



# IRAN'S RING OF FIRE



Will the anticipated attack on Israel by Iran and its proxies start a regional conflagration?

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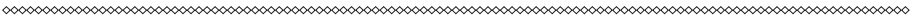
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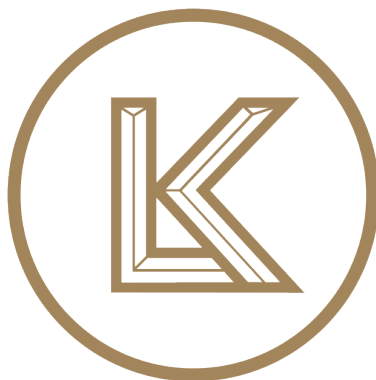


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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This AIR edition has been published as everyone anticipates major military responses from Iran, Hezbollah or both to the targeted killings of Hezbollah military Chief of Staff Fuad Shukur in Beirut on July 30, and Hamas' top leader Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran the next day. Many fear a larger-scale regional war looms.

Top analyst Jonathan Spyer explores Iran's retaliatory options and likely considerations, while Oded Yaron reports on the military hardware Iran and its proxies can deploy. Ilan Evyatar looks at Iran's political state of play in the wake of the election of "reformist" President Masoud Pezeshkian and speaks to a top Israeli intelligence analyst about Iran's calculations. Plus, Ksenia Svetlova and Avi Issacharoff profile both Haniyeh and his successor as head of Hamas, October 7 mastermind Yahya Sinwar.

Also featured this month is an interview with noted Gazan dissident Hamza Howidy about life under Hamas rule, while Izabella Tabarovsky reports on how the widely-used online resource Wikipedia has been manipulated by anonymous activists to falsify and distort facts about the Holocaust, Jews and Israel.

Finally, don't miss legal experts Olivia Flasch and Ami Orkaby on the latest controversial ICJ decision or Nazi hunter Efraim Zuroff's review of Australia's handling of its mass Nazi immigration following World War II.

Your feedback is invited on any aspect of this edition at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au).

Tzvi Fleischer

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**EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN**  
COLIN RUBENSTEIN**“ESCALATION” AND DOUBLE STANDARDS**

**A**s this edition of the *AIR* went to press, Israel, and indeed the whole Middle East, remained on tenterhooks. There are fears that a large-scale war between Israel and Iran, and/or Israel and Hezbollah, could be about to erupt.

Israel's July 30 elimination of Hezbollah military Chief of Staff Fuad Shukur, and the subsequent assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, reportedly via a hidden bomb in an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps compound in Teheran, has been widely described as an “escalation” that puts the Middle East on the brink of a regional war.

However, this ignores the fact that both Iran and Hezbollah have been waging open war on Israel for ten months, since Iran's Lebanese terror proxy began bombarding Israel on a daily basis following Hamas' October 7 invasion and mass pogrom in southern Israel.

As top Israeli intelligence expert Haim Tomer notes in this edition, “Hezbollah does not fire a bullet at Israel without Iranian approval,” with Iranian officers present in Hezbollah's military control rooms.

Plus, Iran is pushing its other proxies, in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, to also launch unprovoked attacks on Israel – and Iran itself launched a massive direct missile and drone attack on Israel in April.

Under deadly fire from Hezbollah missiles, rockets, drones and anti-tank ordnance, Israel has had no choice but to evacuate towns, kibbutzim and villages within five kilometres of the northern border, in effect carving a depopulated security zone out of the country's own territory. At least 60,000 Israelis can't go back home, and many no longer have homes to go back to.

It's difficult for us here in continental Australia to appreciate just how intolerable this situation is for tiny Israel. Imagine if the whole population of Cairns and the Cape York Peninsula had to be evacuated for ten months because of dozens of missile attacks launched daily by a neighbouring country. Moreover, a scant 35 kilometres separate Hezbollah's forward-deployed rockets from Israel's third-largest city, Haifa.

It is often said, correctly, that no one wants escalation to all-out war – not Israel, not Hezbollah, not Iran – yet this misses a crucial distinction. Israel doesn't want a larger war – but it expects hostilities to end. Iran and Hezbollah do not want a larger war – but they aim for daily limited attacks on Israel to continue for as long as possible. For Israel, if the choice is risking a larger war, or Iran and Hezbollah getting their preference of being able to fire at Israel on a daily basis, making a significant section of the already tiny country perhaps permanently uninhabitable, is it any surprise that Israel's military and political leadership feel they have no choice but to take actions designed to try to change the current reality? Yet this is, absurdly, then labelled dangerous “escalation”.

As Federal Opposition Leader Peter Dutton told me while he was in Israel recently, and later wrote in the *Herald Sun*, “Israel has every right to respond militarily to the existential threats it faces,” yet there are, regrettably, leaders in Australia who “demand standards of Israel which they would never expect of other countries,” including our own.

Such attitudes were certainly on display when Special Adviser Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin reported back on the tragic, accidental killing of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers after the IDF believed their convoy had been taken over by Hamas.

A rapid IDF investigation revealed that circumstantial evidence misled the IDF drone commanders to believe they were dealing with Hamas hijackers, but, in any case, open fire regulations were violated. In a few days, the two senior officers directly responsible

were summarily dismissed and three others given formal reprimands, while the file remains open with the Military Prosecutor.

This wasn't enough for the Albanese Government, which insultingly insisted on an Australian-led special investigation, unlike all other nations which lost citizens in the tragedy. Yet Binskin says he was given free access to probe the incident and his report confirmed the IDF's account in almost every detail.

He even confirmed the convoy clearly had armed guards who shot in the air and behaved like hijackers, even though armed guards were against WCK policy.

Foreign Minister Penny Wong's statements following the report, however, misrepresented and omitted the essence of Binskin's findings, using it as just another opportunity to castigate Israel. She cited UN statistics of humanitarian aid workers killed during the war without providing any context, or placing any blame on Hamas for such deaths despite its proven use of hospitals, schools and humanitarian zones as key bases for military operations.


As the UN itself recently confirmed, some staff of one such humanitarian aid body – UNRWA (to which Australia was so quick to resume funding earlier this year despite these well-founded allegations) – are indeed members of Hamas and took part in the atrocities of October 7. Israeli intelligence says that the number is much, much higher than the UN has admitted.

Meanwhile, we've also seen DFAT's comparatively muted censure of Iran's Ambassador to Australia Ahmad

Sadeghi following his declaration that "wiping out" Israel by 2027 is a "heavenly and divine promise" and describing Israelis as a "Zionist plague".

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese rightly said there is "no place in Australia" for such sentiments. Yet the Government's response missed the point that, in calling for the violent annihilation of the Jewish State, Sadeghi was accurately conveying the antisemitic and genocidal policy of the regime he represents. In recent months, Australian foreign policy has sometimes seemed to lack the ability to clearly differentiate between the actions of the Iranian axis of terror proxies against Israel, and Israel's undeniable right to defend its people from this aggression.

Rather than simply criticising Sadeghi's vile, racist threats and moving on – threats which echo the language of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei – we need to internalise them.

If we truly wish to avoid "escalation" in the Middle East – and indeed to de-escalate toward a region of greater stability and mutual security – we should, together with our allies, demand Iran's proxy Hezbollah cease its unprovoked aggression against Israel, abide by UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and withdraw its forces north of the Litani River. Hezbollah's patrons in Teheran must end their destabilising behaviour throughout the Middle East, and – let it not be forgotten – stop their ongoing nuclear violations without delay. And these demands must be backed up by coordinated, coercive measures to enforce them. 

**"There are, regrettably, leaders in Australia who 'demand standards of Israel which they would never expect of other countries,' including our own"**

## WORD FOR WORD

"I offer my condolences to the Islamic Ummah, the Resistance Front, the courageous, proud people of Palestine, and in particular to the family and loved ones of Martyr Haniyeh... Following this bitter, tragic event... it is our duty to take revenge."

**Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei vows revenge for the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh on Iranian soil (X/Twitter, July 31).**

"The secretary has directed additional air assets to move to the region, along with a combination of destroyers and cruisers... should Israel be attacked, the president, the secretary, have committed to come to the defence of Israel."

**US Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh (DOD, Aug. 5).**

"In the Middle East, Iran is virtually behind all the terrorism, all the turmoil, all the chaos, all the killing... When Israel fights Hamas, we're fighting Iran. When we fight Hezbollah, we're

fighting Iran. When we fight the Houthis, we're fighting Iran. And when we fight Iran, we're fighting the most radical and murderous enemy of the United States of America... Our enemies are your enemies, our fight is your fight, and our victory will be your victory."

**Speech by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu before the US Congress (Times of Israel, July 25).**

"We must be very strong so that Israel can't do these ridiculous things to Palestine. Just like we entered Karabakh, just like we entered Libya, we might do similarly to them."

**Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan appears to threaten to invade Israel (Jerusalem Post, July 28).**

"Notwithstanding the conduct of the actual strike itself, in considering Israel's actions so far, I assess that their acceptance of accountability and investigating, reporting and responding, including holding people to account, has to this point been timely, appropriate and with some exceptions sufficient."

**Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister, releases his finding on the World Central Kitchen strike (Foreign Minister's website, Aug. 2).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## JIHAD, REJECTIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM

Here are some recent statements from Palestinian leaders:

1. *"Allahu Akbar, come to Jihad, come to Jihad... strike the sons of apes of pigs, kill everyone who is a settler, slaughter everyone who is Israeli... this is Jihad, Jihad, victory or Martyrdom."*

2. *"Allah, strike your enemies... Allah, strike the aggressive Jews, strike them and their allies, O Master of the Universe, and those who support them both politically and with weapons and money. O Allah, kill them one by one... do not leave even one of them."*

3. *"The Israelites and the Jews spread corruption on earth... they kill people left, right, and centre... No one is safe from them – not trees, stones, people, children, women, the elderly, holy mosques, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, or Jerusalem. They spread corruption on earth, in every sense of the word. This is clear and obvious."*

4. *"This struggle [against Israel]... is the same struggle... between good and evil, between truth and lies, between those loyal to the Merciful One [Allah] and those loyal to Satan."*

5. *"My conflict against this occupation (i.e., Israel) is an existential conflict, not just a conflict over borders. It's either me or him on this land."*

(All translations by Palestinian Media Watch, except number 3 which is from MEMRI).

These five quotes seem to sum up Hamas' ideology pretty well – the fight against Israel is a religious jihad demanded and sanctioned by Allah and every single Jew in Israel must be killed or expelled, all combined with religious antisemitism, including traditional Islamic racism such as referring to Jews as "sons of apes and pigs," spreaders of corruption and followers of Satan.

Yet there's one problem with this analysis – all of these quotes come from individuals officially affiliated with the "moderate" and "secular" Palestinian Authority (PA), not Hamas.

Numbers two and three are from sermons by PA Sharia (Islamic law) Judge Dr Abdallah Harb broadcast on official PA-TV on July 5 and August 2 respectively.

Number four is a statement by PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas' Advisor on Religious Affairs Mahmoud Al-Habbash, also broadcast on official PA-TV on Feb. 9.

Number five is a statement made to *Al-Arabiya TV* on June 15 by Muhammad Al-Lahham, a member of the Revolutionary Council of Fatah, the ruling party of the PA.

And number one is how Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, the movement's armed wing, reacted to the October 7 massacre, issuing a call to jihad and to "slaughter everyone who is Israeli" on its Telegram channel.

My point is that, while most sophisticated people know there is no hope of Israel making peace with Hamas given its religious worldview, total rejectionism and open antisemitism, too many of them ignorantly imagine that the obvious alternative is to make peace with the "secular" and "moderate" Palestinian Authority. Yet the very same beliefs that make peace impossible with Hamas are also widespread in the PA.

A two-state resolution must remain the ultimate goal. But wilful blindness about the realities of the PA as a partner for such a resolution in the near future only makes that goal more difficult to achieve.

## UNRWA'S OCTOBER 7 PARTICIPANTS

As has been widely reported, on Aug. 5, more than six months after the allegations surfaced and evidence for them was provided, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) admitted that nine of its employees "may" have been involved in the October 7 atrocities, and fired them.

Yet news stories about this development almost all failed to report what these employees did and what the evidence against them was. Basically, there is footage taken by Hamas terrorists themselves on October 7 showing at least some of them taking part in attacks, including identifiable UNRWA workers putting the bodies of murdered Israelis into official white UN vans to take back to Gaza, presumably to further abuse the corpses and hold them for ransom.

Moreover, the fired employees are just the tip of the iceberg. Israel has identified many other UNRWA staff members who took part in the October 7 attacks through video and phone intercept evidence, and says it has intelligence that 10% of all UNRWA employees are officially linked to terrorist groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and has supplied UNRWA with

names and ID numbers for more than 100 Hamas-affiliated employees. Plus, Hamas weapons caches and bases have been found in dozens and dozens of UNRWA schools, clinics and buildings in Gaza – including directly under UNRWA's main headquarters in the form of a bunker, connected to the UNRWA building's power supply, whose construction could not possibly have been kept secret from UNRWA staff just above.

These facts render the decision of Western governments, including Australia's, to resume funding to the organisation based on nothing but purely verbal assurances all aid will be used properly as beyond irresponsible.



Footage from October 7 shows identifiable UNRWA employees putting the bodies of murdered Israelis in UN-owned white vans (Screenshot)

## A SIMPLE TEST

Is someone you know confused about who is genocidal in the Israel-Hamas war, thanks to the propaganda and empty sloganeering which dominate social media and too much of the mainstream media?

*New York Times* columnist and recent AIJAC guest Bret Stephens has proposed a simple test that should settle the matter for anyone at all open to persuasion and critical thinking (and sadly there are many who are not). It is simply this: Imagine that the armed forces of the other side surrender, does the killing stop?

Anyone who is not a complete devotee of Hamas ideology knows that if Hamas surrendered, Gazans would no longer be killed. There would be all sorts of complexities and issues, but the war and the deaths it is causing would be over.

However, if the IDF decided to surrender to Hamas, the result would not be an end to violence. Instead, there would be multiple October 7 style massacres on steroids – as Hamas has itself made clear.

So exactly who has genocidal intentions here?

AIR



Seth Mandel

## IF HANIYEH CAN BE KILLED, SO CAN HAMAS

The implications of Ismail Haniyeh's assassination in Teheran will become clearer in the coming weeks, but it should finally bury one of the more absurd claims made by Israel's critics – that there is no military solution to the problem posed by Hamas.

Sometimes this is phrased as: "Hamas is an idea, and you can't kill an idea." Sometimes we're told those eliminated in targeted assassinations – and even battlefield routs – will be replaced by interchangeable cogs.

But the Haniyeh killing so defies that logic that it ought to prompt some reconsideration of this part of Israel's strategy by its critics.

Start with why Haniyeh's forced exit is such a game changer: He had been integral to the development of Hamas as an organisation and a governing force.

Haniyeh was pulled into the inner circle of the group's founder, Ahmed Yassin, in the late 1990s. Both Yassin and his deputy/successor were killed in 2004, quickly thinning out the ranks.

In 2006, Haniyeh led Hamas' slate of candidates in the Palestinian elections and won. Fatah head Mahmoud Abbas refused to recognise the terror group's victory – this was after Haniyeh claimed Fatah had tried to assassinate him – and by early 2007 Gaza had become a civil war battleground.

A Saudi-brokered truce collapsed and the strip fell into anarchy. As US-based expert Jonathan Schanzer wrote in his book *Hamas vs. Fatah*, "While Hamas and Fatah forces were killing one another, no one was policing the streets." After Haniyeh and Hamas' victory, public works projects were halted and infrastructure quickly degraded.

The disorder in Haniyeh's early days opened the gate to Hamas' "Talibanisation" of the Gaza Strip. The fleeing of aid groups brought in under the Palestinian Authority left Hamas in total control of what came into the strip. Christian targets were repeatedly attacked by Islamist thugs. All of this violence and corruption brought Hamas into immediate tension with Gaza's prominent clans.

Hamas' brutal tactics – kidnappings, summary executions – ultimately won the day, ejecting Fatah from the strip. The form that Haniyeh's Islamist terror machine took into the civil war soon solidified into Hamas' day-to-day *modus operandi*.

In 2017, Yahya Sinwar took the operational reins in Gaza and Haniyeh decamped to Qatar to lead Hamas' politburo. This only further legitimised Haniyeh as the gatekeeper of Gaza to foreign ministries around the world. He lived in luxury and plotted Hamas' expansion to the West Bank as Abbas aged, the Palestinian Authority atrophied, and Iran salivated at the thought of adding another beachhead to its proxies' encirclement of Israel.

Haniyeh takes more than mere institutional memory with him; he was the midwife of Gaza as we know it, in some ways its architect (at the risk of giving him too much intellectual credit).

Sinwar has been named the new head of Hamas' political division, and congratulations are in order – mostly for Israel, which can see in Sinwar's promotion the continuing fruits of its methodical dismantlement of Hamas.

There are three reasons to find encouragement in this latest turn of events.

First, Hamas' leadership bench is depleted, and Israel's careful decapitation of its branches has been effective.

Second, Sinwar's consolidation of power, combined with his geographic isolation in tunnels under Gaza, turns Hamas from an organisation into a literal death cult.

