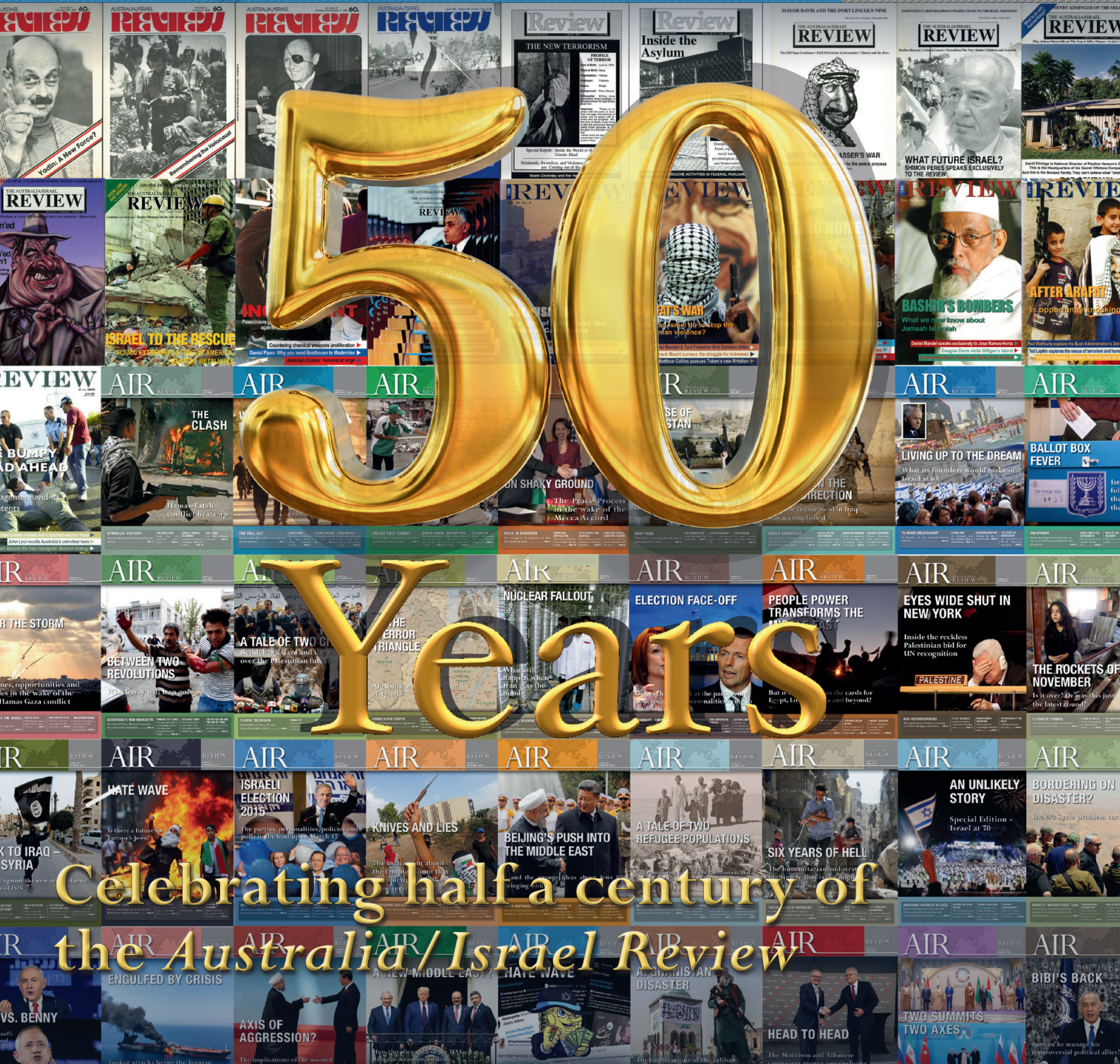


# AIR

AUSTRALIA/ISRAEL  
REVIEW

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JANUARY 2025

AUSTRALIA/ISRAEL & JEWISH AFFAIRS COUNCIL



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This special edition of the *Australia/Israel Review* celebrates our fiftieth anniversary as a publication – a stunning milestone. I have much more to say about our achievements over the past half-century in an article on p. 21, but urge readers first and foremost to read the words of *AIR* founding editor and Australian journalistic icon Sam Lipski, who places the *AIR*'s story in the context of the current crisis afflicting both the Australian Jewish community, and Australia-Israel relations. Also, have a look at the feature we have prepared tracing 50 years of history through the medium of past *AIR* editions.

Of course, *AIR*'s primary task of providing reporting, analysis and commentary on the monthly news can never be neglected, so this edition contains important stories from *AIR* regulars Ilan Evyatar, Ehud Yaari and David Makovsky on the implications of the ceasefire in Lebanon and the dramatic and game-changing collapse of Syria's Assad regime.

And don't miss Allon Lee's analysis of the meaning of Australia's UN vote shifts, David Adesnik's deconstruction of the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants against Israeli leaders, and Julie Szego's dive into the controversial ideology driving many of the cries of "genocide" being directed against Israel.

Please let us know what you think of this edition – or our special milestone – at [editorial@aijac.org.au](mailto:editorial@aijac.org.au).

**Tzvi Fleischer**

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FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN  
COLIN RUBENSTEIN

FROM CRISIS TO CRISIS

For the past half century, the *Australia/Israel Review (AIR)* has been increasing the breadth of knowledge of Australians on a range of truly important issues, from foreign and domestic policy to matters of particular interest to Australian Jewry and, naturally, Israel, both alone and at the nexus of where these issues connect.

What began as a stand-alone periodical founded by the late Jewish community leaders Isador Magid and Bob Zablud, and edited by iconic Australian journalist Sam Lipski, in time became the flagship magazine of the broader Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC). The accessible yet uniquely insightful content that the *AIR* strives to provide – whether written in-house by our policy analysts and researchers, or republished from other high-quality sources – forms the bedrock of AIJAC’s reputation. As such, the magazine has long been as much at home in the offices of legislators in our Federal Parliament and media personnel as in your mailbox in the suburbs.

Almost eerily, there are many parallels between the time when our publication was launched and the events surrounding its 50th anniversary today. Then, as now, Israel was finding its footing in the aftermath of defensive wars that were marked by catastrophic intelligence failures: The Yom Kippur War and the October 7 war, respectively.

Then, as now, the Australian government of the day had, in the eyes of many Australians, become demonstrably less supportive of Israel’s right to self-defence than it should have been, especially given the prevailing shocking circumstances – while also becoming less receptive to legitimate Jewish concerns within Australia.

However, the parallel breaks down with the level of domestic antisemitism that has accompanied the current political failure and lack of leadership. This hit fever pitch with the arson terror attack that destroyed Melbourne’s Adass Israel Synagogue on December 6.

The depths to which both Australia-Israel relations and the security of the Australian Jewish community have descended since the attack of October 7 are without precedent in Australian history.

To be clear, no mainstream Australian Jewish leader is saying the unprincipled de-basement of our country’s diplomatic relationship with Israel under the Albanese Government is itself antisemitic. However, antisemitism has indisputably thrived under the cover of policies that effectively pander to those violently opposed to any Jewish right of self-determination.

The statistics paint a stark picture: antisemitic incidents in Australia have skyrocketed by 316% since October 7, 2023 – and that was even before the Melbourne arson attack and the further antisemitic vandalism, arson and intimidation in Sydney.

Jewish Australians feel abandoned and exposed.

Yet what is perhaps most disturbing is that the Jewish community is not surprised by the Adass Israel attack. The signs have been building for months: doxxing of Jewish creatives, hate-filled slogans at anti-Israel protests, Jewish students advised to study from home for their own safety and defaced war memorials. Police have repeatedly told Jewish Australians to stay away from public areas “for their own safety”.

Our political leaders have failed to effectively defend the values underpinning our multicultural society. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s strong condemnation of the Adass arson attack was welcome, as was his establishment of AFP Special Operation Avalite. But for many in the Jewish community, such statements seem belated and hollow. For more than a year, the Government failed to adequately address the wave of anti-Israel protests that have often turned intimidating and violent, even as its foreign policy decisions consis-





tently exacerbated the problem.

Recent examples include the Government's support for a biased United Nations resolution demanding Israel unilaterally withdraw from all the West Bank and east Jerusalem without requiring any reciprocal actions from the Palestinians, including the cessation of terrorism (see p. 27). Foreign Minister Penny Wong's remarks in a speech in Adelaide on Dec. 9 appearing to equate Israel with serial human rights violators Russia and China reflected a worrying moral relativism and obsession with alleged Israeli wrongdoing that erodes Australia's credibility. And then there is the decision to deny a visitor's visa to Ayelet Shaked, a former Israeli justice minister, on dubious grounds, after granting her one less than two years ago.

These positions embolden those who seek to delegitimise Israel and provide fodder for the antisemitic narratives poisoning our public discourse. Radical activists who have pushed the envelope into antisemitism feel the Government is changing its policies in response to their actions, and will seek to push even further.

Australian antisemitism is not just a Jewish problem. It represents a direct challenge to Australian multiculturalism and the cohesion of our democratic society.

Thus, the Government desperately needs to urgently recalibrate its approach to both domestic and foreign policy. It must crack down on antisemitic hate speech, incitement and violence and provide law enforcement agencies the resources and directives to act decisively against those who target Jewish Australians.

The Government should also return to the bipartisan foreign policy consensus that upheld Israel's right to es-


sential security. Supporting Israel's self-defence against an existential threat is not just morally correct; it aligns with Australia's strategic interests and our shared values. Furthermore, given the Palestinian rejectionism that has seen their leadership turning down repeated, genuine two-state peace offers, it is the only way to bring such an outcome closer.

### **"The depths to which both Australia-Israel relations and the security of the Australian Jewish community have descended since the attack of October 7 are without precedent in Australian history"**

Back in 2000, in the *AIR*'s 25th anniversary issue, our late co-founder Isador Magid wrote about the genesis of the *AIR* in 1974, when then-Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon told Magid that he wanted to see a Jewish magazine established in Melbourne to help encourage improved relations. Magid wrote, "The important point, on which Allon and I agreed, is that the publication should be genuinely independent, not simply a communal magazine, and that it should not be a mouthpiece of the Israeli government."

While the magazine and the broader organisation it spawned, like Australia itself, has evolved over the past 50 years, the entire team at AIJAC is proud to live up to the values on which the *AIR* was founded in late 1974.

Being a trusted source of information forms the bond between our organisation, its supporters, journalists, political and student leaders and the Australian public.

And given the current unprecedented crisis, the need for the quality, fact-checked and timely information we provide to our hundreds of thousands of followers on social media platforms, on our website, in our FreshAIR email updates, and in the *Review* – promoting the shared interests between Australia, Israel and the Jewish world – has never been greater. 

## WORD FOR WORD

"The ICC issuance of arrest warrants against Israeli leaders is outrageous. Let me be clear once again: whatever the ICC might imply, there is no equivalence – none – between Israel and Hamas."

**President Joe Biden on the International Criminal Court (ICC) issuing arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister and former Defence Minister (White House, Nov. 21).**

"Hezbollah decided to attack us from Lebanon on October 8th. A year later... we have pushed them decades back ... With Hezbollah out of the picture, Hamas is left on its own... that will help us in our sacred mission of releasing our hostages."

**Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on the ceasefire agreement with Lebanon (Times of Israel, Nov. 26).**

"With God's help, the city of Damascus has been liberated and

the tyrant Bashar al-Assad has fallen... Long live free Syria."

**Rebels announce the fall of the Assad regime on State TV in Damascus (Sky News, Dec. 8).**

"Everybody is talking about the hostages who are being held so violently, inhumanely, and against the will of the entire World, in the Middle East – But it's all talk... if the hostages are not released prior to January 20, 2025, the date that I proudly assume Office as President of the United States, there will be ALL HELL TO PAY in the Middle East, and for those in charge who perpetrated these atrocities against Humanity."

**US President-elect Donald Trump warns Hamas via a social media post (News.com.au, Dec. 4).**

"I say [to young people] oh yeah, [Arafat] walked away from a Palestinian state with a capital in East Jerusalem, 96 percent of the West Bank, 4 percent of Israel to make up for the 4 percent... I go through all the stuff that was in the deal, and it's not on their radar screen. They can't even imagine that happened."

**Former US President Bill Clinton bemoans current ignorance of the peace deal Yasser Arafat rejected in 2000 (Times of Israel, Dec. 5).**





Tzvi Fleischer

## DOES WAR ONLY BREED MORE RADICALISATION?

How many times have Australian newspapers featured the argument that Israel's devastating response to October 7 – designed to dismantle Hamas' military machine and end its governance of Gaza – would only embitter and radicalise a whole new generation of Palestinians, creating yet more terrorists and extend the 'cycle of violence'?

Of course, this claim never comes with any reasonable and informed suggestion about what Israel should have done differently in response to October 7. But does the evidence support this claim?

Recent polling conducted in Gaza provides a convincing answer – “no”.

For instance, in the latest Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) survey, conducted in October, 74% of Gazans supported a two-state solution, while only 11% supported instead establishing a single Palestinian state in all of “historic Palestine”. In a separate question, 15% of Gazans supported “armed resistance” as the method to establish a Palestinian state while 64% supported political negotiations.

These are much more promising figures in terms of hopes for a negotiated two-state peace than what Gazans were saying before the war, or during its early stages.

There is no AWRAD survey from immediately before the war, but let's look at the data from a different survey from September 2023 by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR).

In that survey, 51% of Gazans supported “armed struggle” and 19% negotiations. When asked whether or not they supported a two-state solution – a different but related question to the AWRAD survey's one offering several options – 34% of Gazans said yes while 65% said they opposed it. In answer to a different question, 69% said a two-state resolution was no longer viable.

Meanwhile, in the most recent PCPSR survey, conducted in September 2024, Gazans were asked to pick one of three possible solutions to the conflict: a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, confederation between the two states of Palestine and Israel and a one-state solution in which the Jews and Palestinians live in equality. A majority of Gaza respondents, 54%, said they prefer a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. This is not only a huge rise over the 34% 12 months earlier, it is actually even more impressive than that, since respondents were given three options rather than just asked “two state resolution, yes or no?”

The PCPSR survey also presented respondents with three ways to establish an independent Palestinian state: 36% of Gazans chose “armed struggle” while 40% chose negotiations (22% chose “popular peaceful resistance”). Not as clear cut as AWRAD's result, but still a huge change since Sept. 2023.

PCPSR polls also show a sharp fall in support for Hamas' October 7 attacks, from overwhelming support in their aftermath, to only 39% support in September 2024.

In other words, despite the sloganeering, the Gaza war, devastating as it has no doubt been for Gaza's residents, has not “radicalised” a generation of Palestinians but, if anything, done the opposite. While the surveys disagree on the details, they both agree that Gazans have moved from mostly opposing a two-state resolution to mostly supporting one, and toward preferring negotiations over “armed struggle”.

This should be unsurprising. Gazans have seen how “armed struggle” to destroy Israel led to absolutely devastating consequences for them without bringing the Palestinians any closer to their goals. So they now prefer different tactics and more achievable goals.

Westerners who imagined they would not realise this and would instead lash out in mindless anger were actually patronising and infantilising Palestinians.

These shifting Palestinian views hopefully make an eventual two-state peace more feasible, though probably not in the short term.

The belief that the opposite would happen was always about ideology, not facts. War is, indeed, inconceivably horrible, and it makes sense that writers and pundits feel a need to remind everyone of this at every opportunity.

But the belief that war can never resolve anything, and therefore was guaranteed only to create more Palestinian violence, was always a simplistic slogan, not a reflection of any serious thought about the incentives, beliefs, goals and capabilities that drive human conflict.

## VIEWS ON HAMAS AND GAZA AID


Interestingly, the AWRAD poll conducted in August found only one percent of Gazans expressed trust in Hamas institutions regarding the distribution of humanitarian aid, and one percent trusted Hamas to lead initial reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

I read this as Palestinians recognising that Hamas is stealing much or most of the aid entering Gaza for its own nefarious purposes – using it to either support its own fighters and their families or else selling it back to Gazans at inflated prices to get funds.

This interpretation is backed up by a new study of social media coming out of Gaza published by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre, which shows Gazans are highly critical of the abuse of aid, includ-



ing by Hamas, with comments about the aid situation such as:

- “The police themselves steal the bread and then give it to whoever they want.”
- “Shameful and disgraceful. Sadly, they want the crisis to continue to gain media sympathy. The crisis is deliberate and everyone is complicit, from UNRWA to the thugs who own the bakeries. All of this is just to profit at the expense of the citizens’ suffering.”
- “Those who can’t manage a line at a bakery and deliberately create a crisis, how can they manage a just cause and a sacred state?”
- “The leaders fill their pockets with millions of dollars taken from the mouths of the hungry and the weak.” 



Seth Mandel

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND BALAAM’S TALKING ASS

It’s hard not to take some enjoyment in the absolute disaster of Amnesty International’s new report on Israel, in which the infamous NGO blew the biggest moment of its nefarious existence. Surely one can appreciate a modern re-enactment of the biblical tale of Balaam’s Talking Ass (Numbers 22).

