



## TRUMP 2.0

What his second Administration portends for Israel and its wars against Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This AIR edition analyses the implications of Donald Trump's emphatic election win in the US, and what his new Administration might mean for Israel, the Middle East and Australia.

Ilan Evyatar explains why most Israelis were hoping for a Trump victory and what they hope to see from his second term; Ray Takeyh provides a Washington-based analysis of the Administration's likely approach and priorities; and Colin Rubenstein offers an Australian perspective on the opportunities and pitfalls. Plus, Jacob Kornbluh profiles the good, the less good and the problematic among the foreign policy appointments announced so far by Trump for his new team.

Also featured this month is AIJAC's factsheet correcting untruths about new Israeli legislation targeting UNRWA, the UN's highly controversial Palestinian refugee agency, alongside some essential historical context from Seth Frantzman. In addition, Lazar Berman examines the war in Lebanon and the urgent efforts to reach a sustainable ceasefire deal.

Finally, don't miss the funny, poignant and wise "self-eulogy" from the universally esteemed late Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer; Jamie Hyams' catalogue of the Australian Government's increasingly disappointing policies since October 7; and top Australian intellectual Paul Monk's exploration of the latest research into what went wrong with the 2003 Iraq war.

As always, please let us know your thoughts on any aspect of this edition at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au)

Tzvi Fleischer

### ON THE COVER

Donald Trump with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu at his Mar-a-Lago estate, Florida, July 26, 2024. (Image: PMO/ Flickr)



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[www.aijac.org.au](http://www.aijac.org.au)**FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN**  
COLIN RUBENSTEIN

**U**S President-elect Donald Trump's decisive victory over Vice President Kamala Harris is a rare event in American political history. Before Trump, only one president had been returned to the Oval Office after a failed re-election attempt.

Trump will go into his second term with an even stronger mandate than his first. Not only did he win the popular vote, but the Republican party retook the Senate and will retain control of the House of Representatives.

No stranger to courting controversy, Trump said some troubling things during the campaign. Citing the fact that the majority of American Jews traditionally vote Democrat, in September, Trump said, "If I don't win this election... the Jewish people would really have a lot to do with that."

Trump also accepted the support of problematic groups and public figures like commentator Tucker Carlson, who recently gave a platform to a Holocaust-denying historian, and promoters of antisemitic conspiracies such as Candace Owens, Nick Fuentes and Kanye West. Attorney-General nominee Matt Gaetz also has some very unsavoury associations. This inevitably raised questions about whether a second Trump presidency would fan already raging flames of antisemitism or douse them.

Similarly, isolationist sentiment espoused by Trump during the campaign and his choice of outspoken isolationist JD Vance as his running mate create some doubt as to whether the foreign policy of a second-term Trump Administration would follow the same path as his first administration – which led to some impressive achievements, especially in the Middle East.

In his first term, Trump withdrew from the fatally flawed 2015 Iran nuclear deal and implemented a "maximum pressure" strategy towards stopping Iran's advance towards nuclear weapons capability. Unfortunately, it was not given enough time to be fully effective before being suspended by the incoming Biden Administration – but it is notable that Iran did not start blatantly flouting its nuclear obligations until after Trump left office.

The brokering of the Abraham Accords – which overturned decades of foreign policy establishment groupthink that said that normalisation with Israel's regional neighbours could only come after the Palestinians make peace with Israel – was a truly historic achievement that any US administration would be proud to have as part of its record.

A similar example of overturning stale conventional wisdom was the decision to finally fulfill a long-standing US law demanding the US Embassy in Israel be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Following the principle that US foreign policy should be based on both American interests and objective reality, Trump froze funding to the politicised (and increasingly terror-complicit) UN Palestinian aid agency UNRWA, and recognised Israeli sovereignty on the Golan Heights. He also promoted a peace plan that offered the Palestinians a state and the region a prosperous future, while not requiring Israel to displace families by removing existing settlements. Israel PM Netanyahu immediately accepted it, while Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected it out of hand.

Reassuringly, most of President-elect Trump's appointments to key security and foreign policy roles thus far appear to suggest a return to the principles that led to these first term achievements is most likely.

Trump's pick for Secretary of State, Senator Marco Rubio, has previously urged Israel to "destroy every element of Hamas they can get their hands on" and rightly blames the terror groups for all the regrettable civilian casualties in Gaza.





His choice for Secretary of Defence, Pete Hegseth, has urged the US to support any Israeli effort to dismantle the Iranian nuclear program.

Trump's new National Security Advisor-designate Mike Waltz is an outspoken friend of Israel, and had been urging the Biden Administration to increase the pressure on Iran on the nuclear weapons issue.

Other welcome appointments include Congresswoman Elise Stefanik as US Ambassador to the United Nations, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee as US Ambassador to Israel and Steven C Witkoff, a Jewish friend and business associate of Trump, as the Administration's Middle East envoy.

Trump's branding of his new Administration's foreign policy agenda as "America First" has been interpreted by some as isolationist, but the team he is assembling largely suggests something entirely different. Trump's quote that "I'm not going to start a war, I'll stop wars," taken together with his call for "Peace through Strength," should mean increased support for US allies in the region, even as his Administration may look to draw down US forces.


It should mean bringing the indirect and direct warfare being waged by Iran and its proxies against Israel to a close by removing the obstacles the US has laid in front of the Israeli military campaigns, in the form of delayed weapons shipments, threats of sanctions and political pressure. This would give Israel the resources and support it needs to bring its wars to a successful and decisive conclusion in the near future.

Further, supporting Israel's military objectives and

reimposing maximum pressure on Iran would help stabilise world commerce by ending the Houthi effort to blockade the gateway to the Red Sea and Suez Canal, and strengthen the projection of US deterrence to its allies around the world.

And let's not forget that preserving and strengthening the ability of the US to project deterrence, and protect international commerce, is profoundly in Australia's interests, especially in the face of the rise of the increasingly aggressive axis of rogue actors including China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. We should therefore hope these elements of the Trump Administration's approach will be accomplished.

Of course, Trump's pro-tariff policies undoubtedly pose a risk to Australia. Mitigating that risk means looking for areas where we can emphasise the shared interests and values underlying US and Australian cooperation. AUKUS is one example – but the Australian Government should also be looking for others.

What it absolutely should not be doing is continuing its current trend of moving further and further from the US with respect to the Middle East and Israel (see p. 28). Our recent UN voting and public statements regarding Israel and its war with Hamas, Hezbollah and their puppet-masters in Teheran are both inconsistent with Australia's long-standing bipartisan Middle East stance and increasingly out of alignment with even the Biden Administration. These moves were never in Australia's national interest, and they have now become deeply dangerous to those interests in the age of the second Trump Administration. 

## WORD FOR WORD

"Dear Donald and Melania Trump, congratulations on history's greatest comeback! Your historic return to the White House offers a new beginning for America and a powerful recommitment to the great alliance between Israel and America."

**Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu congratulates Donald Trump on his re-election (Twitter/X, Nov. 6).**

"What I will tell you is, whatever Hamas is saying publicly, what they are communicating to the mediators is no, we will not do a ceasefire and hostage deal at this time. So, what we need to do is get the rest of the world to continue to increase pressure on Hamas to come to the table, to do a deal in Gaza."

**US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan (JNS, Nov. 13).**

"My dismissal stems from disagreements on three main issues: The first is my firm stance that everyone of conscription age

must serve in the IDF and defend the State of Israel... The second issue is our moral obligation and responsibility to bring our kidnapped sons and daughters back home as quickly as possible... The third issue is the necessity of drawing lessons through a thorough and relevant investigation [of October 7],... a state commission of inquiry."

**Recently dismissed Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant (Times of Israel, Nov. 5).**

"The enemies, both the USA and the Zionist regime, should know that they will definitely receive a tooth-breaking response."

**Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei threatens Israel after it retaliated for Iran's Oct. 1 ballistic missile attack on the Jewish state (SBS, Nov. 3).**

"We, as the State and Government of the Republic of Turkey, have cut off relations with Israel... Coordinated diplomatic efforts must be used [to push Israel] into a corner."

**Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (JNS, Nov. 13).**





# SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

## UNRWA HYSTERIA

On November 12, *ABC Radio National's* Steve Cannane made the following claim prior to an interview with Roger Hearn, an official with the UN refugee agency for Palestinians, UNRWA: "He [Hearn] says UNRWA has enough food to feed all of Gaza sitting across the border in Israel, but the Israeli ban on UNRWA operating inside Gaza means it cannot be delivered."

In the subsequent interview, Hearn never actually says this. That makes sense, because, if he did make such a claim, it would be pretty nuts (Hearn did make some similar claims in a previous Al Jazeera interview). The Israeli legislation does not ban UNRWA from operating in Gaza – though it does end Israeli cooperation with the agency, making operating there much harder. But more importantly, the ban is not yet in effect – it does not start until Jan. 28. So, if UNRWA has enough food inside Israel to feed all Gazans, it has two and a half months to get it into the Strip.

But, of course, it is not true that it has any such stockpile of food in Israel – and Hearn never claims it does in the interview. He says there are unspecified amounts of food stalled in Egypt and Ashdod, and mentions various barriers to getting it to Gazans, including the new Israeli legislation and other administrative barriers, but also "serious trouble with trucks getting looted once they arrive in Gaza."

What neither Cannane nor Hearn mention is that there are huge amounts of aid already inside Gaza that are not being distributed. A couple of days before that ABC interview with Hearn, COGAT – Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories – shared a video showing 900 truckloads of aid sitting on the Gazan side of the Kerem Shalom border crossing waiting for aid organisations to collect and distribute it. Some have reportedly sat there for months. So even if UNRWA could get all the aid supposedly stalled in Ashdod into Gaza, it is not at all clear it would then be successfully distributed.

The truth is the UNRWA situation is the subject of vast amounts of hyperbole like what Australian listeners heard on *Radio National* on Nov. 12. It is widely implied, or even said, that distributing aid to Gazans is impossible without UNRWA. Yet COGAT records show that UNRWA has distributed only 13% of the aid entering Gaza over recent months, with other agencies distributing far more. What's more, UNRWA does not appear to be disputing the COGAT figures (see p. 21 for more on this).

But the UN says UNRWA is the irreplaceable "backbone" of the aid distribution system, and the Israeli decision to cease cooperating with it is unthinkable – and the

ABC amplifies this message.

But I believe some other comments from UN officials more accurately reflect what is going on.

Philippe Lazzarini, the UNRWA Commissioner-General, said this following the Knesset's passage of the UNRWA legislation:

*The vote by the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) against UNRWA this evening is unprecedented and sets a dangerous precedent. It opposes the UN Charter and violates the State of Israel's obligations under international law.*

*This is the latest in the ongoing campaign to discredit UNRWA and delegitimize its role towards providing human-development assistance and services to Palestine Refugees [emphasis added].*

Note the comment about a "dangerous precedent" – which comes way before any remark about the effects of the decision on aid delivery. UN officials – and a lot of other people – just cannot bear anyone pointing out the severe flaws of UN agencies because they see the UN as the great hope of humankind. How can they convince humankind of the need to unite through the UN if people point out that key agencies are completely dysfunctional and counter-productive – or even facilitate terrorism?

The case for dismantling UNRWA on the above grounds is overwhelming. But it remains unthinkable because it would set a "dangerous precedent". The UN says UNRWA is in charge of Palestinians, and no one should be allowed to get away with challenging the UN, no matter how dysfunctional or counter-productive a UN agency has become. Thus, the current wave of "UNRWA hysteria".

## "SICK OF THE JEWS"

In keeping with this column's effort to call everyone's attention to the rejectionist, genocidal and racist rhetoric coming out of the "moderate" Palestinian Authority (PA), not just Hamas, it is worth documenting how the PA reacted to the mass, pre-planned attacks by gangs of youths on Israeli football fans in Amsterdam on Nov. 7.

The PA's official Foreign Ministry put out a statement (Nov. 8) condemning "the barbaric acts that the fans of one of the racist Israeli football teams carried out in Amsterdam for three consecutive days" and calling on the "the Dutch Government to investigate the [Israeli] hooligans and defend the Palestinians and Arabs in the Netherlands from these Israeli settlers and soldiers, who came to the Netherlands in order to transfer their racist ideas and their crimes to the European capitals."

That's right – the gang attacks never happened in the PA's telling. All violence was by the Israeli football fans – also painted as legitimate targets for violence by labelling them "soldiers and settlers".

However, on official *PA TV* (Nov. 10), Tayseer Nasrallah, a Revolutionary Council member for Fatah, the ruling PA party, seemed to acknowledge that there were attacks on the Israeli



fans – but implied this was wonderful. He told the compere: “What happened in the Netherlands two or three days ago is the best proof that the world is sick of the Jews.” Notice he did not even bother to hide that his problem is with “Jews” – not Israelis or “Zionists.”



What’s more, the official Information and Culture Commission of Fatah appeared to agree with Nasrallah that Amsterdam was a wonderful comeuppance to be celebrated. It published a

cartoon showing an Islamic star puncturing and deflating a Jewish soccer ball, with the caption, “Amsterdam: A greater act than all the noise that was heard.” [All above quotes from Palestinian Media Watch]

AIR

## DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

Ahron Shapiro

### WHAT DOC EVATT COULD TEACH PENNY WONG

On November 6, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and Melbourne’s *Age* published an opinion piece by Foreign Minister Penny Wong titled “Australians are traumatised and deserve facts on Middle East horrors”.

The piece, which chiefly recounted the various ways in which the Albanese Government has steered Australian foreign policy away from previous bipartisan support for Israel, included a lot of questionable “facts”. For instance, it cited as fact a Gaza death toll based on numbers served up by the Hamas-run ‘Gaza Health Ministry’ – numbers that are not only unverified, but that also make no differentiation between armed jihadists and non-combatants.

However, perhaps the most egregious non-fact offered by Senator Wong was her casual historical revisionism regarding the reason why the UN Partition Plan of 1947 (also known as UN General Assembly Resolution 181) failed to produce an Arab or Palestinian state alongside Israel (The plan recommended establishing a new ‘Arab’ state, Palestinians were not mentioned. This did not happen because Jordan and Egypt grabbed the West Bank and Gaza).

The Foreign Minister wrote:

*The Middle East’s contested history helps explain these divergent perspectives. Those who know the imperative of Israel for the Jewish people’s survival. Who feel October 7 as part of the long shadow of antisemitism; the abomination of the Holocaust and millennia of Jewish persecution. And those who know the dispossession of the Palestinian people; the failure of the international community to honour the 1947 promise made for a Palestinian state when Israel was established. Who feel that the loss of Muslim and Arab lives has been too easily dismissed.*

Senator Wong’s understanding of the “contested history” in the Holy Land deserves to itself be contested. Her claim that the Palestinians were “promised” a state in 1947 but were somehow thwarted is fiction.

No such international “promise” was made to Palestinian Arabs in 1947 – or at any other time. Rather, the Palestinian Arabs and their Arab state allies placed the goal of preventing the Jews from having their own state far ahead of any national aspirations for self-determination. They did so before the partition plan, they did so immediately afterwards, and they have continued to do so ever since.

The Foreign Minister should not take my word for it. She should instead open up parliamentary Hansard to April 28, 1948, and read what Australia’s legendary ALP Foreign Minister of the time, H.V. “Doc” Evatt, said on the current events of the day.

Harold Holt (Lib., Fawkner) asked Evatt, in light of the civil war that had erupted after the Arabs of Mandatory Palestine violently rejected the Partition Plan, “Is it still the policy of the Australian Government to support the Partition Plan for Palestine? Will he advise the House by what means it is proposed to enforce this policy?”

Evatt reminded Holt:

*The [General] Assembly is only a recommending body. It cannot order anything and it has no enforcement power of its own. By an overwhelming majority, the Assembly recommended the scheme known as partition.*

John McEwen of the Australian Country Party then asked Evatt if, before Australia’s vote in favour of Partition, the cabinet had been informed of “the announced intention of the Arab armies to commence war in such circumstances and of the concurrently announced intention of the Jewish armies also to fight?”

Evatt replied:

*It is perfectly true that when the United Nations was actually considering the problem of Palestine, the representative of what was called the Arab Higher Committee, that is the Palestinian Arabs, did publicly threaten the United Nations that if any solution was offered of which that Committee did not approve, it would attempt to overthrow its opponents by force... What has happened since [passage of the Partition Plan] is simply that the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states surrounding Palestine have threatened to defeat the settlement plan by force. The method of enforcement that the United Nations General Assembly recommended to the Security Council was that the Jewish state within Palestine should be entitled to form its own militia and its own force.*

Even Mahmoud Abbas has said of the Palestinian rejection of the 1947 Partition Plan that “it was our mistake.” The facts are clear: Palestinians have only themselves to blame for rejecting repeated offers of statehood, not only from the UN in 1948, but from Israel in 2000, 2001 and 2008. And no “promise” was ever made to Palestinians that they could have a state even if they refuse to make peace.