Third, it collapses a comforting lie that the West tells itself about these terror groups, enabling a more honest conversation about how to defeat them.

Sinwar is now Hamas' political "wing", its military "wing", and any other chimerical "wing". Large terror groups like Hamas have different departments, sure, but the West has always fooled itself into believing there's a fundamental difference between the guy playing Good Cop and the guy playing Bad Cop. Now, there's not even someone opposite Sinwar to pretend that a compromise is in the works and the West just has to keep making concessions to the "moderates" so the hardliners don't lose their temper.

AIR



Seth Mandel is senior editor of Commentary. © Commentary

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# ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

## “INAPPROPRIATE” RELATIONS

Periodic speculation that Indonesia may someday upgrade political relations with Israel usually runs into a perennial obstacle. Whatever the political configuration in Jakarta, identification with the Palestinian cause and reservations about the Jewish state are deeply ingrained in some prominent sectors, thereby limiting prospects for improving relations except in more favourable conditions.

Further confirmation that the outbreak of war in Gaza last October has put on hold such hopes came with the backlash over a viral photo showing five youth cadres of Indonesia’s largest Muslim organisation meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog in Jerusalem.



An image that ruffled feathers in Indonesia (Image: Zainul Maarif/Instagram)

News of the meeting came to light after Zainul Maarif, a scholar and member of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), shared an Instagram post on July 7 with a photo of the visit, stating that the meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the ongoing “conflict between Hamas and Israel” and Indonesia-Israel relations.

“I am not a protester, I am a religious philosopher. Instead of protesting on the streets and conducting boycotts, I much prefer discussions and conveying ideas,” he wrote.

The meeting was reportedly arranged by an alumni group of Harvard University, who invited the NU members to Israel for discussions on “academia and start-ups”.

Among those weighing in was the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), a body of the country’s top Islamic scholars, which said it “deeply (regretted)” the visit at a time when tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed [in the conflict], while the Indonesian Government swiftly distanced itself from the controversy, saying the visit was

“not related in any way to the formal stance of the Indonesian government.”

The five also faced a stern backlash from NU’s national board of executives, who fired them from their relatively low-level positions, arguing that they had neither notified nor sought permission prior to the visit. “It is inappropriate for NU members to visit Israel. It is an act of geopolitical ignorance,” said an NU spokesperson.

Describing the visit as “inappropriate” and “tone-deaf”, NU chairman Yahya Cholil Staquf said in a press conference at NU’s headquarters in Jakarta, “We understand that this is something that crossed the line in the context of the current situation [between Israel and Palestine].”

Yahya further stated that NU cadres cannot establish relations with Israel-related parties, even if the purpose is to develop activities or scholarship programs. “The only thing allowed is to help the Palestinian people. That is the only thing that is allowed and this must be stated explicitly to all parties who engage,” he said.

Notably, Yahya himself visited the country in 2018 when he was NU’s secretary-general, having accepted an invitation by the American Jewish Committee to speak at a seminar. He and his NU entourage met then Israeli PM Netanyahu. Faced with criticism, he justified his visit as promoting peace between Palestine and Israel.

Famously, the late former president Abdurrahman Wahid, then NU chairman, visited Israel several times for interfaith dialogues throughout the 1990s and called for upgraded relations with Israel, which prompted a backlash from some Muslim groups at home.

Those initiatives had put NU under scrutiny, even if they occurred at a time of relative calm, but in the context of the Gaza conflict, the visit has strengthened the conviction of NU’s critics that it is a friend of Israel.

Meanwhile, the growing trade volume between Indonesia and Israel – most of which takes place via third countries – made national headlines in July, prompting calls upon the Indonesian Government to act.

Data from the country’s Central Statistics Agency showed Israeli exports to Indonesia amounting to more than US\$35 million (A\$53m) between January and May 2024. While the amount is a minuscule proportion of Indonesia’s overall imports (less than 0.05%), it is nearly four times higher than the \$8.85 million (A\$33.3m) recorded in the same period in 2023 and surpassed last year’s total of \$21.9 million. The official data also showed exports to Israel from Indonesia had by May reached more than \$66 million (A\$100m).

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) called on the Government to protect consumers from products linked to Israel, saying that trade links “must be stopped”.

The MUI’s chair of foreign relations, Dr Sudarnoto Abdul Hakim, told *Arab News* that the Government must protect Indonesian consumers under the existing con-



sumer protection laws.

“Any trade will surely yield profits... This financial gain is what could potentially play an important role in funding Israel’s main programs right now,” Hakim said. “Since Israel’s current main agenda is to finish Palestine, let’s not support that.”

AIR



Alex Benjamin

## HATE HAS BEEN WINNING AT THE EUROPEAN BALLOT BOX

Six years ago, Israel’s tenth President Reuven Rivlin said, “For us, it is clear as daylight. Antisemitism is a presence in society that corrupts society itself. We try to explain to the whole world that if you don’t fight against antisemitism, it will hit your societies.”

Europe is still processing a number of elections that have changed the continent dramatically. The far right appears within touching distance of the French presidency in 2027. It missed out on a majority and the prime minister’s office in a second round of national parliamentary voting on July 7 only after the warring political tribes of the far left, greens and liberals managed to agree that the *Rassemblement National* (National Front) was worse than their own substantial differences.

In the European Parliament elections in June, despite some horrific SS gaffes and a Chinese spy uncovered in their offices in Brussels, the far right AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) party came second in Germany. The Liberal Belgian Prime Minister was in tears after being abandoned at the ballot box. In the European Parliament, the Liberals are now lagging in fifth place, as the ultra-conservative Patriots faction led by Hungarian PM Viktor Orban and the more moderate but still right of centre ECR group took the third and fourth spots respectively. The Christian Democratic centre remained top, with the Socialists, spared blushes by a surprising result in Italy, coming in second.

In the mid 90s, French Prime Minister Alain Juppe forced his cabinet to sit through a controversial movie about riots in the French *Banlieues* (poor suburbs largely inhabited by immigrant families) called *La Haine* (“Hate”).

Following the brutal racist gang rape of a 12-year-old Jewish girl in the outskirts of Paris in mid-June, Emmanuel Macron urged his Education Minister to ‘hold a dialogue’ on racism and hatred of Jews, to prevent hateful speech with serious consequences from infiltrating the classrooms.

Yet it is likely too late for dialogue. Classrooms are not just infiltrated but saturated with hate. They were

already saturated when Mr Samuel Paty, a teacher, was decapitated for attempting to create a dialogue on freedom of expression. And this sickness has spread well beyond the classroom. It is in universities; it is on the streets. It prevents football matches between Israel and Belgium in Brussels being held on security grounds. In short, it infects everything.

It is a simple fact, borne out in the long and frequently depressing arc of history, that once the virus of hate is inside society, it won’t rest until it has infected the entire body. Since October 7, antisemitism has risen in some EU countries to levels last seen in the short days ahead of Kristallnacht.

Europe’s leadership had for too long treated antisemitism like a gardener who neglects the growth of weeds. It’s as if they said, “it’s only a small one, affecting a tiny percentage of the garden, what harm can it do?” Since October 7, we’ve gotten an answer.

Europe’s dramatic swerves to the far right and far left can in large part be attributed to this neglect. In *La Haine*, a main character in the movie says, “*La haine attire la haine*”: “Hate attracts hate”.

Jewish communities across the continent represent an early warning system to European governments. We are hyper aware of hate, not only because history has made us so, but because we represent – as has often been stated – the canary in the coalmine.

We warned that the “protests” calling for the eradication of the world’s only Jewish state were dangerous; that the appropriation of the swastika by pro-Palestinian groups used in demonstrations was dangerous; that chants in favour of a global intifada were dangerous; that the sight of masked keffiyeh wearing people terrorising, assaulting and insulting Jewish students on campus, and indeed Jews in the streets, was dangerous. We said anti-Zionism is the new antisemitism, leading to the targeting of Jews and their institutions everywhere.

We warned. We shouted. And we have been ignored. The voters flocked to the margins, giving them voice and, in many cases, power.

These are very dangerous times in Europe.

In one of the most famous lines of *La Haine*, the main character says that what is happening “is the story of a man falling off a ten-storey building, who as he passes each floor, keeps repeating to himself, ‘so far so good, so far so good.’ But what is important is not the fall, but how you land.”

President Rivlin was correct, and so too was Alain Juppe. The time has come to convene every cabinet in Europe to really talk about why hate is winning, and how Europe can land safely. Jewish communities, as the targets of this hate, can help in these vital discussions, but only if our increasingly urgent voices are finally heeded in a serious way.

AIR

9

# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

More than 77 rockets were launched at Israel from Gaza between July 1 and Aug. 12. Three hundred and thirty Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza since Israel began its ground offensive there, as of Aug. 12. Counterterrorism raids in the West Bank have led to the deaths of several senior terrorist commanders and operatives, including in drone strikes in and around Tulkarem and Jenin on Aug. 3 and 6 and July 23.

An Israeli civilian was killed and another injured in a shooting in the Jordan valley on Aug. 11, while two Israeli civilians were killed and another two injured in a stabbing attack in Holon on Aug. 4, amidst numerous other non-fatal terrorist attacks.

Nine Israeli soldiers were arrested on July 29 amidst allegations of sexual and other abuse against Palestinian detainees at Sde Teiman, a military base where many terrorists captured on October 7 are held. The arrests prompted riots later that day at Sde Teiman and the Beit Lid military base by far-right activists – actions condemned by PM Binyamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog and IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi. The Government has since announced that the IDF would phase out the use of Sde Teiman. Four of the arrested soldiers were later released.

## VIOLENCE IN ISRAEL'S NORTH

Hezbollah's offensive actions along Israel's northern border persisted, with July witnessing the group's most lethal attack since the onset of hostilities. On July 27, Hezbollah fired a large Iranian-made Falaq-1 rocket, which struck a soccer field in the Israeli Druze town of Majdal Shams,



Majdal Shams, where a Hezbollah rocket killed 12 children on a soccer pitch (Image: X/ Twitter)

killling 12 children and injuring 50 spectators.

Hezbollah initially publicised the attack, saying it targeted a military facility, but subsequently denied responsibility. Israel released images of rocket fragments with lettering matching pictures of Falaq rockets, used only by Hezbollah in Lebanon. In retaliation for the attack, Israel targeted and eliminated Fuad Shukur, Hezbollah's most senior military commander, in a strike in southern Beirut three days later.

On July 27, the Israeli Navy intercepted a Hezbollah drone which appeared to be targeting the Karish offshore gas field in northern Israel.

Throughout July, Hezbollah and other organisations launched 259 attacks against Israel from Lebanon, resulting in the deaths of 17 Israelis.

## ISRAEL STRIKES YEMEN AFTER HOUSHI DRONE ATTACK

On July 19, the Houthis, an Iranian proxy, launched a modified Iranian Samad-3 drone from Yemen that struck Tel Aviv, killing one person and injuring ten. In response, Israel launched an extensive bombing raid against the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeidah. It was the first time, at least officially, that Israel has struck targets in Yemen.

The Houthis have launched more than 200 missiles and drones at Israel

since October 2023. Meanwhile, reports have emerged that Russian military intelligence officers are on the ground in Yemen helping the Houthis and that Moscow was poised to deliver missiles and other equipment to the Houthis.

## ISRAEL DEGRADES HAMAS

Israel has killed several senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad commanders and officials since June, including Hamas' military chief in Gaza Muhammed Deif on July 13. After some uncertainty, Israel confirmed on Aug. 1 that Deif had indeed been killed. Hamas' Khan Younis brigade Commander Rafa'a Salama also died in the strike.

Hamas' overall leader Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in Iran on July 31, although Israel hasn't officially taken responsibility. Hamas announced on Aug. 6 that Yahya Sinwar, its leader in Gaza and mastermind of the October 7 attacks, would replace Haniyeh.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant told the Knesset on July 10 that 60% of Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip had been killed or wounded since the commencement of Israel's operation in Gaza.

## NEW JOINT APPEAL FOR CEASEFIRE DEAL

The ongoing ceasefire-for-hostages discussions between Israel and Hamas appeared to be at a stalemate prior to the Haniyeh assassination, with reports on July 26 revealing that Hamas had rejected a new hostage deal proposal before any official language had even been sent. Israeli negotiators had added a condition that Israeli forces should be entitled to screen

Palestinians returning to Gaza's north to prevent the return there of Hamas fighters. Hamas accused Israeli PM Netanyahu of stalling, and was reportedly adamant that Israel must agree to completely withdraw from the strip. In addition, Egypt rejected Israel's requirement that Israel have a role in controlling Gaza's border with Egypt to prevent smuggling.

However, following an Aug. 9 statement from the leaders of the US, Qatar and Egypt imploring the sides to finalise a deal, Israel announced it would send its negotiating team to the talks on Aug. 15 in an attempt to finalise the details. Hamas said it would not send a delegation.

### UPDATE ON GAZA AID

According to the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), 5,283 aid trucks entered Gaza during June, but only 3,414 were collected by aid organisations and distributed. In total, 858,131 tonnes of aid have been delivered to Gaza since the start of the war, as of late July.

Following the dismantling of the US floating pier on the coast of Gaza, Israel announced that it will replace it with 'Pier 28' in Ashdod port to help deliver aid.

On June 26, Israel announced plans to increase Gaza's water supply and repair its war-damaged sewage system to alleviate the water crisis and prevent health hazards. On July 3, COGAT confirmed IDF plans to rebuild power lines to restore electricity to a UNICEF-run desalination plant in southern Gaza.

### AL-QAEDA PLEDGES TO WORK WITH IRAN

According to reports, the new leader of the Sunni terrorist group al-Qaeda, Saif al-Adel, is shifting its policy from attacking Shi'ites to reconciling and cooperating with Iran. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has

secretly sheltered al-Adel, an Egyptian paratrooper officer, for many years. In late July, al-Adel revealed his new status and called for attacks on Zionist targets in America, Europe, and Israel, while citing a strategic necessity for jihadists to ally with Iran.

### IRANIAN ATTACKS ON US FORCES RESUME

On July 25 and 26 and Aug. 5 and 10, Iranian-sponsored militia fired projectiles against bases hosting US-led coalition troops in Iraq and Syria. Seven US personnel were injured in the attacks. This was a renewal of direct attacks on US forces by Iranian proxies after a hiatus in such attacks for nearly three months.

Meanwhile, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines stated on July 9 that Iran has become increasingly influential amongst activists in the US protesting against the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, with actors

linked to Iran's government posing as activists online and Iran also supplying protestors with financial support for their activities.

### CHINA BROKERS VAGUE PALESTINIAN UNITY DEAL

On July 23, the rival Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas signed a joint statement in Beijing, brokered by China, that endorsed the formation of a unity government for the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Smaller Palestinian groups also reportedly signed the statement. The plan, which does not have a timetable for implementation and faces other hurdles, is to form an interim reconciliation government for both territories.

In addition, 899 Palestinian terrorists who were captured in Gaza were recognised by the PA as prisoners on June 16, making them eligible to receive monthly salaries from the PA under its "pay for slay" scheme.

## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### "ZIONISTS" EVERYWHERE!

There is a long, tragic history of Jews being scapegoated for the ills of society. In these more sophisticated times, some instead blame "Zionists", but it's clear who they mean.

Take the virulently anti-Israel Maduro regime in Venezuela, for example. Despite having some of the world's largest oil deposits, Venezuela has become an economic basket case under the authoritarian socialist rule of Hugo Chavez and his successor, current President Nicolas Maduro, with millions having fled the country to escape poverty and oppression.

In the July 29 presidential election there, official voting machine receipts released by the opposition show their candidate Edmundo González won around two thirds of the vote, yet the Government-controlled election authority insists Maduro won. Not surprisingly,

unrest has followed.

So who did Maduro blame for this civil unrest? Zionists, of course. Maduro claimed what he called Venezuela's "extremist right" was financed by "international Zionism". "All the communication power of Zionism, who controls all social networks, the satellites and all the power [are] behind this coup d'etat," he said.

Then there's the biggest controversy of the Paris Olympics, the participation in the women's boxing competition of two boxers, including Imane Khelif of Algeria, previously banned by the International Boxing Association for failing gender eligibility tests.

The controversy intensified after Khelif's first round Italian opponent retired after 46 seconds, saying she had never been hit so hard. So who did Algerian Olympic and Sports Committee Director Yassine Arab blame for the controversy over Khelif? "The Zionist lobby" of course, saying "they want to break the mind of Imane... They don't want a Muslim or Arabic girl goes higher in the level of female boxing."

## COVER STORY

# WAITING FOR WAR?

## WHAT WILL IRAN DO NOW?

Jonathan Spyer

Following the killings of Hezbollah's Fuad Shukr and Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh, Israel and the Middle East are poised and waiting for the next move. The two killings represent a significant humiliation for the Iran-led regional axis, which until this point had been projecting a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

The October 7 massacres and the subsequent war may not have come at the express order or at the precise time wanted by the regime in Teheran. But events have proceeded largely in a way satisfactory to it. Israel appeared to be isolating itself diplomatically, unable to deliver a deathblow to Hamas in Gaza and caught in a contradiction between its twin aims of freeing hostages and destroying the Islamist entity in Gaza. All this seemed to confirm that the Iranian strategy of seeding proxy armies on the Jewish state's borders and then using them to bleed Israel to death was working.

