



## “A GRAND BARGAIN”?

The Biden Administration pushes for a wider peace deal in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This AIR edition looks at the prospects of the US Biden Administration's efforts to push for a "grand bargain" to end the Gaza conflict – including normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia in exchange for "substantial steps" toward the creation of a Palestinian state.

Israeli analyst Ilan Evyatar looks at the Israeli internal arguments about accepting any such plan – especially in the wake of the vulnerabilities exposed by the October 7 mass-attack – and the political realities at play. Plus, Washington Institute expert David Makovsky explains the security guarantees required to make any such plan acceptable to Israelis, while former US senior official Douglas Feith explores the Palestinian leadership deficits currently making such an idea look all but impossible.

Also featured this month is top Israeli-Arab journalist Khaled Abu Toameh documenting how Hamas is using Gaza's civilians both as human shields and scapegoats for its own crimes. In addition, leading expert Matthew Levitt, also of the Washington Institute, reviews the development of Hamas over the past 18 years.

Finally, don't miss noted scholar Zachary Abuza on the controversial new Indonesian President-elect Prabowo Subianto or legal academic Mark Meierowitz's analysis of the unprecedented "provisional orders" for Israel's war against Hamas issued by the International Court of Justice.

Please send us your comments on any aspect of this edition at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au).

Tzvi Fleischer

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US Secretary of State Antony Blinken with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem, October 2023 (Image: Kobi Gideon/ GPO/ Flickr)



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

# DON'T THROW HAMAS A LIFELINE

**“Y**ou may have missed it amid the media defeatism,” the editorial for the *Wall Street Journal* opened on February 4, “but Israel is winning its war in Gaza.”

What was true then is even more true now. As Israeli journalist Haviv Rettig Gur revealed during his recent visit to Australia (see page 21), over the last three months, the IDF hasn't just been winning the war, having defeated most of Hamas' armed battalions, it has also learned a great deal about how to better counter Hamas' massive tunnel threat and eliminate Hamas terrorists without having to fight as destructively above ground.

According to Israeli military sources, Hamas' Khan Younis Brigade has now been essentially defeated, leaving the southern Gaza city of Rafah with its four Hamas battalions the last significant territory under Hamas' control.

In addition to being Hamas' final bastion, Rafah, along the Egyptian border, is also the key to preventing Hamas from dominating and benefitting from current and future aid flows into Gaza, and being able to continue to smuggle arms into Gaza through tunnels under the border.

Unless Hamas can somehow be forced to make a deal that amounts to effective surrender – which appears very unlikely – there should be no doubt that the war cannot end without defeating those remaining battalions; killing, capturing or forcing into exile the organisation's top leadership, thought to be hiding in Rafah; and ending Hamas' ability to control cross-border aid and arms flows.

Otherwise, the terror group's rule over Gaza – focused wholly on turning it into a dedicated terror base riddled with tunnels and other military infrastructure – will likely continue. There would be every likelihood that Hamas would soon attempt to repeat the murderous attack it perpetrated against Israel on October 7, as it says it intends to.

As for the fate of the 134 Israeli hostages still being held in Gaza, most Israeli analysts agree that only continued military pressure will convince Hamas to lower its terms to agree to another hostages-for-temporary ceasefire deal like the one it agreed to last November.

Since then, Hamas has been making delusional demands tantamount to requiring Israel's complete surrender in exchange for any release of more hostages – including withdrawing all Israeli troops from and ending all aerial surveillance of Gaza, terminating the blockade of military material into Gaza, and freeing hundreds of terrorist prisoners chosen by Hamas itself.

These are all “obvious non-starters” as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted.

Admittedly, the population of Rafah has swelled to 1.2 million people during the war, mostly from civilians fleeing the fighting in northern Gaza. It's true that in the war's early stages, the IDF told Gazans to move south for their own safety. And one cannot but feel sympathy for the hardships faced by Palestinian civilians who have had to relocate one or more times and are now being asked to move again – though it's worth remembering the distances involved are only a few kilometres.

That said, the slogan we keep hearing that the refugees in Rafah “have no place to go” is simply wrong. As the *WSJ* has reported, the IDF has discussed with the US, Egypt and some Gulf states some very feasible evacuation plans for Rafah's refugees to pre-prepared camps along the Gazan coastline, possibly with Egyptian oversight.

Israel's military has emphasised repeatedly that just as there is no victory over Hamas

without Rafah, there will be no invasion of Rafah before civilians have been given ample time and means to relocate to safer area – and rightfully so.

Given all this, the joint statement released by the Prime Ministers of Australia, Canada and New Zealand on Feb. 15, expressing “grave concern” over Israeli plans to enter Rafah while calling for a ceasefire in which “ Hamas must lay down its arms and release all hostages immediately,” displayed disturbing contradictions and a lack of realism.

It would of course be ideal if Israel’s war against Hamas could be ended by the latter agreeing to lay down its arms and release all hostages, obviating the need for Israel to undertake military operations into Rafah. But as noted above, Hamas’ current demands demonstrate it is nowhere near agreeing to anything of the sort. So if Israel can’t enter Rafah, but Hamas won’t lay down its arms, what happens then?

Moreover, the three PMs also quite rightly called for a negotiated ultimate two-state resolution to achieve lasting peace and security. However, this can’t possibly happen while Hamas, dedicated to both Israel’s destruction and killing Jews, retains power in Gaza. PM Albanese and Foreign Minister Wong have acknowledged as much in the past by repeatedly insisting that Hamas must have no role in Gaza’s future.

The only way to disarm Hamas and to prevent it from

scuttling any future hope for a political resolution is to decisively defeat it, and that will only happen if Israel does conduct a military campaign in Rafah – or the threat of such a campaign forces Hamas to back down from its far-fetched demands.

Wishful thinking – or a vague feeling that “there must be a better way” – cannot change this reality.

This disconcerting unrealism of the Feb. 15 statement reflects a wider trend of fanciful and self-contradictory thinking that has crept into much of Western policymaking in recent weeks regarding the war – including the problematic draft resolution submitted to the UN Security Council by the Biden Administration on Feb. 19.

It’s time to lower the hysteria and design a both principled and reality-based approach to resolving the Rafah military conundrum. This must protect civilian lives as much as possible, yet also close the chapter on Hamas rule in Gaza, which has caused so much pain and suffering to Israelis and Palestinians alike. Otherwise, such suffering will only continue.

It would be simply tragic to throw Hamas a lifeline at the precise moment when its collapse is imminent – thus snatching defeat for Israel from the jaws of victory – and miss the opportunity to move Palestinians and Israelis in a new direction of conflict resolution instead of continued bloodshed.

AIR

## “” WORD FOR WORD

“We never said that they can’t go into Rafah to remove Hamas. Hamas remains a viable threat to the Israeli people. And the Israelis and the IDF, absolutely, are going to continue operations against their leadership and their infrastructure... We don’t want to see another October 7th. What we’ve said is we don’t believe that it’s advisable to go in in a major way in Rafah without a proper, executable, effective, and credible plan for the safety of the more than a million Palestinians that are taking refuge in Rafah.”

**US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby (White-house.gov, Feb. 15).**

“Those who want to prevent us from operating in Rafah are essentially telling us: ‘Lose the war.’ I won’t let that happen. We won’t capitulate to any pressure... There is no alternative to total victory. And there is no way to achieve total victory without destroying those battalions in Rafah.”

**Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (Times of Israel, Feb. 17).**

“The reality is that when it comes to avoiding civilian harm, there is no modern comparison to Israel’s war against Hamas... Despite the unique challenges Israel faces in its war against Hamas, it has implemented more measures to prevent civilian casualties than any other military in history.”

**John Spencer, Chair of Urban Warfare Studies at West Point’s Modern War Institute (Newsweek, Jan. 31).**

“This slowdown, speedup thing is like a cycle that for me does not alter the fundamental trend, which is a trend of constant increase in [Iran’s] inventory of highly enriched uranium... There is a concerning rhetoric, you may have heard high officials in Iran saying they have all the elements for a nuclear weapon lately.”

**International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi (Reuters, Feb. 20).**

“In addition to these 12 workers, we have significant indications based on intelligence, that over 30 UNRWA workers participated in the massacre, facilitated the taking of hostages, looted and stole from Israeli communities... [UNRWA] lost legitimacy and can no longer function as a UN body... 1,468 workers are known to be active in Hamas and PIJ.”

**Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant briefs reporters on UNRWA’s ties to terrorism in Gaza (Times of Israel, Feb. 16).**





Tzvi Fleischer

## WHAT INCITEMENT TO GENOCIDE REALLY LOOKS LIKE

“Genocide” has become the buzzword surrounding the Israel-Hamas war – the key slogan proclaimed by pro-Palestinian activists demanding a ceasefire that would leave Hamas in power, despite the absurdity of any such claim as a matter of law.

In fact, elements of the pro-Palestinian lobby have been making the argument that Israel is engaged in genocide of the Palestinians for years, stretching the definition of the term way past the breaking point to basically claim that any Israeli-Palestinian violence whatsoever amounts to genocide because it is rooted in supposed Israeli racism against Palestinians. So these groups were primed and determined to deploy the term again once Israel’s war with Hamas began to lead to Palestinian casualties in Gaza.

The core element for making a case that something is genocide requires establishing specific intent “to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group,” so the statements of Israeli leaders were scoured to try to establish such intent. And predictably, things were found that could be stretched, or misrepresented, into an argument for it – such as Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant saying, “We are fighting human animals” and an Israeli parliamentarian talking about a need to “flatten Gaza”, comments which were both made shortly after the October 7 attacks. Never mind the first was clearly a reference to Hamas terrorists, not Palestinians broadly, and the second was ambiguous hyperbole from a backbencher with no role in setting Israeli military policy – such quotes gave at least some ostensible plausibility to the “genocide” sloganeering. They were spread on pro-Palestinian social media for that purpose, and then used in South Africa’s case against Israel at the International Court of Justice

But anyone who wants to see what real genocidal intent looks like should have a look at a book recently discovered in Gaza and made public by Israeli President Itzhak Herzog. The book is titled *The End of the Jews*, and it was apparently written by Mahmoud al-Zahar, one of the founders of Hamas (though there is some dispute about this).

The book has chapters such as “The world’s burning hatred for the Jews”, “The general corruption of the Jews” and “Reasons to expel the Jews.” It features blood libel,

the age-old accusation that Jews use the blood of Christian children for rituals, and antisemitic tropes asserting Jewish obsession with wealth and plans to dominate non-Jewish people.

But much of the book is devoted to praising the Nazi efforts to annihilate Jews during the Holocaust, which are held up as a role model to emulate.

That is what incitement to genocide actually looks like – explicit, detailed demonisation of an entire people and praise for their systematic mass murder, not the ambiguous weak tea that pro-Palestinian activists tried to cherry pick from Israeli expressions of shock and anger after October 7.

This is the sort of incitement that leads to horror stories like the Hamas terrorist who, on October 7, called his parents from Kibbutz Mefalsim to announce to them joyfully, “Look how many I killed with my own hands. Your son killed Jews!... I’m talking to you from a Jewish woman’s phone. I killed her and I killed her husband. I killed ten with my own hands! Dad, ten with my own hands... Mom, your son is a hero.”

Of course, the Hamas charter also contains an explicit call for genocide of Jews, citing an Islamic *Hadith* (traditional saying attributed to the prophet Muhammad) predicting that the Muslims are destined to murder all Jews in the end times.

And yet there are people who try to deny Hamas has any animosity toward the Jewish people. For instance, UN Rapporteur Francesca Albanese vehemently denounced French President Emmanuel Macron for saying October 7 was the “greatest antisemitic massacre of our century.” Albanese insisted instead that “The victims of 7/10 were not killed because of their Judaism, but in response to Israel’s oppression.”

Yet not only antisemitism, but genocidal antisemitism, is dead easy to find in Hamas sources – if you are willing to look.

Albanese represents a larger class of people who are completely unwilling to look when it comes to

people they sympathise with – and who are simultaneously determined to pin ridiculous claims on people they do not like based on the flimsiest evidence. Albanese also claimed that what Israel is doing in Gaza is “similar to what happened in the Holocaust.”

When concepts essential to international law and basic morality like genocide are so misused, distorted and abused in this way, it makes one despair of any hope that the world overall can be made a more peaceful and law-abiding place.



Israeli President Herzog with a book found in Gaza: *The End of the Jews* (Image: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

## WHY IS AID NOT REACHING GAZANS?

If you listen to the Australian media, particularly the ABC, you have probably heard story after story quoting UN officials and aid agency heads warning that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic and adequate humanitarian aid is simply not reaching desperate Gazans. And there is always a spoken or unspoken implication that Israel is not allowing in enough aid to Gaza.

You are very unlikely to have seen the pictures that Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) posted on X (formerly Twitter) on Feb. 15 showing what it said was "the content of 500 trucks of humanitarian aid on the Gazan side of Kerem Shalom [the main Israeli goods crossing point], AFTER Israeli inspection, waiting to be picked up and distributed by UN orgs."

COGAT also wrote: "It is the 3rd day in a row that hundreds of trucks are not picked up. The UN needs to scale up their operations."

In other words, there is evidence Israel is making good on its promise back in November to expeditiously allow in as much aid as agencies can bring in – and the real problem is that these agencies cannot distribute it effectively.

Just don't expect to ever hear that on the ABC.

AIR



Shmuel Rosner

## UNRWA IS A THREAT TO COEXISTENCE

Like all things, books have their peak moment. For many of them, it is when they are published. For others, like *The War of Return* by Einat Wilf and Adi Schwartz, it is now – four years after publication.

The book hasn't changed since it was written, neither did reality. But we did. We changed on October 7, when the tolerable UNRWA became intolerable. Ask Wilf and Schwartz, and they will tell you it was intolerable for a long time. They will tell you it is Israel's fault – to some degree – that this organisation, an agency charged with finding a solution for Palestinian refugees, still operates, when a fourth or a fifth generation of supposed refugees is growing up.

UNRWA is not a problem solver, it is a problem exacerbator.

There are two problems with UNRWA, one of which became evident in the last two to three weeks, as more reports about UNRWA employees' involvement in the October massacre and more evidence of UNRWA employees' assistance to Hamas came out. There's evidence in almost all UNRWA facilities: a tunnel beneath an office, a stash of ammunition or cash, a person who guards hostages, all courtesy of this UN-sponsored human rights organisation.

This current problem is the result of the original prob-

lem. As UNRWA became entrenched, its mission was no longer to settle the refugees and their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great grandchildren, but rather to keep their dream of "going home" alive. That is, to keep a sinister and disruptive vision for the Palestinians, one in which Israel somehow ceases to exist as millions of supposed exiled Palestinians go back to places that were resettled decades ago by other people.

Such a vision should not come as great surprise, because UNRWA is an international organisation by name and funding only. It gets its allocations from a naïve, or baleful, world, it draws its legitimacy from being an agent of the international community. But in fact, it is a Palestinian organisation funded by outsiders. Other than a few foreigners in managerial positions, almost all UNRWA employees are Palestinians. In Gaza, they are Gazans, and, in most cases, supporters of Hamas. They get their salaries from you – Americans, or Canadians, or Norwegians [or *Australians, ed*] – and they work for Yahya Sinwar, a cold-blooded killer and a master of violence.

When UNRWA takes care of schools and medicine in Gaza, all expenses are paid by you. It's not because there's no money in Gaza to fund these activities; it is because Hamas takes that money and uses it for other purposes, such as arming itself, digging tunnels, firing rockets. UNRWA is an agency whose work gets Hamas off the hook of having to provide for the population of Gaza.

Hamas is engaged in violence, while UNRWA keeps the people of Gaza fed, clothed and schooled. Hamas has free hands to do what it wants to do, UNRWA has a mission that keeps it viable. All this is well known and documented.

There's no news – except for the fact that we were suddenly made to realize that UNRWA is not a nuisance, it is a threat. It is a threat that should be eliminated along with Hamas rule. There are less corrupt and less political aid agencies that can replace UNRWA, such as USAID, the World Food Program, and other groups that already have functioning operations in certain Palestinian areas.

The most eager supporters of this decision – to eliminate UNRWA – ought to be those who want to someday see a cure for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The cure will not come when the world funds an organisation whose main activity is to keep a wound open, to preach the gospel of victimhood, to educate the next generation of people with no dream other than the destruction of other people's homes and country.

That this organisation is also swarming with terrorist supportive employees is not a bug, but a feature. You can't run an army by staffing it with pacifists, you can't run a school by staffing it with illiterates – and you can't run an UNRWA believing that its workers will be a peace-loving, solution-seeking, peace-promoting bunch.