Wong may be right that Australians, Israelis and Palestinians are all traumatised. Yet Palestinian leaders have the agency to end the cycle of trauma – by saying yes to making peace with Israel, and ending more than 80 years of prioritising Israel’s destruction over their own self-determination.

AIR

# ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

## AMONG FRIENDS

The hosting of the 16th BRICS summit by Russia in the city of Kazan in late October offered a diverse group of Asian and other nations an opportunity for diplomatic partnership-building outside the tent of United States-led Western democracies.

BRICS initially brought together Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009 (adding South Africa in 2010) with the aim of representing the interests of the “Global South” (developing countries) and reducing the dominance of the dollar in trade and financial transactions. The group this year added Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Saudi Arabia is yet to formalise its membership despite having received an invitation to join. Up to 30 other nations have expressed interest in joining, many of whom also attended the summit.

While Russian President Vladimir Putin used the occasion to convey that Moscow is far from isolated on the world stage despite being targeted by US-led sanctions, other attendees came with their own agendas.

The first international forays of Prabowo Subianto’s Government have been keenly anticipated. The Indonesian President sent his newly-appointed Foreign Minister Sugiono – a loyalist from Prabowo’s Gerindra party – on his first foreign mission to the Kazan summit, where he declared Indonesia’s intent to join BRICS. Indonesia has for now been granted “partner country” status – a probation-like process.

The new Foreign Minister also signalled the priority of the Palestinian issue, conveying a message of support from President Prabowo to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. “I will make sure that the issue of Palestine remains at the forefront of Indonesian diplomacy, and we will continue to stand firm with the Palestinian people,” Sugiono later announced via a statement.

Days after the BRICS summit, Sugiono and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held a phone conversation to discuss expanding bilateral relations between Teheran and Jakarta, Iranian media reported. Araghchi reportedly congratulated Sugiono on his appointment and “hailed

Indonesia’s condemnation of the Israeli regime’s aggression on Iran.”

While BRICS meetings offer opportunities for countries to find common cause on select issues, it would be misleading to suggest that those in attendance are seeking to break ties with the US, Europe or other Western powers.

In a press statement, Sugiono said that the BRICS membership did not mean Indonesia is changing its long-standing “free and active” foreign policy of not taking sides, adding that some BRICS priorities – food security and poverty eradication – dovetailed with those of Prabowo’s cabinet.

Yet, Prabowo’s first two months in office also includes visits to China, Japan, the United States and United Kingdom, plus Peru and Brazil for the APEC and G20 summits. If anything, Prabowo’s long political history and extensive international contacts suggest he intends a more active international role than his predecessor Joko Widodo.

Among the other countries seeking full BRICS membership is Malaysia. One of the factors driving this, Asia analyst Zachary Abuza noted recently, is protecting Malaysia’s highly lucrative semiconductor industry. Malaysia has angered Washington by offering to sell semiconductors to sanctioned countries, including Russia and Iran.

“[Malaysian Prime Minister] Anwar Ibrahim bristles at the unilateral imposition of US sanctions on what he deems is a sovereign right to conduct foreign trade... [and] views BRICS as not only a hedge against Western sanctions, but also as an alternative source of capital,” Abuza wrote in *Benar News*.

Meanwhile, Anwar has announced that Malaysia is preparing a draft resolution for the UN General Assembly to expel Israel from the United Nations.

The draft resolution is currently under negotiation by a core group comprising Egypt, Guyana, Indonesia, Jordan, Namibia, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Slovenia and is expected to be presented at the UN General Assembly for approval. It proposes that Israel be removed as a member of the world body “should there be a violation of laws, rules and decisions in issues involving Palestine.”

“The draft resolution is in the negotiation process and we will study if Israel can be removed as a member of UN if there is violation of international laws,” Anwar told the Malaysian Parliament. “Strong measures, including Israel’s removal from the United Nations following Israel’s human rights violations and genocidal crimes, must be enforced as soon as possible,” he added.

Indonesia’s involvement in this move was illuminated through the statement of Anis Matta, Prabowo’s envoy to a summit of Arab League and OIC members in Riyadh on Nov. 11: “The only language that Israel... understands is the language of cruelty... The [Riyadh] summit needs to result in concrete recommendations and steps... We also urge all international organisations to isolate Israel and have their UN membership revoked.”

AIR





Miriam Bell

## RISING ANTISEMITISM IN NZ IS IGNORED

On the 86th anniversary of Kristallnacht, news of antisemitic attacks on Israeli football fans in Amsterdam started to filter through, but there was next to no coverage in the New Zealand media.

The odd syndicated overseas story popped up in larger publications, but they were drowned out by the usual torrent of less than balanced stories about carnage in Gaza.

No official figures in New Zealand, outside the Jewish community, said anything about what had happened in Amsterdam.

Well-known anti-Israel activist John Minto, who has become increasingly vitriolic since October 7, took to social media to justify the attacks, and claim the reports carried by media were incorrect.

Over the course of the same weekend, there was an anti-Israel protest in Christchurch, where protestors held signs with slogans such as “ Hamas is here ” and “ We will never recognise Israel ” with pictures of Hamas leaders.

Hamas is a designated terrorist entity in New Zealand, yet there was no official condemnation of this protest, or the others like it. That has become par for the course in New Zealand. There is no recognition that these supposedly “ peaceful ” protests are creating a hostile, threatening environment for the Jewish community.

The result? While Jews make up only 0.2% of the New Zealand population, in the past year, 13% of all hate crimes in Auckland were against Jews, according to the Holocaust Centre.

Moreover, as reported by the *Australia/Israel Review* previously, 80% of respondents to a survey run by the Centre in July said their children had suffered antisemitic episodes in their schools.

But the rise in antisemitism, which is often presented as “ anti-Zionism ”, is largely unrecognised. Instead, calls for boycotting, sanctioning or condemning Israel pop up everywhere, no matter how unrelated. Examples include the school strike for climate action, the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Banking Sector and a *hikoi* (protest march) against a bill aiming to reinterpret the foundational Treaty of Waitangi.

In October, the Christchurch City Council voted not to purchase goods and services from companies identified by the United Nations Human Rights Council as trading in what it describes as illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land. It turns out Christchurch Council does not, in fact, do any business with any of the companies on

the list, but most councillors still voted for the policy.

Christchurch is not alone – other councils have previously voted to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, or to fly the Palestinian flag.

In a previous column, this reporter explored the newish, National-led Government’s inconsistent and disappointing response to the war in Gaza, and the minimal formal contact it has had with the Jewish community.

Since then, in September, New Zealand voted in favour of a United Nations General Assembly resolution which called for Israel’s unliteral withdrawal from all “ Occupied Palestinian Territories ”, including the Jewish holy sites in Jerusalem, within a year, and for military, economic and diplomatic sanctions against Israel.

This vote was out of step with all of Wellington’s traditional allies, who either voted against it or abstained, and occurred despite Foreign Minister Winston Peters’ admission that New Zealand had some concerns about the text of the resolution.

Peters has been somewhat inconsistent on issues relating to Israel. A recent article on the *Newsroom* website said he has condemned the Israeli military’s actions in relation to UNIFIL but also “ appeared to indicate support for Israel’s concerns about the peacekeepers’ work. ” Likewise, he said while Israel had a right to respond to the October 7 terrorist attacks and the holding of hostages, “ that has a limit to it, and now the chaos and loss of life no longer justifies it. ”

Ashley Church, co-director of the Israel Institute of NZ, said the Government, and especially Peters, had started off saying all the right things, “ but they have subsequently walked back, and dismantled everything they had previously said. Look at the UNGA resolution vote, look at the decision to restart funding to UNRWA, look at the decrying of Israel’s moves, regardless of context. ”

“ The question is ‘ why ’ . . . It is either policy creep due to activists in MFAT ( NZ’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade ) advising Peters, or Peters has had some sort of conversion on the road to Damascus to support Hamas, ” he said.

“ But my pick is number one . . . he is being misled by his MFAT advisers, who are neither impartial [n]or balanced. ”

The National Party now appears just as bad as it was in 2016 when New Zealand chaired the UN Security Council and then Foreign Minister Murray McCully sponsored and voted for resolution 2334 one-sidedly condemning Israel, Church said.

“ After that incident, National . . . MPs like Simon Bridges said New Zealand ‘ got it wrong ’, and it would be more careful in its votes in future. But we are seeing the same old antisemitic stuff we have seen before. ”

“ As a Kiwi, I used to be proud of the stance that New Zealand historically took. Now, I’m embarrassed by the position the country is taking, ” he concluded.



# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Between Oct. 8 and Nov. 13, at least 14 rockets and one drone were launched from Gaza into Israel. The IDF suffered about two dozen fatalities in Gaza since early October, bringing the total killed since ground operations in Gaza began to at least 378.

On Oct. 17, the IDF killed Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in Rafah. He was carrying a passport and thousands of shekels, suggesting he was trying to escape Gaza.

A planned car bombing of the Azrieli mall in Tel Aviv by Islamic State loyalists was reportedly thwarted in early October. On Oct. 15, a terrorist shot and killed a police officer and wounded four others on Route 4 near Yavne. On Oct. 18, two Jordanians attempted to conduct an attack in Israel but were killed. On Oct. 27, one civilian was killed and dozens injured in a truck ramming north of Tel Aviv, while a vehicular and stabbing attack was thwarted south of Jerusalem. Two civilians were injured on Nov. 6 in a car-ramming and stabbing attack. IED and other planned attacks have been thwarted throughout the West Bank and Israel.

Israeli counterterrorism operations throughout the West Bank continue to result in substantial numbers of suspects detained and terrorists killed.

## IDF OPERATIONS IN JABALYA KILL 1,000 TERRORISTS

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi visited IDF troops in northern Gaza's Jabalya on Nov. 8 amidst an ongoing operation which began in early October, when the IDF encircled the refugee camp. According to intelli-



IDF operations in Jabalya (Image: IDF)

gence sources, Hamas was controlling its operations for the entire northern Gaza from the area.

The IDF says approximately 1,000 Palestinian terrorists have been killed and 1,000 captured in the month-long operations. This is the third time the IDF has returned to Jabalya since the war began in October 2023. The IDF operations have included the evacuation of 55,000 of the approximately 70,000 Palestinians originally in the area. There is testimony that, initially, Hamas terrorists were shooting fleeing civilians to deter evacuations.

The IDF estimates that approximately 500-600 terrorists remain within the area, often blending into the civilian population that has yet to leave.

## LEBANON: ROCKETS, DRONES AND CASUALTIES

According to some sources, Hezbollah fired more than 6,340 rockets, missiles and drones at Israel in October, up to four times as many as previous months. However, the number of attacks declined in November.

These attacks killed around 12 civilians and two soldiers, and injured many others. A drone caused minor damage to the private residence of PM Binyamin Netanyahu in Caesarea on Oct. 19. He was not there at the time.

Drones also continue to be launched almost daily by Hezbollah's allies from Iraq, with more than 100

fired in October and dozens more in November.

Hezbollah is estimated to have lost 2,000 soldiers since the start of ground operations on Oct. 1. During that period, at least 44 IDF soldiers have been killed inside Lebanon.

## DETAILS OF ISRAEL'S STRIKE ON IRAN

New details about Israel's Oct. 26 attack on Iran indicate that it was a major success.

According to the latest revelations, satellite imagery and expert analysis, Israel struck a solid-fuel factory required for Iran's Kheibar and Qasem missiles, damaging around 20 heavy fuel mixers, possibly stopping production there for around two years, and other missile production sites. Israel also struck and neutralised a site used for nuclear weapon-related research at Parchin.

Israel also reportedly destroyed all of Iran's three remaining Russian made S-300 anti-aircraft batteries protecting strategic sites. The other battery was hit in Israel's attack on Iran in April.

Senior US envoy to the Middle East Amos Hochstein noted after the October strike that "Iran is essentially naked" with no effective air defence.

Israeli intelligence initially assessed that Iran was intending to retaliate by attacking using proxies in Iraq. However, the US warned Iran it could not restrain Israel's retaliation if Iran attacked it again, and some reports say that, following Trump's election victory in the US, Iran has postponed any retaliation plans until at least January.

## IRANIAN ATTEMPT TO ASSASSINATE TRUMP

On Nov. 8, the US Department of



Justice announced that three arrested suspects would be charged over an attempt to assassinate Donald Trump during his 2024 campaign for presidency. They were allegedly hired by Teheran to murder Trump in revenge for the killing in January 2020 of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Qassem Soleimani during Trump’s first term.

Meanwhile, Iran’s currency, the rial, is in free fall. In mid-November, the unofficial black market exchange rate was around 700,000 rials per USD. When Iran’s new President Masoud Pezeshkian took office on July 30, it was 580,000 per USD.

### US STRIKES IN YEMEN

The US launched B-2 stealth bombers to strike at underground bunkers in Yemen in mid-October as part of its mounting response against the Houthis’ ongoing strikes against navy and commercial ships in the Red Sea. The US strike was also likely a warning to Iran (the Houthis are an Iranian proxy group), with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin saying: “This was a unique demonstration of the United States’ ability to target facilities that our adversaries seek to keep out of reach, no matter how deeply buried underground, hardened or fortified.” The US conducted further attacks on Houthi weapons storage facilities in Yemen on Nov. 9 and 10. On Nov. 11, two US navy destroyers came under heavy fire from the Houthis, but warded off the drones and missiles.

Meanwhile, the Houthis continue to target Israel from Yemen, with two missile attacks successfully intercepted in early November.

### UNRWA BANNED IN ISRAEL

Israel’s Knesset approved two new laws on Oct. 28 banning UNRWA – the United Nations refugee body dedicated solely to

Palestinians – from operating in the country, and prohibiting Israeli officials from cooperating with the group. There will be a 90-day transition period for other humanitarian aid groups to take over from the controversial organisation (For more information, see p. 21).

### NETANYAHU SACKS DEFENCE MINISTER GALLANT

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu fired popular Defence Minister Yoav Gallant on Nov. 5, a move that inspired multiple protests across the country. Netanyahu and Gallant had been frequently at-odds – including over elements of the wars against Hamas and Hezbollah – and Netanyahu had previously tried to dismiss him in March 2023. Netanyahu cited “significant gaps” and a “crisis of trust” for his decision.

Netanyahu replaced Gallant with Foreign Minister Israel Katz. Former



Netanyahu with new FM Gideon Saar (Image: GPO/ Flickr)

Likud member and minister Gideon Saar was appointed as the Foreign Minister to replace Katz, after bringing his New Hope party into the coalition in September.

Major issues of contention between Netanyahu and Gallant include the timing of an inquiry into the events of October 7 – with Gallant wanting an inquiry immediately and Netanyahu saying it should only be held after the current war is over – and the drafting of ultra-Orthodox men into the IDF, which ultra-Orthodox parties in Netanyahu’s governing coalition strongly oppose.

### STRANGER THAN FICTION

#### WHAT A BUMMER

Usually, this column features attacks on Israel or Jewish people that are so absurd that they make the perpetrators look ridiculous. This month, however, we have an instance where someone tried to do something nice for the Jewish community, albeit to make money, but it went terribly – and hilariously – wrong.

In the lead up to the week-long Jewish festival of Sukkot, which this year started on Oct. 16, Amazon was advertising brightly decorated boxes that could be purchased to help celebrate the holiday, presumably to put treats in as presents – although that’s not really a traditional feature of Sukkot.



Screenshot from Amazon website

The boxes had “Happy Sukkot” written on them in English, with the Hebrew letters for Sukkot underneath. That’s where the manufacturer got into trouble. Many people would know that, unlike most Western languages, Hebrew is read from right to left. The designer evidently did not – so the letters were correct, but

were in reverse order.

This would have been bad enough if the result was nonsense, but in this case, the word spelt was “tuchus” – a slang Yiddish term for buttocks. Wishing someone a “Happy Backside” is certainly not a traditional part of any Jewish festival – al-

though many Jews found the error hilarious and ordered the boxes specifically because of the misspelling.

It’s nice that the people behind the boxes thought about the Jewish community. It’s just a shame they made such asses of themselves.



## HOW HIS ELECTION WIN LOOKS FROM ISRAEL

Ilan Evyatar

Donald Trump's imminent return to the White House, following his sweeping United States election triumph over Kamala Harris on November 5, was greeted with satisfaction in Jerusalem after four years of sometimes strained relations with the Biden Administration. According to polls, some 70% of Israelis from across the political spectrum had wanted to see a Trump victory, believing he would be more supportive of Israel than Harris. Now that he is headed back to Pennsylvania Avenue, Netanyahu will hope for a much freer hand in Israel's wars with Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as in its ongoing conflict with Iran.