In that story, the Moabite King hires the prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites. Along the way, God sends an angel to stand in his way, but only Balaam’s donkey can see the angel. The donkey swerves and Balaam beats the animal. On the third attempt, the angel successfully blocks them and the donkey lays down in surrender. Balaam beats the donkey again, but this time she speaks: “What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?”

God’s angel reveals itself to Balaam, who is embarrassed by the whole ordeal. When Balaam ultimately tries to curse the Israelites, he finds that God has put only words of praise in his mouth.

Balaam, then, is unable to execute the sole purpose of his mission. To add insult to injury, his own donkey observed God’s messenger before he did.

Amnesty International’s leaders came to curse the Jews, failed, and were revealed to be sub-donkey intellects in the process.

Here’s what happened. Amnesty has produced a report accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza. It was intended to be the capstone of the organisation’s work. But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum.

Key parts of Amnesty’s report were leaked ahead of time to people one would normally consider oppositional

to the organisation. (I received it from multiple sources well ahead of time.) This happened because there are sufficient numbers of those in Amnesty’s orbit – current and former employees, advisory figures, people in the NGO donor network – who are ashamed of what Amnesty has become. These are allies of the organisation, mind you – but they understood that Amnesty’s report was so preposterous as to ruin the credibility of anyone associated with the group from here on out.

Thus, Amnesty’s attempt to ambush Israel and its defenders became the opposite.

But that was nothing compared to what happened when the report was finally released this week. Amnesty International’s Israel branch – that is, the part of the organisation that works on the ground in the country at the centre of a 300-page report – *disavowed the report*. Amnesty’s Israel-based team says they were not involved in the report – that is damning enough – and that the crew “does not accept the claim that genocide has been proven to be taking place in the Gaza Strip and does not accept the operative findings of the report.”

There’s a reason for that. The report is a joke. It didn’t take long for people to find the part where Amnesty explained that in order to find Israel guilty of genocide, the organisation had to *literally redefine genocide*.

The crime of genocide requires intent, which is difficult to prove. Raphael Lemkin, the father of the term, had in mind “a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, *with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves*” (emphasis added).

The fact that Israel, for example, moved a million civilians out of Rafah before killing a bunch of Hamasniks with very few civilian casualties is representative of Israel’s approach to this war and cannot under any reasonable circumstances even be mentioned in the same breath as “genocide”. Moving civilians out of harm’s way and allowing in regular caravans of food and medicine and other humanitarian items are actions that are mutually exclusive to genocidal intent. Without proof of genocidal intent, such intent can be determined if the *only* plausible explanation of the state’s actions is genocide. Obviously, Israel’s conduct comes nowhere close to meeting that standard.


So, Amnesty just changed the definition, insisting that “Amnesty International considers this an overly cramped interpretation of international jurisprudence and one that would effectively preclude a finding of genocide in the context of an armed conflict.”

So Amnesty International dissents from international law. That’s fine. Just be up-front about it: Amnesty is not accusing Israel of “genocide”, it is accusing Israel of a different crime which Amnesty has named “genocide”, just so it could use that word.

Amnesty International accused Israel of genocide and in





the process acquitted Israel of committing genocide. It's an age-old story – but less fun without the talking donkeys. 

*Seth Mandel is senior editor of Commentary magazine. © Commentary (commentary.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

# ASIA WATCH

**Michael Shannon**

## THE USUAL SUSPECTS

In what is now an annual event, *Reuni Akbar 212* (the 212 Great Reunion) took place in Monas Square, Central Jakarta, on December 2. The event is meant to be a show of force for Indonesia's committed Islamists, but lacking its original impetus, it now invokes the cause of Palestine to generate turnout.

The event dates back to 2016, when Muslims turned out in droves under the banner of *Aksi Bela Islam* (action to defend Islam) to demand the arrest of then Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (AKA 'Ahok') on the grounds of blasphemy. The 2016-2017 gatherings were of political and religious significance nationally because they involved many Muslim groups and political parties. Furthermore, several political figures found an alliance with this movement too tempting to ignore, notably Prabowo Subianto.

But in the years since, crowds have steadily fallen. Islamist parties are political bit players, their pet issues sidelined for now. What's more, Basuki departed the political scene several years ago, so there is no obvious *bête noire* to rile up the crowds.

Just as well there is Israel.

This year, referring to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque, participants chanted: "With our souls and our blood, we will redeem you, oh Al-Aqsa!"

An unidentified Arab speaker at the rally said: "Oh mujahideen of Palestine, you gave revived the world with your strength, your adherence, and your determination to be steadfast for the liberation of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. Dear brothers, we will redeem the Al-Aqsa Mosque with our souls. We will redeem the Al-Aqsa Mosque with our blood!"

Also there was former leader of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) Rizieq Shihab, who voiced support for a proposal to send Indonesian youth to the Palestinian territories to participate in jihad against Israeli forces. He called for the Government to open registration for volunteers.

"Open registration, train them, arm them, and send them to Gaza to liberate Al-Aqsa," Rizieq declared, adding that the proposal was suggested by Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) leader K H Muhyidin Junaidi.

Rizieq further claimed that the proposal had been presented to President Prabowo: "I agree with K H Muhyidin. It's extraordinary that he proposed to *Bapak* President Prabowo to open registration for Indonesian youth to jihad to Palestine," said Rizieq, cheered by his supporters shouting "*takbir!*"

Whether Prabowo would approve such a proposal is doubtful, but Rizieq believes his followers are ready to participate in jihad.

Until now, the MUI limited itself to supporting a boycott of products perceived to be affiliated with Israel – including fast food products, dates, packaged drinks, coffee and milk – issuing a fatwa to that effect and amplifying it through social media channels.


But the re-emergence of Rizieq portends a potential lightning rod for hardline activists not content with the relatively passive action of a boycott.

Rizieq established the FPI in late 1998 during the political ferment that followed the fall of the Suharto regime, and the group developed an unsavoury record of harassment, intimidation and mob violence against religious, ethnic and sexual minorities. Alongside its street agitations and flag-burnings, it also conducted charity work that earned it a solid base of public support.

After appearing almost untouchable for many years, Rizieq's leading role in the original 212 protests put him in the crosshairs of then President Widodo. Charges were filed against him in 2017 after screen captures emerged of text messages between Rizieq and a female supporter that contained nude photos of the woman. Rizieq subsequently fled to Saudi Arabia, living in exile until late 2020, whereupon his chaotic return to Indonesia, he promptly earned a jail term for violating pandemic health quarantine laws and spreading misinformation regarding a swab test.

While Rizieq received a full acquittal in June 2024, much has changed since the FPI's halcyon days. Former President Widodo's banning of FPI and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) – part of the wider effort to suppress Islamist-based opposition in recent years – eliminated traditional platforms that Rizieq could utilise to launch his comeback. Furthermore, his self-imposed exile and subsequent imprisonment may have diminished his influence.

The previously amicable relationship between Rizieq and Prabowo, particularly in the pre-COVID years, might well shift depending how Rizieq approaches his opposition role. With a sprawling and diverse governing coalition that has subsumed several Islamically-focused parties, Prabowo now has little use for an Islamic firebrand.

Potential political rivals of the President may see it differently. Presidential candidate and former Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan, a close ally of Rizieq during the 212 heyday, was seen attending the latter's daughter's wedding in July 2024. 

Alex Benjamin

## THE POLITICAL RINSE CYCLE

Hans Rosling, the late Swedish physicist and academic, once declared that “If you have democracy, people will vote for washing machines. They love them.”

Given the recent trending choices of a plurality of European voters, the declaration still stands, even if not quite in the way Rosling meant.

I say this because a rising number of European electorates are voting for parties actively engaged in laundering their past. They are redefining national cleanliness, one load at a time, as an ad agency copywriter might try to sell it to us.

Case in point: the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party said very recently that it would replace its radical youth wing, which has been classified an extremist group by intelligence services. The youth wing’s members, mostly aged 16 to 30, have frequently been implicated in using racist chants as well as holding meetings with open neo-Nazis.

Why is AfD doing this? Simple. This particular spin cycle is all about making itself look clean and fresh to the electorate before the German federal election scheduled for February 23, while washing away opposition to a future AfD role in a ruling coalition.

To date, all of Germany’s other major parties have refused to enter coalitions with the AfD at both state and national level.

Right now, AfD is achieving second place (18%) in opinion polls, behind the centre-right CDU by a decent margin (32%) but, startlingly in German political terms, ahead of the centre-left SPD (15%). It is miles ahead of the liberal FDP (4%) party, which precipitated the election in the first place by forcing the collapse of the SPD coalition.

This second-place polling comes hot on the heels of a September election that saw the AfD become the first far-right party in Germany’s post-World War II history to win a state election, in the former East German region of Thuringia.

It also put in strong performances in elections in two other ex-communist eastern states, Saxony and Brandenburg.

Meanwhile, in the European elections earlier this year, AfD came second in Germany – despite a series of crises, including a Chinese spying scandal involving an AfD parliamentary assistant in Brussels.

So, what does all of that mean from a pro-Jewish and pro-Israel perspective?

Parties like the AfD are resolutely anti-immigrant and most definitely anti-Islam. They therefore have made noises about support for Israel that could initially appeal to Jewish ears, given how much of the European mainstream has turned relentlessly anti-Israeli since October 7.

I have written before in these pages about how the chief of staff for French far-right leader Marine Le Pen reached out to me saying she wanted to meet. When I asked why, her answer was simple: “Because my enemy’s enemy is my friend” (we didn’t meet).

Friends? Despite all the laundering and re-writing of history, these populist and far-right politicians are not all they claim to be.

For instance, most oppose circumcision and religious slaughter – essential Jewish interests – not necessarily because they are anti-Jewish, but because we are caught in the anti-Muslim crosshairs.

In the grand scheme of things, Jews are a circle that it is impossible for these right-wing nationalists to square.

And yet, some Jewish voters are increasingly supporting these parties. The Israeli Government has also actively courted them, such is the sense of abandonment and lack of meaningful support in the post-October 7 landscape by ruling and traditional parties of the centre.

Jews in the Netherlands found themselves cheering far-right political leader Geert Wilders after the Amsterdam pogrom attempt against Israeli and Jewish soccer fans on Nov. 7.

And if you want an indication of the effectiveness of Marine Le Pen’s efforts to whitewash her and her party’s image, look no further than Serge Klarsfeld, a Holocaust survivor who spent his life hunting down former Nazis. Presented with a choice between the hard-left France Unbowed movement and Le Pen’s far-right National Rally party, the 88-year-old Jewish rights activist said he would vote for the latter “without hesitation”.

While no polling is available on how French Jews voted in recent French elections, results from areas with large Jewish communities suggest support for the far-right is growing.

Time will tell if the AfD can accomplish a similar feat in Germany. Many Italian Jews seem to like far-right PM Giorgia Meloni. Jews, overall, live peaceful lives in Victor Orban’s Hungary.

One thing is certain: The drums of the washing machines are constantly churning, and Jewish concerns about past antisemitism are ostensibly being washed away each election cycle. The pro-Zionist and pro-Jewish vote is the nichest of the niche votes in Europe, but we are nonetheless a bellwether for an increasingly growing demographic of voters now open to options that were once unthinkable.

Trouble is, history has shown us that by the time buyer’s remorse kicks in, it’s often too late.



# BEHIND THE NEWS

## ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Single rockets were launched from Gaza into Israel on Nov. 20, Nov. 24 Dec. 2 and Dec. 3, plus four on Dec. 11, causing no damage. Israel has suffered at least 386 military casualties since the start of ground operations in and around Gaza last year, including 19 soldiers killed between the start of November and Dec. 10.

Attempted and successful terrorist attacks continue throughout the West Bank, including a stabbing and a car ramming. On Nov. 29, nine Israelis, including four soldiers, were injured in a shooting attack on a bus near Ariel. On Dec. 12, another shooting attack on a bus in the West Bank killed a 12-year-old and wounded several others.

Israeli counterterrorism operations in the West Bank continue to result in many terrorists killed or detained.

## PA-HAMAS POWER SHARING DEAL ANNOUNCED, THEN COLLAPSES

It was reported on Dec. 4 that talks in Cairo to form a joint Palestinian committee between Fatah and Hamas to govern post-war Gaza had faltered due to disagreements over power-sharing – especially Hamas demands for control over financial and security portfolios.

Earlier reports on Dec. 3 had indicated a power-sharing agreement had been reached to establish a joint committee of ten to 15 members to oversee Gaza, focussing on health, economy, and infrastructure.

## HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS ADVANCING

According to reports on Dec.

10, negotiations for a potential Gaza ceasefire-for-hostages deal have made significant advances, with draft agreements exchanged between Hamas and mediators. Hamas has reportedly been identifying living hostages and coordinating with other armed groups, including Islamic Jihad, to provide information on hostages' medical conditions and locations. Reports suggest a limited deal could free up to 33 elderly, female, minor and medically vulnerable hostages, in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, increased humanitarian aid to Gaza and a ceasefire lasting between 45 and 60 days.

Videos of two hostages were released in early December, possibly to pressure negotiators.

Israeli PM Netanyahu has expressed optimism about concluding a deal soon. However, some key issues reportedly remain unresolved, including Hamas' demand for a complete IDF withdrawal from Gaza and other long-term ceasefire terms.

## UNRWA SUSPENDS DISTRIBUTION AS GAZA AID INCREASES

On Dec. 1, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) announced it was temporarily pausing the delivery of aid into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing due to its convoys being constantly looted by armed gangs, including one 109-truck convoy almost totally looted on Nov. 16.

In response, Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) noted that UNRWA only provided seven per cent of the Gaza aid delivered in November.

Israel accuses Hamas of being behind the looting. Hamas reportedly formed a new strikeforce at the end of November to deal with the looting and

price gouging on the black market, allegedly killing dozens of gang members and other Palestinians in clashes to ensure Hamas' sole control over aid distribution, an important source of its revenue and political power.

Israel has recently taken steps to increase aid delivery, including opening more crossing points. COGAT figures show 2,323 aid trucks entered Gaza in November, but a major uptick in early December, with 350 aid trucks entering Gaza on Dec. 10 and 201 on Dec. 9. However, large aid stockpiles often sit inside the border waiting for agencies to collect them. For instance, COGAT said there were 685 truckloads waiting for collection inside Gaza on Dec. 8.

## HEZBOLLAH'S FINAL MISSILE FLURRY

In the days before the Nov. 27 ceasefire deal was signed, Hezbollah launched a flurry of attacks against multiple Israeli cities, including some 250 rockets fired at northern and central Israel on Nov. 25. Overall, during the escalation in fighting between Sept. 20 and Nov. 27, Hezbollah launched roughly 9,800 projectiles at Israel. On Nov. 19, Italy's Defence Ministry said Hezbollah had fired eight rockets at a UNIFIL base in southern Lebanon, an attack Italy initially blamed on Israel.

## FEWER ATTACKS ON ISRAEL FROM IRAQ AND YEMEN

The Iran-backed Islamic Resistance in Iraq has dramatically reduced its drone attacks against Israel since early November, despite bold claims from the various groups that they would not back down.

Attacks from the Houthis in Ye-

men continue, although these have reportedly also reduced. The Houthis launched ballistic missiles targeting Israel on Dec. 1, 7 and 8, all of which the IDF intercepted. A Houthi drone stuck an apartment building in the central Israel town of Yavne on Dec. 11, causing a fire but no injuries.

## UN NUCLEAR WATCHDOG CENSURES IRAN

The Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) passed a resolution on Nov. 21 demanding that Teheran take “essential and urgent” steps to explain traces of uranium found at undeclared sites in Iran and allow UN inspectors access to these locations. The resolution also tasked the IAEA with issuing an updated assessment regarding unresolved issues about Iran’s nuclear activities and providing a comprehensive account of Teheran’s lack of cooperation with the agency.

In response, Iran began injecting UF<sub>4</sub> gas into newly installed advanced centrifuges at the Fordow and Natanz sites. Iran is currently operating more than 20,000 centrifuges of various types and has accumulated enough fissile material for several atomic warheads. Additionally, Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – which forbids the development of nuclear weapons – if the 2015 nuclear deal’s ‘snapback’ mechanism to reinstate sanctions on Iran is triggered.

## IRANIAN HIT SQUADS TARGET PROMINENT JEWS IN UAE, CANADA

The Chabad organisation’s emissary to Abu Dhabi, Rabbi Zvi Kogan, was found dead on Nov. 24, three days after he was reported missing. His body was found near the Emirati city of al-Ain following his kidnapping by three Shi’ite Uzbek nationals likely operating under instructions

from Iran. The suspects fled to Turkey, where they were arrested, and will likely be extradited back to the UAE.

It was also reported that prominent Canadian Jewish human rights advocate Irwin Cotler, a former attorney-general of Canada, had been the target of an Iranian assassination plot foiled by Canadian law enforcement authorities. Cotler, 84, has been at the forefront a global campaign to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) a terrorist organisation. He has also represented Iranian political prisoners.