AIR



Shmuel Rosner is a Senior Fellow at the Jewish People Policy

Institute as well as an analyst for Kan News TV. He also writes a weekly column for the Jewish Journal in LA and for Maariv in Israel. © Jewish Journal ([jewishjournal.com](http://jewishjournal.com)), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

# ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

## AT EVERY LEVEL

Malaysia's identification with the Palestinian cause – and strong antipathy to Israel – is deeply embedded in its politics and culture. The expression of this takes many forms, as some recent examples show.

Israel's foreshadowed military action against Hamas in the Gazan city of Rafah drew a predictable response from the Malaysian foreign ministry – known by its metonym Wisma Putra – which condemned any Israeli large-scale offensive in Rafah “in the strongest terms”.

“This dastardly military operation clearly underscores the key goal of the Zionist regime to annihilate the Palestinians from their own land... Malaysia echoes the calls by the United Nations secretary-general for an immediate halt to the vile plan and urges the United Nations Security Council to take swift and decisive action to stop the massacre being perpetrated by the Zionist regime,” said the February 13 statement.

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has led the Malaysian Government to seek other ways to target “the Zionist regime”. In December, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced an immediate restriction on Israeli-flagged or Israel-associated vessels from docking or loading cargo in Malaysian ports.

The move was triggered by the impending arrival of Zim Integrated Shipping Services Ltd, Israel's largest shipping company, at Port Klang on Dec. 26, prompting the Ministry of Transport to impose a permanent ban on the company, which has been docking in Malaysia since 2002. This restriction means that Malaysia will no longer accept ships flying the Israeli flag or ships en route to Israel to load cargo in its ports.

How a move like this plays out is unknown as the shipping industry is rife with multi-layered stakeholders and the concept of ‘flag of convenience’, which refers to registering a ship in a country different from the shipowner's country to reduce operational costs, avoid the regulations of the owner's country, escape taxes, evade strict environmental regulations and hire low-wage international crew members.

However, the shipping industry is vulnerable to disruptions if a country imposes restrictions on ships from

another country, potentially affecting the interdependent logistics supply chain in the industry.

Meanwhile, one company that has already suffered damage from Israel-targeted boycotts is McDonalds, which took a big hit internationally – confirmed in its quarterly earnings report released on Feb. 11 – after its Israeli franchisee announced, in the wake of Hamas terror attack, the donation of thousands of free meals to IDF soldiers, healthcare workers and residents of the affected region. This sparked outrage in countries such as Turkey, Egypt and Lebanon, but also Indonesia and Malaysia.

In December, McDonalds Malaysia launched legal action against Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Malaysia for allegedly defaming the company. The writ of summons claimed McDonalds Malaysian businesses had suffered, putting their blame on the Malaysian NGO, which lobbies the Malaysian public, organisations and the government to boycott Israel and organisations that are “complicit with Israeli atrocities” towards Palestinians.

The local call for boycotting such products was done through social media, providing netizens with comprehensive lists. Apart from McDonald's, they include many household names such as KFC and fashion brand Zara.

The focus of outrage extends to individuals. Malaysian online communities have targeted Ipoh-based political blogger and netizen Ian Miles Cheong, who expressed sympathy for Israel on October 7 last year by tweeting on X, “I have always supported Israel's right to exist. What you're seeing now in Israel would happen everyday if not for the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Israel has a right to exist and a right to defend itself.”

Some Malaysian netizens have called for Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil to take action against Cheong under the Sedition Act, under which Malaysians can be charged for expressing views that could potentially sow discord among the communities or “bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection” against a ruler.

Cheong, whose online activity is largely right-leaning commentary upon American politics and cultural issues, told the *New Straits Times* that he wasn't “pro-Israel”, but has consistently voiced support for peace and has backed Palestine's right to exist on various platforms.

“My views on the matter have been very nuanced contrary to the regurgitated baseless claims about my past from unreliable far left-wing and transgender sources who have been literally trolling me for years due to my conservative views,” he said.

Some online commentators suggested that Cheong downplayed his support for Israel because of Malaysia's sedition laws, after a 36-year-old Malaysian man was arrested in December for having said his country should open diplomatic relations with Israel in an interview on TikTok.





Miriam Bell

## UNRWA AND THE FURY OF NZ'S ANTI-ISRAEL ACTIVISTS

Pro-Palestinian protestors recently forced New Zealand's Prime Minister to leave one of the summer go-to events for politicians just days after the Government stepped up its critical stance towards Israel's war against Hamas.

In mid-February, New Zealand joined Australia and Canada in urging Israel not to embark on a military operation in Rafah, while calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

While the statement also called for Hamas to lay down its arms and release the hostages immediately, it was the most forceful stance New Zealand's Government has yet taken against Israel's military operation.

The move followed Prime Minister Christopher Luxon telling media that "Palestinian civilians cannot pay the price of Israel trying to defeat Hamas," after Israeli strikes hit Rafah. Foreign Minister Winston Peters also met with Israel's Ambassador to New Zealand, Ran Yaakoby, to discuss the conflict.

But these developments did not satisfy the virulent anti-Israel movement in New Zealand.

On February 18, at the Big Gay Out, a centrepiece of Auckland's Pride Festival and an event intended to celebrate diversity and inclusion, Luxon's security detail initiated an abrupt exit from the event for the PM. This came after he was surrounded by a group of protestors chanting "free Palestine" and "blood on your hands" and waving signs accusing Israel of "pinkwashing".

It was a sign of the times. Politics, and foreign affairs, traditionally take a back seat over the New Zealand summer, but this summer has been long and hot, and tensions over the Israel-Gaza war have continued to simmer.

Anti-Israel protestors complain of bias against them and being "silenced", but it is impossible to escape their message. Regular demonstrations around the country are covered largely uncritically by media, while the views of tiny anti-Zionist Jewish groups are often given a platform. Pro-Palestinian graffiti and signage is common.

The movement was, however, dealt a blow in late January, as evidence emerged that at least 12 employees of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, actively participated in the October 7 attacks. Moreover, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on intelligence suggesting about 10% of UNRWA staff in Gaza are linked to militants.

New Zealand was a little slow to act, but a few days after the revelations, it became one of more than 15 donor

countries to suspend its funding to UNRWA. A planned contribution of NZ\$1 million in aid funding would not go ahead until Peters was satisfied with the investigations into the allegations, Luxon said.

This did not go down well with political opponents, such as the Green Party and former Labour prime minister Helen Clark, who spent eight years at the head of the UN Development Program which oversees UNRWA.

Clark told *Radio NZ* that it was "most regrettable that countries have acted in this precipitous way to defund the organisation on the basis of allegations." Defunding the platform would "only increase the misery and suffering of the people under bombardment," she said.

But NZ Jewish Council spokesperson Ben Kepes said it was clear that antisemitism and incitement to terrorism were systemic in UNRWA.

"As a country, we cannot reconcile continuing to fund UNRWA with combatting antisemitism and terrorism. UNRWA is part of the problem, and most certainly not part of the solution that... promotes peaceful co-existence between Palestinians and Israelis."

Israel Institute co-director David Cumin said it was great the Government had not followed the advice of Clark, but the links to terror and participation in barbaric atrocities were just the tip of the iceberg with UNRWA, he said.

"For decades, UNRWA has run schools that teach children to glorify the murder of Jews and indoctrinates them to believe Israel should not exist. We cannot claim to be an 'honest broker' or fully support a peaceful two-state solution when our tax dollars undermine prospects for peace like this."

Cumin, who has been calling for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade to reassess funding for UNRWA for many years, said Peters should find alternate means to help the Palestinians.

"All other people in need around the world are served by agencies that do not entrench conflict or work against peace, and the Palestinians deserve more than an agency that perpetuates their suffering and works with terror organisations," he said.

Peters subsequently announced a NZ\$5 million package of humanitarian support for Palestinians, which will be delivered by the UN World Food Program and UNICEF, rather than UNRWA.

But Cumin said he would like to see New Zealand stop funding the organisation permanently, as the United States has now apparently announced it is doing.

Meanwhile, political commentator Matthew Hooton has suggested that Luxon's Big Gay Out experience with the protestors might work in the PM's favour.

"The combination of Luxon's commitment to pluralism, and their yelling and screaming can only be to his advantage politically," he wrote in his blog.



# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

As of Feb. 16, at least 13,000 rockets, mortars and other projectiles had been fired at Israel since October 7, mostly from Gaza and Lebanon but also from Syria and Yemen. As of Feb. 20, 237 IDF troops had been killed in Gaza since the start of the ground invasion, while Israel estimates approximately 12,000 Hamas members had been killed. Hamas continues to hold around 134 hostages, at least 31 of whom have reportedly been killed.

Israeli operations against Hamas and other terrorist groups continue throughout the West Bank, resulting in at least 394 Palestinian deaths since October 7, according to the PA Health Ministry, mostly terrorists killed in targeted operations or those clashing with security forces.

On Feb. 16, a terrorist shot six Israelis, killing two, at the Re'em Masmiya Junction in southern Israel. There have also been numerous other stabbing and car ramming attacks.

## TWO HOSTAGES RESCUED IN RAFAH

On Feb. 12, intelligence gathered during the ground operation in Gaza allowed Israeli security forces to rescue two hostages from a building in Rafah – Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Luis Har, 70, kidnapped from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak on October 7. The terrorists guarding the two were caught by surprise and immediately killed, with more terrorists killed in a subsequent firefight. Heavy bombardment of Hamas military sites in Rafah by Israel following the rescue allowed for their safe return into Israel.

## IDF HUNTS TERRORISTS IN HOSPITALS

On Feb. 17, after repeated warnings, IDF troops entered the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza's second largest, coming under gun and rocket fire from terrorists barricaded in the hospital and its grounds. Sixteen terrorists were killed. Once inside, the Israelis detained hundreds of terror suspects, including high-ranking Hamas terrorists, some wearing medical garb, and found weapons caches, communication infrastructure, a vehicle used in the October 7 attacks and an Israeli vehicle stolen that day, as well as unopened medication that Hamas had promised to deliver to hostages in a January deal. Israeli forces also delivered supplies to the hospital.

In early February, Israeli special forces arrested approximately 20 Hamas terrorists hiding inside the Al-Amal Hospital in western Khan Younis without gunfire or injury to any patients or staff.

Meanwhile, on Jan. 30, Israeli commandos infiltrated Ibn Sina Hospital in Jenin in the West Bank, killing three members of an armed Hamas cell said to be planning imminent terror attacks. No one else was hurt.

## UNRWA'S HAMAS LINKS

On Feb. 10, the IDF revealed a massive air-conditioned Hamas computing and data centre it had discovered directly under the Gaza headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). This was connected to Hamas' tunnel system, with an entrance in an UNRWA school nearby. The data centre's electricity supply came from cables running from inside UNRWA's headquarters.

This discovery came after Israel revealed 12 UNRWA employees



Weapons found in UNRWA's Gaza headquarters (Image: IDF)

directly participated in the October 7 attacks, with Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant revealing their personal details. Israel also said it has additional intelligence that more than 30 UNRWA employees actively participated in the attacks and approximately 12% of UNRWA's 13,000 employees in Gaza are members of Hamas or other terrorist groups.

## ISRAEL'S RAFAH EVACUATION PLAN

In mid-February, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Israel had presented to the US a draft plan to evacuate civilians from Rafah before attacking Hamas there.

Under the plan, Palestinian civilians would be relocated to the coastal area of the strip into 15 campsites with 400,000 tents and medical clinics – funded by the US and Arab countries.

Senior Israel officials have repeatedly pledged that the IDF will evacuate Palestinian civilians prior to an attack on Rafah.

Senior Hamas leaders and 10,000 Hamas terrorists are thought to be hiding among the 1.2 million Palestinians in Rafah, most of whom evacuated there from other parts of the strip. Most of the remaining Israeli hostages are also assumed to be there.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials have said that their intelligence estimates

that roughly 60% of humanitarian aid entering the strip via the Rafah crossing ends up in Hamas' hands.

## ISRAEL-HEZBOLLAH VIOLENCE CONTINUES

On Feb. 3, the IDF announced Israel had struck more than 3,400 Hezbollah sites in Lebanon and Syria since October 7 in response to ongoing daily cross-border Hezbollah attacks on Israel, killing 200 terror operatives, mostly from Hezbollah. 80,000 residents of Israel's north have been evacuated from their homes ever since October 7, and 427 houses had suffered structural damage as a result of Hezbollah attacks.

Thus far, the ongoing border clashes have resulted in six civilian deaths on the Israeli side, as well as the deaths of nine IDF soldiers and reservists.

A barrage of rocket fire launched by Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon struck the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona on Feb. 19. On Feb. 14, a Hezbollah rocket barrage targeting the northern city of Safed killed an Israeli soldier.

Meanwhile, the US and four of its European allies are working on a diplomatic deal to prevent an escalation between Israel and Hezbollah based on the partial implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which ended the second Lebanon war in 2006. This plan would require Hezbollah to move its forces several kilometres away from the border.

## US RETALIATES AGAINST IRANIAN PROXY MILITIA

Three US Army soldiers were killed and 30 were injured in a Jan. 29 drone attack on their outpost in Jordan by Iranian proxy militia based in Iraq.

The US conducted airstrikes on 85 targets across Iraq and Syria on Feb. 2 in retaliation.

On Feb. 7, a US drone attack killed a commander of Iran's Kata'ib

Hezbollah proxy in Baghdad who the US said was directly responsible for planning attacks on US forces. Meanwhile, drone attacks on US bases by Iranian proxies continued.

Media reports blamed Israel for attacks on two major gas pipelines in Iran in mid-February.

## HOUTHIS ATTACKS MEET US AND UK COUNTERSTRIKES

Houthi attacks against commercial and navy ships in the Red Sea continue. A Feb. 19 missile strike on a British ship forced the crew to abandon the ship, and they also struck a Greek-flagged ship bringing humanitarian aid to Yemen. On Feb. 2, Israel used its Arrow long-range missile defence system to shoot down a rocket fired in the direction of Eilat.

On Feb. 19, the European Union launched a naval mission to help protect cargo ships against the Houthi

attacks, joining a US-led naval force already in the region.

US-led counterstrikes on the Houthis have been continuing. On Feb. 3, US and UK strikes hit 36 Houthi military targets across 13 sites in Yemen after exchanges of more limited attacks on previous days. Further US strikes on Feb. 4 killed 40 Houthi terrorists.

## AL JAZEERA JOURNALIST REVEALED TO BE HAMAS TERRORIST

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) revealed that an additional *Al Jazeera* journalist, Mohammed Wishah, was also a Hamas military commander, based on documents found on a laptop seized in northern Gaza. Wishah served in Hamas' anti-tank missile units until 2022 and later shifted to research and development in the group's aerial units. Photos showed Wishah training Hamas members and firing anti-tank missiles.

## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### UNTO WARDS

It has been well established that Hamas uses hospitals in Gaza for military purposes – for tactical advantage but also, no doubt, for the propaganda benefits of having Israeli forces being seen attacking hospitals.

However, the message that it's bad PR to attack hospitals hasn't reached some of Hamas' supporters in North America.

On Jan. 16 in New York City, pro-Palestinian protestors from the radical 'Within our Lifetime', which calls for Israel's destruction, demonstrated outside the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, accusing it of abetting genocide.

Within Our Lifetime leader Nerdeen Kiswani urged the crowd to "Make sure they hear you, they're in the windows" and led a chant of "MSK, shame on you, you support genocide too." The people "in the windows" included cancer patients, among them children. And what had this

nefarious medical institution done to "support genocide"? It had, as Kiswani explained on X (formerly Twitter), accepted a donation from billionaire Ken Griffin, who had previously spoken out against students at his alma mater Harvard University who had blamed Israel for the October 7 atrocities. That's all. Yet somehow Kiswani thought targeting a cancer hospital would help her cause.

In Toronto, on Feb. 12, there was a pro-Palestinian protest outside Mount Sinai Hospital, which was established by the Jewish community and has a Jewish Star of David in its emblem. Organisers at least had the sense to later claim – not very credibly given that protestors paused outside it for some 15 or so minutes – that the hospital wasn't specifically targeted, and was just on their protest route. This certainly didn't stop demonstrators climbing the portico and scaffolding at the hospital to wave Palestinian flags, and waylaying a Jewish doctor in his car.

Canadian PM Justin Trudeau and other officials condemned the protestors' actions as antisemitic.

## COVER STORY

## A “GRAND BARGAIN”

## OPPORTUNITY OR DANGER AFTER GAZA?

Ilan Evyatar

As the Gaza war enters its fifth month, with Israel waiting outside the gates of Rafah, having defeated Hamas’ Khan Younis division, the Biden Administration was said to be looking for a “grand bargain”. This would be a deal that would bring the Israel-Hamas conflict to an end, get the hostages released and bring about normalisation between Israel and Saudi Arabia, in exchange for “substantial steps” towards a Palestinian state.

