ability to carry out attacks is en-



hanced by the enormous quantities of firearms flooding the area.

The guns are being smuggled in from Jordan, produced in Palestinian workshops and stolen from IDF bases in southern Israel. On Aug. 1, Israel announced that it would build a new security barrier on the border with Jordan, in an attempt to staunch the flow.

The July 5-6 Jenin operation launched by the IDF saw hundreds of weapons seized by security forces, and Israel will continue to launch such operations of various scales, but it will not be enough.



An IDF checkpoint near Huwara (Image: Isranet)

According to the military source, for every successful terrorist attack, on average some ten are foiled by Israel, providing a glimpse into the true extent of the threat.

The instability of the Palestinian Authority, the ability of Hamas to exploit it, and friction between Palestinians and Israelis are all contributing to the strain on the IDF's efforts.

Israel meanwhile is continuing its policy of allowing some 150,000 Palestinians who have passed security screening to work in Israel, as part of its targeted approach that seeks to differentiate between terrorists and civilians, and to decrease the ability of Hamas to use its murderous incitement to recruit even more attackers.

At the same time, the IDF is under pressure from Israeli civilians to show better results and to bring down the number of attacks.

Israel's round-the-clock counter-terrorism effort is up against a network of hostile actors, involving local gunmen supported by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Iran, with the latter three pouring cash and incitement as fuel onto the fire.

Iran is implementing a decision taken around a year ago to transfer its conflict with Israel into the West Bank and onto the streets of Israel, following Teheran's failure to successfully respond to a series of blasts and incidents on Iranian territory that it blamed on Israel.

As such, Iran is strengthening its support for its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon, while in the West Bank, it is working to inject more cash for weapons production and for destabilising the arena.

Israel's fight against terrorism in the area is set to be a long-term affair.

AIR

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HAS IRAN SUPPRESSED THE 'HIJAB PROTESTS'?

Yoni Ben Menachem

Iran is tensely approaching the one-year anniversary of the tragic death of Mahsa Amini. The 22-year-old Kurdish woman died in hospital on September 16, 2022, after being detained by Iranian morality police in Teheran for improperly wearing a hijab, or Islamic headscarf. While the official account is that she fell into a coma after suffering a heart attack at the police station, according to eyewitnesses and leaked medical scans, her death was caused by police brutality.

Following her death, a tsunami of unrest, dubbed the "Hijab Protest", surged throughout Iran. The regime has brutally suppressed the protests, including with the use of live ammunition against protesters.

More than 500 protesters lost their lives and more than 20,000 individuals have been arrested. Shockingly, seven protesters were executed following convictions for assaulting Iranian security personnel.

According to the *Associated Press*, mysterious toxic gas poisoning also hit almost 300 girls' schools around the country.

Iran's "Basij" volunteer militia, an auxiliary branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, lost 70 security personnel.

Amini's death has become a symbol of resistance against Iran's dictatorship and the oppression of women within the country.



A protester cuts her hair: Iranian women have actually been resisting mandatory Hijab laws since 1979 (Image: Twitter)

MANDATORY HIJABS ARE NOT JUST PIECES OF CLOTH

Iranian women have been challenging the mandatory hijab law since its enactment after the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The movement gained momentum, especially after 2017 when Vida Movahedi climbed onto a utility cabinet in Teheran, attached her white headscarf to a pole and brandished it as a protest flag. She, and the women who emulated her, served time in prison.

While Iran has succeeded in quelling the recent protests, a sense of discontent simmers beneath the surface, threatening to erupt anew on the anniversary of Amini's tragic death.

Iran's security forces are already preparing for the possibility of renewed unrest throughout the nation.

Despite years of persistent protests, the hard-line regime remains steadfast in its staunch opposition to the popular demand for the freedom to choose whether or not to wear the hijab.

Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi, infamously known as “The Butcher of Teheran,” declared in early August his commitment to eradicating the practice of hijab removal across the country. During a press conference commemorating fallen Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Syria and Iraq, Raisi confidently proclaimed: “There is no need for concern; we will undermine the hijab removal movement.”

Raisi's words insinuated that the protest was not spontaneous but organised and intentional, hinting at the regime's plans to confront anyone involved in what it perceives as a scheme by Iran's adversaries.

The Iranian regime has historically accused the United States, Israel and the United Kingdom of fomenting protests against the government.

The Iranian Parliament is contemplating a new law imposing unprecedented penalties on women who choose to discard the hijab.

However, the legislative process in Iran is advancing slowly, as some parliamentarians fear backlash from constituents in the upcoming February parliamentary elections.

In July, following ten months of protests, the Iranian Interior Ministry reinstated morality police patrols to address the growing trend of hijab removal among Iranian



In response to the hijab protests, Iran has introduced an all-female police unit equipped with submachine guns (Image: Twitter)

women.

Employing a combination of surveillance cameras and artificial intelligence, Iranian police can identify those who do not adhere to the hijab requirement.

CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENTS

The Iranian authorities have even shut down businesses, restaurants and companies that fail to enforce proper hijab-

wearing. Women driving without their hijab have had their cars confiscated.

Public spaces are now under the watchful eye of the Iranian police, with officers conducting vehicle and foot patrols to ensure women comply with hijab regulations.

In a recent development, Iranian authorities prohibited a short film festival after the organisers paid tribute to art-

ist Sawsan Taslimi by displaying a sticker from a 1982 film in which she appeared without a hijab.

Despite the harsh crackdown on the hijab protest in recent months, the potential for resurgence remains.

Iranian women persist in defying the edict. They are unwilling to relinquish their quest for freedom and choice. AIR

Yoni Ben Menachem, a veteran Arab affairs and diplomatic commentator for Israeli radio and television, is a senior Middle East analyst for the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (JCPA). ©JCPA (www.jcpa.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

AMUST'S LATEST ANTI-ISRAEL CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Ran Porat

Regular *AIR* readers know by now that the *Australasian Muslim Times* (AMUST) has been a recidivist offender when it comes to dissemination of anti-Israel conspiracy theories, often including borderline antisemitic views, in recent years.

The past few months have been no exception. Here are some prime examples.

