

The Mossad Should Stay Out of the Limelight

By Zev Chafets

The secret of its success has been the success of its secrecy.

The Mossad, Israel's storied espionage agency, is the envy of the world. Over more than seven decades, it has built a reputation for highly efficient spying, impressive analytic capabilities and, when ordered, lethality.

One of the secrets of the Mossad's success has been the success of its secrecy. The organization is under the direct control of the prime minister. It reports to no one else and has no spokesperson. Until recently, even the name of the agency's head was a state secret. Only now the Mossad's reputation, and that of Israel's rather less fearsome Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, has been shaken recently over a not-so-secret operation.

Last week, in a televised speech to the Knesset, Bennett departed from custom to announce the conclusion of a "complex, widespread operation" by "male and female Mossad agents" to discover the remains of Lt. Colonel Ron Arad, an air force navigator shot down over Lebanon and taken captive in 1986.

Arad was last heard from more than 30 years ago. He was captured by the Lebanese Shia Amal militia in 1986 and was presumed to have died in captivity after plans for a prisoner swap and ransom payment fell apart. He had not been forgotten, though, and his fate was often the subject of speculation in Israeli media.

Only the operation Bennett announced was an apparent failure. Arad's body was not found. The Mossad doesn't normally publicize its failures and things got more confusing after new Mossad chief David Barnea later claimed it had been successful, though he did not elaborate.

Many commentators saw the publication as a rookie mistake. There was no need to know and the Mossad's credibility, as well as its effectiveness, is critical for Israel's security. But Bennett had his reasons. He is engaged in negotiations with Hamas right now. A sticking point is the return of the bodies of two Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza in 2015. Many in his political base accuse the prime minister of indifference, so the operation's publication was likely a kind of rebuttal. Bennett told the public that bringing

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those missing in action home is "one of the holiest values of the State of Israel" and vowed to return them all, no matter how long it takes.

Other prime ministers have also used the Mossad for missions with political value, but they are rarely so blatant. Benjamin Netanyahu, Bennett's predecessor, pioneered the technique of revealing and taking credit for Mossad operations. In 2018, he went on TV and displayed the Iranian nuclear archive stolen by agents from a government warehouse in Tehran. "Only a few Iranians knew it was there," he said, with a knowing smirk, "and a few Israelis." Nobody had to ask who those few Israelis might be.

Bennett may have been taking a page out of Bibi's book, but it was the wrong one. Bibi went public with a stage full of purloined Iranian files. Bennett, alone on the podium, had nothing to show for his efforts.

Senior figures in the security establishment did not approve of Netanyahu's use of the Mossad for public relations, and they don't like Bennett's either, but they are willing to give the new prime minister a chance. As Major General Amos Gilead, one of Israel's most respected intelligence experts, put it, "broadcasting the mission was a mistake, but at least Bennett didn't disclose any operational secrets. Bibi's leaks revealed means and methods."

Gilead believes that the Mossad needs to go back to the era of silence and secrecy, whatever the political pressures. The Mossad is built to be opaque. If it becomes transparent it will inevitably raise questions in friendly foreign agencies about the safety of shared information and joint operations. If prime ministers make a habit of flaunting successes, it can serve as an invitation and a justification for enemy retaliation. And misrepresenting operational failures as successes from the Knesset podium is neither good statecraft nor good politics.

Bennett should heed Gilad's warning: Using the Mossad as a political tool is dangerous to Israeli democracy and to its organizational mission.

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Realpolitik Should Guide Israeli-Russian Relations

By Professor Efraim Inbar

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When Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett meets Russian President Vladimir Putin for the first time (this Friday, October 22 in Sochi), Bennett must break free of some of his American baggage and approach Putin in realpolitik fashion.

As background to this meeting, it is important to recall several important historical facts. Israel and Russia are about to mark the 30th anniversary of resumption of

relations between the two countries. Bennett should mention in his conversation with Putin that the Jewish People have a moral debt to Russia (formerly, the Soviet Union) which fought fiercely against the Nazis during World War II. The Red Army liberated many Jews from Nazi death camps. Bennett also should acknowledge that the Soviet Union voted in favor of the establishment of the State of Israel at the UN in 1947 (it did so primarily to

push Britain out of the region), and that it enabled the transfer of weapons from Czechoslovakia to Israel during Israel's War of Independence.

This sympathetic stance towards Israel was replaced by a distinctly pro-Arab orientation in the 1950s. The Soviet Union became the arms supplier for most Arab countries and trained their armies, seeking influence in the Middle East at the expense of Western powers. In the wake of the 1967 Six Day War, the Soviet Union led most Eastern bloc countries into severing diplomatic ties with Israel and moved to consistently vote against Israel in all international institutions. Only after the end of the Cold War did Russia reestablish diplomatic relations with Israel and post an ambassador in Tel Aviv.

Today's Russia is no longer the superpower that was the Soviet Union, but it still is a very important country. It has a large nuclear arsenal, and it does not hesitate to use force in foreign affairs (for example, in occupying Crimea). Moreover, it has a significant presence in the Middle East, a region that Russia views as its backyard.

Today, Russia sells arms to Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and several other Arab countries. Egypt has purchased two Russian nuclear power reactors, which makes Egypt dependent on Russian nuclear fuel for several decades. In Syria, the Russian air force is fighting to preserve Bashar Assad's regime, proving to everyone that Russia does not abandon its allies – in contrast to the US. Assad has rewarded Moscow by providing Russian forces a naval base in Tartus and an air base in Hmeimim. In general, Russia seeks to maintain good relations with all parties in the Middle East, including Iran and Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas, Turkey, and Iraq.

