

**Israel's Governing Coalition Struggles with Inexperience and Growing Pains**

By Haviv Rettig Gur

timesofisrael.com

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**Bigger problems than the opposition.**

The failures came in quick, maddening succession. One bill after another crashed in the Knesset plenum, sometimes from laughable and embarrassing errors by coalition lawmakers. Some pundits labeled it the worst string of legislative losses incurred by any ruling coalition in the Knesset's history.

That was last week. And it was painful to watch.

There was the cannabis legalization law, a bill long championed by New Hope's MK Sharren Haskel. It had already won the government's preliminary approval with a vote in the cabinet's legislation committee; now it was the Knesset's turn. After a day-long filibuster by the opposition on Wednesday, all seemed set. Israel would finally, at long last, legalize personal-use marijuana.

But just before the vote, it seemed to suddenly dawn on the coalition leadership that they didn't have the support of Ra'am, the conservative Islamic party deeply suspicious of pot legalization.

"You're condemning your community to lives of crime," Haskel urged the Arab lawmakers at the last minute. "Cannabis usage among Arabs is at 45%." She warned that their opposition to legalizing the plant "is destroying the future of your young people, to be lawyers, doctors — they can't even work as bus drivers with a criminal record."

But Ra'am refused to budge.

In a strange sight, Ra'am's leader Mansour Abbas used his allotted minutes at the Knesset podium to publicly ask Haskel to withdraw her bill for two weeks so the party could study the proposal — in a spirit of "cooperation," he assured.

Haskel was forced to agree — not behind closed doors, quietly, as might be expected between coalition partners, but at the Knesset podium in front of television cameras and snickering opposition lawmakers.

Then came the amendments to the Basic Law: Government that would set down the final legal structure for the new government, closing some gaps from last year's legislation and setting the new bifurcated parity government on a firmer footing. It was only when the bill reached the plenum that coalition leaders noticed they didn't have a majority. MKs were simply missing.

Then, on Thursday afternoon, after a grueling week of filibusters and failures, came the most embarrassing moment of them all: In a tight vote on a bill that would have reformed the selection process for rabbinic judges, weakening the ultra-Orthodox stranglehold over the appointments process and allowing more liberal jurists into the religious court system, Knesset Speaker Mickey Levy accidentally voted the wrong way. The final vote was a tie,

51 to 51, instead of the expected 52-50 the coalition leadership was confident it would get.

Speaker Levy quickly called in the Knesset legal adviser's office and asked to change his vote, but was informed that a plenum vote is always, by law, final. The bill failed.

**Self-sabotage**

The Likud-led opposition is part of the story. It has adopted a scorched-earth strategy in the Knesset, voting against every bill and measure irrespective of its substance, on the principle that denying the coalition successes is the priority. That strategy has left the coalition with very narrow majorities in most votes — and only if all parts of the eight-faction coalition are rowing in the same direction.

Opposition filibusters, even on the most minor of votes, repeatedly kept coalition MKs up till the early morning hours in the plenum. Levy had scarcely slept the night before when he cast his wrong vote.

Yet the failures last week weren't really the opposition's fault. The coalition had the numbers, but couldn't marshal and manage them effectively. It wasn't the opposition that neglected to include Ra'am in the drafting process of the cannabis bill, or to ensure full attendance and support for the Basic Law changes. Nothing the opposition did was responsible for Mickey Levy's wrong vote.

Some of these growing pains are expected. As noted by many, the coalition chair, Yamina MK Idit Silman, is one of the least experienced coalition whips in the Knesset's history. But even that doesn't tell the whole story. There's no specific moment in which Silman is clearly responsible for a failure. The return of the pandemic didn't help; Yesh Atid MK Vladimir Beliak tested positive last week and was sent into quarantine, losing the coalition a crucial vote.

On Thursday afternoon, shortly after his mistaken vote, a frustrated Speaker Levy discovered that coalition leaders, reeling from the loss on the rabbinic judges vote, didn't know whether there were more items on the plenum agenda for the day. "How disorganized are you?!" he shouted in frustration, and then formally closed the plenum till Monday.

It was a merciful veil of closure over one of the worst parliamentary weeks for any coalition anyone could remember.

**Newbies**

The government entered the week with Israelis split down the middle over how well it's doing. A Channel 12 poll last Monday asked Israelis if they were "satisfied" with the government. Answers correlated closely to political views. Self-described center-leftists were 67% satisfied,

23% unsatisfied with the new government; on the right, 32% were satisfied, 61% unsatisfied).

Overall, the split was even: 45% to 45%.

The government appears to be enjoying a grace period, but challenges loom. The pandemic is returning, the budget bill must pass by November 4, and the usual run of crises — witness Sunday's Temple Mount tensions — are a seemingly ever-present centrifugal force pulling the coalition partners apart.

How long can the grace period last, given last week's level of parliamentary dysfunction?

There's one good reason for coalition leaders to be optimistic — and that's the apparent reason for the Knesset failures.

As noted, it wasn't the opposition that drove them. It is the coalition's own inexperience.

After 12 years of mostly Likud rule, the opposition parties are mostly parliamentary neophytes. New Hope's cadre of grizzled ex-Likudniks aside, the new government is the first experience in power for most coalition members.

The experience deficit runs from the very top to the very bottom. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and his alternate Yair Lapid have both spent the past few years famously uninvolved in parliamentary wheeling and dealing. Bennett has been a cabinet minister for nearly the entirety of the past eight years, while Lapid left his party's legislating to backbenchers. Bennett and Lapid, then, are nearly as unfamiliar with the Knesset's ways and procedures as the neophyte Silman. There's a parliamentary leadership vacuum at the heart of the new coalition.