Several European countries, including France and the United Kingdom, have reportedly raised the possibility of unilateral recognition of such a state even before talks on a comprehensive deal have begun. The Biden State Department is also said to be reviewing the possibility of a statement of intent to recognise a future demilitarised Palestinian state as part of a process to kick start a regional process, although it is unclear what form this may take.

Not unexpectedly, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has strongly rejected any such unilateral recognition. A cabinet statement passed on February 8 backed his position: “Israel absolutely rejects international diktat regarding the permanent arrangement with the Palestinians. Such an arrangement will be achieved only by direct negotiations between the parties, without preconditions... Israel will continue to oppose unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state. Such recognition, following the October 7 massacre, will award an immense and unprecedented prize to terrorism, and prevent any future peace agreement.”

This position has also been endorsed by National Unity party leader Benny Gantz, the key member of the War Cabinet – who, according to polls, would score a sweeping victory were elections to be held today – and by his fellow National Unity war cabinet member Gadi Eisenkot. Both of them are former IDF chiefs of staff.

Before examining whether the political conditions for such a “grand bargain” exist, we should take a look at how Israelis themselves feel about the possibility of a two-state resolution in the wake of October 7.

Israeli President Itzhak Herzog, who hails from Israel’s centre-left, probably spoke for most Israelis where he said in Davos on Jan. 18, “if you ask an average Israeli now about his or her mental state, nobody in his right mind is willing now to think about what will be the solution of the peace agreements, because everybody wants to know, can we be promised real safety in the future?”

Thus, polling has shown that Israelis are largely sceptical that any such peace arrangements can be made to work,

**“Netanyahu now faces perhaps the most decisive moment of his career, a juncture that is potentially fateful for the future of Israel and the Middle East”**

a trend that has been developing for some time. A Pew Research Center survey from before the Hamas massacre showed that only 35% of Israelis surveyed between March 15 and April 24, 2023, believed that “a way can be found

for Israel and an independent Palestinian state to coexist peacefully.” A Gallup poll conducted just weeks after the massacre found that 65% of Israelis were now opposed to a Palestinian state, a reversal from a decade ago when over 60% supported a Palestinian state. Moreover, the poll found that a record-high 74% of Israelis do not expect permanent peace between the sides can ever be achieved. A similar Israel Democracy Institute poll that asked whether Israel should agree to pursue a two-state resolution after the war found a 52% majority opposed.

But polling, as we all know, depends on the questions asked. A poll conducted on behalf of the pro-peace Geneva Initiative in January found only 31.7% of Israelis thought a two-state resolution was the most viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – a finding similar to the other polls. Yet when asked whether they would support or op-



Netanyahu's current cabinet, containing some hard right parties, would likely be a barrier to accepting the US plans. But could he agree to do so with support from centrist opposition parties? (Image: GPO/ Flickr)

pose an agreement signed with US support that included: return of the hostages, agreement to establish in the future a non-militarised Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and total normalisation between Israel and Saudi Arabia, a 51.3% majority of Israelis were in favour, 29.8% were against and 19.8% said they didn't know.

So, while there is a broad consensus in Israel against a Palestinian state in the near future, when it is specified that such a state would be established sometime in the future and be demilitarised, and Israel would be given strict security guarantees and gain normalisation with much of the Arab world, a majority of Israelis would likely support such a move.

What then are the chances of progress toward this kind of comprehensive agreement, and would the current Netanyahu Government be able to get on board?

Netanyahu's current hard-right coalition partners, Bezalel Smotrich and his pro-settler Religious Zionist party, and Itamar Ben-Gvir's *Otzma Yehudit* ["Jewish Power"] party, can be expected to jump ship as soon as any talk of such an agreement becomes concrete. That would leave Netanyahu with the sole option of trying to form a new coalition with the centrist National Union party and possibly Yair Lapid's *Yesh Atid* ["There is a Future"] party – which, despite Gantz's current runaway lead in the polls, has double the number of seats (25 to 12) in the current Knesset.

The question is, would Netanyahu be willing to go down that route? At a briefing I attended with Netanyahu several years ago, the Prime Minister turned to the audience and explained that he would be willing to accept a Palestinian state, "just not the Palestinian state you are thinking of." "You" was of course not referring to me personally, but the collective audience of some two

dozen journalists, apparently all guilty by association of being left-wing progressives willing to trade security for an illusion of peace (in fact, at least some of those present could be described as hard right). In other words, he would be willing to accept some kind of truncated and limited Palestinian state.

Historically, for the best part of the past 15 years, Netanyahu has vacillated between expressed willingness to accept a Palestinian state and baulking at many concrete proposals. In 2009, he said he would be willing to accept a demilitarised Palestinian state in his famous Bar Ilan speech, but then engaged in a running verbal battle with the Obama Administration over its plans to push such statehood. He did offer concessions such as a ten-month settle-

ment construction freeze, and releasing Palestinian prisoners, and was said by US mediators to have "sweated bullets" to try to find a way to agree to a workable US-negotiated "Framework Agreement" for a future two-state resolution in 2014. But he also made many public comments insisting there was no Palestinian partner for peace, and denigrating any hopes of a two-state deal.

When Donald Trump offered him the opportunity in 2020 for a peace deal with the Palestinians that would have seen Israel remain in control of much of the West Bank while giving the Palestinians minimum statehood, Netanyahu ostensibly accepted. However, in practice he preferred to focus on plans to annex some 30% of West Bank land which Israel was slated to keep under the plan. Later, he suspended planned annexation moves to facilitate the Abraham Accords normalisation deal with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

A senior figure who served in more than one Netanyahu government told me that at the end of the day, when push comes to shove, Netanyahu as the leader would always opt against a Palestinian state and would prefer to kick the can further down the road.

Netanyahu now faces perhaps the most decisive moment of his career, a juncture that is potentially fateful for the future of Israel and the Middle East.

If he chooses to stick with his hard-right partners, he may well lose the chance to make any progress on the Saudi front and Israel's relations with Europe and the United States will come under increasing strain.

If he takes this route, he will also come under growing public pressure to hold early elections – a ballot that, if present polling is anything to go by, could bring a heavy defeat, given the intelligence and military failures of October 7 that occurred on his watch.

However, early recognition of a Palestinian state by the

Europeans or the US – or extensive pressure on Israel to agree to one – could result in blowback that could give Netanyahu the ammunition to launch a campaign to shore up support on his right. He is certainly hinting that may be his political strategy. On Jan. 18, he told journalists, “Whoever is talking about the ‘day after Netanyahu’ is essentially talking about the establishment of a Palestinian state,” suggesting he may campaign as the only leader who can prevent such a state coming into being.

On the other hand, a coalition with Gantz and Lapid to facilitate a hostage deal that might lead to a “grand bargain” would also likely see his own coalition partners demanding elections as soon as the current conflict begins to wind down.

Normalisation with Saudi Arabia and other Arab and Muslim states could potentially offer him a chance to seal his legacy at the cost of a “over-the-horizon” commitment to a future demilitarised Palestinian state. But it is less clear that this option leaves him with any reasonably plausible path to remaining in power.

The arguments for backing a deal include that it presents Israel the chance to go from calamity to a situation where it expands the circle of peace, achieves full integration into an American-backed regional security architecture against Iran and gains concrete security guarantees.

On the other hand, many Israelis see any move toward Palestinian statehood at the moment as essentially rewarding Hamas for its intolerable and unprecedented violence on October 7, and have strong doubts, in the wake of Israel’s experience with past withdrawals, that any security guarantees can be truly effective.

As has often been the case over the last decade, we once again find ourselves asking, what will Netanyahu do this time? AIR

*Ilan Evyatar is a former editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem Report. He is co-author with Yonah Jeremy Bob of Target Tehran: How Israel Is Using Sabotage, Cyberwarfare, Assassination – and Secret Diplomacy – to Stop a Nuclear Iran and Create a New Middle East (Simon & Schuster, 2023) [see pp. 30-31 for Paul Monk’s review of this book – Ed].*

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## TWO STATES TALK IS HOPELESS WITHOUT ENFORCEMENT

David Makovsky

The Biden Administration hopes to use a hostage release deal to pivot from the Gaza war to a broader historic regional breakthrough between Israel and Saudi Arabia, notching a crucial strategic victory against destabilising forces in the Mideast. With its public upset by Palestinian civilian casualties during the post-October 7 Israel-Hamas war, the Saudis have now made irreversible movement towards a Palestinian state a prerequisite for such a breakthrough.

In this context, the *Washington Post* reported on February 14 that the US and several Arab states are in rapid-fire discussions to develop a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace plan with a “firm timeline” for the establishment of a Palestinian state. While this is likely a trial balloon – perhaps initiated by Arab officials – and it is far from clear if the White House will sign off on the specific dates or a detailed plan for a Palestinian state, some want a quick demonstration of progress to dampen tensions expected to rise during the month of Ramadan, which starts on March 9.

The timeline for an actual agreement is short due to the upcoming American elections: the Biden Administration wants to seal a Saudi deal before the US presidential campaign is in full swing.

This plan has, unsurprisingly, upset many in Israel, who feel this would effectively reward Hamas for its massacre of Israelis. In some analyses, the Netanyahu Government and Hamas are presented as the only real hang-ups to a grand deal that would reconcile Israel and many Arab states while achieving a two-state solution.

Yet Israeli reservations about a Palestinian state go well beyond Netanyahu and are based on real and urgent concerns, security chief among them. This must be dealt with seriously by linking progress on Palestinian statehood to meeting clear security benchmarks, without which instability is certain. An American effort that does not take this into account risks misreading the concerns of a majority of Israelis across the political spectrum.

Israeli support for two states, a strong majority in the heady days of the 1990s Oslo process, has eroded for years. The national trauma of the slaughter of 1,150 Israeli innocents – some beheaded, burned alive and raped – on October 7 and the ensuing war further hardened public opinion. In January, 59% of Jewish Israelis rejected a two-state solution as part of a package of US guarantees, normalisation with Arab states, and long-term military

peace. Support for two states is tied to perceptions of its feasibility, and Israelis have grown increasingly sceptical: a month before October 7, only 32% of Israeli Jews thought Israel and a Palestinian state could coexist peacefully.

The core reason for this opposition is more practical than ideological. Many Israelis support the idea of a compromise for peace but are wary of abandoning the status quo without an agreement with a partner they trust – in their view, the only way to provide real security and actually end the conflict.

While a dedicated minority view the West Bank as biblical patrimony which cannot be ceded, in January 2023 over 60% of Israelis were willing to accept mutual Israeli-Palestinian recognition of the other's legitimate claims, an end to the conflict and the end of future claims under a two-state solution.

If Israelis thought a deal would work, a majority would support it.

For now, though, most Israelis associate two states with a profound security risk and prefer the status quo, despite its dangers. That concern is well-founded: for the past 30 years, Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian arena has often – albeit not always – led to violence, not peace.



Security forces of the Palestinian National Authority in Bethlehem (Image: Shutterstock)

Though Israel withdrew from West Bank cities during the Oslo process, the Second Intifada erupted soon after US-led peace talks broke down in 2000. More than 1,000 Israelis were killed, many of them in suicide bombings. Withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 saw Hamas evict the mainstream Palestinian Authority (PA) from there in mere days in 2007 with a small core of heavily armed fighters, then spend 16 years developing rocket factories and a sprawling subterranean fortress unimpeded.

This was a crucial point. When the chips were down, nobody stopped Hamas from outmuscling and outmanoeuvring the PA.

Beyond the Israeli-Palestinian arena, withdrawal from the Israeli security zone in southern Lebanon did not bring peace with Hezbollah. Instead, it let the group consolidate control despite a war with Israel in 2006, ignore UN Reso-

lution 1701 to develop an arsenal of 150,000 rockets and missiles, some precision-guided, and deploy 6,000 Radwan commandos near the border.

Israel was forced to evacuate 60,000-80,000 civilians from its northern border region shortly after October 7 for fear of a similar attack.

## A FAIL-SAFE MECHANISM

The failures of Gaza and Lebanon, underscored by Hamas and Hezbollah's continued unrelenting denial of Israel's right to exist, shattered the premise – key to any peace deal – that withdrawal makes Israel safer. The lesson for Israelis is simple: without durable and substantive enforcement of demilitarisation of a future Palestinian state, any political solution to the conflict will be under permanent threat.

To be sure, Palestinians have ample reason to distrust Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu publicly endorsed a two-state solution in 2009, but later renounced it, and several key figures in his cabinet oppose a Palestinian state on ideological grounds. Continued settlement expansion has also damaged perceptions of the feasibility of two states.

While this Government likely cannot be swayed, American strategy needs to separate ideological opposition to a Palestinian state from the larger group of Israelis whose resistance stems from security concerns. To convince a majority of Israelis to support a two-state resolution and evacuate West Bank settlements, there must be a fail-safe mechanism to ensure a Palestinian state remains demilitarised. Vague principles are insufficient.

The first step, which Israel is already doing, is to remove Hamas' military capabilities and weaken it enough to be contained by Palestinian security forces.

Then, a future Palestinian state must provide dignity and sovereignty for the Palestinians and be strong enough to deal with extremist actors like Hamas, without militarising and posing a security threat to Israel. This is a delicate balance without international parallels: none of the 15 demilitarised states worldwide are in conflict zones.

Past proposals for demilitarisation outlined a Palestinian state without an air force, armour, or heavy weaponry, but with strong internal security, police, and counterterrorism forces to maintain internal order.


The key ingredient is a third party capable of simultaneously guaranteeing demilitarisation and survival of the fledgling Palestinian state. This third party would oversee border security to prevent arms smuggling, verify demilitarisation by checking for weapons factories and more, and deconflict between Israeli and Palestinian forces. After all, the US wants a Palestinian state to look like Costa Rica, but with good reason rooted in experience, Israel fears that a non-careful withdrawal could produce a Palestinian state that looks more like a dangerous mini-Iran.

The Arab states that have peace with Israel could theoretically serve this function, but there is no evidence that they want to be seen as using force against fellow Arabs. And if most Arab states will not even condemn the October 7 atrocities, what would those guarantees be worth?

Without a very serious ‘coalition of the willing’ prepared to confront bad actors, the US or NATO seem to be the only options. The US maintains a military presence in dozens of countries like Germany and South Korea on their request without eroding their sovereignty.

The idea of deploying American troops or NATO will be unattractive to Americans and Israelis alike. Americans want to avoid dangerous foreign entanglements and Israelis have no desire to complicate US-Israel relations: they are proud that Israel defends itself by itself, and do not want American lives at risk.

Israel could serve as the initial guarantor and eventually turn over authority, since it will want the ability to intervene if the PA proves unable to contain Hamas.

These critical details should not obscure the main point. Recent history indicates any discussion of a two-state solution without an accompanying enforcement mechanism is a recipe for failure. The US needs to push for a Palestinian state that actually works: otherwise Hamas and other violent extremists will overtake it and October 7 will repeat itself. 

*David Makovsky is the Ziegler Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and director of its Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations. © Times of Israel (www.timesofisrael.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## WANT TWO STATES? BUILD A BETTER PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP

**Douglas J. Feith**

**W**ho should control Gaza after the major combat stops? Can new, better Palestinian leaders be empowered?

One school of thought is that the Palestinians cannot do much better than the men (they are all men) who dominate the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken implies this view by insisting on a PA role in governing Gaza on the “day after”.

Another school of thought is more hopeful, or in any event, more ambitious. It sees the Gaza war as a chance for Palestinians, with outside help, to make a quantum-leap

improvement in their politics and society.

There will inevitably be large sums of reconstruction aid donated by Western countries and perhaps also Gulf Arab states. Whichever Palestinians are given the power to spend that aid will, for that reason alone, become politically influential.

The United States can help arrange to channel the aid through a body whose governors would include Palestinians committed to conditions set by the donors. The main conditions could be radical but hard to argue against:

1. Don't steal the funds;
2. Civilian projects only; and
3. Don't promote hatred of Israel or the donor countries.

There could also be more specific guidance – for example, construct permanent housing rather than rebuild “refugee camps” and require schools to promote non-violent resolution of disputes rather than extremism. This would be the opposite of the approach taken for 75 years by the UN agency for Palestinian relief (UNRWA), which has dedicated itself to perpetuating the war against Israel.

The Gaza war is a major historical event, and donors can set goals accordingly. They need not be content to aim for minor reforms of current institutions. Rather, they can pursue serious improvement in the political culture. The benefits could be large.