President Putin sees Israel as a strong country with impressive military capabilities, willing to use force to attain state interests. He also acknowledges that Israel is a key US ally in the region, and even sees Israel as a potential tool for influence over the United States. A reflection of this was a trilateral meeting of national security advisors

from the three countries, held in Israel in June 2019. The three senior officials discussed regional as well as bilateral and trilateral matters, another sign of Russia's desire to be considered a major power on par with the US.

Unlike some of his compatriots, Putin has a positive attitude towards Jews (reportedly because of childhood experiences). Moreover, he regards the many former Russian Jews in Israel as a Russian diaspora to be cultivated. Israel is the only country in the Middle East where Russian language and culture is vibrant.

In their first meeting, one assumes that Putin seek to take the measure of Naftali Bennett, especially in comparison with the previous Israeli leader (Binyamin Netanyahu) with whom Putin had a good working relationship. Filling Netanyahu's big shoes is not easy, but Bennett probably has learned something from working closely with Netanyahu.

It would be useful if Bennett broke free of some of his informal mannerism and adopted realpolitik language in his conversation with Putin. This is the language that Putin understands well and is comfortable with. An attempt to speak in American liberal clichés is doomed to failure.

The main meeting of Israeli and Russian interests is in Syria. Moscow wants to preserve the Assad regime. Russia understands that Israel has the power to rock the boat and undermine Assad's rule. Therefore, Russia has good reason to be sensitive to Israel's concerns about Iranian entrenchment in Syria. Like Israel, Moscow dislikes a strong Iranian influence in Damascus. This explains why, until now, Russia has allowed Israel to strike at Iranian targets in Syria. It is important that Bennett renew this quiet understanding.

However, Israel-Russia understandings on the Iranian nuclear issue should not be expected. Russia sees a strong Iran as a useful factor that weakens the regional status of the US, which is Russia's main rival in the international arena.

The CIA's Poorly Timed Demonstration of Weakness toward Iran

By Elliott Abrams

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Exactly the wrong moment for a “softer approach.”

According to the New York Times, the CIA is about to reorganize itself to deal with the threat of China — by creating a China Mission Center. That's a smart move, likely to bring more manpower, intellect, top-level attention, and resources to the great geopolitical challenge the United States faces in the 21st century.

Similar moves at the State Department, beefing up substantially the old “China desk,” are equally sensible and for the same reasons. Such bureaucratic moves can make a significant difference both as a reflection of what the people at the top of the government care about most and as a means of giving them — and other governments — better information and better options.

When I served in the Trump administration State Department as special representative for Venezuela, from

2019 to 2021, the Department's organization showed the importance accorded to issues pertaining to that country. I was part of Secretary Pompeo's senior staff, with ready and frequent access to him; I had my own small staff; in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs there was a Venezuela desk of about a dozen people, reporting to the deputy assistant secretary of state for Venezuela and Cuba; and there were additional resources in the Andean Affairs desk in the bureau and other offices there.

But switches can be flipped from on to off. The Biden administration has eliminated the office of special representative for Venezuela and its staff, as well as the large Venezuela staff in the Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau and the position of deputy assistant secretary for Venezuela and Cuba. Venezuela is handled at the Andean Affairs desk, along with Colombia, Peru, and other

countries. To officials in the U.S. government and other governments, and to Venezuelans, the message is clear: This issue is going to get a lot less attention at the top.

In another worrisome change, it seems that the CIA, while building up its resources for China, is taking apart those for Iran. The Iran Mission Center is to be dissolved, and its near-legendary leader, Mike D'Andrea, is retiring. The Times reported this: "The appointment in 2017 of Mr. D'Andrea, who had a long career leading operations against Al Qaeda and other terrorist targets, was a sign of the Trump administration's hard line on Iran. And inside the C.I.A., Mr. D'Andrea helped craft a more muscular approach against Tehran."

Yes, indeed — so what is the message being sent now? Clearly, that less attention will be given to Iran and that a softer approach is desired.

This is exactly the wrong moment to send such a message. Iran is violating not only the Obama Iran deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), every day, but also the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and continues to refuse the International Atomic Energy Agency access that is required of every NPT signatory. As is becoming clearer by the day, Iran is not intending to

return to the JCPOA, and the new government of President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani is taking a far harder line.

At this exact moment, it seems dangerously unwise to make bureaucratic moves that signal a softer line on the Iranian threat and less attention to it at the top. Other governments, including that in Tehran, and officials in our own government will see the departure of D'Andrea and the closing of the Iran Mission Center as a message — and it is precisely the wrong message to send right now.

The deeper problem, of course, is that this message may give an accurate sense of Biden administration policy. Iran's conduct is worse and worse, but there is no sign that the Biden administration is yet contemplating the tougher steps it must take as Iran proceeds apace toward possessing a nuclear weapon and the means to deliver it. Dreams of a return to the JCPOA seem to die hard. And the great danger the administration seems most acutely determined to avoid is any move that might invite comparison to its predecessor and the "maximum pressure" campaign of 2019–21.

Naftali Bennett's Meeting with Joe Biden Began to Repair the Cracks in the U.S.-Israel Alliance

By Eran Lerman

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But the Jewish state will need to improve relations with American Jewry to face the challenges ahead.

Although overshadowed by the drama in Kabul, the recent meeting between Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and President Joe Biden was an opportunity to "reset" and remodel the fundamental components of the Israel-US special relationship, which is one of its kind internationally.

Ever since Israel's Declaration of Independence, followed 11 minutes later by US recognition, and even more so since the end of the 1960's, US support has been a cornerstone of Israel's national security. This support rests on several seemingly solid pillars: shared values and historical awareness, national interests in the face of common enemies, and political dynamics on both sides of the ocean, including the unique role played by American Jewry.