The deaths of Haniyeh and Shukr do not reverse this picture entirely, of course. But they do return focus to that part of the picture most advantageous to Israel, and most uncomfortable to Iran. Namely, that while Teheran may be without peer when it comes to building and managing proxy military and political forces, in areas of conventional military and intelligence activity and special operations, it is very much the inferior. The attacks in Beirut and Teheran demonstrate that Israel has penetrated the security structures of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its most powerful proxy to their inner core. They leave Iran in danger of appearing hapless and flailing. For this reason, the attacks have provoked fury among the regime's most committed defenders, and a desire for swift retribution.

'Revenge must be harsh, crippling and without further ado,' thundered *Kayhan*, main organ of the hard line 'principalist' stream within the regime. The paper's editor, Hossein Shariatmadari, is close to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei – who himself promised "harsh punishment"



Ismail Haniyeh, killed in Teheran on July 31; Fuad Shukr, killed in Beirut on July 30 (Images: Shutterstock, Hezbollah Media Office)

for Israel. The *New York Times* reported that Khamenei has ordered a 'direct strike' on Israel in response to the killing of Haniyeh on Iranian soil.

Such a strike could take various forms. The most dramatic and kinetic option for Teheran would be a joint missile and drone attack involving both Iranian and proxy forces from various points in the region. It is worth noting that the attacks on April 13 following Israel's killing of IRGC general Mohammed Reza Zahedi did not involve

proxy forces and were conducted by Iranian state assets alone. But Teheran's proxies in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria have all struck at Israel in the course of the current conflict. A coordinated attack would represent Iran's maximum response. It is the option most likely to open the door to all out regional war.

A second option would be an attack involving one or another of the proxies alone, or a combination of them. The Iranian dilemma here would be that such an attack might not be perceived as a sufficiently severe response to even the score for the strike on Teheran.

A third option would be a targeted strike on a prestige Israeli target, such as a senior official. This would constitute a direct, symmetrical response to the killing of Haniyeh. Until now, however, Iran has not demonstrated the pinpoint intelligence capacities that alone would make such an operation feasible.

It is important to bear in mind that the killing of Fuad Shukr in Beirut opens up a separate account between Israel and Lebanese Hezbollah. Until now, Hezbollah had made clear that its current engagement against Israel constituted a "support front" for Hamas in Gaza, which would be closed down on the achievement of a ceasefire in Gaza. The loss of Shukr in the Lebanese capital introduces a new calculus for Hezbollah, since cessation of fire without retribution for the killing of this senior military official again runs the risk of projecting weakness.

For both the Iranians and their Lebanese proxy, the main dilemma lies in assessing Israeli aims. Specifically, is Israel prepared to up the ante to the point of regional war in the event of a large-scale Iranian and proxy counter attack? Or would the restrictions imposed by the current Gaza conflict – and by the US desire to avoid such a conflagration – force it to absorb such an attack?

The Iranians need to consider carefully. They have had a decade and a half of uninterrupted success, extending their reach to Iraq, Syria and Yemen, coming close to a nuclear capacity. Should they now, prematurely from their point of view, provoke a ruinous regional war, they would stand to face extensive damage and destruction. The US doesn't want Israel to further escalate, but it would be likely to assist Jerusalem in the face of large-scale, sustained attack.

Which option will Teheran choose? We will know soon. In Jerusalem, the municipality recently issued a list of public shelters, along with a laconic statement advising the city's residents to stock enough water and food for three days.

AIR

*Jonathan Spyer is director of research at the Middle East Forum and author of Days of the Fall: A Reporter's Journey in the Syria and Iraq Wars (2018). A version of this article originally appeared in the Spectator. © Jonathan Spyer, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## IRAN'S "RING OF FIRE" AROUND ISRAEL

Oded Yaron

As Israel awaits a response from Iran and its allies following the killing of Hamas' political chief, Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah commander, Fuad Shukr, its air defence systems may have to deal with simultaneous threats of different kinds from multiple fronts.

The different means of attack, as well as the threat of combined strikes coming from multiple fronts, will affect Israel's ability to intercept projectiles and warn its citizens. An Iranian attack, much like its attack last April, which included the use of drones, may have early warning, but Hezbollah has the ability to launch a large number of precision missiles giving Israel just 60-90 seconds of warning, possibly less, making it the greatest threat facing Israel's air defence system.

Hezbollah is estimated to have 150,000 missiles and rockets of varying ranges, and many of those munitions are located in close proximity to Israel's borders. A full utilisation of these capabilities will challenge Israel's ability to provide early warning to citizens, and also intercept projectiles effectively.

Hezbollah also possesses an extensive arsenal of ballistic rockets and missiles, most with fairly short ranges, such as the Falaq 1 which hit the Majdal Shams soccer field in July, killing 12 children and teenagers, and the short-range Burkan rocket, which is equipped with a large 500 kg warhead. These rockets, however, are not precision missiles, and are not remotely controlled.

Along with these capabilities, Hezbollah also possesses a large quantity of longer-range missiles, including the Zelzal 1 at 160 km, the Zelzal 2 at 210 km and the Fattah 110 at 300 km, all of which can reach most parts of Israel, and whose precision Hezbollah has worked on improving in recent years.

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Should Hezbollah use missiles of this category, Israel would have only a few minutes to locate and intercept them. Furthermore, among Hezbollah's main strike assets are the Kornet and Almas anti-tank missiles, which have killed and injured Israelis and caused heavy damage across Israel's northern communities.

Hezbollah also has a large number of remote-controlled kamikaze drones, which are more accurate although carrying a smaller payload than the missiles. The range of one of these drone models, known as the Shahed 129, can cover all of Israel's territory, and since the war's start, Israel's air defence systems have struggled to intercept them, given Israel's preference for systems designed to intercept missiles and rockets as well as the difficulties of radar tracking in the mountainous terrain in the country's north.

Despite being a primary supplier of weapons for militias and armed groups in the Middle East, Iran possesses unique strike capabilities not shared with its regional allies. Most of them were used in last April's attack, when it launched GPS-guided Shahed 129 and Shahed 136 drones, which have a range of more than 2,000 km.

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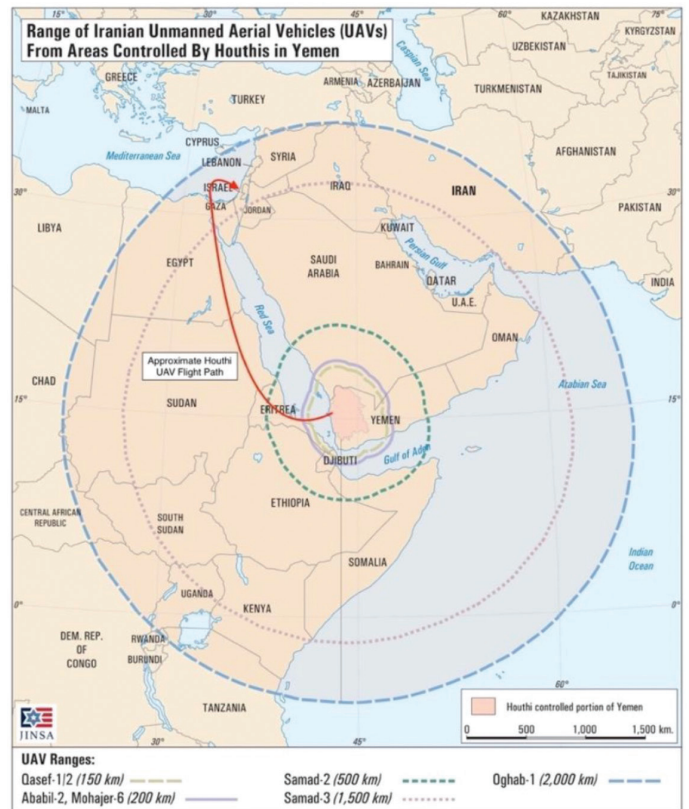


Image courtesy of the Jewish Institute for the National Security of America (JINSA)

These drones have a speed of under 200 km/h, and, consequently, can be located and intercepted hours before they reach Israel.

Iran also launched its domestically produced, GPS-guided ballistic missiles with large payloads, which also have an extended warning time of around two hours. In April's strike, Iran also launched Paveh 351 cruise missiles against Israel, which have a shorter warning time, and greater precision.

Iran has also armed numerous militias in the Middle East, such as Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq and organisations in Syria, as well as its southern arm, the Houthis in Yemen, who possess a large arsenal of Samad 3 drones, used in a strike that killed one and wounded ten in Tel Aviv in July. These low-speed drones have long ranges, but carry a relatively small payload.

The Houthis also possess ballistic missiles, such as the Heidar and Tufan, as well as cruise missiles similar to the Iranian Paveh 351. In this case, like launches from Iran, there is early warning, far more than the threat from the Lebanese border.

Even though Hezbollah is the greatest threat, a combination of threats, especially if launched simultaneously against Israel, would pose a significant challenge to Israel's defence systems.



*Oded Yaron is the Arms Industries and Technology reporter at Haaretz. © Haaretz (Haaretz.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

# DOES IRAN'S NEW "REFORMIST" PRESIDENT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

Ilan Evyatar

**M**asoud Pezeshkian was formally sworn in as Iran's president on July 30. In the run-up to his inauguration, the question being asked in Israel was would this 69-year-old so-called "reformist" have any impact beyond the domestic arena. Specifically, would he be given a sufficiently long leash by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to seek a renewed nuclear accord, and would he oversee any changes to Iran's extremely hostile actions against Israel through Iran's network of proxies?

However, those questions were soon pushed aside as two major events rocked the Middle East, leaving it perhaps on the brink of all-out war. A few hours after Pezeshkian's inauguration, Fuad Shukur, the military leader of Iran's Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, was killed by an Israeli air strike in Beirut. That attack came in response to a rocket fired by Hezbollah which killed 12 children in the Druze village of Majdal Shams three days earlier. Another few hours passed and in Teheran an explosion in a guest house belonging to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) killed Ismail Haniyeh, the leader of Hamas' political wing. Israel did not claim that hit – but neither did it deny responsibility. Either way, Teheran has promised revenge against Israel.

After Haniyeh's death, Pezeshkian said Iran would make Israel "regret its actions".

An earlier glimpse of where the "reformist" President might go regarding Iran's war on Israel came shortly after his second-round run-off win against the hardliner Saeed Jalili, when he sent a letter to Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah pledging Iran's continued support for its powerful Lebanese proxy, which has been engaged in a war of attrition with Israel since Oct. 8, 2023 and is now also threatening massive revenge for the killing of Shukur. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported the resistance of the people in the region against the illegitimate Zionist regime," Pezeshkian wrote, adding, "Supporting the resistance is rooted in the fundamental policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and will continue with strength."

As to whether Iran will seek a renewed nuclear ac-

cord under Pezeshkian, his appointment of former nuclear negotiator Abbas Araghchi as foreign minister suggests that he will at least seek to offer the Supreme Leader an option to return to some version of the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal reached under the Obama Administration – for which Araghchi was a key Iranian negotiator.

Iran has been gradually abandoning all its commitments under the JCPOA in the years since then-US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the deal in May 2018, shortly after Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu gave a press conference publicising information obtained from a Mossad heist of Iran's nuclear archive revealing the extent of Iran's deceptions and progress towards nuclear weapons.

In 2021, Araghchi served as Iran's chief nuclear negotia-

tor in backchannel talks between Teheran and Washington in Vienna aimed at reviving the 2015 deal. Those talks were complicated by the election in June 2021 of hard-line president Ebrahim Raisi, who replaced Araghchi with JCPOA opponent Ali Bagheri-Kani. While the talks went on through early 2023, the Biden Administration eventually admitted they were hopeless.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian: "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?" (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

**F**ollowing the death of Raisi and his Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a helicopter crash on May 19, Khamenei allowed the "reformist" Pezeshkian to run for election, after refusing to allow any reformist candidate to run during the 2021 elections when Raisi came to power. Khamenei was perhaps motivated by his country's dire economic and social situation. Protests over issues such as enforcement of the hijab and the poor state of the economy have rocked Iran over recent years.

Pezeshkian, a cardiac surgeon and former health minister, has promised a number of reforms on the domestic front, including reining in the morality police – the death in 2022 of a Kurdish Iranian student Mahsa Amini at the hands of the morality police for improperly wearing a hijab triggered the country's worst protests since 2009 – promoting women and members of the country's ethnic minorities to management positions in the public service and reducing internet censorship.

Regarding the economy, he has acknowledged that Iran cannot prosper without sanctions being lifted, and for that to happen, he will need to return to some kind of nuclear deal with the US and the West.

Yet that might not be so easy: After Pezeshkian's election, State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller said the US had "no expectations that this will lead to a fundamental change in Iran's direction or its policies."



Nevertheless, the Biden Administration is likely to be nowhere near as tough on a renewed Iran deal as Donald Trump would be should he return to power following the November elections in the US. Khamenei and Pezeshkian will now need to consider whether to gamble on a victory for Kamala Harris and the Democrats or take the risk that they will find themselves having to deal with Trump again.

In his previous term in office, Trump deployed a policy of “maximum pressure” against Iran, applying crippling sanctions and assassinating IRGC commander Qassem Soleimani. Trump considers the Biden Administration far too lax on Iran and has criticised it for not sufficiently enforcing sanctions that are still ostensibly on the books, especially those limiting oil sales. Iranian oil sales to China during the years Biden was president have allowed Iran to make up for much of its lost revenues.

“The problem is Biden has done nothing with [the deal]. I ended it. But we would have had a deal... they were broke. They didn’t have any money for Hamas... they had no money for Hezbollah,” Trump recently told *Bloomberg*.

Israel’s Netanyahu Government could only accept a deal if it includes Iran’s ballistic missile program – the means of delivering a nuclear weapon – and limitations on Iran’s regional proxies, but these were never included in the original JCPOA. Biden or Harris would almost certainly not demand to include these elements in a new deal, and Trump would have to bring the regime to its knees to achieve one including them.

For Netanyahu, Pezeshkian is likely to recall former Iranian reformist president Hassan Rouhani who signed the JCPOA in 2015. Netanyahu called him a “wolf in sheep’s clothing,” as opposed to his hardline predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – called “a wolf in wolf’s clothing” – who would frequently issue threats to erase Israel from the map and engage in Holocaust denial.

Yet, Iran has become increasingly belligerent of late via its real ruler, the Supreme Leader: “The divine promise to eliminate the Zionist entity will be fulfilled, and we will see the day when Palestine will rise from the river to the sea,” Khamenei reportedly told a senior Hamas official at Raisi’s funeral in May.

Iran has made dramatic progress with its nuclear enrichment that has left it only weeks away from producing enough highly enriched uranium for several nuclear warheads. Meanwhile, several Iranian officials have made worrying claims that Iran has mastered all aspects of the nuclear weapons cycle and may be on the verge of changing its nuclear policy to openly build such weapons.

I spoke to a former head of the Mossad’s intelligence division, Haim Tomer, to get a sense of how the Israeli intelligence community sees the situation in Iran. The conversation took place before the Shukr and Haniyeh killings, and do not make for easy reading.

Tomer said that Israel does not know Pezeshkian “well enough” but that it makes little difference, as it is the Supreme Leader in consultation with his defence chiefs who makes decisions on security in Iran.

He expects Teheran to wait to see where things go in the US elections before making any decision on nuclear talks and that Pezeshkian will serve the regime “as someone who the West can talk with” in the event that it faces real pressure. On the domestic front, he can serve as a “reformist president” that can be a card to “broadcast internal messaging to calm the population” if protests against the regime spread again.

Tomer told me about recent discussion at a closed forum on Iran in which there was a view held by many intelligence officials that, while there is no doubt that a majority of Iranians want to see real reform and moderation of the Islamic Republic, allowing Pezeshkian to win the elections was no more than a ploy to give the people in Iran the feeling that they are getting what they want.

As I pressed him on the nuclear issue, and in what direction Iran can be expected to head, Tomer took me back to current events, especially in the wake of the Majdal Shams rocket attack.

He said that while Hamas launched the October 7 attack, probably without Iran’s direct knowledge, the consensus among Israeli analysts is that from a few days after the start of the war, it has become clear that Iran is calling the shots, especially when it comes to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen.

“Hezbollah does not fire a bullet at Israel without Iranian approval,” he says. “Hezbollah works under Iranian strategic dictates and, with the Houthis as well, Iranian officers are sitting in command rooms. One can say this is almost direct Iranian fire on Israel.”

He explained that Iran has changed the way it perceives Israel. In the past, the Iranian view was that Israel was stronger than its enemies and the only way to combat it was through asymmetric warfare. The second stage of evolution was that Iran and its proxies sought to deter Israel to prevent it from attacking them as they built their strength. But the analysis of Iran’s and Hezbollah’s latest statements shows they are developing a belief that they can now defeat Israel: “They are operating with a sense of confidence that



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stems from an evaluation that Israel is not so strong and that the US may not back Israel all the way.”

At the moment, he said, with Iran close to gaining nuclear breakout capability, it still needs Hezbollah as a deterrent and therefore will seek to avoid all out-war. However, an Israeli miscalculation in its response to the Majdal Shams rocket attack could tip the scales and lead Iran to decide that it is time to move from deterrence to victory.

