



PROPAGANDA, STEALING AID AND KILLING CRITICS

Inside Hamas' plans to reconsolidate control over Gaza

PARADIGM SHIFT?

The implications – and impracticalities – of Trump's controversial Gaza plans PAGE 21

DEBATING HATE

Australia's antisemitism crisis as seen in Canberra PAGE 26

THE QATAR FACTOR

Doha's spoiler role in Gaza rebuilding plansPAGE 22

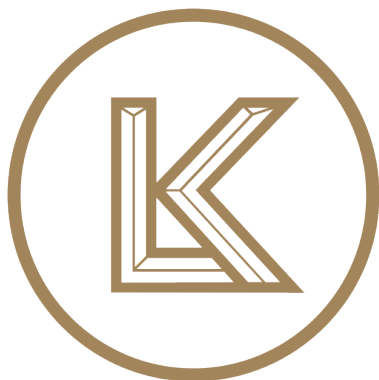
UNRWA'S REAL ROLE

The PA reveals the actual purpose of the contentious UN agency PAGE 7

With compliments

CENTURY PLAZA TRADING

WITH COMPLIMENTS



PROPERTY
GROUP

www.lkproperty.com.au



EDITOR'S NOTE

This AIR edition focuses on exposing the techniques Hamas is using to attempt to consolidate its power in Gaza, following the hostages for ceasefire deal reached in January.

Israeli investigative journalist Ricky Maman does a deep dive into how Hamas succeeded in turning the flows of humanitarian aid into Gaza into a lifeline for itself. Also, the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre reports on Hamas' extensive propaganda efforts to sell the narrative that the Gaza war has been a great "victory" over Israel, while Seth Mandel examines Hamas efforts to crush all dissent in the Strip, often by simply murdering critics.

Also featured this month are Israeli strategic analysts Efraim Inbar and Yossi Kuperwasser on the important implications of US President Donald Trump's controversial Gaza rebuilding plan – even if it is never likely to be implemented. In addition, former top US official Elliott Abrams looks at the sorry history of Gaza, and what the Trump plan gets right about the area's plight.

Finally, don't miss Hussein Aboubakr Mansour on Qatar's likely baneful effects on any reasonable plan for rebuilding Gaza, Jamie Hyams on the antisemitism debates that have recently been so prevalent in Canberra and Ilan Evyatar's report on the renewed judicial reform controversy in Israel.

Please let us know what you think about any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

CONTENTS

FEATURE STORIES

HAMAS' COMEBACK PLANS

RICKY MAMAN

How has Hamas managed to maintain its power and continue functioning as a governing body? For months, we have been told that the organisation suffered devastating blows, that all its infrastructure was dismantled, its leadership eliminated, and tens of thousands of operatives killed – how then can it showcase well-armed formations?PAGE 12



HAMAS' "VICTORY" NARRATIVE

MEIR AMIT INTELLIGENCE & TERRORISM INFORMATION CENTRE ... PAGE 16

HAMAS' WAR ON "COLLABORATORS"

SETH MANDEL PAGE 19

SHIFTING THE DIPLOMATIC LANDSCAPE

The implications of Trump's Gaza proposals
EFRAIM INBAR & YOSHI KUPERWASSER PAGE 21

QATAR, TRUMP AND GAZA

HUSSEIN ABOUBAKR MANSOUR PAGE 22

JUDICIAL REFORM BATTLE FLARES AGAIN

ILAN EVYATAR PAGE 24

DEBATING HATE IN CANBERRA

JAMIE HYAMS PAGE 26

BIBLIO FILE: TRUMP'S MIDEAST TAKE 2

JONATHAN SCHANZER PAGE 28

ESSAY: "GAZA SHALL BE FORSAKEN"

Nobody wants it – but Donald Trump
ELLIOTT ABRAMS PAGE 30

ON THE COVER

Hamas' Al-Qassam Brigades during the handover of Israeli hostages to the Red Cross in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, on February 8, 2025 (Image: Anas Mohammed/Shutterstock)



REGULAR COLUMNS

FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN

COLIN RUBENSTEIN PAGE 4

WORD FOR WORD PAGE 5

SCRIBBLINGS

TZVI FLEISCHER PAGE 6

DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

ITAMAR MARCUS PAGE 7

ASIA WATCH

MICHAEL SHANNON PAGE 8

AIR NEW ZEALAND

MIRIAM BELL PAGE 9

BEHIND THE NEWS PAGE 10

NOTED AND QUOTED PAGE 35

IN PARLIAMENT PAGE 36


MEDIA MICROSCOPE

ALLON LEE PAGE 39

THE LAST WORD

RABBI RALPH GENENDE PAGE 40

HOW TO USE OUR INTERACTIVE EDITION

- Tap/click to return to the Contents page 
- All listed articles link to their page.
- Best viewed in your desktop browser or the Books (iOS) or equivalent e-book reader app in portrait mode.

Australia/Israel Review

Published by the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC)

Editorial Chairman

Dr COLIN RUBENSTEIN AM

Editor-in-Chief

Dr TZVI FLEISCHER

Staff Writers

JAMIE HYAMS OAM, ALLON LEE, AHRON SHAPIRO, OVED LOBEL, TAMMY REZNIK, JUSTIN AMLER, GALIT JONES, ALANA SCHETZER, BREN CARLILL

Publishing Manager

MICHAEL SHANNON

Correspondents

ISRAEL: ILAN EYVATAR
NEW ZEALAND: MIRIAM BELL
EUROPE: ALEX BENJAMIN

National Editorial Board

KEITH BEVILLE, RABBI RALPH GENENDE OAM, GARY HERZ, MIRIAM LASKY, STEVE LIEBLICH, RABBI Dr JOHN LEVI AC, Hon HOWARD NATHAN AM KC



National Chairman

MARK LEIBLER AC

NSW Chairman

PAUL RUBENSTEIN

Executive Director

Dr COLIN RUBENSTEIN AM

Director of Policy and Research

Dr TZVI FLEISCHER

Executive Manager

JOEL BURNIE

Director of Public Affairs

JAMIE HYAMS OAM

Director of Special Projects

Dr BREN CARLILL

Senior Policy Analysts

AHRON SHAPIRO, ALLON LEE

Policy Analysts

OVED LOBEL, JUSTIN AMLER, ALANA SCHETZER, GALIT JONES

Digital Media Producer

AREK DYBEL

Digital Media Editor

REBECCA DAVIS

Digital Communications and Policy Analyst

TAMMY REZNIK

Research Associate

Dr RAN PORAT

Interfaith and Community Liaison

RABBI RALPH GENENDE OAM

Events Coordinator

HELEN BRUSTMAN OAM

Administration

MELBOURNE: ROSEMARY SANDLER, RENA LANGBERG

SYDNEY: LOUISE DE MESQUITA

Israel Liaison

PETER ADLER

Founding Chairmen

ISADOR MAGID AM (OBM), ROBERT

ZABLUD (OBM)

HEAD OFFICE

PO Box 6084

Melbourne, VIC 3004, Australia

Telephone: (03) 9681 6660

Email: aijac@aijac.org.au

SYDNEY OFFICE

Telephone: (02) 9360 5415

Email: aijacsydney@aijac.org.au

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please send all remittances, changes of

address and subscription inquiries to

our Melbourne office (above), or email:

admin-aijac@aijac.org.au

ISSN No. 1442-3693

Print Post Approved – 100007869

www.aijac.org.au



FROM THE
EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN
COLIN RUBENSTEIN

ANTISEMITISM WILL BE ON THE BALLOT

As this year’s federal election marches inevitably closer, it should by now be clear to everyone that – like it or not – the nation’s antisemitism crisis will be one of the salient issues of the campaign. And it will be an issue that matters not only to Jewish voters but to many other Australians who care about law and order, as well as rehabilitating what was our multicultural success story.

Nobody wishes this wasn’t the case more than Australia’s Jewish community.

Yet the soaring levels of antisemitism that we’ve seen nationwide since Hamas’ murderous and hostage-taking rampage through southern Israel on October 7, 2023 can’t be ignored, minimised or checked off as “already dealt with”.

The antisemites, and their often-naïve helpmates, must be given their due. One can’t say they haven’t been creative in their ways of dishing out the world’s oldest hatred, and finding new avenues to escalate the feelings of hostility and anxiety experienced by the Australian Jewish community.

The antisemitic volcano that began erupting with the rally in front of the Sydney Opera House on Oct. 8, 2023 has been spewing out its bile in all directions even since.

Antisemitism – and violent anti-Zionism indistinguishable from antisemitism – have been everywhere: On university campuses; at rallies in the CBDs of major cities on a weekly basis, occasionally even in front of synagogues; in arts circles, where Jewish professionals are doxxed and harassed; in a daily parade of graffiti, stickers and posters; in a successful arson that claimed one synagogue and an attempted arson on another; in the burning down of a childcare centre; in a foiled bomb plot and more. Much more.

Soberingly, for all the antisemitic incidents that have made headlines, we have almost only certainly just scratched the surface.

Had fate not chosen an Israeli social media influencer to randomly be matched with two nurses from a hospital in Western Sydney on a chat app, the alarming reality of how antisemitism has infiltrated the health care system in Australia might have remained unreported.

The publicity surrounding that incident helped bring to AIJAC’s attention many more allegations of racist mistreatment of Israelis and Jews by doctors and nurses across the country.

It also raised the question of why many regulatory bodies have turned a blind eye to healthcare workers who march in venomous anti-Israel rallies with extremist signs whilst in uniform. In one publicised incident, the only penalties that seem to have been meted out were to a whistleblower.

But focusing on antisemitism in healthcare is too narrow – the real point is that antisemitism left unchecked and unchallenged can and will manifest itself in every sphere of life imaginable. For our elected officials to allow this situation to continue to grow in Australia should be unimaginable.

As the election campaign begins to ramp up, some confluence of the antisemitism issue with politics was, unfortunately, inevitable. This is why it is vital to bring some clarity to the issue before election campaigning potentially muddies the waters.

On one hand, Peter Dutton and his fellow Coalition members are well within their rights to seek to hold the Government accountable for its problematic record in failing to effectively confront the 16-month antisemitism crisis in this country. Indeed, as the Opposition, it’s their duty to do so.

The truth is that, since the wave of antisemitism began, the overwhelming consensus within the Australian Jewish community is that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s Labor



Government has at times been dilatory, overly defensive and flat-footed in handling this crisis. And when criticised for this, its go-to tactic has often seemed to be to accuse the Opposition of playing politics with antisemitism, rather than seeking to either explain or improve its policies.

Of course, on the other hand, when dealing with the emotionally charged and highly-important issue of antisemitism, it's also true that the Opposition has a responsibility to approach the matter with sensitivity, nuance and maturity – as it overwhelmingly has – and not just oppose the Government for its own sake.

Antisemitism does not stop at the boundaries of any electorate, and it makes sense that efforts to stop it are more effective when pursued in a bipartisan fashion. But it is important that both sides offer serious policy suggestions that are designed to actually address the problem, not merely score points in parliamentary give and take.

It's not easy to strike the right balance in any given moment.

Yet, ultimately, the onus of responsibility rests on the elected leaders, and this Government cannot escape the fact that Australian Jewry is experiencing the worst antisemitism in living memory. And most of that community has not felt that this Government took the issue seriously enough, quickly enough – even while exacerbating the crisis through a dramatic shift away from Australia's traditional support for Israel's security, a shift which rewarded

and emboldened the antisemitic extremists.


On top of all this, for the first time in Australian history, there is a significant national party running that is enabling and providing a haven for antisemites who operate under the guise of anti-Zionism – the Greens.

Polls indicate an increasing likelihood of a hung parliament, with the Greens gaining the balance of power – a nightmare scenario. This would almost certainly lead to the current intolerable situation getting even worse, so this is an outcome that must be avoided at all costs.

Any genuine fight against antisemitism is entirely incompatible with a future government relying on votes from a party that ridiculously and contemptuously argues that no demonisation of Israel can ever be considered a form of antisemitism, as the Greens frequently do. And that is

only one of their highly problematic behaviours.

For that reason, if he genuinely cares about the antisemitism crisis – and we have no reason to doubt he does – Prime Minister Albanese needs to take a stand now, even before an election date is formally set, by ruling out forming government with the Greens. Both major parties should also call upon all voters to preference the Greens behind the two major parties in every electorate where they are on the ballot.

The Jewish community, in the crosshairs of some of the worst antisemitism it has ever witnessed, can live with nothing less. There is too much at stake. 

“Any genuine fight against antisemitism is entirely incompatible with a future government relying on votes from a party that... argues that no demonisation of Israel can ever be considered a form of antisemitism, as the Greens frequently do”

“” WORD FOR WORD

“This is what a crime against humanity looks like! The whole world must look directly at Ohad, Or, and Eli – returning after 491 days of hell, starved, emaciated and pained – being exploited in a cynical and cruel spectacle by vile murderers.”

Israeli President Isaac Herzog reacting to the return of three severely emaciated hostages on Feb. 8 (Israeli Foreign Ministry website, Feb. 8).

“As far as us rebuilding [Gaza], we may give it to other states in the Middle East to build sections of it; other people may do it, through our auspices. But we're committed to owning it, taking it, and making sure that Hamas doesn't move back. There's nothing to move back into. The place is a demolition site... If we could give them a home in a safer area – the only reason they're talking about returning to Gaza is they don't have an alternative. When they have an alternative, they don't want to return to Gaza.”

US President Donald Trump on his Gaza plans (Times of Israel, Feb. 10).

“We have won and we have not been defeated, and we will not pay the price of the defeat that the occupation suffered under any circumstances... Listen to me carefully as I end this discussion. Anyone who replaces the occupation in Gaza or any city in Palestine will be dealt with only through resistance, just as we deal with the Israeli occupation. This matter is settled and non-negotiable.”

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan (All Israel News, Feb. 16).

“We have a common strategy and we can't always share details of this strategy with the public, including when the gates of hell will be open, as they surely will if all our hostages are not released, until the last one of them.”

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu after meeting with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio (Times of Israel, Feb. 16).

“Before [Iran] was (producing) more or less seven kilograms (of uranium enriched to 60%) per month, now it's above 30 or more than that. So I think this is a clear indication of an acceleration. They are pressing the gas pedal.”

International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi (Reuters, Jan. 22).



Tzvi Fleischer

THE PA'S SOLUTION FOR GAZANS

It would probably not surprise readers that the Palestinian Authority (PA) was not exactly happy with US President Donald Trump's plan to evacuate the Palestinian population from Gaza and rebuild it as a "Riviera". But the reasons may not be what you think.

Many pro-Palestinian Western commentators and journalists took it for granted that PA leaders reject moving Palestinians out of devastated Gaza to Arab countries while the Strip is rebuilt because they think Gazans must remain in their homeland so they can be part of a future Palestinian state.

No. Many PA leaders said instead they want Gazans to be used to "flood" Israel, and presumably destroy it – as per the legally-baseless "right of return" that is so central to Palestinian nationalist ideology.

For instance, Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas told official *PA-TV* (Feb. 15): "If the Americans want a solution, the only place they [the refugees] need to return to is their cities and villages from which they were expelled during the Nakba [i.e., 'the catastrophe', the establishment of Israel]..."

The PA official daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* meanwhile editorialised (Feb. 7): "Instead of uprooting the Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, why don't you return the Israelis to the countries from which they came?"

Meanwhile, Abbas Zaki, a Central Committee member of the PA's ruling Fatah party, wrote an open letter to "all Arab parties" denouncing the Trump plan in which he not only explicitly insisted that returning Palestinians will "flood" Israel, but added that this will result in the end of the "Zionist enemy" in "Palestine".

Denouncing Trump's "rare insolence", Zaki wrote (Facebook, Jan. 29, 2025):

"Is it not time to resolve the most complex conflict by ending the occupation of our land, Palestine, by the Zionist enemy? We await the great day when our Palestinian people will flood towards their villages and cities in occupied Palestine (i.e., Israel) from which it has been expelled for more than 76 years."

I remind readers once again that these statements come from the "moderate" Palestinian Authority – which is often contrasted with the extremism and rejectionism of Hamas. There is a tendency among too many people to make simplistic contrasts between the two, assuming the PA favours a two-state resolution but Hamas rejects it. However, as the above quotes make clear, the PA does not really want a two-state solution – it believes "justice" means Israel's destruction. It may be more open to the possibility of a two-state resolution as a sort of political way station than

Hamas is. Yet even then, the PA treats the legally baseless and historically unprecedented "right of return" to Israel as absolutely sacrosanct – even though it is completely incompatible with any genuine two-state resolution.

(Quotes above from Palestinian Media Watch).

WHAT MAINSTREAMED ANTISEMITISM LOOKS LIKE

Readers may be aware that the US-based Anti-Defamation League published its once-a-decade global survey of antisemitic attitudes, known as the Global 100, in January. The results were not pretty.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the global wave of anti-semitism that has been apparent since October 7, 2023, antisemitic attitudes were way up. In 2014, globally, 26% of those surveyed agreed with a majority of 11 stereotypes about Jews put to them. In 2024, it was 46%. That's a 77% rise in people classified by the ADL as holding "elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes."

Australia was not atypical. We went from having 14% of those surveyed showing "elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes" in 2014 to 20% last year – a rise of 43%. According to the survey, we are now the most antisemitic country in the Anglosphere.

And, let's be clear, none of the questions in the Global 100 are about Israel or Zionism. The only statement that even mentions Israel is "Jews' loyalty is only to Israel."

Some of the answers to the survey questions should be simply shocking. Globally, 35% of those surveyed said the proposition that "Jews are responsible for most of the world's wars" was "probably true" or "definitely true". Twenty-one per cent of Australians agreed with that insane, conspiratorial claim. Meanwhile, 35% of Australians said the proposition that "People hate Jews because of the way Jews behave" was probably or definitely true.