## ICC ARREST WARRANTS AGAINST NETANYAHU DENOUNCED

US President Joe Biden unequivocally denounced the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu and former

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, stating on Nov. 21 that they are “outrageous”. Italy’s Defence Minister Guido Crosetto similarly said on Nov. 23 that it is “absurd” to put Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on the same level as Hamas, echoing comments the previous day from Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Argentina’s President Javier Milei, on Nov. 21, also expressed his country’s “profound disagreement” with the ICC decision.

## UN DISMISSES SPECIAL ADVISER AFTER REFUSAL TO ACCUSE ISRAEL OF GENOCIDE

On Nov. 26, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, the UN Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention, left her role after the UN declined to renew her contract, reportedly due to her refusal to label Israel’s actions in Gaza “genocide”.



## STRANGER THAN FICTION

### “ONLY A FLESH WOUND”

On June 19, as tensions between Israel and Hezbollah continued to rise in the wake of Hezbollah’s constant projectile fire into Israel, then-Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned Israel that if it launched a major offensive against Hezbollah, no place in Israel would be spared Hezbollah’s rockets, and Hezbollah might launch a ground invasion.

He regularly insisted that the only way Hezbollah would stop attacking Israel was if a ceasefire was declared in Gaza.

However, once the Israeli offensive did come, almost the entire upper echelon of Hezbollah’s leadership, including Nasrallah, was wiped out. An estimated 3,500 other Hezbollah fighters were killed, and vast numbers of Hezbollah rockets were destroyed – estimates say Hezbollah lost 70 to 80% of what it had, plus the factories to make more – along with the huge network of tunnels, bases

and other military infrastructure it had spent years building. Hezbollah rocket attacks into Israel were largely ineffective, and the terror group agreed to a ceasefire while the conflict in Gaza continues that requires Hezbollah to withdraw from the border area.

So, who won? Well, according to Hezbollah’s sole remaining leader, Naim Qassem, Nasrallah’s replacement’s replacement as Secretary-General, it was a “great victory” for Hezbollah.

Like the Black Knight, in a famous scene from the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, who has both his arms cut off but insists it’s just a “flesh wound”, Naim stated in a Nov. 29 address that Hezbollah had won because “we prevented the enemy from destroying Hezbollah. We won because we prevented it from finishing off the resistance.” It was also a victory, he said, “due to... the ferocity of the fighting and the great sacrifices.” (Translation from the Middle East Media Research Institute)

Lucky for Hezbollah it won. Imagine what terrible shape it would be in had it lost!





## COVER STORY

# A REGION TRANSFORMED

## FROM A LEBANON CEASEFIRE TO SYRIAN UPHEAVAL

Ilan Evyatar

As northern Israel returned to a fragile calm following the November 27 ceasefire with Hezbollah and Lebanon, the reverberations of Israel's military successes against Hezbollah and Iran unexpectedly extended to a new sphere.

In Syria, within hours of the announcement of the ceasefire, Turkish-backed rebels launched a rapid ten-day offensive that culminated in the collapse of the Assad regime – a seismic event reshaping the Middle East's strategic landscape. This dramatic upheaval has transformed regional dynamics, presenting Israel and its neighbours with both opportunities and challenges.

The Assad regime's sudden collapse marks a major blow to Iran's ambitions in the region. Assad's Syria served as a conduit for weapons and strategic support to Hezbollah. Iran also invested massively in supporting the Syrian regime. Yet, in the face of a well-coordinated rebel offensive, the regime crumbled, leaving Teheran both red-faced and weakened.

Worryingly, Israeli intelligence was once again caught off-balance. All eyes had been on Lebanon after the ceasefire with Hezbollah went into effect, hopefully bringing to a close the war that began on Oct. 8, 2023, when Hezbollah began firing missiles into Israel on a daily basis in support of Hamas' invasion the day before. This had forced the mass evacuation of large areas of northern Israel for more than a year.

After the ceasefire, the focus in Israel was on questions such as whether Hezbollah would adhere to the terms of the deal, as it has not done in the past; how Israel should respond if Hezbollah begins testing the limits; and whether Israel should have continued the fight to further push back and weaken the Iran-backed group, rather than agree to

the deal. No one foresaw that the focus of events would rapidly switch to Syria, or that the Assad regime could be in danger from Islamist rebels long believed to be contained in a small region of northwest Syria.

Nonetheless, following the unexpected and chaotic developments in Syria, Israel moved swiftly to secure its interests. Israeli forces launched some 350 airstrikes during a 48-hour campaign, reportedly destroying Syrian army fighter jets, naval ships, weapons stockpiles and air defences to prevent them from falling into the hands of the rebels, led by the militant Islamist faction *Hayat Tahrir*

*a-Sham* (HTS, "Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant"). The IDF was also said to have hit "research centres" where chemical weapons were being developed. Concurrently, Israel moved forces into former Syrian army border posts in the Golan, establishing a strategic buffer zone to prevent any possibility of spillover of the Syrian conflict into Israeli territory.

The collapse of Assad's regime has left Hezbollah even more isolated after the group had already sustained devastating blows in Israel's two-month offensive – launched after almost a year of cross-border fire. Thousands of its fighters are reportedly dead and more wounded; its leader Hassan Nasrallah and the top echelons of the organisation have been eliminated; and Israeli troops now control parts of southern Lebanon (though the ceasefire deal requires them to withdraw by late January).

Now, without its supply lines through Syria, Hezbollah is further weakened and could face challenges from other Lebanese factions that, for years, were cowed and overshadowed by Hezbollah's overwhelming firepower, largely supplied by Iran (though recent intelligence suggests most Hezbollah arms are Russian, and may have been supplied

**“The collapse of Assad's regime has left Hezbollah even more isolated after the group had already sustained devastating blows in Israel's two-month offensive – launched after almost a year of cross-border fire”**

via the Syrian regime).

Days before Bashar al-Assad fled to Moscow, bringing an end to a dynasty that his father Hafez began over 50 years earlier, Iran had been saying it would consider sending troops to prop up the regime. On Dec. 2, the *Teheran Times* published a photo of Assad and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Aragachi on its front page, declaring Iran’s “ironclad backing” for the Assad regime and proclaiming its “strategic resolve” to defend the “Axis of Resistance”. Less than a week later, Assad was gone, and Teheran was left looking feckless.



Syrians celebrate the fall of the 54 years long Assad regime, but the intentions of the Assad’s successors are unclear at best (Image: Creative Commons)

**F**or Israel, the disintegration of the Iranian axis presents clear strategic advantages. With Hezbollah severely weakened, Hamas almost completely dismantled and the Assad regime removed, Iran’s “Ring of Fire” has been all but extinguished. Similarly, the so-called “Shi’ite Crescent” stretching from Teheran to the Mediterranean has been bisected. However, the vacuum left by Assad’s fall also presents serious risks, including the emergence of new and unpredictable threats, in particular Islamic radicalism.

Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, the leader of the Syrian rebels, has attempted to distance himself from his jihadist past, dropping his *nomme de guerre* – which, perhaps worryingly from Israel’s perspective, means “from the Golan” – and is now using his real name, Ahmed a-Shaara.

Historically, Jolani travelled from Syria to Iraq to fight the US and joined al-Qaeda, was captured by the US military and spent time in Abu Ghraib prison before returning to Syria and founding the al-Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front. He later split with al-Qaeda, rebranding his group as *Jabhat*

*Fateah a-Sham* and then as HTS. Despite his rebranding efforts, Israeli officials and analysts mostly view him as a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” – a dedicated jihadist prepared to appear moderate as a temporary tactic to consolidate power. HTS remains sanctioned as a terrorist organisation by several countries, including the US and UK, yet reports in early December worryingly suggest both countries are considering reassessing this status.

Turkey’s role in the Syrian conflict has added another layer of complexity to the regional landscape. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s ambitions, which include positioning Turkey as a dominant regional power, have raised alarms in Israel and among other Middle Eastern states such as Jordan, Egypt and the UAE.

Erdogan’s long-standing hostility toward Israel presents another threat. On July 28, the Turkish President, long known for his rhetorical flushes, and especially those aimed at Israel, threatened that the NATO member state could intervene militarily against the Jewish state on behalf of the Palestinians: “We must be very strong so that Israel



Ahmed a-Shaara, AKA Abu Mohammed al-Jolani: Is he still a jihadist or has he moderated? (Image: Creative Commons)

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can't do these things to Palestine. Just as we entered Karabakh, just as we entered Libya, we might do the same to them. There is nothing we cannot do," Erdogan said at the time.

Within Israel, there are now growing calls to capitalise on Iran's weakened position following the collapse in Syria. Some defence analysts have urged the Government to deliver a decisive blow to Iran's nuclear program while its regional network is in disarray and air defences all but non-existent following Israel's counter-strike on them on Oct. 26. However, any such move would require careful coordination with international partners, especially the United States.

The ceasefire with Lebanon and the collapse of Assad's regime mark a turning point for the Middle East. While these developments weaken Iran and its allies – and will be welcomed by the conservative Arab states that fear the destabilisation fomented by Iran and its "Axis of Resistance" – they also create a uniquely volatile environment. The success of Sunni jihadists in Syria could threaten other Arab governments, including Jordan, as well as risk new conflict across the previously relatively quiet Israel-Syrian border.

Israel's swift actions in the Golan and its strikes on previous Syrian regime positions and weapons reflect its commitment to safeguarding its security in the face of this uncertainty, but the challenges ahead are significant.

The coming months will test yet again Israel's ability to

navigate a complex and shifting regional landscape. With new threats emerging and old alliances crumbling, the Middle East could stand on the brink of profound transformation. It is unclear if the second Trump Administration in the US will engage or seek to retreat from the region in the face of this uncertainty. For Israel, the stakes could not be higher. Its actions now have the potential to shape not only its own security but also the future balance of power for the region as a whole.

AIR

## WITH ASSAD GONE – WHAT'S NEXT?

Ehud Yaari



Few Syrians can even remember their country before the Assad family took control (Image: Shutterstock)

The fall of the Assad regime is the greatest event of the war over the past year, although the Syrian army did not itself take part in the fighting. The "ring of fire" that Iran had planned to establish around Israel has been dismantled with the loss of the single most important link in the chain, Syria. Hezbollah is now locked in an isolated enclave in south and west Lebanon. Hamas is transformed from a well-equipped terrorist army based in tunnels into a scattered, armed underground. The multitude of Iranian-sponsored Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Units proved to be ineffective in spite of their bombastic rhetoric. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps opted to avoid getting into direct continuous exchanges of blows with Israel, after having a taste of Israel's attack capabilities. Assad's downfall was made possible by a year of Israeli strikes on Iranian targets, military industries and air defence systems in Syria.

In spite of the awkward manner in which Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has managed these campaigns – slowing them down and losing momentum at times – the Israel Defence Forces, with its superb air force,

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has prevailed. Having defeated its enemies, Israel will be looked upon differently by friends and foes alike.

A lunatic megalomaniac, Yahya Sinwar, dreamt of changing the geo-strategic map of the Middle East via a brutal surprise attack on October 7 of last year. He succeeded in his mission, but the region is changing in ways totally different from what he and Hamas prayed for. Yes, Israel is in great pain and divided at home. But for many years to come, its rivals will not dare to test its power.

One of the most important commentators in Teheran, Suheil Karimi, has warned on Iranian television that “without Assad, ultimately there will be no Hezbollah.” Weakened, confused and decapitated, Hezbollah is bound to lose much of its political clout inside Lebanon. Many in the Land of Cedars will seek to stop the remnants of Hezbollah’s leadership from casting a veto over the election of a new president and the composition of a new government. They might also seek to prevent Hezbollah from rearming.

## ISRAEL’S MISTAKES IN SYRIA

A decade ago, Israel could have helped to bring about the collapse of the Assad regime, by assisting the different rebel factions then attacking Damascus. But unnecessary hesitations and an aversion to taking calculated risks prevented the government from helping the rebels. In September 2015, the Russian air force appeared on the scene and, together with Lebanese Hezbollah troops and Iranian Quds Force officers, managed to suppress the insurgency. Just recently, Prime Minister Netanyahu was on the verge of committing a major blunder by trying to lobby the US Administration to offer sanctions relief to Assad in the hope that he would prevent arms shipments going to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Luckily, this effort was overtaken by events – the lightning success of the insurgency.

Israeli intelligence agencies were blind to what was going on inside Syria north of the immediate vicinity of the Golan Heights. Israel was in the dark about the intensive preparations for an offensive by Muhammad al-Jolani



Israeli PM Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yisrael Katz visit near the Israel-Syria border with Northern Command Commander Uri Gordin and Division 210 Commander Brigadier General Uri Plai (Image: Kobi Gideon, GPO)

in Idlib province. Israel was also unaware of the degree of support he was getting from Turkey. Moreover, Israeli intelligence failed to understand that Syrian army divisions were a house of cards ready to fall when the first shot was fired. Finally, Israel did not grasp how international sanctions had made Syria’s economic situation so desperate – 27,000 Syrian lira to one US dollar! Assad was relying on soldiers who were bankrupt and millions of citizens sunk in poverty and misery.

Al-Jolani did not plan to topple the regime at this time. He had obtained a green light from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to expand the territory he was controlling in the northwestern province of Idlib and to seize the M4 highway running nearby. However, when the rebels realised that battalion after battalion of the Syrian Army’s 25th division defending Aleppo were taking off their uniforms and fleeing, a decision was taken to race to the capital.

## WHO ARE THE SYRIAN REBELS?

The rebels are a mosaic of armed militias with different shades of Islamist beliefs.

They include former al-Qaeda members like al-Jolani himself (who has now started wearing a suit and a tie). They include bands of armed villagers and criminal gangs. It will be difficult to establish a decent central government to replace Assad’s corrupt administration. It will take a long time before Syria has a stable compromise coalition among the plethora of players. It’s safe to assume that the Kurds will maintain autonomous control over a quarter of Syria’s territory. The Alawites, removed from power, may try to carve out a separate administration along the coast around Latakia and Tartus, probably with Russian support.

So far, al-Jolani and his allies are not talking about imposing Sharia law on Syria in pursuit of a jihadist agenda. Rather, they stress the need to ultimately bring home millions of Syrian refugees, mainly from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon and then probably from Western Europe. Al-Jolani has also issued assurances to non-Sunni religious minorities in Syria – Shi’ites, Christians, Ismailis and others – that they will not be discriminated against. He promised Jordan and Lebanon that the new Syria will not become a threat to them.

## WHAT SHOULD ISRAEL DO NOW?

Beyond celebrating the demise of the 54-year-old Assad family regime in Syria, Israel should contemplate some immediate steps.

- Military deployments along the Golan Heights border with Syria have taken place, but should not reach a point where they are seen on the other side of the border as a menace. There is no reason to fear the rebel factions in the adjacent Dara’a and Quneitra provinces. Many of their commanders were assisted by Israel for



years before they had to accept a deal with Assad in 2018. Some of those commanders regularly met Israeli

**“Israeli intelligence agencies were blind to what was going on inside Syria north of the immediate vicinity of the Golan Heights. Israel was in the dark about the intensive preparations for an offensive by Muhammad al-Jolani”**

officers in Tiberias and in other places. Many villages in this region have benefited in the past decade from Israel’s “Good Neighbour” operation, which provided humanitarian aid on a large scale, and many were treated in a field hospital established for them on the Israeli side of the border. Israel should invest in cultivating relations with the local activists, offer support and appear helpful in the co-

ming negotiations on “the Day After in Syria” initiated by UN envoy Geir Pedersen.

- Humanitarian assistance to the half-million Syrian Druze in the province of Sweida, 100 kilometres east of the Golan. During the past year, the Druze have embarked on a non-armed revolt against Assad and they need to be strengthened in order to ensure their role in the future. Israel can drop assistance from the air, but it would be more effective to open a “humanitarian corridor”, either from the Golan – as part of a renewed “Good Neighbour” operation – or through a three kilometre corridor from the Jordanian border to the southern-most Druze village, al-Anat. From there, trucks could reach the provincial capital of Sweida in an hour or so.
- Political advocacy with the incoming Trump Administration to maintain the small American military presence (900 soldiers) in the Kurdish territory of northeast Syria beyond the Euphrates River and in the Tanf enclave where the Syrian, Jordanian and Iraqi borders meet. This minimal presence is essential to keeping the Kurdish administration and military forces in place as a buffer against Iranian attempts to gain re-entry into Syria. Their presence also bolsters the US’s ability to steer the

negotiations over a new constitution and government in a sensible direction.

- Diplomatic fence-mending with Turkey’s Erdogan as the war winds down. Turkey has managed to have the upper hand in its competition with Iran over influence in Syria. Rapprochement with Erdogan would be complicated, yet not impossible. There have been up and down cycles in recent years between Israel and Turkey. The Trump team could encourage such dialogue in order to advance collaboration of moderate Sunni Arab states with both Turkey and Israel as a solid barrier to fend off any Iranian aspirations to regain predominance in the Levant.

AIR

*EhudYaari is the chief Middle East commentator for Israel television Channel 12 and Lafer International Fellow of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. © Jerusalem Strategic Tribune (jstribune.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## CAN THE LEBANON CEASEFIRE HOLD?