At the same time, the coalition has sent the vast majority of its experienced members to the cabinet. As a count by the Makor Rishon newspaper showed, fully 36 members of the coalition are ministers or deputy ministers, and of the 24 that remain, just eight have any significant parliamentary experience.

And then there's the Norwegian Law. To overcome that dearth of manpower in the parliament, the new government expanded the Norwegian Law to enable cabinet ministers to resign temporarily from the Knesset in favor of the next MKs on the list.

Last week saw the 20th MK sworn in under the

Norwegian Law rules, fully one-third of the coalition.

The addition of full-time MKs unencumbered by a cabinet post is, in theory, a boon to the Knesset's ability to do its work. But when combined with the inexperience of the factions from which they hail and their own unfamiliarity with parliamentary work, this vast addition of untested and inexperienced manpower has only created a larger management burden for an overstretched and itself under-experienced parliamentary leadership.

MKs missed votes, misunderstood what they were voting on, and have grown frustrated at the long filibusters and constant procedural logjams imposed on them by the opposition and their own inexperience.

It's too soon to say whether last week offered a glimpse at the limits of this coalition — at how it will ultimately fall — or will serve as a wake-up call to the coalition.

What happened last week wasn't a strategic setback, only a tactical one. The coalition can make up much of the lost ground relatively easily. The rabbinic judges law is expected to return to the plenum as early as this week. The anger at Ra'am over the cannabis bill — among other disagreements — is now being managed behind closed doors.

Meanwhile, faction leaders in the Knesset have started calling on their parties' cabinet ministers to attend important Knesset votes, even if they don't have a right to vote. They need the fast availability of the ministers' experience, the extra hands calling lawmakers to votes or filing quick appeals. Many noticed that Naftali Bennett, who by law cannot resign his Knesset seat, was missing in many of last week's votes.

The coalition stumbled badly, but is showing signs of having learned lessons from those failures.

Still, there's precious little wriggle room going forward. There are scarcely two weeks left to the early-August cabinet vote on the state budget law. A fast month of parliamentary work later, the budget must face its first plenum vote.

The coalition can fumble a vote on cannabis; it will not survive a similar fumble on the state budget. If the budget law doesn't pass by November 4, then by law the Knesset dissolves to new elections.

## Hamas Has Found a New Place from Which to Shoot Missiles at Israel

By Yaakov Lappin

jns.org

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With a little help from Hizballah and Turkey.

The two Grad rockets launched at northern Israel early on Tuesday from southern Lebanon were likely fired by Hamas as part of its attempt to respond to tensions in Jerusalem and clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians around the Temple Mount on Sunday.

The Iron Dome air-defense system intercepted one projectile and a second fell in an open area, causing no injuries or damages. Warning sirens went off in border

areas of northern Israel, and the Israel Defense Forces responded with artillery fire, firing about 12 shells into Lebanese territory.

The Lebanese Armed Forces found a third rocket, which was not launched, south of Tyre.

"Hamas looked for a response to the Temple Mount tensions, but it isn't interested in firing from Gaza. Hence, it was easier to do this from Lebanon—with Hezbollah's coordination," said Maj. (res.) Tal Beerli, director of the

research department at the Alma research center, who analyzes security threats to Israel emanating from Syria and Lebanon.

According to Beeri, a former IDF intelligence officer specializing in the Lebanese and Syrian arenas, Hamas chose to fire from Lebanon for a number of reasons.

The first is that it has not been able to recover from the May conflict with Israel and did not want to draw Israeli fire towards Gaza. Hamas correctly assessed that Israel's retaliation in Lebanon would be significantly smaller in scale than in Gaza, said Beeri.

A broader strategic consideration is Hamas's desire to implement, albeit symbolically, a new "equation," announced by Hezbollah, according to which any perceived Israeli offensive activity near the Temple Mount will be answered with attacks.

Beeri noted that in recent weeks, Iranian-backed Iraqi militias and Houthis in Yemen have pledged their allegiance to this same equation.

The Iraqi Qataib Hezbollah militia announced that it had joined the "regional equation" in June in the latest sign of a coordinated Iranian-led axis of radical entities operating against Israel.

Hamas in Gaza and Hamas in Lebanon tightly coordinate their activities, mainly through the terror organization's headquarters in Turkey, according to Beeri.

A branch of that headquarters, known as the "Construction Bureau," is responsible for arming Hamas in Lebanon and ensuring that it has its own ability to activate weaponry.

It appears as if Hamas's gamble was well-calculated, judging by Israel's restrained reaction. Israel also seems reluctant to respond more forcefully in Lebanon at a time when the country is experiencing severe economic and humanitarian crises—basically, sitting at the brink of collapse.

Addressing the rocket attacks from Lebanon, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz stated that Israel "has an interest in a stable, economically prosperous Lebanon. Unfortunately, the situation in Lebanon is deteriorating, and Hezbollah and other terror organizations are working against the interests of the Lebanese people. We responded last night, and we will continue to respond in the right time and place against any violation of Israeli sovereignty."

He added that Lebanon is responsible for what occurs in its territory.

"We outstretched a hand to Lebanon and offered it humanitarian assistance," said Gantz. "That same outstretched hand is also a steel fist that will respond against any aggression."