However, alongside the high points of recent years (above all the moving of the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem), cracks have formed in the above components. The danger of real damage to these pillars also increased with the changing of US administrations. Hence the importance of the Bennett visit, and of the steps which need to follow, to fortify the mutual affinity between the defense and intelligence establishments of the two countries, to reawaken bipartisan support, and to reconnect with American Jewry — and thus possibly "reset" the relationship during the Biden era.

The Concept of a "Reset"

At the beginning of her term of office as Secretary of State in the Obama Administration, Hillary Clinton wanted

to affect a positive turn in US relations with Putin's Russia. As a gesture she brought her Russian colleague, Sergei Lavrov (at their first meeting in Geneva on March 6, 2009) an object resembling the "reset button" of a computer keyboard. This was meant to convey American desire for change and improvement in US-Russia relations, compared to the bitterness of the last years of the Bush era. (Bush ties to Russia were exacerbated by the 2008 Russian offensive against Georgia.)

The gesture backfired. The Russian translation was faulty (peregruzka or "overload," instead of perezagruzka or "reset"), and as time passed the attempt to restore the relationship between Washington and Moscow went aground over a range of issues, from Libya to Ukraine.

However, the concept of reset remains valid. New political realities give rise to diplomatic opportunities. Israel's new government, as signalled by Naftali Bennett's visit to Washington, did indeed seek "to press the reset button" and deal with some problems emerging from the change of administrations, from Democratic control in Congress (which may or may not persist after the November 2022 elections), and from heightened hostility towards Israel within certain segments of the American public.

All three pillars of the special relationship — values, interests, and politics — have been showing signs of strain. Amidst growing polarization and political radicalization in the US, unprecedented questions have been raised in some quarters, and specifically by the "squad" of progressives within the Democratic Party, concerning the shared values

of both countries. This came into focus in the Iron Dome vote on September 21.

Meanwhile, conflicts of interest also have emerged regarding Iran and Israel's stance on Palestinian matters (although the latter mostly has been set aside by the Administration and the Bennett government). And American Jewry has found it difficult to rally around an Israeli government that until recently expressed what amounted to disdain towards the concerns of the non-Orthodox majority of American Jews.

All this requires a thorough and penetrating reset effort; thorough groundwork, or *Harish Amok* in Hebrew (– which happens to be the code name for a US-Israeli emergency cooperation plan). Well-coordinated and efficient efforts are required to engage with Washington and the entire American political arena on both sides of the aisle, with the Administration, Congress, and the public at large. The effort is vital for Israel's future.

The Importance of Personal Relations and Symbols

The importance of personal relations between leaders, in historical decisions that have shaped Israel's relationship with the US over the past seven generations, should not be taken lightly.

Despite his dislike of the Zionist leadership in the US, President Harry Truman had a basic empathy for the hardships of the Jewish People and their resurrection in their homeland, which was also anchored in his religious beliefs. President Dwight Eisenhower did not harbour such sentiments, although he eventually stated that he had been mistaken when he chose to assist Nasser in the crisis of 1956, and he came to see Israel as a potential asset.

There was no real chemistry between President John F. Kennedy and David Ben-Gurion, and their relationship reached a crisis point over Dimona. On the other hand, President Johnson and Levi Eshkol formed a personal friendship, which played a role in the decision to support Israel militarily and politically after the Six Day War.

Golda Meir established long-term understandings with President Richard Nixon on several issues central to Israel's security. The relationship between Yitzhak Rabin and the dominant Secretary of State at the time, Dr. Henry Kissinger, reached a low point during the "reassessment" crisis of 1975, but nevertheless was marked by profound mutual respect.

Closer to the present, there was a fundamental difference between the Clinton Administration's regard towards Israeli prime ministers Rabin, Peres, and Barak, on the one hand, and towards Netanyahu on the other. There was an unprecedented level of understanding and agreement between President George W. Bush and Ariel Sharon, and later with Ehud Olmert – which cannot be said about the relationship between President Barack Obama and Binyamin Netanyahu.

Prime Minister Netanyahu went out of his way to display a personal connection with President Joe Biden, but their relationship was fraught with tension and shaped by the confrontation between Israel and the Obama

Administration. The latter came to suspect, particularly following Netanyahu's controversial address to Congress in 2015, that Israel tilted towards the Republican Party. Four years of the Trump Administration further served to undermine the traditional concept of bipartisanship in US-Israel ties. This is particularly challenging in an era of polarization between Democrats and Republicans on almost every issue, from Covid-19 and to global warming.

Israel's new Prime Minister, despite being politically identified with the right wing and with Judea and Samaria settlements, has been given an opportunity to shake off his predecessor's "baggage," as it is referred to in American political jargon. It is not by chance that in Washington Bennett chose to emphasize Biden's decades of commitment to Israel.

As far as we know, Bennett did find common ground with Biden. On a personal level, their interaction was amicable. Bennett is not perceived by the president and his staff as tainted by over-identification with Republicans. Although Biden was distracted by the Afghan crisis, he spent longer than expected in conversation with Bennett and reportedly found in the Prime Minister an attentive listener.

The language of symbols also carries weight. Following the meeting, the Administration briefed senior members of Jewish organizations, referring to the relationship in terms of a "partnership." Some would interpret this as a rank below "ally," but in fact the "Special Partnership Act" (S.P.A) of 2013 awards Israel a formal and unique standing in Washington, above the obsolete definition of the 1970s as a "Major Non-NATO Ally" (MNNA), which since has been bestowed on dozens of friendly nations.