David Makovsky

In the lead-up to the new ceasefire with Hezbollah, signed on November 27, the Israeli public – impressed by their military’s achievements in Lebanon over the past two months – had high expectations for the terms their leaders would ultimately negotiate. After all, Israel had decapitated much of Hezbollah’s top leadership, eliminated a large part of its arsenal, and destroyed tunnels near border villages that were intended to be used for an attack on northern Israel.

This outcome also shattered the mutual deterrence that had existed since the 2006 war. In accepting a ceasefire, Hezbollah agreed to decouple its war with Israel from Hamas’ war in Gaza, something the group’s late leader



Empty road in northern Israel’s Upper Galilee region in the wake of the Israel-Hezbollah war (Image: Shutterstock)

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Hassan Nasrallah had pointedly refused to do. Moreover, Iran – Hezbollah’s patron and arms supplier – welcomed the ceasefire in a public statement. This was likely a bitter pill for Teheran to swallow given that it has long viewed Hezbollah’s arsenal of 150,000 rockets as a deterrent to potential Israeli military strikes on the Iranian nuclear program.

In light of these successes, local officials in northern Israel felt that the Government had ample leverage to demand strong ceasefire terms that would avoid a repeat of 2006, when UN Security Council Resolution 1701 was adopted. That resolution was intended to end the war and bring stability to southern Lebanon and northern Israel by ensuring that Hezbollah did not deploy south of the Litani River. Yet it failed completely, in large part because the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) were unwilling to prevent Hezbollah from returning to these areas, and also because the international community lost interest in the resolution once the war ended.

During the current war, northern Israeli mayors – who represent many of the estimated 60,000 citizens displaced from their homes since October 2023 – repeatedly urged the Government to establish a depopulated buffer zone in southern Lebanon. Without such a buffer, they argued, Hezbollah fighters would continue embedding themselves within the Lebanese border population and launching short-range anti-tank weapons at nearby Israeli towns. The mayors warned that, under such conditions, northern residents would be unwilling to return home.

After the terms of the ceasefire were announced, a poll by Israel’s *Channel 12* indicated that only 37% of the Israeli public supported it. Yet many Israelis are hopeful that the agreement will ensure their right to self-defence, given the Government’s reported side letter with the United States. (The specific contents of this letter have not been released, but it is believed to give Israel some leeway for responding militarily to Hezbollah violations and, perhaps, maintaining certain kinds of reconnaissance flights over parts of Lebanon.) Many Israelis are also eager to see less burden on reservists, which the ceasefire may soon bring – if it holds.

## THE COMPLIANCE ADJUDICATION MECHANISM

Central to the ceasefire is an enforcement mechanism to adjudicate compliance. The United States plans to aid in enforcement by chairing a panel that reviews complaints. Specifically, Washington could leverage its advanced intelligence capabilities to ascertain if there has been a violation and/or insist that the LAF address the problem. Israel is hopeful that US involvement could make the difference. Moreover, the US Congress is likely to condition any new funding for the LAF on the seriousness of its compliance.

Yet US oversight of the compliance mechanism will face scrutiny. Critics may question whether this process



Israelis will not view the war in Lebanon as a success unless it ends with a secure border that protects northern residents from Hezbollah anti-tank missile attacks (Image: Shutterstock)

could slow Israel’s response, limit its freedom of action, and even make the United States culpable for perceived failures. Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu is likely focused on this potential friction because of the political controversy surrounding the ceasefire within Israel.

More Israelis are now critiquing the mindset that had prevailed in their country since 2006, which was to turn a blind eye to violations in order to preserve the fragile quiet that Resolution 1701 created. In Israel, the phrase “we became addicted to calm” is commonly used to advocate a more preventive or pre-emptive stance on threats before they become catastrophic.

This issue is particularly acute now, when both sides are mutually testing the ceasefire. For instance, on Dec. 2, when Hezbollah fired two mortars at an Israeli military base on Mount Dov, adjacent to the Golan Heights, Israel responded with attacks on 30 targets in Lebanon.

US officials are hopeful that the ceasefire will hold. US President Joe Biden’s envoy Amos Hochstein, who brokered the ceasefire, stated on *CNBC* that this new US-led mechanism will ensure “on the ground” that Hezbollah is “not returning”, that there is “dismantling of their terrorist infrastructure,” and that terrorist organisations do not have “a foothold in South Lebanon again.” However, there are several challenges that could undermine these goals.

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First, international fatigue is bound to reappear after the fighting ends, as it did in 2006, reducing foreign interest in ensuring compliance. Second, Iran and Hezbollah are bound to use their friendly media outlets to deny any violations, making it easier for the group to rebuild. Third, the United States and France – both of which will be part of the new mechanism – might not view violations and military responses the same way Israel does. For instance, both governments reportedly felt that some of Israel’s responses in the first days of the ceasefire were excessive. Moreover, Lebanon is bound to urge France to take a more lenient view of any Hezbollah violations given the potential damage wrought by Israeli military responses.

Thus, as Hezbollah probes to see what it can get away with during the ceasefire, the United States and Israel must develop a shared approach to defining major violations and addressing them. Israel will usually prefer a stronger military response to deter Hezbollah and set the “rules of the game,” while Washington and Paris may believe that too strong a reaction could lead back to war.

The biggest question hovering over the ceasefire is whether the LAF will finally have the willpower to confront Hezbollah. One would hope that the Lebanese Government understands the stakes given the destructive failures that followed Resolution 1701 after 2006, but there are no guarantees. If the United States and Israel do not work together, the LAF could easily revert to the path of least resistance and avoid confronting the so-called “resistance.”

## HOW THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL CAN WORK TOGETHER

Leading the US ceasefire implementation effort will be Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers, the head of Special Operations Command Central, who will co-chair the US side with Hochstein during the 60-day transition period and ensure that the adjudication mechanism is addressing violations effectively. The United States will focus on violations such

**“As Hezbollah probes to see what it can get away with during the ceasefire, the United States and Israel must develop a shared approach to defining major violations and addressing them”**

as rocket launcher deployments south of the Litani, tunnel construction, and weapons manufacturing. Investigations into violations will apparently take place within 24 to 28 hours after a complaint is made. Netanyahu, however, may wish to go further. If most residents of northern Israel are unable to return to their homes, he is bound to see this as the final verdict on the ceasefire and could start pressing for greatly expanded military responses to Hezbollah violations.

Bilateral cooperation could take different forms, but a shared approach is essential for effective implementation. As noted above, reaching an agreed definition of “ceasefire violation” is paramount. This would enable close cooperation between the Israel Defence Force Northern Command, Jeffers’ team in Beirut, and US Central Command in identifying threats and sharing intelligence that goes beyond southern Lebanon, given Hezbollah’s desire to rebuild itself through Iranian arms transfers and other activities. Additionally, US-Israel cooperation on public messaging will be critical as Iranian and Hezbollah media outlets try to downplay the group’s likely violations. Washington demonstrated the importance of sharing declassified intelligence to help shape public narratives after Israel was wrongfully accused of bombing a Gaza hospital just after October 7. This template should be considered if similar situations arise in Lebanon. Finally, if European and Gulf states offer new support to the LAF at an upcoming donor conference, the United States should encourage them to link this assistance to LAF compliance with the ceasefire’s terms, as the US Congress is likely to require.

## CONCLUSION

Some may argue that close US-Israel coordination on these issues is not particularly critical at the moment, claiming that it will take years for Hezbollah to rebuild its capabilities. Others might point to the 60-day transition period, which coincides with the start of the Trump Administration, as an opportunity to review the policy and potentially make adjustments.

Yet, to ensure the agreement’s success, the United States and Israel must have a shared understanding of the ceasefire’s terms and how to act if it is violated. This is key to strengthening the credibility of the enforcement mechanism and ensuring that all parties have learned from the failures of Resolution 1701. AIR

*David Makovsky is the Ziegler Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Director of its Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations. ©Washington Institute, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved. This article was written before the collapse of Syria’s Assad regime.*

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# A week – and fifty years

Sam Lipski

I begin with a plea to readers. Please forgive me for quoting Lenin. But I couldn't help noticing that commentators and analysts were citing Valdimir Ilyich. That happened quite a few times during the days in December when I began writing these brief reflections.

Said Lenin: "There are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks when decades happen."

The pundits using the Lenin quote were reacting to the tectonic shifts in the Middle East.

In just a few days Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime in Syria had collapsed, "gradually then suddenly"; the *Hayat Tahrir a-Sham* rebels had taken control; the Iranians and Russians had scuttled out of Damascus. In 48 hours of air and naval strikes, the IDF had destroyed most of Syria's weapons stockpiles.

Definitely "a week when decades happened."

It's also been a week when Australia's Jews and the burgeoning antisemitism in this country shared the headlines with the historic events in Israel and the Middle East. As they've done so often since October 7.

The world changed on that date. Not just for Israel and the Jews. And not just for what remains of Western civilisation. So much has happened since, with Israel at the centre of it all, it may seem odd to choose just one week to comment about.

I admit it. Seemingly very odd. But then I'd argue that it hasn't been just another such week.

The firebombing of the Adass Israel Synagogue on December 6 in Melbourne made sure it wasn't. For once

"unprecedented" – that overused word – was applied correctly. The deliberate torching of a house of worship – with people inside – was a terrorist act without precedent, even among the thousands of antisemitic incidents since the orgy of Jew-hatred by pro-Hamas demonstrators at the Sydney Opera House on Oct. 9, 2023.

Yet, more than a year later, by Dec. 6, 2024, and with Israel still at war, Jews were undoubtedly shocked, appalled and frightened by the synagogue arson. But it was telling that, as so many community leaders pointed out, we were not surprised. Antisemitism had been repeatedly, even routinely, manifest in the incessant street protests and marches by pro-Hamas and pro-Hezbollah supporters. Jew hatred had been incited regularly by Islamist preachers. Even violence against Jews and Jewish property – especially in Melbourne and Sydney – had become "normalised" in Australia. We were no longer surprised.

Nor were we surprised when the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center warned international Jewish travellers that Australia was not safe for them to visit. The Center cited two reasons for its travel alert: the Australian

**"It's also been a week when Australia's Jews and the burgeoning antisemitism in this country shared the headlines with the historic events in Israel and the Middle East. As they've done so often since October 7"**

Government's failure "to protect Jewish communities... from Islamists and other extremists" and Australia's "anti-Israel" stance at the UN.

Although Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, clearly acting under widespread pressure after the synagogue firebombing, announced a dedicated police and intelligence task force to tackle antisemitism, it was rightly adjudged as "too little too late."

Then, just to round off a week "when decades happened", Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong, in the 2024 Hawke Lecture, doubled down on her obsession with criticising Israel. By bracketing Israel's existential fight for survival with China and Russia's outrages against international norms, and insisting that it was not antisemitic to do so, she deservedly earned the robust response and condemnation from Jewish and non-Jewish quarters.

AIJAC decried her "moral relativism" and "factual confusion".

And in the *Australian* (11/12/24) Anthony Bergin, a Senior Fellow at Strategic Analysis Australia, and Mike Kelly, a former Labor minister, wrote: "Australia's domestic antisemitic escalation and foreign policy vilification of the Jewish state aren't coincidental but interdependent."

For me, that sentence summarises and encapsulates AIJAC's mission today and into the future. Israel's destiny and the sustainability of a vibrant Jewish community in Australia are inextricably linked. They have been since May 14, 1948, and the reborn independent Jewish state of Israel.



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AIJAC, as one of the Jewish community’s national agencies, embodies that view in its title. It is at one and the same time the “Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council.”

Perhaps I can clarify that statement a bit further by going back to AIJAC’s beginnings.

When AIJAC invited me to contribute to this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the *Review*, I asked for a copy of what I’d written for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For one thing, I wanted to avoid repeating myself. But I also wanted to recall what



At the journalistic coalface: Sam Lipski with Bob Hawke

had changed in Australia’s relationship with Israel, and how those changes affected the way Jews were seen and saw themselves in Australian society today.

Reflecting on the beginnings in 1974, barely a year after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when the veteran Zionist leaders, Isador Magid and Robert Zabłud, employed me to start Australia-Israel

Publications (AIP), AIJAC’s precursor, I wrote about “the driving force” that led to its establishment.

“(It) was as much the growing discomfort and anxiety of Australian Jews at what was happening to their sense of security in this country, as it was their undoubted concern for Israel’s security in the international arena.”

The constant theme I saw in AIJAC’s first 25 years was “the all-important psychological link between the local Jewish condition and Israel’s standing.”

At the risk of doing the very thing I wanted to avoid, namely repeating myself, I also wrote: “Israel was as unprepared on the propaganda and information fronts as it had been on its security borders” (in the Yom Kippur War). And I continued: “In all the key citadels of the West’s ‘hearts and minds’ the Palestinians now emerged as the victims, and the Israelis as the recalcitrant occupiers.”

It would be simplistic – worse, it would be factually wrong – to suggest that “the more things change the more they stay the same.” For Australian Jews since October 7, these past 14 months have been “the worst of times” and not, as I wrote in these pages, using those very words, about the Yom Kippur War’s aftermath 25 years ago.

Yes, I know that antisemitism has surged to unprecedented levels around the world since October 7. In that hardly comforting sense, Australia’s Jews are not alone. I can agree that other Jewish communities, especially in Europe, face far more depressing and uncertain futures. And I can also agree with the American Jewish writer, Bari Weiss, and so many others who have suggested that it was probably a

delusion to imagine that Jews in the Western democracies could go on as if “immune from history” and antisemitism. “It is a moment,” Weiss has reminded American Jews, “in which the realities reserved for Jews of other times and other places are now, all of a sudden very much our own.”


But for all my life, I believed Australia was, well, “different”.

As the son of immigrants who came here nearly 100 years ago, and who really believed that Australia was the *goldeneh medineh*, the golden country, the haven, the true “peaceable kingdom”, I know those were articles of faith for so many Australian Jews.

As a Jew born in Australia, educated here, and with Australian children and grandchildren; as someone widely involved in this country’s public life and in community service for six decades; and as a lifelong Zionist since my youth movement days, it has been a profound sadness to see and experience what has happened here.

But then I remember where I was on October 7. In a hotel in Tel Aviv when the sirens began sounding, as we were encouraged to go the air-raid shelters on the 17th floor. With my family, we had come to Israel for a family celebration. That Shabbat Simchat Torah morning all celebration was forgotten.

In the week that followed, while my wife and I stayed on, I wrote to a friend in Australia as follows: “What a terrible, heartbreaking, soul-destroying time to be here. But what a privilege to be with the heroic people of Israel. They will fight back in their righteous anger. They shall overcome. We Australian Jews, and all Australians who care about freedom and value life, shall overcome.”

This is the hope, despite all that’s happened, that will sustain Australia’s Jews for the next 50 years and beyond. 

*Nationally renowned Australian journalist, writer and commentator Sam Lipski served as founding editor of the Australia/Israel Review from 1974 to 1982.*

## TOWARD ANOTHER FIFTY YEARS

**Tzvi Fleischer**

It is shocking to contemplate the fact that I have now edited the *Australia/Israel Review (AIR)* for well over a quarter of century – more than half its long and storied existence. Since I first took the helm in October 1999, I have compiled, edited and overseen the layout and design of more than 300 different editions.

It has always been challenging, and often maddening, and stressful, and chaotic – but certainly an achievement





of which to be proud. Not mainly because of the sheer volume of words, pictures and ideas we brought together, but because of the significant role that the *AIR* has played in Australian politics and national life for the past five decades.

I have also had the privilege to oversee major developments in the quality of the *AIR*. We evolved from 28 pages in 1999 to 32 in 2000 to the present 40 in 2005; went from a black and white publication with a colour cover in 1999 to full colour throughout in 2012; and overhauled the magazine's design and layout to the version you see today in a series of steps beginning in 2006.



The first ever edition of *AIR* that the author edited – October 1999

Our digital footprint also evolved enormously. Our web presence was minimal in 1999, social media did not exist, and print was king. Today, our on-line presence, our social media exposure and our digital distribution are the primary ways to reach most of our audience – and far more quickly than print could possibly achieve. Our impact is undoubtedly much greater as a result – but the process involved some steep learning curves.

Since I took the helm, the *Review* has provided analysis, argument, opinions and background throughout the terms of the Howard, Rudd, Gillard, Abbott, Turnbull, Morrison and Albanese governments. We have provided insight from experts and pundits on the political considerations and strategic thinking of Israeli governments led by Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert, Naftali Bennett, Yair Lapid and, repeatedly, Binyamin Netanyahu. We've also done the same for various administrations in Washington – Clinton, Bush Jr, Obama, Trump, Biden and soon, Trump again.

We've covered staggering numbers of major stories over that time – some we broke, some to which we brought unique analysis and expertise, and some on

which we had a major impact through our advocacy and arguments. See the retrospective opposite for just a few examples.

Yet, today, none of them seem as important as the last 15 months: Israel being forced to fight Hamas, along with Hezbollah and the whole Iranian-led “ring of fire”, in a war unlike any ever fought before; Australian and global Jewish communities struck by a surge in antisemitism that far exceeded anything ever seen in my career; the worst crisis in Australia-Israel relations since the *AIR* was founded in 1975. It amounts collectively to the story of a lifetime.