Given the way a lot of people insist Jewish complaints about antisemitism are only a way to shut up criticism of Israel – which is itself an antisemitic trope in most cases – it seems worth calling attention to what the daily antisemitism looks like in one of the many countries where it is endemic.

Let's use some examples from a country many people may not think of a major purveyor of antisemitism – Turkey. Here are excerpts from three articles that appeared in major Turkish newspapers in a single week:

From the Islamist major newspaper *Yeni Akit* (Feb. 11):

"Did you say Jews? They are the cursed ones who do not hesitate to set the world on fire to fry eggs."


From *Yeni Akit* (Feb. 8):

"It is not possible to come across any other nation other than the Jews that has been consistently exiled throughout the recorded history of humanity... Regardless of the nation, humanity has performed various surgical operations throughout history to rid its body of this malignant tumour..."

From the regional daily *Corum Haber* (Feb. 6):

“According to the Jewish belief, according to the distorted (altered) Torah, the God of the Jews created all people to serve the Jews... the Jews are the masters and the others are their servants, which is the Jewish terminology. In other words, the dominance of the world belongs to the Jews... When examined, it will be seen that the Jews are the rulers of the world economy...”

[Hat Tip: Elder of Zion]

None of this blatant antisemitism caused a stir, in Turkey or outside it, because it is routine there – as in many other countries. Those of us living in countries where such blatant antisemitism is taboo need to be aware that places like Turkey, Iran, Qatar, Russia and even China are pumping out material like this – and it is inevitably making its way to Australia and other liberal democratic countries. 



Itamar Marcus

THE PA: UNRWA IS A POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The mask is finally off. The UN and its benefactors can stop deceiving the world that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a humanitarian organisation. The Palestinian Authority (PA) itself – UNRWA’s most ardent and interested advocate – has inadvertently admitted the essential role played by UNRWA in the Middle East is political and not humanitarian.

UNRWA’s mission came into the spotlight after the Israeli Knesset passed a law that went into effect on January 30, banning UNRWA from operating within sovereign Israel. In response, the UN, NGOs, and numerous donor countries quickly joined the PA in condemning Israel’s law.

They all complained that UNRWA could no longer fulfill its role. However, there is a complete misunderstanding among UNRWA’s benefactors about what UNRWA’s role really is.

The UN asserted that UNRWA “has provided essential humanitarian services to Palestine refugees.” Human Rights Watch, along with 52 other NGOs, concurred that Israel’s move “threatens... the international humanitarian operation in Gaza.” Foreign ministers of donor countries, including Canada, Australia, France, Germany and the UK, expressed “grave concern” because “UNRWA provides essential and life-saving humanitarian aid.”

Comparing these reactions to those of the PA underscores the vast divide between what much of the world thinks UNRWA is and what its champion – the PA – knows UNRWA is.

Nabil Abu Rudeina, spokesperson for PA President Mahmoud Abbas, sounded the PA’s position: “The newly

passed [Israeli] law aims to liquidate the issue of refugees and their right to return and compensation.” Abbas’ office then added: “The presidency decided to act urgently... since the topic of UNRWA is a political topic that is related to the right of return.”

Ahmad Abu Houli, chairman of the PLO Department of Refugee Affairs, concurred that “this [Israeli law] is part of its efforts to eliminate the Palestinian refugees’ cause and their well-rooted right of return... and unilaterally change the criteria for a future political solution.”

The PLO Department for Expatriate Affairs added that Israel’s plan was “to eliminate the refugees’ cause and erase the right of return” [The PA’s responses were all published by *Wafa*, the official PA news agency].

There is a giant abyss between the world’s “humanitarian” UNRWA and the PA’s political “right of return” UNRWA. The first commandment of Palestinian national identity is that the few thousand Arabs who fled Israel during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence and are still alive, together with the 5.9 million residents of UNRWA camps, have a “right of return” to “Interior Palestine” – the PA’s term for the State of Israel.

Even though 99% of them are living in the countries where they were born and raised, UNRWA keeps them registered as “refugees” – stigmatised forever as foreigners in the only country they have ever known.

Israel agrees with the PA’s statements that UNRWA’s unique role was never humanitarian. Indeed, UNRWA’s humanitarian role could easily be filled by others, as in the Israel-Gaza War, wherein only 13% of the aid has been distributed through UNRWA.

The UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which provides “life-saving assistance, including shelter, food, water, and medical care” in 136 countries, would be the organisation caring for the refugees from Israel’s War of Independence, if their needs were only humanitarian.

However, as the PA has made clear, UNRWA’s distinctive role is political – to perpetuate “the right of return” by branding all newborns as “refugees”, thus denying their right to citizenship and equality in their countries of birth.

Many insist UNRWA should be closed because of its involvement in Hamas terror, but this is missing the main point. Even if UNRWA would completely distance itself from terrorists and terror, and even if UNRWA education stopped promoting hatred, the organisation that turned 750,000 refugees in 1949 into 5.9 million “refugees” today is a human rights abuser with no right to exist.

PA Prime Minister Muhammad Mustafa recently admitted that the PA’s concern is not to stop the refugees’ suffering by solving their predicament but, rather, the PA’s goal is to perpetuate it.

“The refugee camps are a symbol of our glory,” he said, according to the official PA daily, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*



[Dec. 15, 2024]. “They are a national symbol that we must preserve.” Forcing people to be “preserved” as refugees because of a political agenda is a fundamental abuse of human rights. AIR

Itamar Marcus is Founder and Director of Palestinian Media Watch. © Palestinian Media Watch (pmw.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

BALANCING ACT

US President Donald Trump’s bold proposal to transfer Palestinians out of Gaza and have the US take over the region sent shockwaves through the Middle East, highlighting how distant countries still hold huge sway in the region.

The globe’s other main superpower – China – is less given to shock announcements or colourful rhetoric. While Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said, “Gaza is the Gaza of Palestinians, an integral part of the Palestinian territory, not a political bargaining chip,” the official Chinese position, restated in a position paper in late 2023, calls for a two-state resolution.

The ongoing role of China in the region, and particularly its relationship with Israel, remains a paradox – marked by economic pragmatism and calculated realpolitik.

China’s response to Hamas’ murderous October 7 attacks conspicuously avoided condemning Hamas, let alone recognising Hamas as a terrorist organisation, but was quick to accuse Israel of overreacting in Gaza. Meanwhile, a surge in antisemitic and anti-Zionist content emanated from Chinese state media, diplomats, online influencers and academia.

Furthermore, Beijing’s continued warm relations with Iran, its high-profile diplomatic successes in late 2023 normalising ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which had been on the brink of normalising ties with Israel before the war, and its attempt to reconcile the Palestinian factions in the “Beijing Declaration” of July 2024, led to Israel expressing “deep disappointment” over China’s position.

Further complicating matters, reports emerged in late 2023 that Israeli high-tech industries were experiencing difficulties importing components from China due to bureaucratic obstacles. These challenges led to increased costs and delays, which some Israeli officials interpreted as *de facto* sanctions by China amidst the ongoing conflict.

Israel’s closeness to the United States seems to be a critical factor. After it became clear that most of the Global South has turned against Israel once the Gaza war started,

China saw an opportunity. Support for Palestine is seen as having boosted China’s image in the developing world – one of Beijing’s main audiences – while also working to undermine US standing abroad and theoretically tilt the global power balance in its favour.

However, Beijing’s position has evolved in step with Israel’s military gains. Its vocal support for the Palestinian cause appears to have tempered, in a calculated shift of geopolitical priorities. Since the ceasefire, China has maintained its earlier call for restraint and dialogue, while its shuttle diplomacy is back on display: Zhan Jun, China’s top envoy, recently visited Israel and the Palestinian Territories, marking the first such trip since the outbreak of war in October 2023.

During talks in Israel, Zhan Jun applauded the ceasefire and emphasised the importance of hostage-release agreements, and spoke of greater Sino-Israeli collaboration. In discussions with Palestinian leaders in Ramallah, he reiterated China’s longstanding support of Palestinian self-determination and the “two-state solution”.

Meanwhile, the fluctuating diplomatic relationship has not prevented deepening economic ties between the two countries. Over the past year, bilateral trade has reportedly increased by approximately 12%, reaching an estimated \$15 billion (A\$22.6b) in overall trade volume. Chinese investments in Israel’s tech sector have surged, enabling start-ups to scale their operations and further integrate into global markets. Concurrently, Israeli companies have found new opportunities in the expansive Chinese market, especially in sectors such as cybersecurity, water technology and renewable energy.

Although each country pursues its own strategic interests, each has clearly benefitted from a partnership that combines Israel’s cutting-edge innovations with China’s vast manufacturing capabilities and market access.

While China is now Israel’s third-largest trading partner globally, the expanding economic relationship is complicated. Israel’s deep-rooted strategic alliance with the United States necessitates a level of caution in its dealings with Beijing. Washington has repeatedly expressed concerns over technology transfers and the potential for security breaches resulting from Chinese infrastructure developments.

For instance, in 2021 Chinese company Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG) began its 25-year contract to build and operate Israel’s Haifa commercial shipping port. Washington expressed concern that the port lies adjacent to the Israeli naval base where ships of the US Sixth Fleet frequently dock, although after four years of operation these concerns have been allayed.

Still, Israel continues its delicate balancing act: reaping the benefits of Chinese investments and technological collaborations while not jeopardising its crucial ties with the US. AIR



Miriam Bell

ANTI-ISRAELI ‘HOTLINE’ PROMPTS CALL FOR OFFICIAL ACTION

“This is not who we are,” a Jewish New Zealander said in a LinkedIn post asking for people to stand against hate, after the country’s latest incident of public antisemitism in early February.

Graffiti saying “genocide high school” had been sprayed on to the wall of the former Kadimah School building in Auckland. The school – the country’s only Jewish day school – has moved, but the defaced property is still owned by Auckland Hebrew Congregation.

Back in early 2020, an incident where swastikas were spraypainted outside Temple Sinai in Wellington was widely reported by media and condemned by public figures including local MPs.

Yet, that did not happen after the graffiti attack on Kadimah. The incident was covered by just one media outlet, and no public figures outside the Jewish community said anything.

There was no public comment from the MP for the electorate the property sits in. Sadly, this is unsurprising – the MP in question is Green Party co-leader Chloe Swarbrick, who has staunchly defended her chanting of “From the River to the Sea” at pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

A possible reason for the difference in response to the two incidents could be the broader environment they occurred in. In 2020, the incident shocked because such overt antisemitism was unusual.

That is no longer the case. Since the October 7 terror attacks on Israel, antisemitism has skyrocketed in New Zealand, as it has globally.

Hate crimes targeting Jews increased 530% from 2022 to 2023, according to New Zealand Police data. Jews make up only 0.2% of the New Zealand population, but in the past year, 13% of all hate crimes in Auckland, and 10% of all hate crimes in Wellington, were against Jews.

There were 20 reports of wilful damage against Jewish facilities in 2024 up to October, while reports of Jewish children subjected to antisemitic episodes at school are at a record high. Virulently anti-Israel protests take place every week, and the rhetoric that accompanies them is also evident in poster campaigns and on social media.

And, as noted, there has been very little condemnation of this from elected officials, public figures, and non-Jewish community leaders.

An exception of sorts came in the wake of a disturbing campaign launched in late January by notorious pro-Pales-

tinian activist John Minto and his organisation, the Palestine Solidarity Network Aotearoa.

The campaign promoted a “genocide hotline” – members of the public were encouraged to call a number to report sightings of Israeli soldiers in New Zealand.

“We need your help to track them down so we can let them know they are not welcome here,” the campaign imagery said. Social media responses to Minto’s campaign included many that were threatening, or overtly violent, toward Israelis.

After being alerted to the campaign, the recently-appointed Chief Human Rights Commissioner Stephen Rainbow released a statement, saying, “This sort of action has the risk of a ripple effect which may cause harm in the community. We call on those behind the hotline to close it down and cease promotion immediately.”

Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters condemned the campaign as “an outrageous show of fascism, racism, and encouragement of violence and vigilantism,” while ACT Party leader David Seymour said the hotline and Minto’s behaviour were “absolutely disgraceful”.

The Human Rights Commission received more than 100 complaints about it, and complaints were also made to police and Netsafe, but the campaign posts were still up on social media as of Feb. 15.

NZ Jewish Council President Juliet Moses said she was pleased to see agencies such as the Human Rights Commission condemning Minto’s campaign.

“The media did a pretty good job of covering it, and the general feeling among the wider public seems to be that it was pretty appalling and unacceptable, and ‘not the way we do things in NZ.’”

The “hotline” also became tied to the issue of whether Israelis are being asked additional questions about their military service on New Zealand immigration applications, she said.

“I still don’t have clarity around that one. The Immigration Minister says there has been no change to Immigration NZ’s policy on this, while others say there has been.

“But it was interesting that once [US Senator] Ted Cruz made [a] post about it there was a sudden flurry of activity and comments about it, unlike in other situations.”

She wondered if there had been a bit more pushback from the New Zealand public on the whole anti-Israel issue recently.

“Maybe they have been looking at what is going on in Australia – the firebombings, the graffiti, the bomb plan, and now the video of those nurses talking about killing Israeli patients.

“And maybe some realise that what is happening in Australia is what happens when you leave antisemitic rhetoric unchecked, and that there is no reason that it couldn’t happen here too,” Moses said.



BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Since the Gaza ceasefire came into effect on Jan. 19, one rocket was launched from Gaza on Feb. 14, falling inside Gaza and allegedly killing a 14-year-old Palestinian.

On Jan. 21, four Israelis were injured in a stabbing in Tel Aviv by an Arab tourist. Two IDF reservists were killed and eight wounded on Feb. 4 in a shooting in the West Bank.

According to Shin Bet data, there were 6,828 attacks in the West Bank and Israel in 2024, double the number for 2023. However, there was a 44% decrease in “significant” attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem, with 231 in 2024 versus 414 in 2023. Forty-six Israelis were killed and 337 wounded in terror attacks in 2024.

REVELATIONS ABOUT HAMAS’ TORTURE OF HOSTAGES

Disturbing new details about how Israeli hostages Ohad Ben-Ami, Or Levy, and Eli Sharabi were tortured, physically and psychologically, by Hamas terrorists in Gaza have been revealed following their release on Feb. 8. This included being chained to chairs, choked, starved, hung upside down, gagged to the point of almost being suffocated, and burned. They were also refused water for several days and only allowed to bathe every few months. One of the men said, “I was shackled inside a dark tunnel, with no air or light. I couldn’t walk or stand, and only before my release did my captors remove the chains, forcing me to learn to walk again.” The three men spent 491 days in captivity and appeared extremely gaunt and frail when finally released.

Fellow hostage Keith Siegal, released on Feb. 1, similarly reported

being tortured and starved, and barely seeing sunlight. British-Israeli hostage Emily Damari, who was freed on Jan. 19 needing surgery for gunshot wounds, has confirmed that she was confined for a time inside UNRWA facilities in Gaza.

ISRAEL’S WEST BANK OPERATIONS

Since Israel launched a major military operation in the West Bank called “Iron Wall” on Jan. 21, dozens of terrorists have been killed, including some senior local commanders affiliated with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and more than 100 detained, with many weapons and explosive devices captured or neutralised. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have fled the fighting from areas around Jenin, Tulkarm, Tamun and Tubas. Several Palestinian civilians were also accidentally killed.

PA RESTRUCTURES PAY FOR SLAY

The Palestinian Authority (PA) announced on Feb. 10 that it was restructuring its “pay-for-slay” policy by transferring financial responsibility for families of Palestinians jailed or killed committing terrorism from the Social Development Ministry to the Palestinian National Institution for Economic Empowerment. The PA claimed this would make the families subject to the same eligibility criteria as other families on welfare, thus meeting repeated demands from the US and other international interlocutors. However, many analysts expressed scepticism, suggesting the reforms would amount to making the same payments to convicted terrorists and their families under a different mechanism.

HEZBOLLAH INCLUDED IN NEW LEBANESE GOVERNMENT

Four members of Hezbollah and its Shi’ite ally Amal have been included in the new Lebanese Government’s 26-member cabinet – including as Finance Minister – despite warnings against Hezbollah participation from the US.

Led by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, the new Lebanese Government formed on Feb. 7 replaces the caretaker government that had been running the country for the past three years. Hezbollah reportedly received the cabinet positions in return for agreeing that its camp would not be given a “blocking third” which can veto government initiatives – a two-thirds majority of the cabinet is required to pass major decisions. Experts hope Salam will lay the foundation for essential reforms concerning security and the economy, including fully implementing the ceasefire agreement reached with Israel in late November and disarming Hezbollah in the south as per UN Security Council Resolutions 1701 and 1559. The new Government’s term of office will expire in May 2026.

INCIDENTS CONTINUE DURING LEBANON CEASEFIRE

The IDF continued to destroy Hezbollah facilities, infrastructure, and weapons caches, and eliminate terrorists in southern Lebanon, before withdrawing from most of southern Lebanon on Feb. 18 under the terms of the US-brokered ceasefire.

Weapons discovered included missiles, rockets, mortars, grenades, firearms, plus multi-barrel rocket launchers aimed at Israel.

On Feb. 15, an Israeli airstrike on

a car in southern Lebanon killed a Hezbollah drone commander who had been responsible for a ceasefire violation. On Feb. 16, Israeli warplanes struck military sites in the Bekaa Valley where Hezbollah activity had been detected in breach of the ceasefire.

Another strike, on Feb. 17, killed the Hamas operations chief in Lebanon.

The IDF has stated that it plans to maintain a continued presence at five key defence posts in southern Lebanon beyond the Feb. 18 deadline until the Lebanese Armed Forces can fully fulfill their obligations to disarm and remove Hezbollah south of the Litani River. Lebanese authorities strongly oppose this.