Netanyahu believes that a second Trump Administration will offer staunch support for Israel. During Trump's first term, his policies toward Israel were marked by significant pro-Israel actions: he moved the US embassy to Jerusalem, recognised Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights and facilitated the Abraham Accords, which normalised relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan. In line with Israel's policies, Trump also withdrew the US from the 2015 Iran nuclear accord brokered by the Obama Administration, cut ties with UNRWA and closed the Palestinian representative office in Washington.

One American media outlet proclaimed facetiously that it was Netanyahu who had won the US election.

Within days of Trump's election, Netanyahu had spoken three times with the President-elect. "These were very good and important conversations," Netanyahu said. "We see eye to eye on the Iranian threat in all its components, and the danger it poses. We also see the great opportunities that Israel faces, in the field of peace and its expansion, and



in other areas."

Trump's stated positions on Israel's conflicts with Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon suggest he will give Israel a freer hand than it has had under the Biden Administration – but may also be impatient to see these conflicts ended quickly. While the Biden Administration provided strong military support and financial aid to Israel, it also applied pressure on the

Netanyahu Government to refrain from certain military actions and occasionally suggested that arms supplies might be restricted if Israel did not meet specific humanitarian goals in Gaza. Reports suggest there have been a number of overt or covert efforts to withhold or delay certain arms shipments to Israel by elements of the Biden Administration as a means of exerting pressure on Jerusalem.

Trump has emphasised that Netanyahu should aim to "finish the job" swiftly, suggesting that Israel may enjoy more flexibility in pursuing its military goals.

Trump's hawkish and pro-Israel cabinet, executive, and political appointments suggest the President-elect will likely continue a similar approach in the Middle East to that of his first term.

His nominee for Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, has publicly opposed a ceasefire in Gaza, stating that Israel should "destroy every element of Hamas they can get their hands on." Pete Hegseth, the nominee for Secretary of Defense and a National Guard veteran and *Fox News* host, has rejected a two-state solution. John Ratcliffe, nominated as CIA Director, has been a critic of Biden's policies toward Israel. Trump's choice for UN Ambassador, Elise Stefanik, is also known for her pro-Israel stances. Mike Huckabee, former governor of Arkansas and Trump's nominee for US Ambassador to Israel, further underscores what Israel

hopes Trump’s second term will look like. Huckabee, an Evangelical minister before his political career, has said, “There is no such thing as a West Bank – it’s Judea and Samaria. There’s no such thing as a settlement. They’re communities. They’re neighbourhoods. They’re cities. There’s no such thing as an occupation.”

Perhaps the most critical issue for Netanyahu currently is Iran. Following Israel’s late October precision strikes on Iranian missile production facilities, a nuclear site and air defences – responding to Iran’s large-scale ballistic missile attacks of Oct. 1 – Iran has again vowed to retaliate. This year’s series of direct exchanges of blows between the two countries has been a very significant escalation of the previously indirect war between Teheran and Jerusalem.

Trump’s 2018 decision to exit the Iran nuclear deal and impose strict sanctions on Teheran was welcomed – and perhaps encouraged behind the scenes – by Netanyahu, who now hopes the second Trump Administration will take an even tougher stance on Iran. With Iran reportedly very close to nuclear breakout capability, and some Iranian officials speaking of potential changes in the Islamic Republic’s nuclear policy – meaning openly progressing towards an atomic bomb – Netanyahu will be hoping that the US will take a tougher stance against Iran, potentially reintroducing crippling economic sanctions. Trump suggested on the campaign trail that Israel should strike Iran’s nuclear program, something that has long been canvassed as a last resort in Jerusalem, but always opposed by Washington.

In anticipation of Trump’s return, Netanyahu’s Strategic Affairs Minister, Ron Dermer, has engaged in meetings with Trump’s transition team and met with the President-elect at his Mar-a-Lago retreat. Topics reportedly included the nuclear issue, Israel’s strategies for managing conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon, and the normalisation process with Saudi Arabia – a step that could shift regional dynamics significantly. Saudi-Israeli normalisation would not only represent a major shift in Arab-Israeli relations, but would also significantly strengthen the coalition of moderate Arab states that, along with Israel, oppose Iranian hegemonistic intentions for the region.

Saudi Arabia, while not part of the Abraham Accords, has responded positively to Trump’s victory. Saudi officials have indicated that Trump’s approach could facilitate a Saudi-Israeli agreement that appeared close to being finalised under Biden before it was derailed by the October 7 attack. Saudi media outlets have suggested that, following what they viewed as the Biden Administration’s failure to achieve major breakthroughs, Trump’s return could bring renewed stability to the region and possibly turn “peace

into a reality.” Nonetheless, Saudi leaders continue to state that they would want assurances that any agreement with Israel includes a clear path to Palestinian statehood.

Emirati commentators, too, have expressed confidence that Trump will renew US support for the Abraham Accords and seek to bring Saudi Arabia into the fold.

While the second Trump Administration is expected to offer Israel more freedom in the military sphere, Trump has reportedly conveyed that he expects Jerusalem to act swiftly in Gaza and Lebanon. He could also introduce a modified plan to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal after his “Deal of the Century” peace proposal unveiled in his first term was vehemently rejected by the Palestinians and the Arab side.

Inside Israel, Trump’s return has prompted some officials to emphasise the importance of maintaining bipartisan support for Israel in the United States. Trump and his populist base have polarised American society, leading to concerns that traditional bipartisan support in Washington for Israel, already under threat from anti-Israel elements of the Democratic party, might erode further if Israel is seen as aligning too closely with Trump or the Republican party, or as a purely conservative priority. To maintain sustained American support, particularly within the American Jewish community, most Israeli leaders, including Netanyahu, see value in fostering cross-party relationships in the United States. Despite this, Netanyahu has, at times, struggled to conceal his personal preference for Republicans.

Israel may face another challenge with respect to Trump’s sceptical approach to foreign aid. Although Trump is expected to continue supporting Israel, he has long been vocal about reducing foreign aid expenditures, while suggesting a shift from grants to repayable loans. If this approach were to include Israel, it could have substantial implications for Israel’s defence budget, especially amid the greatly increased military demands on Israel in the wake of October 7 and the other attacks by Iran and its proxies since then. As Israel prepares to negotiate a new

**“While the second Trump Administration is expected to offer Israel more freedom in the military sphere, Trump has reportedly conveyed that he expects Jerusalem to act swiftly in Gaza and Lebanon”**

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memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Washington on defence aid, the change of government in Washington is likely to complicate these negotiations.

In summary, Trump's return to the presidency is being closely watched in Israel and across the Middle East. Israeli officials are hopeful that his second term will strengthen Israel's strategic position and also lead to significant improvements in Jerusalem's diplomatic position. Meanwhile, moderate Arab states also tend to view Trump's election as a possible opportunity to solidify alliances, including with Israel, that could stabilise the region and counter Iranian aggression – but any such process is neither simple nor straightforward. The Palestinian question, however, remains a central and unresolved issue that could complicate progress toward peace.

In the lead up to Jan. 20, when Trump again takes office, regional leaders are watching developments closely, aiming to secure their own interests in a changing Middle Eastern landscape. Netanyahu certainly sees Trump's return as an opportunity to advance Israel's strategic priorities in Gaza, Lebanon and beyond, to deepen alliances with Arab states, and above all, build the preconditions to finally deal effectively with the escalating Iranian threat.

Of course, the future remains uncertain, and Trump's notorious unpredictability makes any forecasts dubious. But it seems likely that Trump's return will mark a pivotal moment for the region, with long-term and significant implications for Israel's security situation and role in it. AIR

## DONALD TRUMP 2.0 IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Ray Takeyh

By any standard of measurement, Joe Biden's Middle East policy was a failure. A cascade of misjudgements and misapprehensions has caused the region to be dangerous and unstable. All this gives the incoming Trump Administration a chance to usher in policies to empower our allies and weaken our adversaries.

Even in the post-October 7 Middle East, the core of the problem remains Iran. Biden's refusal to enforce sanctions allowed the Islamic Republic to sustain its patronage networks at home and arm its proxies abroad. It is inconceivable that the mullahs did not know that their lethal Palestinian protégé, Hamas, was planning a brutal attack on Israel. They must have surely anticipated an Israeli retaliation, but assumed that the international community led by the United States would step in and impose an armistice on Israel. Indeed, the Biden team and the Europeans were eager to play that role with their various proposals for prematurely ending the conflict. But then the much-maligned Binyamin Netanyahu flipped the script and took on Israel's enemies, at least in its near-abroad.

The Islamic Republic has rarely been weaker in the Middle East. Its proxies are battered. Hamas can no longer reconstitute itself as an effective militia capable of launching meaningful attacks on Israel. Much of Hezbollah's leadership has been decapitated, and the organisation is in disarray as Israel continues to pick off its leadership cadre.

In the meantime, Iran's once-formidable missile force has been exposed as hollow. On two occasions, the mullahs directly aimed a barrage of projectiles at Israel, and both times, they failed to reach their designated targets. Even a limited Israeli response demonstrated that Jerusalem could penetrate Iran's air defences and hit any target at any time. After spending billions of dollars on missiles of various trajectories and on Russian air defence networks, Iran stands exposed.

The new Trump Administration is sure to revive its two trademark policies toward the Middle East that proved successful last time around. We can count on a revamped strategy of maximum pressure against Iran that will once more drain its treasury. The sanctions are needed more urgently today, as Iran seeks to rehabilitate its proxies. In short supply of money, the Islamic Republic is bound to recede its imperial aspirations.

The extension of the Abraham Accords that saw a string of Middle Eastern countries making peace with Israel is also likely to be turbocharged with a particular focus on Saudi Arabia. It is the conceit of the commentariat that Saudi

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## THE VIEW FROM TEHERAN

Reuel Marc Gerecht & Ray Takeyh

Arabia will not make peace with Israel so long as there is no meaningful progress on an independent Palestinian state. However, the new leaders of the kingdom, led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, have different priorities than their elders with their fixation on the intractable Palestinian problem. Salman wants to modernise his country, develop the non-oil sector, and access modern technologies. All this means integrating into the global society as opposed to waging a crusade on behalf of the Palestinians.

Today, Riyadh spends more of its time worrying about the Persian menace to the north than a Palestinian state in the east. The Biden years convinced many in the kingdom that America was not serious about deterring Iran. And so long as this was the case, they would hedge their bets and pay some deference to the mullahs' sensibilities, even on the Palestinian issue. The key to unlocking further progress on the Abraham Accords is still a robust policy toward the Islamic Republic.

All this does not require massive deployment of US forces. The United States has too many competing priorities, and the American people are not eager to embark on new missions in the Middle East. But this does mean a more concerted effort to build up our alliances and give Israel both a free hand and the necessary munitions to defend itself. It means enlisting Saudi Arabia into the alignment of states crafted by the Abraham Accords, which would be easier to do if Iran were set back on its heels.

Lurking behind all this is Iran's nuclear program. In the past few years, the program has advanced as Iran has accumulated highly enriched uranium and built more sophisticated centrifuges. There are many voices in the Revolutionary Guards pressing for moving ahead and actually constructing nuclear arms. Still, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei must consider the fact that his intelligence services are leaky, and his air defences are easily penetrated. All this and the close proximity between Israel and America may give him some pause before taking the most provocative step of his over three decades in power. Khamenei tends to be cautious when danger veers too close for comfort.

Trump's most significant asset is his record of achievement in the Middle East from his previous term and his unpredictability that unsettled the theocratic state. He took the extraordinary step of ordering the killing of Iran's terrorist mastermind, General Qassem Soleimani, and he proved that he could impose debilitating sanctions on Iran despite European reservations. At this late juncture, only an America that stands with its allies and makes its red lines clear can deter a mushroom cloud over an already turbulent Middle East.

AIR

*Ray Takeyh is a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. © The National Interest (Nationalinterest.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

Among the many challenges facing the incoming Trump Administration is an Iran on the edge of nuclear arms. The mullahs have used the Biden years well, filling their coffers and advancing their atomic project. Much has changed in the Middle East since October 7, 2023, and Israel has been more daring in taking on its enemies. But a middle power can do only so much, particularly when constantly badgered by a procession of US Democratic party luminaries.

Among the regional changes is how the mullahs conceive of their war against Israel. The Iranian theocracy now knows that its proxy strategy is flawed, that its conventional ballistic missiles lack accuracy and punch, and that the Jewish state can bomb anything inside Iran, with the possible exception of the clerical regime's deeply buried uranium-enrichment plants.

At least one aspect, however, has remained constant. In its raid on Iran on Oct. 26, Israel didn't attack the greatest threat: Iran's nuclear weapons sites. Nor did it strike what would cause the most immediate, regime-shaking pain, the Kharg Island oil facility, through which about 90% of the Islamic Republic's oil exports are shipped. Israel again showed its discomfort with escalating against Iran. That is likely owing in part to the Biden Administration's prodding for restraint, but also to an/the Israeli fear that its fighter-bombers could fail against the Fordow uranium-enrichment site, which is buried beneath a mountain.

The Israeli Government hopes the air force's strikes inside Iran will induce more nuclear hesitation – that the regime won't enrich uranium to weapons grade and assemble an atomic trigger. Israelis may be praying that Trump will relieve Jerusalem of the task of bombing Iran's nuclear facilities, or at least support Israel if it tries to do so. Given the nature of the threat, and how close the regime is to the bomb, time may no longer be on Israel's side.

For the first time, important Iranian constituencies are publicly calling for the state to build nuclear weapons. On Oct. 2, *Javan*, a newspaper that is a mouthpiece of the Revolutionary Guards, stressed that, given the Israeli use of "devastating military technology to establish a new order... one immediate option is a shift in Iran's nuclear doctrine." It added that "while Iran's nuclear doctrine over the past 50 years (including the Pahlavi era) has been focused on the peaceful use of nuclear technology, today, Teheran has the capacity, context and opportunity for an immediate transformation of this program." A week later, 39 parliamentarians appealed to the Supreme National Se-





Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei: Now hinting his fatwa against building nuclear weapons could soon be reversed (Image: Creative Commons/ Free Malaysia Today)

curity Council to change Iran's defence doctrine. A chorus of Iranian VIPs have since come out in favour of developing the A-bomb to check Israel and the US.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei not so subtly nodded to his protégés. As his webpage describes, he remarked that "certain

individuals, through a misguided analysis and perception, imagine that refraining from producing tools that could provoke the arrogant powers, such as missiles, can bring security for Iran." The cleric wasn't speaking only about missiles. No Western power – including the US, in the 2015 nuclear deal – has ever tried to oblige the Islamic Republic to forgo its missilery.

Jerusalem's assessment of Iran's nuclear threat, and of whatever military actions need to be taken against it, is increasingly intelligence-based. Israeli leaders posit that the air force doesn't need to act until the Iranians are enriching uranium to 90% and are assembling a nuclear initiator. This is similar to what the Obama Administration argued when it advanced its nuclear deal: The US didn't need to worry about secret sites, undeclared weaponisation research, centrifuge parts and dual-use stockpiles because the Central Intelligence Agency and United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors would catch the Iranians cheating. Senior Biden Administration officials suggest the same today.

In practice, however, Washington has never known when its enemies were dashing to the bomb, let alone initiated a military plan to stop them. Perhaps the Israelis will do better. Perhaps they have multiple intelligence sources inside the nuclear program who can alert them. In private, senior Israeli and American officials haven't given the impression that Israel's intelligence network inside Iran is that good.

So far, Israeli intelligence has been good enough to wound and embarrass the Iranian theocracy. But how many times could Jerusalem strike non-nuclear targets in Iran before the clerical regime "dashed" to the bomb in order to stop the Zionists from attacking?

A purge of the Islamic Republic's security services may be in the works. That, along with intensified surveillance of those who have access to the nuclear program, would allow the clerical regime to feel more secure if it decides that building a bomb is an urgent priority. Fear of leaks has likely been one of the reasons Khamenei has been cautious about completing the project that he's advanced for 30 years against enormous outside pressure.

As always, America remains the wild card in Khamenei's calculations. The American political class doesn't seem keen on patrolling or disciplining an unruly Mideast – but the US remains a superpower capable of damaging – if not derailing – the bomb project if it chooses to. Trump's most consequential accomplishment was killing Iran's dark lord, Gen. Qassem Soleimani, which spooked the regime. The new President's unpredictability could slow down the regime's nuclear aspirations. But the fear of the impending Trump Administration could cause the mullahs to dash to the bomb, hoping that American and Israeli intelligence will fail to detect their move.

AIR

*Reuel Marc Gerecht, a former CIA Iran-targets officer, is a resident scholar at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. © Wall Street Journal (wsj.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## A GUIDE TO TRUMP'S ADVISERS AND FIRST CABINET PICKS

Jacob Kornbluh

US President-elect Donald Trump began shaping his cabinet in the two weeks following his election win on November 6, rolling out nominations that feature people deeply connected to the Jewish and pro-Israel communities, including Mike Huckabee, Steve Witkoff and Marco Rubio.

