



OPERATION “GIDEON’S CHARIOTS”

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MAJOR CHANGES TO THE AUSTRALIA/ISRAEL REVIEW

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading the *Australia/Israel Review* (AIR). We hope you find it both enjoyable and informative.

As you may know, the *AIR* just celebrated 50 years of providing information, interpretation and inspiration to the Australian public – a milestone of which we are very proud. However, over the course of those five decades the Australian publishing environment and the technologies used to deliver content have changed enormously – and we have repeatedly sought to change and improve the *AIR* to keep up. We have decided another major evolution is now required if the *AIR* is to carry its long tradition into the next half century.

Therefore, this June 2025 edition will be the final one we will be producing as a monthly print magazine. Much as we love ink and paper, it has simply ceased to make sense to continue publishing in this way when almost all content is now online – and one can do so much more with digital than with traditional media, and get information and interpretation into people's hands so much more quickly.

We are therefore excited to announce that the print *AIR* will be replaced with an all-new, completely redesigned online quarterly magazine whose content will be almost wholly original, and available completely free of charge. We sincerely hope you will like the new and improved version.

In addition, we will also be introducing a series of shorter, regular email newsletters to keep you up-to-date and informed during the period between *AIR* editions. These will deal with Middle Eastern current

affairs, Australian politics, global antisemitism, chronicling and correcting local media coverage and much more.

We will sign you up to receive the new *Australia/Israel Review* automatically by email. We will also be contacting you to offer our other email publications, so please look out for this free offer, and select the specific newsletters of most interest to you.

We are excited for you to join us and share in this latest iteration of the *AIR*'s long history as we continue our original mission of providing the most reliable and in-depth information, interpretation and inspiration to all Australians interested in the Middle East, Australia-Israel relations and other public policy issues of special interest to the Australian Jewish community.

We invite your feedback, or questions, regarding these developments, at editorial@aijac.org.au, or on (03) 9681 6660.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tzvi Fleischer
Editor-in-Chief

Australia/Israel Review



EDITOR'S NOTE

As noted, this edition of the *AIR* will be the final one in the monthly printed magazine form, before an all-new, fully online quarterly *AIR* is launched later this year.

Appropriately, given how the war in Gaza has dominated our pages over the past 20 months, this edition looks at the latest phase of that war – the IDF's new "Gideon's Chariots" campaign to finally end Hamas' control over Gaza's population. Top Israeli security writer Ron Ben-Yishai explains the strategy's details, while Ahron Shapiro explains what Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu is saying about its goals – as well as Israel's aid plans for Gaza. Plus, top Israeli journalist Ehud Yaari explores the likelihood of a Gaza endgame in which Hamas leaders would agree to be exiled.

In addition, Jamie Hyams offers a detailed look at how Australia's most extreme political parties performed during the May 3 Federal election, while Bren Carlill takes on the fallacies and absurdities of arguments being advanced for Australia to recognise the currently non-existent "State of Palestine".

Finally, don't miss Ilan Evyatar on Israel's apparent new opportunities in Syria, or Ran Porat on the conspiracy theories that have developed in the wake of the Dural caravan hoax earlier this year.

Your feedback is especially important as we prepare the next evolution of the *AIR*. Please be in touch at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

ON THE COVER

The IDF's 16th Brigade in the Shejaiya area of the Gaza Strip (Image: IDF)



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EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN****COLIN RUBENSTEIN****A NEW CHAPTER**

For over 50 years, the *Australia/Israel Review* has been a trusted source of in-depth journalism and commentary, so naturally the decision to make this the last printed edition and change the format to a digital quarterly, supplemented by concise yet insightful weekly updates, has not been an easy one.

However, this issue doesn't represent some sort of swan song or fond farewell to our subscribers. Far from it. Rather, consider it a personal invitation to come aboard the *Review's* exciting transformation in the weeks and months ahead.

What's in store is a bold leap forward that will maximise AIJAC's resources to bring even more timely knowledge to a vastly wider audience through a multimedia experience befitting the information age in which we live. Further, it will complement our social media presence, which already places AIJAC among the top-followed Jewish organisations, not only in Australia, but in the world.

With so much happening here and in Israel, in ever-quicker news cycles, the need for AIJAC's insightful content and timely fact-checking is greater than ever.

Case in point, the news fiasco on May 20 when a UN official incredibly made on BBC Radio a bizarre and transparently false claim regarding "14,000 babies that will die [in Gaza] in the next 48 hours unless we can reach them." This anti-Israel libel was reported throughout the next morning on *ABC NewsRadio* and into the evening on the SBS website in sensational headlines and reports. Not long after the interview, the UN discreetly walked back that remark, since it was complete nonsense (see p. 7). AIJAC's social media team swung into action to set the record straight in real time.

Australia of course just decisively re-elected Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his ALP team, and they have a clear mandate to govern. Meanwhile, the Greens' increasingly extremist bent, including their rabid anti-Israel obsession, which helped make university campuses and even city centres unsafe spaces for Jews, almost certainly contributed to their near total wipeout in the lower house.

Unfortunately, in matters of foreign policy, especially regarding the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the Albanese Government has slowly been developing a problematic tendency of moving in lockstep with European nations like the UK and France, as well as Canada. And these nations have been far too prone to having their wrong-headed Mideast policies effectively decided by the false, inflammatory or exaggerated claims coming out of UN organs or affiliated NGOs – such as the "14,000 babies" lie. By contrast, Washington has pushed back on the UN's entrenched pro-Palestinian biases under both Biden and Trump.

An example of such a foreign policy error occurred on May 20, with Foreign Minister Penny Wong signing on to yet another European-led joint statement on Gaza criticising Israel on the issue of humanitarian aid for Gazans.

Once again, as we have seen so often from European and UN sources, the statement distorted the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The international community is refusing to acknowledge, much less attempt to deal with, the overwhelming evidence that aid being supplied through UNRWA and other agencies was stolen by Hamas and exploited on a massive scale to control the population, enrich itself and pay new jihadist recruits.

By joining the Europeans in rejecting Israel's sensible plans to change the way aid is distributed, Australia was effectively urging Israel to continue the mistakes of the past that played straight into Hamas' hands. This would prolong the war and the unavoidable suffering that comes with it.

The timing was especially bad because the war with Hamas appears to be at a decisive crossroads. While the lives of up to 23 living hostages and the remains of 35 others are in

the balance, Israel is poised to fully implement Operation Gideon's Chariots, intended to capture and hold Gazan territory while moving Gaza's civilians out of the way of the fighting. This will leave Hamas exposed in the captured areas.

This would finally end the war in a few months' time. Of course, a quicker way to do so would be for Hamas to finally accept Israel's offer to end the war without further bloodshed based on terms completely in line with the stated positions of Australia and virtually all of Western powers – that there must be no future role for Hamas in the rule of Gaza.

If Hamas releases the remaining hostages and disarms, its leaders and members would be granted safe passage to a regional country willing to accept them (see Ehud Yaari on this, p. 16). At this point, a technocratic government to rule Gaza could be assembled, with the assistance of regional forces, allowing the process of reconstruction of war-torn Gaza to begin.

If this does not happen, reconstruction of Gaza will never find funding so long as Hamas maintains military control over Gazans. Therefore, it is profoundly in Australia's interest to get behind these principles.

Of course, the UN is apoplectic over Israel's plans to directly oversee aid flows so Hamas does not divert and

exploit them, but that is simply entrenched bias and self-interest. Australia is right to insist Gazans must get enough aid to survive, but it absolutely should not sign on to the UN's claim that only its agencies can deliver that aid. The history of the past 20 months has shown UN agencies are

incapable of – and apparently uninterested in – preventing Hamas from being the primary beneficiary of aid flows. With US help, Israel has provided a credible plan to both feed Gazans and liberate them from Hamas' control. Why would we oppose this?

Meanwhile, here in Australia, the Albanese Government must build upon its efforts to combat antisemi-

tism and improve communication with the Jewish community on issues that affect it.

There are no quick fixes and no shortcuts. The one clear verdict of the election was voter rejection of fringe parties and the narrow-mindedness and bigotry they enable and often represent. What's needed now is leadership that will govern from the centre and act in the best interests of Australia's social cohesion, democracy, economic welfare and national security. Though this will be the last printed *Australia/Israel Review*, we will very much be part of upcoming public debates about how best to do that over the Albanese Government's next three years.

AIR



WORD FOR WORD

"The Houthis have announced... that they don't want to fight any more. They just don't want to fight. And we will honour that, and we will stop the bombings, and they have capitulated."

US President Donald Trump suddenly announces the end of the bombing campaign against the Houthis (Guardian, May 6).

"[Trump] wants to save face because of the failure of U.S. aggression against Yemen... Whatever he says – we will not allow any ship, any Israeli ship, to arrive to its port until the aggression against Gaza is stopped."

Houthi politburo official Deifullah al-Shami (Axios, May 6).

"European countries will not influence us and they will not cause us to abandon our core objectives – ensuring the security of Israel and the future of Israel... We strongly oppose their intention to give Hamas the ultimate prize – to recognize a Palestinian state. After October 7, after we saw what a de facto Palestinian state looks like – it was called Gaza... Hamastan. And now they want to create another one?"

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (Times of Israel, May 22).

"I wish to address the residents of Gaza: We are not the ones who brought this destruction upon you. We did not start the war. We did not rob you of food, shelter, or money. We are not the ones hiding in hospitals or schools. We are not the ones staying in luxury hotels while you live in hardship. This is your leadership, those who are holding our hostages."

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir (Times of Israel, May 20).

"We have one very, very clear red line, and that is enrichment. We cannot allow even 1% of an enrichment capability. We've delivered a proposal to the Iranians that we think addresses some of this without disrespecting them... But everything begins... with a deal that does not include enrichment."

US envoy Steve Witkoff on Iran nuclear negotiations (ABC News, May 19).

"For the Americans to say, 'We won't allow Iran to enrich uranium,' is utter nonsense. We aren't waiting for anyone's permission."

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on nuclear negotiations (X/Twitter, May 20).

"Welcome home, beloved son of the State of Israel. We're so excited... everyone is excited, every house in Israel is excited."

Israeli President Isaac Herzog in a phone call with recently freed hostage Edan Alexander (Times of Israel, May 13).



SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

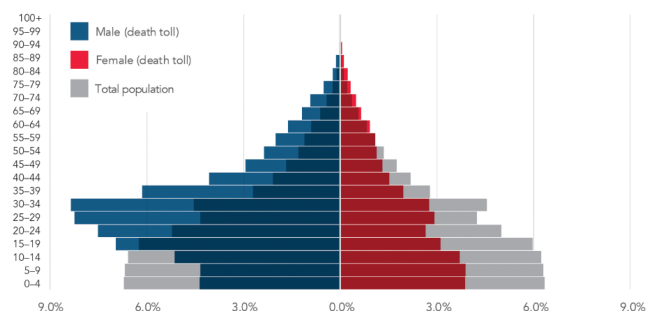
INTERPRETING HAMAS' CASUALTY NUMBERS

Last month, the *AIR* published an article by Ben-Dror Yemini discussing new research showing that even the casualty data from Gaza produced by the Hamas-controlled Ministry of Health there, questionable though this is, makes it clear Israeli forces are not acting indiscriminately or 'genocidally' in their attacks in Gaza.

The Hamas statistics show that combat-age men are far more likely to be killed, compared to their proportion of the population, than women, children or the elderly. Hamas data doesn't differentiate between combatants and civilians, but the only sensible explanation for these numbers is that Israel is doing its best to target combatants. However, as is always the case in intense urban warfare, civilians still die as collateral damage. This is particularly true in Gaza because not only is it densely urban, but Hamas deliberately riddled all civilian neighbourhoods, and most civilian public buildings such as schools, mosques, hospitals, kindergartens and clinics, with military tunnels, rocket launch sites, weapons caches, bunkers, command and control centres and explosive booby-traps.

However, what the Hamas casualty data shows can be difficult to comprehend through a verbal explanation alone, so I am grateful for the latest study on the subject of Gaza casualties put out by Washington Institute for Near East Policy expert Gabriel Epstein. Not only does Epstein's new paper, "Assessing the Gaza Death Toll After Eighteen Months of War", examine the Hamas casualty data comprehensively and professionally, it illustrates the key points with some excellent graphs that make things much easier to visualise. I include two key examples below.

Figure 6. Proportional Distribution of Gaza Fatalities by Age and Gender vs. Total Population, October 7, 2023–May 11, 2025



Note: Lighter shading (blue and red) indicates a higher proportion in the death toll than in the general population, represented by the gray pyramid.

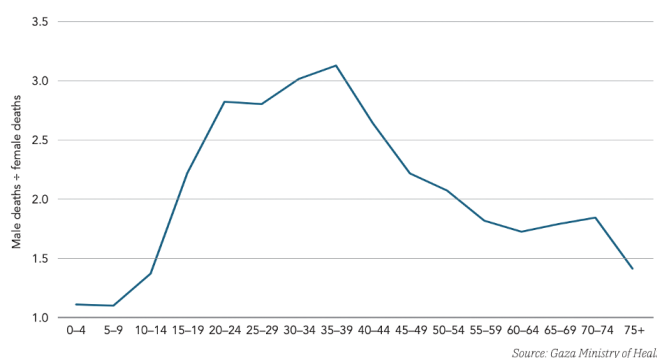
Sources: Gaza Ministry of Health, U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 6, above, shows the actual casualty numbers compared to what they would be if Israel was actually killing Gazans indiscriminately. The grey areas represent Pal-

estinian women and children who would be dead if Israel was killing Palestinians without trying to target combatants. The light blue represents the gross over-representation of largely combat-age men in the Hamas numbers.

Figure 7 makes things even more clear:

Figure 7. Male-Female Death Ratio by Age



To explain what this means, if men and women were being killed in equal numbers, this graph of the male:female ratio of those killed by age would show a completely straight line across the bottom at the "1.0" level. But this graph is nothing like that. Men, especially combat-age men, are many times more likely to have been killed than their female relatives, as the peaks of the graph illustrate.

Overall, according to Epstein, the combat-age male cohort, that is 18 to 45, are 2.85 times more likely than women of the same age to be killed. At some age levels, it is over three times more likely.

To be clear, of course, we must never forget that these numbers represent an utterly tragic reality for many individuals and families – even if a large fraction of those killed have been Hamas or other terrorist group combatants, and even if the ratio of civilians to combatants killed appears arguably better than similar recent examples of urban warfare. There is every reason to want the war to end and the killing to stop as soon as possible – but only in such a way that it is not going to start up again in a few years. But this requires Hamas to be disarmed and removed from power.

The point is that Hamas' own casualty numbers debunk the claims of those who are prepared to help keep Hamas in power by falsely accusing Israel of supposedly targeting civilians.

Since it seems to be too much to ask for the mainstream media to stop treating the questionable Hamas casualty numbers as definitive, is it too much to ask that they at least explain that these same numbers actually debunk the pro-Hamas claim that Israel is killing Palestinians indiscriminately?

PRIMED FOR "GENOCIDE"

I was recently perusing a copy of the *Australia / Israel Review* from June 1994, and came across an article by a then-young researcher named Tzvi Fleischer. It dealt with problematic coverage of the Middle East at that time on SBS, Australia's multicultural public broadcaster, discussing prob-

lems of media bias that seem similar to those that still persist today. However, one item in particular, really made me think “the more things change, the more they remain the same.”

On Dec. 13, 1993, SBS had broadcast the documentary “Connections: My prison, my home,” a hagiographic and completely one-sided biography of Palestine Liberation Organisation activist Raymonda Tawil. But what struck me about it is the documentary accused Israel of “genocide” of the Palestinians (the context used to justify the accusation was the building of settlements in the West Bank).

Wow, where have I heard that before? And this “genocide” claim on Australian TV occurred without the context of Palestinians actually dying in conflict with Israel, as they sadly are today. In fact, the context was the height of the Oslo peace process, in the immediate aftermath of the Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House lawn on Sept. 13, 1993.

This 1993 “genocide” charge provides a perfect illustration of the way the word “genocide” was always inevitably going to be at the core of the anti-Israel slogans employed by pro-Palestinian activists, after Hamas launched a war with the Jewish state through the mass terrorist atrocities of October 7, 2023. “Genocide” claims have been a key weapon in the Palestinian war on Israel’s existence for decades. They actually apparently derive originally from pro-Palestinian propaganda put out by the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s.

The point is that most of those – in Arab, Muslim and far-left circles – leading the charge to label Israel’s actions in Gaza “genocide” are not doing so because they saw the tragic suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza since Hamas launched the current war, and came to the conclusion only “genocide” can explain it. They are doing so because they have been primed for decades to scream “genocide” whenever the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is discussed.

