



AJDS Newsletter

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The Australian Jewish Democratic Society

July 2009

Iran, again

Now that demonstrations protesting the Iranian election results have subsided the focus has shifted once again onto the issue of Iran's nuclear ambitions. We do not know if the election results were valid and we do not know if Iran is building a bomb but we do know the concern of Israelis at the prospect of such a bomb is quite genuine.

Sharing that concern does not imply support for an Israeli attack on Iran. Right-wing Israeli commentator **Yair Lapid** explains one good reason why such a raid should not be supported when he debunked the notion that the world will "be happy" if Israel attacks Iran. "For the first 60 seconds maybe," he wrote. "After that, Iran will close the Strait of Hormuz, which is its almost-automatic reaction when it is attacked. What does this mean? This means that oil stops flowing from the Persian Gulf in two directions-to the West and to the Far East. The *Wall Street Journal* estimated last week that in this case, the soar in the price of world oil would be 'astronomic'.

"A month later the picture would look like this", continued Lapid: "factories shut down in China and Japan, petrol stations closed in Europe, millions of cars stuck from California to New York, the plastic industry shuts down, high-tech shuts down, angry citizens demonstrate opposite Israeli embassies all over the world. In the last oil crisis, after the Yom Kippur War, the OPEC states artificially raised the price of oil to \$36 a barrel. That was enough to get the entire Western world into an hysterical frenzy, which took five years to get over. Since then, the world has learned to relate very cautiously to the oil producers. Those who felt a chill upon seeing [President Barack] Obama bowing to the Saudi Arabian king, should just wait and see how the entire world crawls when it closes the tap. And who do you think they will blame?"

Israel "will manage somehow with the promised hail of Katyusha rockets from Lebanon and the Qassam rockets from Gaza," predicted Lapid, "but the Iranians will invest a fortune also in a series of attacks on American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. The voices being heard in America-saying that they're fed up with paying with body bags so that Israel can do what it feels like-will increase. "This does not yet mean that we must give up our right to self-

defence," concluded Lapid, "but those who think that the world will stand by and applaud, don't know where they are living."

Nuclear free

The AJDS has taken an unequivocal stance in favour of a nuclear-free Middle East. Here **Les Rosenblatt** explores some of the ways in which the idea should be broached to members of our community.

How many Australian Jews will support a nuclear free Middle East? It depends on what this means. It could be a regional agreement to be open to frequent and regular inspection; monitoring and public disclosure of research and development, investments, organisational capacity-building, importation and trade, planning and implementation of nuclear explosive/contamination weaponry (including depleted uranium) by a peak international organisation such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Given the total absence of any discussion of such matters within the forums and media of the Australian Jewish community – except in regard to the much-publicised Israeli fears of a nuclear threat emanating from Iran – it is a matter of urgency to argue for a regional strategy which reduces rather than escalates tensions.

How, then, to define the region? Does it include Turkey, and Georgia and Azerbaijan? Does it extend west of Egypt to Libya? I think it should include the entire Arabian Peninsula, the Iranian Plateau, and the south-eastern Mediterranean states.

The current Obama/Medvedev talks on a re-start of START (the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks involving the two former cold-war antagonists) augurs well for some agreement which ensures a cut to their two post-imperial armouries. There are also the complex diplomatic, economic, and political configurations of the nuclear-armed states – both "old" and "new" – which provide the global context for any consideration of a nuclear-free Middle-East. In what circumstances might Britain, China, France see a nuclear-free Middle East as being in their interests?

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Let's shape our own future
Third AJDS PLANNING WORKSHOP
Sunday 26 July 9.45am – 3.00pm
1590 High Street Glen Iris (A private residence)
BYO snacks to share

Please inform Tom on 9885 6260 if you intend attending - we need to know the numbers and we would like to send you some material from the previous sessions as well.

**The Australian Jewish
Democratic Society Inc**
(Affiliated with the Jewish
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***The views expressed in this
Newsletter are not necessarily those of the AJDS.
These are expressed in its
own statements.***

What we stand for:

- Social justice and human rights.
- Opposition to the vilification and mandatory detention of asylum seekers.
- The struggle against racism, antisemitism in particular.
- Non-violent paths to conflict resolution.
- In line with this, the search for a negotiated solution to the Israel/Palestinian conflict.
- Equal rights, including land rights and justice, for Indigenous Australians.

In this issue...

*Apologies to the vegetarians among you, but the late Renate Kamener used to refer to issues like this as meaty. And she meant it as a compliment. We cover the most important issue as far as Israel/Palestine is concerned: Iran and the bomb on the **cover**, Barack Obama peace momentum on pp 8-9 and the (forced) evolution of Hamas on **page 10**.*

*The most important issue in the world today, climate change and what to do about it is on **pp 6-7** and yes, the writer, Ilan Salbe, is my brother. Also in this issue is a review of the Sensible Jew (**p5**), a Palestinian view of language and Israeli/Palestinian conflict and an article on the best Israeli film at the Festival. Don't miss Les Rosenblatt light-hearted take at Bibi's speech on **page 14** and Irfan Yusuf angry count of another killing of a Muslim woman on **page 15**.*

What we missed most in this issue is the important role that Steve Brook usually plays in tweaking the grammar and spelling and a lot more besides. Steve tells us that he is on the mend and will be back on deck next issue. Many thanks to Miriam Faine, Margaret Jacobs, Sandy Joffe, Vivienne Porzsolt, Deb Reich in Israel, Les Rosenblatt, Larry Stillman Tom Wolkenberg and Sandra Zurbo who read over the articles, tweaked the grammar, made things easier to understand, inserted comments and helped the process along.

Sol Salbe

(Continued from page 1)

What of India/Pakistan/North Korea?

What quid pro quo would Israel regard as sufficient to move it away from its current ambiguity to coming clean on its possession of nuclear weapons, and actually agreeing to dismantle its nuclear strike capabilities? If Iran and Syria (together with all the other regional states) were to permit inspections and commit to the removal of all nuclear military capacity – while perhaps retaining non-military nuclear energy R&D for verifiable scientific, medical and civil purposes – could this be the fulcrum on which a nuclear weapon-free Middle East depends?

And who would or could broker such an agreement? The UN through one of its agencies, or a selection of its Security Council or Assembly members? But before such questions are addressed, as an AJDS member I consider it important to anticipate the likely views within Australia on such matters; more specifically, what stomach for such a policy might be found inside our community?

Whenever I have tried to raise this matter listeners seem stunned that anyone could even consider a public discussion on such a matter, and are very quick to argue that Israel's defence and security are dependent on its possession of the deterrence capacity which nuclear weapons have hitherto provided.

However what if Israel's public posture of neither confirming nor denying its possession of nuclear weaponry – a posture which its treatment of Mordechai Vanunu has heavily underscored – raises the regional suspicion and mistrust of its Arab neighbours to the point where they will take whatever opportunities come their way to develop their own capacities for mounting nuclear threats? They can validly argue that it is a provocation for a non-signatory to non-proliferation (such as Israel) to amass such destructive capabilities outside of any international legal covenants or treaties.

Do we want to see a horrendous destabilisation of the entire region which would arise from a pre-emptive Israeli attack on Iran (with or without US connivance)? Or might we rather presume that Israel could negotiate its way to a nuclear-free regional objective which would assist it in gaining international support and regional goodwill?

How should a Rudd government which is striving to play a greater international role in nuclear disarmament deal with these issues? And what role will Australian Jews play in the inevitable political dilemmas which will follow once the Middle-East is factored in?

These questions must be addressed now within our communities. Silence is no longer an option. It isn't good for anyone, and certainly not good for the Jews.

The AJDS month

Compiled by Sol Salbe

One is almost tempted to suggest to the AJDS Executive that we run a competition to suggest different ways of telling our readers that we have had quite a month. We tell you that each time. But it is not spin; what can we do when that is indeed the case?

Undoubtedly in terms of raising our public profile the most important achievement this month has been Harold Zwier's cooperation with Joseph Wakim, co-founder of the Australian Arabic Council, in publishing "Roadmap to peace needs new milestones."