ISRAEL “KILLS BY INTENTIONAL MEDICAL NEGLECT”

In “Palestine: Allah's baker, Khader Adnan is no more”, Dr Vacy Vlazna (posted online May 19) fires off one piece of misinformation after another, spreading conspiracy theories about the May 2 death in Israeli custody of Khader Adnan after an 87-day long hunger strike. Adnan was a senior operative of the terrorist organisation Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

Adnan, cries Vlazna, “was murdered by the Jewish State of Israel... [He] was murdered by intentional Israeli medical neglect... Truth is Israel killed him.” In reality, Adnan refused all medical treatment following his fifth arrest in February, after he (again) incited the killing of Israelis. Vlazna then throws a broader conspiracy theory into the mix – that Israel deliberately denies medical treatment to wounded Palestinians: “This is one of the Israeli hands-off homicidal ‘weapons,’ like the too common murder of bleeding to death of Palestinians wounded because of the intentional denial of ambulance access.”

Referring to one of Adnan's previous arrests by the Palestinian Authority (PA), Vlazna defends the “Palestinian resistance” and PIJ terrorism, insisting it is “legal, in international law, for all people under oppression to have the

right to resist.” Adnan was, says Vlazna, “the spokesperson for the spirit of resistance of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement,” thus admitting he was a member of an organisation proscribed in many countries as a terrorist group, including Australia. Vlazna explains that the PIJ is “committed to restore the State of Palestine held, now over 7 decades, under Israeli brutal occupation.” In other words, she acknowledges that the PIJ seeks to destroy the Jewish state by force and create a Palestinian state on its ruins (“restore” is of course a misnomer, as no Palestinian State ever existed) – and that “occupation” actually refers to Israel’s existence in any borders, not just control over the West Bank.

Similarly, Mohamed Ainullah, another regular *AMUST* contributor, also labelled the PIJ a “resistant group” before and after the headline of the story – “Israel unleashes terror on Gaza: Assassinate entire families”, May 12.

A WARPED VERSION OF ISRAEL’S HISTORY

In April, *AMUST* asked Sydney lawyer Ramia Abdo Sultan, a prominent pro-Palestinian Australian activist, to provide “her insights and feedback with regard to Palestine.”

Yet, the “information” and “insights” provided by Sultan were not “an eye-opener”, as *AMUST* ceremoniously declared. Instead, Sultan offered a stream of unfounded accusations, historical distortions and borderline antisemitic tropes.

For example, Sultan claims that when the Jewish state was founded in May 1948, “Israel entered Palestine by force and massacred/evicted hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.” This popular Palestinian “invasion” and “ethnic cleansing” narrative is of course counter-factual – there was a Zionist presence in Ottoman and mandate Palestine since 1882 which came under sustained Arab attack in 1947-48, and a Jewish community lived there for thousands of years before that. While some Arabs were killed and evicted from their villages and cities during the War of Independence, the large majority of the 700,000 who became refugees simply fled the war, encouraged by the commanders of the Arab armies who actually did invade the area.

Similarly, Sultan alleges that “Israel is ethnically cleansing the original people of the land of Palestine and has been doing so for 75 years,” not only denying ties between the Jewish people and its ancestral homeland in the Land

of Israel by insisting only Palestinians are the “original people of the land,” but also absurdly claiming a Palestinian population which has grown rapidly in every decade since 1948 is being “ethnically cleansed”.

Another historical fabrication is Sultan’s assertion that “Palestinians welcomed displaced Jews after World War II.” The well recorded and close ties of the most prominent Palestinian leader, Haj Amin al Husseini, with the Nazis during the Holocaust, including his meeting with Hitler and services to Nazi recruiting and propaganda efforts, clearly contradict Sultan’s claim. Moreover, polls conducted in Palestine during WWII (documented by Israeli scholar Hillel Cohen) indicated overwhelming support for

the Germans among the Arabs of Palestine and indeed, several pro-Nazi Arab movements operated in Palestine at the time.

About Gaza, Sultan states that it is “basically a massive refugee camp and this has always been the plan of the Occupiers.” The strip was under Egypt’s control until 1967, and it was Cairo which did nothing to rehabilitate the refugees living there at the time. There was never a “plan” to turn Gaza into “a massive refugee camp.” Responsibility for the dire situation in the strip can be directed at the Palestinian Authority, which controlled Gaza from 1994, and towards Hamas which took it over in a bloody coup in 2007. Israel, on the other hand, voluntarily evacuated all its settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

Addressing recurring tensions in Jerusalem, Sultan muses that “the Palestinians residing in the Al-Aqsa area are hospitable and welcoming.” Alas, over the years, non-stop Palestinian violence, including terrorism, rock throwing and murders, in and around Jerusalem – including repeated attacks on Jews praying at the nearby Western Wall – strongly contradict Sultan’s words.

The question again arises – what can and should be done about *AMUST*’s continuing lack of professionalism and gross abuse of freedom of the press to spread untruths, conspiracy theories and ethnic hatred? Whatever happens, AIJAC will continue to monitor this publication’s unacceptable behaviour.

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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Palestine: Allah's baker, Khader Adnan is no more
Posted by Dr Vacy Vlazna | 19 May, 2023 | Boomerang, Featured, Opinion | 2 Comments



Controversial article saluting a Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist from the Australasian Muslim Times (Screenshot)



RECENT COMMENTS

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Journey toward Dark Truths

Our People: Discovering Lithuania's Hidden Holocaust

by Rûta Vanagaitė and Efraim Zuroff

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 240 pp., A\$49.99



Justin Amler

Under the terms of the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union in June 1940. After the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union, Lithuania was occupied by the Germans in June 1941.

Caught in the middle were the country's Jews.

Our People is a book about a journey in search of truth in the face of authorities who want to take that truth and distort it into something quite different.

One of the greatest myths of the Holocaust was that it was Hitler and the Nazis alone who committed the atrocities against the Jews. But this is, at best, misleading. While the Nazis were the driving force behind the genocide of the Jewish people, they could not have succeeded without the collaboration of willing local citizens across many countries.

This includes Lithuania, where approximately 220,000 Jews were living when the Nazi occupation began. Only 8,000 survived – resulting in the near complete destruction of the 700-year-old Lithuanian Jewish community.

This book, and the journey which lies behind it, involves an unlikely pairing – Efraim Zuroff, famous

Nazi-hunter, and Rûta Vanagaitė, famous Lithuanian author. The two embarked on an expedition together to learn about the Lithuanian Holocaust. Vanagaitė was motivated by a recent discovery that her relatives had been involved in some capacity in the mass murder of the Jews of Lithuania. Zuroff, meanwhile, was motivated both by his profession as a Nazi-hunter and, on a personal level, as a Jew whose family was from Lithuania.