Working with Israelis, Saudis, Emiratis, Bahrainis, Egyptians and representatives of major aid donors such as Canada, the European Union and Japan, US officials can identify competent, well-intentioned Palestinians and organise security for them. The reality is that a random set of Palestinian businesspeople would likely do a better job than the leaders now in power.

The aid donors can draw on the talents of Palestinian engineers, medical doctors and lawyers, especially Palestinians who have lived in the West and know firsthand the benefits of living under the rule of law. What is crucial is that the new administrators not come from the ranks of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (which runs the PA), Hamas or other terrorist or extremist groups. The existing political institutions are the problem, not the solution.

There are capable Palestinians who are not ideologically extreme. The aid donors' challenge is to recruit those who might have the courage, integrity and ability to spend future aid money properly. This means using the aid to buy not explosives, rockets and tunnels for terrorist attacks, but apartment buildings, sanitation systems, power plants, and financial support for farms and factories.

The Palestinian people have never had such leadership. They have never benefited as they should from the billions of aid dollars donated to help them. And the aid donors – shamefully – have never before actually insisted that their funds be spent properly.



Would the newly empowered Palestinians have legitimacy? Not at first, but no Palestinian leader now has a democratic mandate. New leaders may garner support if they use the aid to improve their people's lives without enriching themselves or provoking war with Israel.

The effort may not succeed. But if it doesn't, the current leaders will remain in power. The Palestinians will continue to suffer ill-government without a realistic hope of statehood. Though US President Joe Biden often talks of a "two-state solution", there's not even a glimmer of a chance of that outcome under existing Palestinian political circumstances.



New Palestinian leadership needed, but not in the mould of Haj Amin al-Husseini, Yasser Arafat or Mahmoud Abbas (Images: Wikimedia Commons)

It is hard to overstate the significance of bad leadership. For more than 100 years, violent, self-serving authoritarians have failed the Palestinian Arabs, producing neither general prosperity nor statehood, but only endless unsuccessful war against the Jews.

It is telling that the main Palestinian leaders sided with the Turks in World War I, the Nazis in World War II, the Soviets in the Cold War, Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War, the jihadists after 9/11 and, most disastrously for themselves, with the anti-Zionists in the Arab-Jewish conflict over Palestine. The ideology, instincts and reasoning of Palestinian leaders have always favoured the wrong side, the losing side, the anti-democratic, anti-Western, anti-humane side. This has been a problem for the Israelis but a calamity for the Palestinians.

From the 1920s until after World War II, the Mufti of Jerusalem – Haj Amin al-Husseini – shaped and dominated Palestinian political culture. He used public funds corruptly to accumulate personal power and burned down the homes of Arab political opponents. He fomented anti-Jewish violence by promoting an ideology that combined Islamism, nationalism and false conspiracy theories about Jewish plots to destroy Muslim holy places.

From the late 1960s until his death in 2004, Yasser Arafat ran the PLO and then the PA more or less in the Mufti's style. In 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered to recognise a Palestinian state in an area greater than 95% of the West Bank and Gaza. Arafat turned that offer down. He could have created a Palestinian state. He insisted

instead on a Palestinian "right of return" that would have forced Israel to relinquish its Jewish majority.

From 2004 until now, PA leader Mahmoud Abbas has also proven inflexible. In 2007-08, he refused to accept an Israeli peace offer superior to Barak's. Yet Abbas is widely described as a "moderate", which is true only in contrast to Hamas' singular fanaticism.

The PA's civil administration has always been chaotic, dictatorial and corrupt. That is why Hamas, which at the time had no record of governing, won the 2006 Palestinian community-wide elections. Hamas was able to take control only in Gaza, however. The PA, still today in charge of the West Bank, remains unpopular, which is why there have been no elections since 2006.


Many of the millions of Palestinians are accomplished people who, under the right circumstances, could provide better leadership than Haj Amin, Arafat or Abbas has done.

Gaza war convulsions are making possible changes in the political landscape that did not seem possible beforehand. The opportunity should not be frittered away on small-beer initiatives to try to reform the PA. The Biden Administration would advance US interests if it tried to empower a new Palestinian governing class untainted by corruption and ideological extremism.



*Douglas J. Feith, a senior fellow at Hudson Institute, served as Under Secretary of Defense in the George W. Bush Administration. © Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

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# Human Shields and Scapegoats

## Hamas and the civilians of Gaza

**Khaled Abu Toameh**

Since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, leaders of the Iran-backed terrorist group have been trying to distance themselves from the atrocities by holding Palestinian civilians responsible for some of the crimes – including the murder, beheading, rape, torture, kidnapping, mutilation and burning of hundreds of Israeli men, women, and children.

These are the same civilians that Hamas has long been using as human shields in its *Jihad* (holy war) to murder Jews and obliterate Israel.

First, Hamas uses Palestinian civilians as human shields, then it accuses them of perpetrating atrocities against Israelis.

Hamas is right. Many ordinary Palestinians did participate in the October 7 assault on Israel. The civilians, however, could not have entered Israel without Hamas tearing down the security fence. The truth is that thousands of Hamas terrorists *and* Palestinian civilians participated in the carnage.

The participation of Palestinian civilians in the attack on Israel, though not surprising, refutes the claim by human rights organisations that ordinary residents of the Gaza Strip are not involved in the Israel-Hamas war.

Even Hamas leaders have publicly implicated Palestinian civilians in the October 7 atrocities.

In early February, after Israeli security forces managed to rescue two Israeli hostages who were being held in an apartment near the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, Hamas sought to distance itself from the abduction.

Mohammed Nazzal, a senior Hamas official, claimed that the two Israeli men were being held by Palestinian civilians, not Hamas terrorists. “The two [Israeli] detainees were in a civilian apartment and were captured by Palestinian citizens on the 7th of October,” Nazzal told the Arabic media outlet *Al-Araby*. “There was no clash [between the Israeli commandos] and [Hamas’s military wing]

Izaddin al-Qassam.”

The Hamas leader’s claim that the Israeli hostages were held by Palestinian civilians is yet further proof of how Hamas continues to use residents of the Gaza Strip in its terror activities.

Consequently, Hamas has no right to complain about the deaths of civilians in the war it initiated against Israel while it uses its own people to hold innocent kidnapped Israelis. Does anyone seriously believe that the Palestinian civilians were holding the hostages without Hamas’ knowledge?

This was not the first attempt by Hamas to blame Palestinian civilians for the October 7 carnage.

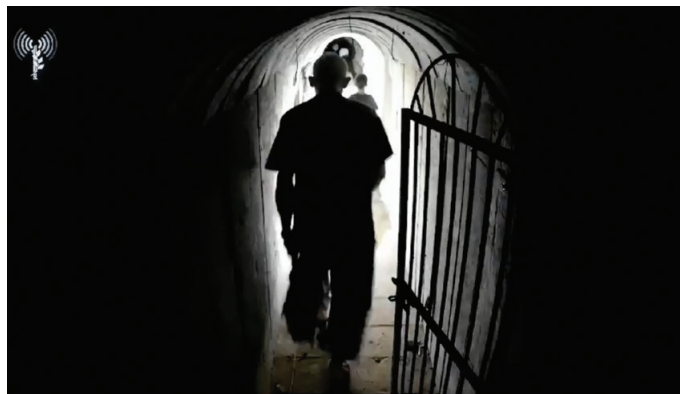
On October 22, senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya claimed that Palestinian civilians and members of other Palestinian factions who crossed the border into Israel kidnapped dozens of Israelis and hauled them back into the Gaza Strip.

During the same month, Hamas leader Saleh al-Arouri also blamed Palestinian civilians for committing most of the atrocities against Israelis:

“When the people in the Gaza Strip heard that the border had been breached and that the Israeli army in the area had collapsed, several young men and gunmen entered [Israel], and this caused a state of chaos”.

“There were [Israeli] civilians who were captured by people who entered, as ordinary people, who captured them and brought them into the Gaza Strip.”

Al-Arouri was later killed in an Israeli airstrike on his hideout in the Lebanese capital of Beirut.



Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar enjoying the safety of a Gazan tunnel (Image: IDF/ screenshot)

## HAMAS TUNNELS ARE ONLY FOR HAMAS FIGHTERS

Hamas leaders leading lavish lives in Qatar and Lebanon do not care about the two million Palestinians of the Gaza Strip, nor do the leaders of the terrorist organisation who are hiding in the vast network of sophisticated tunnels in the Gaza Strip. All they care about

is their own survival. They have already proven that they are prepared to sacrifice tens of thousands of Palestinians rather than release the remaining 134 Israeli hostages held by Hamas and Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip.

The Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip are undoubtedly surrounding themselves with many of the Israeli hostages to avoid being killed or captured by Israeli security forces.

When Hamas decided to drag the entire population of the Gaza Strip into another war with Israel on October 7, it did not care what would happen to Palestinian civilians.



Hamas did not even bother to alert its people to prepare for the war.

Hamas’s disregard for the lives of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip was best reflected by Mousa Abu Marzouk, member of the Hamas political bureau. In an interview with *Russia Today TV* on Oct. 27, 2023, Abu Marzouk was asked: “Many people are asking: You have built 500 kilometres of tunnels, why haven’t you built bomb shelters, where civilians can hide during bombardment?”

The Hamas leader replied:

“We have built the tunnels because we have no other way of protecting ourselves from being targeted and killed. These tunnels are meant to protect us [Hamas] from the [Israeli] airplanes. We are fighting from inside the tunnels. Everybody knows that 75% of the people in the Gaza Strip are refugees, and it is the responsibility of the United Nations to protect them.”

Hamas’ most common uses of human shields include firing rockets from within, or near, heavily populated civilian areas; placing military infrastructure, such as tunnels, headquarters and bases in or near civilian areas, and combating the Israel Defence Forces from or near residential and commercial areas. Hamas also uses “expendable” civilians for dangerous intelligence-gathering missions.

**“According to one Palestinian man: ‘The humanitarian aid is being stolen by those who call themselves resistance fighters. They claim they are defending us, but they are stealing all the aid’”**

### GAZANS PUSH BACK

Jehad Saftawi, a Palestinian from the Gaza Strip who founded RefugeeEye, a non-profit organisation that supports refugee journalists, revealed on Feb. 13 that Hamas had built tunnels beneath his family home in Gaza City, adding:

“Since Hamas’s violent takeover of Gaza in 2007, the bustling and beautiful streets I knew have been dominated by terrorist chaos. Hamas is driven by an ideological stand originating in the concept of annihilating the state of Israel and replacing it with an Islamic Palestinian one. In striving to make this a reality, Hamas has continued to normalise violence and militarisation in every aspect of

public and private life in Gaza.”

Saftawi recounted how his family discovered that Hamas terrorists were digging a tunnel under the new house that his family was building, after the woman living across the street from the new house’s site contacted them:

“She would hear sounds of loading and unloading and feel the vibrations of digging coming from the empty piece of land behind our houses. She suspected someone was digging a tunnel.”

When he confronted the masked Hamas terrorists who were at the site, Saftawi was told by one of them that they would continue as they pleased:

“He [the masked man] said I should not be afraid and that this would just be a small closed room to remain buried underground. No one can enter or exit. He said that only in the case of an Israeli ground invasion in this area and the displacement of residents would these rooms be used to supply weapons.”

According to Saftawi, he told the Hamas terrorist: “We don’t want to live above a stockpile of weapons.”

“When something goes unspoken for so long, it begins to feel impossible that the truth will ever be known. I always looked forward to a time in the future when my family and others like us would be allowed to speak about these tunnels, about the perilous life Hamas has forced upon Gazans. Now that I am determined

to speak openly about it, I don’t know if it even matters.

“My family evacuated to the south [of the Gaza Strip] shortly after October 7. Months later, we received photos of our house and neighbourhood, both of which are in ruins. I may never know if the house was destroyed by Israeli strikes or fighting between Hamas and Israel. But the result is the same. Our home, and far too many in our community, were flattened alongside priceless history and memories.

“And this is the legacy of Hamas. They began destroying my family home in 2013 when they built tunnels beneath it. They continued to threaten our safety for a decade –

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Armed, masked men affiliated with Hamas atop trucks carrying humanitarian aid that arrived in the Gaza Strip via Egypt's Rafah crossing (Screenshot)

we always knew we might have to vacate at a moment's notice. We always feared violence. Gazans deserve a true Palestinian government, which supports its citizens' interests, not terrorists carrying out their own plans. Hamas is not fighting Israel. They're destroying Gaza."

Saftawi is able to speak out against Hamas because, like many tens of thousands of Palestinians, he has fled the Gaza Strip since the terrorist group seized control of the coastal enclave in 2007. Most Palestinians who are still in the Gaza Strip are too afraid of retaliation to tell the truth about Hamas' repressive measures against its own people.

In recent weeks, several Palestinians have complained that Hamas was stealing the humanitarian aid delivered to the Gaza Strip. According to one Palestinian man:

"The humanitarian aid is being stolen by those who call themselves resistance fighters. They claim they are defending us, but they are stealing all the aid coming into the Gaza Strip and then they sell it to the people for a very high price."

A Palestinian woman noted:

"We hear about the aid but we don't know where the aid goes. You can find most of the aid being sold in the markets. There is a big octopus that controls the market and raises the prices. Where are our leaders who have abandoned us? Why don't they come and suffer with us? The leaders [of Hamas] are hiding underground and others are hiding in hell, while the people are suffering"

On Feb. 15, sources in the Gaza Strip reported that Hamas terrorists killed Ahmed Abu al-Arja, a Palestinian boy, while he was trying to get food for his family.

The Palestinians of the Gaza Strip have paid a hugely painful price for Hamas' decision to hurl them into a savage confrontation with Israel.

Yet the participation of some Palestinian civilians in the October 7 massacre and the kidnapping of Israelis is extremely worrying: it illustrates that a large number of people in the Gaza Strip actually do support Hamas and its terrorism against Israel.

Unless the Palestinians rise up against Hamas and

distance themselves from the terrorist group and its *Jihad* against Israel, they will continue to suffer – and the price they pay will continue to soar.

AIR

*Khaled Abu Toameh is an award-winning Arab-Israeli journalist based in Jerusalem. Reprinted from the Gatestone Institute (www.gatestone.com). © Khaled Abu Toameh, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## “AN ABSOLUTELY UNIQUE FORM OF ENEMY”

Ahron Shapiro

Hamas' October 7 massacre of more than 1,130 Israelis and foreign nationals and the kidnapping of 253 others in the Gaza border region was a traumatic wake-up call for Israel in a variety of ways, according to Haviv Rettig Gur, a Senior Analyst for the *Times of Israel*. Visiting Australia, Rettig Gur spoke with journalists in Melbourne on February 15 and was interviewed by *Sky News'* Chris Kenny on Feb. 19 and "Outsiders" on Feb. 18.

Encouragingly, Rettig Gur said, Israel has demonstrated remarkable social cohesion and resilience, and the IDF and other defence agencies are proving capable of learning from mistakes and rapidly adapting to tactical and strategic challenges in the multifront war the Jewish state is now facing. This includes producing plans to further reduce civilian casualties as the IDF prepares plans to eliminate Hamas' four battalions based in the southern Gazan city of Rafah, and hopefully find the top Hamas leadership there.

"What we had known and understood about our enemy, about Hamas, [before October 7] turned out to be completely wrong," said Rettig Gur. "We thought that they were deterred by our massive firepower. And we discovered, on October 7th, that in fact, not only had they not been deterred, they had developed a doctrine, a very subtle and complex and sophisticated doctrine, for deterring us." This centred on the construction of a serpentine network of military tunnels some one and a half times the length of the London Tube.

"By doing that [Hamas] transformed itself into an absolutely unique form of enemy military that has never existed before in the history of the world. We've seen guerrilla armies that attack and then hide behind civilian populations... And we've seen [conventional] standing armies. Hamas [leads] the first 'country' in the history of warfare, certainly to that extent, that you have both. You have [an army] with the irresponsibility for civilians of a



guerrilla force, whose own side’s civilian death toll is [its] force multiplier.”

And so, according to Rettig Gur, Hamas’ 17 years of tunnel development had remarkably transformed Israel’s own firepower into a liability.

“Any threat that they could possibly pose to us... the only way to go into those tunnels and to get at them is to cut through the civilian population, and that was unimaginable” to Israel before October 7. So Hamas was allowed to continue its preparations largely undisturbed.

Hamas’ October 7 attack, however, left Israel no choice but to destroy Hamas’ capability to wage war. “I agree with the world that there’s a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. I don’t think any Israeli denies it,” Rettig Gur said. But he explained that was Hamas’ own war plan.