PLANES CARRYING IRANIAN FUNDS BLOCKED FROM BEIRUT

On Feb. 13 and 14, planes from Teheran were refused landing rights at Beirut airport after Israel warned it would act against flights from Iran which were carrying funds for Hezbollah. Violent protests from pro-Hezbollah forces ensued.

On Feb. 15, Lebanese authorities said they had arrested 25 people after Hezbollah supporters attacked a UN convoy, injuring two peacekeepers.

MAXIMUM US PRESSURE ON IRAN RESUMED

On Feb. 4, US President Donald Trump signed orders resuming the “maximum pressure” policy on Iran that he implemented during his first term of office. The policy includes tough economic sanctions on Teheran targeting its illegal oil exports (mostly to China), while also strengthening mechanisms to ensure the sanctions are not circumvented.

Responding to this news, the value of the Iranian currency nosedived to more than 850,000 rials per US dollar. Since January 2024, the Rial has lost more than 55% of its worth compared to the greenback.

IRANIAN LEADERS URGE BUILDING NUKES

With Trump’s return to office, and fears in Teheran of an attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities, several top Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders have reportedly approached Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei asking him to repeal an Islamic decree (*fatwa*) that allegedly forbids developing weapons of mass destruction, so that Iran can swiftly produce nuclear weapons at will. Iran can create enough highly-enriched uranium to build several nuclear bomb cores within about two weeks. Full weaponisation would still take at least several months – but newly published US intelligence assessments point to Iranian efforts to find shortcuts to speed up the weaponisation process.

Meanwhile, according to an Iranian opposition group, IRGC experts are using two civil satellite launch

sites (near Shahrud and close to Semnan) to mask expedited development of atomic warheads that can be mounted on Iranian ballistic missiles capable of reaching Europe.

NETHERLAND AND FIJI GIVE ISRAEL DIPLOMATIC WINS

On Jan. 28, the Dutch Parliament passed a resolution requiring Palestinian NGOs to recognise Israel’s right to exist to receive funding. This follows revelations after the October 7 attack that European aid to Palestinians was often diverted to bodies affiliated with Hamas and other terror groups.

In further positive diplomatic news for Israel, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar announced on Feb. 17 that Fiji had decided to move its Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Sa’ar had met with Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka in Munich the previous week.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

FORGET LOGIC, THINK OF THE CHILDREN!

We often hear and read claims that the majority of people killed in the war in Gaza have been women and children, even as Israel’s estimates that it killed around 21,000 fighters are often ignored. Also ignored is a study by the Henry Jackson Society that found that the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry includes as women and children numerous casualties who were actually adult men. (The study also found that it includes among the casualties anyone who died during the war, regardless of their cause of death, and even some who died before the war started.)

However, the Turkish news agency Anadolu took this phenomenon of ignoring facts that don’t fit the anti-Israel narrative to an extreme. A Jan. 23 article by Hosni Nadim claimed that more than 38,000 children in Gaza had been “orphaned by Israel’s genocidal war.” The

article then cited Gaza Health Ministry official Zaher al-Wahidi, who “explained that some 32,151 children lost their fathers, 4,417 lost their mothers, and 1,918 lost both parents.”

Even allowing for the fact that Palestinians have large families, and thus the number of parents killed would be considerably less than the number of orphans, these facts would seem pretty obvious proof that the overwhelming majority of those killed in the war have been men (which may be why these numbers haven’t been reported more widely).

However, a mere two paragraphs later, Nadim referred to “Israel’s genocidal war that has killed nearly 47,200 Palestinians, mostly women and children.” Apparently, being so focussed on emphasising the “extent of the pain that the people of Gaza have suffered,” as al-Wahidi put it, made Nadim overlook this complete failure of logic.

Probably not surprising, as the article also absurdly referred to the situation in Gaza as “one of the worst global humanitarian disasters ever.”



COVER STORY

HAMAS' COMEBACK PLANS

LIVING OFF THE AID BONANZA

Ricky Maman

The ceremony Hamas staged for the release of Israeli hostages Eli Sharabi, Ohad Ben Ami and Or Levy on February 8 will be remembered primarily for the emaciated appearance of the three released captives. But those who looked at the bigger picture could spot many additional details of this and other choreographed and well-funded pre-handover events that should worry and trouble Israel. While Israel set the goal of completely eliminating Hamas, and the IDF invested 16 months of intensive warfare in this mission, these elaborate ceremonies, featuring formations of armed terrorists in crisp uniforms, show that the organisation not only remains dominant in the Gaza Strip but is also well-equipped and capable of staging impressive productions.

This raises a number of questions. How has Hamas managed to maintain its power and continue functioning as a governing body? For months, we have been told that the organisation suffered devastating blows, that all its infrastructure was dismantled, its leadership eliminated, and tens of thousands of operatives killed – how then can it showcase well-armed formations? Where did it obtain the necessary funds?

An investigation by Israeli news outlet *Makor Rishon* reveals that, during the war, Hamas managed to get its hands on enormous sums of money, goods, and resources that allow it to remain in power. The main source of funding is provided with the approval of Israel, through the border crossings it established: humanitarian aid.

The amount of money involved is staggering. According to security establishment estimates, close to one billion US dollars (A\$1.57b) have reached Hamas since October 2023, directly or indirectly. This is what enables it to continue paying salaries to its operatives during wartime, and also recruit new operatives to replace those killed. Even Gazans who don't receive direct salaries from Hamas are forced to purchase basic food products from it – or starve.

Numerous sources were consulted for this story, both



Hamas' elaborately-staged hostage handover ceremonies have raised questions about how the terror group has maintained its continuing political power (Image: Anas Mohammed/ Shutterstock)

within and outside the Israeli military and security establishment. Given the sensitivity of the subject, most chose to remain anonymous. The picture they paint shows that some of Israel's lenient policies towards humanitarian aid have inadvertently been undermining the goal of eliminating Hamas.

TWO-COLUMN DISTRIBUTION

All of our sources agree: humanitarian aid is the central factor enabling Hamas to maintain control in Gaza. Food packages, clean water, medical equipment, tents, and fuel – all these serve Hamas operatives, their supporters, and families first. Hamas sells the remaining goods to Strip residents, and the money received is used to pay operatives and maintain its mechanisms.

According to the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), before the war, several hundred trucks entered the Strip from Israel daily, no more than 500 trucks at peak. These carried food, fuel, construction materials, raw materials, furniture, clothing, and goods of all types. Additionally, goods entered the Strip

from Egypt through the Rafah crossing. As soon as the war broke out, all crossings were closed but, almost immediately, the IDF began preparing to transfer humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Hamas anticipated the closure of the crossings and prepared supply warehouses in advance. But the quantities were limited, stockpiles dwindled and, as the campaign progressed, Hamas began suffering from shortages of food, medical equipment, and fuel – which was especially necessary for powering the tunnel network. Then, about 50 days after the October 7 attack, the first ceasefire-for-hostages deal was reached. Besides releasing a small number of Palestinian prisoners, the deal included bringing large quantities of equipment and food into the Strip under the banner of “humanitarian aid”. For Hamas, this was oxygen: it refilled warehouses and prepared well for continued fighting.

The flow of supplies to the Strip did not stop at the end of the ceasefire. From the beginning of the war, the American stance supporting Israel came with an unequivocal demand: Israel must bring in humanitarian aid for Gaza residents. Even when Hamas’ deep involvement in supposedly civilian organisations like the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN agency for Palestinian refugee affairs, became clear, and despite knowing that the terror organisation was seizing many aid trucks, this demand remained.

As the US presidential elections approached, pressure from the Biden Administration to bring more and more aid into the Strip only increased. In a letter then-US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken sent in October 2024, it was stated that Israel needed to change its policy due to “severe humanitarian conditions in Gaza.” The demands on Israel included “flooding” the Strip with aid at a volume of at least 350 trucks per day, humanitarian pauses in fighting, easing restrictions on goods passage, and bringing aid to northern Gaza. If the Israeli government did not do this, the Americans threatened, it would lead to a complete arms embargo. Subsequently, aid volumes stabilised at 200 to 250 trucks per day.

According to Customs and Border Crossings Authority data, during 2024, 42,700 humanitarian aid trucks entered the Strip. The current hostage deal led to a sharp increase in supply flow to the Strip: in the 42 days of Phase A of the current deal, if completed, 600 trucks per day are supposed to enter, totalling 25,200 aid trucks within a month and a half. These are resources transferred directly and indirectly to Hamas – and no one doubts this.

Under the cover of the hostage deal, trucks are entering the Strip in numbers similar to those before the war, except now they bring only essential equipment and food. Other goods not defined as humanitarian are not permit-

ted to cross the border. This means that the quantities of basic resources entering the Strip are even larger than before the war.

According to estimates, Hamas seizes 25 to 30% of the humanitarian aid entering the Strip – 150 trucks per day. Throughout the war, documentation increased showing how Hamas operatives attack truck drivers, take control of vehicles, and steal the goods on them. The IDF’s Unit 504 intelligence officers [*the unit investigating Palestinians captured by the IDF – Ed.*] heard from a Strip resident, a chef working for an American NGO, that Hamas systematically steals equipment and food from UNRWA warehouses as well. The IDF Arabic Spokesperson Lt. Col. Avichay Adraee published videos showing how masked Hamas men beat residents and loot food sacks from them. Other documentation showed operatives impersonating UNRWA workers and stealing fuel and medical equipment from the organisation’s warehouses.

Meanwhile, Hamas launched an “enforcement operation” against humanitarian aid thieves, killing more than 20 Gazans suspected of theft. The message to Gazans was clear: only one entity in the Strip is allowed to steal.

Sometimes Hamas takes on the role of the generous uncle passing out aid packages to residents. In one such case, Hamas took over a distribution line operating at a school and clinic, and began distributing food vouchers to residents, including baby food, creating resident dependence on the organisation. In other cases, two columns could be seen at distribution centres – one for Hamas members and one for Gaza residents. Those in the first line received twice the amount of supplies as their neighbours in the parallel line.

Some of the aid Hamas steals, it immediately resells to residents, the victims of the theft. Its revenue from this channel is estimated at US\$50 to US\$100 million (A\$78 to A\$157m) per month, totalling nearly a billion dollars since the war began. For comparison, the Qatari cash suitcases that Israel permitted to be transferred to the Strip before

“Some of the aid Hamas steals, it immediately resells to residents, the victims of the theft. Its revenue from this channel is estimated at US\$50 to US\$100 million [A\$78 to A\$157m] per month”

with compliments



Alceon

Investment, corporate finance and capital

Phil Green
Trevor Loewensohn
Morris Symonds

Sydney • Melbourne • Brisbane • Perth

Tel: 02 8023 4000
www.alceon.com.au

the war contained US\$30 million (A\$47.2m) monthly.

Even when Hamas doesn't take goods by force, it ensures it profits from them. It collects protection money on every truck entering or moving within the Strip, even for essential aid to hungry residents. This sort of extortion has continued unabated through the current ceasefire.

"The average payment per truck is about 30,000 shekels [A\$13,000], and it can reach 50,000 [A\$22,000]," Eyal Ofer, a Hamas economy expert, tells us. "If you multiply that by 70,000 trucks that have entered since the war began, you reach about 2 billion shekels (A\$880 million). Add to that the goods that reached them, and those they sold at high prices – and we're talking about four billion shekels [A\$1.765b] accumulated in the past year."

"There's a vicious cycle here," says Dr. Ehud (Udi) Levy, former head of the Mossad's Economic Warfare Unit ("Tziltzal", Harpoon), and currently a senior researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security. "The world sends humanitarian aid to Gaza, Hamas seizes it and takes it for free, then sells it for money, with this money it pays salaries, and these salaries return to it because they're also used to buy humanitarian aid supplies."

"There's no functioning economic system in Gaza today, but Hamas manages to pay its people," says Dr. Michael Milshtein, head of the Palestinian Studies Forum at the Dayan Centre at Tel Aviv University, and former head of the Palestinian arena in the Research and Analysis Unit in Israel's Military Intelligence. "Humanitarian aid

is deeply exploited by the organisation. The salary from Hamas sometimes comes in the form of a product basket or medicines. Those connected to the organisation get what they need. From everyone else, Hamas collects taxes. Internal taxation was a major source of income for it even before October 7, and all business activity in the Strip involved paying tax. With the start of Israeli ground manoeuvres in Gaza [in late October 2023], it became clear that the entire civilian space is actually scenery for the jihad project. There wasn't a single kindergarten, mosque, grocery store, or charity organisation that didn't have something from the military wing's infrastructure."

RAFAH AND THE PRIVATE TRADERS

The IDF ground operation into Rafah, which began on May 6 last year, was preceded by a prolonged dispute both within Israel and with international actors. The United States and European countries opposed Israel's takeover of the city in the southern Strip, as it meant closing the Rafah crossing to humanitarian aid coming from Egypt. In light of the criticism, the defence establishment decided to allow goods into Gaza not only through international aid organisations but also through the private market. Israeli traders were permitted to sell various products and materials to Gazan traders, after they received special approval from the IDF.

COGAT initiated this move ostensibly to create a Hamas-bypassing supply route. But information we received points to another reason: an attempt to encourage other, non-Hamas elements in the Strip to take control. Local clans identified as having potential to push out Hamas received special permits to import goods themselves. These goods arrived through Egypt, underwent inspection at the Nitzana crossing, and from there were transported to Gaza through Rafah, with Israel providing air escort.

In practice, this move led to several problems and yielded Hamas tens of millions more dollars. First, the organisation collects "protection money" on every truck entering the Strip, including those coming through private market traders. The bypass route for transferring goods didn't prevent it from profiting this way. When clans tried to take control of certain areas and collect protection money themselves, Hamas fought them: it didn't want competition.

To tighten its grip on the Strip's economy, the organisation operated a kind of police force whose duties included supervising market prices. Lists distributed to merchants detailed maximum prices for various goods, and Hamas announced that for anyone exceeding the stated amount, their stock would be confiscated and distributed for free.

Another problem with opening private routes for goods entry was increased smuggling. Goods originating in Israel pass through fewer control points compared to goods arriving from abroad, and smugglers know how to exploit this in various sophisticated ways. Cash and weapons were likely sent this way to the Gaza Strip as well.

With compliments



ANKA
PROPERTY GROUP

Edgecliff, NSW 2027

Phone: (+61 2) 9302 3000
www.ankaproperty.com

Third, private trade gave Hamas access to funds from abroad. Since the war began, organisation senior officials in Gaza have struggled to receive money held in investments and various accounts, or amounts that Iran, for example, wanted to transfer to them. The goods passage enabled an offsetting move: Iran purchases goods needed by Hamas, or it purchases them remotely, using funds located abroad; a local merchant fronts the transaction to give it legitimacy; and thus ultimately Hamas manages to transfer monetary value into the Strip, even without bringing in cash.

CIGARETTES INSIDE SEWAGE PIPES

Humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip comes from various international organisations – private non-profit organisations like World Central Kitchen, UN agencies, and more. Many countries, including the UAE, Egypt, and Jordan, also send their contributions. COGAT gives approvals to various international entities to transfer goods to the Strip and determines what is permitted and what is prohibited. Qatar, Turkey and Iran cannot transfer aid directly to the Strip, but do so through a back door: they donate money to international NGOs and UN agencies, which then purchase aid products and transfer them to the Strip.

Until a few weeks ago, UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugee affairs, held permission to transfer goods to Gaza – although it was clear that within the Strip, Hamas and this organisation were one and the same. This permission was cancelled at the end of January this year, after the “Law to Stop UNRWA Activity in Israeli Territory” was passed by Israel’s Knesset. However, in practice, the UN continues to work in the Strip through UNRWA mechanisms, even when it’s known that goods reaching the workers and agency facilities effectively fall into Hamas’ hands.

Aid arrives from around the world and funnels into Israel through Ashdod port or border crossings with Egypt and Jordan. Then it enters the Strip through four Israeli crossings – up from one before the war.

Currently, only five types of goods are allowed into the Strip: food, water, medical equipment, medicines, and shelter (tents and the like). Yet in practice, aid trucks also smuggle large quantities of prohibited goods to Hamas. These are sold in the Strip at high prices, further enriching the terror organisation’s coffers.

Many of the smuggling operations involve tobacco and cigarettes. In one humanitarian aid shipment, a thousand packs of Karelia cigarettes were caught on six UNICEF trucks. The trucks’ official cargo was sewage pipes, but inspection of the wooden pallets on which the pipes were loaded revealed the smuggling attempt.

Recently, drug smuggling into the Strip was also discovered, including hashish and Captagon – the drug used by Hamas Nukhba operatives who invaded on October 7, and popular among ISIS terrorists. Sources familiar with the

matter told us that cash and weapons were also smuggled into the Strip throughout the war.

BOMBING BANKS

Another Hamas revenue source was revealed to Gaza residents in the form of a powerful explosion that rocked the Rimal neighbourhood on April 17, 2024. This wasn’t an air bomb, nor a shell fired from an Israeli tank: the noise source was inside the Bank of Palestine. As a result of the blast, banknotes were seen flying in the air, and when the smoke and paper pieces settled, what happened became clear. Not long before the explosion, concerns arose at the bank that economic distress in the Strip would lead to theft attempts, so it was decided to pour another concrete shell around the central vault. This didn’t help. Hamas operatives blew up the vault with its surrounding concrete and fled with about 100 million shekels [A\$44 million]. The next day, several armed men came to the bank and forced employees to open other vaults. Thus, the Bank of Palestine lost another 100 million shekels.

These cases, and another series of vault and ATM robberies of smaller amounts, were revealed in a *Financial Times* investigation. According to estimates, Hamas enriched its wallet this way by about 400 million shekels [A\$176 million] in cash, within just two months. The IDF Arabic Spokesman has publicised a Hamas document showing that the robberies were planned and executed by organisation operatives.

