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# CMER Middle East Report

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## Aims and Scope

The *CMER Middle East Report* (ISBN 978-1-921492-39-6) is an electronic journal (e-journal) published by the Council of Middle East Relations, designed towards fulfilling one of the principal missions of the Council, namely the dissemination of academic research and other scholarly works. With all its inherent advantages, an e-journal serves as the best vehicle to carry CMER to the forefront of the global Middle East scholarly community.

The *CMER Middle East Report* is a scholarly, multidisciplinary, internationally refereed publication focusing primarily on the Middle East and North Africa. The disciplines of interest encompass politics, history, religion, the environment, ethno-history, cultural heritage, social issues, economic development, war and conflict resolution, prehistory and the arts.

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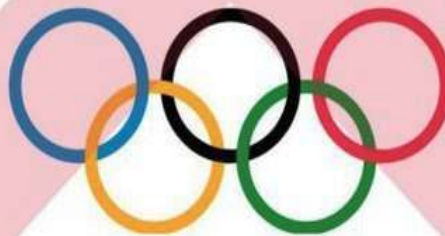
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STAND WITH HONG KONG

STAND WITH UYGHURS



***BEIJING 2022***



**BOYCOTT BEIJING  
WINTER OLYMPICS**

*Say no to concentration camps in China*

The Xinjiang re-education camps, officially called Vocational Education and Training Centers by the government of the People's Republic of China, are concentration camps that have been operated by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional government for the purpose of interning Uyghur Muslims since 2014. The camps were established under General Secretary Xi Jinping's administration.

## **Editorial: Biden's Disengagement**

**By Arthur Tane**  
**TCMER Executive Director**

Unlike former President Donald Trump, who engaged with the Middle East by bolstering the anti-Iranian axis and ensuring the security of U.S. allies in the Gulf, Joe Biden is renege on previous commitments and appeasing America's enemies.

Joe Biden embarked on his first overseas trip in early June. The message he sought to relay to his hosts and the rest of the world was that "America is back," buck back from where? Israel and Middle East visit were not on the itinerary. Instead, while in Europe, Biden meet with lukewarm NATO members, including Turkish President Erdoğan as well as Russian President Putin, the latter of whom he only recently referred to as a "killer."

While one can explain the decision to skip Israel as a result of Biden's old age requirements, the fact is that Biden also chose to ignore other countries in the region, chief among them U.S. allies in the Arab Gulf. Trump, you will recall, began his tenure with a visit to those very same countries and Israel in an effort to express America's deep commitment to contending with the Iranian threat.

This sentiment was being whispered behind closed doors as far back as former President Barack Obama's term in office, and was voiced more explicitly under Trump, who memorably referred to Syria as nothing more than "sand and death." Yet unlike Trump, who engaged with the Middle East through bolstering the anti-Iranian axis and ensuring the security of U.S. allies, Biden's disengagement has seen him renege on previous commitments and appease America's enemies.

The first stage of Biden's disengagement is of course a return to the Iran nuclear deal, which will embolden the Mullahs, Russia and China. Such an agreement would lay the foundation for the United States to lower its presence in the region and disengage from its friends and allies.

At the same time, the Americans have begun to withdraw from Afghanistan following the signing of an accord with the Taliban. This is in fact a liquidation sale, to be paid for by Washington's Afghan allies. After all, no one is under any illusions. Everyone understands that as soon as the West, the Taliban will take over and establish a murderous terror regime. It only a question of time before the US, NATO and Australia are back there again. The social, political and economic enhancements that hve occurred during the course of the last twenty years will be for nought, thanks to Uncle Joe!

The net strategic effect of Biden's unconditional withdrawal from the Middle East and Afganistan is shaping up to be the opposite of what Biden's international security strategy seeks to achieve: diminished confidence among allies, increased boldness among adversaries, the vital strategic territory of Afghanistan ceded to anti-democratic autocracies, a destabilised region containing two nuclear powers with associated proliferation risks, a spiralling of the global jihadist threat and massive population displacement. The great global reset is well under way.



# Biden's Withdrawal from Afghanistan Undermines Regional Security

By Richard Kemp



Jihadists everywhere would be encouraged and empowered by a perceived US defeat at the hands of the Taliban, which was being trumpeted by Al Qaida within days of Biden's withdrawal announcement. Pictured: Security personnel and local residents gather on May 1, 2021 at the site of a car bombing where, in the attack the previous day, at least 24 people were killed and 110 wounded, in Logar province, Afghanistan. (Photo by AFP)

In 1982, Admiral Sir Henry Leach, head of the Royal Navy, told Margaret Thatcher that if Britain didn't retake the Falkland Islands when Argentina invaded, "in another few months we shall be living in another country whose word counts for little". He knew that failure to resist a dictator who seized sovereign territory by force would be a green light to such aggression everywhere. The same calculation underpinned President George H. W. Bush's decision to unleash one of the most powerful armies in history following Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Far worse than failing to intervene is intervening to fail. The withdrawal from Afghanistan is just that. Biden did not order US forces there in 2001, but as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the time, he strongly supported it. Later he said: "History will judge us harshly if we allow the hope of a liberated Afghanistan to evaporate because we failed to stay the course".

It will not be history alone that judges Biden's failure to stay the course now, but America's allies, enemies and competitors around the world. His March 2021 National Security Strategic Guidance says:

"Authoritarianism is on the global march, and we must join with likeminded allies and partners to revitalize democracy the world over. We will work alongside fellow democracies across the globe to deter and defend against aggression from hostile adversaries. We will stand with our allies and partners to combat new threats aimed at our democracies."

Biden emphasises the need to work with NATO and other allies, which he describes as "America's greatest strategic asset".

Fine words butter no parsnips, as Harry Truman was fond of saying. Biden's unconditional withdrawal from Afghanistan provoked the first public statement of dissent against US security policy that I can recall in my lifetime from Britain, America's closest military ally and NATO's next most powerful member. Prior to Biden's decision, both France and Germany, which is the second largest troop contributor behind the US, also opposed withdrawal in the current circumstances, and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg echoed their views.

US allies who have themselves invested huge military and economic resources in Afghanistan fear a Taliban return to power and the blood-bath that would likely accompany it. Their concerns are shared by General Kenneth McKenzie, commander of US CENTCOM, responsible for Afghanistan, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee last week that Afghanistan's forces might well collapse following US withdrawal.

America's partners are fearful also of an intensified threat from global jihadists. Al Qaida — along with Islamic State-Khorasan, with which it sometimes collaborates — would regain their preferred base for attack against the West. As before, Western citizens would flock to Afghanistan for terrorist training. Jihadists everywhere would be encouraged and empowered by a perceived US defeat at the hands of the Taliban, which was being trumpeted by Al Qaida within days of Biden's announcement.

Biden justified his withdrawal with the need to counter challenges from China and Russia and strengthen democratic allies and partners against autocracy. His actions are likely to have the reverse effect.

The abandonment of Afghanistan will long be remembered by countries around the world as they weigh their choices between the US and authoritarian regimes. Already Saudi Arabia has recognised that Biden will not protect them from Iran, with his administration rushing headlong to rejoin the catastrophic nuclear deal and withdrawing support to the Kingdom in its fight against Iranian proxies in Yemen. Fearful for their future, the Saudis know they cannot stand alone against Iran and have opened talks with Tehran, a move that could only harm US interests in the region.

As Russian forces massed along the border with Ukraine in May, Xi will also have noticed that Biden cancelled a transit of the Black Sea by two US warships after Russia told Washington to stay away, calling its planned naval deployment an unfriendly provocation.

Like a kettle of vultures, Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia will all be circling the Afghan carcass following US withdrawal. Iran, which has long provided weapons, funding and safe haven to the Taliban, has been building its influence with them in recent months. Russia has also helped fund and arm the Taliban — sometimes in collaboration with Iran — to kill Afghan, US and NATO forces in order to challenge the US and increase its own influence in the country. China too has been cooperating with

the Taliban, both to hunt down and kill Uighur Muslim leaders and in its hunger for natural resources. It also sees influence in Afghanistan as a means to confront New Delhi. Beijing knows that India, as a US ally and democracy, is the only regional power that could play a genuinely constructive role in a future Afghanistan. Xi is not willing to see that happen.

Pakistan, in cahoots with China, is also determined to keep India out of Afghanistan. Its Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate created the Taliban and today remains by far the greatest external backer of its campaign against Afghan and international forces. Islamabad sees the country as vital strategic depth in a future conflict with India and intends to hold sway over a future Taliban regime in Kabul. But it might have to pay a severe price it did not anticipate as it recklessly fuelled the conflict: a flood of Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban onslaught. They would join the vast number already there, which Islamabad struggles to support. By the end of 2001, 4 million Afghan refugees were in Pakistan, with 1.4 million still there today. This will not be a problem for Pakistan alone; Iran, Turkey and Europe may also face a huge additional influx. Even before Biden's withdrawal, Afghans are already the second largest migrant population in the world.

There is also the prospect of instability in Afghanistan flowing across the border and further destabilising Pakistan with potentially devastating strategic consequences. Intent on overthrowing the government — with its nuclear armory — Jihadists there have been butchering mercilessly for years. Taliban success next door would embolden them and potentially provide support. The soon-to-be-ended US presence in Afghanistan has helped suppress the insurgency in Pakistan.

All of this is a high price to pay for ending what Biden calls the "forever war" in Afghanistan. The truth is this is a forever war for the US only in the rhetoric of those who support surrender to the Taliban. Afghan troops continue to suffer horrific levels of attrition, but the last US combat death there was over a year ago. If a conflict needs to be fought in the first place, it may require an enduring presence, sometimes for decades — look for example at US forces still deployed today in South Korea, Germany and Japan. Look also at the consequences of Barack Obama's precipitate withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 — the rise of the Islamic State and the costly return of US forces for almost another decade and counting.

There are just 3,500 US forces (including off-the-books units) among the 10,000 NATO and other international troops in Afghanistan, all of whom are dependent on US presence. Their function is not combat but training and assistance to Afghan security forces. The US also conducts counter-terrorist operations using intelligence agencies, special operations forces and air assets, the very approach Biden unsuccessfully argued for when vice president, as he opposed the more extensive counter-insurgency campaign that Obama prosecuted while in office.

US President Joe Biden's unconditional withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan by September this year has potentially grave and dangerous consequences far wider than that embattled country and is set to undermine the national security strategy he proudly unveiled only days before announcing his pull-out.

*Colonel Richard Kemp is a former British Army Commander. He was also head of the international terrorism team in the U.K. Cabinet Office and is now a writer and speaker on international and military affairs.*

# How Social Media Validates Anti-Semitism

By Alan M. Dershowitz



Social media platforms are engaged in massive censorship of matters related to alleged election fraud, doubts about medicine, vaccination, anything from former President Donald J. Trump, criticism of Black Lives Matter, doubts about transgender activities, climate change, hate speech and other supposedly politically incorrect tweets and posts. At the same time, it is open season for anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and the double standard toward things Jewish.

This combination - censoring many other things but not censoring anti-Semitism - sends a chilling message: If some things are censored because they are *untrue*, then items that are not censored must have passed some test for *truth*. Thus, the hashtag #HitlerWasRight, which has been posted thousands of times across the social media, must be true. So, too, must the thousands of tweets and posts that claim Israel is a genocidal, Nazi state that deliberately murders children. These anti-Semitic posts must also meet the "community standards" of the various social media.

This is a major problem of selective censorship. When you censor nothing, you validate nothing. When you censor some things, then you implicitly validate what you do *not* censor. An example from history will demonstrate the dangers of selective censorship. Back in the day, when the Soviet Union decided what could and could not be read, it put an organization called "Glavlit" in charge of deciding political correctness - people often forget that the very concept of political correctness was invented by Stalin's Soviet Union. I was in Europe debating a Soviet lawyer about anti-Semitism. I presented the audience with illustrations of anti-Semitic material published in the Soviet Union. My opponent outdid me: he presented neo-Nazi material published in the United States that was far worse. He seemed self-satisfied with his one-upmanship. Then I held up the material published in the Soviet Union and asked him to read what it said at the bottom. He understood what I was asking and he declined to do it. So I read it out: "Approved by Glavlit." I then read what was on the bottom of the material distributed in the United States. It read "published by the Nazi Party USA."

The audience understood. I won the debate. In the United States, no government agency either censors or approves what is published. Only the Nazi Party was responsible for the hate it disseminated. Whereas in the Soviet Union, the government

itself was responsible for the anti-Semitic material that was published. Quite a difference.

The same is quickly becoming true of social media. When they were platforms that allowed everything but illegal material, nothing published on their platforms could be attributed to them. That is why they got the benefit of Section 230, which exempts them from defamation suits: You cannot be responsible for defamation if you do not control what is published on your platform. Now, however, that social media companies have decided to become "Glavlit" - to publish only material that is supposedly truthful and passes its community standards - they have become more like the former Soviet Union than like the United States under the First Amendment.

This is not a call to censor anti-Semitic tweets. It is a call for social media companies to stop censoring other speech based on criteria of supposed truthfulness, "community standards" and other such questionable criteria that are subject to political, ideological and other biases. I want *no* censorship other than for material that is already prohibited by law. But if the social media companies persist in censoring, they must apply a single standard to everything. They cannot exempt anti-Semitism and false claims against the nation state of the Jewish people - while permitting other supposed "half-truths". If they do, they will be responsible for promoting their own big lie: that everything they do not censor must be true. That is the dilemma of the benevolent censor. The current social media have the worst of both worlds: they censor material that is neither dangerous nor necessarily false; and then permit material which is both highly dangerous and demonstrably false.

*Alan M. Dershowitz is the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law, Emeritus at Harvard Law School and author of the book, The Case Against the New Censorship: Protecting Free Speech from Big Tech, Progressives and Universities.*

## Ayaan Hirsi Ali: “How influencers have legitimised anti-Semitism”



In July 2005, Mohammed Bouyeri stood trial for the murder of Theo van Gogh. A year earlier, in broad daylight on a street in Amsterdam, he shot Theo eight times, and then attempted to decapitate him. Theo's crime, for which Bouyeri meted out a death sentence, was a simple one: he had chosen to direct a film, *Submission*, which addressed the mistreatment of women under Islam.

I wrote the script for that film — so Bouyeri pinned a note to Theo's chest when he killed him, declaring that I would be next.

During his trial, Bouyeri said very little. But what he did say chilled everyone present. He declared he was not sorry for Theo's murder; that he would do it again. As Geraldine Coughlan, who covered the trial for the BBC, recalled: “There was total shock in the courtroom. Some people were actually standing up because they couldn't believe what he was saying. It was really without emotion.”

Bouyeri was a pure, cold-hearted killer, radicalised to believe a narrative that anyone who disparages Islam or the Prophet must die. Over the past week, I have repeatedly thought back to that trial, and Bouyeri's unswerving belief in his Islamist worldview. For it seems to me that, sixteen years later, his need to shape the world within a narrative has found an unlikely new following here in the West.

Of all the narratives competing for our attention, there is none as volatile as the one that tells the story of Israel-Palestine. Indeed, there is no other conflict in the world that manages to combine all the highly charged story-lines of our time: the narrative of the oppressor versus the oppressed, of the coloniser versus the colonised, of the genocide perpetrator and system of supremacy.

It is a subject on which everyone seems to have a strong opinion. It is overloaded with emotion; with people desperate to tell their side's “truth”. Instead of a thoughtful, conscientious approach, people rush to defend their “side” — and, in doing so, swiftly drift away from facts, and closer and closer to narratives that dismiss and overshadow objective truths.

It was a false narrative that led Mohammed Bouyeri to kill Theo, and express his intent to kill me. So I don't say this lightly: the narratives circulating today regarding Israel

and the Jewish people are equally dangerous, and are already wreaking havoc around the world. How else are we to explain the fact that, since the most recent conflict erupted between Israel and Gaza, acts of anti-Semitism have spiked in many corners of the Western world?

Of course, for several decades, there have been clandestine pockets of anti-Semitism throughout Europe and the US. This is not a new phenomenon. Despite the horrors that culminated at Auschwitz, anti-Semitism has been haunting our societies for years, continuing to be taught in far-Left, far-Right and Islamic circles. I first encountered these teachings as a child in Africa; as a teenager I joined the Muslim Brotherhood, where I was taught to believe that Jews were not even human, but descendants of pigs and monkeys.

Today, however, anti-Semitism is no longer confined to the fringes of society, but instead has started to leak into the mainstream. Social media has turned it into a contagion, normalising anti-Semitic tropes and attacks. Following the recent outbreak of violence in the Middle East, the Anti-Defamation League's Centre on Extremism found "17,000 tweets which used variations of the phrase, 'Hitler was right'" in just one week. Likewise, anti-Semitism has ferociously spread across Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. This is in large part due to a group of popular "influencers" who — along with their thousands of young, impressionable followers — use their platforms to highlight the Palestinians' plight. No doubt they think they are fighting a just cause. What they may not realise, however, is that they are inadvertently harming Jews, including those living in the West.

I say "inadvertently" because I believe the majority of users posting infographics and memes about Israel-Palestine are simply under-educated and ill-informed. After all, one cannot explain thousands of years of history between Arabs and Israelis in a few screenshots, let alone 280 characters.

Take supermodel Bella Hadid, who, as Daniella Greenbaum Davis has pointed out, has almost four-times as many Instagram followers as there are Jews in the entire world. In response to the conflict, she joined a pro-Palestinian protest in Brooklyn, chanting: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" — an anti-Semitic slogan coined by the Palestine Liberation Organization to call for the elimination of Israel.

Until recently, it was a chant frequently associated with the likes of Hamas, a terrorist organisation whose 1988 charter explicitly called for genocide of the Jewish people. But in today's hysterical climate, one of the West's most famous celebrities can use it and expect applause. Indeed, when the Israeli government accused Hadid of advocating for the elimination of the Jewish state, many of her fans attempted a semantic defence, claiming that Hadid was innocently advocating for a free Palestine, without any harm to the Jews.

But this is where the role of false narratives becomes increasingly alarming. It is my opinion that Ms. Hadid was unaware of the context and history of the chant; I do not believe she understood she was calling for the elimination of Israel, or the expulsion or genocide of the Jewish people. Similarly, I do not believe that she, nor her niece's father, singer Zayn Malik, understood the implications of describing Israel as a "colonizer".

Yet we must not ignore the fact that such descriptions have a pernicious impact on society at large. For whether they realise it or not, sinister actors and adversaries —

look no further than China — have started to capitalise on the ignorance of our progressive elites, using their narratives to harness and spread more anti-Semitism.

Indeed, Jewish communities across the world are already experiencing the fall-out from a new wave of anti-Semitism that has been legitimised by celebrity activists. This month, for example, has also seen the rise of a second frequently misunderstood slogan: a version of “Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, the army of Mohammed will return”, which dates back to the massacre of the Jews by Muhammad and his army in Khaybar, northern Arabia, in the 7th century.

Today, it remains a battle-cry used by Muslims when attacking Jews or Israelis; in the past month alone, it has been used not only in Istanbul, Casablanca, Kuwait City, Doha and Karachi, but in Western Europe, too: in Utrecht, Warsaw, Vienna, Rome, Munster, London, Brussels, Berlin and Amsterdam.

The resurgence of anti-Semitism Europe, in many ways, is unsurprising; it has been simmering under the surface for over a decade. Yet despite a number of terrible anti-Semitic attacks in recent years, America, by comparison, has felt relatively immune — immune, that is, until now. Indeed, I have friends who moved to the US from Europe a decade ago to escape anti-Semitism. This month, for the first time, they are now questioning whether it is safe to walk to synagogue or wear their kippahs.

And is it really so hard to see why? Last Saturday, a man was arrested for attacking Jewish diners outside a restaurant in Los Angeles “on suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon”. Two days earlier, a Jewish man, Joseph Borgen, was attacked by a group of pro-Palestinian activists in New York City’s Times Square. They reportedly beat him with a crutch, sprayed him with mace, called him a “dirty Jew” and explained that “Hamas is going to kill all of you”. Remarkably, a photo of one of the men accused of assaulting Borgen, Waseem Awawdeh, recently appeared in a now-deleted Instagram photo posted by Bella Hadid from a pro-Palestinian protest.

Yet what I found most disturbing was how Awawdeh’s comments following the attack mirrored those of Mohammed Bouyeri’s after he killed Theo van Gogh. Just as Bouyeri refused to apologise, Awawdeh reportedly proclaimed from his jail cell: “If I could do it again, I would do it again.” A video has since been released, purporting to show Awawdeh leaving prison on bail; his friends welcome him outside, put him on their shoulders and proclaim that he was a “hero”.

And herein lies the problem: when such odious acts as Awawdeh’s can be represented as heroism, you suddenly see how easy it is for false narratives to turn into deadly fantasies.



# Australia places Hezbollah on Terrorist List

By Peter Rawlings  
TCMER Board Member



The Australian Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence and Security on June 22 unanimously recommended that the government's Home Affairs Minister designate the Iranian regime-backed Hezbollah's entire organization as a terrorist entity. There are no known specific threats to Australia or Australian interests posed by Hezbollah. However, it is possible that Australia or Australian interests could be harmed by future attacks carried out by external arm of the organization.

This is a mighty step in the right direction for Australia and reflects the seriousness with which the committee takes the deadly activities of Hezbollah. It is now the right time for the Australian government to list Hezbollah in its entirety. During the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas, Australians witnessed Hezbollah flags on our streets and read vile comments from those who support this murderous organization on social media.

Hezbollah is known to be active in Australia, and a dual Australian-Lebanese Hezbollah operative was sentenced in absentia to life in prison in Bulgaria in 2020 for his role in a terrorist attack that killed six people.

Hezbollah is structured and operates as a singular organization, a fact that the group's own leaders proudly proclaim. Moreover, Hezbollah politicians and civilian organizations are deeply involved in the group's terrorist and militant activities. As a result, an increasing number of countries and international organizations have moved to designate the entirety of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

A full proscription of Hezbollah by Australia would mean it would follow our allies the US, UK and Canada, who are part of the Five Eyes security alliance and have previously banned Hezbollah's entire movement.

Australia's governor-general makes the final decision based on government counsel on whether to classify Hezbollah's full organization as a terrorist entity. Australia has listed al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab and Islamic State as terrorist organizations.

## **Something is Sinking and its Not the Dead Sea**

**By Naomi Linder Kahn**

The recently-aired episode of ABC Australia's "Foreign Correspondent" program, titled "The Sinking Sea," presents visually stunning images that convey a sense of loss of a major geographic feature of the Middle Eastern landscape. The video documentary by Eric Tlozek, ABC's outgoing Middle East correspondent, focuses on the demise of the Dead Sea caused by the diminished supply of its tributary waters.

Tlozek's tenure as ABC's Middle East correspondent followed a long line of ABC journalists, including Sophie McNeill, who have faithfully pushed ABC's anti-Israel agenda; in fact, McNeill will be the keynote speaker at the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network's annual dinner this month. Apparently, Tlozek and McNeill share more than an entry on their respective CVs.

The first 13 minutes of "The Sinking Sea" give us a look at the vast, rapid changes that have been caused by the "drying up" of the Dead Sea, through the eyes of geologists who have made this issue their life's work. The subject is weighty, and the scholarly opinions have a strong impact, lending Tlozek's presentation a veneer of scientific objectivity.

Unfortunately, it soon becomes evident that this factual introduction is nothing more than a ploy to lure unsuspecting viewers into what comes after the 13-minute mark. Tlozek shifts the focus upstream to the Jordan Valley, where the waters that feed into the Dead Sea continue to be illegally diverted for human use. Tlozek's entire documentary of the Dead Sea's woes then is revealed as being nothing more than the backdrop for a web of blood libels against Israel: The next 20 minutes or so are used to imply that the Israeli "occupation" and Israeli "settlers" are to blame for water shortages and the cataclysmic shifts in the landscape around the Dead Sea, a result of the dispossession of the "indigenous" Palestinian population" - even though the Jews have lived in that area for nearly 4,000 years.

Before addressing the blatant falsehoods that Tlozek includes in his "documentary," it is perhaps even more important to consider what is not included: the questions that were not answered because they were not asked.

One point that was strangely obscured, and only mentioned in the last minute of the piece, is the very first question any journalist should have asked, but this journalist didn't, apparently because it did not suit his political agenda: What actually caused the Dead Sea's problems? When did the downward spiral begin?

Although Tlozek never comes straight out with it, by inference Israeli "settlers" in the Jordan Valley are portrayed as the cause of the death of the Dead Sea; no mention whatsoever is made of the construction of dams and the rerouting of the waters of the Jordan River in the 1950s - when Jordan still (illegally) occupied Judea and Samaria. The Degania Dam in northern Israel (which enabled the development of Israeli agriculture and provided the life source for the entire Israeli economy), coupled with the massive Jordanian abuse of both the tributary waters and the Dead Sea itself, are not given a moment's consideration, presumably because they cannot be blamed on

the "evil" post-1967 settlers. There is also no mention of the fact that in a central pillar of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty signed in 1994, Israel agreed to give Jordan 50 million cubic meters ( $1.8 \times 10^9$  cu ft) of water each year - and for Jordan to receive 75% of the water from the Yarmouk River. Since that time - and despite Jordan's complete inflexibility on other elements of the treaty where compromise and negotiation were written into the accords (such as extending the lease to Naharayim and Tzofar) - Jordan has repeatedly requested and received even greater water allocations, further depleting the Dead Sea tributaries.

Tlozek also failed to mention that when the Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee), which is full today precisely because of the Degania Dam, enjoys another season of heavy rainfall, or if the planned Israel-Jordan desalination project comes to fruition, the dam will be opened and water will once again flow to the Dead Sea, restoring (at least in part) its water and salinity levels. Lastly, honest reporting of the situation would have at least mentioned that throughout history, the water and salinity of the Dead Sea have fluctuated, and the current situation may be part of a much larger ecosystem cycle. In fact, similar environmental phenomena are occurring in many other inland seas around the globe, including the Caspian Sea, Lake Urmia, and the Great Salt Lake - and no Israeli settlers have been blamed for those ... yet.

Now let's consider what the "documentary" did, in fact, present as fact, beginning with the very damning and specific claims by and about the residents of Kardala. Let's start at the most basic, most accessible level - where any primary school pupil would begin if they were interested in getting information: Wikipedia. The entry on Kardala, written by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 2017, puts the population of this "village" at 200 people in 2010; to have achieved a population of over 1,000 people in only a decade, as stated in the documentary, would have been nothing short of miraculous, particularly since the number of structures on the ground in the village has remained more or less constant since the Wikipedia entry was penned (some 24 structures all told - hardly capable of housing over one thousand residents). The Wikipedia entry also states: "There are no schools or health centres in the village." I remind you that this is as of 2017. The villagers' claim, accepted as fact by Tlozek, that the school and the road that accesses it are "decades old," is an outright fabrication.



Kardala School in 2021



Kardala School in 2018 – no school and no road

These truths about Kardala – irrefutable facts – are borne out by satellite photos available to anyone interested in obtaining them, either from the Palestinian Authority website or from the open-source Israeli government map site ([govmap.gov.il](http://govmap.gov.il)). Above are two images downloaded from the latter: an aerial view of Kardala, marking the school and road (mentioned in the documentary) in 2021 – and the exact same view in 2018, where there is no school and no road.

On the same website, you can access historic maps of the area; a map created by the British Mandatory mapping division in 1935 shows "Khirbet Kardala" – the ancient ruins at Kardala – with no settlement of any kind nearby.

The land surrounding this newborn village has been developed for agricultural use at an astounding rate in recent years, and this is neither a coincidence nor the result of the ingenuity and talent of the local farmers: The Palestinian Authority long ago slated this crucial area for takeover and has poured tremendous resources into illegal activity designed to support the very same specious claims presented by Tlozek in the ABC documentary. This includes creating a system through which water is illegal siphoned off from the Israeli national water grid and piped to the fields for irrigation – a practice so widespread that Jewish communities – where citizens pay a premium price for their water – have major problems with water pressure that actually result in their sometimes having no water in summer months due to uncontrolled pressure drops; reflux contamination and salination caused by the sub-standard piping systems used to steal water, and more. The Palestinian Authority uses European funding to cultivate more and bigger tracts of Israeli state land every year, a well-known exploitation of the loophole in the Ottoman Land Law (still in force in these territories) that grants rights to anyone who uses land for agricultural purposes for a period of several years, whether they own it or not.

This illuminates some of the additional questions that were not addressed by Tlozek: While the man speaking for the residents of Kardala solemnly explains that the Israelis provide only one third of the water that is actually needed to support the population and agricultural projects of the village, the question should be, how was this water allocation determined, and how are the actual water needs of this population determined? In other words, how much water does each Palestinian in this region need, and how many people are we talking about?

Therein lies the rub - or a number of rubs, one might say: The case of Kardala is illustrative of some of the most well-concealed elements of what has come to be known as "the battle for Area C," the section of Judea and Samaria placed under full Israeli jurisdiction under the Oslo Accords. The Palestinian Authority invests tremendous resources in moving people into Area C - people who are actually residents of Areas A and B, the portion of Judea and Samaria placed under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction by the Oslo Accords.

PA Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh announced special grants and tax incentives for any PA residents willing to relocate to Area C Jordan Valley "communities," and even greater incentives for agricultural work. The PA invests untold millions of euros of European taxpayer-funded "humanitarian aid" to initiate massive, unsustainable agricultural projects in desert areas under Israeli jurisdiction in order to take control, physically, of ever-expanding swaths of territory. It goes to tremendous lengths to pad "population statistics" - allowing people born abroad who have never set foot in the Middle East to register as residents of Area C, failing to remove deceased persons from the rolls, and double-counting people who live in Area A or B.

Another well-documented practice is the gerrymandering of the boundary lines of existing communities in Areas A and B to connect with illegal structures it builds in Area C - and then "redefining" the entire complex as Area C, in order to churn out ever-rising population figures. This appears to be the case with the village of Kardala, located in Area C but connected to the older Area B village of Bardala. In this way, all the residents of both "villages" - actually one village under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction and an adjacent cluster of 24 structures that have sprung up on land under Israeli jurisdiction - are now counted as residents of Area C. All told, Kardala and Bardala may or may not have more than 1,000 residents - but by conflating the data for the two, the Palestinian Authority has managed to re-brand the residents of a village fully under its own jurisdiction as part of the (fictitious) burgeoning population of Palestinians living in Area C, and turn them into the responsibility of the Israeli government.

Essentially, this is a shell game played with people, the same people who one minute are under PA jurisdiction, but with a flick of the wrist, the wink of an eye, a bit of creativity and a cooperative "journalist", suddenly become residents of a "historic" Area C village of a thousand residents who are being killed by water deprivation professedly at the hands of a cruel occupation regime and the rapacious settlers that do its bidding.

This is nonsense at best, mendacious falsehood bordering on blood libel at worst.

The allocation of water to Palestinian residents under Israeli jurisdiction was determined in the framework of the Oslo Accords according to population size. Simply put, there would be no water crisis if Europe and the PA would not have orchestrated a large-scale migration of people into Area C for political purposes.

Another question that might have been asked by an honest journalist is, what options are there to alleviate this crisis? Israel provides approximately 70 million cubic meters (MCM) per year of water to the Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") alone, not including the Gaza Strip, even though the Water Agreement signed in the Oslo framework allocates a much smaller quantity of only 23.6 MCM/year (for the "West Bank" alone). If the PA so desired, the residents of the "village" of Kardala could easily be living in Bardala and enjoying sufficient water supplies. Similarly, the housing

needs of all Palestinians currently living in illegal structures on Israeli state land throughout Area C could easily be met if the PA invested its resources in development and construction in the areas under its jurisdiction, Areas A and B, where there is no threat of demolition, confiscation of equipment or materials, and no need for Israeli permits.

A recent study of the availability and utilization of land resources in Judea and Samaria, published by Regavim, found that over 60% of land resources under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction remain available. Rather than using its resources to improve the lives of its people, the PA instead chooses to divert all its resources into illegal, politically motivated projects that are designed to wrest control of as much land as possible away from Israeli jurisdiction.

Agenda-driven journalism is not journalism. It is propaganda, and cannot stand up to the daylight of facts. Let the consumer of propaganda - and its victims - beware.

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## Coroner says Jihad Murderer motivated by extreme interpretations

From AAP

Melbourne's Bourke Street stabbing rampage was a premeditated ISIS terrorist attack, a Victorian coroner has ruled. The fatal attack on beloved Melbourne identity and cafe owner Sisto Malaspina in Bourke Street almost three years ago was a premeditated act of terrorism.

Victorian State Coroner John Cain has handed down his findings into the horrifying 19-second attack by Hassan Khalif Shire Ali in November 2018, finding it was motivated by his adherence to Islamic extremism and ISIS.



He found opportunities to prevent the attack may have been missed, but he was unable to conclude that Shire Ali's trajectory toward it would have been averted if intelligence gaps had been filled, if a different threat assessment had been made or if Shire Ali had not been bailed weeks earlier.

Mr Malaspina, the co-owner of Pellegrini's Espresso Bar, was one of three people stabbed in a frenzied attack by Shire Ali who was a national security person of interest. The horror began when Shire Ali set fire to gas tanks in his car.

Bystander Rod Patterson believed he was running to help the driver when he was blindsided by Shire Ali and stabbed in the head with a 22cm hunting knife. Shire Ali then overpowered Mr Malaspina, repeatedly stabbing him before chasing down security guard Shadi and stabbing him in the neck. He turned then on police, who tried first to disarm him with their batons before one fired his weapon.

In a hearing, Judge Cain said the available evidence supported a finding that Shire Ali's actions constituted a premeditated act of terrorism and an ISIS-inspired attack, attributable to Shire Ali's adherence to an extremist interpretation of Islam.