“Hamas committed two atrocities on October 7th,” he explained. “The smaller one by far was the one committed against [Israel]. Hamas’ second atrocity, and it’s the much larger one, was building Gaza into that battlefield where the civilians are the strategy. There is no other survival strategy. Hamas literally has no other plan for surviving this or winning in any way” but to force Israel to devastate Gaza’s civilian population and infrastructure.



Fighting but also learning: Israeli soldiers in Gaza (Image: IDF)

Even so, Rettig Gur said, the IDF has found ways to reduce civilian casualties despite Hamas’ efforts to the contrary. Meanwhile, international diplomatic pressure against an IDF advance into Rafah has failed to account for this, he said.

IDF operations in Khan Yunis, Rettig Gur pointed out, saw a “much, much lower civilian death toll than the earlier battle in northern Gaza, in Gaza City.”

At the start of the war, he said, the IDF would “get to

tunnels by removing buildings – that resulted in civilian deaths – [but] we’re not doing that now because we know how to get to those tunnels using various means, some secret, including sonar and engineering solutions. Also, [the IDF has] captured many Hamas planners, which has given them a mapped-out vision of some of these tunnel

networks without having to go through them.”

Simply put, “the Israelis are learning how to pull Hamas out of those tunnels [and] dismantle those Hamas battalions without that [ear-

lier] level of harm to civilians. That is probably, hopefully, what we’re going to see in Rafah.”

## ISRAEL QUESTIONING ALL PREVIOUS ASSUMPTIONS

Rettig Gur told journalists that in the wake of the mistakes that saw Israel caught with its guard down on October 7, the Israeli security establishment is “questioning all of its assumptions about its enemies on all fronts.”

“[Israel] is a lot more dangerous [to its enemies] because we don’t trust our own analyses anymore... the thing we misunderstood about [Hamas] was the fundamental strategy they were pursuing for a generation. And if that’s true of Hamas, it can be true of Hezbollah, and it’s true of [Iran’s other] proxies, and it’s true of ultimately Iran itself.”

If Israel believes it can no longer trust the assumptions of deterrence upon which it has built the foundation of its military posture over the past 50 years, “then the only thing that matters is capability [and not trying to control enemy intentions].”

According to Israel’s new security philosophy, if the enemy “has an asset [such as the] 150,000 missiles Hezbollah has aimed at Israel from under 200 villages in southern Lebanon – then they intend to use it,” Rettig Gur said.

“That’s the new Israeli vision of the world,” he added. “How could we possibly afford to assume otherwise?”

However, despite the fact that Israel has suffered painful losses and is facing a long, protracted war, Rettig Gur said Israelis weren’t feeling pessimistic.

The war, he said, put Israeli society to the test, and Israel discovered that it had incredible reserves of social capital in the form of enthusiastic and motivated soldiers and reservists, volunteerism and a sense of common bonds.

“And all Israeli families of those soldiers and all of Israeli society, incidentally, Arabs and Jews alike, are com-

**“Simply put, ‘the Israelis are learning how to pull Hamas out of those tunnels [and] dismantle those Hamas battalions without that [earlier] level of harm to civilians’”**

mitted to getting rid of Hamas,” Rettig Gur told *Sky News*.

Rettig Gur’s visit was arranged on behalf of Zahal (IDF) Disabled Veterans Organisation (ZDVO) Beit Halochem Australia, a charitable organisation aimed at helping rehabilitate disabled Israeli soldiers. According to a recent report in the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, the Israeli Ministry of Defence has estimated that in 2024, 12,500 new disabled veterans will be registered, a 25% increase over the 50,000 veterans currently on the Defence Ministry’s Rehabilitation Department rolls.

AIR



The International Court of Justice’s finding “circumvented its own precedents and basic legal reasoning” (YouTube screenshot)

## ICJ RULING ON ISRAEL – BASELESS AND WITHOUT PRECEDENT

Mark Meirowitz

On January 26, the day before the UN officially observed International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) made a mockery of the rule of law and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the “Genocide Convention”) by ordering provisional measures against Israel in a case brought by South Africa claiming Israel committed genocide in Gaza.

The ICJ, in its provisional measures, ordered Israel “in accordance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention,” to “take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of acts within the scope of Article II of the Genocide Convention” in Gaza. (Article II defines “genocide” as acts “committed with the *intent* to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” [emphasis added] and provides examples of such acts including “killing members of the group” and “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group”).

Significantly, the ICJ did *not* order a ceasefire as the ICJ

did, incidentally, regarding Russia’s actions in Ukraine in another proceeding under the Genocide Convention.

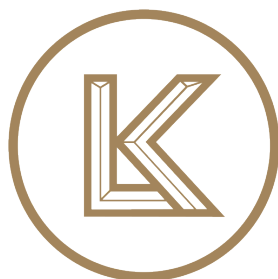
Judge Julia Sebutinde (the Ugandan Judge on the ICJ) in her Dissenting Opinion concluded that the provisional measures ordered by the Court were not warranted – because the measures ordered, requiring Israel to comply with the Genocide Convention, are “redundant” since Israel is *already* under an obligation to take these actions under the Genocide Convention.

The South African Minister of International Affairs stated at a press conference after the ICJ decision was announced that the ICJ did order a ceasefire “by implication” – but this was clearly not the case.

The ICJ should not have issued provisional measures at all and should have stopped the case immediately because South Africa failed to prove the required elements of law necessary for the ICJ to issue provisional measures or even to go forward with the case.

However, in a paper-thin analysis of the law, circumventing its own precedents and basic legal reasoning and logic, the ICJ issued provisional measures against Israel, ordered Israel to report back within a short period of time (and thereafter at additional intervals) and allowed the case to proceed to the merits phase where the Court will fully evaluate whether Israel has committed “genocide” – when no proof of intent to commit genocide on Israel’s part was ever provided and can ever be provided for that matter.

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Some of the flaws in the ruling include:

- Stating that casualty figures can't be independently verified, but then simply quoting Hamas' casualty figures as fact;
- Quoting representatives of the WHO, UNRWA, the UN Human Rights Council as well as the UN Secretary-General to back up its decision. By doing this, the ICJ failed to act as a court applying the law, and became an embarrassing political appendage of the UN.
- Avoiding the ICJ's own precedents to the effect that "for a pattern of conduct to be accepted as evidence of its existence, it would have to be such that it could *only point to the existence of such intent*". (Bosnia v. Serbia, 2007)[emphasis added]. This means that for the ICJ to infer genocidal intent "it must be the only inference that could reasonably be drawn from the acts in question" (Croatia v. Serbia, 2015). In this case as applied to Israel, the inference of such an intent is impossible and implausible!



The Court ignored the evidence Israel presented of its efforts to "minimize the impact of hostilities on civilians" (Image: IDF)

Let's take a look at the persuasive dissenting opinions of Judge Sebutinde and Judge Aharon Barak, the Israeli judge sitting *ad hoc* specifically on this case (Judges Sebutinde and Barak were the only two dissenting judges):

**The Genocide Convention Is Inapplicable to the Events in Gaza.**

As Judge Barak stated, the "appropriate legal framework for analysing the situation in Gaza is International Humanitarian law (IHL) – and not the Genocide Convention." He pointed out that the "drafters of the Genocide Convention clarified in their discussions that '[t]he infliction of losses, even heavy losses, on the civilian population in the course of operations of war, does not as a rule constitute genocide..." Judge Sebutinde in her dissenting opinion was similarly of the view that the ICJ does not have jurisdiction under the Genocide Convention in this case, since the "[t]he Court's jurisdiction is limited to the Genocide Convention and does not extend to grave breaches of international humanitarian law... unless it can be demonstrated that

they were committed 'with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such.'"

**"Intent" Element Must be Proved in a Genocide Case.** As Judge Barak pointed out, "[c]entral to the crime of genocide is the element of intent..." He explained that provisional measures can be ordered only if the Court "is satisfied that the rights asserted by the party requesting such measures are at least plausible" (Gambia v. Myanmar, Provisional Measures, January 2020). In his view, the Court's approach here was "erroneous" in finding that the "right of Palestinians in Gaza to be protected from acts of genocide" is "plausible" (ICJ Order Para. 54). He compared the Gaza case to Gambia v. Myanmar where the reports in the case were based on the meticulous collection of evidence including 400 interviews with victims and eyewitnesses. There was an Independent Fact-Finding Mission (the "Mission") which travelled to many countries to interview victims and witnesses. The Mission concluded that there were "reasonable grounds to conclude that serious crimes under international law ha[d] been committed" "including genocide". Judge Barak noted that in the present case "there is no evidence comparable to that available in

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the *Gambia* case.” The Court in this case relied on reports of various UN agencies and affiliates (such as WHO and UNRWA) which, says Judge Barak, are “insufficient to prove plausible intent” as “[n]one of these statements mention the term genocide or point to any trace of intent.” This, says Judge Barak, is “in stark contrast to the evidence available to the Court in the *Gambia* Case.”


Indeed, says Judge Barak, Israel has presented evidence in this case of its efforts to “minimize the impact of hostilities on civilians” which proves quite the opposite of intending to commit genocide. Judge Sebutinde concluded that: “South Africa has not demonstrated, even on a prima facie basis, that the acts allegedly committed by Israel... were committed with the necessary genocidal intent and that, as a result, they are capable of falling within the scope of the Genocide Convention”. “[T]here is no indication that the acts allegedly committed were accompanied by genocidal intent”.

**“South Africa knew that it had no case against Israel under the Genocide Convention but its sole objective was to extract provisional measures from the Court ordering a ceasefire in Gaza. That failed miserably. Now the case will go nowhere”**

Perhaps Israel should never have appeared to argue its case – and Israel should seriously consider not continuing to cooperate with the ICJ or appear at the upcoming merits phase of the case – as many State parties have done in other ICJ and international tribunal proceedings.

In my view, South Africa knew that it had no case against Israel under the Genocide Convention

but its sole objective was to extract provisional measures from the Court ordering a ceasefire in Gaza. That failed miserably. Now the case will go nowhere.

Notwithstanding all this, Israel should probably continue to make its meritorious case. Eventually, whatever political solution is reached which hopefully effectuates the release of all of the hostages and ends Hamas’ rule in Gaza will make this whole proceeding moot. At the end of the day, with the combined forces of Israel, the United States and its allies, we can be confident that the forces of mayhem and cruelty, namely, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and Iran, will inevitably be completely defeated. It is sad, however, that the ICJ lowered itself and its standards of jurisprudence to produce this ill-advised decision in the Gaza case. 

*Mark Meirowitz, J.D., Ph.D., is a Professor at the State University of New York (SUNY) Maritime College. Reprinted from InSIGHT magazine. © Jewish Policy Center (jewishpolicycenter.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## PRESIDENT PRABOWO: STRONGMAN OR RESPONSIBLE STATESMAN?

Zachary Abuza

The first-round election victory of Prabowo Subianto on February 15 returns a potential strongman, with close personal ties to Suharto’s “New Order” regime (1966-1998), to the helm of Indonesia. It was the fourth presidential campaign for the 72-year-old former general, and the culmination of a 25-year-long campaign to rehabilitate his image.

There are many reasons to be concerned about his presidency, which will have important consequences for democracy and human rights at home, and Indonesian foreign policy in the region and further afield.

Prabowo has an appalling human rights record. In the 1990s, as the head of Kopassus, Indonesia’s special forces, Prabowo stopped at nothing to defeat FRETELIN, the East Timorese secessionist rebel group which won independence through a UN-sponsored referendum in 1999.

Prisoners were routinely tortured, people disappeared, and civilians targeted. But as Suharto’s son-in-law, he was largely untouchable.

In 1998, as the head of Kostrad, the strategic reserve force, Prabowo was implicated in fomenting riots in Jakarta, in an attempt to scapegoat the Chinese community in the midst of the Asian Economic Crisis. He was thrown out of the military for the abduction of pro-democracy activists, a charge that he denies.

After a period of exile in Jordan, he failed to gain the nomination of the Golkar party, the New Order-era political machine, in the 2004 election. He then established the Gerindra party as his own political vehicle.

Prabowo narrowly lost to outgoing President Joko Widodo, commonly referred to as Jokowi, in both 2014 and 2018. In both cases, he ran as a strongman, promising a return to New Order-style governance. He campaigned in uniform, often appearing in packed stadiums on a white stallion.

Ominously, after losing in 2019, he claimed voter fraud and encouraged his supporters, which included many Islamist parties, to take to the streets to challenge the election results. Several people were killed.

President Widodo brought Prabowo into his cabinet as Minister of Defence, where he had a mixed record. On the one hand, he was able to get the Government to raise the defence budget to support a military modernisation pro-

gram. That included deals to procure 42 Rafael jet fighters from France and F-18s from the United States. But several key acquisition programs failed, including an attempt to procure 12 used French Mirage jets from Qatar, and being potentially dropped from a joint fighter production program with South Korea for non-payment.

Prabowo continued the *Bela Negara* [“Defence of the Nation”] policies established by his predecessor, Ryamizard Ryacudu, which identified secessionism, drugs and LGBTQI+ rights as the greatest threats to national security. The military clawed back many of the civilian powers that it ceded in 1998-2000, involving itself in food security, counterterrorism, and the training of militias. This culminated in a 2023 law which allowed uniformed military personnel to concurrently serve in a civilian capacity; a return of Suharto’s “dual function” policy.

But Prabowo also used his tenure as Minister of Defence to burnish his statesman credentials. He waded into the Russian invasion of Ukraine with a factually challenged peace proposal that was ridiculed. But he also used his time to travel to the United States after being banned from entering the country for over 20 years for alleged human rights violations.

This election campaign, Prabowo had a total image makeover, campaigning as a grandfather figure, adroitly using social media, complete with dances and cat videos. With 56% of the population under the age of 40, few remembered life under Suharto’s dictatorship. The cynical selection of Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the 36-year-old son of the term-limited President Jokowi, as his vice president conveyed an image of mentorship.



A different sort of campaign this time round: Prabowo Subianto at an election rally (Image: Shutterstock)

### DEMOCRACY UNDER THREAT?

There are reasons to fear democratic reversals. Freedom of the press weakened under Jokowi, and independent agencies such as the Counter-Corruption Commission lost significant autonomy. Those trends may continue.

The conflict in restless Papua intensified in the past few years, as a new generation of charismatic and media-savvy militants emerged. They stepped up attacks on the security forces and the mining sector, which prompted reprisals escalating the cycle of violence. The Government frequently closed the province to foreign media and imposed internet blackouts. It’s hard to see Prabowo searching for a political solution or addressing the core grievances of Papuans.

Despite the fact that Prabowo’s political coalition includes a number of Islamist parties, Prabowo is mercurial. Personally, he is a secular nationalist. But he has always pandered to the Islamists and toyed with identity politics – though to a much lesser extent than his presidential rival Anies Baswedan. Desperate for a parliamentary majority, Prabowo will likely try to win over Anies’ Islamist partners.

Yet, at the same time, he is likely to give the security forces the resources and authority to target the al-Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, the umbrella grouping of pro-Islamic State organisations.

It’s too early to declare his election means the end of Indonesia’s 25-year democratic experiment. Prabowo’s own party only won 13% of the seats in parliament. His coalition, at the time of writing, only had 42% of the seats, short of a governing majority. He won the election but does not enjoy Jokowi’s still very high approval ratings (76%). Indonesians have shown that they value their




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democracy, and Prabowo's success came after downplaying his strongman image.

We still don't know much about his incoming cabinet. And given the fact that he is not scheduled to be inaugurated until October, unless Parliament moves up the date, there's a lot of horse trading that will likely take place before then.

The policy agenda that he campaigned on, both defence and social services, is likely to be thwarted by fiscal realities. The country has a 3% debt limit, and his promised school lunch and milk program would by itself be enough to drive that to around 5%.

Prabowo has targeted 7% economic growth, which will be impossible without more foreign investment. Like all Indonesian politicians, Prabowo is a protectionist. Indonesia remains a hard place to do business, riddled with bureaucracy, coddled state-owned enterprises, and endemic corruption. Prabowo has no road map to address these realities.

## FOREIGN POLICY

So what does his presidency mean for Indonesia's foreign policy?

He campaigned as the continuity candidate, but he'll likely have a more active foreign policy than Jokowi, whose foreign policy focused on securing new export markets and foreign investment.

Those will also remain key concerns for Prabowo. Indonesia is expected to become the world's sixth largest economy by the turn of the decade, but remains a middle-income country with significant poverty.

Relations with China will remain key, as the largest trading partner, essential foreign investor and provider of critically-needed infrastructure development assistance. As the largest producer of nickel, Indonesia is expecting more investment from China, which dominates the electric vehicle market.

But Prabowo is likely to balance that with outreach to Japan, South Korea, Australia and the European Union.