This book carries us along with Zuroff and Vanagaitė as they visit just some of the 227 mass murder sites scattered around the country, where Jewish men, women and children were marched into the Lithuanian forests and then shot in murder pits.

Much of their time is spent talking to elderly residents of the various areas, small children at the time, yet able to give eyewitness accounts of these horrific events, often in meticulous detail. The trauma of those times still haunts most of these witnesses, who often break down in tears, having lived with these memories their entire lives without ever once being asked about them.

Many of these murders were orchestrated by Lithuanian nationalists known as the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), who enthusiastically supported the Third Reich. The LAF

actively incited the local population to participate in the murder of the Jews, who were presented as having supported the Soviet Union during Moscow's often brutal occupation in 1940-41. Yet, despite this sordid history, some LAF leaders have been glorified as heroes in present-day Lithuania.

Notwithstanding the strong relationship with Israel of recent Lithuanian governments, the authors write that Lithuanian governments and leaders have tried to distort the details of their nation's involvement in the Shoah by pushing a "double genocide" theory. This says the Soviet occupation and the Nazi occupation were both genocides which should be commemorated equally. The problem with this narrative is that it extinguishes the uniqueness of the Holocaust perpetrated against the Jews and also attempts to absolve the Lithuanian nation of involvement – painting the killers of Jews as a few bad actors or criminals. Yet, as Vanagaitė and Zuroff discover, the murder of Jews – which often occurred without any Nazis at all at the killings sites – required a system to support these activities which involved thousands of people, on top of those doing the actual shooting. After the killings, the physical possessions of the Jews were often distributed among the local population, who were able to enrich themselves even as the blood of the Jewish victims was not yet cold.

This book is an emotional experience, and the reader cannot remain unmoved as one reads of communities, hundreds of years old, being obliterated overnight. My own grandmother hailed from Ponevezh, one of those communities. She was able to leave in 1934 as a young child, but almost 9,000 Jews from Ponevezh who did not manage to get out before the war were murdered.

Our People is a confronting and important book, bringing to light a difficult history that many are actively seeking to distort or conceal.





ESSAY

Letter to an American Anti-Zionist

An argument against first-world narcissism

Roya Hakakian

Dear J,

If the proper study of mankind begins with man, as the poet Alexander Pope once put it, then it seems reasonable that the proper study of Israel should begin with the Jew. This, by way of permitting myself to stand in as that Jew and start with a personal tale: One afternoon in December 1978 in Teheran, only a few weeks before Iran's cataclysmic revolution, a chain of knocks pounded the door of our home, rattling it in its frame. My father rushed to the living room, where we watched everyone's comings and goings through the large windows that overlooked the courtyard. I buzzed the caller in. My father's sister, Monavar, walked in – messily dressed, her hair an untidy mass, her face blurred behind a stream of tears. Alarmed at her sight, my father did not greet her, but cried out, "Monavari" – the added "i" was his diminutive for her – "what's wrong?"

At the question, she erupted into

a frenzy of words, which yielded only to sobs. Two days earlier, there had been a demonstration in Khonsar, a small city in central Iran, where my aunt and her family lived and, along with my uncle's two brothers, ran a fabric business. After a while, the demonstration had devolved into looting. The mob had broken into the store, chanting "Jews get lost!". The store had been far more than a business to the three families. It was also a safety deposit box, for they had been tucking all their savings into the rolls of cloth for years. The store had also been their home, for the three families lived above it. The looters had ransacked the store, then doused what they could with kerosene. The fabric proved more flammable than any kindling. In a matter of hours, much of what they had ever owned turned into

a smouldering heap.

It took a long time and a feverish conversation between the siblings in their own Judeo-Persian dialect till my father was able to comfort my aunt. They had thought things through, and by the end, she left our home looking determined, as if she had a plan. Two weeks later, we all caught a glimpse of that plan: My aunt and uncle, along with the other two families and their combined 18 children – a grief-stricken lot whose entire wealth was reduced to several bloated suitcases held together by tightly knotted ropes – boarded a plane bound for Israel.

I know of no "apartheid state", dear J, that has been the sole sanctuary for those who have been turned away by every other country. Do you? I cannot name any colonialists who have been second-class citizens nearly everywhere in the world, including in Palestine under the Ottomans, the very land where the ruins of their

own ancient kingdom still stand. On his daily walks to school in Khonsar, my father and his siblings were often pelted with rocks.

That was on sunny days. On rainy days, they were not allowed to attend school. The locals believed Jews

to be "*Najes*," unclean, and feared that any splash of rainwater off Jewish bodies onto theirs could dirty them, too. (Thus was the fate of my father's education tied to the whims of the clouds!) I cannot name any colonialists who ever accepted the terms that other world powers set for them: the first time in 1937, when the Peel Commission recommended that 20% of the land go to the Jewish residents of Palestine, then in 1947, when the United Nations raised the allotment to 55% in the aftermath of the Holocaust. I know of no colonial power that has been forced into war by several armies of larger and mightier

"I know of no colonial power that has been forced into war by several armies of larger and mightier nations, as Israel was in 1948"

With Compliments

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Crowds in Teheran celebrate Ayatollah Khomeini's return from exile in February 1979 (Image: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty)

nations, as Israel was in 1948. Nor do I know of any apartheid where the “colonial subjects” have risen to the ranks of university professors, supreme court justices, members of parliament, even cabinet ministers.

Our opposing views on Israel depend, in great part, on which of us has endured history's scorching. You, born and raised in the United States, are the product of a life, as any life ought to be, shaped by the daily struggles of work and family. I, on the other hand, am the product of a life that had to be remade from the ashes. The sharing of these autobiographical details does not come easily to me. If I do so here it is not only because they are at the heart of the divide between us. Rather, it is mostly to trace the roots of why peace, which you fault Israel for not achieving, has, in fact, been unachievable.

The dangerous ideology that Ayatollah Khomeini brought into Iran with the 1979 revolution, which ultimately uprooted some 90,000 Jews from there, declared the destruction of Israel as a core mission. But the initial idea of that mission had already formed in his earliest sermons in the 1960s. You see, the Palestinian-

Israeli conflict has had distant and longtime stakeholders far beyond their own borders. Israel stands on one side of this conflict. What it faces, however, is not a single adversary. On our televisions, we see the Palestinian civilians square off with a well-armed Goliath that is the IDF. Widen the lens just a little. Take in the region, and see how David grows beside the powerful and intractable parties who define themselves by their desire to annihilate Israel and, as far as Khomeini and his successors are concerned, even Western civilisation.

