Wagering That Israel Won’t Go to War, Hamas Continues Its Attacks

By Elior Levy

But Jerusalem is determined not to fall into Hamas’s trap.

The Hamas leadership has gone underground in Gaza in light of the gradual security escalation along Israel’s southern border and the subsequent indications that Jerusalem may renew its policy of eliminating terror leaders in the Strip.

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In light of Israel’s threat, Hamas’ senior political echelon and the heads of the organization’s military wing have disappeared, taking extreme care to compartmentalize their movements and their whereabouts.

The Iron Dome system intercepts rockets from Gaza over southern Israel (Photo: Reuters)

As such, on Sunday the IDF refrained from attacking Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip for the first time in 10 days.

The Qatari envoy to Gaza Mohammed al-Emadi is expected to arrive with his country’s monthly stipend to the Strip in the coming days. His entry to Gaza, however, depends on the security situation in the area.

If Hamas continues sending incendiary balloons and rockets into Israeli territory, Jerusalem will not allow al-Emadi to step a single foot in the Strip to deliver the money.

Firefighters battle a blaze started by incendiary balloons from Gaza (Photo: Amnon Ziv)

In recent days, Hamas has been under pressure from Qatar, Egypt and the UN’s Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov.

Each one of the three has tried in various ways to sway Hamas from continuing its plans for further escalation, while hinting that restoring the peace will lead to Gaza receiving further relief and improvements that are not at present part of the existing settlement.

But for now the organization is adamant in continuing on its current course of sending incendiary balloons into Israel, while reiterating that any Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip will be answered with counter-attacks in the form of rocket fire or other offensive activities.

Hamas is also currently dealing with pressure from within as a result of the shortage of fuel within the Strip, which has led to Gaza’s power plant ceasing operations.

The public in Gaza, which has grown accustomed to having electricity for the better part of the day, has returned in recent days to when the average Gazan household received no more then 4-3 hours of electricity per day.

The electricity crisis, the discontinuation of infrastructure projects on the Strip, and Hamas’ assumption that Israel will wish to avoid another campaign against the organization in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, has led Hamas to stand firm in its demands.

Members of the Hamas terror group send incendiary balloons from Gaza into Israel

It seems that Israel is still giving mediators a chance to bring about renewed calm while also trying to avoid violent escalation. Nonetheless, Jerusalem is determined not to let this recent bout of escalation turn into a war of attrition.

If the mediation efforts fail to bear tangible results, Israel will have no choice but to intensify its measures against Hamas even at the cost of a few days of fighting.

Lebanon’s Trial of the Century Ends Hizbollah’s Charade, but Leaves Its Knife at the Country’s Throat

By Oz Katerji

For Rafik Hariri, only a small step toward justice.

Lebanon’s postwar hopes of becoming a free and prosperous nation died smoldering in a mangled crater of seared flesh and jagged metal on the Beirut waterfront. The devastating bomb blast that tore through the Beirut coast didn’t just rip the fragile fabric of Lebanese society apart—it permanently mutilated it beyond all recognition.

But this did not happen in 2020; it happened in 2005. That time, however, it was no act of criminal negligence or corruption but a premeditated murder.

On Feb. 14, 2005, a suicide bomber detonated a Mitsubishi Canter pickup truck loaded with over 2,000 pounds of TNT next to the convoy of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, murdering him and 21 other people.

On Tuesday, after more than 15 years of turmoil, bloodshed, and destitution, as well as the murder of one of the men pursuing the killers, the first-ever international court tribunal established to prosecute terrorist crimes returned a verdict that no one in Lebanon ever doubted: Hariri was assassinated by senior Hezbollah operatives.

But justice has come under absurd circumstances. The tribunal, which spent more than $1 billion and took 11 years to return one guilty verdict (out of four suspects on trial in absentia), never had the remit to investigate Hezbollah as an organization, and its final verdict was undermined before it had even been read out by the demonstrably ridiculous statement that the court had seen “no evidence that the Hezbollah leadership had any involvement” in the assassination, before returning a guilty
Ayyash was found guilty of co-conspiring to murder Hariri with Mustafa Badreddine, Hezbollah’s second-in-command, whose case at the tribunal was dropped following his death in Syria in 2016.

Hezbollah, a Shiite paramilitary organization funded by Iran, has always officially denied responsibility for the bombing, just as it has always denied responsibility for assassinating Samir Kassir, Wissam al-Hassan, George Hawi, and Gebran Tueni, among dozens of other political opponents, and for the deaths of hundreds of innocent bystanders from these bombings.

In Lebanon, prominent critics of Hezbollah and their allies in Syria’s Assad regime get killed in car bombs, Hezbollah denies responsibility, and the nation is expected to move on as if nothing happened and mysterious car bombs are just one of those unexplained quirks of life rather than a clear message, etched in blood, for all to understand.

Yet there can be no misreading of this judgement, despite the surreal statement. Yet there can be no misreading of this judgement, despite the surreal statement. Hezbollah’s most senior operatives do not act independently from the organization’s leadership. This tribunal and verdict, as flawed and toothless and disappointing as they have been for many Lebanese, has at the very least hammered the nail into the coffin of Hezbollah’s charade of plausible deniability.

As of publication time, Hezbollah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah has not responded to the guilty verdict against Ayyash, a man he had previously called an “honorable” resister alongside the other indicted Hezbollah members in a speech in 2011. After previously vowing to “cut off” the hand of anyone who tried to arrest Ayyash or his co-conspirators, whose whereabouts remain unknown, it is unlikely Nasrallah will accept even a court decision that went out of its way to acknowledge there was no paper trail leading directly to his leadership.

A guilty verdict for Badreddine would have been harder to stomach for Hezbollah, but like Nasrallah’s critics whose cars mysteriously blew up, Badreddine was killed by a conveniently unexplained blast and could not be prosecuted by the tribunal because he was dead, another loose end tied up.

Hezbollah’s gaslighting of the Lebanese people is brutally obvious. The day before the verdict was issued, Hezbollah supporters had been posting photos of Badreddine online alongside the hashtag “whomever we killed deserved it.” Immediately after the court convicted him for murdering 22 people, a banner was raised by Hezbollah supporters in Ayyash’s hometown honoring him as a “proud son of the resistance.”

Hariri had to go. The prime minister was a popular and charismatic billionaire entrepreneur who had powerful allies in the Middle East and in the West, and had governed Lebanon for a decade, for all but two years from 1992 to 2004. Hariri had prospered in the years of reconstruction following the end of the bitter civil war. It was then that Lebanon, despite being constrained by much of the same corruption, incompetence, and sectarianism that still rules today, began to see signs of growth following years of darkness.

The Taif Agreement, which ended Lebanon’s civil war, also became a permanent shackle around its neck, with sectarianism becoming the permanent and unrefordable foundation of Lebanese politics. Despite agreements for the full withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, and the full disarmament of militias, the Taif Agreement was never fully implemented. While the problems of today have not changed significantly from the problems of 2005, developments such as the Cedar Revolution and the Syrian civil war have changed the equation.

Lebanon following the civil war effectively became a client state for Bashar al-Assad’s regime, which had more than 15,000 troops occupying territory across the country. The Assad regime dominated Lebanese politics, handpicking its president and forcing pro-regime lawmakers onto election slates.