Prabowo's relationship with the United States is complicated, owing to his human rights record and the visa ban. But he offers the promise of major arms agreements, and controls three major sea lanes of communication. Like others in the region, he sees utility in the US military presence. And during his tenure as Defence Minister, bilateral exercises and engagements with the United States increased. Washington, though, is unrealistic in believing that Prabowo would be willing to stand up to Chinese pressure.

Under Prabowo, Indonesia should be expected to play a greater leadership role in the ASEAN bloc, a role that Jokowi abdicated. That could be important for the bloc's

cohesion. ASEAN flounders without strong Indonesian leadership.

But on a number of issues, Prabowo could be divisive. In the mould of a military strongman, he'll unlikely change course on Myanmar, instead relying on ASEAN's failed Five Point Consensus that continues to treat the Myanmar military as a legitimate actor that should be engaged.

Most importantly, Indonesia is unlikely to push back against Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. Rather than expand naval capabilities, Prabowo oversaw the build-up of bases and deployment of soldiers to Natuna Island. Economically reliant on China, Prabowo is unlikely to pursue any confrontational policies, even as Beijing engages in seismic research, conducts illegal fishing or launches coast guard patrols in Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone.

Indonesia longs to have a greater role in international affairs. That is expected to continue in a Prabowo presidency, though previous Indonesian attempts have been unsuccessful.

Israel's current war against Hamas in Gaza was an electoral issue, in as much as any foreign policy issue was. Each of the three presidential candidates was obsequious in their support for the Palestinians, as they sought to pander to voters in the largest Muslim country in the world. None offered more than knee jerk criticism of Israel.

While Indonesia has had limited bureaucratic engagement with Israel, any move towards full diplomatic recognition would be impossible unless the Abraham Accord process resumes.

There has always been a concern about Prabowo's temperament. Coupled with his authoritarian leanings, there's plenty of reason to be concerned about Indonesia's future.

But the jury is still out. There were similar concerns about the election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in 2022 in the Philippines. He, too, whitewashed his family's authori-

**“Prabowo's past is concerning, but he appears to have mellowed over time. He has promised to govern on behalf of all Indonesians, and... he will have to be a responsible statesman if Indonesia is going to get the respect it feels it deserves”**

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tarian and kleptocratic history through social media that targeted the youth vote. Yet, to date, he has helped restore democratic institutions weakened under his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, and improved the alliance with the United States.

Prabowo's past is concerning, but he appears to have mellowed over time. He has promised to govern on behalf of all Indonesians, and as the economy grows, he will have to be a responsible statesman if Indonesia is going to get the respect it feels it deserves. AIR

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## SYDNEY MOSQUE KEY CENTRE OF EXTREMIST PREACHING

Ran Porat

The Roselands Mosque in NSW has become a hub for extremist preachers articulating hate and antisemitism and undermining Australia's multiculturalism.

### “ALLAH! KILL THE ZIONIST JEWS AND PURIFY AL AQSA FROM JEWISH ABOMINATION”

One of the imams speaking regularly in front of audiences in this mosque is Kamal Abu Mariam. According to the *Australian*, this cleric is “friendly with high-profile former rugby league stars Sonny Bill Williams and Anthony Mundine,” who later even helped Abu Mariam in fundraising for a mosque.

Yet Abu Mariam is an extremist who, for example, encourages martyrdom (February 2024), listing the many ‘benefits’ the Muslim martyr will ‘enjoy’ in the afterlife (such as forgiveness from Allah, 70 heavenly women and a crown). Similarly, he is not a fan of multiculturalism and respect for other religions.

In January 2024, he warned an audience at the mosque “not to partake in any of these non-Muslim celebrations,” and that even saying “Merry Christmas” is forbidden, because doing this may convert a person into Christianity.

The *Australian* story (Jan. 17) focused on Abu Mariam's November 2023 sermon, where he called on Muslims to boycott firms with ties to the “Zionist Nazi regime”, and beseeched Allah to “count them (Jewish Zionists) and kill them one by one. Don't keep any (one) of them [alive].”

Despite being exposed by the media, Abu Mariam did not end his rhetoric of incitement. On the contrary – his extremism was again revealed during an event at the Roselands Mosque in December 2023 titled “The Conflict in Palestine”. The other two speakers at the event were preachers Abd al-Salam Zoud and Mohammad Doar (who speaks about “the Zionist oppressive movement”) from the fundamentalist “Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah” movement, who occasionally give sermons at this mosque.

Soon after October 7, for example, Doar gave (Oct. 20) the Friday *Khutba* (sermon) at the mosque. Headlined “Palestine! What did we expect?”, Doar said during the sermon: “Allah says that you will find that the most severe in enmity towards the believers are the *Yahud* [Jews]... So the reality is... as hard as it to witness what is happening [in Gaza] we should not expect anything less from such a people. A people that Allah... has taught us are *Katalat al-anbiyah* [killers of prophets]. They killed hundreds of prophets and messengers in their time. Why would they show mercy to the innocent and the weak today?” He later also argued that Jews “distorted” their holy books.

In his speech at the December event, Abu Mariam claimed that “the Zionist narrative was always in the forefront, always took precedence world-wide, and the truth was always hidden, concealed.” His explanation of this ‘phenomenon’ was directly rooted in classic “Jewish world domination” tropes: “Because they [Jews] were in charge of the media, of journalists, of governments, of of of... [everything]. That's how powerful... the Zionist Jewish lobby is.”

Constantly labelling the Jewish state “the criminal Nazi apartheid regime,” Abu Mariam warned that unless the Muslims voice their opinions against “the enemies of

**“Najjarine went into a full antisemitic tirade – ‘This is who they [Jews] are. Allah told us about the Israelites so many times in the Koran... He has told us they have killed prophets and messengers because they didn't like them... The Israelites have always been a problem.’”**

Allah [Israel]... their narrative will be in the forefront. Their [Jews] deception, and lies and propaganda will be at the forefront, deceiving fools who parrot and puppet what they [the Zionists] want them to do, what they want them to say.”

“And that's what we have always been hearing, from governments and politicians and what have you – things that please this Zionist criminal regime. [This is] because... they have a strong lobby, where they bribe politicians, they sponsor politicians, they support politicians. And anyone who goes against them, they'll do anything to destroy them – physically and verbally.”



Abu Mariam's sermon at the Roselands Mosque (December 2023): Jews cause "corruption and evil on Earth" (YouTube screenshot)

In a separate sermon in December, Abu Mariam again spoke about the war in Gaza, condemning "the relentless and cowardly bombings [by] the criminal Israeli Nazi apartheid regime." He complained that "in some countries" you cannot protest against Israel, and "you have to remain deaf, dumb and blind and silent to your puppet masters – to the Zionists and the Jewish lobby." The sermon finished with a prayer (Dua'a) by Abu Mariam, asking Allah to kill all "Zionists" and "purify" al-Aqsa from Jewish filth:

"Oh Allah, honour Islam and Muslims, and humiliate polytheism and polytheists... Allah the defeater of all parties, defeat the Zionist usurpers. Oh Allah, defeat them. Oh God, shake them. Oh Allah, show us the wonders of your ability over them. Oh Allah, place [your might] in their throats and as we seek refuge in you from their evils. Oh Allah, overcome them in numbers and kill them wastefully, and do not leave any of them alive... Oh Allah, purify Al-Aqsa Mosque from the abomination and defilement of the Jews, and purify Al-Aqsa Mosque from the abomination and defilement of the Jews."

Abu Mariam also said, "Zionist Jews have transgressed and wreaked havoc, and caused corruption on Earth."

The video of his speech concludes with a warning that these Zionists will be punished, a quote from the Koran (*Surah Ibrahim*, Ayat 42): "Do not think 'O Prophet' that Allah is unaware of what the wrongdoers do. He only delays them until a Day when 'their' eyes will stare in horror."

**A**nother extremist preacher at the Roselands Mosque is Omar Najjarine, a podiatrist by profession, who seems to hold similar extremist views to Abu Mariam and Doar.

For example, in a 2020 lecture (published by ASWJ), Najjarine warned that the fictional *Netflix* show "Messiah" (about a 21<sup>st</sup> century man claiming to be the Messiah) was created to "confuse" Muslims about the real life and character of Jesus. In Najjarine's conspiratorial mind, the creators of this show "are very well educated on the *Dajjal* [devil], the anti-Christ, the *Mehdi* [Islam's Messiah], the story of Islam, the end of days [Day of Judgment] – they know it very well. And they are trying to obviously

distort the mind of the believer, the mind of the Muslim, or leave him in limbo." He suggested confusing and harming Muslims was the only explanation for the show, asking: "Why would they spend millions of dollars to make a movie about this?"

In a sermon on Dec. 1, 2023 at the Roselands Mosque, he argued that "Arabs to the Israelis are like nothing. [They say], 'We are superior.' And we [Arabs] are nothing." He then repeated the famous false belief that Jews in Muslim countries "have no fear of where they are living.. they are happy to be under the rule and protection of the Muslims. This is how it has been for hundreds of years."

Then, Najjarine went into a full antisemitic tirade – "This is who they [Jews] are. Allah told us about the Israelites so many times in the Koran... Allah has warned us over and over about them. He has told us they have killed prophets and messengers because they didn't like them. Allah told us how they disobeyed Moses. The Israelites have always been a problem. They have broken their covenant with Allah over and over and over again."

In line with the popular 'Zionism is not Judaism' line, Najjarine referred to "Jews – Orthodox Jews – that understand that Allah banished them from the Land of Israel, from this land, because they disobeyed Allah."

Jews, concluded Najjarine, are cursed, malicious and a source of evil and corruption: "What is your expectation from people that Allah has told that they are cursed? They cannot fight a people who love death more than they love life. This is the key. Why are there so many verses [in the Koran] and chapters even about the Israelites? Because Allah is teaching you about who they are. Because there will be many days to come when these people will cause strife, corruption, and evil on this earth." AIR

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# THE BIBLIO FILE

## Clandestine War

### Target Tehran: How Israel Is Using Sabotage, Cyberwarfare, Assassination and Secret Diplomacy to Stop a Nuclear Iran and Create a New Middle East

by **Yonah Jeremy Bob and Ilan Evyatar**  
*Simon and Schuster, 2023, 368 pp., A\$55.00*



**Paul Monk**

In June 2018, I reviewed Ronen Bergman's then newly published masterpiece *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations*. I acclaimed both the access Bergman got and the extraordinary quality of his judgements on the subject. When planning to travel to Israel last year, before the Gaza War broke out, I got in touch with him and we agreed to meet. The war has put that meeting on hold.

Bergman is among the most qualified and gifted analysts of Israeli strategic and intelligence affairs. He is the benchmark against which I found myself assessing *Target Tehran*, as I read it. This is not least because Bergman is also the author of *The Secret War with Iran*, looking back over a 30-year clandestine struggle by Israel, after 1979, to keep the fanatical mullahs in Teheran boxed in.

*Target Tehran* sits squarely alongside Bergman's work, with regard to both targeted assassinations and containing Iran. However, it also covers the brilliant capture, in January 2018, of a mass of Teheran's archival documentation about its secret nuclear weapons program, and the extraordinary making of the Abraham Accords

of August/September 2020. It was sent to press in April 2023, however, therefore missing the shock of the October 7 Hamas assault on Israel and the challenge the consequent war has posed to the new order that the Abraham Accords created.

*Target Tehran* is beautifully constructed, with 15 chapters, a "Primary Cast of Characters" at the beginning, followed by the Introduction, and a "Supplemental Cast of Characters" at the end. It has 62 pages of endnotes and an 18-page index, making it highly researcher friendly. It is written in an accessible and well-paced style and the stories it tells are remarkable. It is certainly worth reading, just as a book. But the subject is vital.

The Primary Cast of Characters begins with the four individuals who have headed Israel's Mossad external intelligence service since 2002: Meir Dagan, Tamir Pardo, Yossi Cohen and David Barnea. Each of them emerges from the pages of this book as a complex and highly intelligent personality who served the state of Israel diligently and faithfully over the past two decades. In many ways, the book is the story of their leadership of the

Mossad in a midnight death-struggle with Iran.

The Mossad has been a legendary secret intelligence and black operations service for decades. But few of its tasks have been more challenging than the long attempt to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, given the avowed intention of the Iranian theocratic regime to obliterate Israel if it can.

This is, of course, a sub-set of the existential threats Israel has had to confront since its founding in 1948. But it is, perhaps, the most dangerous of them all.

The current war in Gaza, in which Iran is openly backing Hamas, while arming Hezbollah in Lebanon and unleashing the Houthis in the Red Sea, is evidence enough of Iran's hostility right here and now. But it is in this very context that Rafael Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), announced in late January that Iran now has enough highly enriched uranium to make several atomic bombs.

The 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) is a dead letter now. Iran has clearly violated all the protocols of that agreement and shown no inclination to return to the negotiating table, despite conciliatory moves from the Biden Administration.

It was remarkable to see the IAEA statement come out even as I was reading *Target Tehran*, with its gripping account of all the things Mossad had done over many years to hinder, delay or sabotage Iran's nuclear weapons work. In 2008, President George W. Bush visited Israel and insisted to the then PM Ehud Olmert and Defence Minister Ehud Barak that Israel must not make a pre-emptive attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. The same debate recurred later at the top of the Israeli government: Netanyahu and Barak vs their military and intelligence chiefs. Now what?

One thing should be absolutely clear. Throughout the past 20 years and more, when Teheran declared



Israel's capture of Iran's nuclear archive in 2018 proved Iran was "lying through its teeth" about its nuclear plans (Image: Isranet)

that it didn't have a nuclear weapons program and that the outside world was trying to prevent it from peacefully developing nuclear energy, it was lying through its teeth. It was doing exactly what North Korea did in the 1980s and early 1990s – professing to abide by IAEA inspections and standards, while clandestinely pursuing a weapons capability.

The capture of its nuclear archive in 2018 demonstrated this. It has now simply been confirmed by Grossi, six years later. Iran has no credibility making demands for concessions in exchange for restraint. And the prospects for a new and more effective agreement to replace the JCPOA are surely very poor, given both the high tensions between the US and Iran right now and the prospect of a return of Donald Trump to the White House in 2025.

These are all good reasons to read *Target Tehran*. But it should be read in conjunction with Trita Parsi's two books on Obama, Iran and the JCPOA: *A Single Roll of the Dice* (2012) and *Losing An Enemy* (2017). Those two books trace the diplomacy that led to the imperfect agreement with Iran to put on hold a program it had so long denied it had at all.

Obama's claim was that the JCPOA would buy time for things

to change. Mossad had been trying, for many years, to buy time by other means. Now, says Grossi, we are racing against time if we want to dissuade Iran from weaponising its enriched uranium.

But I digress. The opening chapter of *Target Tehran* is called The Heist. It tells the story of how Yossi Cohen oversaw a meticulously planned operation to break into a warehouse in the Shirabad industrial suburb of Teheran to remove and spirit out of Iran "files, physical and electronic, that contained the entire record of Iran's strenuous effort to become a nuclear-armed power going back to its beginnings nearly thirty years before."

The book is worth reading for this chapter alone, but many readers will be drawn to its accounts of sabotage by cyber weapons (think Stuxnet, developed jointly by Israel and the US) and the assassination of key scientists and project leaders. A long succession of such operations is laid out in detail, along with the deliberations and planning that went into them. The assassination of Qasem Soleimani, IRGC boss and top figure in Iran's weapons programs and terrorism operations, was contemplated a number of times before finally being successfully carried out by the US, not by Israel.

But the sheer technological wizardry developed and deployed by Israel, by Mossad, is deeply impressive. Antony Loewenstein has accused Israel of using "Palestine" as a laboratory for testing surveillance and intervention technologies, but what Bob and Evyatar show is how such innovations were deployed against the rogue power Iran by way of trying to show it, as Yossi Cohen put it in 2020, "Israel is not going to let you get nuclear weapons – what don't you understand?"

The authors make clear that one reason Mossad was able to operate with such success in Iran is that Iran has many dissident movements willing to help Israel against the mullahs. But they also point out that, between 2009 and 2021, there was a long running and disruptive turf war within Iran, between the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) and MOIS (the Ministry of Intelligence and Security) – which Mossad adroitly exploited.

And so, in 2024, we have come to a fateful juncture. Iran has weapons-grade uranium, the JCPOA is defunct, the Biden Administration is struggling to keep conflict with Iran and its proxies from escalating in the Middle East and there is a US presidential election approaching.

Read this book as the gripping drama unfolds. It tells of an ingenious and protracted campaign against a singularly intractable and unpleasant regime to hold it to account for its lies and prevent it from fulfilling its malign ambitions. Had it not been for the Mossad's protracted secret war, one is forced to conclude, Iran would already be nuclear-armed.