Meanwhile, other entities continue to stream money into the Strip through bank transfers. Ofer says the Palestinian Authority transfers salaries to its employees still operating there and support to residents. Additionally, tens of thousands of people in the Strip receive grants from various international organisations through PalPay, a payment application operating in Gaza.

Another money route is fundraising through charity organisations and crowdfunding campaigns. Thousands of such campaigns went up on social networks throughout the war, successfully raising huge sums from private individuals in the US, Europe, and East Asia. Most donate innocently out of desire to help displaced persons and those in need,

With Compliments

Mount Silver Pty Ltd

Consultants & Advisers



without knowing that some money goes directly to Hamas. Israel's Bureau of Counter Terror Financing works with the intelligence community to monitor fundraising, and when a specific campaign is identified as Hamas-linked, it issues sanctions against it. Financial bodies usually honour this, disconnecting the campaign from payment channels and internet servers. So far, about 60 fundraising operations have been blocked this way. But even in this arena, the fight against terror financing is a Sisyphean task: for every campaign closed, a new one opens.

HUMANITARIAN AID'S CATCH 22

The Israeli security establishment is well aware that some humanitarian aid reaches Hamas, but claims it has no effective way to monitor what happens with truck contents after the trucks enter the Strip. The truck drivers are Gazans who have received IDF and Shin Bet approval, but when Hamas gunmen want to take over the vehicle and shipment, none of these drivers resist.

The IDF aspires to find an alternative to Hamas as the Strip's controlling entity, but after 16 months of fighting, it's already clear that no civilian entity will want to take this role before Hamas is removed. Israel imprisons itself in a catch-22, because Hamas cannot be destroyed while continuing to stream resources and equipment that keep it alive. As long as Israel continues to facilitate massive aid into enemy-controlled territory, it feeds the beast and prevents its elimination. This aid has long since stopped being a humanitarian tool and become an instrument for maintaining Hamas rule.

AIR

Reprinted from the Israeli Hebrew-language daily Makor Rishon, translated and edited for length by AIJAC staff. © Makor Rishon (www.makorrishon.co.il), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

HAMAS' "VICTORY" NARRATIVE

The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre

The announcement of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, even before it went into effect on January 19, 2025, provided Hamas with an opportunity to start promoting a "victory" narrative over Israel in the Gaza Strip War, which they refer to as Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which began with the Hamas terrorist attack and massacre on October 7, 2023.

Official statements from Hamas and its senior figures, amplified by the movement's official and affiliated media outlets, as well as during public "release ceremonies" for

Israeli hostages, aimed to promote the narrative that Israel had failed to achieve its objectives against the "resistance" and the "steadfastness" of the Gazans.

The implementation of the agreement, such as the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostages, the return of displaced persons to northern Gaza and the Israeli withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor, were also used to contrast Hamas' "victory" with Israel's "failure".

Hamas' media made extensive use of statements from Israeli political, military and media figures, which, in their perspective, reinforced the message of Israel's "failure" to achieve the war's objectives.

In our assessment, Hamas will continue highlighting Israel's failure to achieve its objectives and promoting the "victory" narrative as long as the ceasefire agreement is maintained, in order to soften public criticism in Gaza of the extensive devastation in the Strip. If the agreement transitions to the second phase, which is expected to include further Israeli withdrawals from Gaza and the release of more prisoners who committed particularly serious crimes, Hamas will intensify its "victory" propaganda to increase its power in Gaza and maintain its position in the Palestinian arena, even if it is forced to relinquish actual control over the Gaza Strip.

THE HAMAS "VICTORY"

The announcement on Jan. 15, 2025, of a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip by Qatar's Prime Minister marked the launch of Hamas' "victory" campaign, which intensified when the ceasefire went into effect on Jan. 19. Hamas quickly promoted the "victory" narrative, claiming that the "resistance" and the "steadfastness" of Gaza residents had forced Israel to halt its "aggression" and had prevented it from achieving its objectives. Khalil al-Hayya, the acting head of the Hamas political bureau in Gaza, who led the Hamas negotiating team, gave the main themes of the narrative in a speech announcing the finalisation of the agreement. He said:

"Today we prove to the occupation that it has not succeeded and will not succeed in defeating our people and their resistance, achieving nothing but despair, destruction and massacres of our people, and failing to bring back its [hostage] prisoners except through an agreement with the resistance to stop the war and aggression and through an honourable exchange agreement. Therefore, we say with confidence and certainty, the steadfastness of our people, their immense sacrifices and the courage of their resistance have defeated the declared and hidden objectives of the occupation in this war, and the will of our people remains free, proud and pure, untainted by any stain of cowardice or weakness."
(Hamas in Judea and Samaria Telegram channel, Jan. 15).

Israel failed to achieve its objectives

- Hamas has consistently emphasised, both through state-



“The occupation’s objectives thwarted by the resistance” (Shihab, January 18, 2025)

ments by senior figures and visual content, in its Telegram channel, *al-Risalah*, *al-Aqsa TV*, and *Quds* and *Shehab* news agencies, a series of “failures” attributed to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Government to achieve the declared and (in their view) the “hidden” objectives of the war, including the failure to eliminate Hamas, failure to uproot the Gazans, failure to free

the hostages through military pressure, severe divisions within the Government, heavy damage to the Israeli economy, the threat of lawsuits in the International Court of Justice, arrest warrants issued against Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant by the International Criminal Court, significant losses within the IDF ranks and damage to Israel’s international standing.

- Since the first phase of the ceasefire agreement began on Jan. 19, Hamas spokesmen have often highlighted every step taken by Israel as part of its commitments under the agreement as a “victory” for them and a “failure” for Netanyahu, who they claim was forced to back down. Even delays by Israel in implementing phases of the agreement are labelled by Hamas as an attempt by the Prime Minister to cover up his “failures.” For example, Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua said, “The return of the displaced, the continued prisoner exchanges and the withdrawal from the [Netzarim] corridor refute Netanyahu’s lie and his illusion of a complete victory over our people” (*al-Risalah*, Feb. 9).
- To emphasise the narrative of Israel’s “failure,” Hamas publishes quotes from Israeli media, political and military officials, journalists and commentators on social media and in affiliated media outlets, using their statements when consistent with Hamas propaganda. In general, during military conflicts, Hamas significantly increases its quoting of Israeli media both for psychological warfare and to reinforce its “victory” narrative.
- The Hamas media rushed to report the resignation on Jan. 21, 2025 of IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi and the Commander of the Southern Command, who joined other senior IDF officials in announcing their resignations in recent months, inserting them into the “victory” narrative. Visual materials were used, with headlines suggesting that Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the “resistance’s” victory were the reasons for their resignations.

Consistent use of the word “flood”

- The Hamas “victory” narrative often makes use of the word “flood” (*tufan*) to emphasise that the “achievements” which allegedly resulted from the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre are, in its view, an integral part of Operation al-Aqsa Flood and would not have been achieved without the attack. By doing so, Hamas aims to respond to critics of the October 7 attack from both inside Gaza and beyond:
 - Hamas named the deal for the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostages the Flood of the Free deal (*tufan al-ahrar*).
 - Zaher Jabarin, head of the martyrs, prisoners and wounded office in Hamas, said, “The release of prisoners as part of the Flood of the Free deal is a historic victory for the will of the Palestinian people and its brave resistance” (*Quds Press*, Jan. 29).
 - The large public participation in welcoming ceremonies for released prisoners is referred to in Hamas media as a “human flood” (*Quds Agency Telegram channel*, Jan. 30).

Steadfastness and sacrifice”

- The concept of “steadfastness” (*sumud*) is always prevalent in Hamas’ media during routine times but is emphasised and amplified during times of war. As part of establishing Hamas’ “victory” narrative, “firm stance” is presented as a noble trait of the Gazans, which enabled them to survive the [so-called] “genocidal war” for 15 months and allowed the Hamas leadership to adhere to its “principles” and impose its conditions on Israel. “Sacrifice” is represented as complementing “steadfastness”, mobilised by Hamas to raise the Gazans’ morale and to mitigate the criticism it faces in the Strip because of the war’s heavy toll on lives and property.
- The Hamas media often publish pictures of Gazans standing on the ruins of their homes to show their “steadfastness”, despite the extensive destruction, and the “failure of the occupation” to displace them from their land.

THE CUSTOM MADE RUG & CARPET SPECIALISTS

DESIGNER RUGS

Established 1986

SYDNEY | MELBOURNE
BRISBANE | AUCKLAND

1300 802 561
designerrugs.com.au

- The value of “sacrifice” is also highlighted in the context of the “martyrdom” of the movement’s leaders and senior figures, who serve as role models and whose “sacrifices” are personal examples.
- The elements of “steadfastness” and “sacrifice” also appear in Hamas statements and in declarations of its senior figures and spokesmen:
 - A statement published by Hamas on the eve of the Qatari announcement of the ceasefire agreement read: “The agreement is the fruit of the legendary steadfastness of our Palestinian people” (*al-Risalah*, Jan. 15).
 - After the ceasefire agreement was approved, Khalil al-Haya, head of the Hamas political bureau in Gaza, said, “We say with confidence, the steadfastness of our people, their great sacrifice and the courage of their resistance have thwarted the declared and hidden objectives of the occupation in this war” (*Shehab Agency*, Jan. 15).
 - Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said in a statement marking the implementation of the third phase of the hostage release deal that the Palestinian people, with their legendary “steadfastness”, courage and unity in support of the resistance, were behind Hamas.

INTEGRATING THE VICTORY NARRATIVE INTO IMPLEMENTING THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

- Hamas views the hostage deal itself as an achievement and a victory, leveraging and fully exploiting each phase of the hostage releases to promote its “victory” narrative. Hamas repeatedly emphasises that Israel failed to free the vast majority of the hostages through military pressure and only succeeded through an agreement, representing it as a victory manifested by Israel’s “surrendering” to Hamas’ terms. Hamas propaganda relies heavily on statements from Israeli officials, former military personnel and commentators which appeared in Israeli media, and convey the notion that military pressure did not achieve its goal and did not lead to the release of the hostages.
- That Hamas continues to dominate the Gaza Strip, remaining the ruling authority there and the sole party with whom Israel is forced to negotiate for the hostages’ release, supports its “victory” narrative. Hamas staged and publicised most phases of the Israeli hostages’ releases and transfers to the Red Cross in highly choreographed ceremonies, which included armed guards, a decorated stage to which the hostages were led, filming hostages wearing “hostage tags” and bracelets in the colours of the Palestinian flag while holding “release certificates” bearing the Hamas logo, and conducting “interviews” with the hostages before their release,

forcing them to repeat Hamas texts. Emphasis was also placed on the hostages’ attire, representing them as prisoners of war.

- The release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons in exchange for the release of hostages, as stipulated in the agreement, is represented as a symbol of Hamas’ “victory” in having imposed its terms on Israel and adhered to its “principle” that the release of Israeli hostages could only be achieved through the release of Palestinian prisoners, including hard-core prisoners sentenced to long terms, including life imprisonment. Hamas also represented the prisoner release as fulfilling a fundamental commitment to its supporters, made possible solely by its victory. That was reflected by Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem, who said, “We forced the occupation to cross the red lines it had set for itself and release prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment” (*alresala.net*, Jan. 30).
- Hamas’ media outlets give extensive coverage to prisoner releases focusing on the celebrations and receptions held for the released prisoners in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, and even in Cairo, where some prisoners were deported and were given a festive reception led by senior Palestinian faction leaders.



Zakaria Zubeidi, responsible for an attack that killed 6 people in 2002, celebrating his release (Palinfo website, January 30, 2025)

The return of the displaced Gazans to the northern Strip

- On Jan. 27, at 7:00 AM, IDF forces withdrew from parts of the Netzarim Corridor, allowing Palestinian residents to move from the southern Gaza Strip to the north, via both pedestrian and vehicular routes, for the first time since late October 2023. Hamas authorities in Gaza reported that half a million people returned to northern Gaza within just 72 hours.
- The return of displaced residents to northern Gaza has become a prominent feature of Hamas’ “victory” narrative. While the extensive destruction of the Gaza Strip and the fact that many displaced residents remain homeless are widely covered in Hamas media (as part of the “victim” narrative), the Hamas message is that the land of Gaza remains in the hands of its owners and that Israel failed to force the Gazans’ displacement.
 - Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem said, “The return to northern Gaza after the ceasefire agreement reflects the failure of one of the war’s objectives to bring about the displacement of our people from their Palestinian land. Our people’s deepened hold on their land despite the unprecedented genocidal war has settled the struggle for Palestinian existence

on the land in favour of our people” (*alresala.net*, Jan. 23).

- According to an official statement, “The return of the displaced is a victory for our people and a declaration of the occupation’s failure and its migration schemes” (*alresala.net*, Jan. 27). AIR

© *The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre*, (www.terrorism-info.org.il), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

HAMAS’ WAR ON “COLLABORATORS”

Seth Mandel

Hamas is always at war – sometimes with Israel and sometimes with its own people. You can tell the difference by the fact that Hamas only wears military uniforms when it’s carrying out a campaign of terror and score-settling on Palestinians in Gaza.

Amid all the debate over the future of Gaza, Western media and supposedly “pro-Palestinian” advocates are noticeably quiet about Hamas using the ceasefire to murder and maim the Palestinian civilians whose wellbeing the world suddenly stopped fretting over.

On January 23, four days into the ceasefire, a Gazan-born Palestinian dissident reported that Hamas’ Telegram channel was crowing about the terror group’s execution of presumed “collaborators”. He followed up with a video that soon made the rounds on social media showing Hamas gunmen shooting civilians in the legs as they lay on the ground with their hands tied.

Later that night, *Gaza Now*, a Hamas-affiliated outlet, reported that “5 collaborators of the Zionist occupation were executed in the southern Gaza Strip a short while ago, bringing the number of collaborators executed today to 11.”

By the end of the month, Hamas was boasting of hundreds of supposed collaborators it would be combing through Gaza to execute: “The beginning is Rafah, then Khan Yunis... The rest of the governorates, one after the other, will be dealt with by a special unit affiliated with the security services in Gaza. They will strike with an iron fist, and there will be no repentance for anyone except [by] the punishment of bullets.”

On Feb. 6, Israeli newspaper *Maariv* reported that, three weeks into the ceasefire, the campaign was still ongoing: “The terrorist organisation began executions and a widespread wave of arrests. Not only those suspected of any collaboration with Israel, but also anyone who rebels against the situation in Gaza, in any form whatsoever, including on social media, is arrested by Hamas members.” On Feb. 13, Hamas reportedly opened fire on a family near Khan Yunis.

Hamas does this after every war. It’s a tradition.

Not that Gazans were free of that tradition during the war. But it’s a more focused campaign now that Hamas brigades aren’t afraid to operate out in the open.

Hamas, of course, really does rule with an iron fist. The terrorists of Gaza also kill with reckless folly: On Feb. 14, an errant rocket aimed at Israel fell inside Gaza and killed a Palestinian teen.

None of this is terribly unusual. But it’s worth pointing out that Hamas remains able to commit horrific crimes against Israeli hostages and Palestinian locals at the same time. Which means that, while Hamas may be far from its pre-war strength, the status quo in Gaza remains.

Which is another way of saying that there will be no rebuilding of Gaza in the near future. Hamas remains in control of the enclave, and its behaviour is identical to

the way it acted during and before the war. There is less for Hamas to break in Gaza, but it intends to break what it can find.

Considering all this, there is something almost silly about the way the discourse on the conflict has become monopolised by the subject of postwar recovery. Even if Palestinian civilians wanted to leave the enclave temporarily to allow their neighbourhoods to be rebuilt, Hamas wouldn’t let them go anywhere – and Hamas certainly

wouldn’t leave of its own free will.

During active conflict, Hamas is the biggest threat to Gazans: Israel creates safe zones and gives advance notice of attacks in the hot zones, and Hamas’ use of those humanitarian sectors puts civilians in the line of fire. And when there’s not active conflict, Hamas is still the biggest threat to Gazans: It just goes around executing them at will.

Any plan, therefore, that aims to improve life for Palestinians requires a realistic way to rid Gaza of Hamas. Without that, there is no “Riviera on the Med,” no two-state solution, no peace – no change at all. AIR



Hamas is determined to continue controlling Gaza by acting in the same murderous way toward locals that it employed before October 7, 2023 (Image: Anas Mohammed/ Shutterstock)

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





MERITON

QUALITY APARTMENTS BUILT FOR A LIFETIME



Meriton is renowned for building large, luxurious apartments of the highest quality, uniquely designed by industry acclaimed architects and built by our highly skilled and experienced construction teams. We pride ourselves on the highest levels of workmanship to bring you award-winning developments.

Apartments for sale | Apartments for rent | Meriton Suites



meriton.com.au



It takes a Village

St Ives Shopping Village offers a community environment with over 100 fashion, food and lifestyle retailers with independent and national brands available.

We are delighted to support the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council.

stivesvillage.com.au @stivesvillage  
166 Mona Vale Road, St Ives



Shifting the Diplomatic Landscape

Implications of Trump's Gaza proposal

Efraim Inbar & Yossi Kuperwasser

US President Donald Trump's proposal, to relocate Gaza's Palestinian population to ensure a safer and better life and transform the Gaza Strip into a "truly wonderful area", has captivated the imagination of many Israelis. However, this suggestion is being met with fierce opposition by Arab countries and the Palestinian leadership.



Trump's Gaza plans captured the imagination of many Israelis because it constitutes a recognition that past approaches to the Palestinian issue must change fundamentally (Image: [Whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov/)/ Flickr)

The plan points to the price that the Palestinians will have to pay for their decision to carry out the terrible terror attack of October 7. Israel paid for its unreadiness with many lives and the freeing of a large number of terrorists as part of the hostage release agreement. The Palestinians paid with the decapitation of much of their leadership and the death of many of their people. Much of Gaza has been reduced to ruins.