Here's a guide to key players and candidates in Trump's incoming cabinet and advisory circles, as related to Jewish and Israel issues:

### MARCO RUBIO, SECRETARY OF STATE

#### Why Trump picked him:

Rubio, vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has vast national security experience and strong connections to secure a swift Senate confirmation.



**What he's said on Israel:** Rubio, 53, has echoed Trump's "peace through strength" doctrine and called to allow Israel to do what's needed to defeat Hamas. In a viral video earlier this year, Rubio said he expected Israel "to destroy every element of Hamas." Rubio likened the Israeli ground operation in Rafah, which was opposed by the Biden Ad-



ministration, to the Allies' pursuit of Adolf Hitler during the Second World War.

**What he's said on Iran:** Rubio has advocated for reinstating tough economic sanctions on Iran to weaken its terror networks and prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

**Relationship with Jews:** Norman Braman, an auto dealership magnate and past president of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, was Rubio's political patron. Rubio surprised pro-Israel backers with his April vote against emergency funding to Israel because it lacked border enforcement measures. Rubio excused Trump after he repeatedly accused American Jews of disloyalty to Israel and suggested they must hate their religion if they vote for Democrats.

### PETE HEGSETH, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

**What he's said on Israel:** Hegseth, 44, a *Fox News* host, provided favourable coverage of Israel on the network and said that his time in the US Army turned him into a supporter of the Jewish state. He interviewed Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in March and said, "Israel needs our support." He also ran a three-part series on *Fox Nation*, "Battle in the Holy Land: Israel at War," that focused on the war in Gaza and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "There's no doubt this is a fight that Israel needs to finish," Hegseth said, echoing Trump's call for Israel to finish the job and eliminate Hamas.



**A hardliner on Iran:** Hegseth called for US military action against Iran back in 2020. "I don't want boots on the ground, I don't want occupation, I don't want endless war," he said on *Fox News*. "But Iran has been in endless war with us for 40 years. Either we put up and shut up now and stop it, or we kind of wait, go back to the table, and let them dither while they attempt to continue to develop the capabilities to do precisely what they said they want to do."

### MIKE WALTZ, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER

**Why it matters:** The selection of Rep. Mike Waltz of Flor-

ida, a former Green Beret with a staunchly pro-Israel record, to lead the National Security Council signals Trump's intent to maintain his strong support for Israel in a second term and take a tougher approach toward Iran.



**What he's said on Israel:** Waltz, 53, consistently criticised the Biden Administration's foreign policy, describing it as one of "concession and chaos". He strongly supports Israel's war in Gaza and praised Israel's targeting of Hezbollah operatives and elimination of the terror group's commanding leadership. Even before the war in Gaza, Waltz said the US should allow Israel to strike Iran's nuclear program. Last month, Waltz recommended that Israel strike Kharg Island, a crucial hub for Iran's oil exports, and its nuclear facilities at Natanz.

**One of his key tasks:** Waltz, a staunch advocate for expanding the Abraham Accords, will play a central role in talks with Saudi Arabia to advance Trump's goal of achieving regional peace and resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### ELISE STEFANIK, US AMBASSADOR TO THE UN



**What it means for Israel:** Stefanik, 40, brings her national security experience and a combative, unapologetic style to the United Nations at a critical juncture for Israel and the Middle East. With tensions expected

to rise around Iran's nuclear ambitions and increasing global pressure on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Stefanik could position herself as a formidable ally for Israel. Stefanik recently called to cut off aid for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), which the UN claims is the main supplier of humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza.

**Her popularity among conservative Jews:** Stefanik gained popularity in the Jewish and pro-Israel community earlier



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this year after challenging the presidents of Harvard, MIT and the University of Pennsylvania on whether calls for the genocide of Jews violate their campus codes of conduct.

## MIKE HUCKABEE, US AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL



**Why he got the job:** Huckabee, 69, enjoys the trust of both Trump and Netanyahu. Huckabee, a Baptist minister and former Governor of Arkansas, has been traveling to Israel since 1973 and

says he's taken more than 100 trips there since. A MAGA loyalist, Huckabee is a seasoned advocate for Israeli interests. His influence could bolster Netanyahu's outreach to US evangelical Christians, a community Netanyahu has increasingly prioritised in recent years.

**What he's said on Israel:** Last year, he led a mission of Evangelical leaders to Israel following the October 7 attacks. "I came here to say loud and clear that evangelicals stand with Israel," Huckabee said. In 2008, Huckabee said, "There's really no such thing as a Palestinian." During the 2016 Republican presidential primary, Huckabee said he saw the West Bank as an "integral part" of Israel. In 2017, he said, "There is no such thing as a West Bank. It's Judea and Samaria. There's no such thing as a settlement."

**A supporter of annexation:** In a radio interview following the announcement of his new role, Huckabee said there's a chance that Israel will be given the green light to annex the West Bank in a second Trump term.

**Unconventional pick:** Huckabee would be the first non-Jewish ambassador since 2011 and the first non-Jewish appointee without diplomatic experience in more than four decades.

## STEVEN WITKOFF, SPECIAL ENVOY TO THE MIDDLE EAST

**Why he was picked:** Witkoff, 67, has no diplomatic experience. However, he has a longstanding trusted relation-

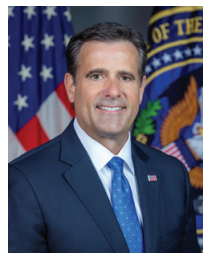
ship with Trump, and with his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who was instrumental during the first Trump Administration in crafting the Trump peace plan and brokering the Abraham



Accords. Like Kushner, Witkoff brings a real estate negotiating approach that Trump values. Witkoff has served as the Trump campaign's backchannel to the Jewish business community, particularly after President Joe Biden halted the shipment of 2000-pound weapons to Israel.

**Relationship with Israel:** Witkoff attended Netanyahu's address to Congress in July, and found it moving, especially when Netanyahu talked about the hostages in Gaza – some of whom were at the Capitol that day. "It felt spiritual", Witkoff said on the *Fox Business* channel the next day, "and yet, that's not the reaction you sense that you were getting from many of those Democrats."

## JOHN RATCLIFFE, CIA DIRECTOR



**What it means for Israel:** Ratcliffe, 59, previously a member of Congress from Texas and former Director of National Intelligence, accused the Biden Administration of diverting critical US intelligence assets from monitoring terrorist groups like Hamas. During the presidential campaign, he criticised

Vice President Kamala Harris for promoting "a false narrative" that portrayed Israel as targeting innocent Palestinians in Gaza. Ratcliffe also supported the 2017 travel ban that restricted immigration from seven predominantly Muslim countries.

**What he's said on Iran:** In a recent interview with *Fox News*, Ratcliffe praised Israeli strikes on Iran, describing them as an example of the 'Trump Doctrine' of maximum pressure. He suggested that the US should assist Israel in such military actions.

## STEPHEN MILLER, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF AND HOMELAND SECURITY ADVISER

**Jewish with strong nationalist views:** Miller, 39, declared last month at Trump's Madison Square Garden rally, "America is for Americans and Americans only." He was influential in crafting tough



immigration policies during Trump's first term and the architect behind the policy of separating young children from their undocumented parents. Miller led the implementation of the so-called Muslim travel ban in 2017 and reportedly also hoped to eliminate all refugee admissions

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to the US, dismantling a policy put in place in the wake of the Holocaust.

## LEE ZELDIN, EPA ADMINISTRATOR

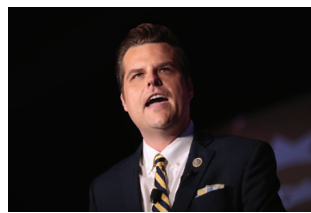
**A Jewish MAGA loyalist:** Zeldin, 44, has earned Trump's trust since voting as a congressman against certifying the 2020 election results. During the campaign, Zeldin was a vocal Trump surrogate and critic of anti-Israel sentiment in the Democratic Party.



He excused Trump's remarks saying Jews would be to blame if the former president lost the election, and he accused Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro of "trying to un-Jewish himself" to become Kamala Harris' vice-presidential pick.

**His Jewish background:** Zeldin, who is married to a Mormon, leaned into his Jewish background to rally Orthodox voters during his 2022 New York gubernatorial campaign. His great-grandfather Moshe Efraim "Morris" Zeldin, after whom Zeldin is named, was an Orthodox rabbi in Brooklyn and a pioneer in the Zionist movement.

## MATT GAETZ, ATTORNEY-GENERAL



Trump raised eyebrows when he announced the nomination of controversial Florida Congressman Matt Gaetz, 42, as head of the Justice Department.

**What he's done and said:** Earlier this year, Gaetz faced backlash for voting against a bipartisan bill aimed at addressing rising antisemitism in colleges and universities, invoking an antisemitic trope that Jews killed Jesus. Gaetz called the Anti-Defamation League "racist" in 2021 after it urged *Fox News* to fire host Tucker Carlson for promoting the antisemitic "Great Replacement Theory". In 2019, Gaetz suggested that George Soros, the Hungarian-born Jewish billionaire and frequent target of antisemitic tropes, was behind an alleged migrant caravan.

## TULSI GABBARD, DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A military veteran and former Democratic congresswoman for Hawaii who later left the party, Gabbard, has been strongly critical of the Biden Administration as insufficiently supportive of Israel since October 7, and has been vocal against Islamist terrorism and expressed support for the Jewish state.



However, some of Gabbard's past anti-war stances make her controversial in pro-Israel circles. Most notoriously,

she met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2017, and defended his attacks on Syrian civilians.

Gabbard also voted against a House resolution condemning the December 2016 United Nations Security Council resolution condemning and declaring illegal all Israeli settlements. She said that she shared the concerns of the Obama Administration – which declined to veto the resolution – about settlements. She also condemned Israel for firing live ammunition at rioters at the Gaza fence in 2018.

In 2019, Gabbard refused to condemn Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) for antisemitic comments about US support for Israel and voted in favour of a resolution sponsored by Omar designed to defend the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. However, Gabbard has also expressed personal opposition to BDS and voted in favour of some anti-BDS legislation.

She also criticised the first Trump Administration for killing Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Gen. Qassem Soleimani in 2020, describing the strike as an unconstitutional act of war.

## OUTSIDE ADVISERS AND PEOPLE WITH ACCESS


- **Jared Kushner**, Trump's son-in-law and former Middle East adviser, who said earlier this year he would not return to the White House, is involved behind the scenes and could be a key player in a potential normalisation deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

- **Massad Boulos**, the Lebanese American father-in-law of Tiffany Trump who led outreach to Arab-American communities during the election, is likely to be the point person for Lebanon and have Trump's ear on the Middle East.

- **David Friedman**, Trump's first ambassador to Israel, is interested in returning to a national security position to influence Middle East policy and advance a pro-settlement agenda.

- **Arthur Schwartz**, a behind-the-scenes operator and Twitter troll who has been Donald Trump Jr.'s political adviser for years and is close to Vice President-elect JD Vance.

- **Laura Loomer** is a conspiracy theorist and provocateur who flew with Trump and appeared with him in September and uses her Jewishness to attack opponents.

Other influencers within Trump's close circle who have promoted antisemitic tropes and are associated with white nationalists include former *Fox News* host Tucker Carlson, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Steve Bannon and Charlie Kirk. 

*Jacob Kornbluh is the Forward's senior political reporter. Additional reporting by AIJAC staff. This story originally appeared in the New York-based Forward, a leading American Jewish publication. To get the Forward's free email newsletters delivered to your inbox, go to [forward.com/newsletter-signup](https://forward.com/newsletter-signup).*







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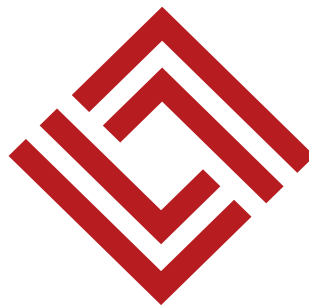
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# Truth and Untruths about UNRWA

## Israel's anti-UNRWA legislation

**AIJAC staff**

**C**ommentary about the new Israeli legislation 'banning UNRWA', passed by the Knesset on October 28, has mischaracterised the scope of the laws, falsely advanced the idea that UNRWA is irreplaceable and underplayed Israeli concerns about UNRWA. This factsheet provides some corrective information.

### SCOPE OF THE LAWS

The legislation does *not* ban UNRWA from Gaza or the West Bank. Instead, it bans UNRWA from operating inside Israel, including all of Jerusalem. The legislation also prevents Israeli authorities from cooperating with UNRWA in the West Bank and Gaza.

The legislation will take effect 90 days after it was passed. Israel has declared it will use that time to ensure that aid continues to flow into Gaza by consolidating collaborative supply lines with other agencies.

Following the passage of the legislation, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu released a statement, pledging:

*Since avoiding a humanitarian crisis is also essential, sustained humanitarian aid must remain available in Gaza now and in the future. In the 90 days before this legislation takes effect – and after – we stand ready to work with our international partners to ensure Israel continues to facilitate humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza in a way that does not threaten Israel's security.*

### IRREPLACEABLE UNRWA?

The many media and political claims that only UNRWA can provide aid to Gaza are not accurate. There are multiple aid agencies operating in Gaza. These include a number of other UN agencies, such as the UN World Food Program. In fact, according to figures from COGAT (Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories), the IDF division responsible for overseeing aid, only 13% of all aid to Gaza between August and October was distributed by UNRWA. In contrast, 50% of that aid was distributed by the World Food Program.

While these are IDF figures, it is notable that when then Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz pointed out on Nov. 4 that UNRWA was only distributing 13% of Gaza aid, UNRWA and the UN did not dispute his figures, merely arguing that “the Israeli figures do not account for the key role [UNRWA] plays in coordinating aid deliveries” and “Without UNRWA coordination... no U.N. agency could operate at the scale required.”

Yet this claim for indispensability in coordinating aid by others is not very credible. Other aid agencies successfully operate in crises throughout the world without “coordination” by anything resembling UNRWA. For example, the UN's Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) asserts that it has, since its creation in 2005, “provided more than \$6 billion in life-saving assistance in more than 100 countries and territories,” with more than US\$800 million in 2019 alone. The idea that only UNRWA can do in Gaza what

CERF does everywhere else appears absurd.

### WHY IS ISRAEL CONCERNED ABOUT UNRWA?

Multiple media reports have asserted that the reason for this new Israeli legislation is the involvement of some UNRWA employees in the October 7 Hamas-led invasion of Israel. Israel *is* concerned about this, but this is not the root cause of the new legislation. There

is considerable, incontrovertible evidence of seemingly uncontested Hamas abuse of UNRWA facilities over the last 13 months of war. Further, UNRWA has long proved an important obstacle to the achievement of Israeli-Palestinian peace over many years.

### THE CURRENT WAR

Here are some examples of Hamas coopting UNRWA over the past 13 months, and/or UNRWA silence in the face of Hamas abuse of UNRWA facilities:

#### **Hamas combatants / UNRWA employees**

Fateh Sherif Abu el-Amin was Hamas' leader in Lebanon, responsible for all of Hamas' operations in the country, including coordinating terror activities with Hezbollah, procuring weapons and recruiting operatives. He was also the principal of an UNRWA secondary school and the head of the UNRWA Teachers' Union in Lebanon. UNRWA was told that el-Amin was a Hamas official but merely suspended him temporarily. He was killed by Israel in September 2024.

Muhammad Abu Attawi was a Hamas 'Nukhba Force' commander who participated in the October 7 invasion,



Israeli concerns about UNRWA include complicity with terror, inciting hatred and violence, and helping destroy hopes for Israeli-Palestinian peace (Image: Shutterstock)

leading a squad that massacred some 16 Israelis hiding in a bus shelter after fleeing the Nova music festival, and kidnapped four others. He was also an UNRWA employee. Israel had provided his name, along with 100 others, to the UN in July 2024, but no action was taken. He was killed by Israel in October 2024.

In October 2024, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar was killed by Israeli forces. His bodyguard carried a passport identifying him as an UNRWA employee. These are far from the only UNRWA employees killed as Hamas combatants in this war.

In August, UNRWA Director-General Philippe Lazarini was confronted in Switzerland by Ayelet Samerano, whose son was killed on October 7. She pointed out that video available online shows that, “On October 7, an UNRWA employee entered Israel and actively participated in the massacre, brutally murdering and kidnapping my boy’s body, with a United Nations car, into Gaza.”

#### **Participation in the October 7 invasion and before**

Numerous UNRWA employees participated in the October 7 invasion and massacres. Early in the war, Israel provided the UN with a list of 12 UNRWA employees who took part in the invasion. UNRWA subsequently fired nine of them. This is frequently reported in the media. However, Israel later provided UNRWA with a list of 100 UNRWA employees who allegedly took part in the invasion; UNRWA has taken no action against them, saying Israel has not provided enough evidence.

United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric admitted on Sept. 30 that UNRWA has no ability to properly vet its staffers for terror ties.

This lax attitude means UNRWA terror links long pre-date the current war.