*Dr. Paul Monk is a former senior intelligence analyst and long-time consultant in applied cognitive science. He is the author of a dozen books, including The West in a Nutshell: Foundations, Fragilities, Futures (2009) and Dictators and Dangerous Ideas (2018).*



# ESSAY

## Militancy over Governance

### The evolution of Hamas since 2006

Matthew Levitt

Over the last 18 years, since I wrote *Hamas: Politics, Charity and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, Hamas has experienced significant change – just not in the ways many people expected it would. Whereas some assessed that participating in Palestinian national politics or ruling the Gaza Strip would moderate, or at least co-opt, Hamas’ inclination to violence, that did not prove to be the case. The October 7 massacre demonstrated in the most visceral and brutal way that Hamas ultimately prioritised destroying Israel and creating an Islamist Palestinian state in its place over its governance project in Gaza, Palestinian national reconciliation, or the end of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict through a two-state resolution.

In the years since my book came out, Hamas experienced two transformational events. The first watershed event for Hamas came in the wake of the group’s decision to participate in Palestinian national elections in 2006, resulting in Hamas winning 74 of 132 seats and ultimately leading a National Unity Government with Fatah. This came after the August 2005 withdrawal of all Israeli settlements and military forces from the Gaza Strip.

Some predicted that by reconciling with its Palestinian political rival in Fatah, Hamas would become more responsive to its own public and ultimately a more moderate movement, but that did not happen.

Indeed, in June 2006 Hamas operatives penetrated into Israel via tunnels dug from Gaza, ambushed an Israeli border patrol, killing two soldiers and injuring two more, and kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Hamas would hold Shalit captive for five years, releasing him in exchange for the release of 1,027 Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

Hamas and Fatah never reconciled their political visions, and as a result the political experiment that was the Hamas-led National Unity Government was short-lived. Fatah sought to keep Palestinian Authority (PA) policies within the boundaries of the Oslo Accords, while Hamas worked to undermine such policies, with a particular focus on curtailing Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation.

Finally, in July 2007, Hamas took over the Gaza Strip from Fatah by force of arms, leaving Fatah to control the PA and govern the West Bank. Shortly thereafter, I met with PA officials in Ramallah who listed names of family members thrown from rooftops by Hamas militants in Gaza and showed me documentation of how Hamas tried to use West Bank businesses and PA departments to launder Hamas money when it led the National Unity Government.

Even after Hamas confirmed its propensity for militancy with its violent takeover of the Gaza Strip – this time targeting not Israelis but fellow Palestinians – some analysts believed

that running the Gaza Strip would moderate Hamas or, short of that, that the group would be co-opted by virtue of the responsibility of governance, the daily grind of collecting garbage, and paying teacher salaries. Hamas’ Islamic social institutions in Gaza and the West Bank, one author wrote in 2014, “advocated a moderate approach to change that valued order and stability, not disorder and instability.”

Again, that did not turn out to be the case. And yet, assuming control of governance in Gaza did present Hamas with a stark choice. It could continue to carry out acts of violence targeting Israel, knowing these would risk Israeli retaliation, or it could focus on providing for the needs and security of the residents of the Gaza Strip. In the first few months after the 2007 takeover, the pace of Hamas slowed while the group consolidated power and took over governmental institutions. But by December 2008 Hamas initiated the first in a series of rocket wars with Israel. By 2015, after three rounds of rocket wars, some still assessed that Hamas would prioritise survival over “resistance” (i.e. fighting Israel) and placed hope in periodic efforts to reconcile Fatah and Hamas, each of which failed as Hamas refused to give up its arms and abide by peace process commitments.

The second watershed event came on October 7, when thousands of Hamas operatives murdered some 1,200 people in Israel, wounded thousands, and took at least 240 people hostage, including nationals from more than 40 countries.

October 7 was a departure from Hamas’ established *modus operandi*, but an intentional one, which the group planned in careful detail. Never had the group executed such a large attack, let alone employed such barbaric tactics. In the words of Secretary of State Antony Blinken, “Babies slaughtered. Bodies desecrated. Young people burned alive. Women raped. Parents executed in



front of their children, children in front of their parents.” The attack, he concluded, “brings to mind the worst of ISIS.” Maps and documents seized from Hamas attackers on October 7 revealed the group specifically targeted elementary schools and a youth centre.



Plans designed to keep Hamas more focused on governing than fighting never worked (Image: Shutterstock)

In fact, October 7 was the war Hamas always wanted. For 18 years, from its inception in 1988 to its participation in the 2006 Palestinian national elections, Hamas was a sub-state militant actor engaged in a wide array of activities – from politics, to charity and social-welfare, to terrorism – aimed at replacing Israel with an Islamist, Palestinian state.

**B**y engaging in both overt civilian and covert militant activities, Hamas created a self-sustaining system in which each of its activities supported the others. Political and social activities helped build grassroots support for Hamas at the expense of its Palestinian political rivals. Through acts of violence, it undermined political compromise

with Israel and presented itself as the guardian of maximalist Palestinian claims. When raising funds abroad, the group could raise funds for overt activities, freeing up fungible funds for less altruistic activities.

This proved to be an effective model – if all Hamas aspired to do was perpetuate conflict, stick to its ideological guns, and draw Israeli blood. Throughout this period of time, Hamas never came close to posing an existential threat to Israel, even with the onset of the Second Intifada in 2000. Hamas’ indiscriminate attacks successfully terrorised Israeli citizens, but failed to uproot them.

Fast forward to 2007, when Hamas suddenly found itself in control of the Gaza Strip. Faced with the choice of focusing on governance or militancy, Hamas chose the latter. It diverted funds intended for civilian public services to build tunnels and a robust weapons production program. Hamas played a long game, investing in efforts to instil a “culture of resistance” in Gaza society, with a focus on schools and youth.

Meanwhile, Hamas duped Israeli and Western officials into thinking it would not put its governance project at risk and therefore could be deterred. The result was an Israeli policy of “buying quiet” centred on allowing billions of Qatari dollars to flow into Gaza over about a decade to keep Hamas more focused on governing than fighting.

Hamas took the money, but was never co-opted. Hamas politburo

member Khalil al-Hayya, based in Qatar, succinctly summarised the group’s outlook in comments made weeks after October 7: “Hamas’s goal is not to run Gaza and to bring it water and electricity and such. Hamas, the [Izz al-din al-] Qassam [brigades] and the resistance woke the world up from its deep sleep and showed that this issue must remain on the table.” Summing up how Hamas balances the competing needs of addressing the needs of Palestinians and fighting Israel, al-Hayya added, “This battle was not because we wanted fuel or labourers. It did not seek to improve the situation in Gaza. This battle is to completely overthrow the situation.”

In other words, for all that changed in the years since the publication of *Hamas* – control of territory and billions of dollars to govern Gaza – Hamas remained committed to its core principle of prioritising the destruction of Israel over the well-being of Palestinian civilians. That, in a nutshell, explains why Hamas executed the brutal October 7 attack and why Israel responded with an assault aimed at ending the Hamas governance project in Gaza.

AIR

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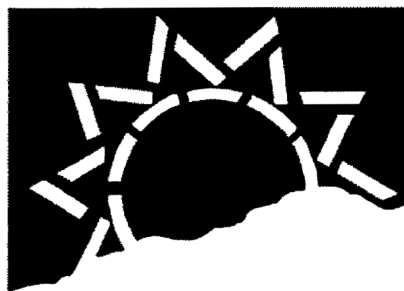
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Andrew and Carol Crawford

# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### UNBELIEVABLE? NOT REALLY

Australia joined the US and more than a dozen other countries in suspending aid to UNRWA, the main aid agency for Palestinians, because of revelations that at least 12 staff were involved in Hamas' October 7 massacre.

On Jan. 29, News Corp columnist Andrew Bolt called UNRWA a "grievance industry that generates \$1bn a year in donations. It's also largely captured by Palestinian staff, employing 30,000 of them, including 13,000 in terrorist-controlled Gaza. Not surprisingly, Palestinian teachers employed by UNRWA have repeatedly been caught preaching Jew hatred and using atlases showing Israel literally wiped off the map..."

"No other 'refugees' get a UN organisation just for themselves 78 years later, nursing the fantasy of a 'right of return', instead of encouraging them to get on with their lives."

On Feb. 6, *ABC Radio National* "Drive" meekly accepted a claim from UNRWA's Thomas White that "we go to extraordinary measures to ensure... staff abide by humanitarian principles, one of them... being neutrality," adding that "the vast majority of UNRWA staff are committed doctors, teachers, nurses, water engineers."

On *Sky News* (Feb. 19), Liberal Senator Claire Chandler attacked the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade after it disclosed at Senate Estimates that Australia paid UNRWA \$20 million last year without undertaking the usual "compliance checks" to "make sure [it] isn't undertaking terrorist activity."

### REFORM SCHOOL

In the *Australian* (Jan. 30), AIJAC's

Colin Rubenstein was quoted saying Australia "needs to find ways to drastically reform how such aid is delivered – perhaps by giving the UN High Commissioner for Refugees the same responsibility for the Palestinians it has for every other refugee population in the world."

Liberal Senator Dave Sharma told *Sky News* (Jan. 29), "I don't think we should ever fund that organisation again... When I returned as Australia's ambassador to Israel in 2017, one of my valedictory messages was UNRWA is part of the problem here. Not part of the solution."

In the *Australian* (Feb. 15), former Labor government adviser Ben Scott agreed that UNRWA's endorsement of "the return of Palestinian refugees to their ancestors' homes in today's Israel is not consistent with a two-state solution."

The *Australian* website (Feb. 15) ran Zionist Federation of Australia President Jeremy Leibler's op-ed noting the "UNHCR, the agency responsible for the rest of the world's refugees, cares for 13 times the number of people, with half the staff. UNRWA spends almost double the amount of money on each Palestinian refugee than the UNHCR spends on any other refugee across the globe... UNHCR resettles... hundreds of thousands of people each year. In 75 years... UNRWA hasn't resettled a single individual."

### STATE OF DELUSION

On Jan. 29, the *Age* ran two op-eds promoting a "one-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one by former anti-Israel Human Rights Watch activist Sarah Leah Whitson and another by academic A. Dirk Moses.

Moses claimed that "in 2007", it

was already "clear" that "the two-state solution... was no longer viable. There were simply too many settlers, settlements." Yet this didn't stop Israeli PM Ehud Olmert only a year later offering to create a Palestinian state on the equivalent of 100% of the West Bank, all of Gaza and a shared capital in Jerusalem.

Whitson claimed the two-state solution died in 2000, leaving "a massive void where once there was an imaginable path toward a more just future."

The peace process did not die in 2000. Not only was there Olmert's 2008 offer, but there were serious prospects for two-state peace advanced in 2013-14 and 2020 but rejected by PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

### HOW GREEN WAS MY HATRED

NSW Greens MP Jenny Leong's speech to a pro-Palestinian gathering referring to the "Jewish lobby" having widespread "tentacles" which they use to "influence power" was widely reported and condemned.

On Feb. 7, the *Daily Telegraph* said "what Leong said... was extremely close to age-old bigotries about Jews controlling the world... We invite Leong to reconsider her words and to read more widely."

In the *Australian Financial Review* (Feb. 12), former Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said since Hamas' October 7 massacre, the Greens have "given legitimacy to antisemitism" and "been demonising... Israelis... Hamas... aren't... fighting for a two-state solution. They want the Jews eliminated. The Greens know this but have still gone out of their way to support Hamas."

On Jan. 28, *West Australian* colum-

nist Ben Harvey said Greens Senator Jordon Steele-John must “accept two facts. Israel is going to exist and Palestinians voted for Hamas knowing their political rulers were murderous Jew-haters.”

## THE FULL STORY

ABC journalist Alexander Lewis’ two reports for *ABC TV* (Feb. 2) on the NSW Police announcement that they had concluded video from a vile anti-

Israel protest outside the Sydney Opera House on Oct. 9 did not include the phrase “Gas the Jews” but rather “Where’s the Jews”, were balanced.

On *ABC TV* “News”, Lewis said NSW Police confirmed “there was evidence of antisemitic chants at the rally, namely ‘F the Jews’, among other slogans” and Executive Council of Australian Jewry’s Alex Ryvchin was quoted saying “the greater issue isn’t whether it was ‘gas the Jews’ or ‘where’s the Jews?’, ‘F the Jews’.

Each phrase is as menacing and abhorrent as the next. The real issue here is that two days after the greatest atrocity inflicted on the Jewish people since the Holocaust, a group of Australians, a mob of thugs, gathered to... menace and threaten their fellow Australians.”

But on *ABC TV* “The World” that night, Ryvchin’s point that the other antisemitic comments were equally menacing was missing.

On Feb. 2, the *Sydney Morning Her-*



## IN PARLIAMENT

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) – Feb. 15 – “An impending major Israeli ground offensive in Rafah... would bring further devastation to more than a million civilians seeking shelter in Rafah, many there by Israel’s direction... Our message to Israel is: listen to the world; do not go down this path.”

Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (Greens, NSW) – Feb. 15 – “The Australian government... is... shielding and aiding... Israel in its mission to annihilate Gaza and massacre tens of thousands of Palestinians.”

**Andrew Wilkie** (Ind., Clark) – Feb. 15 – “There’s no doubt Israel has committed war crimes in Gaza and will unleash even more horrors in Rafah.”

**Alicia Payne** (ALP, Canberra) – Feb. 13 – “We need an end to the sickening, indiscriminate killing in Gaza.”

**Max Chandler-Mather** (Greens, Griffith) on Feb. 12 moved a motion calling on the Government to end support for Israel’s “invasion of Gaza”. He said, “20,000 Palestinians have been murdered by the Israeli military, including over 10,000 children... the Israeli military is on the verge of turbocharging this genocide.”

**Josh Burns** (ALP, Macnamara) – Feb. 12 – “[The Greens] have ignored standards within their own party... have remained silent in a blatant antisemitic statement by one of their colleagues.”

The motion was adjourned.

**Michelle Ananda-Rajah** (ALP, Higgins) – Feb. 12 – “Antisemitism is disgusting. It must stop.”

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – Feb. 8 – “I condemn, totally, any form of antisemitism—including the comments by... the [Greens] member for Newtown, whose comments about ‘tentacles’, with regard to the Jewish community, I find offensive.”

**Josh Wilson** (ALP, Fremantle) – Feb. 8 – “The wholesale destruction of Gaza is not self-defence.”

On Feb. 7, Greens Leader **Adam Bandt** (Melbourne) and Greens Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Senator **Jordon Steele-John** (WA) moved in the House of Representatives and Senate respec-

tively to suspend standing orders to move a motion on Gaza. Bandt said “Labor must stop backing the invasion of Gaza and help stop a genocide.”

Shadow Foreign Minister Senator **Simon Birmingham** (Lib., SA) – Feb. 7 – “Hamas... continue to call for a repeat of the 7 October attack, for Israel to be destroyed and ... genocide of the Jewish people... no nation could or would live with the ongoing threat that is posed... by Hamas.”

**Elizabeth Watson-Brown** (Greens, Ryan) – Feb. 7 – “This parliament... must not continue to support Israel’s genocidal actions in Gaza.”

Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) – Feb. 7 – “This motion... ignores what actually caused this war... fails to mention the fact that Hamas, its leaders, its operatives and its supporters in Hezbollah, Iran, Yemen and elsewhere continue to call for repeats of the 7 October attack.” A similar point was made by Minister for Trade and Tourism Senator **Don Farrell** (ALP, SA).

Only the Greens and Senator **Lidia Thorpe** (Ind., Vic.) supported the motion in the Senate. Only the Greens and two independents supported the motion in the House.

**Bob Katter** (KAP, Kennedy) on Feb. 7 moved a motion to support Israel and condemn Hamas.

**Julian Leeser** (Lib., Berowra) – Feb. 7 – “Hamas didn’t just seek to brutalise Israel. They sought to unleash antisemitism across the world and, sadly, they have... I say to the Greens: it is time to root out the antisemitism in your political party.”

Senator **Jordon Steel-John** (Greens, WA) on Feb. 6 moved a motion to support South Africa’s genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas.) – Feb. 6 – “Israel has an inherent right to self-defence, which was recognised in the ICJ ruling... Hamas... wants to see civilians on both sides killed.”

Senator **Lidia Thorpe** (Ind., Vic.) – Feb. 6 – “In a historic legally binding ruling, the ICJ declared that it is highly likely that genocide is occurring in Gaza.”

Senator **David Shoebridge** (Greens, NSW) – Feb. 6 – “Any fair-minded observer believes that genocide is occurring in Gaza.”