This law requires the Administration to establish cooperation in a variety of areas, from cyber, through the range of renewable energy solutions, and the struggle against global warming, to the ultimate challenge (at present) of learning lessons from each country's struggle with the pandemic. In this context, there is also room for reviewing the visa policy for entry of Israelis to the US. However, all of these are eventually only secondary issues in comparison with the two major questions on the agenda. 1. Is there still a stable partnership of interests between Washington and Jerusalem? 2. Can the erosion of moral and political affinities be stopped and reversed, with the aid of American Jewry?

The Strategic Dimension: Confronting Iran is First Priority

Without the political and personal baggage that burdened the relationship between the previous Israeli government and the Biden Administration, it is possible, at least theoretically, to hold a straightforward discussion devoid of any suspected "interference" in America's internal affairs between the President and the heads of his administration and Prime Minister Bennett and his team. The key player on the Israeli side is the new national Security Adviser, Eyal Hulata, who came to Washington

on October 5 for the regular consultation of strategic teams, led on the US side by his counterpart, Jake Sullivan. Hulata's professional background in nuclear physics enables him to focus on the intelligence and operational aspects of contending with the Iranian nuclear project. But are the strategic objectives of both countries still the same?

During the Trump era the answer seemed clear. The US sided with its traditional allies in the region – Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt – and took a hard-line stand towards the Iranian regime, the culmination of which was the abandoning of the nuclear agreement. The Trump administration applied “maximum pressure” policy against Iran and ordered the assassination of Qassem Suleimani.

The Biden Administration, on the other hand, has turned its back on the Saudis in their campaign in Yemen. It also has indicated that it is not pleased with the way the Sisi regime is consolidating its rule in Cairo, and indeed, some of US aid to Egypt has delayed. And of course, the administration has prioritized a return to the nuclear agreement with Iran.

At the same time, there is still basis for a pragmatic discussion between Israel and the US regarding Iran. Despite the difficult impression the retreat from Afghanistan has left, the Biden Administration is not isolationist in its approach (as was made clear in its initial guidance on national security policy in March 2021). Biden still regards the United States, together with its democratic allies as a leading and formative factor on the international scene, in fierce and growing competition with China and Russia. Therefore, he is aware of the importance of preventing nuclear weapons proliferation and preventing the Iranian nuclear project from coming to fruition, and the value of communicating with Israel on this issue.

Naturally, the American and Israeli points of departure for this discussion remain different. The Biden Administration believes in diplomacy, even with the Taliban, whereas Israel has, to put it mildly, very little faith in the chances of persuading Iran by peaceful means. At the same time, it was obvious during the visit that Washington is attentive, more so than at the early weeks of the administration, to the assumptions that underpin the Israeli stand. It is also willing to listen to operational ideas which derive from these assumptions. This is due to increasing frustration with provocations of Iranian leadership.

The Biden Administration has learned, the hard way, that the Iranian regime, most certainly under the presidency of Ra'isi (who faithfully embodies the views of the Supreme Leader) sees no need for compromise and continues to race towards accumulating fissile material for nuclear weapons. Tehran no longer bothers to hide this objective. The enrichment of uranium 235 to a level of 60% has no other purpose than as a step towards 94%, which is defined as “military grade” enrichment. Under these circumstances, there is reason to listen to Israel, an ally whose commitment to stopping Iran is clear, and which has the power to protect itself by itself.

Did the visit yield any shift in the position of the administration? It may be more precise to say that the discussion with Israel, which began long before the visit, and continued thereafter, reinforced trends that had already begun to emerge.

The US also has basic demands. Had Biden been willing to go back to the JCPOA agreement “at any cost,” an understanding already would have been reached with Iran on removing sanctions. Inasmuch as it is possible to judge, the administration is increasingly aware that capitulation to the dictates of Teheran would be an irresponsible step that may have far reaching implications on the future of the entire international balance of power.

Three specific statements testify to this, although the possibility remains that even miniscule signs of flexibility on the part of Iran may once again tempt the administration to exercise the diplomatic option.

During Biden's meeting with President Rivlin (towards the end of the latter's term of office on June 29, 2021), Biden spoke about Iran not having a nuclear weapon “on my watch” (in other words, the coming few years). When meeting with Bennett, Biden sharpened his language, saying that the Iranians “will not have nuclear weapons, period.” Even if this is only a nuance, it is significant regarding expiry date of the “sunset clauses” in the agreement with Iran and Biden's principal intent of achieving a “longer and stronger” agreement.

More important was the explicit reference in the President's address following the meeting of “other options” for action should negotiations fail. This implied threat has already unnerved the Iranians and elicited a response from the regime's National Security Council head, Shamkhani, who cautioned that Iran would reserve the right to respond in a similar fashion. Within the context it was said, this wording has concrete meaning. Biden is ready to listen to the Prime Minister and his entourage on how to exercise these “options.” Translating this into action requires comprehensive groundwork by the professional echelons in both countries, but at least in theory, the President's words have created an opening for such interaction.

Secretary of State Tony Blinken indeed warned, in a speech at the US Ramstein Air Force base in Germany (on September 8) that the time is drawing near when there will no longer be any point in returning to the nuclear agreement. However, he avoided specifying the steps the US would have to take should this happen.

The cumulative effect of these statements, in the face of defiant Iranian behaviour, enabled Hulata's team to emphasize the need to prepare for and perhaps even execute options to delay the Iranian project. Even if the Iranians are willing to resume negotiations, it is doubtful that a speedy reset of the JCPOA is possible. The Biden Administration is having a difficulty in cancelling all sanctions as demanded by Iran. Moreover, within the limits of the American constitution, Biden cannot assure **Visit suburbanorthodox.org for the current issue.**

the Iranians that the US always will remain committed to the agreement. Meanwhile, Iran is reaching the threshold of nuclear capacity and is not thrilled by the idea of turning back the clock.