AIR



Seth Mandel

STOP QUOTING THE UN

When it comes to the conflict in the Middle East, UN representatives should no longer be quoted on live news broadcasts – if at all. This will do more to reduce the spread of misinformation than anything Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook and its parents company Meta, has been asked to do over the past decade.

On May 20, Tom Fletcher, the UN’s humanitarian chief, said this to a BBC anchor on-air: “There are 14,000 babies that will die in the next 48 hours unless we can reach them.”

Just to put this in perspective, that number would equal more than half of the total number of civilian casualties during the entire course of the war so far. The BBC’s Anna Foster replied that 14,000 is “an extraordinary figure”.

To which Fletcher replied that he would characterise it as a “chilling figure”. To anyone listening to the interview undistractedly, it would be immediately recognisable as “a made-up figure”. Foster’s even engaging with it was extraordinary. It was Fletcher’s willingness to spread a lie of that magnitude that was “chilling”.

How did Fletcher come to the 14,000 figure? “We have strong teams on the ground” was his answer.

With that, the number was off and running. On top of massive international media coverage, British lawmakers in the House of Commons even cited the number during parliamentary debate.

It turned out that the number of dead babies in the UN projection was actually zero. Zero babies. Fletcher had garbled a report that worried that 14,000 children could possibly suffer malnutrition over the course of an entire year if no food aid were allowed into Gaza for that period of time.

Again, number of deaths in the study: zero. Timeline for the study: one year.

Obviously, Tom Fletcher cannot ever be allowed near a news audience again. I would say that Fletcher should probably find another line of work, but whoever would succeed him atop the UN humanitarian pyramid would likely be just as unreliable and unethical.

And that’s the problem. It’s true that no one outside of Goebbels’ communications team has so propagandised a global audience during a war to exterminate the Jewish people. But the UN inflates figures all the time, and it collaborates with genocidal fascist death squads to do so. Fletcher is what happens when you irresponsibly allow the UN to be considered a voice of authority.

No UN personality should be quoted without the news agency concerned first checking into the statement. About anything.

And anyway, what are Fletcher’s trusted teams on the ground up to these days? Well, also on May 20, Israel facilitated the entry of 93 UN trucks of food, supplies and medicine into Gaza. How many, according to the UN itself, reached their destination?

I’ll give you a hint: it’s a number that has come up a couple of times already. That’s right – zero.

According to *Haaretz*, “the UN said that none of the trucks that entered Gaza reached their destination due to traffic, logistics and security problems.”

Traffic. *Traffic*. The United Nations says it failed to deliver baby food to Gazan infants because of traffic. [To be clear, some of the aid began to actually reach Gazans the following day – ed.]

The UN – at least in terms of anything involving the Mideast – cannot be trusted to act and cannot be trusted to speak. It will not say what is true, and it will not even come close to accomplishing the tasks it demands for itself. So here again we have our favourite number: zero. There

are zero things the UN can be trusted with in this conflict. Stop quoting them, stop delegating important tasks to them, and certainly stop repeating anything you hear from them without some sort of fact-checking effort first.

Listening to the UN will get people killed. How many? I cannot speculate, but the number is almost certainly greater than zero.

AIR

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

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

DASHED HOPES

It's been nearly two-and-a-half years since Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) coalition formed government, following several years of political chaos. Hopes for the Government took a heavy hit with the inclusion of the corruption-riddled United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) into the ruling coalition, along with the ongoing curtailment of individual and press freedoms and expanding Islamification.

Yet with the economy rebounding strongly and no obvious challenger, the 77-year-old Anwar is well positioned to contest the next election, due November 2027. With the pluralist Reformasi philosophy synonymous with Anwar's name largely discarded, the Pakatan Harapan – like the discredited UMNO that governed the country for 75 years – relies upon support from the old elites. Much is as it was.

The continuity is notable in two key areas: the primacy of Islamic sensitivities in social and legal affairs, and the strident advocacy of the Palestinian cause and demonisation of Israel.

Perhaps the most sensational controversy erupted in March 2024, when KK Super Mart came under fire for selling socks emblazoned with the word “Allah” at an outlet in Sunway City, Petaling Jaya. This sparked widespread outrage among conservative Muslim groups who argued that placing the divine name on footwear – objects associated with impurity – was deeply disrespectful. KK Super Mart swiftly apologised and withdrew the product, and its founder later sought pardon from the King. However, the episode escalated further when three of its stores were targeted with petrol-bomb attacks the following month.

Shortly thereafter, a local shoe manufacturer, Vern's Holdings, faced a similar uproar after Muslim consumers noted that the logo on the soles of certain high-heeled shoes resembled the Arabic script for “God”. Public pressure mounted rapidly on social media, leading Vern's to halt sales of the offending designs, offer refunds, and

destroy over 1,100 pairs seized by authorities, while the company's founder was summoned by JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) for questioning.

In early February 2025, the Government faced a backlash over proposed JAKIM guidelines for Muslims attending non-Muslim events and celebrations. Under the draft rules, Muslims would allegedly need to avoid “religious propaganda” and seek approval from Islamic authorities before participating in weddings, funerals, or cultural festivals held at non-Muslim venues. Within days, fierce criticism from political leaders and civil society prompted PM Anwar to scrap the guidelines altogether. While some lauded the quick U-turn as a victory for inclusivity, others cautioned that the proposal's mere existence revealed underlying strains in interfaith relations.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's response to the war sparked by Hamas' massacre of Israeli civilians could have been predicted in advance.

Since October 2023, PM Anwar has consistently resisted Western pressure to designate or condemn Hamas, emphasising engagement with its political wing. That same month, he publicly rejected Western demands to denounce the group, stating Malaysia would “continue to maintain relations with Hamas” and that “pressuring attitudes” would not alter Kuala Lumpur's position. Amid ongoing pressure, Anwar has maintained his “no apologies” stance on engaging Hamas' political leaders.

At the same time, Anwar has been vociferous in condemning Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Speaking at a pro-Palestinian rally in Kuala Lumpur on October 24, 2023, he denounced Israel's bombardment as reaching a “level of insanity” and “the height of barbarism.”

In December 2023, Malaysia imposed a maritime ban on all vessels owned by Israeli shipping company ZIM, along with any ship bearing the Israeli flag, barring them from docking at its ports or loading cargo, for what Anwar called “cruelty against the Palestinian people.”

Domestically, his Government also initiated a nationwide Palestine Solidarity Week, a move that drew scrutiny after students and teachers were photographed brandishing toy firearms and wearing keffiyeh scarves while waving Palestinian flags, including a pro-Hamas banner.

By February 2025, Malaysia had escalated its rhetoric, condemning any US proposal to forcibly relocate Gazans as “ethnic cleansing” and a blatant violation of international law. Concurrently, Anwar announced Malaysia's commitment to fund the construction of a school, hospital and mosque in Gaza to support post-conflict recovery.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Parliamentary Caucus on Palestine has urged countries considering normalising ties with Israel to halt such moves, while calling for “aggressive diplomacy” in condemning Israel's actions and “a just, lasting two-state solution based on international law and UN mandates.”

Perhaps the climate of disillusion is best encapsulated

by former Prime Minister Najib Razaq. The alleged architect of 1Malaysia Development Berhad, which collapsed into one of Asia's biggest-ever financial scandals, has had his 12-year sentence cut in half amid credible rumours he will be allowed to serve the remainder under house arrest – a strategy to keep the ethnic Malays who continue to venerate him on Anwar's side.

AIR



Alex Benjamin

SINGING AMIDST THE RUINS

“My former home... was a large house with many doors and many rooms for many different kinds of people. This house has been divided, broken up, ruined. I have no business with what is there now. I am used to living in a house, not in cabins.”

Early 20th century European novelist Joseph Roth hated divided societies, and was heartbroken over the shattering of Europe's previous comity in the 1930s. Like contemporary European literary great Stefan Zweig, Roth spent his last years lamenting a shared European life destroyed by extremists. Both were Jews.

I was in Madrid last month, where, as Vice-Chair of the European Jewish Association, I found my thoughts drifting to the lamentations of Roth and Zweig as we revealed the outcome of a poll we had taken across seven European countries.

More on the poll in a minute, but first let's set the scene. Most Jews in Europe descend from ancestors who lived through the 'break up' of Roth's European House – forced to migrate and take refuge in other countries, as doors were closed and everyone was forced into their separate “cabins”. For the vast majority of Jews who moved from Galicia or Romania or Ukraine to France or the UK, their primary preoccupation was leaving behind the past, building again, getting an education and playing an active role in society. So it was with my own family, who escaped pogroms in Bucharest and settled in London's East End.

Jews seldom brought their old baggage with them. Never in my childhood did I hear my grandparents try to relitigate what happened to their families in Romania. Going out on the streets, harassing Romanians living in London, or calling for boycotts of Romanian goods would never have crossed their minds.

The poll we presented, conducted by IPSOS and analysed by an eminent European migration expert, saw 4,400 representative respondents in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium express clearly that Europe is today importing antisemitism, long-standing conflicts and distorted narratives. These are then reshaped and echoed on the streets, in schools and across social networks.

Nowhere is this transmission more evident than among the continent's youth. According to the poll's data, 28% of Europeans aged 18 to 24 have either participated in or witnessed antisemitic remarks presented as anti-Israel commentary. The most common settings for antisemitic remarks? The workplace (48%) – followed by conversations among friends and family and then, public forums, both physical and digital.

Meanwhile, 65.4% of Europeans say that the war in the Middle East has impacted how Jews are viewed in their own countries. Among those, 55% say it has worsened perceptions. The conflict is not only reshaping views of Jews – 65.3% also say it affects how Palestinians are perceived, underscoring how foreign conflicts now create domestic powder kegs. This imported discourse is having real consequences: 20.4% of European respondents directly blamed the Jews in their own country for the Gaza war. In Spain, that figure climbs to 24%.

Media coverage also plays a decisive role in fuelling hate, with 49.3% of respondents saying they believe the media's portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has harmed Jewish communities in Europe. This view climbs to 62.6% in the Netherlands and 52.3% in Germany. Even when antisemitic incidents stem from foreign narratives, it is local Jewish communities who face a backlash – in fortress-like synagogues and Jewish buildings, in classrooms and on the streets.

The picture painted by the data is clear: geopolitical tensions are being absorbed into Europe's social fabric, and Jewish communities are the first to bear the consequences.

But I believe that the vast majority of Europeans are in that oft-cited “silent majority”, who may have geopolitical views, but, like my own grandparents, just want to get on and live their lives in peace.

Proof of that emerged in that least likely of places – the Eurovision vote. In that famously populist song contest, Europe's silent majority spoke loudly. They voted to place the Israeli entry – “New Day Will Rise,” sung by Nova Music Festival massacre survivor Yuval Raphael – first in the public vote, including even in relentlessly anti-Israel Spain. It was a quiet referendum on the hate on our streets and accompanying radicalised politics, so out of step with European values of tolerance and respect. The public voted to reject the mindset that equates everything Israeli or “Zionist” with evil and demands everyone punish all manifestations of the Jewish state.

The protests, disruptive noise and screaming targeting the world's only Jewish state continue – but it is becoming clearer and clearer that much of it is imported in a way alien to the best European traditions. Yet political leaders, university presidents and European media choose to listen to the red-faced activists responsible for the anti-Israel cacophony, and not the far larger contingent who quietly voted for Israel. By continuing to do so, they are actively contributing to recreating Roth's “house divided, broken up, ruined.”

AIR

BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Three rockets were launched toward Israel from Gaza on May 13, two on May 18, one on May 21, three on May 22, one on May 23 and three on May 26. None caused casualties.

Renewed fighting in Gaza has seen Israel kill dozens of senior terrorist operatives and fighters, likely including the leader of Hamas, Muhammad Sinwar, in airstrikes on a tunnel system running under a Khan Younis hospital on May 13. At least nine Israeli soldiers and one police officer were killed in and around Gaza between April 24 and May 9.

On April 30, an IDF soldier was wounded in an IED attack near the town of Beita in the West Bank. On May 7, two reservist soldiers were seriously wounded in a shooting at the Reihan Crossing. On May 14, Tzeela Gez, a pregnant 30-year-old mother of three, was killed in a shooting in the West Bank en route to the hospital to give birth.

IDF counterterrorism operations across the northern West Bank continue to result in dozens of senior terrorists and terrorist cells being eliminated and other suspects being detained.

US-ISRAEL AID INITIATIVE FOR GAZA

On May 8, US Middle East Envoy Steve Witkoff presented the UN Security Council with a US-Israeli initiative to distribute aid in Gaza through the 'Gaza Humanitarian Foundation', (GHF) – bypassing Hamas to provide aid via an initial four distribution hubs in the Gaza Strip. Israel intends to arrange for Gaza's civilians to relocate to safe areas around these hubs. The Foundation will reportedly utilise its own private security to facilitate aid distribution directly to Gazan

families, while IDF forces secure the operation from a distance.

The GHF's first distribution site opened on May 26, though several key details about the overall scheme remain unclear. GHF CEO Jake Wood resigned on May 26.

AID RESUMES TO GAZA



On May 19, Israel resumed facilitating the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. In all, 495 trucks of aid, including baby food, flour, other food and medical supplies and equipment entered Gaza between May 19 and May 25. Israel reportedly intends to continue allowing in approximately 100 trucks per day.

After initial delays in transporting the aid from the Gaza border to UN distribution hubs, the aid was distributed to bakers, medical facilities and soup kitchens. The UN initially claimed that the route from the border offered by the IDF was unsafe, and that it feared looting.

After preventing aid from entering Gaza since early March, the change in Israeli policy comes as Israel rolls out its three-stage "Gideon's Chariots" war plan, and after the IDF and Israeli Government conceded that Gazan food warehouses were empty.

HOSTAGE EDAN ALEXANDER RELEASED

IDF soldier Edan Alexander, a 21-year-old US-Israeli citizen, was released on May 12 after 584 days in

brutal Hamas captivity. Nicknamed "the American" by his captors, he was shackled in a cage, tortured during interrogations, starved and held in collapsing tunnels without daylight. His physical condition deteriorated so severely he could not walk unaided. In recent months, Hamas began feeding him more regularly, seemingly in preparation for his release. Alexander was the last known living American hostage, but the remains of four other US citizens are still being held.

NEW PA VP

Veteran Palestinian politician Hussein al-Sheikh was elected Deputy Chair of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Vice President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) – a newly created role – on April 25. Al-Sheikh is considered a close aide to 90-year-old PA President Mahmoud Abbas. As VP, he would become interim PA President should Abbas die or retire. Until now, the interim successor to the PA President was the Speaker of the Palestinian Majlis (Parliament) and since the last Palestinian election in 2006, that position was held by Hamas official Aziz Dweik.

THE HOUTHIS, ISRAEL AND THE US

On May 6, US President Donald Trump suddenly announced the end of the bombing campaign against the Houthis which had begun on March 15.

As of May 26, the Houthis had fired a total of 39 ballistic missiles and 10 drones at a near-daily frequency at Israel since March 18. Most have been intercepted or fallen short.

On May 4, a Houthi ballistic missile impacted near Ben-Gurion Airport, prompting large-scale Israeli retaliatory strikes on Hodeidah port

and a cement factory. Israel also launched large strikes against Sanaa airport on May 6 and a further wave of strikes on Houthi-controlled ports on May 17.

LEBANON UPDATE

The IDF is continuing operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon, including striking a Beirut warehouse that stored Hezbollah precision missiles in late April, after warning local residents to evacuate. In early May, the IDF eliminated multiple Hezbollah members and destroyed several Hezbollah facilities using bunker-buster bombs in the Nabatieh region.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's new Government, with the backing of the US, is now taking steps to regain control of the country's only international airport, which had been under effective Hezbollah domination for years. Dozens of airport staff suspected of being affiliated with Hezbollah have been removed, smugglers have been arrested, flights from Iran have been suspended, and new surveillance technologies are being installed.

Meanwhile, a Lebanese committee tasked by the Government with removing weapons held by Palestinian factions in refugee camps held its first meeting on May 23.

IDF ACTIVITIES IN SYRIA

During April and May, Israel expanded its involvement in southern Syria, providing medical and security aid to the Syrian Druze population amid escalating sectarian violence. The IDF established a mobile medical facility near the Druze village of Hader and deployed soldiers to nine posts within the UN buffer zone to prevent weapons from reaching hostile groups. More than 100 Syrian Druze have reportedly been killed in attacks by Islamist supporters of Syria's new regime.

Israel has reportedly also been holding secret talks with Syrian re-

gime officials, mediated by the UAE, following Donald Trump's May 14 invitation to Syria to join the Abraham Accords.