Senator **Nick McKim** (Greens, Tas.) – Feb. 6 – “There is a genocide underway in Gaza.”

Only the Greens and Senator Thorpe supported the motion.

ald said the findings “in no way lessens the impact of” the other “abhorrent offensive phrases less than 48 hours after Hamas gunmen killed some 1200 people, mostly Israeli Jews.”

On Feb. 5, News Corp columnist Tim Blair wrote “Well, hooray for that. The Jew-hating mob clearly chanted ‘f . . . the Jews’, as police confirm, but they didn’t say ‘gas the Jews’. They merely asked where the Jews were, as they raucously celebrated Hamas’s rape, torture, slaughter, animalistic defilement and abduction of more than 1000 Jews just a day or so earlier. How completely innocent and reassuring.”

## PUZZLE PEACE

In the *Australian* (Jan. 29), AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein analysed Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu’s controversial Jan. 18 press conference in which he said that Israel must maintain “security control” over all territory west of the Jordan River, which, he admitted, “contradicts with the idea of [Palestinian] sovereignty.”

Dr Rubenstein argued that Netanyahu is not intrinsically opposed to Palestinian statehood, but noted that every time Israel has withdrawn, terror increases from that territory, citing Gaza, southern Lebanon and parts of the West Bank.

ABC Middle East correspondent Tom Joyner’s report of the speech (Jan. 19) omitted Netanyahu’s line about terror and included Joyner claiming, “Israel has for years . . . shown no real interest in supporting the creation of a Palestinian state.”

Netanyahu hasn’t always opposed a Palestinian state. In 2013/14 talks, US Middle East envoy Martin Indyk said Netanyahu “sweated bullets” to reach a deal, but Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had “checked out.” Netanyahu also accepted the 2020 Trump peace plan.

In the *Guardian Australia* (Jan. 24), PA representative to Australia Izzat Abdulhadi criticised Netanyahu but

wasn’t asked to explain President Abbas’ rejection of peace offers.

Australian PM Anthony Albanese commented on *ABC TV* “Insiders” (Jan. 4) that “we need to de-escalate. Part of that might mean, for example, any existence of a Palestinian state would be one which was a demilitarised state as well.” This obviously suggests compromising Palestinian sovereignty, just as Netanyahu had said, yet this was not deemed controversial.

## MINORITY RULES

The *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* have repeatedly platformed fringe, unrepresentative Jewish voices that do not reflect the mainstream Australian Jewish community’s views on Israel to a much greater extent than mainstream ones.

On Jan. 24, Israeli-Australian writer Itamar Livne wrote that he understood why some Jews might feel uncomfortable attending pro-ceasefire rallies they might perceive as including anti-Israel rhetoric – which he denied was actually problematic – but urged them to do so anyway. An example Livne naively cited was the chant of “From the River to the Sea.” He said while some people “insist . . . [it] simply calls for restoration of the human rights of the Palestinian people, the chant is also famously used by Hamas . . . which until six years ago had no qualms calling for the destruction of all Jews.”

The full chant is “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free,” which can only mean Israel’s elimination. Moreover, there is ample evidence Hamas still supports killing Jews.

On Feb. 7, the papers ran an op-ed by Sarah Schwartz and Max Elliott Kaiser, who falsely accused “Australia’s pro-Israel lobby groups” of claiming that “any criticism of the state of Israel is . . . an attack on all Jews.” Pro-Israel organisations support the IHRA working definition of antisemitism which explicitly states, “criticism

of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”

## THE DANGER ZONE

In the *Daily Telegraph* (Jan. 23), AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams explained why Hamas is so dangerous, writing that it supports the Islamic doctrine of “*Muqawama*” which means “persistent warfare” in Arabic.

“*Muqawama* . . . adherents strategise in terms of hundreds of years and see Israel the same way they regard the Crusader Kingdoms of the Middle Ages – a foreign element established through force of arms, which was eventually forced to go back to where it came from. They believe that, ultimately, they can achieve the same outcome against the Jewish state,” he wrote.

Meanwhile, in the *Australian* (Jan. 17), AIJAC research associate Ran Porat wrote about the issue of Israeli settler violence, noting “Palestinian terrorist violence is on a much larger scale and has been rising within the West Bank. This trend is actively encouraged by the PA under its weak, long-serving, 88-year-old President, Mahmoud Abbas.”

## GULFS APART

In the *Australian* (Jan. 20), AIJAC’s Oved Lobel warned that the West’s appeasement of Iran has failed and “Iran’s nuclear weapons program is rapidly expanding. Barring substantial strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities or a regime collapse, there is nothing that can be done to halt it now . . . If nobody is willing to respond to blatant provocations when Iran does not have nuclear weapons, they certainly will not do so once it does.”

Meanwhile, on *ABC Local Radio Melbourne* (Feb. 12), analyst Lydia Khalil argued that the Israel-Hamas war “provided too much of a temptation for Iran and its proxies not to take advantage of the situation,” which

is why Teheran ordered Houthi fighters to attack shipping in the Red Sea.

## ABC'S AGIT PROP

The ABC has appeared to single-handedly wage a propaganda war against Israel's planned operation in Rafah to wipe out the remainder of Hamas' forces, running story after story from UN or aid agency figures denouncing any such plans.

On Feb. 12, far left anti-Zionist Israeli journalist Amira Hass told *ABC Radio National* "Breakfast" that "the Israeli army keeps claiming... victories... but they have not yet succeeded in completely making Hamas surrender. They do not surrender." Surely that's precisely why Israel needs to invade Rafah?

Earlier on "Breakfast" (Feb. 8), far left Israeli commentator Akiva Eldar said Israeli PM Netanyahu is adamant the IDF needs to enter Rafah because "otherwise it would be considered a political suicide that the Hamas will declare victory."

On the ABC website (Feb. 11), ABC Global Affairs Editor John Lyons argued against the Rafah operation saying, "in January, Israel flew a drone over Beirut and assassinated deputy Hamas chief Saleh al-Arouri... Which raises an obvious question: Why could Israel not have carried out 'surgical strikes' against Hamas's leadership in Gaza?" Maybe because the leaders are hiding underground in tunnels and a failure to also degrade Hamas' military infrastructure and fighting force, as well as the leadership, would see it quickly regroup to fight another day?

On *Sky News* (Feb. 7), AIJAC's Joel Burnie condemned calls for Israel not to enter Rafah, saying "the call for an immediate ceasefire... means... reverting back to October the 6th, where Hamas remains in power of Gaza, it remains in a position to repeat the massacre, the rape, the pillaging, the murder that occurred on October 7."

The *Australian* (Feb. 20) agreed with Israel's leadership that it's "essential" for Israel to launch its ground offensive in Rafah to "destroy Hamas" and telling it not to do so "is in essence telling [Israel] to lose the war."

## HACK BY NAME...

Discussing the legal status of the West Bank on *ABC Radio Triple J*'s "Hack" Joyner said: "The West Bank is occupied Palestinian territory. What that means is that it's Palestinian land. The land belongs to Palestinians and is nominally controlled by Palestinians. But Israel has sort of forced itself using its military onto the land since 1967. So, for the last five or six decades, although it's Palestinian territory, it's been under Israeli control."

When the West Bank came into Israeli control in its defensive war in 1967, it was not widely referred to or considered "Palestinian land" and was certainly not "controlled" by the Palestinians, nominally or otherwise. The territory was captured from Jordan, which had illegally annexed the area following 1948 Arab war to destroy the nascent Jewish State.

Nor did the report include the Israeli view that the West Bank is disputed land, not "Palestinian land".

## COURTING CONTROVERSY

In the *Daily Telegraph* and *Advertiser* (Jan. 30), AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein welcomed the International Court of Justice's decision not to order that Israel implement a ceasefire in Gaza and its call for Hamas to release the hostages it holds.

However, he criticised the Court for agreeing with South Africa's claim there was a "plausible" case that acts of genocide might be happening in Gaza.

Dr Rubenstein wrote, "Israel targets only Hamas military infrastructure and makes great efforts to minimise civilian casualties by issuing warnings to evacuate, establishing safe zones, and pausing military activity for hours each

day to allow residents to seek food and water. Since early on, it has allowed the delivery into Gaza of all aid that agencies can get there. Why then did the Court say genocide was plausible? The Court uncritically accepted claims by UN functionaries, many with anti-Israel records."

On *ABC Radio National* "Late Night Live" (Feb. 7) former International Criminal Court prosecutor Regina Weiss argued it doesn't matter that Israel has tried to minimise civilian deaths, saying, "we can see... the civilian death toll [of] 27,000" – which not only takes Hamas numbers at face value but ignores the fact that even Hamas has admitted that thousands of its fighters have been killed and are included in that death toll.

## REASONS? HOW UNREASONABLE!

A report on *ABC Radio* "AM" (Feb. 8) into the ultimately unsuccessful efforts to reach a ceasefire for hostages deal between Israel and Hamas failed to provide the reasons why Israel said no.

The report stated that Israel rejected Hamas' proposal for a ceasefire, and that Binyamin Netanyahu called it delusional. ABC Global Affairs Editor John Lyons set out in detail only Hamas' proposed stages for the release of hostages, strangely describing this as "what Hamas did want from this deal." But the report didn't explain what Hamas actually wanted from the deal in exchange for releasing hostages – information widely available. This included Israel agreeing to release 1,500 Palestinian prisoners, 500 of whom would be chosen by Hamas, the withdrawal of all Israeli troops from Gaza, no aerial surveillance of Gaza and an end to Israel's blockade of military materials entering Gaza. Such detail was crucial to understand why Israel rejected the deal, yet Lyons' language would have led listeners to think Hamas had no significant demands of Israel.

Allon Lee

## DOXX-LAND

The leaking of the names, photos, employment details and other private information of 600 Jewish writers, artists, musicians and academics who had joined the private “J.E.W.I.S.H Australian creatives & academics” WhatsApp chat group shocked much of the country.

Nine Newspapers (Feb. 8) quoted Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-CEO Alex Ryvchin saying, “These people have painstakingly collected the names, faces, professions and other personal information of a group of Australians whose sole common trait is that they are Jews... It is a ‘Jew list’ drawn up and published in a menacing manner intended to inflict maximum emotional damage and professional loss.”

On Feb. 12, News Corp columnist Andrew Bolt denounced two of the main doxxers, attacking “arts bureaucracies” for giving “both of them tens of thousands of dollars of your money to keep them in business.”

In the *Age*, (Feb. 14), former ABC journalist Ramona Koval, a member of the group, wrote, “The group became a place where we could reassure those who were feeling the intimidation from anti-Jewish colleagues, groups, and cultural organisations making one-sided public statements about a far-off war. Jewish board members across such organisations including the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art felt so unwelcome that they resigned. The group shared experiences, articles, and reports, much like any other group of people with a common experience. I’m sure you have your own WhatsApp groups too, including advocates and activists in the mix as this one does. It’s part of living in a democracy. In a democratic society we accept all lawful civic activities. Intimidating all members of the group by publishing their photos and other details has no place in modern Australia.”

On ABC TV “7.30” (Feb. 15), group member Alana Kushnir said, “What I think is a big issue here is the assumptions that have been made. You’re a bad person, that you condone genocide, that you want thousands of children to die, and that is absolutely not true. And that’s not true of anyone in the WhatsApp group or any Jews for that matter.”

On the ABC website (Feb. 19), TV and radio host Patricia Karvelas said, “The bigger question is why we are in

a situation where Australians – whether Jewish or Palestinian – are being personally targeted and policed. What’s the end game? The Australian government has reacted to this episode with a move to criminalise doxxing and introduce jail terms for those responsible. The parameters of the laws will be subject to consultation... but the fact that

we are even having this conversation speaks volumes about how toxic things have become.”

An article on SBS’s website (Feb. 13) quoted Australia Palestine Advocacy Network President Nasser Mashni saying, “It should be abhorrent to us all that this group conspired to

target, intimidate and silence people who are speaking out against the genocide in Palestine.” His characterisation of the group was of course false. The article also quoted two experts questioning the effectiveness of proposed new legislation to combat doxxing.

*Canberra Times* columnist Jack Waterford’s Feb. 17 piece was a wild, factually-challenged rant against doxxing laws, which misrepresented both the details of the WhatsApp group, and the views of pro-Israel Jewish supporters and organisations, including claiming that any criticism of Israel is called antisemitic.

On the ABC “Religion & Ethics” website (Feb. 15), Monash University’s Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation head David Slucki wrote, “There is no question that some of the opinions expressed by some members of the group are objectionable – including to other members of the group! But that’s not what is at issue here. The question is: Is it right to assign collective blame to all the members of a private Jewish WhatsApp group, casting them as co-conspirators, branding them “Zios” (an antisemitic dog-whistle popularised by American white supremacist David Duke) and releasing their personal information, including photos, job titles, and employers, knowing this might lead to intimidation, harassment, and violence?”

On ABC *Radio National* “Drive” (Feb. 12), Federal Liberal MP Julian Leeser was challenged on why existing laws on doxxing are insufficient and replied, “Some of the people engaged in the doxxing themselves aren’t engaged in those direct practices [of online intimidation and harassment which are arguably already illegal], but they’re engaging in the facilitation and encouragement of those practices. And I think that’s the important thing.”

# THE LAST WORD

Rabbi Ralph Genende

## BURNING BRIDGES OR BUILDING THEM?

October 7 was a cataclysm, a tectonic shock of epic proportion for the Jewish people. We have been shocked to the core at the brutality of Hamas, staggered by the virulent antisemitism across the world and in our own neighbourhoods, and at the mindless and promiscuous vitriol towards Israel. We are perplexed by many of our neighbours and colleagues, by their silence, awkwardness, hostility, indifference or ignorance. Challenges abound.

One of the critical challenges is in the interfaith space – particularly between Jews and Muslims.

I have been engaged in interfaith work for most of my adult life. For the past 30 years, I have worked alongside Christians and Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, Buddhists and Mormons, Maoris and Aboriginal people. My interaction with Muslims began shortly after September 11, establishing contacts between Year 11 students from the Jewish Mt Scopus College and Muslim King Khalid College.

My faith in interfaith work with Muslims and some Christians was deeply shaken by October 7. It felt like the bridges we had carefully created had all been burnt, that relationships we had thoughtfully and even lovingly nurtured had been torn apart. I was stunned by the silence of the Jewish Christian Muslim Association (JCMA) that I had been president of and for whom I had facilitated a journey to Jerusalem for a group of Jews, Christians and Muslims. I resigned from it together with its President, Rabbi Kaltmann.

I was numbed and dismayed by our Muslim colleagues' lack of moral clarity to distinguish themselves from the Islam of Hamas and outraged by those who had the clarity but lacked the moral courage to actually say so.

People of faith can fail and have failed us, and we Jews know faith can falter but it can also renew, deepen and strengthen us – we dare not lose our hope, which is fundamental to the Jewish psyche.

Despite the *schadenfreude* of

some of our critics, we believe there must be a future. We will continue to live together in this country with its rich multifaith and multicultural tapestry.

People of faith are our allies and crossing cultures remains imperative. To listen to the other is the beginning of repairing bridges. It will take time, humility, and patience – it's always easier to tear down, much harder to rebuild.

Our Muslim interlocutors will need to show us exactly where they stand on support for Hamas and Hezbollah and what their intentions are regarding anti-Jewish, not to mention anti-Israel, teachings in their schools and mosques. And we need to be prepared to hear their pain about the suffering caused by what they term Israel's "occupation", the huge losses of life in Gaza and how it erodes their faith in us and our morality.

I have been heartened by conversations with a few brave Muslims and a good number of Christians, Hindus and people of other faiths who have reached out. It is, however, especially difficult to reach out to each other while we are still engaged in a war, losing young soldiers

daily, our people being held captive and there being so many heartbreaking casualties in Gaza. Shared sorrow can, however, be a bridge for and to the future. It's admittedly easier at this point to collaborate with our allies in non-Muslim cultures and religions.

In the meantime, I will continue to despair and dream, to doubt and to hope, to labour and to act for the future of interfaith collaboration here, in Israel and across the world. I draw hope from the Torah in which Isaac and Ishmael, the two sons of Abraham, put aside their fractious past to bury their father and their mutual pain and hostility.

There are surely enough courageous and genuine seekers of faith to still make it a better world. Rabbi Nachman of Bratislav (1772-1810) famously summed up the need for bravery and boldness in our collective human imperative: "the whole world is a very narrow bridge, but the main thing is not to fear at all!"



Muslim clerics praising (or not condemning) Hamas' atrocities has deeply shaken Jewish interfaith outreach (YouTube screenshot)



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