## Why the King of Jordan's Visit to Washington Matters—to Israel and to the U.S.

By Ghaith al-Omari and Ben Fishman

washingtoninstitute.org

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**Beset by challenges, Amman needs the assistance of its allies.**

The upcoming visit of Jordan's King Abdullah II—the first by an Arab head of state since President Biden took office—signals a return to Washington's traditionally robust relations with one of its closest Middle Eastern allies. For Amman, the trip falls during a time of acute domestic and external challenges, so the king will be raising a full menu of concrete issues.

### A Challenging Context

Although Jordan just celebrated its centennial, defying countless predictions of its imminent demise, the kingdom is still navigating an unprecedented public rift in the royal family. On April 4, the government announced the discovery of a plot to destabilize the country, and Hamzah bin Hussein, the king's half-brother and former crown prince, was reportedly involved. The plot itself was contained—Hamzah swore fealty to the king, two of his accomplices were sentenced to fifteen years in prison, and no public unrest emerged from the incident (indeed, it may have served as a reminder to Jordanians of the cost of instability). Yet the crisis did highlight the extent of the kingdom's economic troubles and perceptions of corruption.

COVID-19 has hit Jordan's long-struggling economy especially hard. Unemployment reached nearly 25 percent at one point, including a staggering 50 percent youth unemployment. With assistance from the World Bank and

other donors, Amman enacted social relief payments to ease the burden, but these steps are merely stopgaps.

Even before the pandemic, economic hardship had fueled periodic widespread protests, including a string of demonstrations that led to the prime minister's resignation in 2018. Cumulatively, these challenges have eroded public trust in the government, parliament, political parties, and other institutions. The notable exceptions to this are the monarchy, military, and security services, which continue to enjoy very high levels of public confidence according to a September 2020 poll.

Externally, Jordan is facing challenges on all of its borders. To the north, the Syria conflict has flooded the kingdom with refugees, cut off an important trade route, and threatened to bring Iran—directly or through its proxies—to its frontier. To the east, attempts to deepen relations with Iraq (whether bilaterally or through a trilateral process with Egypt) have produced diplomatic progress but little concrete economic dividends. To the west, a weak and fickle Palestinian Authority remains a source of concern, and relations with Israel's leadership were extremely negative under former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, causing civil and diplomatic affairs to suffer greatly (though security ties remained strong). And to the south, King Abdullah's relations with Saudi crown prince Muhammad bin Salman are tepid at best.

In Washington, the relationship with Amman showed signs of fraying under President Trump, though key

aspects remained robust. The kingdom received at least \$1.275 billion per year under a five-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed in 2018. The Trump administration also initiated a process that resulted in the two countries signing a Defense Cooperation Agreement this January, allowing them to coordinate more closely on the security front and enabling the U.S. military to move certain regional assets to Jordan. Even so, Jordanian officials reportedly felt sidelined by the administration's wider Middle East policy, including its 2020 Israeli-Palestinian peace plan (which minimized Jordan's role on Jerusalem) and its policy toward Syria. Amman was also concerned that the visible lack of bilateral warmth would signal a weakening of U.S. support and embolden external meddling and domestic unrest.

#### Ensuring a Productive Visit

In contrast to the unease during Trump's tenure, Amman has exhibited tremendous relief during the early stages of the Biden administration, in part due to the king's personal ties with the new president and many of his senior officials. In the midst of the Hamzah affair, Biden's early call to the king sent an important signal of U.S. support, especially as speculation of a foreign element to the plot ran amok.

Regionally, the Palestinian issue will figure high on the king's agenda during his visit, which will include a July 19 trip to the White House. Although there is no expectation of a full-fledged return to the peace process, the king will seek affirmation of Washington's commitment to the two-state solution and Jordan's special status in Jerusalem—both of which fit the Biden administration's approach to the conflict.

Further, Israel's new prime minister Naftali Bennett and foreign minister Yair Lapid have placed early emphasis on revitalizing the relationship with Amman. On July 8, Lapid and Jordanian foreign minister Ayman Safadi signed an important deal that will increase water sales to the kingdom (after the collapse of the long-negotiated Red Sea-Dead Sea Conveyance Project) and expand Jordanian trade to the West Bank. The United States should applaud this momentum and encourage other areas of cooperation, including healthcare, energy, the environment, and grassroots initiatives.

Bilaterally, discussions will focus on the broad contours of U.S. assistance and renewing the MOU, set to expire after this fiscal year. The United States is by far Jordan's largest bilateral donor, especially since aid from its traditional Gulf partners started drying up last decade. The comprehensive package of U.S. assistance supports the kingdom's budget, military, and development activities. Moreover, the MOU has greatly increased the balance of economic assistance versus military assistance, such that the ratio was more than two to one in fiscal year 2020.

When the Biden administration issued its so-called "skinny budget" request, it pledged to "fully fund key allies in the Middle East including Israel and Jordan." In actuality, however, the proposed budget called for decreasing

Amman's economic support funds by almost \$100 million (or 16 percent) and its foreign military financing by \$75 million (or 18 percent), though Congress will likely increase the administration's request as it has in the past. King Abdullah does not personally negotiate dollar amounts on such matters, but his visits to the White House and Congress will no doubt set the stage for future negotiations over the assistance budget and the next MOU.

Under the Trump administration, the vast majority of economic support funds (\$746 million over the past three years) came in the form of direct budget support. Few countries have received support in this manner over the past decade, and none to the extent of Jordan. Although this practice demonstrates confidence in Amman to manage assistance in a way that best fits its most pressing needs, providing cash grants may limit Washington's leverage to encourage reform, in contrast to the prerequisites mandated by large-scale aid programs from international financial institutions. The Biden administration must decide whether to sustain this practice or link significant budgetary support to more specific reform commitments.

