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QUARTERLY

Trials & Triumphs: Israel at 75



Lenny Ben David on Robert Kennedy's Connection to the Jewish State | **Avi Bell** on Judicial Reforms | **Arlene Kushner** on the Modern State of Israel | **David Levy** and **Shay Shabtai** on Israel in CENTCOM | **Lauri B. Regan** on Israel and the US Partnership | **Earl Hailston** on CENTCOM Before Israel | **Eric Rozenman** on Making Aliyah | **Sean Durns** on Palestinian Authority Leadership | **Yoram Ettinger** on the Potential for Saudi-Israeli Ties | **Harold Rhode** on Turkey | **Karmel Melamed** on Persian-Jewish Connections | **Benjamin Weinthal** on EU Meddling | **Shoshana Bryen's** Reading List |

Featuring an Interview with **Arsen Ostrovsky**

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

This is modern Israel's 75th anniversary. If it was an American, Israel would be on Social Security. But Israel is older than that and younger than that, a vibrant, growing, and capable country. For all the doom and gloom about judicial reform, Israel's democracy is not in doubt. Yes, there are problems – chief among them are Iran and terrorism egged on and paid for by the Palestinian Authority using American funds in violation of the Taylor Force Act. The Biden administration's clear preference for a "two-state solution" with Palestinians who don't want one, doesn't help. Nor does only marginal support for the expansion of the Abraham Accords, voluntarily entered into among Israel and certain forward-looking Arab and African countries.

Our authors take on these and other issues: Lenny Ben David goes back in time to show Robert Kennedy in Israel in 1948. Avi Bell explains the Supreme Court, while Arlene Kushner explains the relationship between Israeli citizens and their elected government. Threats to American and Israeli interests in the region – and the US-Israel partnership in CENTCOM – are the purview of David Levy, Shay Shabtai and Lauri Regan. Earl Hailston was there before it started. On



Judea and Samaria, Sean Durns considers the future after Palestinian Authority head Mahmoud Abbas; there will be one. Benjamin Weinthal addresses illegal European funding for illegal Palestinian projects in the territories. And Eric Rozenman provides a sidebar on Aliyah. Israel's relations with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and with the Iranian people are addressed by Harold Rhode, Yoram Ettinger, and Karmel Melamed. Don't miss our interview with international human rights lawyer Arsen Ostrovsky. He brings the fight for recognition of Israel's legitimacy and sovereignty into the teeth of the enemy – the UN and other international organizations, as well as to college campuses, and the news media.

Our book review this issue is a review of our bookshelf – Israel-related books you might have missed or need to read again. Plus, one really great atlas.

If you appreciate what you've read, I encourage you to make a contribution to the JPC. You can use our secure site: <http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/donate>

Sincerely,

Matthew Brooks
Publisher

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Publisher
Matthew Brooks

Editor
Shoshana Bryen

Associate Editors
Michael Johnson
Eric Rozenman

Copy Editor
Shari Hillman

Published by:
Jewish Policy Center
PO Box 77316
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(202) 638-2411

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JewishPolicyCenter

@theJPC

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Featuring

LENNY BEN DAVID is director of publications at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and a former Israeli diplomat. (3)

AVI BELL, J.D., is professor of law at Israel's Bar-Ilan University. (5)

ARLENE KUSHNER is an investigative journalist and co-founder of the Legal Grounds Campaign. (8)

Cdr. **DAVID LEVY** a retired US Navy Commander and former US diplomat, is a senior research fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center. Col. **SHAY SHABTAI**, IDF (Res.), is an expert in Israeli national security and Ph.D. candidate at Bar Ilan University. (11)

LAURI B. REGAN is the vice chair of the executive board and chair of the advisory board of the Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET). (14)

Lt. Gen. **EARL HAILSTON**, USMC (ret.) served as Component Commander for US Central Command. (17)

ERIC ROZENMAN is communications consultant for the

Jewish Policy Center. (20)

ARSEN OSTROVSKY is a human rights attorney and CEO of The International Legal Forum. (22)

SEAN DURNS is a Senior Research Analyst for the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA). (27)

YORAM ETTINGER is a retired Israeli ambassador. (30)

HAROLD RHODE, Ph.D., is a former official in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. (33)

KARMEL MELAMED is an internationally published Iranian American journalist and attorney. (36)

BENJAMIN WEINTHAL is a Writing Fellow for the Middle East Forum. (38)

SHOSHANA BRYEN is the editor of *inFOCUS* Quarterly and the Senior Director of the Jewish Policy Center. (41)

Robert Kennedy in Palestine, 1948

by **LENNY BEN DAVID**

Editors Note: All references to “Palestinian” and “Palestine” except the last one refer to the Jews and Jewish land under the British Mandate for Palestine.

In April 1948, one month before Israel declared independence, Robert Kennedy, then 22 and a recent Harvard graduate, traveled to Palestine to report on the conflict for the *Boston Post*. His four dispatches from the scene were published in June 1948. The newspaper closed in 1956, and the reports were forgotten for decades. Yellowed newspaper clippings of Kennedy’s articles were found by this author in a pile of discarded files in Washington D.C. They were subsequently published as *Robert Kennedy’s 1948 Reports from Palestine* [Editor: Lenny Ben David] by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

The young Kennedy’s visit to Palestine and other countries had many unexpected and delayed effects. According to Bobby Kennedy’s daughter Kathleen, RFK’s fiancée broke up with him over his trip, which led to his 18-year marriage to Ethel Skakel and 11 children. On another familial note, in 1939, his brother (and later president, John F. Kennedy) visited Palestine and wrote to his father his impressions of the inhabitants, the violence, and the British mandate rule. JFK subtly acknowledged his father’s well-known antisemitism and doubted the likelihood of a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Jewish strife.

Dear Dad: I thought I would write you my impressions on Palestine while they were still fresh in my mind, though you undoubtedly, if I know the Jews, know the ‘whole’ story.



Bobby Kennedy standing on what is today King David Street in Jerusalem in April 1948. Behind him, barbed wire and a British Army roadblock. (Photo: Kennedy Family)

The oldest Kennedy brother, Joseph Jr., visited European countries, including Nazi Germany in 1934, apparently at the behest of his father, Joseph Sr., who served as the US ambassador to Britain. In his reports to his father, Joe Jr. praised some of Hitler’s policies. “Hitler is building a spirit in his men that could be envied in any country.” Joseph Kennedy Jr. died in a plane crash during World War II.

■ **End of the Mandate**

Robert Kennedy arrived in a chaotic and perilous land on the eve of the British departure from Palestine in May 1948. Jewish Jerusalem and the Jewish Quarter of the Old City were under Arab siege, and regular Arab armies were pouring into the territory from surrounding countries. Kennedy praised

the Palestinian Jews (only one month later did the name “Israel” and the term “Israelis” come into being).

The Jewish people in Palestine who believe in and have been working toward this national state have become an immensely proud and determined people... It is already a truly great modern example of the birth of a nation with the primary ingredients of dignity and self-respect.

The Arabs are most concerned about the great increase in the Jews in Palestine: 80,000 in 1948. The Arabs have always feared this encroachment and maintain that the Jews will never be satisfied with just their section of Palestine but will gradually move to overpower the rest of the country.

JEWIS HAVE FINE FIGHTING FORCE

Make Up for Lack of Arms With Undying Spirit, Unparalleled Courage--Impress World

This is the second of a series of four articles on the Palestine situation written for the Post by Robert Kennedy, Harvard senior and son of the former ambassador to Great Britain. Young Kennedy has been traveling through the Middle East and his first-hand observations, appearing exclusively in the Post, will be of considerable interest in view of the current crisis.

BY ROBERT KENNEDY

The Jewish people in Palestine who believe in and have been working toward this national state have become an immensely proud and determined people. It is already a truly great modern example of the birth of a nation with the primary ingredients of dignity and self-respect.

Continued on Page 6—Third Col.

(Image: Boston Library)

JFK in 1939: The Arabs naturally objected to the Jewish encroachment. They felt that the Jews, if permitted, would dominate in their country numerically as well as economically.

Back to RFK:

The Arabs are determined that a separate Jewish state will be attacked and attacked until it is finally cut out like an unhealthy abscess.

From a small village of a few thousand inhabitants, Tel Aviv has grown

into a most impressive modern metropolis of over 200,000. They have truly done much with what all agree was very little.

The Jews point with pride to the fact that over 500,000 Arabs, in the 12 years between 1932 and 1944, came into Palestine to take advantage of living conditions existing in no other Arab state. This is the only country in the Near and Middle East where an Arab middle class is in existence. I came in contact personally with evidence that demonstrated clearly the British bitterness toward the Jews. I have ridden in Jewish armored car convoys [between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem], which the British have stopped to inspect for arms. As always, there were members of the Haganah aboard, and they quickly broke down their small arms, passing the pieces among the occupants to conceal them so as to prevent confiscation.

Satisfied that none existed, the convoy, supposedly unarmed, was allowed to pass into Arab territory. If the arms had been found and confiscated and the Arabs had attacked, there would have been but a remote chance of survival for any of the occupants. There have been many not as fortunate as we.

In the biography *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. reported that during his visit to Palestine, Kennedy wrote to his parents that the Jews he met “are different from any Jews I have ever known or seen.” As for the Arabs, he wrote, “I just wish they didn’t have that oil.”

■ Later

Robert Kennedy served as the US Attorney General during his brother John’s presidency. He was elected to the US Senate in 1964 from the state of New York and emerged as the leading Democratic candidate for the 1968 presidential elections, presenting himself as an anti-war and human rights champion. He strongly supported Israel, especially after the 1967 Six Day War.

Sirhan Sirhan, RFK’s assassin, chose the first anniversary of the Six Day War to kill the Democratic candidate. At his trial and in his diary, the Arab Christian complained about Kennedy’s support for Israel in 1948 and again during the 1968 campaign. Specifically, Sirhan pointed to a May campaign speech in a Portland, Oregon synagogue where RFK urged the US government to provide Israel with advanced F-4 Phantom jets.

Sirhan was found guilty of murdering Kennedy and sentenced to death. However, because of constitutional rulings on the death penalty, the assassin’s sentence was changed to life imprisonment. Today, at the age of 78, Sirhan’s latest request for parole was turned down for the 17th time on March 1, 2023.

RFK’s daughter, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Lieutenant Governor of Maryland, 1995 – 2003, told this writer that people should know, “A Palestinian terrorist killed my father because he supported Israel.”

LENNY BEN DAVID is director of publications at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. A former Israeli diplomat, he is the author of *American Interests in the Holy Land*.

How Court Reform Will Strengthen Israeli Democracy

by AVI BELL

No observers of Israel can be unaware of the vast gap between the reality of the country, on the one hand, and the news media-reported version, on the other. Yet, even against that background, recent discussions about Israel's proposed judicial reform are exceptional. In media reports, Israel's Knesset is considering a set of proposals to "demolish" democracy, establish "dictatorship," terminate human rights, and destroy everything from Israel's economy to its medical system to nature itself. The reality of the proposals is very different – they are reforms that have been mooted for decades to correct serious and recognized flaws in Israel's legal system.

To understand the proposed judicial reform requires an understanding of what it reforms.

Israel has operated under two entirely different constitutional-legal regimes during its short existence. The first legal regime lasted roughly from the founding of the country in 1948 until the ascension and reign of Aharon Barak over Israel's Supreme Court during the 1980's, '90's, and early 2000's. In its first legal regime, Israel was a fairly typical Westminster parliamentary democracy. Israel's elected Knesset was supreme; like Britain, Israel did not adopt a written constitution.

Governments were approved by the Knesset, and could last only so long as they enjoyed the Knesset's approval. Israel's legal system was largely based in British law with some continental and, particularly German, influences. The courts comported themselves in accordance with the legal heritage from the British mandatory government, and

were initially staffed by professional judges appointed by the government and approved by the Knesset. In 1953, Israel shifted appointment power to a professional committee comprised of some elected officials, some judges and some lawyers.

The second legal regime was instituted by Aharon Barak and his colleagues on the Supreme Court and has lasted until the present day. Aharon Barak was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1978. He became President (chief justice) of the Court in 1995, in which post he remained until mandatory retirement in 2002. Barak was an unabashed revolutionary; he himself chose the label of "constitutional revolution" for one of his more controversial innovations, the court's fabrication of a power to cancel parliamentary legislation.

Barak and his colleagues' changes to the legal system were systematic, comprehensive, and revolutionary, implemented slowly and methodically over decades. Barak also seized functional control of the judicial appointments

The Supreme Court has decided that Israel has a constitution after all, and its content is determined by the Court from time to time...

committee, ensuring ideological uniformity on the court and unquestioning loyalty to his agenda of judicial aristocracy. Although Barak has not served in the court for two decades, his successors, many handpicked by Barak, have continued in his revolutionary path.

The Barak-era revolution vastly

expanded the power of the court at the expense of the democratic branches of government and of individual liberty. The Court shuttered radio stations, ordered television and radio programs off the air, denied political parties and individual politicians the right to run for office, blocked senior appointments, fired elected officials including the Speaker of the Knesset and government ministers, and it terminated military operations. The Court cancelled some kinds of welfare payments and created others. It cancelled some kinds of taxes and created others. It cancelled government contracts and ordered others.

It transferred decision making authority from the Knesset, the government, mayors and city councils to itself and to legal advisors (including the Legal Advisor to the government) whom it deputized to the will of the Court. The Court systematically eroded the rights of the criminally accused, especially in the cases of public officials, by authorizing the use of illegally obtained evidence, functionally approving unlawful sur-

principles that the Court has never fully articulated.

The Barak-era Supreme Court has downgraded Israel from a full-fledged democracy to a tutelary democracy, in which democratic governance is subordinated to a judicial aristocracy. The Court (together with subordinate government lawyers) is uniquely powerful in the democratic world. Israel, for instance, is the only country in the democratic world in which a Supreme Court can cancel legislation without any legal or constitutional authority or bond. In today's Israel, it is the Supreme Court that reigns supreme, not the elected representatives of the people. The Court's ideological guidelines are sometimes liberal, but more frequently populist, progressive, socialist, and self-aggrandizing. The Court recognizes no limits on its powers and brooks no challenges to its authority.

With this background, it is possible to understand the debate about judicial reform. While they differ in details, all the judicial reform proposals can be summarized in one sentence. They all cancel or limit changes to the legal system implemented by the Barak-era court. With one exception, all the proposed changes directly revise or eliminate the Barak-era's most controversial doctrines, such as the Court's unlimited power to overturn legislation or government actions with which it disagrees. The one exception concerns the appointment system: all the proposed judicial reforms address the Barak-era court excesses by modifying the appointment procedure to break the ideological uniformity of the Barak-era supreme court. Obviously one can argue about the wisdom of any particular element of the proposed reform. But no matter which proposal is adopted, Israel will end up with a liberal-democratic legal regime that is somewhere in between its initial form, and the Barak-era tutelary democracy. Israel's democratic character will be enhanced, not harmed, by the reform. To claim that the reforms will end democracy in Israel, as



Demonstrators against Prime Minister Netanyahu's Supreme court reform block the Ayalon Highway in Tel Aviv. (Photo: Oren Rozen)

opponents do, is to claim that Israel only became democratic 40-50 years after its founding, under Aharon Barak and his colleagues' tutelage.

Consider, for instance, the controversy over various "override" provisions within the reform proposals. Several versions of the reform would allow the Court to continue its Barak-era practice of cancelling parliamentary legislation but limit it. The Court would not be able to overturn laws that the Knesset labels "Basic Laws" or other laws that the Knesset insulated in advance from review. The Court would only be able to overturn laws on the basis of Basic Laws, rather than willy-nilly the way it does today. Additionally, if the Court overturned a law, the Knesset could reverse the Court decision by vote of an absolute majority of Knesset members.

Such reversals would certainly be rare. Due to strict in-person voting requirements and relaxed quorum rules, almost no Knesset legislation is passed by an absolute majority in any of its readings. The one existing override clause in Israeli law (in Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation, which permits overrides with an absolute majority of 61 out of 120 members of Knesset) has been successfully exercised once in 29 years. The result

would be a court with greater power to overturn Knesset legislation than before Barak's "revolution" but less than today.

The one exception to direct revisions or revocations of Barak-era innovations – updating the appointments process – is a modest one. All the proposed versions of judicial reform retain the existing structure of judicial appointment by committee, rather than directly by elected officials. Today, all judges are appointed by a committee with three Supreme Court justices, two ministers in the government, two other members of Knesset, and two lawyers chosen by the Bar Association. Because the Supreme Court justices coordinate their votes (contrary to the law), and seven affirmative votes are required to appoint anyone to the Supreme Court, current justices can veto any new appointments. And because the justices sit on the committee until retirement, while the other members turn over frequently due to elections, the judges can ensure their candidates always win by simply waiting for the committee's composition to change. The proposed judicial reform does not return Israel to its initial system of appointment by the government with approval by the Knesset (a system very close to the United States' appointment

by the president and approval by Senate). Instead, it adds more members of government and Knesset to the committee, eliminating the judicial veto, and enabling the appointment of Supreme Court justices that are not aligned with the judicial aristocracy.

What, then, explains the hysterical response of reform opponents? In part, opponents seek to defend the Barak-era regime. Naturally, the justices themselves and their deputized government

[There] are many who harbor deep suspicion of electoral democracy, and who would much prefer that a left-leaning judicial aristocracy manage the affairs of state than the Great Unwashed.

lawyers seek to preserve the unlimited power they have seized. But beyond them are many who harbor deep suspicions of electoral democracy, and who would much prefer that a left-leaning judicial aristocracy manage the affairs of state than the Great Unwashed. In support of their claims, these opponents have developed an entire Orwellian vocabulary, in which true “substantive” democracy is comprised of governance by a judicial elite that knows the public’s true desires and needs, while governing by elected representatives approved by a majority of the public is nothing less than tyranny itself.

Opponents turn every accepted concept of democratic and liberal government on its head in order to claim that Israel must retain the Barak-era judicial aristocracy. They argue, for instance, that there can be no liberty if any organ of the state has unlimited power, and, therefore, the Israeli judiciary must continue to enjoy unlimited power. Likewise, they argue that Israel needs checks and balances among its institutions, and therefore the Knesset must be deprived of all power to check the courts.

But to a much greater degree than arguments of substance, the opposition to judicial reform must be seen as an artifact of Israeli democracy. The opposition opposes judicial reform because it is a centerpiece policy of the current government, no matter what its content. Israeli politics have always been hyperbolic, and the opponents’ rhetoric upholds this dubious tradition. Thus, opponents describe judicial reform not simply as a policy to be opposed, but

rather as the transformation of Israel into a fascist dictatorship, a theocratic autocracy, and an exit from the family of democratic states. To a large degree, the debate has been *ad hominem*, with opponents rejecting reform on the grounds that reform politicians’ motives are largely political, although, naturally, opponent politicians’ motives are also largely political. None of these arguments affects the merits of the proposal.