Because of this other strategic-political issues have taken a back seat. It also is obvious that the American Administration understands that Bennett's government is unable and unwilling to tackle end-of-conflict negotiations with the Palestinians.

As for relations with China, orderly staff work is required to define the boundaries of what is possible. Israel has been careful not to reach any head-on confrontation with Beijing, but there is no doubt about who Israel will choose if it is forced to decide on restraining Chinese involvement in the Israeli economy. Israel's relationship with the US is strategic, demographic (since the US is the primary diaspora of the Jewish People), and moral. The Prime Minister indirectly hinted as much when referring to biblical texts in his White House address, texts that are generally not familiar to the Chinese but are the foundational texts on which many Americans have been raised.

The Moral Dimension and its Political Implications

Despite the importance of the strategic issues on the agenda, some estimated that the dramatic crisis in Kabul would detract from the importance of Bennett's meeting with the President and his senior officials. that at this sensitive timing

On the other hand, it can be argued the Prime Minister's visit to Washington at this sensitive time reminded the public, the professional echelon, and US politicians of Israel's value as a democratic, reliable, and strong ally that does not ask American soldiers to bleed in its defence. In other words, Israel is everything that Afghanistan never was and never could be. Therein lies the importance of the US-Israel "special relationship," now more than ever.

Worthy of mention is Bennett's decision to strictly focus, this time, on the president and his senior staff. There were no meetings with key members of Congress, or with Republican party leadership. The message to Biden was that the current Israeli government regards him as the source of authority, and it has no intention of again placing itself in the position of playing internal US politics.

There is also room to note, as did President Biden, the unique character of the new Israeli government. It encompasses a wide spectrum of political parties, including an Arab party, right wing, left wing and centrist elements, a record number of women, and a wide representation of social groups. This makes it difficult for hostile entities to tag Israel as a distinct enemy in an era of "discourse on

rights" and "intersectionality." (Intersectionality often leads to the sometimes brutal "cancelling" of "privileged whites" on campus and in the public domain, and to "cancelling" of pro-Israel voices.)

The risks of this tagging were well illustrated in hostile propaganda and blatant antisemitic expressions during Operation Guardian of the Walls (although there also was demonstrated support for Israel). Without denigrating the importance of right-wing evangelical elements of American society as part of Israel's basis of support, the primary confrontation in the near future is with the radical left wing on campuses, on social networks, and in Congress.

This mainly means neutralizing the influence of Congresspersons who form the Squad, such as Rashida Tlaib (of Palestinian origin), Ilhan Omar, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who combine a social agenda anchored in Marxist concepts with blatant hostility to Israel. The real test of their ability to confront Israel's friends in Congress was when funding for Iron Dome was put forward as free-standing legislation, and it gained 420 vs. 9 votes in the House of Representatives – proving that Israel still has a bipartisan base of support to maintain and build upon.

The Role of American Jewry

To win this battle, Israel needs the help of American Jews. The challenge now is to translate the spirit of change into an intensive and consistent effort to significantly restore Israel's relationship with American Jewry, which has reached a dangerous threshold of erosion (– at least as far as this erosion, which is rooted in deep historical and social causes, can be influenced by policy decisions). Prime Minister Bennett did not have time for organized meetings with the leadership of Jewish organizations (although he did so in New York, during his UNGA visit). Improvement in the Washington-Jerusalem relationship has implications for the atmosphere in ties with members of the Jewish community (many of whom did not take kindly to the over-identification of the previous Israeli government with President Trump and his worldview).

Israel's top political leadership must be harnessed for this effort, alongside relevant ministers, and ranking professionals in the foreign affairs, Diaspora relations, education, and religious affairs ministries. It must also be reflected in government policies on sensitive issues in Israel, especially the Western Wall question and attitudes towards Non-Orthodox Jewish denominations.

Only if a strong foundation of support is rebuilt within American Jewry and with both sides of the party divide that is tearing America apart, will the Israeli government be able to conduct a pragmatically based conversation on the complex subject of Iran

Israel Has Much to Offer the Nations of Africa, and Deserves a Place at Their Table

By David May

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Palestinian recalcitrance shouldn't hold Israel-African relations hostage.

Palestinian advocacy groups and certain countries are

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pressuring the African Union (AU) to rescind Israel's observer status, when the AU executive council meets this week in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. But Israel's expertise in

health, agriculture, defense, and other fields should convince the AU to prioritize its partnership with the Jewish state over Palestinian grievances.

In July, Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Yair Lapid welcomed Israel's readmission as an observer at the AU, calling it "a day of celebration for Israel-Africa relations." It "corrects the anomaly" that has existed since Israel lost its observer status when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) reorganized as the African Union in 2002.

Oponents of Israel's upgraded status have lobbed tenuous arguments against the partnership. To tarnish Israel's image in Africa, activists have portrayed the Jewish state as a racist colonizer. However, Israel's restrictions on Palestinians are related to security issues, not race. And Israel is the product of a post-colonial national liberation movement, a trait it shares with many African countries.

Some have argued that African countries should not improve relations with Israel until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is resolved. But it is unclear why Palestinian recalcitrance should hold Israeli-African relations hostage, especially in light of Israel's numerous attempts to solve the conflict.