The need for political and economic reform is no secret, as the king himself often acknowledges. On June 10, he formed a national committee to look into some facets of political reform, such as transforming the electoral system and advancing decentralization. Yet despite being politically and geographically representative, the committee was met with widespread public skepticism, pointing again to the worrisome loss of confidence in national institutions.

Those types of issues may be too sensitive for Washington to probe deeply, but other aspects are appropriate for discussion, particularly matters related to the economy, public sector performance, and corruption. The administration could also mention Jordan's downgraded standing in Freedom House's latest annual report, encouraging the king to restore the country's previous level of press freedom. Economically, U.S. officials could offer helpful messages on several fronts: reinforcing the need for action in sectors that the IMF and other authorities have identified as obstacles to advancing private-sector growth; committing to help American companies invest in Jordan's market; and offering to use diplomatic influence with Gulf states to enable the return or expansion of Jordanian workers (whose numbers have been curtailed due to COVID and economic nationalization initiatives, particularly in Saudi Arabia). Yet care should be taken to ensure that calls for improvement on various fronts, while firm, remain private and focused on achievable goals.

Of course, one visit cannot address the totality of U.S.-Jordanian issues. Yet restoring the relationship to its traditional strength will itself bolster Jordan's stability, both by sending an unmistakable signal of U.S. support and by

creating a fruitful environment to advance the extensive bilateral agenda.

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## Iran is Responsible for the Slow Death of Lebanon

By Jonathan Spyer

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**Collapsing currency, shortages, and political crisis, brought on by Hizballah.**

Lebanon is currently in the grip of the worst economic crisis in its history. There are daily shortages of fuel and electricity, a chronic lack of medical supplies, and an absence of essential medicines in hospitals. 77% of Lebanese households are unable to purchase sufficient food. The Lebanese pound has lost 90% of its value over the last two years. Lebanese citizens, meanwhile, are prevented from withdrawing more than \$100 per week, as foreign currency reserves grow thin. The situation is reaching a point of no return, with the real possibility of widespread hunger. Lebanon is, today, by all measures a failed and collapsing state.

How has the country reached this point? Less than two decades ago, Lebanon was revamping its image as a center of commerce and tourism on the Mediterranean coast. The 'March 14' movement, named after the popular mobilization which forced a Syrian withdrawal in 2005, was riding high. It was presented as one of the few successes of the then US Administration's strategy of regional democratization. This reporter visited the country in that period, in 2007. A palpable longing for normality could then be discerned among younger Lebanese. The civil war was already a receding memory. What remained of it, among Sunnis and Christians, at least, was a kind of dread of the possibility that political violence might return. The Israeli occupation of the south had ended in May, 2000. Normality seemed within reach.

What went wrong? What went wrong was discernible also back then. Also then, it was evident that there were two powers in Lebanon. The first, as represented by the March 14 movement, was ostensibly forward looking, orientated toward the west, towards commerce, normality. The other power was that of Iran, via its oldest franchise, the Lebanese Hizballah movement. This interest had its own military power, which outmatched that of the state and dwarfed the other irregular military presences in the country. It had its own economy, too, its own sources of income, its own smuggling routes. The project of the Iranian element was that the two Lebanons should continue to exist indefinitely. The former was to provide a convenient carapace of normality and legitimacy beneath which the latter could continue its allotted tasks in Teheran's long war against Israel. Supporters of the March 14 project had a tendency to avoid the discussion of hard power issues. This in retrospect was to prove fatal.

Any chance that the Lebanon of March 14 might mount a defense in arms of its vision of the country ended in the events of May and June, 2008. In a brief conflict on the streets of Beirut, the forces of Amal and Hizballah

contemptuously brushed aside the haphazard military mobilizations of the pro-March 14 Sunni and Druze forces.

From this point on, the die was cast. It was clear that there would be no further attempt at real resistance to the Iranian project in Lebanon. What there would be instead would be obfuscation, and denial. The Iranian approach fitted perfectly the desire of the Lebanese to ignore reality. This reporter remembers addressing an audience of mainly young Lebanese in London at an event in summer, 2008, shortly after the violent events in Beirut. I warned that the emerging prospect in the country was of Iranian occupation. No one, perhaps understandably, wanted to hear this from an Israeli. 'We'd rather have them than you,' one young Lebanese woman called out, to applause from the audience. So be it. Now she has her wish, and its consequences.

In the years subsequent to 2008, events followed a downward spiral. The Syrian civil war brought around 1.8 million refugees to Lebanon, further straining the country's fragile infrastructure. The Syrian war dealt a crippling blow to the tourism sector, which had accounted for around 7.5% of Lebanon's GDP. Growing Saudi and US discontent at the reality of Iranian power in the country came to a head in 2015-16. In early 2016, Riyadh announced the withdrawal of its deposits from the Central Bank of Lebanon. This followed the cancellation of \$4 billion of aid to the Lebanese armed and security forces. The US 'Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act' of 2015 hit hard at the financial services sector, another key element in the Lebanese economy. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates issued advisories against travel to Lebanon at that time. This ended the country's traditional role as a permissive playground for visitors seeking a congenial respite from Gulf restrictions.

At this stage, Lebanon was seeking to manage a public debt of \$69 billion, totalling 150% of GDP. But as the official economy foundered, the parallel Iran/Hizballah shadow economy prospered. Not, however, in such a way that the average citizen benefitted. The porous or Hizballah supervised borders between Lebanon and Syria allowed for smuggling of oil imports, and their resale in Syria, to the benefit of Hizballah. Captagon amphetamine pills manufactured in Syria, and cannabis were smuggled the other way, finding their destination in European cities or in the Gulf via Hizballah supervised routes. Needless to say, none of the profits from this burgeoning sector went to service the national debt, or to benefit the

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crumbling public infrastructure.