Lebanon was never going to be a shining beacon of liberal democracy in the Middle East under this postwar system. Lebanon was never going to be a shining beacon of liberal democracy in the Middle East under this postwar system. But after years of bloodshed, the Lebanese people were at long last able to start living their lives again.

Hariri was also no hard-liner against the Syrian regime. He had been complying with the regime’s demands for many years before the political realities in Lebanon started to change. Before Hariri’s assassination, Assad was demanding a term-limit extension for his preferred pro-regime president, Émile Lahoud, even though it violated Lebanon’s constitution. This was a deeply unpopular move in Lebanon as the country grew weary of Syrian military occupation, and opposition to the regime’s dominance over political affairs was growing.

Political opposition to Hezbollah’s armed status was also increasing, and Hariri’s growing relationship with the so-called Bristol Group, a cross-confessional political grouping established following the aftermath of the Lahoud extension, that convened at the Bristol Hotel in Beirut to call for the full compliance with the disarmament and withdrawal of the Taif Agreement.

The reality of the relationship between Hariri and the Assad regime was laid bare by the transcripts of recordings of meetings between Hariri and Assad’s diplomatic henchman Walid Muallem passed to the Special Tribunal.

“We want a pro-Syrian regime in Lebanon,” Hariri said. “But, at the same time, Lebanon will not be ruled by Syria forever.”

The conversation was strained, and Hariri’s routine acquiescence to the regime became apparent, but Hariri was signing his own death warrant by saying what nobody
was allowed to say in Lebanon to Hezbollah or Assad: “No.”

“Brother, you are like a father to me. Is there more? Can you be more than that? You may be my father, OK, but I can’t accept for you to choose the woman I will marry, what she will wear, name my children, which school they will attend,” Hariri said to a Syrian diplomatic representative. “You know how there is interference in every small detail in the country.”

A day after this conversation took place, Hariri would join with the Bristol Group opposition in calling for the immediate and total withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

Less than two weeks later, Hariri was dead.

The real hero of the farcical Hariri tribunal is a man whose name appears only once in footnote in the full judgement. Hariri’s murder, like so many of Hezbollah’s assassinations, would have remained shrouded forever but for the bravery, genius, and defiance of one man.

When the Lebanese Internal Security Forces intelligence officer Capt. Wissam Eid was handed responsibility for the organization’s investigation into the Hariri assassination, few expected it was a case he could solve. Perhaps he wasn’t even supposed to.

But Eid was no run-of-the-mill police officer—he was a once-in-a-generation analytical genius. While the Special Tribunal notably poured scorn on how the Lebanese authorities handled the crime scene and subsequent investigation, not one word was saved for the man whose investigation was the basis of the overwhelming weight of telecommunications evidence that initiated the tribunal.

Hezbollah had no idea just who they were up against.

Using nothing but an Excel spreadsheet and raw cell tower communications data, over the course of one year, Wissam Eid painstakingly found patterns in the data that he successfully identified as a comprehensive network of mobile devices used to both plan and execute the Hariri investigation.

As Eid began getting closer to the truth, the death threats began. As Eid began getting closer to the truth, the death threats began. He began to receive messages that the phones he was investigating belonged to Hezbollah, and that he should stop digging.

Far from being intimidated, Eid began sleeping in his office so he could finish his investigation and not endanger the life of his family. Astonishingly, he cracked the case.

But this groundbreaking achievement of Alan Turing-like brilliance was not celebrated—it was ignored. Eid had cracked the case in 2006. He had sent his report to the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission, a report he had risked his life to write, one that few people could have ever written. It remained ignored for at least a year.

A year later, someone from the U.N. commission’s team eventually found Eid’s report and finally established contact. The man who alone had uncovered Hezbollah’s complicity in the murder of Hariri was finally being heard. A few weeks later, Wissam Eid was killed by a car bomb.

But while Eid’s slaying will never be the subject of an international tribunal, nobody in Lebanon is in any doubt as to who is responsible.

Without Eid’s telecommunications data investigation, there would be no conviction for Salim Ayyash, there would be no evidence of Badreddine’s involvement, and the Lebanese public could continue to bury their heads in the sand about who was responsible for the murder of 22 of their fellow citizens on Feb. 14, 2005.

It is remarkable that Eid wasn’t prominently recognized by the tribunal. Without him, they would have had nothing. Despite 11 years of work, the overwhelming majority of their evidence against Hezbollah was discovered by one man three years before the tribunal even started.

But Eid’s sacrifice will see no justice, his genius won’t be marked by statues or street names, and his bravery won’t be taught in schools—at least not as long as Hezbollah continues to threaten every speaker of truth in Lebanon from the shadows.

Speaking to Foreign Policy, Eid’s parents Mahmoud and Samira Eid expressed their pride in their son’s achievements following the conclusion of the tribunal.

“We accept its verdict. It’s true that we wanted to know the assassin, but we were hoping to know who orchestrated this assassination,” they said. “The only evidence that the court took into consideration is the communication data which Wissam was able to discover one year after the assassination relying on personal effort and using simple techniques.”

Like many Lebanese, Samira and Mahmoud expressed their frustration and disappointment that the verdict did not go further.

“We accept its verdict. It’s true that we wanted to know the assassin, but we were hoping to know who orchestrated this assassination,” they said. “They are not alone in that sentiment.

Some in Lebanon are now arguing whether the tribunal was worth it at all. Some in Lebanon are now arguing whether the tribunal was worth it at all. The defendants were tried in absentia, and, as a result, if Ayyash is ever apprehended he will have to be tried all over again. There is no chance Hezbollah will admit complicity, and even if the court had convicted Nasrallah himself, it would have made no material difference to the lives of Lebanese people.
Lebanon remains a country held hostage by a murderous foreign-backed terrorist organization. There is no prospect of economic or political reform that does not require dismantling Hezbollah, and there is no prospect of dismantling Hezbollah without a civil war, and Hezbollah’s leadership has started threatening the Lebanese public again with the simple message: fall in line or you will be next.

The mass protest movement that has been raging since October 2019 under the slogan “All of them means all of them,” referring to the entirety of Lebanon’s corrupt political ruling class, has escalated following the ammonium nitrate blast that smashed Beirut’s port into pieces earlier this month. Effigies of Lebanese politicians, including Hassan Nasrallah, are being publicly hanged in the streets of Beirut, a city close to an uprising. But while the Lebanese public may be sick of all of their sectarian overlords, Hezbollah holds dominion over all, with its terrifying domestic military capabilities dwarfing that of many regional states.

The mood in the international community toward Hezbollah has started shifting, with the United Kingdom and Germany recently moving toward Washington’s position by proscribing Hezbollah in full after many years of trying to draw a distinction between Hezbollah’s military and political wings. (Even by Hezbollah’s own standards, no such distinction exists.) France and the wider European Union, so far, remain unconvinced on the issue, but with an international tribunal conviction and the introduction of sanctions against the Assad regime and its allies under the Caesar Act in the United States, Hezbollah is beginning to find itself increasingly isolated. But an isolated Hezbollah is simply a more paranoid and violent Hezbollah, and the international community can’t defeat the group by closing a few offshore European bank accounts.

Samira and Mahmoud Eid tell me that justice in Lebanon “will only be served when the people behind the assassinations are sentenced and held accountable. Whoever killed Rafik Hariri killed Wissam Eid and the rest of the martyrs. Justice will be served by punishing those who planned, not those who served as mere tools to commit the murders.”