A media first

This call on the leaders of Israel and Palestine to revitalise attempts at peace scored an Australian media first when the same article with same strong message was published in the *Australian Jewish News* and the Arabic language *An Nahar*.

It may be recalled that Wakim is a long-time community activist who has not been shy in tackling the sensitive issues in his community. Neither has he been reluctant to put his own view across. He savaged Julia Gillard's recent trip to Israel. *AJDS News-*



Harold Zwier (L) and Joe Wakim

letter readers would know that the two writers have contributed jointly to the media before, but this was the first time that their respective community newspapers simultaneously published their thoughts.

What made the publication even more unusual was the message conveyed by Wakim and Zwier. They did not subscribe to either side's narrative but were motivated instead by a will for dialogue and reconciliation. At the same time, they did not spare their verbal rod from either Israel's Binyamin Netanyahu or Palestine's Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas).

Wakim and Zwier addressed both sides when they wrote: "Israeli and Palestinian leaders need to face their fears, hopes and expectations from the opposite sides of the negotiating table, rather than chest-beating and point-scoring to appease their coalition partners. And if they are unable to rise above past failures, they need to hear harsh, heartfelt and honest words from all of us."

The writers were unhappy with the Israeli PM's insistence that the Palestinians "must truly recognise Israel as the state of the Jewish people". Wakim and Zwier pointed out that in the Oslo Accords the Palestinians recognised "the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security".

Wakim and Zwier called for a Palestinian national unity government which by including Hamas can "present a united front with all factions recognising Israel as a sovereign state". On the Palestinian side they also called for more temperate language lambasting some official of Abbas who called Netanyahu "a swindler and a liar".

While the article also appeared on the ABC's *Unleashed* site and was picked up by the Australian Friends of Pal-

estine website, the mainstream media ignored this historical achievement despite several efforts to get them interested.

Harmony Walk

The AJDS made another public appearance at the inaugural Harmony Walk. While our numbers were small so were the numbers overall. We received several messages from both members and non-members expressing a great deal of cynicism about the Brumby government's sudden conversion to the cause of fighting racism. While the government has shown little solidarity with members of the Muslim community when they were vilified over the past eight years, it moved swiftly when attacks on Indian students affected the state economy.

Our own community leadership do not have a much better record but the march was so friendly that the mixing and matching gave photographers some opportunities not soon to be repeated: The AJDS sandwiched between the Jewish Community contingent on one side and Hijab-covered Muslim women on the others; AJDS in front, the middle and at the rear of the Jewish community contingent and the Jewish community (with very little of the advertised blue-and-white appearance) marching right next to the red-flag carrying Socialist Alternative contingent. A case of the lion lying down with the lamb?

Earlier the Jewish Community Council of Victoria's call to wear Blue and White prompted veteran AJDS member

June Factor to write: "The call by the Jewish Community Council of Victoria for Jews to participate in the Harmony Walk against racism is admirable.

Antisemitism is an ancient, ugly and destructive form of racism but by no means its only mode. The recent attacks on Indian students in Melbourne and Sydney, and the ongoing vilification of Muslims, are a reminder of the need for the widest public community opposition to racism in its various obnoxious manifestations.

"However I am puzzled and disturbed by the JCCV's request for Jews joining the Harmony Walk to wear blue and white. These are the national colours of Israel, and appropriate for any Israelis joining the Walk, if they wish to be identified in this way. Australian Jews do not have a uniform, and an Australian Jew is not an Israeli, unless a citizen of both countries. The JCCV needs to avoid giving the false impression that being a Jew and being an Israeli is one and the same."

La Trobe Dialogue

Attempts at harmony were no doubt involved in the Dialogue Diaspora sessions convened by the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University. Wisely, discussions within the sessions was private and even though quite a few AJDS members, friends and supporters attended, we cannot report it at this stage. We can only hope that the participants will emulate the final Sri Lankan Dialogue comprising Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher participants who unanimously agreed to issue a joint public statement calling for peace in Sri Lanka and active cooperation in Australia.

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Climbing Uluru is like clambering up the War Memorial

Chris Graham

The news that Environment Minister Peter Garrett is considering banning the climbing of Uluru will be celebrated throughout black Australia.

The proposal to close the climb is part of a new draft plan for the management of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. One of the arguments advanced against the idea on Canberra talkback was that the rock is in Australia, so it should be accessible to all Australians. Sure. And I should be able to spend a lazy afternoon downing a carton of beer on the lawns of Kirribilli House whenever I want. Only problem is, we have a little thing called "property law".

Uluru is owned by a group of Aboriginal people and has been since the hand-back in 1985. The traditional owners ask people -- via a sign at the base of the rock -- not to climb it. Then they leave it open to visitors to do the right thing. The majority don't.

If you go onto someone's land and they ask not to do something, and you do it anyway, generally speaking you're not welcome back. But in the case of Uluru, tens of thousands of tourists every year ignore a request from the landowners, but can come back whenever they like. It's a situation not replicated anywhere else in the nation. No other property owner's rights and wishes are treated with such disdain.

Opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt also hit the airwaves arguing that the proposed ban was unacceptable as people come from all over the world to enjoy the site.

"Give people education. This is not just a local treasure but it's a national treasure and an international treasure," Hunt said.

"Give them the cultural information, let them make up their own mind as to how best to honour Uluru and the surrounding area."

People don't climb the rock to honour it. They climb it because it's there, because lots of other people are doing it, and because there's the promise of a great view of... flat desert scrub as far as the eye can see.

Which brings me to the Australian War Memorial. It's a tourist icon (a bigger one than Uluru, in fact). It's also a place of great spiritual significance. And I'd like to climb up the side of it because I suspect the view over Lake Burley Griffin is sensational. It would be my way of "honouring" the Anzacs. Give me the cultural information, Greg. And a rope.

[Chris Graham is editor of the *National Indigenous Times*. First published by Crikey.com.au.]



Chris Graham

(Continued from page 3)

This subject also prompted a letter to us, this time from **Sivan Barak**, an Israeli Australian who was actually born in the US. Barak was one of the participants in the joint Israeli-Palestinian project in Melbourne "What do you think about me" and has since become very active attending both AJDS and Women in Black functions. She wrote: "One year ago was a massive turning point for me politically and socially as a result of a Palestinian Israeli workshop I participated in. For the first time I met and befriended Palestinians, heard their side of the story and began to question my knowledge of the conflict..."

"La Trobe University are facilitating a dialogue between Jews and Arabs regarding the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and I am participating as an Israeli, one of very few sadly. For some unknown reason this dialogue will be mostly between Jews and Arabs and will debate what should be happening in the Middle East for the Palestinians and Israelis, I find this absurd. It should not be a discussion about religion or what the diaspora wants. It should be an opportunity for the two warring people to sit in a safe space and talk. I hope this is the case."

Planning Session

Finally we have held the second AJDS planning session.

Helen Rosenbaum reports: The aim of this workshop was to build upon the first workshop (summary notes for workshop 1 & 2 are available for those attending the third session), at which we looked at where AJDS has come from, and acknowledge key milestones in the organisation's history and the political-global context in which it has been operating. We also looked at our identity – how

we ourselves and how others might see us.

The purpose of workshop 2 was to move from the past and current contexts into the future, starting with an inspirational goal or a vision of the world that AJDS is trying to create. Keeping this vision in mind we then started to explore the issues and problems that AJDS is trying to address. We also began a discussion about the role of AJDS and the ways in which we would like to work in the future. At the next workshop session we'll look at specific strategies AJDS could employ to realise these aspirations.

AJDS fundraising event *Servant of the Revolution* a play by Anitra Nelson

A suppressed scandal — lover, baby, wife — in historical proportions. Played out by Lenchen, servant of communist revolutionary Karl Marx.

A rare theatrical exploration of socialist and feminist contradictions. You won't look at Marx the same way again.