What makes you an American is not only the blue passport that gets you breezing through customs at the world's airports. It is also the blindness you have for some of the evil in the world. You have a distinct inability to see other authoritarian regimes' atrocities as an expression of their

own political or ideological agenda. You blame America, and by extension Israel, for much of the wrong those regimes commit. This is a privileged defect I think of as “first-world narcissism”. You attribute such undue might to America and to Israel, within its own neighbourhood, that they become the ubiquitous engines of all the bad, while other regimes turn into perennial victims with no agency of their own.

I envy your biases because the errors of your perspective are really the blessings of your democratic upbringing – blessings that you, born into them, often cannot recognise, or that you assume to be universal. Though I am not your contemporary, the gap that exists between us is too great to be explained by the difference in our age alone. For instance, when you were studying for your high school civics exam, learning the Bill of Rights and the importance of individual liberties, I had become invisible under my mandatory Islamic uniform and headscarf. My mornings began by standing single file in the schoolyard, chanting “Death to the Great Satan and its bastard child,” metaphors for America and Israel.

Individual rights and civil liberties were far from our minds as we were busy spewing hate and wishing so many dead. When the worst image on the walls of your city was graffiti, I was staring at the black triangle painted on the wall of our alley. On each of its corners was the face of the three world leaders who had signed a peace accord together in 1978. Beneath the dark drawing were these words:

Death to the wicked trio: Carter,



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Sadat, and Begin

When you were getting days off from school for the Thanksgiving holiday or Martin Luther King's birthday or President's Day, my joyless school calendar – a procession of ghosts – mostly commemorated the death of imams and other figures who had been martyred, which in Iran's clericalism meant that they had committed an act of terror. When you were strolling down Elm Street, I was passing through Khalid Islambouli Avenue – named for the assassin of Anwar Sadat, the slain president of

the 13-year-old suicide bomber who had thrown himself in the way of enemy tanks. The future, for the ayatollah, was never ahead, but below – in the grave. All these comparisons, I hope, make one badly overlooked point clear: The most formidable of Israel's enemies prize death far above life, which is why they are, first and foremost, the enemies of their own people.

Ayatollah Khomeini's fervour for the Palestinians had little to do with the Palestinians. They were merely pawns in his game of power. His

all the evil mongrels he spawned. If peace has eluded Israel, it is, in great part, because the ayatollah's progeny thrive on chaos, celebrate ruin, and live to die, just as he did. Whatever the origin of the conflict once was, it has now morphed into a war between liberalism and illiberalism, modernity and religious fundamentalism, women's rights and misogyny. No doubt ordinary Palestinians dream of a prosperous future and of leading peaceful lives like any other people. But in the hands of their current leadership, they are as trapped as I once was, standing in the schoolyard, chanting the diatribe the principal shouted into a bullhorn.

One of the greatest human struggles, the writer Joseph Conrad believed, is the struggle of creating an alliance between the two contradictory instincts of egoism, the moving force of the world, and altruism, its morality. For Jews, the tension has been far more acute and persistent, affecting not only the individual but the larger community, too. To fulfill our moral destiny, the Jewish people are commanded to exercise altruism by being “the host to humanity” and opening our homes and lives to receive the stranger and care for him.

But there is also Jewish egoism to consider. To end our perpetual persecution, Jews have had to pursue nationalism and build a safe haven, so that victimhood ceases to be our destiny. Altruism and egoism are also the antagonistic instincts that define our challenge.

“What is a Jew?” Martin Buber laments. “I shall not attempt to define here the accursed and all-honoured question.” The philosopher Edmond Jabès sees the antagonism as surpassing the self: “The idea of a Jewish state is a contradiction in terms. To be Jewish is to be dispersed, to be without a home in the traditional sense.”

The desire to find an equilibrium between the two instincts is, in part,



The Islamic republic of Iran has backed the Palestinian cause from the beginning – not out of sympathy for their plight, but to use the Palestinians as pawns in Iran's regional power plays (Image: Khamenei.ir)

Egypt. The street name and a postage stamp were two of the many tributes the regime paid his assassin.

When your presidents were addressing the nation about improving the quality of K–12 education, Iran's supreme leaders were promising paradise to the youth willing to die for the cause of “jihad” and supplying plastic keys to soldiers on the front lines to open its gates. And this was the most unforgettable of them all: In the mid-1980s, when the war between Iran and Iraq was at its peak, Ayatollah Khomeini, who had vowed never to end the fighting until Iran captured Baghdad and then went on to “free” Jerusalem, repeatedly praised

ambition was to prove himself worthy of leading all Muslims everywhere. By casting himself as the champion of the Palestinians, he hoped to distinguish himself – the leader of a Shi'ite nation – among the global Sunni majority. Even since his death, Palestine has remained the cause that Iran has used to transcend its status as an Islamic underdog to become the saviour of all “oppressed” Muslims everywhere.

By the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, the ayatollah's army had not reached Jerusalem, but his ideology had. Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad – which now either directly rule, or wield great influence, over the majority of the Palestinians – are

the pursuit that gives depth to our lives and keeps us from the indulgences of undue selfishness or selflessness. But often, we seek to relieve the discomfort by abandoning one for the other. Betraying Jewish egoism – Zionism – and turning one's back on the only Jewish homeland, pretending that the countless mobs that broke windows of Jewish businesses, set fires to Jewish property, and drove out the Jews from their communities are all bygone offences, would be one way of coping with rising antisemitism and the vehement attacks on Israel, especially on university campuses. Another is to withstand the tension: to stand by Israel's founding principles, while also striving to reach peace with the Palestinians, so they can build their lives and thrive, too. The second task may prove impossible, but as the Mishnaic wisdom goes, we do not have a duty to complete it, only to not abandon it.

In the end, dear J, your objection to Israel is about much more than Israel alone. It is also an objection,

albeit inadvertently, to the plight of those who are fighting for freedom and democracy in some of the lands from which we fled. Your good intentions notwithstanding, you become

an agent in the propaganda campaigns of autocratic nations, like Iran, that claim Israel to be the world's greatest evil.