But even after 11 years of work, that justice seems as far away as it was on Feb. 14, 2005.

Mr. Katerji is a British-Lebanese freelance journalist focusing on conflict, human rights & the Middle East.

How the Israel-UAE Deal Demonstrates the Need for American Leadership in the Middle East

By John Bolton mosaicismagazine.com August 25, 2020

An American-led alliance can be a strong deterrent to Iran and China.

Not every diplomatic breakthrough is a home run, but solid singles and doubles, added together, make for winning (and sometimes championship) seasons. The recent Israel-United Arab Emirates agreement falls into this latter category. So saying does not diminish its significance, but actually helps demonstrate that “normal” diplomatic progress between former adversaries is, in the Middle East, a considerable success.

Regional experts rightly agree that the deal, years in the maturing, reflects the clearly emerging reality rather than representing an unexpected new departure. The corollary is that moving toward normalized relations hardly means all contentious issues before the two parties have been resolved. The Palestinian question is deferred, not answered, to the dismay of some and to the relief to others. The UAE embassy is not likely to be in Jerusalem. The reactions of Turkey and Iran show that some already-fraught relations will grow even worse. And unsurprisingly, enthusiasm in Europe was notably subdued, meaning that considerable hard diplomatic work remains to prove the obvious in continental capitals. Middle East peace is not at hand.

Nonetheless, recognizing, signifying, and absorbing reality, as the Israel-UAE deal does, is one more step forward. Especially in confronting Iran’s regional threats, which are urgent and palpable, it matters that Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem (Israel’s capital no matter where embassies are located) will achieve full diplomatic recognition. And the worldwide menace of China, this century’s existential issue for the United States and the West as a whole, will hopefully face stronger, more coherent opposition in the Middle East.

The Israel-UAE agreement thus represents not only progress locally, but the region’s inexorable transformation from a place where great-power rivalries are fought out, to one that takes its part in larger global struggles. Ironically, many in the region undoubtedly would prefer not engaging in these larger battles, but that luxury is fast disappearing.

The deal’s timing was also important, particularly given November’s presidential election in America. There is, unfortunately, far more at risk in our upcoming voting than the regional players may have realized. Locking in elements of the Middle East’s new correlation of forces (as the Soviets put it) is an insurance policy for all involved.

There is little doubt, for example, that a Biden victory will revive dreams of a new nuclear deal with Iran. While it’s hard to imagine something worse than the 2015 JCPOA, there will be those in Biden’s White House working feverishly toward that goal. And, as with most Europeans, the two-state solution for the Palestinians has near-eternal life in the mainstream Democratic party. Much worse lies in the party’s left wing; its influence in a Biden administration is presently unknowable, but it will doubtless be unhelpful to whatever extent it manifests itself.
No one, however, should assume that Donald Trump’s re-election would be much better. Whether, in a few years, any U.S. forces will remain in Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan, or even long-standing bases in the Arabian Gulf, is very much open to question. Remember what President Trump said in announcing (and taking credit for) the Trump/Abraham Accord:

“We don’t have to be there anymore. We don’t need oil. We don’t need anything there except friendship. . . . It started off when we had to be there, but as of a few years ago, we don’t have to be there. We don’t have to be patrolling the straits. We’re doing things that other countries wouldn’t do. But we put ourselves [sic], over the last few years, in a position where we no longer have to be in areas that, at one point, were vital. And that’s a big statement.

On Iran, just days before these remarks, Trump said, not for the first time, that “we will have a deal within four weeks” of his re-election. Despite the president’s assurances of amity, in my view U.S. national interests require a sustained political, military, and economic presence in the region.

Normalization between Israel and any Gulf Cooperation Council member makes military and intelligence activities regarding Iran easier and more productive. U.S. and Israeli diplomacy should therefore focus on securing additional new recognitions, perhaps Bahrain and Oman (or, farther afield, Sudan and Morocco). The more instances where Tehran’s adversaries enhance their national-security cooperation, the harder it is for Iran to advance its interests by driving wedges between them.

The Trump administration’s efforts to invoke “snapback sanctions” under Security Council Resolution 2231 will play out in the coming weeks. As I recently wrote in the Wall Street Journal, I oppose this course of action. But whatever the outcome, there is no prospect of any future agreement with Iran that conceivably precludes it from achieving deliverable nuclear weapons, whether negotiated by Trump or Biden. Iran has not made a strategic decision to renounce nuclear weapons. Quite the opposite. The evidence is unmistakable that Iran’s 2015 agreement for port construction in Abu Dhabi as part of China’s strategic objectives in the multi-billion-dollar purchase American weapons. And there is no mistaking China’s market for weapons systems and other high-tech items. And like the West as a whole, America included, Israel missed early signals of Beijing’s broad efforts to jeopardize Western military capabilities, and specifically to exploit for intelligence purposes fifth-generation telecommunications systems. Britain, for example, only recently reversed course to preclude China’s Huawei from upcoming UK telecoms infrastructure projects. Prime Minister Netanyahu has undertaken yeoman efforts to undo the damage in Israel, but for the West generally, much remains to be done.

So too, the Emiratis and the Saudis have been tempted by China’s “peaceful” nuclear energy capabilities, and ballistic-missile programs. Recent reporting on China’s participation in constructing a Saudi Arabian facility for milling and refining uranium ore into “yellowcake” (U3O8 in solid form) is only the latest example. Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and others have pursued weapons contract with both Moscow and Beijing, and will continue to do so if Congress legislates restrictions against their ability to purchase American weapons. And there is no mistaking China’s strategic objectives in the multi-billion-dollar agreement for port construction in Abu Dhabi as part of we will follow suit as soon as possible.” It would in fact be better for the region if no other power developed nuclear weapons, but the Arab leaders will believe that only if they see U.S. staying power.

Israeli relations with the Emiratis can be a major factor here. One of the less remarked but nonetheless badly flawed aspects of the 2015 deal was allowing Iran to have any uranium-enrichment or plutonium-reprocessing capability. America and Israel will have to work with the UAE and others looking at developing truly peaceful nuclear programs to uphold the “gold standard” for U.S. consent: such peaceful programs are permissible, but must not include the front and back ends of the nuclear fuel cycle. Israeli technology can play a significant role here.

On China, realigning Middle Eastern attitudes will almost certainly be more difficult, but even more essential. The United States is not now entering a cold war with China in the same ideological sense as with the Soviet Union, but the ongoing contest is epochal nonetheless. China’s concepts of “civil-military fusion”; social metrics by which its citizens are to be judged; repression of the Uighurs (which should be noteworthy for Islamic countries); the crushing of the “one country, two-systems” concept in Hong Kong; China’s aggressive nuclear build-up; development of blue-water naval capabilities; offensive cyberwar programs; territorial belligerence in the South China Sea, along the frontier with India and elsewhere; and more, demonstrate what China is up to. This is not the “peaceful rise” of a “responsible stakeholder,” as China’s advocates have long argued. The United States, along with Europe and the Middle East, can either respond to this now, or pay the price later.