The organisation has the means to hit back at Israel by causing major destruction in Haifa or even Tel Aviv. And then Iran could join in with a direct attack on Israel, as it did in mid-April.

“We could be entering a new stage of the fighting,” he says. “You know how it starts; you don’t know how it ends.”

With the region now even closer to all-out conflict, those words could well be prophetic.

AIR

## WHO WAS ISMAIL HANIYEH?

Ksenia Svetlova

The first and the only time I interviewed Ismail Haniyeh, the late head of Hamas’ political bureau, was in January 2006 in Gaza, on the day of the fateful elections for the Palestinian Parliament, shortly after exit poll results were published.

Like every other member of Hamas, Haniyeh was overwhelmed by this unexpected victory. Hamas had been aiming for a significant increase in power in the Parliament, but it did not expect an outright victory. Haniyeh nevertheless sounded extremely smug and full of himself. He ordered me and a few other female journalists present in the room to cover our heads. Many other Hamas leaders never made such a demand.

During the interview, he promised that under Hamas leadership, Gaza and the Palestinian people would conquer new heights, and he personally promised to follow in the footsteps of the “martyrs” – Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Dr. Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi, two Hamas founders who were assassinated in spring of 2004.

During a rule that formally lasted 18 years, Haniyeh definitely took Gaza to new heights of failure, misery and devastation, while enriching himself and his family.

## HUMBLE ORIGINS, QUICK RISE TO POWER

Born in 1962 in al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza to a family of refugees from al-Jura village, located next to the Israeli town of Ashkelon, Haniyeh grew up in poverty. His father, a fisherman, died when he was still a child and as a youngster,

he worked in construction in Israel to support his family.

Haniyeh got involved in politics early on – he was active in the Muslim Brotherhood movement as a university student. During the First Intifada (1988-1992), he joined Hamas and anti-Israeli protests in the Strip, landing him in an Israeli prison where he served a three-year sentence.

Ismail Haniyeh became one of the terror group’s young stars. In 1992 he was exiled to southern Lebanon along with hundreds of top activists. Under heavy American pressure, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin repatriated the exiled group back to Israel. Upon return to Gaza, he was appointed dean of the Islamic University. In 1997, Haniyeh began serving as the right hand of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Proximity to Yassin did wonders for his career: after both Yassin and Rantisi were assassinated, Haniyeh became a de-facto leader of Gaza.

Following Hamas’ win in the 2006 elections, he was appointed to the post of Palestinian Authority Prime Minister. Sixteen months later, when Hamas overthrew the Palestinian Authority in Gaza in a *coup d’état*, Haniyeh became Prime Minister of the Hamas-led government of Gaza and the political leader of Hamas in Palestine.

## THE MAKING OF AN EXTREMIST

“We do not have any feelings of animosity toward Jews. We do not wish to throw them into the sea. All we seek is to be given our land back, not to harm anybody,” Ismail Haniyeh told *Newsweek* back in 2006, soon after the Palestinian parliamentary elections. Thus began a narrative in the West that Haniyeh was moderate, open to negotiations and even to some form of peace settlement with Israel. Yet, Hamas under Haniyeh refused the conditions set by the roadmap of the international Quartet on the Middle East – a halt to terrorist activity and acceptance of Israel.

In 2006, the same Ismail Haniyeh vowed during a visit to Iran not to recognise Israel, and during a 2012 visit to Tunisia promised to continue the armed struggle and never cede a single part of Palestine.

Before and after the elections of January 2006, Haniyeh promised the Palestinians that Hamas had a development plan for Gaza, that international aid would be plenti-



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ful, and that the Palestinian state would soon be a reality. But the group's military activity ensured that life in Gaza would become much more difficult. By June 2006, terrorists came out of a tunnel into Israel and kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit back to Gaza. Hamas increased the shelling of Israeli border towns with Qassam rockets, and built more underground tunnels for both smuggling and military purposes. One of the results of this policy was Israel's maritime blockade to prevent the smuggling of weapons on a commercial scale.

## PIVOTTO IRAN AND A NEW LIFESTYLE

The romance between Iran and Hamas began in the 1990s – at the time, an uneasy romance between a hard-core Sunni movement and a Shi'a fundamentalist regime. In 1998, after his visit to Teheran, Sheikh Yassin said that “the Islamic Republic of Iran supports this ideal [of a Palestinian state] even more than the Palestinians themselves.” Yet at the same time, sources close to him indicated that he was always wary of the Iranians and preferred to seek funding elsewhere.

His successor Ismail Haniyeh had a different opinion. Under his leadership, Iran increased funding.

While Gaza-based Yahya Sinwar was rightfully labelled an extremist, Ismail Haniyeh, who travelled abroad and dressed in expensive suits, was deemed to be a more moderate figure. The truth is that both worked for the same goal – turning the Gaza Strip into a large military base and Hamas into an army that trained to kidnap Israelis, take over Israeli border communities and shell Israeli towns with technologies provided with the help of Teheran.

A word about those fancy suits. Although Hamas ran

in 2006 on an anti-corruption ticket, very soon it became just as corrupt as the nationalist Fatah movement.

Back in 2010, Haniyeh spent four million US dollars to buy a plot of land on the Gazan beachfront near al-Shati refugee camp where he grew up. He registered the land under his son-in-law's name. Since then, he purchased several apartments, villas and buildings in the Gaza Strip and registered the property in the names of some of his 13 children.

Publicly, he pledged to survive on olive oil and za'atar (dried herbs), while in private he kept amassing enormous wealth.

Haniyeh was not “moderate” in any context. His successor, however, looks even worse.

Just little over a week after Haniyeh's assassination, Hamas announced that Yahya Sinwar, the architect of October 7, is the new head of the political bureau. Sinwar will be different to his predecessors, Khaled Masha'al and Ismail Haniyeh: isolated in his Gaza tunnel, hard to reach, hungry to keep all power in his own hands. Sinwar wishes to consolidate the organisation's power that used to be dispersed among leaders in Gaza, West Bank, Israeli prisons and the diaspora.

Sinwar's uncompromising and zealous type of leadership might bring the end of Hamas closer, for Sinwar will not listen to any voices of reason, but will seek death and destruction, for Hamas and for the entire region. AIR

*Ksenia Svetlova is the Executive Director of ROPES (The Regional Organization for Peace, Economics & Security) and a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Middle East Programs. She is a former member of the Knesset. © Jerusalem Strategic Tribune (www.js Tribune.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## HAMAS NOW A ONE-MAN SHOW

**Avi Issacharoff**

**H**amas has indicated its path forward in appointing Yahya Sinwar to replace slain politburo head Ismail Haniyeh. It is a one-man show with one vision. Sinwar has told the other senior members of his terror group: “I will navigate, I will lead and anyone who disapproves will end up dead,” as did Mahmoud Ishtiw, who was executed in 2016 after he was accused of being gay.

Ishtiw was a senior commander of the Hamas military wing and a battalion head in Zeitun. He was probably put to death under orders from Sinwar, who suspected that he had collaborated with Israel during the 2014 war and provided information that led to a failed assassination attempt on Mohammed Deif.

He was not the first Palestinian to be executed by Sinwar. During his incarceration in Israeli prison, the Hamas leader was dubbed Abu Tna'ash, the father of 12, after he was said to have murdered a dozen people suspected of collaborating with Israel.

The Hamas leader proved how dangerous he could be, and how extreme in his views, before the October 7 massacre. He

led Hamas into this brutal war knowing full well that he was about to sacrifice thousands of lives on the altar of his vision – to be the modern-day Palestinian Saladin.

Sinwar understood that Gaza's 2.2 million Palestinians would pay the terrible price for his delusions, but that did not stop him from carrying out his plan.

Gaza is in ruins, the Hamas military wing is in tatters, and now the terror group's political wing has fallen into line with the man who has brought the greatest disaster since 1948 onto the population of Gaza.

By choosing Sinwar as the new politburo chief, any appearance of a division of authority or separation between the leadership abroad and the one in Gaza under Sinwar has become a thing of the past.

Now no one will dare oppose the all-powerful Sinwar, who will do all it takes to solidify his rule and will eliminate any threat to it, without hesitation. AIR

*Avi Issacharoff is an Israeli journalist known for his focus on Palestinian affairs, and one of the creators of the hit TV-series Fauda. A fluent Arabic speaker, he has been a correspondent for Haaretz, the Times of Israel, Walla! and Yedioth Ahronoth. © Yedioth Ahronoth (Ynetnews.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*



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# Inside Hamas-stan

## A Palestinian dissident speaks out

Gianluca Pacchiani

**B**ERLIN – In 2019, Gazan activists Hamza Howidy and Amin Abed organised and participated in demonstrations against the harsh living conditions in the impoverished Strip. They were both arrested by Hamas and placed in the same prison cell. Every day, they were subjected to beatings and torture.

Last August, Howidy, 26, managed to leave Gaza after another round of protests and another detention. Abed, 35, stayed behind, unable to afford the exorbitant exit fees from the enclave, and unwilling to let his beloved Gaza collapse further under the weight of Hamas' mismanagement and repression. Even after October 7, Abed refused to remain silent in the face of the devastation that the terror group brought upon Gaza. In July, the well-known activist, a longstanding thorn in Hamas' side, published a Facebook post in Arabic excoriating the Islamist group for its onslaught against Israel. "Hamas knew from the very first moment [that Israel would retaliate], but it was ready to give anything in return for the continuation of its rule, the hen that lays golden eggs for its leaders and its investments abroad," a paragraph in the post read.

Shortly after publishing it, Abed was assaulted by more than 20 "thugs" – Hamas security members, according to bystanders – wearing masks and wielding batons and knives in the school where he was sheltering with his family. His arms and legs were broken.

"Amin [Abed] is the bravest Gazan you could ever meet," said Howidy of his audacious friend and former cellmate, in an interview with the *Times of Israel*. "He was never afraid of Hamas. Whenever we thought of organising a protest, he was the first one to post about it, to speak up. He dedicated everything to opposing Hamas," Howidy said. (Following his assault, Abed said in a recent interview he is now considering leaving Gaza as well.)

Howidy lives today in Germany, where he arrived a few months ago and submitted an asylum application. He receives shelter and a stipend from the German government. Safe from Hamas' retaliation against himself and his family – who in the interim lost their home in an Israeli airstrike and have also left the Strip for Egypt – Howidy is now a vocal Hamas critic on the international stage. He main-

tains an English-language X (Twitter) account where he documents the suffering of Gazan civilians at the hands of both Hamas and the IDF. He has also penned a number of op-eds in prominent magazines, chief among them *Newsweek*, and given interviews to international media outlets describing Hamas' terror rule over Gazans and chastising self-professed liberals on Western university campuses for hurting Palestinians by absolving Hamas of its crimes against them.

During a trip to Berlin from the undisclosed German town where he temporarily resides, Howidy sat down with the *Times of Israel* to describe in detail his experience as a Hamas dissident in Gaza, and to refute Western misconceptions about the terror group and his fellow Gazans.

"I often hear Israelis asking Gazans why we did not oppose and overthrow Hamas. You can see what happened to Amin Abed for writing a Facebook post. So just imagine the consequences for going to a protest," he said. "It could get you killed."

"But I feel deeply about my country, and I don't want it to be depicted as full of terrorists and terror supporters. I want people to see the other side," he continued. "We have moderate people like every other country, but we don't have the opportunity to speak, nor the protection."

Behind his decision to expose himself on international platforms is the knowledge that he is a pioneer. "I believe that Gazans first want to see someone start to make his voice heard, and others will follow," he said.

### THE 'WE WANT TO LIVE' PROTESTS

In 2019, hundreds of Gazans took to the streets demanding better living conditions in what became known as the "We Want to Live" (*Bina Na'ish*) rallies. Hamas security forces brutally suppressed the marches, beating demonstrators and detaining more than 1,000. Howidy and Abed were among them.

"The protests did not have leaders and were not explicitly political," Howidy said. "To be honest, we wanted to overthrow Hamas, but we couldn't say it out loud publicly, so we demanded a reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, and fresh elections."

Hamas security forces were swift in clamping down on the demonstrations. To disperse the masses of protesters, they opened fire into the crowd, Howidy recalled. "People started running for their lives. After shooting, the militia came with batons and started hitting as many as they could. And then they arrested us," he said.

Howidy managed to get out of prison after three weeks thanks to a US\$3,000 bribe paid by his relatively wealthy family – an exorbitant sum in the enclave, where the aver-



Gazan activist Hamza Howidy (Screenshot)

age monthly salary was then circa \$400-500.

Others were not so fortunate. Many of those detained spent eight or nine months behind bars, and Abed was in jail for a year. Howidy estimated that his friend must have been arrested by Hamas at least ten times, and had his arms and legs broken twice before.

Howidy maintained that Hamas' brutality, then as now, is a symptom of its weakness. "Hamas are afraid. They know that people are angry and want to replace them, but are too scared to protest because they know how Hamas would respond. We have tried many times."



Following their 2007 seizure of power, Hamas fighters set out to terrorise the population through acts of brutality (Image: Shutterstock)

and tortured is a very, very long time. When people in the West think of prison, they think of calling a lawyer and a trial in court. In Gaza, we were under a terrorist regime; we had none of that. Your family cannot visit you. You don't

have any idea what's going to happen to you." Howidy said.

Hamas fabricated charges against him, as well as against other detainees. "They accused us of the most ridiculous things. For instance, for the first few days, I was accused of collaborating with Israeli authorities. Then they accused me of working with the PA. And then in the last days, I remember them telling me I was financed by the UAE. I was like: What the

f\*\*\*! I only protested because I want a job!"

Anti-Hamas protesters again thronged the streets of Gaza in the summer of 2023 demanding an improvement to the dire living conditions under the same slogan, "We want to live," an event barely covered in international media outlets, Howidy noted.

Once again, the young man was among the participants and was arrested and detained for two weeks. The kick-back his family paid to get him out of jail this time rose to US\$5,000. After that round of protests was also brutally repressed, Howidy lost any hope that Gaza could become a livable place.

Prodded by family members, who were afraid they could not get him out of prison a third time, he decided to leave the enclave, and join the ranks of about 300,000 Gazans who had already left before October 7 in search of a better life abroad.

## A LIFETIME UNDER HAMAS' BRUTALITY

The 26-year old grew up in Gaza City's Rimal neighbourhood, in what used to be one of the most upscale areas in the Strip, and for that reason was home to various Hamas leaders. The terror group's chief Yahya Sinwar used to live a 15-minute walk away from his home, and Ahmad Bahar, another prominent official killed in an Israeli airstrike in November, also resided nearby. Howidy was only nine years old when, in June 2007, Hamas wrested power over the coastal enclave from the Palestinian Authority (PA) after winning a majority of seats in the Palestinian legislative elections the previous year. After the coup,

**"You know what would help the Palestinians in Gaza? Condemning Hamas' atrocities. Instead, the protesters routinely chant their desire to 'Globalise the Intifada.'"**

Hamas took to executing dozens of members of Fatah, the secularist party that runs the PA. About 600 Palestinians were killed over the course of few weeks in the internecine fighting between the two factions.

"I was young, but I remember the violence. When they took control over Gaza, Hamas started coming for

the Fatah people," Howidy said. "They tied their bodies to their motorcycles and dragged them in the streets of my neighbourhood," he recalled. "It was a nightmare. Their goal was to shock the people by exposing them to the worst possible brutality so that they would remain silent for a long time," he said.

The spectre of Hamas' savagery loomed large in the everyday life of Gazans. When Howidy was arrested for the first time in 2019, his detention was relatively short compared to that of some of his friends. However, Hamas jail was a frightful place. "Three weeks of being beaten daily

## HAMAS' PROPAGANDA MACHINE

Howidy recalled that growing up, Israelis were inevitably portrayed in Hamas' discourse as Mossad agents, out to recruit Palestinians as collaborators, and he was told that

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peace with them was impossible. Nevertheless, while still in Gaza, he secretly made contact with a number of Israelis on social media out of curiosity, and became friends with some of them.

Today, he advises his Gazan friends to also become acquainted with their neighbours. “[Israelis] are normal people. There is a small minority of extremists, but with most of them, you can reach a reconciliation,” he said. “You should just understand their concerns – particularly when it comes to security. Just look at their history.”

Hateful propaganda against Israelis was omnipresent under Hamas. For four years, Howidy was a student of accounting at Gaza’s Islamic University, the “alma mater” of many of the terror group’s leaders.

During that time, he said, he was exposed to constant brainwashing – not only against Israel and Jews, but also against other religions, such as Gaza’s small Christian minority. “There were two or three Christian schools in Gaza, and a Christian club where people met to play soccer. One of my professors said he wanted Hamas to close them down,” he recalled. “As I said, it’s like ISIS,” he added, referencing the Salafi group’s targeting of any religious group other than Sunni Muslims, “but with good PR. They know how to support the freedom fighter narrative. And thanks to the Qatari and Turkish regimes, they can finance themselves.”

But after ruling the coastal enclave for 17 years, precipitating repeated armed conflicts with Israel and squandering billions of aid money in tunnels and weaponry, the terror group has lost the favour of most Gazans, Howidy maintained.