It is no secret that the *AIR* has never been simply a magazine that reports and informs – though I certainly hope we have done that – but has also sought to convince, empower and accomplish positive change. Those are all goals to be proud of – which today seem more urgent than ever.

Of course, everything we accomplished over the last 25 years was constructed on a foundation built by my predecessors – first and foremost our founder Sam Lipski, who shows why he remains such a legend of Australian journalism in the pages opposite. But gratitude must also be extended to the ebullient Michael Danby; Michael Kapel, who greatly strengthened the *AIR*'s national reputation with his knack for deep investigatory work; and the always professional Adam Indikt. I learned a great deal from each of them – and from dozens of dedicated, smart and highly-skilled men and women with whom I have had the privilege of working over the past quarter-century.



Tzvi Fleischer – lowly *AIR* researcher – in the mid-1990s

None, of course, shaped the *AIR* over the years more than our indefatigable and always focused Editorial Chairman, Colin Rubenstein, who was on the scene when I first joined the organisation as a lowly researcher in 1992, and continues to share all his experience and accumulated wisdom.

Fifty years of the *AIR* is certainly an occasion for celebration – but also for reflection. We have sought to provide information, ideas and debate in ways that are fundamentally Australian, fundamentally Jewish and intended to impact our world for the better. In the future, how we do things is inevitably going to change, but as the past 15 months – and especially the past two weeks – have shown, doing them now seems more important than ever. I don't expect to be here in another 50 years. But looking back over the last 25, I greatly hope some version of the *AIR* will still be around in 2075 – in whatever form it then takes.

With Compliments

**Brayelle P/L.**



# 50 YEARS OF HISTORY WITH THE AIR

**AIJAC staff**

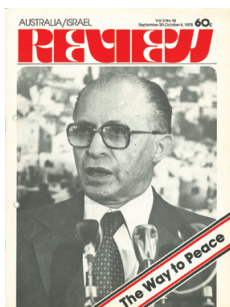
Over the past 50 years, the *Australia/Israel Review* has covered, in its own unique way, numerous dramatic and world-changing events in Australia, Israel and around the world – and broken some major stories with significant effects on Australian political life. Below, we ask you to walk with us through a few of those events and stories through the medium of some of our favourite past editions – out of the nearly 1,000 published over the last half-century.

## VOL. 3, NO. 16 – SEPTEMBER 20-OCTOBER 4, 1978

### First Camp David Summit between Israel and Egypt

Sam Lipski, Editorial:

“As we prepare to welcome the Jewish New Year, 5739, it is tempting to introduce a new method of historical dating: BCD Before Camp David and ACD – After Camp David.”

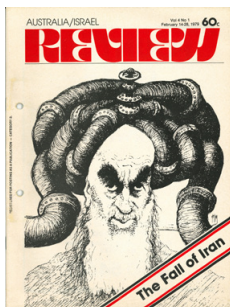


## VOL. 4, NO. 1 – FEBRUARY 14-28, 1979

### Islamic revolution in Iran overthrows the Shah

Chaim Herzog, “Iran and Islam”:

“The main hinge of Western defence was until now Iran, but it no longer occupies that position. For the defence to be realistic, it must be based on political stability, otherwise it has no meaning whatsoever. Political stability and military ability are concentrated today in only one country in the Middle East, namely, Israel. Any new defence scheme of things must establish itself on the



firm base provided by Israel.”

## VOL. 11, NO. 19 – OCTOBER 21-NOVEMBER 3, 1986

### Chaim Herzog becomes first Israeli President to visit Australia

Isador Magid and Robert Zablud, co-Chairmen of AIR, “Comment”:

“The official State Visit to Australia by Israel’s 6th President Chaim Herzog (November 4-10) is symbolic of the excellent relationships between our two countries. This affinity is based on their common values: parliamentary institutions, the rule of law, freedom of the press and association, and respect for the dignity of the individual.



“Ever since the positive UN role played by Australia in Israel’s creation, successive Australian governments have consistently supported Israel’s quest for security and a just, negotiated peace with its neighbours...”

## VOL. 13, NO. 6 – APRIL 15-MAY 8, 1988

### Israel’s 40th Anniversary... and Australia’s 200th

Rabbi John S. Levi, AIR editorial board member, “Israel at 40 – Australia at 200”:

“Australia became a nation in 1901. It fought its wars on battlefields and jungles far from its cities and shores. The safest street and field in Israel is only 30 kilometres from a hostile border. What country, other than Israel, could survive the danger, the abuse and the hatred of the past 40 years and still flourish?



“Australia has the courage to be one of the two or three countries in the United Nations to stand apart from the unremitting Arab and Soviet inspired attacks upon Israel’s legitimacy and statehood, and to vote against them. Australia took a crucial role in the debate to partition Palestine and establish a Jewish State just over forty years ago. Ever since

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then the fate of these two disparate countries has been linked by that most mysterious bond – a sense of friendship.”

**VOL. 16, NO. 20 – NOVEMBER 6-19, 1991**  
**Madrid Peace Conference – first multilateral Arab-Israel face-to-face Summit**

Jeremy Jones, Comment:  
 “In the aftermath of the Madrid meeting the role of America must be to try to maintain the dynamic for peace while resisting the temptation to impose a solution which would increase rather than lessen the bitterness.”



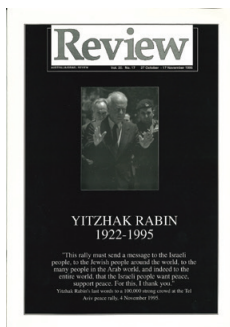
**VOL. 18, NO. 16 – SEPTEMBER 7-20, 1993**  
**Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat kick off the Oslo peace process with a signing ceremony on the White House lawn**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:  
 “Without ignoring the real risks, we can only welcome the historic Israeli/Palestinian agreement as potentially representing a turning point on the road to genuine peace between Israel and her neighbours... One can only hope that the prediction of Israel’s opposition Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu who, fearing an unrepentant PLO state, warned the deal ‘is a guarantee of increased tension, future terrorism, and ultimately, war’ is not fulfilled.”



**VOL. 20, NO. 17 – OCTOBER 17-NOVEMBER 20, 1995**  
**Rabin is assassinated by a Jewish extremist**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:  
 “In that one fatal moment, Israel lost a unique and towering leader, one of extraordinary courage, commitment and vision. His like may not come again... it becomes the responsibility of all of us, Israelis, Australians, people of good will around the world, to see that this great Israeli statesman leaves behind a lasting legacy, a legacy of peace.”



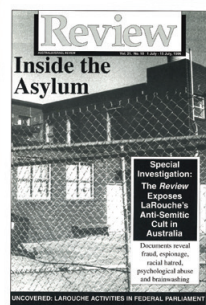
**VOL. 21, NO. 10 – JULY 1-15, 1996**  
**An AIR investigation exposes the devious and underhanded tactics of the Citizens Electoral Council (CEC), the Australian followers of American fraudster and conspiracy theorist Lyndon LaRouche**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:  
 “The activities of the CEC have continued unchecked

for more than five years. They have grown from strength to strength. All Australians have the right to live free of harassment with their basic privacy and personal security ensured. It is a right which every Australian Government undertakes to protect.”

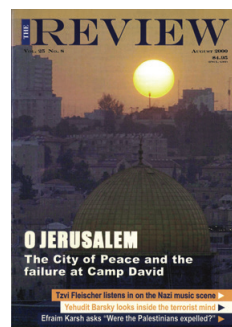
**VOL. 22, NO. 14 – OCTOBER 1-22, 1997**  
**An AIR investigation tracks down Australia’s most senior living alleged Nazi war criminal, Karlis Ozols**

Zandy Alter and Michael Kapel, Cover story:  
 “Karlis Ozols refused to talk to the *Review* this week when he was contacted for a response. However, his wife claimed that all the wartime killings that had taken place in Latvia had been conducted by Jews. She also told the *Review* that she has evidence that ‘Jews who worked for the KGB are responsible’ for the claims against her husband. Mrs Ozols said that the stories about her husband ‘are wrong’ and that they have no further comment. When asked whether her husband had been the subject of investigations by the SIU [Ed. Special Investigations Unit], she said it was ‘none of your business.’”



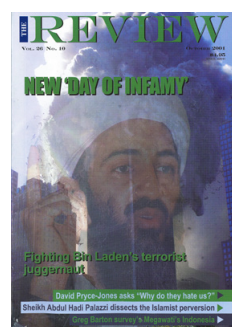
**VOL. 25, NO. 8 – AUGUST 2000**  
**Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat, hosted by US President Bill Clinton, discuss peace at Camp David**

Daniel Mandel, Cover story:  
 “The Israelis imagined the hostilities giving way to negotiated outcomes. The Palestinians treated hostilities as placed in abeyance pending the satisfaction of their terms. To this end, Israelis have talked up and Palestinians talked down peace. Arafat has done nothing to moderate Palestinian hopes or demands, or to ready his people for concessions.”



**VOL. 26, NO. 10 – OCTOBER 2001**  
**The September 11 terror attacks in the US**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:  
 “The US, Australia, and our allies will now wrestle with a global terrorist problem which is slippery, elusive, and not amenable to simple solutions, and in which serious moral questions will doubtless need to



be debated. But there should be no doubt, the carefree complacency of the democracies a mere two weeks ago is a thing of the past.”

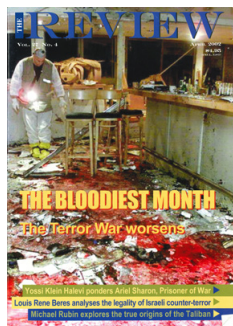
**VOL. 27, NO. 4 – APRIL 2002**

**The terrorist violence of the Second Intifada reaches a bloody crescendo in Israel**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial, “The Bloodiest Month”:

“Many often assume that the current situation is a ‘cycle of violence’. The conventional wisdom has it something like this: Palestinians are angry at being ‘occupied’ and ‘humiliated’ by Israel. In their despair, they make terrorist attacks on Israel. This leads to both Israeli reprisals, which makes Palestinians more angry and more likely to carry out terrorist attacks, and Israeli insecurity... If only Israel could be made to see the situation of the Palestinians, or forced to do the right thing by the Americans, then, by a combination of restraint in response to Palestinian attacks and generosity in empowering Palestinians and ending their occupation, the causes of the violence will be removed and all Israel’s legitimate security needs will be met.

“Actually, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the situation. The solution is correct – two states for two peoples – but the means of getting there is hopelessly naïve.”



**VOL. 30, NO. 12 – DECEMBER 2005**

**Israel unilaterally disengages from Gaza**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:

“[Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon’s bold and costly move to disengage from Gaza unilaterally is clearly creating new opportunities for positive change... The Palestinians now urgently need to follow suit and marginalise their extremists if the cause of real peace is to be advanced.”



**VOL. 31, NO. 8 – AUGUST 2006**

**The 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:

“Israel has once again been dragged into a war it did not want and did not start... The obvious resolution of the problem is for Lebanon to regain control over its own foreign policy and all its territory, and thus obviate any need for Israel to respond militarily to Hezbollah



attacks... Hezbollah must be significantly weakened, so that it has no ability to seriously interfere with the extension of Lebanese sovereignty.”

**VOL. 39, NO. 8 – AUGUST 2014**

**The 2014 Hamas-Israel war, one of four major wars Hamas provoked with Israel between 2008 and 2023**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:

“Most responsible players in international diplomacy understand that handing Hamas... a victory would be suicidal for Israel. And not for Israel alone. Other extremist groups will be watching the Hamas example. Imagine if the principle is established that any response to a terror group firing rockets or launching terror from civilian areas is illegitimate because of the inevitable civilian casualties, and the only recourse the targeted party effectively has is to grant the terror group’s demands.”



**VOL. 45, NO. 10 – OCTOBER 2020**

**The Abraham Accords are signed, normalising relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, later joined by Morocco**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:

“Perhaps counterintuitively, [the Abraham Accords] have the potential to bring the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, as they remind their leaders that the world waits for no one. Palestinian leaders have the agency to take the brave steps necessary to negotiate an end to the conflict, and the establishment of a Palestinian state existing alongside Israel in peace and prosperity.”



**VOL. 48, NO. 11 – NOVEMBER 2023**

**Hamas’ October 7 mass terror attack on Israel, leaving almost 1,200 people dead, and 250 taken hostage**

Colin Rubenstein, Editorial:

“It is a very dark time – but the only hope to advance to a better one is for the rule of Gaza by bloodthirsty, Iranian-supported Hamas terrorists to be dismantled. Australia’s long-standing bipartisan goal of helping achieve a two-state Israeli-Palestinian peace is simply inconceivable without this being achieved. We hope that Australia’s political leaders will keep this in mind.”





# ICC'S ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL ARE UNFOUNDED

David Adesnik

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued a warrant on November 21 for the arrest of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his former defence minister, Yoav Gallant. In doing so, the Court has betrayed its mandate by levelling transparently false charges in a case in which it has no jurisdiction.

When ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan initially applied for the warrants in May, the lead accusation he made against Netanyahu and Gallant was the “starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.” Yet, as he wrote those words, a surge of aid was pouring into Gaza.

In the aftermath of the October 7 massacre, Israeli authorities suspended the delivery of aid into Gaza as they sought to regain their composure amid a devastating surprise attack. But aid soon resumed, and United Nations data showed an increasing number of trucks delivering their goods for three months straight.

But in February 2024, there was a sudden drop. Despite their mutual antagonism, UN agencies and Israeli authorities worked to improve the situation. Whereas 2,874 trucks reached Gaza in February, the number rose to 4,993 in March and 5,671 in April.

Despite this surge, warnings multiplied that Gaza was on the brink of disaster. What drove this fear was an assessment by the UN-backed famine monitor known as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC. For experts around the world, the IPC is the gold standard in famine monitoring. In mid-March, the IPC warned that “Famine is imminent” and would strike Gaza within two months.

The IPC employs a very specific definition of famine, which includes excess mortality of “at least two deaths per 10,000 people/day,” meaning that, if it were to strike in Gaza, there would be hundreds of deaths each day just from hunger, not violent conflict.

As the two-month forecast window drew to a close, it became clear that there was no famine. The Hamas-run Government Media Office in Gaza has reported 41 total deaths from malnutrition throughout the war. Those were tragic losses, but not evidence of Israeli malice.

In May, the IPC’s Famine Review Committee found that there had not been enough evidence to conclude that the situation in Gaza met the criteria for a famine. In late

June, it issued a new quarterly assessment stating that, “The amount of food and non-food commodities allowed into the northern governorates increased,” and that, “The available evidence does not indicate that famine is currently occurring.”

Back in March, the IPC found that 30% of Gaza residents were experiencing the most severe type of deprivation, rating a five on the IPC’s five-point scale. By mid-October, it was down to 6%.

One has to read IPC publications with a magnifying glass to find any hint of why its forecasts proved to be so wrong. Its October report referred in passing to a “temporary surge of humanitarian assistance,” with no indication of who was responsible. Western media mainly reported the IPC’s persistent warnings that conditions could take a turn for the worse at any moment.

This brings us back to the ICC and its claim that Israel has been deliberately starving the people of Gaza. Aid

organisations frequently complain that Israeli authorities delay their shipments, turn their trucks back at the last moment and impose onerous paperwork requirements. Yet Israeli data show that over 58,000 trucks have brought cargo into Gaza since the beginning of the war, delivering more than 1.1 million tons of goods.

The full contents of the ICC warrants are secret, yet the ICC’s summary of the charges alleges that Ne-

tanyahu and Gallant’s “conduct led to the disruption of the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide food and other essential goods to the population in need in Gaza.” The facts say otherwise.

Although it is not the only charge against Netanyahu and Gallant, the alleged Israeli starvation campaign is the focal point of the ICC’s accusations. There is no way to separate the weakness of this charge from the weakness of the entire case, which exposes how politicised the court has become.

Israel, like the United States, is not a party to the Rome Statute and therefore not subject to the Court’s jurisdiction. To pursue an investigation of Israeli leaders, the Court had to stretch its mandate to the breaking point, asserting that it has jurisdiction because Israeli actions took place within the “State of Palestine”.

Some might see this as legal innovation for a noble purpose, yet there is a double standard at play. The ICC has issued no warrants for the Chinese leaders responsible for the cultural genocide of their country’s Uyghur Muslim minority.

There is no warrant for Bashar Assad, whose regime tortured and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Syrians. Nor has the Court pursued Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, whose regime supports Assad, Hamas and



Israel was being accused of starving Gazans even as the aid trucks surged into the enclave (Image: IDF)

numerous other violent terrorist organisations. None of those are members of the ICC – but neither is Israel. Yet it’s only the Jewish state that the ICC has chosen to target by stretching its mandate via questionable legal innovations.



*David Adesnik is the Vice-President of Research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) in Washington, D.C. A version of this article appeared in Canada’s National Post. © FDD (fdd.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.*

## UNGA PAINS

Allon Lee

The claimed motivation for the Albanese Government’s decision to change Australia’s stance on a number of the anti-Israel resolutions the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) votes on every November and December is ostensibly to advance the creation of a Palestinian state.