You become an unwitting party to that deception at the expense of far greater and more dire emergencies, including those of women, secular activists, and the various minorities in the Palestinian ter-

ritories. As Israel's violations receive disproportionate attention, those fighting for freedom and equal rights will remain in the shadows.

Since September 2022 alone, nearly 20,000 demonstrators have been arrested in Iran and more than 600 have been killed or executed. The demonstrators in Iran have often chanted "Forget Palestine! Think of us!" At a first glance, they may seem to be making a demand from their own government. But they are equally frustrated by an international com-

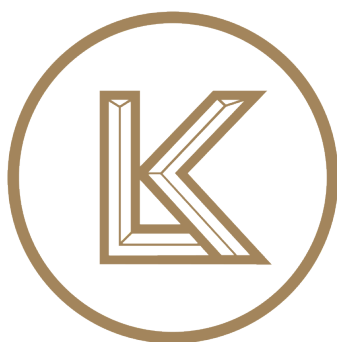
munity, the Western media especially, that seems to quickly move on from every story but that of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Years ago, the founder of Human Rights Watch, Robert L. Bernstein, wrote in an opinion piece for the *New York Times* decrying the record of the very organisation he had created: "The region is populated by authoritarian regimes with appalling human rights records. Yet in recent years Human Rights Watch has written far more condemnations of Israel for violations of international law than of any other country in the region." That trend has only intensified.

Israel can be criticised. Every democracy should be. But when the criticism begins to have echoes of the calls from autocrats in the region, you must pause and question whether you have become a pawn in a dangerous game in which countless men and women are valiantly fighting, and dying, without a mention. 

Roya Hakakian is a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship in nonfiction and the author of three books in English, including Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran. Reprinted from Sapir Journal. © Sapir (www.sapirjournal.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

WATCHING OUR LANGUAGE

On the *Sky News* website (Aug. 14), AIJAC's Justin Amler argued that the Albanese Government's claim that its decision to refer to the West Bank as "occupied Palestinian territory" would increase the prospects for peace was "wholly misguided and ahistorical."

Amler noted that numerous generous Israeli peace offers involving creating a Palestinian state did not lead to "even the pretence of a serious counter-offer," but instead were "often met with murderous violence, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Israelis."

Earlier, the *Herald Sun* (Aug. 10) editorialised that the Albanese Government "made a serious error of judgement" by changing its position, a change which the paper said was prompted by "domestic, internal partisan politics" and would have "chilling impact" on the need to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a negotiated settlement.

The *Australian* editorial (Aug. 10) called the decision an "empty gesture", saying that Australia "would do the Middle East and the world a service if the government, through international forums, encouraged effective steps towards the long overdue resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations... Such progress is unlikely for now, which underlines the futility of the Left arguing for what it thinks about the disputed territories."

CRIKEY GETS CRANKY

On Aug. 11, Crikey reporter Maeve McGregor laid into the federal Coalition for criticising the Government's change of language.

McGregor wrote that "Labor's modest shift in position on the enduring Israel-Palestine conflict this week

has, according to a sulphurous Peter Dutton, fractured the nation's emphatically pro-Israel stance. Worse still, the opposition leader insists, the changes weren't inspired by principle but a thinly veiled concession to the left flank of the party ahead of its national conference."

McGregor quoted fervently anti-Israel academic Ben Saul saying the Coalition's "position is pretty disturbing, and, frankly, quite shocking, and the fact that this is even news demonstrates how extreme the Morrison government was on this" – referring to its decision to recognise west Jerusalem as Israel's capital and oppose some anti-Israel United Nations resolutions.

That Saul regards as "shocking" the former Government's recognition of west Jerusalem – which has been sovereign Israeli territory since Israel was established in 1948 and its capital since 1949 – reveals how extreme his own views are on Israel.

Meanwhile, Dave Sharma, former Australian Ambassador to Israel and former Liberal MP, told *Sky News* (Aug. 9) that the "use of the phrase occupied territories is problematic in international law. Occupied presumes that there is another sovereign whose territory that particular land belongs to. Well, the previous sovereign over the West Bank and Gaza was the Ottoman Empire, which ceased to exist over 100 years ago. The right way to characterise these territories is disputed."

A MATTER OF RECOGNITION

On the ABC's "Religion & Ethics" website (July 24), Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-CEO Peter Wertheim wrote that despite the ALP

platform encouraging the Government to recognise a Palestinian state, "recognition cannot *create* a state where none exists on the ground... It is one thing to opine that a Palestinian state *ought* to exist; it is quite another to declare that such a state already *does* exist."

Moreover, he argued that the split in Palestinian politics mitigates against recognition. Hamas, he noted, rules Gaza and refuses to recognise Israel's existence nor any agreement signed with it, while the Palestinian Authority is based in the West Bank. Wertheim said "neither Australia nor any other country, including Israel, could rely on any commitments that may be made by the Palestinian Authority or any other entity on behalf of 'the State of Palestine' as a whole... So, to what, exactly, would Australia be extending official recognition?"

NOTHING TO DECLARE

On Aug. 2, "Religion & Ethics" ran British academic Victor Kattan's response to Wertheim, arguing that there were no legal impediments to recognising a Palestinian state and implying Australia should do so.

On Aug. 10, Wertheim replied saying that "Kattan argues that a Palestinian state does not have to exist before it is recognised, and that a putative new state can be ushered into existence by the act of recognition itself. As Kattan points out, this idea is known in international law as the 'constitutive theory' of state recognition..."

"The alternative, more widely accepted view is known as the 'declaratory theory', which maintains that recognition is merely an acknowledgement by other states of an already-existing reality. A new state acquires a legal personality and legal

capacity only if and when it actually begins to operate as a State 'on the ground'... In practice, and in their public statements, the nations of the world have generally followed the declaratory theory rather than the constitutive theory."

Meanwhile, writing in the *Canberra Times* (Aug. 17), Melbourne writer Josh Feldman pointed out that during Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' recent visit to China, he denied the regime was persecuting Muslim Uyghurs, claiming that Beijing's policies in the region have "nothing to do

with human rights and are aimed at excising extremism and opposing terrorism and separatism."

Feldman said this "speaks volumes about the nature of the state many in Labor want to recognise: an oppressive, kleptocratic, inept regime that has long prioritised extremism over peace with its neighbour."