“The civilian population in Gaza today is extremely angry at Hamas, even many of its former supporters.

“While they don’t necessarily love Israel, people have realised that Hamas is using them as pawns and human shields, nothing more. They have realised that Hamas’ only strategy is to maximise civilian casualties.”

Hamas’ perverse tactic of hiding inside civilian infrastructure is not new, as it adopted the same modus operandi in previous rounds of confrontation with Israel, Howidy said. “People in Gaza knew this 100%. In previous military operations, we would always tell each other

to stay away from schools and hospitals, because we knew that Hamas were hiding there. However, when we see that these places are targeted [by the IDF] and there are civilian losses, we cannot say it’s acceptable because Hamas is operating there. There must be another way to fight them.”

## CONFRONTING HAMAS SUPPORTERS IN THE WEST

Howidy became an object of media attention after publishing an op-ed in *Newsweek* in April, at the zenith of anti-Israel protests on American and Western university campuses, in which he slammed demonstrators for failing to condemn terrorism and glorifying violence.

“You know what would help the Palestinians in Gaza? Condemning Hamas’ atrocities. Instead, the protesters routinely chant their desire to ‘Globalise the Intifada.’ Apparently, they do not realise that the intifadas were disastrous for both Palestinians and Israelis, just as October 7 has been devastating for the people of Gaza,” Howidy wrote in his op-ed.

In his interview with the *Times of Israel*, he doubled down on his criticism of the protesters.

“The problem is that the people in the West believe in the freedom fighters narrative, which is totally wrong. Yes, Israel deserves much criticism – I personally criticise Israel. But what Hamas does is not fight for freedom, nor defend the rights of the Palestinian people,” he said.

“Campus protesters believe that Israel is made up of white supremacists. They don’t know that over 50% of Israelis are descendants of Arab Jews,” he added.

“I don’t want to tell them whom to support, but they have to spend more time reading about this conflict before choosing their enemies and their heroes. If they knew what Hamas did to Palestinians, besides what it did to Israelis on October 7, for instance, what it did to us protesters in 2019, they would realise that they are supporting terrorists, but with good public relations.”

AIR

*Gianluca Pacchiani is the Arab affairs reporter for the Times of Israel © Times of Israel (timesofisrael.org) reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*



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# A TERRIBLE OMEN FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW

Olivia Flasch & Ami Orkaby

Since the terrible attacks on October 7, it has seemed as though the international community, led by an elite organisation, the United Nations, and its international court system, has time and time again allowed itself to be misled, and its values and principles misused, in a manner that is putting the entire international rules-based order at risk.

The “Advisory Opinion regarding the Legal Consequences of Israel’s Policies and Practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, issued by the International Court of Justice on 19 July 2024, is yet another example.

The proceedings were biased from the start. In December 2022, the UN General Assembly passed, by 87 votes to 79, a nine-page resolution condemning Israel in the harshest of terms, declaring almost every action it has ever taken as in violation of international law and of Palestinian rights, and requesting the International Court of Justice to issue a legal opinion on the legal consequences of such violations.

The resolution was drafted and sponsored by 32 states, two-thirds of which have no diplomatic relations with Israel. It was the 15th General Assembly resolution condemning Israel that year, compared to 13 resolutions adopted against all other countries combined.

After the resolution was passed, a plethora of states and international organisations submitted their “written observations” to the Court on the legal consequences of Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights. Then, in February 2024, the Court held oral hearings on the subject. Fifty states and international organisations, including Palestine, participated.

The vast majority of them condemned Israel in lengthy monologues prepared and delivered by rising stars in international law, lawyers seeking to etch their names into the Court’s archive in one of the most publicised and politicised court proceedings of our time.

Those of us interested enough to watch the livestream heard grandiose, Shakespearean declarations, like the following statement, completely devoid of factual basis and made only to evoke public emotion: “On Israel’s approach, it decides how, if at all, Palestinians may meet, trade, teach, worship, live, love.”

Just like in 2004, when the Court held advisory pro-

ceedings on the legal consequences of the construction of the wall (or security fence) between Israel and the West Bank, Israel chose not to participate in the spectacle.

Some may argue that it should have done so, if only to use the opportunity to present its arguments.

But Israel would be forgiven for deciding that dealing with two simultaneous sets of international court proceedings (South Africa’s genocide case against Israel and the International Criminal Court’s arrest warrant applications against Netanyahu and Gallant) is plenty, particularly in circumstances where its focus is very much on retrieving its more than 100 hostages held in Gaza, while waging an impossible war against Hamas – particularly given that advisory opinions are simply opinions, and not legally binding.

## COURT CRITICISED FOR RELYING ON UN REPORTS

According to its own rules, the Court is prevented from drawing adverse inferences from a state’s decision not to participate in advisory proceedings – and it should satisfy itself that it has sufficient information available to it to reach a legally sound conclusion on the questions it has been asked. But all standards seem to differ when it comes to Israel.

Thus, following the February 2024 hearings, when the Court broke for deliberations, it was fairly obvious that it

would be relying almost exclusively on United Nations resolutions and reports to form its legal opinion on the matter. It also did so in 2004.

Reliance on United Nations documents over primary information was always going to pose a risk in terms of getting the history and facts straight. And it shows in the opinion.

For example, relying on a United Nations Fact-Finding Commission’s findings on how Israeli legislation and policies have affected residents in east Jerusalem, rather than relying on the actual legislation and policies and determining for itself how these have affected residents, is how the Court was able to conclude, at paragraph 165, that “Israel’s measures in East Jerusalem create an inhospitable environment for Palestinians” – even though several polls conducted over the last couple of years show entirely different results.

The results of one such poll, conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research in 2022, showed that between 2010 and 2022, the number of Palestinian residents of east Jerusalem who would prefer Palestinian sovereignty over east Jerusalem decreased from 52% to 38%, while the number of residents who would prefer Israeli sovereignty increased from 6% to 19%. The



The ICJ became a theatre for up and coming lawyers to “etch their names into the Court’s archive in one of the most publicised and politicised court proceedings of our time” (Screenshot)

remaining 42% of respondents stated that they would prefer international or “other” sovereignty over the area.

The 2022 poll also showed, for example, that “Palestinians are more satisfied with the services provided to them than they were ten years ago.”

But while overreliance on United Nations documentation was expected, what came as a complete shock was the extent to which the Court manufactured an entirely new narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, oftentimes at complete odds with reality. First, in paragraphs 52 and 53, the Court describes the process of Israel becoming a sovereign state. Here is how it describes that process:

“While the Jewish population accepted the Plan of Partition, the Arab population of Palestine and the Arab States rejected this plan, contending, *inter alia*, that it was unbalanced. On 14 May 1948, Israel proclaimed its independence... an armed conflict then broke out between Israel and a number of Arab States, and the Plan of Partition was not implemented.”

An unbalanced Plan of Partition. Israel pushing ahead and proclaiming its independence, despite concerns of “unbalance”. And therefore, “armed conflict broke out,” resulting in the Plan of Partition not being implemented.

Stating that Israel proclaimed its independence while omitting that it was *de facto* recognised as a State by more than a dozen countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, on the same day or just days after, using the neutral phrasing “armed conflict broke out” rather than specifying that Israel was attacked on the morning of 15 May 1948, a day after it became a State, by the armies of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, all serve to remove, or distance, responsibility for the events leading up to the situation now complained of before the Court from the Palestinians and any neighboring Arab states, placing such responsibility exclusively on Israel.

Second, the Court declares, in paragraph 78, that the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which it describes as encompassing the West Bank, east Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, is “from a legal standpoint” a “single territorial unit”, the “unity, contiguity and integrity of which are to be preserved and respected.”

Again, distorting both history and international law, the Court ignores the very foundational document it refers to in paragraph 52, the General Assembly resolution providing for “the creation of a special international régime for the City of Jerusalem” separate from the Jewish State and the Arab State it purported to create in the region.

Third, in paragraphs 88-90, the Court comes to the remarkable conclusion that Israel’s disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip, an action in 2005 to promote peace, was not at all a disengagement. Troops on the ground are not required to evidence a continued presence, it says, but what is a determining factor is which party exercises effective control over the area. A reference is then made to

Israel’s control over the air and maritime spaces surrounding Gaza and control of its land borders.

That Israel has ever faced, or that it currently faces, extreme threats of terrorism from multiple fronts is not mentioned in the opinion even once. Hamas is mentioned once in the entire Advisory Opinion, when the Court explains, conveniently, that the current case does not include conduct by Israel in the Gaza Strip in response to the attack carried out against it by Hamas and other armed groups on 7 October 2023.”

It appears that by labeling the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023 and subsequent events outside the scope of the opinion, the Court felt that it could ignore the very existence of Hamas.

There is not even a reference to Egypt’s role in the Gaza blockade. Instead, the Court states that Israel retains “significant control over the Rafah crossing,” placing no responsibility or control in the hands of Egypt whatsoever. The Court paints a picture of Israel being the only authority in control of the Gaza Strip, for no legitimate reason.

The Court gets around these broad-brush conclusions by noting that it did not need to go to the trouble of making findings of fact concerning “specific incidents”. It was sufficient for it to “establish the main features of Israel’s policies and practices and on that basis assess their conformity with international law.” Why the Court would be exempt from looking at specific facts to make factual determinations, it did not clarify.

Perhaps that is why Judge Nolte found it necessary to append to the Court’s opinion a separate opinion that the “broad request” from the General Assembly necessitated a “particularly broad and merely illustrative approach to the factual assessment” by the Court, a “bird’s-eye-view’ of the situation.”

He concludes, quite rightly, “Any conclusive legal determination of Israel’s responsibility for specific conduct would require a full investigation into the facts constituting such conduct, including a careful consideration of whether Israel’s security concerns may be legally relevant with respect to any specific situation.”

Needless to say, this crucial disclaimer was not included in either the Court’s majority opinion or the international media reports that followed.

That the Court’s President, formerly the Lebanese Ambassador to the United Nations, voted against Israel 210 times during his time at the United Nations and made the following statement in 2009 is worrying and was arguably reason enough for him to recuse himself from any cases involving Israel for lack of impartiality and independence, under Article 17(2) of the Court’s Statute:

“Israel, as an occupying Power, has constantly and systematically violated its basic duties under international humanitarian law. Such violations have included the annexation of land, the punitive demolition of houses, the



transfer of populations, collective punishment, political assassinations and the use of torture. For too long, Israel has systematically challenged the will of this Assembly. For too long, it has shown flagrant disrespect for international law. For too long, its war criminals have benefited from impunity.”

There is precedence for these types of recusals. In thirty-five other cases, Judges of the Court have recused themselves voluntarily. Nevertheless, Judge Salam appears to view his situation differently.

The sheer number of shocking conclusions reached by the Court would require an article almost as long as the Advisory Opinion itself. But it is worth mentioning what might be the most shocking conclusion of all. At paragraph 178:

“The Court notes the argument made by two participants in the present proceedings according to which Israel’s ‘deep historical ties and own valid claims to’ the territory it now occupies have been disregarded by the very formulation of the question. The Court observes, first, that it is not called upon to pronounce on historical claims concerning the Occupied Palestinian Territory; and, secondly, that no information has been provided to the Court to substantiate such claims.”

In this absurd pronouncement, the Court ignores the very essence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – the fact that both parties claim to have deep historical ties and their valid claims to the same territory – and dismisses Israel’s position in its entirety.

It claims to have seen no information to substantiate the suggestion that Israel has deep historical ties and its own valid claims to the territory under dispute. It is as if the very history of Israel as the Jewish homeland, the archaeological finds detailing Jewish presence in Judea, Samaria, and elsewhere in the region, all of it, was simply constructed out of thin air.

The Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024 is not binding. The many recommendations provided by the Court, ranging from realising the Palestinian people’s “right to an independent and sovereign state” to obliging United Nations Member States to “abstain from entering into economic or trade dealings with Israel concerning the Occupied Palestinian Territory” to obliging Israel to pay damages to the Palestinians, may never be implemented – at least not by Israel’s allies. But the Court’s rewriting of history, distortion of facts, and shocking misapplication of the law still have the potential to shape international relations in a truly detrimental way. We should all be alarmed. AIR

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## OPPOSITION LEADER PETER DUTTON MAKES LANDMARK TRIP TO ISRAEL

Alana Schetzer

**F**ederal Opposition Leader Peter Dutton recently visited Israel to gain a stronger understanding of Hamas’ unprecedented terror attack on October 7 and the ensuing war against the terrorist group in Gaza and strengthen bilateral ties.

Along with Foreign Minister Penny Wong – who travelled to Israel in January – Dutton is the most senior Australian politician to visit Israel since the October 7 terror attacks. However, Wong did not meet with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu or visit any of the sites of the October 7 terror attacks during her trip.

Across his three days in Israel, Dutton held meetings with top Israeli leaders, including Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, Foreign Minister Israel Katz and Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana.

Following these meetings, Dutton pledged to “rebuild” Australia’s relationship with Israel should the Coalition win the next election, saying, “I sent a very clear message on



Peter Dutton (centre left) meets Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz (centre right). Also present are AIJAC’s Dr Colin Rubenstein and Joel Burnie.

With compliments



Corvin Group Pty Ltd



behalf of the Coalition that should we win the next election, we look forward to the relationship becoming stronger and making sure that we can build off the platform of previous prime ministers where the relationship has been close and has been strong and to our mutual benefit.”

He also told *Sky News Australia* that Israel was Australia’s closest ally in the Middle East and that the relationship had been a “force for good” for decades: “We shouldn’t neglect that. We should never forget it.”

Dutton also met with Palestinian Authority Assistant Minister for Multilateral Affairs Ammar Hijazi, and with Australia’s Ambassador to Israel, Dr Ralph King.

Dutton has spoken several times since his return about the trip and the devastating scenes that he witnessed, both through visiting the communities attacked on October 7 and when viewing 47 minutes of raw footage taken from mobile phones, dash cams, bodycams, and CCTV on that day.

Following the trip, in an op-ed published in the *Daily Telegraph* (Aug. 1), Dutton wrote: “I’ve seen some shocking things in my life as a former police officer on the beat and as a Home Affairs Minister who handled terrorism and child exploitation cases. But this footage shakes you to the core.”

“If the anti-Israel protesters who march in the streets of democracies around the world and serve as Hamas’ useful cheer squads watched even just a few minutes of this footage, I believe many would down their hate-filled placards in horror,” he concluded.

World leaders, political staffers, journalists, activists and selected individuals have been invited to view the footage in question in closed screenings. However, the Israeli Government has made the decision not to release the footage publicly due to both its extremely graphic nature and to protect the privacy and dignity of the victims and survivors.

Dutton also asserted that Israel has “every right to defend its territory and its people,” especially from a terrorist organisation that has openly and frequently committed to repeat the devastating October 7 attacks “again and again”.

One of the most important meetings Dutton held was

with family members of hostages and returned hostages. Those present included Yair Moses Finkelstein and Margalit Moses, who are the son and former wife, respectively, of Gadi Moses, 80, who remains in Hamas captivity in Gaza. Margalit Moses herself was kidnapped on October 7 from her home in Kibbutz Nir Oz, but was released as part of a ceasefire deal last November. Her former husband is a cancer survivor who suffers from diabetes and fibromyalgia.

Also in attendance at the meeting was Ali Alziadna, whose brother Yousef, 53, and nephew Khamza, 22, were kidnapped from Kibbutz Holit, and Alon Nimrodi, who is the father of 19-year-old Tamir Nimrodi, who had joined the IDF less than a year before and was kidnapped from a military base.



Dutton visits Kibbutz Be’eri, where more than 100 people were murdered on October 7

**D**utton visited two sites central to the October 7 terror attacks – Kibbutz Be’eri and the Nova music festival site. Ninety-six civilians and 31 IDF personnel were brutally murdered at Kibbutz Be’eri and another 26 residents were taken hostage. At the Nova Music Festival site, located in the Re’im forest about five kilometres from the Gaza border, 364 people were murdered and 40 people were kidnapped.

Following a sobering visit to Yad Vashem – Israel’s official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, in Jerusalem – Dutton laid a wreath dedicated to the six million victims and stated: “Thank you to Yad Vashem for its dedication and devotion to remembering those who have fallen at the hands of evil.”

In his op-ed, Dutton stated that the “world must never forget what happened” to the thousands of victims who were murdered or injured on October 7, and noted the emotional scars that have been left behind.

“On October 7, the monsters of Hamas acted with glee as they tormented their victims. My trip to Israel has not only reinforced the importance of standing with our ally in its darkest hours. It has also reinforced the duty that democratic citizens have in turning the tide of anti-Semitism – wherever we find it and whatever form it takes.”

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# RECOGNISING THE PROBLEM

Jamie Hyams

The June 25 Senate debate on recognising a Palestinian state became notorious because ALP Senator Fatima Payman crossed the floor, and later left the ALP. The controversy overshadowed the item's policy content, with the major parties setting out the circumstances



Former ALP Senator turned independent Fatima Payman (Image: X)

under which they believe Australia should recognise such a state, and the minor parties and independents displaying their positions.

Greens Deputy Leader Senator Mehreen Faruqi moved “for the

Senate to recognise the State of Palestine,” as a matter of urgency.