For example, between 2000 and 2004, 13 UNRWA employees were arrested over involvement with terrorist organisations. This includes Nahed Attalah, director of food supplies for UNRWA in Gaza. He admitted to using his UN vehicle and free travel permit to transport arms, explosives and combatants to carry out terrorist attacks. He also admitted to using his UN travel pass to meet with terrorists abroad to transfer money into Gaza for terrorist activities.

#### **Abuse of UNRWA facilities**

A sophisticated Hamas data centre (with server, industrial battery power banks and living quarters) was located by Israeli forces directly under UNRWA’s Gaza headquarters. Electrical cables went from the UNRWA building above, through the floor, into the Hamas tunnel.



Electrical cables found by the IDF that lead directly from UNRWA’s main Gaza headquarters into an underground Hamas data centre located beneath it (Image: IDF)

Israel has found numerous other examples of Hamas storing its materiel in or under UNRWA facilities, equipment or packaging. A 167-page lawsuit filed in a New York court in June 2024 details how UNRWA allowed Hamas to use its facilities for weapons storage, allowed tunnels and command centres to be built under UNRWA facilities, used Hamas-approved textbooks in schools and provided Hamas with revenue by paying UNRWA employees in US dollars. (This forced those employees to convert their salary into shekels – the currency used in Gaza – in Hamas-controlled currency exchanges, allowing Hamas to earn a ten to 25% commission for each trade.)

In recent months, as Hamas tunnels have been located and destroyed by Israel, Hamas fighters and commanders are increasingly using UNRWA and other schools – now used to house displaced Gazans – as command centres (thereby rendering these schools ‘military objects’ under international law, subject to attack by Israel). UNRWA always condemns the subsequent Israeli attacks against the Hamas combatants in these sites but refuses to acknowledge or condemn the Hamas use of UNRWA facilities that leads to such attacks.

One Israeli hostage, 84-year-old Ditzta Heiman, released in the November 2023 ceasefire deal, was held in the home of an UNRWA school teacher.

Thousands of UNRWA school teachers and other UNRWA employees celebrated the October 7 Hamas invasion and massacre of Israelis.

## **LONG-TERM CONCERNS**

Since its establishment, UNRWA has helped prevent Israeli-Palestinian peace in numerous ways.

#### **Foundational reasons**

UNRWA classifies a ‘Palestine refugee’ as someone displaced from their home in Mandatory Palestine as a result of the 1947-1949 war, as well as all their descendants. According to UNRWA, they do not lose “refugee” status even if granted full citizenship in another country. This inalienable, hereditary refugee status is different from all non-Palestinian refugee populations across the world, which is

why the Palestinian “refugee” population today is far larger than it was when UNRWA was established in 1949.

The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) provides immediate aid to all non-Palestinian refugee populations, but also assistance to resettle them in safe third countries. In contrast, UNRWA provides incentives for “Palestine refugees” to remain dependent on UNRWA



aid, and never assists them to permanently resettle outside its camps. Additionally, UNRWA keeps alive – and unofficially endorses – the promise of a “return” to Israel for all descendants of the original refugees. These twin policies disincentivise people to end their hopeless refugee existence.

**Anti-peace practices**

Beyond the foundational reasons why UNRWA helps perpetuate the conflict, its practices do the same. UNRWA schools teach antisemitic and anti-peace education, and its teachers glorify violence against Israelis. This practice has been repeatedly condemned by the EU Parliament, but international contributions to UNRWA, including by Australia, continue, despite a lack of reform.

UNRWA refugee camps in West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon have armed Palestinian terrorist organisations openly operating in them. UNRWA does not condemn this nor insist that these be removed if UNRWA operations are to continue. The UN doesn’t consider Hamas a terrorist organisation. As such, UN bodies – including UNRWA – cooperate with Hamas, despite the fact that UNRWA’s chief backers (which include the US, UK and Australia) proscribe Hamas as a terrorist organisation, and have legislation that bans any cooperation with terrorist organisations. This might explain why, in 2004, the former head of UNRWA told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “I am sure that there are Hamas members on the UNRWA payroll, and I don’t see that as a crime.” More recently, in February this year, Martin Griffiths, the UN’s Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, insisted “Hamas is not a terrorist group for us... It’s a political movement.”

In February 2024, Israel released information showing that some 12% of Gazan UNRWA employees were affiliated with Hamas or Islamic Jihad, and nearly half have immediate family who are members.

On those few past occasions where UNRWA officials have attempted to stand up to Hamas, they are successfully intimidated into silence, including through expulsion of the employee or employees who raised the alarm. AIR

# AN EMPIRE OF PERPETUAL SUFFERING

**Seth J. Frantzman**

In the wake of Israel passing two bills that essentially block the activity of the UN Relief and Works Agency in areas under Israeli control, UNRWA’s work is under scrutiny.

Many circles worldwide have condemned Israel’s actions. UNRWA is a “lifeline”, the UK says. UNRWA has



UNRWA is portrayed as the “backbone” of Gaza aid efforts, but actually supplied only 13% of aid there over recent months (Image: Anas Mohammed/ Shutterstock)

claimed Israel’s vote is against the UN Charter. The organisation is “irreplaceable,” the head of the World Health Organisation said.

What is most interesting about UNRWA is that the organisation exists at all. Established by a UN General Assembly resolution in 1949, it began its work in 1950 toward providing direct relief and work programs for “Palestine refugees” – meaning, at the time, the hundreds of thousands of Arabs who had fled the fighting in British Mandate Palestine and, later, areas that became part of the State of Israel in 1948.

Many ended up in what is now Gaza and the West Bank, as well as Jordan, Lebanon and other countries in the region. This was a major crisis at the time because there was nowhere to house these people in areas that were already poor and rural, such as Gaza, the West Bank and the Kingdom of Jordan.

Egypt occupied Gaza in 1948 and Jordan occupied the West Bank, so both of those countries took over areas where refugees had gathered.

The UN stepped in to try to help the situation. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established only in 1950.

This largely explains why the Palestinian refugees became a unique issue and how the UN ended up per-

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petuating their refugee status and essentially adopting the Palestinians as a singular cause.

What has UNRWA done since its founding? The organisation has 58 recognised refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. Since UNRWA's establishment, the number of "refugees" has increased. Today, for example, there are some 900,000 registered "refugees" in the 19 UNRWA camps in the West Bank.

The UN estimates that around one-third of the overall number of people considered "refugees" live in the 58 camps, meaning that many of them have moved to towns and other areas. However, in some cases, such as in Lebanon, they are often restricted to the camps.

UNRWA maintains not only the camps but also a large number of facilities linked to the camps and refugees. For instance, UNRWA says it has 155 facilities in Gaza, where it enabled 1.5 million internally displaced people to shelter in January 2024. There are eight refugee camps in Gaza; the Khan Yunis camp, for example, has almost 100,000 people registered in it.

It's worth thinking of UNRWA not as the organisation it was immediately after its founding, when it provided essential services that were actually needed, but rather as the empire of perpetual suffering that it has become.

An organisation that manages almost 60 camps and hundreds of facilities and serves a growing population that numbers some six million registered refugees is more like a country than an organisation.

This is a crucial point: UNRWA, as an organisation, including the refugees it deals with, is larger than approximately 80 of the countries that are members of the UN. Despite the good intentions that may have been behind its creation in 1950, UNRWA has transformed into something entirely different. The only reason to maintain an organisation like UNRWA, which keeps millions of people dependent, is to use them as a proxy against Israel.

Because Egypt and Jordan had taken over the areas of the Arab state that was supposed to be established based on the Partition Plan, UNRWA stepped in as a kind of state-in-the-making for Palestinians. Most people don't view UNRWA as a protostate, but in essence, that is what it has become.

UNRWA camps served as the foundation for the majority of Palestinian political – and, later, militant and terrorist – activities. Schools and refugee camps organised spaces for the groups that emerged, ranging from Fatah to the PFLP to Hamas.

For instance, Hamas gained power partly through areas in Gaza, such as Khan Yunis, from which slain leader Yahya Sinwar hailed. Many other refugee camps also became

known as bases of various groups and gunmen.

UNRWA would prefer not to take responsibility for the fact that its camps became the main organising ground for gunmen and terrorism. In fact, the rejection of Israel's existence comes primarily from the UNRWA camps.

What that means is that the UNRWA state or empire was organised to destroy Israel and use the refugees as the main engine of this destruction.

**“UNRWA, as an organisation, including the refugees it deals with, is larger than approximately 80 of the countries that are members of the UN”**

The concept of UNRWA is to keep Palestinians dependent, living in refugee camps generation after generation, while using its young men as foot soldiers to fight Israel. Winding down the camps and having the people live normal lives and believe in two states and peace

could have potentially resulted in peace. However, the UNRWA mandate was never to embrace peace, two states, and coexistence.

One can draw a direct line from the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust to the establishment of the State of Israel and the creation of UNRWA as a weapon in the hands of the international community to try to use refugees as proxies against Israel.

This line is clear because the UN played a key role in the Partition Plan. The UN then undermined its own plan by creating UNRWA, which served to perpetuate the conflict. Each succeeding generation has taken up the baton from the UNRWA camps and launched wars against Israel. The first war occurred in the 1950s, when Egypt used "infiltrators" and fedayeen (guerrillas) against Israel.

Then there was the Jordanian Civil War, aka Black September, in the 1970s. The war then moved to Lebanon, where Palestinians upended the Lebanese system, leading to Israel's invasion in 1982.

Then the movement moved via Tunisia back to Gaza and the West Bank and laid the groundwork for the First Intifada. When the Oslo peace deal emerged, Hamas emerged to upend it.

Since the 1990s, the UNRWA camps have not embraced two states or peace but have instead continued to embrace extremism, thereby becoming a hotbed for radicalism. The road to October 7 was paved from there. In Gaza, when Hamas took over, UNRWA didn't oppose Hamas but was available to partner with it.

Now, Gaza has been destroyed in another war because of UNRWA's unwillingness to end this conflict and stop using refugees as a tool against Israel.

AIR

*Seth Frantzman is senior Middle East correspondent and analyst at the Jerusalem Post, an adjunct fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and the author of The October 7 War: Israel's Battle for Security in Gaza (2024). © Jerusalem Post (jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

# OPTIMISM ON LEBANON DEAL, BUT IMMENSE OBSTACLES REMAIN

Lazar Berman

An air of optimism has emerged around the chances for a negotiated end to the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon in the coming weeks.

On November 12, US special envoy for Lebanon Amos Hochstein told reporters at the White House that “there is a shot” to secure a ceasefire soon and that he is “hopeful” about the deal’s prospects.

Israeli officials have sounded similar notes.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar said there has been “certain progress” on a ceasefire in Lebanon.

Another official told the *Times of Israel* that progress had been made, and now Israel was speaking to the US about letters “to anchor our ability and legitimacy to operate against any threat from Lebanon.”

“If there are any attempts to fire at us, to build up their military, to bring in weapons through Syria, we will act,” promised the official.

The fact that the US Joe Biden Administration and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s Government see eye-to-eye on the parameters of a ceasefire in Lebanon is undoubtedly a positive development.

Yet there will be no deal if a central player in the fight doesn’t accept the terms – Hezbollah.

Any arrangement will officially be signed between Israel and Lebanon. At the same time, everyone knows that Beirut will not agree to anything that Hezbollah does not consent to.

And it is hard to imagine the Shi’ite terror group accepting one of Israel’s core demands – freedom of action to operate in Lebanon to counter threats and stop the rebuilding of Hezbollah’s military.

Israel isn’t about to relent on this point either. It wants the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to move into southern Lebanon in force and for countries like the UK and France to train the rather lacklustre LAF. A massive deployment of Lebanese soldiers along Israel’s border is part of a solution, but they are not about to take on Hezbollah militarily when it decides the time is right to start moving assets toward Israel again.

UNIFIL, which has unequivocally failed in its *raison d’être* of keeping Hezbollah from moving thousands of fighters and massive weapons caches to the border with Israel, would still be part of a settlement, in Israel’s eyes. The force would have to be overhauled, with more capable and assertive militaries making up a larger proportion of



French UNIFIL soldiers in southern Lebanon (Image: Shutterstock)

UNIFIL.

France, which currently contributes 665 troops to the peacekeeping effort, is sure to become an even more central country to UNIFIL. Its forces have taken peacekeeping efforts in Africa seriously, and Paris understands that the situation on the Lebanon-Israel border cannot return to the pre-October 7 reality.

Still, that wouldn’t be enough for Israel. It will not rely entirely on the weak military of an enemy state or international peacekeepers who have already let Hezbollah build up a formidable force on Israel’s borders once before.

Nor would it likely satisfy the tens of thousands of displaced Israelis who would look with understandable sus-

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picion at yet another negotiated document that is supposed to convince them that no Hezbollah anti-tank missile will strike their homes after they move back.

### FURTHER, DEEPER

It may be that Hezbollah is eager to end the fighting, after losing its leadership, military positions, and thousands of operatives and tens of thousands of rockets, and will ultimately accept the deal that Israel and the US put on the table.

If it isn't, however, then Israel has no other cards left to play other than expanding its ground operation in Lebanon.

An Israeli official told the *Times of Israel* that if Lebanon turns down the latest US-Israeli offer, the IDF is ready to drive further into the country.

As negotiators – including Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer – continue their work in Washington, the IDF is already pushing ahead. The military announced that the 91st Division has reached “new targets” belonging to Hezbollah, as commandos raided several new areas.

Though senior officials, including novice Defence Minister Israel Katz, are calling for Israel to keep attacking Hezbollah until it achieves all of its goals, that option comes with considerable problems.

Israel's ground operation in Lebanon was conceived primarily as an engineering effort – a war on Hezbollah infrastructure in the border area. The IDF said that the “limited, localised, and targeted ground raids” would be focused on border villages that posed an immediate threat to Israeli towns.

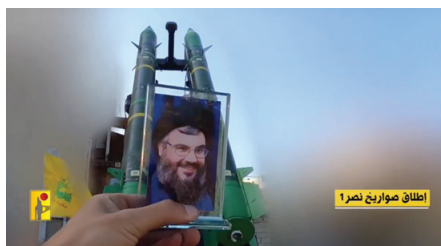
IDF forces have completed that task, but northern residents still aren't in their homes.

Expanding the operation could mean that Israel will destroy Hezbollah weapons caches and fighting positions in villages further away from the border. That is unlikely to push Hezbollah into a ceasefire, nor will it make Israelis more comfortable about returning home. The minute the

IDF leaves, Hezbollah can infiltrate the area with missile teams and fire at Israeli towns if it so chooses.

In the meantime, Hezbollah seems to have found its footing again. It was knocked off balance in September, when Israel detonated thousands of paggers and walkie-talkies in the hands of terrorists, assassinated Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and took out most of the elite Radwan force leadership.

But the terror group is recovering. It maintains consistent rocket fire on northern Israel, and Hezbollah attacks have killed 44 IDF soldiers in the month-and-a-half since Israel began its ground operation. It has also managed to carry out high-profile drone attacks, including on the Golani Brigade's training base and Netanyahu's house in Caesarea.



Screenshot from a Hezbollah video showcasing their missiles

It seems prepared for a war of attrition against IDF forces if they stay in Lebanon, a form of conflict that offers advantages to the guerrilla force. Though Hezbollah will lose many times more men than the IDF, Israel is far more sensitive to casualties, and as the death toll slowly ticks up, domestic pressure is likely to do so as well.

That strategy worked for Hezbollah in the 1990s, when an Israeli protest movement successfully pushed political and military leaders to accept the need for a withdrawal from the security zone in southern Lebanon.

For all that, there remains a quick way out of the fighting in Lebanon. Hezbollah has repeatedly said it would stand down if the war in Gaza came to an end.

Though Netanyahu would like to see a successful end to that campaign as well, Hamas has no incentive to accept anything less than victory in a deal that sees the hostages released from captivity. That would mean that the group remains in Gaza, and is in a position to slowly recover its governing and military capabilities.

Israel is not about to accept that.

### THE TRUMP FACTOR

Still, there is an upcoming event that could change the dynamics in Lebanon.

US President-elect Donald Trump will take office on Jan. 20, and is expected to be much more aggressive against Iran and its axis than Biden was. He has selected Iran hawks to his cabinet, and employed a maximum pressure sanctions campaign against the Islamic Republic in his first term.

Iran is sure to be nervous about Trump's return, and will be looking to dial down tensions with the US until it gets a read on the direction of Trump's policy in the region.

Threats from Trump to Iran about the price it will pay if its proxy Hezbollah refuses to accept a ceasefire could well make the cost of continued combat too high for Teheran.

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But that message has yet to be issued. In the meantime, Biden's top aides are throwing their full weight behind the effort to help Israel wrap up the fighting before Trump returns to the White House. AIR

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

## QATAR OBFUSCATES OVER HAMAS

**Yaakov Lappin**

The United States is pressuring Qatar to expel Hamas leaders from its territory due to the terrorist organisation's refusal to consider even a short ceasefire and new suggestions for a hostage release deal with Israel.