There is an irony to the opposition to judicial reform – its existence and character demonstrate in practice exactly why the opponents’ claims of incipient dictatorship are nonsensical. Even in the era before Barak’s “constitutional revolution,” constitutional scholars agreed that Israeli governments and parliaments are exceptionally weak when compared to other democracies. All governments in Israel are unstable and subject to be undone in minutes by political bargains. The political logic of the opposition is to create chaos to destabilize the government and bring about new elections. It is, the opposition believes, exactly how the 1999 opposition toppled Prime Minister Netanyahu’s then-government,

and, in their opinion, how the 2022 opposition toppled then-Prime Minister Naftali Bennet’s government.

Chaos works as an opposition strategy precisely because the opposition’s claims of unlimited government power (absent the court) is a lie. Governments in Israel last only as long as they enjoy the confidence of parliament, and governments have never lasted to term, even in the pre-Barak era. There have been 37 governments for 25 parliaments, meaning one half of all governments fail to last even the term of the Knesset. Knessets typically fall to early elections, and no party has ever won a majority of seats in the Knesset. The idea that judicial reform could lead to all-powerful Israeli governments is risible.

One of the central reasons for Israel’s electoral instability is proportional representation. Israeli elections are not conducted by district, but at-large, with even small minority parties winning representation in the Knesset. John Stuart Mill identified proportional representation as a democratic technique for protecting minorities centuries ago, and constitutional scholars of Israel have often complained that minority interests are too powerful (for instance, that ultra-Orthodox Jews are able to win draft exemptions and generous welfare payments by trading their minority votes). When opponents claim that Israeli minorities will be left unprotected if judicial aristocracy is curbed, they are arguing that Israelis should reject the wisdom of their experience in favor of a hollow cliché.

The battle for judicial reform will continue in Israel with the characteristic amounts of noise, demagoguery and anger, but in the end, the democratic process will win out. And lovers of liberal democracies should be all the happier if judicial reform prevails.

AVI BELL, J.D., is professor of law at Israel’s Bar-Ilan University, visiting professor at the University of San Diego law school and a senior fellow of the Kohelet Foundation.

Crossroad for Israelis: Society and Government

by ARLENE KUSHNER

As the modern State of Israel approaches her 75th anniversary, little is being said about the fact that the nation is an historical anomaly. Yet this reality is critical to an understanding of who the Israelis are. No other people, banished from its land for an extended period, has ever returned with identity intact.

As the process of “ingathering” proceeded, Jews came from an astonishing 70 different lands. They returned from different cultures, speaking different languages. But they came knowing that they were Jews and that they were returning to the land of their ancestors. This understanding is what bound them together. David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, was a secular Jew; yet he was well versed in Tanach (Hebrew Bible) and knew that the land belonged to the Jews from ancient times.

This primary recognition was reflected clearly in the Declaration of Independence:

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance...

It is the self-evident right of the Jewish people to be a nation, as all other nations, in its own sovereign state.

The melding of Jews from different lands into one Israeli people, one Israeli culture, has been a complex process. Today we are looking in the main at the

second and third generation, and we can see the blending, as yet imperfect, of those different cultures into a new, and vibrant Israeli culture. One of its hallmarks, at least until recently, has been a sense of unity during times of difficulty. Israelis have been ranked by social scientists as among the happiest of people; we have been told that this happiness, despite multiple difficulties, is fostered by feelings of purpose and of belonging.

Today Israel is at a crossroad that is intrinsically tied to these issues of purpose and belonging. The path that the nation takes at this critical juncture will have enormous impact going forward.

At the heart of the matter are basic issues of national identity. But these issues did not arise suddenly now; we can trace their roots and a slow erosion of Israel’s founding identity back thirty years. Today, attitudes have shifted, and the matter has come to the fore.

■ *The Oslo Accords*

In 1993, the first agreement of the Oslo Accords was signed between

(renamed the West Bank by Jordan during Jordanian its 1949 – 1967 occupation) had a legitimate claim to that land and the right to establish a state or autonomy there and in the Gaza Strip. For years, left-wing Israeli governments were devoted to fostering a peace process that was in fact a chimera.

The PLO, headed by the unrepentant terrorist Yasser Arafat, was never going to make peace. An honest examination of PLO documents and policies made it eminently clear that what the Palestinian Arabs intended was an incremental weakening of Israel, while never abandoning terrorism, until such time as defeating her entirely was possible. But the left preferred to ignore the evidence and continue to embrace a deceitful Arafat – and subsequently his successor, Mahmoud Abbas.

Israel was losing her way. Israelis on the right were aggrieved and angry, with reason: The Mandate for Palestine of 1922 was an article of international law that allocated all of Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea

Israelis have been ranked by social scientists as among the happiest of people; we have been told that this happiness, despite multiple difficulties, is fostered by feelings of purpose and of belonging.

Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. This agreement and a subsequent one two years later embraced the left-wing notion that Palestinian Arabs living in Judea and Samaria

to the Jews for a homeland. *Uti possidetis juris* is an article of customary international law that recognizes the boundaries of a newly established state to be the last boundaries the territory had prior to

the state's establishment. In the case of the State of Israel, the last legal boundaries were those of the League of Nations' Mandate for Palestine, granted to Great Britain to administer after World War I and continued by the United Nations after World War II. What is more, the region envisioned for a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria was precisely the heart of the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) where the Jewish people were established in ancient times: Hebron, Shilo, Beit El. Surrender of this land would represent an unacceptable surrender of ancient Jewish heritage.

Add to this challenge the fact that within Israel there are Arab citizens who claim that they are denied the rights due

Israeli Arabs already have full civil rights...What they are seeking is the elimination of Jewish symbols and policies favorable to Jews: no Jewish star on the flag, no Hatikva...

them because Israel is a Jewish state. They demand that Israel become a "state of all its citizens." It must be emphasized that Israeli Arabs already have full civil rights. They can vote, receive access to all government services (health, pensions, etc.), can petition the court, and so forth. But they do not have national rights.

What they are seeking is the elimination of Jewish symbols and policies favorable to Jews: no Jewish star on the flag, no *Hatikva* as the national anthem, no right of return just for Jews, etc. The goal, far more than giving "equal rights" to Arab citizens, is destroying Israel as a Jewish state.

■ **Areas A, B and C**

The Oslo Accords divided Judea and Samaria into three regions, with Area C under the complete civil and security control of Israel. Palestinian Arabs, who would have more than adequate room in Areas A and B under PA control, have encroached upon Area C to an alarming

degree, erecting thousands of buildings illegally with EU funding. Although the goal of the building project is a de facto Palestinian state that interferes with Israeli contiguity, successive Israeli governments have failed to demolish the illegal building.

■ **The Court**

While Oslo was set in place, Aharon Barak became president of the Israeli Supreme Court. He unilaterally changed rules of the court, thereby providing it with unprecedented power and establishing a process for selecting new justices that put control in the hands of the court. Barak's court was left-wing; this process enabled continuous and unim-

ped selection of new left-wing justices. Time and again this court, sitting as the High Court of Justice (to hear appeals against other government bodies or appeals tribunals), has found in favor of Palestinian Arabs and otherwise blocked right-wing initiatives.

■ **Politics and Elections**

Over the course of the last several years there has been a discernable shift to the right in the Israeli electorate. This is with regard to matters of tradition and politics, particularly where Israeli national rights are concerned. This movement rightward is particularly noteworthy because it is occurring at a time of growing progressive, left-wing sentiment internationally. The progressive viewpoint is universalist, while the Israeli populace is increasingly nationalist.

Despite this public movement rightward, from 2019 through 2021 a major electoral instability prevailed (with "anti-Bibi" sentiment regarding Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu playing a role); there was a series of four elections in short order. Following the election in 2021, Naftali Bennett (the Yamina party) and Yair Lapid (Yesh Atid) agreed to establish a joint coalition as a matter of political expediency.

To secure sufficient mandates, Bennett and Lapid broke with tradition and brought in the Ra'am party, headed by Mansour Abbas. The problem here is not that it is an Arab party, but that it is an anti-Zionist party, the political arm of the Southern Branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel. This crossed a red line, moving some in the electorate more decisively to the right.

Bennett and Lapid agreed upon a rotation government, with Bennett serving as prime minister for the first two years. After one year, however, he called for a vote to dissolve the Knesset, and stepped down. Lapid then became interim prime minister until the next election.

■ **November 1, 2022**

Elections for the 25th Knesset were held on Nov. 1, 2022, and this time there was a decisive win for Benjamin Netanyahu and the Likud party. The electorate had spoken. By December 21, Netanyahu had succeeded in forging a majority coalition of 64 seats in the 120-seat Knesset, including Religious Zionists (Bezalel Smotrich), Otzma Yehudit (Itamar Ben Gvir), Shas (Aryeh Deri, whose position is currently on hold), UTJ (United Torah Judaism-Yitzhak Goldknopf). Ben Gvir did exceedingly well; his tough stance on terrorism was eagerly embraced by many.

The government laid out goals, with judicial reform and development of Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria at the top of the list. Additional issues of high priority included taking a strong stand against terrorism and stopping illegal Palestinian Arab building. After a struggle, Smotrich secured a ministerial position within the Defense Ministry, which had been promised to him in the coalition agreement. The post

gave him authority over civil affairs in Judea and Samaria. Ben Gvir assumed the role of public security minister, which gave him authority over the police and provided him with the opportunity to respond with a strong hand regarding unrest by Israeli Arabs.

Right-wing members of the electorate were jubilant and saw this as the beginning of a new era in Israel, an era that would reinstate founding values. This may still come to pass; the correctives that are being projected are exceedingly important. But the way is proving to be exceedingly difficult. While the coalition – including many members of Likud – are right-wing, Prime Minister Netanyahu himself is centrist.

■ **Judicial Reform**

The biggest problem confronting the government now, as it moves to actualize important judicial reforms, is the hysteria that has been generated on the left. Major protests, ostensibly against reforms that will destroy democracy, are being incited by Yair Lapid, who does not seem to be willing to accept the results of the election. According to several reliable reports, these protests are being funded by foreign sources.

Ironically, some individuals involved in the protest supported these reforms until very recently. Although several members of the government, including Netanyahu, Justice Minister Yariv Levin, and Simcha Rothman, chair of the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, have invited Lapid to negotiate adjustments in the reforms, he has refused. Lapid's rabble-rousing is shameful and destructive. Many outside Israel are prepared to accept his criticism of the proposed reforms with insufficient understanding of the issues.

Proposed changes in the composition of the committee that selects justices of the Supreme Court, for example, would render the process more democratic, not less. A severe limitation on the concept of "reasonableness," which was instituted during Barak's presidency, is



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a 2023 press conference. (Photo: Kobi Gideon)

also in order. As matters stand, the court, sitting as the High Court of Justice, does not have to base decisions on law – but can apply the justices' sense of what is "reasonable." This is a dangerous business, affording the court excessive power.

■ **Terrorism and Response**

Lastly, there is the matter of the way the government is handling terrorism. This is a critical issue, as Israel is now dealing with major attacks: early this year 14 innocent Israelis were killed by terrorists in just weeks. The double murder of two brothers, Hallel and Yagal Yaniv, who were on their way to their yeshivas, sent the nation reeling. They were shot on Route 60, a major thoroughfare that runs through the Palestinian Arab town of Huwara, which has a history of fomenting terrorism. Because of despair at the mounting deaths, and frustration at the fact that no official action was taken inside Huwara, dozens of Israelis entered the town on a destructive rampage. Vigilantism cannot be condoned, but it is important to understand what happened here.

Minister Ben Gvir, while not overtly praising this action, spoke about being at war. This caused an uproar, but his comments must be placed in context.

A week prior to this incident, the Israel Defense Forces had conducted a major operation in Nablus, taking out terrorist members of the vicious, recently formed Lions' Den group. In the course of the operation, a number of Palestinian non-combatants were wounded, bringing international criticism against Israel.

The United States and Egypt prevailed upon Netanyahu to send a delegation to Jordan to meet with Palestinian Authority officials to find ways to calm the situation. Reports then circulated from the United States and Egypt, saying that Israel had agreed to reduce anti-terror operations – limiting them to "smoking gun" instances. Ben Gvir, who had not been informed of this meeting before it happened, was livid. Backing off is precisely the wrong stance to take and signals weakness.

The question now is whether a true right-wing position on counterterrorism will prevail. Anything less would be regrettable, by virtue of being ineffective.

ARLENE KUSHNER is an investigative journalist, author of books on the PLO and Ethiopian Jews, and co-founder of the Legal Grounds Campaign, which provides courses for law students on Israel's legal rights in the land of Israel.

Israel's Move to US CENTCOM is Transformational

by Cdr. DAVID LEVY, USN (Ret.) and Col. (Res.) SHAY SHABTAI

Israel's shift from US EUCOM to US CENTCOM is no less than a formal recognition of Israel as a regional heavyweight. The move has transformed the strategic landscape. Under US CENTCOM's umbrella, Israel Defense Forces are now conducting exercises with Arab militaries, opportunities in long-range air operations have emerged, efficiencies in missile defense have been created and former adversaries are now eager to purchase Israel's military technology. Also, the shift creates a more natural and cooperative military environment for the IDF.

The second anniversary of Israel's shift to US Central Command (US CENTCOM) has arrived, and the regional and strategic impact of the change is readily apparent. Security cooperation with Arab states, multinational exercises, and frequent visits by the US CENTCOM commander are all indications of Jerusalem's deepening role as a regional power.

In January 2021, as part of the Trump administration's adjustments to the Unified Command Plan (UCP), Israel was officially transferred from US European Command (US EUCOM) to US CENTCOM. This meant Israel was expected to engage in security cooperation (e.g., exercises, military sales, operational planning) with US regional allies and partners also in US CENTCOM – specifically, with moderate Arab states. The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, were a vital precursor to this move and a harbinger of future Arab-Israeli collaboration.

■ **The Move**

The United States has 11 Unified Combatant Commands (COCOMs). Each is led by a four-star general or flag officer, and they all report directly to the president. Four are functional commands, like US Strategic Command (US STRATCOM), which oversees nuclear deterrence. Seven are geographic.

The geographic commands oversee operations in regional areas of responsibility (AORs). US EUCOM, es-

soft power solutions. The IDF, by contrast, is offensive-minded and prefers a direct approach.

The relationship reached a diplomatic crisis during the First Gulf War (1991). Israel wanted a direct liaison with the operational forces of US CENTCOM but was rebuffed. During the Iraq War, Israel was required to use US EUCOM as an interlocutor when assisting US and coalition forces in Iraq, including those tasked with containing Iran.

The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, were a vital precursor to this move and a harbinger of future Arab-Israeli collaboration.

established in 1952, was the first unified command to address the Soviet threat. It originally had auspices over the Middle East as well. US CENTCOM was created in 1983 in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the failure of Operation Eagle Claw to rescue American diplomats and embassy staff held hostage in Iran.

The IDF suffered a cultural mismatch during its tenure at US EUCOM. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, US EUCOM has seldom engaged in military operations (the Bosnia and Kosovo wars were rare exceptions). Like NATO, it prefers diplomacy and

Like the IDF, US CENTCOM is often involved in military operations. US CENTCOM has, indeed, been the most operational command of the last two decades, leading coalitions in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Its leadership is also more culturally aligned with Israel, making it the preferred partner.

■ **Common Threats**

US CENTCOM and the IDF face many common threats. This bond helps them overcome policy constraints and bureaucratic red tape, driving both sides to streamline cooperation. Thus, it is not surprising that Israel views the shift to

US CENTCOM as a natural and welcome event. The timing is also fortunate now that US EUCOM has shifted its resources to the Russo-Ukraine War and the defense of NATO, which leave little room for Middle East affairs.

One of a combatant commander's

with Iran, both work to mitigate Iran's activities, collect intelligence, and interdict weapons shipments.

A disadvantage to the shift to US CENTCOM pertains to security concerns in the West Bank and the activities of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

second anniversary of the shift, some effects are already evident. Israel will now participate in US CENTCOM's review and updating of Middle East CONOPS (Concept of Operations, or war plans). US CENTCOM will help sway Arab states into allowing the Israeli Air Force to use their airspace to conduct distant operations. Future operations may even include refueling and other logistics support in these states.

US CENTCOM and the IDF face many common threats. This bond helps them overcome policy constraints and bureaucratic red tape, driving both sides to streamline cooperation...

■ *The Benefit to Israel*

With the move to US CENTCOM, Israel gains advantages and efficiencies at the operational level. Theater anti-ballistic missile systems are distinct from short-range rocket and missile defense systems such as Iron Dome. These systems respond faster and have a higher success rate if a radar system near the launch site detects the launch early. Being in the same COCOM AOR means missile defense is under a single command structure with one set of rules of engagement (ROE), making command and control more predictable and dependable. For example, a US Aegis-capable destroyer could spot a launch over the Persian Gulf and pass targeting information to an Arrow system in Israel, greatly enhancing the likelihood of a successful interception.

functions is to serve as the top-level representative of the Department of Defense and the highest United States official on the ground alongside senior State Department ambassadors. They often meet with heads of state, heads of government and military chiefs. They convey the president's messages and intent. A COCOM will typically serve for three to four years.

Most COCOMs aspire to visit every friendly country in their AOR during their tenure, but few find the time to reach them all. Instead, trips are prioritized by the relative importance of the countries. Gen. Michael Kurilla took command of US CENTCOM in April 2022 and has already visited Israel five times. This level of attention is almost unprecedented in peacetime and signals Israel's weight as a US regional partner.

This highly politicized issue has caused friction between the two militaries in the past. Gen. Anthony Zini served as US Special Envoy (2001–2003) to Israel and the PA while they were enmeshed in the Second Intifada. Zini had to negotiate the widening gap between the two parties as a result of the recalcitrant PA's refusal to address terrorism. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, newly returned to office, will have to

Jerusalem's security cooperation with Arab states is increasing, and US CENTCOM's reliance on Israel as a regional influence continues to grow.

■ *Israel's Security Concerns*

The foremost of the common adversaries and threats facing both Israel and the United States in the region is Iran's nuclear weapons program. Tehran also targets the forces of both nations by providing surrogates with Iranian-made missiles, UAVs, and IEDs. While neither nation is in a formal state of war

assuage the concerns of Israel's new US CENTCOM Arab partners when he wishes to extend the Abraham Accords in response to local security issues.

The long-term implications of Israel's shift to US CENTCOM have yet to reveal themselves. However, at the

In November, Israel and the US held a joint exercise that drilled in long-range strike capability and inflight refueling. Potential adversaries, like Iran, recognize the capabilities displayed and the message sent by such exercises. Earlier this year, the IDF participated in the massive



A US Air Force KC-10 Extender assigned to the 908th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron, performs aerial refueling operations with an Israel Defense Forces F-16 Barak. (Photo: Staff Sgt. Christian Sullivan / US Air Force)

US-led International Maritime Exercise (IMX) hosted in Bahrain. Through these exercises, the IDF is learning to work in a multinational force with other US CENTCOM partners.