VIEW FROM THE IVORY TOWER

On *ABC Radio National* "Saturday Extra" (Aug. 12), veteran academic

and Israel critic Dennis Altman conceded that despite his support for Australia recognising a Palestinian state, "there is of course no particularly well-functioning state at the moment."

Yet he traduced opponents of unilateral recognition by saying, "the people who oppose that move keep talking about a two-state solution and yet when they're offered a possibility of doing something concrete, they suddenly oppose it." Those who argue for a two-state solution have strong reason to believe that recognising



IN PARLIAMENT

(Note: For the parliamentary debate regarding the Federal Government decision to refer to the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza as "occupied Palestinian territories" and settlements there as "illegal", see page 21.)

Tony Zappia (ALP, Makin) – Aug. 9 – "According to Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, settler violence against Palestinians is 'a form of government policy, aided and abetted by official state authorities with their active participation'. Understandably, these actions provoke retaliation and jeopardise peace negotiations. Global voices supporting Palestinian statehood and injustice are growing louder while excuses for the continuing oppression of the Palestinian people are rapidly losing credibility."

Senator **Raff Ciccone** (ALP, Vic.) – Aug. 3 – "I had the pleasure of taking part in a parliamentary delegation to Israel hosted by the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, commonly known as AIJAC by many in this place. The purpose of the delegation was not just to familiarise many of us with the realities of Israeli social, economic and political life but also to get a better understanding and appreciation of the broader Middle Eastern landscape... It was my first time in the state of Israel, and I was overwhelmed by how much history there was."

Tania Lawrence (ALP, Hasluck) Standing Committee on Economics – July 25 – "We're seeing increasing drought, hail, floods... Obviously, that's going to have incredible adverse impacts on agriculture, and yet we have other countries such as Israel, for example, where 40% of crops are grown in the desert, and where water scarcity and technology is key to being able to achieve the yields that they are. One example... is that they are able to produce a tomato yield in excess of 300 tonnes per hectare, and we're sitting at around 100 so."

The following comments are from the Victorian Parliament on Aug. 15:

Opposition Leader **John Pesutto** (Lib., Hawthorn) – "I desire

to move, by leave:

That this house:

(a) notes the Albanese government's decision to abandon sensible diplomacy and its harsh stance towards our democratic friend Israel;

(b) notes that this decision aligns the federal Labor government with its Labor left faction; and

(c) calls on the Premier to publicly distance himself from his faction's stance."

Deputy Opposition Leader **David Southwick** (Lib., Caulfield) – "I desire to move, by leave:

That this house:

(a) notes the worrying, but deeply important, findings of the Australian Jewish University Experience Survey;

(b) affirms our bipartisan commitment to fighting antisemitism; and

(c) calls on the Minister for Education to bring university vice-chancellors, Jewish students and leaders together to work towards a solution."

(Leave for both was refused. On Aug. 17, John Pesutto moved that the house move to debate the Southwick motion, saying "Antisemitism is a most insidious form of racism... it calls on us as a Parliament to take prompt action." However, after debate, the motion was voted down along party lines, the ALP and Greens opposing on the grounds that there was not time to debate it this sitting.)

Shadow Special Minister of State **David Davis** (Lib., Southern Metropolitan) – "...Senator Wong has said... they are going to start referring to the 'occupied Palestinian territories'... this has certainly upset many in the Jewish community. The Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council has blasted the shift as a 'profound disappointment'... AIJAC executive director Colin Rubenstein said: 'It is incredibly counter-productive to label these areas as occupied Palestinian territories, with the government purporting to know what the boundaries of any future two-state resolution will look like...' I do not think they should have changed the description... I call on the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the Premier, if possible, to advocate against this move..."

a Palestinian state that does not yet exist would be the opposite of doing something “concrete” to bring such a resolution closer, and would prefer Australia instead help press Palestinian leaders to return to genuine peace talks.

Altman also called for Australia to “engage in dialogue with countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, which... are emotionally and politically aligned with the Palestinian cause and work with them towards some sort of internationally enforced settlement.” This is an absurd proposition given neither state has diplomatic relations with Israel, Malaysian politics is riddled with open antisemitism and both nations have been ardent enforcers of boycotts of the Jewish state.

GUARDIAN GOES TO WATER

Guardian Australia Middle East correspondent Bethan McKernan’s report on Aug. 6 about waterparks in areas of the West Bank controlled by the Palestinian Authority overflowed with anti-Israel propaganda.

McKernan said, “access to water for Palestinians is greatly impaired by the occupation: Israel controls about 80% of the water reserves in the West Bank, but both the West Bank and Gaza Strip face severe water stress and drought.”

In fact, Israel supplies more water to the Palestinians in the West Bank than it is required to under the Oslo Accords. Moreover, both Hamas, which runs Gaza, and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, choose not to implement best practice water policies, despite Israeli offers to help. This includes such simple practices as recycling, maintaining or replacing old broken pipes and preventing water loss through evaporation.

The report said, “the World Health Organization’s recommended water access level is between 50 and 100 litres per capita a day, but a UN study from 2021 found that Palestin-

ians in the parts of the Jordan Valley under total Israeli control can access between just 30 and 50 litres a day, whereas Israeli settlers living in the same area have 320 litres a day. Palestinians in Area A have between 75 and 100 litres a day.”

Given the vast majority of Palestinians live in Area A and only a few thousand are in the Jordan Valley (where there are some illegal hamlets with limited access to water infrastructure), it is clear most Palestinians have an adequate supply of water.

McKernan also indulged in hyperbole with her statement that “Jericho’s waterpark entrepreneurs have had to get creative. One park is supplied by Mekorot, Israel’s national water company, another by the Palestinian Water Authority, and the Safari AquaPark, which also owns the land, has been able to dig its own wells.” In other words, there is a proliferation of sources of water for Jericho.

BACK TO THE 60s

ABC Radio National “Religion & Ethics Report” (July 19) interviewed Aparna Gopalan from *Jewish Currents*, a far-left US magazine with a virulently anti-Israel agenda. She accused pro-Israel advocacy groups in the US of teaching extremist Hindu nationalist groups how to block criticism.

According to Gopalan, Hindu activists are deflecting accusations against supporters of contentious issues, such as the Hindu caste system, by comparing any criticism to claims of antisemitism experienced by Jews. Gopalan said Jewish groups “encourag[e] this strategy”.