In March 2020, against the background of countrywide, multi sectarian protests against corruption, poor public service, youth unemployment and mismanagement, Lebanon defaulted for the first time on its debt payments. A reform plan was approved by the IMF, but following the government's resignation after the Beirut port explosion in August, 2020, negotiations were stalled. The Lebanese economy contracted by 20% in 2020.

This is the background to the current grave crisis in Lebanon. All the elements – US sanctions, Saudi and international withdrawal of aid and investment, subsequent debt default and loss of confidence, resulting currency devaluation, a shadow economy benefitting only itself, and a paralysed political system – are all directly traceable to the distorting effect that the presence of the pervasive Iranian project on Lebanese soil has brought.

From this point of view, the current situation stands as a stark warning to all countries faced with infiltration by the IRGC and its various militia franchises. These are good at building paramilitary muscle and converting it into political power. They have no knowledge of or interest in economics. As a result, the net outcome of their taking of de facto power in a country will be that country's eventual

ruin and impoverishment. Lebanon is now the case study for this process.

From Israel's point of view, there is little to be done but to continue to guard the borders. There is no reason to suppose that the current chaos in Lebanon will incline the Iranians and their proxies toward military adventures in the south. When hunger and infrastructural collapse are a real prospect, no one is likely to rally around the national colors – not those of Lebanon, and certainly not those of Iran and its local agents. Regarding any international response, international aid should be made contingent on the disarming of the Iranian proxy, and the thorough going reform of the political system. Any other remedy runs the danger of offering support to Lebanon's current Iran-created dysfunctionality. The key point: Lebanon was the first Arab state to undergo internal collapse, and consequently the first to receive the intentions of the IRGC's brand of political-military takeover. With allowance for local variations, similar Iranian efforts are now under way in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Lebanon is the first Arab state to have been brought to the point of destruction by this project. The significance of the current events thus extends far beyond Lebanon's borders. Iran is responsible for the slow death of Lebanon.

## **Alarming Development: China's State Media Pushing Clear Anti-Israel Narrative**

**By Rachel O'Donoghue**

**honestreporting.com**

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**Critics of Israel are not hard to find. It seems that every other day a new article or video is published that pushes a distorted perspective on complex issues and, more generally, casts the Jewish...**

Critics of Israel are not hard to find. It seems that every other day a new article or video is published that pushes a distorted perspective on complex issues and, more generally, casts the Jewish state in a negative light (See here, here, and here).

But while anti-Israel bias in the press is all too prevalent, the recent stream of prejudiced stories appearing in the Chinese media is a disturbing new development. The two countries have traditionally been allies and China represents Israel's second-largest trading partner. While the relationship may not seem the most natural given their geographical distance, different cultures and political systems, and disproportionate sizes, a mutually beneficial economic partnership has nevertheless been cultivated over many years.

Yet this close economic relationship has not stopped the media arm of the Chinese government from recently churning out numerous stories that demonstrate a clear anti-Israel bias.

Following the hostilities between Israel and Hamas earlier this year, China Daily, a broadsheet with the widest circulation of any English-language newspaper in China, produced a number of stories that took aim at the Jewish state.

Announcing the Egypt-brokered ceasefire that ended the latest Gaza conflict, a May 21 article titled, Israel, Hamas agree to start ceasefire early Friday, reads:

Israel has been launching massive raids on the Palestinian enclave with airstrikes, artillery shellings and drone attacks since May 10, in response to the rockets fired by Palestinian militants in Gaza to retaliate for Israel's violation of the sacred Islamic holy site of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

This is the heaviest fighting between Israel and Gaza militants since 2014, which has so far killed 232 Palestinians, including 65 children and 39 women, and 12 Israelis."

The article implied that Hamas terrorists were provoked into firing rockets because of a deliberate "violation" of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli police. But this description misrepresents events as they actually transpired. In fact, Israeli police raided the compound in response to Palestinian rioters who had violently clashed with security forces at the site, throwing rocks at officers among other things. The piece also neglects to mention that while the Al-Aqsa Mosque is one of Islam's holy sites, it is built on the Temple Mount – the holiest site in Judaism.

It is also worth noting that when providing figures on the death toll of the conflict, China Daily only highlights the number of Palestinian women and children who died and omits any reference to Israeli casualties, which

included two children and a number of women. It also overlooks intelligence that suggests 48 percent of Gazans who died were associated with terrorist groups, as well as the number of casualties who were killed by Hamas rockets.

Moreover, a June 26 article, titled China calls for restraint by Israel over tension, states:

A Chinese envoy on Thursday asked for restraint in Gaza and called on Israel to stop illegal settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territory [...]

The Security Council issued a press statement on May 22 welcoming the announcement of a truce in Gaza. Less than a month later, the Israeli government approved the flag march in the holy city, a move that escalated tensions. It also conducted airstrikes in Gaza again.”

First, there is the reference to “illegal settlements” on “Palestinian territory.” Yet the legal status of such settlements is in fact contested. Although they are frequently referred to as a violation of international law, this is not the position of the Israeli government. Under the 1993 Oslo Accords – the comprehensive set of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians – no consensus was reached regarding the status of settlements. For an incisive analysis on how such settlements are legitimate under international law, Andrew Lovy’s overview of the issue is a good place to start.