■ **People-to-People**

On a personal level, IDF personnel have and will continue to have positive interactions with the personnel of the US and Arab militaries. As a US CENTCOM member, Israel can now send IDF liaison officers to its components' headquarters. These officers will build relationships with their counterparts in the US and the region and will plan exercises and operations together. Other officers will participate in bilateral or multinational training events, symposia, and courses. These personal relationships build trust and understanding between regional military officers who may ultimately become military commanders or senior decision-makers.

In 1972, the American Department of Defense established the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) corps. These individuals serve as defense attachés, security assistance officers, and country desk officers on major and joint staffs. They are subdivided by region. While Israel was in US EUCOM, the FAOs were European experts. They were NATO and EU specialists and spoke European languages. In US CENTCOM, the FAOs are Middle East experts. They have served in the countries of the region and have trained with IDF and Arab military officers. They speak Arabic, Farsi, or Hebrew, and know the history, personalities, and nuances of the region. Thus, Israel's interlocutors at US CENTCOM's highest echelon are experts on regional concerns.

Israel's move to US CENTCOM is already having an impact. Jerusalem's security cooperation with Arab states is increasing, and US CENTCOM's reliance on Israel as a regional influence continues to grow. The opportunities and efficiencies

gained in regional multinational exercises, unified command structure, and personal relationship-building brought about under US CENTCOM's auspices have only just begun to show results that may yield major dividends in the future.

Cdr. DAVID LEVY, a retired US Navy Commander and former US diplomat, is a senior research fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University. He was Director of Theater Security Cooperation for US Naval Forces Central Command and was US Air and Naval Attaché in Tunis. Cdr. Levy is a former RAND Corp. Federal Executive Fellow and a Ph.D. candidate at Bar-Ilan University. Col. SHAY SHABTAI, IDF (Res.), is an expert in Israeli national security, strategic planning, strategic communication, and a cybersecurity strategy consultant. He is about to complete his Ph.D. at Bar-Ilan University. This article first appeared as a BESA Center policy brief.

Israel: A Strategic Ally for the United States

by LAURI B. REGAN

For 75 years, Americans and Israelis have shared fruitful trade relations, cultural affinities, political similarities, and values. And over the past 40 years, since the 1983 announcement by President Ronald Reagan of “US-Israel Security Cooperation,” a strong alliance has been built on a foundation of mutual national security interests, strengthening both countries and their allies as well as maintaining regional stability in a part of the world susceptible to chaos and disorder.

It wasn't always smooth. President Barack Obama's Mideast policy reduced America's regional security role, inserting daylight into the relationship and empowering America's enemies including Iran and Russia. But then, President Donald Trump's pro-Israel policies centered on the recognition that a strong Israel, supported by a strong America, would enhance peace in the region. And it did – in the form of the Abraham Accords.

President Joe Biden has reverted to Obama-era Mideast policy, enabling a drumbeat of threats of long-term damage to the US-Israel alliance from many powerful Democrats. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT), a Democrat member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, went so far as to describe Iranian-aligned, terrorism-financier, Qatar, as America's “best partner in the region.” Members of the congressional Progressive Caucus have threatened to restrict military aid to Israel and/or cut-off funding for the Iron Dome missile defense system.

It is therefore imperative to revisit the multi-faceted strategic significance of Israel to American national security interests and ensure the alliance continues to maintain bipartisan support for the well-being and long-term survival of both of countries and the West more broadly.

■ US ‘Onshore Balancer’

Former Secretary State Alexander Haig once described Israel as the “largest, most battle-tested and cost-effective US aircraft carrier, which does not require a single US personnel, cannot be sunk and is located at a most critical area for US national security interests.” General George Keegan, former head of US Air Force Intelligence, declared that “Israel is worth five CIAs.” And former Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HA) recognized that “Israel's contribution to US military intelligence is greater than all NATO countries combined.”

threat, Iran's subversion of the Gulf and the Middle East, al-Qaeda's entrenchment in Yemen which controls key sea lanes for oil tankers, the war on the Saudi-Yemen border, the intensification of Iranian-Syrian cooperation, the enhanced Middle Eastern profile of Russian and China, Turkey's Islamization, etc.

Thirteen years on, those threats have only grown and there is no question that Israel is the most reliable US ally in the region and the only country with the strength, capability, and commitment to the survival of democratic principles, to assist the United States as it confronts these challenges.

Supporting Israel has enabled order in the region, managed by the United States from offshore, without the commitment of US forces; not a single American soldier has risked his or her

Supporting Israel has enabled order in the region, managed by the United States from offshore, without the commitment of US forces...

On a 2010 visit to Israel, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen discussed a series of mutual threats to America and Israel:

Iran's nuclearization, global Islamic terrorism, domestic and regional war in Iraq, escalation of the ballistic

life for Israel. In fact, unlike other allies located in strategic arenas across the globe, not one GI has ever been stationed in Israel, with the exception of 100 American soldiers managing the US X-Band Radar monitoring Iran from the Negev Desert since 2012. So, while the US benefits from the commonality

of threats, it is Israel that exists on the front lines of the war against radical Islam and terror, and often suffers the resulting casualties.

Israel and the US are about to mark two years since the announcement of Israel's move from the US European Command (EUCOM) to the US Central Command (CENTCOM) with responsibilities for the Middle East and Persian Gulf, eastward to Afghanistan. Officially, the move took place in November 2021, although regional exercises in the Red Sea began well before that.

Last December, the two countries participated in combined air exercises designed to build readiness to face Iran and other regional threats. This was followed

ironclad partnership with the IDF – are critical to regional security and stability. All these trips to the region inform my understanding of the threats and challenges faced by each country and the capabilities available. This visit... reinforced the importance of this relationship and the many opportunities ahead of us for the Middle East.

Furthermore, Israel is the only US regional ally with a democratic government remaining a constant American partner. The governments of America's other allies in the Mideast are totalitarian or authoritarian and their inherent instability poses the possibility of in-

President Biden is continuing down the same path.

When Israel's enemies see the alliance weaken, they become bolder. If the US is perceived as abandoning Israel, the Arabs will have every reason to assume that when befitting, America will also abandon them leaving them to turn to our enemies. As Dennis Prager stated,

You cannot weaken the protection [of Israel] without weakening America's moral values, which form the basis of America's greatness. Even aside from compromising America's moral essence, weakening American support of Israel will only strengthen the America-hating Islamists. The notion that the primitive monsters of the Taliban, Hamas, al-Qaeda, and the like will become pro-American – or just stop attacking America – if America weakens its support of Israel, betrays an ignorance of evil that is frightening.

While historically, support for a strong US-Israel alliance has been bipartisan, Democrat support has become unreliable.

in January 2023 by the historic Juniper Oaks 23 exercises, the largest joint military exercise between the United States and Israel involving naval, land, air, space, and cyber warfare elements. While American politicians may fret over Israeli domestic policies, US military personnel recognize the strategic importance of a strong alliance with Israel.

Israel's Gulf and Red Sea neighbors recognize it as well, fearing both an aggressive conventionally armed Iran as well as the potential for a nuclear Iran. These concerns which helped lead to the Abraham Accords. They see that a strong Israel is necessary to keep their enemies at bay, and also to enhance peace in the region.

CENTCOM Commander Gen. Eric Kurilla said on his November 2022 visit to Israel, his fourth in seven months:

Our strategic partnerships within the region – to include our longstanding,

ternal political and military challenges. Those countries, including Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia continuously face threats posed by radical Islam and have inconsistent records when it comes to providing America reliable military support.

■ **Consequences of 'Daylight'**

While historically, support for a strong US-Israel alliance has been bipartisan, Democrat support has become unreliable. President Obama's policies were filled with contentious and public conflicts with Israel on issues from the Palestinians to the Iranian nuclear program and demonstrated a lack of understanding of the value of America's relationships with our regional allies. They also showed a fundamental misunderstanding of the history of the Middle East, confusion as to the motivations of its relevant players and the true causes of a lack of peace in the region.

■ **Similar Interests, Enemies**

The common argument that American support for Israel inflames Muslim hatred of the US, generating terrorism, is backward. Islamists hate both countries because of who we are, what we do, and what we represent. Islamists view the United States and Israel as fundamentally the same, two countries joined together in similar pursuits – “the Little Satan” and “the Great Satan.” In a 2008 speech, Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders said:

The war against Israel is not a war against Israel. It is a war against the West. It is jihad. Israel is simply receiving the blows that are meant for all of us. If there would have been no Israel, Islamic imperialism would have found other venues to release its energy and its desire for conquest...

As such, it is natural and beneficial that the two countries cooperate across a range of endeavors.

With regard to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Israel provided America with invaluable knowledge in asymmetric warfare against suicide bombers, car bombs, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), booby traps, anti-tank missiles, and interrogation of terrorists. Israel provided the US with continuous, real-time

including artificial intelligence, directed energy, counter-unmanned aerial systems, biotechnology, and hypersonic capabilities. The Stuxnet virus used to thwart Iranian nuclear development, the Iron Dome missile defense system and other joint projects have saved an untold number of lives.

airline security systems, non-radio-logical breast cancer diagnostic equipment, computerized systems for medication administration, ingestible video cameras for diagnosing cancer and digestive disorders, heart pump devices, and Parkinson's, cancer, and acne treatments – benefitting people across the globe.

Israel's purchase of military equipment produced in the United States provides an economic boon to the military industry as well as providing thousands of American jobs.

intelligence; US soldiers who faced IEDs and other terrorist weapons benefited from Israeli strategic and tactical information. American soldiers trained in IDF facilities, and Israeli-made drones were used in reconnaissance and attack missions. Soldiers fighting in Iraq benefited from Israel's intensive military experience specifically designed for the situations facing combat personnel there.

Domestic terror attacks also underscore the importance of the US-Israel relationship for Americans at home who benefit from the lessons of an Israeli population that has faced domestic terrorism since Israel's inception. Israel shares with the US military, intelligence, and local crime fighting communities vital intelligence information, counter-terrorism techniques, airport security procedures, first-response to terror attacks, and national security knowledge that only decades of battle-tested experience can produce. It is impossible to put a price – in terms of lives and treasure – on the intelligence, expertise, and homeland defense lessons that Israel has provided to the United States.

■ **Advanced Systems**

Washington and Jerusalem have worked together on research and development of numerous weapons systems

General Dynamics, which produces F-16 fighters, attributes hundreds of improvements to the jets' systems to Israeli technology, estimated to be worth billions of dollars and to have saved years of R&D that would have otherwise been required. Israel's purchase of military equipment produced in the United States provides an economic boon to the military industry as well as providing thousands of American jobs.

Moreover, America's superpower status has consistently been boosted by Israel's military achievements as the US reaps direct benefits from Israel's military credibility. While Iran moves closer to attaining nuclear power status, the US can be perceived as weak on the international stage. On the other hand, when Israel states that a nuclear Iran is unacceptable, the world believes the threat and understands Israel's existential challenges and will to follow through on that threat.

■ **World Contributions**

Finally, Israeli advancements in technology and science are not limited to military application. Israeli civilian innovations include Waze, cell phone technology, various Windows operating systems, voicemail improvements,

■ **Conclusion**

Russian President Vladimir Putin's reassertion of Moscow's power in the Mideast and Europe, the dangers posed by radical Islamic forces, and a dangerously aggressive and militarily advanced China (which is now allying with America's enemies including Iran) reinforce the necessity of the United States maintaining a strong partnership with Israel. Israel's strategic location in the heart of the Mideast; democratically elected government; growing and stable economy; technological, scientific, medical, intelligence-gathering, and military advancements; and common threat assessment ensure that it remains a paramount national security asset to the United States.

Israel has proven to be a strategic ally to the US in military, political, and ideologically driven confrontations for the past 30 years. It will continue to play a vital role in ensuring America's success in thwarting Iran's hegemonic intentions and the threat of radical Islam and imminent terror attacks at home and abroad for decades to come. In fact, Israel's Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer recently said:

Just as Britain was the most important ally of the US in the 20th century, Israel will become the most important ally in the 21st century.

LAURI B. REGAN is the vice chair of the executive board and chair of the advisory board of the Endowment for Middle East Truth and the vice president, treasurer and board member of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East.

CENTCOM Before Israel

with Lt. Gen. EARL HAILSTON, USMC (Ret.)

Lt. Gen. Earl Hailston, USMC (ret.) served as Commanding General of US Marine Corps Forces Pacific, US Marine Forces Central Command, and US Marine Corps Bases Pacific. *inFOCUS* Editor Shoshana Bryen spoke with him recently about his experiences with CENTCOM before Israel joined.

Shoshana Bryen: You spent a lot of time in CENTCOM with our Arab allies, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, but you never went to Israel in that context, and you never really saw the other half of the Middle East. What were you learning when you were with them about Israel and about the US relationship with Israel?

Earl Hailston: It really was a learning event. I had just moved from being an infantry officer to becoming an aviator, which was at the time of the 1973 War. After 1973, we became very closely attuned to and paid attention to the tremendous strength of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) and military-to-military relations between the United States and Israel. Pilots who fought in the '73 war came and talked to us.

■ *The 'Israel Problem'*

So, I started with a basis of great respect for and attention to Israeli forces and our Israeli friends. But if you fast forward from that, I found myself in a position preparing US forces in CENTCOM. I'd never been to Israel, I'd never really been in CENTCOM before, but post-9/11 I was very much involved in trying to prepare for our move into Iraq, particularly force buildup. I was the commander of the Marine component, and my orders were to find a place for us to bed down and move into the region.

Every morning I jumped in my airplane and flew out of our base in Bahrain to any number of regional places, particularly Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. And I got tremendous pushback. Although we were welcomed by our hosts in Bahrain,

we got pushback in this sense that, "Oh, we're here. We think a lot of you, we like the United States. But I'd like to help if you can solve the Israeli issue first."

And I would get no farther than my three cups of tea and I would turn around and leave at the end of the day and find myself at four o'clock in the afternoon at our staff meetings talking to the commander of CENTCOM, Gen. Tommy Franks.

And he'd say, "Well, how'd you do? When can we move in?"

And I'd shake my head and say, "I got absolutely nowhere. I met some people, great conversations, haven't got an agreement."

And the conversation was very blunt and forward, "You need to do better. I need some answers."

And every day the script was passed from one country to the next. "Welcome. However, I can't help you until you and the United States solve our Israel problem."

If you do that to somebody for months on end, all of a sudden, I did find myself saying, "I've got to take care of these 20 countries over here. I need forces in. We've got something going on." I found myself asking, "How important is Israel?"

And so, Israel became the speed bump in my road to getting things done.

■ *What They were Saying*

During this process, I also learned an awful lot about our Middle East partners, loosely used. And I can't claim even today in 2023 that I understand them. I understand how difficult it is to understand them, what they're saying, what they're doing and what they really mean.

We understood quickly that what

you hear is not really what you're hearing. ... Even at that time, there were a lot of undercover talks and missions through a series of those countries. At the time, for example, I did place a lot of American troops into Jordan, but I didn't understand or appreciate the private relationship between Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and the King of Jordan. So that made life completely different. I got faced with an awful lot of pushback and I wasn't getting any help.

I had some crazy questions. If the Middle East was so important to us, why did we have this policy and what's going on? Without covering history, we went through the move into Iraq and then through the region. I grew longer in the tooth and older and I retired.

■ *Visiting Israel*

Bryen: When I invited you to visit Israel, how did you feel about that? Did you jump up and say, "Yes, this is my opportunity." Or did you say, "Eh?"

Hailston: I got the invitation and I had to really think about it for quite a while. And I had in the back of my mind the table just reversed. Instead of sitting there across from a sheik, I was going to be sitting across the table from an Israeli partner and hearing the same: "Why are you here? What's going on?" I made the decision to go.

Bottom line up front, it is the best program that we had going mil-to-mil and pol-mil meetings across the world and especially in that region. It was terrific. I went to Israel and shortly after I got there and met people, I mean it was a matter of the first few days, my old

respect and deep respect was immediately renewed. And life has to be reality. It can't be the six o'clock news at night. Especially it cannot be CNN.

A couple of things that stick in my mind, but sitting on the beautiful streets of the city of Tel Aviv in the evening after a good day of visiting forces, visiting people, or meeting with the Knesset members, sitting and relaxing in what could have been a street in Paris, having a dinner or an evening cocktail of some sort and chatting with local folks. That's one. So, it is a peaceful, wonderful place full of people who love democracy and want to expand it through the region.

■ *Back in the Region*

Bryen: Let's go back to the region and if you would give us your thoughts on how Israel integrates. Does it seem to you that the Arab partners have accepted this? If they don't want to work with Israel, we, the United States, are going to have trouble.

Hailston: We need to understand the deep inside relationships that still remain on Israel's western border with Egypt, for example. Anybody who remembers the '67, the '73 wars and what took place has to understand that the relationship there now is incredible and it's very, very important to the region, but it's mostly under the table.

This is part of what's hard to understand. They acknowledge it, but not publicly – "You must keep it quiet that I came here to see you today." In the rest of the region, I do love to hear them reach out. And there's a reason for that. If you have common interest. And that's what Israel has paid attention to. What are our common interests here? And common interest is what goes to the tail end of your question of who is the problem in the region, writ large?

■ *Two Problems*

Hailston: Every single country I went to had two problems. One that was fictitious: that was Israel. That is something that was played up and stays there and

they use it for a placard. The other one is felt deep in their souls, and it is on the eastern side of the Gulf and that is Iran.

And everybody is paying attention to what Iran does or doesn't do or how they do it. And so how do I see things going in the region? We've taken a terrible step backwards with the expansion of nuclear power out there what we have allowed Iran to do. No one here wants to understand – because it is 5,000 to 7,000 miles away from us – that they need to produce two things: The first one will be sent to Tel Aviv and the second one will be sent to Haifa or someplace like that.

And we let that roll off our backs. I mean that is something that Israeli people cannot accept. And I think people understand that here on the surface, but they don't pay it enough attention. We have a very, very, very big problem. The poor Iranian people do too, who are subjugated to all of this stuff and they

I went to Israel and shortly after I got there and met people, I mean it was a matter of the first few days, my old respect and deep respect was immediately renewed.

are not allowed to voice their opinions and their opinions are not what the Khamenei's of the world espouse. We the United States, need to stand arm-in-arm with our Israeli friends.

■ *The Palestinians*

Hailston: I do believe someone has to break through on the Palestinian problem – and to let people understand it.

And the front page of what you and I accept as our big newspaper here today, I have to read about deaths caused by Israeli soldiers doing something or other and I won't go into detail on that. It gives no credit to the fact that actually that comes from the Israeli people protecting their nation from terrorists. There is a Palestinian leadership that is

not going to resolve this problem. I don't know what they're going to do. But we have to understand that for Israel, it is protection of a sovereign country that is going on. We turn the tables on that to poor Palestinian people being abused.

That's not the truth.