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8pm Saturday 1 August

*Mechanics Institute Performing Arts Centre, Brunswick
(Corner Sydney & Glenlyon roads)*

Tickets \$25

Contact Sol Salbe on 9318 3107 for group booking

The *Sensible Jew*: a very welcome development

Sol Salbe

First impressions count: and my first impression of the *Sensible Jew* was a good one. Funnily enough the auguries were not good; for a start, they were anonymous. I only found about them through a privacy faux pas on their part. For a group that defines itself by its distance from Antony Loewenstein, it was curious that they managed to misspell his name in their subtitle. And yet there was something fresh and novel about it. What a pleasure it was to read a blog whose point of view could not be predicted in advance. From the beginning, the writers had something new and intelligent (even if not always palatable) to say.

There was a lot more to enjoy. Their critique of Jeremy Jones' attack on *Seven Jewish Children* was sharp, acerbic and best of all, witty. While anybody could have picked the glaring holes in Jones' argument, the *SJ* did it with style.

Others could see it too. The *Sunday Age* picked up the story and gave the blog a tremendous boost. Not to be outdone, the *Australian Jewish News* followed up the story, making sure that even more people became aware of the *SJ*.

When it comes to politics, the shine does come off a bit. In my opinion the bloggers' refusal to get into any discussion of Israel/Palestine is unwise. They are absolutely correct in suggesting that there are plenty of platforms for that kind of discussion. But Israel's behaviour is not irrelevant to what the community says and does. Nor is the situation static; on the contrary, the dynamics keep on changing. You may well argue that those on the Left who criticised Israeli offers of help to countries affected by natural disasters are anti-Israel per se. But can one label those who opposed Israel's brutal war on Gaza, which killed up to 1400 people, the majority of them civilians, incorrigibly anti-Israel? Are those on the Left who label Israel's recent military operation "disproportionate" really showing their "antisemitic" character when those who launched those actions argued that they *ought* to be disproportionate?

This refusal to get into the nitty-gritty extends well beyond the merits of Israel's behaviour and that of its adversaries. Yoram Symons, who questioned the wisdom of the Anti-Defamation Commission's attack on *New Matilda* and *Crikey* based his report on an article in the *Jerusalem Post*. One might ask: what's the point of relying on a right-wing English-language newspaper in Israel when the ADC report itself was produced in Melbourne and is available for all to see? Surely the merit or otherwise of the ADC attack is relevant. I happen to think that this is one of the ADC's poorer efforts, but I suggest that one cannot question the wisdom of the ADC going public without examining the report itself.

The site's relationship with Loewenstein is another example. It is not just a matter of misspelling his name. Take this comment: "The clearest case in point for this was the community's handling of Antony Loewenstein. By reacting so vocally and so vociferously to his opinions and to his book, we aided and abetted the creation of a mountain from what could have remained

a molehill. The community's incessant demonisation of Loewenstein only served to give him even greater legitimacy in the eyes of his supporters, and the volume of our campaign against him brought many more into his camp." I think this is insightful, not to mention correct. But it misses the crucial point that the vilification campaign also changed the course of Loewenstein's political evolution. Someone who started by questioning some aspects of Israel's policy was pushed further and further away. One only has to read the second edition of his book, which advocates a one-state solution, compared with the first edition, which supported the continuing existence of Israel. *SJ* writes: "I am quite uninterested in examining his personal history or psychological motivations for his positions. For me, Loewenstein the man is himself quite uninteresting. Loewenstein, the phenomenon, is another matter entirely." To understand the phenomenon one needs to read Loewenstein and not assume you know what his views are.

Second-hand information does take you further from the source. But sometimes being divorced from the reality will take you even further, to where you don't really want to be. A great example was *SJ*'s critique of Yakov Rabkin. Rabkin is an impressive and knowledgeable speaker, as everyone who heard him can testify. His article in the *Age* was quite interesting. I thought that he gave far too much credit to the Rudd government and Australia in the matter of Sorry Day, but the essence of his argument was valid.

The Sensible Jew had a different take.

"No. We are not making this up. The concluding sentence of the article reads: '*The fact that there is no Sorry Day in Israel also explains the violence that continues to plague the Holy Land to this day.*'"

"Even from a left wing perspective, this is an offensive comment. Can anyone, on the left, right, or in between imagine that the Palestinians' primary concern is an apology? Of all the issues to attend to in the region, 'sorry,' wouldn't even make it into the top 100."

That is written with some confidence, but is it based on research or guesswork? My view is that what really matters here is not a Left or Right point of view, but a Palestinian one. After all, the *SJ* is talking about the Palestinians' primary concern. So I called one of my Palestinian friends. He confirmed my understanding of their concern. The issue is indeed important, not so much in terms of an apology but in terms of an acknowledgement by the perpetrators of the wrong done to them.

The *SJ* does have a way to go, but on the basis of what we have seen so far, it deserves to be regarded as an important part of the Australian Jewish discourse.



**Writer Yvonne Fein
outed herself as one of
the *SJ* bloggers**

US and Australian climate bills: necessary evils

Ilan Salbe

Australia and the United States have greenhouse gas abatement bills making their way through their legislatures. Some view these as important starting points to tackle global warming. Others argue the bills represent a drop in the ocean in the face of a climate crisis that will engulf humanity. In the face of political realities, both are right. A start (however small) is essential; and agitation is needed to accelerate policy towards required levels of mitigation. Also in the mix is the question of whether the Australian Greens and other independents should be legislators – or agitators

The US “HR 2454” Climate Bill, with its “energy efficiency promotion” part and its “emission cap and trade scheme” part, was passed by the US Congress in late June 2009. If it gets through the US Senate it would come into effect in 2012. The US Environmental Protection Agency analysis of the Bill provides some useful pointers for interpretation.



Loy Yang power station. It is not the visible steam but the invisible carbon dioxide that we need to cut

The energy efficiency part purports to kick-start emission abatement: “Energy consumption levels that would be reached in 2015 without the policy are not reached until 2040.”

Predicted efficiency gains reduce the demand for *allowances* (or in Australia, *permits*) in the early years. That results in a lower allowance price, which limits the incentive for an early transition to lower emission energy sources.

Renewables are not advantaged by the bill. Instead, nuclear power generation is expected to have grown 150 per cent by 2050 and in that year to make up 40 per cent of electricity generation. Whilst there is a nominal 20 per cent renewable electricity requirement by 2020, the bill reduces the requirement for efficiency gains, new nuclear and carbon capture and storage (CCS) generation and existing hydropower – which means forecast renewable electricity would be at 12 per cent in 2020 and would only be at 20 per cent in 2030.

Rather than the oft-quoted ‘reductions in a particular year’ measure, the vastness of the oceans and atmosphere mean that what matters for global warming are cumulative emissions reductions. US domestic cumulative emis-

sions to 2050 are reduced 23 per cent by the bill. With domestic and mostly international offsets projects (*non trading scheme induced projects*) added, the forecast cumulative emission reduction rises to 40 per cent.

Very generous concessions are provided to trade-exposed, emission-intensive industries. These are only phased out between 2025 and 2035 or earlier if other countries “take comparable action on climate change”. Local electricity distributors are given a declining volume of free allowances until 2030.

Little Pain

It is striking how little pain is inflicted by the bill. US per household consumption is still expected to have increased by 83 per cent by 2050. Forecast growth *without* the bill is only one per cent higher! The US population is expected to increase by 30 per cent by 2050, magnifying the effect of this increase.

Australia’s climate bill has been widely reported. Treasury modelling shows it has many similarities to the US bill. Where it differs is that only a five per cent (US 17 per cent) emission reduction target at 2020 (on 2000 levels) is on the table, with 60 per cent at 2050 (US 80 per cent). Australia is more serious about renewable power – with a genuine 20 per cent target for 2020; by 2050 forecast renewables attain 50 per cent. Coal carbon capture and storage is seen as the high-tech electricity generation of the future, reaching a 31 per cent share in 2050. Australia’s Gross Domestic Product is expected to grow 180 per cent by 2050. Again, without the bill growth is only 6 per cent higher! Population growth will be similar to that of the US.