However, a closer analysis of the resolutions’ text reveals that they are likely to have exactly the opposite result – emboldening the Palestinian Authority (PA) to believe it can win a state without the need to negotiate with Israel.

On November 14, Australia departed from a long-standing bipartisan stance on two anti-Israel resolutions that concern resources and the environment.

The decision to change Australia’s vote from “no” to “yes” on the resolution – “Oil Slick on Lebanese Shores” – appears entirely gratuitous.

This resolution belongs to the UN’s Sustainable Development agenda. Israel is the only country that the UN ever singles out for condemnation under this agenda.

This one-sided resolution, first introduced in 2006, demands Israel pay compensation for ecological damage caused by the Israeli Air Force damaging oil storage tanks during that year’s Lebanon war.

Until 2024, all Australian governments, including the first two years of the current Federal Government and the 2007-2013 Rudd-Gillard Labor Government, voted “no”.

The reasoning for Australia’s hitherto principled stance of opposing this resolution is obvious.

The resolution one-sidedly ignores Hezbollah’s culpability for starting the conflict and its responsibility for causing environmental destruction in Israel’s north, including the loss of 500,000 trees due to fire.

The Australian Government’s argument that supporting this one-sided and obsolete resolution advances the cause of peace appears obviously baseless – “Oil Slick on Lebanese Shores” has zero connection to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The second resolution – “Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources” – accuses Israel of “widespread destruction” in the West Bank and Gaza.

This includes alleged damage to “Vital infrastructure... water pipelines, sewage networks and electricity networks... in particular in the Gaza Strip... [that] has polluted the environment and which negatively affects the... water and sanitation systems... the water supply and other natural resources of the Palestinian people.”

The resolution falsely accuses Israel of preventing the construction of sewage treatment plants, water pipes and desalination projects in Gaza even though Israel has had no direct role in Gaza’s governance since 2005.

And it ignores how poor governance by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and the West Bank respectively is the main cause of environmental degradation in those areas.

Significantly, the resolution also overlooks the environmental damage Hamas has caused in Israel, including in 2018 when it sent incendiary balloons across the border triggering bushfires and creating horrendous air pollution by burning tyres to create smokescreens.

The resolution further ignores the fact that under the terms of the Oslo Accords signed by Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1993, Israel is legally entitled to administer those areas of the West Bank which are under its jurisdiction, primarily Area C. Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong reportedly ignored advice from the Australian UN mission to abstain.

On Dec. 3, Australia changed its votes on three more UNGA resolutions.

The most problematic resolution was “Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.”

The last time Australia voted “yes” to this resolution was in 2002.

The 2024 iteration of the “Peaceful settlement” resolu-

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tion was double the length in comparison to the last time we voted yes in 2002, and much more extreme.

Explaining why Australia decided to vote “yes”, Australia’s Ambassador to the UN, James Larsen, said the resolution doesn’t pre-judge the outcome of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

But the resolution absolutely does pre-judge the outcome of negotiations. It demands a full unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and east Jerusalem as soon as possible – plus that Israel pay reparations to Palestinians.

The resolution makes no demands of the PA, such as cessation of incitement to terrorism or the “pay for slay” scheme that financially rewards acts of terror. And it pretends Hamas does not exist.

This motion does nothing to acknowledge that the PA has rejected generous and substantive Israeli offers to create a Palestinian state that would resolve many of the demands made of Israel in this motion, including the Palestinian refugee issue.

The resolution’s demand for total and unilateral Israeli withdrawal from both the West Bank and east Jerusalem undermines the principle of land swaps that has been central to all peace plans over the last few decades. It further indulges in appalling moral equivalence, equating terror attacks by Palestinians with Israel’s counterterrorism responses to those attacks. It even calls for the release of Palestinian prisoners who committed acts of terrorism, but not Israeli hostages kidnapped on October 7.

The resolution this year added a new proposal that a conference be held in June 2025 that will produce a document that will “urgently chart an irreversible pathway” to a two-state solution – a conference sure to be heavily stacked in favour of the PA, and likely to provide an additional excuse to continue avoiding bilateral negotiations.

The second resolution considered on Dec. 3 was the “Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat.” Be-

tween 2004 and 2022, Australia always voted no on this resolution, but this year it abstained. The Division for Palestinian Rights is a subdivision of the UN Secretariat’s Department of Political Affairs that plays a critical role in the anti-Israel machinery that dominates all elements of the UN bureaucracy.

Essentially, it is the UN’s dedicated propaganda department on behalf of the Palestinian national cause, constantly issuing publications and organising events. Some of those events and publications effectively devolve into calls for

Israel’s destruction, or support for anti-Israel terrorism.

The third resolution Australia voted to change its position on was “The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.”

Between 2001 and 2022, all Australian governments voted to abstain on this resolution, but last year, we shifted to yes. However, this year the Government returned to abstaining for unexplained reasons.

The Australian Government is aware that these resolutions are fundamentally flawed. Indeed, every time Australia has supported anti-Israel resolutions that have come up for consideration since October 7, Foreign Minister Penny Wong admits as much, even as she orders our diplomats to vote for them anyway.

Frustratingly, the Government has preferred to falsely spin these dramatic and counter-productive changes in our UN votes as a reversion to past bipartisan policy, citing past votes decades ago on very different versions of these resolutions under totally different circumstances. Or else insist we are simply following the international “consensus”. These manoeuvres are no substitute for actually explaining how in the world supporting one-sided resolutions that clearly do not reflect reality can possibly encourage a peaceful resolution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. AIR



Foreign Minister Penny Wong continues to admit various UN resolutions are fundamentally flawed, but then vote for them anyway (Image: UN)

## THE TOON BOOM SINCE OCTOBER 7

Allon Lee & Aviva Winton

**P**rovocative, incisive, clever, infuriating, reductive, crude, insulting – even grotesque.

Political cartoons have the power to pack a punch. They can make you outraged but also force you to engage.

Since Hamas’ October 7 massacre, political cartoonists have enjoyed a bumper year. In practice, newspaper car-

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toons largely mirrored the editorial and ideological stance of the publications where they appeared.

In general, the Nine Newspapers and the *Canberra Times* reflect a worldview where the UN's inherent goodness is unquestionable, while Israel is, at best, of a piece with Hamas. At worse, Israel is guilty of genocide, ethnic cleansing, infanticide and starvation as a weapon, while Hamas isn't even in the picture.

By contrast, News Corp cartoonists have focused on Hamas' moral and actual culpability for the war, while highlighting the group's Western apologists and intended or unintended enablers – including the UN and certain politicians.

In the days after October 7, *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) cartoonist David Rowe was surprisingly sympathetic to Israel, although this sympathy quickly disappeared.

On Oct. 10, he drew Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei sitting alongside the Grim Reaper watching a TV showing buildings in Gaza engulfed in flames.

The *Sydney Morning Herald's* (SMH) Alan Moir (Oct. 14) mirrored Rowe, depicting an Iranian military figure pressing the plunger on a detonation box marked "Hamas", which sets off an explosion in Gaza.

On Oct. 11, Rowe commented upon the vile anti-Israel protest on the steps of the Sydney Opera House, showing a Star of David projected onto the iconic building and, in the water, the blood red lettering of the word "antisemitism".

On Nov. 11, Johannes Leak in the *Australian* satirised the angry mob of pro-Palestinian protesters who descended *en masse* on Caulfield where many Jews live. An angry protester sneers, "Look at them – living quietly in their own neighbourhoods, going about their business peacefully – they're asking for trouble!!" and, on Oct. 13, he drew skid marks on a book labelled "Rules of War" with a Hamas jeep speeding off in the distance.

In the *SMH* (Oct. 10), Cathy Wilcox's first cartoon post-massacre drew a link between Palestinian terror and "murderous occupation".

The *SMH's* Megan Herbert (Oct. 30), like others on her side of the ideological spectrum, focused on Gazan

casualties. Herbert drew two boxes. One, labelled "Human Rights", showed a dove flying above a home. The other box – "Human Wrongs" – showed a fighter plane dropping a bomb onto the devastated house and a pile of bodies adjacent to it.

Foreign Minister Penny Wong's insistence from April onwards of the need to rapidly establish a Palestinian state became fodder for Mark Knight in News Corp papers on April 12, depicting her astride a unicorn.

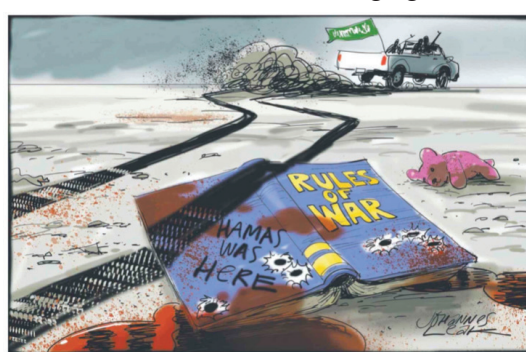
Two days later he belled the cat, with the cartoon making it clear that Hamas had made a two-state solution "out of the question".

Hamas' cynical use of human shields was skewered in a cartoon by Leak's *Australian* colleague Spooner (Oct. 17) that featured a Hamas fighter promising to look after "[Israeli] hostage children the same way we care for our own."

In the *Australian* (Nov. 1), Spooner tackled the notion of Hamas as freedom fighters bravely battling against Israel depicting two armchair critics, one of whom asks how Hamas can save Gaza and the other person suggesting "surrender?".

Two days later, Spooner depicted a little wounded boy trying to seek shelter in a Hamas tunnel only to be told, "The tunnels are for our resistance, not your existence."

Cartoonists of all political persuasions employed figures associated with death but for different messaging.





Commenting on the al-Shifa hospital non-massacre, Rowe (Oct. 19), again employed the Grim Reaper, standing in front of a Red Cross pushing a hospital bed bearing a body and a toe tag with the word “TRUTH”.

On Oct. 23, Glen Le Lievre in the *AFR* featured the Grim Reaper with his head in hands amid the ruins of a hospital, implying that even he is overwhelmed by the death toll.

By Nov. 1, Rowe had done a 180-degree turn, drawing Netanyahu ready to consume a peace dove and presumably a glass of blood. A Grim Reaper approaches offering Gaza on a serving tray.

Spooner, two days later, employed the figure of the devil ascending from a Hamas terror tunnel with his arms held aloft, telling Israeli troops he’s surrendering because “Even I have standards”.

Likewise, three weeks in, the *Daily Telegraph’s* Warren Brown (Oct. 30) drew a Hamas-robed skeleton standing over an active battlefield, declaring “all my own work”.

For the most part, cartoonists critical of Israel have largely ignored Hamas, except as a means of suggesting it and Israel are morally equivalent. A textbook example of this smear was Moir’s cartoon in the *Age/SMH* (Oct. 26, 2024).

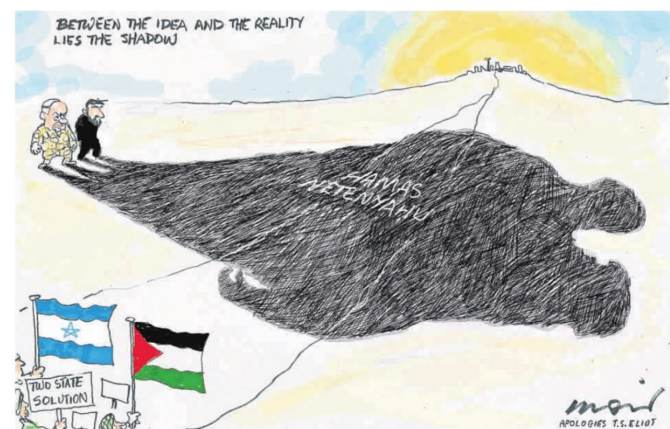
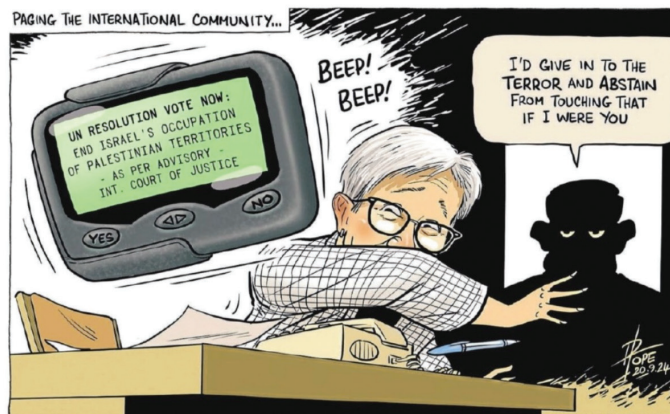
In the drawing, Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu stands alongside a Hamas terrorist. Their shadows morph into a large, shapeless monster obscuring a map of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

The Palestinian and Israeli flags make a contrast to each other.

The former is accurate, but on the latter, the Star of David has only five points and Netanyahu is also misspelled.

The cartoon’s false equivalence masks the truth that Hamas broke a ceasefire to perpetrate a heinous massacre on October 7, deliberately turned its own people into human shields and could end the war by releasing the hostages and surrendering its weapons.

This false equivalence narrative materialised shortly after October 7, as evidenced by Badiucao’s *SMH* and



*Age* cartoon (Dec. 23, 2023), which featured an Israeli soldier and Hamas terrorist simultaneously affirming that killing children is “ok” but it “depends upon the context.”

Meanwhile, commenting on the Israel’s tragic, unintended killing on April 1 of Australian aid worker Zomi Frankcom and six colleagues, in the *Canberra Times* (April 4) Broelman drew gun sights over a child, an aid worker, an old woman and a Hamas terrorist. The legend says, “One of these things is not like the others.”

On the same topic, Mark Knight in the *Herald Sun* (April 6) memorialised Frankcom without attributing blame for her death.

Like many media professionals, Wilcox’s *SMH* cartoon (Jan. 30) misrepresented the International Court of Justice’s (ICJ) interim ruling.



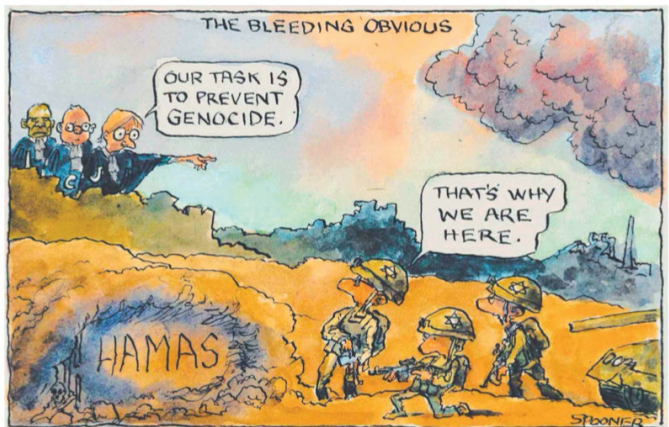
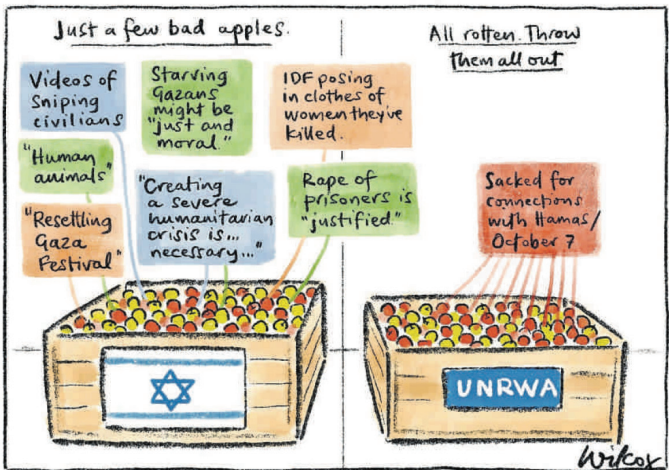
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other problems, UNRWA staff helped carry out the October 7 massacre.

Pope's Sept. 20, 2024, *Canberra Times* cartoon showed a cowering Penny Wong before a buzzing pager (a visual reference to Israel's attack via Hezbollah pagers) that warns her to support a UN resolution demanding Israel end its occupation of "Palestinian territories". Ignoring Israel's successes, Pope's cynicism regarding the war was also reflected on Oct. 3, 2024, with the plummeting figures of Netanyahu and Khamenei blindfolded and locked in an embrace.

The Biden Administration's 'culpability' for the war's continuation was a recurring theme. In the *SMH* (March 6 and 27), Wilcox linked Gaza's death toll to the Biden Administration's role as weapons supplier to Israel.

The fine line between critical comment about Israel and the danger of repeating antisemitic tropes hung over *AFR* cartoonist Rowe's April 4 cartoon, which featured the Grim Reaper operating an old-fashioned telephone switchboard. The Reaper puts world leaders on hold but patches Israeli PM Netanyahu straight through. Concerningly, the connecting wires between the names USA, Canada, Australia and Gaza on the switchboard form a Star of David, evoking the age-old trope that Jews manipulate world politics for their own nefarious plans.

Meanwhile, Pope in the *Canberra Times* (May 4) implied a steel-helmeted Netanyahu uses antisemitism to deflect all criticism of Israel.

On the flipside, the *Spectator Australia* Oct. 14, 2023, cover featured a cartoon of police arresting a man carrying an Israeli flag who asks, "What's my crime?" The response is that "You're Jewish".