■ *What Happened in Iraq*

Bryen: That is, I think, the point that the Gulf Arabs made. Solve the Israel problem, they said. And for them, the Israel problem was in fact the Palestinian problem. At some point, they took the Palestinians out of the middle, they took the US out of the middle, and they began to look at the region differently. What changes did you see, or have you seen since then in their understanding of what's going on?

Hailston: Yes, I've seen a better understanding from the people that you sit

across from at the table. But again, they don't say that publicly to the world. That is the other issue. They do not give it public support. I'm going to give you a short story that illustrates what I found stem-to-stern in the Middle East.

We were done with our move into Iraq. We'd gone all the way to Tikrit. Saddam's sons, Uday and Qusay, were gone, and we were diligently at work trying to find Saddam Hussein.

I had in my headquarters an Iraqi whose entire family was summarily executed by Saddam. We, with him, found their graves. They all died of a disease – a .30 caliber bullet hole somewhere in their foreheads. Mother, father, uncles. We were sitting around much like we did in Tel Aviv after a full day's work,



Michael Kurilla, head of the United States Central Command (left), meets with now former IDF chief Aviv Kohavi. (Photo: Israel Defense Forces)

the meetings were over, we were relaxing a little bit, literally, honestly in the middle of the desert, by the campfire. And he was there with my colonels and a couple of other generals. We were pondering why we can't find Saddam. This is the son who has lost his family for doing nothing but being in the middle of the fight.

I looked to him and said, "You've got to give me an answer. You need to help us here. What are we doing or how do we do this thing?"

And he told me, "I can't help you. Tonight, if Saddam came to my tent, I would not turn him over. I would hide him and help him to escape."

I said, "What? You're kidding me?"

He said, "No, you're an infidel. He is an Arab and he's a Muslim. I must help him. I cannot help you in that case."

The light came on, I put my head in my hands. A man who had lost his entire family to somebody was blinded by something that is not reality, or, as we see the human world, of holding people accountable. And I think we need to put this in our quiver to know when we negotiate and to talk with these folks, it doesn't matter how many people you have murdered and killed and what you have done to the rest of your country in between. Somehow Lawrence of Arabia had better luck than we did maybe. But that's the lesson I've carried for all these years.

■ Looking to the Future

Bryen: That's a depressing lesson.

But it's always my goal to leave on a positive note. So, if I were looking for a positive takeaway from changes, what do we take away and is there a positive future for the United States in the region?

Hailston: A simple answer to your question is for us continuing to work. I think we make the most of what we have seen, especially recently in the rest of the world. We have a problem, a deep problem here in Washington, but Israel has done so well with Saudi Arabia. We need to continue with that. We cannot back step at all on the Jordanian issue and the relationship, and somehow or other continue to live on and improve and strengthen the relationships with Egypt.

And I think that there is a chance, especially right now with how things are going with a couple of those countries to accentuate common interests. And there is that one central common interest that is held in the region."

That's the road that I would embark upon. I would start down that road of common interests, but then common interests expand out into common interests of livelihood and better things for the family and the region, and we can flourish.

Now, can we boil this down to what is in our national interest?

I've done a lot of study as a military professional on terrorism and how you undermine a government. And I can't think of any better example than what is crossing the American border right now. Two Americans were murdered by the cartel, and we've had a hundred thousand deaths to poison fentanyl coming across the border. We have criminals that are shooting folks left and right here in the country.

This is going to undermine our government. People are not going to feel safe to sit down in the street (and I mean our Tel Avivs) and have our open lunches and our drinks. I had a series of emails yesterday about who in my church is armed for the guy coming through the door on Sunday? This isn't only about Jewish people and synagogues. People have to understand that.

And for Israel, with people infiltrating across any of their borders, it can be from Lebanon, or it can be the Palestinians coming and doing what they want. Israel is doing the right thing. They have to pay attention to it. The rest of the world has to understand how they are saving their sovereign citizens. And I think the positive note is we have to understand that. We don't. We do not understand that now.

Bryen: That's both positive and negative at the same time.

Hailston: Yes, and that's how it worked.

A good young friend of mine devoted all of his efforts to preparing his trip to Israel. He wrote up afterwards how everybody needs to visit the Holy Land. He posted it, and I don't know how many friends he's got, but everybody saw a tremendous picture of Israel yesterday and he said, "If there is nothing else you do in your life, you must visit Israel."

Bryen: I'll go with that. Earl Hailston, thank you for a great and enlightening perspective on the US military relationship with Israel and our Arab friends.

Making Aliyah, Making a Difference

by **ERIC ROZENMAN**

Before she became a resident of Beersheva, Israel, a Dartmouth College student from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida started spending summers and school breaks in the Jewish state. Israel. Ft. Lauderdale was “a great place to grow up,” Menucha Saitowitz told *inFOCUS*, but “I decided to spend a year [in Israel] to see if I could make aliyah.”

She could. She met her husband, “an American who’d also come to Israel on his own.” They both were observant Jews who “fell in love with the country.” That was 11 years and four children – ages 9, 8, 5 and 3 – ago.

Now, still dusty, it’s not sleepy. Construction cranes cross the horizon, like they do in much of Israel, the city hosts a concert hall in the center of downtown...

With a desire “to make a difference in building the country,” Saitowitz worked for several Israeli non-profit organizations. “The government makes grants to non-profits working in social reform areas,” including inter-group relations, she notes. “But sometimes it takes two years to pay. ... Meanwhile, the organizations have to raise funds to keep the doors open.”

A former senior Israeli diplomat, also speaking to *inFOCUS* last summer as Israel headed to its fifth election in

three years, indirectly explained such delays: “The country functions in spite of its government.”

Now at an organization called Desert Stars, Menucha Saitowitz works to “to help empower young Bedouin, through leadership, education, and integration into wider Israeli society.” Bedouin comprise nearly 300,000 of Israel’s estimated 9.5 million people. Most, but by no means all, live in the Negev Desert region, of which Beersheva, with approximately 210,000 residents, is the largest city and de facto capital.

Occasional visitors to Israel may remember the Bedouin town of Rahat as

a relatively small concentration of tin-roofed buildings and tents not far off the main highway into Beersheva. They would be stunned by today’s Rahat, a close-to-the-ground city of 80,000 people that sprawls far across the northern Negev’s low hills.

“Desert Stars operates a high school in [nearby] Lahav,” Saitowitz said. “It enrolls Bedouin students from tribes and towns all across the Negev. It employs both Arab and Jewish staff, and one-third of classes are taught in Hebrew to

ensure students graduate with strong command of the language.”

Only a few generations ago, many Bedouin were, if not nomadic then semi-nomadic. They often relied on sheep herding. Today, Saitowitz said “some Bedouin are quite prosperous. There are doctors, lawyers, university professors” at Beersheva’s Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

But there are complications. For example, “In one Bedouin town, there are two tribes with a long standing blood feud. Within the town, they cannot go to the same school or interact in any way. However, both families send students to our school. We send two different buses, one for each family, to get around this issue.”

Israel is a high-tech power,” Saitowitz said, “but some areas lack internet connections.” During the Covid-19 crisis when students needed to study at home, Desert Stars provided them with computers and internet sticks so they could connect to online Zoom meetings and continue learning. Many Bedouin families lack computers, instead relying on their smartphones for internet. “However, you can’t write an essay or research paper on your phone,” she said.

Desert Stars describes its mission as “building a generation of Bedouin leaders to promote a thriving Bedouin community and a strong Israeli society. We empower mission-driven young people to realize their individual and collective potential as change-making leaders.”

Its leadership and academic programs for youth and young adults from Bedouin clans across the Negev, include:



Beersheva in southern Israel. (Photo: ArieStudio)

Forsan Al Sahra – Youth Movement (ages 12-18); Desert Stars Leadership High School (14-18); Rawafed Empowerment Center (14-18); Incubator for Leadership and Entrepreneurship (18-19); Raidat Leadership Program for Women (20 and older); and Desert Stars Alumni Program (20 and older).

Stories about high crime rates in Bedouin neighborhoods, and disregard for the state itself, have made news in Israel, but these incidents represent a miniscule segment of Bedouin society, Saitowitz asserts. She points out that in March, 2022 “when an Israeli Bedouin killed four people [in Beersheva] during ‘the knives intifada,’ it was shocking. We never had that type of violence before. Bedouin leaders, including family members of the terrorist, immediately repudiated his action. They said, ‘This is not us. These are not our values.’”

Saitowitz said that President Isaac Herzog and Knesset member Mansour Abbas spoke at the opening of a new cultural center in Rahat in February 2022. Abbas, who participated in the

2021-2022 coalition government of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Foreign Minister/Prime Minister Yair Lapid, heads the Southern Branch of Israel’s Muslim fundamentalist Islamic Movement. According to Saitowitz, Abbas encouraged those in attendance, mainly Desert Stars participants, to explore and embrace their multi-layered identity as Muslim, Arab citizens of Israel. He advocated participation in Israeli society and working with state institutions to achieve much-needed advancement for Arab citizens. The Southern Branch of the Islamic Movement is not considered as rejectionist of the state of Israel as the Northern Branch, she added.

“I think Bennett did a good job in trying to promote the integration of minority groups into Israeli society,” said Saitowitz, who describes her own politics as, “personally, right-wing. ... I think helping Bedouin integrate and advance is a way to strengthen Israel.”

Promoting better integration of Bedouin into Israeli society is Saitowitz’s

day job. In addition to that and being a wife and mother of four children under 10, she is a Beersheva booster. With her husband she was part of a small group “who worked to make Beersheva attractive” to more young families. “With housing costs impossible in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv ... there is now a core group” promoting the desert capital as the ideal home for young families – fellow immigrants and ‘standard’ Israeli families alike.

“And the mayor [Ruvik Danilovich] is terrific,” Saitowitz says. “We have new parks and playgrounds ... and there is a staffer dedicated to assisting new English-speakers in dealing with the bureaucracy” when it comes to settling in Beersheva.

The nearby Tel Beer Sheva (“Well of the Oaths” or “Well of the Seven”) archaeological site, open to the public was first settled around 4,000 B.C.E. The Torah relates that it played a key role in the lives of the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Regardless, a few decades ago modern Beersheva was a sleepy, dusty desert outpost.

Now, still dusty, it’s not sleepy. Construction cranes cross the horizon, like they do in much of Israel, the city hosts a concert hall in the center of downtown and, says Saitowitz, more shopping malls (Israelis call them canyons – pronounced cañyons) per capita than any where else in the country.

In addition to the Beersheva River Park built in cooperation with the Jewish National Fund on reclaimed wasteland, with its lake and athletic fields, the city offers “all these new malls” and “dining out in new, nice restaurants and cafes.” Like the rest of Israel, “it’s not cheap, and if you’re not in technology, salaries are not high,” Saitowitz says.

Regardless, she notes, it’s a wonderful place to live, and helps fulfill the dream of Israel’s founding prime minister, David Ben Gurion, of settling the Negev.

ERIC ROZENMAN is communications consultant for the Jewish Policy Center.

“Jews are Not Mere Victims”

An *in*FOCUS interview with ARSEN OSTROVSKY

Arsen Ostrovsky is a leading human rights attorney and CEO of The International Legal Forum (ILF). His digital media reaches millions of users, making him truly heard around the world, both on-line and in person. In 2018, Ostrovsky was awarded the Nefesh B’Nefesh Bonei Zion prize for his ‘Israel Advocacy’ and last December, *The Algemeiner* called him one of the Top 100 People Positively Influencing Jewish Life. *in*FOCUS Editor Shoshana Bryen spoke with him recently.

***in*FOCUS QUARTERLY: TELL US ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FORUM.**

Arsen Ostrovsky: ILF has been at the forefront of some of the most significant legal battles against antisemitism, BDS, and terrorism during the past year, including initiating successful legal proceedings against Unilever over the Ben & Jerry’s boycott, taking on Amnesty International over “apartheid” allegations and proudly standing up for the Jewish nation against relentless lawfare attacks before the United Nations and the International Criminal Court.

In a landmark case, ILF is now taking on University of California-Berkeley, following its unprecedented attempt last summer to exclude Jewish and Zionist students from campus activities, and more recently, was instrumental in stopping the flow of funds to an American charity that had been funneling money to a PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine)-affiliate terrorist group.

Underpinning ILF’s mission, is the belief that the law can, and must, be utilized as a powerful tool, in order to change the paradigm from defense and reaction to pro-active work in the fight against antisemitism, terrorism and the delegitimization campaign against the State of Israel.

***i*F: HOW MUCH TROUBLE ARE JEWS IN?**

Ostrovsky: Sadly, I see many gathering dark clouds on the horizon for Jews in the United States, where antisemitism and violence is at record highs, and where some neighborhoods are virtually becoming no-go zones for Jews, something unfathomable barely a decade ago.

Today’s antisemitism is vicious, relentless and multifaceted. We see it playing out on the streets of America, in classrooms and boardrooms, in communications media and civil society, by celebrities and on-line, in the cultural arena, courtrooms and beyond.

Whereas previously, it may have been unfashionable to target Jews or be openly antisemitic, today we see violence against Jews skyrocketing, neo-Nazism and Holocaust distortion surging, and antisemitic tropes spreading like wildfire.

Antisemitism is like a virus, that continues to morph and mutate through generations.

Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (of blessed memory) observed:

In the Middle Ages, Jews were hated because of their religion. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century they were hated because of their race. Today they are hated because of their nation state, the state of Israel. It takes different forms, but it remains the same thing: the view that Jews have no right to exist as free and equal human beings.

■ ***Against Nation and People***

Ostrovsky: In other words, today’s modern manifestation of antisemitism is directed not only against Jews as individuals, but against Israel as the Jewish nation and collective embodiment of the Jewish people.

We see this increasingly expressed through the BDS Movement, which seeks to paint Israel as a pariah state, ostracize it from the world and ultimately dismantle it.

We see it in the way human rights discourse is turned around and weaponized against Jews and as a means to vilify the State of Israel, for example through antisemitic blood libels, by organizations like Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, which charge Israel with the grave crime of apartheid.

We see it on campuses across America, which have become ground zero in the fight against antisemitism and where Jewish students are being attacked, harassed, intimidated, marginalized and excluded, often even forced to conceal or deny core elements of their very Jewish identity.

We see it from the halls of Congress, where elected officials are engaging in antisemitic tropes, highly divisive rhetoric and incitement.

And we see it in a relentless campaign waged against Zionism, the Jewish people’s right to self-determination and liberation in their ancestral homeland. These antisemites masquerade behind a façade of anti-Zionism or vilification of Israel, but underneath it, is sheer, unadulterated Jew hatred to the core.

■ **Multidirectional Antisemitism**

Ostrovsky: This antisemitism today comes from all directions: the progressive far left, the resurgent far right, and the Islamists. Although these groups come from widely disparate political beliefs, the one unifying factor is a deep-seated hatred of Jews, and by extension, of the Jewish state, Israel.

Then pouring fuel on this antisemitic fire today, we have the phenomena of social media, which has contributed to creating an environment in which we see antisemitism on steroids, with Jew-hatred, incitement, Holocaust distortion and conspiracy theories spreading on-line unabated.

We need to recognize also that violence against Jews does not occur in a vacuum. It is a direct result of a pervasive discourse, demonizing Jews and vilifying the sole collective Jewish state, all under the guise of purported criticism of Zionism and Israel. As we have seen throughout history, and indeed today, words have consequences, and such hate, incitement and peddling in antisemitic tropes directly contributes to a climate of fear, harassment and violence against the Jewish community.

Yet, at the same time, notwithstanding the grave challenges before us, I refuse to give up hope.

■ **Jews are Not Mere Victims**

Today, Jews are also not mere victims. We have legal tools at our disposal, such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which our organization has invoked against UC Berkeley, over its exclusion of Zionist students, and anti-BDS laws throughout the United States.

We have a widely endorsed and adopted definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which serves as an indispensable tool in identifying antisemitism when it occurs and allows us to educate and take action.

We see also many civil society groups and thought leaders speaking



Arsen Ostrovsky

out against antisemitism, and despite a small number of vocal antisemites in Congress, the overwhelming bipartisan majority remains outspoken in the fight against Jew-hatred. I am also immensely uplifted and inspired by the incredibly courageous students on campus, who taking on the antisemites head-on.

Antisemitism might be the oldest and most enduring of hatreds, but we must never give up hope in the fight against this great evil and continue to hold our heads high, as proud Jews and Zionists.

■ **Lawfare**

iF: IS THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT (ICC) THE MOST SERIOUS THREAT ISRAEL FACES IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA?

Ostrovsky: Having understood long ago that they could not defeat Israel militarily, the Palestinians, aided and abetted by elements in the anti-Israel civil society, embarked upon a different strategy, “lawfare” – that is, weaponizing and politicizing international law and its institutions for the purposes of attacking,

vilifying, and delegitimizing the Jewish state in the international arena.

One of the most egregious examples of this campaign was the Palestinian case against Israel before the International Criminal Court, which has the power to investigate and try individuals accused of the most heinous of crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, especially when the countries of origin do not have independent judiciaries able to do in a bona fide manner.

In making the absurd finding in 2021 that the Palestinians are a state with standing before the ICC, the Court opened an investigation over purported war crimes committed by Israelis.

This move also underscored the legitimacy of concerns by Israel and the United States, which refused to sign on to the Rome Statute authorizing the ICC, primarily because both countries already had fully functioning judicial systems capable of honest and independent investigations, and out of fears that the court would become politicized – a concern that this case only underscored.

■ *Court of Injustice*

Ostrovsky: Today, on top of the ongoing ICC investigation, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) will also come into the fray, following a UN resolution requesting an Advisory Opinion by the Court on the purported illegality of Israel's presence in Judea and Samaria ("West Bank").

Although such advisory opinions are non-binding, they carry considerable moral weight and are regarded highly as a reference point by the legal community, as well as civil society and the UN.

On the ICJ case, we need to make clear that not only is the opinion sought against Israel baseless, completely one-sided and entirely without merit, but that it is solely an instrument of Palestinian lawfare, for the purposes of delegitimizing and undermining the legal rights of the Jewish state, and ought to be dismissed outright.

The US has a number of tools at its disposal. In addition to making any potential legal submissions, the US should consider revoking any budgetary allocations with respect to these cases, implement visa restrictions on the prosecutors and senior officials, and threaten punitive measures against the Palestinian Authority in the event they continue to pursue these cases, as part of their ongoing lawfare campaign against Israel.

■ *The United Nations*

iF: THE SAME SET OF ISSUES ARISE AT THE UNITED NATIONS. IS THIS A LOSING BATTLE? THE NUMBERS CERTAINLY SUGGEST ISRAEL CANNOT "WIN."

Ostrovsky: There are three certainties in life: death, taxes and that the Jewish state will always be found guilty before the United Nations.

The UN, which was founded in the wake of the Holocaust to prevent war and genocide, has today become the world's foremost body for disseminating Jew hatred and antisemitism.