He said while the actions of one man that day were intended to intimidate and harm, the acts of many others who stepped in demonstrated the opposite result. He praised Mr Patterson and other bystanders, including two off-duty police officers who acted with real courage, and in scant regard for the consequences for themselves.

Judge Cain also found the use of lethal force by police was justified in the circumstances. He commended them for their presence of mind, restraint and effective collaboration in a volatile and dangerous situation, noting one of the officers only graduated from the police academy five months earlier and it was their first time working together.

## ISIS Recruiter Allowed Back into Australia

From AAP



A 30-year-old Sydney man alleged to be an Islamic State recruit has been arrested upon his return to Australia, seen sporting a hoodie and beanie hat in handcuffs at the airport.

Mohamed Zuhbi, 30, arrived in Melbourne on a flight from Turkey on May 8 and was arrested by counterterrorism authorities at the airport. He was seen being escorted through the airport by officials in full PPE, himself in a black tracksuit with a hat and face mask.

Zuhbi allegedly travelled from Sydney to Turkey in 2013 and then on to Syria, where he helped foreign fighters travel to the area.

He has been charged with six terrorism-related offences including supporting a terrorist organisation and engaging in hostile activity overseas.

He has been charged with three counts of provide support for another person to engage in a hostile activity in a foreign state.

Zuhbi fronted Melbourne Magistrates Court via video link on May 10.

He will be placed into 14-day quarantine at a correctional facility in Victoria before he is extradited to New South Wales so his case can be heard in a NSW court. ...

Zuhbi is also wanted by American law authorities for multiple offences including conspiracy to commit murder in a foreign country.



# Why is the CCP being awarded with the Winter Olympics?

By Victims of Communism



As the world gears up for the 2022 Winter Olympic games, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) shows no sign of stopping its genocide against Uyghurs and other indigenous peoples in Xinjiang. Rather, Beijing has answered international condemnation by sanctioning Western politicians, suing researchers, and spewing disinformation. In response to the CCP's actions, the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation is joining with human rights organizations from around the world to call on the International Olympics Committee (IOC) to move the 2022 Olympic games out of China.

The Olympic Charter states that the goal of Olympism "is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity." The Communist Party of China has not only proven beyond all reasonable doubt that it is unwilling to live up to these lofty ideals, but actively works to undermine them.

The Olympic games are the world's preeminent sporting competition. Not only is it an honor to be chosen as the host city but also an immense source of worldwide media coverage and tourist dollars. By allowing Beijing to host the games, the free world risks legitimizing the CCP' rule while the regime is committing genocide 1,600 miles away in Xinjiang. Anything less than moving the games out of China will be an affront to the victims and a signal to the CCP that the free world intends to stand idle in the face of genocide. We call on the sponsors of the games, namely Airbnb, Coca-Cola, General Electric, Intel, and Visa to divest from the games to show their commitment to basic human dignity.

The CCP has resolved to shatter and remake the indigenous peoples in Xinjiang using a variety of draconian measures. The regime has repressed local cultures by disappearing intellectuals and subjecting children to indoctrination in boarding schools. Many religious practices have been outlawed, with adherents subject to extra-judicial detention while houses of worship are either destroyed or remade. Finally, Beijing has taken steps to reduce the population of indigenous peoples in their own homeland by subjecting women to forced abortions and sterilizations and others to forced rendition to forced labor schemes far from their homeland.

“We cannot stand by and allow Beijing to host the 2022 Winter Olympics while the CCP is committing genocide against the Uyghurs. The IOC is morally responsible for ensuring the Games are moved out of China,” said VOC President and CEO Ambassador Andrew Bremberg. “The free world must ensure the CCP is held accountable for their horrific crimes against humanity.”

During a June 2020 appearance on France 24, VOC Senior Research Fellow in China Studies Dr. Adrian Zenz warned that “Beijing is now moving into territory that meets very clearly one of the five criteria for genocide set out by the United Nations...Therefore we now need to re-evaluate the situation because Beijing’s practices in Xinjiang are partially moving into a territory of committing actual genocide.”

Since then, the U.S. Department of State under two administrations has recognized Beijing’s actions for what they are: genocide. In addition, the parliaments of Canada, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the UK have passed resolutions recognizing the atrocities as either genocide or severe human rights abuses with similar resolutions being considered in legislatures around the world.

The IOC has the obligation and responsibility to move the 2022 Olympic games out of Beijing. It is unacceptable to ask Olympic athletes to have to choose between competing on soil where they know genocide is being committed 1,600 miles away and sacrificing a lifetime of preparation by not competing at all out of moral obligation to the victims of the CCP’s genocide. The decision should not be put on the athletes. The decision is that of the IOC and they will be held morally responsible if they choose to do nothing.

*The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (VOC) is an educational, research, and human rights bipartisan nonprofit devoted to commemorating the more than 100 million victims of communism around the world and to pursuing the freedom of the more than 1.5 billion people still living under communist regimes.*

# Move the "Genocide Olympics" Out of China

By Uzay Bulut



Human rights and faith groups - such as the Committee on the Present Danger: China's Captive Nations Coalition, Women's Rights without Frontiers, and Save the Persecuted Christians - have requested in an open letter to the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) that the 2022 Winter Olympics be moved out of China because of its genocide against the Uyghur people in Xinjiang and severe oppression of its other citizens. The letter's 108 signatories remind the USOPC and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) of their charter commitments and international obligations pertaining to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment for Genocide. The letter entitled "Stop the 2022 Genocide Games" said, in part:

"Today, we are confronting another totalitarian regime actively engaging in, among crimes against humanity, another genocide. Yet, as of now, the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) and its international counterpart are preparing to enable the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to receive and exploit a propaganda bonanza that will make what the Nazis enjoyed pale by comparison. That must not happen.

"As you know, the United States government has determined that the CCP is genocidally oppressing millions of Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in the region of western China they call East Turkistan and the Chinese Communists have branded Xinjiang. At least one million of these victims are incarcerated in scores of concentration camps, some replete with crematoria, where they are being brainwashed, raped, forcibly aborted and sterilized, tortured, organ-harvested and

forced to perform slave labor. Is that acceptable to the U.S. Olympic Committee? Would your organization want to be associated with, let alone be seen as condoning, such barbaric behaviour?

"The U.S. government has prohibited the importation of cotton produced in East Turkistan lest American consumers unwittingly support the CCP's slave labor practices. Western companies in China that are complying with this requirement – including some that are sponsors of the 2022 Beijing Olympics – are being punished by the Chinese government for such compliance. Does the U.S. Olympic Committee really want to side with China's slave-masters?

"That would especially be the case since the PRC has given no indication that it will abandon the genocidal oppression of Uyghurs and others, let alone dismantle the massive infrastructure used for this purpose. Rather, the CCP will no doubt exploit the 'Genocide Games' as proof that the world is indifferent to, if not actually implicitly endorsing, its crimes against humanity.

"If the Chinese Communist Party's systematic oppression of those enslaved in its Captive Nations – including not only Uyghurs, but Tibetans, Southern Mongolians and the people of Hong Kong – were not bad enough, countless millions of Chinese citizens are also victims of the CCP. China employs the world's most comprehensive state surveillance and a repressive 'social credit system' to ensure their submission. Were a Beijing Olympics to occur next year, athletes, international staff and visitors would all be subjected to these invasive and coercive totalitarian techniques, as well.

"In addition, Olympians would effectively be legitimating the CCP's assiduous persecution of millions of religious believers. Millions of Chinese Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and Muslims are among those who have been subjected to CCP imprisonment, torture and executions in the last several decades.

"Then there is the matter of the Chinese Communist Party's involuntary extraction of vital organs. Eminent international human rights experts have found that forced organ harvesting is taking place in the PRC on an industrial scale. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of China's own people, ethnic and religious minorities and prisoners of conscience have been murdered to profit the CCP. Is the U.S. Olympic Committee willing to associate with the perpetrators of these crimes?"

Several countries, including the US, Canada and the Netherlands, have accused China of committing genocide – defined by international convention as the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

As well as interning Uyghurs in camps, there is evidence that China has been suppressing the Uyghur population through mass sterilizations and using Uyghurs as forced labor. In 2020, there were more than 380 "re-education camps" in Xinjiang – an increase of 40% on previous estimates – according to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

A UN report from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted, as early as 2018, that the Chinese state was holding ethnic Uyghurs and other minorities in the so-called "counter-extremism centres" and "re-education camps" in Xinjiang:

"Gay McDougall, Committee Co-Rapporteur for China, raised concern about the numerous and credible reports that in the name of combatting 'religious extremism' and maintaining 'social stability', the State party had turned the Xinjiang Uyghur

Autonomous Region into something that resembled a massive internment camp shrouded in secrecy, a "no rights zone", while members of the Xinjiang Uyghur minority, along with others who were identified as Muslim, were being treated as enemies of the State based on nothing more than their ethno-religious identity. The Co-Rapporteur noted reports of mass detention of ethnic Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities, and estimates that upwards of a million people were being held in so-called counter-extremism centres and another two million had been forced into so-called 're-education camps' for political and cultural indoctrination. All the detainees had their due process rights violated, while most had never been charged with an offense, tried in a court of law, or afforded an opportunity to challenge the legality of their detention."

The first independent expert application of the 1948 UN Genocide Convention to the ongoing treatment of the Uyghurs in China, undertaken by the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, in cooperation with the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, was issued on March 8. The report stated:

"Dozens of experts in international law, genocide studies, Chinese ethnic policies, and the region were invited to examine pro bono all available evidence that could be collected and verified from public Chinese State communications, leaked Chinese State communications, eyewitness testimony, and open-source research methods such as public satellite-image analysis, analysis of information circulating on the Chinese internet, and any other available source."

According to the report's executive summary:

"This report concludes that the People's Republic of China (China) bears State responsibility for committing genocide against the Uyghurs in breach of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) based on an extensive review of the available evidence and application of international law to the evidence of the facts on the ground.

"Intent to Destroy. Under Article II of the Genocide Convention, the commission of genocide requires the 'intent to destroy, in whole or in part, [a protected group], as such.' The 'intent to destroy' does not require explicit statements. Intent can be inferred from a collection of objective facts that are attributable to the State, including official statements, a general plan, State policy and law, a pattern of conduct, and repeated destructive acts, which have a logical sequence and result — destruction of the group as such, in whole or in substantial part.

"High-level statements of intent and general plan. In 2014, China's Head of State, President Xi Jinping, launched the 'People's War on Terror' in XUAR, making the areas where Uyghurs constitute nearly 90 percent of the population the front line. High-level officials followed up with orders to 'round up everyone who should be rounded up,' 'wipe them out completely ... destroy them root and branch,' and 'break their lineage, break their roots, break their connections, and break their origins.' Officials described Uyghurs with dehumanizing terms and repeatedly likened the mass internment of Uyghurs to 'eradicating tumors.'"

The report also exposes comprehensive state policy, pattern of conduct and repeated destructive acts:

"a. Government-Mandated Homestays. Since 2014, the Government of China (Government) has deployed Han cadres to reside in Uyghur homes as monitors, resulting in the rupturing of family bonds. County governments further coerce, incentivize, and actively promote Han-Uyghur marriages.

"b. Mass Internment. In 2017, the XUAR legislature formally legalized the mass internment of Uyghurs under 'De-Extremification' regulations. The top security official and entities dispatched a manual and set of documents across the region with orders to police Uyghurs, 'speed up the construction' and expansion of the mass internment camps, 'increase the discipline and punishment' within the camps and maintain 'strict secrecy' over all information, which is not to 'be disseminated,' nor 'open to the public.' The manual outlines the complex hierarchy of officials, entities, and the centralized digital surveillance system overseeing the entire campaign.

"c. Mass Birth-Prevention Strategy. China has simultaneously pursued a dual systematic strategy of forcibly sterilizing Uyghur women of childbearing age and interning Uyghur men of child-bearing years, preventing the regenerative capacity of the group and evincing an intent to biologically destroy the group as such.

According to Government statistics and directives, including to 'carry out family planning sterilization,' 'lower fertility levels,' and 'leave no blind spots,' China is carrying out a well-documented, State-funded birth-prevention campaign targeting women of childbearing age in Uyghur-concentrated areas with mass forced sterilization, abortions, and IUD placements. China explicitly admits the purpose of these campaigns is to ensure that Uyghur women are 'no longer baby-making machines.'

"d. Forcible Transfer of Uyghur Children to State-run Facilities. Pursuant to new Government policy in 2017, China began building a vast network of massive State-run, highly securitized boarding schools and orphanages to confine Uyghur children, full time. XUAR counties receive specific quotas from higher authorities to institutionalize such 'orphans,' who often lose both parents to internment or forced labor.

e. Eradication of Uyghur identity, community, and domestic life. Pursuant to Government campaigns, local authorities have eliminated Uyghur education, destroyed Uyghur architecture and household features, and damaged, altered, or completely demolished the majority of mosques and sacred sites in the region, while closing off other sites or converting them into commercial spaces.

f. Selective Targeting of Intellectuals and Community Leaders. The intent to destroy the Uyghurs as a group is further demonstrated by the Government's deliberate targeting of the guardians and transmitters of Uyghur identity for prolonged detention or death, including household heads, intellectuals, and cultural leaders, regardless of Party affiliation or educational status.

The deliberate targeting of Uyghur leaders and sacred sites evinces an intent to destroy the essential elements of Uyghur identity and communal bonds, which define the group as such."

The report notes:

"China's policies and practices targeting Uyghurs in the region must be viewed in their totality, which amounts to an intent to destroy the Uyghurs as a group, in whole or in substantial part, as such.

Acts of Genocide. While commission of any one of the Genocide Convention's enumerated acts with the requisite intent can sustain a finding of genocide, the evidence presented in this report supports a finding of genocide against the Uyghurs in breach of each and every act prohibited in Article II (a) through (e).

"(a) Killing members of the group." There are reports of mass death and deaths of prominent Uyghur leaders selectively sentenced to death by execution or, for elders in particular, by long-term imprisonment.

"(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group." Uyghurs are suffering serious bodily and mental harm from systematic torture and cruel treatment, including rape, sexual abuse, exploitation, and public humiliation, at the hands of camp officials and Han cadres assigned to Uyghur homes under Government-mandated programs. Internment camps contain designated 'interrogation rooms,' where Uyghur detainees are subjected to consistent and brutal torture methods, including beatings with metal prods, electric shocks, and whips. The mass internment and related Government programs are designed to indoctrinate and 'wash clean' brains, driving Uyghurs to commit or attempt suicide from the threat of internment or the daily extreme forms of physical and psychological torture within the camps, including mock executions, public 'self-criticisms,' and solitary confinement.

"(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." The authorities systematically target Uyghurs of childbearing years, household heads, and community leaders for detention in unliveable conditions, impose birth-prevention measures on Uyghur women, separate Uyghur children from their parents, and transfer Uyghurs on a mass scale into forced hard labor schemes in a manner that parallels the mass internment. In sum, China is deliberately inflicting collective conditions calculated to terminate the survival of the Uyghurs as a group.

"(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group." The systematic birth prevention campaign in Uyghur-concentrated areas is reinforced by the mass internment drive. In the camps, Uyghur women are subjected to forced IUD insertions, abortions, and injections or medication halting their menstrual cycles, while Uyghur men of childbearing age are targeted for internment, depriving the Uyghur population of the ability to reproduce. As a result of these interconnected policies, growth rates in Uyghur-concentrated areas are increasingly approaching zero.

"(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." Where detentions and forced labor schemes are leaving Uyghur children bereft of both parents, they are being sent to State-run orphanages and raised in Chinese-language environments with standard Han child-rearing methods."

The report also explains China's responsibility for genocide under the Genocide Convention:

"China is a highly centralized State in full control of its territory and population, including XUAR, and is a State party to the Genocide Convention. The persons and entities perpetrating the above-indicated acts of genocide are all State agents or organs — acting under the effective control of the State — manifesting an intent to destroy the Uyghurs as a group within the meaning of Article II of the Genocide Convention. This report therefore concludes that China bears State responsibility for an ongoing genocide against the Uyghurs, in breach of the Genocide Convention."

Kuzzat Altay, the President of the Uyghur American Association, and his family are one of the hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs targeted by the Chinese government. Altay, in an interview, told Gatestone about his father, who was taken to a camp in 2018:

"I did not know whether he was alive or dead. After two years of advocacy, I saw my father alive on Chinese State TV, denouncing me from being his son. He asked me to stop all activities against the Chinese government.

"He was released from the camp as a retired, wealthy 70 years old businessman who 'graduated' from a 'reeducation' camp with a tailor certificate. His leg was broken in the camp. Chinese guards forced him to stand up with a broken leg when his leg was broken. I believe Chinese guards pushed him. That's why he broke his leg.

"He is currently under house arrest. He can go outside for groceries. But I can't communicate with my father. The authorities do not allow it. My brother in the US can call him once a week. I lost contact with more than 100 relatives. It is a crime for them to contact me.

"China holds our family members hostage. If we speak up, they take our family members to concentration camps, or Chinese authorities constantly harass them, forcing them to tell us to stop. Sometimes, the Chinese police face time Uyghurs abroad next to their family members, ask them to obey, and to stop speaking up.

"Chinese authorities call Uyghurs abroad to collect intelligence, force them to spy, and threaten them with taking family members to the camps. China launches periodic mass attacks using its social media trolls to intimidate and harass Uyghur activists.

"Uyghur refugees are very well treated in non-Muslim, Western countries, but in Muslim countries, including Turkey, Uyghur refugees are in danger. There is credible evidence that they are harassed by local authorities, arbitrarily detained and deported back to China. Many Uyghurs have been arrested in Turkey, although they have committed no crimes. China does not renew their passports, and Turkey does not grant them residence cards; thus, they cannot legally work and their status is in limbo. They fear arrest and deportation to China."

"The Chinese government wants to eradicate Uyghurs," Altay concluded. "After many Western countries have recognized the Uyghur Genocide, China forced local Uyghurs to show a 'happy face' on TikTok for Xinjiang propaganda."

Nevertheless, despite its genocide against Uyghurs and systematic repression against its other citizens, Communist China is set to host the Winter Olympics in 2022.

The letter to the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC), the International Olympic Committee and other institutions noted:

"For all these reasons, we – the undersigned members of the Committee on the Present Danger: China and leaders of the international human rights community who also stand against the Chinese Communists' ongoing genocide and other crimes – call upon the U.S. Olympic Committee to lead an urgent international effort to relocate the 2022 Winter Games to another venue in this country or elsewhere, providing a 'Freedom Olympics' alternative to the 'Genocide Olympics.' Failing that, you are on notice that we will bend every effort to boycott the Games.

"We remind you that the 2020 Olympic Charter states: 'The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to



promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.' Honoring arguably the greatest human rights abuser in the world with the privilege of hosting the Olympics runs directly counter to the Olympic Charter. Holding the Games in Beijing does a tremendous disservice to athletes, who do not want their desire to prove themselves the world's best to be put in the service of the world's worst oppressors.

"Moreover, under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, to which both China and the United States are parties, the official designation of CCP genocide by the U.S. government requires that we 'punish' the offending regime. Specifically, Article 1 of that binding international treaty states: 'The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.'

"We are, therefore, obliged at a minimum not to reward the Chinese Communist Party with hosting perhaps the most prestigious international event in the world. Instead, we should recognize the CCP as the Transnational Criminal Organization it is and treat it accordingly."

The letter also refers to the coronavirus pandemic that originated from the Chinese province of Wuhan, caused more than three million deaths worldwide and crippled much of the world economically:

"Holding the 2022 Olympics in Beijing would amount to a vindication of the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to avoid responsibility for the ongoing, murderous coronavirus pandemic that emanated from Wuhan and was then deliberately spread around the world, thanks to the PRC allowing international flights to continue after severely restricting domestic travel. Again, the question occurs: Does the USOC wish to be remembered as standing with the millions of American and other victims of the CCP virus or with those who unleashed it?"

More than three million deaths worldwide have been caused by Communist China for failing to disclose, and even outright lying about, the human-to-human transmissibility of the Wuhan virus. Virtually every country has been victimized by what can only be regarded as Communist China's mass murder. So why should nearly 200 countries reward China with the economic bonanza and implicit legitimacy that hosting the 2022 winter Olympics would confer?

When one thinks of more than three million dead only because of Communist China's deliberate deceit - in addition to its genocidal attacks on the Uyghurs - it would seem appropriate to move the Olympics almost anywhere else. All the countries crushed both by deaths caused by Communist China's conscious export of its virus and the economic devastation that followed need to make sure that instead of being enriched and celebrated, Communist China should be held to account - at the very least by being invoiced for the economic damage it caused and removed from hosting the Olympic games.

*Uzay Bulut, a Turkish journalist.*

# China's BRI in MENA being built with Forced Labour

By Judith Bergman



"The entire Belt and Road initiative is based on forced labor," according to Li Qiang, director of China Labor Watch, an organization that recently published a report detailing the conditions of some overseas Chinese workers who are building China's Belt and Road infrastructure projects across the world. (Photo by Aidan Jones/AFP via Getty Images)

"The entire Belt and Road initiative is based on forced labor," according to Li Qiang, director of China Labor Watch. "Chinese authorities want the Belt and Road projects for political gain and need to use these workers."

A new report, "Silent Victims of Labor Trafficking: China's Belt and Road workers stranded overseas amid Covid-19 pandemic" by China Labor Watch, published on April 30, details the conditions of some of those overseas Chinese workers, who are building China's Belt and Road infrastructure projects across the world. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) forms a crucial part of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) foreign policy and is a key tool in China's ambition to become a global superpower.

China Labor Watch spoke to approximately Chinese BRI workers in Indonesia, Algeria, Singapore, Jordan, Pakistan and Serbia. Many shared similar stories. According to the report:

"They were promised a job with good pay to support their families back in China. Upon arriving in the host countries, however, Chinese employers confiscated their passports, and told them that if they wanted to leave early, they had to pay a penalty

for breach of contract, which is often equivalent to several months' worth of their salary."

China Labor Watch found that most of the indicators of forced labor in the definition used by the International Labour Organization (ILO) were present concerning the Chinese workers they interviewed.

Almost all the workers had been deceptively recruited with promises of certain wages and legal work visas. Instead, their passports were confiscated right after they disembarked the plane, leaving them unable to leave unless they paid a heavy fine to the Chinese employer. They received no legal work permits, making them illegal workers. They were locked up in poor living and working conditions on the work premises, which were guarded by security guards. If they wanted to leave the premises, they needed permission from the guards. They suffered excessive work hours of up to 12 hours a day, 7 days a week with no holiday allowance and insufficient labor protection and safety equipment. Many workers were injured during work with no access to medical treatment, leading some to permanent disability. After a worker from a Chinese mining company in Indonesia was diagnosed positive for Covid-19 in November 2020, he was put in isolation in an empty dormitory room for more than 20 days without any medical treatment. Later other workers found his dead body.

According to the report:

"We have found that in some Chinese steel and mining companies, workers are frequently detained and beaten by the company's security guards due to disobedience, attempting to strike, or other disputes with management. In a WeChat group of Chinese steel workers in Indonesia, someone posted a video of a worker being repeatedly reprimanded and slapped until the uniform was covered with blood from his nose. Then other members of the group commented that a factory's translator was the one who beat them.

"Intimidation and threats are common for controlling Chinese workers in forced labor at some BRI projects. The most commonly used threats include deportation, reprisal after returning home, high fines and penalties. It is also common to force workers to sign a waiver of rights to sue the employer and to force workers to delete evidence of labor rights violations on their phones."

Most workers received "late payments... and unexplained deductions."

"A worker who went to Jordan worked in the desert for five months but only received his salary for the first six days. In Algeria, when an installation project of a subcontracting company was close to completion in 2019 two workers were left behind for maintenance and installation. They could not refuse the arrangement because their employer threatened them with six months of salary that had not yet been paid."

There was no place where the workers could complain.

"Several workers said they tried to call the Chinese Embassy to report that their passports were detained by their employing company. The embassy's reply was that it had no right to intervene and the workers were told to file a report at the local police station. However, these workers, cannot even get out of the gate of the work site, and they also face language barriers. It is quite unrealistic for them to call the local police. Moreover, workers are afraid that they will be punished or fined if the police find out that they do not have legal work status."

The Chinese embassy also seems to have actively worked to suppress their complaints.

"Two volunteers we interviewed who are concerned about stranded overseas Chinese workers told us that what they published on their personal accounts about overseas migrant workers were often deleted by WeChat [a Chinese messaging and social media app] admins within a few hours. Once, after publishing an article mentioning a specific company name, an author received a call from the Chinese Embassy and company executives, telling him to delete the article and not to continue to focus on these workers."

That the Belt and Road Initiative may be based on forced labor, as alleged by the report, is not surprising. Forced labor exists in two distinct forms in China. One form is modern slavery, not directly sanctioned by the state, as exemplified by the BRI workers mentioned above.

The other form of forced labor is systematic and legal under China's penal system. Communist China has used forced labor and labor camps, citing "reeducation", since the 1950s. In 2013, the CCP claimed that it was abolishing the practice, only to reinstate it again some years later to "reeducate" Uyghurs. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), the Chinese government has built nearly 400 detention camps in Xinjiang. "By most estimates, about 10% of Uighurs and other Muslim nationalities in Xinjiang have found themselves arbitrarily detained in these camps," according to Nathan Ruser, a researcher at the ASPI.

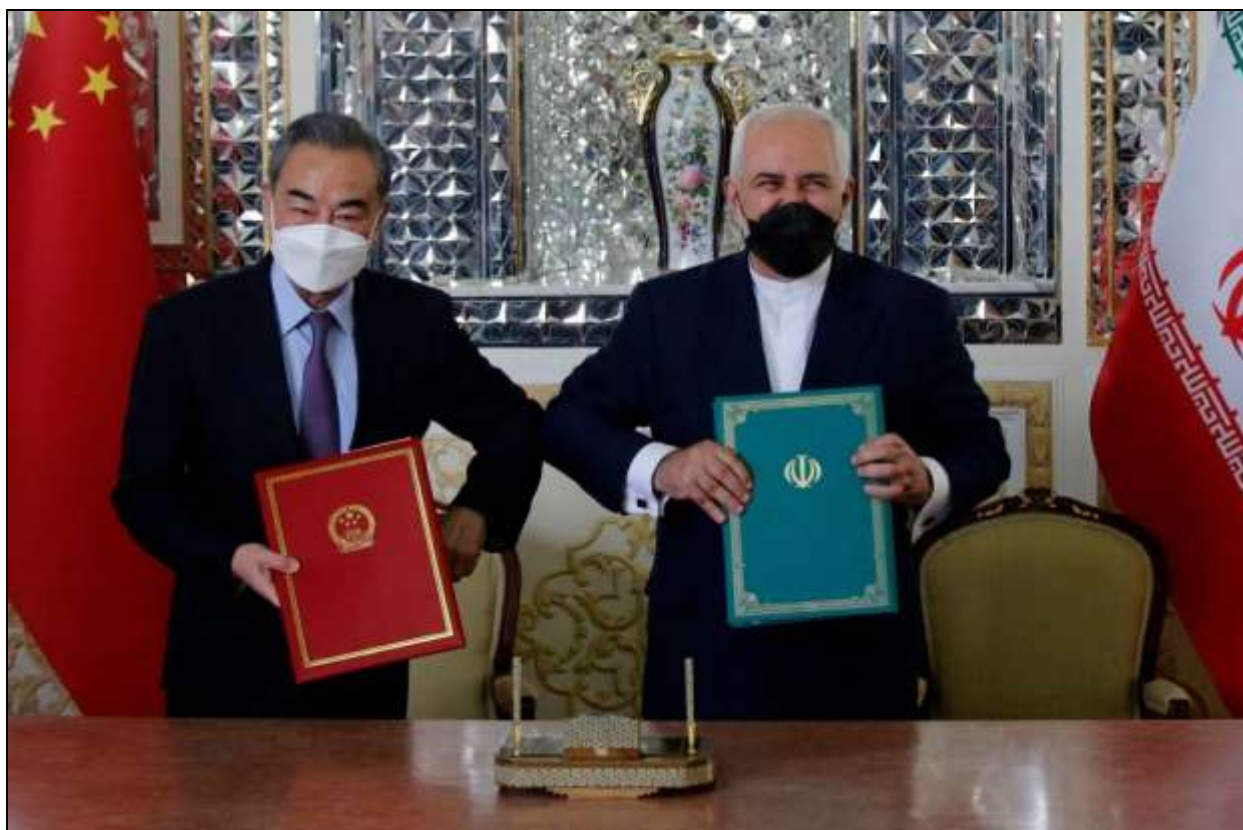
"Tens of thousands of former detainees are likely to have been transferred into forced labour programmes... Xinjiang's continuing detention camps ...underpin a vast network of labour programmes where consent is impossible. They contaminate the supply chains of hundreds of multinational companies with forced labour, and they implicate not only Chinese authorities, but much of the rest of the world in a concerted campaign of ethnic replacement that credible reports suggest may well amount to genocide".

While the forced labor of Uyghurs has received much international attention in recent years, a much less known fact is that China also subjects Tibetans to forced labor on a large and organized scale. In the first seven months of 2020, China drove more than half a million Tibetans into forced labor, according to a 2020 report, "Xinjiang's System of Militarized Vocational Training Comes to Tibet," by Adrian Zenz for the Jamestown Foundation. According to the report, the CCP has been "reeducating" Tibetans in Tibet in ways that are similar to the forced-labor to which it subjects Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The report states:

"In 2019 and 2020, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) introduced new policies to promote the systematic, centralized, and large-scale training and transfer of 'rural surplus laborers' to other parts of the TAR, as well as to other provinces of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the first 7 months of 2020, the region had trained over half a million rural surplus laborers through this policy...The labor transfer policy mandates that... farmers are to be subjected to centralized 'military-style'... vocational training, which aims to reform 'backward thinking' and includes training in 'work discipline,' law, and the Chinese language..."

## China and Iran: Join Up the Dots

By Gwythian Prins



The Free World seems finally to be waking up to the fact that for at least a decade we have been in 'grey war' with the new alliance of China, Russia, Iran and North Korea (CRINK) without openly realising it. Pictured: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at the signing ceremony for Iran and China's "25-year strategic cooperation pact," on March 27, 2021 in Tehran. (Photo by AFP via Getty Images)

The Free World seems finally to be waking up to the fact that for at least a decade we have been in 'grey war' with the new alliance of China, Russia, Iran and N. Korea (CRINK) without openly realising it. Within high circles in the Western Intelligence Community (which is awake, not woke, thankfully) there is a name for it: ghost attack.

Ghost attack is described thus in two stages: Stage One: "Commit non-attributable, or feasibly deniable, acts of war that advance your own national power and physically harm your adversaries, but do not fit traditional legal standards to mobilize them to a formal response." Stage Two: "Then foment chaos, advance the narrative of your innocence, and underline your adversary's incompetence through information warfare."

A recent privately circulating paper discusses three recent ghost attacks: The Colonial Pipeline ransom attack; the covid outbreak; the denigration of Western vaccines. The first, by a Russian cyber-criminal group which is unlikely to be free-lancing, is already public. The latter two have been struggling to break the Communist Chinese intelligence services' skilful grip on the narrative of the pandemic year.

While zoonotic (natural) causation is possible, evidence is now reversing the burden of proof beyond reasonable doubt in favour of SARS-CoV-2 being a chimera originating

from so-called 'gain of function' research principally but not only in the Wuhan Institute of Virology from which, on balance of probability, it most likely escaped by accident due to sloppy procedures. The first end-to-end bio-chemical and forensic diachronic analyses, which were performed in Norway in early 2020 and then updated, are shortly to be published after having been blocked for more than a year. The embargoed Sørensen/Dalgleish paper, written by leading virologists and vaccinologists, is being extensively discussed in the world's press following a letter in *Science* on 14 May 2021, also written by eminent scientists in the field, that finds deep defects in the WHO investigation and calls for a well-informed and balanced review of the lab-release hypothesis, to which the Anglo-Norwegian paper is the authentic response. On 26th May, US President Joe Biden ordered a 90 day investigation by the CIA; then, on 2nd June, the release of a huge data-dump of Anthony Fauci's emails under an FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request occurred. It is already yielding confirmation of Sørensen/Dalgleish's forensic deductions, both on virus aetiology and on who, how, where and when the purposive manipulation was done. No wonder there was such pressure to silence them. So, the dam which has held since early 2020 is breaking.

What concerns us here are the geo-strategic implications of this breach. It means that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has effectively lost the dominance over the narrative that it has held so successfully since February 2020, assisted by highly-placed 'friends of China' in the West, especially in universities and scientific journals. As that fully informed conversation develops in coming weeks, the public mood in the Free World will undoubtedly darken further. If this supposition is correct and if Xi Jinping's command group knows this, as its verbally violent response to the CIA tasking suggests, then perhaps it would be prudent to form a further hypothesis of how, network-like, several other dots may join up? In the world of intelligence analysis, this technique is known as Net Assessment. The dots lead from PRC loss of control over the narrative of the pandemic to blowing up the Middle East, to impending war in the South China Sea.

### *Blowing up the Middle East*

Allocating responsibility for the recent violence in the Middle East soon gets lost in the red mist of prior prejudice against Israel in left-wing and woke circles that are dominant in mainstream Western media at present. Therefore it is especially important to fix the facts scrupulously. The cycle of Palestinian violence spiralled quickly up from clearly pre-prepared and pre-meditated rioting on the Temple Mount to also pre-prepared heavy Hamas rocket barrages of Iranian designed or supplied rockets fired from Gaza. These bombardments apparently sought (but failed) to saturate Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile defences, and led to Israeli-Arab rioting for the first time in two decades, each requiring commensurate Israeli response.