It is evident that under the current leadership, the reconstruction of the area will not be possible. Moreover, the American plan provides a response, albeit partial, to the refugee issue – a central component of the Palestinian national ideology.

Trump's proposal is so out-of-the-box that its implementation would require fundamental paradigm shifts among the parties involved. It is difficult to see such shifts occurring soon, despite President Trump's claims that some of these changes are already underway and that eco-

omic pressure will ultimately bring about the rest.

To enable the realisation of the US President's proposal, three conditions must be fulfilled:

First, Hamas will have to be removed from power in Gaza and replaced with an entity willing to facilitate the implementation of the Trump initiative. At least in the first stage, this would mean Israeli military control of the territory.

Second, assuming that there is no intention of forcibly evacuating the Palestinian population, nearly all Gazans would need to be convinced to relinquish their grip on the land (bearing in mind that *sumud*, or "steadfastness", is one of the core principles of the Palestinian ethos) and go into "exile" to improve their quality of life. Nevertheless, based on surveys, it appears that a significant number of Gazans would be willing to emigrate.

Third, Arab nations and other countries would need to cooperate in absorbing Gazans and funding the project. At present, such a move runs counter to their interests and could expose pro-Western Arab leaders, especially in Jordan and Egypt, to severe internal criticism.

In the coming weeks, Trump is set to launch an effort to bring about these changes in meetings with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. The initiative is part of his attempt to shape a broader regional architecture centred on neutralising the Iranian nuclear threat and expanding the Abraham Accords through the normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Trump is enlisting Western entrepreneurial logic for this effort, but it is doubtful that this will be enough to convince the people of the region to abandon their fundamental concepts.

Nevertheless, the Trump proposal is important, both in content and form. For the first time, it puts on the table a seemingly practical action plan that challenges conventional wisdom – thinking that has long obstructed progress and ensured the continuation of terror from Gaza. The proposal makes it clear that, after October 7, the approach to the Palestinian issue must change fundamentally.

The proposal has not come from Israel, local politicians, or think tanks. It comes from the US President at the very beginning of his term. Moreover, it acknowledges for the first time in a long time that the "two-state solution" is not the only possible solution to the conflict, contrary to even the original Trump plan (presented toward the end of his first term in office).

Without saying so explicitly, it includes the message that the Palestinians, as the aggressors, must pay the price for the war they initiated and lost.

Taken in the context of Israeli and US measures against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the proposal signals

that the rules of the game have changed – to the detriment of the Palestinians in a way that weakens the logic of their struggle and narrative against Zionism.

Even if Trump ultimately fails to secure the conditions for implementation of the plan, the very fact that it has been put on the table will force the Palestinians and Arab countries to propose practical alternatives to deal with the difficult reality in Gaza, and to do so in a way that is acceptable to both Israel and the US.

Additionally, it highlights once again how Europe and the rest of the international community are irrelevant to the resolution of the conflict.

The Palestinian counter-reaction might also manifest in increased motivation to carry out attacks from the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), and perhaps also as intensified activity against Israelis abroad. This is because the Palestinians see the implementation of the ceasefire-for-hostages agreement as a victory for terrorism, and this inspires further escalation.

Moreover, the agreement also releases terrorists into the territories of the Judea and Samaria and Gaza – as well as abroad – including terrorists who will seek to orchestrate new attacks. In light of this, Israel must continue – and step up – its counterterrorism efforts, particularly in Judea and Samaria, while also preparing for a renewed flare-up of the campaign in Gaza.

So far, Israel is not required to officially address the plan, as its details have yet to be presented. Beyond expressions of appreciation and understandable satisfaction, Israel should refrain from leading public moves to promote the plan.

This is because its appeal and the chances of its success stem from the fact that it is an American initiative, not an Israeli one. Israel's active promotion of the plan might interfere with the implementation of the hostage deal and increase tensions with the pragmatic Arab states, particularly Egypt and Jordan, who view the issues raised by the plan as being of almost existential importance.

The appropriate policy is to wish Trump success in his efforts to convince key Arab countries to assist in implementing the plan while noting the obstacles that exist, which are not Israel's doing. In any event, Trump's plan is perceived as an expression of a pro-Israel American policy; the image of the US standing firmly by Israel's side enhances its deterrence and its international standing.

Given the pro-Israel winds blowing in Washington and Trump's character, official Israel should not publicly object to proposals put forward by the US.

As noted above, the Trump plan is predicated on removing Hamas from the equation – an outcome that is unlikely without IDF action or at least the threat of an IDF operation. The Americans, who are not enthusiastic about sending soldiers to Gaza, understand this and appreciate Israel's contribution to the possibility of implementing

their plan. The moderate Arab states would also like to see Hamas removed from Gaza, a fact that provides Washington with additional leverage over them.

Israeli diplomacy should take advantage of the Trump plan and its underlying assumptions to undermine entrenched views in many capitals around the world regarding the nature of the conflict in our region and how to manage it.

AIR

Prof. Efraim Inbar is the former head of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security. Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser is the new head of the Institute. He is a former head of the Research Division in the IDF Intelligence Corps. © Jerusalem Post (jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

QATAR, TRUMP AND GAZA

Hussein Aboubakr Mansour

For years, and long before October 7, Gaza has languished as one of the most troubled enclaves on Earth: A strip of land mired in poverty, controlled by Hamas and functioning both as a human shield and propaganda tool for regional powers. In the aftermath of the massacre of 1,200 people in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, Gaza was reduced to a little more than rubble, with no country willing to help end the crisis.

Now, US President Donald Trump has announced a bold – some would say quixotic – plan to “take over” Gaza, turn it into a glittering American “Riviera of the Middle East,” and provide alternate homes for Gazans in Egypt and Jordan. At face value, the move has the potential to shake the region's stagnation. It might even push Arab states to either step up with a realistic solution or cede control to a US-led effort at reconstruction and modernisation.

Yet, one glaring obstacle stands in the way: Qatar.

If Trump expects Arab leaders to help solve the Gaza crisis, he must also pressure Qatar to rein in its propaganda networks and ongoing alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood. These networks, notably Al Jazeera, have long used the Palestinian quagmire as a cudgel to hammer other Arab regimes, portraying them as complicit in Israel's siege or indifferent to Palestinian suffering. In so doing, they undermine rival governments that are already wary of a backlash from their own citizens and the broader Arab street.

Qatar's posture in the Middle East has always involved a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, Doha flaunts its relations with Washington, hosts a major US military base and positions itself as a modernising, business-friendly emirate. On the other, it funds and gives shelter to Islamist



US President Trump with the Emir of Qatar, Tamin bin Hamad Al Thani, during his first term in 2019 (Image: Whitehouse.gov/Flickr)

groups, from the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas to even more extreme jihadists.

That same duality extends to its media empire. Al Jazeera's Arabic channel regularly lambasts the region's monarchies and strongmen for failing to support the Palestinians, all while the Qatari monarchy cultivates cordial ties with Western powers like the United States, having thousands of American technocrats and professors on its generous payroll.

This duplicity is not lost on the region's leaders. They know that if they so much as nod in the direction of a US plan for Gaza, Al Jazeera's cameras will magnify every perceived betrayal or shortfall, labelling them traitors who capitulate to American imperial designs. In such a volatile environment, any Arab ruler who endorses a Trump-led initiative to restructure Gaza's political future may be handing Qatar's media the perfect rhetorical weapon. Even the suggestion of letting a "Riviera in the Middle East" be built is being spun as "selling out the Palestinian cause" or "destroying Palestinian identity".

Domestic opponents in Egypt, Jordan or Saudi Arabia, for instance, can seize on that narrative – weaponising Al Jazeera's coverage to rouse popular outrage. No leader wants to face the wave of condemnation that might stem from a 24/7 news cycle painting them as complicit in the final displacement of Palestinians. The spectre of the Arab Spring and waves of protests that toppled governments remain fresh in their memory. A single storyline, "X regime is handing over Palestinian land to the American bulldozer," could stoke unrest among populations already fatigued by economic hardships and historical grievances.

If Trump is serious about forging a solution in Gaza, then he must address the contradictions in Washington's relationship with Qatar. Historically, the United States has treated Doha with kid gloves. Qatar invests heavily in American real estate, business ventures, universities, and, not least, lavish lobbying campaigns in Washington. Over the years, an array of Washington insiders, think tanks

and political influencers have found themselves on Qatari payrolls, enjoying lucrative consulting contracts that often hamper scrutiny of Doha's double-dealings.

That same scenario looms large over the Trump Administration. On one side, Trump champions a new Middle Eastern order – cracking down on extremism and ending the endless tragedies. On the other, Qatar remains an ostensible ally, never facing real pressure to restrain Al Jazeera's incendiary narratives or break from the Muslim Brotherhood.

For the President to propose a visionary reimagining of Gaza while still embracing Qatar's emir, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, is to perpetuate American hypocrisy. If Washington fails to push Doha on the media front, any arrangement for Gaza could collapse under a barrage of Qatari-sponsored propaganda that incites the region's populations and torpedoed any meaningful buy-in from Arab states.

Most Arab capitals – from Riyadh to Cairo – are well aware of Qatar's media prowess and ideological gambits. Their caution on endorsing dramatic shifts in Gaza's future stems not only from the fear of domestic backlash but from a broader anxiety that any perceived alignment with US policy offers easy fodder to Al Jazeera's editorial team. Meanwhile, Qatar continues to project an image of progressive diplomacy and philanthropic generosity to the Palestinians while effectively controlling the narrative that defines how other Arab states are judged on the issue.

Ultimately, the dissonance arises from the United States wanting to champion stability and oppose extremist narratives yet refusing to confront an ally that skilfully plays both sides. At stake is not simply the success or failure of a futuristic "Gaza Riviera-plex", but whether Middle Eastern alliances – and indeed, American diplomacy – can transcend petty entanglements with a tiny emirate wielding outsized influence. Should Trump proceed without addressing Doha's propaganda might, then he'll be effectively inviting a fresh round of condemnation to any Arab state bold enough to join his plan.

His grand vision to transform Gaza may sound like a pipe dream or a cynically choreographed move to corner Arab leaders. In either case, a crucial piece is missing: a determination to hold Qatar accountable. If that piece is

With compliments

NDM Sylvania P/L



absent, any talk of radical change in Gaza will only feed the region's vicious cycle, wherein politicians float grand ideas, Qatari media tears them down, and the Palestinians remain in tragic limbo. AIR

Hussein Aboubakr Mansour is the Director of the Endowment for Middle East Truth's Program for Emerging Democratic Voices from the Middle East. © Jewish News Syndicate (JNS.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ISRAEL'S JUDICIAL REFORM BATTLE FLARES AGAIN

Ilan Evyatar

While the attention of most Israelis remains fixed on the Gaza ceasefire and the fate of the hostages, another battle has once again been heating up – the long-running judicial reform controversy which wracked the country throughout 2023 up until October 7.

In a dramatic and unprecedented move, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Justice Minister Yariv Levin and Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana all boycotted the swearing-in ceremony of the new Supreme Court President, Isaac Amit, on Feb. 13.

The absence of Israel's top political leaders at Amit's inauguration underscores the profound and ongoing tension between the executive and judicial branches. Speaking at the swearing-in ceremony, Israeli President Isaac Herzog strongly condemned the boycott, stating that in a democracy, one branch of government should not boycott another, and that the legal system should not be turned into a political



Israel's new Supreme Court President, Justice Isaac Amit

battlefield. Meanwhile, Amit, in his inaugural speech, reiterated his commitment to judicial independence, noting that the judiciary does not stand above the other branches but works alongside them, "as an equal partner in the democratic framework of checks and balances."

Amit called on Levin to maintain the regular working meetings that have always taken place between the Justice Minister and the Supreme Court President "to ensure that the country's citizens and residents continue to receive a high-quality and efficient judicial system."

However, Levin, the architect of the controversial judicial reform plan launched in January 2023, declared that he does not recognise Amit's appointment. "The procedures by which he was 'elected' are fundamentally flawed and illegal," he asserted.

Two right-wing NGOs, Lavi and Im Tirtzu, had petitioned the High Court of Justice against Amit's appointment, alleging that claims of conflicts of interest were not thoroughly examined. They pointed to cases Amit had presided over where, they argued, he should have recused himself due to professional or personal ties. The High Court of Justice dismissed the petition, with Justice Alex Stein ruling that the Judicial Selection Committee – which

chooses judges, and selected Amit – was the appropriate body to evaluate such concerns and that it had reviewed all relevant information before confirming his appointment.

The Government's boycott is the latest chapter in a long-running battle over judicial authority. Earlier this year, Levin and new Foreign Minister (and former Justice Minister) Gideon Sa'ar introduced a compromise proposal aimed at reforming the Judicial Selection Committee. Their plan sought to replace the two Israel Bar Association

representatives who currently are part of the nine-member committee with one government-appointed attorney and one opposition-appointed attorney, while also shifting to only requiring a simple majority rather than the current supermajority for Supreme Court appointments.

Before the Hamas attack on October 7, judicial reform protests had reached a fever pitch, with hundreds of thousands of Israelis demonstrating weekly against the Government's proposed changes. The protests both underscored and exacerbated deep divisions within Israeli society, with some military reservists threatening to refuse service and prominent business leaders warning of significant economic fallout if the proposed reforms went ahead. The crisis created the perception of a fractured and weakened Israel – a factor that Hamas leaders reportedly considered when planning their attack on October 7.

According to intelligence assessments, Hamas leader

C | F | S | G

CONCEPT FINANCIAL SERVICES GROUP

**MERGER & ACQUISITIONS
CAPITAL RAISINGS
DIRECT INVESTMENT**

For more information visit cfsg.com.au
or contact Marcus H. Rose, Executive Chairman,
on 03 7036 6933 or info@cfsg.com.au

Yahya Sinwar miscalculated Israel's resilience, believing that the internal discord over judicial reform would paralyse the country's response as political divisions would prevent Israel from committing to a prolonged ground war in Gaza. However, the attack had the opposite effect, uniting Israelis across the political spectrum and temporarily sidelining the judicial reform debate, as national security and fighting a war, in Gaza but also against Iranian proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen and the West Bank, took precedence.

Yet ongoing tensions and stalemate over the Judicial Selection Committee led to an unprecedented situation where, for over a year and four months, Israel's Supreme Court functioned without a permanent President. In addition, the Court is currently operating with 12 judges instead of its full array of 15 justices. Levin refused to convene the Committee for more than a year – apparently to prevent its expected selection of Amit – until ordered to do so by the Court itself this January.

Critics argue that the prolonged leadership vacuum was a deliberate tactic by the Government to pressure the judiciary into accepting its reforms.

Levin's refusal to recognise Amit's appointment could have significant ramifications for the judiciary. As justice minister, Levin shares authority with the Supreme Court president over the administration of the judicial system. Many key decisions – ranging from budgetary allocations



Israeli Justice Minister Yariv Levin, with PM Netanyahu: Both boycotted Justice Amit's swearing-in ceremony and have vowed not to work with him (Image: Shutterstock)

to judicial appointment – require their joint approval.

Critics argue that Israel's Judicial Selection Committee currently grants sitting justices and their legal allies excessive influence over new appointments, effectively allowing them to choose their own successors. The current committee consists of nine members: three Supreme Court justices, two government ministers, two Knesset members and two representatives from the Israel Bar Association. While Levin's reform proposals in 2023 would

have assured the government a majority on the committee, the more recent Levin-Sa'ar proposal, replacing the Bar Association representatives with attorneys appointed by the government and the opposition, would give the government four votes, the opposition two, and members of the existing Court three. Supporters claimed this would enhance judicial diversity and prevent ideological gatekeeping by the existing judicial establishment, while opponents warn it could politicise the courts by making judicial selection contingent on political loyalty rather than legal expertise.

Former Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit was among those who sounded the alarm, warning that these reforms could undermine judicial independence. "This is not a gradual reform – it is a fundamental shift that would change the DNA of the Supreme Court," he cautioned.

However, supporters of the proposal argue that concerns over judicial independence are overstated, pointing to Mandelblit himself as an example. When he was appointed attorney-general in 2016, critics expressed fears he would be beholden to Netanyahu due to his previous role as the Netanyahu Government's Cabinet Secretary. In the end, not only did Mandelblit demonstrate his independence, but he also went on to indict Netanyahu in three corruption cases. Proponents of the reform contend that this proves legal professionals can act autonomously, even when appointed by political figures, and that the proposed changes would not compromise the judiciary's ability to check government power.

Israel's judicial system serves as the primary check on government power in the absence of other such checks that the Israeli political system lacks, such as a bicameral legislature, a presidential veto or an executive branch independent of the legislative majority. Critics of the Levin-Sa'ar proposal argue that increasing political influence over judicial appointments would weaken these safeguards by making the courts more susceptible to government pressure.

Meanwhile, judicial independence advocates have vowed to fight the reforms through public pressure and, if necessary, legal challenges. The Israel Democracy Institute warned that politicising the judiciary will have long-term consequences not just for the rule of law but for Israel's international standing. Some experts have argued that weakening the judiciary could make it more difficult for Israel to defend itself against international legal scrutiny, particularly regarding military operations in Gaza.

In 2023, the judicial reform battle was one of the most polarising issues in Israel's modern history, with both sides viewing it as a fundamental fight for the country's democratic future. The Government's boycott of Amit's appointment – and the renewed reform proposals – suggest that this standoff is far from over.

DEBATING HATE IN CANBERRA

Jamie Hyams

Discussion of antisemitism was, appropriately, prominent in the returning Australian Parliament. In fact, within minutes of the February 4 resumption for this year, antisemitism was the subject of debate in both houses.

In the House of Representatives, independent **Allegra Spender** moved that the House:

“(1) deplores the appalling and unacceptable rise in antisemitism across Australia, including violent attacks...;

(2) unequivocally condemns antisemitism in all its forms; and

(3) resolves that all parliamentarians will work together constructively to combat the scourge of antisemitism in Australia.”