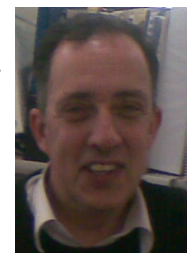
Are these legislated abatement schemes any good? A good scheme should have target achievability, extensive coverage, flexibility to increase to higher levels of abatement, practical compliance auditing and political robustness. Fairness and being non-damaging to the general environment (no Chernobyls!) are also highly essential

The schemes’ targets are modest, especially in the early years, and yet are projected to rely on unproven CCS and nuclear technology. With growing consumption and risky high-tech generation, it is likely the schemes will have to adapt to achieve projected emission cuts. At least the Australian mandatory renewable targets should facilitate adaptability by driving technological improvements.

What are the positives and negatives?

The bills cover most of US and Australian emissions. Use of international offsets will provide some global coverage. Two things are important to recognise in this regard.

Firstly a large pool of international offset projects is expected to be available and could allow for accelerated abatement. Secondly, international offset projects are likely to provide auxiliary non-greenhouse environmental benefits to countries who normally can’t afford such luxuries.



Ilan Salbe

(Continued on page 7)

Limmud-Oz: The debates we have to have

Vivienne Porzolt

This year's Limmud-Oz in Sydney, presented a rich varied program. In addition to the usual mix of culture, religion, history, philosophy and right-wing politics, Limmud-Oz opened its doors to a whole range of progressive groups often vilified by the communal leadership. Jews against the Occupation, Jewish Voices for Peace and Justice, Peter Slezak, co-initiator of the Independent Australian Jewish Voices, a reading of Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children*; all were there. This made it a really refreshing and stimulating talkfest.

This was perhaps in part a response to the furore in Sydney earlier this year round the cancellation of the meeting organised by Jews against the Occupation with Israeli peace activist Professor Jeff Halper, and the cancellation of the *Australian Jewish News* advertisement for the meeting. The flood of letters to the *AJN* and the well-attended Jewish community meeting in the alternative venue at a nearby Uniting Church was evidence of a strong desire on the part of ordinary members of the Jewish community to discuss the issues that Jewish officialdom would rather we didn't. Limmud gave them the opportunity and they grabbed it with both hands. All the critical sessions were very well-attended.

Angela Budai, now a member of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, was selected to appear on a panel of heavies like Jeremy Jones and Israeli Arab affairs commentator, Ehud Ya'ari, on the subject **Communal censorship: do we allow alternative views?** Budai spoke very well to this well-attended session, with the other speakers giving fairly predictable perspectives. It was a pity that the chair only chose speakers from the audience with whom she was acquainted, as this made the discussion rather too predictable.

Donna Jacobs Sife and Abe Quadan presented a session on different narratives and experiences of a Jewish woman and a Palestinian man. For many in the audience, this would have been their first opportunity to hear from a

Palestinian about his experience..

Peter Slezak of the IAJV presented a refreshing secular perspective on Jewish identity and the impact of Israel, to a well-attended if rowdy session. I like to think that it was the success of Jews Against the Occupation in raising the debate during Jeff Halper's visit that persuaded him that there was value in engaging with the organised Jewish community. Too many left-wing Jews refuse to do this. They demonise "the Jewish community" as much as "the Jewish community" demonises them. Yet it is plainly the duty of progressive Jews to engage without being shackled by the established paradigms.



Peter Slezak spoke at Limmud-Oz

Better chaired and therefore more constructive was the excellent session on *Seven Jewish Children*, presented by Tanya Goldberg and Ari Lander. First there was an effective reading of the 10 minute piece. Then people in the large audience responded from a wide range of points of view but did not harangue each other. It was quite memorable and, for me, the highlight.

Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins presented on *The voices you do not want to hear*. Citing writers such as Bernard Avishai and Meron Benvenisti, he covered a number of issues that would have been new for many in his audience. But being who he was, he was given a much more respectful hearing.

Jews against the Occupation Sydney held a stall and engaged with numbers of the Limmudniks. We were unfortunately too late with our proposal for a session.

All in all, Limmud-Oz this year showed that there is a good opportunity for progressive Jews to work "within the Pale" and that we have a duty to do so.

(Continued from page 6)

Critically, both schemes have regular built-in reviews that can reset targets based on the latest available science – and this flexibility provides a mechanism for accelerated action. The first such review will occur in Australia by June 2014 and in the US by July 2013.

Compliance auditing will be challenging, especially with offset projects in developing countries, which have immature compliance bureaucracies. The bills have various provisions to deal with this – and with experience, auditing should become less of a problem.

The use of nuclear power, coal-fired power generation, and growing populations and consumption do not augur well for the environment generally. There is no hint of a change to the "*material growth is good*" mindset.

What about political robustness? Currently the schemes are advantaged in being promoted by the first term Rudd & Obama "honeymoon" administrations. There is also considerable popular support for action. However, commencement delays and economic dark clouds could erode these advantages.

To sum up: the bills as currently framed propose minimalist short term actions to meet current political expectations. Although grand designs are presented for the longer term, the reality is that it is left for future generations to sort things out. Concerned environmentalists should do anything and everything to draw attention to this.

However, the Australian Greens – and other independent elected representatives with legislative clout – need to seriously consider passing Australia's bill because it can be adjusted to play a more meaningful tune. The observations above suggest accelerated abatement is possible and could start within a couple of years of the scheme's commencement, with the bill's mandated first reviews. What is the alternative? Delay and you play into the hands of those who profit from deferment. Delay and risk weaker bills from post-honeymoon administrations. Delay and you defer technological and auditing improvements. Delay and risk removing yourself from the agenda that you spent blood, sweat and tears creating. Don't delay!

[Ilan Salbe is a mathematical modeller and an independent thinking Blue Mountains environment activist.]

The Obama World Order

Michael Tomasky

It's a long-held piece of Washington conventional wisdom – and, unlike most long-held pieces of Washington conventional wisdom, this one actually happens to be true! – that Democratic presidents tend to be more interested in domestic policy, while Republicans like making foreign policy.

There are several reasons for this. The main one: Democrats have usually had far more ambitious domestic agendas. Meanwhile, foreign policy has taken up more oxygen in Republican politics ever since the dawn of the Cold War, when a tough line became one of the two or three central elements of the GOP *Weltanschauung*.

Besides, a Democratic Congress has been the norm for most of that time, so Republican presidents got that foreign policy was the realm in which they had to worry far less about that meddlesome Congress. With certain asterisks here and there – the ill-travelled and internationally incurious George W Bush was the main exception until a certain September morning – this division of labour has held true.

Now comes Barack Obama. It's not that he isn't engrossed in domestic policy, obviously. He's announcing some new initiative every week. This week is supposed to be "energy week", as the president puts more political capital behind cap-and-trade legislation. But we knew he'd do all that. It's what Democratic presidents do, especially when they take office in the throes of economic crisis.

Toughest issue

The biggest surprise of the early Obama era, though, has been the way he's thrown himself into foreign policy. Here again one could well argue that he didn't have much choice, given the number of messes he inherited and the new ones the world seems to have a habit of making, notably, the simultaneously frightening and inspiring one in Iran, which Obama correctly calculated was not the right occasion for oratorical showboating. But he's doing, or trying to do, more than clean up messes. His project is a new grand strategy that (in theory at least) re-establishes American moral authority in the world, uses it to build coalitions to settle disputes, and as a by-product, makes the Democratic Party look a lot more like Harry Truman and a lot less like George McGovern.

Want proof of his seriousness of intent? Then look at the issue he's most vigorously thrown himself into – only the world's toughest: Israel and Palestine. I recently spoke with about a dozen close observers (Jewish, Arab and other) of the situation, and virtually all of them expressed surprise that Obama has moved so quickly, aggressively and personally on the issue.



Michael Tomasky

It's a marked contrast to Bush, who let the Middle East grow mould for seven years and then pressed Condi to hurry up and do something at a time by which players in

the region knew she carried no weight anyway. And, of course, it's a marked contrast to the usual *modus operandi* of presidents of both parties because Obama opened the chess match with a high-risk, public dressing down of Israel on settlements. "We were very surprised at how strongly Obama came out in that first meeting with Bibi," says Ghaith al-Omari of the American Task Force on Pales-



Who's the boss? Some Israelis were offended at this official White House photo of Obama speaking to Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu.

tine.