The Palestinians who backed the wrong horse in the 1948 war of liberation are tragic anachronisms, the only major group in the long list of those displaced in the convulsions of the late 1940s not to have moved on to thrive and rebuild their lives. They have been used as pawns in the games of other powers, cemented in place with the persisting glue of anti-Semitism. The origin of this recent cycle was confidently proclaimed in most Western media as yet another example of an old false trope: resistance to another illegitimate attempt by Israel to seize Palestinian properties. So the Israelis, again, were supposedly to blame. Yet that just is not true. Some claim that the Sheikh Jarrah cases in East Jerusalem are obscure and interminable like *Jarndyce v Jarndyce*, the dusty case whose origins no-one could any longer

comprehend in Charles Dickens' novel *Bleak House*. The property dispute at Sheikh Jarrah, the ostensible cause of the May 2021 Gaza conflict in the Middle East, is not so complicated. It is a private rent dispute, caused by squatters and by Palestinian tenants who acquired protected tenancies (not ownership) during the period of Jordanian occupation 1948-1967 when Jordan illegally sequestered the property rights of Jewish landowners. The Palestinian tenants and squatters are refusing to pay their Israeli landlords rent for properties that have been in undisputed Jewish ownership since the middle of the 19th century. Therefore, as in any law-abiding jurisdiction, the owners have gone to court to enforce their rights and to obtain eviction.

Also of interest is the Sherlock Holmes clue. The case of 'Silver Blaze' turned on something that did not happen (a dog that did not bark in the night). Predictably, there were screaming thousands outside the Israeli Embassy in London; the former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn spoke from a platform adorned with a Jew caricature balloon; a car convoy of anti-Semites in north London shouted megaphone abuse at Jews and threatened to rape their daughters. But it is surely the absence of street demonstrations or expressions of support for the Palestinians in Sunni countries that is of far greater importance, and possibly a sign that the Abraham Accords have struck even deeper roots than enemies of Israel fear?

Why does this matter? Surely war is hell and all are equally to blame? Not so. When in November 1864 General William T Sherman ordered the evacuation and subsequent burning of Atlanta before his scorched earth march through Georgia, to the sea, the Confederate commander General Hood protested against his plan. "...Permit me to say that the unprecedented measure you propose transcends, in studied and ingenious cruelty, all acts ever before brought to my attention in the dark history of war". Sherman, a deeply religious man, replied with a claim both to just cause (*ius ad bellum*) and just conduct (*ius in bello*). On just conduct he replied that "war is cruelty and you cannot refine it," which is Clausewitz' principle of illimitability, although immediately Sherman sought to refine it by giving early warning to permit evacuation.

This is exactly what the IDF sought to do with pinpoint strikes in Gaza preceded by phone calls and "tap on the roof" dummy projectiles. The aim? To spare civilian Palestinian lives even while Hamas broke Geneva Conventions and used Gazans as human shields to provide compliant Western media with pictures of dead children: subliminal recollections of the ancient anti-Semitic blood libel and flagrant war crimes if ever there were. The aim of extreme precision targeting underlies the feint executed by the IDF on 13th and 14th May 2021. Former British Army commander Richard Kemp has explained how Operation "Guardian of the Walls" echoed Gideon's deception of the Midianites and, to the extent possible, separated Hamas from civilians. Tank engines serving as Gideon's *shofars* and 155mm SP artillery as his torches. 7,000 reservists were called up. It was made public that a ground attack had been "signed off". The mainstream media, generally anti-Israel, were quick to headline this imminent escalation. Thus alerted, the Hamas terrorists, expecting a ground attack, withdrew into their tunnel complex, leaving the civilians to face the IDF. The ground attack, however, did not come. Instead, 12 squadrons of 160 IAF warplanes dropped JDAM (Joint Direct Attack Munition) "bunker buster" bombs onto the "metro" tunnel complex under Gaza, destroying the matériel and those within it. The battle damage report is not public; but the fact that Israel initiated a unilateral cease-fire indicates that the IDF must have been satisfied with the point reached. No modern army goes to such lengths to spare civilian life.

Yet Sherman's letter to Hood mainly addressed "just cause" rather than sparing civilian lives. He wrote: "those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out ... I know that I had no hand in making this war:" moral responsibility for all the inevitable suffering and death that war brings lies upon the originators. Under Sherman's Doctrine, Hamas is responsible for every civilian casualty in Gaza. This is, of course, also the basis for the "Hiroshima doctrine": if an intolerable blow can end war, it finds moral justification in the lives saved and those with just cause are justified in their actions. It is a fraught calculus. So is everything in war. But that does not mean it has to be excluded from practical ethics.

The record shows that it was a Palestinian and especially a Hamas decision to start this 2021 belligerency. Then why did they do it? *and why now?* - so often the first intelligence analysis question to ask. The only other person who published the importance of this 'why now' question prominently was former National Security Adviser John Bolton. He confined his hypothesis to the Iranian circles, which are necessary but not sufficient: the circles are not mutually exclusive. The first circle is certainly a power struggle between the Islamist Hamas and the Palestine Authority of Fatah. Much evidence shows why this is a proximate motive cause. Yet the 'why now' question pushes further. Both Hamas and Hezbollah, with its 130,000 rocket arsenal in Lebanon (as of 2019), are self-confessed Iranian proxies. Neither can nor would act without Iranian approval - or request. The Ayatollahs have, like their proxies, since Iran's Revolution of 1979, vowed the total destruction of Israel. This goal is also inscribed in the charters of Hamas, Hezbollah and the current Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas, and in eschatological Shi'i beliefs about the return of Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi, the Hidden Imam, who will return over Jerusalem in a blaze of fire.

More prosaically, one may surmise that fury at the degradation of their military leadership, notably the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Quds (external ops) Division, by a USAF drone on 3 January 2020, and the subsequent disruption of their nuclear programme at Natanz by unidentified parties, gives them every desire to unleash the dogs of war. Likewise, both Iranians and their proxies have every interest in destroying the Abraham Accords which, by circumventing the Palestinians, offer the most far-reaching possibilities for normalisation of regional relations in half a century, and threaten defeat for Iran and its proxies. Again we ask: why now? Remember CRINK: China, Russia, Iran, N. Korea?

Xi Jinping first voiced the idea of a major China-Iran agreement on his state visit in 2016. China, Iran and Russia conducted joint military exercises in the Indian Ocean for the first time in late 2019. In June 2020 a draft of a China-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership within the One Belt One Road (OBOR) colonial policy was leaked from an Iranian source: there was discontent within Iran at the prospect of such heavy chains. It suggested a 25-year term and investment in the oil, gas and transportation infrastructure of \$400bn in exchange for increasing flows of discounted Iranian oil (making Iran still only China's fifth most important source of oil: China has been the world's largest oil importer since 2017, stepping into Saudi and Iraqi supplies as the West, for various reasons, stepped back). Since then, Chinese purchase of Iranian oil has been on an accelerating upward curve, from 4m bpd in 2009 to 10.85m bpd in 2021, reaching a new high in March 2021, the month in which the \$400 bn agreement was finally signed (on 27th in Tehran). This agreement between China and Iran strengthened the hands of both countries to test the resolve of a Biden administration filled with Obama-era appointees committed to two of his signature foreign policy



errors, the Iran Nuclear Deal, and a dogmatic prioritisation of the so-called "Two State Solution" that is now dead and buried. With people such as Hady Amr, now the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for "Israel-Palestine," who implausibly Biden sent to "mediate" what cannot be mediated, hope dies. Amr is *parti pris*: someone who once said that he was "inspired by the Palestinian intifada." He has in the past wrongly accused Israel of ethnic cleansing and apartheid.

### *Showdown in the South China Sea*

Obama's third signature error in foreign policy forms a bridge to the other set of dots to be joined up. Fifteen years ago the many small islands and reefs in the South China Sea which are now PLA bases with runways and ports, were uninhabited, many of them tidally submerged and marked with metal poles (which confer no territorial rights under UNCLOS - the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea). It was mainly on Obama's watch that this militarisation proceeded, unchallenged, when it could and should have been nipped in the bud. Now, after the unveiling in November 2012 of Xi Jinping's "China Dream" ambition to become the world's political weather-maker by the centenary of the Communist assumption of power in 1949, often repeated and elaborated by him since then, the illegal unilateral declaration of Chinese maritime sovereignty within the 'Nine Dash Line' that sweeps through the littoral jurisdictions of Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia will be much more difficult to dismantle without physical challenge.

If the PRC's occupation of the South China Sea, threaded with strategic SLOCs (Sea Lines of Communication), is not dealt with one way or another, China's navy will soon have a second and secure southern approach to Taiwan for the invasion that it has threatened for so long.



Pictured: The area claimed under China's 'Nine Dash Line', marked by the red boundary.

If we assume, reasonably enough, that Beijing judges the Free World to have failed the tests set during the pandemic year - of its humiliation of the British by its cruel and studied abrogation of the 1997 Hong Kong agreement, of military clashes with India, of Uighur genocide - we may also take Xi's word that Communist eyes are intently on Taiwan whose very success is a standing reproach, showing as it does how Chinese people are *not* welded to the CCP but can make a splendid success of thriving in democracy. There is another way than Xi Jinping's way for a great and ancient people.



Until relatively recently, the Peoples' Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) was primarily configured for amphibious attack across the Taiwan Straits; but no longer. An immense and rapid building programme has turned the PLAN into a blue water navy with long reach for the first time since the epic voyages of Admiral Zheng He for the Yongle Emperor, third of the Ming Dynasty, between 1405-1433. Its ballistic missile submarines are thought to hide mainly in the bastion of the South China Sea just as the Soviet Navy used to use the Sea of Okhotsk before the collapse of the USSR. Furthermore, its fleet of 'little blue men' on fishing boats are integrated into military

operations. They swarmed to Whitsun Reef to pose a presence in such number that it could not be challenged without escalating violence.

In the event of war, the PLAN generally asserts an unrestricted global theatre of action but specifically holds at risk US assets from Guam to the far side of Hokkaido, hence US bases in Japan. Furthermore, the PLA has threatened missile attacks on Australia, where key Five Eyes intelligence assets are situated. PLA planners must be aware that these are red lines as much as an attempt to invade Taiwan. Any such actions would trigger US escalation, as recent speeches by senior USN officers have confirmed. It appears that the Communist Chinese are throwing down a gauntlet to test our resolve.

The numbers are certainly formidable, but caution is in order: numbers do not equal capability. The PRC's newly enormous fleet is not battle tested. Admiral Cunningham famously observed when asked if, faced with heavy Royal Navy losses, he would pull back during the battle for Crete during the second world war, that "it takes three years to build a ship but three hundred years to build a navy" - or longer, as was the case with his, the world's first - and the PLAN has no such continuity or depth.

The PLAN may be ideologically fervent, as a film of ship inspections by President Xi would suggest, and it may claim advanced weaponry such as hypersonic anti-ship missiles. But Communist China is not ten feet tall. As the recent failure of the PRC space station suggests, we should not automatically assume technological omnipotence. Furthermore we should take advantage from the fact that much defence intellectual property has been obtained from us by hook and by crook. We should remember also, as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* (the ancient text which still guides Chinese military thinking) and the other foundation text of Chinese strategy, the *Thirty Six Stratagems* of the Warring States/Three Kingdoms period, both observe, that perception of power has a power of its own; and that the most elegant defeat is the one incurred by the moral disarmament of the enemy.

Herein lies some hope if your heart has been sinking. Both President Biden's words and those of his Secretary of State Antony Blinken, take a view of the PRC's challenge to the Free World that barely differs in substance from the views of their immediate predecessors, as *realpolitik* dictates should be so. But in the realm of deterrence, it is deeds, not words, that matter; and here the American 'deep state' has not been inactive.

Over recent months and years, the US Dept. of Defence has been engaged in a series of technical moves of significance. They have not been much remarked, let alone joined up, in the mainstream media; but all can be found in the professional military literature, as they should be if they are to compose a credible deterrent to make Xi Jinping think again and stay his hand.

There is public awareness that the USN has been increasing the tempo of FONOPs (Freedom of Navigation Operations) steadily through 2020, both within the Nine Dash Line, near the artificial island bases, and in transits of the 110 mile wide Taiwan Straits. So too have other Western navies, including the French. A USN FONOP, near the Paracel islands in mid-May 2021, was greeted with near hysterical levels of denunciation from Beijing. But more recently other activities have been reported. Here are a few.

The USN 7th Fleet (based in Japan) whose forward-based carrier strike group is centred on the USS Ronald Reagan, has increased its presence off the Scarborough Shoal, a Philippine territory illegally occupied by the PLA.

The USN has also indicated increased patrol presence of nuclear hunter-killer submarines in the South China Sea. (Details on submarine operations are never specified.) France has also confirmed a "Rubis" class hunter-killer patrolling these waters. These too are significant signals because it can be assumed that Western submarines will detect and 'mark' PLAN ballistic missile submarines with the intention of denying them sanctuary in the S. China Sea bastion as well as posing the wide spectrum of threat to land and sea targets that such potent capital ships can do.

The US Marine Corps has been engaged in reinforcing and Army Engineers in constructing new 'lily pads' in the Philippines archipelago. These are bases with logistic capability to receive regiment-scale reinforcement from US Army Rangers.

In their first ever standing deployment outside the continental USA - to mid-Pacific bases at Diego Garcia and Guam - the USAF has, for a few years now, forward-based a small number of the immensely potent B2 Spirit stealth bombers.

These are unlikely to be the only deployments that are being made; but they are sufficient to suggest, in the event that deterrence fails, comprehensive positioning to be ready for a short pre-emptive war to drive the PLA out of the South China Sea.

Add to this the diplomatic commitment of a newly reinvigorated Pacific alliance to which staunch allies the Australians and the Japanese belong. Both nations bring formidable military capability in five dimensions (land, sea, air, space, cyber). The United Kingdom, now free of its entanglements to the failing experiment of the EU, will re-adhere, expressing its commitment in the maiden deployment of the new Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group, already *en route* to the region, including a Royal Netherlands Navy escort. Together, the Free World can be seen to be getting the measure of Xi Jinping.

What net, then, do the dots suggest, when all joined up? The Communist leadership may be aware that the window of the freedom of action which it has enjoyed generally since it joined the WTO in 2001 is starting to close. It has had special freedom of action during the global preoccupation with the pandemic 2019-21 which may have begun by accident but which has been deftly exploited on the principles of Ghost Attack. Indeed, it may be closing more swiftly, even quite soon, as the PRC loses control of the pandemic narrative as the truth is coming out and Free World vaccines get a grip. To maintain initiative and momentum on the roadmap to the 'China Dream', and most particularly aware that the US is now deploying ways to block the PRC's ambitions in the South China Sea, other distractions are needed.

Iran, now tightly locked into CRINK - China, Russia, Iran and N. Korea - needs little encouragement to attack Israel, especially via its proxies where it can claim "plausible deniability". The current bout of violence and its sequel suit Xi Jinping's command group well as a "Dead Cat" tactic: a misdirection so that eyes are off the prime area of interest for the PRC. That area is, as it has ever been during most of its millennia of history within its own continental zone. As the British naval historian Andrew Lambert has observed in his canonical work *Seapower States*, the recent illegal occupation of the South China Sea by this untraditional maritime power is the 'continentalisation' of this sea-space.

Herein lies our chance. The Free World is traditionally, geo-politically, maritime and has mature and tested naval capability that the PLAN does not yet possess. Furthermore, despite race activist screeching, we certainly do not have the reputation for arrogant racism that the new PRC imperialists have acquired in Africa. First-hand observation over four decades enables me to assure you that PRC colonialism is nakedly avaricious and demonstrably unpopular in a way that late British colonial rule simply was not. The rude health of the Commonwealth attests to that.

Chinese demographics and hydrology in China's north are also not moving in Xi Jinping's favour. Charles Parton makes these points powerfully. He is a former British diplomat with long China experience and expertise who crucially, unlike the late Sir Percy Cradock whose baleful advice led to the unnecessary surrender of Hong Kong island in 1997, is not imbued with the reflex defeatism so often seen at the top of the British Foreign office since 1956.

The demographic constraint is both from the below replacement level overall birth-rate and commensurate ageing population profile and from the sex imbalance legacy of the stringently imposed 'one child policy' that leaves China with 30-40 million men, aged 20 to 45, known as "leftover men" or "bare branches" never finding female companionship, with all the social combustibility that this implies. Dialling up permission (if you please) to have three children now, will provide no swift rebalancing but may be an interesting experimental test of the depth of CCP social power: it assumes that pro-natalist instructions will be obeyed by the proportionally well-educated and relatively liberated Chinese female population. Good luck with that. Drought, Parton writes, is less noticed but ought to be better understood. It means that twelve northern provinces, with roughly half of China's industry, power generation, agriculture and population, suffer either from acute water scarcity or from water scarcity for which water carriers from the south will not, for lack of capacity, be a long-term solution. He also identifies debt overhang and education deficits as other reasons contributing to a heavy drag on Xi Jinping's "China Dream".

In short Xi Jinping's command group must be aware that many windows are closing and that time is not on their side unless, via the United Front Work Department of the Ministry of State Security, which Xi Jinping has described as "...an important magic weapon for strengthening the party's ruling position ... and an important magic weapon for realising the China Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation," they can persuade the Free World to self-harm sufficiently that we effect unilateral moral disarmament. For this, there is evidence of intent and, unfortunately, of some current success.

Therefore, the Free World must not fall for the Dead Cat gambit. We must firmly support Israel, the window of the West in the Middle East, and we must maintain the Abraham Accords as the best road to normalisation in that region. If we ensure that we are not woke but all awake, we can, in this frame of mind, resist cultural subversion and moral disarmament propelled by the PRC 's United Front Work Department of the Ministry of State Security's 'make friends for China' strategy within our body politic. In these ways, the threat posed to us by the most patient, intelligent, malign and formidable enemy that we have faced, can be defeated.

The admission of the PRC to the World Trade Organisation on "12/11" in 2001 in the lazy and arrogant belief that the Communist Chinese would thereby become more like us, was a grave and ignorant error that we now live to repent. By preference, a Free World united front of firm deterrence and ostracism may cause the Mandate of Heaven

to move from Xi Jinping's communist dictatorship, as it has from over-reaching Chinese leaders many times before over two thousand years. We have a duty to the betrayed democrats of Hong Kong and by extension to all decent Chinese people to help them to liberate themselves. But for twenty years we have averted our eyes and so the hour is now late. Many in the Western establishments who were defeatist or complicit over the last two decades have much to answer for. Therefore, to prevail the Free World may have to use force if needs be; and if force must be used, then sooner is safer than later.

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## **Blinken's Mideast trip highlights limits of American efforts**

**By Dmitriy Shapiro**



While the Biden administration's negotiations to reach a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip has generally been seen as successful, experts have low expectations that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit this week to the Middle East will accomplish anything more substantial than to ensure the international community that the United States remains engaged in the region.

Dispatched at the request of U.S. President Joe Biden, Blinken met with Israeli, Palestinian, Egyptian and Jordanian officials as conversations continue on how to secure a lasting ceasefire in the region, with the United States calling for international aid to help rebuild the Gaza Strip without involving Hamas, an internationally designated terrorist organization that controls the territory.

"I think he wants to go and show that America is still there, America is still leading. To basically go and get some of the credit for the ceasefire, which is well-deserved," Ghaith al-Omari, a former Palestinian negotiator and senior fellow at the Washington Institute told JNS.

Such public diplomacy contrasts with the Biden administration's apparent policy of conducting diplomacy out of the public view to a point where during the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the international community accused the president of not doing enough to stop the violence.

Al-Omari said the visit is not a sign that the administration is changing its policy, which is a major shift from the public diplomacy conducted by previous administrations, especially of former President Donald Trump. He added that the administration is also rolling back Trump's policies towards Israel and Palestine to be back in line with the consensus of the European Union and other allies, and focusing on small, concrete areas of cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis.

But whether the United States can accomplish its goal of helping rebuild Gaza after the latest conflict while bypassing Hamas is seen as highly unlikely.

"Blinken's trip, coming on the heels of another Middle East conflict, shows how the administration's desire to wash its hands of the region is easier said than done, just

like [former President Barack] Obama and Trump both discovered,” Jonathan Ruhe, director of foreign policy at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA), wrote in an email on Tuesday. “I’d expect Blinken to focus on reaffirming the importance of allies in Jerusalem (as he has already), in Cairo and Amman since the United States will need their help in stabilizing the region.”

In the summer of 2014, then-U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is thought of having prolonged the conflict by bypassing Egypt during “Operation Protective Edge.” Instead, Kerry worked with Qatar and Turkey, which have extensive influence over Hamas, despite not being trusted by Israel or Egypt.

Qatar was also the main source of funding for rebuilding Gaza after the 2014 conflict as other actors in the region didn’t want to have anything to do with Hamas.

“Qatar is a supporter of Hamas. And all of that funding went to Hamas’s benefit,” said al-Omari. “That funding used to come in literally suitcases of cash that was flown into Ben-Gurion [International Airport], taken by convoy to Gaza by the Qatari envoy. So Israel was actually part of that process because they understood that at the end of the day, if you need stability in Gaza, you need to maintain a certain humanitarian level, and you cannot do that without working with Hamas.”

“So I think it’s unrealistic to expect Hamas not to benefit, but there are ways to do it that will maybe reduce the benefit that Hamas gets,” he added.

Alliances built under the Abraham Accords in 2020 have brought new players into the mix, the most significant being the United Arab Emirates.

Al-Omari said that if an Arab coalition that included the UAE and Saudi Arabia can be formed to pledge funding to rebuild Gaza, it would dilute the influence of Qatar. Egypt will be interested in such a partnership, as it is concerned about security on its border with Gaza and the fact that Hamas is an arm of the Islamic Brotherhood, which is the enemy of the Egyptian government.

“Egypt has a very complicated relationship with Hamas. They engage Hamas, they work with Hamas, but also Hamas is part of the Muslim Brotherhood, so they don’t want them to be particularly strong,” explained al-Omari. “And part of it is almost a vestige of the old kind of split between Egypt, with the UAE and Saudi on the one hand, and Qatar and Turkey on the other hand.”

But al-Omari isn’t confident that such a coalition will come together.

“Unfortunately, I think we’re going to go back to the status quo,” he said. “So far, I just don’t see much of an appetite, to be honest, and I fear is going back to where we were before.”

Any real change in Gaza, he said, would require an effort to dilute Qatari influence and create a more robust mechanism on the ground to track where international humanitarian aid is going.

“For all of the creative thinking that we’re hearing, sadly I just don’t see the fundamental dynamics have changed,” said al-Omari. “I don’t see other countries willing to put in the money, and I just don’t see any country that’s willing to actually deploy anyone on the ground and risk death. I hope I’m wrong, but I see that in the end, we’re going to end up exactly where we were the day before Hamas fired the rockets.”



'They will invest in building more tunnels and producing more rockets'

Israel will also seek to play a bigger role in the negotiations this time around than in 2014.

"We destroyed a lot of their infrastructure, and I think we restored deterrence, but knowing Hamas for many years, I am sure now that they will use the humanitarian aid that they will receive, and they will invest it in building more tunnels and producing more rockets," said former Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon.

Danon said on May 20 that Israel should bring forward its own humanitarian demands during talks about the reconstruction of Hamas and push for the release of two Israeli citizens—Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed—being held hostage by Hamas and for the bodies of Israeli Defence Forces' soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul to be returned to Israel.

"I can tell you that in Israel, it is a major issue that we should not allow the reconstruction of Gaza without bringing up our demands, especially the demand to bring back our boys who are being held in captivity under the rule of Hamas," said Danon.

Blinken's meeting with Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh are symbolic acts to show that the United States won't engage with Hamas, and that the P.A. is still the internationally recognized authority. But besides the meeting and the announcement of the reopening of the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, the P.A. is completely irrelevant to the negotiations. In fact, it has emerged even weaker from this round of conflict to Palestinians than previously, said al-Omari.

Jason Greenblatt, the former U.S. special envoy to the Middle East in the Trump administration, said in an email. "This issue was reviewed time and again by many of the donor countries who contributed funds to the Palestinians, and in the three years I was at the White House, no donor country—not one—found a way to do this."

Greenblatt said that Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, and the P.A., which controls the West Bank, are bitter rivals, and that getting anything done to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza has been an "elusive task" because of Hamas.

"Now is not the time to speak about aspirational peace," said Greenblatt. "After Hamas fired thousands of rockets at Israel, including at Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and other population centres, it's time for people to finally recognize that before you can get to the issues of any peace deal, you need to accept the fact that the situation in Gaza makes any discussion of peace premature until Hamas and PIJ lay down their weapons and recognize the Jewish State of Israel, which is extremely unlikely, or Hamas and its partner in crime are eradicated."

Said the former envoy: "Saying anything else is just paying lip service to a noble idea but is unrealistic one at the moment, and certainly does not help Palestinians in any meaningful way."

# The Real Impact of the War Between Hamas and Israel

By Sarah Feuer

As the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas takes effect — whether it will hold remains to be seen — attention will turn to the gains and losses of either side, the demands of each in reaching a new *modus vivendi*, and prospects for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more generally. But beyond the war's impact on dynamics within and between Israel and the Palestinian territories, the broader regional dimensions of the war and its aftermath merit close consideration. Even as much of the commentary throughout the war focused on the local, immediate, and perhaps most obvious triggers — the combustible situation in the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, missteps on the part of the Israeli police in managing access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque for Muslim worshipers during the holy month of Ramadan, and Hamas's anger at the Palestinian Authority's decision to postpone elections that seemed certain to bring defeat for the Fatah movement — regional dynamics were also at play. And just as they contributed to the latest conflagration, they will undoubtedly carry implications for the days and years after.

The local conditions, grievances, and movements informing relations between Israel, Hamas in Gaza, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank have always partly reflected an ongoing struggle for influence between rival actors at the regional level. Four developments within that broader struggle in recent years provided the fuel and ignition for the current explosion. The first was a decline in the regional influence and political sway of Sunni Islamist movements inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), after a brief ascendance they had enjoyed in the years following the region-wide uprisings familiarly known as the "Arab Spring." The decline began with the 2013 coup in Egypt overthrowing the Islamist (if democratically elected) regime of Mohamed Morsi and was propelled by the territorial defeat in 2018 of the so-called Islamic State (Da'esh), a terrorist organization some came to view as a more extreme variant of Brotherhood-inspired Islamism. A few actors in the region, Hamas, Turkey, and Qatar chief among them, continued to espouse and promote the ideology and interests of Islamist governance, but by and large, the regional trajectory of the last several years had undermined the MB camp.

A related development was a strengthening of the pragmatic Sunni Arab states which had aligned, if only in a loosely coordinated fashion, around shared goals of countering Iran and diminishing Sunni Islamism, whether in the style of the Muslim Brotherhood or more radical strains. Traditionally, and even more so since the tumult of the Arab Spring, regimes in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, and Morocco have sought a Middle East that would prioritize stability, economic development, and generally positive ties with the West, while eschewing and in some cases actively repressing moves toward political liberalization. In their determination to push back against Iran and counter Islamist movements, these states had found an eager partner in Israel, and last year's normalization agreements further bolstered Israel's budding alliance with the Sunni pragmatic states, injecting an additional measure of cohesion and strength into the bloc. A notable exception was the Israeli-Jordanian relationship, which deteriorated

in recent years on the political level, even if security cooperation remained largely intact.

The Abraham Accord treaties signed in 2020 also reflected a third trend relevant to the current moment, namely the declining regional salience of the Palestinian issue. Importantly, it was not that populations across the region stopped caring about or identifying with the Palestinian cause. But through a decade of mass protests over domestic governance deficiencies, civil wars in places like Syria and Yemen, the rise and fall of a jihadist proto-state in Iraq and Syria, an increasingly assertive (and, in most cases, unwelcome) Iranian encroachment, and the Covid-19 pandemic, the bandwidth needed for the Palestinian issue to galvanize publics across the Middle East had simply been jammed by other, more pressing matters closer to home. Meanwhile, some leaders evidently concluded that the lack of a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should no longer override other national interests that could presumably be advanced by strengthening ties with Israel.

A final set of regional developments concerns the Iran-led axis, which was widely seen as ascendant in the last decade as Iran's influence extended beyond Lebanon and Syria to include allied Shiite militias in Iraq and affiliated Houthi militants in Yemen. Though bruised by its involvement in the Syrian war fighting on behalf of Bashar al-Assad, Hezbollah (Iran's proxy in Lebanon) remained firm, amassing an arsenal thought to contain at least 100,000 missiles and rockets, and capitalizing on the chaos and destruction of the last decade to all but swallow up the Lebanese state. But the Iran-led camp had more recently faced serious setbacks, including the Israeli military campaign to prevent Iran's entrenchment in Syria, the Trump Administration's "maximum pressure" policy of sanctions against the Islamic Republic, and the assassinations of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force Commander, Qasem Soleimani (by American forces) and Iran's chief nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh (allegedly by Israel) in 2020.

The imprints of these broader regional trends — the declining power of Sunni political Islam, the ascendance of anti-Islamist, authoritarian Arab states increasingly allied with Israel, the diminishing regional salience of the Palestinian cause, and a less assertive, if still determined, Iranian camp — were critical, if not immediately discernible, in the trajectory of the latest Gaza war. Much has been made, for example, of Hamas's decision to attack Israel in response to ostensibly unrelated developments in Jerusalem, where the group has some public support but no formal representation or authority. That decision, like Hamas's determination to present itself as the defender of al-Aqsa, and by extension the protector of Palestinians and Muslims everywhere, made sense if a goal was to inject life into a fledgling regional Islamist project and more generally remind the region of the Palestinian predicament. The PA, for all its efforts to manage relations with Israel while retaining political legitimacy in the West Bank, never positioned itself regionally in any meaningful way, in stark contrast to Hamas's success in garnering sponsorship from key regional players. Not coincidentally, Doha allowed a mass rally featuring Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh vowing to defend Jerusalem and al-Aqsa. And it should be no surprise that the harshest condemnations of Israel's military response came from Hamas's supporters in Qatar and Turkey, who undoubtedly saw in the current unrest an opportunity to undercut the ascendance of their rivals in the pragmatic Sunni camp.

Those rivals, and especially the states which signed normalization agreements with Israel last year, are now in an unenviable position. They face anger at home over the civilian deaths in Gaza resulting from their newfound ally's military operation there, alongside a more widespread lament that the accords did nothing to usher in an era of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The normalization agreements showed that Israel could establish relations with Arab states in the absence of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, disrupting a decades-old paradigm that had consistently linked the two. Indeed, the very significance of the Accords was in seeming to decouple the Israeli-Palestinian question from the broader Arab-Israeli landscape; indictments of the Accords for not precluding the war between Israel and Hamas are either missing the point or disingenuous. The pragmatic Arab states and their affiliated news outlets condemned Israel's actions in Jerusalem, but they were decidedly restrained and even-handed in their reactions to Israel's aerial campaign in Gaza; for an enlightening comparison, one need only refer to the statements these regimes issued throughout the last major Israel-Hamas confrontation in 2014. The latest round of hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians, then, did not refute a paradigm shift that facilitated the normalization agreements; rather, Hamas's calls for a new Palestinian uprising are best understood as reactions to that reality.

In war, there are military targets and there are target audiences. Israel's retaliatory assault targeted and largely destroyed Hamas's tunnels, but the target audience included Iran and its proxies, reminding Hezbollah and other like-minded onlookers in the neighborhood of the dangers they face. In 2006 after Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers and killed another three in a cross-border raid, Israel responded with airstrikes and a ground invasion which heavily damaged Lebanon and which Hezbollah later admitted to having underestimated. While the eventual ceasefire left many in Israel struggling to identify a "victory" for the Israel Defence Force (IDF), the force of the Israeli response in the Second Lebanon War has since been credited with deterring Hezbollah for fifteen years. Tehran, which provided both Hamas and its unruly cousin, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, funding and technical know-how to build their rockets, may have enjoyed seeing Israel under fire these last few weeks; the armed drone reportedly launched by Iranian forces in Syria (and downed by the IDF), like the four rockets fired from Lebanon by groups presumably receiving Hezbollah's tacit permission, reflected Iran's cheerleading for Hamas from the bleachers. But these were in keeping with a more muted Iranian axis, and Iran's significance in the war ultimately had less to do with one side's rockets and more to do with the other side's military response.

## Hamas and Iran Turned Gaza into Cemetery for Children

By Khaled Abu Toameh



Hamas's claim that it "won" the last war with Israel has become the subject of ridicule and mockery by many Arabs, who are aware that Hamas's only interest is to appease the mullahs in Iran for the sake of milking them for more money and weapons. Pictured: Iran's "Supreme Leader" Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (right) greets Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on February 12, 2012. (Image source: [khamenei.ir/AF/AF](http://khamenei.ir/AF/AF) via Getty Images)

Hamas's claim that it "won" the last war with Israel has become the subject of ridicule and mockery by many Arabs who are not afraid to call out the Iranian-backed terrorist group for lying to the Palestinians and the rest of the world.

The Arabs are also not afraid to hold Hamas responsible for the massive destruction and the loss of the lives of innocent Palestinians and Israelis in order to serve the interests of its masters in Iran.

Scenes of Palestinians celebrating the Hamas "victory" sparked a wave of condemnations in the Arab world, especially in the Gulf states. The reactions of the Arabs to Hamas's self-proclaimed victory shows that many in the Arab world are not fooled by the terrorist group's propaganda machine. The Arabs are aware that Hamas's only interest is to appease the mullahs in Tehran for the sake of milking them for more money and weapons. The Arabs understand that this just is another farce by Hamas and particularly Iran.