Take for example the UN Human

Rights Council, which has a visceral and pathological obsession with Israel, having condemned the Jewish state almost more times than the rest of the world combined, and which allocated a spot on its permanent agenda solely to condemn Israel, the sole country-specific item, whereas human rights issues in the entire rest of the world are shoved into one solitary agenda item.

In the last few years alone, the Council has counted China, Russia, Venezuela, Cuba and Qatar amongst its

state in perpetuity, having already since issued two reports condemning Israel for just about every crime imaginable.

Created purportedly in the wake of the 2021 conflict between Hamas and Israel, to investigate supposed "underlying root causes" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the resolution establishing the commission did not even mention Hamas, a US-designated terror group sworn to Israel's destruction, which fired almost 4,500 rockets at Israeli civilians during the 2021 war.

Israel of course is not above the law, but the ... fact is that the Jewish state has been systematically denied equality before the UN Human Rights Council.

members. This is inexcusable, unconscionable and intolerable.

Instead of holding to account the world's most egregious human rights abusers, the Council continues its relentless obsession with Israel. The Council has never condemned Hamas or passed a resolution condemning the Palestinian Authority over its repulsive "Pay-to-Slay" policy of paying terrorists and murderers of Israelis.

■ *UN Commission of Inquiry*

Ostrovsky: Israel of course is not above the law, but the undeniable fact is that the Jewish state has been systematically denied equality before the UN Human Rights Council, which has displayed systematic, disproportionate, and visceral bias against it.

But just when you thought the UN could not stoop any lower in its relentless obsession with Israel, last year it established an unprecedented "Commission of Inquiry" to investigate the Jewish

From the very beginning, it was evident that this was no more than a kangaroo court, in which the Jewish state's guilt was already predetermined before the ink on the resolution establishing the commission was dry.

In fact, Israel never stood a chance of getting a fair hearing, given the decision to appoint Navi Pillay as chair, with Miloon Kothari and Chris Sidoti as commissioners. All have denounced Israel in the most vicious terms.

This kind of blind bias is a direct and flagrant violation of the UN's very own Rules and Guidelines on Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-Finding Missions, which state that "Members should, in all cases, have a proven record of independence and impartiality."

In any democratic court of law, a judge exhibiting such blatant lack of impartiality would never have been appointed in the first place. But at the UN, you get promoted and rewarded for exhibiting antisemitism and hostility toward Israel.

Truth of the matter is, this is not a commission, but a fixed inquisition, representing a singularly unprecedented assault against the Jewish state.

■ *Can the UN Be Fixed?*

Ostrovsky: Although the United States and dozens of liberal democratic nations have condemned the one-sided and biased nature of this commission, and in particular the abhorrent antisemitic remarks of Kothari, condemnations, while important, are not sufficient.

Congress must lead efforts to immediately and permanently disband this sham of a commission. In the meantime, there are options to legislate that no US funding goes toward the commission of inquiry. The commission members should also be denied visa entry into the

and the make-up of the UN Human Rights Council, Albanese essentially has tenure and is immune from removal from her post.

■ *Is it Time to Leave?*

iF: IS IT TIME FOR THE US TO LEAVE THE UN?

Ostrovsky: There have been a number of principled calls from Congress urging that Albanese be removed from her post, including a recent bipartisan letter led by Democrat Brad Schneider of Illinois and Representative Ann Wagner of Missouri, a Republican. However well-intentioned, these efforts are likely to fall on deaf ears. Seemingly the only pre-requisite for such position at the Human Rights Council is hostility and bias against Israel.

continue to be the primary funders of this sham of a council.

What is needed urgently is the creation of a new body, one that will be made up of democracies and free societies, its mission focused unwaveringly on standing up for the victims of human rights abuse, not their abusers.

■ *The Middle East Paradigm*

iF: IS THERE POSITIVE SPACE OUT THERE FOR ISRAEL?

Ostrovsky: Amidst a sea of challenges across the Middle East, the one beacon of light and hope in the last three years, has been the Abraham Accords, which have been nothing short of a tectonic geopolitical realignment of the Middle East.

In 2016, former Secretary of State John Kerry now infamously said that “there will be no advance and separate peace between Israel and the Arab world, without the Palestinian process and Palestinian peace ... no, no, no and no.”

The Abraham Accords proved his theory and decades of prevailing thought on the Middle East “peace process,” spectacularly wrong. After the Abraham Accords, what was once a broad Arab-Israeli conflict, is no longer; now reduced almost exclusively to a Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

In 1973, legendary Israeli diplomat Abba Eban famously quipped: “The Arabs never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity.”

Today, whereas the Palestinian leadership is continuing to squander every opportunity before them, Arab states, courageously led by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, now also Morocco and Sudan, are leading the way by grasping them.

Today, Israel is embraced more than ever by the Arab and Gulf world, while peace prospects between Israel and the Palestinians have never been further away, due to ongoing Palestinian terrorism, incitement and refusal to engage in any meaningful peace efforts.

Today, Israel is embraced more than ever by the Arab and Gulf world, while peace prospects between Israel and the Palestinians have never been further away...

United States, where they continue to lobby for support and to advance their racist objectives.

Today, there is no international body more rooted in unhinged antisemitism, Jew-hatred and hostility towards Israel than the UN Human Rights Council.

One need also look here at Francesca Albanese, the “UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories.” This is someone who has engaged in Holocaust distortion with Nazi analogies against Israel, invoked gross antisemitic tropes, like control by “the Jewish lobby,” and has expressed support for the BDS movement.

Because of the nature of her position

In re-entering the UNHRC, the Biden administration admirably sought to reform the body from within. Two years later however, the council has counted gross human rights abusers like China, Cuba, Qatar, and Venezuela among its members.

One needs to ask, therefore, is it time to discard the notion that the US (or anyone) can influence the council for the better, and withdraw from this irredeemably antisemitic, anti-democratic body of hate, which has become rotten to the core, defined by its unrelenting obsession with Israel and defense of the world’s worst tyrants, dictators and murderers.

It is unfathomable that US taxpayers



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (L) President Donald Trump, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain Dr. Abdullah bin Rashid Al-Zayani, and Minister of Foreign Affairs for the United Arab Emirates Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan at the White House during the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020. (Photo: White House / Tia Dufour)

■ *Changes in the Arab World*

Ostrovsky: The simple fact of the matter is that even the Arab world has grown frustrated with the Palestinians’ relentless intransigence, selfishness and rejectionism, refusing to be held hostage to their veto on peace and normalization with Israel.

What was the national interest for the Arab countries in acquiescing to Palestinian demands and pouring billions after billions of dollars in aid, when they could be collaborating with Israel on security, innovation, science and technology and actually seeing real, tangible benefits?

It was Albert Einstein who reportedly defined insanity as “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” That is a rather apt description of decades of failed Middle East foreign policy, which prioritized appeasement of the Palestinians and pressure on Israel to make further concessions as the only path to peace.

■ *The Benefits for the US*

Ostrovsky: The Trump administration ought to have been commended for

recognizing that instead of obsessively focusing on the historic grievances between countries in the region, it made

more sense to foster an alignment of these countries around their common interest, primarily with respect to the Iranian threat, and the immense opportunities to gain out of opening of relations with Israel.

Unlike Israel’s peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, the Abraham Accords are a truly warm peace, which is what distinguishes them. Whereas agreements are signed between leaders

and diplomats, real, and durable peace is made between people and in the last three years we have seen exponential growth between Israel and the region in trade, investment, and civil society engagements.

The only question remains which country will be next to sign onto the Abraham Accords. Recently, Oman opened up its airspace to Israeli airlines, and Israeli negotiations are already on with a number of Muslim countries, including reportedly Indonesia.

But all the talk remains on Saudi Arabia, because open Saudi-Israeli relations would transform the Middle East. The only question here is not if, but when!

Although the Abraham Accords have received a solid bipartisan support under the current Biden administration, it will require further, actively engaged United States’ diplomacy if the Accords are to be expanded.

I believe in order for this to happen, there also need to be far greater understanding that the US has also

But all the talk remains on Saudi Arabia, because open Saudi-Israeli relations would transform the Middle East.

The only question here is not if, but when!

benefited tremendously from the Abraham Accord, including directly through jobs, regional stability and strength in national security.

iF: ARSEN OSTROVSKY, ON BEHALF OF THE JEWISH POLICY CENTER AND THE READERS OF INFOCUS QUARTERLY, THANK YOU FOR AN ENLIGHTENING – AND SCARY – PICTURE OF OUR WORLD.

The West Bank After Abbas

by SEAN DURNS

“Authority,” the nineteenth century British poet Alfred Lord Tennyson once wrote, “forgets a dying king.” Few would describe Mahmoud Abbas, the obese, 87-year-old autocrat who rules the Palestinian Authority (PA), as “kingly.” Indeed, the Soviets reportedly used the code name “Mole” to describe his stolid, bespectacled figure. But there is little question that Abbas’s power is ebbing and that the PA’s control over the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) is slipping.

Abbas is currently in the eighteenth year of a single, elected four-year term. The aging kleptocrat is deeply unpopular. So, for that matter, is the PA that he leads. Those who care about both Israel’s security and American national interests should begin to think about scenarios that might unfold should Abbas depart, either from office or from this mortal coil. Iran and Hamas, among others, hope to gain from a succession struggle.

The PA was born out of the Oslo Peace Process that began three decades ago. It was created to provide Palestinians with limited self-rule in exchange for promises from then-Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat that they would renounce terrorism and resolve outstanding issues with Israel bilaterally.

The PA was not created to give Palestinian Arabs a state, as then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made clear. Rather, it was, to use a phrase popular at the time, a “chance for peace.”

Yet, that chance has been given and Palestinian leadership has been found wanting.

The promises made by Arafat – and by the PLO’s then-foreign emissary, Mahmoud Abbas – provided the impetus for the PA’s creation. And they remain the basis for the international aid that the Authority receives. But from the

Authority’s inception, those promises have been broken.

The PA has incentivized terror attacks against Israelis, paying tax-deductible salaries to terrorists and using its official media and school curriculum to celebrate the murder and maiming of Jews. And it is both corrupt and repressive, known for imprisoning and torturing dissidents while top Fatah apparatchiks enrich themselves.

By installing Arafat and his Fatah movement as the inaugural heads of the PA, American, and Israeli policymakers at the time were making a risky bet that they could co-opt so-called “hardliners.”

That bet, however, has not paid off.

Arafat rejected offers for a Palestinian state in exchange for peace with Israel. In 2000, he launched the Second Intifada, a five-year-long terror campaign in which 1,000 Israelis were murdered. Arafat’s decision echoed the choice of the 1930s Palestinian Arab leader – and future Nazi collaborator – Amin al-Husseini, who launched what was arguably the first intifada in 1936. And like Husseini before him, Arafat’s decision to reject peace in favor of war, only further splintered the Palestinian movement, leading his people to disaster. Instead of warding off rivals like Hamas, a Muslim Brotherhood de-

the Jews, was the future.

When elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, the PA’s unicameral legislature, were held in January 2006, Hamas beat Fatah handily. The electoral loss led to a brief-but-bloody civil war that culminated with Hamas seizing the Gaza Strip. The US-designated terrorist group has maintained an iron grip on Gaza ever since, and has launched several wars against the Jewish state, each resulting in death and destruction primarily in the Strip.

For its part, Fatah has never recovered.

Arafat’s successor, Abbas, could have chosen a different path. Biographers Amir Tibon and Grant Rumley note that Abbas privately opposed Arafat’s decision to launch the Second Intifada.

Initially, foreign governments, including the United States, viewed Abbas as more moderate than his predecessor.

Indeed, as Tibon and Rumley have pointed out, “Abbas was more popular in Washington than in Ramallah, Gaza, or Jerusalem.” The “Mole” had spent most of his career with the PLO and Fatah in behind-the-scenes work – and much of it abroad, including a period studying under Soviet auspices. He didn’t have either Arafat’s charisma or his street cred.

Abbas is currently in the eighteenth year of a single elected four-year term. The aging kleptocrat is deeply unpopular. So, for that matter, is the PA that he leads.

rivative, Fatah only emboldened them.

When Arafat died in 2004, Fatah was in ruins. For many Palestinians, Hamas seemed like a better option. The aging kleptocrats of Fatah were viewed as the past. Hamas, whose charter called for the destruction of Israel and genocide of

With his aviator sunglasses, keffiyeh and stubble, Arafat looked like a 1970s revolutionary. Abbas, by contrast, looks like an overfed banker.

Yet, this hasn’t stopped Abbas from consolidating power. He has refused to hold elections. The PLC hasn’t met since

2007. Laws are issued as decrees. And opponents and critics have become dissidents and emigres.

Abbas's ability to speak for and lead the Palestinian people was always up for debate, but since Hamas seized the Gaza Strip in 2007, Abbas has been a crippled dictator who can't claim to represent all the Palestinian people.

But the end of Abbas's rule is in sight. It might not be tomorrow; indeed, it might not be next year. But the aging Abbas, who reportedly smokes two packs of cigarettes a day, is on borrowed time. And so is the imperfect lynchpin that both the United States and Israel have counted on to maintain order and a modicum of stability.

To be sure, Abbas has continued to pay salaries to terrorists and to herald those who murder and maim Jews. He has, on several occasions, incited violence, perhaps most infamously in 2015 when he declared, "We welcome every drop of blood spilled in Jerusalem."

But unlike Arafat, Abbas hasn't carried out a terror campaign on the level of the Second Intifada.

And unlike Arafat, Abbas has rejected support from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the world's foremost sponsor of terror and Hamas's chief patron. A West Bank after Abbas would offer new challenges, both to Israel and to American interests in the Middle East.

The greatest danger comes from Tehran and its proxies.

Iran is committed to Israel's destruction. The regime has trained and supported several terrorist groups, including Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and others that surround the Jewish state. The Islamic Republic's strategy is to wrap itself, snake-like, around Israel. And should Abbas die or be deposed, the West Bank would provide the regime with a new front.

Indeed, Iran seems to be actively planning for such an occurrence. The regime has been making inroads in the West Bank and capitalizing on the growing unpopularity of both Abbas and Fatah.

According to the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic intelligence agency, Iran has been carrying out military intelligence operations in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) for years. As the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA) has documented, Iran also has been smuggling weapons into the West Bank, often using PA-ruled territories as a way station for the smuggling of both weapons and drugs into Israel, including into the Jewish state's Arab communities. By smuggling arms and sowing social discord, Iran is seeking to destabilize the West Bank.

The Shin Bet has arrested several Iranian-trained operatives in the West Bank, some of whom were reportedly planning attacks in Israel. In 2020, for example, Israeli security services rolled up a West Bank-based cell of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terrorists who were being directed from Lebanon and Syria, both of which are Iranian satrapies.

Indeed, in the years since, the tempo of Israeli counterterror raids in the West Bank has increased markedly – a sign not

into the West Bank, right next door.

Indeed, in August 2022 remarks, Hossein Salami, a top Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) operative, bragged that Iran was now arming its allies in the West Bank. It is, Salami told Iranian state media, part of the regime's strategy to continue its *jihād* against "the Zionists."

And there is every reason to expect that Iran would capitalize on the chaos that would follow in a post-Abbas West Bank.

In fact, as CAMERA detailed in a July 5, 2021 *Washington Examiner* commentary, Hamas has actively encouraged anti-Abbas activities – including in the weeks and days leading up to the 2021 Israel-Hamas War. That conflict, it should be recalled, was sparked, in part, by Hamas's desire to exploit West Bank Palestinians who were dissatisfied with Abbas's decision to cancel planned elections.

Iran has both the means and the motive to take the West Bank. It has been laying the groundwork for years. Such an occurrence would be unacceptable to Israel. Iran poses the only existential

And there is every reason to expect that Iran would capitalize on the chaos that would follow in a post-Abbas West Bank.

only of Abbas's diminishing authority, but of Iran's expanding influence.

Hezbollah, the Lebanese-based, Iranian-backed terrorist organization, also has been active in PA-ruled areas. Once called the "A-Team" of terrorist organizations by a US deputy secretary of state, Hezbollah possess more missiles and rockets than most countries, and maintains a presence on nearly every continent. It is, by a wide margin, Iran's most capable proxy. And not only does it control Lebanon, on Israel's northern border, but it has managed to root itself

foreign threat to the Jewish state. It is the chief supporter of the myriad of terrorist groups waging war against Israel. And it is the only current enemy that can wield the resources and capabilities of a nation-state.

It would be unthinkable for Iran to gain another foothold in the area – particularly directly on Israel's doorstep. Accordingly, should Iran seem likely to take over the West Bank, Israeli intervention probably would be a foregone conclusion.

Nor would Jerusalem be alone.



Palestinian National Authority Mahmoud Abbas. (Photo: EU /European Parliament)

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has long been both weak albeit surprisingly durable. The current monarch, King Abdullah II, isn't popular, and Jordan likely would be loath to intervene. Yet, an Islamist power that seeks to foment revolution would be an unwanted neighbor. It is possible that Jordan, which has previously relied on Israel to prevent the rise of threats to Hashemite rule, would assist in some fashion, Israeli efforts to prevent Iran from taking Fatah's place.

The United States would be right to support operations aimed at forestalling an Iranian takeover. Failing to do so would be tantamount to abandoning longtime allies and would erode US deterrence and credibility in a region key to American interests.

Of course, the reason for the West Bank's vulnerability can't be overlooked – or overstated. Fatah has grown increasingly unpopular. A June 2022 poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found a “significant drop in support for Fatah and its leadership.” The survey of West Bank Palestinians found a “significant change in the domestic balance of power in favor of Hamas.”

Abbas lacks a true, designated successor. In February 2022, he promoted a longtime associate to an important post. Hussein al-Sheikh, described by Reuters

as an “Abbas confidant,” was named to the PLO's executive committee. In June 2022, he was appointed Secretary-General of the PLO, effectively making him Abbas's second. A quarter century younger than the PA leader, he seemingly has the support of the older man, as well as established relationships with Israel from when he served as Abbas' liaison to the Jewish state.

Yet, it would be a mistake to assume that Hussein al-Sheikh would be anointed. Like other successful autocrats, Abbas has prevented any rival centers of power from forming and gaining enough strength to challenge his rule. In February 2022, the PLO's Central Council named the 73-year-old Rawhi Fattouh, another Abbas aide, to head the PLO's National Council. Fattouh, however, is older than al-Sheikh, and he was not subsequently named secretary-general.

Other potential successors exist.

Mahmoud al-Aloul, the deputy chairman of Fatah, was called a “likely successor” to Abbas in 2018 but has seen his star fade in more recent years. Mohammad Shtayyeh, the PA's prime minister, is another possibility. Abbas himself was briefly prime minister in 2003 – however that was largely an Arafat concession to the West.

And in an environment where the ethos of “who holds the gun, holds the power” dominates, the PA's longtime intelligence head, Majid Faraj, would be able to muster considerable hard power in any potential power struggle. Other longtime Fatah operatives, such as Jibril Rajoub and Abbas Zaki, are also possibilities. Once an imprisoned terrorist, Rajoub does not lack for street cred, although at 70, he is very much part of an older generation. Notably, Zaki has expressed a willingness to receive support from Iran – a move that would be a shift back to the Arafat era.