Israel itself has been tempted by potential sales into China’s market for weapons systems and other high-tech items. And like the West as a whole, America included, Israel missed early signals of Beijing’s broad efforts to jeopardize Western military capabilities, and specifically to exploit for intelligence purposes fifth-generation telecommunications systems. Britain, for example, only recently reversed course to preclude China’s Huawei from upcoming UK telecoms infrastructure projects. Prime Minister Netanyahu has undertaken yeoman efforts to undo the damage in Israel, but for the West generally, much remains to be done.

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Beijing’s “Belt and Road Initiative,” a worldwide Trojan Horse of enormous proportions.

Mutual diplomatic recognition between Israel and the UAE is unquestionably good news. If the two countries, their neighbors, and the United States play the game wisely, history will likely characterize it as a “milestone” in the changing geostrategic environment in the Middle East.

The region will continue to change, but bilateral Israeli-Emirati relations will now become more stable. Stability is not in the regional or global forecast in the foreseeable future, even as the instability of past conflicts recedes or disappears.

Mr. Bolton served as the U.S. National Security Advisor from 2018 to 2019.

This West Bank Land Is Not ‘Palestinian’

By Sean Durns

“Who can challenge the rights of the Jews in Palestine?” Yusuf al-Khalidi wrote to the chief rabbi of France on March 1, 1899. “Good Lord, historically it really is your country.”

More than a century after Khalidi’s admission, the Jewish people’s connection to their ancestral homeland is often forgotten. Indeed, many news outlets and analysts not only ignore it — but often attempt to erase it.

Take, for example, The Washington Post. The newspaper’s August 13, 2020 report, “Trump announces historic peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates,” asserted that “Arab leaders had privately warned Trump that they could not agree to future economic or diplomatic ties with Israel if Israel took over land now considered Palestinian.” But the article, by reporter Anne Gearan and Jerusalem bureau chief Steve Hendrix, doesn’t say why the land is “now considered Palestinian.”

In fact, a sovereign Palestinian Arab state has never existed. Rather, the status of the territory is, at best, disputed. Its status is to be resolved by negotiations anticipated by UN Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian interim accords, the 2003 international “road map,” and related diplomatic efforts. Indeed, the co-authors of Resolution 242, US Under Secretary of State Eugene Rostow, US Ambassador to the United Nations Arthur Goldberg, and British ambassador Lord Caradon made clear, both then and later, that Jews and Arabs both had claims in the territories, and that no national sovereignty over them had been recognized since the end of Ottoman rule.

The Washington Post itself, in a September 4, 2014 correction prompted by CAMERA, noted that “the Israeli-occupied territories are disputed lands that Palestinians want for a future state.” In another recent CAMERA-prompted correction, The Wall Street Journal acknowledged on May 16, 2020, that “under the Oslo accords, sovereignty over the West Bank is disputed, pending a final settlement.”

Further, there is a legal basis for Jewish claims to the land. As CAMERA has documented (see, for example, “The West Bank—Jewish Territory Under International Law”), Israel has a foundation for asserting sovereignty over the area. Additionally, the League of Nations Palestine Mandate, adopted later by the United Nations, calls for “close Jewish settlement on the land” west of the Jordan River in Article 6. The UN Charter, Chapter XII, Article 80, upholds the Mandate’s provisions. The 1920 San Remo Treaty and the 1924 Anglo-American Convention also enshrined Jewish territorial claims in international law.

Yet the Post isn’t alone in de facto deciding in favor of Palestinian claims. An August 14, 2020 Vox article by Alex Ward (“Kamala Harris’s foreign policy, explained”) incorrectly asserted that the Jewish National Fund (JNF) “played a major role in pushing Palestinians out of their lands to make way for the State of Israel.” This is, in every sense, ahistorical.

In fact, Jews are from Judea and Samaria, an area that only in the last half-century or so has been referred to as the “West Bank.” The Jewish presence in the land of Israel predates that of the Arab and Islamic conquests in the 7th century — by thousands of years. Further, that presence has been continuous. Indeed, in Jerusalem, for example, Jews constituted a majority of the inhabitants since the 1840s — long before the 1901 creation of the JNF.

Another important but omitted fact: much of the land that Jews acquired was purchased from Arabs, including from several notable Palestinian Arab families. As the historian Benny Morris noted in his 2008 book 1948: “A giant question mark hangs over the ethos of the Palestinian Arab elite: Husseinis, as well as Nashashibis, Khalidis, Dajanis, and Tamimis … sold land to the Zionist institutions and/or served as Zionist agents or spies.” These families, many of whom would lead opposition to the existence of Israel and the right of Jewish self-determination, secretly sold land to the very movement that they denounced.

Indeed, as the historian Yehoshua Porath documented in The Palestinian Arab National Movement, 1929-1939, when British official John Hope Simpson met with Arabs in the northern part of what is today Israel some Arabs requested a meeting where they “expressed their views in support of Jewish immigration and land purchases.” “These people,” Porath noted, “were owners of large tracts of fallow land of which they wanted to sell part in order to reclaim the rest. Since they could not find any potential Arab buyer, they needed Jewish immigration and growing Jewish demand for land in order to sell it to them for as dearly as possible.”

To be sure, this was not a majority viewpoint, and those Arabs who were found to have publicly sold land to Zionists were — and still are — denounced as traitors.
Yet, as noted above, prominent anti-Zionist Palestinian Arabs still sold land to Jews, albeit secretly.

Reviewing data from 1920-1939, Porath concludes that as much as 52.6% of the land acquired by Zionists was purchased from non-Palestinian Arab landowners, while 24.6% was purchased from Palestinian Arab landowners, and only 9.4% from the fellahins, or peasants, who rarely owned land under the Ottoman Empire. Beginning in 1928, “the amount of land bought by Jews from Palestinian landowners (both big and small) exceeded the amount bought from non-Palestinian landowners.”

Jews, then, are not only indigenous to Israel, but they also acquired much of the land that is today Israel by purchasing it — often from Palestinian Arabs themselves. To be sure, Palestinian Arabs could have had a state, with some of it constituted in Judea and Samaria — including in 1948 when they rejected the UN’s 1947 Partition Plan, choosing instead to make war on Jews. On a number of occasions, they’ve been offered a state, but they’ve consistently rejected statehood if it meant living in peace next to a Jewish state.

This raises the question: when and why do many in the media choose to refer to the land as “Palestinian”? Particularly when no Palestinian Arab state has ever existed and Jewish claims to the land, both historical and legal, exist? As the blogger Elder of Ziyon has documented, from 1948-1967, when Jordan occupied Judea and Samaria and part of Jerusalem after seizing them in the 1948 war, “the New York Times recognized Jerusalem and the entire West Bank as being part of Jordan, and the Israeli side of Jerusalem was merely an ‘Israeli sector,’ but not part of Israel.” For several years, The New York Times continued to refer to cities like Ramallah — today the seat of the Palestinian Authority — as being “Israeli-occupied Jordan.” The term “West Bank” was seldom used; the land, the Times claimed was Jordanian. “Slowly,” Elder notes, “the Times started to realize that calling it ‘Jordanian’ didn’t make sense as Jordan wanted less and less to do with it. Suddenly, Israel wasn’t occupying Jordanian land, but merely an area whose legal status had yet to be defined — the West Bank.”

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, usage of the term “West Bank” became more widespread at the Times and other outlets — and with it, the implied notion that “West Bank” means “Palestinian” and that the land was, and always had been, Arab.