Assistant Education Minister Senator Anthony Chisholm moved an amendment to add, after “Palestine”, “as part of a peace process in support of a two-state solution and a just and enduring peace.”

Shadow Attorney-General Senator Michaelia Cash moved to amend this Government amendment by adding the following preconditions:

- i. recognition by Palestinian representatives and the Palestinian Authority of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state;*
- ii. that there is no role for Hamas...;*
- iii. reform of the Palestinian Authority... including major security and governance reforms;*
- iv. agreed processes to resolve final status issues including... borders and rights of return; and*
- v. appropriate security guarantees between parties to ensure peace and security within recognised borders.”*

The Coalition amendment was supported by the Coalition and Senators Ross Babet and Jacque Lambie, but defeated by the ALP, Greens and Senators David Pocock and Lidia Thorpe. The ALP amendment was then also defeated, supported only by the ALP and Senator Pocock. The original Greens motion was then put and defeated, supported only by the Greens and Senators Pocock, Payman and Thorpe.

Senator Faruqi said there is a “full-blown genocide in Gaza,” demanded “the right of return for Palestinian refugees” and that “The world must do to Israel what it did to South Africa: boycott, divestment and sanction.”

Shadow Foreign Minister Senator Simon Birmingham said Hamas is “a dangerous terrorist organisation... spon-

sored by Iran as part of their plan of disruption around the region and the world—and yet Hamas sees parts of the UN, some governments and certainly political parties like the Greens... advancing on [their] demands. It is shameful.”

Senator Chisholm said, “The widespread human suffering... in Gaza is completely unacceptable... Australia no longer sees recognition as only occurring at the end of the process... We want... a reformed Palestinian authority that disavows violence and is ready to engage in a meaningful political process.”

Senator Thorpe interjected, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” during a division.

On July 3, in the House, Assistant Foreign Minister Tim Watts moved a motion to the same effect as Senator Chisholm's.

The motion passed with the ALP and most independents in support. The Coalition, Greens and Bob Katter and Allegra Spender were opposed.

Shadow Minister for Science and the Arts Paul Fletcher then sought to move the same motion as the Coalition's Senate amendment, but the ALP prevented it by successfully moving to adjourn the debate.

Watts said, “No Australian government has ever expressed such strong support for a Palestinian state... the borders of a future Palestinian state should be determined through direct negotiations,” then proudly listed Government criticisms of Israel's conduct of the war.

Fletcher said, “The signal that this government is sending... is that we are rewarding... the lawless, murderous, terrorist organisation Hamas.”

Liberal Julian Leeser said, “It's important that we don't recognise a state that hasn't come into existence, particularly when many of the actors in that state do not believe that Israel has a right to exist.”

Independent Zoe Daniel claimed, “Just as the Australian government exerts pressure on Hamas for Israeli hostages to be released... the same pressure must be brought on the Netanyahu government to end its offensive... the fundamental rule to protect civilians is not being followed.”

Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care Ged Kearney asserted, “It was the Nakba that uprooted millions of Palestinians.”

Liberal Andrew Wallace noted everybody demands a ceasefire and asked “Why is no-one ever talking about how Hamas should surrender and return the hostages?”

Green Max Chandler-Mather asked how it's fair the “government recognises Israel but refuses to immediately recognise Palestine?” He accused Israel of murdering 37,000 Palestinians, genocide and “an engineered famine”, calling for sanctions.

Independent Allegra Spender said all the ALP motion does “is tear our community even further apart.”





# THE BIBLIO FILE

## A mass emigration of criminals

### Fascists in Exile: Post-War Displaced Persons in Australia

Jayne Persian

Routledge, 182 pages, A\$49.99



#### Efraim Zuroff

One of the strangest outcomes of World War II was the mass post-war emigration of Nazi war criminals to the Anglo-Saxon democracies which fought against the Nazis and played a major role in the defeat of the Third Reich. Thus, for example, some 200,000 American soldiers lost their lives fighting against the Germans, yet an estimated 10,000 Nazi perpetrators were admitted as immigrants to the United States during the decade after the war. And a similar situation developed in Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The only exception in this regard was South Africa, which was hermetically closed to immigration in the aftermath of World War II.

For more than three decades in the United States, and more than 40 years in the other Anglo-Saxon democracies, no effort was undertaken to identify, investigate, and if possible, prosecute any of these perpetrators. But as knowledge and interest in the Holocaust grew throughout the world, efforts to bring these criminals to justice were launched.

The first government to take steps to enable the prosecution of the Holocaust perpetrators, who had immigrated by lying about their service with the Nazis, was the United

States, which established its Office of Special Investigations in 1979. Nazi collaborators were stripped of their American citizenship, and could then be deported. Eight years later, Canada passed a law enabling criminal prosecution of Nazi criminals, and in 1989, Australia passed a similar law. In the UK, it took almost another five years to pass similar legislation in 1991. The only country which refused to take legal action against immigrants who lied about their service with the Nazis was New Zealand.

Now that at least three and a half decades have passed since the efforts to prosecute these perpetrators commenced, and there is no political will in any of these countries to bring ninety-year-olds to justice, the time has come for historians to assess the results. So far, two books on the “belated” trials of Holocaust perpetrators in Anglo-Saxon countries have been published this year – *Safe Haven* by Jon Silverman and Robert Sherwood on Great Britain, and Jayne Persian’s *Fascists in Exile* on Australia.

The latter is the subject of this review, and well deserving of public attention. Anyone interested in post-Holocaust justice, the history of Australian Jewry, the critical role of Eastern European Nazi collaborators

in the Final Solution, and related topics will find this book of great interest. Unlike *Safe Haven*, which covers the history of the issue starting with the passage of the British War Crimes Act in 1991 (after a heated struggle that took four and a half years with fierce opposition by the House of Lords, which twice rejected the bill), *Fascists in Exile* covers the entire issue, from the post-World War II emigration of the Eastern European refugees to Australia to the present.

Persian does an excellent job of exposing the serious flaws in the screening, or the lack thereof, both in Europe prior to immigration and in Australia after arrival. During the years 1947 to 1952, 170,000 non-Jewish Displaced Persons settled in Australia, the overwhelming majority of whom were Eastern Europeans from countries in which the local population actively participated in the mass murder of the local Jewish population. Although there was extensive information available on the World War II service of such individuals, hardly any effort was made by the International Refugee Organisation to prevent their immigration, or even inform the Australian authorities about their past.

Persian explains in great detail what went wrong in Europe, as well as in Australia. First of all, in Europe, most of the investigations were carried out by inexperienced officers and enlisted men, who were not aware of the role played by Eastern European Nazi collaborators in the Holocaust. To make things worse, the British Foreign Ministry instructed its military officers to protect the 20,000 members of the Latvian SS Legion, who fought for the victory of the Third Reich. Quite a few of the Latvia SS Legion’s members joined after serving in the Arajs Kommando mass murder squad, or the Latvian SD, both of which played major roles in the annihilation of Latvian Jews, as well as German and

Austrian Jews deported to Latvia.

Another example of the totally irresponsible screening of large numbers of prospective immigrants occurred with respect to the Ukrainians of the Galicia Division of the SS, which also participated in the mass murder of Jews. Only 180 out of 8,000 men were interviewed individually. Thus is it not at all surprising that the IRO acceptance rate for immigration was 82.6%.

To make matters worse, all the flaws in the screening process in Europe were exacerbated by the policies of the Australian government, which believed that once the IRO vetted the refugees, they were no longer responsible for any additional security checks. In addition, the major concern of the Australian government was that the refugees would fit into "White Australia", and help solve the country's population and labour force deficits. In effect, their only concern was that the new arrivals might join and strengthen local fascist organisations.

To add insult to injury, the only Europeans whose immigration to Australia was considered undesirable by the government were Jews. In the words of an Australian immigration official quoted by Persian, "We have never wanted these people and still don't want them." And in instructions sent in 1949 to the Australian mission in Europe, the staff were instructed that "The term [Jewish] referred to race and not religion and the fact that some DP's who are Jewish by race have become Christian by religion is not relevant."

Given this attitude, it is not surprising that all the protests and warnings, especially by Jewish activists, about the immigration to Australia of Nazi collaborators were ignored or summarily dismissed. All this changed in 1983, in the wake of the ouster from power of the Liberal Party, which was the political home of the overwhelming majority of the right-wing Eastern European refugees. Labor was open



Konrad Kalejs, whose deportation from the US to Australia sparked a national debate about Nazi war criminals (Image: AAP)


to investigating the Nazi war criminals who had immigrated to Australia, and the combination of the deportation of Latvian suspect Konrad Kalejs from the US to Australia, and a five part exposé on radio and TV by journalist Mark Aarons, led to the 1986 decision to establish an official government inquiry, headed by Andrew Menzies, a former deputy secretary in the Attorney-General's Department.

The final chapters of the book are devoted to the efforts of the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), which was established in 1998 by the government as a result of the findings of the Menzies investigation. It opened with a total of 841 files, but according to Persian, that figure is misleading since some suspects had two or three files. The country of origin with the highest number of suspect files was Lithuania with 238, followed by Latvia with 111, Ukraine with 84, Hungary with 45, and Croatia with 44 (The Simon Wiesenthal Center's office in Jerusalem sent the Australian authorities a total of 487 suspects, mostly from the Baltics, between 1986 and 2005). Two hundred and forty-eight of the suspects were

not located in Australia, and 262 persons were assumed to be deceased due to their advanced age.

According to Persian, SIU interviews of suspects were a fairly informal process, which relied on a cooperative interviewee. Suspects could simply refuse to be interviewed, others simply answered "no comment, no comment." In case after case, it was clear that the suspects had served in killing squads, but no one admitted that they had committed murder, nor were there any eyewitnesses who could testify that a certain suspect had committed murder. Thus, it was not surprising that the first three prosecutions failed, which gave the government of Paul Keating an excuse to close down the SIU long before it finished its task.

There are a few factual mistakes in Jayne Persian's book that should be mentioned. The American OSI won cases against slightly more than 100 Holocaust perpetrators, not against "several hundred people". Canada only prosecuted one case on criminal charges, not three. And Persian failed to mention the successful prosecution in Germany of Ernst Hering, who was discovered due to the (failed) trial in Australia of Heinrich Wagner, who served in the same unit which murdered 104 Jews in Israelovka, Ukraine. She also failed to mention the jailing of Karoly Zentai, who sat in prison in Perth for several months awaiting extradition to Hungary to face charges for the murder of Peter Balasz, an 18-year-old Jewish boy whom he caught in Budapest on a tram without the obligatory yellow star.

Despite these facts, Persian's book is extremely informative, and well-researched and written, and should be required reading in every Australian high school and university. 

*Dr Efraim Zuroff is the chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and Director of the Center's Israel Office and Eastern European Affairs.*





# ESSAY

## Wikipedia's Jewish Problem

### Trafficking in disinformation related to Jews, Israel, and Zionism

Izabella Tabarovsky

In June, a group of Wikipedia editors and administrators rated the Anti-Defamation League as “generally unreliable” on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and “roughly reliable” on antisemitism “when Israel and Zionism are not concerned.” They also evaluated the ADL’s database of hate symbols, deeming it as “reliable for the existence of a symbol and for straightforward facts about it, but not reliable for more complex details, such as symbols’ history.”

The anonymous editors, with unknown backgrounds or academic credentials, accused the ADL of “conflating” anti-Zionism with antisemitism and relying on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of antisemitism, which, they claimed, brands all criticism of Israel as antisemitic and stifles pro-Palestinian speech. They also accused the ADL of “smearing” Students for Justice in Palestine by calling on universities to investigate whether the group provided material support to Hamas, a US-designated terrorist organisation.

All of these critiques are assertions not of fact but of leftist dogma, designed to create the impression that

left-wing antisemitism does not – indeed, could not – exist.

“Wikipedia’s leadership are clowns,” tweeted Larry Sanger, Wikipedia’s co-founder, in response. Sanger had earlier declared Wikipedia’s neutrality – on all issues – effectively dead. But the general public has

**“With Zionism, Israel, and antisemitism at the heart of the global disinformation endeavour, we may already be witnessing a concerted effort to capture these areas of Wikipedia and turn them into anti-Israel propaganda”**

yet to catch up.

With 6.6 billion visits in June, Wikipedia ranked the fifth-most-visited site worldwide, outranked only by Google, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. For many students and scholars, it serves as a starting point for research – a source of sources to be investigated further.

Closer to home, what’s clear is that Wikipedia’s articles are now badly distorted, feeding billions of people – and large-language models that regularly train on the site, such as ChatGPT – with inaccurate research and dangerously skewed narratives about Jews, Jewish history, Israel, Zionism, and contemporary threats to Jewish lives.

Wikipedia was launched on January 15, 2001, as a single English-language edition at [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com) by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger. Sanger announced the launch on the

mailing list of Nupedia, Wikipedia’s predecessor, which he and Wales had also created.

Whereas Nupedia was a peer-reviewed online encyclopedia with a seven-step approval process, Wikipedia, as stated in its name, is a wiki: a collaboratively edited site managed directly by its users through a web browser. The site is operated by the Wikimedia Foundation, a US-based nonprofit organisation, but is a “self-governing project,” whose largely anonymous volunteer editors – referred to internally as Wikipedians – are subject to a set of “policies and guidelines.”

Wikipedia’s key principles are codified in “five pillars,” which include writing from a neutral point of view and using reliable sources to document key arguments. Disputes are resolved by volunteer administrators and can be escalated all the way to the Wikipedia Arbitration Committee (aka Wikipedia’s “Supreme Court”). Punishment can include bans varying in severity and length of time.

Wikipedia also prides itself on radical transparency: Every edit can be seen by everyone on a specially designated page. Discussions related to each article are documented on “talk” pages and publicly available. In theory, Wikipedia’s model of self-governance sounds unimpeachable: a crowd-sourced, transparently run project democratising knowledge and empowering every person on the planet to participate in its creation.

Yet problems started to emerge from the beginning. Civility quickly went out the door. Conflict-resolution mechanisms proved increasingly byzantine, and mechanisms meant to assure neutrality proved easy to manipulate. Hierarchies formed, as old-timers acquired greater clout and wielded it to prevail in increasingly bitter edit wars. Newcomers found it difficult to break through old-timers’ “fortress mentality”. “Wikipedia is amazing, but it’s become a rancorous, sexist, elitist, stupidly bureaucratic



Wikipedia claims to be protected by radical transparency – but its model has actually left the website open to repeated manipulation by malign actors looking to re-write history (Image: Shutterstock)

mess,” observed one writer in 2014.

Structural problems soon translated into content related ones, including on Jewish topics.

In 2004, a spokesperson for the Polish branch of Wikimedia Foundation created an article in English describing an extermination camp in Warsaw, where the Nazis gassed 212,000 Poles. The story – a fiction – remained on the site for 15 years before the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* revealed the problem in 2019. By then, the article had been translated into multiple languages, and its claims incorporated into multiple other Wikipedia articles. An estimated half a million people were exposed to the lie.

Last year two historians published a bombshell paper demonstrating how a group of ideologically driven editors spent years systematically distorting Polish Jewish history across multiple Wikipedia articles to align it with far-right Polish nationalist preferences. Working in concert, the group falsified evidence, promoted marginal self-published sources, created fake references, and advanced antisemitic stereotypes. It whitewashed “the role of Polish society in the Holocaust,” “minimise[d] Polish antisemitism, exaggerate[d] the Poles’ role in saving Jews,” blamed Jews for the Holocaust, and generally steered “Wikipedia’s narrative on Holocaust history away from sound, evidence-driven research, toward a skewed version of events,” wrote the authors, Jan Grabowski and Shira Klein.

Wikipedia’s mechanisms proved entirely inadequate in the face of this motivated, organised assault. Working “as a monolith,” the group manipulated the procedures, coordinated edits, and rallied to each other’s support when challenged. Users seeking to correct the group’s edits found themselves outnumbered and outmanoeuvred.

“Challenging the distortionists takes a monumental amount of time, more than most people can invest in a voluntary hobby,” wrote Grabowski and Klein. The distortionists exhausted their opponents with endless debates, aggressive “battleground behaviour”, rudeness, and “mass deletions”, leading some to simply give up on editing the topic. Volunteer administrators called upon to resolve conflicts were unqualified to adjudicate content issues and unwilling to invest the hours required to sort through sources.

Another case involved Croatian-language Wikipedia. There, a right-wing group of “real-life friends, ideological sympathisers and political allies” captured the entire site and proceeded, among other things, to whitewash the history of World War II-era Croatian fascist organisation Ustaše, its Nazi puppet Independent State of Croatia (NDH), and the Jasenovac extermination camp where tens of thousands of Serbs, Roma, and Jews were murdered.

Interlinked articles created a “web of deception” whose goal was “to influence the reader’s final moral or value judgment” of events, wrote an independent consultant Wikimedia hired in 2021 to evaluate the situa-

tion. The distortionists learned how to “dynamically” adjust “their behaviour in order to avoid raising too many alarms or triggering reaction by the global community.” They established sock-puppet accounts to undermine voting procedures, and obstructed discussion with the help of “well-known disinformation tactics” such as “relativization of facts, whataboutism, discreditation of other participants and outright bullying.” So complete was the capture that local press began to refer to Croatian Wikipedia as “Nazi Wikipedia”.