Prominent Arab journalist Amjad Taha, an expert on international affairs and a popular commentator on the media and social media networks in the Gulf, burst into laughter

when asked during a TV interview if he thought Hamas had scored a "victory" against Israel.

"In the war in the Gaza Strip, no one won," Taha said. "The children and women on both sides lost. Does victory mean the use of women and children as human shields? Does victory mean the death of 269 Palestinians and the injury of 8,900 in the Gaza Strip?"

Taha pointed out that some of the Palestinians killed during the 11-day war were victims of Hamas rockets: "Out of 3,700 rockets fired by Hamas [into Israel], 400 rockets fell on residential areas in the Gaza Strip and killed women and children."

"How strange. We live in an era where defeat has become victory. Bon appetite to [Qatar-based Hamas leader] Ismail Haniyeh for the Mercedes car, the Rolex watch and the Armani suit. Bon appetite to Hamas for trafficking in the blood of innocent Palestinians. As usual, Haniyeh won, the people lost."

Echoing the widespread belief in the Arab world that Iran was using its Palestinian proxies, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, to extract concessions from the US and other world powers at the Vienna negotiations to revive the 2005 Iran nuclear deal, Taha added:

"The Hamas militias in the Gaza Strip belong to Iran. What these militias recently did was serve Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps. Iran wants to use the Palestinian issue as a winning card at the Vienna negotiations. Iran wants to use the Palestinian issue to force the US to lift the sanctions on Iran in return for ending the security escalation which threatens Israel. The terrorist Ismail Haniyeh, who is based in Qatar, said, 'We thank Iran for giving us money and weapons.' Iran's money is intended to help the mercenaries to continue trafficking with the Palestinian issue. Iran's weapons are for destruction, not construction."

The negotiations between Iran and the world powers over the 2015 nuclear deal resumed last week in Vienna with the goal of bringing the US back into the agreement.

Emirati journalist and writer Mohamed Taqi was even more blunt in his criticism of Hamas's alleged victory and its alliance with Iran.

"God's curse on all those who exploited the al-Aqsa Mosque, the Palestinian issue and the Palestinian people in return for personal glory and money," Taqi said in a video he posted on Twitter. "God's curse on the traitors who sold the Palestinian issue to give it on a silver platter to the mullahs of Iran."

Like many Arabs, Taqi denounced the Hamas leaders for living in luxury in Qatar and Turkey while sacrificing their own people in the Gaza Strip to appease Iran.

"Which 'resistance' are you talking about, Haniyeh, when you and your children are staying in hotels in Qatar and Turkey?" Taqi asked, addressing the Qatar-based Hamas leader who was seen travelling in a new Mercedes car in Doha during the fighting between Israel and Hamas.

"Which 'resistance' are you talking about when you are sacrificing your people while you and your children are living the good life? Then you ask the Arabs, whom you have accused of treason, to rebuild the Gaza Strip while you are presenting your 'victory' to Iran?"

Moroccan writer and political analyst Saeed Al-Kahel accused Hamas of turning the Palestinian issue into a "commercial asset."

Hamas, Al-Kahel wrote, "does not want the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to end because it wants to achieve political and financial gains. Hamas has turned the Palestinian issue into a commercial asset that generates funds from various sources and ensures prosperity and wealth for its leaders."

Al-Kahel, too, shares the view that Iran is using its Palestinian allies' campaign of terrorism against Israel to get the US to lift the sanctions on Iran. "Hamas has turned the 'resistance' into a pressure card in the hands of Iran, which is exploiting it in its conflict with the West in order to lift the sanctions over its nuclear program," Al-Kahel wrote.

"Therefore, whatever the outcome of the armed confrontation with Israel, Hamas will not declare its defeat. Rather, it will make it a victory, even if it celebrates it among the ruins and coffins. The more killing and destruction, the more Hamas's income increases while the Palestinians continue to suffer from siege and poverty. What is worse is that political Islamic organizations are proud of the illusory victory achieved by Hamas. None of these organizations asked about the nature of this victory and its gains for the benefit of the Palestinians and their cause: how much land was liberated, how many prisoners were released, and how many [Palestinian] refugees returned? None of this has been achieved, and will not be achieved as long as Hamas controls the Palestinian decision-making process. Palestinian blood has become cheap for Hamas, as well as for the Islamic Movement [in Morocco], whose leaders were quick to congratulate the Hamas leadership on a 'clear victory.'"

Samir Ghattas, a former Egyptian parliament member and head of the Egyptian Middle East Forum for Strategic Studies, also warned against Iran's attempt to use Hamas to obtain gains from the US and other world powers during the Vienna negotiations.

Ghattas noted that Iran tried from day one of the fighting between Israel and Hamas to assert its presence in the battlefield by issuing statements in support of the Palestinian terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip. The statements, he said, included a letter sent by Major General Esmail Qaani, head of Iran's Quds Force, to Hamas arch-terrorist Mohammed Deif, pledging full support for the Palestinian war on Israel.

"Iran wants to achieve qualitative and strong progress in the Vienna negotiations, and is playing the card of the factions and militias loyal to it in the region, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine in order to confirm its regional strength and weight," Ghattas said in a clear warning to the US administration and the world powers negotiating with Iran. "Iran exploited Hamas and the Islamic Jihad for its own benefit only, and if it wanted the interest of the Palestinians, it would have contributed to the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip," he added.

"Tehran has not contributed or made donations for humanitarian or reconstruction projects in Gaza, but rather contributed to financing the purchase of weapons and others in order to turn Gaza into a weapon centre that threatens the security of the region. The recent Gaza war and the similar wars that preceded it in 2008, 2012 and 2014 were just opportunities that Iran exploited politically and militarily for its own interests only, not for the interest of the people of Palestine and Gaza, but at the expense of their blood."

Muhammad Mujahid Al-Zayyat, a consultant at the Egyptian Centre for Thought and Strategic Studies, said that Iran's support for Hamas during the war with Israel was aimed at sending a message to the West that the Palestinian terrorist groups have become a bargaining chip for Iran in its dealings with the West.

The recent Gaza war, Al-Zayyat argued, is another attempt to show strength on the part of Tehran and hint that it will go to the Vienna negotiations with a Hamas "victory" in its hands in order to lift the sanctions against it and achieve what it wants from the Iran nuclear deal.

The Egyptian expert, in other words, is joining other Arabs in warning the Biden administration and the Western powers against allowing Iran to be rewarded for Hamas's war of terrorism against Israel.

Saudi political analyst Abdul Rahman Altrairi also scoffed at Hamas's claim that it won the war. He pointed out that Iran's Lebanon-based Hezbollah terrorist militia had previously declared victory over Israel after causing massive destruction to Lebanon's infrastructure during the 2006 war with Israel.

Altrairi reminded those Westerners who are working hard to appease Iran that the Iranians are responsible for "destruction and corruption" in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

Altrairi warned the West that one of Iran's goals during the Gaza war was to destroy the peace treaties between Israel and some Arab countries and "reposition Israel as an enemy of the Arabs."

Emirati preacher Dr. Waseem Yousef also condemned Hamas for its hypocrisy in dealing with the Arabs:

"Hamas fired rockets from people's homes, and when the [Israeli] response came, Hamas cried and shouted: 'Where are the Arabs, where are the Muslims.' Hamas turned Gaza into a cemetery for innocent people and children. Hamas burned the flags of most Arab countries, insulted all Arab countries, and did not respect anyone."

It is refreshing to see voices from the Arab world ridiculing Hamas for declaring victory against Israel while bringing disaster to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. It is also refreshing to see how many Arabs are aware of the dangers of Iran's involvement with Palestinian terrorist groups that seek the elimination first of Israel, then of *them*.

The most important message coming from many Arabs, however, is one that is directed to the Biden administration and the Western powers, alerting them to the fact that Iran is seeking to take advantage of the recent war in the Gaza Strip to intimidate them into making additional concessions to Tehran. It now remains to be seen whether the Biden administration and the Western powers will heed this warning or continue to bury their heads in the sand, pretending that the mullahs in Iran, in exchange for massive bribes from the US, will magically change their savage stripes. They did not last time; what will happen to the region if they again do not?

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## Gaza and the Next Lebanon War

By Assaf Orion



Last month, the Hamas operation “Sword of Jerusalem” met the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) operation “Guardian of the Walls” in the fourth major conflict between the two parties since Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip in 2005. This round pitched two very different military doctrines against each other. Following Iran’s art of war (and using more than a few Iranian-designed weapons), Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) relied mostly on rocket and mortar fire against Israel’s populated areas, complemented by attempted attacks over- and underground, by air and sea, and in the cyber domain. For survivability, Hamas embedded its military assets and operations in the heart of Gaza’s densely populated areas, investing heavily in digging an underground network of military tunnels that it dubbed “Jihad City.”

By launching heavy, indiscriminate rocket fire and other attacks against Israeli civilians, Hamas sought to inflict losses, disrupt daily life, terrorize the population, and project power among Palestinian and regional audiences. And by conducting such operations from within its own population centres, the group sought to dissuade the IDF from striking its forces—while at the same time drawing Israeli fire onto Gazan civilians. This cynical doctrine is a win-win for Hamas because it decreases Israel’s operational leeway while also imposing political and reputational costs for collateral casualties. In that sense, the group’s choice and design of the battlefield dictated many of the operational moves long before the first rocket was launched.

Interestingly, Hamas leader Yahya al-Sinwar stated that if Gaza “resistance” factions had precision-guided missiles, they would focus their attacks on military targets only. He also claimed that they were gradually moving their command posts out of residential towers and homes. Such statements may be music to international ears and perhaps to some in Gaza as well, but they are unlikely to entail any actual internal reckoning or tactical changes—after all, even with its current weapons, Hamas could avoid targeting population centres if it wanted to.

For its part, Israel’s military defensive efforts thwarted all enemy attacks except rocket fire and isolated antitank missile attacks. The Iron Dome system intercepted around 90 percent of rockets headed to populated areas and some explosive drone attacks as well. Missile defenses, early warning, and generally responsible civilian conduct saved many lives. Of the more than 4,300 rockets and mortars launched at

Israel, around 3,600 made it over the border, around 1,700 were intercepted, and around 180 fell in populated areas, causing casualties and substantial damage at dozens of sites and disrupting daily life.

On the offensive side, the IDF conducted intelligence-driven precision strikes on Hamas and PIJ military targets in Gaza, hitting command-and-control elements, rocket launchers/crews, antitank missile teams, naval attack assets, intelligence assets, cyber/electronic warfare elements, weapons development/production sites and experts, terrorist financial assets, and the sprawling military tunnel network that the IDF dubbed “the Metro.” According to some reports, the original plan was to draw hundreds of Hamas combatants into the tunnels with a real or fake IDF ground maneuver, then destroy them with a massive simultaneous strike while they were trapped underground. Yet early strikes on certain underground targets and an unconvincing feint greatly decreased the number of Hamas casualties in the phased tunnel strikes.

When Matthias Schmale, the Gaza director for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), candidly acknowledged that the IDF’s strikes had been “precise and sophisticated,” Hamas threatened him sufficiently to make him flee the Strip. Indeed, considering that the IDF struck around 1,500 targets in one of the most densely populated areas on earth, the numbers of civilian casualties—tragic and regrettable as they are—reflect Israel’s real effort to minimize the loss of innocent lives while striking legitimate military targets.

On the perception front, IDF messaging had conflicting effects among different domestic, Palestinian, regional, and international audiences. For example, much of the wide Israeli media coverage concerning damage and casualties at home wound up emphasizing defensive shortcomings, enhancing the enemy’s sense of achievement, and only partly reverberating in international opinion as justifying Israel’s self-defence. Conversely, media operating under Hamas’s dictum in Gaza reflected the IDF’s achievement of hitting enemy forces hard, but naturally supported the Hamas ethos of an underdog’s sacrifice while portraying Israel as the party responsible for all of the human toll. In short, IDF messaging efforts seemed to unlearn many of the lessons gleaned from the 2008 and 2014 campaigns.

Realizing that casualty counts are a potent way to impose reputational costs on Israel, Gaza officials typically bundle together combatant and non-combatant statistics, animating the numbers with graphic visuals of dead or injured children and women. Such releases hit their emotional targets effectively, but they do not tell the full story. The IDF initially assessed that as many as 200 of those killed were militants (some of whose bodies may still be trapped in collapsed tunnels); Hamas recently stated that it lost about half that number. Moreover, some of the Palestinian civilian casualties were caused by the estimated 680 Hamas/PIJ rockets that fell within the Strip. In other cases, at least two buildings collapsed upon residents far from the impact point of Israeli strikes because tunnels carried the blasts beyond their recalculated safety distances. Multiple civilian casualties also occurred when Israel struck militant commanders who were hiding behind human shields.

#### Implications for IDF and “Axis” Strategy

From a long-term perspective, the latest conflict was just another link in a chain of confrontations between Israel and Iranian terrorist proxies, from the 2006 Lebanon war to the 2008, 2012, and 2014 Gaza conflicts. After each bout, all parties carry

lessons and improvements into the next round even if they were not directly involved in the previous fight.

IDF chief of the general staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi reflected on this still-emerging operational environment in a speech delivered this January, emphasizing how “armies of terror” with tens of thousands of personnel, large fighting units, and standard military weapons are increasingly deploying in populated urban spaces. By openly aiming their fire primarily at Israeli civilians, these “armies” engage in wide-scale terrorism. Their most significant threat is their growing volume of ballistic missiles and rockets with heavier warheads and improved precision, though they also wield advanced cruise missiles and substantial electronic warfare and cyber capabilities. In the past decade, Kochavi noted, Hamas and Hezbollah have also built forces whose purpose is to raid into Israeli territory. Taken together, their military doctrine represents a clear, preplanned violation of international law.

In response to this doctrine, and in order to fulfill Israel’s imperative to protect its population in a morally legitimate manner, Kochavi argued that the IDF has to “widely expose [the enemy], widely strike it, and widely destroy it.” Operational intelligence and massive precision-strike capabilities are the IDF’s answers to enemy concealment and decentralization of its weapons. In his view, the IDF’s core values and international laws regarding armed conflict exist not just to protect the other side’s non-combatants’, but also for the sake of helping the IDF protect Israeli civilians. Precise intelligence enables the IDF to strike military targets according to the principle of discrimination. And when such strikes are conducted on a massive scale, they are more effective at decreasing the threat to Israel’s population, in accordance with the principle of proportionality.

Minimizing collateral damage when striking an enemy military target is important, yet Kochavi also argued that this calculation needs to be weighed against potential damage prevented in Israel. In Lebanon, he said, Hezbollah’s efforts to decentralize and disperse its forces throughout the population have created an environment in which “every fifth house is a military target.” The same goes for Gaza and other fronts. Accordingly, Kochavi urged local civilians who knowingly live among military targets to leave as soon as tensions rise in order to minimize the danger they will face if conflict erupts.

On the home front, Kochavi reminded listeners that in wartime, many missiles will still hit their targets in Israel despite all IDF efforts to the contrary. Given the imperatives of international law and national values, Israel has no reasonable way to mitigate this threat other than its current doctrine outlined above.

Yet what are the IDF’s realistic alternatives if a wider war breaks out? Under heavy, sustained enemy fire, relying on defensive operations alone would quickly deplete Israel’s missile defence interceptors, leading to a steep rise in casualties and damage at home. Sooner rather than later, the IDF would need to use offensive means to degrade the enemy threat. Airstrikes alone cannot sufficiently suppress heavy enemy fire, making ground maneuvers and their much-higher casualty counts inevitable. In the end, the most effective way to decrease incoming fire into Israel is to lessen the launching days—in other words, to seek the shortest conflict through high-intensity, simultaneous operations instead of phased efforts.

As most Western militaries that share the IDF’s values and legal adherence know too well, the doctrine described by Kochavi is currently the least bad of several bad

options. This doctrine will no doubt be tested again, not just in Gaza, but also in Lebanon, where Hezbollah's arsenal is ten times larger than Hamas's and its fighting forces are much more powerful. Sadly, the Gaza conflict may have been just a trailer for the full disaster film awaiting the parties in Lebanon. For example, Gaza militants launched around 400 rockets per day at Israel in this round, but Hezbollah could sustain five to ten times that pace using heavier, more accurate weapons. At the same time, the IDF is capable of conducting at least a dozen times more daily strikes than its Gaza tally of around 150 strikes per day, perhaps hitting thousands of targets daily in a Lebanon war. These ballpark strike numbers could result in thousands of fatalities, especially since Lebanon's size and the expected intensity of conflict would make it difficult for the IDF to practice the same collateral mitigating measures it used so widely in Gaza.

Rather than avoid such a cataclysm, Iran's axis of resistance often seems bent on facilitating it. According to Ibrahim al-Amin, a confidant of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, officers from the Lebanese militia shared an operations centre in Beirut with their Hamas counterparts during last month's conflict, helping them coordinate their actions, providing them with intelligence support, and monitoring enemy movements. Iranian Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani himself visited this centre twice during the eleven days of fighting. And after the ceasefire was reached, Hezbollah, Iran, and Yemen's Houthis joined Hamas and PIJ in threatening that the next "transgression" in Jerusalem would lead to a wider regional war against Israel (e.g., Nasrallah offered this message in a June 8 speech).

Because such belligerent rhetoric has sometimes become a self-fulfilling prophecy for "resistance" groups, and because Gaza is still at risk of re-escalating, one cannot prudently exclude additional conflicts erupting in the Strip, Lebanon, or elsewhere. To prevent these conflicts and their attendant human devastation, all parties will need to address the fact that intentional upstream preparation of densely populated urban battlefields has become the main strategy practiced by Iran and its proxies. When the rockets start flying, it will be too late.

*Brig. Gen. Assaf Orion (Res.) is the former head of the Strategic Division in the IDF General Staff's Planning Directorate.*

## Hezbollah 'liaisons' help control Lebanon

**By Don Gibbons**  
**TCMER Board Member**



The fact that Hezbollah is deeply embedded in some 200 southern Lebanese villages is well known, but what is less known is the role played by the terror organization's local administrators.

Now, a new report published on Monday by the Israeli Alma Research and Education Centre, a security watchdog, sheds new light on the role of the *Rabat*, Arabic for "liaison."

When Hezbollah's units in southern Lebanon need fuel, food or logistics, it is the *Rabat* who will deliver, according to the report. When the Iranian-backed organization needs to find a new civilian home to plant rockets in, the *Rabat* will be there, directing them to the right place.

Maj. (res.) Tal Beeri, who served for 20 years in the IDF's Military Intelligence Directorate, is now head of Alma's research department. He told JNS that the *Rabat* plays a critical role in Hezbollah's ability to install weapons in civilian areas in Lebanon.

"The *Rabat* maps out locations in the village where Hezbollah can place its missiles," said Beeri. The liaison's ability to do this stems from his authority in his area of jurisdiction.

"The *Rabat* serves as Hezbollah's senior representative in a village," Alma's report stated. His duties are wide-ranging, including deciding the identity of village officials representing Hezbollah. "His word is final," the report added.

"One *Rabat* may be appointed to several small, nearby villages. An area supervisor is appointed above the local *Rabats*," it said, indicating how highly structured Hezbollah's "state-within-a-state" truly is.

The questioning of a Hezbollah prisoner from the 2006 Second Lebanon War shed further light on the process that enables these administrators to control their areas, and boost Hezbollah's tactic of using human shields by hiding powerful weapons in villages.

The questioning shed light on how, in the southern Lebanese village of Ayta ash Shab, “Hezbollah rents the houses and apartments. The properties are leased after Hezbollah address the person in charge of the village on its behalf (the Rabat),” the report said. The liaison then coordinates communications between Hezbollah and the relevant property owner.

Prior to selecting the property that will act as a rocket-storage or launch centre, the Rabat conducts a full clearance process to ensure that the location is suitable, said Beeri. “It’s not an automatic process. At the end of the clearance, the Rabat makes his recommendations to the Hezbollah unit that is looking for a civilian home.”

In most cases, Hezbollah offers rent money, but in others, the organization simply seizes the property, which always belongs to Lebanese Shi’ite village residents.

With time, said Beeri, Hezbollah understood that paying rent is preferable to avoid stirring up resentment. “In open areas, if the property is privately owned, Hezbollah often declares an area of interest as a ‘closed military zone,’ ” he added.

The Hezbollah liaison system is a central aspect of the organization’s ability to operate freely and install civilian and military infrastructure in southern Lebanon, according to Beeri.

“They are considered to be central Hezbollah operatives in the areas they work,” he said. The Alma report was able to expose the identity of 23 such liaisons throughout southern Lebanon.

“These are not mysterious figures. The village knows who the Rabat is. Anything that happens in the village must receive his approval. He deals with both the military and civilian matters,” explained Beeri.

Even in civilian matters, such as providing financial assistance to civilians or help with food during the pandemic, the Rabat became involved. He also acts as a local arbitrator, settling disputes. And the final call on who is entitled to Hezbollah aid, including fuel and money rests, with him.

The liaisons played a central role in allocating Iranian, Saudi and Qatari reconstruction money that poured into southern Lebanon following the Second Lebanon War. “Hezbollah asked their rabats who should get the money,” said Beeri.

The liaison is present at all communal events, such as social ceremonies, sporting events, and council meetings.

According to Alma’s report, “The Rabat system in southern Lebanon is another clear sign that the ‘state of Hezbollah’ actually controls the state of Lebanon and that Hezbollah’s power is derived from its connections to the people—Hezbollah put much work into cultivating these connections,” the report noted.

The amount of power focused in the hands of the Hezbollah liaisons opens the door to corruption and exploitation of power, said Beeri.

A prominent example of this occurred in August 2019, when a Lebanese man who had ties to the village Rabat incited an attack against a woman who refused to sign a Shi’ite temporary marriage contract, which is usually meant “purely for pleasure,” with the woman receiving the role of a type of mistress.

Eventually, some of the residents, in cooperation with Hezbollah operatives, attacked the woman, throwing her out of her home with her belongings.

The Rabat also enables Hezbollah's units to remain constantly supplied with fuel, food and all other logistical needs. "Someone has to arrive and provide these things to the units," said Beerli.

"The Rabat calls the gas stations and the service providers, and makes sure the supplies are coming in. Ultimately, their goal is either to rent property or procure business services. They often turn to local Hezbollah operatives who are also business owners or property owners. But that is not enough. So they also have to turn to local civilians for rent and business service needs," he explained.

In addition to these roles, Hezbollah's liaisons are also the local "police officers" of the organization, making sure that its wishes are enforced. Those who refuse to rent their property to Hezbollah risk facing "real pressure," said Beerli, but this only occurs if the organization decides that the location is supremely important.

"Hezbollah does not want to lose its support base. Hence, only in certain cases of refusal, it will make the property owners 'an offer that can't be refused.' Most of the population accepts these requests. They get favors in return. They know Hezbollah is the central address, and they don't want to find themselves dealing with Hezbollah's security unit," he added.

Similarly, if Hezbollah wants to arrest someone in a village, it will consult with its local liaison and gather intelligence on their routines, workplaces and roads most often travelled and when. "It shows the depth of Hezbollah's control in Lebanon," attested Beerli, "the extent to which the state of Hezbollah truly controls the state of Lebanon."

## Islamic Republic: Welcome to Iran's Fake Democratic Elections

By Majid Rafizadeh



Do not be deceived by any narrative that suggests the Iran's political system is democratic or that the people of Iran freely or fairly get to elect their president. Out of 592 individuals who registered to run as candidates in the Iranian regime's presidential election this month, the unelected Guardian Council only approved seven individuals to run for the presidency. Pictured: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani casts his ballot for the presidential elections in Tehran on May 19, 2017. (Photo by Majid Azad/AFP via Getty Images)

Ebrahim Raisi's election as president of Iran came as no surprise. All those who might have been a threat to him were disqualified. He was the choice of the supreme leader, and small wonder: few people better embody the ideology of the Islamic Republic. He will not open Iran up to the outside world, and will certainly not look to accommodate the United States in any way. As for Iran's behavior in the Middle East, he has made clear that it is "not negotiable." The Israel-Hamas conflict last month was a reminder that nearly everything in the Middle East is connected—and whether we're talking about Hamas rockets, the ongoing calamity in Yemen, or the Iran nuclear deal, Tehran and its destabilizing role in the region is the common factor...

Iran's mullahs claim that the Islamic Republic is a "democratic" system of governance. Iran's Supreme Leader recently boasted about the Islamic "democracy," the regime's political system and people's crucial role in influencing and shaping the political establishment:

"The Islamic Revolution transformed the rule of a country from a despotic monarchy into a popular, democratic republic run by the people. Today, the nation of Iran rules



over its own destiny. It is the people who choose. They may make a right choice or a wrong choice, but it is they who choose. This is very important."

In reality, though, the Iran is an authoritarian, theocratic regime masquerading as a democracy. The ordinary people of Iran do not run the system and have no influence whatsoever in choosing who will be their leaders.

To clarify, let us begin with the top position in the Islamic Republic: the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader of Iran is not elected. This position is held by an ayatollah who enjoys the final say in the nation's domestic and foreign policy issues; who is the chief of Iran's military institutions including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), its elite branch the Quds Force and the paramilitary group *Basij*, and who also appoints the IRGC's senior cadre and generals and the head of the judicial system.

Next in line are the positions of the president and members of the parliament (*Majlis*) in the Iranian regime. The President of the Islamic Republic basically does not have power. He acts as a puppet for the Supreme Leader and the IRGC, and facilitates their achieving their parochial and ideological goals, both regionally and internationally. One example, for instance, is the 2015 nuclear deal that the Iranian president reached with the US Obama administration and getting sanctions lifted for the Iranian regime.

When it comes to the positions of the president and the parliamentarians in Iran, Article 16 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic stipulates:

"In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the country's affairs must be administered by reliance on the public vote, and through elections. These will include the election of the president, the deputies of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majlis*), the members of the councils, and other such institutions, or through a referendum in such instances as are determined in other articles of this document."

The Iranian regime, however, has incorporated another article in its Islamic constitution that basically diminishes the power of people's vote. Article 9 of the Islamic Republic's constitution states:

"The qualifications of the candidates for presidency, with respect to the conditions set forth by the constitution, must be confirmed by the Guardian Council prior to the general elections and approved by the leader for the first term".

The Guardian Council is an unelected body made of 12 unelected members who are appointed directly (six members) or indirectly by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The other six members are nominated by the head of judiciary who, in return, is appointed by the Supreme Leader.

The unelected Guardian Council has a history of arbitrarily disqualifying reform-minded candidates, women and those who are perceived as disloyal to the principles of the state and the Islamic revolution, from running for office.

As a result, the so-called democratic elections of the Iranian regime come down to the Iranian people getting to vote only on a few individuals who have already been selected and approved by the regime's mullahs. Out of 592 individuals who registered to run as candidates in the Iranian regime's 13th presidential election, the unelected Guardian Council only approved seven individuals to run for the presidency.

Nevertheless, with a straight face, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed out on May 2: "All elections held by the Islamic Republic have been totally flawless. There might have been certain issues and offenses, but none of them had a significant impact on the result of elections. Those who raise fraud claims do so because of being defeated."

Of course, for the ayatollah, the elections are "flawless" because his regime gets to pick who runs.

Instead of condemning the mullahs for this charade of fake elections, the Biden administration - after feathering the nests of American enemies such as Russia and China - continues to try to make a deal that will not be kept, shower Iran's regime with masses of money it demands from America's hard-working taxpayers, and lift sanctions to further empower yet another corrupt and predatory regime.

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# Iran's Propaganda Outlets Take a Hit

By David Pollock



On June 23, seemingly out of the blue, the U.S. government announced that it had seized the websites of several dozens of Iran's foreign media platforms, including its English-language flagship Press TV and its Arabic-language one, Al-Alam. The official American announcement explaining this step was a bit confusing, even to experts on sanctions and related enforcement measures. What is clear is that this represents an unusual move. The U.S. has previously shut down and sanctioned media operations of designated terrorist groups or non-state militias, most notably Hezbollah's Al-Manar television. It has also recently requested some other, government-sponsored outlets, like Russia's RT or Qatar's Al-Jazeera, to register as foreign agents. Seizing official websites outright, however—even those of an adversary state with whom the U.S. has no diplomatic relations—is very rare.

Some therefore speculated that this was merely an obsolescent carryover from the Trump Administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran's regime. Others, at the opposite end of the logical spectrum, wondered if it could even be a Biden Administration effort at political cover for upcoming concessions in the Iran nuclear negotiations. A few saw a link to Iran's newly crowned president, Ebrahim Raisi, who is already under U.S. sanctions for his role in Tehran's hostile regime, or perhaps to wider current concerns about disinformation, false flag information warfare, and electoral interference. And still others, myself included, thought it might simply reflect inadequate coordination among the various federal agencies dealing with different aspects of Iranian affairs.

In any case, the impact on the nuclear negotiations, or on other important issues, appears to be negligible. A few low-level Iranian officials merely protested verbally against the U.S. action. Similarly, little has surfaced from senior American officials; the State Department referred questions about this issue to the Justice Department, which has almost nothing to add to its original terse and obscure statement.

Nevertheless, the U.S. move against Iran's leading foreign broadcasters serves as a vivid reminder of how poisonous their propaganda really is. Regardless of any nuclear deal, this and related dimensions of Iran's non-nuclear yet hardly conventional threats to the region and to U.S. interests are almost certain to continue apace. Support for terrorism, subversion, sectarian strife, civil war crimes verging on genocide in Syria

and Yemen, and even the eventual destruction of Israel or Arab states allied with the U.S. are hallmarks of Iran's foreign policy. And Iran's foreign media and social media platforms are actively complicit in this campaign.

I know, because until a few years ago I was a frequent guest speaker on both Press TV and Al-Alam. I had thought to provide a small dose of reason and goodwill to offset their openly adversarial and lopsided discussion. Yet in vain, as the following two anecdotes, one from each of these two major Iranian outlets, will amply illustrate.

On Press TV, during President Obama's first year in office, I was featured on a panel about his new approach to U.S. policy in the Middle East. It was a call-in talk show, and the first caller, an American, responded to my comments as follows: "That guy is a Jew-snake. And Obama, he looks colored, but he's really a Jew too. We have no choice but to get rid of him."

I looked hard at the show's moderator, an African American, and at both my fellow panelists, also Americans. I asked them if they had anything to say to this caller. They all demurred. Afterward, I wrote to the moderator, who replied that the channel's legal department had no problem with what had just occurred on air. I called the Secret Service, to report that Press TV had just broadcast an explicit death threat against the president—only to be told they would do nothing about it. I soon stopped answering Press TV's calls.

Still, I kept appearing on Al-Alam, headquartered in Beirut but broadcasting from a rented studio at the National Press Club, right in downtown Washington, DC. My rationale was that, since I was speaking in Arabic, I might have greater credibility and possibly some positive impact with that audience. Once in a while I did get a sympathetic chuckle, as when I remarked that "Iran is indeed ready to fight for Assad's regime—to the last Arab soldier."

Eventually, though, as the enormity of Assad's atrocities and Iran's collaboration with them became increasingly apparent, Al-Alam's denials grew ever more strident and extreme. Finally, they started cutting me off in mid-sentence whenever I cited these incriminating facts. That's when I stopped answering Al-Alam's calls as well.

Which brings us back to the latest website incident, and its implications for future policy. This atypical American action will, as argued above, probably have only minimal direct impact on Iran's media "outreach," on its nuclear program, or on its material support for terrorism. To those on the receiving end, however, it should serve as one more wake-up call about the Tehran regime's ultimate objectives and modus operandi. My own very limited personal experience aside, the non-nuclear threats Iran poses to Americans, Arabs, Israelis, and others are deadly serious. No nuclear agreement can confront those threats. On the contrary, some of the resources Iran will gain from sanctions relief will no doubt once again be applied to such abhorrent propaganda, and much worse. Thus, once that agreement is revived, the U.S. and its friends and allies must become more vigilant, creative, and resolute about meeting that challenge—in both words and deeds.

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## Iran's New President: A Mass Murderer Mullah

By Majid Rafizadeh



Following the Iranian regime's sham election, the next President of the Islamic Republic is Ebrahim Raisi (pictured). At the age of 24, Raisi was appointed deputy prosecutor of the Revolutionary Court. There, as a member of the "Death Commission", he became known for, and implicated in, one of the world's largest mass executions, in which more than 30,000 people were executed, including children and pregnant women. (Photo by Atta Kenare/AFP via Getty Images)

The Iranian regime ran a sham election to make its favorite mullah candidate, Ebrahim Raisi, linked with mass executions, become the next President of the Islamic Republic. Will the European Union and the Biden administration at least condemn the Iranian regime and stop the West's appeasement policies with the ruling mullahs?

In Iran, the regime urged people to vote, most likely to show that it enjoys legitimacy; however, what it faced was widespread voter apathy and a record low voter turnout. Many people boycotted the elections and protesters called on US President Joe Biden to stop trying to return to the nuclear deal. Anahita, an Iranian teacher from Tehran, told Gatestone, "I did not go to vote. Like many people, I did not have a candidate. So, why should I vote? The mullahs had a candidate: Raisi".

Three days before the election, Soraya, a student at Tehran University, noted: "The government is telling people to vote. But I see voting as an insult. We are not going to vote in order to show the world that we Iranians are frustrated with this clerical establishment. We do not support a government that shoots down a passenger plane [Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, downed by the IRGC in January 2020], that lies repeatedly, and that kills and tortures its own citizens. We do not support a

government that steals the nation's resources and spends it on its militias. The old game of moderate or hard-liner is over. They are all the same."