Naturally, this has produced some alarm. But my impression from my interviews is that it's often overstated. For every Malcolm Hoenlein, who kicked up dust within the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations in June with some anti-Obama comments, there's at least one counterpart willing to give the president a shot. Even mighty AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] is holding its fire. "I think most people are saying, 'It's good he's starting this'," says Congressman Jerry Nadler. "There are right-wing elements who want to read evil intent into everything. But in general the mood is: 'We need movement'."

Movement has commenced, no doubt about that. But what can we really expect? Says Aaron David Miller, who worked on the issue for six secretaries of state of both parties: "President Yes-We-Can is squaring off against a region and an Israeli prime minister saying No-You-Can't."

I heard a few theories as to why Obama went so public about the settlements. An intriguing one held that it wasn't intended to be quite that public – that Secretary of

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

State Hillary Clinton, maybe in a slightly overeager attempt to please the boss, used language that was stronger than even Obama would have preferred at a late May press conference, but that once she said it, the White House didn't want to hang her out to dry as Bush had Colin Powell over North Korea. Once regionalists think that the secretary of state doesn't have a president's confidence, she's cooked. (For the record, the unanimous verdict among my sources was that Clinton has Obama's total confidence.)

Logjam theory

Fascinating if true. But I have my own theory, which I've named the Easiest Log Theory ... You're looking at a logjam. Under layers of timber, you can see the handful of logs that are really causing the problem. But you can't start with those because you can't get to them. You start



One of the most influential members of Obama's team is the Hebrew-speaking former IDF volunteer Rahm Emanuel

with the ones that are easiest to remove. Water will flow, even if just a trickle. And eventually you'll get to the big ones. Israel and the settlements are the easiest log. There's no point starting with the Palestinians: (a) They're harder to deal with, and (b) who speaks for them anyway? ("They're Humpty Dumpty," said Miller.) Fatah and Hamas make the Republicans look coherent. So in my theory, the thinking is: Get a concession out of Bibi, which sorta kinda happened when he used the words "Palestinian state" in his 14 June speech, and get the Israelis (and the key US Jewish players) into a time-for-action mindset. Then, take that to the Palestinians – and, crucially, to other Arab leaders – and say: "Okay. They've moved. Your turn."

Of course, I am not, and Obama is not, the first person in history to think of this. But two big factors are different now.

First, the Obama team. It's strong. You have Clinton and Mitchell. You have a roster of second-tier players who were widely praised in my chats last week: Mara Rudman is Mitchell's top aide, Fred Hoff is another, David Hale another (he's moving to Jerusalem full time). On the National Security Council staff, Daniel Shapiro is widely respected, and Dennis Ross may be brought over, in a move presumably meant to placate Israeli hawks. As a group, they and others get high marks for knowledge, experience and seriousness.

Mixed Team

They do, some sources say, fall into different camps – not so much hawks and doves as, for example, those who

want Obama to pursue broad regional deals simultaneously (that mostly means an Israel–Syria deal, which isn't impossible); those who think the most important step is to elevate Palestinian moderates and isolate Hamas, those who are sensitive about pushing Israel too hard. This last category includes chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, but Emanuel, I'm told, is more intent on peace than people think. He's called the Oslo Accords signing ceremony at the Clinton White House in 1993, which he choreographed, one his proudest moments. "[A solution] is sort of unfinished business from his earlier days," says one insider.



Eran Wolkowski in Haaretz assesses the relationship of power

Mostly, there's Obama himself. He's invested in getting a deal, and, unlike Bush, he's deep in the details. "He's advising the advisers," says James Zogby of the Arab American Institute. And the second thing that's changed? Congress. Traditionally, Congress was, as one person told me, "the court of appeals for the Jews". If Israel didn't like what a president was up to, they went to Capitol Hill. They'd fix things. That is suddenly and thoroughly different. If Netanyahu was surprised by Obama's frankness, he was shocked to sit with Jewish members of Congress the next day and hear them say "It's time to do this" instead of "We've got your back". Nadler wasn't present but confirms this reaction from friends who were. As long as Obama is showing leadership, and it looks like he might get results, Congress will watch his back more than Bibi's.

No one expects miracles here. The paradox is that at this moment of resolve and openness in Washington, there is more fear and distrust in the region than usual. Obama will have to get tough on what's called "Palestinian incitement" (antisemitism, anti-Zionism, promotion of violence). And that's even before getting to the real issues (borders, Jerusalem, the rest).

But at this early point, we can say this much. Obama wants to be a serious foreign-policy president. And his speech in Cairo, and his rhetoric of transformation in general, have clearly helped light a fuse that caught fire in Lebanon and in the demonstrations in Iran. But we're now starting to enter the phase where the deeds need to match the speeches. This is emerging as the great tension of this presidency, from health care to the Middle East and now to Iran. Can he take advantage of the energies his words have set in motion?

[Liberal columnist Michael Tomasky is editor of *Guardian America*. First published in *New York Magazine*.]

Hamas bends to pressure in Gaza and abroad

Rafael D Frankel

[Some people might argue the combination of calm in Israel's south, Hamas's drop in popularity and the apparent debate within that organisation as justification for Israel's war last northern summer. Even if the cause and effect could somehow be proven, the morality of the high price in death and destruction paid by the Gazans would still be questionable. Nevertheless the writer's credentials as an experienced reporter make this important reading.]

Gaza City, Gaza - By one calculus of Middle Eastern politics, Israel could say that its month-long offensive against Hamas and heightened economic blockade of Gaza have succeeded.

Rockets no longer fly into Israel from the Gaza Strip. And Gaza's Islamist rulers saw their support base drop below 20 percent as a direct result of a war that exacted a high price: 1400 dead, 50,000 homes destroyed or damaged, and 1.5 million of Israel's neighbours more embittered than ever.

The question now: Will Gaza's battering lay the groundwork for reincorporating the territory and its leaders into a revived peace process? Or will it prolong Gaza's isolation?

Hamas remains the unchallenged ruler here, two years after ousting Fatah after a violent conflict. But there is evidence that grumbling among its constituents and external pressures are bending what was once an uncompromising stance toward Israel by the Islamic Resistance Movement, as Hamas is formally known.

Not only is Hamas refraining from attacking Israel, it is also preventing smaller militant factions from engaging in militant acts.

Hamas spokesman: 'We have disappointed our people'

A 29 June poll indicated that support for Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank fell precipitously to 18.8 per cent following the war. Though it has eliminated its internal opponents and does not permit antigovernment demonstrations, Hamas is not immune to those sentiments.

"Both Fatah and Hamas have disappointed our people," says Hamas spokesman Ahmed Yousef. "Until now we couldn't reconcile our rift and end the divide between the West Bank and Gaza. [We are] giving the Israelis all kinds of justification to continue confiscating land in the West Bank."

Gaza's short-term fate may well depend on the ongoing reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fatah in Cairo. Egypt has extended the deadline for a deal to July 28, inviting the two parties to reconvene for a seventh round of talks on July 25.

Under the accord being formulated, a committee made up of all the Palestinian factions would set policy for the Gaza Strip until elections were held for the Palestinian presidency and legislative council next year. Unresolved for now is the role of Hamas's security forces and whom they would report to under such a scenario.

But according to Yousef, under no circumstances will Hamas disband its Qassam brigades, the 16,000-man

force which acts as Hamas's army.

"Al-Qassam will be a resistance force that has nothing to do with people's daily lives," Yousef says. "It will be like Hezbollah in Lebanon. They will not be visible, but they will be there."

Impact of US, Iranian dynamics

Hamas may be feeling the effects of the political gyrations in Iran, its strongest backer. And the group's extremist rhetoric is now a severe diplomatic liability with the ascension of an American president whose background and worldview do not provide the militant group with an easy enemy.