Mohammad Dahlan, a charismatic Abbas rival who was banished in 2010, is a frequently discussed possibility. Dahlan has spent subsequent time living in Egypt and the U.A.E. Despite his time abroad, the Abbas regime fears him enough to have arrested several of his supporters in 2020. Dahlan and arch-terrorist Marwan Barghouti, who sits in an Israeli prison for five counts of murder, are longtime Abbas rivals who are frequently mentioned as possible successors. Yet, due to imprisonment and exile, both men would face significant hurdles to claiming the throne.

While it is difficult to predict who will succeed Abbas, the immediate outcome – chaos – is a near-certainty. In the last century, the Palestinian movement has had only three leaders: Amin al-Husseini, Arafat and Abbas. It is utterly lacking in healthy and functioning institutions and the rule of law. This problem has only worsened under Abbas, who has centralized power, and it has failed to be addressed by both policymakers and press who, via both money and neglect, have enabled it. Their derelictions will soon prove costly, and it will be Israelis, Palestinians, and potentially the United States itself, that will be picking up the tab.

SEAN DURNS is a Senior Research Analyst for CAMERA, the 65,000-member, Boston-based Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis.

Saudi Arabia's "Interest Driven" Israel Policy

by Ambassador (Ret.) YORAM ETTINGER

Effective Israel-Saudi Arabia cooperation is a derivative of both countries' national security and economic interests. The current, unprecedented, Saudi-Israeli security, technological, and commercial cooperation, and the central role played by Saudi Arabia in inducing the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan to conclude peace treaties with Israel, are driven by the Saudi assessment that Israel is an essential ally in the face of real, clear, lethal security threats, as well as a vital partner in the pursuit of economic, technological and diplomatic challenges.

It is a win-win proposition.

■ *Vision 2030*

The blossoming cooperation is driven by Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's (MbS) "Vision 2030," which aspires to catapult the kingdom to a regional and global powerhouse of trade and investment, leveraging its geo-strategic position along crucial naval routes between the Far East and Europe (the Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea). Vision 2030 has introduced ground-breaking cultural, social, economic, diplomatic, and national security reforms and upgrades, leveraging the unique added value of Israel's technological and military capabilities.

Saudi Arabia, like the UAE and Bahrain, is preoccupied with the challenge of economic diversification. The country is overly reliant on oil and natural gas, which are exposed to price volatility and depletion, and could be replaced by emerging cleaner and more cost-effective energy. Israel's ground-breaking

technologies are seen as an effective vehicle to diversify the economy, create more jobs in non-energy sectors, and establish a base for alternative sources of national income, while bolstering homeland and national security.

The future of "Vision 2030" – which defies traditional Saudi religious, cultural, and social norms – and the future of Saudi-Israel cooperation, depend on domestic stability and the legitimacy of MbS. The crown prince is determined to overcome and de-sanctify the fundamentalist Wahhabis in central and southwestern Saudi Arabia, who were perceived until recently as the Islamic authority in Saudi Arabia and an essential ally of the House of Saud since 1744. MbS will keep expanding cooperation with Israel, as long as he deems it beneficial to his ground-breaking vision of Saudi Arabia, while overcoming potent Wahhabi opposition.

■ *Saudi Interests*

This ambitious strategy is preconditioned on reducing regional instability, minimizing the threat of existing rogue entities, and preventing the rise of additional such threats (e.g., domestic, Iranian-supported Shiite elements, Iranian-supported Houthis in Yemen, similarly backed Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the proposed Palestinian state, whose potential leaders already feature a rogue intra-Arab track record).

Notwithstanding the March 2023 resumption of diplomatic ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia is aware that the Middle East resembles a volcano, which frequently releases explosive lava – domestically and regionally – in an

unpredictable manner, as evidenced by the 1,400-year-old stormy intra-Arab/Muslim relations, and recently demonstrated by the Arab Tsunami, which erupted in 2010 and is still raging.

Saudi national security interests include the mounting threats posed by Iran's ayatollahs, "Muslim Brotherhood" terrorists, Iranian-supported Shiite terrorists in the oil-rich Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, the Iranian-based al Qaeda, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's aspirations to resurrect the Ottoman Empire, which controlled large parts of the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, Saudi Arabia is aware of Erdoğan's security ties with the neighboring, pro-ayatollah Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, Erdoğan and Saudi Arabia militarily support opposing sides in Libya's civil war, where Erdoğan backs Islamic terrorists.

■ *Role of the US*

The survival of the Saudi government, and the implementation of Vision 2030, depend upon the formation of an effective coalition against rogue regimes. However, Saudi Arabia is frustrated by recent geo-strategic developments that have produced a powerful tailwind for its mortal enemies: the erosion of the US posture of deterrence; the 43-year-old US addiction to the diplomatic option toward Iran's ayatollahs; the American embrace of the Muslim Brotherhood; and appeasement of Tehran-backed Houthi terrorists. In addition, Saudis are alarmed by the ineffectiveness of NATO (No Action Talk Only?), European vacillation in the face of Islamic terrorism, and the vulnerability of the Arab regimes. This

geo-strategic reality has driven the Saudis (reluctantly) closer to China and Russia, militarily and commercially.

■ *Israel's Value Added*

Against this regional and global backdrop, Israel stands out as the most reliable “life insurance agent” in the region and an essential strategic ally, irrespective of past conflicts and despite disagreements over secondary and tertiary issues for the Saudis, including the Palestinian issue. In addition, Riyadh faces economic and diplomatic challenges – which could benefit from Israel’s cooperation – such as economic diversification, innovative technology, agriculture, irrigation, and enhanced access to advanced US military systems, which requires an improved posture on Capitol Hill.

MbS has recognized the commercial and military capabilities of Israel; the added value of its special standing among most US voters and Capitol Hill legislators; Israel’s can-do mentality in the face of extraordinary odds; and its reliability as a partner.

Saudi interest in expanding military training, intelligence, counter-terrorism, and commercial cooperation with Israel is a byproduct of its high regard for Israel’s posture of deterrence and muscle-flexing in the face of Iran’s ayatollahs (in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran itself), and Israel’s systematic war on Palestinian and Islamic terrorism. Furthermore, the Saudis respect Israel’s principle-driven defiance of US pressure, including Israel’s policy on Iran and Israel’s 1981 bombing of Iraq’s nuclear reactor (in the face of brutal US opposition to the bombing), which spared the Saudis the devastating wrath of a nuclear Saddam Hussein.

On a rainy day, MbS (just like the US) prefers a deterring and defiant Israel on his side.

A deterring and defiant Israel is a cardinal force-multiplier for Saudi Arabia (as it is for the US). On the other hand, an appeasing and retreating Israel would be

irrelevant to Saudi Arabia’s national security (as it would be for the US).

■ *Palestinians*

To reiterate, Saudi Arabia’s top national security priorities transcend – and are independent of – the Palestinian issue. Expanding Saudi-Israel cooperation, and the key role played by Riyadh in accomplishing the Abraham Accords,

MbS is aware that the Palestinian issue is not the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict, neither a crown-jewel of Arab policymaking nor a core cause of regional turbulence.

have contradicted Western conventional wisdom that the Palestinian issue is central to Arab policy makers, and that the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is, ostensibly, preconditioned upon substantial Israeli concessions to the Palestinians, including the establishment of a Palestinian state.

On the contrary, MbS is aware that the Palestinian issue is not the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict, neither a crown-jewel of Arab policymaking nor a core cause of regional turbulence.

Independent of the pro-Palestinian Saudi talk, Riyadh (like the Arabs in general) has demonstrated an indifferent-to-negative walk toward the Palestinians. Arabs know that – in the Middle East – one does not pay custom on words. Therefore, the Arabs have never flexed military (and barely financial and diplomatic) muscles on behalf of the Palestinians. They acted in accordance with their own – not Palestinian – interests, and certainly not in accord with Western misperceptions.

Unlike the Western establishment, MbS accords critical weight to the Palestinian intra-Arab track record, which is low on moderation but top-heavy on subversion, terrorism,

treachery, and ingratitude. The Saudis don’t forget and don’t forgive (especially) the Palestinian collaboration with Saddam Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which was the most generous Arab host of Palestinians. The Saudis are also cognizant of the deeply rooted Palestinian collaboration with Islamic, Asian, African, European, and Latin American terror organizations, includ-

ing Muslim Brotherhood terrorists and Iran’s ayatollahs (whose machetes are at the throat of the House of Saud), North Korea, Cuba, and Venezuela.

■ *Riyadh and the Abraham Accords*

Saudi Arabia has served as the primary engine behind Israel’s peace treaties with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, and has forged unprecedented defense and commercial cooperation with Israel, independent of the Palestinian issue and consistent with the Saudi order of national priorities. Precisely because the Saudis do not sacrifice Middle East reality and their national security on the altar of the Palestinian issue, they have played a major role in the establishment of the Abraham Accords.

The success of the Abraham Accords was a result of avoiding the systematic mistakes committed by Western policy makers. The latter have produced a litany of failed Israeli-Arab peace proposals, centered on the Palestinian issue, while the Abraham Accords focused on Arab interests, bypassing the Palestinian issue, avoiding a Palestinian veto. Therefore, the durability of the Accords

depends on the interests and stability of the respective Arab countries, and not on the Palestinian issue, which is not a top priority for any Arab country.

Their stability, however, is threatened by the volcanic nature of the unstable, highly fragmented, unpredictable, violently intolerant, non-democratic and tenuous Middle East. The tenuous nature of most Arab regimes yields tenuous policies and tenuous accords. For example, in addition to the “Arab Spring” of 2010 (which is still raging on the Arab Street), non-ballot regime-change occurred (with a dramatic change of policy) in Egypt (2013, 2012, 1952), Iran (1979, 1953), Iraq (2003, 1968, 1963-twice, 1958), Libya (2011, 1969) and Yemen (a civil war since the ‘90s, 1990, 1962), etc.

■ *Impact of a Palestinian State*

With this in mind, Saudi Arabia, the Abraham Accords, and US interests would be severely undermined by a Palestinian state west of the Jordan River. It would topple the pro-US Hashemite regime east of the river and transform Jordan into a chaotic state in

global trade; and yield a robust tailwind to Iran, Russia and China and a major headwind to the US and its Arab Sunni allies, headed by Saudi Arabia.

Why would Saudi Arabia and the Arab regimes of the Abraham Accords precondition their critical ties with Israel upon Israeli concessions to the Palestinians, who they view as a rogue element? Why would they sacrifice their national security and economic interests on the altar of the Palestinian issue? Why would they cut off their noses to spite their faces?

The well-documented fact that Arabs have never flexed a military muscle (and hardly a significant financial and diplomatic muscles) on behalf of the Palestinians, provide a resounding answer.

■ *Israel’s Bottom Line*

Notwithstanding the importance of Israel’s cooperation with Saudi Arabia, it takes a back seat to Israel’s critical need to safeguard/control the geographic cradle of its history, religion and culture, which coincides with its minimal secu-

secured Israel’s survival and dramatically enhanced its posture of deterrence. They transformed the Jewish State into a unique force and dollar multiplier for the US.

An Israel-Saudi Arabia peace treaty would be rendered impractical if it required Israel to concede the mountain ridges of Judea and Samaria, which would transform Israel from a terror and war-detering force multiplier for the US to a terror and war-inducing burden upon the US. Contrary to the Western (mis)perception of peace treaties as pillars of national security, the unpredictably violent Middle East features a 1,400-year-old reality of transient (non-democratic, one-bullet, not one-ballot) Arab regimes, policies, and accords. Thus, as desirable as Israel-Arab peace treaties are, they must not entail the sacrifice of Israel’s most critical national security feature: the permanent topography of the mountain ridges of Judea and Samaria, which dominate 80 percent of Israel’s population and infrastructure.

In June and December of 1981, Israel bombed Iraq’s nuclear reactor and applied its law to the Golan Heights, both in defiance of the Western – primarily American – foreign policy establishment. The latter warned that such actions would force Egypt to abandon its peace treaty with Israel. However, Egypt adhered to its national security priorities, sustaining the peace treaty. Routinely, Western policy makers warn that construction in Jerusalem (beyond the “Green Line”) and in Judea and Samaria would trigger a terroristic volcano and push the Arabs away from their peace treaties and cooperation with Israel.

None of the warnings have materialized, as Arab states act in accordance with their own interests, not in accordance with Western misperceptions and the rogue Palestinian agenda.

YORAM ETTINGER *is a retired Israeli ambassador and frequent writer on Arab-Israeli and US-Israel relations.*

An Israel-Saudi Arabia peace treaty would be rendered impractical if it required Israel to concede the mountain ridges of Judea and Samaria...

the vein of uncontrollable Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. It would produce another platform of regional and global Islamic terrorism, which would be leveraged by Iran in order to tighten its encirclement of Saudi Arabia via Iraq, Syria and Yemen. This would trigger a domino scenario, which would threaten every pro-US Arab oil-producing country in the Arabian Peninsula; jeopardize the supply of Persian Gulf oil; threaten

rity requirements in the volcanic Middle East: the overpowering mountain ridges of Judea and Samaria (West Bank).

The unpredictable nature of the Middle East defines policies and accords as variable components of national security. On the other hand, topography and geography are fixed components of Israel’s minimal security requirements. The mountain ridges of Judea and Samaria, and the Golan Heights have

Erdoğan Stays the Course After the Earthquakes

by HAROLD RHODE

Some years ago, there was a heated discussion between a Turkish diplomat who spoke excellent English and a State Department Foreign Service Official (FSO). The Turkish diplomat was denouncing human rights in America. The FSO responded: “What have we done wrong? What can we do to put it right?”

He misunderstood his interlocutor. In the Muslim world, intimidation, and the willingness to use power breed respect. Giving in represents weakness. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan can and does rail against the US and American policies, but wouldn't dare to do the same to Russia or China because they would respond by “squeezing” back. Turkey, and not only Turkey but also other countries, fear Russia and China; they don't fear the United States, and they don't fear Israel. Today in China, where the Chinese subject Muslim Uyghurs – who are Turks of both the same religious and ethnic origins – to mass imprisonment, Turkey is silent.

That's because Turkey needs Chinese aid and trade to keep its economy afloat.

As the Turkish economy declines, and in particular after the earthquake, however, Turkey is also reaching out to countries that were considered adversaries – including Israel.

■ *Erdoğan's Turkey*

It would be an understatement to say that Israeli-Turkish relations are complicated.

Erdoğan has not turned over a new

leaf. He remains committed to the same radical Muslim view of the world, pushing a radical Islamic ideology which envisions a complete Muslim takeover of the world.

But his vision of the world – with Turkey at the center – had begun to collapse even before the massive February earthquakes. The economy was in shambles; people didn't have enough money to put food on the table. In the past, when things were tight, Turkish citizens – ever so concerned about hiding their problems from others – would go to the store and, for example, buy a whole pumpkin even though they couldn't afford one. Asking to buy a piece of a

pumpkin would be shameful because others would make fun of them for not being able to purchase a whole one. And shame – i.e., concern about what others would say about you behind your back – often means more than life itself in Middle Eastern culture.

Things had gotten so bad before the

massive earthquakes that people had in fact swallowed their pride and bought slices of the pumpkin. And they blamed Erdoğan for their descent into poverty. With the general election that was scheduled for June 18 (it may be changed now), he saw the need to get a handle on Turkey's desperate economic situation or he might, even with his ability to manipulate election results, end up losing.

His resourceful cunning saved him.

■ *Courting His Enemies*

Erdoğan knew that he had to make an accommodation with his sworn enemies – i.e., Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, etc. Until then,

Erdoğan has not turned over a new leaf. He remains committed to the same radical Muslim view of the world...

he had worked with Qatar, along with the fanatical Shiite regime in Iran (which hosts many of Erdoğan's fellow Muslim Brotherhood [MB] leaders), to overthrow the heads of the above-mentioned countries. But now he needed help from his fellow Sunnis who controlled the Arab side of the Gulf, so he “sucked up”

and made nice to them. The Gulf Arabs were under no illusions as to Erdoğan's ultimate goal and have only cautiously been offering him help.

But like Israel's Gulf allies, the Israelis understood exactly what Erdoğan was up to.

Despite all the formal niceties in which the Israeli and Turkish presidents engaged, Turkey still permits Hamas terrorists operate in the country...

■ *Israel's Position*

Israel's then-newly installed President Isaac Herzog traveled to Turkey to meet Erdoğan. But from two statements he made in Turkey, it is clear that Herzog understood Erdoğan's game. When he visited the mausoleum of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Secular Democratic Republic, whom Erdoğan loathes, Herzog, as required by protocol, signed the visitors book. His inscription is a quotation from the Book of Psalms (Chapter 34, Verse 15) "Turn away from doing evil, make peace and pursue it."

Turks generally are not well-versed in the Jewish Bible, but in this case, the subtle implication wasn't lost on them. The message, although Herzog referred to Ataturk, was directed against Erdoğan personally. Turkey's political class, steeped in the subtleties of Turkish culture, understood what Herzog meant to convey.

There are approximately 20,000 Jews living in Turkey, primarily in Istanbul and Izmir. President Herzog also addressed a meeting of all the rabbis of Turkey. In his speech, he stated when

push comes to shove, Israel, in the end, sees itself responsible for the fate of all Jews throughout the world.

Despite all the formal niceties in which the Israeli and Turkish presidents engaged, Turkey still permits Hamas terrorists to operate in the country, plan-

ning and directing Hamas's activities in the Gaza Strip and West Bank (Judea and Samaria). And Turkey still quietly, yet actively, supports the MB and other militantly anti-Israel Muslim extremists in the West Bank who are bent on destroying the State of Israel.

in 2003 and then president of Turkey in 2014, he went about systematically destroying relations with these three non-Muslim neighbors. It was only natural that Greece, Cyprus, and Israel would develop a strong alliance against Erdoğan's radical Islamic Turkish policies, both economically and militarily. And given the patterns of Jewish history over the past 2,000 years, it stands to reason that Israel understands its relations with Turkey in terms of the modern Hebrew expression: "Honor him and suspect him."

■ *The Earthquakes*

The earthquakes have only complicated things for Erdoğan. The areas hit by the quakes are largely Kurdish, with some Arabs living there as well. Israel was the first of 40 countries that came to the rescue.

Listening to the words of the Israeli rescue teams who came back from helping is instructive. The locals repeatedly told the Israelis that they preferred Israeli rescue-teams to others because "Israel cares." Certainly, that is NOT the conclusion Erdoğan wanted Turkish citizens to reach.

In the end, we must remember that Erdogan needs us much more than we need him.