One organisation Gopalan named was “this very influential group in the Jewish community in the US, which is called the ADL, the Anti-Defamation League, and they’ve pioneered a strategy that is now being used by Hindu groups... you’ll find the ADL being pro-LGBTQ rights, pro-abortion in certain cases. They’ll be against, you know, racism against Black people in

the US, but they’ll... take the most reactionary positions possible on the question of liberation for the people of Palestine.”

In fact, the ADL supports the two-state solution formula for peace which calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state living in peace side by side with Israel. Gopalan’s use of the words “reactionary” and “liberation” in describing this stance reeked of mindless 1960s-style radical sloganeering.

SQUAD GAME

Another effort to smear a mainstream US pro-Israel organisation came via *Guardian* writer Chris McGreal, who (Aug. 12) ran a beat up about US Congressional Democrats who travelled to Israel on a study tour organised by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

Referring to AIPAC as “a hardline lobbying group”, McGreal regurgitated the talking points of the left-wing “Justice Democrats”.

According to McGreal, the Justice Democrats which “helped fund election campaigns for [congresswomen] Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other members of the ‘Squad’ critical of Israeli policies” had “asked why the [Democratic] party was working with AIPAC when it endorsed the re-election campaigns of more than 100 Republican members of Congress who tried to block Joe Biden’s presidential victory.”

In fact, far from simply being “critical of Israeli policies,” some in the Squad support the BDS movement calling for Israel’s destruction, and have been accused of antisemitism.

McGreal made absolutely no attempt at balance, instead quoting only spokespeople from rival left-wing Jewish organisations.

This included Hadar Susskind, President of Americans for Peace Now, who accused AIPAC of “defend[ing] Israel’s ultranationalist government and... seeking to defeat progressive members of Congress.”

Except that AIPAC also supports people like House minority leader Hakeem Jeffries, an African American member of the Democrat's progressive wing. AIPAC is a mainstream pro-Israel organisation which backs both Democrats and Republicans who support Israel.

MATTERS FOR JUDGEMENT

AIJAC's Ran Porat was interviewed on *ABC Radio National* "Between the Lines" (Aug. 3) to discuss the ongoing crisis in Israel over the current Netanyahu Government's proposed judicial reform agenda.

Dr Porat explained that because Israel does not have a constitution and uses a unicameral system of government, in the 1990s the Supreme Court "took upon itself to protect civil rights, to protect the civilians against the government."

Only when the Court "started to block policies that the government of the day didn't like" did this suddenly become an issue, Porat said, adding that "[Israeli PM Binyamin] Netanyahu himself protected the Supreme Court and he glorified it many times... as a beacon of democracy."

Addressing the supposed threat posed by the higher birth rate among Israel's ultra-Orthodox population to Israel's future as a secular, economically strong country, Porat challenged the claim that the ultra-Orthodox endanger Israel's economic success. He said "the secular population has an immense influence on the ultra-Orthodox population, and they are intermingled. They are part of the job market... part of the economy. We can see hi-tech ultra-Orthodox... I actually see [a] positive future in that respect."

LOST IN THE WEST BANK

ABC Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn's online article and video report on *ABC TV* "7pm News"

(July 30) about West Bank settlement outpost Pnei Kedem – co-founded by Australian-Israeli Michael Lourie – included numerous errors and important omissions.

Horn incorrectly claimed Pnei Kedem was a "recently legalised settlement." In fact, despite government announcements of an intention to legalise it, this hasn't actually happened.

Both reports stressed as fact that settlements "are illegal under international law" and to back this up quoted Dror Sadot, a political activist with no legal background currently working for the left-wing Israeli NGO B'Tselem. She asserted that "international law is very clear. You cannot take... citizens of an occupier and move it to an occupied territory."

In fact, many eminent jurists argue Israel is legally entitled to build West Bank settlements, and Horn should have included at least some balance.

Both of Horn's reports also stated that "Judea and Samaria is how religious Jews refer to the parcel of land recognised internationally as the West Bank." In fact, until Jordan occupied those areas in the 1948 war, Judea and Samaria were the internationally accepted terms for the mountainous areas now known as the West Bank.

Other misrepresentations included a claim that "Israel is rapidly expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank" and that "this year already a record number of housing units have been approved in the West Bank, in line with the Netanyahu government's plan for massive settlement expansion." In fact, due to high interest rates and inflation, actual housing starts in the settlements are currently at their lowest level in 13 years (see p. 11).

Another false assertion was the statement that "new settlements have been approved year on year." In fact, there has only been one new settlement approved in the last two decades.

ABC ERRORS

The ABC was heavily criticised for a headline it put on a website report (Aug. 6) about a Palestinian terrorist who was killed after he shot dead a Tel Aviv municipal patrol officer.

The headline "Palestinian man killed in Tel Aviv shooting that leaves another critically injured", turned the terrorist aggressor into a victim.

After Zionism Victoria complained, the headline was amended to "Tel Aviv shooting leaves one man critically injured and one dead" and an editor's note put on the webpage noting the change. However, no apology was offered.

Meanwhile, the ABC amended an online report (Aug. 8) after AIJAC complained it contained errors. The report referred to the Albanese Government's July 1 statement, which it claimed had "said the government of Israel's approval of new settlements in the West Bank – over 5,700 – further reduced 'the prospects for peace.'"

Israel had of course not announced 5,700 new settlements, and the Government's statement had not said it had but expressed concern over approval of "5,700 new settlement units in the West Bank."

The amended ABC article reflected what the Government statement actually said.

CALLING TIME

Citing research by AIJAC's Oved Lobel, the *Australian* (Aug. 16) called on the Albanese Government to impose a new round of sanctions on Iran, after Canada and the UK did so in response to the regime supplying Russia with drones for its war in Ukraine.

The editorial noted, "This is the 13th time since October 2022 Ottawa has intensified its targeted sanctions against Iran."

The paper chided the Government for believing "financial sanctions and travel bans [it] imposed in March on 14 Iranian 'entities responsible for egregious human rights abuses' were enough."

Allon Lee

REINVENTING THE PAST

The Albanese Government's erroneous claim that its decision to call the West Bank "occupied Palestinian territories" was simply a reversion to longstanding Australian government practice was largely reproduced in media reports.

The headline on news.com.au's report (Aug. 8) stated, "Labor... to resume recognition of 'Occupied Palestinian Territories'," a claim reiterated in the introduction.

The *Guardian Australia's* Daniel Hurst and Josh Butler (Aug. 8) also fell for the spin, writing, "the... government will reinstate the term 'Occupied Palestinian Territories'."