President Obama's speech in Cairo to the Muslim world gave Hamas "food for thought," says John Ging, Gaza director of the United Nations relief agency that cares for Palestinian refugees. Hamas is "thinking of the opportunity, [and] they are thinking of the consequences of failing to take the opportunity."

Whether the Fatah-Hamas compromise being formulated is enough to compel Israel to lift its siege of Gaza may depend on the degree of pressure Washington is willing to apply to Jerusalem. According to multiple stories in the Israeli press, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu wants a package deal that includes the return of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for any easing of the siege.

"Israel was surprised that following Operation Cast Lead, there was no real international pressure to ease the blockade on Gaza," says Eran Shayshon, the director of the national security program at the Tel Aviv-based research institute, Re'ut. Shayshon does not foresee a change in that stance unless Hamas makes dramatic concessions.

"Total failure" of Palestinian leadership

Even if a Fatah-Hamas deal is reached, Gazans are pessimistic about any lasting reconciliation..

Between the two factions, "there is a tacit agreement, without talking, that we are happy with the situation the way it is today," says Eyad Sarraj, an independent Gaza politician and human rights activist. If that is the case, then the past two years could be only the beginning of isolation for Gazans.

A "total failure" of Palestinian leadership has led Gazans to the point where they "are now the last ones to decide on [their] destiny," Dr Sarraj says. "Other people are more powerful and control the decisions in Washington, in Tel Aviv, in Damascus, in Tehran, in Cairo."

But Hamas will not allow a separate peace between Israel and Fatah in the West Bank, warns Yousef, the Hamas spokesman. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas "cannot do anything without getting the consent from Gaza," he says.

[Originally published in the *Christian Science Monitor*.]



Dr Eyad Sarraj

RAISINS AND ALMONDS

ICG farewells Gareth Evans

The International Crisis Group farewelled its outgoing president and CEO on 30 of June, The former Foreign Minister had a quite a fruitful time in the organisation. Chris Patten, co-chair of the ICG noted that in his nine-and-a-half years at the helm Evans "took a small organisation analysing some 12 conflicts with 25 staff and a budget of two million dollars, and he transformed it into the pre-eminent international NGO in conflict prevention and resolution, examining some 60 conflicts world-wide with 130 staff and a budget of over 15 million."

"Under him the ICG established its unique mix of field-based research, experienced policy analysis and high-level advocacy that together make the ICG so well-respected", said Co-Chair Tom Pickering. [Activists of all shades who are concerned various issues around the globe speak highly of the ICG –Ed,]

Gareth Evans will be succeeded by Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

[From the ICG]

Darfur raids high-light policy follies

United Press International reported in the first week of July on the impact of the presence of Armed rebels within refugee camps.

United Nations aid workers say that the Darfuri refugees are consequently at risk.

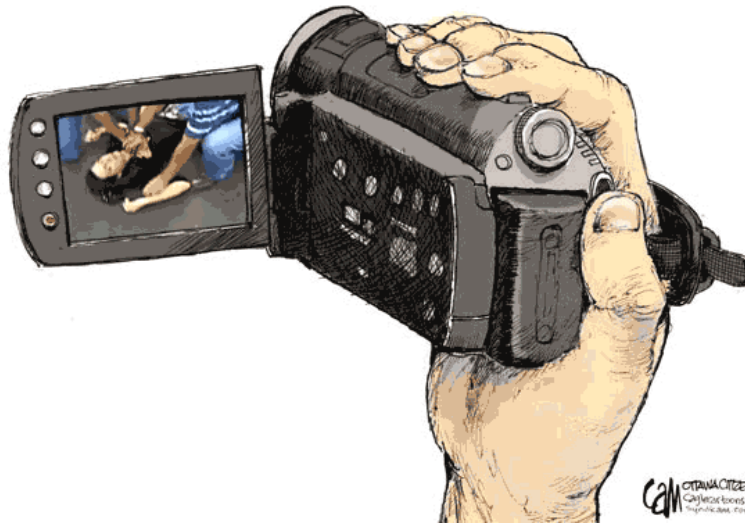
"The BBC said its correspondent saw fighters of the Justice and Equality Movement armed with rocket-propelled grenades and AK-47s openly driving through the Oure Cassoni camp for Darfur refugees. Humanitarian workers said that could bring reprisals from Khartoum.

"Sudanese warplanes reportedly dropped bombs near the camp last month, believed to be retaliation for JEM taking over the Darfuri towns of Kornoi and Um Baru in May. The bombing killed two people and numerous animals."

Pamela Curr of the Asylum Seekers Resource used the example to slam the Liberal parties and others who take a hard-line on refugees. "Next time Liberal spokesperson Dr Sharman Stone starts bleating about 'Real Refugees in the camps in Africa' being the ones we should help, we could remind her that camps are very dangerous places and many refugees choose not to go into them for exactly this reason,

"This accords with the information given to us by relatives here who live with the fear that their family members will be killed before they can get them to safety. Even approaching the UNHCR office in some places is extremely

THE WEAPON OF CHOICE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY...



dangerous. Once they have been interviewed and given a card- what then? As they walk out of the Ndjamena office onto the streets in Chad, young men are grabbed by Darfur rebel forces and forced into militia to fight or by Chadian forces and imprisoned or worse. Is it any wonder that refugees have to help themselves to safety."

[From Pamela Curr]

Change in Australian perception of I/P?

According to a new poll conducted by Roy Morgan Research, the majority of Australians think that Israel's military action in the Gaza Strip in January this year was unjustified. Additionally, the poll found that more Australians sympathise with Palestinians than with Israelis in the Middle Eastern conflict.

This surprising result has received very little coverage in the media with nothing in the Fairfax broadsheet the *Australian Jewish News* or other mainstream media. This would be almost unheard of for research conducted by

the Roy Morgan Research. The explanation may be in the fact the survey was commissioned by the Sydney-based Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine (CJPP) and the Adelaide Australian Friends of Palestine (AFOPA) organisations. The survey does not appear to be on the Morgan website either.

For someone who remembers Australians supporting Israel over the Arabs by a factor of 15 to 1 this is

a startling change. On closer examination though, the result may not be so surprising. The biggest differences emerge around attitudes to Israel's military attack on Gaza in December-January when a large number of Palestinian civilians were killed. Some 42.0 per cent of Australians found Israel's actions were "not justified" whereas only 29.0 per cent found them "justified". The rest said they "couldn't say".

Of the 636 Australians aged 18 years and over asked whether their sympathies lie more with the Israelis or with the Palestinians; 28.0 per cent responded "with the Palestinians", 25.0 per cent "with neither", and 24.5 per cent were "with the Israelis". 23per cent said "they couldn't say".

[We received the CJPP but checked it with the Morgan organisation.]

Viewer advisory warning requested

During the coverage of the cricket on Thursday night there was unfortunately a shot of John and Janette Howard in the crowd. I would appreciate the TV networks showing their usual warning that "the footage may offend some viewers".

[Letter from Ian Kerr of Galston to the SMH]

The language that absolves Israel

Saree Makdisi

On 13 June, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu delivered a speech that, by categorically ruling out the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state, ought to have been seen as a mortal blow to the quest for a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The next morning, however, newspaper headlines across the United States announced that Netanyahu had endorsed the creation of a Palestinian state, and the White House welcomed the speech as “an important step forward”.

Reality can be so easily stood on its head when it comes to Israel, because the misreading of Israeli declarations is a long-established practice among commentators and journalists in the United States.

In fact, in the United States, a special vocabulary has been developed for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. It filters and structures the way in which developing stories are misread here, making it difficult for readers to fully grasp the nature of those stories – and maybe even for journalists to think critically about what they write.

The ultimate effect of this special vocabulary is to make it possible for Americans to accept and even endorse in Israel what they would reject out of hand in any other country.

Let me give a classic example.

In the US, discussion of Palestinian politicians and political movements often relies on a spectrum running from “extreme” to “moderate”. The latter sounds appealing; the former clearly applies to those who must be – must they not? – beyond the pale. But hardly anyone relying on such terms pauses to ask what they mean. According to whose standard are these manifestly subjective labels assigned?