But according to many in the press, the land could not — it must not — ever be held to be Jewish. It can be Jordanian. It can be Palestinian. But Jews’ claims to their ancestral homeland are to be erased or minimized.

Mr. Dums is a Senior Research Analyst for CAMERA, the 65,000-member, Boston-based Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis. Visit suburbanorthodox.org for the current issue.

One step closer to compromise
By Anat Talmy
The Israel-UAE treaty is another fracture in the united Arab front.

We should celebrate. A historic peace deal to normalize the relationship between Israel and the United Arab Emirates has been reached. This achievement would not have happened without U.S. facilitation, and it opens the Middle East to a new chapter. The plan will include reciprocal embassies, economic investments, trade, direct flights and permission for UAE citizens to visit the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are polarizing leaders, but with this accord they have united two enemy states along common interests. While not singular, it is momentous. It is thus unfortunate that it is being derided by some who are unwilling to appreciate the value and potential virtuous cycle this accord may lead to.

Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) tweeted, “We won’t be fooled by another Trump/Netanyahu deal.” IfNotNow, a progressive Jewish American activist group opposing the Israeli presence on the West Bank, said “there is nothing to celebrate about Trump & Netanyahu’s latest sleight of hand, which once again, seeks to distract from their failures in leadership as they face an ongoing pandemic, economic crisis, civil unrest, & plummeting support from the public.” And Jamal Zahalka, a Knesset member who is a part of the Joint Arab List, tweeted that this agreement is a bad one made by dangerous people. One would also expect that organizations such as the Jewish Voice for Peace, whose main goal is achieving peace between the Palestinians and Israelis, would embrace this peace accord as the first step in this direction. But alas, they denounced this agreement as “is nothing more than theatrics.”

Acknowledging this achievement and its potentially huge downstream effects should be an obvious step, and indeed many people on the left, among them Dennis Ross and Thomas Friedman, have done so. It may well be that those who oppose this peace agreement are simply so deranged with hate for Trump or Netanyahu that they can’t bring themselves to give these leaders the credit for achieving it. But for some, more subtle reasons may be in play: They are either unwilling to accept that a peace agreement necessarily involves compromises from both sides or are unable to admit that their fundamental assumptions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were wrong.

The first overturned assumption of the left regarding the conflict is that resolving the Palestinian issue is the only way for achieving normalization with the Arab world. Netanyahu, however, has repeatedly emphasized that the Palestinians are not the key to Middle East peace. The reason is explained thoroughly by Micah Goodman in his...
Following year his administration recognized the Golan Heights as a part of Israel. The year after that, the administration announced that Israel’s West Bank settlements do not violate international law. All these actions were widely criticized by liberals and by many Arab leaders across the Middle East. They claimed that these actions would lead to turmoil, cause a reversal of Israel’s budding relations with Arab states and harm U.S. efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. Instead, the opposite has occurred. The Trump administration’s acts have bolstered the prospects of peace rather than undermined it.

The Israel-UAE treaty is another fracture in the united Arab front. Until now, only two other countries have signed a peace treaty with Israel: Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. The agreement with the UAE will hopefully pave the road to warmer relations with the rest of the Arab world. Moreover, that this deal is on the heels of the unveiling of the Trump administration’s “Peace to Prosperity” vision earlier this year, for which the UAE was present, signals to the Palestinians that the UAE has had enough of Palestinian rejectionism. Bahrain and Oman were also at the unveiling. Might they be next to change allegiances?

For some, a peace deal that doesn’t include the Palestinians is not an achievement. But due to current Palestinian rejectionism, an agreement that does include them is simply not possible. Israeli accords made with Arab countries may well be what be the factor that brings the Palestinians to the negotiating table. The more Arab countries that follow the UAE’s lead, the more likely it is that the Palestinian leadership will be forced to compromise. And it is only through compromise that a greater peace can be achieved.

Ms. Talmy is an Israeli-American software engineer living in Pittsburgh.
The problem is that an embassy can be shut down on a moment’s notice. An established flight route or a trade agreement can be canceled with one phone call. How do we know? Because it already happened – with other Gulf kingdoms.

Following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, Israel established diplomatic or trade offices in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar. These moves were hailed as major breakthroughs for peace. But a few years later, when Arafat launched the Second Intifada, all that was gone. As punishment for Israel defending itself against suicide bombers and Lynch mobs, those Arab Gulf regimes broke off their relations. Later, some of them found it was beneficial to them to unofficially reestablish some contacts.

They acted according to what was useful to them, not because of any sincere, permanent change of heart regarding Israel or Jews. The UAE’s new agreement with Israel is useful to the UAE right now; the minute it becomes less useful – for whatever reason – the agreement will not be worth the paper it was printed on.

The pattern was established with the Oslo agreement. Israel made concrete, on-the-ground concessions – it agreed to the creation of the Palestinian Authority, a self-governing entity that occupies 40 percent of Judea-Samaria and shelters and sponsors terrorism against Israel. In exchange, Israel received gestures: unenforceable promises of peace by the PA and offices in several tiny Gulf countries. That made both Israelis and world Jewry feel good. It tasted like “normalization.” But this vanished as quickly as it had arrived.

The creation of the PA was an almost-irreversible concession. In theory, Israel could dismantle the PA. In practice, doing so would result in so much international condemnation and punitive actions that probably no Israeli government will ever do it. The same is sadly true of the new UAE agreement.

Israelis and American Jews are celebrating this “feel good” moment. One U.S.-based pro-Israel group on the right announced that it is “profoundly grateful” for this “momentous day.” Another declared that it is “thrilled” by this “game-changing” agreement.

But the game has not changed. In fact, Israel is trapped once again in the all too familiar game of having to pay for symbolic gestures with the hard currency of real and probably irreversible concessions – this time the suspension of applying Israeli law to any part of Judea-Samaria.

In theory, a future Israeli government could proceed with applying Israeli law there. But in practice, doing so would result in the UAE breaking off relations. And if any other Gulf sheikhdoms follow the UAE in signing deals with Israel in the days ahead, they too will condition their recognition on Israel refraining from applying sovereignty.

Thus, any future Israeli decision to proceed with sovereignty will mean multiple Arab states breaking off relations, not to mention massive international condemnations, U.N. resolutions, American pressure, and the like. It is highly unlikely that any Israeli government would have the courage to do that.

Supporting Jewish sovereignty and development throughout the undivided Land of Israel, and opposing creation of a Palestinian Arab state in the Jewish homeland, has never been popular stands to take. They have meant defying the United Nations, the New York Times, and the Union for Reform Judaism, among others. It means being disliked by many Democrats. And now, unfortunately, it also means coming into conflict with the Trump administration.

It may feel “thrilling” for a moment to bask in the warm attention of some Gulf dictator, and to find oneself on the same side as a president or an important newspaper. But that is not the Jewish way to evaluate political or diplomatic developments. The very essence of both Judaism and Zionism is the willingness to remain loyal to eternal principles and beliefs, even if nobody else in the world will accept them.

Mr. Phillips is national director of Herut North America’s U.S. division. Herut is an international movement for Zionist pride and education and is dedicated to the ideals of pre-World War II Zionist leader Ze’ev Jabotinsky.

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Russia and Iran Might Be Behind the Flare-Up in the Caucasus

By Irina Tsукerman

What it means for Israel.