It is important for the world to know exactly who is this new President of Iran.

After the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, Raisi was appointed as a judge at the age of 19 in the Karaj Prosecutor's Office, even though he had no formal university education. A year later, he was appointed to be the prosecutor for Karaj city, the fourth-largest in Iran. During the first few years after the revolution, Raisi proved his loyalty to the Islamic Republic by silencing many dissidents and opposition groups.

At the age of 24, Raisi was appointed as deputy prosecutor of the Revolutionary Court. There, as a member of the "Death Commission", he would be known for, and implicated in, one of the world's largest mass executions, in which more than 30,000 people were executed, including children and pregnant women. A US House of Representatives resolution detailed:

"... over a 4-month period in 1988, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran carried out the barbaric mass executions of thousands of political prisoners and many unrelated political groups... according to a report by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre, the massacre was carried out pursuant to a fatwa, or religious decree, issued by then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini..."

The late Hussein-Ali Montazeri - one of the founding fathers of the Islamic Republic, as well as a human rights activist, an Islamic theologian and the designated successor to the Islamic revolution's Supreme Leader Khomeini until the very last moments of Khomeini's life - said regarding the massacre:

"I believe this is the greatest crime committed in the Islamic Republic since the [1979] revolution and history will condemn us for it... History will write you down as criminals."

Montazeri pleaded with Raisi and his colleagues to stop the executions:

After overseeing the mass executions and brutally cracking down on opposition and dissidents, Raisi was promoted by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and later appointed to more high positions. These included the Prosecutor of Tehran, Chairman of the National Television Supervisory Council, head of the General Inspection Office, and as the Attorney General of the Islamic Republic.

Finally, Khamenei appointed Raisi as the head of the regime's notorious judicial system. After his appointment, Raisi pointed out in a speech at the 23rd National Assembly of Revolutionary Guards Commanders and Officials in 2019: "We will not cut the fingers of those who are corrupt; we will cut off their entire hand."

The U.S. Department of Treasury, on November 5, 2019, placed Raisi on its sanctions list. The Biden administration - instead of enriching and empowering these tyrants - needs to stand with the Iranian people, who for decades have been suffering under Iran's brutal and predatory regime.

*Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is president of the International American Council on the Middle East.*

## Pompeo blasts Biden's appeasing of Iran

By Israel Kasnett



Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo harshly criticized the Biden administration for its blatant efforts to appease Iran by going out of its way to avoid explicitly stating the Islamic regime's involvement in the Hamas terror group's firing of more than 4,000 rockets at Israeli civilians from its base in the Gaza Strip.

"This is a broader strategic effort by the Biden administration to place Iran as a central figure inside of their vision for how they'd like to see the Middle East realigned," said Pompeo.

"You can't designate the Houthis as terrorists if you want the Iranians to sit down with you in Vienna. You can't oppose Hamas—an ideological, radical terrorist regime sitting in the Gaza Strip firing missiles against civilians in Israel—because you know you have this other game that's being played, this other policy. The Iranians know this. They've played this game for an awfully long time. It's why this vision of just getting back into the [Iran nuclear deal] and saying, 'We'll be able to control their missile program and their terror efforts' is such a folly."

Pompeo, a distinguished fellow at the Hudson Institute, sat down on Wednesday with Michael Doran, a senior fellow at the institute, to discuss the Biden foreign-policy team's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

According to Doran, "the Iranians have attacked the U.S. in Iraq, opened a front against the Israelis, and the Houthis are far from becoming more moderate. I am shocked by the absence of any sign of reconsidering on the part of the administration."

Pompeo replied that the administration "is never going to walk away from their commitment. It's the same cast and crew that fundamentally believe that appeasing Iran was the solution to Middle East stability. I think the world can now see that was folly."

He added that the United States “has a deep and consistent interest” in doing its best to “take down this terror—this campaign against Israel, the ‘Little Satan’—that ultimately could grow into an Iranian campaign against the ‘Great Satan,’ the United States.”

‘The isolation of Iran led to deterrence’

Doran questioned whether Israel’s two-week-long conflict with Hamas is “part of the U.S.-Iranian contest.” Pompeo replied, “It most certainly is.”

“This is part of an appeasement strategy of Iran that has given, if not a green light, has certainly not shown the red light—the deterrence light that we showed to Iran,” he said.

Pompeo noted that Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy in Lebanon on Israel’s northern border, is a “real risk” to security, as it has “enormous amounts of precision-guided munitions,” and is “watching closely” and “performing their own strategic calculation as well.”

The Trump administration was criticized when it recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

“The claim was there would be an explosion in the Middle East,” said Doran, noting that “explosion” occurred during the Biden administration, which has expressed the belief that it has the answer to Mideast peace.

“We withdrew from the [deal], and we did not have kinetic conflict like we are seeing today,” said Pompeo, adding that during his tenure at the State Department, he concluded that settlements “are not inconsistent with international law.”

Pompeo noted that the above actions taken by the Trump administration came under fire from many elements around the world, “including much of the foreign-policy establishment” that said, ‘This is going to cause war.’ ”

According to Pompeo, “the isolation of Iran led to deterrence. Now, Iran is sitting in Vienna. They know they will get billions of dollars. [They are] on the cusp of economic victory.”

“You survived to live another day after the enormous pressure that your regime was under during the Trump administration,” he said about the Iranians. “You are giddy, and you will test this administration.”

Doran questioned why White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki recently said, “Aside from putting forward a peace proposal that was dead on arrival, we don’t think they [Trump administration] did anything constructive, really, to bring an end to the longstanding conflict in the Middle East.”

“Ask the people of Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia,” replied Pompeo. “They felt we did an enormous amount of good in the Middle East because of the pressure we put on the Iranian regime, and the support we provided to Israel and to them.”

Pompeo said Psaki “can say what she wants, but I am confident the people impacted by this the most understood how much good the Trump administration did for prosperity and peace throughout the Middle East.”



## The "Iran Deal" Soon to Be Resuscitated

By Lawrence A. Franklin



Based on Iran's pattern of obstructionism, the impending renewal of the JCPOA "nuclear deal" does not inspire confidence that the Islamic Republic - even if it verbally agrees, or this time signs a document - will ever be in compliance. Pictured: The heavy water production facility at Arak, south of Tehran. (Photo by Majid Saedi/Getty Images)

The latest alteration before the Americans trying to revive the "nuclear weapons deal" - known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - with Iran is the carefully staged election this month of Ebrahim Raisi to its presidency. A clerical hardliner known as "the Butcher," he is responsible for thousands of executions of oppositions leaders, torture and other "ongoing crimes against humanity."

Raisi's election, "engineered to guarantee his victory," looks suspiciously like a ploy by Iran's Supreme Guide Ali Khamenei to terrify the American negotiators into capitulating to Iran's demands even faster and more recklessly, to avoid negotiating with an opponent more uncompromising than whomever they are negotiating with at present. Upon his victory, Raisi immediately announced that he will not meet with US President Joe Biden, and that Iran's "ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias" were "nonnegotiable."

Negotiators at the Vienna-based talks on re-establishing the JCPOA have reportedly already drafted an agreement and returned to their respective capitals in the hopes of securing endorsement of the revived JCPOA. While some differences remain, the P5+1 nations (Iran and the US, UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany) will likely restore the JCPOA before Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's term of office expires in mid-July.

Presumably, President Biden's negotiating team has agreed to substantially lifting the Trump administration's sanctions on Iran to win the support of Iran's hardline dominated regime.

The JCPOA is allegedly designed to prevent, or at least postpone, Iran's drive for a nuclear weapons capability along with the means to deliver them. Among the deal's many major drawbacks is that after it expires, Iran can enrich as much uranium to have as many nuclear weapons - and the means to deliver them - as it likes.

One significant question of a newly invigorated JCPOA is whether the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) will be granted complete access to known and suspected Iranian sites associated with the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

The IAEA must also monitor the warehousing or dismantling of Iran's more advanced centrifuges, installed after then US President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the JCPOA in May 2018. During the agreement's term, the IAEA registered its dissatisfaction with the Islamic Republic's lack of cooperation with inspectors. IAEA officials complained that Iran resisted attempts to monitor compliance with the JCPOA. The IAEA will also be tasked with Iran's obligation to export or destroy highly enriched uranium beyond the amount permitted by the JCPOA.

It is likely that the newly negotiated JCPOA will be signed by the P5 +1 countries on or near the anniversary of its original approval by July 15, 2021. Iran, tellingly, never signed the original agreement.

Iran's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Araqchi, who heads the Iranian negotiating team in Vienna, only a month ago played down positive expectations. He suggested that there are some difficult issues still to be negotiated, but that the team is making headway nevertheless. Sina Azodi, an Iran specialist at the Atlantic Council, claimed on China Global Television Network (CGTN) that the negotiating team had already arrived at an agreed upon text of the JCPOA's redux. Ali Akbar Dareini, of Tehran's Centre of Strategic Studies, echoed the regime leadership's apparent view: that the revival of the JCPOA deal is worth the Iranian agreement in exchange for the lifting of sanctions in order to improve the country's economy. The benefit that the West allegedly secures from the JCPOA is to forestall Iran from developing a nuclear weapon for ten to fifteen years - after which it is open season.

Dareini, author of *Legitimate Deterrence*, a book on Iran's nuclear program, has repeatedly warned that Iran's national defence plans are not on the table for discussion. Mohsen Milani, an Iranian scholar at the University of South Florida, agreed with Dareini that the US should not expect any future negotiations on missiles or regional policies.

Despite signs that the P5+1 negotiating team will subscribe to a re-constituted JCPOA "understanding," there seems to exist no trust that the Islamic Republic will comply with any agreement. The IAEA's catalogue of doubts regarding Iran's compliance with any nuclear safeguards is lengthy. Some of these instances of non-compliance by Iran include: exceeding the limits of installed centrifuges, imprecise recording of the amount of low enriched uranium, the establishment of unauthorized enrichment sites, and failure to declare exact amounts of imported uranium. In June 2020, the IAEA Board of Governors dispatched a formal resolution of complaint to Iran, calling upon Tehran to satisfy overdue requests regarding several undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran.

Based on Iran's pattern of obstructionism, the impending renewal of the JCPOA does not inspire confidence that the Islamic Republic - even if it verbally agrees, or this time signs a document - will ever be in compliance.

Variables determining the worth of a renewed JCPOA include not only whether the IAEA will be able effectively to monitor the Islamic Republic's compliance with the terms of the agreement. Another variable might also include US lobbying with the other signers of the JCPOA to attempt to persuade Iran to discuss other security issues, such as Tehran's ballistic missile programs and support for sub-national terrorist groups. It is also sadly assumed, based on past patterns, that the US, in its eagerness to secure a deal - any deal - will back down when faced with any Iranian demand.

The US will also likely put pressure on Israel to refrain from "precipitous" attacks on Iran's nuclear weapons development infrastructure. Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has said that Israel's determination to frustrate Iran's ambition to become a nuclear power will not change. He stated - considering Iran's record of cheating - that no agreement with Iran can be trusted. That Bennett lacks experience of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a given; and understanding the fragility of Bennett's eight-party coalition, Iran will doubtless soon test the new Israeli PM to determine if he possesses the same independent will both to resist US pressure and to defend Israel's vital interests as his predecessor Netanyahu did.

*Dr. Lawrence A. Franklin was the Iran Desk Officer for Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld.*

# Is the Biden Administration Helping Iran to Achieve Its Nuclear Dream?

By Con Coughlin



The improvement in Iran's technical ability to develop nuclear weapons is the result of a number of steps Tehran has taken during the past year to increase its nuclear activity, all of which constitute clear violations of the terms Tehran agreed under the JCPOA. (Image source: iStock)

The most likely outcome of US President Joe Biden's ill-considered attempt to revive the nuclear deal with Iran is that it will lead to a dramatic reduction in the time frame Tehran requires to build an atomic warhead.

One of the central goals of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) struck with Iran by former US President Barack Obama was to delay Tehran's ability to develop nuclear weapons for more than a decade.

At the time the deal was agreed in 2015, intelligence experts predicted it would take it Iran about one year to develop the technological know-how to develop a nuclear warhead if Iran was allowed to continue with its nuclear activities.

In an attempt to slow Iran's research into nuclear weapons, the JCPOA required Tehran to eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98%, and reduce by about two-thirds the number of its gas centrifuges for 13 years. For the next 15 years, Iran would only enrich uranium up to 3.67%.

Yet, despite the JCPOA being in force for nearly six years, the latest estimates suggest that Iran is only a matter of months away from having the ability to produce sufficient quantities of weapons-grade uranium for one nuclear warhead.

A report published by the Institute of Science and International Security this week predicts a "worst case scenario" of 2.3 months for Iran to produce enough weapons grade uranium (WGU) for one nuclear weapon.

"Iran could produce a second significant quantity of WGU early in the fifth month after breakout commences, and a third quantity could be produced early in the seventh month," the report concludes.

The improvement in Iran's technical ability to develop nuclear weapons is the result of a number of steps Tehran has taken during the past year to increase its nuclear activity, all of which constitute clear violations of the terms Tehran agreed under the JCPOA.

Iran's most serious breach of the accord took place on April 16 when Iran began enriching uranium, a key component in the production of nuclear warheads, at 60 percent purity for the first time - just below the threshold required for nuclear warheads. In addition, Iran has said it will increase the number of sophisticated centrifuges, the sophisticated devices used for uranium enrichment, at its Natanz facility to 5,000.

Biden administration officials insist these moves by Iran, which Tehran says have been taken in response to the previous Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA in 2018, are nothing more than a bargaining ploy to increase pressure on Washington to make further concessions at the latest round of talks taking place in Vienna on reviving the nuclear deal.

There is growing concern within Western intelligence circles, however, that any advances Iranian scientists achieve by accelerating the country's nuclear programme will result in them gaining vital technical knowledge that cannot be erased. Iran's scientists would be able to retain their nuclear know-how even in the unlikely event that the Vienna negotiations result in a new deal whereby Iran agrees to lower its enrichment levels and make substantial reductions to the number of its operational centrifuges.

The rapid advances Iran is making in its nuclear programme were acknowledged earlier this week by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who conceded that the "breakout time" Iran requires to move from conducting nuclear research to developing nuclear warheads could soon be reduced from months "to a matter of weeks."

During a meeting with the US House of Representatives on Monday, Mr Blinken warned that Iran's nuclear programme was "galloping forward... The longer this goes on, the more the breakout time gets down ... it's now down, by public reports, to a few months at best. And if this continues, it will get down to a matter of weeks."

By highlighting the dramatic reductions in Iran's "breakout time", Mr Blinken was seeking to justify the Biden administration's decision to invest so much political capital in seeking to revive the JCPOA.

Mr Blinken was nevertheless forced to concede that, even though indirect talks have been taking place between the US and Iran in Vienna since April, the US still does not know whether Iran has any genuine intention of resuming compliance with the agreement.

Furthermore, with Iran's hardliners set to consolidate their control over the regime in this month's presidential elections, which are due to take place on June 18, Western diplomats are becoming increasingly sceptical about the prospect of concluding a new agreement with Tehran.

Ebrahim Raisi, the candidate who is seen as the favourite to replace Iran's outgoing President Hassan Rouhani, is a renowned hardliner whose candidacy has attracted the support of both the regime's all-powerful Guardian Council, as well as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Raisi, a close ally of the country's 82-year-old Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, has previously served as the head of Iran's judiciary and made his name during the 1980s as a prominent member of Iran's notorious Death Commissions, when opposition activists were either executed or sent to clear minefields during the Iran-Iraq war.

Consequently, if the predictions are correct and Raisi emerges triumphant in the presidential elections, the prospects of the hardliners making any tangible concessions over the country's nuclear programme will be negligible.

As a result, the only achievement of Mr Obama's deeply-flawed nuclear deal with Iran will have been to enable the ayatollahs to achieve their dream of acquiring nuclear weapons, with all the implications that will have for the future security of the globe.

*Con Coughlin is the Telegraph's Defence and Foreign Affairs Editor.*

## Muslim Brotherhood Praises U.S. Democrats for Abandoning Israel

By Lina Zaidi  
TCMER Board Member



The Muslim Brotherhood's official online mouthpiece offered praise this week to Democratic members of Congress who are publicly criticizing Israel as it defends itself against an onslaught of terrorist rockets.

"Democratic representatives demand the protection of Palestinians from Zionist attacks," reads a headline in Ikhwan Online, the Brotherhood's official propaganda site. The jihadist extremist group, which is designated as a terror outfit in multiple countries, highlighted critical remarks about Israel's defensive operations made by outspoken opponents of the Jewish state—Reps. Ilhan Omar (D., Minn.), Rashida Tlaib (D., Mich.), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D., N.Y.), Andre Carson (D., Ind.), Debbie Dingell (D., Mich.), Mark Pocan (D., Wis.), and Cori Bush (D., Mo.), as well as Sen. Bernie Sanders (I., Vt.).

"A large number from the American Democratic Party urged their government to try stopping the violence of the occupation forces against the Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank," the Arabic language article states, highlighting the support these liberal American lawmakers have among anti-Israel extremist groups in the region. The article was independently translated for the Washington Free Beacon.

All of the lawmakers mentioned above are widely known for their anti-Israel views and supporting a range of organizations that seek to boycott the Jewish state and promote anti-Semitic slurs about the country. Their criticism follows Israeli airstrikes directed at terrorist groups operating in the Gaza Strip. These groups, including

Hamas, bombarded the country with more than 1,000 missiles in just more than two days. Israel says it will continue to conduct defensive operations until Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups that are funded by Iran stop their attacks.

Omar, Tlaib, and Pocan, who are among the most outspoken anti-Israel members of Congress, harshly criticized Israel for protecting its citizens from missile attacks.

"Israeli airstrikes killing civilians in Gaza is an act of terrorism," Omar said in a statement that ignored Hamas's repeated strikes. "Palestinians deserve protection. Unlike Israel, missile defence programs, such as Iron Dome, don't exist to protect Palestinian civilians. It's unconscionable to not condemn these attacks."

Omar's comments led Sen. Ted Cruz (R., Texas), a staunch Israel ally, to accuse her of acting as Hamas's press secretary.

"American taxpayer money is being used to commit human rights violations," Tlaib said in a similar statement. "Congress must condition the aid we send to Israel, and end it altogether if those conditions are not followed."

Ocasio-Cortez joined with her fellow "squad" members to blast Israel for "inciting violence."

Pocan rushed to defend Omar after she came under fire for several anti-Israel comments.

"I'm seeing a lot of right-wing extremists criticize my wonderful colleague [Omar] because she rightly condemned the murder of Palestinian children & Israel's violence against Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrar & at al-Aqsa. I did the same, wonder why they're not criticizing me?" he asked on Twitter.

Tlaib and Omar also publicly broke with the administration on Wednesday after President Joe Biden publicly defended Israel and backed its defensive operations.

Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who also has said Israel has a right to defend itself against terrorists, could be "having trouble finding the courage to speak up against Israel's actions and stop supporting this inhumane violence," Tlaib tweeted.

"No mention of the al-Aqsa raid. No mention of the 13 innocent children killed in airstrikes," Omar tweeted after the White House issued a statement on the situation. "No mention of the ongoing occupation of millions in an open air prison. You aren't prioritizing human rights. You're siding with an oppressive occupation."



# The Poisonous Fruit of Appeasing Iran's Mullahs

By Khaled Abu Toameh



"The Houthi's missiles and drones nearly hit the holy sites in Mecca and Medina. How can Iran invest in the bombing of Saudi Arabia while claiming... that it seeks to liberate Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque? Iran's claim to support Islamic holy sites is not related to any religious beliefs. It is related to regional ambitions, expansionist dreams, and striving to export the Iranian revolution to various countries in the region." — Mohammed Hassan Mufti, Saudi author, Okaz, June 3, 2021. Pictured: Smoke billows from an Aramco oil facility in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia, following a drone attack launched on the facility by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia, on September 14, 2019. (Photo by AFP via Getty Images)

Iran is continuing to exploit the Palestinian issue to promote its expansionist schemes in the Middle East and meddle in the internal affairs of Arab countries, including Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain.

Iran is doing so while its representatives continue to conduct indirect negotiations with the US administration in Vienna on reviving the 2015 "Iran nuclear deal," which Iran never signed.

Diplomats from Britain, France and Germany who are negotiating with the Iranians seem oblivious to the growing concern in the Arab world over Tehran's support for terrorism and its ongoing intervention in the internal affairs of several Arab countries.

The accusation that Iran is using the Palestinian issue to advance its schemes in the region was made by many Arabs in the aftermath of the recent war between Israel and Hamas, which ended with an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire on May 21.

During and after the 11-day war, Iran went out of its way to make known that without Tehran's financial and military support, Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip would not have been able to fire thousands of rockets at Israel.

Many Arabs, however, are scoffing at Iran's claims and accusing it of taking advantage of the last round of fighting between Hamas and Israel to present itself as the defender of the Palestinian cause, Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Arabs clearly see what the Biden administration, Britain, Germany and France are refusing to see - that Iran has ambitions not only to acquire a nuclear bomb, but also aggressively to export its "Islamic revolution" and terrorism on a global scale.

The Arabs have pointed out that Iran's Quds Force, a branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), has done nothing to defend Jerusalem and the Palestinians since its establishment in 1982. It is also important to note that one of the missions of Quds Force is to "liberate Jerusalem and Palestine," a euphemism for the elimination of Israel.

"The notorious Quds Force has committed crimes against Arabs and has been busy creating militias consisting of Arab traitors in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, noted Saudi writer Abdullah Al-Anzi. "Iran uses the Palestinian issue to pass its expansionist agenda and extend its ideological and political influence to the Arab countries. Iran wants to show that it is the defender of the Palestinians."

A Lebanese activist, who did not reveal his name, recently posted a video on social media in which he mocked Iran's Quds Force for its ostensible plan to "liberate Jerusalem and Palestine." In the video, which has gone viral on various social media platforms, he asked:

"Iran has a force called Quds Force. Isn't it the duty of this force to come to Jerusalem to help the Palestinians? Or is its duty just to go to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain? This force has gone to many Arab countries, but never to Jerusalem."

The words of the Lebanese activist struck a chord with many Arabs who have long accused Iran of working to destabilize their countries with the help of its terrorist proxies, especially Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and the Houthis.

Referring to the Iranian-backed Houthi militia in Yemen, which has been attacking Saudi Arabia with missiles and drones for the past few years, Saudi writer Walid Al-Ghamidi commented:

"The Quds Force is in Yemen to launch attacks on Mecca and Medina and their surroundings [in Saudi Arabia]. The goal of the mullahs in Tehran is to attack Muslims and inflict the greatest possible harm on them."

Saudi author Mohammed Hassan Mufti said that he was "completely baffled" by the "strange" statement of Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif expressing Iran's intention not to abandon its duty toward Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

"The truth is that such a statement may delude some people into thinking that Iran has never, and will never, actually abandon its support for the Palestinian cause, and that it has never failed to seek to liberate the Al-Aqsa Mosque," Mufti remarked.

"Isn't Iran the country that supports the Houthi militia with money and weapons to attack Saudi Arabia? The Houthi's missiles and drones nearly hit the holy sites in Mecca and Medina. How can Iran invest in the bombing of Saudi Arabia while claiming

with the utmost enthusiasm that it seeks to liberate Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque? Iran's claim to support Islamic holy sites is not related to any religious beliefs. It is related to regional ambitions, expansionist dreams, and striving to export the Iranian revolution to various countries in the region."

According to Mufti, the extent of Iran's manipulation of the minds of young Iranians was exposed during the Iran-Iraq war. Iranian soldiers who were captured by the Iraqi army told their interrogators that the mullahs in Tehran had convinced them that "the road to Jerusalem passes through Iraq," the Saudi writer revealed. "There is no dispute among experts and political analysts that Iran is a direct cause of the complete destruction of at least four Arab countries."

Saudi columnist Bader bin Saud warned that the Biden administration's insistence on negotiating with the Iranians about reviving the Iran nuclear deal at a time when the mullahs in Tehran are boasting of their financial and military support for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad will intensify tensions in the Middle East.

"The Biden administration still insists on continuing the nuclear negotiations with Iran," bin Saud wrote.

"America's entry into the Iranian nuclear agreement will exacerbate matters and will enable the mullahs to obtain nuclear weapons and more than a billion dollars. Some of the money will go to Iran's agents in the region. The Iranian regime considers the Middle East an extension of its strategic depth and neo-colonialism, and calls for the universality of the Palestinian cause to justify its direct intervention in Palestinian affairs."

Dr. Dalal Mahmoud, a professor in the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University, stated explicitly that Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood have done nothing for the Palestinian issue over the past years.

Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, she told the Emirati newspaper Al-Ain, referring to the dispute between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, have actually "contributed to increasing the complexity of the Palestinian issue, conspired against it and exploited it for their political calculations, and increased divisions among the Palestinian people."

Former Egyptian diplomat Mohamed Al-Orabi said that the relationship between Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood is "governed by opportunism and an interest in achieving the common goal of being present in the region, extending influence and destabilizing the security and stability of the region and the Gulf."

Prominent Syrian writer and journalist Faisal Al-Qassem said that many Arabs were ridiculing Iran's rhetoric about supporting the Palestinians and "liberating Jerusalem and Palestine."

"The strange thing is that Iran often asks the Palestinians to specify their role in the resistance in return for Iranian support... The Palestinians are required to mention Iran's name in their statements. Generally speaking, Iran has not and will not succeed in the public relations game to polish its image and benefit from the Palestinian uprising because most of the Arab street is making fun of it."

Qassem noted that polls on Twitter have shown that more than 85% of voters do not trust the Iranian position on the Palestinian issue. "How can those who have killed and

displaced millions of Syrians, Iraqis, Lebanese and Yemenis help the Palestinians," he quoted some Arabs as saying.

"Does Iran want to liberate Jerusalem and give it to the Palestinians, or does it want to add it to the group of Arab capitals it occupies, such as Damascus, Baghdad, Beirut and Sana'a? When Iran claims that it supports the Palestinians in their fight against Israel, does it do that to help them liberate Jerusalem and annex it to the other four Arab capitals occupied by Iran?"

Gassem also pointed out that some commentators have come to prefer keeping Jerusalem under Israeli control over its liberation by Iran. He quoted one Arab as saying:

"Look at the capitals occupied by Iran: Baghdad has become, according to the United Nations, the dirtiest capital in the world, while Beirut has become the largest dumpster in the Middle East. As for Damascus, it turned into a ruin, while Sana'a returned to the Middle Ages."

Iraqi writer Dr. Bahera Al-Sheikhli also mocked Iran's claim that it is doing its utmost to help the Palestinians:

"During the past 30 years, the Al-Quds Force fought the Arabs everywhere and did not fire a single bullet to liberate Jerusalem or Palestine. Jerusalem and Palestine are the Trojan horse of the Iranian regime. Jerusalem is not in the mind of the regime. Rather, what concerns Iran is killing Arabs and occupying their countries. The only thing Iran did for the Palestinians was that it divided them into two entities – one led by the Palestinian Authority and another led by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Iran seeks to expand at the expense of the Arabs and their countries, and does not care about Jerusalem."

Emirati political analyst Abdel Munim Ibrahim said he also shared the view that Iran and its Quds Force have done nothing to "defend" the Palestinians. Instead, he pointed out, the Quds Force has "committed crimes against Arabs in their countries."

"The Iranian Quds Force is nothing more than a political cover that uses the Palestinian cause to play conspiratorial roles against Arabs... It is not concerned about what is happening in Jerusalem and Palestine. It is very interested in supporting its agents and armed militias in Iraq and Syria and smuggling missiles, drones, explosives and mines to the Houthi militias in Yemen. Only the delusional people in Palestine, the Gulf and the Arab countries were betting on the Quds Force to liberate Jerusalem and defend the Palestinians. The truth is that Iran established the Quds Force to occupy Arab countries, recruit Arab traitors into terrorist organizations to overthrow Arab governments, and threaten Arab national security."

The Arabs are also sending a message to the Biden administration and other Western powers that Iran's continued interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries – both directly and through its proxies – poses a risk to regional security and stability.

The Arabs, in other words, are telling the Americans and other Westerners that appeasing Iran by reviving the nuclear deal, lifting sanctions or giving it money will only assist its regime in perpetrating more crimes and increasing instability and terrorism in the region. This is the poisonous fruit of placating the mullahs.

*Khaled Abu Toameh is an award-winning journalist based in Jerusalem.*

# Iran's Atlantic Voyage: Implications for Naval Deployments

By Farzin Nadimi



As international nuclear negotiations enter a crucial phase, the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) has sent a pair of naval vessels on a long journey around the Cape of Good Hope, potentially bound for either Venezuela or Syria according to various assessments. First deployed on May 10 and currently somewhere in the South Atlantic under the watchful eyes of U.S. intelligence, the pair consist of IRIN's largest vessel—the seabase ship Makran (pennant number 441)—and the missile frigate Sahand (74). Among other goals, their mission likely includes testing U.S. and allied commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and UN Security Council Resolution 2231, under whose terms Iran is now permitted to export military equipment—though Syria is barred from receiving it while under international sanctions, and Venezuelan deliveries could entail significant legal complications as well.

## A Long-Awaited Voyage

Iran has talked about sending naval task groups to the Atlantic since at least 2011, and it raised the prospect again in February 2014 just as a new round of nuclear talks was set to take place in Vienna. In that case, an Iranian admiral claimed that a flotilla would be deployed close to U.S. waters; the Obama administration (correctly) reacted with skepticism. In November 2016, Tehran made a real attempt by sending the auxiliary ship Bushehr and the frigate Alvand (71) toward the Atlantic, but that effort ended in failure when Bushehr reportedly struck a drifting container and had to make an emergency port call at Durban, South Africa, for several months before repairs could be undertaken. In 2018, another naval commander spoke of a plan to send two or three warships to Venezuela for a five-month mission as a tit-for-tat response to the U.S. Navy carrier presence near Iranian waters.

Now that Iranian vessels have actually entered the Atlantic, Washington views the deployment with increasing concern. This is largely because the enormous Makran—a converted tanker—can hold substantial quantities of weapons and/or fuel for transfer to Venezuela's military or Syria's Assad regime.

Before Makran was commissioned this January, Iran had only three support vessels capable of accompanying warships that far. The largest and most capable of these was

the Kharg, which has served as IRIN's flagship since 1984 and participated in numerous long-range anti-piracy, training, and intelligence missions starting in 2009. Between 2013 and 2018, it underwent a complex overhaul that kept it off the seas, and for unknown reasons, it was never sent to the Atlantic upon returning to service. Then, earlier this month, it sank after an explosion apparently originating from its domestically rebuilt boilers. The other two support ships—Bushehr and Bandar Abbas—are smaller and older than Kharg.

This time, Iran is using the brand-new 228-meter-long, 121,000-ton Makran, accompanied by one of its newest home grown frigates. The Sahand is only moderately armed by modern standards, but it has been designed for longer missions of up to 150 days in rough seas like the Atlantic. Both ships are reportedly fitted with electronic surveillance capabilities.

#### Potential Arms on Board

Commissioned partly in response to the port restrictions that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Makran is lightly equipped but can reportedly carry enough fuel and supplies to stay at sea for as long as three years, offering a suitable maritime launch platform for helicopters, boats, drones, submarines, and large missiles, among other missions (e.g., special operations). IRIN previously lacked this type of launch capability.

The ship's spacious deck currently boasts a large helicopter landing pad (which has limited utility due to its lack of a hangar) and multiple speed boats. Two of its standard 40-foot (12.2-meter) containers have been placed in a conspicuous position on deck, which suggests they contain special cargo such as antiship cruise missiles with launchers. One candidate missile is the Abu Mahdi, a longer-range version of the Soumar/Hoveizeh boasting an active radar seeker head and a claimed range over 1,000 km. The containers are also large enough to hold three other missile types ranging from 8.9 to 10 meters long (the Fateh-110, the Zolfagar, or the Dezful, with ranges between 250 and 1,000 km), or the smaller Raad-500 (500 km range and ready for launch). In addition, Makran can hold a hidden cargo of ballistic/semi-ballistic missiles, suicide drones, and/or parts.

#### What If the Ships Head for Venezuela?

In the Caribbean, Venezuela is the only logical destination for such systems—it is one of just two Iranian allies in the region, and even Tehran presumably realizes that trying to deliver arms to the other ally (Cuba) would be a nonstarter. Venezuela's ability to legally receive arms from Iran is complicated by a web of U.S. sanctions, but in August 2020, President Nicolas Maduro praised the idea of buying Iranian missiles and air defence systems, with sources reporting that the two governments signed an arms contract.

As for timing, Makran can sail between Cape Town and Venezuela's Puerto de Hierro naval base in about nineteen days at its maximum speed of 15 knots. If it transports the aforementioned missile systems there, some of them would have sufficient range to reach Puerto Rico or the Panama Canal (around 700 km), and all of them could reach Colombia in its entirety. This would bring several U.S. military targets into range, including Southern Command forces at Tolemaida Air Base and Bajo Cauca as well as SOUTHCOM warships operating in the Caribbean.

If Iran decides to expand its kinetic footprint in the Caribbean, it could proliferate even longer-range missiles. For example, the Haj Qasem (1,400 km claimed range) could

reach Puerto Rico and the Panama Canal if launched from northwest Venezuela. To hit the mainland United States (e.g., Miami), missiles or drones with ranges over 1,850 km would be needed (e.g., the Shahab-3, Ghadr, or Imad). Yet even without additional shipments of longer-range systems, the Abu Mahdi alone would pose a formidable threat to all of Colombia, the Panama Canal, and most of the Caribbean. Likewise, any sales of smart sea mines, waterborne improvised explosive devices (suicide boats), or high-performance armed and reconnaissance drones (e.g., Shahed-129, Shahed-149/Gaza, Shahed-171/191) could alter the balance of power in the Caribbean and cause significant challenges for SOUTHCOM on par with those already posed against CENTCOM.