The most incomprehensible part about this is that it took Wikimedia Foundation 14 years from the time the first complaints began to surface to do something about it. The report warned that the entire situation gave a green light to other bad actors to come in and do the same and that “a more resourced and better-organized attempt could be harder to detect and eventually reverse.”

And that was all before October 7, 2023.

These days, Wikipedia ranks its “perennial” go-to sources – the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, NPR, MSNBC, and BBC – as “generally reliable” and extends the ranking to openly partisan far-left outlets like *Haaretz*, the *Intercept*, the *Nation* and the *Guardian*. Al Jazeera and the NGO Amnesty International (both known for their anti-Israel bias) are rated as “generally reliable” as well.. On the other hand, conservative sources such as *Fox News*, the *New York Post*, *Washington Examiner*, and *Washington Free Beacon* are coded various shades of unreliable, with the *Beacon* getting the “generally unreliable” grade.

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This ranking tells us what kind of slant we can expect in Wikipedia’s articles about Israel, Zionism, and anti-Zionist antisemitism. In the wake of October 7, “generally reliable” sources have trafficked in disinformation, as when the *New York Times* splashed the Al Ahli hospital bombing hoax over its front page, helping spark violent anti-Jewish riots across the world; or when the *New Yorker* legitimized Holocaust inversion – a long-running staple of anti-Zionist propaganda originating in the 1960s USSR.

Conservative outlets, on the other hand, have produced reporting that tells Israel’s side of the story and have

looked far more critically at the anti-Israel campus protests. The “generally unreliable” *Washington Free Beacon* has arguably produced the most extensive reporting on the protests. Wikipedia editors, however, are warned against using the *Beacon* as a source, which is why of the 353 references accompanying Wikipedia’s article on the pro-Palestinian campus protests, the overwhelming majority is to liberal and far-left sources plus *Al Jazeera*.

One-sided sources are just one among a host of problems in Wikipedia articles related to October 7 and the war that followed. In a World Jewish Congress report released in

March, Dr Shlomit Aharoni Nir documents numerous ways in which relevant Wikipedia entries have become de facto anti-Israel propaganda. From biased framing to omissions of key facts to stressing anti-Israel examples while ignoring the Israeli side of the story, to promoting fringe academic perspectives on Zionism – Wikipedia’s editors and administrators have actively worked to subvert the site’s neutrality policy on this topic.

As in other instances, conflicts and bullying behaviour predominate, with Israeli editors describing uniquely “hostile and disrespectful” treatment. Israeli users, who are most knowledgeable about the October 7 events, often found themselves locked out of editing key articles, which were open for editing only to users who’d made more than 500 edits. Several editors told Aharoni Nir that there were a number of activists who operated anonymously and were “responsible for the anti-Israel tone.”

Among some of the most troubling instances Aharoni Nir documented were calls for deletions of crucial articles. These included articles describing individual massacres on October 7, such as those at Netiv HaAsara, Nir Yitzhak, Yakhini and other kibbutzim and moshavim, as well as articles describing Hamas beheadings. Some of the calls succeeded. So did the call to erase the article about Nazism in Palestinian society (a “documented historical and sociological phenomenon,” notes Aharoni Nir). By contrast, the article normalising equations between Israel and Nazi Germany – a propagandistic and antisemitic concept that has been weaponised against Jews for decades – remains on the site. Meanwhile, Wikipedia’s Arabic site openly abandoned the principle of neutrality last December when it temporarily went dark in solidarity with the Palestinians, then added the Palestinian flag to its logo and posted a pro-Palestinian statement at the top. Israel’s Wikipedia community protested. Wikimedia Foundation – you

## WIKI-CIDE

### Aviva Winton

Subsequent to the original publication of the above article by Izabella Tabarovsky, Wikipedia’s Jewish problems again made headlines.

As of August 5, Wikipedia officially changed the heading of its page titled “Allegations of genocide in the 2023 Israeli attack on Gaza” to “Gaza genocide”, according to a report from *Ynet.com*. This change in title reportedly followed a vote among Wikipedia administrators after months of debate, and news reports said Wikipedia editors now consider it a “settled fact” that genocide is taking place in Gaza.

The article further stated that “supporters of the new title argue that there is a broad consensus in academia on the matter, citing academic articles by Holocaust historians, genocide scholars, human rights professors and legal and political experts.”

Amongst the so-called experts Wikipedia cites for this “consensus” is UN Special Rapporteur on Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese, whose hate-filled social media posts employ such openly antisemitic rhetoric that the US has called for her removal from the position, and numerous other Western governments have condemned her.

The footnotes section of the Wikipedia entry cites Boycott from Within (a Jewish-Arab group in support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement

against Israel), the Jewish Voice for Peace, the Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights that operates out of the Jabaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, Amnesty International, and the (communist) People’s Forum, based in the US, amongst many other anti-Israeli NGOs.

The extensive entry titled “Gaza genocide” is divided into subtopics analysing the issue from various angles – academic, legal and cultural discourse on genocide, statements from politicians in Israel and abroad, the legal process at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and Israel’s actions on both local and international fronts.

A significant portion is dedicated to American cooperation, particularly President Joe Biden’s, with the supposed “genocide.” Criticism from progressive “Squad” members against White House policy, such as Jewish Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Rashida Tlaib, is included, as are claims by climate activist Greta Thunberg and rapper Macklemore.

Wikipedia editors who were opposed to the article’s title change said it violated Wikipedia’s policy on neutral titles and accused the online encyclopedia of being biased against Israel, reports said. They noted that Wikipedia kept the word “allegations” in another title – “Allegations of genocide in the 2023 Hamas attack on Israel” – but removed the term when accusing Israel of genocide due to a successful months-long campaign led by anonymous anti-Israel editors.





(From top) ADL head Jonathan Greenblatt, Wikimedia CEO Maryana Iskander (Screenshots)

guessed it – did nothing.

Many, undoubtedly, will note the irony of the ADL being attacked by the Wikipedia woke, given the criticism the organisation and its head Jonathan Greenblatt have faced from the Jewish community for their progressive tilt and failure to focus on left-wing antisemitism. But the ADL has long been in social justice warriors' crosshairs. In 2020, 100 hard-left groups signed an open letter demanding that the left "drop the ADL" as an ally.

And in January, the *Nation* published a piece whose title, "The Anti-Defamation League: Israel's Attack Dog in the US," read like a *Pravda* headline circa 1970. The Wikipedia editors who won the battle over downgrading the ADL used this piece to back up their arguments, along with articles in the hard-left *Guardian* and *Jewish Currents*.

In response to a letter by 43 Jewish organisations requesting it review the decision, Wikimedia issued a press release referring to Wikipedia's supposedly inviolable mechanisms that must be preserved to keep it "neutral and free from institutional bias." All content decisions are made by "Wikipedia's volunteer community" in a transparent manner, with clear processes in place, and Wikimedia dares not interfere in the magic of that process.

The brush-off, however, reads like an evasion so crude, it borders on deception. It's true that Wikipedia's old-timers tend to resent interventions from the foundation, but the foundation isn't as powerless as it claimed in the release. In fact, Wikimedia's senior management says something else entirely in its other communications. See, for example, the blog Maryana Iskander, Wikimedia's CEO, published three weeks after October 7. There she extolled Wikimedia's crucial role in fighting "mis/disinformation, censorship and other threats." Whatever Wikimedia does to combat mis/disinformation and censorship, when it comes to Jewish topics it is nowhere to be found.

Meanwhile, there are troubling signs that in the recent battle over the ADL, Wikipedia's editors used some of the techniques we've encountered already – combativeness, manipulation, and taking advantage of administrators' ignorance – to edge out their opponents and push through their own agendas.

One Wikipedian who opposed the new ADL classification quit editing, having become "fed up" with bias among the administrators. Editors told the *Jewish Journal* that Wikipedia's existing system is "overrun by political actors who are running circles" around volunteer administrators. One editor said it would be easy for anti-Israel activists to make a case that everything the ADL does relates to Zionism and ultimately squeeze its content off the site completely. Another suggested that Wikipedia must shift from an all-volunteer oversight system to one based on "paid, vetted experts in each field that also have a strong grasp on the nuances of debate,

mediation, and arbitration to ensure that Wikipedia policy and principles are actively enforced."

With Zionism, Israel, and anti-semitism at the heart of the global disinformation endeavour, we may already be witnessing a concerted effort to capture these areas of Wikipedia and turn them into anti-Israel propaganda. The people doing this could be domestic zealots or state actors like Iran or China – or all of the above. What's clear is that Wikipedia's vaunted decision-making transparency aside, the anonymity of its editors and administrators is a major obstacle to understanding who produces content and for what purpose.

Meanwhile, Wikimedia's Croatia report notes that when it comes to ideological capture, time is of the essence. The longer Wikipedia audiences are "exposed to disinformation and bias while being assured by the Wikipedia community's decades-long built reputation that they are reading neutral, fact-based information," the greater and more irreversible the effects.

Today, Jewish people and the Jewish story are under an unprecedented global assault, and Wikipedia is being used as a weapon in this war. Yet there are no signs that Wikimedia – which washes its hands of any decision-making responsibility with regard to Wikipedia's content yet raises millions off its back – recognises its role and responsibility at this moment. AIR

*Izabella Tabarovsky is a Tablet contributor. © This article is reprinted from Tablet Magazine, at tabletmag.com, the online magazine of Jewish news, ideas, and culture. © Tablet Magazine, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

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# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### CONDUCT BECOMING

Prior to the release of former Defence Force chief Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin's report scrutinising Israel's investigation into the April 1 Israel Defence Forces (IDF) drone strike in Gaza that killed Australian aid worker Zomi Frankcom and six of her World Central Kitchen (WCK) colleagues, the *Australian* quoted AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein (July 18) predicting that Binskin's report would likely confirm that the IDF had "a robust system of investigating itself" and had "learned from the mistakes" made.

The Nine Newspapers (Aug. 2) quoted Zionist Federation of Australia's Alon Cassuto's reaction to the report's release – that it "reaffirmed that while Frankcom's death was tragic, 'the IDF did not and does not target aid workers or any civilians.'"

A follow-up report in the Nine Newspapers (Aug. 6), noted the Israeli Embassy in Canberra said Foreign Minister Penny Wong "misrepresent[ed]" and "omitted crucial details" during a media conference in which she released the report.

### IDF VERSUS ADF?

The behaviour and remarks of Senator Wong at the press conference for the Binskin report's release were criticised in the *Australian* (Aug. 7) by Peter Jennings of Strategic Analysis Australia. He argued that "far from justifying Penny Wong's confected outrage about 'an intentional strike by the Israeli Defence Forces' on an aid convoy, Mark Binskin's careful review finds the strike was a terrible error swiftly followed by an impartial investigation, with involved officers sacked and reprimanded."

Jennings asserted that "If Wong wants 'full accountability' she should

press the World Central Kitchen to answer why there was no direct communications established with the convoy, why the vehicles left planned routes and were moving in the dark without night identification, and why armed guards were present when that was not planned."

A day earlier, Strategic Analysis Australia colleagues Michael Shoebridge and Anthony Bergin had written in the *Australian* that the appointment of Binskin as a "special adviser" was "a diplomatic insult... implying [Israel] couldn't conduct its own investigation," but he was nonetheless "provided with all the information he required" by Israel.

His report, they said, "undercut[s] narratives about wanton Israeli breaches of international humanitarian law and laws of armed conflict." Significantly, Binskin mentioned favourably the similarities between the IDF and Australian Defence Forces rules of engagement and standard operating procedures, they noted.

### PIERS-ING ANALYSIS

News Corp columnist Piers Akerman in the *Sunday Telegraph* (June 23) said, "Such is the perverted ideology of Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood sponsored by Iran, that deaths of Palestinians are to be celebrated, particularly if they occurred in an action against the great Satan, the US, or the lesser devil, Israel, but actually in combat with any infidel." A week later in the paper, Akerman criticised the Albanese Government's "lack of support" for Israel.

In the *Spectator Australia* (June 29), Akerman said, "Iran, the fount of evil in the region is pulling the strings of proxy armies Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis across the Red Sea," adding

that Teheran benefits from cooperation with China, Russia, and North Korea.

### BEAUTIFUL ONE DAY, ANTISEMITIC THE NEXT?

On July 1, the *Courier Mail* condemned the huge surge in recorded instances of antisemitism in Queensland, particularly on university campuses, since October 7.

The editorial said, "it is a line in the sand moment not just for the university, but for the state as well... there is little our politicians can do to shape events in the Middle East... even less that the average citizen can do, but that feeling of helplessness should never be allowed to develop into hate."

Similarly, on the same day, the Adelaide *Advertiser* called out the Extinction Rebellion protest movement for "try[ing] to argue that Israel's defence of its territory, by rightly trying to eliminate Hamas, is partly to blame for global warming."

Meanwhile, on *Sky News*' website (June 29), AIJAC Visiting Fellow Professor Greg Rose noted reports of the involvement of Islamist groups in university protests, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, which he argued should be listed by Australia as a banned terror group.

### DEATH BY PROXY

Analyst Jonathan Spyer noted in the *Australian* (July 8) that "From Iran's point of view, the strategy of slowly building up proxy forces in neighbouring countries is working very well. It has brought Tehran ownership of Lebanon, domination of Iraq and a large part of Yemen, freedom of action in Syria and effective ownership of the Palestinian war against Israel.

“Alongside this, Iran’s nuclear project is proceeding apace. Tehran is now just weeks away from possessing sufficient enriched uranium to build a nuclear device.”

In the *Canberra Times* (July 9), Dr Bren Carlill of the Zionist Federation of Australia argued the international community must pressure Hezbollah and Iran to withdraw the former’s forces north of Israel’s border with Lebanon to the Litani River. Car-

lill added that unconfirmed reports claiming Australia informed Israel it won’t be supported if it starts a full-scale war with Hezbollah appeared to be based on domestic politics rather than principle.

### NORTHERN EXPOSURE

In the *Australian Financial Review* (Aug. 2), *New York Times* columnist Bret Stephens noted that Hezbollah has

caused the displacement of 60,000 Israelis from the northern communities living alongside Lebanon.

“Those who condemn Israel for its allegedly disproportionate response to the attacks by Hamas and Hezbollah would be a bit more intellectually honest if they asked themselves what they’d demand of their governments if they were in the same situation,” Stephens wrote.

Earlier, in the *Australian* (July 10),



## IN PARLIAMENT

Shadow Foreign Minister Senator **Simon Birmingham** (Lib., SA) – July 4 – Moving to suspend standing orders so he could move “That the Senate reaffirms Israel’s inherent right to self-defence, whether attacked by Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran or any other sponsor of terrorism”: “Palestinians... are used and abused as human shields by Hamas, who hide amongst them, hide hostages amongst them... If this were Australia, there would be no tolerance of terrorist organisations like Hamas or Hezbollah.”

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** – “I move: At the end of the motion... add... ‘Calls on all parties to exercise restraint;... Supports efforts to press all parties to the conflict in Gaza agree to the ceasefire proposal.’”

Standing orders were suspended, the amendment was defeated, with only the ALP and Senator David Pocock supporting, and the original motion was then carried on the voices, with the Greens opposing.

Shadow Defence Minister **Andrew Hastie** (Lib., Canning) – July 4 – moving the same motion in the House: “Hamas continues this by refusing to release the hostages, surrender, lay down its arms and cease to be a movement.”

Labor adjourned the House debate with the Coalition and independents opposing the motion to adjourn.

Shadow Education Minister Senator **Sarah Henderson** (Lib., Vic.) – June 27 – on her bill for a judicial commission into antisemitism at universities: “Since 7 October, Australians have witnessed an unprecedented spike in antisemitic activity across our country... But, arguably, nothing has been quite as bad as on some university campuses... We must stop the antisemitic hate and incitement on university campuses.”

Greens Deputy Leader Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (NSW) – “This bill is a thinly veiled attempt to attack student encampments and tarnish students and staff who are calling for justice for Palestine.”

Shadow Attorney-General Senator **Michaelia Cash** (Lib., WA) – “October 7 commenced an incredible wave of domestic antisemitism... it seems that the root of the infection is found sadly and, quite frankly, appallingly in our university campuses.”

Shadow Indigenous Australians Minister Senator **Jacinta Nampijinpa Price** (CLP, NT) – “For some reason... it has been acceptable for terrorist flags to be flying... and for terrorist chants to be used at... our universities.”

Others speaking in favour of the bill included Senator **Matt O’Sullivan** (Lib., WA), Senator **Maria Kovacic** (Lib., NSW), Senator **Dave Sharma** (Lib., NSW) and **Andrew Wallace** (Lib., Fisher) and Senator **Jacqui Lambie** (JLN, Tas.). Senator Henderson’s proposed judicial inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities will be examined by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee.

**Julian Leeser** (Lib., Berowra) – July 3 – moved the same motion in the house: “Universities are ground zero for antisemitism and we are now seeing it filter into other aspects of life.”

Labor adjourned the debate with the Coalition and independents opposing the motion to adjourn.

Senator **Faruqi** – asking whether the Government would sanction Israel: “We have witnessed Israel’s full-blown genocide in Gaza, during which Israel has ruthlessly massacred close to 40,000 Palestinians, including around 15,000 Palestinian children.”