Shortly after its founding, Israel began its outreach to Africa. Their shared post-colonial legacy — and Israel's desire to overcome isolation caused by the Arab League boycott — spurred this partnership. In the process, Israel shared agricultural and technological advancements crucial for countries breaking away from the yoke of colonialism. However, in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Arab and Muslim countries coaxed African nations to cut ties with Israel. Most nations complied with a 1973 OAU resolution calling on members to do just that.

Israel has renewed its ties with African countries in recent years, maintaining relations with 46 out of 54 African countries. In 2009, then-Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman embarked on a five-country tour of Africa. In 2016, then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set out on his own four-country tour. In 2017, Netanyahu became the first non-African leader to address the Economic Community of West African States. And in January 2021, Sudan — the site of Arab countries' post-Six-Day War rejection of normalization with Israel — signed the Abraham Accords peace deal with the Jewish state.

In a July press release, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed cooperation with African nations in "the fight against Corona." Israel has been a global leader in the fight against the coronavirus, and the AU stands to benefit tremendously from Israel's expertise. Israel's many other

contributions to public health in Africa include combating malaria, providing neonatal care, and building health facilities. And an Israeli-designed method for protecting harvests is helping feed Africa.

MASHAV, Israel's agency for international development cooperation, has provided Liberia with COVID-19 relief items such as face masks, thermometers, and medical gowns. MASHAV has also helped African countries improve their agricultural capacity. In 2016, the chairperson of the African Union Commission presented Israel's ambassador to Ethiopia and the deputy head of MASHAV with a plaque recognizing Israel's work to combat the spread of Ebola in 2014; Israel set up field hospitals and became the largest donor per capita in that health crisis. In 2017, Sierra Leone named the Israeli non-governmental organization (NGO) IsraAid as its outstanding international NGO of the year, due in large part to the group's contributions to the fight against Ebola.

Israeli water technology can also be a boon for the AU. Israel has been a pioneer in water technology since it popularized drip irrigation and desalination. Watergen, an Israeli company, has deployed machinery in Africa that literally creates water out of thin air. This can help the continent overcome lack of access to clean water, one of its greatest causes of poverty. Yet in 2018, anti-Israel hostility led Cape Town, South Africa, to reject Israeli assistance as it nearly became the first major city in the world to run out of water.

The Israeli press release heralding its renewed observer status also mentioned defense cooperation as a key arena for collaboration. Israel has provided several African countries with military advisers and weapons for decades. Since 2000, Israel has dramatically increased military collaboration with the Horn of Africa countries, particularly Kenya. Al-Qaeda operatives in the coastal Kenyan city of Mombasa bombed an Israeli-owned hotel and attempted to down an Israeli plane in 2002. Continued threats of terrorism led Israel and Kenya to conclude a public security agreement in 2011 to increase cooperation. Israel has complemented its recent diplomatic outreach to several African countries with military training. And Israel has much to offer African countries in the defense sector, particularly in cybersecurity.

Increased Israeli-African cooperation will help both parties thrive. The AU should not allow its health and prosperity to become another casualty of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr. May is a senior research analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) of the Islamic Republic and of its willingness to use any degree of brutality to retain its grip on power.

In Lebanon and Iraq, Iran Exposes Its Fragility

By Alberto M. Fernandez

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For all the power of its militias, Tehran relies on an aura of inevitability.

The parallels are eerie. The same week in October

October 15, 2021

2021 that a heavily armed "protest" by Hizbullah and its allies in Beirut against an independent judge turned violent, another Iran-controlled militia in Iraq — Kataib Hezbollah

– is threatening Iraqi judges over certifying election results that were not fully satisfactory to the factions closest to Iran.

The preliminary results of Iraq's October 10 parliamentary elections showed that the coalition of the most pro-Iranian militia/death squads/parties – the Fatah Alliance – did poorly, losing many seats. Also losing was the pro-Iran alliance led by Ammar Al-Hakim, which also lost many seats. But the purported "winners" also have Iranian ties; Muqtada al-Sadr's alliance came in first place and former Iraqi prime minister Nuri Al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition rebounded somewhat from the disastrous results it obtained in the 2018 elections.[1]

Muqtada Al-Sadr's movement provided some cover for Iraq's demonstrators in 2019, and Al-Sadr's fighters clashed with and even killed supporters of anti-demonstrator pro-Iran militias such as Asaib Ahl Al-Haq. But Al-Sadr's support for demonstrators was not open-ended, particularly when they seemed to take a more pronounced anti-Iran tone. The charismatic cleric clearly strikes an Iraqi nationalist pose when needed, but also seems to reliably bend to Iran's wishes when really needed. Al-Maliki, a longtime collaborator with the Americans, is also a longtime collaborator with Iran. Even Sunni and Kurdish parties that won seats have a history of working with Iran's hegemon, though their hearts may not be in it. One can make the case that most leaders in Iraq have been co-opted by Iran to greater or lesser extents. Some are reluctant partners, while others are enthusiastic ones.