As for the seven camouflaged Zolfaqar speedboats visible on the deck of Makran, they are a standard part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) fleet but were not previously known to have entered IRIN's service. These boats are capable of carrying Kowsar/Zafar, Nasr, or Nasir anti-ship missiles (25, 35, and 130 km range, respectively) along with a 12.7 mm machine gun. Although delivery of these boats would not alter Washington's strategic calculus substantially, the prospect of Venezuela engaging in longer-term asymmetric naval cooperation with the IRGC is worrisome.

#### What If the Ships Head for Syria?

To reach the Syrian ports of Tartus or Latakia, Makran would need slightly longer than the estimated nineteen days required to reach Venezuela. Once in the Mediterranean, the vessel and its cargo could pose numerous security problems.

For example, the Zolfaqar fast-attack boats could be used to equip a special IRGC or Hezbollah naval unit responsible for protecting Iranian oil tankers headed for Baniyas. The Syrian Navy already has an earlier version of the Zolfaqar in service, armed with C-802/Noor missiles.

The missiles potentially onboard Makran would be even more of a threat if successfully delivered to Syria. For example, the Dezful would be able to reach Saudi Arabia's capital and all of Israel, though it would fall short of Europe.

#### Conclusion

The maiden Atlantic voyage of Makran and its escort frigate creates a precedent that will likely be repeated in the future, and probably followed at some point by IRGCN oceangoing missile-armed vessels and converted cargo ships. Besides political messaging and naval experimentation, such missions give Tehran a perfect opportunity to create logistical bridges to Venezuela and/or Syria while testing arms embargos and otherwise exerting counter-pressure against the West. Of course, foreign naval vessels are free to navigate international waters just as American ships do in the Persian Gulf.

Indeed, the Iranian regime is well versed in eroding regional security and U.S. authority using asymmetric and gray-zone methods, so it should not be permitted to extend these methods to the East Mediterranean. And if the Makran voyage is an attempt at running accurate missiles or heavily armed fast-attack craft to America's backyard, Washington should view it as a serious, intolerable threat—one that may be easier to forestall before it takes hold than after.

*Farzin Nadimi is an associate fellow with The Washington Institute.*

# Kremlin Preparing to Give Iran Advanced Satellite System

**By Anastasia Kravtsov**  
**TCMER Board Member**



Russia is preparing to provide Iran with an advanced satellite that would enable it to track potential military targets across the Middle East. The satellite is projected to have the ability to track long-range targets, including IDF bases, as well as oil refineries throughout the Persian Gulf and Iraqi bases for US troops.

Details of the Kremlin's move was published days before US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin meet in Geneva and as Iran and the United States are engaged in indirect talks on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal designed to put curbs on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for easing economic sanctions.

The satellite would allow continuous monitoring of facilities ranging from Persian Gulf oil refineries and Israeli military bases to Iraqi barracks that house US troops.

While the Kanopus-V is marketed for civilian use, leaders of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps have made several trips to Russia since 2018 to help negotiate the agreement. Russian experts travelled to Iran this spring to help train crews who would operate the satellite from a newly built facility near Karaj west of Tehran.

The satellite would feature Russian hardware including a camera with a resolution of 1.2 meters — a significant improvement over Iran's current capabilities, though still far short of the quality achieved by US spy satellites.

The Revolutionary Guards said in April 2020 that they had successfully launched the country's first military satellite into orbit, prompting then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to call for Tehran to be held accountable because he believed the action defied a UN Security Council resolution.



## While Biden Envoys give away the Store in Vienna, Iran Escalates the Conflict

By Jonathan S. Tobin



Diplomacy is in bloom in Vienna this northern spring. According to *The Washington Post*, the indirect talks taking place in the Austrian capital between the United States and Iran with diplomats from Britain, France and Germany carrying messages between the two parties have been a huge success.

A “senior administration official” assured the paper that progress is being made toward a reinstatement of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal “on every issue, every time we meet.” While there are still issues remaining to be negotiated, at this rate the remaining gaps between the two countries’ positions are expected to be closed “within a matter of weeks.”

The completion of the process is expected to wait until after Iran’s faux presidential election on June 18 in order for Tehran’s efforts to entice the West to resume financing the tottering regime to be a fait accompli. While the usual nonsense about a battle between mythical Iranian moderates and hardliners is used as an excuse for delays, it’s clear that what the nation’s theocrats want to avoid is any kind of distraction from its plans.

The *Post* article does its best to maintain the fiction that the Biden administration, which has treated the Iran talks as its No. 1 foreign-policy priority, is being careful not to be too generous with concessions. Still, given the history of negotiations between Democratic administrations and Iran, in addition to the tough line that the regime has taken on refusing to commit to more intrusive monitoring of its facilities or to cease its support for terrorism, there’s little doubt that the “progress” has again been the result of American surrenders. There’s equally little doubt that there will be nothing in whatever it is that comes out of Vienna this summer that will commit Tehran to renegotiate a pact whose already weak restrictions will expire by the end of the decade.

While officials like U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken have tried to sound tough on Iran when speaking in public, the first signs that the American position is crumbling in Vienna are already becoming apparent. Last week, it was reported that the United States was already beginning to lift some of the sanctions imposed on Iran by former President Donald Trump during his “maximum pressure” campaign that brought the regime’s economy to a standstill. While the administration claimed that there was “absolutely no connection” between the dropping of sanctions and the talks in Vienna, if you believe that then you’ll believe anything. President Joe Biden’s diplomatic flacks say he wants to be “reasonable” with the Iranians, which is an open invitation to Tehran to hold its ground on any and all outstanding issues, and simply wait for the Americans to cave in the way they did during the talks that led up to the original nuclear deal.

If there were any doubts about whether these talks are being conducted in a different spirit than the ones between the Obama administration and Iran from 2013 to 2015, look beyond what’s going on behind the scenes in Vienna or even the lifting of sanctions in Washington. What else is going on in Iran while American diplomats are boasting to their new “media echo chamber,” provided by mainstream liberal publications like *The New York Times*, whose coverage of the issue reiterates that of the *Post*?

That would involve looking at how much Iran is invested in foreign adventures and terrorism aimed at undermining the United States and its regional allies, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. If you do that, you’d see that just as Iran doubled down on its foreign mischief-making while encouraging former President Barack Obama to think they wanted a way to “get right with the world” in 2013, they’re doing the same thing now.

As Obama negotiated, largely in secret, with Iran, the ayatollahs were doubling down on their quest for regional hegemony by intervening in the Syrian civil war on behalf of the brutal Bashar Assad regime. But instead of taking that as a sign that Iran’s intentions were in question, Obama single-mindedly ignored every provocation that indicated that the regime’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was expanding its terrorist empire.

Rather than act to stop the spread of its auxiliaries, Obama was fearful lest a strong American response scare the Iranians away from the nuclear talks, where they were getting away with vetoing his demands for an end to their nuclear project. That was what led to Obama’s infamous retreat from his “red line” pledge to punish Assad for using chemical weapons and a host of other decisions that essentially made it clear that he was desperate for a deal at any price.

Biden and Blinken have been saying they will be tougher this time. But as a new round of Iranian provocations begins, there’s no sign that their response will be any different from that of Obama’s.

*The Wall Street Journal* reported last December that Iran was already supplying the leftist dictatorship in Venezuela, led by Nicolás Maduro, with arms and paramilitary operatives. But now that Biden is president, the Iranians are growing even bolder in their challenge to American security interests. As *Politico* noted last week, Iran has sent two warships to Venezuela as part of an arms transfer program. This is exactly the sort of thing that American administrations routinely regard as both a threat as well as a violation of traditional Monroe Doctrine interests. Last year, the Trump

administration warned Venezuela that it was looking for trouble if it acquired Iranian missiles, and Maduro apparently backed down. It may be that Iran is once again testing American resolve as it once did in Syria, only this time in Washington's backyard rather than in the Middle East.

Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin told a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing last week that he was "concerned" about Iran sending ships to the Americas—something it has never done before. But "concern" about Tehran meddling in what Austin called "our neighborhood" was as far as he would go. The Iranian regime could be forgiven for seeing that weak statement as nothing less than an indication that Biden would do nothing about this dangerous escalation. Nor is the administration up in arms about what *TIME* magazine reported earlier this month about a massive Iranian disinformation campaign that has been going on in the United States. The goal of the effort was to "spread discord and anti-Semitic tropes," and was apparently part of an effort to undermine the Trump re-election campaign. According to the magazine, such illicit Iranian activity increased last month after the fighting between Hamas and Israel via bots and trolls being operated by Iran.

Iranian social-media sabotage didn't stop Trump in 2020 any more than the Russians defeated Hillary Clinton in 2016. But the same administration that came into office vowing to investigate and stop such efforts by Russia isn't doing much more than "monitoring" what Iran is doing.

When you add these incidents up, it paints a picture of an Iranian regime that is as confident today about its ability to get away with both provocations and continually saying no to the United States at the negotiating table, while expecting to reap concessions from the Americans for doing so, as it was six years ago.

That's the proper context through which the "progress" and optimism emanating from Vienna should be seen. Much as Tehran sized up Obama and his foreign-policy team as pushovers, the same dynamic appears to be in play again. Iran expects to get its way at the negotiating table. The surest indicator of that confidence is the way it is testing Biden and seeing weakness rather than resolve from its negotiating partner in response to every test. The cost of that failure will make the world less safe than it might have been had America stuck with pressuring Iran rather than appeasing it.

*Jonathan S. Tobin is editor in chief of JNS—Jewish News Syndicate.*

# Israel's New Government is among the Most Diverse in History

By Alan M. Dershowitz



Israel stands among the countries of the world most committed to achieving real equality for all its citizens. Pictured: Members of Israel's new cabinet attend their first meeting at the Knesset in Jerusalem, Israel on June 13, 2021. (Photo by Gil Cohen-Magen/AFP via Getty Images)

I challenge anyone to name a parliamentary democracy that has had a more diverse coalition government - racially, religiously, ethnically, ideologically, politically, national origin - than the current Israeli government. It includes people of nearly every color from Black Ethiopians to brown Muslims to swarthy Sephardim to pale Russians. It includes a modern Orthodox Jew as Prime Minister, along with fundamentalist Muslims and atheist and agnostics Jews. It has a gay cabinet member, a deaf member of the Knesset and people who trace their roots to Asia, Africa, Europe and America.

A record number of nine women will be serving in the new Israeli cabinet. The current Prime Minister is a right-winger. The Prime Minister designate who is currently Minister of Foreign Affairs, is a left-winger. Every shade of political opinion - and there are many in Israel - is represented in this government. The old expression "two Jews, three opinions" can now be changed to "20 Israeli cabinet members, 30 opinions" - because each cabinet member represents multiple opinions within their parties.

All the same, bigots, particularly on the hard left in the United States and Europe, insist on characterizing Israel as an apartheid state. Nothing could be further from the truth. Israel has *real* diversity, not the kind of phony diversity that characterizes many American institutions. American diversity is simply a euphemism for more Blacks, and

especially more Blacks who hold the same views about political and racial matters. It has little to do with diversity of attitudes, experiences, views.

The best evidence of this truism came from Google's appointment of a chief diversity officer who had expressed anti-gay and anti-Jewish views. It is inconceivable that Google with its vast resources and ability to check everything, did not know of his bigoted views. He is Black and that is all that diversity means at Google and many other American institutions. It is different in Israel, because Israel is such an inherently diverse nation that takes its diversity seriously.

Does this mean that perfect equality has been achieved in the nation state of the Jewish people? Of course not. Like every democracy struggling with racial and ethnic issues. Israel is far from perfect. Its laws mandate equality, but discriminatory practices persist against certain groups of Jews and Muslims. Israel's courts consistently render decisions moving the country toward complete equality, but courts alone can never achieve that result.

Moreover, Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people and as such can give equal civil, legal, religious, linguistic and political rights to its non-Jewish citizens, but it cannot give them equal national rights. The state was created to be Jewish in character and to never discriminate against Jews in immigration or religious rights. It is the only Jewish state in a world which discriminated against Jews for thousands of years and which stood by as six million of them were murdered.

Many other nation, states and provinces around the world, with far less historical justification, have even greater national and religious characteristics. Every Muslim-majority nation is officially a Muslim state that bestows considerable benefits on members of that faith. England is an Anglican Christian state with an established religion. Catholicism is the official religion of several European countries. Many national flags and emblems have crosses, crescents or other distinctly religious symbols. Several particular national anthems refer to religion.

Many countries have laws of return that favour certain ethnic and religious groups. Several Arab countries have religious restrictions and citizenship and land ownership. And on and on. But Israel is the only nation that is routinely condemned for its law of return, its observance of Jewish holidays, its flag and its exemption from military service for most Arabs (and Jews learning full-time in religious seminaries).

Even with these limited and historically justified exceptions, Israel stands among the countries of the world most committed to achieving real equality for all its citizens.

The good news is that Israel has finally achieved a government, and that the government *is* among the most diverse in the history of democracy. The bad news is that its very diversity - particularly its political and ideological differences - also make the government one of the most unstable in the history of democracy. It prevailed in the Knesset by a vote with 60 votes out of 120, with one abstention. So stay tuned to see how the now government manages to survive the challenges of diversity. In the meantime, however, stop singling out Israel for demonization by mislabeling it as apartheid or undemocratic.

*Alan M. Dershowitz is the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law, Emeritus at Harvard Law School.*

## Who is Naftali Bennett, Israel's New Prime Minister?

By Arthur Tane  
TCMER Executive Director



Naftali Bennett, who was sworn on June 13 as Israel's new prime minister, embodies many of the contradictions that define the 73-year-old nation. He's a religious Jew who made his wealth in the mostly secular hi-tech sector; a champion of the settlement movement who lives in a Tel Aviv suburb; a former ally of Benjamin Netanyahu who has partnered with centrist and left-wing parties to end his 12-year rule.

His ultranationalist Yamina party won just seven seats in the 120-member Knesset in March elections, the fourth such vote in two years. But by refusing to commit to Netanyahu or his opponents, Bennett positioned himself as kingmaker. Even after one member of his religious-nationalist party abandoned him to protest the new coalition deal, he ended up with the crown.

### An Ultranationalist with a Moderate Coalition

Bennett has long positioned himself to the right of Netanyahu. But he will be severely constrained by his unwieldy coalition, which has only a narrow majority in parliament and includes parties from the right, left, and centre.

He is opposed to Palestinian independence and strongly supports Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, which the Palestinians and much of the international community see as a major obstacle to peace.

Bennett fiercely criticised Netanyahu after the prime minister agreed to slow settlement construction under pressure from President Barack Obama, who tried and failed to revive the peace process early in his first term.

He briefly served as head of the West Bank settler's council, Yesha, before entering the Knesset in 2013. Bennett later served as cabinet minister of diaspora affairs, education, and defence in various Netanyahu-led governments.

"He's a right-wing leader, a security hard-liner, but at the same time very pragmatic," said Yohanan Plesner, head of the Israel Democracy Institute, who has known Bennett for decades and served with him in the military.

He expects Bennett to engage with other factions to find a common denominator as he seeks support and legitimacy as a national leader.

#### Rivalry with Netanyahu

The 49-year-old father of four shares Netanyahu's hawkish approach to the Middle East conflict, but the two have had tense relations over the years. Bennett served as Netanyahu's chief of staff for two years, but they parted ways after a mysterious falling-out that Israeli media linked to Netanyahu's wife, Sara, who wields great influence over her husband's inner circle.

Bennett campaigned as a right-wing stalwart ahead of the March elections and signed a pledge on national TV saying he would never allow Yair Lapid, a centrist and Netanyahu's main rival, to become prime minister. But when it became clear Netanyahu was unable to form a ruling coalition, that's exactly what Bennett did, agreeing to serve as prime minister for two years before handing power to Lapid, the architect of the new coalition.

Netanyahu's supporters have branded Bennett a traitor, saying he defrauded voters. Bennett has defended his decision as a pragmatic move aimed at unifying the country and avoiding the fifth round of elections.

#### A Generational Shift

Bennett, a father of four and a modern Orthodox Jew, will be Israel's first prime minister who regularly wears a kippa, the skullcap worn by observant Jews. He lives in the upscale Tel Aviv suburb of Raanana, rather than the settlements he champions.

Bennett began life with his American-born parents in Haifa, then bounced with his family between North America and Israel, military service, law school, and the private sector. Throughout, he's curated a persona that's at once modern, religious, and nationalist.

After serving in the elite Sayeret Matkal commando unit, Bennett went to law school at Hebrew University. In 1999, he co-founded Cyota, an anti-fraud software company that was sold in 2005 to US-based RSA Security for 145 million. Bennett has said the bitter experience of Israel's 2006 war against the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah drove him to politics. The month-long war ended inconclusively, and Israel's military and political leadership at the time was widely criticised as bungling the campaign.

Bennett represents the third generation of Israeli leaders, after the founders of the state and Netanyahu's generation, which came of age during the country's tense early years marked by repeated wars with Arab states.

A Jewish nationalist but not really dogmatic. A bit religious, but certainly not devout. A military man who prefers the comforts of civilian urban life and a high-tech entrepreneur who isn't looking to make any more millions. A supporter of the Greater Land of Israel but not a settler. And he may well not be a lifelong politician either.

# The Coup against Benjamin Netanyahu

By Mark Levin

Barak Ravid is an Israeli journalist of the old Soviet school. In other words, he is a shameless propagandist for the cause. In his case, the cause is to destroy Netanyahu and install a left-wing government, and he's been working on it for many years. In his last *Axios* screed, he trashes former President Donald Trump and then tries to link the smeared president with Netanyahu—that is, both men are said to oppose a government of the people and the decision of the voters.

We know plenty about the first point, and I've discussed it a lot over the last several months. I've neither the time nor the room to correct his lies. But what of this propagandist's second point, with regard to Netanyahu?

Well, in this case, Netanyahu (his party, the Likud) indisputably received nearly *six times* the votes of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. What do I mean?

Bennett is the man set to replace Bibi as prime minister. How did this come to pass? Among other things, he ran to the right of Netanyahu in the election. Even still, he and his party received less than 5 percent of the popular vote. How does a politician who barely registers among the voters become a prime minister in a democracy? To my knowledge, it has never happened, certainly not in Israel. Indeed, how could it? Israel prides itself on being a democracy, despite its dysfunctional electoral system.

Well, Bennett has desperately wanted to be prime minister, despite the fact that he does not have the support of the Israeli people and never has. Not even close. He was once a flunky in the Likud Party and Netanyahu's chief of staff. But he turned on the premier and has been agitating to replace him ever since. But, again, without the backing of the voters, he had no chance. Or, at least, that's what everyone thought.

Israel's parliament—the Knesset—consists of 120 members. Bennett decided to run in his own party. His party garnered a grand total of six seats out of 120. In sum, it was *crushed* at the polls. The people overwhelmingly rejected it and him. But Bennett had another idea, no doubt hatched before the election against the possibility that he performed as disastrously as the polls had suggested he would. Since Israel's governments are built on like-minded coalitions of multiple parties, and if the conditions allowed, he'd join the Netanyahu opposition, but only if he could position himself to become the next prime minister.

This would mean abandoning everything he ever said he stood for, and even the relatively few people who'd voted for his party. But so be it. If that's what it takes, that's what will be done. He left the so-called right-wing parties and threw in with the left-wing parties—most of which are small and tiny parties (including the Arabs)—in order to defeat the prime minister, negotiate to become premier himself and sell out his voters and his country for a short stint as prime minister.

And he and his new comrades claim this as a new “unity government,” having managed to cobble together a one-member majority. The question is, “unity” around what? The tyranny of ridding Israel and the world of one of its greatest leaders and critically wounding his own country, which faces grave threats from Iran, Palestinian terrorists and a hostile Biden administration/Democrat Party?



This is not a unity government. It is a government of has-beens, wannabes, reprobates and malcontents. Incidentally, Netanyahu is and has been the leader of Israel's largest political party, Likud; all of its voters will be disenfranchised. But who cares, right? Just another bunch of deplorables, but this time apparently Israeli deplorables. And the Israelis could never have dreamed that Bennett would wind up as prime minister.

This is a historic betrayal of the State of Israel and the Jewish people, including by its ideologically radical and self-aggrandizing media.

Which brings me back to Barak Ravid, and virtually all of his fellow comrades. The radical-left Israeli media (much like the American media), have long despised the prime minister because he is a strong, confident and enormously successful statesman in so many ways. He dared to stand up to the genocidal Iranian regime and its chief foreign supporter, Barack Obama. They have effectively joined, if not led, this grotesquely tyrannical movement to oust Netanyahu.

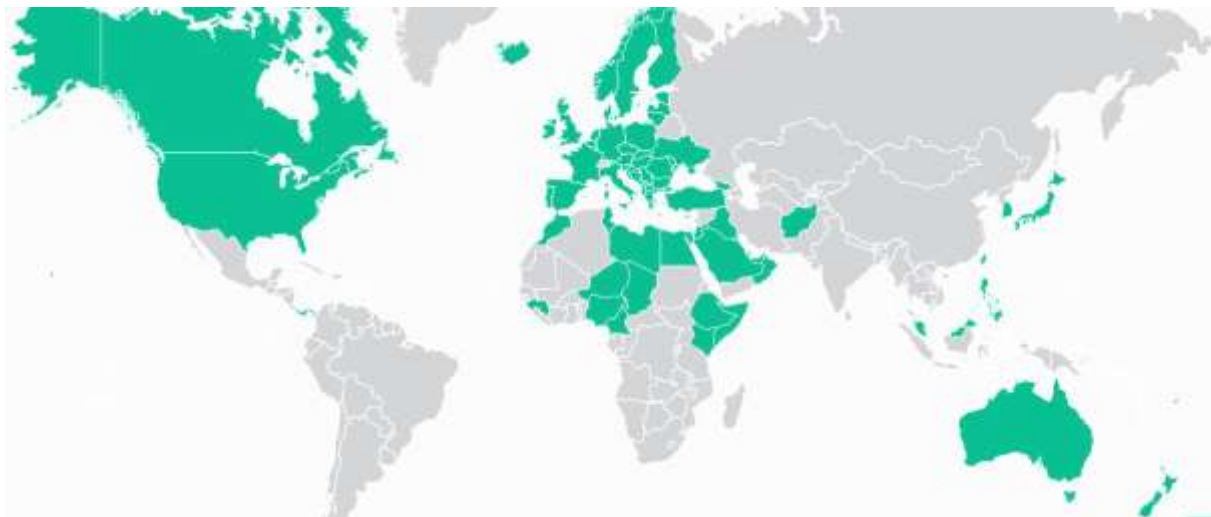
It is they who reject democracy and the will of the people. It is they who threaten Israel's democracy. And this gaggle of media fools and ideologues is spewing self-righteous commentaries about elections, morality, change and, of course, unity, as fast as their inane and incoherent minds can put pen to paper and mouth to microphone. Israel and the United States are desperately in need of a truly free and objective press. Instead, we are burdened with useless idiots.

This is the real story of what has happened in Israel, and it is actually worse than I've had time to explain.

*Mark Levin is an American lawyer, author, and radio personality. He is the host of syndicated radio show The Mark Levin Show, as well as Life, Liberty & Levin on Fox News.*

# Global Coalition against Daesh

**By Zara Dawoud**  
**TCMER Board Member**



The Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS, reconvening in-person after two years, met on June 28 in Rome at the invitation of Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Luigi Di Maio and U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken. The Ministers reaffirmed their shared determination to continue the fight against Daesh/ISIS, and to create conditions for the enduring defeat of the terrorist group, which remains the Coalition's sole purpose, through a comprehensive, coordinated and multifaceted effort. The Ministers welcomed new members joining the Coalition - Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritania, and Yemen. Together the Ministers emphasized the protection of civilians as a priority and affirmed that international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as applicable, as well as relevant UN Security Council resolutions, must be upheld under all circumstances.

The Ministers committed to strengthening cooperation across all Coalition lines of effort in order to ensure that Daesh/ISIS Core in Iraq and Syria, and its affiliates and networks around the world are unable to reconstitute any territorial enclave or continue to threaten our homelands, people, and interests. The Ministers remain firmly united in our outrage at atrocities perpetrated by Daesh/ISIS and in our determination to eliminate this global threat, and stand alongside survivors and families of victims of Daesh/ISIS crimes working for accountability.

Daesh/ISIS no longer controls territory and nearly eight million people have been freed from its control in Iraq and Syria, but the threat remains. The resumption in Daesh/ISIS activities and its ability to rebuild its networks and capabilities to target security forces and civilians in areas where the Coalition is not active, requires strong vigilance and coordinated action. This includes allocating adequate resources to sustain Coalition and legitimate partner forces' efforts against Daesh/ISIS, and significant stabilization support, both to address the drivers that make communities vulnerable to recruitment by Daesh/ISIS and related violent ideological groups, as well as to provide support to liberated areas to safeguard our collective security interests. In this regard, the Ministers noted the 2021 Pledge Drive for

Stabilization as an important means to help sustain the recovery of areas liberated from Daesh/ISIS and prevent its resurgence. The Ministers reaffirm that Daesh/ISIS will continue to be pressured by curbing its ability to raise revenue, enhancing information sharing on terrorists through bilateral and/or multilateral channels like INTERPOL, and fighting against Daesh/ISIS' toxic propaganda and denying the group space to exploit social media online.

The Ministers acknowledged Iraq's efforts to counter Daesh/ISIS' remnants and prevent its resurgence, and commended the increased capacity of the Iraqi forces to combat Daesh/ISIS. Appropriate measures to enhance the operational efficiency and coordination of our collective efforts to maintain the necessary pressure on Daesh/ISIS remain essential. The Coalition operates in Iraq at the request of the Government of Iraq in full respect of Iraq's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and to the benefit of the Iraqi people.

The Ministers firmly condemned the continuing attacks against Coalition personnel and convoys, and diplomatic facilities, emphasizing the importance of the Government of Iraq protecting Coalition assets. The Ministers welcomed the incremental expansion of NATO's non-combat advisory, training and capacity building mission in Iraq based on the requirements and consent of the Iraqi authorities and complementing the Coalition's efforts. The Ministers also welcomed the EU's support to the Iraqi authorities through the EUAM Iraq Mission.

In Syria, the Coalition stands with the Syrian people in support of a lasting political settlement in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254. The Coalition must continue to be vigilant against the threat of terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, to build on the success it has achieved and continue to act together against any threats to this outcome and to avoid security vacuums that Daesh/ISIS may exploit. The Coalition continues to support inclusive local recovery and stabilization in areas liberated from Daesh/ISIS and reconciliation and reintegration efforts to foster conditions conducive to a Syria-wide political resolution to the conflict under the parameters of UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

In a session of the meeting focused on the security situation in other continents and regions, particularly Africa, the Ministers noted with grave concern that Daesh/ISIS affiliates and networks in sub-Saharan Africa threaten security and stability, namely in the Sahel Region and in East Africa/Mozambique. The Coalition is committed to working with affected countries to address the threats posed by Daesh/ISIS in Africa to ensure the enduring global defeat of the organization upon the request and prior consent of the countries concerned, and in full respect of international law and in close coordination with existing initiatives, notably the Coalition for the Sahel and the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum. The Ministers welcomed the presence of delegations from several African nations as observers to this ministerial meeting. The Ministers discussed that reinforcing civilian state institutions and consolidating the rule of law, including law enforcement capacity, will be an essential component of combatting Daesh/ISIS, and that the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS will seek to have effective engagement on the African continent. The Ministers tasked the Coalition Working Groups to assess ways in which they can contribute to counter Daesh/ISIS efforts in the affected regions. The Ministers also welcomed Afghanistan's efforts to counter the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria-Khurasan (ISIS-K).

Recognizing the challenge posed by foreign terrorist fighters who are in custody, as

well as their family members who remain in Syria and Iraq, the Ministers committed to pursuing existing effective justice and accountability mechanisms in close coordination with the countries of origin. This also includes accountability for fighters who have used sexual violence as an instrument of terror. The Coalition remains committed to promoting efforts to ensure that accused terrorists, including those of foreign nationalities, are treated appropriately and tried consistently with applicable international law obligations, including fair trial guarantees, and urges the custodians of the detained Daesh/ISIS terrorists to treat them humanely at all times, in accordance with international law. The Ministers further recognized that the situation for Daesh/ISIS detainees and family members in northeast Syria is of grave concern and recognized the importance of finding a comprehensive and long-term solution to this serious issue.

The Coalition reaffirmed its belief that a comprehensive and collective effort remains necessary to achieve a full and enduring defeat of Daesh/ISIS worldwide. The Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS has proven that it is a cohesive, responsive tool that has achieved notable successes through military, political, stabilization, counter-messaging, financial, and law enforcement lines of effort.

## Biden Rewards Abbas and Hamas

By Bassam Tawil



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's May 25 announcement that the Biden administration will ask Congress to allocate \$75 million in aid to the Palestinians and that Washington will reopen the US Consulate in Jerusalem is sending the wrong message to the leaders of the Palestinians. Pictured: Blinken (left) speaks with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on May 25, 2021, in Ramallah. (Photo by Alex Brandon/Pool/AFP via Getty Images)

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's May 25 announcement that the Biden administration will ask Congress to allocate \$75 million in aid to the Palestinians and that Washington will reopen the US Consulate in Jerusalem - which previously had served as a *de facto* embassy handling US relations with the Palestinians - is sending the wrong message to the leaders of the Palestinians.

First, these overtures signal to Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas that the US will support and lavish funding on any Arab leader who seriously abuses not only his own people but also his neighbours. This policy would also include leaders such as Vladimir Putin in Russia, Xi Jinping in China and "Supreme Guide" Ali Khamenei in Iran, as well as other despots.

One pretext for the war that Hamas initiated was that Abbas had cancelled parliamentary elections to have been held in May and July. The real reason the elections were canceled was that they would have resulted in another victory for Hamas.

Hamas won the last parliamentary election in 2006 due to the Palestinians' frustration over the rampant political, administrative and economic corruption in Fatah, the dominant faction of Abbas's PA.

The Biden administration - by offering Abbas more money and reopening the US diplomatic mission that deals directly with the Palestinians - is actually rewarding Abbas for those attributes.

By engaging Abbas and sending the top US diplomat to meet with him in Ramallah, the Biden administration is telling the Palestinians that it does not care either about human rights or responsible governance.

It is telling the Palestinians - as well as leaders worldwide - that the United States and the Biden administration have no problem dealing with a leader who misgoverns his own people, who incites them to violence and who does not have the slightest intention of educating his people for peace with their neighbour.

The Biden administration, in addition, is telling Abbas that it has no problem with him continuing to run the PA as a one-man show while cracking down on his political rivals and social media users for daring to speak out against corruption and human rights violations in the PA-ruled areas of the West Bank.

On the eve of Blinken's visit to Ramallah, Abbas's security forces arrested a number of Palestinian political activists on suspicion of "insulting" senior Palestinian officials on various social media platforms or during rallies in the West Bank.

When Abbas announced his decision to postpone the elections, he made extremely serious - and extremely false - charges against Israel. Abbas said he was holding Israel responsible for hindering the vote, which Israel had not done, and for carrying out "assaults" against the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, which Israel also had not done.

It was, in fact, Abbas's harsh rhetoric against Israel that contributed to the eruption of violence on the streets of Jerusalem, where Palestinians physically attacked police officers and Jewish civilians.

On May 18, Abbas announced in front of the Arab Parliament, the legislative body of the Arab League, that he was planning to prosecute Israelis for committing "war crimes" for responding to the rockets and missiles that Iran's proxies, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, had fired into Israeli territory.

The \$75 million aid package for the Palestinians that Blinken intends to ask Congress to approve will most likely just end up helping Abbas in his effort to file "war crimes" lawsuits against Israelis in various international forums, including the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is also trying to indict Americans.

Ironically, the same Abbas who told Blinken that he (Abbas) is committed to a peace process with Israel is the same Abbas who also wants to see his Israeli "peace partners" put on trial at the ICC.

Abbas, in other words, wants to make peace with the Israelis, but only after he gets them handcuffed and imprisoned for alleged "war crimes." Needless to say, this is the same Abbas who does not dare to call out Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad for *their* war crimes of firing 4,000 rockets and missiles indiscriminately into Israel.

While Blinken has rewarded Abbas financially, he has also given Hamas a political gift in the form of reopening east Jerusalem's US diplomatic mission. The consulate used to serve as a liaison to the Palestinians until the Trump administration merged the consulate into the new US Embassy in Jerusalem.

Hamas launched its recent war on Israel professedly because of Jerusalem. Hamas told the Palestinians that it was firing rockets and missiles at Israel as part of its campaign to "liberate Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque from the Zionist enemy." Hamas even named its war on Israel "Sword of Jerusalem."

The real reason Hamas launched its war, though, was apparently to gain more power throughout all the Palestinian territories, as it had been hoping to do in the elections, before they were suddenly cancelled.

Hamas then seems to have decided, possibly with the urging of Iran, to try "Plan B": a show of strength to show the Palestinians who was the real "strong horse" - and to further weaken Abbas, whose political power exists only because Israel provides full-time security for him.

Hamas's goal was to send a message to the Palestinians and the world that the Jews have no rights in Jerusalem; that it is exclusively an Arab and Muslim city, and that only Hamas can deliver it. Hamas also possibly wanted to show the world that contrary to Israel's claim, Jerusalem is not a united city where Arabs and Jews live together.