She added, “The message from this parliament today must be unambiguous... We are all united against antisemitism. Words must be backed by action.”

Jewish ALP MP **Josh Burns** seconded the motion, saying, “Antisemitism is a wicked problem... It is up to each and every member of this House to stand firmly and strongly against it and to do whatever is in our power to ensure that Australia is a safe place.”

Liberal Jewish MP **Julian Leeser**, their co-Chair of the Parliamentary Friends of IHRA, stated, “The only thing that will solve antisemitism in this country is tough measures, strong leadership and stronger laws.”

Other notable comments included the following:

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese**: “Antisemitism stands in vile opposition to all we are as a nation... These acts of hatred are an assault on the rights that every Australian cherishes.”

Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton**: “We stand with the Jewish community, we stand with every right-thinking Australian and we condemn antisemitism in every form.”

Assistant Minister **Matt Thistlethwaite**: “Over the last month, members of the Jewish community... have been subjected to some disgusting and terrifying antisemitic and racist attacks. I unequivocally condemn those attacks.”

Shadow Foreign Minister **David Coleman**: “If you allow antisemitism to gain even the smallest foothold... your society is no longer safe. It is an evil that is always there below the surface and, at the first sign of it coming above the surface, it must be repressed.”

Independent **Zoe Daniel**: “What’s happened in Gaza is terrible... Questioning that, the lack of humanity in it,

is not antisemitic... But hateful rhetoric and acts against Jewish people here are absolutely wrong and must be condemned.”

Jewish ALP MP **Mike Freedlander**: “It is important that we do act together to get rid of this scourge.”

Labor’s **Linda Burney**: “I have a very simple message to those perpetrating these antisemitic acts... Disgust will be your reward.”

Labor’s **Peter Khalil**: “Antisemitism is a violent, ancient hatred. It’s run its wicked course through history.”



The issue of antisemitism dominated the Parliament’s first sitting of 2025, which began on Feb. 4 (Image: Shutterstock)

Greens Leader **Adam Bandt**, however, seemed concerned for only certain types of Jewish victims, saying, “I’ve had members of the Jewish community say to me recently that they oppose the invasion of Gaza, they oppose the occupation, they oppose what Benjamin Netanyahu is doing and they participated in peaceful protests but that the recent attacks are having an effect on them. I want them to know...

there is universal support to say that antisemitism has no place in this country.”

Independent Senator **Jacqui Lambie** moved the same motion in the Senate, adding, “The antisemitism... has got to stop. It is not just hateful and hurtful; it’s un-Australian... To the people who are doing this... You seriously are Australia’s scum.”

Foreign Minister **Penny Wong** said, “These attacks are an attack on the Australian Jewish community, but they are also an attack on who we are as Australians. They’re an attack on our values.”

Other notable Senate comments included the following:

Shadow Minister **Michaelia Cash** spoke of “the vile rise of antisemitism in this country... Jewish Australians across Australia... deserve our support.”

Greens Deputy Leader **Mehreen Faruqi**: “The Greens support this motion, but it would have been really good to see an acknowledgement of tackling and condemning all forms of racism in this country, not trying to weaponise antisemitism.”

Labor’s **Deborah O’Neill**: “This is an ancient and insidious evil... The horrific massacre of October 7... unleashed and gave licence to those who are filled with hatred in their souls.”

Shadow Minister **James Paterson**: “What the Jewish community has been asking of... governments in this country for 15 months now is for action to accompany the words of condemnation.”

Shadow Minister **Bridget McKenzie**: “[The Holocaust] started with antisemitism becoming normalised... Post October 7 that’s exactly what has been happening here.”

Independent **Lidia Thorpe** said, “If you want to stamp out

antisemitism, you must include racism in all its forms,” and moved an unsuccessful amendment to add “racism in all its forms” to the motion.

Both motions passed without a division.

On Feb. 4 and 5, during the debate on the Criminal Code Amendment (Hate Crimes) Bill, which Attorney-General **Mark Dreyfus** moved in September, many MPs and Senators took the opportunity to further address antisemitism, including the following (for reasons of space, many worthy contributions, especially from those previously quoted, aren’t included):

Shadow Assistant Minister **James Stevens**: “We are seeing this remarkably depressing blooming of disgusting antisemitic behaviour in our community.”

Shadow Minister **Dan Tehan**: “If there is anything that will destroy the social fabric of this nation, it is antisemitism, and we have to do everything we can to stamp it out... an attack on a Jewish Australian is an attack on every Australian.”

Minister **Clare O’Neill**: “One of the most concerning things that I’ve seen happen in my adult lifetime in this country is the rise in antisemitism.”

Liberal **Jenny Ware**: “Jewish people... were attacked simply because of their Jewish faith and ancestry, and it is completely unacceptable.”

National **Anne Webster**: “Antisemitism is inconsistent with Australian values and unthinkable in modern Australia.”

Liberal **Andrew Wallace**: “This hate speech... has re-branded, and it’s a campaign that is called ‘Zionism’. But... they are the same ancient tropes, lies and attitudes that have been repackaged to attack the Jewish people.”

Shadow Minister **Michael McCormack**: “Why people hate Jewish people I can’t comprehend.”

Independent **Helen Haines**: “There are people out there who seek to intimidate, to terrorise and to hate, and to do this to people because of their Jewish faith... There must be consequences for these vile actions.”

Liberal **Paul Fletcher**: “The outbreak of antisemitism in Australia is... a threat to civilisation and to the values which underpin our modern Australian nation.”

National **Pat Conaghan**: “From the river to the sea’ talks about the ethnic cleansing of Jews. How is that not a breach of section 93Z?”

National **Colin Boyce**: “It is both desperately sad and utterly predictable that, on learning of these horrific [October 7] attacks on Jewish people in their own homeland, malicious actors here in Australia would draw inspiration from this.”

Liberal **Rowan Ramsey**: “Those sentiments of early 1930s Germany seem to have taken root here... it’s the beginnings of rabid antisemitism, and it needs to be stamped out.”

Shadow Minister **Jason Wood**: “Antisemitism is a direct rejection of... being Australian.”

National **Sam Birrell**: “As horrific, distasteful and as outrageous as [antisemitism] is, we need to talk about it.”

Liberal **Gavin Pearce**: “It’s up to every leader at every level... up to every person on the street to condemn [antisemitism] as strongly as possible.”

Labor’s **Michelle Ananda-Rajah**: “The kind of systemic and degrading hate that my Jewish community are now experiencing... I’m now... in a country that I don’t recognise... if you give antisemitism a foothold... it will accelerate.”

Labor’s **Shayne Neumann**: “It is a disgrace and abhorrence that Australia in the 21st century should have this occurring.”

Minister **Tony Burke** spoke of “antisemitism—a form of bigotry that is as ancient as it is vile.”

On Feb. 6, the Senate returned to debating a bill on a judicial commission into antisemitism at universities, last considered in July 2024.

Shadow Minister **Jacinta Nampijinpa Price** noted, “Little by little the hatred grew and became more pronounced. People became unashamed of their antisemitic views.”

Liberal **Linda Reynolds** said, “Today, here in Australia we are witnessing the most extraordinary acts of hate against Jewish Australians.”

Liberal **Hollie Hughes** added, “When you are inciting hatred... talking about the annihilation of a country... support for recognised terror organisations whose sole mission is the destruction of Israel and the Jewish people, that is antisemitic.”

Labor’s **Raff Ciccone** said, “[Antisemitism] is a scourge on our community... the level of hate that is being directed towards the Australian Jewish community is just abhorrent and... needs to be called out.”

Finally, on Feb. 12, **Josh Burns**, who chairs the Parliament’s Human Rights Joint Committee, presented the report from the Committee’s inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities. He stated, “For too long, Jewish students have been vilified, intimidated, excluded from societies and clubs, ostracised in student union meetings and fundamentally let down by the university procedures that are meant to look after their safety and their wellbeing.”

Deputy Chair, Liberal **Henry Pike**, said, “The evidence the committee received demonstrated that there has been an alarming and abhorrent rise in antisemitism among students and staff at Australian universities... Antisemitism is inherently un-Australian... Australian universities have become incubators of antisemitic thought in our country.”

AIR

With Compliments from

GRENCORP

www.greencorp.com





THE BIBLIO FILE

Trump's shot at Mid-East peace #2

One Jewish State: The Last, Best Chance to Resolve the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

David Friedman

Humanix Books, December 2024, 256 pp., A\$54.99



The Battle for the Jewish State: How Israel – and America – Can Win

Victoria Coates

Encounter Books, December 2024, 186 pp., A\$54.99



Jonathan Schanzer

With Donald Trump's return to the White House, Washington had been bracing for a reprise of the President's now-famous unpredictable and mercurial approach to governance. But if there was one area of Trump's presidency that was, more or less, consistent last time around, it was the Middle East.

Trump's support for Israel was unwavering. His "Peace Through Prosperity" plan promoted a performance-based path to statehood for the Palestinians. The Abraham Accords cemented normalisation between Israel and several Arab states. The maximum pressure sanctions policy on the Islamic Republic of Iran squeezed the regime financially. Trump's hard-nosed approach to the regime in Teheran was punctuated by the January 3, 2020, killing of IRGC Quds Force chief Qassem Soleimani.

Just before Trump's return to Washington, two of his top Middle East foreign policy advisers released new books. And they may provide

a hint of the president's policies on Israel.

David Friedman, the President's former attorney, who then became America's Ambassador to Israel, encourages Israelis to "begin a national conversation regarding the future of Judea and Samaria" – the disputed territory also known as "the West Bank", inhabited by both Jews and Arabs who lay claim to it. In his book, *One Jewish State*, Friedman describes this sought-after real estate as "Israel's biblical heartland", which must be preserved by Jews and Christians alike. He asserts that "Palestinians would be receptive to life under Israeli sovereignty if accompanied by the opportunity for better health, education, and prosperity and the assurance of human dignity."

Friedman throws shade upon the "peace process" that has consistently failed to serve American interests for more than three decades. He notes that consecutive presidents, Democrat and Republican alike, have

failed to achieve the two-state solution, primarily because of Palestinian rejectionism. Friedman believes that the Palestinians are simply not willing to make the compromises necessary for such a diplomatic outcome. And it is for this reason that he proposes a completely different paradigm – one that will be viewed by traditional Palestinian nationalists with disdain.

Friedman writes that the United States should embrace the Puerto Rico model for Middle East peace. He notes that Puerto Rico (Spanish for "wealthy port") is an alternative standard for Palestinian autonomy. He notes, "The residents of Puerto Rico do not vote in US national elections. They do, however, benefit from well-recognized human rights and elect their civilian leaders. While not a perfect analogy to Israel, Puerto Rico ensures the human dignity of its citizens while forgoing collective national rights." Under Friedman's vision, "Palestinians will be free to enact their own governing documents, as long as they are not inconsistent with those of Israel."

Friedman's book suggests a wholesale change in the diplomatic paradigm that would certainly provoke controversy. By contrast, Victoria Coates proposes a series of more modest steps that would merely mark a return to sensible previous Trump policies. The final chapter of *The Battle for the Jewish State* enumerates these policies, most of which were conceived when Coates was Deputy National Security Adviser for the Middle East and North Africa on the Trump Administration's National Security Council.

After a concise review of the disastrous Israel policies that have invariably failed past presidents, Coates suggests that the next administration should "reimpose the funding freeze on the Palestinians, if for no other reason than the fact that the murderers of October 7 are being rewarded under the Palestinian 'pay for slay' law



Will ideas from veterans of Trump's first term in office inform the Mideast policies of his second? (Image: Shutterstock)

in violation of the Taylor Force Act.” Coates wisely calls for a ban on any taxpayer dollars to UNRWA – the UN Relief and Works Agency that has effectively served as a partner and enabler of Hamas terrorism in Gaza.

While Coates proposes a handful of punitive measures against Israel's enemies, adversaries and detractors, her vision for a more effective Middle East policy also includes some forward-looking steps. She endorses “lengthening the term of the memoranda of understanding that outline the US-Israel security partnership from ten years to twenty-five.” She notes that the “US-Israel Free Trade Agreement could be expanded.” She states that “America could finally and unambiguously recognize Israel's sovereign borders” – an apparent nod to Friedman's call for Israel to control

all of the West Bank.

Coates also seeks to build upon the Abraham Accords. She notes that an effective “Saudi Arabia-Israel agreement would unlock the possibility of the broader regional security and economic alliance originally proposed by President Trump on his first trip abroad in 2017, which

began with a summit meeting with Arab states in Saudi Arabia as well as a visit to Israel... the first direct presidential flight from Riyadh to Tel Aviv.” In short, Coates remains bullish on a Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) also known as “Arab NATO”.

“Friedman throws shade upon the ‘peace process’ that has consistently failed to serve American interests... He notes that consecutive presidents... have failed to achieve the two-state solution, primarily because of Palestinian rejectionism”

She notes that the United States and Israel should “work with fellow producers in MESA on a responsible energy policy, one that will keep global markets amply supplied to meet the world's burgeoning energy demands in the coming years.”

Domestically, Coates voices concern about the recent spike in anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hate. She calls on Congress to “amend and strengthen” the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 “to counter the threats America faces today,” including the groups that “have promoted and

lent political legitimacy to Hamas” on college campuses and main street America. She endorses the idea of Elie Cohanim, Trump's former Deputy Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, to transfer the special envoy office from the State Department to the White House to “demonstrate a Presidential commitment to a broader mandate” – namely fighting antisemitism at home and abroad with equal vigour.

Whether the policies of David Friedman and Victoria Coates are embraced by Trump remains to be seen. Their respective places in the new Administration have not yet been secured (if they will be at all).

New figures, such as National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Special Envoy to the Middle East Steven Witkoff (among others) will have their hands full with a fragile ceasefire following a war that rocked the region for 15 months. They will assume their new roles armed with more than a few ideas floated by veterans of Trump World, and at a time when the problems of the Middle East are in desperate need of new thinking. AIR

Jonathan Schanzer, a former terrorism finance analyst at the United States Department of the Treasury, is Executive Director at the nonpartisan think tank Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). This article was originally published in the Washington Free Beacon (freebeacon.com). © FDD (fdd.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

WITH COMPLIMENTS

JAGEN

SOUTH YARRA VIC 3141
TEL: (03) 9661 8250





ESSAY

“Gaza shall be forsaken”

Nobody wants it – but Donald Trump

Elliott Abrams

Gaza has been a problem for a long time. The prophet Zephaniah set the tone:

For Gaza shall be forsaken... Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the Lord is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant (2:4–5).

It didn't really get better, and 22 centuries later, John Milton has Samson describing the place as little more than a prison:

Promise was that I / Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver; Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves.

Little has changed. Nobody wants Gaza – except, it appears, Donald Trump. More on that later.

In our era, the Kingdom of Egypt took over when the British abandoned the Palestine Mandate and ruled Gaza from 1948 to 1967. But the Egyptians never annexed the area and never wanted to. They never viewed it as part of Egypt; Gazans could not become Egyptian citizens or move there. Israel conquered Gaza in the 1967 war, but when it withdrew from Sinai as part of the Camp David accords, it offered to give Gaza back to Egypt. No deal.

“For Gaza shall be forsaken” – initially even by the Palestinians. In the original PLO charter of 1964, article 24 clearly states that “this Organisation does not exercise any regional

sovereignty over the West Bank in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, [or] on the Gaza Strip.”

Of course, that changed pretty quickly, but only on paper. The Palestinian Authority in Ramallah always gave Gaza and Gazans low priority. Same with Hamas, as Haviv Rettig Gur has written:

What had Hamas made of Gaza, its society and economy, before the war? A land with so much natural beauty and potential, and recently discovered offshore gas – and what did Hamas build there? Even under the Israeli and Egyptian blockades, the GDP per capita in Gaza was higher than Morocco's before October 7. Its potential was always enormous. And here's the thing: That potential remains. But not with Hamas. Because Hamas doesn't see that

potential, and if someone points it out to them, they don't care. They chose the catastrophic war that began on October 7. They built a vast tunnel system for 17 years whose only purpose was to force the enemy to cut through cities to get to them when that war came. And given what they think of Israelis, Hamas actually expected Gaza's destruction to be even worse than it is. One powerful signal that it always intended this destruction: That tunnel system is the biggest thing Palestinians have ever built, and Hamas built nothing else in Gaza in all their years of ruling it.

When the Israelis pulled out of Gaza in the second week of September 2005, there was a fleeting moment of hope for something better. I was serving in the George W. Bush Administration in 2003 when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced his decision to get out of Gaza. About 9,000 Israelis lived there among what was then 1.3 million hostile Palestinians and were protected by hundreds of IDF troops. Hamas terrorism required repeated Israeli military operations in Gaza. The “peace process” between Israel and the Palestinians was stuck, and Sharon – as I recall it – decided to move forward with setting Israel's permanent border. Whatever he had in mind for the West Bank, he did not think



Israel's traumatic evacuation of some 8,000 settlers from Gaza in 2005, which led to a Hamas takeover, rather than Palestinian development (Image: Isranet)



Valuable and productive greenhouses in Gaza looted and destroyed in the wake of Israel's 2005 disengagement (Image: X)

Israelis had a future in Gaza. It was a place without religious significance to Jews. The demography was hopeless. And the burden of protecting the 21 Israeli settlements was too great. In 2005, the withdrawal was completed, and Gaza was left to the Palestinian Authority to govern.

Shimon Peres, then Sharon's partner in the withdrawal from Gaza, spoke of "making Gaza Singapore". I can recall his saying poetically, with throaty Israeli 'r's, "we shall turn Gaza from terrorism to tourism." The Israeli settlers had built a network of more than 3,000 greenhouses, which together provided about 15% of all Israeli agricultural exports – fruits, vegetables, and flowers as well. The Israeli owners did not want to leave them for the Palestinians, uncompensated, so a group of Jewish philanthropists put up the money and bought them. The Gazans would be given a head start on economic development, with the greenhouses as models.