Despite that grim reality, i.e. that Iran has many levers to pull in Iraq, this week Abu Ali Al-Askari, a leader in the feared Kataib Hezbollah death squad, took to social media to warn Iraqi judges about problems with voting machines and the need for judges to maintain their clean records. He also accused members of Iraq's Intelligence Service of inflating the numbers of the Emtidad movement – which is connected to mostly Shia protestors against Iran and certainly does constitute a political challenge to the Iranian project in Iraq. Emtidad may have won up to 10 seats in the 329 member Iraqi legislature, five of them in the mostly Shia (and very poor) Dhi Qar governorate in Southern Iraq.[2] A small number of voices to be sure, but voices that Iran does not control.[3] The Fatah Alliance is not done with trying to get the authorities to give them a bigger share of the political pie in Iraq, even though Iran can build a new government sympathetic to Iran using Al-Sadr or Al-Maliki or even current Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.[4]

If Iran's proxies were concerned about 10 parliamentarians, in Lebanon Iran's proxies seems to be concerned about one judge. Judge Tarek Bitar only took over the investigation of the Beirut Port explosion earlier this year, after the previous judge was removed at the request of two former government ministers connected to the Amal party of Nabih Berri, a close ally of Hizbullah.[5] Even though many Lebanese already believe that there was

a Hizbullah connection to the blast (one explanation was that this was a shipment of nitrates used in barrel bombs against Syrian cities during that country's civil war), the idea of a judge actually clarifying the case and fingering some corrupt officials – a category of which Lebanon has a surplus – seems to have become a Hizbullah redline. This led to a violent provocation in Beirut on October 14, as Hizbullah and Amal opened fire on unnamed assailants, even firing rocket propelled grenades at office buildings. Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea sarcastically noted on Twitter that he thought that Hizbullah had nothing to do with the explosion, but that after the day's events, he was not so sure.

The fact that Hizbullah and Amal thugs attempted to aggressively show force in Christian parts of Beirut, blame a Christian party for escalating tension, and appeared to have been repulsed (the facts are unclear) has heightened sectarian feeling, although the whole event has a sense of fabricated theater about it.[6] But the "clashes" certainly escalated Christian-Shia tension, a reality which places tremendous pressure on Lebanon's seemingly senile president Michel Aoun and his ambitious son-in-law Gibran Bassil, who aspires to become president in 2022 with the help of Hizbullah. Their Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) is closely allied with Hizbullah and poses as the great protector of Lebanon's remaining Christians. The clashes and rhetoric make maintaining both of those poses difficult.[7] Expectations are that somehow the government will shut down Judge Bitar's investigation, a victory for Hizbullah, perhaps by transferring it to the military justice system.

Why have Hizbullah in Lebanon and its counterparts in Iraq, near hegemon in both countries, reacted with such vehemence to what may seem to the outsider to be relatively small reverses? It is because Iran's proxies in both countries are indeed almost all-powerful but they are very strong in only relative terms. Anti-Iranian-regime feeling is strong in Lebanon, in Iraq, and in Syria (and is strong inside Iran too). Aside from a fanatical and heavily armed hard core – essential henchmen for Iran's hegemony – nobody much likes Iran, even if they also don't like the U.S. or Israel. It is that small and fanatical hardcore that projects its power, through the triple venues of politics, propaganda, and violence, over much larger populations who serve under Iranian hegemony, at varying levels of willingness, because of fear, weakness or greed.

The key elements of such an approach are the perception of inevitability and an aura of impunity. It is those elements, coupled with actual violence, that generally keep the masses in line. That is why a single judge in Lebanon, a mere handful of deputies in Iraq, or one lone heroic voice like Lokman Slim constitute a threat.[8] They shatter the narrative of inevitability.

Iran is simultaneously both dominant and fragile in its exercise of that near total dominance over most of its subject Arabic-speaking populations. Iranian-orchestrated

repression and the pandemic eventually silenced anti-Tehran, anti-system protests in both countries in 2020, but nothing has really changed negative popular views. There is little evidence that support for Iran exists in these countries beyond that small but fanatical hardcore and enabling corrupt politicians. But that may be enough. Iran

Strangle Israel, get a great speaking gig

By Moshe Phillips jns.org

With his past record on U.S.-Israel relations, why is former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger addressing Temple Emanu-El in New York City?

Bravo Iraq!

This was the phrase that automatically came to my mind the other day as the Iraq's latest general election was completed without incident.

The kudos was deserved for several reasons.

First, last week's election, the fifth in Iraq's history since liberation in 2003, shows that despite many ups and downs caused by historic and cultural bumps on the road, the process of democratization is still well on its course.

It also reaffirmed the invaluable consensus reached among Iraqis of all political persuasions that winning and holding power is legitimate only through the free expression of the people through elections. Though nothing in history is irreversible, the traditional culture in which power was won and lost in rebellions, coups d'etat, street riots, foreign invasions or assassinations of the ruler may have had its day in Iraq.

Because the parliament is the sole conduit for the exercise of people power, the results of the election will also determine who will serve as president of the republic and prime minister.

Next, because of the proportional representation system in force, no sect, party or group could hope to win a monopolistic hold on power. In a country that suffered decades under a brutal one-party system, the election has the healing power of unity in diversity.

The very fact that the election took place is also a cause for celebration. Key players, including some foreign powers and political barons addicted to power and perk, did all they could to prevent an early election that they sensed might reduce their share of power.

For months, the official media in the Islamic Republic of Iran had played mood music against early elections in Iraq. And when it became clear that the process would not be halted, Tehran circles started mobilizing for affecting the outcome. "Supreme Guide" Ayatollah Ali Khamenei released \$200 million from a "national emergency fund" to enable the Quds Force, Tehran's foreign legion operating in several regional countries, propel its proxies back into power. The Tehran media called this Iraqi election "Qassem Soleimani's election" with the subtext that Iraqi voters would pay tribute to the assassinated general by massively voting for his local proxies.

Because Iraqis living abroad could not vote this time,

and its proxies hope that a combination of repression, distraction, and emigration will help them maintain the status quo. And that is probably right. It will work until it doesn't, until some spark makes the whole shaky edifice come down.

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the Quds Force organized day-trips for an unknown number of dual-nationals living in Iran, sometimes for decades, to vote for Quds Force candidates.

However, as the results show, Tehran's proxies did worse than anyone imagined.