Furthermore, in talks mediated by Azerbaijan, Israel reportedly reached an in-principle agreement with Turkey on May 21 to prevent conflict between Turkish and Israeli forces in Syria, including a hotline to deal with potential flashpoints.

UK FOILS IRANIAN PLOT TO ATTACK ISRAELI EMBASSY

On May 8, UK police stormed a house and arrested four Iranians reportedly planning a terror attack against the Israeli Embassy in London. Last year, Iran was implicated in planned attacks against Israeli embassies in Sweden and Norway.

A second group of Iranians was also arrested in the UK in early May, and charged with targeting journalists

working for *Iran International*, a media outlet critical of the regime.

Meanwhile, Iran is taking steps to bolster the defence of its atomic facilities. Analysis of satellite imagery by the US-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) details how Iran is constructing a new security perimeter south of the Natanz underground uranium enrichment compound.

JORDAN BANS MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

On April 23, Jordan's Interior Minister Mazen Fraya announced a full ban on the Muslim Brotherhood, freezing its assets and criminalising all activities and promotion of its ideology. The previous week, Jordanian authorities had announced the arrests of 16 members for allegedly plotting attacks with homemade rockets and drones. The Brotherhood is the parent organisation of Hamas.



TEMPLE TANTRUM

Palestinian leaders are so determined to deny the Jewish connection to Israel that they regularly deny obvious and accepted facts. So on April 23, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, in a televised speech at the PLO Central Council, claimed that the Jewish temples were not in Jerusalem, but in Yemen!

Denying vast amounts of archaeological and historical evidence to the contrary – including non-Jewish ancient Roman historians – Abbas stated, “In the Noble Quran – and I believe that also in other divine books – it says that the [First and Second Jewish] Temples were in Yemen... The Jews say, ‘This is ours, that was ours...’ No. That’s not what the Quran says.” (Translation Middle East Media Research Institute)

Abbas was not the first to make this outlandish claim. Bemoaning Yasser Arafat's failure to provide any initiative at the

failed Camp David peace talks in 2000, then-US President Bill Clinton remarked that the only new idea Arafat brought to the summit was that there never was a Jewish temple on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

In 2003, Arafat had also claimed the temples were in Yemen, telling Israeli Arab leaders he had seen the site with his own eyes.

In 2018, Hassan Asfour, a former Palestinian official who was involved in the Oslo Accords negotiations, claimed on an *al-Arabiya* political affairs program that Israel had assassinated Arafat because of his belief the temples were in Yemen.

Most of Yemen is now ruled by the Houthis, who proclaim their antisemitism loudly and proudly. Their slogan is, “God is the Greatest, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse be upon the Jews, Victory to Islam.”

We're not sure what the Houthis make of Palestinian attempts to suggest their country is actually the site of the Jewish homeland, but it's hard to imagine they'd be impressed.



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COVER STORY

“GIDEON’S CHARIOTS”

UNDERSTANDING THE IDF’S PLANS FOR GAZA

Ron Ben-Yishai

For anyone seeking to understand what the IDF is planning for Gaza in the coming months, it’s best to ignore the voices emanating from the Israeli political system – and instead study the details of “Operation Gideon’s Chariots”. This military campaign, if carried out in full, could endanger the hostages still held by Hamas. However, the plan has been designed to minimise that risk as much as possible.

Operation Gideon’s Chariots is a combined military, civil and diplomatic campaign aimed at achieving two goals simultaneously: first, to pressure Hamas and Islamic Jihad into softening their positions and agreeing to a significant hostage deal under terms acceptable to the Israeli Government. Second, to inflict a severe blow on Hamas’ military capabilities and governmental infrastructure – enabling, on the “day after”, the establishment of a new order in the Gaza Strip.

Under such a prospective arrangement, the terrorist organisation would be effectively disarmed, and its military and civilian leadership in Gaza would be unable to function or control the relatively small terror groups likely to remain scattered throughout the Strip.

Three main phases – the first has already begun

Operation Gideon’s Chariots was planned to unfold in three primary phases. The first involved preparatory measures. The second, which began on May 16, consists of intense preparatory fire from the air and ground, combined with the movement of the majority of Gaza’s civilian population to secure shelters in the Rafah area. The third phase is a ground manoeuvre aimed at gradually taking control of large parts of the Strip and preparing for a prolonged military presence.

The preparatory phase lasted from the Israeli Cabinet’s decision to approve Gideon’s Chariots on May 5 until US President Donald Trump concluded his visit to the Middle East on May 16. During that time, preparations started in



The IDF’s new strategic plan calls for taking and holding Gaza regions until they can be completely cleared of Hamas fighters and infrastructure (Image: IDF)

the Rafah area for the prolonged stay there of nearly two million Gazans, who are expected to arrive during the second phase.

The area designated for this movement is in the southwestern part of the Strip, between the Morag Corridor and the Philadelphi Route. It is not a contiguous zone but consists of large areas around Rafah that are currently depopulated. The IDF believes that most of the tunnels in the area are no longer usable by Hamas.

The creation of a “sterile” Rafah zone was achieved through a recent operation that severed connections between the Khan Younis and central refugee camps (Deir al-Balah and al-Mawasi) and Rafah – primarily by exposing and demolishing the tunnels linking these areas. That operation was, in fact, preparation for the broader campaign now being planned.

As the second stage continues, Israel, in coordination with an American company, will establish logistical centres where this company will distribute humanitarian aid, including food, medicine, water and sanitation, to Gaza’s civilians. The aid will arrive via the Kerem Shalom crossing,

undergo inspection, and be escorted by the IDF along the shortest route to each of the secure zones housing civilians. In each such area, a logistics centre will be set up, staffed by personnel from the American company, which currently also manages the screening of Gazan civilians crossing to and from the northern part of the Strip.

The IDF, in coordination with the Shin Bet, will establish inspection points on the main routes leading to the Rafah safe zones. These “drain points” play a crucial role: preventing Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters from fleeing future combat zones and using the civilian population as human shields. These checkpoints are intended to conduct strict filtering using advanced technological systems, aimed at severing contact between Hamas leaders and the civilian population, thereby preventing the recruitment of new fighters.

The logistics centres currently under construction in the zones designated for civilian relocation are also meant to deny Hamas the ability to loot aid and sell it to fund its operations.

During the preparatory phase, a limited call-up of reserves took place. These reserve units will likely not enter Gaza, but rather replace regular units stationed along the Syrian and Lebanese borders, which will then be redeployed to the Gaza area in preparation for the eventual start of the ground manoeuvre.

Israel had placed great hopes on US President Trump’s recent Gulf trip and his meetings, especially with Qatar. Israel still hopes Trump will pressure the Qataris to resume active mediation and apply substantial pressure on Hamas’ political leadership to soften its stance on the hostages – and to agree to a deal in which Hamas is disarmed and its leadership dismantled.

Israel still intends to give Hamas leaders in Gaza a chance to reconsider their stance on the hostages and agree to the “Witkoff Plan”, under which some hostages

(between five and 11) would be released in two stages, in exchange for ceasefires lasting a month or more. These would preclude the need to continue Gideon’s Chariots.

Intense fire and civilian movement

As the second phase continues, the IDF will call on Gazan civilians across the Strip – including in areas where IDF troops have yet to manoeuvre – to evacuate to secure zones prepared for them. The drain points will be activated at this stage to strictly filter those moving south to Rafah, aiming to prevent, as much as possible, the movement of armed terrorists into the safe zones. This will allow the IDF to combat terrorists remaining in the Strip without risking civilian casualties.

The population movement has two strategic objectives: first, to pressure Hamas to stop fighting; and second, to push many Gazans closer to the border crossings with Egypt and Israel, and the coast, encouraging voluntary emigration and thus helping realise Trump’s vision for Gaza. Israel is currently engaged in intensive negotiations with several countries around the world willing to accept Gazans who wish to emigrate – countries deemed attractive enough to entice such a move.

Distribution of humanitarian aid in Gaza will begin during this phase under the new system, with the IDF securing the aid convoys. The aid volume will be smaller than before the recent complete halt, but Gazans in the new open-air shelters around Rafah will receive all necessities. Trucks will arrive at fortified logistical centres established and secured by the IDF. Aid will be distributed from controlled access points, with monitored routes to residential areas, preventing Hamas from looting food crates. During this phase, the evacuation of sick and wounded individuals from the Strip will also continue.

Combat and prolonged presence: Phase three

In the third phase, the IDF will launch a ground manoeuvre in the evacuated zones, now populated mainly by terrorists from various terror groups.

The objective: sever above-ground and underground links between Hamas and Islamic Jihad battalions and brigades – or what remains of them – and deal with each group separately using forces familiar with the terrain, thus reducing the risks from traps and explosives.

The IDF will act systematically, flattening buildings that could serve as combat shelters and exposing and destroying tunnels that might enable surprise guerrilla attacks. This phase aims to prevent Hamas commanders from relocating forces or reaching safe zones. It will also seek to block the group from controlling its fighters or recruiting new ones, given the absence of humanitarian aid to fund such efforts and the removal of young civilians who could be recruited.

The gradual takeover of territory, severed above and

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below ground from other areas, will take several months. Forces remaining in the field will block Hamas from resurfacing, systematically eroding terrorist capabilities and the infrastructure, including tunnels and public buildings like schools, used in the fighting.

Hamas' 'exit options' and the levers of pressure

The operational plan includes "exit options" for Hamas during each phase. In the preparatory phase, Israeli officials believed Hamas might agree to a phased hostage release under the "Witkoff Plan" – to prevent the population transfer stage, which Hamas appears to fear greatly. However, this proved not to be the case. The second exit opportunity is before or during the onset of the ground manoeuvres. The third is sometime toward the end of Gideon's Chariots, before Israel orders the final conquest of the Gaza Strip.

The current plan was prepared by the IDF General Staff, with the Operations Directorate leading the effort. Together with the Shin Bet, Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), Military Intelligence, other military branches, and in coordination with the Americans, three operational plans were developed. IDF Chief-of-Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir favoured the Gideon's Chariots plan, but all three were presented to Defence Minister Israel Katz and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. After their approval, the plans were shown to the cabinet, with Netanyahu and Katz backing Gideon's Chariots.

Extensive thought, effort and resources were invested in this plan, which employs three pressure levers proven, through the 18 months of fighting, to be highly effective against Hamas' leadership.

The first lever is the occupation and control of territory, severing remaining Hamas units from one another and systematically destroying combat infrastructure. This includes expanding buffer zones along the Strip's edges, which also enhances the security of Gaza-adjacent Israeli communities by physically separating them from Gaza.

The second lever, particularly stressful for Hamas, is the civilian movement through drain points into areas unconnected to Hamas' infrastructure. This not only prevents recruitment but also strips Hamas of its ability to govern civilians.

The third lever – equally troubling for Hamas – is the prevention of aid theft. This denies the group a vital source of funding through the resale of looted humanitarian supplies.

AIR

Ron Ben-Yishai is a veteran Israeli military reporter and National Security correspondent for the Israeli daily newspaper Yediot Ahronot and Israeli TV's Channel 1. © Yediot Ahronot (Ynet-news.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved. Additional reporting by AIJAC staff.

NETANYAHU LAYS OUT HIS VISION FOR WAR'S NEXT STAGES

Ahron Shapiro

Amidst international pressure to cancel the IDF's new Gaza offensive, called "Operation Gideon's Chariots", and criticism at home over the failure to reach a deal with Hamas for the release of more hostages, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu held a surprise press conference, in Hebrew, for Israeli journalists on May 21 – the first in five months.

In his remarks, Netanyahu clarified his Government's war plans, explained in three steps Israel's new strategy for distributing humanitarian aid to Gazan civilians without it falling into Hamas' hands and aired his view on limited hostages-for-ceasefire deals. Finally, he also set out Israel's terms under which Hamas could end the war immediately without the need for further bloodshed.



Netanyahu on May 21: 'Gideon's Chariots' intended "to complete the war, to complete the mission." (Image: GPO/ Flickr)

Reiterating his war aims, Netanyahu said, "[The war] has a justified and exceptionally clear purpose: To defeat Hamas, which carried out the atrocities of October 7; to return all our hostages; and to ensure that Gaza no longer poses a threat to Israel."

Netanyahu implied that, given these aims, a Hamas offer to release all the hostages in return for the war's end would not be sufficient.

"If there is an opportunity for a temporary ceasefire to bring back additional hostages – and I want to emphasise, a temporary ceasefire – we are prepared for it," he said.

However, he said, "The 'Gideon's Chariots' operation is



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intended... to complete the war, to complete the mission... Our forces are seizing more and more territory to clear it of terrorists and Hamas terror infrastructure. And at the end of this process, all areas of the Gaza Strip will be under Israeli security control, and Hamas will be completely defeated.”

Netanyahu then devoted a large portion of his remarks to the humanitarian aid issue in Gaza. Given the importance of this matter, I will quote his words at length:

“In order to preserve our operational freedom of action, and to allow our very best friends to continue supporting us, we must prevent a humanitarian crisis. We said this at the start of the war as well. I hear this from Israel’s best friends — friends from the Senate, true and close friends of our country — and they tell me the following: we’re giving you full backing, we’re sending you weapons, we’re giving you support at the Security Council.

“Eliminate these monsters. Eliminate them. But one thing — one thing — we cannot accept. We cannot accept a situation of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

“But on the other hand, we know — as you all know — that Hamas loots a significant portion of the aid, and it sells the rest at outrageous prices to fund its terror army. That is the money source for recruiting terrorists. We eliminate terrorists, and they recruit using the money they loot from the aid that enters Gaza.

“Therefore, in order to prevent Hamas from taking control of the humanitarian aid, we developed, together with the US, another plan — a plan for distributing basic food to civilians and children that will not reach Hamas. And it is divided into three phases. Phase A: the entry of basic food into Gaza now, to prevent a humanitarian crisis and to enable the continuation of the fighting.

“Phase B, and this will happen in the coming days, is the opening of food distribution points by American companies that will be secured by the IDF. And Phase C, during the takeover of areas in the Gaza Strip, is the creation of a sterile zone in the south of the Strip, to which the civilian population will be evacuated from the combat zones for their protection... Free of Hamas, the residents of Gaza will receive the full humanitarian aid.”

After delineating his humanitarian aid plan and the way it would work vis-a-vis the fighting involved in Gideon’s Chariots, Netanyahu then explained Israel’s terms for bringing the war to a close, a scenario where all the hostages would return home but also Hamas would surrender

its weapons and leave Gaza.

“I am ready to end the war,” Netanyahu said, “under clear conditions that will guarantee the security of Israel: All the hostages return home, Hamas lays down its weapons, leaves power, and its leadership is expelled from the Strip — that is, whoever is left of it. Gaza is completely demilitarised.” Citing the views of US President Donald Trump under his “Gaza Riviera” plan announced in March, Netanyahu added that “Gaza residents who want to leave will be able to leave.”

Following Netanyahu’s prepared remarks, one of the journalists asked why “victory had not been achieved” even after a year-and-a-half of fighting.

“Why is the war in Gaza lasting so long?” the Prime Minister asked. “I’ll tell you. No army in the world has ever encountered an urban arena like this — with tens of thousands of terrorists above ground, and 50 metres below ground, with a civilian population that supports them.

“This is a new situation in urban warfare — there’s never been anything like it. Not in Fallujah, not anywhere else.

“Another thing: we had hostages. That’s also a new element. And another thing: we were under international pressure — an embargo. An embargo is no trivial matter. All of these things delayed and are delaying us.

“We don’t want to harm our hostages. We want to continue this war — and we will do it step by step... it won’t take [another] year and a half — that I promise you. I don’t want to reveal here our plans or our timetables, but we are determined to complete the defeat of Hamas, the release of all our hostages, and to bring a different future to Gaza. Otherwise, we’ll just get the same thing again and again.”

The press conference made waves in the Israeli media, because while Netanyahu often accepts interview requests from foreign media, he rarely calls press conferences for the Israeli media. His previous one was held in December 2024.

AIR

(All the quotes above have been translated into English by AIJAC staff, as an official English transcript of the press conference was not available at press time.)

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THE HAMAS DEPORTATION SOLUTION

Ehud Yaari

Recently, several senior Hamas figures indicated to US envoys via intermediaries in Qatar that the group might be willing to accept limited deportations of its

military commanders and certain other operatives from the Gaza Strip. The same figures also conveyed that Hamas might be ready to discuss a longer-term ceasefire, post-war “security arrangements”, and the handover of administrative tasks to another governing body, though they declined to use the term “disarmament”.