The reality, like it or not, is that Hamas and the PA both want the same result: the destruction of Israel and its replacement with an Islamic state. They just differ about how to get there. Abbas would prefer to do it diplomatically, by having international groups declare a State of Palestine, which could then, if necessary, be used as a launching pad from which to conquer the rest of the territory; Hamas, as in its charter, prefers to seize all the land militarily, through jihad. Neither the PA nor Hamas has the slightest interest in any kind of peace with Israel.

Now comes Blinken and announces the reopening of the consulate in the city. Here is how the Palestinians understand his gestures: If you fire 4,000 rockets and missiles at Israel, you get a US consulate in Jerusalem and millions of dollars of US taxpayer money. It works! The solution, then, is to keep on doing it!

By reopening the consulate, Blinken is also telling both Hamas and Abbas that the US does not recognize Jerusalem as the united and undivided capital of Israel. Blinken has also sent a message to Abbas and Hamas that former US President Trump's formula of "peace for peace" in the Middle East is off the table; they no longer need to worry.

Abbas and Hamas had denounced Trump's plan as a "conspiracy to eliminate the Palestinian issue and rights." Now, Abbas and Hamas are rubbing their hands because, the way they see it, the Biden administration has actually just achieved their goal of scrapping Trump's peace plan, "Peace to Prosperity: A vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People." It was supported by the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Morocco, as well as by Serbia and Kosovo.

Blinken's visit then, even with the best of intentions, has been a big win for Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah and all those Arabs and Muslims who are fiercely opposed to Israel's right to exist and totally reject peace with it.

The Biden administration's decision to resume unconditional financial aid to the PA - and to Iran - only means strengthening dictatorships and corruption for those living in the Middle East. It means that Abbas can go on with his autocratic rule and oppressive measures, including depriving his people of a parliamentary government, freedom of

expression and equal justice under the law. America's decisions will embolden Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad and prove to them that their most recent war against Israel was not in vain.

By rewarding Abbas, Hamas and the anti-normalization camp in the Arab world, the Biden administration has bludgeoned its declared objective of reviving a peace process in the Middle East. It has demonstrated decisively that corruption and dictatorship pay. It has shown that terrorism pays - to the tune of millions of dollars. Palestinian incitement and violence against Israel are unlikely to recede in the context of such an encouraging outcome.

*Bassam Tawil is a Muslim Arab based in the Middle East.*



## Arab States are ‘Washing their Hands’ of the Palestinians

By Andrew E. Harrod



In what proved to be a snapshot of professional views of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the eve of war, Georgetown University adjunct professor and Middle East Institute (MEI) senior fellow Khaled Elgindy concluded that the “Arab world is sort of washing their hands” of the Palestinian cause during a May 3 MEI webinar. He agreed with his fellow panelists addressing “Arab-Israeli Normalization: A Viable Avenue Towards Peace?” that America and Arab states are prioritizing practical self-interests over an increasingly failed, violent Palestinian state project.

The panelists examined the implications of Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates establishing normal diplomatic relations with Israel during former President Donald Trump’s final months in office. These agreements initiated by Bahrain and UAE’s Abraham Accords have become only more remarkable in the days following the panel. The Iranian-supported Hamas terror group in Gaza renewed rocket attacks against Israel on May 10, firing thousands of rockets at Tel Aviv and other Israeli civilian population centres. Israel retaliated with airstrikes and artillery. UAE officials warned Hamas of sanctions if its campaign persists.

These Arab state recognitions of Israel “robbed the Palestinians of one of the very few points of leverage that they had vis-à-vis Israel,” noted Elgindy. Palestinians suffer “already pretty stark power asymmetry” with Israel. Given this “existential threat to the Palestinian national project,” he added, the “Palestinian response across the political spectrum was extremely negative.”

Richardson Centre for Global Engagement vice president and executive director Mickey Bergman, Elgindy’s fellow Georgetown adjunct, argued that these Arab states had been “very opportunistic” in making deals with Israel. The panelists noted that Trump recognized Morocco’s claim to the disputed Western Sahara and delisted Sudan as a state sponsor of terror. Meanwhile, Bahrain and the UAE wanted closer ties with Israel and the United States, particularly given growing Iranian threats.

Focusing on the Gulf States, MEI non-resident scholar Mohammed Soliman noted that for them, “geopolitics is back.” Since Trump’s 2016 election, “America has less local

capital and willingness to invest in a lot of problems around the world.” In particular, “America is leaving everything behind for the Indo-Pacific,” he noted.

“In order to reorganize the region in a post-U.S. dominated architecture,” analyzed Soliman, Gulf states “need to solve certain problems and realign with certain forces.” This precluded trying to resolve the interminable Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the moribund solution of creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel. “The current status quo cannot be sustained,” he explained, “based on a dream of having a two-state solution soon.” As Elgindy concurred, “basically, what Arab states are saying is, we cannot simply wait around forever, either to pursue our bilateral interests or to pursue other geopolitical interests,” on “this unicorn called a two-state solution.”

By contrast, Gulf states seemed more interested in military alliances among themselves and with Israel to counter threats like Iran, said Soliman. “The idea of an Arab-Israeli NATO” goes back to President George W. Bush, and “we are getting there. It’s not a fancy idea anymore; however, it is going to take time.” Webinar moderator Joyce Karam, Washington correspondent for *The National*, noted that an “Arab NATO” was an “idea that was first started with Harry Truman” with initiatives that led to the failed 1955 Baghdad Pact.

Elgindy additionally cited the practical realities that facilitated Israel’s relations with Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the UAE. Unlike Egypt and Jordan, which made peace agreements with Israel in 1979 and 1994, respectively, this Arab quartet had never engaged in military hostilities with Israel. Correspondingly, several of these states have had “under-the-table relations with the Israelis anyway” and now merely “are consecrating an existing geopolitical order.”

Meanwhile, Arab states “will continue to pay lip service to two states because everyone needs some place to hang their hat” concerning a strategy for the Palestinians, observed Elgindy. Yet international actors are increasingly practicing “conflict management” and “risk aversion” towards the Palestinians, United States Institute of Peace Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Program, explained director Lucy Kurtzer-Ellenbogen. In tandem, she added, Israeli “trends are clear that the body politic has moved very much and largely to the right,” to the detriment of concessions to the Palestinians. This trend has only accelerated with the latest eruption of violence.

Yet even before Hamas’s latest jihad, Elgindy correctly faulted Palestinians for their plight, as the Palestinian Authority’s recent cancellation of long overdue elections—the first since 2006—further exposed the corruption of the P.A. dictatorship. The cancellation “is another sign of a, I don’t any other way to put it, but a bankrupt leadership, that has no strategic vision, that is incapable of even minimally doing what is required to put its own house in order.” “You can never really underestimate the Palestinian leadership’s dysfunction,” he added.

The election fiasco “is very much a self-inflicted wound,” said Elgindy, and Palestinians have “become their own worst enemies” by showing themselves unworthy of serious international consideration. This societal incompetence “is self-reinforcing” against Palestinian state aspirations, as Arab nations are “not inclined to want to move ahead with two states.” In this context, he chastised Israel, the United States and other countries for “opposing Palestinian reconciliation efforts” between the P.A. and Hamas, as if giving power to jihadist terrorists could solve anything.

The situational analysis of the Palestinian cause left Elgindy in a gloomy mood. Israelis continue to settle disputed West Bank territories, the historic Jewish heartland of Judea and Samaria, thereby continually limiting the extent of any future Palestinian sovereignty. “De facto annexation is happening on the ground as we speak, with nary a word of opposition” globally, he said; the situation “is deteriorating really, really rapidly.”

Yet what for Elgindy is Palestinian defeat is for others Israeli victory over a hitherto implacable foe that has resorted to futile bloodshed yet again. After decades of Israeli resilience against Arab efforts to destroy the Jewish state, practical Arab governments are seeking mutually beneficial relations with Israel and abandoning extremist, rejectionist Palestinians. If this acceptance of reality spreads to other Arab states, perhaps one day even Middle East studies professors will follow suit.

*Andrew E. Harrod, a Campus Watch Fellow, freelance researcher and writer, is a fellow with the Lawfare Project.*

## EU unpublished report finds Palestinian textbooks contain Anti-Semitism

By Chan Ling  
TCMER Board Member



An unpublished report by the European Union on Palestinian textbooks confirmed that the Palestinian curriculum includes anti-Semitic content, incitement of violence and the delegitimization of Israel.

The German newspaper *BILD* published findings from the report on Tuesday and asked why they were never publicized. The publication stated that the report was commissioned in 2019 by then-E.U. foreign affairs representative Federica Mogherini and examined teaching instructions published by the Palestinian Ministry of Education between 2017 and 2020.

The report, written by the German Georg-Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, was also seen by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se), an Israeli NGO that has previously drawn attention to similar offensive content in Palestinian textbooks.

According to IMPACT-se, the institute found in textbooks the “frequent use of negative attributions in relation to the Jewish people in, for example, textbook exercises [that] suggest a conscious perpetuation of anti-Jewish prejudice.” It even discovered a textbook chapter that “sends the message that the Jews as a collective are dangerous and deceptive, and demonizes them. It generates feelings of hatred towards Jews.”

The examined material also contained depictions of Israeli violence that “tend to dehumanize the Israeli adversary; occasionally with accusations of malice or deception.” When discussing violent actions by Palestinians against Israel, the textbooks label them as part of “a heroic struggle” against the Jewish state; in general, portrayals of violence perpetrated by the Israeli protagonists present them as “a

homogenous entity mostly referred to as the '(Zionist) occupation' or by similar epithets."

"This as yet unpublished E.U. report into Palestinian textbooks is a damning indictment of the Palestinian Authority's systematic and purposeful insertion of anti-Semitism, hate and incitement to violence in its textbooks," said IMPACT-se CEO Marcus Sheff.

He added: "The question is, will E.U. policymakers finally take action to condition E.U. funding to the P.A. on positive reforms to the curriculum as the European parliament has demanded on several occasions?"

A spokesperson for Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the findings "prove Israel's consistent claim that incitement is constantly present in Palestinian Authority textbooks ... a claim that Israel has raised with the European Union and its member states for many years."

"Instead of educating for tolerance, coexistence, peace and non-violence—as is required under UNESCO's mandatory standards—Palestinian textbooks include anti-Semitic components, deny the existence of the State of Israel and glorify violence as a method of resolving the conflict," said the spokesperson.

The spokesperson also noted that the E.U. continues to invest millions in funding the P.A.'s educational system without monitoring content that appears in textbooks or demanding that it stop "indoctrinating its children to hate and kill."

## Emir of Qatar Should Go

By Lina Zaidi  
TCMER Board Member



(Sheikh Mubarak Bin Khalifa Al-Thani)

Sheikh Mubarak Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Qatar's ruling family member, has called on the Emir of Qatar to immediately quit power according to Saudi Gazette. Sheikh is an important member of the ruling Thani clan.

Saudi Gazette, an English-language daily newspaper published in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, reported on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 that Sheikh Mubarak Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Qatar's ruling family member, has called on the Emir of Qatar to immediately quit power and pave the way for someone else, who is more efficient and able than him from among the members of the family, to take over at the helm of affairs. Calling Emir to quit power is something unheard in GCC countries - will Emir quit is an interesting question.

Sources close to the Al-Thani family claim that the angry Sheikh Mubarak Bin Khalifa is not happy due to some personal and political differences with the Emir and other senior members. Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries are not using Sheikh Mubarak to malign the Emir, they said.

**Qatari regime controlled by Iran & Turkey?**

In an interview with Okaz, Sheikh Mubarak, an estranged member of Qatar's ruling family, said that the present regime in Doha is usurpers of power. After the plots and machinations, the Al-Hamadain regime is now targeting the security and stability of other states and peoples in the region. "The Hamadain regime is too small to undermine Egypt's security. The people of Qatar now suffer a thousand times, because of the stupid acts of the regime that does not represent the people or satisfy them," he said.

Sheikh Mubarak claimed that the practices of the Qatari regime, especially after it had fallen into the arms of Iran, Turkey, and some terrorist parties, were totally rejected by

the Qatari people. "Iran and Turkey are controlling Qatar. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Turkish officers, and individuals are present in the streets and neighborhoods of Qatar to suppress and torture everyone they dislike," he alleged.

Khalifa bin Mubarak is among the ruling family members. He left Qatar for rejecting the regime's policies. Khalifa is currently based in Saudi Arabia.

He recently spoke to a regional newspaper and said that "it is likely to hear of a coup within the Qatari regime. This was previously done by the former Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, when he turned on his father and became the ruler".

He was referring to the bloodless coup of 1995, when current Emir's father, Hammad bin Khalifa Al Thani forcibly removed his own father from throne. Hammad then ruled peacefully till June 2013 when he voluntarily handed over power to his fourth son, current Emir: Tamim bin Hammad bin Khalifa Al Thani who is now ruling for the past seven years.

Relations with Saudi Arabia and UAE started to deteriorate during the independent minded reign of Sheikh Hammad bin Khalifa. He created Al Jazeera - Arabic and English - developed closer relations with Iran and tacitly supported Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Many quarters believe that he handed over the power to Tamim, his son, in the hope that relations with Saudi lead GCC block will improve but it has not happened. In fact relations deteriorated to the stage where GCC countries have severed their trade and diplomatic relations with Doha in June 2017.

#### *GCC countries allege Qatar of supporting terrorism*

It is worth recalling that on June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt severed diplomatic and trade relations with Qatar, closing land, air and sea links, as they accused Doha of supporting "terrorism" and their regional rival, Iran. Doha vehemently denies the charges and says the boycott aims to impinge on its sovereignty.

The quartet set 13 demands for lifting the blockade, including the closing down of Al Jazeera Media Network, shuttering a Turkish military base, and reducing ties with Iran. Qatar's ruling family rejected the demand.

As a result of the blockade, Qatar's ruling family faced several challenges. Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah, Secretary-General National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), pointed to "the seriousness of the violations affecting Qatari children as a result of the blockade imposed on the country, expressing regret that the celebration of the Universal Children's Day coincided with the continuing violations and discriminatory measures of the blockade countries, which did not exclude any category of Qatari society, including children".

However some GCC countries - notably Kuwait - off lately have been trying to resolve difference between Doha and Jedah. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah of Kuwait has categorically stated that the dispute between Qatar and its Gulf neighbours "is no longer acceptable" and must be resolved. He was addressing the opening session of parliament's new term, Sheikh Sabah said the boycott has greatly weakened the unity of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), of which Qatar is a member.

*Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, a dynamic leader?*

Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani is seen as a dynamic leader who is making efforts on several fronts to uplift his country. The Emir was able to convince the western countries to host mega event of the FIFA world cup (Dec, 2022) is likely to make it as a new hub for international tourism.

Similarly, despite a boycott from the GCC countries, the Emir and his team managed to strengthen Qatar's economy. Qatar's ruling family is reportedly working on different areas to raise the country's soft as well as hard power.

It is important to mention that the Emir has issued recently a decree for a higher committee to be established and prepare the first-ever elections to the Advisory Council. Analysts believe that should the process move forward, Qatar would become the first Gulf Arab monarchy to introduce legislative elections and will become a limited democracy.

The date of the election has not been specified. The constitution of Qatar, adopted in 2003, stipulates that 30 members of the Shura Council be elected and 15 others appointed by the emir, yet so far all Qatari lawmakers have been appointees.

The Shura Council is mandated with adopting budgetary parameters, working out and discussing legislative initiatives, and monitoring the work of the ministerial cabinet. For bills to be passed into laws in Qatar, they need to be voted for by two-thirds of lawmakers and be approved by the emir.



## **Qatar Finance Minister Arrested**

### **From AAP**



(Ali Shareef al-Emadi has been Qatar's finance minister since 2013)

Qatar's finance minister has been arrested over allegations of abuse of power and misuse of public funds in the gas-rich Gulf state, state media say.

The attorney general ordered that Ali Shareef al-Emadi be questioned after a review of alleged "crimes related to the civil service", according to the Qatar News Agency.

Mr Emadi has not yet commented. He sits on the board of Qatar's \$300bn (£216bn) sovereign wealth fund and is chairman of Qatar National Bank.

Mr Emadi was chief executive of the bank, which is the Middle East's largest lender, before becoming finance minister in 2013. He was appointed as part of a new cabinet when the current Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, took power.

Last year, British financial magazine *The Banker* gave Mr Emadi its "Finance Minister of the Year" award for the Middle East. It cited his efforts in managing Qatar's finances during the coronavirus pandemic, during which its economy shrank by 3.7% amid lower global energy demand.

The Qatar News Agency report did not provide any further details about the allegations against Mr Emadi. But a source with knowledge of the investigation told Reuters news agency: "The findings and investigation are related to his government position as finance minister and not to his board member roles at other entities."

Such arrests are rare in Qatar, but the tiny emirate has sought to crack down on corruption as it prepares to host the Fifa World Cup next year. It has spent billions of dollars on stadiums and other infrastructure for the event.

Qatar was ranked 30th out of 180 countries on Transparency International's 2020 corruption perceptions index, making it the second best performer among Arab states after the United Arab Emirates.

## **Eyewitness Comes Forward Against Qatari Royal Accused of Murder**

**By Don Gibbons  
TCMER Board Member**



Three more plaintiffs who worked for brother of Qatari Emir have joined a lawsuit that details a campaign of violence, abuse and intimidation by playboy race-car driver

Sheikh Khaled Al-Thani, the brother of Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, is alleged to have "personally murdered" an employee who insulted his wife in a planned new lawsuit that will allege a history of violence and threats.

Attorney Rebecca Castañeda said the original lawsuit she filed in 2019 that detailed Sheikh Khaled's violent behavior and threats against two American contractors is being expanded to include three more Americans who allege "even worse violence" that also includes threats to kill a head of the American sports racing industry.

Castañeda said after forcing Sheikh Khaled's attorneys to respond to the lawsuit in November — satisfying the US federal court requirement that defendants be "served" — she sought out other individuals who work for or had worked for Sheikh Khaled, saying that she had information regarding other crimes.

"Between the five plaintiffs, we have a total of seven solicitations for murder. One of the plaintiffs watched the sheikh murder someone in front of him and (the sheikh) actually asked him to assist in the murder. He said no. We also have additional weapons solicitations," Castañeda said, referring to the impending lawsuit.

"He (Sheikh Khaled) murdered a fellow employee in front of one of the plaintiffs who is filing suit. He asked the plaintiff to actively participate in the murder."

Sheikh Khaled had previously been accused of threatening to kill several people including his employees who refused his orders, Castañeda said.

Castañeda said that the murder victim was “an Indian employee.” Sheikh Khaled’s wife became angry after the employee failed to pick her up from shopping at an agreed time.

“The sheikh’s wife apparently felt slighted that an employee did not pick her up on time. The employee was murdered. The suit will allege the timeline for that and how that happened, and the terror the plaintiff felt in being involved,” Castañeda said.

“This took place in Qatar, so you have an American citizen in a foreign country with a foreign royal. You can imagine that your chances and your opportunity for escape are zero percent. There are no other options. The plaintiff witnessed that employee’s abuse and eventual murder.”

The new lawsuit will also detail how Sheikh Khaled, the owner of Al-Anabi Racing USA LLC, based in Massachusetts, sought to have one of his racing industry rivals killed.

“The sheikh asked one of the plaintiffs to murder the head of a US racing car organization,” said Castañeda, noting Sheikh Khaled races cars in international competitions.

In another instance, made by one of the three new plaintiffs, the lawsuit will detail how Sheikh Khaled ordered a rival sheikh in Bahrain be targeted in a hacking operation.

“That sheikh was successfully hacked — business websites, personal emails and computer servers,” said Castañeda.

Castañeda described the Bahraini sheikh targeted by Sheikh Khaled as “a personal enemy, someone the sheikh deals with in a competition sense (racing).”

She said that the names of all victims and targets will be identified when the new lawsuit is filed. The five plaintiffs are American, she said. Two of the new plaintiffs are former military contractors who worked for Sheikh Khaled, like Pittard, while the third new plaintiff worked for the American government.

Castañeda described Sheikh Khaled as “someone who has never been held accountable for his actions, and probably moves through life thinking the future will be the same. We’re here to tell him that is not the case.”

#### New sources step forward

The attorney said she had asked for information on Sheikh Khaled on Twitter and was surprised by the response. She vetted and interviewed the individuals, and added three to the lawsuit who will be identified when formal filing takes place.

“About January, we had more information that was coming in. I had previously done a public Twitter video stating that if anybody had information they wanted to share, whether they work for him, had worked for him, or just have information, please let us know, it will remain confidential,” Castañeda said.

“Several people contacted my office. We had some anonymous emails from people who didn’t want to be named that shared information, and then we had people who did want to be named and were willing to share their information publicly.”

Castañeda added: “It has become clear to me over the past several months that people are scared of somebody who has financial resources and the ability to take whatever

actions they want. The lawsuit includes physical abuse, emotional abuse and basic power.”

She said that in February 2020, after the original lawsuit was withdrawn, Matthew Allende’s girlfriend was viciously assaulted in her home.

Castañeda said that she could not confirm the brutal rape and assault is linked to the lawsuit, but insisted the legal fight to hold Sheikh Khaled accountable for his misdeeds will not be discouraged by any intimidation.

First lawsuit flushed out Sheikh Khaled

The new revelations expand allegations detailed in the original lawsuit, filed on July 23, 2019, of how Sheikh Khaled threatened two employees Matthew Pittard and Matthew Allende. The two former employees worked for Sheikh Khaled’s companies and allege they were threatened at gunpoint when they refused orders in September 2017 to kill two unnamed Americans.

Sheikh Khaled had also claimed the targets had sullied “his social reputation.” When Pittard, a security professional, and Allende, a paramedic, refused, Sheikh Khaled imprisoned them and threatened to have them killed, too.

When Sheikh Khaled discovered an American he had imprisoned at his luxury palace in Qatar had been freed by Pittard and Allende, he threatened the former, saying, according to the lawsuit, that “he would kill him, bury his body in the desert and kill his family.”

The unnamed American captive was first arrested on Sheikh Khaled’s orders and jailed at the Onaiza police station in Doha before being moved to the sheikh’s residence. Documents claim Allende scaled a two-meter security fence and a six-meter wall in order to escape from Sheikh Khaled’s Qatari compound after he was allegedly threatened at gunpoint.

Brandishing a Glock 26 automatic pistol, Sheikh Khaled demanded Pittard return the freed American or provide information on his whereabouts. If Pittard refused, Sheikh Khaled allegedly told him that he “would pay the price.”

“We have not refiled the lawsuit yet, but we will shortly,” Castañeda said. “We have continued our investigation and built additional complaints for three other men who have come forward who also worked for Sheikh Khaled.”

After temporarily withdrawing the lawsuit in January, Castañeda sought out other individuals who had similar allegations regarding Sheikh Khaled and spent four months researching the details.

Now that Sheikh Khaled has been “served” in the original lawsuit, he will not be able to duck or dodge the new lawsuit, Castañeda said.

“We are working on serving him (with the lawsuit). Obviously, as an international defendant, it is difficult. It is not the same as serving an American individual with corporate offices,” she said. At least another five companies are also being added to the lawsuit.

*Anyone who is working or has worked for Sheikh Khaled who wants to share information about his abuses can email Rebecca Castaneda in confidence to [rlcast1@protonmail.com](mailto:rlcast1@protonmail.com), or to call 813-708-7018.*

## **New Qatari textbooks glorify Hamas, reject Arab-Israeli normalization**

**By Peter Rawlings  
TCMER Board Member**



Qatar prides itself on its high level of education and yet its own textbooks clearly do not meet accepted international standards, according to a new report by IMPACT-se, a research institute that analyzes schoolbooks and curricula within the prism of UNESCO-defined standards on peace and tolerance. Its updated report evaluates the current Qatari curriculum in conjunction with the London-based think tank the Henry Jackson Society.

Some of the key findings show that hatred towards Jews and clear anti-Semitism remain central themes of the curriculum. Jews are characterized as having global control. The persecution of Jews is justified by blaming the rise of the Nazi Party as a result of Jewish greed after World War I. Jews today are presented as disloyal, inherently treacherous and hostile enemies who seek "to bring the Muslims' downfall and the end of Islam."

In addition, the curriculum openly rejects the normalization and peace-making between Israel and Arab nations. In the fall of 2020, Israel codified ties with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain as part of the Abraham Accords, followed by Sudan and Morocco.

Hamas, recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, is described in the textbooks as a legitimate "Islamic resistance" movement which seeks to "oppose the Zionist project." Hamas's firing of thousands of rockets into civilian populations is glorified – described as "brave" and "remarkable." Suicide bombings and terrorist acts by Palestinians are portrayed as a legitimate response to ongoing Israeli oppression, calling terror acts as "armed operations" or "military operations."

David Roberts of King's College London, author of the report's foreword and one of the most prominent Qatar experts today remarks "a state's education curriculum feeds the waters in which state policy-makers swim." He added that the Qatari curriculum "is a clear reflection of the direction of Qatari foreign policy, currently going through a

period of change and testing the slowly venturing forth from a radical Islamist curriculum."

He continued, "There is a litany of problematic elements in Qatar's education curricula, as the IMPACT-se report exhaustively documents, which contrast the stipulated norms and international standards of UNESCO. Even if the critical links and rationales underpinning Qatar's foreign policies are pragmatic and geostrategic in nature, generations of teaching such extreme and relatively extreme sentiments have surely had some impact, somewhere, on the decision-making chain."

"Despite the hyper-controlled nature of Qatari policymaking and its relative insulation from local pressures, no leader, however autocratic, is entirely unmoored from public opinion," he said. "And a local population raised on an educational curriculum of this nature is sure to be well-disposed to its state engaging and supporting Islamist-oriented causes broadly conceived."

According to a statement published by IMPACT-se, the Qatari curriculum "appears to be in a phase of transformation. While somewhat less radical than previous versions, the process of moderation is in its infancy. Some particularly offensive material has been removed after decades of radical propaganda in Qatari schools; however, the curriculum still does not meet international standards of peace and tolerance."

'A slight movement away from radical jihadism'

The report focuses on Qatar's school curriculum for grades one through 12. It provides an assessment by measuring Qatari textbooks against international standards based on UNESCO, U.N. declarations, and other recommendations and documents relating to education for peace and tolerance.

IMPACT-se said the curriculum "reflects the same overall tension facing Qatar's leadership. That tension, as highlighted by Roberts, is between Qatar's Islamist affinities and its desire to be seen as an open, neutral and progressive leader in the Arabian Gulf. Textbooks teach Qatari children to accept those different than themselves and advocate for peace, while at the same echoing anti-Semitic canards and reinforcing the Qatari regime's support for Salafist terror organizations."

"There is a slight movement away from radical jihadism but a great amount remains," the statement said. "Nevertheless, Qatar's curriculum is heavily influenced by Western educators – displaying the Qatari gift for embracing contradictions."

Marcus Sheff, CEO of IMPACT-se, notes that while they envisage themselves as leaders in international education, the Qataris own curriculum "continually falls short of basic international standards of respect, peace and tolerance, and fails to propel Qatar towards its goals of modernization and globalization." Sheff said some changes to the textbooks have been made, "but the country stubbornly persists in its promotion of radical jihadi ideals." He also said that students are "encouraged to look at the world through a Muslim Brotherhood-created lens, and anti-Semitism remains a central component of Qatari education."

The Qataris "might take this opportunity to promote peace in the region and stop describing Hamas firing of thousands of rockets into Israeli civilian populations as 'brave' and 'remarkable' in their textbooks," suggested Sheff. "It is clear what further changes need to be made," he said. "If combined with peace and tolerance education, Qatar could become the leader in education it aspires to be."

- Advertising -



## MBS – The Great Islamic Reformer

**By Arthur Tane**  
**TCMER Executive Director**



In an interview with "Al-Arabiya", the Saudi Crown Prince suggests concentrating the constitution and laws on the Koran, eliminating many hadiths (sayings of the Prophet). He speaks of the need for a current "interpretation" of the Koran. A real change in ideological direction that goes beyond the Wahhabism propagated by Riyadh to date. No more stoning, scourging, killing apostates and homosexuals.

On April 27 Saudi Arabian Crown Prince, Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), gave a long television interview to the Saudi channel "*Al-Arabiya*", dedicated to his economic and social program for a new country in the framework of the 2030 vision, first unveiled in 2015.

In the interview he spoke of moderation in the application of Islamic laws, challenging Wahhabism, an ideology developed by Mohammed ben Abdelwahhab, an 18th century Saudi preacher, who reigned for a long time in the country and elsewhere, after promoting it for many decades in the Muslim world.

It would seem that MBS has come out in favour of the reform of Islam, when he stated: "All Muslim jurists and scholars have been talking about the concept of moderation for over a thousand years. So, I do not think I am in a position to clarify this concept, as much as I can ... abide by the Saudi constitution, which is the Quran, the Sunnah, and our basic governance system and to implement it fully in a broad sense that is inclusive of everybody."

Until a few years ago, such a speech would have been unimaginable and [even that evening] it was hard to believe it, if broadcast live on the television channel.



MBS also declared that "the Constitution of Saudi Arabia is the Koran" and that his country is "obliged to implement the Koran in one form or another"; that is: all citizens will be respected as such and in their differences. To be more explicit, he stressed that only what is only said "unequivocally" in the Koran should be applied: "In social and personal affairs, we are obliged to implement only the stipulations clearly enunciated in the Quran. Thus, I cannot apply a sharia punishment without a clear or explicit Koranic stipulation of the Sunna."

If this is to take place, says MBS, then Islam needs reform and sources of religious legislation need review. In saying as much, MBS has placed himself alongside Muslim intellectuals such as Mohamed Arkoun, Mohamed Shahrour, Faraj Fouda and others. It must be said that many of these intellectuals have been persecuted, imprisoned, interdicted, or killed because they had defended a contemporary view of Islam, or tried to cure Islam of its illness: Wahhabism, or political Islam.

MBS says the reform is clear: "The government, where Sharia is concerned, has to implement Quran regulations and teachings in mutawater (well-known) hadiths and to look into the veracity and reliability of ahad hadiths and to disregard "khabar" hadiths entirely, unless if a clear benefit is derived from it for humanity. So, there should be no punishment related to a religious matter except when there is a clear Quranic stipulation, and this penalty will be implemented based on the way that the Prophet applied it."

In this case, according to this criterion, only 10% of the valid hadiths remain, which are those converging with the Koran. In addition, some Islamic laws would disappear, such as stoning, scourging, amputating the hands of thieves, as well as Islamic criminal law laws, such as the death of the apostate and homosexuals.

The announcement of the crown prince establishes a distance, a fundamental break with Wahhabism and constitutes a real change of ideological direction, in the sense that it favors recourse to the direct interpretation of the Koran and the hadith, without worrying about the different schools of thought and the ulama who forged Wahhabi Islamic thought.

The crown prince also added that "to implement a penalty on the pretext that it is a Sharia penalty while there is no stipulation for such a penalty in the Quran or in the mutawater hadith, then this is also a falsification of the Sharia [...] When we commit ourselves to follow a certain school or scholar, this means we are deifying human beings. God Almighty did not put a barrier between Himself and people. He revealed the Quran and the Prophet PBUH implemented it and the space for interpretation is open permanently."

MBS continues: "If Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdulwahhab were with us today and he found us committed blindly to his texts and closing our minds to interpretation and jurisprudence while deifying and sanctifying him he would be the first to object to this. There are no fixed schools of thought and there is no infallible person. We should engage in continuous interpretation of Quranic texts and the same goes for the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH, and all fatwas should be based on the time, place, and mindset in which they are issued. For example, 100 years ago, when a scholar would issue a certain fatwah not knowing that the Earth was round and not knowing about continents or technology, etc. that fatwah would have been based on the then-available inputs and information and their understanding of the Quran and Sunnah, but these things change over time and are different right now."

This is like saying that Saudi Arabia is opting for Koranism, a current of thought that rejects the authority of the hadiths and that supports the re-actualization of interpretations as a function of time, knowledge and cultures. Koranism supports that each country can have its own Islam, which is encultuated by the culture that welcomes it.

But for the moment, despite these revelations, Bin Salman appears to be proceeding with caution. His considerations denote his having read the books of Mohamed Shahrour, Ahmed Abdo Maher and other thinkers who perhaps influenced and incited him to break away from the excessive religion of his ancestors and ancient generations. MBS understood that Islam, as it is understood and known today, constitutes a brake on development and modernity.

In any case, it is curious to note that on the part of the leaders of Wahhabism there has been no reaction, if not some expression of support published in recent days

Yet, in the near past, such claims would have been considered blasphemous. Will they have been afraid to hear the prince say: "Anyone who adopts an extremist way, even without being a terrorist, is a criminal and will be severely punished by the law"?

Without political will and political strength, the reform of Islam cannot take place. In any case, the question today is: what are other countries waiting for to reach the same decision? If other Muslim countries do not have the courage to follow the Saudi model currently in vogue, they will find themselves with a modern day inquisition, such as Algeria which condemns free thinkers to prison. Under MBS guidance, Saudi Arabia is looking forward to a bright future in line with the ambitious 2030 vision. It is standing at the threshold of a great social and economic transformation.

## **Saudi Women allowed to live, travel without Male Guardian**

**By Zara Dawoud  
TCMER Board Member**



Women in Saudi Arabia are to be allowed to live alone without a male guardian, after a landmark ruling for the country known for its harsh gender inequality. The landmark ruling states that "an adult woman has the right to choose where to live. A woman's guardian can report her only if he has evidence proving she committed a crime."

Saudi Arabia has lagged behind many of its neighbouring countries when it comes to women's rights, with voting rights only being given to women for the first time in 2011. In the 2021 World Economic Forum's global gender gap report, the kingdom was ranked 147th out of 156 countries. Although this score is extremely low, it is higher than it has been in previous years, proving that real progress is being made.