There is no question Australian cartoonists play a valuable role, and are often very skilled at their craft.

As Wilcox recently told *ABC Radio*, the cartoonist articulates "something [readers] were suspecting... but they weren't sure how to put it into words."

That is all well and good. But cartoonists who elicit an emotional response based on misinformation, or naked partisanship, essentially use their gifts in the cause of obscuring rather than illuminating truth.

AIR

Wilcox's cartoon wrongly claimed, "The ICJ says it's 'plausible' that Israel is committing genocide." The Court never said this, only that Palestinians have a "plausible right" to protection from genocide, as the Court's then-President has made clear.

Similarly, *Canberra Times* cartoonist David Pope (Jan. 30) misrepresented the ICJ finding to infer the Albanese Government supports genocide.

Spooner's Feb. 20 cartoon titled "The bleeding obvious" featured ICC judges pointing to Gaza saying, "Our task is to prevent genocide" and three Israeli soldiers retorting, "That's why we are here".

The UN halo effect was seen in the *SMH* (Nov. 6, 2024), where Wilcox drew Israel and UNRWA as apple crates. Israel's multitude of alleged war crimes was listed against UNRWA's sole indiscretion of employing staff with "connections" to "Hamas/October 7". In fact, among many

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# THE BIBLIO FILE

## The ideology that says Israel's existence is genocide

### On Settler Colonialism: Ideology, Violence, and Justice

Adam Kirsch

W.W. Norton & Company, August 2024, 160 pp, A\$41.35

Julie Szego

The eruption of anti-Israel bile since the October 7 attacks felt surreal – it still does. Activists demanding Israel be ostracised emerged from seemingly everywhere; from the ABC to Legal Aid to the Department of Defence, for crying out loud. Queers for Palestine – *surely* this is a joke?

Within days of the massacre, petitioners at Melbourne's literary *Overland* journal decried Israel's "ongoing genocide" and "annihilation" of the Palestinian people.

It wasn't the display of Israel animus on the political left I found staggering – I've documented that pathology in countless newspaper columns during the past 20 years.

No, it was the many disparate causes effectively merging with the Palestinian cause to the point of self-abnegation and the absence of shame in echoing antisemitic tropes about Jewish depravity and deceit.

Something had clearly been seeded while we were sleeping only to burst forth once the conditions were ripe. But what, exactly?

A compelling answer is found in Adam Kirsch's *On Settler Colonialism: Ideology, Violence, and Justice*. Kirsch dis-

tills, in a mere 132 pages, the essence of a relatively new ideology that's all but hijacked the Israel-Palestine debate in anglophone countries, how it took shape within academia, and why we should all be worried about it.

The belief system thrust into the mainstream after October 7 is not exclusively concerned with Israel and the Middle East. Its centre of gravity is rather the US, Canada and especially Australia, countries with shameful episodes in their origin stories.

One of the revealing aspects of settler colonial ideology is the way it conceals itself within a linguistic sleight of hand.

The term "settler colonialism" can be used in a neutral sense to describe historical events. But in academia the term is an explanation – a denunciation – of Australia and other Western countries *today*.

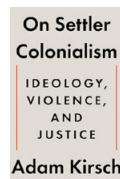
Because the term blends historical fact with contemporary mythology, it becomes very challenging to critique – what reprobate individual would argue *in favour* of settler colonialism given the misery and intergenerational trauma that European colonialists visited on indigenous peoples?

While Kirsch writes principally

for an American audience, we learn early on that settler colonialism is something of an Australian export.

The term "settler colonialism" was first coined by an Australian scholar abroad; Kenneth Good, a political scientist who taught briefly at the University of Rhodesia in the 1970s. Good described as "settler colonial" places such as Rhodesia and Algeria where a sizeable number of Europeans had enjoyed dominance over the local population.

But in Kirsch's telling, this story really starts in the 1990s when the idea of "settler colonialism" underwent a crucial shift – in Australia. At the time, the nation was grappling with what became known as "the history wars", a debate about how to evaluate Australia's colonial past.



Australian political theorist Patrick Wolfe: Key progenitor of the "settler colonialist" construct (Screenshot)

It was then that theorists began referring to Australia as a "settler colonial" entity. In a seminal 1999 text, anthropologist Patrick Wolfe wrote what would become the most frequently quoted sentence in the history of this new academic discipline: "The colonisers came to stay – invasion is a structure, not an event."

And thus, "settler colonialism" was born not as a descriptor of tragic historical events but as an ideology that proposes what Kirsch calls a "new syllogism". That is: if settlement is a genocidal invasion, and invasion is an ongoing structure and not a completed event, "then everything and everyone that sustains a settler colonial society today is also genocidal."

The spiritual evil driving this genocide is defined as European "insatiability": a lust for resources, for power and even for knowledge.

This European rapaciousness – in the lingo, “settler ways of being” which is contrasted with the idealised “indigenous ways of knowing” – underlies all our norms and institutions, including national borders, Western science and the heterosexual nuclear family. (Perhaps you’re starting to glimpse the ideological scaffolding behind “Queers for Palestine”?)

The guiding premise of settler colonial ideology is that European settlement should never have happened, so it follows that the only real way to make amends would be to rewind time and revert to indigenous sovereignty – which is impossible. We can only devote ourselves to the never-ending “work” of decolonisation.

**K**irsch exquisitely documents how Lorenzo Veracini, a leading theorist from Melbourne’s Swinburne University, pondered what doing “the work” of decolonisation might mean in an Australian context. Back in the 1960s, Frantz Fanon, part of the leadership of Algeria’s brutal FLN, and author of the seminal text, *The Wretched of the Earth*, defined “the work” as bringing about the (literal) “death of the colonist.”

“I recommend a Fanonian (and metaphorical) cull of the settler’, Veracini writes – conscious,” Kirsch notes, “that the two adjectives pull in opposite directions.”

And so, understanding their calls for murder can only be metaphorical, the scholars of settler colonialism indulge in conspiratorial thinking and rhetorical violence.

Ah, but what, Kirsch asks in a masterful pivot, if there were a country where settler colonialism could be challenged with more than just words? A country, as it happens, whose people Western civilisation has traditionally considered it virtuous to hate?

And so we have a concept first developed to explain the history of Australia now most often invoked in connection with Israel. In Palestine, the fable goes, just as in Australia,

the European colonisers – which is how the early Zionists are referred to – saw not a land inhabited by indigenous people since time immemorial but “terra nullius”, empty territory.

The Israel-Palestine conflict, Kirsch explains, functions as “the reference point for every type of social wrong,” whether the building of a pipeline under a Sioux reservation or the Mexican experience in the US in the 19th century, which activists duly refer to as a “nakba”.

And with Israel as its centre, settler colonialism throws up what Kirsch identifies as yet another syllogism: “If Israel is a settler colonial state and settler colonialism entails genocide then it is ideologically necessary for Israel to be committing genocide.”

The key point here is that the ideology of settler colonialism defined Israel as essentially genocidal long before the 2023 Gaza war, “creating a frame” through which all of its subsequent actions were viewed. Hence, the *Overland* petition’s October 2023 reference to Israel’s “ongoing genocide” against Palestinians.

Here, Kirsch explains, the discipline finds itself “having to define genocide down so that it no longer means what it is ordinarily taken to mean.” Once again, Australian scholars come to the rescue: Wolfe devises a category of “structural genocide”, in which even indigenous citizenship in a settler colonial state can be part of the “logic of elimination”.

To make Israel fit the mould of a genocidal settler-colonial regime entails an exercise in disavowal so vast that I don’t have the space to plumb it here – but little of it will be news to regular readers of this publication.

The most revealing passages are where Kirsch traces what we might call settler colonialism’s own repressed unconscious – the age-old antisemitic echoes inherent in defining Zionists and Israelis as emblematic of settler rapaciousness and greed.

We hear over and over that until Palestine is “free” no-one is free;

eliminating the Jewish state is in this worldview the key to eliminating every injustice in the world – including homelessness in Toronto – wiping the slate clean, returning us all to an innocence before the Fall.

With history falsified to dehumanise Israelis, it was no surprise that so many in the academic world found justifications for the slaughter of October 7 – when they weren’t voicing outright jubilation. After all, these “settlers” had no right to be there in the first place.

As to what “decolonisation” in Israel-Palestine might look like, given that, unlike Algeria in the 1960s, Israeli Jews have no equivalent of France to go back to – not that that stopped a protestor outside Columbia University taunting Jews with “Go back to Poland!” – is never really elucidated.

While Kirsch flags early on his belief in a two-state solution, he leaves a key concession to the end: to Palestinians, Israel does resemble a colonial power because the state was established without the consent of the people already living there. The creation of the Jewish state brought Palestinians displacement and suffering. But conquest and displacement are constants throughout history, which, no matter what Wolfe says, is nothing if not a series of events. Colonisation and the Mabo judgement; the Nakba and the Camp David negotiations: all are events. A progressive movement worthy of its name must acknowledge the bloodshed and injustice of the past while ensuring these do not lay the foundation for even greater bloodshed and injustice in the future.

I have no idea how we pull ourselves out of this new Dark Age to intellectual sanity, but Kirsch offers a place from which the journey can start.

AIR

*Julie Szego is a Melbourne-based author, lecturer and journalist, who previously wrote for the Age newspaper for more than 12 years and now publishes a Substack newsletter called “Szego Unplugged”.*





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## THE MONTH IN MEDIA

### MINORITY REPORT

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph/Courier Mail* (Nov. 20) shortly after Israeli and Jewish sports fans were attacked in Amsterdam by pro-Palestinian thugs, AIJAC's Rebecca Davis highlighted rising global antisemitism and the vulnerability of being an Australian woman belonging to a targeted ethno-religious minority.

"Hatred does not happen in a vacuum... it descends to such depths when leaders don't lead, when governments don't govern, and when police don't police. When businesses ignore bigotry. When universities trivialise. When media misreports. When it's #MeToo – unless you're a Jew," she wrote.

In the *Australian Financial Review* (Dec. 9), AIJAC's Justin Amler wrote about the mood in the Australian Jewish community after the devastating arson attack on the Adass Israel Synagogue in Melbourne on Dec. 6.

Amler said many Jews feel "abandoned" by Australia's leaders and unhappy with their inadequate responses to "this increasing wave of hatred" that began "14 long months" ago.

He said, "The images of a burning synagogue in the heart of the Jewish community will leave a painful wound on the soul of our community that will not easily heal."

Three days earlier, the paper lamented the 316% rise in reported cases of antisemitism since Hamas' October 7 massacre, attributing it to "political and institutional failures to call out antisemitism."

The editorial said, "It started with university administrations failing to protect Jewish students and staff from anti-Gaza war protests on campus. It now includes the National Anti-Racism Strategy released by the Australian Human Rights Com-

mission last month, which promotes DEI (Diversity Equity and Inclusion) theories but contains no substantial discussion of how to combat the spike in antisemitism."

AIJAC's Joel Burnie told *Sky News Australia* (Dec. 6) that the Jewish community was not surprised by the arson attack on the synagogue, given the recent rise in antisemitism.

### CANBERRA'S COMPLICITY?

News Corp columnist Andrew Bolt (Nov. 25) inveighed against the Albanese Government's decision to ban former Israeli justice minister Ayelet Shaked from visiting Australia.

Bolt wrote, "It claim[ed] she'd 'incite discord'. Discord from whom? From the pro-Palestine extremists who forced Myer to cancel the opening of its Christmas windows? The vandals who last week tagged cars and homes in Woollahra with 'F--k Israel' slogans? These ferals now dictate which Jews may come? Now add Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Jews who cannot visit Australia, after the International Criminal Court ordered his arrest on sight – here, too – for supposed war crimes."

Writing in the *Age* (Nov. 28), AIJAC's Dr Colin Rubenstein and Jamie Hyams argued that recent Australian government decisions, coupled with inadequate responses to antisemitism, have not only strained relations with Israel but contributed to the surge in antisemitism here.

"The events of October 7 and subsequent occurrences have severely traumatised the vast majority of the Jewish community. Many reactions to those events, including from our government, have compounded that

trauma, creating feelings of isolation and even betrayal," they wrote.

"The government's own political calculations no doubt inform its actions. However, the overall effect has been to degrade Australia's relationship with our most important Middle Eastern ally... and to make Australia's Jewish community, suffering its worst-ever wave of antisemitism, feel more isolated."

In the *Australian* (Dec. 7), NSW Liberal Senator and former Australian Ambassador to Israel Dave Sharma accused the Albanese Government of undermining Australia's relationship with Israel for domestic purposes.

Senator Sharma said the Government's bad faith moves included, "[summoning] the Israeli ambassador... earlier in the year to be warned that Australia would not support Israel in responding to continued rocket attacks from Hezbollah. Labor has failed to criticise the shameful overreach by the International Criminal Court of its own jurisdictional limits. And it has put an effective stop on military exports to Israel, including for equipment that can be used only in self-defence."

Speaking to *Sky News Australia* (Nov. 15) after the Albanese Government decided to vote in favour of two anti-Israel UN General Assembly resolutions, AIJAC's Joel Burnie accused PM Anthony Albanese of renegeing on his commitment before the last federal election that "no matter which party is in power here, Israel will have Australia's friendship and support."

### COURT IN TROUBLE

In the *Australian* (Nov. 18), Strategic Analysis Australia senior fellow Anthony Bergin castigated the Government's decision to support



the UN General Assembly resolution “Palestinian Sovereignty over natural resources,” which echoed the International Court of Justice’s advisory opinion calling on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank within one year.

“The court’s vice-president, Julia Sebutinde, made clear in her dissenting opinion, the advisory opinion completely airbrushed out the agency of Israel’s neighbours and Palestinian leadership over decades that have been at the heart of the threat to Israel’s security and the absence of a Palestinian state. The ICJ made it ap-

pear the prolonged Israeli presence in the Palestinian territories was solely due to Israel’s obstinance.”

### A RESOLUTIONARY PATH

The *Australian* (Dec. 5), criticised the Albanese Government’s decision to vote “yes” on the UN General Assembly resolution “The Palestinian people’s right to self-determination.”

The editorial said, “A two-state solution is impossible until Iran disbands its Hezbollah and Hamas terror armies.”

It said the “government [is] desperate to stay in office” and was “looking to protect inner-city marginal electorates from the Greens, whose opportunist enmity for Israel is boundless, as well as suburban seats with large Muslim communities.”

Earlier, on Nov. 28, the paper slammed UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ decision not to renew the employment contract of UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Alice Wairimu Nderitu, after she refused to describe Israel’s actions in Gaza as passing the thresh-



## IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – Dec. 8 – media release: “The Jewish community has made an extraordinary contribution to the strength and success of our nation... Antisemitism is disgraceful, and I unequivocally condemn it.”

Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) and Shadow Home Affairs Minister Senator **James Paterson** (Lib., Vic) – Dec. 9 – media release: “For too long, the rise of vile anti-Semitism in our country has been allowed to fester... We need to say enough is enough.”

The following three comments are from the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian universities, Nov. 29:

**Josh Burns** (ALP, Macnamara) – “One... misunderstandings about IHRA is around the ability to have a free and democratic conversation about Israel, to criticise Israel freely and how that does not interfere with academic freedom or freedom of speech.”

**Henry Pike** (Lib., Qld) – “I’m concerned, Professor Scott, that the antisemitism... on your university campus isn’t coming from outside but is within.”

Senator **David Shoebridge** (Greens, NSW) – “Have you spoken with Jewish academics who have shown solidarity with the Palestinian struggle to understand their particular struggles and many of the attacks that have come against them?”

Senator **Fatima Payman** (Ind., WA) – Nov. 28 – Second Reading speech, *Treasury Laws Amendment (Divesting from Illegal Israeli Settlements) Bill*: “The world has watched in horror at the genocide... Settlement violence is not an aberration of individual extremist settlers, but part of an Israeli policy of unlawful occupation, annexation and apartheid.”

Senator **Payman** also tabled Second Reading speeches for two other bills aimed at Israel, the *Defence Trade Controls Amendment (Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity) Bill* and the *Genocide Risk Reporting Bill*.

Greens Deputy Leader Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (NSW) –

Nov. 26 – “In attempting to erase the indigenous people of Palestine... People... see the truth of Israel. They see it for the genocidal apartheid state that it is... a settler, colonial project built on violent racial supremacy.”

Senator **Andrew Bragg** (Lib., NSW) – Nov. 26 – “One of the most disappointing things that has happened during my brief time in public life has been the return of antisemitism.”

Senator **Dean Smith** (Lib., WA) – Nov. 25 – “Israel [has] a robust legal system, an independent judiciary and a commitment to accountability. For the ICC to cast doubt on such a system raises serious questions about its true intentions and undermines its credibility.”

Shadow Attorney-General Senator **Michaelia Cash** (Lib., WA) – Nov. 25 – “Does the Prime Minister agree with our ally President Biden’s very strong stance in support of our other democratic ally, Israel [on the ICC warrants]?”

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) – responding: “Australia respects the independence of the International Criminal Court and its important role in upholding international law.”