If the Hamas Political Bureau embraces this potential new negotiating stance, it might represent the best route out of the current stalemate, paving the way toward a US-brokered agreement on ending the war and releasing the remaining hostages. Of course, it is far from certain that the messages received from a handful of leaders – based in Qatar, no less – will be accepted as policy by the entire organisation, especially the affected members on the ground in Gaza.

So far, the proposal mainly reflects growing awareness on Hamas leaders’ part that meaningful concessions are required if ending the fighting is truly their top priority.

As they are keenly aware, Israel’s “Gideon’s Chariots” operation has been applying heavy pressure since it was launched on May 16, killing all of the group’s top commanders in southern Gaza and dozens of other operatives. They also understand that, even if Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is willing to consider an extended ceasefire in exchange for the return of all hostages (living and dead), his security cabinet will demand more than that, since key members remain sworn to the objective of crushing Hamas’ military forces and removing it from power.



Hamas negotiator Khalil al-Hayya has always rejected exile, but other Hamas leaders may be reconsidering (Image: Palestinian Information Center)

Deportation and disarmament were raised frequently during the many months of talks conducted through Egyptian and Qatari mediators. Yet Khalil al-Hayya and his Hamas negotiating team adamantly rejected both ideas, and Arab officials evidently did not pressure them enough to change their minds.

It is unknown if these issues were raised in the group’s more recent direct channel with the Trump Administration. In any case, at least part of the Hamas leadership appears ready to soften their stand on exiling commanders from the group’s military “wing”, the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades, but less ready to commit to any plans for disarmament.

According to Palestinian sources, the latest draft agreement submitted by the mediators with Washington’s blessing calls on Hamas to put its heavy weapons in storage – a process that would be supervised by the Palestinian Authority and observers from countries that would be assisting the new governing body in Gaza.

DEPORTATION PRECEDENTS

Palestinian armed groups have accepted the idea of expulsion in the past. The most dramatic example was Yasser Arafat’s August 1982 departure from Beirut to Tunis with 8,500 Palestine Liberation Organisation fighters following a deal brokered by US envoy Philip Habib. Arafat and some of his cohorts soon infiltrated back into north Lebanon – only to accept another expulsion to Tunis in December 1983.

Numerous other voluntary deportations occurred over the next few decades. In May 2002, 13 Palestinian gunmen were expelled to Cyprus after barricading themselves inside Bethlehem’s Church of the Nativity with Christian hostages for 40 days.

In other cases, dozens of high- and mid-level Hamas operatives convicted of terrorist crimes by Israeli courts were deported with the consent of the group’s leadership in exchange for freeing Israeli hostages. Many of those exiled later became key figures in Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad headquarters in Doha, Beirut, Istanbul, Damascus and even back in Gaza, where they sought to orchestrate attacks from the West Bank.

During the current war, earlier rounds of negotiations saw Hamas consent to the expulsion of certain released prisoners whom Israel deemed too dangerous to go back to their homes in the West Bank.

BACKROOM FRICTION

Besides offering a pathway to a settlement, the reports of potential softening in Hamas positions reflect the rapidly changing balance of power within the group’s top echelons. The main feature of this ongoing backroom struggle is the rise of individuals who were removed from the decision-making process for years and thus were not

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involved in the preparations for the October 7 attack on Israel. In recent months, some Hamas elements have intensified their criticism of that assault as premature and insufficiently coordinated with Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah, though this internal dissension rarely leaks into the public domain.

Moreover, the group now lacks a clear hierarchy following the deaths of so many senior figures, including Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh, his deputy Saleh al-Arouri, and the two main architects of October 7, Muhammad Deif and Yahya a-Sinwar. Within this vacuum, Hamas members who were sidelined in the past have seized influential roles in shaping outside negotiations – most notably financial chief Muhammad Ismail Darwish and Nizar Awadallah, who previously contended with Sinwar for the top post in Gaza.

FINDING THE RIGHT “DAY AFTER” SCENARIO

Whether officially or through “non-papers”, several Arab governments have proposed blueprints for post-war Gaza, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. In each case, officials have made it known that they envision disarming Hamas and its terrorist allies to allow for the establishment of a technocratic committee that can run the Strip and facilitate the flow of major reconstruction funding. So far, however, most Arab governments have refrained from publicly calling on Hamas to hand over its weapons. PA President Mahmoud Abbas is the only one to repeatedly state that no weapons should be tolerated in the Palestinian territories outside of PA security agencies.

For its part, Hamas has been fairly eager to relinquish its civil responsibilities in Gaza while avoiding discussions of disarmament – a clear signal that it intends to copy Hezbollah’s model in Lebanon of remaining the strongest military force on the ground while leaving governance and service provision to others. At the same time, the group has reached the point where it can no longer simply ignore the pressure to explore mechanisms for disarmament, since this is Israel’s top priority and a growing back-channel demand by US-backed Arab governments. In response to this dilemma, Hamas is evidently looking for ways to retain as much of its military arsenal as possible while counting on the weakness of any future administration in Gaza to ensure it can still exert control on the ground. Even if Arab states fulfill their tacit promise to send a few security battalions to police Gaza under a post-Hamas administration, none of them is prepared to undertake the difficult task of dismantling the group’s military infrastructure.

This is why deporting Hamas’ top brass is such a promising alternative. Depending on the included ranks agreed

to by negotiators, around 1,000 to 3,000 military commanders could be offered safe passage out of Gaza. If they accept, the group’s ability to function would be severely compromised. Replenishing its arsenal of rockets and anti-tank weapons would become extremely complicated, and restoring large parts of the destroyed tunnel system would likely be impossible once the “brains” of the operation were gone.

Commanders might also be more amenable to leaving given growing local pressure to end the war as soon as possible. Although the spate of public protests denouncing Hamas was largely quashed recently following street executions of “collaborators”, the group has apparently instructed its military operatives to keep a low profile and stay away from markets and aid distribution points – presumably to disguise their participation in Gaza’s flourishing black market economy, where exorbitant prices are charged for the distribution of humanitarian goods. Indeed, local commanders likely realise that taking care of the population’s needs is way beyond their capabilities. They also know they are unable to stop the Israeli military from manoeuvring deep into Gaza, and after spending months hiding in tunnels and losing many fellow combatants, they no doubt feel exposed to Israeli targeting. In short, it is safe to assume that many of them would be happy to leave.

One crucial question remains unresolved: where exactly would these Hamas commanders go? Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf states would never agree to take them in, while past hosts Syria and Lebanon are no longer willing to accept such guests amid their ongoing political transitions. That leaves countries like Iran, Algeria, Qatar, Libya, Tunisia, Turkey or even faraway Malaysia, though they may not relish the idea of importing large numbers of Hamas terrorists either.

Other major obstacles include formulating the mechanisms of the deportation process, deciding the identities and final numbers of members to be exiled, determining the status of their families, and addressing Hamas’ demand for guarantees that Israel will not pursue them. These issues alone may require long negotiations.

Israel’s current military campaign in Gaza was designed with significant pauses in mind to allow for phased implementation of a deal. Thus, US officials could enlist Arab governments to publicly support deportation arrangements even amid the new fighting. If successful, such efforts could soon produce a framework of agreed principles and a viable ceasefire, enabling the parties to launch the initial stages of a broader postwar deal.

AIR

Ehud Yaari is the Washington Institute for Near East Policy’s Lafer International Fellow and a Middle East commentator for Israel’s Channel 12 television. ©Washington Institute (washingtoninstitute.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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Fringe Failure

How Australia's extremists fared in the election

Jamie Hyams

As the dust settles after the latest Federal election, with the Australian Labor Party celebrating and the Liberal/National Coalition parties licking their wounds, it's interesting to see where the fringe far-left and far-right parties ended up. One thing these parties all have in common is that they are somewhere between strongly and viciously anti-Israel.

THE AUSTRALIAN GREENS

The Greens Party was far less successful in this election than it had hoped.

Greens MPs and senators "distinguished" themselves throughout the last term of Parliament by their appalling performance on Israel, especially since Hamas' October 7, 2023 atrocities ignited the war in Gaza. On the first sitting day of Parliament following those attacks, the Greens voted against a bi-partisan motion expressing solidarity with Israel, largely because it supported Israel's right to self-defence.

Throughout the war, they have regularly moved and attempted to move motions and made speeches condemning Israel, accusing it of genocide and demanding Australia act against it.

The party's policies included its "Campaign to end the occupation of Palestine," including:

An end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories...

The State of Israel to end its ongoing genocide in Gaza...

The Australian Government to formally intervene on behalf of South Africa and their case of genocide against... Israel at the ICJ.

The Australian Government to sanction all members of...

Israel's war cabinet...

Hamas to release all hostages... unconditionally.

The planners and perpetrators of the October 7 attack are to be brought to justice in accordance with international law and independent UN and ICC-backed investigations [should take place] of the war crimes being committed by... Israel in Gaza right now.

Notably, there are no demands on the Palestinian Authority, or calls for a two-state peace. As Bren Carlill and Galit Jones demonstrated in the May *Review*, some Greens candidates were even more extreme than the party's official positions and MPs' rhetoric.

Following its growth from one House of Representatives seat to four in the last election, the party had high hopes of further expanding its presence there. However, it

ended up holding on to only one seat.

Party leader Adam Bandt had held the seat of Melbourne since 2010, but suffered a primary vote swing -5.28%, falling to 39.45%. His two-candidate preferred (TCP) vote fell by -8.59%, giving Labor the seat.



Outgoing Greens Leader Adam Bandt concedes defeat (Screenshot)

In Stephen Bates' seat of Brisbane, the swing in his primary vote was -1.34%, down to 25.9%. He finished third.

High profile MP Max Chandler-Mather also lost his Brisbane suburban seat of Griffith. His primary vote dropped to 31.65% with a -2.94% swing, while his TCP result was 39.41% against Labor, after he won with 60.46% against the Coalition in 2022.

The Greens did hold Brisbane outer metropolitan Ryan. Incumbent Elizabeth Watson-Brown suffered a -1.23% swing in her primary vote, to 28.98%, but achieved a TCP vote of 53.27%.

The Greens had also hoped to win three more seats, but finished third in Melbourne inner southern suburban Macnamara, where its primary vote dropped to 25.47%, a swing of -4.19%, and in northern NSW coastal seat Richmond.

Finally, in Melbourne inner northern suburban Wills, which former Greens state leader Samantha Ratnam left the Victorian Parliament to contest, the Greens achieved a 2.53% primary vote increase to 35.58%, and a TCP swing of 7.57%, but still fell short, with a TCP vote of 48.54%, 3,203 votes behind Labor.

However, the Greens' real power has always been in the Senate, and here, that power may be increasing. Despite a -0.95% swing in its overall primary vote, the party held on to all six of its contested Senate seats, maintaining its previous total of 11. At the time of writing, it looked most likely that the increase in Labor Senate seats means the Government will now be able to get any legislation passed if the Greens support it. In the previous Parliament, some independents were also needed if the Coalition was opposed. This will increase the Greens' bargaining power.

AUSTRALIA'S VOICE

Having quit the ALP after being indefinitely suspended for voting against the party to support a Greens motion to recognise a Palestinian state, and saying she would do so again, WA Senator Fatima Payman set up her own party – Australia's Voice. While she wasn't personally up for election, being halfway through her six-year term, the party ran candidates in the Senate elections in all states except Tasmania.

Its website proclaims, "Nearly 50,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including over 18,000 children. If our leaders can't stand up to this, how can we expect them to

stand up for us?” The party received less than 1% of the vote in each state – 0.73% in NSW, 0.97% in Victoria, 0.74% in Queensland, 0.68% in WA and 0.69% in SA.

THE MUSLIM VOTE

The Muslim Vote was not a party, but a group set up to guide voters, with the slogan “Justice for Palestine. The Australian Muslim Community is uniting.”

Its website scored candidates in selected seats, but also endorsed three independent candidates, providing their how-to-vote cards.

Ahmed Ouf ran in Blaxland in Sydney’s western suburbs, against Education Minister Jason Clare. His policies on Israel include “One state built on justice and equality” and a full “right of return” for Palestinian refugees. Both mean the end of Israel. He also stood for “Unconditional support of the Palestinian peoples’ right to seek liberation” – in other words, support for terrorism – and for an end to Israeli “apartheid” and support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel.

Ouf received 16,319 primary votes, 18.78%, finishing third. At the time of writing, it was unclear whether preferences would lift him into second over the Liberal candidate, but either way, Clare’s primary vote of 46.16% was easily high enough to ensure he retains the seat.

Dr Ziad Basyouny ran against Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke in inner south-western Sydney seat Watson. His policies also include “Advocating for a Unified Democratic State in Historic Palestine” which would be “from the river to the sea” and a full right of return, meaning the end of Israel. He accuses Israel of apartheid, racism, genocide, ethnic-cleansing and war crimes, and calls for sanctions against it.

He received 12,270 primary votes, or 14.74%, coming third, but preferences pushed him up to second. In the runoff against Burke, he received 33.18% of the TCP vote.

Samim Moslih ran in Melbourne outer northern suburban Calwell. His website proclaims, “I’ll fight for indigenous rights and for those suffering overseas, including the people of Palestine, who deserve peace, dignity, and freedom.” The *Australian* reported on Dec. 12, 2024, that he said, “I do believe... we need to have a free Palestine from the river to the sea with a representative democracy.” Asked if that means ending the state of Israel, he said, “Genocide cannot be rewarded.”

Moslih received 6,164 primary votes, or 6.86%, finishing behind numerous candidates including two independents whose websites did not mention Palestine.

THE CITIZENS PARTY

In its heyday, the Citizens Party of Australia, formerly known as the Citizens Electoral Council, the Australian followers of the late American demagogue and fraudster

Lyndon LaRouche, ran in nearly all seats, always doing very poorly. These days, it needs to content itself with doing very poorly in far fewer seats. Its policies for this election include, “Independently oppose the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, including through an arms embargo on Israel, without waiting for US permission.” It also wants Australia to withdraw from the Five Eyes intelligence sharing agreement with the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand, and work with Russia and China instead. The group is also known for promulgating various antisemitic and other bizarre conspiracy theories.

It ran in 18 seats, finishing last in all but two. The highest primary vote it received was 2.92%, but it received less than 1% in ten seats and less than 2% in all but three. In the Senate, it ran in all states, recording primary votes of between 0.13% and 0.32% and finishing last in all but WA.

SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Socialist Alliance policies include “Solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle; isolate apartheid Israel with boycott, divestment and sanctions; end all military and sporting ties with Israel.”

The party ran in six seats, doing well in Wills with 8,812 votes, or 8.02%. However, in the other five, it received between 0.95% and 2.91%, finishing last or second last. In the Senate, it ran in NSW, getting 0.25%, in Queensland, receiving 0.65%, and in WA, where it tallied 0.24%.

VICTORIAN SOCIALISTS

The Victorian Socialists want to “End Australia’s support for the apartheid state of Israel,” saying they will “demand a free Palestine and stand in solidarity with Palestinians against Israeli aggression.” They also want us to close the “Israeli embassy and expel its diplomats.”

They achieved 1.6%, 8.37%, 6.24% and 6.45% in the four lower house seats they contested, and 1.52% in the Victorian Senate election.

AUSTRALIA FIRST

Australia First leader Jim Saleam – previously the Deputy Leader of the National Socialist Party of Australia

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before founding National Action – ran as an independent in outer Sydney seat Lindsay, demanding an end to immigration and multiculturalism. He finished last with 1.13% of the vote. (Note: figures may have changed slightly since the time of writing)

AIR

NINE REASONS PREMATURE RECOGNITION WOULD BE BAD FOR PALESTINE

Bren Carlill

France and Saudi Arabia are co-hosting a UN conference this month about creating a Palestinian state.

Before or during the conference, France will likely recognise Palestine as a state, and is urging other countries to join it. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong keeps indicating she is considering similar recognition. Because Australia typically moves in concert with likeminded countries, France's initiative might encourage her to follow suit.

There are at least four possible motivations (separately or together) for making such a move:

- A belief that Palestine is a state;
- While acknowledging it's not, using recognition to punish Israel for supposedly preventing this;
- While acknowledging it's not, using recognition to reward Palestinian state-building efforts; or
- While acknowledging it's not, offering recognition to virtue-signal to domestic constituents.

Let's look at why none of these motivations would make sense today.



"Palestine" may have a flag, but it does not currently meet the criteria for statehood. Prematurely recognising it will not bring the day it does closer (Image: Shutterstock)

1. Palestine is not a state

And nor has it ever been.