The second issue raised by the China Daily piece is the suggestion that the Israeli government inflamed tensions by authorizing a flag march in Jerusalem. The key element missing here is context. The so-called “flag march” is an annual Jerusalem Day celebration that commemorates the reunification of the holy city following the 1967 Six-Day War. The claim that this event was deliberately provocative is thus untethered from reality. Furthermore, the article mentions airstrikes in Gaza but omits entirely the fact the strikes were in response to incendiary balloons that were launched at Israel.

Another article, No quick end seen to tensions in the Gaza Strip, published on July 5, describes how peace between Israel and the Palestinians may be hard to achieve under the new government led by Naftali Bennett:

With a shaky coalition, it might be best for the government to continue to follow Netanyahu’s path, such as exaggerating security issues, creating external enemies and taking measures to worsen the external environment to promote internal cohesion and support [...]

Palestine on Thursday complained that Israel’s

collecting Palestinian taxes and customs duty have limited the government’s scope for investment.”

In what way are these security issues exaggerated? Hamas’ own 1988 charter – The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement – explicitly calls for the destruction of Israel. Terrorists from Gaza and the West Bank have perpetrated atrocities against Israeli citizens, including suicide bombings, knife and gun attacks, and the firing of rockets towards civilian-populated towns and cities. Iran, which is currently enriching uranium to levels beyond those allowed under the 2015 nuclear deal, has described Israel as a “cancerous tumor” that will be “uprooted and destroyed.” Meanwhile, the Tehran-backed terrorist group Hezbollah, which rules vast swathes of Lebanon, poses a continuous threat to Israel from the Jewish state’s northern border.

The article offers little clarification of its later assertions. Recent measures taken by Jerusalem have been aimed not at causing instability in the region, but at defending the Israeli population. The airstrikes alluded to in the China Daily piece have been in response to indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza, and targeted Hamas weapons arsenals – many of which were hidden in densely populated civilian areas. Furthermore, in the last year Israel has normalized ties with four Arab countries – the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan – in a major step toward greater stability in the Middle East.

As such, how can Israel’s foreign policy be construed as one that deliberately worsens the external environment?

The article also makes reference to the Palestinian Authority’s criticism of Israel for withholding taxes and customs duties. As before, a critical component is missing from the China Daily piece. There is no mention as to the reason Israel withholds the money: Ramallah’s refusal to end its “pay-for-slay” policy that provides stipends to terrorists and their families.

Such anti-Israel rhetoric, which descended into outright antisemitism on at least one occasion, has not gone unnoticed. In May, the Israeli embassy in China criticized a segment shown on Beijing-based CTGN, which peddled the antisemitic trope that “wealthy Jews” influence US foreign policy makers so that they will favor Israel.

China’s volte-face on Israel may be attributed up to a number of reasons, but regardless of the motives behind this disinformation campaign, it should sound alarm bells for Israel and friends of the Jewish state around the world.

## When Islamists Go Woke

By Ayaan Hirsi Ali

The long march through progressive institutions.

Following ISIS’s demise, Islamists around the world have been forced to radically reassess their strategy against the West. Dashing the utopian hopes of its sympathisers, the fall of the Caliphate has set back the Islamist cause for decades. Just as when many Communists became

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disillusioned once their ideology had been implemented in the Soviet Union, ISIS’s barbarity can no longer be ignored.

True, even in 2021, some groups such as the resurgent Taliban and Boko Haram — to say nothing of the Iranian regime — remain committed to a type of Islamist

militancy that includes an emphasis on violence, with all the human suffering that entails. But for the most part, jihadist militancy has proved unpopular among Muslims, often inviting a violent counter-reaction. Its promise of an Islamist dream state has lost its appeal.

Yet Islamists in the West appear to have found a possible solution that sidesteps, at least for now, the use of explicit violence. The core of this alternative strategy is to focus as much as possible on *dawa*.

Nearly 20 years after 9/11, Westerners still remain unfamiliar with *dawa*. In theory, the term simply refers to the call to Islam, a kind of invitation; Westerners would recognise it as part of a proselytising mission. In practice, however, Islamists rely on *dawa* as a comprehensive propaganda, PR and brainwashing system designed to make all Muslims embrace an Islamist programme while converting as many non-Muslims as possible.

Among Western analysts, *dawa* — which became a tool of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 20th century — has traditionally received far less attention than militant jihad, though observers have emphasised its importance in the “humanitarian” activities of Hamas.

In *Unveiled*, the ex-Muslim Yasmine Mohammed compellingly describes her difficult marriage to the Egyptian jihadist Essam Marzouk. Yasmine commented on the rivalry that exists between jihadists (such as her ex-husband) and ostensibly “non-violent” Islamists:

“The truth is that Essam hated the [Muslim] Brotherhood: he thought Islamists were a bunch of pansies. He was actually aligned with a more militant group in Egypt called Al Jihad, who were the Egyptian wing of Al Qaeda. Both Islamists and jihadis have the same goal — to spread Islam — but they have different methods. Islamists want to do this through passive means such as politics, immigration and childbirth.”

This important point is often lost on politicians in Western countries. For no matter what misguided retired CIA officials may claim, groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood are neither moderate organisations nor pluralist partners in civil society. Islamist groups are certainly not likely to prevent the radicalisation of young Muslims. Instead, as one observer noted more than a decade ago, “the history of the Brotherhood movement shows, in fact, that it has operated by and large not as a firewall against jihadism, but as a fertile incubator of radical ideas in a variety of locales”.