After Armenia’s attack on Azerbaijan’s borders on July 12, a flurry of speculative articles appeared that contained obvious disinformation intended to portray what had happened as either a continuation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, an extension of Armenian-Turkish tensions, or part of a larger proxy conflict between Turkey and Russia, which is present in Syria and Libya and has most recently divided NATO.

At first glance, the chain of events that led to the current conflict seems straightforward. Armenia attacked Azerbaijani positions without warning, putting at risk civilians residing in the Tovuz area. At least 11 members of the military and one elderly civilian were killed.

Armenia then proceeded to boast about having taken out a general for the first time ever, while simultaneously claiming it had been provoked. Several other senior Azerbaijani officers were also killed, which points to a premeditated attack, not an act of spontaneous violence. Indeed, this development calls into question the narrative that the current escalation is just the latest in a series of skirmishes arising from Armenia’s illegal occupation of 20% of Azerbaijan’s internationally recognized territory.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has become a protracted crisis due to a combination of ethnic cleansing...
of Azerbaijanis from both Armenia and the occupied territories, the turning of over a million Azerbaijanis into refugees and IDPs, the turning of Armenia into a virtually monoethnic state, and the destruction of cultural heritage.

The last major escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict took place in 2016, when Azerbaijan reclaimed the strategic village of Çocuq Mızrancı. As residents of the liberated village and elsewhere along the ceasefire line can attest, unprovoked violations are a part of daily life. Armenian snipers targeting civilians have wounded or killed many and forced others to vacate their houses.

But this most recent attack was not launched from the occupied region, but rather along the international border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, in close proximity to geopolitically essential oil pipelines.

Azerbaijan’s ambassador to the US, Elin Suleymanov, warned that Israel’s oil supply could be endangered due to these border clashes. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline “provides Israel with 40% of its oil,” but also ensures that Russia and Iran cannot monopolize delivery to Europe and Israel from the Caspian region. Azerbaijan, already a top competitor to Russia and Iran in supplying European energy needs, is about to bypass Armenia and Russia to become a significant supplier of gas to southern Europe via the Southern Gas Corridor, which is scheduled to be fully operational by year’s end.

The diversification of Europe’s LNG sources undermines Russian and Iranian political power, which is premised on the threat of leaving Europe out in the cold. Their positions were already precarious when the US ended all oil trade waivers for the Islamic Republic last year. It only just lifted waivers on Russia’s construction of the Nordstrom II pipeline (initially sanctioned in December 2019). Circumventing US sanctions is a matter of survival for these regimes.

Iran in particular has faced economic devastation due to Washington’s “maximum pressure” campaign. Tehran, already more dependent on Beijing as a result of a recently concluded 25-year trade deal, has essentially rented out the oil fields in Ahwaz to China.

For Armenia, the new escalation has potentially favorable military and political ramifications. Armenia is part of a military bloc known as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The current conflict may be an attempt to draw Azerbaijan into a bigger conflagration with CSTO members, who are pledged to protect one another. According to Fariz Ismailzade, Vice Rector of the ADA University, the likelihood that this gambit will succeed is diminished by Azerbaijan’s good relations with two CSTO member states: Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Armenian lobbyists are trying to gain a political advantage by portraying the crisis as a standoff with Turkey (a position to which Turkey lends credence by offering to arm Azerbaijan) as well as with France (a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, which focuses on finding a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict) and various other NATO members.

In the US, ANCA, a well-organized and politically influential Armenian lobby group, has been playing up the perception of the inseparability of the two Turkic countries in the public mind and taking advantage of general American ignorance of historical and political realities. It is attempting to tie Azerbaijan to Turkey’s Ottoman past and current neo-Ottoman ambitions. In addition, ANCA has manipulated various ethnic and religious biases in pursuit of political support, even attacking Israel’s Ambassador to Azerbaijan George Deek, who is Christian.

ANCA also seeks to benefit politically from a heated US presidential election year. It anticipates a more favorable outlook in Washington in the event that the Democrats prevail in November and is now planting the seeds of anti-Azerbaijan action, such as a proposed bill that would freeze all military sales to that country. The proposing of such a bill required a provocation, such as an act of war, which is why ANCA has been at the forefront of creating the perception that Azerbaijan struck first.

This is not a one-off event. ANCA cultivates relationships with both members of Congress and figures in the think tank world, constantly pushing the idea of “Artsakh,” a fake republic in the otherwise empty occupied territories that is unrecognized by anyone except Russia. ANCA creates layers of legal fictions via continuous unilateral actions such as repeated requests for large humanitarian packages from Congress for the ersatz entity, tying these requests to aid for Armenia proper.

There are red flags pointing to the planned and strategic nature of this operation. Indeed, in retrospect, there were warning signs, such as Iran’s growing presence in the vicinity and more direct assistance to Armenia for weeks prior to the attack. A few weeks prior to that, Iran and Armenia reinstated a visa-free regime, perhaps weeks prior to the attack. A few weeks prior to that, Iran and Armenia reinstated a visa-free regime, perhaps contributing to Armenia’s poor handling of COVID-19. In June, Russia and Armenia were engaging in talks about running biological labs, a convenient cover for bringing Russian biological weapons close to Azerbaijan, a development that would threaten all of the Caucasus and should concern the US.

Armenia and Russia are also interested in developing joint military forces. Not only is Russia completely running the show, but it is increasingly erasing any semblance of Armenia’s independence and asserting its own military presence in the region in a manner that can only be described as menacing. All these factors independently of each other should have been causes for concern, but that they are all occurring at once when the US is struggling with internal crises and a beleaguered foreign policy in a hotly contested election year points to a premeditated operation designed to help advance a political agenda.

Azerbaijan’s information warfare against Armenia has been partially successful, such as its display of sophisticated Israeli drones that Armenia, with mixed results, has tried to claim credit for downing. On the
political front, however, the outcome so far has been largely driven by ANCA’s organized campaign.

Azerbaijan should respond to these attacks through a combination of methods. First, it should strive to become a “country brand,” like Singapore, by diversifying its economy away from oil dependency, becoming a hi-tech hub for the region, and building investor confidence through joint ventures and the expansion of electronic government services. Ismail Rustamov, the representative of Azerbaijani society in the US, has suggested steps focused on investor confidence to help overcome perceptions of business risks.

Azerbaijan should form a closer joint defense relationship with the US, benefiting from joint training and insights from experienced field operatives and officers. Additionally, greater resources need to be marshaled for information warfare and the political aspect of the battle.

John Kerry Holds Fast to His Middle East Misconceptions

By David Harsanyi

August 19, 2020

nationalreview.com

Even after history has proved him wrong.

It took approximately 20 seconds for former secretary of state John Kerry to drop the first flagrant lie in his Democratic National Convention speech on Tuesday, when he claimed that the Obama administration’s so-called Iran deal had “eliminated the threat of an Iran with a nuclear weapon.” It didn’t get any better from there.

Kerry knows well that sunset provisions in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) provided Iran’s government with a pathway to building nuclear weapons in a few years. He knows well that Israel uncovered a giant cache of documents with instructions on how to jumpstart a program to build a nuclear arsenal, which undermined both the spirit and the rationale of the nonproliferation agreement Iran signed. He knows that Iran was developing ballistic-missile programs meant to deliver nuclear weapons.