Zephaniah might have prophesied what then happened: When the Israelis left, crowds looted and destroyed the greenhouses within one week. Here is the NBC report from Sept.

13, 2005:

Palestinians looted dozens of greenhouses on Tuesday, walking off with irrigation hoses, water pumps and plastic sheeting in a blow to fledgling efforts to reconstruct the Gaza Strip. American Jewish donors had bought more than 3,000 greenhouses from Israeli settlers in Gaza for \$14 million last month and transferred them to the Palestinian Authority. Former World Bank President James Wolfensohn, who brokered the deal, put up \$500,000 of his own cash.

Palestinian police stood by helplessly Tuesday as looters carted off materials from greenhouses in several settlements, and commanders complained they did not have enough manpower to protect the prized assets. In some instances, there was no security and in others, police even joined the looters, witnesses said... The failure of

the security forces to prevent scavenging and looting in the settlements after Israel's troop pullout Monday raised new concerns about Gaza's future.

We in Washington had been concerned that the Palestinian Authority, the governing body in the West Bank, might not be up to the job of governing Gaza. I met in Sharm el-Sheik

"Think of it this way: In all the wars of the past two centuries – the First and Second World Wars, Korea and Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, Ukraine – there has never been a case in which civilians were absolutely forbidden to flee the battlefields. Until Gaza."

with Egypt's second-most important official after President Hosni Mubarak, intelligence chief Omar Suleiman. Could the PA handle it? Could they police up Hamas? Suleiman was angry that we even raised this possibility, literally pounding on the table and telling us Egypt had it all in hand. *I have men in Gaza*, he said, *we know everything that's going on, and if I need to send more men, I will. Egypt has control.*

That was 2004. After the Israelis left in September 2005, Hamas bided its time for about 18 months and then took a week to overpower the PA forces and take control. Egypt said and did precisely nothing.

Neither did the other Arab states. For all of them, Gaza was an embodied argument: Israel is illegitimate, all Gazans are displaced refugees who have the "right of return" to the orange groves they left behind. They had no more interest in actual living Gazans than the authorities in Cairo. It's not that Arab refugees are never, ever accepted anywhere. After all, Germany took about 1.2 million Syrian refugees during the civil war in the past decade, and there are millions more in Turkey (3-4 million), Jordan (about 650,000), Iraq (about 250,000), and Lebanon (about 850,000). Even Egypt took in over 100,000 Syrians. And there are about 2 million Iraqi refugees living in the Arab world (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and perhaps 150,000 in Egypt) and Turkey.

But Gazans do not merit this compassion. For if they leave, they are abandoning the great struggle against the Jewish state. Think of it this way: In all the wars of the past two centuries – the First and Second World Wars, Korea and Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, Ukraine – there has never been a case in which civilians were absolutely forbidden to flee the battlefields. Until Gaza. When the current war began, I was sure Egypt would not take masses of Gazans, but I thought that – with enough Ameri-

can pressure – it would agree to take *some*. Perhaps children. Perhaps the elderly. Perhaps mothers and daughters. But the Egyptians were true to the great Palestinian cause, and the number was zero.

And then, in January 2025, along came Donald Trump, sounding a bit like Shimon Peres. Trump did not demonise Gazans. He spoke of the majority of them as victims who deserved something better:

I also strongly believe that the Gaza Strip, which has been a symbol of death and destruction for so many decades and so bad for the people anywhere near it, and especially those who live there and frankly who's been really very unlucky...

It should not go through a process of rebuilding and occupation by the same people that have really stood there and fought for it and lived there and died there and lived a miserable existence there. Instead, we should go to other countries of interest with humanitarian hearts, and there are many of them that want to do this and build various domains that will ultimately be occupied by the million Palestinians living in Gaza, ending the death and destruction and frankly bad luck... The people will be able to live in comfort and peace... They're going to have peace; they're not going to be shot at and killed and destroyed like this civilisation of wonderful people has had to endure. It's right now a demolition site. This is just a demolition site. Virtually every building is down. They're living under fallen concrete that's very dangerous and very precarious. They instead can occupy all of a beautiful area with homes and safety and they can live out their lives in peace and harmony instead of having to go back and do it again. The US will take over the Gaza Strip and we will do a job with it too.

I do not believe that this will happen. But Trump has wonderfully challenged the Arab view of Gaza as central to the Palestinian concept of “steadfastness” (*Sumud* in Arabic)



Gaza today is a “demolition site”, President Trump has argued, and Gazan Palestinians deserve proper “homes and safety” instead (Image: Shutterstock)

needed against the Zionist enemy, and he has rightly called it inhuman. In fact, he has jettisoned the view that the most important thing about Gaza is its role in the “two-state solution” that will produce a new sovereign state of Palestine alongside Israel.

He said, in that same press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, that “The only reason the Palestinians want to go back to Gaza is they have no alternative.” That is a reproach to the Arabs and an answer to those who call moving Gazans out of Gaza some kind of war crime. Trump is right: Many, many Gazans would dearly love to leave, but they have been trapped. If visas to almost anywhere

were available, how many would jump at them? A third of the population? Half? Three-quarters? More? Perhaps steadfastness, and even fighting the Jews, is too great a luxury when you look around and see armed Hamas terrorists, no jobs, and no homes. But no one is offering those visas; apparently refugees from Iraq or Syria are one thing, and Palestinians are another. And unless that changes, Trump’s plan will not get off the ground.

Trump’s plan tacitly understands another reason Gaza has never developed into the Singapore that Shimon Peres dreamed of, and that is the condition of the society that has developed in Gaza in the past two

decades of Hamas control. Economic and political development require both sound government and a culture in which the polity can advance. One look at Haiti is a reminder of that obvious point. Trump's plan accepts that development will not happen in the current Gaza situation, where society is permeated by corruption, brutality, hatred, and terror.

This is a simple fact about life and is not a reflection of prejudice against Palestinians. Gouverneur Morris, one of George Washington's envoys to France, watched the revolutionaries there play at becoming the next United States of America. He wrote in July 1789, just days before the storming of the Bastille, that "they want an American Constitution, with the exception of a King instead of a President, without reflecting that they have not American citizens to support that constitution." It is a profound point. Governments and constitutions are what Marx would have called the superstructure, but they must be built on an actual, existing society. The Constitution was not a piece of paper but the product of the free society that had been built by colonists in British America, and by their children and grandchildren.

Gaza does not have Morris' "American citizens" either, and Trump recognises that pouring more money into it from Qatar or UNRWA (or the United States) will only reproduce what is there now: more terrorism, more death and destruction, and more misery. So he, in effect, suggests that we rely on Zephaniah's vision for a while – "there shall be no inhabitant" – perhaps for ten years, while the physical Gaza is transformed. As Trump put it, "Do a real job, do something different. Just can't go back. If you go back, it's going to end

up the same way it has for years."


Perhaps ten years of living without Hamas in a variety of countries would transform Gazans, too. Some would stay in the places to which they moved, while others would want to go "back" to the new Gaza – but this time not as UN-certified permanent "refugees" from the 'naqba' of 1948. This time, as people with options for a decent life who chose to live in Gaza because it offered economic opportunity and peace.

It's fanciful, and very, very unlikely.

But it's a better, truer, understanding of what led to Gaza's current situation and what could possibly lead out of it than decades of "peace processing" and UN resolutions, which in the end have produced terrorism, war, and misery.

Trump is treating Gaza as a physical place and its people as suffering humans, which is more than has ever been done by any Arab League resolution condemning Israel and calling it a war crime to allow Gazans to move away. "We will not allow the rights of our people... to be infringed on," declared Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has not permitted an election in 19 years. Trump's

scheme would "undermine the core of the Palestinian national project," said Algeria, which is true if the core of that project is endless violence aimed at destroying Israel. An Arab League statement said Trump's proposal would "threaten the region's stability" which is also true if, by stability, is meant the 77 years of refusal to accept Israel in peace as a Jewish state.

Gaza is, as Trump called it, a "hellhole", and history suggests it will remain so. Not because of anything the Israelis did. They left it in 2005 with an open possibility for a better future. Not because of Donald Trump, who in his first weeks in office offered a different future and asked Arab governments to think for once about Gazans as people rather than cannon fodder in the struggle against Israel. But it is apparently still easier to dream on about the "two-state solution" and the "right of return", and far easier to scream about Israeli crimes and Palestinian victims, than to let the Jews live in peace. Until that changes, "Gaza shall be forsaken." 

Elliott Abrams is senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the US Council on Foreign Relations and chairman of the Tikvah Fund. He served in the State Department and National Security Council in the Reagan, George W. Bush, and Trump Administrations. © Commentary Magazine (commentary.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

With Compliments

Geoff Morris & Family

and

Ardkeen P/L.

WITH COMPLIMENTS



LEVEL 32, 120 COLLINS STREET
MELBOURNE VIC. 3000
TEL: (03) 9131 9200

Premium Retirement Living - Resort style lifestyle



With compliments

 ApplewoodRetirement
www.applewood.com.au

APPLEWOOD
YOUR LIFE. YOUR LIFESTYLE.

5 Grand Boulevard, Doncaster
Phone: 8848 1111

NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

NURSING GRIEVANCES

Australians were stunned by shocking footage of two nurses in a major hospital in Sydney boasting on social media they would kill Israeli patients if they had to treat them.

Speaking to *Sky News* (Feb. 13), prominent Sydney Muslim leader Jamal Rifi insisted that “the majority of the Muslim community, they have condemned what they have done, and they don’t agree with it, and we don’t hold these views whatsoever.”

Yet News Corp columnist Andrew Bolt (Feb. 17) noted, “Not one of our main Muslim groups. Not the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, the Australian National Imams Council, the Alliance of Australian Muslims, or the Australian Muslim Advocacy Network” had denounced the nurses.

On *Sky News* (Feb. 14), AIJAC’s Joel Burnie was asked about the reaction of Muslim organisations and leaders to the incident. Burnie said, “Unfortunately, we’d have to suggest on what we see is that many voices that want to reach out to the Jewish community proactively, and with an outstretched arm of solidarity and unity... unfortunately find it difficult to do so with the potential backlash from either organisations in their community or let alone their constituents.”

In the *Daily Telegraph* (Feb. 13), Burnie wrote that “matters would likely never have deteriorated to this stage if similar expressions of hatred had been deplored and shut down in the months following October 2023.”

In the *West Australian* (Feb. 18), AIJAC’s Ahron Shapiro wrote about the situation of hospitals in Israel where Arabs and Jews work alongside each other in “unsinkable islands of coexistence.” Shapiro said that unlike Australia in the last 15 months,

where some health care workers have attended virulently anti-Israel demonstrations in uniform, in Israel, health care workers keep politics out of the hospital ward, focussing only on the treatment of their patients.

In the *Australian* (Feb. 15), columnist Julie Szego wrote, “Bankstown Hospital, its website full of the usual social justice blather about supporting ‘culturally and linguistically diverse communities’, saw nothing wrong with disseminating a photo with what a spokesperson now calls ‘political messaging’. It had no concerns such an image might undermine people’s faith that Bankstown provided excellent healthcare to all, regardless of ethnicity or political views. If ‘Free Palestine’ is the hospital vibe, why be shocked at nurses broadcasting to the world a delightful, lighthearted riff on snuffing out Israeli patients?”

LYONS STRETCHES

On Feb. 5, after US President Donald Trump’s press conference with Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu, where he discussed his plan to rebuild Gaza and transfer its population to Egypt and Jordan, ABC Global Affairs Editor John Lyons gave a running commentary, often letting his enthusiasm get the better of him.

On *ABC TV* “News” (Feb. 5), Lyons wrongly accused Trump of supplying Israel with the bombs that devastated Gaza (that was previous President Joe Biden).

He also falsely referred to Netanyahu as “on the far right himself.”

A theme Lyons kept repeating was the claim that US foreign aid to Egypt and Jordan means that “neither... regime... can exist, stay in place, without American money.”

In 2023, Egypt and Jordan re-

ceived US\$1.43 billion and US\$1.7 billion respectively in US foreign aid – sums that Saudi Arabia or another Gulf state could easily replace should Trump withhold aid.

GAS BAG

On Feb. 6, Lyons twice suggested a motivation for Trump’s plan was the “huge oil and gas reserves off the coast of Gaza.”

Lyons continued, “In fact, last year, or the year before, Israel unilaterally announced a development of one of them. Because they’re off the occupied Palestinian territories, technically, they should be part of their assets. Or once there’s a resolution to this conflict, that should be worked out.”

He added that a 2019 report by the UN Trade and Development Organisation claimed the estimated recoverable oil off Gaza was 1.7 billion barrels.

“And so, one of the reasons, or certainly if America unilaterally took over Gaza, as Donald Trump suggested, perhaps moved troops in, tried to get the Palestinians to leave, Americans presumably would say, well, we’re now here... We then have access to that energy.”

The estimate of 1.7 billion barrels is for Israel’s territorial waters. There has been no assessment of the oil off Gaza.

As for the “unilateral” development project, in 2023, with Egyptian mediation, Israel agreed that gas could be extracted off Gaza to raise revenue and provide energy for Gaza and the Palestinian Authority, not for Israel, as Lyons implied.

ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE

On *ABC TV* “Breakfast” (Feb. 12),

former Israeli military spokesperson Jonathan Conricus explained why Israelis might support Trump's plan.

"What happened on October the 7th was a monstrous attack on Israel. And in the history of nations, in the history of war fighting, when you take that kind of action, when you as an entity, Gaza as an entity, when you take that kind of action, then you are making a bet. If you succeed, you conquer Israel, you kill the Jews and you establish a Sharia based country in what they call Palestine, my home Israel. But if you lose, there are consequences to pay."

Even John Lyons understood this perspective – while exaggerating it – saying on *ABC TV "News"* (Feb. 5) "October 7 has traumatised Israel as a nation. The atrocities Hamas committed are unspeakable. And Israelis now, that's seared into their mindset. And so, they want the buffer zone. They want no Palestinians, essentially. Many of them want no-one in Gaza, so there's no threat."

STATES OF CONFUSION

On *ABC RN "Saturday Extra"* (Feb. 8), Georgetown University Qatar's Mehran Kamrava said, "if there's any

silver lining to Trump's announcement, it's that it is out-of-the-box thinking."

But Kamrava's preferred proposal appeared to be an unachievable and unjust one-state solution "in which Israelis and Palestinians live side by side, under the same roof, in dignity and in peace."

By contrast, the Atlantic Council's Ahmed Al Khatib told *ABC RN "Hour"* (Feb. 5), the two-states for two-nations formula for peace remains the only vehicle for expressing the Palestinian people's and the Jewish Israeli people's "unique individual national identities."



IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – Feb. 13 – "Antisemitism is a scourge. It's opposed by anyone who is decent."

Shadow Health Minister Senator **Anne Ruston** (Lib., SA) – Feb. 13 – "Yesterday, Australians were shocked and disgusted by the antisemitic threats made by nurses at Bankstown Hospital."

Senator **Hollie Hughes** (Lib., NSW) – Feb. 13 – "Stand with Jewish Australians—because the Holocaust... started with the actions that we're seeing on the streets of Sydney."

Shadow Assistant Foreign Minister **Julian Leeser** (Lib., Berowra) – Feb. 13 – Asking a question: "For the last 15 months, Jewish Australians have been subjected to harassment, doxxing, firebombing, death threats and terror plots. Today... NSW Health workers [are] calling for Israeli patients to be refused treatment, and claiming to have murdered Israelis."

Anthony Albanese, responding: "This antisemitic video... is disgusting... It is very clear to me that these people have committed... crimes, and they should face the full force of the law."

Shadow Attorney-General Senator **Michaelia Cash** (Lib., WA) – Feb. 12 – Asking a question, mentions the "utterly vile footage of two nurses... making despicable antisemitic death threats against Israeli patients."

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA), responding: "The footage is sickening... shameful, and the comments... are vile. Antisemitism has no place in this country."

Senator **Nick McKim** (Greens, Tas.) – Feb. 12 – "We should have... a strong, independent foreign policy that prioritises our national interests... That means an arms embargo on the genocidal government of Israel, sanctions on the genocidal war criminals leading the Israeli government and full self-determination for the people of Palestine, and... recognising Palestine."

Senator **Steph Hodgins-May** (Greens, Vic.) – Feb. 11 – "Attacks on the Jewish community in recent months... are a

disturbing escalation to the activity of neo-Nazi and far-right groups."

Maria Vamvakinou (ALP, Calwell) – Feb. 10 – "I've been critical of... Israel... as anyone... who believes in human rights and international law should be... Those who seek to exploit antisemitism for their own interests... sow the seeds of hate and division."

Senator **Fatima Payman** (Ind., WA) – Feb. 6 – Asking a question: "The Minister must admit how absurd Australia's position is, as the Government claims to support a two-state solution but refuses to recognise Palestine."

Senator **Wong**, responding: "A future Palestinian state must not be in a position to threaten Israel's security. We see no role for Hamas in the future governance of Gaza or in the future Palestinian state and no role for terrorists. We need a reformed Palestinian Authority... Hamas must release all hostages, and issues such as Jerusalem and the final territory of a Palestinian state should be defined through negotiations."

Deputy Greens Leader Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (NSW) – Feb. 5 – "A ceasefire is not justice. Justice means self-determination and freedom for the Palestinian people so they never have to live under the yoke of Israel or imperial oppression ever again."

Shadow Education Minister Senator **Sarah Henderson** (Lib., Vic) – Feb. 4 – "This is what it is: an ongoing campaign against Israel, which has fuelled antisemitic hate and division in our country... The hate and incitement on university campuses is out of control."

Senator **Dave Sharma** (Lib., NSW) – Feb. 4 – "What have we seen in Australia these past 16 months?... A sustained campaign of harassment, intimidation and vitriol targeted at one specific Australian community in a way that... is unprecedented in our history."