■ *Israel, Greece, and Cyprus*

None of this is lost on Israel's leaders, which is why Greece, Cyprus and Israel are planning a tri-lateral summit later this year. Neither of the Hellenic countries had positive relations with Israel before Erdoğan came to power. But when he became prime minister

To add insult to injury, the Turkish agency responsible for fortifying Turkish buildings in that earthquake-prone area proved wildly incompetent, and the locals know exactly why that was so. That agency used to have competent officials who knew how to do their jobs. But Erdoğan replaced



The President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, and the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, at a joint press conference in 2022. (Photo: Haim Tzach / Government Press Office)

these officials with his allies – militant Islamists who knew nothing about making earthquake-proof buildings and have been expert only at taking bribes for letting builders cut corners regarding earthquake proofing.

Erdoğan, however, has also been superb in pulling rabbits out of hats.

In this case, Turkey's economy has improved lately largely because of Turkish exports to Russia and China, and from an infusion of cash from Russians looking to avoid international sanctions. This is particularly notable in light of the fact that Erdoğan's Turkey is a member of the NATO alliance. The members of NATO, except for Turkey (and Hungary) want Finland and Sweden to join the alliance, which would help strengthen it against Russia. And when Sweden gave in to some Turkish demands, Erdoğan upped the ante, which shows that he cares more about himself than about helping his nominal Western allies against Russia.

■ Conclusion

As long as the West and its Arab allies keep in mind what Erdoğan's ultimate goals – his form of Islam dominating the entire world – we might, when it can be useful to us, find common ground with Turkey. But we should never take our eyes off Erdoğan's goal. His extremist form of Islam endangers not only the non-Muslim world, but many in the Muslim world as well. Countries including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and others, among them Israel, are natural allies of the West against him and his supporters. Erdoğan recognizes the value of patience ("Sabir" in Turkish and equivalents in Arabic and Persian). He knows how to wait us out. He knows how to entice us with nice words. Words, whether in signed documents or words as spoken, mean so much to Westerners.

But in Erdoğan's part of the world, words are often nothing more than politeness, and mask what the Turks really intend. Two can play at this game should America choose. Even though this sort

of diplomacy is maddening to US officials, it would behoove them now to follow Erdoğan's lead and confuse him. The late Secretary of State George Shultz, meeting with an American ambassador about to assume his new post in a Middle Eastern country, said, "Always remember that we represent America, not the countries to which we are posted."

The US diplomat arguing with a Turkish counterpart should have responded with something like: "Shame on you. How dare you say that? Look at how you treat your minorities in Turkey. Why don't you let your Kurds, for example, learn Kurdish? Why can't people be free to learn what they want?"

In the end, we must remember that Erdoğan needs us much more than we need him. But up to now, we haven't.

HAROLD RHODE, Ph.D., is a former official in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He has lived and studied in Iran, Turkey, and many parts of the Arab world.

Hope For Iran's Future: Rejecting Regime's Israel Hatred

by **KARMEL MELAMED**

This past February marked the 44th anniversary of the radical Islamic regime coming to power in Iran and, aside from a small sector of die-hard regime loyalists and those connected with the regime's security apparatus, the vast majority of people in Iran did not celebrate this milestone. Since September of last year, many of Iran's now 85 million population bravely launched their own grassroots revolution calling for the downfall of the totalitarian Islamic regime that has long deprived them of freedom and better economic opportunities.

The numerous protests by average Iranians in almost every single city in Iran have also revealed the people's total rejection of all the ideologies of the Islamic regime – including the regime's vile hatred of Israel and Zionism. Yet these actions by Iranian protestors, who are mostly younger in age, are not surprising for many of us who are fluent in the Persian language and have been closely monitoring the situation on the ground in Iran for decades.

In fact, Iranian protestors' rejection of the government's long campaign of hate for Israel has been on full display since 2018 when mass demonstrations against the Islamic government first began. These actions on the ground in Iran along with the thousands of messages coming through from the people of Iran through various social media platforms today reveal a hopeful outlook for a renewed friendship and future peaceful ties between Iranians and Israelis.

■ **Words & Actions**

Countless video clips uploaded and written messages posted to social media

platforms like Twitter and Instagram from Iran for the last six months have shown the people's protests for freedom revealed their outright rejection of the ruling mullah regime's four decades of anti-Israel indoctrination. Perhaps the best example of this was from the popular slogan numerous young protestors were chanting in the streets saying; *"Not Gaza, Not Lebanon, I will only sacrifice my life for Iran."* This slogan revealed that Iranian protestors do not support the calls for Israel's destruction by the terrorist group of Hamas in Gaza and the terrorist group Hezbollah in southern Lebanon who are both funded by Iran's Islamic regime.

Moreover, their social media videos have shown Iranian protestors tearing down the regime's street signs with the names of "Palestine, Gaza" or "Al-Quds" and stomping their feet on these torn down signs. In some cities, blue colored "Palestine Charity Boxes" posted on many street corners by the regime for collecting spare change to "benefit" the Palestinian war against Israel have also been torn down and dumped in trash bins by protestors. As if these actions during the recent protests were not enough to reflect the furious rejection Iranians have for the regime's anti-Israel propaganda, protestors have also set fire to hundreds of public street banners and posters of the regime's terrorist mastermind Qasem Soleimani who had planned various terrorist actions against Israel over the past decades. In essence, the words and actions from average Iranians demonstrate to us that the ayatollahs' efforts to brainwash and instill an indoctrination of hatred for Israel and Jews into the minds of young Iranians have utterly failed after 40 plus years.

■ **Social Media Messages**

With the Islamic regime tightly controlling all official news and other information flowing out of Iran, thousands of Iranians have instead turned to social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram and others to express their opinions and concerns. Again, in many of these social media platforms, Iranians have not only rejected the Islamic regime's calls for Israel's destruction but instead voiced widespread support for Israel. This has been reflected in the thousands of social media messages from protestors and individuals from Iran, thanking Israelis for supporting their current revolution.

Likewise, when popular Israeli activists like Emily Schraeder and Hananiya Naftali have sent out messages in English language and Persian language on platforms such as Twitter expressing their support for the freedom of the people of Iran, one can find overwhelmingly positive responses from countless individuals within Iran. To them, at the same time, numerous individuals in Iran have also expressed their warm messages of friendship to Persian language posts on social media platforms from the Israeli Foreign Ministry and Defense Forces accounts over the years.

One popular account on Facebook and Twitter from an individual based in Iran representing a group called the *"Friendship Council For People of Iran and Israel"* (FCPII) has been promoting warm relations between the people of Iran and Israel for many years. The Iranian person managing the FCPII account from Iran obviously does so at great personal risk to his life as he could be easily arrested by the Islamic regime's thugs if they discovered his identity or location. Despite the



high risk to his personal safety, this individual revealed to me that he continues to promote friendship between Iranians and Israelis because of his ultimate desire to see peace and harmony between both nations one day.

Perhaps the most surprising signs on social media of support for Israel from within Iran came in May 2021 during the last major Gaza war with Israel, where thousands of Iranians took to different platforms and expressed solidarity with Israelis. One Twitter account, identified as “Mamadou Archives” and shown to be based in Iran, hosted a live session with more than 25,000 participants – primarily Iranians – that sent out nearly 100,000 tweets during the course of seven hours supporting Israelis. During that war, one reoccurring message from Iranians in Iran in social media was their extreme anger at the Islamic regime for spending their county’s wealth on funding Hamas rockets instead of on coronavirus vaccines.

And while seeing the people of Iran supporting the people of Israel facing terrorist attacks from Hamas rockets may be surprising to some, for many of us Iran watchers, their support is nothing new. In fact, in recent years there have been many videos uploaded to social media

platforms showing average Iranians who specifically avoid stepping on the flag of Israel painting outside of office buildings and universities where there is typically a lot of foot traffic. The Israeli flags have been painted by the Iranian regime’s stooges as a move to encourage Iranians to express their hatred for Israelis by stepping on the Israeli flag. Yet many Iranians in these videos do not comply with the regime’s desires and intentionally avoid stepping on the Israeli flags. Again and again, these actions from the people of Iran reveal to us in the West that the vast majority of Iranians harbor no hatred for Israelis, for the State of Israel nor the Jewish people.

■ Warm Ties Remembered

While a significant percentage of Iran’s population today is under the age of 35 and has no memory of the warm relations between Iran and Israel prior to 1979, they have indeed heard much from their parents, grandparents, and the older generation who still recall happier days. Examples remain in Iran today despite the Islamic regime’s four-decade campaign of promoting hate for Israel. In many of Iran’s major cities, the water and sewage systems were manufactured

in Israel and installed by Israeli technicians in the 1960s and 1970s. There are still several military bases which operate the desalinization systems installed by Israeli companies in Iran during the 1970s. While Israel no longer provides spare parts and repair for these systems, Iranian engineers have still managed to produce their own replacement parts to maintain such systems.

Other examples of Israeli support for Iran can be found in a few of the major dams created by Israeli companies in Iran in past decades and the residential apartment buildings Israeli companies built in Iran’s capital of Tehran in the 1970s. Additionally, many older Iranians have not forgotten the life-saving humanitarian aid Israel provided to Iranians during various earthquakes and disastrous floods that ravaged parts of Iran in the 1960s. This contemporary history of friendly ties between Israelis and Iranians is something the current Islamic regime will never be able to erase because of its powerful impact that endures to this day.

While we may not currently know when Iran’s current radical Islamic regime may collapse or may ultimately be dismantled by the people of Iran, we can be confident in knowing that the majority of Iran’s population probably harbor no hatred for Israel or the Jewish people based on their rejection of the Islamic regime’s constant campaign of vile anti-Israel indoctrination. The younger people of Iran, who are the majority of the population, are telling and showing us daily that they prefer to embrace the doctrine of peace, friendship, co-existence and tolerance from their nation’s ancient founder Cyrus the Great. Therefore hope endures that one day soon when this Islamic regime is no more in Iran, a new page will be written about the ancient friendship between the Jewish people and the people of Iran.

KARMEL MELAMED is an internationally published award-winning Iranian American journalist and attorney based in Southern California.

EU and UN Illegally Funding Palestinian Projects

by **BENJAMIN WEINTHAL**

One scandal from the perspective of Israeli residents of Judea and Samaria – the disputed territory where 80 percent of biblical events unfolded – that rarely garners headlines is illegal construction carried out there by the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN).

The Jerusalem Post reported in 2022 that the EU doled out half-a-billion dollars over the past seven years to support a Palestinian Authority (PA) plan to control Area C of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), according to a report from Israel's Intelligence Ministry.

The Oslo Accords, which were signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993, carved the West Bank into three areas: A, B, C. The Accords placed areas A and B – the region that covers all Palestinian cities and central population centers – under administrative control of the PA, with shared Israeli-Palestinian security responsibilities. Former PLO chairman Yasser Arafat along with his lead negotiator at Oslo and current PA president, Mahmoud Abbas, accepted the divisions.

As a result of the Oslo Accords, military and civilian control over Area C was absorbed by the Israel Defense Forces. The ensuing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has been over Jewish settlements and a Jewish presence in the West Bank. In short, the Oslo Accords stipulated that Israel would have control over Area C. All of this helps to explain Israel's outrage over the EU and UN working to build Palestinian entities in Area C.

Israel's right-of-center government advocates that Area C, some 60 percent of

Judea and Samaria, should remain within Israel's future borders. The PA and the EU argue that the territory should be allocated for creation of a Palestinian Arab state. Nearly 500,000 Israelis and an estimated 300,000 Palestinians live in Area C.

■ **EU Outrage**

The presence of Jews living in the biblical heartland evokes the usual reams of outraged newsprint, hours of intense television coverage and seemingly endless digital chatter. Most European media outlets and the EU have turned the Jewish residents of Judea and Samaria into the be-all and end-all of crises in the Middle East.

The Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's mass murder of over 500,000 people in Syria – including through chemical warfare – seems to be at times relegated to a minor urgency when compared with Jews building homes in Judea and Samaria.

Comments such as those from the then-PLO envoy to Washington, Maen Rashid Areikat, who in 2011 advocated the cleansing of Jews from Judea and Samaria when he declared, "I think it will be in the best interests of the two people to be separated first," garner scarce outrage.

Areikat answered a press query at the time about whether gays would be tolerated in a newly formed Palestinian nation by stating: "Ah, this is an issue that's beyond my [authority]."

One thing that jolts many Israelis is the sanctimonious hypocrisy practiced by the scores of EU and UN politicians and bureaucrats who incessantly lambast Israel's government for permitting Jews to live in Judea and Samaria. Yet the same EU and UN politicians and bureaucrats

largely ignore grave Palestinian human rights violations and do their best to circumvent Israeli-Palestinian negotiations by building Palestinian infrastructure in the disputed region.

■ **Illegal Building in Area C**

Naomi Linder Kahn, the international spokesperson for the Israeli NGO (non-governmental organization) Regavim, told Fox News in 2020 that the UN has breached international law and the Oslo Accords by "pouring millions of dollars into projects that support the Palestinian Authority's systematic program to unilaterally establish a state."

Regavim, according to its website, is dedicated to the protection of Israel's natural resources and supports Jewish life in Judea and Samaria. On Regavim's homepage, one can find a detailed 20-page study on this illicit intervention as early as 2014 titled "Report on the Involvement of the European Union in Illegal Building."

The NGO continues to exhaustively document EU and UN illegal construction in Area C. This writer has viewed Regavim's photographic evidence of the illicit building activity.

A series of significant events over the last few months has exposed the United Nations' and the European Union's bureaucratic warfare against Israeli control in Judea and Samaria.

The UN General Assembly passed a resolution asking the "World Court," known formally as the International Court of Justice, to weigh in on Israel's "annexation" and the "legal status of the occupation." The Palestinians promoted the resolution, which is titled "Israeli practices and settlement activities

affecting the rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories” and urges The Hague-based ICJ to “render urgently an advisory opinion” on Israel’s “prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of Palestinian territory.”

Israel’s ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, tweeted at the time that “The Palestinians have rejected every peace initiative but instead of pushing them to change, the UN is helping them to harm the only vibrant democracy in the Middle East. Absurd.”

The Palestinians are following their old and failed pattern of trying to internationalize the conflict in UN and EU fora so as to bypass direct talks with Israel. The troika of the UN, EU, and the Palestinians is increasingly wedded to gutting the negotiation process the Palestinian side committed to with Israel at Oslo in favor of bad-faith bargaining and unilateral actions, argue Israeli critics.

■ **The Knesset Responds**

In late December, 40 members of Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, charged the European Union with working against the Jewish state, as evidenced by a leaked EU document showing how it seeks to illegally carve out territory for the creation of a Palestinian state.

According to the letter penned by the Israeli lawmakers:

We learned of an official policy document of the European Union, a document the gravity of which cannot be overstated, one that leaves no room for doubt as to the one-sidedness and animosity of the EU towards the State of Israel and the Jewish people. The document completely ignores our people’s historical affinity to our homeland, completely ignores the political agreements and the status of the State of Israel in Area C and seeks to establish the 1949 borders as Israel’s final-status permanent borders – in complete disregard of the Jewish communities in the area.

The Knesset letter is a remarkable breakthrough from the vantage point of Israelis, who seek greater resistance from Jerusalem against the EU unilateralism.

“We are gratified by the Knesset’s response. For too many years, the Israeli government did not respond to the blatant violations of Israel’s jurisdiction and international law,” Kahn said in December.

The members of the Knesset in their missive added that the EU document:

Exposes only the tip of the iceberg of the EU’s activities to undermine the State of Israel. We have not lost sight of your ongoing and continuous con-

tribution, both direct and indirect, to campaigns designed to tarnish Israel’s name, from blood libels regarding alleged violence on the part of settlers, through unfounded accusations that Israel deliberately harms children, to specious comparisons of the policies of the government of the State of Israel to those of the Apartheid regime in South Africa of yesteryear.

The European Union has created an entire apparatus to sanction Jewish life in Judea and Samaria. In 2015, the EU infamously sent a directive to member states to single out Jewish products from Judea and Samaria for labeling.

The punitive measure applying a double standard to Israel was met with fierce opposition from Israeli politicians from the left and the right. Israel’s foreign ministry castigated the EU’s

discriminatory policy, applied to Israel’s territorial dispute with the Palestinians “while ignoring 200 other territorial disputes around the world.” Jerusalem announced at the time that:

Israel condemns the decision of the European Union to label Israeli goods originating over the ’67 lines. We regret that the EU chose for political reasons to take an unusual and discriminatory step which is drawn from the realm of boycotts, just as Israel is facing a wave of terror directed at all citizens. The claim that this is a technical step is a cynical, baseless claim.

Most European media outlets and the EU have turned the Jewish residents of Judea and Samaria into the be-all and end-all of crises in the Middle East.

■ **European BDS**

The normalization of the European BDS (boycott, divest and sanctions) measure has its origins in the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD). In 2012, the NPD submitted a legislative initiative in the parliament of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania state seeking to punish Jewish products. The neo-Nazis’ motion called for Israeli products to be labeled and for a “clear designation of origin” to be implemented.

A mere five months later, in 2013, the mainstream German Green party, which currently controls the foreign ministry, introduced an initiative in the federal parliament (Bundestag) that largely mirrored the neo-Nazis’ legislation.

■ **Kerstin Muller & Friends**

One of the sponsors of the anti-Israel Green party labeling measure was Kerstin

Müller, who has spent most of her political career bashing Israel in the Bundestag and in Tel Aviv when she ran the Israel office of her party's Heinrich Böll Foundation. Müller's pro-boycott Israel activity in 2013 prompted the usually skittish Berlin Jewish community to say she was acting in an "antisemitic way."

Müller also worked zealously to pass a resolution in the Bundestag in 2010 condemning Israel's interception of the Turkish-owned vessel the Mavi Marmara that sought to break Israel's legal blockade of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

Unsurprisingly, given the largely anti-Israel initiatives of German foreign policy think tanks, Müller was rewarded with a position as an expert on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for the German Council of Foreign Relations. Her tireless hostility toward Jews in Judea and Samaria, Israeli self-defense measures, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would remain largely constant.

Müller's apologists argue that her anti-Israel and alleged antisemitic activity took place a decade or more ago. However, her scapegoating of Jews remained steady. In 2021, she blamed "radical settlement organizations" for the violence in East Jerusalem while ignoring Palestinian terrorism and rocket attacks. She has a documented history of showing sympathy for the US- and EU-designated terrorist entity Hamas, demanding that Israel lift its blockade on the organization. She accused Israel of "war crimes" in its war of self-defense against Hamas in 2014 and declared that the genocidally antisemitic terrorist movement has "important demands."

The Jerusalem-based NGO Monitor chronicled her efforts to help dislodge Netanyahu from power while she was working in Tel Aviv.

In 2021, she tweeted after his Likud party suffered an election defeat: "Bibi is out really good news from Israel!"

In 2022, Müller praised the achievements of the former German Green party

leader Hans-Christian Ströbele, who had just died. Ströbele defended Saddam Hussein's Scud missile attacks against Israel in 1991 as "the logical, nearly unavoidable consequences of Israel's policies" in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Müller's pro-Hamas and alleged antisemitic rhetoric would normally disqualify a person from a foreign policy role in mainstream discourse. Making matters worse for critics of Müller, the Berlin chapter of a pro-Israel organization, the European Leadership Network (ELNET), appointed her to the group's advisory board. Carsten Ovens, the executive director of ELNET-Germany, has gone mum about Müller's appointment.