The 1933 Montevideo Convention defines a state as having a permanent population, defined territory, a government and a capacity to enter into relations with other states. Not only is much of its population not permanent (they define themselves as refugees), the 'State of Palestine' does not have defined territory. Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) agreements with Israel specifically state that final borders will be determined in future negotiations.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip 'borders', which numerous entities, including the International Criminal Court (ICC) and UN, claim are Palestine's borders, are not international borders but temporary armistice lines from the 1947-49 war. The relevant treaties that created them say as much.

Moreover, Senator Wong and others speak of the need to create a Palestinian state. That means they know that Palestine is not a state, even if they might like it to be. Recognising the existence of something that doesn't exist is nonsensical.

2. Which Palestine?

The Palestinian Authority (PA) only has limited control over parts of the West Bank. It has not controlled Gaza since 2007. Hamas, proscribed as a terrorist organisation in many countries including Australia, had exclusive control over Gazan territory between 2007 and 2023. It wasn't Israel that prevented the PA from effective control of Gaza. Ironically, Gaza under Hamas was closer to meeting the definition of statehood than the PA has ever achieved.

3. It undermines the rules-based order

Under still-binding Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements, both sides agreed that Palestinians would form a government with limited autonomy over parts of the West Bank and Gaza and that neither side would take steps to change the status quo, including on 'final status' issues, such as borders, Jerusalem and relations with other states, except via negotiations.

When Palestinians seek to upgrade the status of 'Palestine' to a state, and have that recognised, any state-level body like the UN or country like Australia that goes along with that farce is undermining the rules-based order.

Current global chaos is due to countries like Russia, China and Iran challenging the rules-based order. Now, the international community wants to reward Palestinians for doing the same.

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4. Israel has not blocked Palestinian statehood

There is a long history of Israel offering the Palestinians statehood, or acquiescing to others doing so. Palestinians have either rejected or refused to respond to such offers in 1937, 1947, 2000, 2001, 2008 and 2014. Palestinians have refused to negotiate on final status issues since 2014 because such negotiations typically end in them being offered a state, which they keep refusing – very awkward for a movement that professes to desire statehood.

5. Palestinians have not earned a “reward”

If recognition is not punishment for Israel, what is the international community seeking to reward? Notwithstanding frequent rejections of statehood, Palestinian efforts at building the institutions of statehood have been woeful. The PA is weak, corrupt and dictatorial, and is unable or unwilling to face down the armed gangs dominating several areas of the West Bank. None of this is Israel’s fault. If Israel were to pull out of the West Bank tomorrow, the result would be Somalia, not Singapore.

Beyond the lack of proto-state bona fides (despite billions of aid dollars to create them), Palestinians have been pursuing ‘lawfare’ against Israel, including seeking membership of state-level organisations, like the ICC. Once inside, their primary focus is not to build “Palestine”, but to use them for diplomatic warfare against Israel, by launching or facilitating court cases, sanctions and resolutions targeting Israel.

Rather than pushing back, the international community lavishes diplomatic largesse on Palestine. Rewarding anti-peace behaviour does not encourage peace.

6. It will encourage terrorist violence

Many Palestinians interpret the diplomatic momentum flowing their way over the last 20 months as an achievement attributable to the October 7 Hamas attack that began this war. After Spain, Ireland and Norway recognised Palestine last year, Hamas, Al Jazeera and numerous Palestinian commentators openly claimed that it was brought about thanks to the October 7 attacks.

Palestinian violence has a long history of success. The first intifada brought about Israeli–Palestinian peace talks. The second led to the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. October 7 led to recognition by three Western countries, and maybe many more. Does this teach Palestinians that terrorist violence doesn’t pay?

The PLO, despite its many problematic policies, is still officially wedded to using diplomacy to seek Palestinian statehood. However, if it turns out that Hamas violence – of a barbarity and scale not seen since the Holocaust – is what brings about mass Western recognition, it will be the final nail in the coffin for any Palestinian movement that seeks to achieve statehood via diplomacy.

7. It would (further) undermine Israeli trust in international intentions

Viable Palestinian statehood requires Israeli cooperation. Israel will only cooperate if reassured that the West takes seriously Israel’s concerns about the security risks posed by Palestinian statehood. Few Western governments do. This is because the basic Western perception is that Palestinian statehood would end the Israeli–Palestinian dispute. It wouldn’t, because a critical mass of Palestinians want to fight Israel until it is destroyed. Until these people are greatly reduced in number and influence, Israeli–Palestinian peace is almost impossible. By undermining Israeli trust that the West will back its essential security requirements, premature recognition of Palestinian statehood reduces the prospects of actual Palestinian statehood.

8. Palestinians have been prepping their people for perpetual conflict

As noted, a decisive number of Palestinians want to fight Israel in perpetuity – in large part because Palestinian leaders have been prepping their people for this for decades. Consider the promotion of a Palestinian “right of return”, the state-sponsored antisemitism in schoolbooks, the oft-violent rejection of normalisation with Israelis, the PA’s financial rewards for terrorism, the naming of schools for terrorists and on and on. This lays the foundation for rejection of any peace. Even if Palestine were to achieve independence tomorrow, many or most Palestinians would still want to fight Israel. Diplomatic rewards, such as recognition, tell Palestinians that their actions to date have been correct.

Offering Palestinians the carrot of statehood was and should remain the West’s way to get Palestinians to temper their violent methods and messaging.

9. Domestic appeasement

The most likely reason centre-left Western governments are entertaining recognition of Palestine is because a very vocal minority in their rank and file is constantly making loud noise about it. These people have drunk the pro-Palestinian Kool-Aid, and no amount of reasoning (see 1 to 8 above) will convince them otherwise.

But feeding this crocodile won’t satisfy it. The ‘Free, Free Palestine’ crowd won’t be happy with just recognition. They won’t stop until Israel is completely ostracised and sanctioned, and will constantly campaign for ever more extreme action until Israel is destroyed. Recognition of non-existent



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Palestinian statehood will only encourage their disruptive, divisive tactics, not dampen them. Leadership therefore requires standing up to them, not acquiescing.

Further, Australia prematurely recognising Palestine would constitute a highly concerning politicisation of foreign policy. Australian foreign policy could start swinging wildly depending on which party holds government. This is not good for Australia's global reputation, or the welfare of the Australian Jewish and Arab communities. Instead, Labor and the Liberals should focus on maintaining a bipartisan position on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, as they used to.

A FINAL WORD

Western impatience to finally resolve the long and bloody Israeli-Palestinian dispute is understandable. But attaining viable peace should be the motivating principle in Australian foreign policy, not angry impatience and certainly not domestic political considerations. Senator Wong told a February Senate Estimates hearing that a Palestinian state needs a reformed Palestinian Authority. If recognition is to come before statehood, it must be used, at minimum, as a reward for significant Palestinian reforms that actually cultivate both peace and viable Palestinian governance. It should absolutely not be used in a way that will further undermine the prospects for peace – as it would today. AIR

ISRAEL NOW ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS?

Ilan Evyatar

The Middle East rollercoaster is hurtling forward at full speed.

When Ahmed al-Shara'a toppled the Assad dynasty in early December 2024 after its more than 54 years in power, it would have been hard to imagine that, just over five months later, the former rebel leader and al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadi would find himself shaking hands with US President Donald Trump. And that was just a week after visiting French President Emmanuel Macron in the Élysée Palace.

Further, the notion that Shara'a's Syria and Israel might engage in indirect negotiations and discuss the possibility of normalisation – even exploring Syria's potential inclusion in the Abraham Accords – would have seemed far-fetched in the extreme.

In the immediate aftermath of Shara'a's attaining the Syrian presidency, Israel launched Operation "Arrow of Bashan" [the biblical name for the area conquered by the Israelites from King Og], targeting Syrian military installations and infrastructure. These operations included

extensive aerial and naval strikes, resulting in the destruction of significant portions of Syria's military capabilities, including its air force, armoured corps, navy and chemical weapons stockpiles.

Israeli forces also crossed into southern Syria, seizing a buffer zone of approximately 460 km² to prevent jihadi forces from targeting the border region. Since then, Israel has conducted several strikes, including one just 500 metres from the presidential palace on May 2, responding to attacks on the Druze community in southern Syria, which Israel has vowed to protect.

Israeli officials also launched a diplomatic offensive against Syria's new leader, with Foreign Minister Gideon Saar labelling Shara'a and his Government as "jihadists in suits" after an apparent massacre of Alawites in Syria's coastal region by government-affiliated militias. He urged Europe to "stop granting legitimacy to a regime whose first actions... are these atrocities."

However, in early May, it emerged that Israel and Syria had been holding talks through back channels in the United Arab Emirates and Azerbaijan. According to a *Reuters* report, the back channel was opened after Shara'a visited the UAE on April 13 for a meeting with President Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan, more than two weeks before the strike near the presidential palace. Syrian security forces confirmed that discussions had taken place on "technical matters" related to security issues and counterterrorism, without addressing Israeli military activities in Syria.

Israeli media reported that these back-channel talks occurred at a private residence in Abu Dhabi belonging to a senior security official, involving two Israeli academics with backgrounds in security and three close aides to Shara'a. According to the Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*, the parties aim to continue the dialogue and expand it to include economic matters – such as possible Israeli medical aid, academic exchange programs for Syrian students and other areas of mutual concern.

On May 7, Shara'a flew to Paris for talks with French President Emmanuel Macron. There, the Syrian President confirmed that "There are indirect negotiations taking place through intermediaries to ease the situation and attempt to absorb it, so that matters do not reach a point of losing control by both sides."

A week later, Shara'a travelled from Damascus to Riyadh to meet President Trump during Trump's whirlwind Middle East tour, which included Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, but not Israel. Trump announced his intention to lift sanctions on Syria despite Israeli efforts to prevent him from doing so before certain conditions were fulfilled. The US President urged the former jihadi, who once fought the US in Iraq and had a US\$10 million bounty on his head, to join the Abraham Accords and normalise ties with Israel. Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman also attended the meeting, while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan joined by phone.

Following the meeting, reports emerged of further higher-level back-channel talks between Israel and Syria in the Azeri capital, Baku. According to CNN, the head of the IDF's Operations Directorate, Maj. Gen. Oded Basyuk, met with Syrian Government representatives in the presence of Turkish officials. Israeli media reported that members of Israel's National Security Council also attended the meeting, which was part of broader discussions regarding a deconfliction mechanism with Turkey in Syria.

Syrian political researcher Dr Nader Khalil told the independent Syrian *Enab Baladi* website that direct normalisation between the new Syrian leadership under Ahmad al-Shara'a and Israel is unlikely in the short term but could become a reality in the medium to long term. According to Khalil, the current regional context, with multiple mediation channels at play, provides a framework for indirect negotiations. While these talks are unlikely to lead to full normalisation, they could result in limited, local security agreements in the near future.

Yet even as Israel and Syria inch toward tentative dialogue, the road to normalisation – or even limited coordination – is strewn with obstacles.

First of all, from Israel's perspective, Shara'a is a former jihadi with roots in al-Qaeda. For many in Jerusalem, Shara'a's newfound pragmatism appears less like a genuine change of heart and more like a tactical adjustment to buy time to solidify his regime.

In addition, even if Shara'a's intentions are genuine, there is no guarantee that he has the ability to impose control over a country where various jihadi groups remain active and pose a threat to both the regime and Israel. Israel's concern is the potential for a situation akin to Libya, where the West welcomed the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, but the country subsequently fractured into two competing spheres of influence, lacking a central state – a situation which continues today.

Despite the talks and Trump's optimistic forecasts that Damascus could join the Abraham Accords, Israel is currently relying on force and acting as a regional power, no longer willing to remain on the sidelines.

Israel has numerous interests in Syria, including ensuring that Damascus no longer poses a threat and that Iran cannot use the country as a conduit for weapons transfers to Hezbollah. Additionally, Israel says it is committed to the Druze population concentrated in southern Syria and desires to see the Kurdish areas in the north maintain their autonomous status.

Israel also prefers that Saudi Arabia and the UAE – not Qatar, which supports Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood – contribute the hundreds of billions of dollars required for Syria's reconstruction. This ties into the question of Qatar's partner, Turkey, which has ambitions in Syria and close ties to the new regime there. Israel has already warned that Turkey establishing air bases in the



Trump's surprise meeting with Syrian President and former jihadist Ahmed al-Shara'a (right), mediated by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (left) (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Palmyra region would cross its red lines. Israeli airstrikes in early April destroyed three Syrian air bases that Ankara was believed to be considering using for deploying Turkish forces. The talks that occurred in Azerbaijan followed this incident, with the aim to de-escalate tensions to prevent a direct clash. Jerusalem reportedly warned the Turks that any expansion of their current military deployments in Syria would be viewed as a "dangerous infringement" on Israel's security.

At a recent symposium on Syria held by the Jerusalem Institute of Strategy and Security, Col. (res.) Eran Lerman, a former Israeli Deputy National Security Advisor, noted that while Turkey has a long-term neo-Ottoman vision and seeks to control large swathes of Syria, it is not currently seeking a direct confrontation with Israel.

However, Dr Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, an expert on contemporary Turkish politics and foreign policy, argued that Erdogan will aspire to make Syria a satellite state. He expressed concern that Erdogan, who has been in power for over two decades and has eroded the checks and balances of the Turkish state whilst neutralising his rivals and the judiciary, seeks to establish his legacy as the leader who restored Turkey's greatness. This means expanding Ankara's influence in Africa, Iraq and the eastern Mediterranean, and there is little to stop Turkey from expanding in Syria.

"After October 7, we don't have the luxury of ignoring any threat. We must keep our eyes open and distance the Turks from our northern border," warns Yanarocak. AIR

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TRUMP'S LANDMARK VISIT TO THE GULF

Eldad Shavit & Yoel Guzansky

From May 13 to 16, US President Donald Trump completed his first diplomatic visit of his second term in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, signalling that these countries hold personal significance for him – not just for the United States. The outcomes of the visit provided the leaders of these states with an opportunity to showcase a broad convergence of interests.

It is increasingly evident that the President and his administration are signalling Washington's intention to reshape the framework of regional alliances, potentially by reducing its reliance on Israel.

The central focus of the high-profile visit – Trump's first foreign trip since returning to the White House – was a series of joint declarations about intentions to promote economic deals, primarily in the defence and technology sectors, totalling an unprecedented amount of approximately US\$2 trillion. These deals, which have yet to be formally signed, were outlined in cooperation with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE.

Saudi Arabia: On the table are arms deals, Saudi investments in the United States, collaboration in the oil market and in AI technology, a defence pact, and also nuclear co-operation. In this context, and contrary to earlier reports, Saudi Arabia has not yet received approval for a nuclear program, and no significant agreement on this issue was signed during the visit.

Qatar: Discussions centered on expanding defence cooperation and investments in the United States, including a mega-deal to purchase aircraft from Boeing valued at about \$100 billion. According to the White House statement, President Trump signed an agreement with Qatar to promote mutual trade worth at least US\$1.2 trillion.

United Arab Emirates: Deals worth \$200 billion were advanced, mainly involving cooperation in the AI field.



Trump revelled in the pageantry afforded him in (from top) Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE (Images: Whitehouse.gov/ Flickr)

Efforts were also made to promote a security agreement, alongside US expectations for massive investments amounting to US\$1.4 trillion from the UAE in American technology over several years.

Throughout the visit, the Gulf monarchs' desire to bestow Trump with royal honours was especially prominent, and it appeared that a competition was underway among them for the president's favour, with each striving to outdo the others in the respect and benefits it offered to him. Trump, for his part, did not hold back in showering praise on his hosts, emphasising his deep appreciation for their leadership and accomplishments. All sides presented the visit as an exceptional success.

It is evident that Trump views close relations with the

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Gulf states as a significant contribution to US interests, a view shared by the Gulf countries themselves, which are eager to open a new chapter and deepen ties with the United States. The main beneficiary of this development – alongside Trump – is Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, who gained recognition for both himself and his country as having an upgraded status and as being a central pillar for the United States in the Arab world and the region as a whole.

The visit helped both sides advance their goals on the diplomatic front as well:

- **Mutual influence on regional policy** – In order to tighten their relations with the United States, the Gulf states are also required to reduce, to some extent, their ties with China, thereby addressing key American interests.
- **The struggle for regional status vis-à-vis Iran** – The visit allowed the Gulf states to leverage their ties with the United States to showcase their ability to set the regional agenda concerning Iran – at least during Trump’s term. In return for the mega-deals, they expect the United States to take steps to guarantee their security.
- **Willingness to coordinate energy policy as much as possible** – Trump places great importance on oil prices, while for the Gulf states, a key goal is to influence oil prices in exchange for security guarantees.

During the visit, Trump’s emphasis on reshaping the regional alliance structure became evident, particularly through his calls for conflict resolution and the promotion of stability, which he sees as vital to achieving his administration’s economic goals.