Shadow Assistant Minister Senator **Dean Smith** (Lib., WA) – Feb. 4 – "We are witnessing the normalisation of antisemitic hate in Australia... indifference allows evil to flourish."

Senator **Jana Stewart** (ALP, Vic) – Feb. 4 – "We have seen a devastating rise of antisemitism across the country and across the world, and that is entirely unacceptable."

“We should never give up on the idea that there should be two separate spaces, regardless of how those spaces specifically look like and regardless of the demographics in and around them. There should be two distinct spaces for two distinct people. And for me, that is not only a fundamental pathway forward, but for many Palestinians... most Palestinians don’t believe in the one state solution. They want their own space to express their national heritage and identity.”

Meanwhile, on *ABC RN* “Religion and Ethics” (Feb. 12), discussing his new book *The Holy and the Broken*, Australian-Israeli journalist Ittay Flescher also promoted what appeared to be a one-state solution cum confederation.

“I favour something called the land for all, a lot of people say, well, that’s a fantasy, but I think it’s no less a fantasy than what’s happening now, which is horrific... I want to give a platform to more voices that are calling for this land to be shared in a political structure that gives self-determination to two people but doesn’t have enforced separations and checkpoints and all of these sorts of things,” he said.

SAMAH HEAT

In *Nine Newspapers* (Feb. 7), Palestinian-Australian writer Samah Sabawi wrote, “Israelis were clear about their genocidal intent” in Gaza and asked why it was necessary for Israel to drop 2,000 pound bombs on hospitals.

Later that day on *ABC TV* “Afternoon Agenda”, Sabawi said “somebody has to be accountable” for the destruction in Gaza. Of course she didn’t mean Hamas.

In a letter published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Feb. 8), AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams pointed out that Hamas was the only side with an intent to carry out genocide, citing its October 7 atrocities and public statements.

“Israel’s intent was simply to prevent Hamas carrying out similar attacks, as it has repeatedly vowed it will,” Hyams wrote.

Furthermore, he said, Israel’s conduct in the war “proves its intent wasn’t genocidal, with Israeli forces repeatedly warning and evacuating civilians before attacking, even though this also gave terrorists the opportunity to escape. Israel even delayed its attack on Hamas’ final bastion in Rafah for months while it established a safe zone for civilians. It also facilitated the entry of more than 1.3 million tons of aid, and even arranged two rounds of polio vaccines. An army intent on genocide wouldn’t do any of this. Israel bombed civilian buildings solely because Hamas illegally embedded its military throughout them. It certainly never used 2,000-pound bombs on hospitals, as Sabawi claims.”

SURPRISING SURPRISE

On *ABC TV* “News” (Feb. 6), ANU’s Jesse Moritz claimed that Saudi Arabia’s emphatic rejection of Trump’s proposal was “surprising” because “they’ve been inching towards agreeing to a normalisation deal with Israel, which would have been a huge deal.” There was never any chance Saudi Arabia was going to agree to Trump’s plan, despite its hopes for a normalisation deal.

Moreover, as the *Australian’s* Henry Ergas wrote in his column (Feb. 14), giving Gazans new houses in safe areas will “cut no ice with Hamas, whose interests lie in perpetuating the misery that inflames the people of Gaza and ensures the flow of aid that finances its terrorist activities. Nor will it calm the Arab states and their allies... They didn’t have a critical word to say in 1991 when Kuwait, in retaliation for the Palestine Liberation Organisation’s endorsement of Iraq’s attempted annexation, brutally expelled 300,000 Palestinians, driving many into the desert.”

GOOD AND BAD

In the *Australian* (Feb. 6), AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein discussed Presi-

dent Trump’s Gaza plan, saying that while some aspects of the plan remain unclear or are unworkable, there are also elements that are positive.

“The cycle of mindlessly pouring in aid for reconstructing Gazan homes after every war instigated by Hamas, while Hamas uses that aid to facilitate rebuilding tunnels, rockets and its other military infrastructure, must not be repeated,” Dr Rubenstein wrote.

He said the likelihood that 1.8 million Palestinians would “choose to leave willingly is almost certainly unrealistic, while the prospect of forcibly transferring them should be both legally and morally unthinkable.”

On Feb. 9, AIJAC’s Bren Carlill wrote in the *Australian Financial Review*, “There are serious concerns about the long-term effects that [President Trump’s] style and goals might have on American democracy and the international system... But... he is correct that the Western approach to solving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has, for most of its existence, often been wrong-headed and even counter-productive... Certainly, it’s hard to imagine things being worse than the past 16 months.”

WHAT NEXT?

Before Trump’s dramatic announcement, AIJAC analysts considered future policy directions needed regarding Gaza.

Earlier, in the *West Australian* (Jan. 28), Carlill called for a “de-nazification” program in Gaza, like what happened in Germany after WWII. He warned that “if the international community won’t enforce the conditions necessary for Gaza’s transformation, it is effectively guaranteeing more wars between Israel and Hamas.”

In the *Australian* (Jan. 28), Colin Rubenstein insisted that the ceasefires in place between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza are welcome, but Israel must be given the option of responding militarily if required.

FRINGE DWELLERS

In *Nine Newspapers* (Feb. 5), United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counter-terrorism Ben Saul wrote that under the Trump plan, “The US would simply replace Israel as the unlawful occupier of Gaza. If Trump is so concerned about peace, it is not clear why he believes a US occupation would bring that about when over half a century of Israeli occupation has brought perpetual war, death and misery to Palestinians and Israelis alike.”

Former Human Rights Watch Executive Director and Israel critic Ken Roth went into full-blown conspiracy mode in the *Guardian Australia* (Feb. 6), “Gaza in all likelihood would be only a first step... the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem would surely follow. Even the so-called Arab population of Israel might not be exempt. Far from the ‘Free Palestine’ chants that are heard these days on college campuses, the area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River might become Palestinian-free. That would allow Israel finally to accomplish its goal of being both a Jewish state and a democracy.”

SELECTIVE JUSTICE

On *ABC RN* “Breakfast” (Feb. 6), UIN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese, who loves to prattle on about international law, was happy to disregard it when the program’s host pointed out that the International Court of Justice had not yet ruled if Israel had committed genocide in Gaza.

Albanese responded, “even if it was not that in January last year, the ICJ recognised the plausible risk of genocide. This should have been enough to trigger the responsibility of countries to intervene.

The Court never found that. As Court President Joan Donoghue explained to *BBC TV* last May, “The shorthand that often appears, which is

that there’s a plausible case of genocide, isn’t what the Court decided.” It decided that the argument that Palestinians were entitled to make a case asking for protection under the genocide convention was “plausible”.

WHO CAUSED WHAT?

On *ABC NewsRadio* (Feb. 6), writer Laila Haddad said, “Trump [was] representing an administration who was aiding and abetting the genocide of the Palestinians” and “Netanyahu has stated... his intent, he made his intent very clear. And as we know, that’s what matters in cases of genocide or ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity. His intent was to make Gaza unliveable.”

Haddad was spectacularly wrong. Donald Trump’s predecessor, Joe Biden occupied the White House from the start of the war on October 7, 2023 till the implementation of the ceasefire the day before Trump was inaugurated, so Trump had nothing to do with “abetting” the Israeli war against Hamas.

Moreover, Netanyahu has always consistently insisted Hamas’ terror infrastructure has been Israel’s target. He has never stated he plans to make Gaza “unliveable”.

HACKED OFF

A report on the ceasefire by Shalailah Medhora on Triple J’s “Hack” (Jan. 30) said:

“That ceasefire [is] meant to last for 42 days, and involves Hamas releasing 33 hostages in exchange for Israel releasing 1,900 political prisoners.”

It is incorrect to claim that all of the 1,900 Palestinian prisoners being released are “political prisoners”. The overwhelming majority of those being released have been convicted in a court of law for acts of violence, including murders, or membership in a listed terrorist organisation.

No other mainstream media organisation, including Al Jazeera, used

such non-factual language in describing the prisoners to be released.

After AIJAC lodged a complaint, the ABC acknowledged the error in an editorial note on the “Hack” website.

CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

On *Sky News* (Feb. 12), AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams challenged the claim made by some people, accusing “the Jewish community [of] say[ing] that any criticism of Israel is antisemitism.”

Hyams explained, “They try to paint us as the people who cried wolf, which makes antisemitism seem not so significant, because if everything’s antisemitism, then nothing’s anti-semitism... it suggests that any of our criticism, any of our concerns about criticism of Israel is also illegitimate because we just hide behind antisemitism. So... it’s a kind of antisemitism in itself, because what it’s saying is that you Jews are so devious and so manipulative that you pretend everything’s racism against yourself to get away with stuff you shouldn’t get away with.”

COSMETICS DEPARTMENT

On *ABC NewsRadio* (Feb. 11), Washington-based Middle East analyst Laura Blumenfeld told host Sarah Morice that the Palestinian Authority (PA) had just said “they’re going to cancel a very controversial policy called Pay for Slay, where terrorists who were imprisoned in Israeli jails, having committed violent crimes, had families receiving subsidies from the Palestinian Authority.” Had Morice probed further, listeners might have understood that the PA’s move was only cosmetic, shifting the subsidy mechanism to a proxy. However, Morice not only declined to ask a follow-up question but seemed to be determined to sidestep the news that the PA has been subsidising terrorism, saying only, “That’s very interesting”, before hastily ending the interview.

Allon Lee

UNHINGED ON UNRWA

The reality that an Israeli ban on the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) applies only to its activities in Israel and east Jerusalem but not in Gaza nor the Palestinian Authority-controlled cities of the West Bank, seemed to get lost in a lot of Australian reporting.

On *ABC RN* “Breakfast” (Jan. 30), host Sally Sara seemed surprised when UNRWA spokesperson Juliette Touma said, “Our local staff are not going anywhere, you see. They are the doctors, the nurses, the teachers, the drivers, the backbone of our operation across the occupied Palestinian territory. Now what might happen in the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, is that our international staff that depend on visas from Israel, they might have to leave.”

Touma explained, “In Gaza we have international staff who are on the ground and, so far, they’ve not been asked to leave so the plan is to continue to deliver as much as we can. In Gaza the backbone of our operation are also Palestinian staff.”

On *ABC NewsRadio* (Jan. 30), Global Affairs Editor John Lyons falsely said, “It’s essentially been closed down... and there’s nothing to replace it. So, in terms of meds and schools, vaccinations, et cetera, no one really knows who’s going to deliver them.”

Lyons did, begrudgingly, concede that “Israel’s ban... doesn’t necessarily affect local people in Gaza or the West Bank. They’re losing their international workers and officers and managers, etc, but... the UNRWA people inside Gaza will still, to a limited extent, be able to try to deliver... aid.”

On *ABC TV* “The World” (Feb. 3), former UNRWA staffer Lex Takkenberg agreed with Israel’s claim that other organisations are filling the gap, explaining, they “have been using the UNRWA infrastructure, the warehouses, the distribution centre, the vehicles, the logistical routines and personnel also to deliver.”

Overstating UNRWA’s importance was another common theme. On *ABC TV* “News” (Jan. 30), Medical Aid for Palestinians’ Liz Allcock said, “I do think that UNRWA... since 1949 has... provided essential services for so many people where no one else has been able to do so... people are, of course, worried about how they’re going to survive day to day.”

SBS’s website correctly explained (Jan. 29), “the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established a year after the UNRWA started operations to address refugee issues on a global scale but the UNRWA retained sole responsibility for Palestinian refugees due to pressure from Arab states. As a result, it is the only refugee agency... dedicated to a specific population.”

“SBS TV ‘World News’ was a repeat offender in obscuring the fact that UNRWA will still operate in the West Bank and Gaza”

Yet, *SBS TV* “World News” was a repeat offender in obscuring the fact that UNRWA will still operate in the West Bank and Gaza.

On Jan. 29, the program did say that the ban relates to “UNRWA working in Israel,” but the visuals showed Gaza, which may have led viewers to miss this point. The report did include US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Dorothy Shea accusing UNRWA of “exaggerating the effects of the [Israeli] laws – suggesting that they will force the entire humanitarian response to halt is irresponsible and dangerous.”

On *SBS TV* “World News” (Jan. 30), Tanya Dendrinis said, “The existence of millions of Palestinians, meanwhile, is at immediate risk, according to humanitarian organisations, who’ve denounced Israel’s ban... in areas under sovereign Israeli control.”

The next night, *SBS TV* “World News” (Feb 1) reporter Claudia Farhart said, “A surge in aid has been coming in... 60% of it brought in by the UN agency UNRWA, now banned by Israel... Britain, France and Germany [have been] reiterating their... grave concern and asking Israel to let UNRWA’s work continue.”

Measured voices included Michael Easson and Jamal Rifi in the *Australian Financial Review* (Jan. 22), who noted that the “Swedish, Dutch and Swiss governments have decided to avoid UNRWA. Australia should do the same.”

In the *Courier Mail* (Feb. 5), AIJAC’s Tzvi Fleischer wrote, “Humanitarian aid should be the responsibility of the various agencies, such as the World Food Program and World Health Organisation, which perform these tasks for the 99.9 per cent of the world’s population that is not Palestinian.”

In the *Daily Telegraph* (Feb. 6), AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams dispelled the myth that UNRWA is simply an aid agency, pointing out that its “ultimate aim” is to maintain the Palestinians on its rolls as “refugees until they can ‘return’ to Israel. This is just a recipe for continued conflict, since such a ‘return’ would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state.”

THE LAST WORD

Rabbi Ralph Genende

THE TALE OF ESTHER IN 2025

When I read the Book of Esther and its absurd and fantastical tale of Jew-hatred, genocidal madness, despotic dynamism and the unabashed pursuit of power, I feel like I am reading a text for today. A case of *the more things change, the more they remain the same*.

The Book of Esther is a story of contradictions, peppered with coincidences and events of pure chance. At one moment the Jews of Persia are living in comfort and security assured of their respected place in the multicultural environment of ancient Iran. The next instance they face a devastating decree of destruction. Then, with giddy intensity they move from terrifying fear to empowerment and security under a Jewish PM and powerful Jewish queen. This is the critical lesson of the festival of Purim (celebrated this year on March 13/14). Esther's story calls on us to recognise the general agonising uncertainty of the human condition and the vulnerability of Jewish destiny.

Disturbed by the horror of 9/11, American thinker Lee Harris has argued that liberal democracies have forgotten the true meaning of a true enemy; an individual that you simply can't sit down and reason with in the belief that you can find the solution for every conflict. Such an enemy, says Harris, is "someone who is willing to die in order to kill you... They hate us simply because we are their enemy."

In Haman, the Persian Jews meet their own version of such an "enemy" – representing a primeval, venomous evil, which first appeared in the person of his reputed ancestor Amalek. Amalekites attacked the new nation of Israel, fresh out of Egypt, not out of fear but cynical impunity, according to the Torah. Haman, like Amalek, cares little for

human life, especially if it gets in the way of his desperate pursuit of power and his narcissistic belief in his own superiority.

The Talmud asserts that Haman claimed he was a god. Like some other H's – Hitler, Hamas and Hezbollah – they are what the poet WB Yeats described as the worst of humanity, filled with passionate, vitriolic intensity.

This lesson is closely linked to another important Purim message highlighted by Rabbi JB Soloveitchik, that while evil people are a threat to all human beings, they are all too often a particular threat to the Jews.

The Persian exile taught the Jews that our mere presence can make many people feel uncomfortable and unsettled. Haman puts it simply and precisely: "Yet all this honour and prestige is worthless as long as I see Mordechai

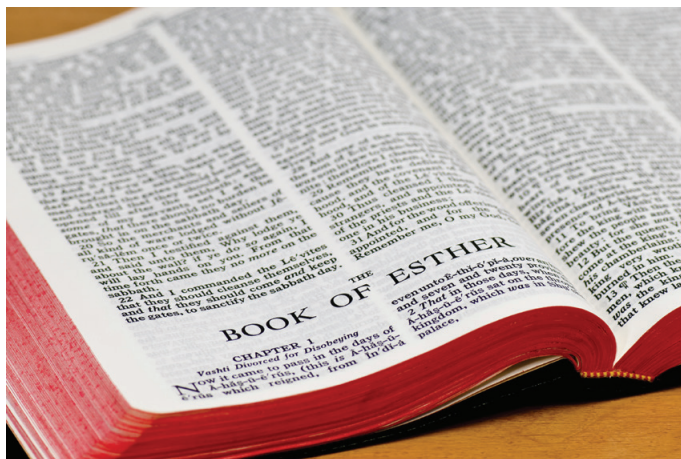
the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (Esther 5 :13). And, subsequently, he hatches his genocidal plan to eradicate every Jew – a fine precursor to the Hamas Charter.

This plan is a reminder, says Soloveitchik, that Jews everywhere, even those living in benign and liberal societies, must answer decidedly: Yes, it can happen here.

But for all these dark messages, the story of Esther ends with an astonishing

message of hope and empowerment. It reminds us that, with skill and courage, you can defeat a diabolical enemy and a perverse ideology. The words of Mordechai to Esther resonate in our times: "If you persist in keeping silent at a time like this, relief and deliverance will come from some other place... but... who knows whether it was just for such a time as this that you attained the royal position." (Ibid 4:14). None of us chose to live in a post-October 7 era, but we can choose to act with clarity and moral courage to counter the disgraceful antisemitism and brutal ideologies of these times.

We must respond to the world's longest hatred with possibly its longest love – love for your neighbour, your God, and even the stranger! Yet at the same time, we must also be aware of the genuine evil that can lurk in the hearts of all human beings.



The dramatic Book of Esther, describing events in Persia more than 2,000 years ago, still has important themes that resonate today (Image: Shutterstock)



9 771442 369017 >

Australia \$7.95 (inc GST)

AIR