Senator **Wong** – replying: “No Australian government has ever expressed such strong support for Palestinian statehood as this one.”

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – July 1 – “‘From the river to the sea’... has been used both by supporters of Israel and supporters of Palestine who support a single state... I condemn [it] unequivocally.”

Senator **Andrew Bragg** (Lib., NSW) – June 26 – “The attempted mainstreaming of the saying ‘from the river to the sea’ is deeply antisemitic, and ... designed to erase Israel from the map.”

**Max Chandler-Mather** (Greens, Griffith) – July 2 – “Thirty-seven thousand Palestinians have been murdered, 72% of them women and children... One million Palestinians are at risk of death by starvation as a result of Israel’s engineered famine.”

Greens Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Senator **Jordon Steele-John** (WA) – July 4 – “Australia must immediately sanction those complicit in this genocide, including Prime Minister Netanyahu and Minister of Defense Gallant.”

AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein argued that the low-intensity war Israel is fighting on its northern border against Lebanese terror group Hezbollah is "approaching a moment of decision."

Dr Rubenstein said if all-out war is to be avoided in the short term, then Hezbollah's forces need to pullback "some 20km from the border [with Israel]," as per UN Security Council Resolution 1701, but neutralising Hezbollah longer term requires weakening its Iranian paymasters.

On *ABC Radio* "PM" (Aug. 2), former Middle East correspondent Adam Harvey echoed Dr Rubenstein: "I think what's happening in the north of Israel is now seen as untenable... But the deaths of those children [in Majdal Shams] has really highlighted that. You've got entire cities, entire towns anyway evacuated... Israel's effectively lost a lot of territory and there's a lot of pressure on Israel from the right anyway to act and to strike further at Hezbollah in south Lebanon. And push them out of that sort of 10k buffer zone back towards the Litani River."

## SAID STORY

On *ABC RN* "Breakfast" (Aug. 1), discussing Hezbollah's fatal rocket hit that killed 12 Druze children in Majdal Shams in the Golan Heights, and Israel's assassination of Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur, followed by the killing of Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran, US-based Law Professor Wadie Said sounded like an apologist for Iran.

Said suggested Haniyeh's role in Hamas was purely political, asserting that he was "not involved in... the sort of day-to-day decisions on... military tactics... and strategies."

He also appeared to give credence to conspiratorial claims that Israel caused the attack on Majdal Shams, saying, "There was a famous incident in the Vietnam War called the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which allowed for an escalation of the Vietnam War based

on an alleged North Vietnamese attack, which then turned out to have not been true."

## WHEN EAST IS WEST

On *ABC RN* "Religion & Ethics" (July 10), Jamal Rifi attempted to explain why the Morrison Government's policies on Israel and the Palestinians upset Australia's Arab and Muslim community.

Dr Jamal Rifi said, "[they] reduced the funding for UNRWA from 20 million to 10 million. And at the same time made the decision that they're going to recognise east Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. And they are going to move the embassy from Tel Aviv into east Jerusalem."

These claims were wrong. The Morrison Government recognised only Jerusalem's western part, which has been sovereign Israeli territory since 1948, as Israel's capital and acknowledged Palestinian aspirations for a future capital in the eastern side of the city. And they denied any plans to move the embassy.

## CHOPPY WATER

On July 13, *Canberra Times* columnist and frequent Israel critic Jack Waterford accused pro-Israel lobby groups of labelling criticism of Israel as antisemitic.

"It may be true that critical references to Israel or Zionism may indicate more fundamental hostility to Jewish people or the Jewish religion, but whether that is so is not to be determined as a matter for deconstruction, semiotics or divination by agents and advocates of the cause of the state or the Zionist dream," Waterford wrote. So who should determine if something is antisemitic if not the victims of antisemitism?

## LEARNED DISCOURSE

Visiting Australia, former IDF spokesperson Peter Lerner explained

to *ABC Radio National* "Breakfast" (July 17) why Israel's war against Hamas is justified and moral.

Lerner said, "Unfortunately, there are still too many bent-on Israel's destruction [who] have not come to terms with Israel's existence. Hamas is just the... spearhead of the most recent attack."

Addressing the accusation Israel's military campaign has not conformed with international law, Lerner said, "I think proportionality in warfare weighs on the military necessity and not on a numbers game," adding, "professionals in military affairs" from the US and UK have "said to me, 'Peter, you're setting a standard most Western militaries can't live up to.'"

Lerner agreed that "too many people are suffering" but "sometimes there is a necessity to go to war."

## DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

In contrast to ABC Global Affairs editor John Lyons, who has repeatedly seemed incapable of informing listeners what Hamas is demanding in the ceasefire for hostage deal with Israel, his ABC colleague Allyson Horn did so with ease.

On *ABC TV* "The World" (July 16), Horn said "there are still... huge, significant gaps that need to be bridged... between Israel and Hamas that have been so problematic for all... the negotiations throughout this war. That continues to be the issue."

She explained that Hamas had demanded "an entire end to the war," not just a "temporary ceasefire" and for Israel to "withdraw all of its troops from Gaza."

But, she said, "Israel says it won't do that because it... would leave a political vacuum there" enabling Hamas to "rebuild both its military and governing capabilities."

## STRANGE "PRAGMATISM"

Nine Newspapers' US correspondent Farrah Tomazin (July 25) pre-

dicted that the Democrats' presumptive Presidential candidate Kamala Harris would be tougher on Israel than US President Joe Biden.

Tomazin wrote, "[Harris] is viewed as someone willing to be more pragmatic and publicly critical of the way the war is being conducted. Democrats therefore hope she can win back voters who say they could never support Biden because of his refusal to push back hard enough against his Israeli counterpart."

According to Tomazin, a "pragmatic" approach apparently means the US Administration should jettison its principled support for Israel as it fights an existential battle against Hamas to gain domestic votes.

## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

AIJAC's Colin Rubenstein argued in the *Australian Financial Review* (July 26) that intercommunal tensions, particularly the explosion of antisemitism since Hamas' October 7 massacre, do not prove that Australian multiculturalism has failed.

Dr Rubenstein wrote, "we need to focus on the right targets. Australian multiculturalism was never a license for 'anything goes', that whatever your background or values – be they embedded in extremism, violence, terrorism, racism or whatever – they'll fit into diverse Australia."

Australian multiculturalism has succeeded "by emphasising the need to accept and practise one's responsibilities and not just exercise one's rights. It relies on a non-negotiable commitment to certain shared core values and responsibilities, including parliamentary democracy and the rule of law; freedom of speech and religion; the equality of the sexes; and mutual respect and tolerance."

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* (Aug. 6) on the same topic, Peter Kurti also expressed concern that the hostility and hatred experienced by Australian Jews since October 7 is placing

"unprecedented strain" on Australian multiculturalism.

"When private custom conflicts with public laws, the latter must prevail. That is why polygamy, child marriage and female circumcision are – and always will be – illegal under Australian law."

## DEBUNKING MISINFORMATION

In the *Canberra Times* (July 2), AIJAC's Oved Lobel highlighted a series of recent reports that have debunked two of the most pernicious claims levelled at Israel during its war against Hamas in Gaza.

Lobel noted that the "prevalent claim... that 70 per cent of [Palestinian] casualties were women and children," has been proven wrong by the UN, which, in May "surreptitiously halved the number of women and children it claimed had been killed in the war."

Meanwhile, the UN's own expert committee on identifying famine found that there wasn't enough data to back up earlier UN claims of widespread famine in Gaza.

Elsewhere, AIJAC's Justin Amler in the *Daily Telegraph* (July 31), systematically detailed how the UN and its staff have repeatedly "failed all tests of decency" by attacking, criticising, and blaming Israel since the October 7 massacre.

On *ABC Newsradio* (July 29), retired Australian Major General Mick Ryan dismissed Greens claims that Australia exports offensive weapons to Israel. Ryan said Israel was fighting to protect its civilian population, and a device Australia sells to bring down enemy attack drones is clearly a "defensive weapon".

## LATE NIGHT LIES

*ABC RN* "Late Night Live" (July 24) interviewed US Palestinian activist and writer Saree Makdisi ahead of his attendance at this year's Festival of

Dangerous Ideas in Sydney.

Much of what Makdisi said belonged in a festival of delusional ideas.

Makdisi falsely claimed that Israel is "a democracy for as long as you're Jewish, and that's the issue, because half of the people over whom Israel exerts power, that is to say, direct sovereignty, are not Jewish. They're Palestinian Arabs."

Makdisi claimed even Arabs who are Israeli citizens do not have equal rights with their Jewish compatriots "because they are subject to over 60 laws that discriminate on the basis of the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens... For example, nobody in Israel, Jewish or Arab or otherwise, can vote for a secular democratic state," he said.

The last claim is just false, while Makdisi's claim about 60 discriminatory laws is pure propaganda, which on close examination is nonsense.

The list of supposedly "discriminatory laws" includes such things as making Jewish holidays public holidays and the benefits army veterans receive after they serve in the IDF. This is considered racist because Israeli Arabs are not drafted but Jews are. Of course, Israeli Arabs can choose to volunteer to enlist in the army, or in community service, and are then entitled to similar benefits.

Makdisi also bizarrely claimed early Zionist settlers planted eucalyptus trees from Australia as they "grow very quickly" and because olive trees "represented a backward, primitive, non-European culture."

He's just wrong. Eucalyptus trees were planted because they helped to drain swamps and provide windbreaks to stop erosion.

Makdisi included pine trees in his list of "European species" that Jewish settlers supposedly used to obliterate the native environment. In fact, the main type of pine tree planted by Jewish settlers was and still is the "Aleppo Pine", which is not European and has grown in Israel for thousands of years.

# MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

## HITS AND MISSES

The end of July and first week of August was a tumultuous period in the Middle East.

On July 27, a Hezbollah rocket killed 12 Druze children playing soccer in the village of Majdal Shams on Israel's Golan Heights. This was followed by Israel's elimination of top Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur on July 30, and the assassination of Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran a day later.

For the most part, the media consensus was that Hezbollah fired the rocket that hit Majdal Shams, yet Hezbollah's vehement but implausible denials were sometimes given too much credence. Israel's evidence – including debris found on site with markings from an Iranian Falaq-1 rocket that only Hezbollah uses – received scant coverage.

On *ABC TV* "News" (July 29), Global Affairs Correspondent John Lyons was highly sceptical of Hezbollah's involvement, explaining that the group usually claims responsibility and saying, incorrectly, that "it's very unusual... for Hezbollah to target this area." Lyons said he wanted "to actually see the evidence" that it was a Falaq-1 rocket – even though Israel had already released photographic evidence.

Emeritus Professor Amin Saikal on *ABC RN* "Breakfast" (July 29) also questioned Hezbollah's responsibility for the strike, suggesting Israeli PM Netanyahu wants to "drag the Americans into this major conflict in the region."

On *ABC NewsRadio* (July 29), analyst Rodger Shanahan said, "if they weren't directly responsible, then at least one of their close allies [was]. So, at the end of the day... Hezbollah is ultimately responsible... they realise the gravity of the error... and I think they're trying to backpedal."

In the *Australian* (July 30), correspondent Samer Al-Atrush wrote "[Hezbollah] was certainly the culprit. Its denial speaks to the so-called Islamic resistance's embarrassment at having massacred a dozen children to a religious minority that wields power in Lebanon."

Former Australian Ambassador to Lebanon Ian Parmer (*ABC TV* "The World", July 30) attributed the hit to a "misfire... I think there's no doubt Hezbollah fired the rocket... aiming at an Israeli military site" near the village.

Although no party claimed the hit on Haniyeh, it was widely agreed only Israel has the expertise to carry it out.

Former Federal Labor MP Michael Danby told *Sky News* (Aug. 1) that Haniyeh was killed "to send a message... to Hamas that, 70 years after the Second World War, if you kill... Jews or Israelis, the people who organise it are not going to get away with it. But also important was the message to Iran. If you continue to use... your proxies... Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, all funded by Teheran[s] oil revenues... we can get you."

**"The media consensus was that Hezbollah fired the rocket that hit Majdal Shams, yet Hezbollah's vehement but implausible denials were sometimes given too much credence"**

Amin Saikal in *Nine Newspapers* (Aug. 2) seemed to imply that killing Haniyeh was also part of a conspiracy by Israel's PM Netanyahu to, among other things, "oblige the US to participate in a war [against Iran] Israel cannot win on its own."

*Guardian Australia* correspondent Simon Tisdall (July 31) suggested "it would have been preferable if Haniyeh... had faced trial at the International Criminal Court" but "that now cannot happen... Israel has once again sought 'justice' through extrajudicial murder." Tisdall also commended Hezbollah's "restraint" since October 7. Elsewhere, analyst Jonathan Pannikoff said on *ABC NewsRadio* (Aug. 1), that he doubted the ICC "would... go after Israel on [the killing of Haniyeh]" in the same way "they're going after Israel... when it comes to the war in Gaza."

The extent of Haniyeh's involvement in terrorism was a hot topic.

*SBS*'s website reported (July 31) that "Adeeb Ziadeh, a specialist in Palestinian affairs at Qatar University, said before [Haniyeh's] death... he had close ties with... hard-line figures in the group and the military wing."

On *ABC TV* "The World" (July 31), Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek said Arab leaders "viewed him as a pragmatist, and in Hamas terms, a relative moderate," while *SBS TV* "World News" (Aug. 1) reporter Liz Maddock asserted Hamas "have lost in Haniyeh a more moderate voice."

The *West Australian* (Aug. 1) disputed Haniyeh's reputation as a "relative moderate," saying Haniyeh "bears responsibility" for the more than 1,150 Israelis murdered on October 7 "and the many thousands of Gazans killed, used by Hamas as human shields, in the course of five wars... with Israel." The paper correctly noted that Haniyeh "had a key role in building up Hamas' military capacity, including through securing millions in military aid from Iran" and was accused of diverting humanitarian aid.

# THE LAST WORD

Rabbi Ralph Genende

## VENGEANCE, RETRIBUTION AND JUSTICE

Vengeance has been with us since the birth of humanity. The earliest record of murder in the Bible is an act of revenge – Cain kills his brother Abel as an act of fury at both his sibling and the God who favours him.

Vengeance is a basic, primaevial human impulse. Nietzsche wisely said, “A small revenge is more human than no revenge at all.” Yet exercising revenge can be costly and harmful.

Since October 7, *nekamah*, or retribution, has emerged as one of the key words in Israeli public life, not only in popular culture, but in the media, the military, the Government and the Knesset. Shortly after October 7, Binyamin Netanyahu put it bluntly: “We will strike them until they are crippled, and we will avenge with full force this black day they inflicted upon the state of Israel and its citizens.”

As I write this piece, the world is anxiously awaiting Iran’s retaliation for Israel’s retribution – the targeted killings of some of its most deadly enemies from the leadership of Hamas and Hezbollah.

Retribution can be seen as an act of justice and as a way of stopping violence. It sends a message of strength to one’s enemy.

Israel’s capacity to strike at the very heart of the capitals of terror has restored some of its battered pride and some deterrence against its opponents. Indeed, many analysts of the Middle East suggest that the only way to win a conflict in that part of the world is via displays of strength.

On the other hand, vengeance can perpetuate a cycle of tit-for-tat, an endless pattern of attack and reprisal. Righteous indignation can lead to inhuman and unrighteous behaviour.

Jewish wisdom has long pondered the value and limits of revenge and retribution. In the Bible, God both approves and disapproves of it. Early on in Jewish history, He calls on the Israelites to take revenge on their enemies, be they the Amalekites or the Midianites. The rabbis of the Talmud suggest that a righteous person should rejoice when they witness retribution.

Yet alongside these sentiments, God explicitly forbids vengeance (Leviticus 19:18) and

commands forgiveness, as Joseph forgave his brothers who sought to kill him.

Some thinkers argue that it is only God, not man, who exercises vengeance and only in the past appointed human agents for this. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, says Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Jews may and perhaps should appeal to God for justice and retribution, but not become advocates of revenge.

This is not to say we should not seek to destroy the enemies who seek to annihilate us. Jewish Law clearly states that it is just and right to pre-emptively kill those who want to kill you.

On the fast of Tisha B’Av (August 12 in 2024), Jews recall their communities throughout the ages who were helpless in the face of their murderers and marauders and cried out in their fear and agony – including those who etched onto the walls of the gas chambers, “Take revenge for our deaths.”

In the collective Jewish psyche, October 7 channelled the collective trauma of the Holocaust, just as the Shoah animated many Zionist leaders in the 1940s; partisan leader Abba Kovner, for example, led a group called “The Avengers”.

The mood of so many, if not most, in Israel and across the Jewish world is therefore understandably for payback against the genocidal Hamas leaders and their followers.

However, blind vengeance is also a path that can lead to a dead end of violence and despair, and Jews have long distinguished between justice and vengeance. Jewish teaching says we should not celebrate the fall of our enemies.

We may hate the way they have besmirched the soul that God gave them, but as King Solomon (*Proverbs 24:17*) recommended, we should not gloat (or hand out sweets) or rejoice in their destruction.

We are urged to stand for life and the careful calibration of justice.



Jewish partisan leader Abba Kovner, centre, with his unit known as “The Avengers” (Image: Wikimedia Commons)



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