While Qatar has confirmed that it is stalling its mediation efforts in the indirect hostages-for-terrorists exchange talks between Israel and Hamas, it has not confirmed that it is ousting Hamas members.

Jonathan Schanzer, Senior Vice President for Research at the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said, "The regime in Doha is trying to simultaneously confirm and deny the news. This is consistent with Qatar's double-dealing. The goal right now should be to squeeze the regime to jettison Hamas," he added.

While it is "unclear how Trump's arrival will change any of this," Schanzer assessed, the fear of a shift in American policy "is undeniably pushing Doha to make these moves and announcements."

Meanwhile, "the Qataris are going to continue to buy up assets in the United States, regardless of who is president. This is their way of gaining leverage over our leaders in politics and business," said Schanzer. "I believe that the next administration needs to conduct a careful and thorough review of these sovereign investments. The amount of money that Qatar has invested in this country is staggering. But it has not yet been made clear why it has invested so much – especially in sectors like education that do not yield a financial return."

Brandon Friedman, Director of Research at Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, told *JNS* that US pressure on Qatar is the Biden Administration's "last card to play. How effective it will be depends on how Hamas – and Qatar – perceive the Trump Administration. My guess is that the Qataris suspect the Trump Administration will ask them to expel Hamas, so there is no harm in playing this card now and pre-emptively dealing with a potential source of tension

with the new Administration."

According to Friedman, "The Qataris use their relations with various Islamist and jihadi groups as foreign policy tools to advance and protect their interests. Even if they expel Hamas, they will continue to host factions of the Muslim Brotherhood and let Al Jazeera be used to promote the Brotherhood's ideology. It is also unclear whether the US asked Qatar to end its role as financial backer and conduit for Hamas' extensive regional network of businesses and charities, which funded its terror infrastructure."

Qatar, Friedman said, "was traumatised by the Saudi-led June 2017 blockade that lasted until the end of the Trump presidency. The blockade was imposed shortly after Trump's visit to the Saudi kingdom. The Qataris are likely to make every effort to earn the good favour of the Trump Administration."

Asked to address the American military's ongoing use of Qatar's al-Udeid Airbase, which Doha spent a very large sum of money to build and develop, Friedman said, "I don't view the US as dependent on al-Udeid. I see it as a source of leverage for the US in dealing with Qatar. It is a symbol of US protection."

"If the US withdrew from al-Udeid, Qatar would feel unprotected. In fact, one might argue it is not a coincidence that the US quietly renewed its lease of al-Udeid for another ten years after the Qataris brokered the November [2023] deal for the hostages. It was almost as if it was a reward for good behaviour or a service provided."

Addressing Doha's global investments, Friedman said that "Qatar can use its immense wealth to purchase US arms, which would likely be viewed favourably by Trump. It can also invest its energy wealth in the US economy, which is one of the ways Saudi Arabia won favour with the first Trump Administration. It is worth noting that Qatar has been substantially increasing its activities in both of these areas – US weapons purchases [\$1 billion in 2022] and investments in the US economy over the past five to ten years." AIR

*Yaakov Lappin is an Israel-based military affairs correspondent and in-house analyst at the Miryam Institute, research associate at the Alma Research and Education Centre and a research associate at the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University. © Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*



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# THE CONSEQUENCES OF AUSTRALIA'S MIDEAST POLICY SHIFTS SINCE OCTOBER 7

Jamie Hyams

The events of October 7 and its aftermath have severely traumatised Australia's Jewish community. In several regards, Australian reactions to those events, including from our Federal Government, have been extremely disappointing, compounding the trauma and creating feelings of isolation and betrayal. Surveys show that Israel is a central issue for upwards of 90% of Australian Jews, so our Government's policy and pronouncements about Israel directly affect us.

Since the October 7 atrocities led to an Israel-Hamas war, at almost every opportunity, the Government seems to have chosen to strain, instead of consolidate, our relationship with Israel. Even early condemnations of the October 7 pogroms and acknowledgement of Israel's right to defend itself contained constant admonitions to Israel to do so with restraint and in accordance with international law, as if Israel isn't trying to do so.

This has been a constant theme, together with statements that the civilian death toll is unacceptable. The Government appears to have largely ignored the Hamas human shield tactics that make civilian deaths inevitable, Israel's efforts to evacuate civilians from harm's way – described by some military experts as unprecedented – and the ratio of civilian to combatant casualties being approximately one to one – a lower civilian-to-combatant casualty ratio than in other recent urban warfare campaigns.

One festering sore for Jewish communities worldwide is the appalling double standards the UN and its agencies apply to Israel. Israel is generally censured there as often as all other countries combined, with permanent agenda items in UN bodies devoted to condemning Israel. UN double standards regarding the Jewish state are seen as antisemitism playing out on the international stage.

For Australian Jews, there was a measure of pride that our country was not part of this farce. Alas, no more. Australia's UN voting record has regressed to abstentions or even affirmatives when there should be noes – including changing our votes to “yes” on two highly problematic draft resolutions in a UN Second Committee hearing on Nov. 14.

Earliest examples include supporting a motion in December, barely two months after October 7, when the smell of death was still raw in the killing fields of Israel's kibbutzim bordering Gaza, that demanded a ceasefire and the release of hostages, but didn't even mention Hamas.

The Australian Government had, quite rightly, frequently asserted Hamas could have no role in Gaza's future, yet here it was supporting a ceasefire that would leave Hamas in power. This was to become a recurring theme.

We voted in May for a resolution supporting recognition of a still non-existent Palestinian state – breaking not only with the US, which opposed the resolution, but also Canada, the UK and Germany, which abstained. The motion also gave “Palestine” greater powers in the UN.

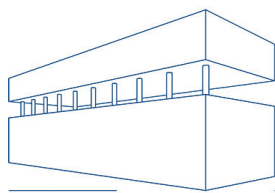
This in turn led to the appalling Palestinian-sponsored UN General Assembly resolution of Sept. 19 that demanded Israel completely withdraw from the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem within a year or face sanctions, while imposing absolutely no obligations on the Palestinians. The motion completely upended the paradigm of land for peace achieved via negotiations, which had guided all Middle East diplomacy since 1967. Yet we not only abstained rather than opposing this motion, but Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong even expressed disappointment that we couldn't support it only because it went beyond the very flawed and biased July 19 International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion upon which the resolution was based.

For Jews, perhaps the resolution's most galling part was its insistence that any Israeli presence in the Old City of Jerusalem, the location of Judaism's holiest sites and thousands of years of Jewish history, is illegal.

Then, in three speeches at the UN at the end of September, Wong's main themes were to push for a timeline for the recognition of a Palestinian state prior to the conclusion of negotiations, and for an urgent and apparently permanent ceasefire. Pushing for recognition of a Palestinian state not only encourages the Palestinian intransigence that has prevented one until now, with all Israeli offers of a two-state peace rebuffed, but also serves as a significant reward for the October 7 terrorism, which clearly prompted Australia's initiative.

The Albanese Government has also refused to oppose Palestinian lawfare against Israel in the International Criminal Court (ICC) and International Court of Justice (ICJ). In January, Wong weakly said that Australia does not agree with the “premise” of South Africa's genocide claims against Israel at the ICJ, but Australia nonetheless refused to intervene in the proceedings despite having done so in

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recent unrelated ICJ cases.

Australia also endorsed the ICJ’s advisory opinion referred to above, even though that decision was based on a biased UN General Assembly referral that all but predetermined the Court’s decision.

The Government has also continually expressed support for UNRWA, and doubled our funding to the agency, despite abundant evidence of its thorough infiltration by Hamas and unwillingness to act effectively against this situation (see p. 21).

**D**isappointingly, PM Albanese hasn’t even visited Israel since October 7. Wong did, belatedly, visit Israel in January, but unlike many other visiting dignitaries, refused to express a measure of solidarity by visiting the sites of the Hamas atrocities in the south.

It was also galling that the Israeli Ambassador was called in for a meeting in June and dressed down by a junior minister, who warned that Australia would not support Israel if it went to war with Hezbollah in Lebanon. Our Government apparently expected Israel to continue to accept without response the ongoing thousands of Hezbollah rocket, missile and drone attacks that had killed civilians and driven more than 60,000 Israelis from their homes.

Then there was the saga over the tragic accidental killing of aid worker Zomi Frankcom and her World Central Kitchen (WCK) colleagues in an Israeli drone strike on April 1. Seemingly not satisfied with Israel’s ability to investigate its own mistakes and take appropriate disciplinary action against the officers responsible, Australia appointed Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin as Special Adviser to investigate Israel’s response. No other affected country felt the need to make a similar appointment.

Binskin’s findings agreed with Israel’s – the attack was a tragic case of mistaken identity, caused by a failure of Israeli officers to follow protocols, but also by the presence, against WCK policy, of gunmen within the convoy. He stressed the similarity of the IDF’s conduct, and investigation mechanisms and processes, to the ADF’s. Yet in her press conference releasing these findings – and indeed subsequently – Wong ignored these aspects of his findings, misleadingly describing the incident as an “intentional strike”, while making it sound as if Binskin had uncovered previously unknown wrong-doing by Israel, adding, “We will continue to press for full accountability, including any appropriate criminal charges.”

Even on the one-year anniversary of October 7, the Government couldn’t contain its parliamentary condolence motion to the victims of the Hamas attacks, feeling the need to include clauses calling for a ceasefire and a two-state solution. This led the Opposition to oppose the

motion. The Government then blocked the Opposition’s attempt to move its own motion.

In a *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age* opinion piece on Nov. 6, 2024, Wong wrote that the international community had failed to honour the 1947 promise of a Palestinian state – yet there was no such promise (see p. 7). She didn’t even mention the peace initiatives the Palestinians had spurned. She also wrote that Israel’s supporters claim the ALP



Foreign Minister Penny Wong and PM Anthony Albanese have degraded our relationship with our most important Middle Eastern partner (Screenshot)

enables Hamas by insisting Israel follow the laws of war. In reality, the ALP enables Hamas by condemning Israel even though Israel *is* following the laws of armed conflict.

The constant blaming of Israel for civilian deaths and other attacks on Israel’s conduct have no doubt added to the climate contributing to the sharp rise in antisemitism since October last year. The Government has condemned this antisemitism, but even here, its half-hearted conduct has gravely disappointed much of the Jewish community.

The Government was less strong than it could have been in relation to the often antisemitic and intimidatory aspects of the anti-Israel demonstrations and protest encampments. It is also galling that Government figures seem unable to discuss antisemitism without adding “and Islamophobia”, as if antisemitism on its own is insufficiently significant to discuss.

The fact that many Jewish university students and staff feel unsafe on campus causes the Jewish community great angst. The Coalition rightly argues that the only way to deal with the failure of universities to remedy this situation is a judicial inquiry with royal commission powers. However, the Government blocked the Opposition Bill to establish this, instead referring the problem to a parliamentary committee with fewer investigative powers and subject to politicisation by hostile senators.

The Government’s own calculations no doubt inform its actions. However, the overall effect has been to degrade Australia’s relationship with our most important Middle Eastern partner, in a way that shows a distinct lack of principle and appears to undermine our core national interests.

The Australian Government’s frosty and highly critical stance on Israel will also almost certainly put us at odds with the incoming Trump Administration, likely damaging our relationship with by far our most important strategic ally.

And, sadly, the effect of the Government’s shift in Middle East policies has been to increase the isolation felt by Australia’s Jewish community, suffering its worst-ever wave of antisemitism. Indeed, it may even have inadvertently contributed to the intensity of the unprecedented antisemitic wave afflicting Australia over the past year.





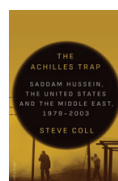
# THE BIBLIO FILE

## Blind man's bluff in Iraq

**The Achilles Trap: Saddam Hussein, the United States and the Middle East, 1979-2003**

by *Steve Coll*

*Penguin Random House, 2024, 556 pp, \$65.00*



destruction (WMD) and how this led to the US invasion.

The book is divided into three chronologically ordered parts: “The Enemy of My Enemy” (December 1979 to August 1990), “The Liar’s Truths” (August 1990 to September 2001) and “Blind Man’s Bluff” (September 2001 to March 2003). The enemy in Part One was Iran, or more precisely the radical Shi’ite regime in Teheran and its militant wing, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The liar of Part Two is Saddam himself, who played an elaborate and prolonged shell game with his WMD after his defeat in the (first) Gulf War. This generated genuine confusion in US intelligence and at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The “blind man’s bluff” of Part Three refers to Saddam’s blindness to the consequences of his own game of bluff. Coll’s unpicking of all this is meticulous and illuminating. It centres on the paradox that Saddam believed the CIA was omniscient. He therefore interpreted American behaviour based on the assumption that official Washington knew what he knew and that its insistence it was uncertain about his WMD programs was all Machiavellian bluff. His counter bluff was to keep playing his shell game, in the belief that he could thereby deter US invasion and rally Arab allies. He got it exactly wrong.

The most significant oversight in the book is that having titled his book *The Achilles Trap*, Coll doesn’t mention, much less explain, that title until page 283. It turns out that the CIA’s file cryptonym for covert operations against Saddam was ‘DB Achilles’, where DB was coding for matters pertaining to Iraq and ‘Achilles’ the codename for Saddam. The title of the book was very well chosen, but it would have been good to explain it at the start.

Here is the key passage:

Saddam himself had cited the Achilles myth while rallying Arab

**Paul Monk**

**S**teve Coll, former Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and a long-time staff writer for the *New Yorker*, is the author of a string of books, dating back to the late 1980s, on corporate America (*The Deal of the Century*, *The Taking of Getty Oil*) and on secret intelligence (*Ghost Wars*, *Directorate S*).

This latest book is a much-needed contribution both to retrospective understanding of how the United States came to invade Iraq in 2003, and the broader question of how US intelligence assessments and foreign policy are made. It is more than usually topical, given the uncertainties following the presidential election in the US, to say nothing of the challenge with which Iran now confronts us all.

The book concludes just as the Iraq War begins in March 2003. In the weeks prior to the onset of war, there

was a great deal of passionate debate as to whether the planned invasion was justified. Bob Hawke, long retired but a respected elder statesman, declared publicly that it was not. Such an invasion, he declared, “would be illegal, immoral and stupid.” Many others agreed.

I wrote, in an essay which appeared in the *Australian Financial Review* the day the war started, that the matter was not as clearcut as that, but that if the US overthrew Saddam Hussein only to get bogged down in a prolonged and bloody urban guerrilla war, the invasion would come to seem a stupid strategic decision. That’s what happened.

Philip Bobbitt would write, in *Terror and Consent* (2008) that it had been a war of choice, not of necessity, with a very messy outcome, but we needed to ask how things may have turned out had the US *not* overthrown Saddam.

In *The Achilles Trap*, Steve Coll takes us back along the tortuous path which led to the US invasion. He focusses upon three things: American perceptions of Saddam Hussein over time; Saddam’s perceptions of America, from wary cooperation against Iran to war with the US; and Saddam’s ambition to develop weapons of mass

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neighbours in 1990 to his coming war against America. For both the Iraqi dictator and the CIA, the example of the Homeric hero with a vulnerable heel offered a call to action, despite long odds. Saddam regarded America as too hubristic and too afraid of taking casualties to defeat a united Arab nation, which he hoped to forge through his own leadership. . .

The CIA's operatives and leaders embraced hope over experience as they searched for a coup plan that might work. Both sides, therefore, trapped themselves by imagining a fatal flaw in their opponent that did not actually exist.

Both paid the penalty for this. Saddam's country was invaded and he was overthrown, captured, tried and executed. The United States was drawn into a long, bloody war and its national security establishment and executive lost a good deal of credibility as a consequence.

**S**addam's phobic belief that the CIA was all-knowing was of a piece with his visceral anti-Zionism and antisemitism. He believed the US intended to facilitate Israeli conquest of the Middle East and the creation of a Jewish empire. Coll shows us how this played out. What Saddam saw as manipulative genius on the part of Washington was actually staggering incompetence.

This theme is of vital importance in our current circumstances, not least in trying to read the thinking in Teheran. Are the ayatollahs and the IRGC reading *The Achilles Trap*, as a wider war looms in the Middle East? What lessons will they think they can learn? Almost certainly the wrong ones. Having reportedly interrogated the head of the IRGC on charges of having spied for Israel, and witnessed the stunning decapitation of Hezbollah by the 'Little Satan', will they see the 'Great Satan' as incompetent, or as Machiavellian?

In any case, the centrepiece of

Coll's analysis is his careful reconstruction of the WMD programs Saddam did have, in the 1980s; the astonishment of the CIA and IAEA, in 1990-91, when they discovered how large and advanced these programs had been; and the way in which Saddam's shell game for more than a decade after that confused his own scientists and generals and confounded IAEA and Western intelligence analysts. This history is vital in correcting widespread and partial "narratives" about WMD and the Iraq war.