■ **A Feature Not a Bug**

In terms of encouraging Palestinian recalcitrance at the negotiating table and the EU efforts to create facts on the ground to advance a Palestinian state, Müller's posture is not a bug in the German and EU systems but rather a feature.

After all, Germany and other EU member states pump significant funds into Palestinian NGOs, including the Ramallah-based terrorist entity Al-Haq, and EU construction projects in Judea and Samaria. Israel's government classified Al-Haq as a terrorist organization because it is linked to the terrorist group the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

Im Tirtzu, a grassroots Zionist organization, recently published blistering material on Germany's interference in Israel's democracy and civil society. Im Tirtzu Chairman Matan Peleg also outlined Germany's meddling in his Hebrew-language book *Country for Sale*.

The German Foreign Ministry's reported boycott of Im Tirtzu events sparked sharp criticism from newly-elected members of the Knesset. The Likud member and Minister of Diaspora Affairs, Amichai Chikli, told Arutz Sheva (Israel National News) in December:

The incessant involvement of the German government and agents on

its behalf in internal political issues in Israel through various funds and even more so under the guise of 'pro-Israel' organizations such as the DIG [German-Israeli Association], which boycotts conservative Zionist organizations in Israel such as Im Tirtzu and its employees, crosses every possible line.

Likud Knesset member Ariel Kallner called for an investigation into the German foreign ministry's anti-Zionist activities. He told *The Jewish Press* in January:

With friends like these, who needs enemies? The investigation of the Im Tirtzu movement reveals a very disturbing picture: The German-Israeli Friendship Association (DIG) under the leadership of Mr. [Volker] Beck is not a supporter of Israel at all, but is completely intertwined with the left-wing side in Israel and denies the legitimacy of right-wing Zionist positions such as support for the Jerusalem flag march. The exposé revealed by the Im Tirtzu movement on the German 'price tag' actions is that of a blood libel.

Beck, like Müller, is a former Green Party Bundestag deputy.

The complaints of Jewish residents in Judea and Samaria are being largely ignored. Advocates of a Jewish presence in the biblical heartland argue that the EU and the UN have created a cottage industry of politicians and bureaucrats in an effort to bypass Israel and establish a nascent Palestinian state.

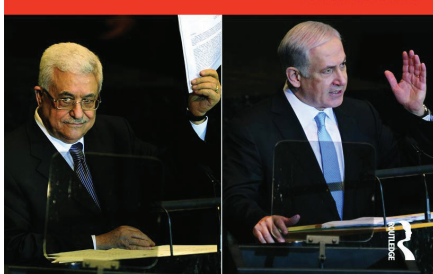
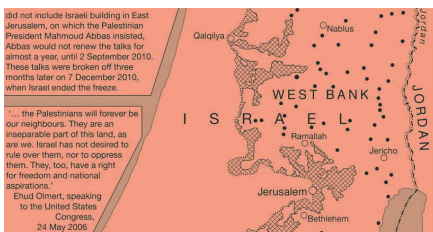
The pressing question for many observers of the new Israeli government is, will Netanyahu block the EU and UN's illegal construction and persuade the Palestinians to engage in negotiations with Israel?

BENJAMIN WEINTHAL is a Writing Fellow for the Middle East Forum.

Book Review Bits

review by SHOSHANA BRYEN

Israel's 75th anniversary is a good time to review our book reviews and make one essential addition to your library.



The Routledge Atlas of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

by Martin Gilbert.

Maps. Brilliant, necessary, non-political, thought-provoking, and "aha!" moment-provoking maps. Don't have another argument about Israel with anyone without bringing your atlas. You will win every time.

Jews and Power (Second Edition)

by Ruth R. Wisse

Jews live in a world of code – words that say one thing and mean something entirely different to the initiated. Religion, nationality, ethnicity, Zionism, antisemitism and anti-Zionism, intersectionality, racism, tikkun olam, peace (alone or next to "process"), Holocaust and holocaust all mean to the speaker what they mean to the speaker.

What the listener, Jewish or not, hears is often something else.

What is clear to the magnificent Ruth R. Wisse in *Jews and Power* is that the evolution of Jews, as practitioners of a religion and as nationalists and as people of widely varying ethnicity, has no parallel. Jews worked to adapt to political conditions in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and elsewhere over centuries and under wildly disparate conditions. At all times, in all places, she notes, "Jews needed accommodation; anti-Jews needed an object of blame." Code, and understanding code, were essential to survival.

The three "staples of nationhood" are land, a central government, and a means of self-defense.

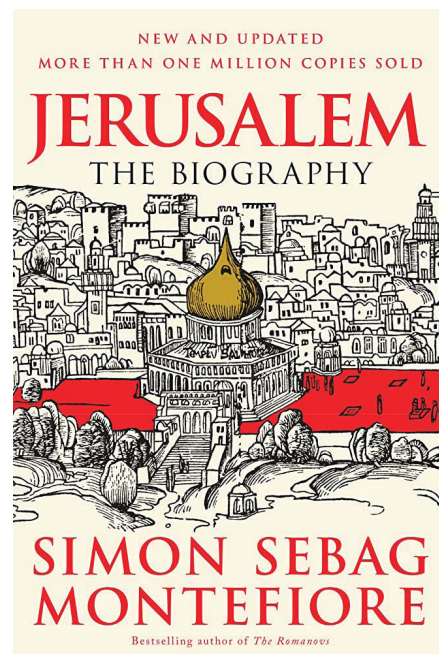
But if nationhood requires three staples that diaspora Jews didn't have, Jews had three other staples – "Torah, worship, and deeds of lovingkindness." (Torah, Avodah v'Gmilit Chasadim) These, especially the Torah, which was translated into the vernacular and studied and shared by the community, were portable. Study was mandatory, and time for study was much to be desired in poor and working communities. (See: Tevye).

Across countries and eras, Jewish communities made accommodation with local rulers, offering benefits and services in exchange for security. However...the arrangement was entirely one-sided. As long as the governing powers valued the Jews over other things, they were relatively safe. But "other things" could and did include populist mobs, riots, and better offers, at which point, the Jews would be jettisoned.

The conclusion returns us to the beginning – the modern relationship

between Jews, states, and power, both political and military, and between Jews and antisemites. *Jews and Power* is not proscriptive, it will not tell you how to deal with the haters or protect the Jews. But for Jews and non-Jews alike, it offers a cogent description of the development of the Jewish people and their unique institutions across time and space.

It is an education well worth the investment of time and intellectual energy.



Jerusalem: The Biography

by Simon Sebag-Montefiore

Simon Sebag-Montefiore brings impeccable credentials to the monumental task of writing *Jerusalem: The Biography*. A history Ph.D. from Cambridge, he has been a banker and a foreign correspondent reporting on, among other events, the fall of the Soviet Union. He is also the great-great-nephew of Sir Moses Montefiore.

Lineage isn't determinative,

however; mission is. Sebag-Montefiore states his. “If this book has any mission, I passionately hope that it might encourage each side to recognize and respect the ancient heritage of the Other (sic).”

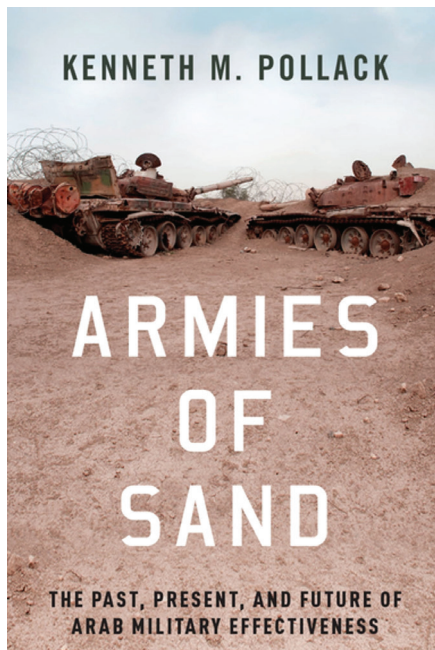
Any mission other than honesty in telling the tale is suspect.

It is worrisome that the admission of mission doesn’t appear until the epilogue – where perhaps it was meant as an afterthought – but it isn’t, it is fundamental. I put it up front so you can enjoy the huge, gory, often repulsive, but fascinating story of the Holy City with the knowledge that this biography serves an interest. Oddly, the mission posits only two sides, but he writes cogently and fluidly (blood being the most prevalent fluid) about so many sides that you need a spread sheet.

At the end, Sebag-Montefiore is honest. Across 548 pages of text, the Jewish side of the equation never denies the Christian or Muslim heritage of Jerusalem. The “Others” not only denied the Jews the right to worship or live in the city or live at all, but they also denied one another. Each conqueror claimed sole occupancy – sometimes permitting others to live or pray in the city, but only as a magnanimous gesture, never by right.

Then there is the question of “Palestinian nationalism.” Although the back cover calls Jerusalem “the capital of two peoples,” there is no indication anywhere inside that the Arabs – or anyone else – considered Palestine a separate governmental entity or Jerusalem belonging to anything other than the occupier of the time.

Sebag-Montefiore failed in his mission. At no time in this bloody carnival of odd, colorful, and violent personages, and momentous events can the reader find “each side” recognizing and respecting the ancient heritage of “the Other.” On the other hand, he’s written a fascinating biography of a city that likely will never peaceably be shared except under the sovereignty of the one side that isn’t exclusionary – the Jews.



Armies of Sand

by Kenneth Pollack

The old joke about Jewish holidays is, “They tried to kill us. They failed; let’s eat.” The old axiom about Arab-Israeli wars is, “They had Russian equipment and tactics; Israel had Western/American equipment and tactics. We won; let’s eat.”

Not so, according to this fascinating study of not only Arab armies and tactics, but also the relationship between cultures and the militaries they produce.

Starting with an excellent overview of the 1967 Six-Day War, former CIA military analyst and current resident scholar at AEI, Kenneth Pollack notes that not all of the Arab armies in that war or in the 1973 Yom Kippur War were actually Russian-armed and trained. To make the differences clear, he takes the reader carefully through those countries and on a detailed dive into Russian military operational and tactical constructs in World War II. He notes the effectiveness of the Russian Army against the Nazis, although at a horrendous price in lives lost.

Pollack’s examination of Arab culture and its variants is interesting, but what emerges as truly useful in assessing military capabilities are the trends across the region: conformity, centralization of and deference to authority, passivity, group loyalty, manipulation of

information, atomization of knowledge, personal courage, and ambivalence toward manual labor and technical work.

Pollack presents no judgment – just expert information well-organized and accessible to the non-militarily inclined.

Gaza Conflict 2021: Hamas, Israel, and Eleven Days of War

by Jonathan Schanzer

reviewed by Lauri B. Regan

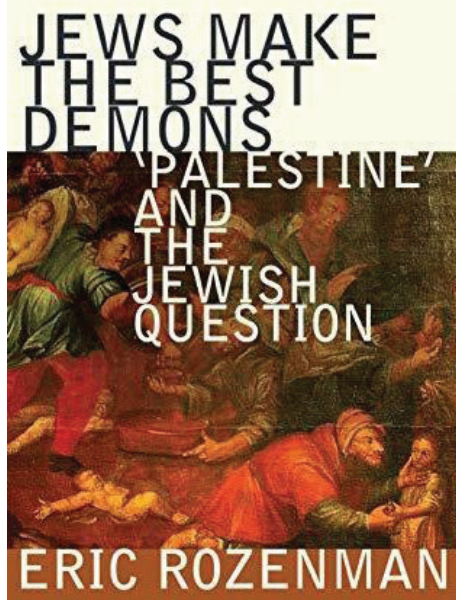
While she neither seeks nor initiates conflict, Israel has, since her founding, been engaged in never-ending war.

Iran and its terror proxies in the Gaza Strip have a plan as they wage war against Israel: continuous hostilities plus “wars between wars,” as detailed in Jonathan Schanzer’s *Gaza Conflict 2021: Hamas, Israel, and Eleven Days of War*. In his fourth book, Schanzer, a Middle East historian and foreign policy expert at The Washington Institute, does a superb job of explaining the events, alliances, and ideologies that led to Operation Guardian of the Walls (OGW). He details the influence of Iran and other malign players, and shares the disheartening reality that, “Hamas exists to fight Israel. The group’s patrons provide funds and other assistance for exactly that reason. War will unfortunately come again.”

In addition to never ending military attacks on Israel and its citizens, Israel faces a strategic and organized assault on its legitimacy from many fronts. It is in this context that Schanzer’s book is both timely and a critically important tool that should be read by everyone in the world’s foreign policy establishment and certainly by every member of the UNHRC Commission of Inquiry that was recently established to persecute Israel for alleged human rights violations.

Equally important would be for *Gaza Conflict 2021* to become an integral part of both high school and college curricula surrounding the Middle East and Israel. It is factual and supported by extensive endnotes, easy to read, flows well, and educates. In short, it is a must read for anyone wishing to understand the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iranian support for global terrorism, and the precarious nature of Israel's survival in the face of forever wars conducted by both regional foes and the international community that fails to appreciate the history and political forces behind those seeking Israel's annihilation.



Jews Make the Best Demons

by Eric Rozenman

This book is irritating. And important. Irritating because you wanted to think that antisemitism – especially in Europe – isn't a problem, but in fact you know better. Important because Eric Rozenman, a journalist and columnist for a wide range of newspapers and organizations, [Disclosure: he is a consultant to the Jewish Policy Center] makes you look where you didn't want to.

He starts with “the dilution of content but intensification of form,” that has resulted in the increasing “delegitimization” of Israel. The heart of the book is the observation by a progressive political thinker that, “In general, truth is a relative thing, and if you state something which is factually untrue, it may, nevertheless, in fact, be considered to be true if it ought to be true.”

In a key theme, it took only a few decades before the Holocaust, a singularly

Jewish experience, was appropriated by non-Jews (and some Jews), well-meaning and not, who changed the debase-ment, dislocation, and horrific torture and murder of Jews into political fodder. Jews as metaphor: Jews are the “new Nazis” and Palestinians the “new Jews.” Or Jews want “too much” compassion for their history and a “dispensation” for “crimes” they commit. “Je suis Charlie” – no one else is really Charlie Hebdo and the French magazine's staff massacred by jihadists – but appropriating him, or the Holocaust, scores political points.

The conclusion will not surprise you: antisemitism is, indeed, the world's oldest hatred. And dressing it as anti-Zionism doesn't change it.

Israeli National Security

by Charles Freilich

Pick and choose carefully. Charles Freilich, a senior fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center and a former Israeli deputy national security adviser, is a profound believer in a “peace process” resulting in a “two-state solution” for Israel and the Palestinians. It heavily influences his strategy for Israel in certain areas – including, in Chapter 10, the “Special Relationship” between the United States and Israel.

The “peace process” also informs his recommendation in Chapter 12 for “Separat(ion) from the Palestinians as foremost national objective... Unilaterally if necessary... on the basis of demography and security.” Such unilateral border drawing would necessarily include territory east of the Green Line – which would certainly add to the “pariah” narrative. And the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza didn't do much for security, either.

His belief that Israel is too dependent on the United States – a fair point – also leads him to see “a resolution of the Palestinian issue would be one of the most effective means possible of reducing Israel's dependence on the United States...” OK, yes. But how? With whom? Under what circumstances?

Don't be discouraged. Freilich is a great writer and his broader understanding of Israel's classic defense doctrine, new strategic environment, changing military threat, nuclear and regional arms control policy, the military response today, and more are definitely worth the price.

What Justice Demands

by Elan Journo

This is specifically a book for Americans, and that's okay.

Libertarian author and director of policy research at the Ayn Rand Institute, Elan Journo frames the conversation about American policy in the Middle East as a question of justice. Or many questions of justice. In a book less about Israelis and Palestinians than about Americans, Journo posits that America has been unable to be the honest broker it would like to be because politicians – regardless of party – chose one of three (useless) positions: 1) Finding the Middle Ground; 2) Doing Right by Israel; or 3) Doing Right by the Palestinians. This, he says, misses the point.

Rather, we need a secular, moral framework “concerned not with collectives, but with the lives of individual, irreplaceable human beings; and it holds certain values – human life, freedom, progress – as objective: Values for everyone, at all times, in all places.”

In the end, Journo believes the United States should stand for freedom and justice for as many people as possible. That inclines us toward Israel and away from the PLO, PA, Hamas, and the PIJ (Palestinian Islamic Jihad) as Palestinian leadership. Toward the Palestinian people and – and oddly – against elections, which, in his view, have empowered not only Palestinian dictators, but jihadists across the region.

The president and his policy directors would do themselves, the regional players, and the American people a service to read this very American, and very wise, book.

SHOSHANA BRYEN is Senior Director of The Jewish Policy Center and Editor of inFOCUS Quarterly.



PO Box 77316
Washington, DC 20013

■ A Final Thought ...

Grow Up

After a wave of terror attacks against Israelis by Palestinians, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the legalization of nine formerly unauthorized communities in Judea and Samaria. It was a great move – nonviolent and aimed precisely at what the Palestinian leadership and its terrorist foot soldiers don't want: more Jews in the disputed territories.

It was the “grown up” thing to do.

The US response, by contrast, was infantile. State Department Spokesman Ned Price had a veritable temper tantrum. “The US is deeply troubled by Israel’s announcement that it will reportedly advance thousands of settlements (sic) and begin a process to retroactively legalize nine outposts,” he declaimed.

US Ambassador to Israel Thomas Nides made clear his contempt for the country to which he makes American representation. Nides said, “We’re telling the prime minister – as I tell my kids – ‘pump the brakes,’ slow down, try to build a consensus, bring the parties together.”

That “I know better” attitude is not new. Toward the beginning of this administration, Nides told an Israeli security forum of active and retired military and intelligence personnel that President Joe Biden, “fully and completely believes a two-state solution is best for Israel. We want to see that

neither side does stupid things.”

Stupid things, that is, by stupid children.

Israel’s real-life, adult experiences have led its people and its government to different understandings.

The so-called “second Intifada” began in late 2000, when Yasser Arafat ginned up his people in a war that killed more than 1,000 Israelis. The US equivalent, adjusted for population, is almost 40,000 people: More than twelve 9-11s in under five years.

Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 resulted in Hamas’s ascension to the top of the Gaza thugocracy and the recurring rocket wars. The Hamas charter says *jihad* is the only answer to Israel.

Iran is a regional wrecking ball, seeking bases and factories for precision-guided missiles and drones on Israel’s borders, continuing its nuclear project, and building ballistic missiles with “Death to Israel” written in Hebrew along the side.

Israel at 75 is a modern state, with civilizational roots thousands of years old. Its historic and present experiences differ from those of the US: its neighbors are different, and the threats to its security and very existence are different.

Nides and the Biden administration should grow up.