Kerry’s big accomplishment was to destroy a sanctions program that was working, thereby saving the Islamic Republic from economic ruin. This allowed the Islamist government to strengthen its proxies in Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Yemen, and Iraq.

Now Kerry says Trump “doesn’t know how to defend the troops”? Well, I’m not sure that the man who oversaw the billions in direct cash payments to a government that had a hand in murdering and maiming hundreds of American troops has the moral authority to level that criticism. Kerry himself acknowledged that sanctions relief would likely end up in the coffers of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard — now a designated terror group. Surely, then, he knew that the pallets of euros and Swiss francs he was shipping to Tehran in an unmarked cargo plane would also find their way to the groups triggering conflicts across the Middle East — not to mention subjugating people at home.

While many argued for a maximum-pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic, Kerry preferred the no-pressure route. The Iran deal, in fact, often seemed to be the Obama administration’s top obsession. Nothing would stand in the way. And while the media echo chamber was misleading the public at home, Kerry was placating Russia and allowing a humanitarian disaster to unfold in Syria in an effort to save the deal.

Around the time the Obama administration was chasing an Iran deal, the Syrian government, backed by the Islamic Republic, was crossing the president’s Red Line and gassing civilians. Michael Doran, a former senior director of the National Security Council, noted that from the beginning of the crisis Obama “showed deference to Iran on the nuclear front” and “the same deference to the Iranian interest in Syria.” Even when the Unites States began funding rebel forces in Syria, the administration reportedly wouldn’t allow Iranian’s ally to be touched.

When pressed on the matter by some Syrian civil-society workers in London, then Secretary Kerry snapped, “What do you want me to do, go to war with Russia?” Obama officials — led by Kerry — long peddled this false choice: the Iran deal or war. Well, we are no longer a party to Iran deal, and there is no war. Meanwhile, there is a highly weakened Iran, and there are growing alliances among our Sunni allies and Israel.

Kerry would continue to entertain Iranian officials even after he was out of government. When Trump ordered a drone strike of the terrorist Qasem Soleimani, a man who masterminded the killing of American soldiers and thousands of Iraqi civilians, Kerry said the world was in “no way at all” safer, and claimed that Trump was risking an “outright war.” All Iran did was launch a performative counterstrike.

Kerry was wrong about Iran. Kerry was also wrong about Israel — a nation he doesn’t ever seem to consider an “ally” in his speeches about Obama’s alleged foreign-policy successes. And when the U.S. embassy was about to be moved to Jerusalem, Kerry warned it would lead to “an
explosion” in the Middle East — more specifically, “an absolute explosion in the region, not just in the West Bank and perhaps even in Israel itself, but throughout the region.” Moreover, Kerry declared, it would have a serious and negative repercussions on relations between Israel and the Arab world, making peace far less likely.

Of course, outside of some typical Palestinian noise, the opposite has happened. Only recently, Israel and the United Arab Emirates agreed to a historic deal that normalized relations between them. They were no doubt a dream of mutually beneficial wealth returning to the region helped forge the pacts. Right now, though, Obama has one more Nobel prize than he does a peace agreement. And time keeps proving John Kerry wrong.

The Mossad Head Suggests That Turkey Might Be More Dangerous Than Iran

By Roger Boyes

Ankara is dedicated to keeping its neighbors from enjoying fossil-fuel-funded prosperity.

The man who is given most public credit for negotiating a groundbreaking deal between Israel and the UAE is the head of Mossad, Yossi Cohen. He has been talking secretly with fellow spooks in the Gulf states for years, pointing out that they shared a common enemy: Iran. But there was one encounter about 20 months ago when he let slip another agenda. “Iranian power is fragile,” he reportedly told spymasters from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, “but the real threat is from Turkey.”

That was quite something coming from the spy chief who masterminded the Israeli heist of large chunks of the Iranian nuclear archive from a warehouse in central Tehran. His point, though, was not that Iran had ceased to be an existential menace but rather that it could be contained: through sanctions, embargoes, intelligence sharing and clandestine raids. Turkey’s coercive diplomacy, its sloppily calculated risk-taking across the Middle East, posed a different kind of challenge to strategic stability in the eastern Mediterranean.

The region is beginning to feel a bit like the Balkans in the early 1990s, a space occupied by failed and failing states, mounting popular anger, too much military hardware and big powers itching to exploit a power vacuum. The eastern Mediterranean, normally the haunt of holidaymakers at this time of year, is living dangerously. Turkish warships, escorting a vessel suspected of transporting arms to Libya, were put on battle stations when a French frigate tried to challenge it. France is reinforcing its naval presence and may use it to support Russian ground-to-air missiles, believes it can operate outside alliance norms. Its case is that Greece and its many islands are preparing to exploit the deep-sea gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean basin and thus turn the sea into a prosperous Greek lake. The ambitions of the Republic of Cyprus have also drawn Turkish anger: it surmises that Turkish-dominated northern Cyprus will not be able to share in the Greek bonanza.

The dream of mutually beneficial wealth returning to this corner of the Med, of a Phoenician empire 2.0, is shared not only by Greece and Cyprus but also Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Italy and even the Palestinian Authority. Yet Recep Tayyip Erdogan views regional energy co-ordination as a project designed chiefly to marginalise Turkey.

Here, then, is why the eastern Med has become such a volatile mess: it is torn between Erdogan’s drive to make Turkey into the indispensable Eurasian power, Russian opportunism and the corrupt cabals that have robbed regional governments of their ambition. Neither the European Union nor Nato seems ready to calm the waters.

The crises of the Levant hop like performing fleas from one society to another. It took a huge docksise explosion to highlight Lebanon’s critically infirm institutions, to expose how many of society’s biggest problems have been simply dumped in a freezer and forgotten. The collapse of the country’s banks has also destroyed the savings of the Syrian middle class who thought their neighbour was a safe haven. Increasingly the international community seems to think that keeping Bashar al-Assad in place is preferable to the meltdown that could follow his removal.

The Lebanese blast was felt across the water in Cyprus and should have woken up its elites. For almost half a century they have put up with a divided island. The north is an impoverished Turkish fiefdom; the south is a convenient EU pit stop for Russian cash. How much longer can that continue? Turkey is letting more refugees pass its borders to make the sea trip to Greece; just as
Vladimir Putin uses gas as a means of pressure on western Europe, so Erdogan weaponises migrants. Turkey also knows how to turn the tap on and off to Hamas in the Gaza strip, Israel’s running sore.

And so it is that Turkey flirts with war. Erdogan might see it differently, view himself as the master of unpeace, in which he accumulates influence by denying others the space to prosper. His military support for the Libyan government in Tripoli is supposed in the first instance to thwart his rivals and their proxies. A marine exploration agreement with Tripoli was clinched with a view to blocking others. But he is plainly overextending Turkish power, in northern Syria, in its endless struggle with the Kurds.

How the ADL Erased Al Sharpton’s History of Anti-Jewish Agitation
By Liel Leibovitz    August 23, 2020
Rendering him kosher for other Jewish organizations.
This past weekend, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella group uniting 125 local Jewish communities and 17 national Jewish organizations, sent an email to its followers proudly announcing that it has signed on as a partner in the Virtual March on Washington this week, an event organized by Al Sharpton.