Saddam Hussein astonished everyone with his WMD achievements in the 1980s, and then by secretly dismantling the program in the 1990s (Image: LinkedIn)

Coll begins his book with the observation that the discovery, by the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), that Saddam did not have WMD, came as a "shock" and a "revelation". The ISG's mission abruptly shifted from hunting for WMD to sifting truth from misperception and fabrication in the history of Saddam's regime.

Coll himself was in Iraq, on assignment for the *Washington Post*, from October 2003 as this unfolded. It is vital to register this sense of ISG shock and bewilderment, which gave Coll what would become the theme of this book, years later.

In late 2003, he spoke with David Kay, the ISG head, and found:

He was exploring a theory that Saddam had been bluffing – pretending that he might have WMD in order to deter the radical ayatollahs from attacking Iraq. And yet the matter seemed uncertain, Kay told me, since Saddam did not appear to have been particularly afraid of Iran. When one of his ministers had worried aloud that

Iran might pursue its own nuclear or chemical arsenal, Saddam had reportedly replied, 'Don't worry about the Iranians. If they ever get WMD, the Americans and the Israelis will destroy them.'


It's almost eerie reading that in 2024, as American and Israeli alarm over Iran's nuclear aspirations and Iran's aggressive and prolonged offensive against both Israel and the United States in the Middle East have us all on the brink of a large-scale war.

But that is to read through the lens of hindsight. What Coll has provided is a history which enables us to comprehend how things unfolded in reality – through a generation of missteps and mutual misperceptions, when no-one had the benefit of hindsight. Saddam poured resources into a very large WMD program, then destroyed his WMD stocks, while insisting that his own scientists and security agencies systematically conceal that this had been done.

This is the kernel of Coll's book, and it warrants close reading.

The overarching theme of the book, however, is as he writes, "The trouble American decision-makers had in assessing Saddam's resentments and managing his inconsistencies."

He adds that the lessons from this are more important than ever as we seek to deal with a whole set of autocrats in the 2020s.

Saddam Hussein, like Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Ali Khamenei and Kim Jong-Un, was a conspiracy theorist. He was paranoid. But as the old poster of half a century put it, 'Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean they're *not* out to get you.' Saddam was a murderous and aggressive tyrant, and his enemies *were* out to get him. They did. And Iran? 

*Paul Monk did his PhD on US counter-insurgency strategies throughout the Cold War in Southeast Asia and Central America. He subsequently worked in the Defence Intelligence Organisation, where he became head of the China desk in 1994.*





# ESSAY

## “We don’t have another people”

### A self-eulogy

**Yehuda Bauer**

*AIJAC was deeply saddened by the passing on October 18 of Professor Yehuda Bauer, a towering figure in Holocaust studies for more than half a century, at the age of 98. AIJAC had the privilege of hosting Prof. Bauer in Australia on more than one occasion, and his unmatched knowledge, his meticulous scholarship and his overwhelming moral authority were always more than apparent. So too were his puckish sense of humour and original way of thinking. Both are very much on display below in this piece which he wrote shortly before his death – as a moving and unique “self-eulogy”.*

I realise that it isn’t customary for a deceased to eulogise himself. More often than not, his role is to be lying silently, deaf to the praises and veneration.

If he could hear, he would be shocked by the exaggerations and misrepresentations, and blush with shame. It is in the nature of things that deceased people find it hard to blush. Too late. Such is also the case at hand. Taking this important issue into consideration, I have decided to write my own eulogy, clearly realising that the person most familiar with me is me. This is going to be a long eulogy. What can you do?

I hope I passed away with not too much suffering. They say the process

of dying isn’t pleasant, but I cannot tell how it went with me, so cannot report about it. Any historian knows, anyway, that oral testimonies must be crosschecked, except that in this case, this is hard to do. As I do not believe in either kingdom come or in a higher power that regulates our life and death, I am certain I will not rest in heaven; I will just finally rest. Oh, well. Just, as Herzl probably said, don’t do anything stupid while I am dead – this instruction is intended for daughters, sons, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but also to anybody who is listening.

All in all, I have had a good life, nothing to complain about. I was born in Prague, as you may know, to parents who loved each other very much – Uly and Victor Bauer. Since boyhood, I saw my father as more or less my god; it remains so to this day. I look like him, our body language is entirely identical, my voice is his voice. I am just doing an impression of him. I have not achieved his incredible moral stature; more’s the pity.

In 1943 we demanded to enlist in either the military or the Haganah, but they talked us into taking our matriculation exams, and so I set out for the Palmach in early summer of

1944. After my discharge, I attended the Hebrew University for one year, and then received the single scholarship that the Mandate government awarded to Jews in the humanities, and went to Cardiff in Wales, well stocked by Mum with the finest European clothes – that were entirely inappropriate for a student in Britain in 1946. By 1945, I was already a member of the Hashomer Hatzair party, even though I actually grew up in the Scouts party, and was supposed to be one of the founders of Kibbutz Hatzarim. Instead, I went back to Cardiff to complete my BA and MA [*after Israel’s War of Independence, during which he came back to join the fight. Ed.*] Upon returning to Israel, I landed at Kibbutz Shoal on March 23, 1952.

Gabriel Kitain, who was duty roster coordinator at the kibbutz, sent me to work the fields on the sled for hours each day, piling up bales of hay. “If he survives this”, he said, “he will remain here.” I did. My life on the kibbutz for 41 years has been good. I was a cowherder, a cowboy – that is, a dairy

**“Was I an Israeli patriot? A Zionist? Though I was not born here, this is my country, and I wouldn’t leave it even if I was promised fortunes – in fact, they did promise, and I turned them down”**

farmer – and I enjoyed myself. I did my doctorate in 1960 with Prof. Israel Halperin, about the Palmach, because I was crazy. In 1955 I married Shula and we lived together for 35 years. We raised two daughters. I have lived with Ilana for 25 years after my divorce.

I did a lot of work, I have dealt with the most horrific issues a Jewish historian can deal with, and if not for my family and my hobby of folk music, I would not have been able to stand that. Even the start of my preoccupation with genocide was first and foremost due to moral considerations I got from my father. I have met prime ministers, kings, presidents, I made great speeches, because I had the gift of gab, as is evidenced by this

eulogy. I was able to express myself. The honours did tickle my ego – it would be hypocritical to deny it – but the main thing was to promote an understanding of things, including the issue of genocide. I was among the founders of an international group that addressed the issue both theoretically and politically.

**A**nd what does Yehuda Bauer leave behind? A large pile of books and articles. All this will eventually be forgotten, as everything in this world is subject to oblivion. There remain five grown up children, my own two daughters and Ilana's three sons, eight grandchildren and four, later more, great-grandchildren, and several thousand students, in Israel and abroad. Those students may have absorbed some of what I tried to teach them, and perhaps a little more.


Was I an Israeli patriot? A Zionist? Though I was not born here, this is my country, and I wouldn't leave it even if I was promised fortunes – in fact, they did promise, and I turned them down. I hope that my offspring here don't leave it, because that battered cliché is true: we have no other country, and don't have another people, screwed up though this one is.

As Chaim Weizmann once said: This is the best Jewish people we have got. We have to do what we can with it. I belong to this people despite the fact that, in principle, I find it hard to belong to any human group that will accept me as a member. But I did not choose to be Jewish, I was born into this business through no fault of my own. The truth is, I have not only made my peace with this, I am even happy about it. If you have to be born into some ethnic group, it's better to be born Jewish. It is a fascinating, annoying, disgusting, exciting, horrific, wonderful people.

I do not believe in utopias because every utopia eventually leads to murder. But I do believe that you can fix, at least somewhat, even the Jews. Even the world – if only very slightly.



"Don't cry – smile a little. It's best to smile, even to laugh, as long as you still can" – the final message of renowned Holocaust historian Prof Yehuda Bauer (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

So, as I have said, give it a try. Forgive me this long eulogy, I promise not to write another one. And don't cry – smile a little. It's best to smile, even to laugh, as long as you still can. So give it a try. Peace be unto you. 

*Professor Yehuda Bauer was Professor of History and Holocaust Studies at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and an academic advisor to Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Memorial Centre in Jerusalem. He was also the first academic advisor to the International Holocaust Remembrance Association [a predecessor of*

*the contemporary International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance] when it was founded in 1998. Over his long career, Bauer published over 40 books on the Holocaust and antisemitism. Among the most famous and influential are They Chose Life: Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust (1973), The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness (1979), American Jewry and the Holocaust (1981) Jewish Reactions to the Holocaust (1989), and Rethinking the Holocaust (2001). The above was originally published in the Israeli daily Haaretz. © Haaretz (Haaretz.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

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# NOTED AND QUOTED

## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### TRUMP CHANGE

There was intense speculation to what extent US President-elect Donald Trump's policy towards Israel would differ from the outgoing Biden Administration.

ABC Global Affairs Editor John Lyons told *ABC TV* "News" (Nov. 6) "on the Middle East, he has said Israel should finish the job... whatever that means... Kamala Harris was prepared to stand up to Netanyahu... when he was here in Washington a few weeks ago. And I think Netanyahu and the sort of Likud in Israel [*sic*] were wanting Donald Trump to win."

On *ABC RN* "Saturday Extra" (Nov. 7), Stephen Wertheim, historian of US foreign policy, agreed Trump has said he "want[s] to take the restrictions off Israel, but... he would like to see Israel, you know, end its war sooner rather than later."

Wertheim speculated that there might be no difference with "the Biden Administration [which] also wanted Israel to end its war in Gaza many months ago. And the fact is, it was unable to or unwilling to use leverage, given all the US military aid it was giving Israel."

The next day on *ABC RN* "Breakfast", the Washington Institute's Director of Research Dana Stroul said "President-elect Trump has said... he also wants to see a ceasefire and the hostages released. But he's provided absolutely no details on how he might pursue that."

Stroul noted that "What is really unique about the Middle East is that both Israel and the majority of the Arab governments of the region, I think, are breathing a sigh of relief that the next US administration will be President-elect Trump and not a Harris Administration."

Having said that, Stroul believed

the "pressure" to end the war in Gaza and Lebanon was "probably only going to get more in a Trump Administration. And so, [Israel's] doing what they believe they need to do militarily now."

### READING COMPREHENSION TEST FAILED

In an online article (Oct. 19), ABC Middle East correspondent Eric Tlozek claimed that "A letter published in July by the medical journal the *Lancet*, written by three public health researchers, said if a conservative estimate of four indirect deaths per one direct death was applied, the true death toll at that time would have been 186,000." Not true.

The letter did not say there were 186,000 Palestinian deaths between October 2023 and June 2024, but that this could be the future total.

The letter stated that "By June 19, 2024, 37,396 people had been killed in the Gaza Strip since the attack by Hamas and the Israeli invasion in October, 2023" but "even if the conflict ends immediately, there will continue to be many indirect deaths in the coming months and years."

The ABC Ombudsman rejected AIJAC's complaint, which pointed out the report's error as well as radio interviews where John Lyons (see *AIR* Nov. 2024) made similar claims.

Incredibly, the Ombudsman falsely insisted that Lyons and Tlozek had accurately reported the letter's contents.

However, on *ABC RN* "Drive" (Oct. 21), while discussing revised death tolls in Gaza, Lyons did not repeat the false claim 186,000 Palestinians had died in the conflict.

### ABC'S MAKE UP CLASS

*ABC NewsRadio* (Nov. 3) misrepresented what World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus tweeted about an explosion in northern Gaza that injured six people near a clinic dispensing polio vaccinations.

ABC newsreaders repeatedly and incorrectly claimed that the WHO had attributed the blast to an "Israeli airstrike". Dr Ghebreyesus had only called it a "strike" and had not ascribed blame to Israel or Hamas.

While correctly reporting that the IDF had denied responsibility, ABC reports repeated an unsubstantiated Palestinian claim that a "helicopter" carried out the attack, which, given the context, could only refer to Israel.

In an online article (Nov. 5) the next day, the Palestinian allegation had morphed from an Israeli helicopter to a "drone strike".

Yet there was no acknowledgment in ABC reports that Palestinian sources had changed their story.

An IDF investigation later ascribed the explosion to an IED planted by Palestinian terrorists, but the ABC failed to update its reporting with this important point.

### BANNED AID?

On *Sky News*' website (Nov. 8), AIJAC's Justin Amler explained why Israel passed laws banning UNRWA – the main UN aid agency for Palestinians – from operating inside Israel.

Amler wrote that the global community has ignored mountains of evidence that shows UNRWA is an organisation "complicit in terrorism" and "so corrupted that it is beyond redemption."

"Over the past 74 years, the UNHCR [UN High Commission for

Refugees] has helped successfully resettle 50 million refugees for a brighter future. Over that same time period, UNRWA has not helped even one,” Amler wrote.

Meanwhile, on *Sky News* (Nov. 3), AIJAC’s Joel Burnie cleared up some myths about UNRWA and the ban.

Burnie said the ban would “not stop [UNRWA] activities inside Gaza and the West Bank.”

“The important part... is... that UNRWA is not the only provider of aid in Gaza or the West Bank and is not the largest contributor to aid. You

have lots of other United Nations-based programs, such as the World Food Program, the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, that are currently on the ground in big numbers in Gaza to ensure... humanitarian aid is getting to the people that need it,” he said.

## DEFENDING THE INDEFENSIBLE

In a cross to *ABC Radio National* “Breakfast” (Oct. 29), Middle East correspondent Matt Doran said Israel

insists “there are others who can step in and provide the services that UNRWA does in handing out food, in providing medical services, in teaching young Palestinians, although... no alternative agency has actually been named as the successor here.”

Audio was played of UNICEF’s James Elder saying “UNRWA is the backbone. They have thousands and thousands of workers, many hundreds of whom have been killed in the process of trying to deliver aid, but they are the organisation that is able to go north to south, east to west. UNRWA



## IN PARLIAMENT

**Sophie Scamps** (Ind., Mackellar) – November 7 – “Israel’s parliament voted to ban UNRWA from the country within 90 days... What is Australia doing to ensure that the people of Gaza do not die of starvation and preventable diseases such as polio?”

The following statements occurred in various Senate estimates hearings.

### November 7

Greens Deputy Leader Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (NSW) – “Why won’t you sanction Israel?... expel the Israeli ambassador?”

Senator **Faruqi** – “What is stopping you from doing anything real to hold Israel to account?... pressure from the US?... from the pro-Israeli lobby?”

Shadow Assistant Foreign Minister Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas.) – “The government is obviously... aware that staff of UNRWA participated in... 7 October. What was the rationale for the... statement on the Israeli... legislation revoking privileges and immunities granted to UNRWA?”

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) answering – “We don’t want innocent Palestinians to starve... the humanitarian situation in Gaza is unacceptable... Insufficient aid has been allowed... 1.95 million people are facing high levels of acute food insecurity... I don’t see it being contested that UNRWA is the backbone and really the only organisation that can actually facilitate delivery within Gaza.”

Senator **Wong** – “The General Assembly resolution which established... Israel also looked to the establishment of a state of Palestine... any future Palestinian state must not be in a position to threaten Israel’s security. There can be no role for terrorists and it will need a reformed Palestinian Authority.”

Senator **Wong** – “No Australian government has ever taken the approach we have taken at the UN.”

Senator **David Shoebridge** (Greens, NSW) – “Do you accept due to the gross disparity in power between... Israel and the

occupied people of Palestine that... it is a betrayal of the Palestinian people to say... they must negotiate their outcome with Israel without assistance and indeed pressure from the international community?... we say that a just peace should include full consultation with the people of Palestine and the people of Israel. And we’re not imposing a two-state solution.”

Senator **Wong** – “We have engaged in a number of changes of Australian policy. We adopted... the name Occupied Palestinian Territories because that is what they are. We have affirmed that Israeli settlements... are illegal... We have sanctioned extremist Israeli settlers... We’ve doubled our funding to UNRWA because it does vital work. We have shifted our position on recognition, recognising that this is a matter of when, not if.”

### November 5

Senator **Faruqi** – “Several human rights organisations have called Israel’s... treatment of Palestinians apartheid. The ICJ has published an opinion calling it apartheid... [and] found that there is a plausible case of genocide. The ICC has accused the Israeli Prime Minister and Defence Minister of crimes against humanity and applied for their arrest warrants. This is not about impartiality. This is about ABC minimising Israel’s crimes because you are refusing to tell people the truth... Why are you... covering up a genocide?”

Shadow Education Minister Senator **Sarah Henderson** (Lib., Vic.) – “I want to ask about... SBS’s decision to remove and then refuse to run four interviews that presented Israel’s side of the war in Gaza.”

Senator **Lidia Thorpe** (Ind., Vic.) – “The UN Charter’s article 51, the IV Geneva Convention and the ICJ’s advisory opinion... all stated that an unlawful occupying power, Israel cannot claim a right to self-defence in Palestine.”