In a cynical way, Islamists achieve far more through *dawa* than when they confine themselves to simply blowing things up and stabbing people to death. The threat is not as obvious. Jihad and the use of violence tend to provoke an immediate response. With *dawa*, on the other hand, it is possible to talk about charity, spirituality and religion — and then compare it to normal religious proselytising missions. In a free society, what reasonable person would take issue with that?

But *dawa* is also about building networks: local, regional and international. In *The Call*, Krithika Varagur revealed both the enormous global scale and opaque nature of these efforts. Saudi Arabia, in particular, has channelled billions of dollars into *dawa* — with much of it directed into the US.

In the West, these regimes are not given much thought, nor is the Islamist infrastructure in the United States. Nonetheless, Islamism is spreading within Western institutions, and it’s largely thanks to an unlikely alliance: *dawa* has recognised the alluring power of “woke”, and has started to adopt the language of civil rights and multiculturalism.

Of course, this is not an entirely American phenomenon, but the energy in our progressive movement has taken this cooperation one step further. In France, by contrast, “Islamogauchisme” (Islamogauchism) is much more likely to be correctly identified as a threat to the model of universal, secular and republican citizenship. In Britain, it remains less prominent, confined to fringe politicians such as George Galloway, who believes that “the progressive movement around the world and the Muslims have the same enemies”.

Yet as historian Daniel Pipes has noted, the relationship between Islamism and extreme Leftism is nothing new. In 2007, Oskar Lafontaine, former chairman of Germany’s Social Democratic party, noted: “Islam depends on community, which places it in opposition to extreme individualism, which threatens to fail in the West. [In addition,] the devout Muslim is required to share his wealth with others. The Leftist also wants to see the strong help the weak.”

But the internal tension between “wokeism” and Islamism is never far away. Just look at Al Jazeera, which uploads documentaries about transgender rights on to its social media channel, while broadcasting sermons suggesting husbands should beat their wives on its Arabic station.

Nevertheless, the two movements do share objectives. Both are anti-West and anti-American. Both have a critical attitude towards “capitalism” based on individualism. True, the Islamists have been around for much longer. But Islamist ideologues are willing to co-operate with non-Muslim Leftists as long as it serves their purposes.

To their credit, some on the Left refuse to countenance Islamism, as they become increasingly aware of the contradiction between supporting universal human rights (including women’s rights) and the demands of Islamists. In France, for example, the centre-Left former Prime Minister Manuel Valls courageously denounced Islamogauchism without the least hesitation.

In the United States, however, such vocal opposition from the Left is increasingly rare. Indeed, at the 2019 Netroots Nation conference — America’s “largest annual conference for progressives” — multiple panel discussions and training sessions reflected the Islamist agenda,



frequently coalescing around a critique of Israel while neglecting the toxic role played by Hamas in perpetuating the conflict. Meanwhile, Linda Sarsour, a feminist organizer and co-chair of the “Women’s March”, has made her support for Islamism more explicit: “You’ll know when you’re living under Shariah law if suddenly all your loans and credit cards become interest-free. Sounds nice, doesn’t it?”

In government, too, Islamism’s capture of progressivism has become increasingly clear. Turkey’s Islamist President Erdogan might lead one of the world’s most brutal and repressive regimes, but that hasn’t stopped Ilhan Omar, the Democratic congresswoman from Minnesota, from expressing support for him. No doubt she was inspired by Erdogan last year when he proclaimed that “social justice is in our book”, and that “Turkey is the biggest opportunity for western countries in the fight against xenophobia, Islamophobia, cultural racism and extremism”.

Erdogan, in effect, was explicitly using progressive rhetoric. It’s a move that’s since been mirrored in Iran.

The Tehran Times — which describes itself as “a loud voice of the Islamic Revolution” — recently attacked former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for his “deep-rooted Islamophobia”. And in March, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif “lauded the determination of Islamic countries to address Islamophobia as one of the main challenges facing the Islamic Ummah [community in the West]”. Islamists, in other words, are becoming skilled at wrapping themselves in a mantle of woke words, while engaging in systematic brutality and repression within their own countries.

To this new alliance between Islamism and progressive rhetoric, there is no simple response. Dawa, by its very nature, is inherently more difficult to fight than jihad. But those who believe, as I do, in a free, open, pluralist society need to be aware of the nature and magnitude of this new challenge. After two decades of fighting Islamist terrorism, we have a new and more subtle foe to contend with. Wokeism has long been regarded as a dangerous phenomenon — but only now are we starting to see why.

## **A Mezuzah in Dubai Symbolizes the Normalization of Judaism in Israel**

**By David Eliezrie**

**jpost.com**

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### **How secular Zionism came to terms with religion.**

Last week in the United Arab Emirates, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid was busy putting up mezuzot. The first in Dubai, at the new embassy, and the second a day later in Abu Dhabi. It was a full-fledged religious ceremony. Lapid was capped by a kippah and assisted by the local rabbi, Chabad emissary Rabbi Levy Duchman. He wasn’t the only government minister participating in religious ceremonies. A few days earlier, Diaspora Affairs Minister Nachman Shai was chanting the haftarah from the biblical books of Prophets on the fast day of the 17th of Tamuz in the cavernous synagogue of Bal Harbor, Florida. He had arrived in Miami to comfort the local community after the tragic collapse of a condo tower that was home to many Jewish residents.