In this context, one of the most striking developments was Trump’s dramatic decision – encouraged by Saudi Arabia and Turkey – to meet with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa and his announcement lifting all of the US sanctions imposed on Syria since 2019. Trump described the move as giving Syria a chance to prosper and clarified that it marked a first step toward normalisation between the United States and the new Syrian regime.

In parallel, the visit included extensive discussions on Iran and the war between Israel and Hamas. In both cases, Trump expressed a desire to pursue novel and unconventional solutions, favouring negotiation over military action:

- **Iran** – The Gulf states urged Trump to reach a nuclear agreement with Iran to reduce the threat of war, which could undermine their economies and stability. Trump made it clear that he is not interested in military action against Iran and expressed optimism about the ongoing negotiations between the United States and Iran. However, he stressed that if the talks fail, the alternative would be increased economic and military pressure on Iran (although he refrained from specifying the nature of any military action).
- **The war in the Gaza Strip** – Throughout the visit, the Trump Administration’s efforts to advance a hostage

deal between Israel and Hamas – including a ceasefire and planning for a post-war phase – were unsuccessful. The Gulf states, for their part, emphasised the need to pressure Israel to end the war, with Saudi Arabia requesting that the issue of normalisation with Israel be postponed for the time being. Although Trump reiterated his hope that more countries – especially Saudi Arabia – would join the Abraham Accords, the Administration appears to assess that such prospects remain limited without a major shift in the situation in Gaza.

From the leaders’ statements during the visit, it is evident that both the US Administration and the Gulf states that Trump visited were pleased with their alignment on a wide range of visible issues. However, the practical implications of this alignment will be tested over time. Several potential areas of friction can already be identified:

- **Oil production and pricing** – The US administration expects increased oil output and a subsequent drop in prices. The Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, responded to the demand and acted to increase production. However, due to economic pressures – especially in Saudi Arabia – and low oil prices, sustaining this level of output may prove difficult. The Saudi oil company Aramco has reported poor performance due to declining prices and is evidently struggling to implement planned projects. Thus, low oil prices and economic stress may hinder the Kingdom’s ability to fulfill its commitments to the United States.
- **Policy toward Iran** – All Gulf states wish to avoid escalation with Iran and, for their own reasons, maintain a good relationship with it. Saudi Arabia seems to have learned a lesson from Trump’s first term, during which it participated in the “maximum pressure” strategy against Iran and suffered for it. From Riyadh’s perspective, that strategy was ineffective, and, in addition, Saudi Arabia was the target of an Iranian missile attack, with no American defence forthcoming. Therefore, a US decision to attack Iran using bases in the Gulf could provoke conflict between regional states and the administration.
- **The war in Gaza and the desire to bring Saudi Arabia into the Abraham Accords** – The prolonged conflict, and especially the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, could generate domestic pressure on Arab regimes. As a result, they used the visit to press President Trump on the issue. Indeed, he voiced criticism of the humanitarian situation, including his statement that “a lot of people are starving” in Gaza, and that the situation needs to be “taken care of.” In any case, Trump’s ambition to convince Saudi Arabia to join the Abraham Accords will not be realised as long as Riyadh is uncomfortable with the situation in Gaza and Israel remains reluctant to commit to a political resolution of the Palestinian issue. Although Trump’s visit to the Gulf focused on strengthening alliances between the United States and the regional states – within which Israel is a significant player – he did

not include Israel in his itinerary. While he emphasised the importance of comprehensive regional normalisation, Israel's absence contributed to a sense of exclusion from the dramatic diplomatic processes unfolding. This omission created the impression that the President and his Administration may be signalling to the Israeli government that Washington aims to reshape regional alliances – possibly even by reducing its reliance on Israel.

It is worth noting that Israel was not the only party left out. Other key Arab leaders – most notably from Egypt and Jordan – who had been invited to Gulf summits during Trump's 2017 visit were also excluded this time. AIR

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A ROUGH END TO “ROUGH RIDER” IN YEMEN

Oved Lobel

On March 15, the United States military launched an intensive bombing campaign, codenamed “Operation Rough Rider”, targeting the Houthis, more accurately known as Ansar Allah, in Yemen.

That campaign, accompanied throughout by extremely threatening rhetoric from US President Donald Trump and his senior officials aimed at the group and, more importantly, its overseers in Iran, came to an end on May 6, when Trump suddenly announced a ceasefire.

Iran reportedly facilitated the ceasefire agreement, and didn't suffer any consequences for its role in the Houthi aggression, despite the US correctly and repeatedly blaming it for the Houthi attacks on international shipping and



“Operation Rough Rider” in the Red Sea (Image: US Navy)

US warships. US adversaries will have taken note of the chasm between the Trump Administration's rhetoric and actions.

While the more than 1,000 US strikes killed hundreds of Houthi operatives and reportedly inflicted severe damage to their military infrastructure and weapons depots, it is unclear what, if anything, was accomplished in strategic terms by “Rough Rider”. As an organisation, the Houthis appear to still be essentially intact and able to function at every level.

What's more, Iran will be able to use the current ceasefire to rearm and resupply the group, as it was doing even during the operation. While Israel will continue to independently and substantially retaliate against the Houthis for their ongoing missile attacks with strikes on energy infrastructure and ports, this will only have limited effects on Houthi capabilities and funding. Meanwhile, a reported ground operation against the Houthis by other local Yemeni forces that was mooted to happen as a result of “Rough Rider”, and which would have been vital for any enduring success, is now out of the question.

The White House's initial March 15 announcement of the campaign said it was to restore freedom of navigation through the Red Sea for “American commercial and naval vessels.” Alongside international vessels, US ships had not been able to traverse that waterway safely since October 2023, when the Houthis began firing at both Israel and international shipping as part of the Iranian-led multi-front war that was started when Hamas invaded Israel on October 7 of that year.

But even the original announcement noted that the last Houthi attack against the US Navy before “Rough Rider” had occurred on Dec. 9-10, 2024. Meanwhile, the Washington Institute's maritime incidents tracker recorded the last Houthi attack on a commercial ship on Nov. 18, 2024.

Although they'd halted their attacks earlier, the Houthis only officially announced the end of the campaign against international shipping on Jan. 19, the day a six-week Hamas-Israel ceasefire came into effect. The group said

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that it would no longer fire on any ships “except for vessels wholly owned by Israeli individuals or entities and/or sailing under the Israeli flag.” It also said it would stop firing even on these “upon the full implementation of all phases of the agreement.”

After his ceasefire announcement on May 6, Trump continues to insist that the Houthis had come to him desperate for a deal. A May 14 *Reuters* article reported that US intelligence had picked up vague “indications” that the Houthis wanted a ceasefire.

A more in-depth *New York Times* report from May 12, however, said Trump simply lost patience with the lack of concrete progress from the operation. Oman told Trump’s Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff – who was already in the country for Omani-mediated nuclear negotiations with Iran – that it would mediate an off-ramp for Trump, who then gave this offer the green light. This corroborates the claims made by Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi that it was the US that decided to stop the campaign.

According to the *Times* report, Gen. Michael E. Kurilla, the head of US Central Command (CENTCOM) originally proposed an eight-to-ten-month campaign of intense airstrikes coupled with targeted assassinations of Houthi leaders to cripple the organisation. Trump shrunk that timeline to 30 days, and when he demanded metrics for success, CENTCOM could provide nothing but the number of munitions dropped.

Coupled with several reported near-misses, including one involving an F-35, along with the loss of seven MQ-9 drones, and two F/A-18s (as a result of accidents), the unsustainable munitions expenditure and a cost of more than US\$1 billion, Trump decided to end the operation.

Trump also reportedly wanted something positive to announce prior to his Middle East tour in mid-May and, according to the aforementioned *Reuters* report, both the UAE and Saudi Arabia were worried that the Houthis would once again begin targeting them unless there was a ceasefire.

In the end, it does not appear the Houthis conceded anything of substance for the ceasefire or agree to deviate from their Jan. 19 position. After Trump’s announcement, senior Houthi officials reiterated their threat to Israeli ships, and more recently to any ship heading to Israel’s Haifa port.

This ceasefire, and the manner in which it was reached, appear likely to leave US allies – especially Israel – feeling isolated and with reduced confidence in US commitments and guarantees. The UK, which participated in Operation Rough Rider, was not informed of the ceasefire agreement prior to its announcement, and the agreement itself reportedly only covers US naval ships and commercial shipping.

Halting the constant Houthi missile and drone attacks on Israel was never included as an operational aim of the campaign, and Israel was not informed about the ceasefire.

Following the announcement, US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee said the US would only concern itself with the ongoing Houthi attacks on Israel if Americans were harmed.

Near-daily Houthi launches at Israel since the ceasefire, include seven missiles and two drones between May 6 and May 22, with no US response or even condemnation, confirm that Israel stands alone on this issue. This will negatively affect Israeli trust that US nuclear negotiations with Iran will lead to an agreement robust enough to prevent the regime developing nuclear weapons in the future.

As for the US ceasefire with the Houthis, it is extremely unlikely to restore true freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, as the Houthis can renew attacks on commercial shipping at any time. Shipping companies know this and will likely continue to avoid the area, as they had been doing even after the Houthis announced the end of attacks on Jan. 19.

The whole story of “Rough Rider” appears to follow a wider pattern of President Trump and his Administration issuing extreme threats but subsequently capitulating very quickly on most of the substantive points at issue, even while spinning this as a victory. This trend risks making the world a far more dangerous place for all US allies and partners, not just Israel.

AIR

AMUST AND THE DURAL CARAVAN HOAX

Ran Porat

With antisemitism on the rise in Australia since October 7, 2023, many of those who oppose the right of the Jewish state to exist have been seizing any opportunity to carry out their propaganda war on Israel, often by ignoring facts and promoting lies.

One telling example is the reaction to the Dural caravan hoax. On Jan. 19, police found a caravan in the town



Police at Dural, following the discovery of the infamous caravan (Image: X/ screenshot)

of Dural, NSW filled with explosive materials, an anti-semitic document and a list of possible targets within the local Jewish community. The incident was initially labelled by NSW Premier Chris Minns as “terrorism”. It was later revealed by police that it was a hoax plot by criminal gangs, with no intention to carry out an actual terror attack. Instead, the intent was to trade information about the explosive caravan for favourable plea bargains, as well as to divert police resources.

The same gangs were also behind a series of other anti-semitic incidents in the state, carried out for the same purpose – though it is notable that the reputed head of the gang in question, Sayit Erhan Akca (who is laying low overseas), has made antisemitic social media posts in the past.

Australia’s Jewish leaders have stressed that the caravan threat being a hoax does not diminish the crisis of antisemitism on our shores, or the loss of safety and security experienced by the local Jewish community.

Yet, as AIJAC’s Bren Carlill noted in last month’s edition, a Greens candidate used the hoax to flip the narrative against Jews, implying that the caravan was an example of “Zionists” lying to justify killing.

The Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN) was also quick to attack leading politicians and “pro-Israel organisations [who] rushed to politically motivated conclusions, implying connections between these fabricated incidents and the movement for justice for Palestine, as well as those protesting Israel’s genocide in Gaza.”

Others in Australia’s anti-Israel camp jumped on the hoax wagon to use the Dural incident as a platform for spreading antisemitic tropes and other lies. For example, activist Tom Tanuki argued (April 21) in *Independent Australia* that the incident proved that there was no genuine antisemitism problem in Australia and both Labor and the Coalition were complicit in hiding the truth about what happened for political reasons. Worse, according to Tanuki, “Both mainstream political parties essentially co-signed [ECA] co-CEO Alex] Ryvchin’s fascist policy recommendations by attending the Sky News event” (referring to that news channel’s Antisemitism Summit held in February).

“Liberal and Labor were both so eager to seize on a narrative about the insidious rise of unchecked antisemitism in this country that they took whatever bullshit was fed to them and used it,” said Tanuki.

Tanuki suggested that the major political parties used the hoax for their ‘evil’ legal steps against antisemitism and extremism despite somehow knowing in advance that the Dural incident was fake. “The drug dealer [behind the caravan hoax] gave them what they were evidently desperate for, and they used what they were given to dismantle pro-

test rights and threaten civil liberties, despite being highly likely to have known the circumstances fed to them would soon be discredited.”

Yet Tanuki’s fantasies were small fish compared to the whale-sized examples of insanity featured in the *Australian Muslim Times* (AMUST) – a media outlet with a long and ugly record of promoting extremism, antisemitism and conspiracies for decades, as documented in these pages previously.

In his piece, “How Australian politicians and media were

duped by criminal elements in a manufactured anti-Semitism crisis” (March 15), regular AMUST columnist Mohamed Ainullah openly advanced a baseless conspiracy theory that, contrary to what the police said about criminal gangs, “possibly Israeli intelligence [is behind the hoax] to further garner support for Israel.”

Without presenting any proof for his claims, Ainullah noted that “While no definitive foreign entity has been named, speculation has turned towards Israeli intelligence or affiliated networks. Historically, intelligence agencies have been known to

engage in covert operations to sway public opinion and policy. If Israeli operatives were indeed involved, the motivation could have been to push Australia towards harsher legislation under the guise of protecting Jewish communities while also deepening political alignments beneficial to Israel.”

Ainullah finished his ‘analysis’ with a warning that “The real threat is not just terrorism – but the deliberate engineering of crises to serve hidden agendas.”

AMUST: ISRAEL “PLAYS DOUBLE” WITH NAZIS

Also entering the fray was Bilal Cleland, a regular contributor to the publication – and a serial Israel-hater who cynically claimed in the past that “Muslims are not and have never been anti-semitic” despite himself spreading blatantly antisemitic tropes. In his “Zionists’ alliance with Nazis and White Supremacists” (March 29), Cleland mentioned a few cases where former Nazi officers were recruited post-WWII to work for Israeli intelligence, such as Walter Rauff – who very briefly worked for Israel whilst in Syria – and Otto Skorzeny, who was recruited for the Israeli Mossad in the 1960s for a short period. Cleland listed those isolated cases as “proof” that “This sort of hand-holding between the Zionist movement and some very questionable characters is not new”, and “While many Jewish organisations hunted down war criminals for decades, we find Israel playing double [games].” In fact, double agents and unsavoury bedfellows are not at all an unusual phenomenon in the fickle world of espionage, but

“Regular AMUST columnist Mohamed Ainullah advanced a baseless conspiracy theory that, contrary to what the police said about criminal gangs, ‘possibly Israeli intelligence [is behind the hoax]’”

a few examples of briefly working with former low-level Nazis in no way proves Israel has aligned itself with the Nazis, as Cleland argued.

A later *AMUST* piece by Cleland, “The American West to Gaza: Devastation and Dispossession” (April 26), was another example of how Cleland tries to distort history in service of his hateful agenda.

Out of a population of more than 10 million Israelis as of 2025, fewer than 150,000 people immigrated to Israel from the US since 1948. Yet, Cleland attributed to this small group an almost mystical power, stating that “The Israelis, many of whom come from the USA, appear to have brought with them the colonial prejudices of their homeland.” Zionists, said Cleland, are the same as the Europeans who colonised the American continent since the 16th century because “All European colonists... like the Zionist colonists of Israel, lacked respect for the indigenous inhabitants of the land.”

Later in the article, Cleland accused Israel’s Prime Minister of “adopting” the model of the mistreatment and massacres of native Americans by the hand of the Europeans. “We should consider whether the pattern of the American genocide, provided the blueprint for Netanyahu,” says Cleland.

After claiming that Adolf Hitler was influenced by what happened in the US to Native Americans, Cleland writes, “We see in the opening of the American West, lebensraum to the East, and now the eradication of Palestinians, colonial expansion, dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants followed by genocide as part of a pattern.”

JUSTIFYING HATE TOWARDS JEWS WHO SUPPORT ISRAEL

The icing on the *AMUST* cake is served in a piece titled “When silence becomes complicity: On Zionism, fear, and speaking the unspeakable” by Shayne Chester (April 26). The main theme of the author is that “Anti-Semitism has been monetised, criminalised, and weaponised. This isn’t a fringe conspiracy theory. It is a calculated strategy – one that has proven effective in silencing criticism of Israel, chilling political debate, and protecting a settler-colonial state as it commits atrocities in real time.”

Exemplifying ignorance about Zionism, Chester muses that “To ask why so many Jews support Zionism, even in its most militarised and supremacist forms, is labelled hate.”