Because last week also marked the 29th anniversary of the Crown Heights riots, it’s worth it to stop and recall that among his many distinctions—MSNBC pundit, and an adviser who reportedly regularly speaks to Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, collector of innumerable sateen suits—Al Sharpton is also currently America’s only living pogrom leader.

After a car driven by a Hasidic Jew accidentally swerved and struck a young African American boy, killing him, hundreds of the neighborhood’s Black residents rioted in the streets, chanting “death to the Jews!” as well as looting stores, attacking anyone who was visibly Jewish, and ripping mezuzot off of door posts. Sharpton was quick to arrive on the scene, leading a march in which participants burned an Israeli flag and called to kill all Jews. At the young boy’s funeral a few days later, Sharpton delivered a eulogy that borrowed heavily from The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, saying that the Jewish residents of the neighborhood practiced “apartheid” and were there only to further the Jewish global grip on money and power. He ended by ominously shouting: “pay for your deeds.”

At least one Jew had already paid the ultimate price for Sharpton’s incitement: A few days earlier, 20 Black men surrounded Yankel Rosenbaum, a 29-year-old student, stabbing him in the back and beating him so badly they smashed in his skull. Rosenbaum succumbed to his wounds later that night. Sharpton showed up on the scene soon after, ensuring that the rioting continued for days.

The constant search for enemies and scapegoats exhausts even his supporters, and has left him almost friendless in the region. He admires Putin yet seems incapable of imitating Putin’s formula of freezing conflicts he cannot win and settling for modest gain. The Kremlin leader deployed just enough force to keep Assad in power, to secure a Russian military base and a Mediterranean port. Erdogan, it seems, doesn’t know the meaning of “just enough” and has yet to win anything much from his erratic policy of almost-war.

After the Cold War there were hopes that Russia could be a useful member of western clubs. It became a strategic rival. Turkey was seen as a possible EU member. It reinvented itself as the world’s loose cannon.

As the years went by, Sharpton was given ample opportunity to apologize for his prominent role in this modern day anti-Semitic bloodletting. He never did.

Why, then, is this unrepentant hater being supported by a major Jewish organization? Why, barely a year after a spree in which visibly observant Jews were violently attacked in record numbers, are Jewish organizations siding up to kiss Sharpton’s ring?

One might be inclined to rail against the JCPSA—if, that is, you didn't understand that it's a meaningless umbrella organization for local JCRCs (Jewish Community Relations Councils), many of whom routinely ignore it. So where’s the real power here? Who actually koshered Sharpton enough to send the signal to other, lesser organizations that it was OK to lend him their name and whatever credibility they might still be able to pretend they have?

Unbelievably, it was the ADL.

If you’re not particularly invested in the annals of organized Jewish life, you may still remember the Anti-Defamation League as a sterling organization, a staunch and serious bulwark that once inspiring saw the fight against anti-Semitism as expanding its mission to defend and protect other minorities.

No longer. As soon as he took over the venerable organization in 2015, Jonathan Greenblatt, a former Obama aide, committed himself and his group’s considerable resources not to the hard and often thankless job of documenting and, when needed, standing up to prejudice, but to the far trendier and more glamorous pursuit of amplifying the sort of headlines that sophisticated, educated, affluent people—whose circumstances couldn’t be any more different than those of the actual Jews being physically attacked in their far less glamorous neighborhoods—like to pretend matter.

Here’s a clear and maddening example: One key reason good, honest people used to trust the ADL was the group’s commitment to painstakingly tracking the number
of anti-Semitic attacks in America, a survey long considered our most reliable barometer. In 2018, however, the group came under criticism for flubbing its reporting in a major way, feeding the perception—repeated and amplified by the mainstream media—that anti-Semitism in America was sharply on the rise as a direct result of Donald Trump’s election. When examined, the group’s alarming claim—that anti-Semitic incidents spiked 57% in 2017—fell apart: First, the group admitted it wasn’t monitoring confirmed attacks but rather reported attacks, a far weaker metric; second, and much more seriously, the ADL’s survey counted not only incidents that could reasonably be considered bona fide attacks or threatened attacks but also occasions of Jews “perceiving themselves victimized due to their Jewish identity.” As a result of this methodological choice, the ADL’s survey, for example, counted hundreds of threatening calls to Jewish community centers made by a mentally troubled Israeli teenager. You had to read the report’s fine print to learn that the number of violent attacks against Jews that year had actually decreased by 47%; Greenblatt did not advertise this finding in his public communications, going so far as to write in The New York Times and say that “incidents include high-profile ones such as neo-Nazis marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting ‘Jews will not replace us,’” as well as “physical assaults.” The bottom line was clear: The head of the ADL, contrary to his organization’s own findings, was arguing that a clear and present danger threatened the well-being of American Jews, a danger charged and accelerated by the president.

Despite paying lip service to anti-Semitic violence from groups traditionally associated with the left—it was impossible not to, given the swelling of violent incidents involving Black assailants battering Jews in New York, hardly a stronghold of the Klan—Greenblatt continued to tether his group to the social media driven efforts of the #Resistance. In June, for example, he became one of the most vocal advocates calling on Facebook to censor pro-Trump political ads. The man he joined in this effort to stifle free speech and censor a business owned by Mark Zuckerberg, a successful Jewish entrepreneur? Al Sharpton.

Greenblatt’s decision to choose faddish politics over the less glittering work of keeping Jews safe is maddening enough. It’s even more infuriating that he failed; having made his odious moral decision, he then refused to even seek out the minorest price from Sharpton for bringing him back into the fold of acceptability—not even a simple apology that would at least telegraph a distaste for anti-Semitism to Sharpton’s many followers. Greenblatt couldn’t even muster that small gesture. A soulless and cynical political operative is one thing; a supine and ineffectual one is another.

Where does all this leave us, regular Jews who don’t care too much for the skullduggery of organizational politics and who just want Jews to be able to go to the store or play in a playground or jog in the park without having their heads bashed in?

It’s time for us to realize that many of the organizations we considered to be cornerstones of American Jewish life are dying. Some are imploding in obvious ways, as COVID-19 or other external circumstances rob them of their life force in one fell swoop. But many more are ceasing to exist by becoming something very, very far from what they were established to be, and by harnessing their energies to groups and causes that have little or nothing to do with Jews. The ADL is one such example; so is the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, which continues to cheer on Mayor Bill de Blasio even as he blatantly and vilely targets Jews—and Jews alone—for their role in spreading the coronavirus and does absolutely nothing to keep his Jewish constituents safe from violent attacks.

These groups, and many more like them, have sadly chosen the benefits of being associated with the smart set over the duty of standing with their own community.

What’s most challenging here for us regular folks is that we could once count on these organizations to be our moral compasses—to study and understand the world in ways we couldn’t and to then point us in the right directions, first in knowing what was right and what was wrong, and then in confidently spending our resources (time, money, attention, and more) accordingly. No more.

As we enter Elul, a month of introspection and moral accounting, there’s one small but not unimportant thing we must do to make ourselves and our communities safer, stronger, and more just: We can take back this burden—and the power that went along with it. Let us stop supporting, in deed or check or word, any organization that chooses Instagram politics over needy people. Let us abandon those who huddle with pogromists. Let us demand the respect we deserve, and reject anyone who uses “the Jewish community” as a prop in some seedy political game. We’ve real enemies, and we haven’t the luxury of self-serving officials happy to sacrifice us for their own benefit. It’s time to be our own leaders.