Meanwhile, Israeli politicians are labelled according to an altogether different standard: they are “doves” or “hawks”. Unlike the terms reserved for Palestinians, there’s nothing inherently negative about either of those avian terms.

So why is no Palestinian leader referred to here as a hawk? Why are Israeli politicians rarely labelled “extremists”, or, for that matter, “militants”?

There are countless other examples of these linguistic double standards. American media outlets routinely use the deracinating and deliberately obfuscating term “Israeli Arabs” to refer to the Palestinian citizens of Israel, despite the fact that they call themselves – and are – Palestinian.

Similarly, Israeli housing units built in the occupied territories in contravention of international law are always called “settlements”, or even “neighbourhoods”, rather than what they are: “colonies”. That word may be harsh on the ears, but it’s far more accurate (“a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state”).

These subtle distinctions make a huge difference. Unconsciously absorbed, such terms frame the way people and events are viewed. When it comes to Israel, we seem to reach for a dictionary that applies to no one else, to give a

pass to actions or statements that would be condemned in any other quarter.

That’s what enabled Netanyahu to be congratulated for endorsing a Palestinian “state”, even though the kind of entity he said Palestinians might – possibly – be allowed to have would be nothing of the kind.



Saree Makdisi

Look up the word “state” in the dictionary. You’ll probably see references to territorial integrity, power and sovereignty. The entity that Netanyahu was talking about would lack all of those constitutive features. A state without a defined territory that is not allowed to control its own borders or airspace and cannot enter into treaties with other states is not a state, any more than an apple is an orange or a car an aeroplane. So how can leading American newspapers say, “Israeli Premier Backs State for Palestinians”, as the *New York Times* had it? Or “Netanyahu relents on goal of two states”, as the *Los Angeles Times* put it?

Because a different vocabulary applies.

Which is also what kept Netanyahu’s most extraordinary demand in Sunday night’s speech from raising eyebrows here.

“The truth,” he said, “is that in the area of our homeland, in the heart of our Jewish homeland, now lives a large population of Palestinians.”

In other words, as Netanyahu repeatedly said, there is a Jewish people; it has a homeland and hence a state. As for the Palestinians, they are a collection – not even a group – of trespassers on Jewish land. Netanyahu, of course, dismisses the fact that they have a centuries-old competing narrative of home attached to the same land, a narrative worthy of recognition by Israel.

On the contrary. The Palestinians must, he said, accept that Israel is the state of the Jewish people (this is, incidentally, a relatively new Israeli demand), and they must do so on the understanding that they are not entitled to the same rights. “We” are a people, Netanyahu was saying; “they” are merely a “population”. “We” have a right to a state – a real state. “They” do not.

And the spokesman for our African American president calls this “an important step forward”?

In any other situation – including our own country – such a brutally naked contrast between those who are taken to have inherent rights and those who do not would immediately be labelled as racist. Netanyahu, though, is given a pass, not because most Americans would knowingly endorse racism but because, in this case, a special political vocabulary kicks in that prevents them from being able to recognise it for exactly what it is.

[Saree Makdisi is a professor of English and comparative literature at UCLA. He is the author of, among other books, *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*. Originally published in the *Los Angeles Times*.]

Ajami

[The New York Times described the movie Ajami: "The directors, who also share billing, as its writers, have made a powerful movie about a community of restless bedfellows. There are Palestinians working illegally, organised gangs, drug traders, Bedouin revenge squads, corrupt Jewish police, clandestine lovers and a Christian Arab godfather. All are vividly played by a cast of non-professionals. The film opens on a revenge murder — a case of mistaken identity — witnessed by Nasri, an Arab boy." *Ajami* is certainly the Israeli highlight of the **Melbourne International Film Festival**. The account below is courtesy of the Jaffa portal.]

Residents of Jaffa have long been accustomed to seeing a bunch of youngsters running around the neighbourhood with serious cameras and sophisticated movie paraphernalia. These were the Tel Avivian Yaron Shani (35) and his Jaffan counterpart Scandar Copti who over a long time produced the film *Ajami* with limited resources and a troupe of amateur actors that were picked and trained by them.

The film tells the story of this entire land and, in particular, Jaffa's story — a tale of enemies living side by side. It's the meeting of opposite viewpoints — Jews and Arabs, Christians and Muslims, fathers and sons, East and West, cops and robbers. We see them through a mosaic of five distinct stories which interweave to become a single narrative with a common end, providing a comprehensive image of the Jaffa perspective on human experience.

The various strands of the story reveal a world of love and kindness, cheek by jowl with violence and hatred. All the characters in this film are good people who care for their dearest and nearest but who find themselves struggling with other characters. This provides a humanist illustration of the human tragedy — how people of conscience who share the same values can become mortal enemies.

Different artist and different creation

Copti, who lives in a small flat in the Givat Aliya neighbourhood near the Babai restaurant, found it diffi-



Yaron Shani (L) and Scandar Copti in Cannes

cult to focus his replies after working through the night. Originally he studied mechanical engineering in the Technion, but lost interest and dropped out. "I always loved the cinema and dabbled in it", he says. He set off

on a master's degree course in cinema studies but again dropped out after less than a year. Evidently he is not destined to study in an organised environment. These days he makes a living editing video productions. Copti met Yaron Shani, a cinema studies graduate from Tel Aviv University, at a festival of student films in Tel Aviv. Shani suggested a joint project; they worked on the screenplay for two years. Producing the film, which is based on true stories from the neighbourhood, took them another three years.

Casting and production did not proceed in the ordinary way. "We ran around and looked for people for roles in the film. We hung signs in the street. When we needed kids we approached a local school, got permission to address the students, and recruited suitable children. We did likewise in senior citizens' centres and in the youth centres — both Muslim and Eastern Orthodox.



"We recruited nine groups from **Ajami Neighbourhood** Jaffa, [Jewish] Givatayim, and Kafr Kassem 270 people all together. We ran acting workshops for over a hundred people and then made our selections using quite strict criteria, based on the script which was already final. There are quite a few participants in the film who are not from Jaffa, but all the roles of the characters from Jaffa are played by local people."

Turning ordinary people into actors

Funding came from the Israel Film Fund, the Berlin Media Board, the German affiliate of Arte and another international fund; the production was based on improvisation using ordinary people, not professional actors.

"Once we chose the actors, we started working with them on improvisation, on acting in front of the camera. Together we constructed the history of each of the characters before they appeared in the story line of the film.

"One of the characters is a cook who has a personal relationship with both the owner and the owner's son. We took all of them to the Babai restaurant where they worked without pay for a considerable period of time, getting to know each other and practicing improvised role playing.

"Another character, playing someone whose grandfather is paralysed, practiced improvising scenes from the day on which the grandfather is taken to hospital and is told that his paralysis is permanent.

"In this way all the actors, all of them ordinary people, got to know the history of their characters and practiced improvisation in front of the camera."

Making it in the big world

Finally, six long and back-breaking years after the project began, the film, with its large cast and multiple locations, was finally completed. The dream became reality. The film has now been screened as the final showing of the Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival.

[Translated by Sol Salbe]

Ajami is showing on Sat 1 August and Sun 9 August.

Bupkis* from Bibi

Binyamin Netanyahu's speech throws a couple of specks of kosher synthetic food freshener on what was always going to be a stale, dry, cold and limp dish he was serving up to his unexpected visitor, Barack Obama. No Palestinians were at the table, although they were being offered some drudge-work in the kitchen once they'd passed the indefinite probationary labour test for the pre-breakfast 3am shift. This was dressed up as economic reconciliation.

Samaria, Judea and other such religiously-based Israeli state regions of "greater Israel" deriving their entitlement from G-D were spoken of with all the pride of ownership. It did not seem to faze Bibi that he was talking about occupied territory, the subject of contestation for the scarcely acknowledged prospect of a Palestinian state. And what a state. One capable of taking millions of Palestinian refugees in addition to its overcrowded resident population. Naturally it would have no military resources because it would have no need for self-defence or security.