And within a sentence, antisemitism pops up in some of its most noticeable forms – such as comparing Israel to the Nazis, and pinning all real and perceived actions and policies of Israel’s government on “the Jews”. However, Chester insists that doing so “is not hate. That is accountability. To say it is antisemitic to ask why someone supports ethnic cleansing is like saying it is Teutophobic [Anti-German sentiment] to criticise Nazis... Zionism is not Judaism.”

The article accuses Jews backing Israel in its war in Gaza, ignited by Hamas’ murderous attack on October 7, 2023, of being complicit in the most heinous crimes.

“[W]ho are the Jews supporting the starvation of children, the rape and torture of detainees, the demolition of homes over people’s heads? How did they come to believe that Jewish safety depends on Palestinian erasure?”

Chester points fingers at prominent Australian Jewish figures like Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-CEO Alex Ryvchin, “the Leiblers” (meaning the prominent Jewish Australian Zionist family of Mark, Jeremy and others) and AIJAC’s own Executive Director Colin Rubenstein for “play[ing] their part [in supporting Israel’s aforementioned ‘crimes’]. Their media saturation campaigns repeated one line: ‘My people [the Jews] are afraid.’”

Yet it is simply a fact that most Jewish people in Australia are worried, and with good reason. Following the Hamas terror attack on October 7, they are facing an unprecedented wave of antisemitism, vitriol and hate. Revelations that one apparently particularly scary antisemitic plot was a hoax do nothing to undermine this reality. Moreover, *AMUST* is playing its part in feeding this avalanche of extremism and radicalisation – as it has done for many years.

AIR

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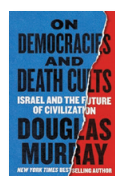
THE BIBLIO FILE

Israel and the pathologies of the West

On Democracies and Death Cults: Israel and the Future of Civilization

Douglas Murray

Broadside Books, April, 2025, 240 pp., A\$34.99



Peter Berkowitz

In the United States and Europe, university students and professors, journalists and diplomats, activists and NGOs, international court judges in The Hague, and international organisation bureaucrats in Turtle Bay, Brussels and Geneva take a peculiarly intense interest in condemning Israel. It would be bad enough if Western condemnations only demonstrated bias against the Jewish state. But they also display an antipathy to principles such as the dignity of the person and virtues such as the courage to defend one's family and nation with deep roots in Western civilisation. Since Israel embodies these principles and virtues, which are essential to the preservation and flourishing of freedom and democracy in the 21st century, learning from and standing by the Jewish state fortifies the West.

The critics work overtime to vilify Israel, but their favourite accusations conflict with the facts and rely on gross double standards.

First, the critics allege that, inspired by Zionism, Israel illegitimately embraces nationalism, conceiving of itself as the nation-state of the Jewish people. This allegation neglects that Israel remains the Middle East's lone rights-protecting democracy. It ignores

that, like all minorities in Israel, Arab citizens, some 21% of the population, enjoy full civil and political rights. And it overlooks that, like Israel – but often with less success in integrating Muslim minorities – nation-states across Europe combine the protection of rights, democratic self-government and devotion to nationhood.

Second, according to legions of detractors in the West, Israel occupies the West Bank (territory Israelis often refer to by the biblical names Judea and Samaria) and Gaza. Yet military imperatives compel Israel to maintain overall security responsibility for the West Bank where, within Palestinian Authority (PA)-administered areas, Iran-backed Hamas plots against both the PA and Israel. Meanwhile, many in the West justify Hamas' October 7, 2023, massacre in southern Israel – Gaza jihadists killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages, mostly civilians – as laudable resistance to occupation, notwithstanding Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza.

Yet the West seems generally unconcerned about clear-cut occupations and volatile territorial disputes elsewhere. Turkey invaded northeastern Cyprus in 1974, declaring the establishment of the Turkish Republic

of Northern Cyprus, though hardly anyone in the West notices Ankara's more than 50 years of occupation of the Mediterranean island. Few in the West (until recently) have given much attention to the bloody strife between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. And the Chinese Communist Party's unlawful seizure of, and snuffing out of freedom in, Hong Kong in 2020 excite little sympathy or engagement in the West.

Third, asserts the fashionable indictment, Israel's war-mongering visits death and destruction on the region. Yet fighting between Jews and Arabs over the last 100 years has stemmed primarily from Arab and Muslim determination initially to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state, and then to wipe out Israel. A comparative perspective is revealing. From the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which the British government announced support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, to Oct. 6, 2023, approximately 91,000 Arabs died in fighting against Jews living in their ancestral homeland. Since the terrorists' October 7 assault on Israel, around 50,000 Arabs have been killed, according to Hamas, whose numbers don't distinguish combatants from noncombatants and don't consider the jihadists' use of Palestinian noncombatants as human shields. In addition, according to its own estimates, the Israel Defence Force has killed 3,800 Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon after the Iran-backed militia opened, on Oct. 8, 2023, a northern front against the Jewish state.

Despite the terrible death toll in Gaza over the last 19 months, Arab fatalities in the Middle East at the hands of other Arabs in just the last 14 years exceed by more than sevenfold the total number of Arab deaths in all the wars that Arabs have waged against the Jews for more than 100 years. Since 2014, nearly 400,000 Arabs have perished in the Yemen civil war fomented by the Iran-backed Houthis. And since 2011, approximately 650,000 Arabs have been killed in

Syria. Few and far between, however, are the best and the brightest in the West who act as if the massive loss of Arab life in the Middle East in which Israel played no role should trouble the humanitarian conscience.

In *On Democracies and Death Cults: Israel and the Future of Civilization*, Douglas Murray excoriates the Western hypocrisy, mendacity and malignancy that fuel enthusiasm for Hamas' butchery of Jewish civilians and antipathy toward Israel's exercise of its right to self-defence. A *New York Times* bestselling author of eight books, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, intrepid war correspondent on three continents, prolific commentator in magazines and newspapers on politics and culture, and eloquent and unflappable debater and talk-show guest, Murray has warned the West for years about the perils of indulging Islamic extremism.

Murray's new book deepens that warning. He describes Hamas' atrocities and chronicles Israelis' heroism. He analyses the moral pathology that impels educated Western men and women to hate Jews and side with their murderers. And he sketches lessons that citizens of the West must learn in order to overcome the internal disarray and the self-loathing that spur them to make common cause with jihadists who loathe individual freedom and equality under law.

On Oct. 8, 2023, Murray attended a hastily arranged demonstration in New York City's Times Square. "But it was not a protest against the horrors of the previous day," writes Murray. "It was not a protest against the terrorists of Hamas. It was instead a protest of the State of Israel and the citizens of the world's only Jewish state." He encountered banners and signs adorned

with slogans – subsequently made familiar by student encampments at America's elite campuses – affirming Hamas' genocidal intentions and extending the war against Israel to the West: "From the River to the Sea," "Resistance Is Justified," "Resistance Is Not Terrorism," "Fight White Supremacy," "Long Live the Intifada," and "By Any Means Necessary."

New York, where the British-born Murray makes his home, was not an exception. In numerous European cities, huge crowds celebrated the mass slaughter of Jews. Yet, he ruefully notes, "there was not a single

major protest against Hamas in any Western city."

Murray, who first visited Israel in 2006 to report on the war with Hezbollah and has returned many times since, resolved to show solidarity with Israel, cover


Hamas' war of extermination against the Jewish state, and clarify its larger implications. Arriving in Israel shortly after the October 7 attack and staying for many months, he travelled to the kibbutzim and towns where Hamas perpetrated the massacre. He visited survivors of the slaughter and victims' and hostages' families. He went to the morgues to confront Hamas' sadism embodied in charred and mutilated corpses. He entered Gaza to observe the treacherous urban warfare. He consulted with Israeli political officials, military commanders and soldiers. He conversed with a multitude of ordinary Israelis. He not only provided courageous on-the-scene reporting and astute political and military analysis but also bore witness to Israeli suffering and resilience, establishing himself as a tireless champion of the Jewish state.

In Hamas, Murray observes, Israel faces a distinctively evil enemy. The jihadists' atrocities were "something uncommon even in the long history

of violence," he argues. Whereas the Nazis hid their extermination of the Jews, "the terrorists of October 7 did what they did with such relish," writes Murray. "Not just the endless shouting of their war cries. Or the visible glee you could see in their faces and hear in their voices. It was the fact that all of this gave them such intense joy. And that they were proud of their actions."

How did Israel turn the tide against jihadists who proudly declare their love of death? What must the West do to overcome the contagion of antisemitism, recognise the evils of Islamic extremism and grasp the best within the West?

Murray finds an answer in God's exhortation to "all Israel" in Deuteronomy, Chapter 30: "[C]hoose life". Biblically understood, this means not only surviving but also embracing the good, which includes cherishing the dignity of the person whilst summoning the courage to defend one's family and nation. Israel, Murray shows, provides an inspiring example of choosing life.

For the West at this juncture, choosing life must include learning from and standing by the Jewish state. 

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The raw anti-Israel hate on Western streets is a symptom of a deeper social malaise, writes Murray (Image: Shutterstock)

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THE MONTH IN MEDIA

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

On *ABC Radio National* "Saturday Extra" (May 10), former Israeli PM Ehud Olmert detailed his generous peace plan that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected in 2008 – an inconvenient truth rarely acknowledged by the ABC.

"I proposed... a comprehensive solution on the basis of two states... the '67 borders, with a very small annexation of about 4.5 to 5% of the territory of the West Bank, but with a swap of territories that were part of the State of Israel... And then I also offered that the Arab side of Jerusalem will be the capital of the Palestinian state."

Olmert said if the "Palestinian leadership [had] the courage and the vision and the inspiration to sign an agreement with us [it] may have changed the lives of millions of people in the entire region... I can't ignore the failure of the Palestinians time and again."

On *ABC Radio National* "Breakfast" (May 22), Yossi Beilin, who was instrumental in the genesis of the Oslo peace process in the early 1990s, said the motivation was to stave off the threat from Hamas, which was gaining in popularity among Palestinians.

Hamas, he explained, presented itself as "a non-corrupt organisation... dedicate[ed]... to the good of the Palestinian people. But I knew exactly what they were saying. They were not shy about it, that they should never recognise the right of the Jews to have their own state."

Beilin disagreed with the view that creating a Palestinian state will be seen as a "prize" for October 7, arguing that "for Hamas, this is a kind of a punishment if you recognise a Palestinian state which lives in peace with Israel."

FACTECTOMY

ABC Middle East Correspondent Matthew Doran either doesn't know or doesn't care that, according to international law, medical facilities lose their protected status when that status is abused.

In a cross to *ABC Radio* "AM" (May 15), Doran was discussing the IDF's strike in an area adjacent to the European Hospital in Khan Younis, where it correctly believed Hamas military commander Mohammed Sinwar was directing terrorism from tunnels, along with other senior Hamas terrorists.

Doran said if Sinwar was killed, "that would be a significant achievement for the Israel Defence Forces. It would, if true, would also cast doubt on Hamas' insistence that it does not use hospitals and other civilian infrastructure as shelters."

However, he spoilt it by saying, "it is another example of Israel repeatedly attacking things like hospitals in its bid to target Hamas, something which is outlawed under international law."

Doran's online article about the strike (May 15) stated: "Hamas has rejected the IDF's allegation that a Hamas command and control centre was buried beneath the compound. It has accused Israel of continuing to attack hospitals despite their protected status under international law."

In contrast to Doran, Claudia Farhart's report on *SBS TV* "World News" (May 14) about the IDF strikes near the European Hospital correctly noted that "targeting hospitals is illegal under international law, but they lose that protection if they're being used for acts harmful to the enemy."

A 'CLAYTONS' CORRECTION

An AIJAC complaint lodged with the ABC Ombudsman's office regarding Doran's mistake on "AM" was grudgingly upheld.

An editor's note quoting the relevant section of the Geneva Convention was put on the May 15 "AM" webpage. But the note did not explain that it was referring to Doran's error, nor did it apologise for misleading ABC listeners on this highly contentious issue.

HIDE AND SEEK

An ABC online article (May 16) by Matthew Doran absurdly said, "The IDF has continually insisted Hamas hides its operations in hospitals and other civilian buildings, but many of its claims are presented without evidence."

A report on the *Australian* website (May 16) provided the kind of detail Doran said was missing about the European Hospital strike. This included confirmation that the IDF had targeted the "emergency yard and rear compound of the European Hospital," not the hospital itself. Significantly, it included a Saudi newspaper report that confirmed the existence of a tunnel system in the environs of that hospital being used by Hamas.

COUNTER CLAIM

Speaking to *ABC NewsRadio* (May 16), Matthew Doran said, "we are hearing from local health authorities and Gaza's civil defence agency that many of the bodies which are being brought out from the ruins of buildings, residential buildings that have

been hit, are those of women and children.”

This, he said, is “fuelling further scepticism about Israel’s claim that it is only targeting Hamas, that it is doing everything it can to limit civilian casualties there.”

Doran went on to praise the bravery of Palestinian journalists.

He failed, however, to caution listeners that the “local health authorities and Gaza’s civil defence agency” are Hamas-run. Moreover, many of “the incredibly brave and dedicated Palestinian journalists who are the eyes and ears of the world in Gaza” are either Hamas loyalists or know better than to report anything Hamas doesn’t want the world to know

about.

Later in the day on *NewsRadio*, the BBC’s Cairo-based reporter Rashdi Abualouf gave a more nuanced perspective on what Palestinians in Gaza are saying.

“There is a feeling among Palestinians that, yes, Israel sometimes, or maybe most of the time [is] targeting Hamas, but at any cost. So, if they want to kill like one person in this building, they don’t care if there is ten or 15 civilians around them,” he said.

Interestingly, contrary to most media reports that claimed Hamas released Israeli-American hostage Edan Alexander as a unilateral goodwill gesture with no Israeli involve-

ment, Abualouf revealed that four days after his release, Hamas issued a statement complaining that part of the deal had included Israel allowing food into Gaza, and Israel had not yet complied.

WORKING ON IT

The *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a letter to the editor from AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams (May 19) that sought to dispel some of the many misrepresentations made by journalist David Leser in those papers on May 17 concerning the IHRA working definition of antisemitism.

Hyams wrote: “In criticising the IHRA definition of antisemitism for



OUT OF IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – May 26 – press conference: “Israel’s actions are completely unacceptable. It is outrageous that there be a blockade of food and supplies to people who are in need in Gaza... Australia finds these actions as completely unacceptable, and we find Israel’s excuses and explanations completely untenable and without credibility. People are starving, and the idea that a democratic state withholds supply is an outrage.”

Then Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) – May 1 – Israeli Independence Day message: “Yom Ha’atzmaut is a powerful commemoration of statehood and a profound statement of survival, resilience and hope.

“Yom Ha’atzmaut is a time to honour the Jewish people’s ancient and unbroken connection to the land of Israel – and their extraordinary journey through millennia of exile, persecution and renewal. It’s a time to reaffirm Israel’s right to exist, to defend itself, and to flourish as a beacon of democracy in the Middle East.

“It’s a time to reject the propaganda and false equivalence that emboldens antisemitism. And it’s a time to condemn the evil of Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis.”

Note: There was no Israeli Independence Day message from the Prime Minister this year.

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) – May 6 – asked on *Sky News* about Israel announcing its new military campaign in Gaza, “It’s all about getting the remaining hostages that Hamas still has. What’s your response to this move?": “Well, first, my principled response is Australia continues to call for a ceasefire. We want to see the hostages returned and we want to see humanitarian aid delivered. The humanitarian situation in

Gaza is catastrophic. No aid has gone in for weeks. So, we will continue to call on all parties – ceasefire, hostage returns and humanitarian aid to be delivered.”

Senator **Wong** – May 6 – asked, on *ABC Radio National*, “Would your government allow the arrest of Benjamin Netanyahu if he were ever to visit Australia?” replied, “We don’t speculate on hypotheticals.”

Opposition Leader **Sussan Ley** (Lib., Farrer) – May 13 – asked, at a press conference if she still agreed with a statement she had made in 2008 that she was sympathetic to the Palestinians because they had to pay the price for the Holocaust: “I don’t... I took a trip... to Israel. I spent a lot of time seeing what was happening on the ground. The impact of that trip and the changed geopolitical circumstances of the Abraham Accords... and then, of course, the hideous events of October 7... have changed my thinking on the entire subject... I remain a steadfast friend of the Palestinian people and I wish that we had, right now, a partner in this peace process. I wish that we had leadership of the Palestinian people that was not letting them down quite so badly, because right now, what we are seeing is not a party interested in peace with Israel. It is not a party interested in a secure Israel behind secure borders, and it is not a party interested in a just and lasting peace.”