Today no one would think much of this, but it’s a stark contrast to the old labor Zionist attitude to Judaism. When Menachem Begin became prime minister in 1977, one of the first things he noticed was that the Prime Minister’s Office had no mezuzah. His five predecessors – David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin – were not bothered by a door with no mezuzah. They had been the standard-bearers of the secular brand of socialist Zionism who championed a replacement of classical Judaism with a new brand of secular Jewish nationalism. Begin was first a Jew, rooted in tradition, from which blossomed the intrinsic bond of a Jew to Eretz Yisrael. According to Yehuda Avner, author of *The Prime Ministers*, Begin wanted a mezuzah affixed. Avner asked if he should call the press. “No,” said Begin, “bring a hammer.” Moments later the new prime minister

recited the blessing that he knew by heart and installed a mezuzah.

That blessing represented a new era in Israel, one in which Judaism became more natural to Israeli society. This struck me in the week before Shavuot, when I was watching the local news on my iPad, tracking the political tensions in Israel. It seemed that every dairy product imaginable was being advertised in the days before the holiday.

Most American Jews have little or no idea of the significance of Shavuot, marking the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. It’s not a major holiday here outside the observant community. But for Israelis, it’s significant. Some attend synagogue, others flock to the beach, and many even do both. It’s so ubiquitous that even local businesses capitalize on it in their advertising. The tradition of eating dairy is a religious one, rooted in the experience on Sinai when the Jews hadn’t yet learned the proper laws of kosher slaughter, so they ate dairy. Religious or not, according to the intriguing study of the intersection of Jewish identity and modern Israel, *Israeli Judaism* by Shmuel Rosner and Camil Fuchs, 82% of Israelis eat dairy on Shavuot.

Many of the early Zionist leaders did battle against traditional Judaism. Every religious Jew knows the sordid history, from the assassination of Jacob Dahan in 1924 by the Hagana, to the stories of the children of Tehran in the pre-state era. Then later, with the children of Yemen, and the effort in the early decades to place immigrants from observant families in secular schools. When politicians like Ben-Gurion made compromises on issues of religion, it

was more as a result of political expediency than a desire to integrate Jewish values into society.

There's no question that elements of this culture of hostility toward tradition continue today. In particular on the political Left, the Supreme Court, in academia and the media. While the court will have Arab justices, there has never been a haredi justice. Its leadership resists any reform in the self-selective process of judicial appointment. Yet even in these historic secular bastions we are seeing a subtle shift toward a greater inclusivity of a religious perspective. Just look at religious Israeli TV hosts like Sivan Rahav Meir and Amit Segal.

Israel today is a different country than the one the socialist-Zionist pioneers envisioned. Judaism reaches much deeper into day-to-day living. We are far from the days when secular-Zionist prime ministers refused to put up mezuzot. Today, even parties that are rooted in secularism cannot divorce themselves from the core of Jewish identity, and even the prime minister is wearing a kippah.

There are still many issues of contention between state and religion, and the political debate will be with us for

many more years. There is a good chance this new government may attempt to lower religious standards, putting many traditional Jews on edge. However, the tone has changed. Judaism has moved from something the early Zionist leaders wanted to replace with a brand of secular nationalism to an intrinsic dimension in modern Israeli society.

Today, a young non-Orthodox American Jew has a 70% chance of intermarrying. For those in the non-Orthodox sector there is a strong chance that those tenuous ties to Judaism will wither away. For Israeli Jews of the same age, their trajectory is totally different. Intermarriage rates amongst young Israelis is miniscule, the connection to tradition much higher. As we see today, 30% of Israelis observe Shabbat and another 30% identify as traditional. According to Rosner, just 28% of Israelis see themselves as secular. If a young Israeli has political aspirations, he will have to learn the blessing of the mezuzah and keep a kippah handy so he can affix one in a foreign embassy.

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## Why Is Washington Prepared to Offer Iran Sanctions Relief in Exchange for Nothing?

By Elliott Abrams

cfr.org

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**Hope is not a strategy.**

One of the key defenses of the Biden administration's strategy toward Iran is that the Trump administration approach, called "maximum pressure," failed.

The Trump approach was based on an assessment of the Iranian economy. The theory was that if Trump won re-election and Iran was faced with four more years of intense economic pressure, it would agree to a serious and comprehensive negotiation. That negotiation would include not only Iran's nuclear program but its support for terrorism and its missile program.

Recent data from the IMF shows why this theory was persuasive. The IMF's most recent "Regional Economic Outlook: Middle East and Central Asia," reports that Iran's "Gross Official Reserves" fell from an average of \$70 billion in 2000-2017, and \$122.5 billion in 2018, to \$12.4 billion in 2019 and an amazing \$4 billion in 2020. At that level Iran was on a rough par with countries such as Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Armenia, and Georgia. By contrast, in 2020 Algeria had \$46.7 billion in reserves, Iraq had \$54.1 billion, Libya \$51 billion--and Afghanistan \$8.6 billion, twice as much as Iran.

What explains the collapse in Iran's reserves? The "maximum pressure" campaign. And the argument that 'faced with a continuation and even intensification of that campaign, Iran would have had to negotiate' seems entirely reasonable.

Instead, the Biden administration's approach is to give Iran sanctions relief and an injection of tens of billions of dollars if it agrees to go back to the 2015 nuclear deal, the JCPOA. Acknowledging that the JCPOA is inadequate, the Biden administration says we do need a "longer, stronger, and broader" agreement that lasts longer and covers Iran's missile program and its support for terrorism. But by lifting most sanctions and allowing Iran access to all that cash, this policy would largely eliminate Iran's incentives to negotiate a new deal.

Whenever we hear that "the maximum pressure campaign failed," we ought to recall that IMF statistic: Iran's reserves almost disappeared between 2018 and 2020. The Biden policy, which suggests that Iran will concede more while the pressure on it is reduced, is simply illogical. As the old saying goes, hope is not a strategy.

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