The real proof, however, can be seen in the dramatic changes taking place within the kingdom, all with a focus on social reform.

The decision to allow women to live by themselves without permission or a male guardian is a landmark ruling. The amendment to the "Law of Procedure before Sharia Courts," will allow single, divorced, or widowed women to live independently in a house without permission from their father or any other male guardian.

The old law stated that women who find themselves in these circumstances must be under the responsibility of a male guardian who would be able to control her every move if he wished, whereas the amendment now states that "an adult woman has the right to choose where to live. A woman's guardian can report her only if he has evidence proving she committed a crime."

For many people, this decision has been years in the making.

Saudi writer Marian al-Otaibi was embroiled in a three-year legal battle from 2017-2020 after she was sued by her family for living and traveling alone without her

father's permission. She eventually won the case after the court ruled that she had "the right to choose where to live."

Courts will no longer accept lawsuits filed by family members of girls who choose to live alone, something that has been allowed up until now.

The decision to change the law was made as part of a larger plan which Prince Mohammed bin Salman is working to implement after promising that Saudi Arabia would become a more equal place for women.

Other changes which have come about recently include the decision to allow women to register for Haj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, without needing a male guardian with them. They will also be allowed to join the military and armed forces in various positions, including the Medical Service and the Royal Navy.

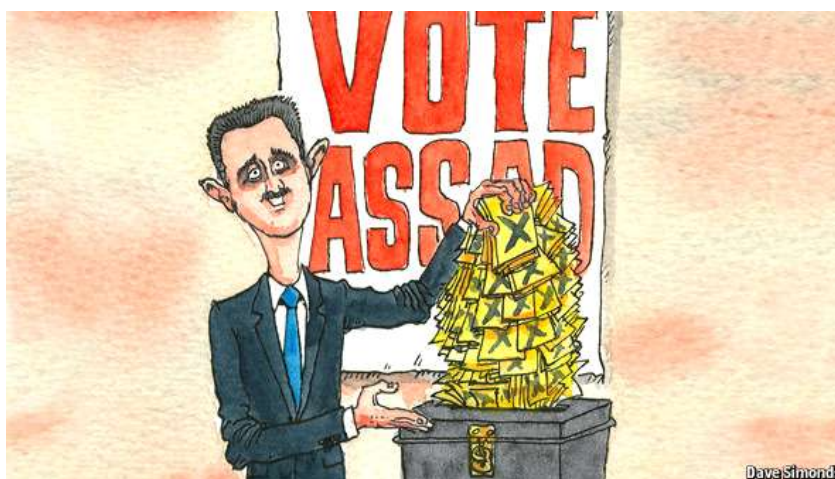
In 2019, Saudi Arabia passed a law that would allow women the right to drive, and it has now been extended to include the option for young women aged 17 to receive their driving licenses. The first steps have also been put into motion to allow women in the kingdom to pursue legal careers and be appointed as judges.

In January 2021, the Saudi-based Al Arabiya media channel reported that the undersecretary for women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia, Hind al-Zahid, had "initiatives in place on several levels" that would allow women to assume the position of judge.

Women in Saudi Arabia are welcoming these long-overdue changes.

## Russia Pushes a Dangerous Narrative Ahead of Syria's Sham Election

By Anna Borshchevskaya



Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad was guaranteed a election victory on May 26, a sham no serious observer considers free and fair. As this latest chapter of the Syrian decade-long tragedy continues to unfold, Russia, a chief Assad supporter, is using the election to promote its own broader narrative and build influence.

### How Russia Is Using the Election to Its Advantage

The Russian foreign affairs ministry decried the “alleged illegitimacy” of the election as interference in Syria’s internal affairs. “No one has the right to tell the Syrians when and under what conditions they should elect their head of state,” said the ministry’s statement. Then it proceeded to denounce the “illegal foreign occupation” of Syrian territory, implicitly referring to the US. Russian officials have made it clear over the years the Kremlin wants the small remaining American contingent to leave Syria. They remain committed to this goal.

Russia’s *Kommersant* presented Russia as the voice of dispassionate reason which “calls for respect for the basic law of the [Syrian] republic,” rather than denounce the outcome of the election before it happens. To an uninformed audience this may sound sensible—and this is partly the point of Kremlin messaging—but the reality is another matter entirely.

The UN Security Council Resolution 2254 outlines steps for a political transition for Syria. The resolution chartered a Syrian-led and UN-facilitated political process that established a transitional governing body, a new constitution agreed upon by the Syrian constitutional committee, and UN-supervised elections that meet “the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora.” Nothing of the sort is taking place, which makes the upcoming election a cruel and predictable farce. To date, negotiations in Geneva failed to produce a new constitution as the Assad regime, shielded by Kremlin diplomacy, purposely stalled the discussions.

It would be tempting to say that Moscow is simply rejecting the UN resolution it signed, but the reality is more nuanced. Rather, the Kremlin promotes a different

interpretation of the UN resolution—it finds nothing that explicitly prohibits holding the elections now with the current Syrian constitution in place. In earlier years, Moscow diluted legal documents such as the 2012 Geneva communique, on which Resolution 2254 is based, precisely to leave these terms vague. Thus, Moscow not only supports Assad as a “legitimate” ruler of Syria but also erodes from within the spirit of international institutions that envisioned his eventual departure. In essence, this is the purpose of Russian diplomacy on Syria.

In addition, as the Syrian election nears, Moscow renewed its longstanding claim that sanctions against Assad, and especially the so-called Caesar Act, hurt the Syrian people. This claim is part of the Kremlin’s narrative that portrays the West as aggressive and destabilizing, bent on ousting regimes it doesn’t like, as opposed to Russia that stands for respect of international law, anti-terrorism and Syrian sovereignty. The Caesar Act, named after a Syrian military defector who documented evidence of Assad’s war crimes, officially took force in July 2020. It sanctions governments, companies, and individuals indirectly funding Assad’s regime. The Syrian people are not the target, while the act does not hinder the provision of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people—rather Assad, with Moscow’s support is doing that.

### Russia’s Strategy

It is no accident Moscow is now focused on sanctions. Leveraging humanitarian assistance to support Assad is crucial to Moscow’s play. Just as Moscow blocked last year’s UN efforts to deliver cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria, it appears set to do the same this summer at the upcoming vote as it pushes for the aid to be delivered from Assad-controlled areas. Perhaps nothing highlights the Kremlin’s position as clearly as this month’s conversation with Vladimir Putin and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. “When considering the humanitarian situation in Syria, concern was expressed over the tightening of unilateral sanctions against the legitimate authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic,” according to the Kremlin’s statement about the meeting.

Indeed, to shift pressure away from Assad, the narrative that sanctions—rather than Assad—are suffocating the Syrian people has resurfaced in the Russian state-controlled press in the context of the Syrian election. In a recent interview, Russian foreign affairs minister Sergei Lavrov said the West aims to “suffocate the Syrian people so that they stand up and overthrow Syrian president Bashar Assad,” echoing earlier comments published in Russia’s *Izvestiya* by the Syrian ambassador to Russia Riad Haddad, “they do everything they can do suffocate us.” Moreover, the argument that sanctions against Assad are ineffective or harm the civilian population has taken hold in the West, showing that it is not immune to Kremlin narratives. The Middle East region too has shifted towards the Kremlin position as the Arab League moves closer to accepting Assad, something Lavrov has not failed to highlight. “[M]any Arab countries are realizing the importance of restoring ties with Damascus. For our part, we fully support this readiness,” he told Egypt’s *Al-Ahram* last month.

In this context there is a hint of indifference to the West in Russian press comments. One Russian analyst quoted by state-run RIA Novosti said that even if the West does not accept the Syrian election as legitimate it will still have to deal with Assad. In a similar vein, Vitaly Naumkin, director of the Institute of Oriental Studies told a *Kommersant* reporter in the article cited earlier, “There is no tragedy that the West does not recognize the [Syrian] elections. Obviously, Assad will win. But there are sane people in the West who understand that the idea of postponement [of elections] is absurd, since in that case anarchy and chaos will ensue.”

### A Sad Past, Present, and Future

It's hard to see how legitimizing a man who spared no depravity to cling to power and plunged his country into a war that destabilized the entire region will bring stability. Moreover, Western non-recognition of Syria's "election" matters as does its commitment to Syria and more broadly the global order that the Kremlin seeks to erode—an order that says there are limits to what a state can do to its citizens. It also matters that while the true scope of Syria's horrors has largely gone unnoticed by the Russian public, a group of Russian human rights groups recently unveiled a report, the first of its kind, that describes Russia as a perceived gross violator of humanitarian law in Syria, not a liberator. The Kremlin made many serious gains in its great power contest with the West as a result of Vladimir Putin's intervention to save Assad. But the story of Russia's Syria adventure is not over, and the US role remains crucial.

*Anna Borshchevskaya is author of Putin's War in Syria: Russian Foreign Policy and the Price of America's Absence.*

# Rehabilitating Assad

By David Schenker

In recent weeks, momentum has been building toward reintegrating Syria into the Arab League. The country was suspended from the organization in November 2011, eight months into a brutal regime suppression effort that had killed 5,000 civilians. Ten years on and with an estimated 500,000 dead, several Arab states—encouraged by Russia—are taking steps to end the decade-long isolation of Bashar al-Assad and restore Syria's membership. Although the Arab League is an archaic, dysfunctional, and largely irrelevant organization, the move is nevertheless significant for what it signals: a greater regional willingness to engage with Assad politically and economically. Consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015), U.S. policy has premised any such reengagement on a valid political transition, but regional states may undermine the prospects for real change by welcoming Damascus back into the fold prematurely.

## Increased Arab Engagement

Upon suspending Syria for refusing to implement the Arab League peace plan in 2011, the organization levied a series of sanctions that included travel bans on some senior regime officials and limitations on investments and dealings with the Central Bank of Syria. With the exception of Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, all league members enacted and at least partially enforced these measures for the better part of a decade, largely due to concerns that Western countries might sanction them if they did not comply.

Over the past few years, however, a number of Arab states began pressing to end Syria's suspension, spurred by economic exigencies, fatigue with the war, regional rivalries, and a growing sense that the Assad regime had prevailed. Senior Trump administration officials pushed back against these efforts, but contacts between Arab capitals and Damascus nevertheless intensified from 2016 to 2020, with several states reopening their shuttered embassies and reposting senior diplomats.

The United Arab Emirates has been among the most insistent of these advocates. Despite initially supporting the rebels, Abu Dhabi reopened its embassy in Damascus in December 2018 and has since called for reinstating the country's Arab League membership. The idea gained further traction this March after Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov toured the UAE and other Gulf states. At a joint press conference during Lavrov's visit, Emirati foreign minister Abdullah bin Zayed disparaged Washington's approach to the matter and lamented that U.S. economic restrictions such as the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act "make the matter difficult." He then called for the reconstruction of postwar Syria.

The UAE has not been alone in its outreach:

Tunisia reopened its embassy in 2015, posting a mid-tier diplomat to Damascus. Oman returned its ambassador to Syria in October 2020, the first Gulf state to do so. Five months later, the Syrian ambassador accredited to Muscat stated that the two countries had agreed to "boost investments" and trade. Jordan dispatched a charge d'affaires to Damascus in 2019, filling a slot that had been empty since 2012. Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry announced last month that Cairo supported Arab normalization with Syria, shortly after his meeting with Lavrov.



Iraq hosted Syria's minister of petroleum last week, in part to negotiate a deal for importing Egyptian natural gas via Syria. Saudi Arabia dispatched its intelligence chief to Damascus for talks with his Syrian counterpart on May 3, which the Guardian described as "the first known meeting of its kind since the outbreak of the war." They reportedly discussed reopening embassies.

Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan will soon hold a meeting in Baghdad focused on reintegrating Syria into the region, according to an April report in Asharq al-Awsat.

A range of parochial motivations appear to be driving this embrace. For the UAE, reintegrating Assad and rebuilding Syria holds the promise of ending Turkey's deployment in Idlib, where the Emirati adversary has stationed troops to prevent additional refugee flows. Jordan seems driven primarily by a desire to help its economy, repatriate refugees, reestablish consistent trade, and restore overland transportation through Syria en route to Turkey and Europe. In this regard, Washington's Caesar Act restrictions continue to irritate Amman.

More broadly, Egyptian officials seemingly subscribe to the dubious idea that Syria's reentry into the league would gradually accentuate its "Arabism" and thereby move Damascus away from Persian Iran. Other regional states likely share similar views; even some Israeli national security figures improbably assess that Russia may limit Iranian encroachment in postwar Syria under Assad.

Most Arab states—particularly Egypt—also seem prepared to accept the charade of Syria's imminent presidential election as evidence of a political transition. During his April 12 press conference with Lavrov, Foreign Minister Shoukry declared that the planned May 26 vote would allow the Syrian people to "choose their future...and form a government that represents them," despite the inevitability of rigged results in Assad's favor.

#### Defying the UN, Ignoring War Crimes

Efforts to rehabilitate the Assad regime are inconsistent with Security Council Resolution 2254, which outlines the need for free and fair elections with diaspora participation, the writing of a new constitution, and other prerequisites that Syria has not yet met. The resolution also stipulates full implementation of the June 2012 Geneva Communiqué, which called for a full political transition to a democratic, nonsectarian Syrian state that respects human rights.

Beyond these still-distant political goals, engaging Assad also ignores the need to hold the regime accountable for its "massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law," in the words of UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres. Technically, these violations fall short of the international definition of "genocide," but the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has characterized them as "brutal crimes against humanity and war crimes." During an April address to the General Assembly, Guterres reiterated that those responsible for such crimes—including the use of chemical weapons against civilians—should no longer enjoy impunity. "Perpetrators," he said, "must be held to account."

#### Arab League Cynicism

The league's 2011 decision to suspend Syria was astounding at the time because the organization had seldom if ever demonstrated distaste for its members' crimes against humanity. In March 2009, for example, it hosted Sudanese president Omar

Bashir at a Qatar summit just weeks after he was indicted by the International Criminal Court for ordering the murder of nearly 500,000 civilians in Darfur.

A decade later, this willingness to overlook human rights violations is seemingly returning to the fore. On April 21, Syria was stripped of its voting rights in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, a decision supported by eighty-seven OPCW member states. Yet eight Arab League states abstained from the vote, including Jordan and Iraq, whose own Kurdish population was subject to chemical attacks during the Saddam Hussein era. Another league member, Palestine, was among the fifteen opposing votes, joining the likes of Iran and Russia. Elsewhere, the league has failed to condemn the genocide being perpetrated against Chinese Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. To the contrary, Beijing noted that the organization explicitly supported “China’s just position on...Xinjiang” during the July 2020 China-Arab States Cooperation Forum meeting in Amman.

### Policy Implications

Despite the disappearing Arab commitment to Resolution 2254 and the long odds against success, Washington should continue to press for change in Syria. Admittedly, regional fatigue with the war and refugee crisis is growing, but Syria under Assad will never be a safe haven for these millions of exiles to return. Likewise, readmitting Syria to the Arab League and funding postwar reconstruction will not prompt Assad to break the regime’s forty-year strategic relationship with Tehran. Rather, normalizing with Damascus would simply alleviate pressure on the regime and enable it to further consolidate power.

Notwithstanding the growing acceptance of Assad in Arab capitals—and even Israel—his rehabilitation is not inevitable. To forestall the collapse of the processes enshrined in Resolution 2254, however, the Biden administration will have to reassert leadership, assigning a new envoy or other empowered senior official to coordinate the international approach with Europe and regional states.

Washington should also reject Syria’s imminent presidential election, which will assuredly hand Assad another seven-year mandate even as Arab League members attempt to characterize it as a “transition.” Instead, U.S. officials should work with European partners to shape international consensus regarding the election’s failure to meet the “free and fair” requirements laid out in Resolution 2254.

Concurrently, the United States should increase its humanitarian efforts in Syria and prevail on those Gulf states leading the normalization charge to provide additional assistance as well, especially in areas outside regime jurisdiction. Assad remains in control of Damascus and its environs, but the decisions to use chemical weapons and commit other mass atrocities against the Syrian people are beyond the pale and should preclude his rehabilitation. At this point, however, only the United States can prevent that outcome.

*David Schenker served as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs.*

## Erdogan Whips Up Anti-Semitism

By Uzay Bulut



A major reason for Jew-hatred in Turkey appears to be irresponsible leaders, such as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who repeat hateful propaganda while remaining completely blind to, or proud of, their own crimes. (Photo by Adem Altan/AFP via Getty Images)

As Hamas indiscriminately bombed Israeli cities from May 11 to May 17, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered a speech in Ankara in which he targeted both Israel and Jews with anti-Semitic slurs. Erdogan disseminated countless falsehoods that misinformed the Turkish public about Israel, the Jewish people, Gaza, and other issues - all the while fanning the flames of anti-Semitism.

In discussing the Islamic history of Jerusalem, where the Jews were living for more than a thousand years before Islam even appeared with Mohammad (c. 570-632) - and scooping up ancient Jewish leaders on the way:

"Jerusalem... is a region that hosts the most ancient settlements of humanity. Many prophets who were also our prophets, from Prophet Abraham to Prophet David and Prophet Solomon, lived in these lands and left their marks on these lands."

Erdogan's words need to be analyzed to see the parallels of how Islam views history. According to an Islamic perspective, Islam has always existed, apart from time, therefore all the prophets were originally Muslim and those who followed them later, Christians and Jews, distorted their teachings. Then the Angel Gabriel [Jibril] appeared before Mohammad and encompassed parts of Christianity and Judaism - in versions rather different from those of the Bible's Old and New Testaments. This is how, in Islam, in the Qur'an, we find Musa (Moses), Ibrahim (Abraham), Yusuf (Joseph), Maryam (Mary) and Isa (Jesus), among others.

This view, according to Moshe Sharon, Professor Emeritus of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, consists of:

"[the] basic attitude is that all history is in fact Islamic history... that all major figures of history basically are Muslim – from Adam down to our own time. So, if the Jews or Christians are demanding something and basing it on the fact that there was a king called Solomon or a king called David, or a prophet called Moses or Jesus, they say something which is not true or, in fact, they don't know that all these figures were basically Muslim figures....

"In fact, since the creation of the world there is only one religion and it is the religion of Islam. So, if anybody says 'Look, there is a place connected with Solomon and that is the place where the Temple of Solomon stood,' a true Muslim would tell you: 'Yes, you're absolutely right. But don't forget that Solomon was a Muslim and David was a Muslim. And Abraham was a Muslim. And Isaac was a Muslim, and Jesus was a Muslim.' This is what they mean by the Islamization of history."

According to Sharon, there is, through this "Islamization of history," also an "Islamization of geography". In this view, any land once under Muslim rule - as the entire Middle East was under the Ottoman Empire, as well as much of Spain and Portugal (*Al Andalus*) once under Muslim Arab occupation - must now be "liberated" by Muslims and remain, in trust to Allah, under Muslim rule forever:

"Anywhere which was connected with these people or with these prophets who were all Muslims becomes a Muslim territory. And therefore, when Islam was not in that area before Mohammed came to it, it should have been there. By that area, I mean the Middle East or other parts outside of the Middle East which are now Muslim. So any place like this had to be freed, not to be conquered. They had to be liberated. So, Islam appeared in history in the time of Mohammed - or reappeared in history from their point of view - as a liberator. And therefore, there is no Islamic occupation. If somebody occupies anything, it will always be somebody else, not the Muslims. So, there is no Islamic occupation. There is only Islamic liberation."

Hence, when Erdogan and other Islamists say Jerusalem is home to Muslim prophets, they deny the Jewish faith of these religious figures. Erdogan, glorifying the Arab invasion of Jerusalem in the seventh century as well as the Ottoman occupation of the city from 1517 to 1917, said:

During the first world war, the "tired Ottoman Army had to withdraw" from Jerusalem. But "we did not leave Jerusalem alone after we retreated... We must defend Jerusalem with everything [we have]." He continued:

"Like many geographies that lost its peace and tranquility following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Palestinian lands are crying out with cruelty, pain and blood.

"The conflict has turned into a one-sided massacre and theft since 1948, which is today called Nakba, the day of disaster, by Palestinians.

"The state of Israel, whose boundaries are still uncertain, has turned into a terrorist device in the hands of politicians who pursue Zionist dreams and radicals who consider it permissible to commit crimes against humanity."

In reality, both Muslim Arabs and Ottomans violently invaded Jerusalem and remained occupiers there for centuries. While under Islamic rule, native Jews and Christians became *dhimmi*s - second-class "tolerated" subjects - who were forced, by a

"*dhimmi* pact" with Muslims, to buy protection for their lives and property with a special tax called a *jizya*. Even so, their rights were systematically and routinely violated.

As for Zionism, it was simply the struggle of the Jewish people's right to self-rule in their ancient homeland, part of which is still even named for them: Judea. Their struggle reached its goal when the Jewish people declared the establishment and independence of the State of Israel in 1948. A year later, Israel was admitted as the 59th member of the United Nations. In 1949, Turkey also recognized Israel.

The evening that Israel declared independence, on May 14, 1948, five Arab armies - those of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Iraq - invaded Israel in the hopes of killing the new country in its crib. Palestinians are the Arabs who fled, planning that when the Arab armies won, they all would come back and resume life in their former homes. Unfortunately for them, the Arab armies lost. When some of the Arabs who had fled tried to come back, they were not permitted in: they had proven themselves disloyal. Arabs who had *not* fled remained, and presently make up about 21% of Israel's population, or nearly two million out of a population of 10 million. They all enjoy exactly the same privileges and rights as Jewish and other Israelis. The only exception is that they are not obligated to join Israel's armed forces unless they wish to, so that if there were a conflict, brother would not have to fight brother.

When other Arab states also refused to integrate the Arabs who fled, they found themselves stranded and stateless, at times in refugee camps, where five generations later, many remain, including in the West Bank, run by the Palestinian Authority.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership has rejected offers for a Palestinian state at least six times in the past 90 years: in 1937, 1948, 1967, 2000, 2008 and in 2020. All of the offers were either made or accepted by the Jews.

For Islamists such as Erdogan, the problem is that Jews now have a sovereign country in the Middle East, therefore, everything they do - including just existing - is supposedly a "crime against humanity."

Erdogan, in addition, referring to the US president Joe Biden's recent arms deal with Israel, falsely claimed that the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas "caused the martyrdom of hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza": "Mr. Biden took the side of the Armenians in the so-called Armenian genocide [recognition], and now unfortunately, you are writing history with your bloody hands in this incident [Hamas-Israel war]... And today I remind you once again that we are continuing our Jerusalem watch with 84 million people [Turkey's population] altogether, and we will continue it." Erdogan then referred to a "blood libel", and an example of classic anti-Semitism:

"A Jewish Prime Minister - I will not give his name - told me 'when I was killing Palestinians when I was a general, it gave me the greatest pleasure'. He told me this when I visited [Israel] as the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey. They [Jews] have it in their nature; they are only satiated by sucking blood.

"They [Jews] are murderous enough to kill babies. They are murderous enough to kill five-year-old, six-year-old babies. Murderous enough to kill women by making them crawl on the ground. They are such murderers that they kill old people. There is no other one like them."

Such accusations are, of course, totally false, but imagine how many ignorant people worldwide they infect with violent Jew-hatred.

What actually needs to be condemned is Hamas's terrorism. It is Hamas that aims to destroy Israel, which commits war crimes, and attempts genocide, not only against Israel but against the Jewish people, as can be seen yet in Article 7 of the Hamas Charter. Moreover, it is Hamas that harms its own people and puts them in danger, and uses them as human shields: an additional war crime. Hamas has made no secret of advocating the use of civilians as human shields. Hamas spokesman, Sami Abu Zuhri, interviewed in 2014, openly called on the people in Gaza to use the human shield tactic to defend their homes. "We in the Hamas movement," he said, "call on our people to adopt this procedure."

The problem with Islamists and other anti-Semites is that they refuse to see Jews as actual human beings who have feelings, struggles and sufferings that deserve respect and equal rights. This dehumanization has cost the lives of countless Jews. Palestinian-Arab terror groups, for instance, are responsible for the deaths of thousands of Israeli civilians. See a list of some major terror attacks against Israelis between 1948 and 1967 here. According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

"While the Palestinians claim that terrorism is a response to 'occupation,' the fact is that Palestinian terrorism predates Israel's presence in the territories. Numerous terrorist attacks murdered and maimed Israeli civilians during the two decades before 1967 (and even before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948). Therefore, terrorism was and still is nothing less than a tool intended to eventually bring about the destruction of Israel itself."

Referring to Israel "a state of thugs" and a "terrorist state", Erdogan said: "When America and some other states following it announced that they recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel at the end of 2017, this murderous state's appetite for bloodshed increased.

"They [Israel] try to shadow the conscience of humanity by putting forward the missiles fired at Tel Aviv. How many rockets did they [Hamas] fire? I wonder what was destroyed by the rockets they fired. Explain it."

The recent bombardments were started by Hamas on May 10. More than 4,300 rockets were launched at Israeli civilians indiscriminately until the ceasefire on May 21. The reason Hamas and those who enable them could not commit a massacre or genocide against Israel is because Israel has a powerful military and the Iron Dome missile-defence system that intercepts and destroys short-range rockets. The Iron Dome is largely effective, and can intercept the vast majority of the rockets. However, some got through, killing 13 Israelis and injuring dozens more.

Erdogan's rage also targeted other nations. He went on to condemn Austria for showing solidarity with Israel during Hamas' attacks against the country.

"I curse the Austrian state that flies the Israeli flag on the building of its prime ministry. Raising the flag of a terrorist state on such an official institution means living a life of projection with terrorism. The Austrian state is probably trying to make Muslims pay the bill for the Jews they [Austria] subjected to genocide."

Unlike Turkey, which still aggressively denies the 1913-23 Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide, Austria responds differently. Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in

1938 and today acknowledges Vienna's complicity in the Holocaust and announced in 2018 the creation of a memorial to Austrian Jews killed by the Nazis.

"Remembering in an honest way means admitting the truth," said Austria's leader, Sebastian Kurz, in 2018. "At that time, many Austrians supported a system to which people with disabilities, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, people with different political views, resistance fighters, and many more fell victim. Above all, this system murdered over 60,000 fellow Jewish citizens and displaced around 130,000 from their homes."

Ironically, Erdogan also mentioned, with a straight face, Turkish occupied northern Cyprus: "Turkey expresses at every opportunity that it favors a just two-state solution in the Palestinian territories, just like in Cyprus."

There are two problems with these statements. First, Turkey has been illegally occupying the northern part of Cyprus since 1974 and forcibly displaced the indigenous Greek community there. It thus has no legal or moral right to impose any so-called "solution" on the sovereign government of Cyprus, an EU and UN member. Second, Hamas does not aim for a two-state solution. As Hamas co-founder Mahmoud al-Zahar told Britain's Sky News in a recent interview, Hamas thinks that Israel has no right to exist.

Erdogan also offered a regime change for Jerusalem:

"The management of Jerusalem by a commission consisting of representatives of three religions [Islam, Judaism, and Christianity] will be the most correct and consistent way in today's conditions. Otherwise, it is not easy to achieve permanent peace in this ancient city."

Erdogan's offer to change the administration of Jerusalem is an open assault on the sovereignty and security of Israel. The three religions are already present and enjoy religious liberty in Jerusalem, unlike the tiny, dying non-Muslim community in Turkey. Jerusalem's Old City has Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Armenian quarters, where those communities preserve their cultures and traditions. Why does Erdogan offer to create a new "administration" in Jerusalem, which is already multicultural, when Istanbul (or Constantinople), an ancient city built by Greeks, is today an almost Greek-free, Armenian-free and Jew-free city? Where are the Jewish, Greek and Armenian neighborhoods of Istanbul? There are none left. Properties left behind by the murdered or deported non-Muslims have been seized either by the Turkish government or citizens. A country like Turkey that has annihilated or driven out its indigenous non-Muslim citizens through genocide, pogroms, deportations and other rights abuses should not be lecturing Israel or anyone else about how to administer their own cities.

Erdogan also issued a threat - his word - to Jerusalem if he does not get his way:

"Every attack by the Israeli security forces [and] by the Jews against the Masjid al-Aqsa under protection has the effect of a bomb with the fuse lit. The history of the world is full of examples of gigantic conflicts, destruction, and bloodshed caused by the bombs fired in Jerusalem. The fastest and most effective way to prevent this threat in its current situation is to give Jerusalem a new administrative status as we propose.

"We call on the United Nations, the United Nations Security Council, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which has [this proposal] as one of its founding objectives, and all

other international organizations to act immediately and effectively for Jerusalem and the oppressed Palestinians."

Such misleading and malign statements can only increase the hatred of Israel and Jews within Turkey. They might even cause more violence, wars and instability within the region. The last thing Turkey needs is more hatred against Jewish people and other nations. When it comes to hostility against Israel, Erdogan's Turkey already has a record that is terrible. A 2014 Pew Research Centre poll found that the country most hated by Turkish citizens is Israel. 86% of respondents had an unfavourable opinion of Israel, while only 2% viewed it positively. A major reason for this Jew-hatred appears to be irresponsible leaders who repeat hateful propaganda while remaining completely blind to, or proud of, their own crimes.

*Uzay Bulut, a Turkish journalist.*



## How Erdoğan's Miscalculation Crippled Turkey's Air Defences

By Burak Bekdil



Turkey is blackmailing the U.S. (and NATO allies) that it may opt for a Russian fighter jet, the Su-57, for instance, in case it feels threatened by the lack of a new generation fighter aircraft. Pictured: A Su-57 fighter jet of the Russian Air Force. (Image source: Anna Zvereva/Wikimedia Commons)

One of the hottest issues in the 50-minute discussion between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and U.S. President Joe Biden during the NATO summit of June 14 was NATO member Turkey's acquisition of the Russian-made S-400 long-range air defence system and subsequent U.S. sanctions, including expelling Turkey from the U.S.-led multinational consortium that builds the F-35 fifth-generation fighter jet. Unsurprisingly, the meeting ended without a solution. That is bad news for the Turkish Air Force (TuAF).

For more than a decade, Turkey's military top brass planned future air power capabilities based on the assumption that they would be receiving at least 100 F-35s starting in the 2020s. The TuAF operates squadrons of fourth-generation U.S.-built F-16s and older F-4s in its operations against separatist Kurdish militants in Turkey's southeast as well as in northern Iraq and Syria. Turkey first began acquiring the F-16s from the U.S. in late 1980s and has locally produced the iconic fighter jet under license, being one of the five countries to locally produce the aircraft. Today, TuAF has a total of 270 F-16C/D aircraft in its inventory, all of them Block 30/40/50 models. Most of those aircraft will have to be phased out within the next 10 to 15 years, depending on their upgrades. Whether Congress will allow the sale of fighter jet parts and servicing for upgrades is another question mark.

What are Turkey's options to minimize the inevitable decay in TuAF's deterrence? Not too many. Turkey is still blackmailing the U.S. (and NATO allies) that it may opt for a Russian fighter jet, the Su-57, for instance, in case it feels threatened by the lack of a new generation fighter aircraft. This is bluffing. TuAF generals know too well that switching from NATO-standard aircraft to Russian ones after 70 years is not like changing your American car in favor of a Japanese one. Building a new operational structure, modifying air bases, new repair, service and maintenance systems will be too costly, time consuming and technologically difficult.

In theory, Turkey is proud of its own indigenous fighter jet program, the TF-X. Tusaş Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) has for years been running the TF-X program. Turkey's defence and aerospace authorities have been announcing "breaking news" almost daily to update the public on the TF-X. Most recently, TAI announced that it started to build Europe's second biggest supersonic wind tunnel for future tests of the TF-X. The company said it signed a deal with a Turkish university for the Turkish fighter jet's software system. TAI has also unveiled the TF-X's mock-up.

These are fairy tales Turks love to hear. The government-sponsored narrative about the Turkish fighter jet in the making aims is for domestic consumption only. Few Turks know that their aerospace engineering is at best decades away from building a new generation aircraft. TAI first aimed to fly the TF-X in 2023, the centennial of the Turkish Republic. It is now talking about 2025-2026 to take a prototype aircraft from the hangar. That deadline is not realistic either.

In reality, the TF-X is still at pre-conceptual design phase. In other words, it has not been designed yet - because you cannot design a fighter jet before choosing the engine that will power it. Turkey does not have aircraft engine technology but claims it is developing it. That claim, too, is for domestic consumption.

Erdoğan's top officials are undermining themselves when they try to convince the public that Turkey's local defence industry is making miracles in fighter jet technology. In a recent television debate, Mesut Çaşın, one of Erdoğan's chief advisors, took out what looked like a tiny model aircraft from his pocket and showed it to cameras, claiming "this will be Turkey's national, indigenous fighter jet."

In the meantime, fearing further U.S. sanctions, Turkey has suspended plans to activate the S-400 surface-to-air missile system. Although the official target to activate the system was April 2020, the Turkish military is keeping the S-400 "packed and inactivated." This means Ankara paid a good \$2.5 billion to Moscow for a system that it probably will never activate.

Russia's ambassador to Ankara, Aleksey Yerhov, mocked Turkey's reluctance to activate the Russian system for which it paid \$2.5 billion.

But the show goes on. Ismail Demir, Erdoğan's top defence procurement official, said on June 21, "The issue of the defence industry is a highly significant issue in diplomacy." He was right. Turkey's acquisition of the \$2.5 billion Russian air defence architecture, its inability even to activate the system, and the consequences of that acquisition are textbook examples of how the defence industry can be mishandled in diplomacy.

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