Greens Leader Senator **Larissa Waters** (Qld) – May 15 – press conference on being elected leader: “We stand firm always on social justice and human rights. Whether that’s First Nations justice, whether that’s a free Palestine... we will always be there, calling out atrocities, calling out a genocide... I know a lot of wonderful Jewish voters are backing the Greens because they don’t want a genocide either.”

Greens Deputy Leader Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (NSW) – May 15 – press release: “Migrant and multicultural communities in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne have backed us for speaking the truth and standing against the genocide in Gaza.”

supposedly being overprotective of Israel, David Leser neglects to mention it specifically states that criticising Israel as you would criticise any other country is not anti-semitic.

“In saying it’s anti-semitic to describe Israel’s existence as a racist endeavour, the definition doesn’t refer to Israel’s behaviour, as Leser implies, but to suggesting Jewish self-determination in the Jewish homeland is somehow racist. Those who favour the Jerusalem Declaration do so because it lets them feel it’s somehow not anti-semitic to deny Jewish self-determination in their homeland while demanding that same right for others.

“Leser’s accusations of apartheid, genocide and deliberate starvation are simply wrong. All Israeli citizens have equal rights... In Gaza, Israel evacuates civilians for their safety, rather than targeting them as a genocidal army would do... Israel blocked aid, after enough entered Gaza to last for months, because Hamas steals and uses it to consolidate its power, but deliveries will soon resume.” The *Age* ran a shorter version of the letter.

KENNY BELIEVE IT?

On May 20, the *Canberra Times* ran Hyams’ letter responding to the weekly column by the paper’s political analyst Mark Kenny, who claimed (May 18) that Israel is committing war crimes in Gaza through its aid blockade and bombings.

Hyams wrote: “During the cease-fire at the start of the year, enough food went into Gaza to last months. Hamas steals the food and then sells it for exorbitant amounts so it can pay its terror squads, or uses it for coercion to maintain control. Article 23(2) of the Fourth Geneva Convention provides that the obligation to allow aid doesn’t apply if there is a serious reason to fear that consignments may be diverted from their destination or that a definite advantage may accrue to the military ef-

forts or economy of the enemy. Israel and the US have a plan to distribute the aid which avoids Hamas stealing it... The hospital compound bombing Kenny cites hit a Hamas control centre under the hospital, and probably killed Hamas’ military leader and other senior officers. Hamas’ militarisation of such facilities is the actual war crime.”

PREDETERMINED DETERMINATIONS

On *ABC TV* “The World” (May 19), Chris Sidoti, a member of the UN Human Rights Council’s viciously anti-Israel Commission of Inquiry into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was being entirely disingenuous when asked if he and his colleagues agree that Israel is guilty of genocide.

Sidoti replied, “Our Commission of Inquiry hasn’t yet got to that point. That’s a question that we are looking at.”

Yet, in the very next breath Sidoti said, “Many organisations have already looked at this question of genocide and have come to the conclusion that Israeli policy and practice in Gaza constitutes genocide,” making it very clear which way he is leaning.

Moreover, Sidoti has previously referred to Israeli military operations as “genocidal”.

He dismissed the Netanyahu Government’s announcement it will “introduce basic amounts of food back into Gaza” as “PR”. Without mentioning Hamas’ coup and brutal rule over Gaza, Sidoti falsely claimed Gaza has been subject to a “siege” for the last 20 years.

Meanwhile, commentator Chris Kenny in the *Australian* (May 17), defended Israel’s conduct during the war, writing, “We have never seen a war previously where so much care has been taken to warn civilians about attacks and provide pathways and ceasefires for safe passage.”

IMPLAUSIBLE

The ill-informed assertion that the International Court of Justice had ruled in January 2024 that it was “plausible” Israel is committing genocide in Gaza cropped up again.

The *Guardian Australia*’s May 15 editorial wrongly stated that “The international court of justice ruled in January last year that there was a ‘plausible risk’ of genocide.”

In the *Canberra Times* (May 17), ANU academic Elise Klein damned the Albanese Government for its “refusal to stand up against what the International Court of Justice warned was plausible genocide in Gaza.”

As *AIR* continuously points out, the Court’s former 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”.

DETACHED ANALYSIS

Emeritus Professor Amin Saikal’s analysis in *Nine Newspapers* (May 16) of Donald Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE seemed to suggest that Israel and the Sunni Arab states are in strategic opposition to, rather than the reality that they are part of, a US-aligned bloc countering Iran.

Saikal claimed that Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS) was “shaken by [former US President] Joe Biden’s regional plan (an ‘Israel first policy and withdrawal from Afghanistan’).”

This is absurd. Recently revealed documents prove that Hamas, with Iran’s connivance, carried out the October 7 attack when it did because it feared the Biden Administration was on the cusp of securing a normalisation deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Saikal also claimed that Trump has “de-emphasised the importance of a healthy relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel,” and pointed to his support for a Saudi nuclear program as evidence.

In Riyadh, Trump clearly articulated his support for normalisation, telling his hosts that Saudi–Israeli peace would “greatly honour... me.”

Equally questionable is Saikal’s claim that Trump now “prioritises a de facto alliance with the UAE over Israel’s strategic partnership.” This ignores the fact that the UAE is a founding member of the Abraham Accords and shares many publicly acknowledged interests with Israel.

Meanwhile, Nine Newspapers’ Michael Koziol’s article on Trump’s visit offered a more factual-based perspective than Saikal. Koziol cited international affairs professor Gregory Gause’s opinion that the visit “shows [Trump] is unlikely to receive too much pressure from the Gulf states on the Israel– Hamas conflict. [Gause] believes that rather than Trump putting any real pressure on Israel to change course, he is more likely to wash his hands of it and tell Israel to ‘do what you want.’”

RISKY BUSINESS

On *ABC Radio National* “Breakfast” (May 15), John Bolton – National Security Adviser during President Trump’s first term – was critical of his former boss’ decision to drop economic sanctions on Syria.

Bolton said, “I don’t think we have nearly enough evidence at this point that the HTS regime and its head have fully and truly renounced terrorism. Apparently, when Trump met with al-Shara’a... he pressed [him] to grant full diplomatic recognition to Israel, take up a strong anti-terrorist position and fight against terrorist activities... I would have done it in connection with a negotiation that would result at the end of it in lifting the sanctions, not give the sanctions

up and then hope they’ll be anti-terrorist in their policy.”

MIXED MESSAGES

On *ABC Radio* “World Today” (May 14), the *Economist*’s Gregg Carlstrom highlighted the contradictory messages coming from the Trump White House in relation to what it considers an acceptable nuclear deal with Iran.

Carlstrom said, “we’ve heard very mixed messages from the Trump Administration. Trump himself said last week they haven’t decided on the question of enrichment. His Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, said there can’t be any enrichment, that’s a red line. But previously, a few weeks earlier, Witkoff had allowed [Iran] to keep enriching under a new deal. So, it seems as if the Trump Administration still doesn’t know exactly what it wants from a new agreement with Iran.”

WILTING GREENS

The link between the Greens’ poor showing at the May 3 federal election and their rabid anti-Israel rhetoric and policies was commented upon.

In News Corp papers (May 9), AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein wrote, “Australia has largely rejected and is punishing [the Greens’] hatred and inflammatory, divisive rhetoric... the Greens have shifted from primarily focusing on the environment to a preoccupation with hard-left politics. Its obsession with Israel is just one facet of this transformation.”

Former Victorian state Labor minister Philip Dalidakis in the *Australian Financial Review* (May 7) wrote, “The Greens candidates who ran on anti-Israel platforms saw their support collapse for a simple reason – voters saw through their performative outrage wrapped in slogans and devoid of solutions.”

On election day, the *Advertiser* warned readers against support-

ing the Greens, saying, “In the latest example of tacit support for terror group Hamas, Greens leader Adam Bandt in April refused to condemn a brutal crackdown on protesters in Gaza, in which Hamas executed at least six Palestinians. Instead, he condemned Israel, challenging the democratically elected ‘extremist Netanyahu government to end the occupation of Palestine.’”

The *West Australian* (May 5) said, “Just as Indigenous Australians were hurt by the outcome of the Voice, Jewish Australians are also disillusioned by the politics that has promoted debilitating anti-Semitism. Mr Albanese talks about unity. He must address these fears and resist caving in to a further embrace of foreign policy that alienates our closest friends.”

The *Australian* (May 6), said voters “were repulsed by the [Greens] party’s weaponisation of the tragic circumstances in the Middle East for political advantage. Mr Bandt has been unable to accept that his party’s views on the Middle East conflict, which was sparked by the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel, is seen as a threat to national cohesion. Addressing reporters on Monday, Mr Bandt denied his hardline position on Israel cost him votes.”

MIND THE GAP

ABC TV’s “The World” and *SBS TV*’s “World News” offered sharply contrasting coverage on May 9 of Israel’s decision to close three UNRWA-run schools in east Jerusalem – a move affecting hundreds of students.

Both reports noted that the closures followed a 2024 Israeli law banning UNRWA operations within its territory.

However, only SBS provided some crucial context that Israel accuses UNRWA schools of promoting anti-Israel incitement, and that the Israeli Ministry of Education says it will reassign all students to other schools.

MEDIA MICROSCOPE

Allon Lee

THE LIE OF THE LAND

One of the most alarming claims since October 7, 2023, came during a BBC interview on May 20, when the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher warned, “There are 14,000 babies that will die in the next 48 hours [in Gaza] unless we can reach them.”

This was totally false. Fletcher either misunderstood, misrepresented or cherry-picked a UN report which predicted that up to 14,000 children under six (not babies) could suffer malnutrition (not die) between April 2025 and March 2026 (not the next 48 hours), if aid did not begin flowing into Gaza immediately.

Unsurprisingly, the ABC latched onto Fletcher’s claim, running TV, radio and online reports on the morning of May 21.

On *ABC TV* “News Breakfast”, Middle East correspondent Matthew Doran reported the claim, including excerpts from the BBC interview. Interviewing anti-Zionist writer and activist Peter Beinart at 8:15am, “News Breakfast” host Bridget Brennan framed a question around the 14,000 figure.

By mid-morning, someone at *ABC TV* “News” had learnt about Fletcher’s blunder, and subsequent reports included only his call for Israel to allow aid trucks into Gaza, not the “14,000 babies” claim.

But this knowledge was not ABC-wide.

As late as 3pm on May 21, one *ABC NewsRadio* host said, “The United Nations says more than 14,000 babies will die if supplies don’t reach them in the next 48 hours.” Around 4pm, a BBC-sourced clip on *NewsRadio* was still making the claim.

Likewise, at 3:26pm on May 21, the ABC “Religion & Ethics” website uploaded an op-ed that said the UN warns that “14,000 babies will die in the next 48 hours without food aid.” At time of writing, this remains uncorrected.

Matthew Doran’s *ABC TV* “7pm News” May 21 report omitted any reference to Fletcher’s snafu. But at 7am the next day, Doran’s original TV report, which included the false claim, was re-uploaded to the ABC website. At the time of writing, the ABC website has at least four video or audio reports which include the erroneous claim.

The situation at SBS was similar. As late as 2pm and 5:50pm on May 21, reports were still uploaded to SBS’s website stating that “the UN says it’s worried that 14,000 babies are at risk of death from starvation within the next

48 to 72 hours.”

SBS TV “World News” (May 21) at 6:30pm diluted Fletcher’s claim, opting for “The UN’s Office of Humanitarian Affairs says more than 14,000 babies and young children suffering from severe acute malnutrition are at risk of accelerated death.”

On May 23, an SBS online article covered the whole saga accurately but, as of writing, multiple audio items reporting Fletcher’s original claim can still be accessed.

Channel 7’s 6pm bulletin on May 21 said, “The UN claims a blockade... could endanger thousands of babies in coming days,” but did note “Israel says it has allowed 93 aid trucks into Gaza in the past day.”

Network Ten’s “News First” at 5pm (May 21) said, “The UN warns 14,000 babies could die in just days, unless humanitarian aid deliveries rapidly increase.”

On May 22, the *Australian Financial Review* hardcopy ran Fletcher’s mistaken claim.

Meanwhile, the *Guardian Australia* website remains awash with recent op-eds and news reports that treat the fake claim as true.

On May 22, on their respective programs, *Sky News*’ Chris Kenny and Andrew Bolt excoriated the media’s uncritical reporting of Fletcher’s comments.

Kenny asked, “Did... they actually believe that there could be 14,000 babies in Gaza on the brink of death? It just made no sense at all. Yet the claim ran globally. It was widely reported as fact here in Australia.”

Bolt asked, “Did that Palestinian activist, by the way, who shot dead those two Jews in Washington, hear that fake news... about Israel killing 14,000 babies?”

Writing about aid in the *Daily Telegraph* (May 23), AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein called the incident another example of the frequent “rumours and lies” being spread concerning Gaza.

As late as Friday afternoon on May 23, freelance writer Rachel Withers told *ABC Radio Melbourne* “Drive with Ali Moore” that “the UN has warned that 14,000 babies could starve to death within days if Israel does not end its blockade.” Moore noted Israel had allowed in some aid but did not correct the mistake.

As former Israel Government spokesperson Eylon Levy explained to *Sky News* on May 25, “The problem we’re dealing with is there are many people who want to believe the worst about Israel.”

“As late as 2pm and 5:50pm on May 21, reports were still uploaded to SBS’s website stating that ‘the UN says it’s worried that 14,000 babies are at risk of death from starvation’”

THE LAST WORD

Rabbi Ralph Genende

SOUTH AFRICA TO AUSTRALIA AND BACK AGAIN

My wife and I left a South Africa torn by racism and wracked by the injustices of apartheid. Poverty and suffering were endemic.

And yet this was the country that gave my parents refuge from the horrendous hostility and devastation of the Holocaust. This was the land that allowed the “Litvaks”, Lithuanian Jews, to recreate the tight-knit communities they had left behind. And it was here I learned the Torah from singular scholars, some from the old country itself.

I have returned many times over the years and spoken to local Jewish congregations. Most often, I was the visitor from the thriving and creative Australian community sharing stories of our proud achievements in this accepting and lucky land, a proud example of multicultural achievement and multifaith harmony, in contrast to the volatility and violent reality of post-apartheid South Africa.

Yet on this visit, nothing was quite the same. I had changed, Australia had changed and South Africa was different.

The world shifted on October 7, 2023. There was a tectonic transformation in Jewish consciousness. We are, in the Talmudic phrase, in an upside-down world.

The South African Jewish community wanted only to hear about the antisemitism in our land down under, incredulous about our near-top ranking in the planetary anti-Jewish Olympiad. For some, there was a barely concealed *schadenfreude*; for others, a genuine fear for their families, who had migrated to Australia – they had left their homes to escape danger! For yet others, this was just confirmation that hostility towards Jews and Israel was as universal as the wild grass, as deeply rooted as the African baobab tree. Australia is no longer the same place, but neither is South Africa.

For the first time in many years, there seemed to be a spirit of optimism in the Jewish community. In the Jewish area of Johannesburg – or Joburg, as we call it – still protected by its own armed security services, there was a vibrancy and confidence.

Yes, there still are the stupendously high walls and

electrified fences and plans for even more security arrangements for these gated communities. There are also desperate beggars on so many street corners and obvious, debilitating poverty and staggering unemployment and crime in this country of deep political corruption and incompetence.

Despite the awareness that beyond the high walls there is gross hunger and heartache, there remains a belief in the future of South Africa and the vitality of this small community – which was once so much larger.

Highly successful and determined Jewish business-people contribute not only to the economy, but also to the social welfare of the country, alongside Jewish educators and artists, social activists, doctors and lawyers. And then

there are the growing religious communities, with beautiful new synagogues popping up alongside a rich variety of kosher restaurants and delis.

There was a sense of having come through the worst and hope that the country’s new coalition government and a chastened African National Congress (ANC) would, in time, temper its vile anti-Israel rhetoric and egregious actions,

including the absurd genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. There is also a strong belief that most ordinary citizens of South Africa are not intrinsically antisemitic, and that their Christian beliefs make them more sympathetic to Israel than their failing ANC leadership.

While South African universities are not much different from ours in their anti-Israel stances, they didn’t experience campus occupations, and they don’t have weekly anti-Zionist protests or marches.

To be sure, there is the same universal vulgar and vituperative antisemitism coming from both political extremes. The May 1 cover of the *SA Jewish Report* featured the first antisemitism hate speech case at the Equality Court in Cape Town against a local comedian for “depraved videos and utterances” against Jews.

I left South Africa more optimistic about its future – despite power blackouts and the huge potholes in Joburg’s streets. This beloved country remains not just a place to cry or sigh for – it’s also a place to fly to and barrack for.



An alumni reunion of Johannesburg's Yeshiva College (Image: Yeshiva College)