Senator **Cash** – Nov. 21 – “Do you accept that your government’s shifting position on Israel emboldens anti-Israel elements within the Australian community to conduct such anti-Israel vandalism?”

Senator **Wong** – “There is no place for antisemitism in this country... We use our vote in the UN system to do what we can to work with others to progress the cause of peace.”

**Anne Stanley** (ALP, Werriwa) – Nov. 20 – “I condemn the [Netanyahu Government’s] barbaric campaign that is set on ensuring the utter annihilation of the Palestinian people.”

Senator **Nick McKim** (Greens, Tas.) – Nov. 19 – “Australia must impose sanctions on Israeli war criminals, like Mr Netanyahu... the deliberate displacement of Palestinian people... to be forced into concentration camps.”

Senator **Raff Ciccone** (ALP, Vic.) – Nov. 15 – Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee: “You talk about Australia needing to work collaboratively... with like-minded partners. Do you not consider... Israel to be a like-minded partner, given that they’re the only democracy in the Middle East?”

old of what constitutes genocide.

The *Australian Financial Review's* Andrew Tillett (Dec. 5) wrote, "Foreign Minister Penny Wong's decision to shift from abstaining to support is a return to the position of the early Howard government: between 1996 and 2000, Australia voted in support of the two-state solution resolution." However, those votes were during the Oslo peace process. When Palestinian leaders launched the Second Intifada in 2000, after rejecting an unprecedented Israeli offer to create a Palestinian state, the Howard Government decided it would no longer support biased UN resolutions, as have all Australian governments since. Moreover, resolutions have become even more extreme in the past two decades.

## A STATE OF DELUSION

On *ABC RN* "Breakfast" (Dec. 5), pro-Palestinian lobbyist Nasser Mashni said Australia's support for UN General Assembly resolutions that demand Israel immediately withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza "puts us in line with more than 95% of Earth's population. It's the right thing to do, particularly at day 423 of this ongoing genocide."

But he then rejected the two-state outcome the resolution calls for, thus putting himself at odds with the supposed "95% of the world's population" that he said supported it.

Mashni claimed that "A two-state solution's gone... It might have worked if the Israelis had the same sort of intent that the Palestinians came to the party with. The reality today, though, is that that land is indivisible. What needs to happen, and I'm very clear, my father was raised in that Palestine where somebody's religion was second to their nationality. Every one of Abraham's children, Muslim, Christian, and Jew, should live together equally without any level of superiority."

He also called for "every Palestinian hostage, every Israeli hostage [to]

be released." There are no Palestinian hostages, only prisoners held according to the rule of law, and provided with basic rights not given to Israeli hostages in Gaza.

## OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

In the *Australian* (Nov. 28), AIJAC's Ahron Shapiro explained that Israel "will not stand idly by and watch Hezbollah violate the current ceasefire as it did in 2006," which resulted in "18 years of patient military build-up [by Hezbollah]."

"In theory, [the ceasefire] creates an opportunity for Lebanon to assert its sovereignty over its entire territory after decades of abandoning its south to powerful terrorist militias," he wrote.

The paper's editorial in the same edition said the 60-day ceasefire "between Israel and Hezbollah is an important victory over terror and Tehran's ayatollahs after their major investment in the Lebanese Islamist group's barbarism." The deal represents "a change in the balance of power" in the Middle East, with Iran and proxies on the backfoot, the paper said.

On *ABC RN* "Drive" (Nov. 27), Lebanese-born analyst Walid Phares welcomed the ceasefire but expressed scepticism about its longevity, given Hezbollah's ideology.

He suggested that unless UN Security Council Resolution 1559 – which calls for Hezbollah's disarmament – is enforced, the agreement will go the way so many others have in the past.

Writing on the ceasefire in the *Canberra Times* (Nov. 28), Alan Behm and Emma Shortis bizarrely referred to the Israel-Lebanon border region as "northern Palestine".

The pair said the ceasefire had nothing to do with protecting the vulnerable but only each side seeking to consolidate its positions. This is nonsense. Israel is well-known for its efforts to protect its own citizens, unlike Hezbollah, which uses its civilian

population as human shields.

They also falsely accused Israel of genocide, despite Israel facilitating over one million tonnes of aid entering Gaza, assisting Gazans to be immunised against polio and issuing warnings to civilians to relocate to safer areas ahead of military operations.

## RODGER THAT

In *Nine Newspapers* (Nov. 27), analyst Rodger Shanahan wrote, "Tying any ceasefire agreement in Lebanon to a ceasefire in Gaza, Hezbollah and Iran bet that it could pressure Israel on a second front without Israel fighting on a second front. They miscalculated. As a result, Hezbollah's leadership has been decimated and its weapons stockpiles have been greatly reduced."

However, he was also sceptical the ceasefire would hold.

"The idea that Hezbollah will withdraw to north of the Litani River and take its weapons with it... ignores the fact that much of Hezbollah actually lives south of the Litani River and will simply return to their homes and rebuild," he wrote.

## OBSESSION!

After discussing the Hezbollah-Israel ceasefire deal, on Nov. 27, *ABC Global Affairs* Editor John Lyons moved on to the situation in Gaza, which, he said, is "now virtually unliveable".

As usual, Lyons blamed Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu for the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu has long been opposed to a Palestinian state... As long as Israel insists on occupying Palestinians and denying them what the United Nations voted for in 1947, that they should have their own state alongside a Jewish state, these ceasefires will merely be pauses between wars."



The insinuation that Israel prevented the creation of a Palestinian state in 1947 and is still blocking its establishment today is Lyons' constant theme – but it relies on historical sleight-of-hand.

Palestinian Arab leaders in collaboration with neighbouring Arab states opposed the 1947 UN Partition Plan, which would have seen the creation of a Jewish state and an Arab state. It was not Israel but the Arab states that prevented a Palestinian state being formed after 1948 and even the PLO explicitly rejected establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza until at least the late 1970s. Since then, Palestinian leaders have rejected Israeli offers for a two-state peace in 2000, 2001 and 2008. Since 2014, they have refused to even engage in final status peace talks. But in Lyons' insinuations, none of this ever happened.

### LANCET LIE LIVES ON

On Nov. 22, for at least the fifth time, John Lyons repeated the false claim that “an interesting article in the *Lancet* medical magazine in July” said “it’s not implausible to estimate that up to 186,000 or even more deaths could be attributable to the current conflict in Gaza.”

As last month's Noted and Quoted reported, there was no article in the *Lancet* claiming that 186,000 Palestinians had died between October 7 and the end of June 2024, as Lyons implied, but rather a letter suggesting that the war could ultimately be the indirect cause of that many casualties in the future.

Meanwhile, AIJAC's appeal to the ABC Ombudsman of its earlier rejection of a complaint about Middle East Correspondent Eric Tlozek and Lyons' misreporting on this issue was partly successful. The Ombudsman agreed that Tlozek's online article warranted an editorial note to clarify the *Lancet* letter's claims. Yet, bizarrely, Lyons, whose misreporting on

the *Lancet* issue was more egregious than Tlozek's, was deemed not to have breached ABC editorial standards.

### ANNEXATION ALARMISTS

In the *Age/SMH* (Nov. 21), academic Amin Saikal claimed that a re-elected Donald Trump would give Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu free rein to annex the entire West Bank and Gaza and also be happy to see Israel to continue fighting Hamas and Hezbollah.

There is little evidence to suggest that Trump would support the sweeping annexation Saikal envisions, particularly if it conflicted with his wider objectives, such as expanding the Abraham Accords that he initiated in 2020.

Moreover, contrary to Saikal, Trump has made it very clear he wants a ceasefire in place between Israel and Hamas before he assumes office on Jan. 20.

Meanwhile, on *Sky News Australia* (Dec. 3), anti-Zionist activist Antony Loewenstein said he worried that Trump will “speed up... official annexation of the West Bank [and] an unofficial of sorts splitting up of Gaza to allow settlers to return. There is a strong push within Israel to bring fundamentalist Jewish settlers back to Gaza.”

Moreover, in a conspiracy theory we have seen nowhere else, Loewenstein said, “There is a desire by many in the Israeli government to settle southern Lebanon.”

Loewenstein went on to falsely accuse AIJAC and other mainstream organisations of “believ[ing] in endless occupation”. Host Laura Jayes appeared sceptical of his claim that AIJAC “blindly supports Netanyahu”.

### LATE NIGHT LIES

On *ABC RN* “Late Night Live” (Nov. 11), Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian

Territories, who has a long history of antisemitic tweets and support for Hamas terrorism against Israel, accused Israel of seeking to displace Palestinians in Gaza.

“Eighty per cent of Gaza is either rubble or severely damaged... All universities have been destroyed. Why?”, she asked, and advocated for Israel's expulsion from the UN, citing attacks on UN personnel and facilities. “No other state has attacked the UN as Israel has this year,” she concluded.

### FORENSIC FOOLISHNESS

On *ABC RN* “Drive” (Nov. 20), Omar Ferwati from Forensic Architecture, explained that his organisation has compiled a comprehensive visual report “documenting and analysing the conduct of the Israeli military since it began its campaign in Gaza last year,” which South Africa included as part of its submission to the International Court of Justice alleging Israel is guilty of genocide.

According to Ferwati, “What we see is a pattern where Israel's conduct indicates an organised campaign, as we say, to destroy life, the conditions necessary for life and life sustaining infrastructure, the ability to continue to live there.”

He said, “It looks to us that hospitals were systematically targeted” and “there was a cumulative and repetitive action to destroy agriculture” and that more than 75% of known schools were targeted.

Ferwati said Forensic Architects does not claim to determine intent, which is a critical component in proving genocide.

Of course, maybe Forensic Architects is finding patterns of behaviour because Hamas fighters have a pattern of basing themselves in hospitals, in schools and in residential areas and returning to those locations time and time again, so Israeli forces then target them there, as permitted under the laws of war.

Allon Lee

## BURNT OFFERINGS

The arson attack that gutted the ultra-Orthodox Adass Israel Synagogue in Melbourne on December 6 saw the Federal and Victorian Governments – both centre-left – heavily criticised for their responses to the antisemitic incidents that have grown ever more violent since Hamas’ October 7 massacre.

AIJAC’s Rebecca Davis told *Sky News* (Dec. 6) “there’s a sense of betrayal for so many people within the Jewish community who have dedicated their lives to the broader Australian community. We don’t just stay in a little enclave... we have contributed... with our philanthropy – to the arts... business – every sphere of Australian life and for those who have gone silent in the last 13 months, it’s sadly been noted.”

In the *Sunday Telegraph* (Dec. 8), AIJAC’s Joel Burnie wrote, “The constant vilification of Israel in the media, on social media, on university campuses, by the Greens, and yes, by our government, certainly plays a role in inciting this anti-Semitism.”

Rabbi Laibl Wolf told *ABC Radio* (Dec. 6) that it was “sad that the political climate in Australia has deteriorated and I do blame the leadership, despite the platitudes which were stated after the burning of the synagogue, because nothing happens in a vacuum.”

On *Sky News* (Dec. 6), host Steve Price criticised Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan for making a quick exit after receiving a hostile response from the crowd when she visited the Adass Israel Synagogue. AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams responded by saying, you “don’t walk away at the first sign of discord because people are angry and people are hurting and they’re going to take it out on the Government, especially if they, in this case, justifiably feel that the Government has not been doing enough.”

On Dec. 7, the *Australian* whacked Penny Wong for not “focusing on the Melbourne attack” but instead for political reasons “doubled down... insisting the Jewish state could not punish Palestinian civilians for the actions of Hamas. It is Hamas, however, that puts civilians on the frontline.”

The *Australian’s* Yoni Bashan (Dec. 9) wrote, “Australian Jews are living in a perverse moment during which morally reprehensible acts have been left unchecked... Labor’s response has deliberately sought to cool relations

with a historically warm ally.”

In the same edition, the *Australian* editorialised that PM “Albanese got it right on Sunday when he said his personal view was that the firebombing of the Adass Israel synagogue was an act of terrorism... The PM’s doorstep response... was two days too late. It was given on the wrong side of the country... his tone and words lacked authority, empathy and gravitas... [his] visit to the burnt shell of the synagogue... will also be four days too late.”

The *Daily Telegraph* (Dec. 9) said the PM is “a very emotional man... but with these statements... [he] sounds more like an insurance assessor.”

Adelaide’s *Advertiser* (Dec. 7) insisted the “federal government must condemn anti-Semitism in its actions – not just in its words. It has again proven itself to be lacking in courage.”

By contrast, the ABC’s chief political correspondent Laura Tingle used her *AFR* column (Dec. 7) to attack the federal Liberal response to the attack. She concluded by saying, “It is worth noting the very different treatment by our politicians of Muslim communities subject to similar attacks over the past 10 years.”

Meanwhile, unlike his ALP colleagues in Melbourne and Canberra, NSW Premier Chris Minns’ response was widely praised.

On Dec. 12, *SMH* state political editor Alexandra Smith noted that Minns had gone straight away to Sydney’s Central Synagogue to condemn the Adass Israel Synagogue firebombing in Melbourne, calling it “an act of terrorism,” while Albanese waited two days to do so.

On Dec. 12, NSW Jewish Board of Deputies President David Ossip told *Sky News* he held a joint press conference with Minns because of the Premier’s “strong and unequivocal” stance.

But Ossip noted that he chose to boycott the PM’s visit to the Sydney Jewish Museum, explaining, “I couldn’t bring myself to go and hear the Prime Minister talk about antisemitism whilst his Government continues to plot further policy moves against the state of Israel... And whilst he fails to rein in his Foreign Minister, who continues to use incendiary, demonising and provocative rhetoric which in my opinion endangers the Jewish community.”

**“AIJAC’s Joel Burnie wrote ‘The constant vilification of Israel in the media, on social media, on university campuses, by the Greens, and yes, by our government, certainly plays a role in inciting this anti-Semitism.’”**





# THE LAST WORD

Rabbi Ralph Genende

## LIGHT FROM THE EMBERS

More than 30 years ago, my wife and I left South Africa to escape the cruel injustice and racism of apartheid. We came to Australia – delighting in its openness to diversity, its freedom and acceptance of difference, its dazzling multicultural palettes and its respect for its first peoples.

Nothing prepared us for the pandemic of antisemitism unleashed by October 7. Its trajectory from the Opera House on Oct. 9 has been well documented, as has the agony and anxiety of the Jews of Australia. Here on naked display was the venomous hatred we thought we had left behind in South Africa.

Sadly, the arson attack on the Adass Israel Synagogue on Dec. 6 was as predictable as it was awful. When vile anti-Jewish words (often concealed as “anti-Zionism”) face no pushback beyond pious pronouncements, violent attacks on people and property are inevitable. As the Talmud teaches, when you are kind to the cruel, you will ultimately be cruel to the kind.

However, there’s one significant ray of light this time: Unlike the stunning silence of much of the multifaith community after October 7 (and worse, the refusal of most Islamic bodies to even acknowledge the horror), this time support came forth with promptness and unequivocal clarity.

Catholic Archbishop Peter Comensoli messaged me from the airport:

*“Ralph, I have just landed in Rome to the terrible, terrible news. My heart is broken. I realise you are now in Sabbath, but be assured of my full and strong support, and my prayer for all the Jewish community in Melbourne. Peter”*

Shortly after he issued a heartfelt public video on all his social media.

Members of the diverse Victorian Multicultural Commission’s Multifaith Advisory Group, which include the various churches, the Baha’i, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh communities, sent out a statement that reads in part:

*“The trauma of this incident will resonate deeply within the Jewish community, already grappling with the impact of events in the Middle East. We stand with them in solidarity. News of the fire, on the eve of Shabbat prayers, is especially heartbreaking for people of faith... We stand together.”*

I wondered if Muslim spiritual leaders would respond, given their silence, and, from some, aggressive stances, after October 7. I was thus heartened to see that the Board of Imams of Victoria had signed the Multicultural Commission document. I was even more encouraged by the personal note from my colleague Ahmed of the Australian National Imams Council:

*“I know it is Sabbath today... but I wanted to reach out and let you know my heart and prayers are with you and fellow Jewish community in the aftermath of the arson attack on the synagogue. We must all feel safe in our places of worship, and nothing justifies such actions. I pray the perpetrators are brought to account. No matter what both our differences are regarding the situation in the holy land, I believe we wholeheartedly agree in the sanctity of our communities and places of worship.”*

You may say these are just words and even worse, may simply be empty posturing. However, as the People of the Book, we believe in the power of words. We know well that words wound and have been part of the path that led to the intimidation and death of so many Jews throughout our history. If we believe unchallenged slurs led to the burning of the shul, then we must also believe that positive statements can lead to its rebuilding and the mending of tattered relationships.

Ahmed alluded to our differences and the fierce exchanges we have had in some of our public meetings and private conversations about Israel, Palestine and Gaza. But genuine interfaith interactions don’t overlook or minimise differences but in fact lead to real respect for one another.

Yes, religion can divide, but it also unites. In the timeless words of Rev Martin Luther King Jr, it prompts us to recall that the power of love is ultimately stronger than the love of power.



The destruction wrought on the Adass Israel Synagogue in the arson terror attack on December 6 (Image: X)



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