Nine Newspapers' James Massola and Matthew Knott got it right (Aug. 8), writing, "[Foreign Minister Penny] Wong has also previously referred to the Palestinian territories in official statements rather than the occupied Palestinian territories."

The ABC quickly adopted the Government's narrative, a *News Radio* report (Aug. 8) ending with a comment, "the Federal Government looking to strengthen its objection to Israeli settlements in the West Bank. That's the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel."

SBS TV "World News" (Aug. 9) newsreader Janice Petersen's introduction to Richelle Harrison-Plesse's report said it was a "move that was swiftly criticised by Jewish groups as inaccurate and ahistorical."

Although Harrison-Plesse's report did not say it was a reversion, later that night on *SBS Radio*, a script she prepared referenced, "the Government's decision to reinstate the term 'occupied Palestinian territories'."

Similarly, the *Australian Financial Review's* Andrew Tillet (Aug. 9) wrote, "Amid a backlash from Jewish groups, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese defended an announcement to revert to describing East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza as 'occupied Palestinian territories'."

On Aug. 9, the *Australian's* Ben Packham wrote that calling the West Bank "Occupied Palestinian Territories" was "a move to appease the party's Left and avoid embarrassing challenges to [Albanese's] authority at next week's national ALP conference."

On Aug. 10, AIJAC's Dr Rubenstein tackled the "reversion" claims in the *Daily Telegraph*, writing, "contrary to the Government's claims, this is not simply a reversion to the stance of previous Labor governments. No previous Aus-

tralian government of any persuasion has ever taken the position that the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem are all properly termed 'occupied Palestinian territory', and for good reasons... no Palestinian state has ever existed, so there is no such thing as sovereign 'Palestinian territory'. Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem from Jordan – which illegally occupied those areas – in a defensive war in 1967. Before that,

the boundaries of the West Bank and Gaza were simply armistice lines, not national borders."

Five days after the announcement, *ABC TV* "Insiders" host David Speers (Aug. 13) said, "The Government's now adopted new

language or reverted to old language, if you like, that describes the territories as occupied Palestinian territories." But on the following week's episode, Speers only claimed that Labor had "gone back to declaring the West Bank and Gaza as occupied territories."

In the *Australian* (Aug. 15), AIJAC's Ahron Shapiro challenged the Government's assertion that the West Bank has historically been referred to by Australian governments as "occupied Palestinian territories", writing "you'd be hard-pressed to find any evidence to support this claim."

He also quoted senior Clinton Administration official Madeline Albright in 1994 stating at a UN Security Council meeting, "We simply do not support the description of the territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 war as 'occupied Palestinian territory'... this language could be taken to indicate sovereignty, a matter which both Israel and the PLO have agreed must be decided in negotiations on the final status of the territories."

In the *Canberra Times* (Aug. 20), Mark Kenny wrote the Government "revert[ed] to its previous descriptions of the West Bank as 'occupied' territory" and attacked the reaction of the "Israel lobby" to the change as "typically unrestrained."

The paper published Colin Rubenstein's letter responding to Kenny (Aug. 24) noting, "the government did not simply say it would describe the West Bank as 'occupied' territory, as Kenny states. It has determined it will describe all of the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza as 'occupied Palestinian territories'. While previous Australian governments have casually used the terms 'occupied' or 'Palestinian', no previous Australian government has adopted this as the official description."

THE LAST WORD

Jeremy Jones

SCHOOL DAYS

There has been a great deal of recent media coverage of antisemitism in state schools.

This is after decades of the promotion of multiculturalism and programmes by the Jewish community and others to try to end racist bullying.

On my first day of high school, I knew exactly one person in my school, and he took me to meet his friends. After they each gave their names and I gave mine, one of them said “I have a better name for you than Jones, you will be Jewns.”

It took me a few seconds to realise that what he had done was to highlight, and mock, the fact that I was Jewish.

The other boys laughed, making it clear that they found this bullying, which was ongoing, amusing.

At football training, the widely respected captain of one of the teams said that he had to get the Jewish kids to move more quickly. He then took coins out of his pocket, threw them down, and said “let’s see how fast the Jews really can run.”

I picked up the coins, returned them to the captain, and let him know that I had got the message – not everybody was viewed equally in this team.

Throughout my school years I heard that Jews were miserly, dishonest in business dealings and always suspect when they did anything which appeared altruistic.

I was once sitting with a group of high school friends when one of them started making nasty comments about “the Jews”. When I objected, I was told that he wasn’t talking about me, but about a group of students in our year who were predominantly, if not entirely, children of European migrants, including Holocaust survivors, whereas I was a fifth generation Australian.

Trying to help even my friends understand what was wrong with their antisemitism was difficult enough, but

behaviour by teachers was on another level.

As I reached the upper years of high school, Jewish students

younger than me would come and tell me when they had been bullied by antisemites, and I became a quiet support to help them work with what was essentially a sympathetic and understanding teaching staff.

One student told me that his history teacher made references to Australian banks being controlled by Jews, which we could easily demonstrate was not just wrong, but an antisemitic myth. I know that this resulted in some action against that teacher, although the details were never made public.

More extraordinarily, a number of students came to tell me that one day a teacher had abused one of his students, telling the class that he was sick of their “Jewish arrogance”.

They were doubly alarmed, as the student being bullied by his teacher wasn’t even Jewish. I reported the incident to the headmaster, who had not heard about it from anyone in the class. Once again, it seemed the matter was then settled satisfactorily within the school.

I could say quite a bit more about my own experiences, but I know many not only had it much worse, but did not have the tools required to help them survive, let alone thrive.

There is absolutely no logical reason that a Jewish Australian, and especially a child, should not be able to live their life without vilification, racist stereotyping, discrimination or mockery.

Those who attended Jewish schools didn’t have the issue of being a minority in the playground to deal with, but often found themselves the subject of abuse and insults while wearing their school uniform on their way to and from school.

It is an unpleasant reality that antisemitism has many sources and a multiplicity of manifestations.

One of the problems common to many of the recent stories of episodic antisemitism in certain schools in New South Wales and Victoria has been the failure of teachers and administrators to act promptly and effectively.

It is simply outrageous that so many young people are having such horrible experiences in Australia even today.



Shockingly, despite Australia’s progress as a multicultural society, antisemitic bullying remains a problem in our public schools (Image: Shutterstock)



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