And all the settlements and checkpoints? The 500,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem?

Well, Jerusalem would remain undivided, so there was no need to think about East Jerusalem. And the West Bank settlements? Well, Bibi's view was "live and let live", except that the Gaza blockade was a bit embarrassing on

this score. Best not to mention it. Anyway the two-state kosher synthetic food freshener would be a taste-enhancer as well.

And the unexpected visitor wasn't going to complain, when it was obvious to how much trouble his host had gone to serve him up something presentable at such a late hour. As for indigestion, well, that was his private affair and the symptoms wouldn't become evident until the small hours when, if it became a serious problem, he could blame those probationary Palestinian labourers on the early kitchen shift.

The Americans would understand, having had to put up their own walls down in Mexico to keep out the wetbacks who found work in their own kitchens. It wouldn't be the first case of food poisoning from people not even on the books.

To finish the meal Bibi proposed a toast to old friends Jordan and Egypt, wished a speedy recovery to Iraq and then went bananas about Iran. The lights were out by midnight.

*Bupkis, also spelt bubkes and bubkas, but still means the same thing. The word bupkis, literally "beans", means "nothing, zero, having no value".

Les Rosenblatt

Miss Marple and the Hamasniks in Teheran

Sol Salbe

Here's a sweeping statement: *AJN* editor Ashley Browne did not devour detective books as a youngster. I have no idea what he did indulge in but my gut feeling is that neither Arthur Conan Doyle nor Agatha Christie were on the menu.

Why do we care? Because he may have learned some useful tips. In mid-June the *Australian Jewish News* reprinted a *Jerusalem Post* article suggesting that Hamas members were helping Iran crush dissent. The *AJN* has a reputation to protect, so perhaps the editor could have applied a few of the methods of Sherlock Holmes or Miss Marple. A good detective would have asked some questions before republishing, starting with motive. Why should any members of Hamas help Ahmadinejad when the other candidate is just as supportive of the Palestinian cause? You can never tell (with this sort of internal unrest) who is going to be the eventual victor, so why alienate a possible winner?

Next a detective would check the reliability of the witnesses. Evidence is only as good as the quality of the witnesses. Reporter Sabrina Amidi was on the spot and she reported: "The most important thing that I believe people outside of Iran should be aware of, the young man went on, 'is the participation of Palestinian forces in these riots.'" A massive crackdown by the government with possibly hundreds killed and the most important message to get across is the participation of at most a few hundred Palestinians?

But wait, there is more: "Another protester, who spoke as

he carried a kitchen knife in one hand and a stone in the other, also cited the presence of Hamas in Teheran." The Teheran demonstrations were characterised by the peaceful nature of the demonstrators. How many protesters did you see on TV with weapons in one hand let alone two?

A good detective will want to know how these demonstrators knew that the thugs that beat them were Palestinians. Palestinians do not have identifying markers on their body, so it must have been the language used by the thugs. The vast majority of Teheran's residents speak Farsi and so they can obviously recognise the sound of Arabic, but how can they tell what kind of Arabic? Iran has got its own Arabic speaking population whose accent is no doubt different to the Palestinian one but would a Farsi speaker be able to tell?

Finally a good detective will check for similar stories. Lo and behold there's another version of the story that transform the Hamasniks into Hezbollah. Robert Fisk was also on the scene:

"I've had this one from two reporters, three phone callers



**Joan Hickson as
Miss Marple**

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(one from Lebanon) and a British politician. I've tried to talk to the cops. They cannot understand Arabic. They don't even look like Arabs, let alone Lebanese. The reality is that many of these street thugs have been brought in from Baluch areas and Zabal province, close to the Af-

ghan border. Even more are Iranian Azeris. Their accents sound as strange to Tehranis as would a Belfast accent to a Cornishman hearing it for the first time."

If you are reading this, Ashley, it's never too late to pick up a good whodunit. Believe me it will come in handy. Might I recommend Sara Paretsky?

The honour killings they seem to have forgotten about

Irfan Yusuf

We've all heard of the various victims of honour killings over the years. But one woman's honour doesn't seem to figure very highly in Western media outlets. Indeed, in Australia, not a single News Limited newspaper has reported the murder of Marwa al-Sherbini in Dresden, Germany by a non-Muslim German Citizen?. Not a single News Limited blogger has commented on the incident, including those like Andrew Bolt who frequently pluck poorly-reported stories of violence against women of nominally Muslim heritage. Funny, that.

Marwa al-Sherbini was in her early thirties, smart and attractive. She comes from an educated middle class family, both her parents working as pharmacists. She grew up in the cosmopolitan Egyptian city of Alexandria and ended up in Dresden.

Every morning, Marwa readied herself for work, putting on her pharmacy uniform and her headscarf. She would stand in front of the mirror, checking her makeup and smiling. But Marwa's smile hid her secret dread. Each morning on her way to work, Marwa's honour was being sullied and her security threatened by the violent and vicious taunts of a man. "You slut!" he would scream at her, "You whore!" The man didn't stop at mere words



Marwa al-Sherbini

but threatened her with violence, even followed her to work.

Finally, Marwa had had enough. She talked to her employers who put her in touch with the local police. She brought charges to court. The man appeared and was fined. She appealed. She knew the fine would not have stopped him. If anything, it will make him angrier and give him more reason to carry out his threats.

The date for appeal arrived, and Marwa attends accompanied by male relatives. The accused also attends. In the presence of the judge, the prosecutors and other people present in court, the man screams out the same violent abuse. "You slut! You whore!" But this time he goes even further. He produces a knife and stabs her. Not once. Not twice. Marwa is stabbed at least 18 times. She died later in hospital.

Marwa was three months pregnant at the time. Her three year old son witnessed the whole incident.

Now let's imagine for a moment that the man involved in the taunts and the stabbing was Marwa's husband. Imagine if Marwa had applied to the court for an order restrain-

ing her husband from making violent threats toward her, stalking her and harassing her. Imagine if he had then stabbed her in court. No doubt this honour killing would have made a prominent story in metropolitan daily newspapers. No doubt it would have been treated as yet another story of an honour killing. No doubt some columnists would have frothed at the pen about how Muslim migrants don't integrate and are typically violent to women.

But Marwa's attacker was not her husband. Marwa's husband, an academic working at the prestigious Max-Planck-Institut for pharmacology, was present in court. He tried to save his wife and was somehow confused by court security for the attacker. Perhaps they assumed that a Middle Eastern-looking man was more likely to attack a woman. Marwa's husband was shot and at the time of writing was in a coma in hospital.

It all started one day when she took her son to the local park. The man was seated on the swings, and Marwa politely asked if her son could use the swing for a short while. He responded with a continuous stream of taunts and threats. He called her "terrorist", "Muslim bitch", "whore" and numerous other names. In court, he questioned what right she had to be in Germany. Before stabbing her, he shouted: "Do you have a right to be in Germany at all? When the NPD comes to power, there'll be an end to that. I voted NPD."

Perhaps this is what's worth contemplating. More and more European voters are turning to far-Right parties. Many of these parties have replaced virulent anti-Semitism with virulent anti-Muslim (and general anti-immigrant) sentiment. And mainstream European parties are meeting the far-Right challenge by co-opting far-Right rhetoric and attitudes, encouraging ugly sentiment.

And inevitably it is women who suffer more than men. Women are easy targets for hate-filled men. When a man feels a woman has sullied his honour, he lashes out against her. She is the easy target. A harder target is the man's own anger, his deeper issues.

Violence against women is violence against women. It is just as evil whether it is perpetrated by a particular kind of religious fanatic or by someone inspired by fanatical hatred of a particular religion. The result is the same. A woman is harmed. Her family mourns. Her community falls into a deep communal depression.

I could write more, but it's hard to deal with the rage and anger I feel at those who only seem to care about a Muslim woman being killed when they can use it as an excuse to malign her culture and to make life difficult for her children and others left behind.

[Originally published on Irfan Yusuf's blog]

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