### November 4

Shadow Home Affairs Minister Senator **James Paterson** (Lib., Vic.) – “[An] organisation which received [Commonwealth Government] funding... say on their social media: ‘Nazism & Zionism: Two Sides of the Same Coin... Zionism is a continuation of Nazi ideology...’ Is that an appropriate statement for a government recipient?”

has the size and scope. No agency can replace that.”

Former UNRWA chief Chris Gunness told *ABC NewsRadio* (Oct. 29) that banning UNRWA risked “the humanitarian catastrophe facing 2.3 million people in Gaza... turn[ing] into a humanitarian apocalypse.” Gunness linked banning UNRWA with a threat to have Israel expelled from the United Nations.

## FAIR WARNING?

On *ABC TV* “News” (Oct. 31), Middle East correspondent Matt Doran listed the warnings Israel gives to Lebanese civilians informing them to vacate ahead of military operations.

Doran said, “The warnings in Baalbek came thick and fast. Calls to mobile phones with pre-recorded messages from Israeli troops followed up by the local fire brigade driving up and down residential streets with loud hailers telling people to flee. This video from the IDF’s Arabic spokesman showing just how large the evacuation area is.”

Earlier (Oct. 21), John Lyons backhandedly acknowledged on *ABC RN* “Drive” that Israel’s advanced warnings do “sometimes” save lives.

Lyons added, “If the Israelis believe there’s a Hezbollah person in a building, they will not give a warning... However, if they are targeting a supply of weapons, they believe Hezbollah has hidden some weapons in the basement of a building... they will sometimes give a warning because their view is ‘we want to destroy the weapons, not the people.’”

## QUESTIONABLE

In the *Daily Telegraph* (Oct. 23), AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams posed a series of questions regarding global criticism that is only levelled at Israel.

This included asking “Why was it cause for celebration when the US kills terrorist leaders such as Al Qaeda and ISIS heads, but cause for concern

when Israel kills their Hezbollah and Hamas equivalents Hassan Nasrallah and Ismail Haniyeh?”

Hyams concluded by stating that there’s only one question that explains them all: “Why is Israel subjected to different standards from every other country?”

## AFTER SINWAR

After Israel eliminated Hamas leader and October 7 mastermind Yahya Sinwar, the media discussion was dominated by its impact on the war in Gaza.

On *ABC Radio* “AM” (Oct. 18), John Lyons said, “It was impossible for Benjamin Netanyahu to go for a ceasefire while Yahya Sinwar was alive because if he’d come out the next day with a victory salute or something, it would have politically been untenable for the Israeli Government... But it’s also unclear what this means. Does the Israeli Government decide now is the time to try to pull off and get some sort of ceasefire or do they... decide now is the time to go in harder?”

Former Mossad chief Efraim Halevy told *ABC RN* “Breakfast” (Oct. 18), “There are still fighting elements in the Gaza Strip... Hamas still has control, for instance, of the north of the Strip... they were hoping to re-establish their rule over the entire part of Gaza.”

On the ABC’s “News Daily” podcast (Oct. 22), international relations expert Rajan Menon, said, “so the plan now seems to be to create a zone in northern Gaza that is completely devoid of any Palestinians... and that will leave Hamas operatives behind, presumably, and then to essentially cut aid supply so they will be completely devoid of means of sustenance and will be forced to either surrender or... die or... leave.”

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* (Oct. 19), veteran *New York*

*Times* columnist Thomas Friedman said Sinwar’s death “creates the possibility for the biggest step toward a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians since Oslo, as well as normalisation between Israel and Saudi Arabia — which means pretty much the entire Muslim world.”

But, he wrote, that requires Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu agreeing to “the participation of a reformed West Bank Palestinian Authority in an international peacekeeping force that would take over Gaza in the place of the Sinwar-led Hamas.”

On *ABC RN* “Saturday Extra” (Oct. 19), Palestinian American senior fellow at the Atlantic Council Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib said Hamas will still want a role in running Gaza after the war ends but “that cannot be allowed to happen for the sake of the Palestinian people, for the safety of Israel and indeed for regional stability.”

## DOUSING IRAN’S RING OF FIRE

In the *West Australian* (Oct. 28), AIJAC’s Allon Lee wrote on the significance of Israel’s elimination of Hamas’ October 7 mastermind, Yahya Sinwar, in the context of Iran’s “Ring of Fire” strategy.

Lee said it is understandable the world wants Sinwar’s death to expedite a region-wide ceasefire, but from Israel’s perspective it cannot happen before Iran is sufficiently defanged.

Similarly, AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein, in the *Canberra Times* (Nov. 6), said anyone who cares about regional stability, a negotiated two-state peace, or the welfare of Palestinians and Lebanese civilians, should want Israel’s increasingly successful war against the Iranian “Ring of Fire” to fully achieve its aims and not end prematurely.

## LIES OF THE LAND

A report on *SBS TV* “World News” by Claudia Farhart (Nov. 1), about a long-running property dispute be-



tween a Palestinian family near Bethlehem and Israeli settlers, omitted key information.

The report noted the Qasiyeh family said they opened a restaurant in 2001 on land they inherited from their grandfather.

Alice Qasiyeh said, “We have faced demolitions every time we rebuild the restaurant – 2012, ’13, ’15. And then 2019, we also faced demolition with the house.”

Farhart said the demolitions are “usually ordered due to not having Israeli building permits, which the UN says are nearly always impossible to obtain for Palestinians.”

According to Farhart, a subsidiary of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) – “which buys and develops property” – claimed ownership of the land – and recently the family were evicted, while settlers established an outpost there.

Naomi Kahn from the Israeli NGO Regavim explained the JNF bought the land “decades ago” and said the Qasiyeh family and their supporters had pursued “lawfare”, which hadn’t succeeded.”

According to Israeli media reports, omitted from the SBS story was that Alice’s father, Ramzi, ignored a stop work order in 2005 from the Israeli Civil Administration and built a home and a restaurant there.

A legal case then slowly made its way through the Israeli courts. The judgement in May 2023 found that the only evidence the Qasiyehs had to show ownership was a document showing taxes were paid, while the JNF subsidiary provided proof it had registered ownership of the land in 1969.

## MARR MARRS LOEWENSTEIN’S CLAIMS

On Oct. 22, *ABC RN* “Late Night Live” host David Marr cast a critical eye over anti-Zionist activist and writer Antony Loewenstein’s far-fetched statements about Israel.

According to Loewenstein, Israel

decided after its foundation in 1948 to make new friends and “the way they wanted to do that was to sell weapons, to test weapons, largely on Palestinians.” This activity only increased after Israel won control over the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, he said.

Loewenstein estimated that Israel has sold weapons to “at least” 140 countries, it uses this as an “insurance policy” and this is the reason “the world is mute when [Israel’s] committing mass slaughter.”

Marr retorted, “Antony, the munitions industry, the surveillance industry, they’re not nice guys. They’ll sell to anybody... Are you not drawing kind of very particular conclusions from the ordinary catch and grab of the munitions trade?”

Likewise, Loewenstein questioned what sort of democracy Israel is when it is “supporting a thug like [former Chilean dictator General] Pinochet, arming him, training his people, and by the way, not assisting the Jews of that country to leave, which Israel did not.”

Marr again interjected, “But the United States was supporting Pinochet as well.”

Loewenstein said that while the world immediately condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a war crime, different language was used in response to “Israeli actions” after October 7.

But Marr pointed out, “They’re not the same. It’s a different war... It’s compelled by different reasons... I think that that’s intellectually dishonest for you to argue from commentary on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and to what’s going on in Israel.”

Marr also chided Loewenstein for claiming “how do you have a democracy” when “hundreds, if not thousands of Israeli troops on Tik Tok in Gaza [are] posting [videos] humiliating Palestinians.”

Marr replied, “Democracy is about the way in which people are elected, and Netanyahu was elected.”

## MEDIA WATCH BLIND TO ITS OWN BIAS

In October, the ABC’s “Media Watch” program was blind to its own bias against Israel.

Most of the Oct. 7 episode focused on the accusation that Israel targets journalists in Gaza and Lebanon. The show left out vital context, such as two Palestinian journalists killed by the IDF in Gaza were in a car with a terrorist who was operating a drone. In Lebanon, journalists were accidentally killed because they were too close to the fighting or had ignored Israeli warnings to vacate or avoid specific areas.

The Oct. 7 episode also attacked the media for focusing on what it called the “trivial” issue of a “handful of protestors flying Hezbollah flags.” Hezbollah is a banned terror organisation.

The Oct. 14 episode was more of the same, and instead of focusing on actual reports in the Australian media, chastised the media for not sufficiently covering the deaths of journalists in Gaza and Lebanon.

On Oct. 21, the show seemed to suggest that claims from the Hamas terrorists who govern Gaza should be accepted without reservation whereas democratic Israel should be distrusted.

The Oct. 28 episode accused Israel of “deliberate[ly]” killing three journalists in Lebanon who worked for TV networks linked to Hezbollah or Iran.

Host Paul Barry said, “Under Article 79 of the Geneva Convention journalists in war zones are protected, provided they play no part in hostilities. And there is no evidence those working from the media compound in south Lebanon were doing anything other than covering the war.”

In other words, if reporters are hanging out in a compound where terrorists are based, Israel has no right to target that site.

Allon Lee

## RESOLUTIONARY CHANGE

If the Federal Government intended its unheralded Nov. 14 decision to suddenly vote in favour of two annual anti-Israel UN General Assembly resolutions to generate controversy, it succeeded. One resolution demands Israel pay compensation for an oil slick that happened during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. The second recognises the “permanent sovereignty” of Palestinians over all natural resources in the West Bank and Gaza.

Ahead of the voting, Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong published a piece in the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* (Nov. 6) stressing the importance of countries respecting international law and implying that Israel was failing to do so.

The *SMH* published a letter in response (Nov. 7) from AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams, who wrote of Wong’s piece, “Totally missing is any acknowledgement of Israel’s efforts to avoid civilian casualties with evacuations and warnings, its efforts to allow the transfer of aid, or the fact that the civilian to combatant casualty ratio of around one to one is far better than other recent urban wars.”

The *Australian’s* Simon Benson (Nov. 15) cited AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein’s observation that, since 2006, all Australian governments had voted the other way on the oil slick question because it ignored the environmental destruction Hezbollah caused in Israel during the same 2006 war. On the “permanent sovereignty” resolution, he noted that Australia had voted no or abstained on this resolution since 2003.

On *Sky News* (Nov. 14), AIJAC’s Bren Carlill said of the permanent sovereignty resolution that the “text negates any and all Israeli claims to the West Bank. The Australian Government’s position is that Israeli and Palestinian territorial claims will be determined through negotiations.”

Also on *Sky News* (Nov. 15), AIJAC’s Joel Burnie said “these two resolutions were not supported by the Biden Administration. So, the Albanese Government is not just at odds with an incoming Trump Administration.” Burnie also said the votes contradicted Prime Minister Albanese’s assurance before the last federal election that “no matter which party is in power here, Israel will have Australia’s friendship and support.”

Former Australian Ambassador Ian Parmeter told *ABC Radio* “PM” (Nov. 15), “I think the catalyst for this change... was probably some comments by an ultra-right wing member of Benjamin Netanyahu’s cabinet, Bezalel

Smotrich, who, a few days ago, called on Israel to use the election of Donald Trump... to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.”

Parmeter also hypothesised that Australia backed the permanent sovereignty resolution because “Israeli settlement activity is increasingly taking up the water in that area.”

**“Alex Rychin told SBS TV ‘World News’ (Nov. 15), “This looks like something fairly vindictive, and more geared towards an election next year than changing anything on the ground.”**

But others argued political considerations likely motivated the vote change. Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-CEO Alex Rychin told *SBS TV* “World News” (Nov. 15), “This looks like something fairly vindictive, and more geared towards an election next year than changing

anything on the ground.”

The *Daily Telegraph* editorialised on Nov. 15, “Nothing has changed in the Middle East that would seemingly warrant a change in our UN voting status. But there is one thing. There certainly is one change... Hamas psychopaths stormed into Israel on October 7, 2023.”

On *ABC Local Radio 774* (Nov. 15), Palestinian lobby group APAN President Nasser Mashni had a bet each way, partly attributing the Government’s shift to ongoing protests and the fact that “they can no longer conveniently hide behind Israel as a normal country. The world is seeing what Israel is... It’s a genocidal regime.”

On *ABC Radio* “World Today” (Nov. 15), academic Tristan Dunning said Australia’s vote would not achieve much in practice but “it does signal that Australia will be looking to chart a more independent foreign policy under the Trump Administration.”

Writing in the *Australian* (Nov. 18), Strategic Analysis Australia’s Anthony Bergin said Australia’s voting shift “no doubt assists the government taking away Greens votes for Labor.”

*Sky News* “Outsiders” host Rowan Dean (Nov. 17) thundered, “How many is this? Six, seven times, Penny Wong has stabbed Israel, a close ally of ours, and stabbed the Jews of Australia, in the back.”

News Corp columnist Piers Akerman (Nov. 17) slammed what he said was a “weasel-worded statement from Wong’s office... that Australia had voted with an overwhelming majority of UN member states.” Akerman said, “The UN is full of tinpot Third World nations ruled by autocratic dictators... it is not surprising the majority would vote against the only liberal democratic society in the Middle East.”



# THE LAST WORD

Rabbi Ralph Genende

## ABRAHAMIC ANGST AND ASPIRATIONS

I've been involved in interfaith work for most of my rabbinical life. I have seen the best and the worst of it; the profound bridging of different lives and perspectives, but also the shallow political posturing and the bonhomie of superficial unity – “We're all basically the same and if we sing from the same song sheet long enough everything will be fine.”

For some, interfaith is a waste of time – after all, you can't really trust the other and our belief systems are incompatible and incommensurable. For these people, since October 7, their attitude has only hardened. How can you trust a Muslim when they rape and brutalise in the name of Allah? The rabbis of the Talmud, they contend, got it right when they argued, “It's a law of Moses from Sinai that Esau (the non-Jew; typically the Church) hates Jacob the Jew.” And, by extension, Ishmael hates Isaac.

Interfaith relations have been in crisis since October 7 and Jewish-Muslim interactions have stalled, if not broken down. In Australia, antisemitism, often fuelled by primarily-Muslim pro-Palestinian protests, has gone through the roof.

So, when I told people I was going to Indonesia for an interfaith conference, they were concerned, confused or simply sceptical. Going to a Muslim country ostensibly hostile to Israel, engaging in interfaith dialogue with Muslims and Christians during this time of war and polarisation, speaking to imams? Was this sheer folly? How can you relate, even to a moderate Muslim, after their thundering silence in those days immediately after October 7? Was it even safe to arrive in Jakarta sporting a kippah?

When I heard about the Abrahamic Peace Working Group Conference, I weighed up these concerns. But, continuing in the tradition of AIJAC leaders like Jeremy Jones in Indonesia for more than 30 years, I was inspired

by the belief that if a Muslim organisation was willing to invite Jews and Muslims to come together (and also interact with

Christians) at a time like this, it was a rare opportunity. It supported my belief, based on the profound reflections of Rabbis Jonathan Sacks and Menachem Froman (a pioneer of interfaith endeavours in Israel), that if religion is part of the problem, it can also be part of the solution.

The Abrahamic Peace or Circles initiative is the brainchild of Dr Dino Patti Djalal, former Indonesian Ambassador to Washington. He similarly believes that addressing the problems of the world means recognising the role religion plays in it. The October 7 War, says Dino, will have emotional and psychological consequences. Left unchecked, it can also allow religious extremism to flourish. While he is mindful that meetings like this will not change the world overnight, he is convinced that small and incremental changes can temper the dangers of extremism.

The conference involved Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders and scholars. The purpose of the

conference was not only reflective; it was also a bold call to action. It sought to urgently explore how these three great faiths could join together, work side by side and come up with practical suggestions to help heal the wounds, mend the ruptures and prevent further deterioration.

And that's what we did for two intense days in the cool mountain air of West Java in the beautiful city of Bandung. We spoke together, we worked together, we argued, we engaged in courageous conversations.

Drafting an action plan was the most challenging part of the conference. Referencing the war was a flashpoint of vigorous and impassioned debate. The Action Plan is a bold, hopeful and practical response offering concrete proposals to address Abrahamic angst, using educational, governmental and social media platforms alongside grassroots and youth-oriented programs.

The conference coincided with the weekly Torah reading of Lech Lecha (Genesis 12), which concerns the journey and mission of Abraham: to be a blessing to humanity. This is an important reminder to us Jews not to despair of our role to try to repair the world, and to play our part in the story of humanity.



Rabbi Genende (3rd from left) with Christian and Muslim delegates at the Abrahamic Peace Working Group conference in Bandung, Indonesia



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