The militia-dominated bloc led by Hadi al-Ameri lost 35 of its 50 seats. The biggest winner on the Shiite side was Muqtada Sadr's maverick bloc, which has called for limiting the holding of weapons only to the state; in other words disbanding the Iran-controlled militias.

In the past few days, Tehran media have tried to seek some solace in the fact that former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has managed to remain in the game as a victory for "martyr Soleimani's way." However, Maliki, though always close to the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was never a Soleimani stooge as the late general could not tolerate anyone with an ego himself. Soleimani's ideal lackey is Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Lebanese branch of Hezbollah, who, according to the late general's only lengthy interview, "would not drink water without consulting with us."

To belittle the impact of the Iraqi election, Iran's official media also harped on the theme of "low voter turnout." True, the latest election attracted only 43 percent of registered voters, one or two points below that of the previous exercise. However, Tehran official media quickly abandoned the theme because it reminded people of an even lower voter turnout in Iran's own recent presidential elections.

The latest Iraqi election has other interesting features.

It was the first to take place in 83 constituencies instead of 18 mega ones. The new rule allows the voter to make a choice based on his opinion of individual candidates rather than lists presented by party coalitions. The use of biometric cards also helped with ensuring the process against organized fraud.

The fact that a large number of candidates, almost 3,500, contested the 329 seats at stake, indicated the abiding attractiveness of the democratic process for a growing segment of politically active Iraqis. Those who entered the competition included the largest number of young activists, women and individuals standing as independents.

We have not completed a breakdown of the results, but at first glance it is clear that a new generation of Iraqi politicians is taking shape. The fact that young activists representing pre-Covid street protesters won more than

8% of the seats may point to new directions in Iraqi politics.

The results also indicate a faster exclusion of former exiles and dual-nationals that until recently dominated the political scene in Baghdad.

The parties and groups representing the Sunni Muslim community emerge from this election with a heightened profile and a more credible leadership, something that could speed up the healing of sectarian wounds inflicted on it since 2003.

The election also marked the marginalization of the Shiite clerical institutions based in Najaf both because the grand ayatollahs adopted a lower profile and because many candidates realized that endorsement by masters of the turban may prove a kiss of death in politics.

The Kurdish parties, still enjoying control of more seats than warranted by the demographic strength of the Kurdish community, emerge with more or less the same profile as before. This means that they would continue to play a key role in the formation of the next government. That could be a positive thing if the aim is to prevent wild swings of the pendulum. But it could also be negative if

the Kurds let themselves be tempted by sectarian gains at the expense of broader national interests.

The ruling mullahs in Tehran had hoped that the election would turn out to be a referendum on American military presence in Iraq. That didn't happen, as the Iraqi political elite preferred to focus on the need for foreign military presence in all its forms be ended. The 2,500 US troops still in Iraq could be withdrawn at any moment under the status of forces mechanism in place since 2008. The same could not be said about the Iran's proxy units in Iraq that include many dual-nationals at all levels including their high command.

Last week, the Tehran media labelled the Iraqi election as "the first test for Gen. Esmail Qa'ani" the lackluster bureaucrat who has replaced the bombastic Soleimani.

Well, Qa'ani emerges as the loser that he deserves to be. As for Soleimani, who died in Baghdad, his ghost now witnesses a second death in Iraq, this time of Soleimanism. *Amir Taberi was the executive editor-in-chief of the daily Kayhan in Iran from 1972 to 1979; he has been a columnist for Asharq Al-Awsat since 1987.*

United Arab Emirates to join Israel in moon shot

By Ron Kampeas

The next time Israel tries to land a spacecraft on the moon, it will have some neighborly help.

United Arab Emirates and Israel plan to land Israel's un-crewed Beresheet craft on the moon in 2024 in a joint space exploration deal, Haaretz reported on Wednesday.

Israel's first attempt to land a lunar module on the moon failed in 2019 when it crashed.

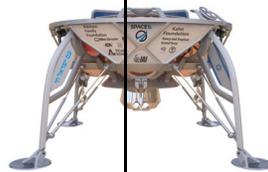
The Beresheet 2 effort will be part of an agreement slated to be signed between Israel

jta.org

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and the UAE to develop space technologies. The craft will collect soil samples and conduct experiments.

Israel and the UAE are accelerating their cooperation under the Abraham Accords normalization deal brokered last year by the Trump administration. Last week, their foreign ministers met in Washington with their U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, to sign trilateral agreements on advancing religious freedoms and collaborating on climate change.



Graphic of the Beresheet spacecraft (Courtesy/SpaceX)

In first, Eilat to host gaming world championship

By Naama Barak

500 video game maestros set to descend on the southern city this fall to compete in four different tracks.

The southern city of Eilat is set to host the world's very best gamers this fall when it becomes the playing ground of the Esports World Championship.

Slated for November 14-20, the international video games contest will see 500 gamers from 85 countries vie for the top spots. The gamers beat some 10,000 hopefuls who spent recent months competing in playoffs around the world that were viewed by millions of people online.

The contestants will compete in four games: Dota 2 (groups), Counter-Strike (groups), TEKKEN 7 (singles) and eFootball PES 2021 (singles).

israel21c.org

October 20, 2021

Israel will be represented by the Overwolf Israel team, which in turn represents the Israeli Esports Association.

This year's contest will be the 13th international competition; last year's contest attracted around 1.5 million viewers worldwide. It will be the first time that Israel is hosting.

"It's a great honor to host in Israel the Esports World Championship, which garners great global exposure. I thank the Prime Minister's Office, the Tourism Ministry, Eilat Municipality and Maccabi World Union for their contribution to the organization of the competition in Israel," said Ido Brosh, head of the Israeli Esports Association.